

Alfred Wiseman (b. 1936)

In 2016, the Montana Historical Society honored Alfred Wiseman of Choteau, Montana for his outstanding contributions to Montana history and heritage. Wiseman was named a 2016 recipient of the Trustees Heritage Keeper Award.

Al Wiseman and his wife Elaine (née Gray) are Michif cultural preservationists who are members of the Michif Little Shell community of Montana. They were both born in the Métis settlement in the canyon along the South Fork of the Teton River¹ and live in Choteau, Montana. They also have a cabin on the road into the canyon.



Al Wiseman was one of a group of local Choteau citizens who felt that the famous Old North Trail in Montana along the Front Range should be marked before it totally disappeared. This trail, starting as a footpath over the years, evolved into a dog travois path, a horse travois trail, wagon trail, and in parts a gravel road and paved highway. It was one of America's first highways.

Just west of Choteau, Montana parts of this highway still sit, untouched, in much the same shape as when those First Americans traveled down it. From this main road others branch off like spines into the mountains, through the passes, and into the Westside country of the Rockies. It was in continuous use until the automobile became common place and the roads and highways moved further east onto the flat plains country.

Ancient stone cairn markers still stood in some spots, pointing the winding way through the foothills. And the actual trail made from the travois digging into the earth marked other sections. But the cairns had been torn apart by people looking for treasure under them [which they never found], and the trails were gradually fading away naturally. The committee decided to place boulders with "Old North Trail" marked on them at strategic locations along the trail in Teton County. They had also developed a

¹ At one time pejoratively called "Breed Town" by outsiders.

map of the trail to the Canadian border. This was used by some Métis and Blackfoot people, visiting back and forth, who still traveled by wagon until the 1950s.

The Old North Trail is now marked, but to many it is just scratches in the dirt and piles of rocks. The full story of the trail and its rich bodied history needs pointing out, and for this Al Wiseman is the person to see. Al gives guided tours of the trail and accompanying sites through the Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Preserve. These are usually free to those interested and can be short tours, or full day expeditions. Since the early people didn't just pass through the area quickly there are sites of tipis ring camps numbering in the hundreds of lodges, eagle catching pits, vision quest sites, and numerous buffalo jumps to see. The buffalo jumps [in many cases corrals rather than jumps] had been in use since prehistoric times with the last one in the area being around 1843. Piskan, in Blackfoot, was the name for these corrals, and they provided a food resource that allowed abundance in the winter months.

In addition to the Native American sites there are those of the Métis settlers. These are the people who had slipped into the nearby foothills to avoid the U.S. government forced removal to Canada in 1883. They used those many canyons just as the early travelers on the trail did. They were ideal places to escape enemies, and not be found.

In 2009 the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management put up an interpretive panel commemorating the Métis Settlement and Old North Trail. The following is their report of the event.

New Interpretive Panel Highlights Métis

by Ann Bouchers, Montana State Office, and Rod Sanders, Lewistown Field Office

Nearly 70 people listened appreciatively to the smooth, sweet sounds of a fiddle and a guitar drifting up through the trees. It was a fitting close to a National Public Lands Day event at the Ear Mountain interpretive site along the rugged Rocky Mountain Front 25 miles west of Choteau.



Al Wiseman, Jim Fox and Vince Fox close out the ceremony dedicating a new interpretive sign about the Métis.
Photo by Benjamin Miller

The July 31 gathering began with a few maintenance projects before moving on to the day's biggest attraction: the dedication of a newly installed interpretive panel about the Métis ("MAY-tee" or "may-TEE") Indians.

The Métis, a distinctive group of mixed blood French/Scottish and Indian people, evolved during the 17th century French/Canadian fur trade era. Their ancestral homeland -- then known as "Rupert's Land"-- was a large area which drains into Hudson Bay, including what is now known as the Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota.

In the 1870s, many of the Métis moved into Montana due to conflicts with European and Canadian immigrants, and eventually made their homes in some of the secluded canyons along the Rocky Mountain

Front. Until about 1920, there was a thriving Métis village near the Ear Mountain site.

Rod Sanders, outdoor recreation planner for the Lewistown Field Office, researched information for the new panel. Several people contributed to and reviewed his work, including Christi Belcourt, an Ontario, Canada, Métis artist whose work is featured on the state-of-the-art (high pressure laminate) sign. Historical photographs were provided by the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba. John Lemieux from the BLM National Sign Center in Rawlins, Wyo., designed the layout of the panel with guidance from Rod Sanders and MSO's interpretive specialist, Ruth Miller. The result is an attractive, informative synopsis of the Métis culture.

The dedication ceremony included remarks from Willy Frank, Lewistown Assistant Field Manager; Richard Hopkins, manager of the First Peoples Buffalo Jump near Great Falls and BLM Great Falls Field Station Manager when the trail and kiosk were constructed; Al Wiseman, a Métis descendant who lives nearby; and Rod Sanders. Jim Fox and son Vince of Harlem closed the ceremony with traditional Métis music on the guitar and fiddle.

Several others also deserve credit, including Zane Fulbright, Lewistown FO archeologist, for securing the funding for the new panel; and Sandra Padilla for organizing the NPLD project itself. Other Lewistown BLM contributors were Stan Benes, Mona Driskell, Benjamin Miller, Lori Montgomery, and Abel Guevara.

The South Fork of the Teton River was home to over 100 Métis, many are buried in the cemetery of the old community. The Wiseman's maintain 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.

Al Wiseman is the son of Cecelia Larance (b.1915) and Albert Dale Wiseman. His Métis grandparents on the maternal side are James Julien Larance (b.1881) and Mabel Clementine Fellers. Clementine was the daughter of Franklin Fellers² and Harriet June Gray. Harriet was the sister of James Gray who was the father of Métis political leader, lawyer and rights activist Raymond Francis Gray (1900-1961). Their parents were Michel Gray (1843-1904) and Caroline Campion (1837-1923).

Al's great-grandfather was Basile Larance (b. 1860) and his great-grandmother was Madeleine Campion.

Elaine Wiseman is the daughter of Marie Carriere (1927-2012) an Alfred Gray. Her maternal grandparents were William John Carriere (b.1885) and Flora Azure (b. 1887).³

² Born 1874 at Dupuyer, Montana. Franklin's parents were Adolphe Fellers born 1837 in France and Emilie Garipey born August 31, 1855 at St. Francois Xavier.

³ Flora Azure was the daughter of Francois Azure (b. 1862) and Emma LaRance (b. 1862). Emma LaRance was the daughter of Basile LaRance (b. 1831) and Marguerite Desjardins (b. 1837).



Cemetery maintained by Al and Elaine Wiseman of Choteau (Photo by Ralph Thornton)

The Wisemans were also involved in the development of the Choteau Museum and nearby Michif house furnished in Métis traditional style. Métis Elder Al Wiseman is also an archivist of Michif fiddle tunes.





Michif House

Scrip:

Larance Jr., Basile - Concerning his claim as a child - Address, Fort McLeod - Born, 1860 at St. Vital - Father, Basile Larance Sr., (Métis) - Mother, Marguerite Desjardins, (Métis) - Married, 1878 at McLeod to Madeleine Campion - Children living, two, Marie Rose born 1880 and Julien born 1882 - Children deceased, one, died unchristened - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 265.

Declaration by Basile Larance Jr

Concerning his Claim
to participate in any grant to Half-Breeds living in the
North-West Territories, as a half bred child

1. What is your name and P. O. Address? York McLeod P.O.
2. Where and when were you born? at St. Vital, P.E. in 1860
3. What was the name of your father? Basile Larance Sr
4. What was the name of your mother? Marquise Desjardins
5. Was your father a Half-breed or Indian or other? Half-breed
6. Was your mother a Half-breed or Indian or other? no
7. Where were you living each year since you were born? We left Manitoba with my parents when I was two or three years of age to come to Edmonton & on the plains following the buffalo & at St. Albert, I was living in the N.W. Terr. before & after the 15 July to this day I am at McLeod now since four years -
8. What has been your occupation? Trapper & laborer
9. If married when, where and to whom? in 1878, at McLeod, to Madeline Champion
10. How many children have you living? two
11. Give their names, and dates of birth? Marie Rose, age five years, Julien age thirteen
12. What was the name of their respective (mothers or fathers as the case may be)? Myself & Madeline Champion
13. How many children had you who died? one
14. Give dates of birth and death of those who died? he died last spring he was not named, as he died at night the same day of his birth

14. Can you produce baptismal certificates of the birth of your children? If so, produce them, if not, state reasons? *None*

15. Of those dead can you produce burial certificates? If so, please produce them, if not, state why not. *None*

16. Have you ever had a homestead entry? *None*

17. If so, what became of it? *None*

18. Have you ever had any land claims in Manitoba or the North-West? If so, state nature of them, when and how acquired and, what disposal did you make of them? *None*

19. What do you consider the value of all your property, land, implements, building, horses, cattle, &c.? *one horse, valued about \$50.00*

20. Did you ever receive land or scrip in Manitoba in commutation of the Half-Breed rights? *None*

21. Mention any names by which you have been called, other than your name given above? *None*

22. Do you receive any annuity as an Indian, or in any way participate in grants to Indians? *None*

23. State anything bearing on your claim that you may wish

I prefer to have a scrip for \$2.00 per acre rather than 2.00 acres of land

I lived in the vicinity ever since the 15 March last

*Witness
R. J. Smith*

*in
Basile Karanovic
Mark*

No. 188 Form J.

H.B. 312

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,



NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

Mt. Macleod 14 May 1885

This is to Certify that *Basile Larance the younger*

a Half-Breed, has proved to the satisfaction of the Commission that he was residing in the North West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of the Dominion Lands Act, 1883, and the Order in Council of the 30th March, 1885, is entitled at this date to Scrip to the amount of *Two hundred and forty* dollars.

The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to *Two hundred and forty* dollars, will be payable to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted, and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in payment of Dominion Lands.

W. A. R. Shult

Chairman of the Commission.

Larance, Julienne - Concerning her claim as a child - Address, St. Albert - Born, 1866 at St. Albert - Father, Basile Larance, (Métis) - Mother, Marguerite Desjardins, (Métis) - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 833.

No. 535 Form J.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,



NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

St. Albert 17 June 1885
This is to Certify that *Julianne Larance*
a Half-Breed, has proved to the satisfaction of the Commission that she was residing in the North
West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (B) of Clause 81 of
the Dominion Lands Act, 1888, and the Order in Council of the 30th March, 1885, is entitled at
this date to Scrip to the amount of *240* dollars.

The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to *240*
dollars, will be payable to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted,
and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par
in payment of Dominion Lands.

W. P. Re-shut.

Chairman of the Commission.

Collins, Agathe; address: Chateau, Montana; claim no. 1804; born: 11 May, 1878 at St. Albert; father: Basile Larance (Métis); mother: Marguerite Desjardins (Métis); file ref. 962086.

1804

allowed
Reserve
J.A. McKenna

1804

*Father rec'd scrip
as NW 14th Sec
in 1872 279713
mother also with
same figure 279719*

121

Form A.

Disallowed
U.S. Residence
16/3/11

NORTH-WEST HALFBREED CLAIMS COMMISSION.

1900. Reg. 962086

Before JAMES ANDREW JOSEPH MCKENNA, of the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, Esquire, and JAMES WALKER, of the City of Calgary, in the North-West Territories, Esquire, Commissioners.

Duly appointed and sitting as a Royal Commission at Edmonton in the North-West Territories, to investigate claims of Halfbreeds who were born in the Territories between the 15th July, 1870, and the 31st December, 1886, personally came and appeared Agathe Colleen ne Larocne

Claimant, who being duly sworn, deposes as follows:—

Claim rec'd under O. Reg. 1904
5th Dec 1904
Scrip issued to Agathe Colleen ne Larocne for 2000

- Question 1. What is your name?
Answer Agathe Colleen
- Question 2. Where do you reside?
Answer Chateau Mont
- Question 3. Where were you born?
Answer Ed. Alberta
- Question 4. When were you born?
Answer 11th of May 22 years ago (1878)
- Question 5. What is your father's name?
Answer Basile Larocne / Basile Larocne / Agathe Colleen
- Question 6. What was the name of your mother before her marriage?
Answer Marguerite Desjardins / Marguerite Desjardins / Marguerite Hamilton
- Question 7. Is your father a Halfbreed or an Indian?
Answer Not
- Question 8. Is your mother a Halfbreed or an Indian?
Answer Not
- Question 9. Have you ever received land or scrip in Manitoba or the North-West Territories in commutation of your Halfbreed rights?
Answer No

Buff Coat attached from 28. Albert. Alta.

Question 10 Are you a member of any Indian Band?

Answer. No.

My father and mother were sent in
to the bridge. I was living in Mountain View
or ten years before the rebellion I was quite
small when I went there and have lived
there ever since I came here a year ago
last July and am going back to Mountain
this fall

Exhibit A is Certificate of my baptism

And further deponent sayeth not.

Sworn before us at Edmonton
in the North
West Territories on the 24th
day of August A. D. 1900. *Witness*
Agathe X Bullins
Maak
J. P. ...
Commissioners. *J. ...*

Form No. 151.

HALFBREED COMMISSION.

Ottawa, 1st April, 1901.

Madam /-
(Application 1904)

Referring to the application for halfbreed scrip made by you at Edmonton in August last and reserved for decision at Ottawa. I have now to advise you that your claim has received due consideration and has been disallowed on the ground of United States residence.

Your obedient servant,
J. Samuel Prater
Secretary Halfbreed Commission.

Mrs Agathe Collins nee Lawrence,
Chicago, P. O.
Great Falls,
Montana.

HALFBREED COMMISSION.

Ottawa, 1st April, 1901.

sir /-
(Application 1904)

Referring to your letter of the 9th March last transmitting therewith power of attorney in the case of Agathe Collins' application for halfbreed scrip. I have now to advise you that the claim has received consideration and has been disallowed on the ground of foreign residence.

I return you the power of attorney herewith.


Your obedient servant,
J. Samuel Prater
Secretary Halfbreed Commission.

London Holloway Esq.,
Wimpsey,
Man.

Campion, Madeleine - Concerning her claim as a child - Address, Fort McLeod - Born, St. Albert, North West Territories, 1860 - Father, William Campion, (Métis) - Mother, Philoméne, (Métis) - Married, 1878 at Fort McLeod to Basile Larance - Children living, two, Marie Rose born 1880 and Julien born 1882 - Children deceased, one, died 1884, not named - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 269.

71/B. 312

No. 184 Form J.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,

NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.

Fort McLeod May 14 1895

This is to Certify that Madeleine Campion
a Half-Breed, has proved to the satisfaction of the Commission that he was residing in the North West Territories previous to the 15th day of July, 1870, and under Sub-clause (E) of Clause 81 of the Dominion Lands Act, 1888, and the Order in Council of the 30th March, 1885, is entitled at this date to Scrip to the amount of Two hundred and forty dollars.

The Scrip called for by this Certificate, amounting to Two hundred and forty dollars, will be payable to bearer, will specify the name of the person in whose favour it is granted, and will be delivered to the person producing this Certificate. Said Scrip will be accepted at par in payment of Dominion Lands.

W. A. R. Stewart
Chairman of the Commission.

Declaration by Madeline Champion wife of
Basil Larance Jr
 Concerning her Claim
 to participate in any grant to Half-Breeds living in the
 North-West Territories, as a half breed child

1. What is your name and P. O. Address? Fort McLeod P.O.
2. Where and when were you born? at St. Albert N.W. Terr. in 1860
3. What was the name of your father? William Champion
4. What was the name of your mother? Philomene
5. Was your father a Half-breed or Indian or other? (Half breed)
6. Was your mother a Half-breed or Indian or other? do
7. Where were you living each year since you were born? I lived in the North West Territories since since I was born (in 1860) My parents were Indians before I resided with them in the North West Territories before the 15th July 1870 to the day we were at Sun River from 1875 to 1882 since then here at McLeod
8. What has been your occupation? I am the wife of a Labourer & Freightman
9. If married when, where and to whom? Basil Larance the younger at McLeod in 1878
10. How many children have you living? two
11. Give their names, and dates of birth? Maria Rose aged five years, Julian aged three years
12. What was the name of their respective (mothers or fathers as the case may be) J. Maguire & Basil Larance Jr
13. How many children had you who died? one
14. Give dates of birth and death of those who died? he died last spring the same day of his birth he was not named

Form No. 143.

Gray, Christina; address: Choteau, Montana; claim no. 1386; born: 14, June, 1881 at St. Mary's; father: Michel Gray (Métis); mother: Caroline Champion (Métis); scrip cert.: form C, no. 898.

Appendix: Census

**EXCERPT FROM 1900 CENSUS Cree or Chippewa/Métis in Choteau Township Teton County
Montana**

NAME RELATION AGE TRIBE YEAR OF IMMIGRATION

BRASS, Rosalie Boarder 11 Cree 1891
JOCCO, Pete Head 28 Cree 1877

MILLER?, Angelique Mother 51 1877
MILLER?, Jacob Father 70 Cree 1877
MILLER?, Barnie Brother 25 Cree
MILLER?, Johnie Brother 23 Cree
MILLER?, Albert Brother 22 Cree
ROSETT, Joe Head 34 Cree 1883, Jenne Wife 33 Cree 1877, Eliza Daughter 13 Cree MT, Johnie Son 9
Cree MT, Isabella Daughter 7 Cree MT, Frank Son 1 Cree MT
LARANCE, Bazil Head 38 Cree 1881, Julian Son 18 Cree MT
GUARDAPEE, Joe Head 45 Cree Naturalized
GUARDAPEE, Sarah Wife 35 Cree -
GUARDAPEE, Eli Son 23 Cree MT
GUARDEPEE, Julien Son 21 Cree MT
GRAY, Cecitia Daughter 18 Cree MT
FELLERS, Louis Head 29 Cree MT, Elizabeth Wife 23 Cree MT
DEMURRAY, John Head 22 Cree 1889, Olive Wife 20 Cree MT, Emma Daughter 1 Cree MT, Julian Son
9/12 Cree MT
HAMILIN, Sivers Head 50 Chippewa 1885
HAMILIN, - Wife 55 Cree
HAMILIN, Lorman? Son 17 Cree
SWAN, Batise Head 35 Chippewa 1882, Julia Wife 25 Chippewa, Rosa Daughter 10 Chippewa MT, Runie
Daughter 5 Chippewa MT
BASSETT, - Head 54 Cree MT
-, Amab Mother 90 Piegan MT
BELCORE, Alex Head 26 Cree 1890, Mary R. Wife 22 Cree MT, Ursula Daughter 10/12 Cree MT
GREY, Joe Head 30 Cree 1890
GREY, Caroline Wife 48 Cree 1880
GRAY, Jas Son in law 26 Cree 1892
GRAY, ALBERT Grandson 2 Cree MT
GUARDIPEE, Joe Son 13 Cree MT
GREY, Florence Daughter 10 Cree MT
GREY, Mary A. Daughter 5 Cree MT
GREY, Melvina Daughter 3 Cree MT
GARDINER, Pete Head 75 Cree 1882, Rosalie Wife 65 Cree, Frazine Daughter 20 Cree
LAPEYRE, Pascal Head 35 Cree 1872
LAPEYRE, Mary Ann Wife 34 Cree 1872
LAPEYRE, Cecelia Daughter 6 Cree MT
LAPEYRE, John Head 49 Cree 1872
LAPEYRE, Mary Wife 47 Cree 1872
LAPEYRE, James Boarder 33 Cree MINN
HAMLIN, Joe Head 25 Cree 1890
HAMLIN, Della Wife 19 Cree MT
LARANCE, Jackson Head 38 Cree 1880, Eliza Wife 29 Cree 1887, Grigway Son 11 Cree MT, Josaphine
Daughter 9 Cree MT, Ursula Daughter 7 Cree MT, Gertie Daughter 5 Cree MT, Eva Daughter 3 Cree MT,
Dolman Daughter 5/12 Cree MT
ST. GERMAIN, Milner Sister in law 27 Cree 1890
LARANCE, Bazil Head 75 Cree 1876
LARANCE, Maggie Wife 60 Cree 1876
NADO, Frank Head 48 Cree 1888, Emma Wife 29 Cree 1876, Frank Son 5 Cree MT, Louis Son 3 Cree
MT, Henry Son 4/12 Cree MT

CARR, Joe Head 30 Cree MT, Marian Wife 24 Cree MT, Pearl Daughter 4 Cree MT, Arthur Son 2 Cree MT



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