

Teton River, South Fork (Montana)

As the South Fork of the Teton River exits the Rockies, it creates a canyon which widens for approximately a mile and a half before it bends sharply past the southern slope of Crystal Mountain. The South Fork of the Teton River, just west of Choteau, Montana was home to over 100 Métis, many are buried in the cemetery of the old community. The Wiseman family maintains the Métis Cemetery in the old Canyon Community where they were born in Teton County, northwest of Choteau near South Fork of Teton River on land which is now owned by the Nature Conservancy. The surnames found in this cemetery are Bruno, Collins, Fellers, Gray, Larance, Parenteau, St. Germaine, and Talipson.

One of the early settlers in the Teton River Canyon was Jean-Baptiste Gariepy.¹

Jean Baptiste Gariepy was at St. Francois Xavier until father's death, in 1856, after this he became a noted buffalo hunter in Canada, which occupation he followed until 1868, when he came to Montana and located at Fort Benton, which he made headquarters for buffalo hunting until 1882, when the American bison practically ceased to exist and his occupation was gone. But he was equal to the emergency and in that same year secured a ranch on the upper Teton River, eighteen miles from Choteau, Teton County, and for twelve years engaged in stockraising. This property he sold in 1896, and from that time he has resided with his son, Eli, who has a fine ranch on Cut Bank River, and with his daughter. Emily, the wife of Adolphus Fellers, living near Dupuyer, Teton County. Mr. Garepee, although advanced in years, is still healthy and active, and has a number of plans mapped out for hunting and trapping in the mountains. He has seven children ; Mrs, Emily Fellers; Magdaline, now of North Dakota; Johnnie, at St. Peter's mission; Charles, living on the Teton River; Mary, married and residing in Canada; Eli, owner of the ranch on the Cut Bank River, and Josephine, wife of Gabriel Selwood (Salois), now living on the Upper Depuyer River. (From *Progressive Men of Montana* p. 1557-1558)

The Métis settlers had slipped into the South Fork Canyon and the nearby foothills to avoid the U.S. government forced removal to Canada in 1883. After the 1885 Resistance they were joined by Métis refugees from Canada. They used those many canyons just as the early travelers on the Old North Trail in Montana along the Front Range did. They were ideal places to escape enemies, and not be found. They lived off the land, hunting game, “woodhawking”, selling the buffalo bones they collected, and working for area ranchers It was while living among the Métis in this canyon that Joseph Kinsey Howard,

¹ Jean-Baptiste Gariepy was born on July 7, 1832, at St. François Xavier, the son of Louis Marie “Awistoyus” Gariepy (b. 1771) and: Josephte Suzette “Nahasthay” Ducharme (b. 1806, died 1871 on the Marias River). His father, Louis was a voyageur first with the NWC then after amalgamation with the HBC. He retired to St. Francois Xavier in 1824.

Baptiste received Half Breed Scrip (#262) under the Treaty of April 12, 1864 with the Red Lake and Pembina Half Breeds.

Baptiste married Judith Cardinal on June 4, 1855 in St François Xavier. She was the daughter of Antoine Cardinal and Marie DeMontigny Comtois. Baptiste’s wife Julia was born in Montana in 1828.

wrote *Strange Empire*, the story of Louis Riel and the Métis people. In the 1940s, Joseph Kinsey Howard conducted the most comprehensive research to that date concerning the Métis people of the United States and Canada, in particular those residing in Montana. While living along the South Fork of the Teton River west of Choteau, Montana, he became familiar with them and with their story.²



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² Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire* (1952; reprint, St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1994), 11.