IN BETWEEN PEOPLE: THE METIS OF CENTRAL MONTANA

Candi Zion
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COVER: Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel’s trusted military commander. His wife Madeleine (Wilkie) was the sister of Lewistown’s Judith (Wilkie) Berger. Madeleine died of tuberculosis in 1886, buried in a Lewistown Metis cemetery and later reburied in the mass graves at Calvary Cemetery in Lewistown, Montana (reddit.com).
IN BETWEEN PEOPLE: THE METIS OF CENTRAL MONTANA

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THE METIS: RIGHTS TO RUPERTS LAND LOST

The fascinating story of the Metis people living in Central Montana can only be understood by an examination of their ancestors; European explorers, freemen, trappers, traders and hunters voyaging to the North American (Canada) continent in search of economic gain and pursuit of empire expansionism. It is from these adventurous and enterprising men that the Metis people descend.

It began with the French invasion of lands in North America occupied by several tribes of indigenous people. One of the first French explorers, Jacques Cartier, a maritime adventurer, navigated the St. Lawrence River and Gulf in 1534 later naming the region the “Country of Canadas” after two large Iroquoian settlements. A year later, Francis I, King of France, laid claim to the far reaching lands that included most of the Canadian eastern seaboard, the Great Lakes Region, and extending south to the Gulf of Mexico just west of the British colonial borders, naming it “New France”.

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1Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2; “Canada (New France)”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org,
With the expansive land claims, French explorers and entrepreneurs made their way through the Canadian countryside constructing outposts based around areas of native settlement. Tadoussac, a 1599 trading post established at an Innu hunting base near the confluence of the Saguenay and Saint Lawrence Rivers, constituted the first French settlement and remained the center of French trade with indigenous people until the 18th century. Although constructed as the first French post, it was not considered as “official” since it was a trading monopoly post. The first colonial official settlement is recognized as Quebec, established by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. Canada was eventually divided into the districts of Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montréal, Hudson's Bay, named after Englishman Harry Hudson who explored the water bodies in 1609 looking for the Northwest Passage, Acadie(a) in the northeast, Plaisance on the island of Newfoundland and Louisiane(a).²

In 1754, the British, with an eye to acquire the colonies, not just Canada, and capitalize on trade opportunities under French rule, entered into a bloody conflict with the French known as the Seven Years War. Great Britain victoriously defeated the French and their allies, taking possession of lands including the bulk

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of New France; the conflict formerly ended with the signing of the 1763 Treaty of Paris calling for the renouncement of any French claim on Canada in exchange for other colonies. Additionally the treaty and subsequent documents offered the residing “French Canadians” continued residency, a form of French civil law, and other civil and human rights including the right to practice Catholicism. Under the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the British recognized to a certain extent, the rights of indigenous people promising them fiduciary care by the Crown realizing the potential threat poised Europeans by the much larger native nations. This treaty is disputed today as both positively and/or negatively supporting tribal sovereignty and self-determination.³

The transfer of New France to Great Britain opened the way for British commercial ventures poised and ready to capitalize on the fur bearing industry. The powerful fur trading British Hudson Bay Company, established by English royal charter in 1670 under the King of England, Charles II, operated as the de facto government of the region for nearly 200 years until 1870. Pursuant to the charter, the company received sole access to “build without bounds” and obtain the prime British American Rupert’s Land (named after the king’s cousin Prince Rupert) comprised of the Hudson Bay watershed and encompassing Manitoba,

most of Saskatchewan, southern Alberta, southern Nunavut, and the northern portions of Ontario and Quebec. In what later became the United States, Rupert’s Land extended into Minnesota, North Dakota and a very small part of Montana and South Dakota. The company intended to create a trapping and trading monopoly while allowing the Hudson Bay employees and their mostly mixed blood families to organize and form communities, farm, live and prosper on the land.⁴

During their two and one half centuries of occupying this vast land, these British entrepreneurs and French voyagers formed alliances of mutual economic and social benefit with the indigenous people. Several prominent independent fur traders, freemen and fur trading companies moved into the area, some establishing trading posts. By 1743, Frenchmen Pierre Gaultier de Varennes and Sieur de La Verendrye had established two posts in the popular and lucrative Red River Basin with at least five related native groups following the traders. The traders and their employees depended on developing relationships with native tribes for economic ties and partnerships and an understanding of the native trade networks, for friendship, sustenance, and knowledge of the terrain and its varied flora and fauna.

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Rupert’s Land
(purple)

“Rupert’s Land” wikipedia.com
The natives enjoyed the benefits of the European trade goods, items they had never been exposed to, especially guns. One of the most important bonds of these two extremely differing groups of people proved to be the union of the cultures in cohabitation of marriage producing children that became a new and in between culture. These familial connections between the male Europeans, called “O-tee-paym-soo-wuk”, “their own boss”, and female natives solidified neither white nor Indian, but rather “Metis”, French for “mixed blood”.

Wives of these European men came from several different tribes, but two tribes produced the most familial alliances; the Chippewa and Cree. The early Cree are reported to have inhabited as far south and east as Pennsylvania, but non-native populations expanded from their American east coast colonies gradually pushing west through the wildernesses, forced indigenous people to flee from the intrusive movement. The traditional “homelands” of the Cree and Chippewa (Ojibwe) intersected around the Hudson Bay and Great Lakes with the Cree inhabiting lands farther north and west of the Chippewa.

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5Michael Hogue, Metis and the Medicine Line, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2015), pg. 17; Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2; Candi Zion and Becki Miller, Fort Assiniboine (National Register Nomination, 2017), Section 8 pgs. 27-28; “Metis Celebration” photocop[y, Lewistown Public Library, SC 22.3., pg. 21; Martha Harrown Foster, We Know Who We Are: Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pgs. 17, 22-23; “Metis”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org, (2021) pg. 1.

6Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2; “Cree”, Canadian Encyclopedia, canadianencyclopedia.ca, (2018), map; “Ojibwe”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org, (2021), map; Candi Zion and Becki Miller, Fort Assiniboine (National Register Nomination, 2017), Section 8 pgs. 27-28.
The progeny of the Europeans and native tribes thrived and obtained lifeways and skills from immersion in both their indigenous culture and European culture. The Metis children grew to adulthood discovering opportunities as translators for European and later American fur trading companies, as guides, trappers, freighters,
tanners, woodhawks, traders and hunters, while following their native ancestor’s lifeways as a highly mobile community.\textsuperscript{7}

By 1849, Father G.A. Belcourt, a longtime resident of Pembina, now part of North Dakota, indicated that 5,000 Metis lived in the region and descended from thirteen differing bands with the majority being of Cree or Chippewa ancestry. A St. Paul newspaper article from that time period described their perspective of the physical characteristics, dress and linguistics of the Metis men as:

“Their dress is halfway between that of the whites and Indians…They wear wild looking fur caps, blanket coats, pants secured around the waist by a belt, and deer skin moccasins. Their complexion is swarthy, their hair and eyes black. Their language is an impure French, though they probably all talk Indian, besides.”\textsuperscript{8}

The Metis consistently ventured south of the 49\textsuperscript{th} parallel tracking the fur bearers and wild game where their migratory path led, seeking seasonal plants and following ancient trade routes their ancestors trod throughout the centuries. They were unattached to the concept of a boundary between the two neighboring countries of Canada and the United States, freely roaming wherever and whenever they needed to find sustenance. Early historic records of these treks into what

\textsuperscript{7}Candi Zion, \textit{In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River}, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2.

\textsuperscript{8}Martha Harroun Foster, \textit{We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community}, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pg. 40.
became Montana identify Metis and their large family assemblages up the Flathead and Jocko Rivers on Hudson Bay Company fur trapping expeditions. It is noted that in 1846 several of these trapping mixed blood families established homes near Father Jean Pierre DeSmet’s Bitterroot Valley mission, and others pursued the fur trade with the upper Missouri River forts, living and thriving along that river and her tributaries.⁹

In his memoirs, Central Montana cattle baron Granville Stuart, recounts stories about Hudson Bay trappers and Metis he encountered while gold mining and pursuing capitalistic ventures in southwestern Montana Territory. He talks about meeting Capt. Richard Grant, previously employed by the Hudson Bay Company, and his family who moved into the area with several other trappers, their native wives and children. Grant built a substantial log cabin while the other mountain men and families in attendance lived in the more commonly used dressed elk skin lodges down the “Beaverhead at the mouth of the Stinking Water”. Grant’s wife was a quarter “Red River Indian of the North” (Red River settlement in Canada); she and her three daughters had been educated in a convent, learning several languages. One of the daughters married C.P. Higgins, who in partnership with Frank Worden founded the Hellgate Trading Post, the beginnings of Missoula, as

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⁹Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 3.
well as forged a successful career as an enterprising business man in Missoula.

One of the Grant’s son, John, and his Bannock wife Quarra, established the Grant (Kohrs) Ranch on the Clark Fork River persuading others, including several Metis families, to settle with him, founding the town of Deer Lodge.¹⁰

In 1867, non-native people living in British North America desired autonomy from England wishing to pursue their interest in expanded westward development, an action that jeopardized the rights and future of the native people and Metis. The Hudson Bay owned Rupert’s Land, settled by the Europeans and Hudson Bay employees, their native wives and Metis descendants, became a focal point of the expansionists. The families and natives before them had transformed and developed the wilderness into desirable, cohesive and organized settlements and capitalized on the land’s resources.¹¹

Despite the impending dire consequences for the original Rupert’s Land inhabitants, the Hudson Bay Company relinquished their charter and chartered lands in 1870 to the newly formed Dominion of Canada. The Metis residents established their own provisional government on the heels of this decision and in


¹¹Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2.
Red River Parishes in 1870

Gary Still
redriverancestry.ca
protest of the appointment of the unpopular English speaking, William McDougall as governor. The new Canadian government engaged the Metis led by Louis Riel, a well-educated, intelligent, brash, spiritually driven young man in the racially driven conflict, the Red River Resistance of 1869 to 1870. This and following conflicts and battles over Metis land use and rights, basically forced many to escape oppression and flee the country.\textsuperscript{12}

The increasing and widening non-native settlement of Canada caused the tribes to fragment and migrate south and west, as did the buffalo herds feeling the pressure and enduring decimation by civilization for profitable gain. The fur trading industry was in decline as the market contracted and dwindled causing further economic pressure on the tribes and Metis. The economic disparities complicated by a typhoid fever epidemic caused the mass exodus from Canada of the Metis and their families from the 1860s to 1870s. They were not alone; these pressures were also felt and conflict experienced by the Cree and Pembina band of the Chippewa, many of whom were closely related to the Metis. By the late 1870s and early 1880s, Metis, Cree, and Chippewa appeared together in the unpopulated lands

\textsuperscript{12}Candi Zion and Becki Miller, \textit{Fort Assiniboine} (National Register Nomination, 2017), Section 8 pg. 28; Candi Zion, \textit{In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River}, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 2-3; “Rupert’s Land”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org, (2021) pg. 1.
north of the Missouri River, in the areas that later became Havre and Zortman, and the Milk River region in the Montana Territory.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13}Lawrence Barkwell, “Louis Riel Petitions for a Reserve in Montana”, (Manitoba: Louis Riel Institute, n.d.), pg. 1; Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pgs. 2-3; Candi Zion and Becki Miller, Fort Assiniboine (National Register Nomination, 2017), Section 8 pgs. 28.
The 1870 census, conducted in the most populated portions east of the Rocky Mountain Front Range in Montana Territory, reveals several Canadian families and their half-blood children resided in the areas of the Sun River Valley, Fort Benton, St. Peter’s Mission and Fort Shaw. The occupations of the household heads, true to their roots and life experiences, indicated they were either traders or hunters.
Over the next few years, additional enclaves of Metis included tent and small cabin camps along the Front, around what became Augusta and Choteau and on the Dearborn River, Deep Creek and the Teton River. On the northern Front, the Metis established communities around Bynum, Dupuyer and near Birch Creek, and in close proximity to the Blackfeet people at Two Medicine River near Heart Butte and Babb.¹⁴

The tightly knit families, tribes and Europeans related by blood and kinship, headed south in creaky, wooden two wheeled Red River carts by way of the Sweetgrass Hills, Cypress Hills and Saskatchewan. They traveled throughout the Milk River Valley and Missouri River country and other smaller river and creek bottoms. But tensions were high following the 1876 Battle of the Little Big Horn and 1877 Battle of the Bear Paws. The pressure was on, forcing many native or native blood people to leave those areas placing the in between Metis in a position, once again, to find a place to put down roots. According to Clemence (Gourneau) Berger, twenty five families led by her father-in-law Pierre Berger, left the Milk River (Malta to Chinook) country in the spring of 1879, traveling by the under construction Ft. Assiniboine, across the Missouri River at Ft. Benton down to Arrow Creek, around the Judith and Snowy Mountains, through the Judith Basin,

¹⁴Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 4.
landing in the valley of Spring Creek. The families were the Bergers, Fleury’s, Azures, Lyonnais (also known as Doney), Adams, Turcottes, Larocques, Doneys, Gayions (Gagnons), Fayant (Fagnant), Ducharme, Wilkies, Ledoux, Ouellettes, LaFountain(e)s and a widow, Ellen Laquoit. The families settled in the Judith Mountain foothills near Spring Creek, and Half Breed Creek not far from the short lived 1874 summer military camp of Camp Lewis (1873 Fort Sherman had been dismantled), the 1874 Reed and Bowles Trading Post, and around the 1880 Ft. Maginnis. John B. LaFountain settled 160 acres near a small stream that fed into Spring Creek later labeled Blind Breed Creek after the partially blind LaFountain. John B. Berger, interested in the source of the clear Spring Creek, traced it to a spring which he aptly named, “En Grand Source”, or “Big Spring”.15

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15Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pgs. 3-4; Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 5, 8, 11-38; Capt. Michael Koury, Guarding the Carroll Trail Camp Lewis 1874-1875, (Johnstown, Colorado: The Old Army Press, 1969), pgs. 13-15; News Argus, “First Settlers”, December 22, 1957, SC 22.1, Lewistown Public Library; Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pg. 108.
Reeds and Bowles Trading Post and Reedsfort (Post Office)
lewistownlibrary.org
A second major wave of Metis settlers came in the fall following Francis A. Janeaux, a trader who in the early 1870’s operated a post northeast of present day Saco on Frenchmen’s Creek. He intended to close his old trading post and open a new one around the Metis settlement which later became Lewistown, making arrangements with T.C. Powers of Fort Benton for goods in the summer of 1879. These families included the Klines (although they may have been in the first wave), Janeauxs, Dagneaus, Morases, Laverdures, Charettes and quite possibly Moses Latray (Latreille) who worked for Janeaux but may have arrived independently as he was known to have been working around Ft. Benton since 1866.¹⁶

A third wave followed and included the Wells, LaFromboise, more Ouellettes, and Marions. Other families are noted as being in the area by 1880 including the Gariepys, Cardinals, Davis’s, Adams, more Laverdures, and Charbonneaus. The 1880 census indicates other families resided there too, but the census takers spelling may be inaccurate. These are the Galepas, Piskas, Feeais, Myers, and Larges.¹⁷

¹⁶“Metis Celebration” photocopy, Lewistown Public Library, SC 22.3, pg. 16; Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 41-50; “The Heritage Book of the Original Fergus County Area”, Camey Bertolino Collection, photocopy, nd., no pg.
¹⁷Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 52-71.
Francis Janeaux: lewistownnews.com; Red River Carts: timetoast.com
Louis Riel took refuge in Montana with the Metis, teaching at St. Peters Mission, spending time with the already established Central Montana Spring Creek Metis, and around Rocky Point and Carroll, steamer-freight posts on the Missouri River. He was reorganizing, and planning, eventually petitioning the Canadian and United States Army for reservations, hunting rights, enrollment and most importantly, human rights. The first petition was submitted in 1878 by a group of Metis in the Cypress Hills requesting a strip of land 150 miles along the border where the Pembina River crosses into the states for the purpose of hunting. In August of 1880, while camped on the Musselshell River, Riel wrote an appeal to General Nelson Miles asking that he forward it to the proper authorities for the creation of a “special reservation” for his people to set down permanent roots. In the petition, Riel begins by stating, “We the undersigned Halfbreeds…” and continues by saying, “We ask the government to set aside a portion of land as a special reservation in this territory for the Halfbreeds…” Riel says further, “…if it should be so desired to have Halfbreed scouts a willing answer to the call would be given.” About one hundred Metis, men and women, most interrelated, and living at nearly all the aforementioned locations in the Montana Territory, signed the petition.
Rocky Point buildings

“Rocky Point”
mapper.acme.com

Rocky Point Location in the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge near Fort Peck Dam
The Spring Creek group comprised the majority of signers including the Bergers, Mose LaTray, the Laverdures, and LaFountains. Despite their efforts, Riels’ petition was denied. It is of special interest that he designates his people and himself as “Halfbreed”, perhaps because the racial stigma was customary and the social norm of the times.\textsuperscript{18}

Several of the Metis, in stark contrast, broke from Riel over the issue of reservation enrollment and “Indian” status. Chippewas from Pembina and Turtle Mountain asserted their desire to maintain connections with their Dakota roots and family. Instead, they supported negotiations for the Turtle Mountain Reservation, with the exception of the Little Shell Tribe who refused to sign and became ‘Landless” until 2019 when they received federal recognition.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{19}Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pgs. 126-127; “Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org, (2021) pg. 1; Bill Thackeray, editor, Metis Centennial Celebration Publication, 1879-1979, (no pub: per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 1979), pg. 27.
Louis Riel

123clipartpng.com
Not all of the Metis fled what once was Rupert’s Land, however. Strongholds of Metis, Assiniboine, Chippewa and Cree battled the Canadian government. The situation had worsened for them causing a Saskatchewan delegation led by Gabriel Dumont, Riel’s military commander, to travel south and coax Riel back to lead and renew the battle for land and autonomy. The Metis and Canadian government clashed causing the horrific Northwest Rebellion of 1885 which resulted in devastation and bloodshed, and the eventual trial and execution of Riel. The tragic events prompted the Metis in a second major wave to flee to the northern tier of the United States in 1885, mostly to the Dakota and Montana territories, settling the Hi-Line country and the prairies to the Rocky Mountains. Many fled to the Spring Creek area after the Rebellion, including Gabriel Dumont who was under constant vigil by the United States government as well as the Canadian government which kept an open file on the military leader for years.²⁰

Concerned that the Metis in Spring Creek would join Riel, the Commander of Fort Maginnis, Lt. Colonel James W. Forsyth, entered into an investigation of the matter. In 1880, the fort commander had given permission to Riel who was working as a trader at Carroll and acting on behalf of the Metis, the right to hunt,

and protect themselves and their horses against the “raiding Indians”. The commander had made a distinction, not clearly defined in other situations, between the “Indians” and the Spring Creek Metis. Riel’s involvement with the Spring Creek Metis however, caused non-natives to become worrisome about their intentions. An 1885 Mineral Argus article reports the commander’s investigation found little prospect of the “breeds” enlisting in Riel’s service or sympathizing with the cause. To prove this case, Metis were asked to bring letters sent them from Canada to determine any degree of joining the insurrection, but found nothing to that effect. It was felt, “…they have good ranches and permanent settlements which they are too wise to sacrifice for a mere sentiment of sympathy with the northern insurrectionists…” The article describes further how, “…they are generally among the most peaceful and law abiding citizens…”, of about fifty families with seventy-five men capable of bearing arms.21

Concurrently, with the Metis petitions for land and mass exodus of Metis from the north, ran a general non-native public sentiment that balked at native and part native populations moving into the Montana Territory. Fort Assinniboine, called into action, continually uprooted and rounded up Cree as well as Metis, destroying their homes and stock forcing them to continually move, often across the border.

into Canada from the time the fort was constructed in 1879 for the next seventeen years. The people and powers that be in the Montana Territory were determined to irradiate and displace the “renegade Canadian Cree”, a blanket term used to define Cree and anyone of mixed descent, the movement heightening to a frenzy around statehood in 1889.22

There were some proponents and sympathizers in support of giving the Metis reservation lands, but the most prevalent sentiment voiced by politicians and newspapers insisted on deportation even though definitively establishing the Metis’s country of origin remained in question. The Cree Deportation Act of 1896 placed the responsibility of rounding up every Cree and Metis for deportation into Canada in the hands of Lt. Pershing’s Troop D and 10th Cavalry of Fort Assinniboine. This major statewide roundup that covered much of Montana deported over 500 people, most of whom eventually and often immediately returned to the Montana Territory after their hand-off to the Canadian Mounties. Many of the Metis, however, including the Spring Creek Metis, did not suffer the

22Candi Zion, In Between People: The Metis of the Front Range and South and North Forks of the Teton River, (per a Dave Walters Fellowship, 2019), pg. 5; Mineral Argus, “Will Not Join Riel”, April 23, 1885, SC 978.6292, Lewistown Public Library.
subjugation of the roundup, being well entrenched in Montana as settlers, landowners and as the founders of Lewistown.  

23 Ibid., pgs. 5-6.
THE SPRING CREEK METIS AND GRANVILLE STUART SETTLE CENTRAL MONTANA

The early accounts of these Metis landowners and Lewistown founders settling on the prolific and rich lands of this part of Central Montana are well documented. Clemence (Gourneau) Berger wife of Isaac Berger, and daughter-in-law of Pierre, came by way of the Red River colonies and lived in the Canadian Wood Mountains for the birth of her first two children. From there they went on to the Big Bend of the Milk River near what became Malta. They followed where sustenance led, going back up to Canada into the Cypress Hills and returning again to the Big Bend country and moving along the Milk as far east as present day Chinook. It was there that they witnessed the starving Nez Perce, baby’s heads sticking out of sacks made to carry on each side of the mother, fleeing General Nelson Miles and the Battle of the Bear Paws on their way to Canada. They lived for around six years on the Milk River before arriving at Spring Creek in 1879 and settling near Boyd Creek, which flowed into Spring Creek. She describes her life on the move saying, “While we roamed the prairies…we were always in the same company of part Indian blood, and traveled in many groups…just following the
buffalo trails. You might think we lived the life of the real Indians, but one thing we had always with us which they did not- religion”.

The Metis were profoundly devote Christians proud of their Catholicism, instilled in them from the early introduction of that faith to their ancestors by the French. Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries lived with their people, documenting the ancestry of births, marriages and deaths as they moved and hunted. A missionary was always in accompaniment until the people reached the Milk River, and then the Metis would go any distance to find one. Clemence states further, “Wherever we were, we had some Jesuit missionaries with us. They baptized our children and instructed them in the Catholic faith, and we always did try to live in accordance with their teachings…Every night we had prayer meeting and just before a buffalo hunt, we would see our men on bended knee in prayer.” Travel was frowned upon on Sunday when a rosary was always publicly recited in an enclosure of drawn together Red River carts.

As time went by, the herds of buffalo began to thin out causing Metis leaders to call meetings and discuss alternatives. Clemence continues, “…we had several meetings to decide on what to do next. We realized that we could not live on

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24Mary Jean Golden, *1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin*, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 5-7.
25Elizabeth Swan and her sister Margaret LaTray, “A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers”, 1945, SC 1.1, Lewistown Public Library; Ibid., pg. 6.
hunting forever. One general meeting was called, and it was then decided that we should settle permanently somewhere in 1878. I remember my father-in-law, Pierre Berger, decided to cross the Missouri River and come west. He told his sons he heard of a place through an Indian friend which he believed would be suitable for all.”

Interviews with early Metis pioneers disclosed information about the second wave of Metis to the Spring Creek area in the summer of 1879. A 1921 News Argus article reveals Metis families were living on the Milk River at a point between what became Glasgow and Malta. During the winter of 1878 to 1879, Frank Daignon and John Laverdure found horses that had been lost and belonged to Major Alonso Reed of Reed and Bowles Trading Post and later Reed’s Fort (Reedsfort) near present day Lewistown. In January, Reed visited the camp, identifying his horses telling the Metis about the magnificent country he lived in, “…a basin surrounded by mountains with fine streams of water dividing the valley and with fish and game in abundance, large herds of buffalo in particular…”. The Metis decided to travel there with an escort of two soldiers and two civilians sent by Captain Williams, commanding officer at Ft. Benton, to as far as the Felix McGuin branch on Cottonwood. At some point, two Metis were sent to scout out

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26Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 7-8.
the buffalo, finding a large herd northeast of Black Butte. After a four day rest, the whole contingency of Metis set out killing large numbers of the animals.

Following the buffalo, they drifted toward the Flat Willow where they met up with Pierre Laverdure, Francis Daignon, and Francis Janeaux who had traveled south from Ft. Benton. Together, the group ventured south of the Snowy Mountains through the “Gap in the West” (Judith Gap) discovering many more herds of buffalo. From there they traveled to Spring Creek where they found Paul Morase, Janeaux’s employee, and a Canadian named Renaud who had come down from
Rocky Point on the Missouri River. The Metis created a settlement and claimed land in the area; one of the early settlers, Bernard LaFountain fell ill in October of 1879. Word was sent to St. Peter’s Mission, calling for a priest, Fr. Damiani answered the call performing the very first Catholic mass in a teepee erected for the occasion setting the precedence for regular visits by the priests thereon.\(^{27}\)

In a 1931 interview, Ben Klyne (Kline) talked about the military presence traveling with the second wave of Metis on their trek to the Spring Creek area. “…the soldiers were bringing the breeds from Milk River to the Missouri River. The breeds were lined up single file in their carts (waiting for the ferry). The line extended about a mile. The soldiers and some of the breeds started a run on a bunch of buffalo. The buffalo, in order to escape a group, made a run towards the line, and knocked the breeds and their carts like a bunch of ten pins.”\(^{28}\)

Elizabeth Swan, daughter of John B. Berger, in a 1957 newspaper article describes military involvement with the third wave of settlers bound for the Spring Creek area. She narrates the ferry crossing of this group of Metis at the junction of the Missouri and Musselshell Rivers on the Carroll Crossing. Among them, were the Wells and Ouellettes. The Army rounded them up at the Milk River informing

\(^{27}\) News Argus, “Half Breeds are First Settlers in Judith Basin”, 12-16-1921, photocopy, collections, Lewistown Public Library.

\(^{28}\) Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pg. 39.
them that they should go to the Spring Creek Metis settlement. According to Elizabeth, General Nelson Miles and his troops escorted the group as far as the Missouri River, helping them load the Red River carts on the ferry. Once arriving at their Spring Creek destination, Ouellette staked out a piece of land that later became known as the Metis enclave of “Buckskin Flats”.29

In a 1945 interview by her daughter, Elizabeth discusses the Red River Metis decisions to break into groups and select permanent locations elsewhere. After about eight years on the move around the Milk River chasing diminishing herds of buffalo, the Metis groups decided to either head back to Canada, North Dakota, or different points in Montana. She confirms that Pierre Berger, Elizabeth’s father in law, led the first wave of Metis to Spring Creek.30

She also describes the arrival of the Janeauxs and their group in the second wave of Metis settlers. Francis was married to Pierre Laverdure’s daughter, Virginia, and with their family brought a string of Red River carts loaded with goods from his trading post near Malta. He settled 160 acres that he eventually homesteaded building a home in what later became Lewistown across from the present day Lewistown Post Office. He also built the Janeaux Trading Post near Main Street and 3rd Avenue North to Broadway, constructing a stockade to protect his property

30Elizabeth Swan and her sister Margaret LaTray, “A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers”, 1945, SC 1.1, Lewistown Public Library.
from marauding tribes. The stockade was described to be an enclosure of four walls, 100 feet by 150 feet built of six to eight inch diameter posts, eight to ten feet high and set in the ground, two bastions at opposite corners, with half a dozen cabins, the cookhouse, trade house, and other buildings contained within its walls.  

As more people, including white populations, moved into the area between 1880 and 1899, it became increasingly apparent that the early settlers needed to lay claim to their properties. Peter Berger, Antoine Ouellette, Francis Janeaux, Paul Morase, and Pierre Laverdure were some of the first to lay claim, traveling to White Sulphur Springs, the county seat of Meagher County. Metis filing permanent homestead claims in addition to those mentioned included Antoine Wallet, John B. Berger, Edward Wells Jr., J.B. Pichette, Francis Laverdure, Alexander Wilkie, Isaiah Berger, Isadore Berger, and Antoine Fleuries (Fleury). Trader and skilled worker families staked claims closer to the city nucleus with those of higher status getting the best location, while the hunter families lived farther away. Some purchased their land outright, others filed as “squatters” under the 1841 Preemptive Act or proved up on the land after five years per the Homestead Act requirements.

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However, several Metis migrating from Canada after 1885 were unable to lay claim to the land if they were identified or labeled as Canadian Crees. John Swan requested citizenship in 1907 filing a form with the District Court Clerk, an act that became an issue involving Metis naturalization. The clerk, unclear on how to proceed, requested a ruling from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization in Washington D.C. The response by the department chief, Richard K. Campbell, noted that pursuant to 2161 of the revised statutes, only free white, Africans or persons of African descent could apply. Campbell stated, “It would appear, therefore, that Canadian half breed Indians as mentioned in your letter could not be naturalized under that provision.” The newspaper article reporting on the subject noted that 825 aliens gained citizenship since the formation of Fergus County and that approximately 20% of the population were “half breeds”.  

These rulings left non-naturalized Metis in fear of never achieving citizenship because of the three strikes: being considered Canadian, Indian, and mixed blood. It forced them to contemplate their native descendancy and the benefits of ensuring citizenship through enrolling with the respective reservations where most of their relatives resided. By 1916, the Metis enrollment in the Rocky Boy (1916), Turtle

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Mountain (1882) and Little Shell (federally recognized in 2019) federally confirmed and secured residency within the United States.\textsuperscript{33}

While the Metis were settling the Spring Creek area, Granville Stuart was searching Montana in 1880 for a suitable place with plenty of water, timber and acres for hay crop on which to raise and maintain livestock. In his memoirs, Stuart talks about staying at Chamberlain’s place on McDonald Creek in May and how the Sioux had earlier stolen several horses from his host and a nearby camp of “half breeds”. A few days later, Stuart and those in his accompaniment entered into the Judith Basin and camped between Janeaux’s fort and the Reed and Bowles Trading Post. There he found a settlement of Red River “half breeds” plowing and planting a crop. Stuart roamed around the countryside continuing his search from May through June, starting back to headquarter at Chamberlain’s place. On the way, they overtook about fifty Red River carts of “half breeds” who had just moved to the Judith Basin and headed to Flat Willow and beyond to hunt buffalo. He described the carts as having two very large wooden wheels that made a “peculiar squeaky noise” that could be heard for miles. They rode about forty miles assessing the country but finding less timber and potential hay land than desired.

\textsuperscript{33}Martha Harroun Foster, \textit{We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community}, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pgs. 219-221.
Upon returning to Chamberlain’s again, they found forty more carts and families had recently arrived making the settlement a large village of tents and carts.\footnote{Granville Stuart, edited by Paul C. Phillips, \textit{Forty Years on the Frontier}, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), pgs. 131-135, 143-144.}

On June 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1880, Stuart went down to the settlement inquiring about the hay land, streams and general lay of the country. He hired Sevire Hamelin, a signer of Riel’s 1880 petition for a Metis reserve, as a guide and they started out for the Judith Mountains. They stopped and camped for the night at a spring on the way, and in the morning traveled three miles to a clear cold water creek where a small grove of cottonwoods grew. Two miles from the mountains they viewed a “magnificent body of hay land with cold springs all through it.” Stuart stated, “This is the very place we have been hunting for…all of this country for a hundred miles is well grassed, well-watered, and good shelter. There is an abundance of yellow pine and poles for all fencing and building purposes at the foot of the Judith Mountains. This is an ideal cattle range.” None of the land had been surveyed, so Stuart and his men set about laying foundation logs on ten claims to establish occupancy. His search for the ideal ranch was over. He was about to embark on a journey to become one of Montana’s biggest and most influential, powerful cattle
operator. It was the Metis, looking for their own place to light and call home, that guided Stuart’s dream to fruition.35

In 1880, Capt. Dangerfield Park established and constructed Ft. Maginnis on the upper end of the hay meadow of Stuart’s home ranch. He was dismayed that the fort claimed more than half of his meadow in their military reserve, but decided it was a convenient place to buy supplies, have access to a post office and telegraph communications. His dismay was heightened when the fort purchased beef from other ranches and when he discovered the soldiers were no cowboys allowing their cattle to range on Stuart’s land and elsewhere. His stock issues were complicated by “roving bands of Cree Indians from Canada” who were caught rustling his cattle. With two cowboys, he started for their camp of about fifty people and one priest. He found starving people and listened as the priest justified the killing of Stuart’s stock, three steers, one yearling and one cow, to serve their needs. Stuart ordered his cowboys to cut out five ponies from the herd as reimbursement causing a great commotion and the scene to “become quite ugly”.

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35 Ibid., 143-144; Lawrence Barkwell, Metis Dictionary of Biography, H to K, (Manitoba: Louis Riel Institute, 2018), pg. 19.
Fort Maginnis 1886: wikipedia.com; Troops: legendsofamerica.com
After cutting out the horses, Stuart called for the priest and declared he would be hung “higher than Haman if he ever set foot on the range again”. Apparently, he and the group fled back to Canada, however, Stuart continued to experience livestock rustling throughout that extremely bad winter of 1880 to 1881 and beyond estimating a 5% loss from Indians. He believed that much of the stolen stock ended up in the Dakotas or driven north into Canada.36

In 1881, Stuart estimated his cattle losses at 1,300 head; he was joined in his growing concern by other ranchers that had settled in the area. James Fergus, neighbor and namesake for the county, wrote Stuart that same year stating, “the Big Spring half breeds are killing our cattle on Dog and Armells Creek.” Stuart responded by saying, “We have got rid of the Indians to find what I suspected all along, that the half breeds are as bad as the Indians”.37

Stuart did not hold Native Americans in high regard even though he and his brother, James, both married native women while living in southwestern Montana. James’s first wife was French Canadian and Nez Perce; a later wife was native and Mexican. Stuart had a brief liaison with a French Canadian and later married Awbonnie Tootanka, a fifteen year old Shoshone girl with whom he had eleven children. Awbonnie, raised in a white cultured home, lived with her sister and white husband in the Deer Lodge area where Stuart was living at the time. But his familial connection to his native wife did not soften his approach. He complained bitterly about the Indians crossing the border to steal his stock and accused “half breeds” of stealing horses. He considered the soldiers at Ft. Maginnis just as bad;

37Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pg. 130.
not only inept at cowboying but inept at stopping the raids and went further to accuse them of killing his cattle to supplement their rations.\textsuperscript{38}

Stuart’s despair over the loss of his stock and belief in the ineptitude of the soldiers caused him to consider other means of vigilante justice. He was not new to the concept. While in southwestern Montana, his brother James, participated in serving

\begin{center}
\textbf{Granville Stuart and his full blood Shoshone wife, Awbonnie Tootanka,}
\end{center}
\textit{We Pointed Them North}, E.C. (Teddy Blue) Abbott

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., vii,x-xi; Karin Ludeman, oral interview, March 3, 2021; Teddy Blue Abbott and Helen Huntington Smith, \textit{We Pointed Them North}, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1939), pg. 190.
“justice” through the Alder Gulch Vigilante Committee formed in 1863 by future territorial leaders including the founder of Bozeman and a prominent Bozeman businessman, the first superintendent of Yellowstone Park, the first senator, and first territorial governor. James narrates the 1862 incidents that led to the committee’s formation and Montana’s first hanging, giving the Stuart’s then residence of Gold Creek, the name “Hangtown”. A young man named Arnett was killed in the game of monte, his cards clenched so tightly in his left hand and his revolver in his right that they couldn’t pry them loose, burying them with him. The perpetrator was found guilty and hung at 2:22, August 26, 1862, and buried beside Arnett near the river bottom outside of town. Granville Stuart in a side bar claimed, “Justice was swift and sure in those days.”

The thievery experienced by Stuart increased and was felt by several other stockmen causing them to take matters into their own hands and form the Stock Protective Association on August 15, 1881 in Fort Benton. A $500 reward was offered for anyone selling whiskey to the Indians and a $100 reward for those that sold or gave whiskey to “half breeds”. Men were hired at the Association’s expense to ride the range on the lookout for Indians. These men were to intercept Canadian Indians at the border sending them back across with the warning that if

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they crossed back into Montana Territory, they did so at their own peril. Stuart said, “Stealing horses and stealing cattle would no longer be tolerated.”

The rustlers prevailed, however and continued their trade unabashed. By 1884, they were more organized and particularly active along the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers and the Dakota badlands. Hence, in 1884, the same year that Riel went back to Canada to try and resolve the longstanding conflicts with the Canadian government, Stuart formed his own “protective” association, the Stuart’s Stranglers also known as the Judith Basin Vigilantes. It was apparent there were rustler’s rendezvous at the mouth of the Musselshell, at Rocky Point, and at Wolf Point; the vigilante group was bent on eradicating the perpetrators. On June 25, 1884, Narciss(e) Laverdure, a signer of the 1878 Metis petition for hunting rights and a reserve, and Metis Joe Vardner were caught stealing horses from J.A. Wells on the Judith River. A gun fight ensued with Vardner dead and Laverdure captured and placed in a stable under guard. At 2:00 am on the 27th, an armed posse overpowered the guard, although Stuart doesn’t identify the posse, it is presumably his Stranglers. Laverdure was taken out and hanged. A few days later, on July 3rd, Sam McKenzie, a wolfer who was Scotch Metis and believed to have been stealing horses and driving them into Canada, was captured a few miles below Ft. Maginnis and hung from the limb of a cottonwood tree two miles below

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40Ibid., pgs. 156-157.
the fort. According to Stuart, McKenzie had successfully dodged authorities on both sides of the border because of, “his many friends among the Cree half breeds in Canada and in the Judith Basin.41

In his memoirs, Stuart talks about the Canadian Cree, the Indians, the “half breeds” and then the group of “half breeds” living in the Judith Basin and his suspicions of them, but it is not clear if any people of the Spring Creek settlement were actually involved in, or aided the rustling. Narciss Laverdure was related to the Laverdure’s residing there and probably visited back and forth, however, records indicate he may have been based in the Cypress Hills. What is certain, Stuart had no love loss for the Metis even though his children were half blood and it was a Metis who helped him find the perfect place for his ranch, an area they could have just as easily settled.42

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41Ibid., pg. 195, 198, 201; “Stuart’s Stranglers”, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, Wikipedia.org, (2021) pg. 1; Lawrence Barkwell, Metis Dictionary of Biography, Volume L, (Manitoba: Louis Riel Institute, 2018), pg. 85.
42Lawrence Barkwell, Metis Dictionary of Biography, Volume L, (Manitoba: Louis Riel Institute, 2018), pg. 85.
THE FAMILIES OF THE METIS, MARRIAGE AND WORK

The Metis that settled in Spring Creek, followed the patterns of their ancestors who traveled and lived in family groups that often included parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins and all of their families as well. The Metis were very close knit, intermarrying within the other non-related family groups and often producing multiple offspring. Early pioneer Pierre Berger and his wife, Judith Wilkie, were blessed with ten children over their lifetime. In 1879, Antoine Fleury and his wife, Elizabeth Wilkie who was Judith’s sister, had at least ten living children; Jean Baptiste Turcott(e) and his wife Angelique Paquin had nine. Antoine Ouellette had a total of twelve children and was married to Angelique Bottineau. Pierre Laverdure may have been married before, but it was Catherine Charette with whom he had fourteen children. Mose LaTray, and his wife Suzanne Perrault de Morin had thirteen children. Many of these men as well as many of their relatives and wives, signed the 1880 Riel petition, another indication of how close knit the families really were.43

Mose and Suzanne (Perrault de Morin) LaTray

Carol LaTray Collection
To provide for the large families, the Metis subsided however they could, working as traders, trappers, hunters, woodhawks, working livestock and ranches, freighting, anything they could do to keep their families going. Mose Latray was a notable woodhawker down on the Missouri River providing cord wood for the steamships hauling freight on a stretch of the river from Ft. Benton to Cow Island. He also was a builder, helping make bricks for Ft. Assinniboine and constructing the first Reedsfort Post Office ca. 1880 with the help of Frank Ouellette using a broad ax and constructing several other homes, businesses and ranch buildings in Lewistown, Giltedge, and Maiden. Mose also did a little freighting, hauling potatoes for the Brooks Ranch north of Lewistown. His son Joe, worked as a hand for the N Bar Ranch, and was well known for his accomplished horse breaking methods. Mose also spoke five native dialects and French qualifying his hire as an interpreter for Ft. Maginnis. “Teddy Blue” Abbott recalls that Mose had an interesting way of speaking English retaining a heavy French accent in all the fifty plus years he knew him. Mose remained in the employment of the fort for eight years of the fort’s ten year existence, and also served the role of undertaker for the fort and nearby mining community of Gilt Edge. He cleverly invented a method of
preservation that involved stuffing the bodies with charcoal preserving them for transportation to their final resting place.44

Mose LaTray and some of his children

Carol LaTray Collection

44Carol Latray, Interview, 1-25-2021; Camey Bertolino Collection, photocopy, nd., no pg.; Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pgs. 138-139; Teddy Blue Abbott and Helen Huntington Smith, We Pointed Them North, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1939), pg. 182; “Fort Maginnis”, Camey Bertolino Collection, photocopy, nd., pg. 358.
Pierre Laverdure, born in 1812 in Pembina, although it is said he may have been born in 1793, lived a life as a trapper, farmer, buffalo hunter, miner and buffalo bone collector. He came to the Spring Creek area in the second wave with several of his children including his daughter, Virginia, who was married to Francis Janeaux and his daughter Eliza who was married to Francois Dagneau. A devout Catholic and respected elder, another of his duties included leading the frequent community prayers in the absence of a priest. He died in 1902, but as the date of his birth is disputed, so is his means of death as differing reports claim he either died in his log cabin home or that he died by exposure, walking out into a snow storm and freezing to death.45

By 1886, Lewistown became the county seat of Fergus County with a population of 125 residents and twenty two businesses. The town continued to grow and by 1888 had thirty two businesses and a population of nearly 400. The implications were huge for the Metis as they did not own any of the new businesses nor did most of them have the financial means to establish freighting companies or ranches. Pierre Berger and his son freighted goods from Rocky Point to Ft. Benton, Ft. Maginnis, Lewistown, and Maiden using their own Red River carts or

45Mary Jean Golden, 1879 Metis Trek to the Judith Basin, (Lewistown: Ballyhoo Printing and Design, per a grant from the Montana Committee for the Humanities, 2003), pgs. 43, 44, 48; Lawrence Barkwell, Metis Dictionary of Biography, Volume L, (Manitoba: Louis Riel Institute, 2018), pgs. 89-93; Martha Harroun Foster, We Know Who We Are; Metis Identity in a Montana Community, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pgs. 42, 64.
for other freighting outfits. Many of the Metis worked as woodhawks. The steamboats of the early years required a considerable amount of wood, but even though those days had gone, firewood was in high demand in the developing neighboring communities. Of the greatest irony was also one of the greatest employment opportunities that arose from the days of thousands of buffalo roaming the ranges; bone picking. The bones from dead buffalo that lay scattered over the plains were processed and burned to obtain carbon for sugar refining. In addition, the bones were picked, freighted and used for the manufacture of fertilizer. Tons of buffalo bones were shipped out by rail locally from mostly the
Big Sandy railyard to processing plants. Metis women also helped picked bones and helped support their families by cooking for ranchers and farmers, and providing medical services using traditional herbs, but most were unable to work outside of the home because they had families to tend. That required managing large gardens, keeping livestock, gathering plants and berries, cooking, cleaning, tanning hides for clothing and continuing the traditional ways of beading or embroidering clothes and footwear in the beautiful floral designs for which the Metis are well known.\textsuperscript{46}
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THE FOLLOWING METIS GENERATIONS

Several of the descendants of the pioneering Spring Creek Metis and others agreed to be interviewed from December of 2020 to March of 2021 to share their family stories, what level of education they and their family received, if they experienced prejudices, and if they served in the military. Some of the interviewees were selected based on their relationship to the Metis who came in the first wave of settlers to the Spring Creek area, the Bergers, LaTrays, LaFountains, and Laverdures. Others included an interviewee who moved to Roy and was raised in the Augusta area (another place of Metis settlement), two ladies who were not Metis but together related their memories of Metis in Lewistown, a descendant of the Doney line, not from Lewistown but rather from the Missouri River/Milk River country, and two of the great, great granddaughters of Granville Stuart and his Shoshone wife, Awbonnie.

The family stories follow very closely to historic documentation and reveal that the early settlers and their children were spiritually devout, hard-working, taking on any jobs they could to stay afloat, and that family was most important above all else. Life was not easy as many had not filed on the land where they lived, or were unable to file because of the naturalization laws. Many of the first Metis here were not educated to read English, speaking broken English or speaking only French or their native language, diminishing financial opportunities and limiting an
understanding of the law. Once again, as in the Red River colonies, people lost their lands that had been so suited for agricultural purposes. But agricultural work experience carried several of the first Metis and the next generations to make a living working for farms and ranches, haying, tending sheep, cattle or breaking and selling horses. Woodhawking, following in their ancestor’s trade, was another occupation many of the next generations pursued cutting firewood and timber for posts and poles.

The native blood people interviewed held a wide range of occupations including truck driving, law enforcement, school maintenance, construction, ranching, farming, a cabinetry business, food truck, landscaping, medical microbiology, horse training, medical transcription, and a home day care. Some of the interviewees and their parents didn’t finish high school, some held high school degrees, and others attended college and/or held degrees of higher education.

The early pioneers ensured their children had educational opportunities by establishing schools; education became an important part of the Metis’s lives. Foster noted in her book, *We Know Who We Are, Metis Identity in a Montana Community*, schools such as the 1886 Half Breed School and 1895 Boyd Creek School were constructed to serve the needs of both the non-native and Metis children. However, as non-natives took over school board and county official positions, a gap widened between the cultures causing Metis to pull away, often
sending their kids to St. Peter’s mission where the school attendees were mostly Metis and native. Family responsibilities and the necessity to be wage earners often cut institutional learning short, however. Children of the pioneers and their children didn’t usually attend school any farther than the eighth grade. Subsequent generations faced the same dilemma, having to work to support their families; they were lucky to finish high school in many cases.

A theme that commonly runs throughout the interviews is the pride and appreciation held by the interviewees for their ancestors and a general belief that hard work garners respect no matter the color. It seems reasonable to assume the early pioneers earned respect and filled critical needs for the growing communities. The early community must have understood the importance of the Metis’s integral roles in the founding of Lewistown because of how, in those prominent pioneer’s obituaries and news reporting of the time, the Metis are thoughtfully held in high regard, even while being called “half breeds”; lasting histories that stand as testament to their contributions and racial labeling both.

However, while not all experienced prejudicial treatment, some of those interviewed revealed an underlaying prejudice against people of color, especially “half breeds” or “Indians”, sharing stories about their own experiences. These incidents occurred mostly from the 1950s to now and ranged from racial slurs, to receiving the low end tasks of a job, to an assumption and judgement of race, to
being avoided or treated as if they were “invisible”. Male interviewees who grew up tough speak of fighting in defense or because it’s just what they did.

The generations following the early pioneers and their children often were listed as “white” on legal documents, perhaps because the reality was, intermarriage with white families diluted the percentage of native blood. It must also be noted that the same families are often enrolled at Turtle Mountain, Rocky Boy, and with the Little Shell. Another confusing component of an “in between” culture.

It is assumed because of ethnic labeling, judgement and narrow mindedness held by others, that listing as “white” made life more livable in a white culture. Schools perpetuated assimilation of the natives and Metis into the predominantly “white” culture by encouraging and sometimes forcing upon them that culture’s dress, social graces, hair styles and perceptions of success. To succeed, it was increasingly critical to fit in, and often elders were closemouthed about discussing their Metis and native ancestry, not educating others and sharing stories of their past, not even with their kin. Many of the Metis ways were not passed down or were forgotten by the next generations, and some descendants were not interested at the time. An example of this is that very few interviewees had Metis recipes or played Metis music or instruments. It has only been until the last 40-50 years that the significance of native and Metis cultures has been reevaluated, accepted and taught.
It is with enormous pride that the interviewees talked about their service or their family’s service in the military. Several of the men spoke of enlisting, many because of educational opportunities offered after serving, because they decided it was their best chance to get ahead, or because of an unuttered sense of “warrior” duty. Several of the interviewee’s fathers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, and children entered into the various military branches, some losing lives, some serving several tours, some returning with physical issues or post traumatic disorders. An excerpt from Chuck LaFountain’s (CL) interview by Candi Zion (CZ) sums it up:

CL “…Everything you experience in life makes you who you are today.”

CZ “And who are you today?”

CL “I’m a red blooded American. I’m a Marine…always was a Marine…always will be a Marine. I believe in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. And that’s the way I’m gonna go out. I’m gonna fight for it ‘til the day I die.”

It is hoped that this research and documentation will help shed light on the Metis, their incredible life journeys, the richness of their culture, their contributions to us all, and an appreciation of who they are.
Karin Ludeman and Martha Boyce look through their family albums before their interview
Camey Bertolino at Susan and Mose LaTray's grave, Cavalry Cemetery, Lewistown
Okay, today we are here with Camey Bertolino, and what is your date and place of birth?

Mine is Wheatridge, Colorado, 1966.

Where do you live now?

Uh, Pryor, Montana.

Okay, Pryor, Montana. What’s your occupation?

I’m a rancher.

K, what’s your spouse’s name, date, and place of birth?

Mark Bertolino and I think he was born in Red Lodge, Montana.

And what’s his date of birth?

10-15 of 57.

Okay, so I meant to ask you...what is your maiden name?

My maiden name was Habovstak, it’s Czechoslovakian.

Oh, Czechoslovakian, interesting combination, okay!

Yeah...I know!
That’s cool, so Mark...he’s Italian isn’t he?

Yeah, he’s Italian.

Okay, and he’s a cattle buyer?

Yep.

K, what are your parent’s and grandparent’s names?

My grandfather...my mother was adopted. So that’s how we work with the LaTray deal. She was adopted right when she was born. From Betty Bear. And that was Florence Johnson if I remember Lena LaTray, Moses LaTray, and thats how it goes.

Okay, so again, your mom was adopted and...

She was adopted right the day she was born.

Adopted by...

Clarence Leischner.

Okay, but she was...her lineage was...

Uh, she was a Bear.

She was a Bear.

Uhhuh.

Bear went back to?

Went back to Lena LaTray, Florence was her mother and then Lena and then Moses.
CZ    Okay, Florence Bear...

CB    Well if I remember Florence was a Johnson.

CZ    Okay, Florence Johnson, okay. Make sure I understand this. So, Florence was....(some overtalk)

CB    My mom’s biological mother was Betty Bear. And her mom was Florence, and her mom was Lena.

CZ    Gotcha.

CB    And Moses was her grandfather and Susan was her mother.

CZ    What happened that she was adopted?

CB    Well...ha ha...you know, I don’t know...my understanding, Betty said she just didn’t like this Lewistown area. She always felt kinda strange. But she got pregnant by a guy and you know, it was kinda during that time period that if you weren’t married, you were kind of a breed, I think that had a lot to do with it you know? And he was an Irish sailor man that had come through during the war.

CZ    Really?

CB    Yeah. And my mom actually has McKennon the other side of her from Ireland. So, it’s a heck of a cross! HaHa!

CZ    Yeah!
CB  But the Irish sailor man came up into the Miles City Lewistown area because of the, and even Great Falls, because of the military during those time periods, so yeah.

CZ  That’s interesting!

CB  So, yeah, my mother was the prodigy of a sailor! HaHa!

CZ  An Irish sailor, my gosh, wow! So, tell me a little bit about their ancestry. They were French?

CB  They were French Canadian, Moses was, and my grandmother was a Chippewa, or my great, great grandmother was a Chippewa. And her name was Susan Morin. She was from Turtle Mountain. And he was from Quebec. And, I don’t know. We asked to see how they met, and nobody in the family said how they really met. I mean the joke was he might have bought her for a pack of cigarettes.

CZ  chuckles...

CB  I guess that was a real thing back then. You know...especially being that she was full blooded Chippewa, but we don’t know. We’d like to think that he loved our grandma! And I think he did, I think he had a lot of respect for Susan because she was a very industrious woman and had a lot of talents you know. They ended up having, if I remember right, 12 children, but only 9 of them lived.

CZ  Wow.

CB  So they kinda had a little bit of a situation there, but I think that’s just normal being out on the plains.
CZ  So his background was what?

CB  He was a woodhawk, a trapper. He was a mason, he was a mortician and he was just a builder.

CZ  And what was his ethnicity then? Was he French Canadian or did he have Metis blood himself?

CB  They put him down as just part of the Metis... I don’t know...we’d really have to look into the blood part they always said he was part of the...that he was French. That’s pretty much what the family always said. But then during that time period too, you had those Native American tribes up there in those areas that lived like white people. They lived in homes, they had courthouses, they had everything, you know that we had, that were civilized ‘til the British came in and tried to take over those areas that they started saying you’re not civilized enough. And that they wanted the land that was already cropped and things like that, and that’s what causes a lot of these ripples. You’d be surprised how many of them were farmers and they actually lived in communities, they weren’t nomadic like the Plains Indians, these guys were settlers.

CZ  Like the Red River settlement up there, water rights and everything.

CB  Yep, they had a town hall, they had houses, they had their own court systems, they had everything. So, you know...

CZ  So your female side, Susan, she was full blood Chippewa Cree and did she speak...?

CB  She only spoke her language.
CZ She only spoke her language. So, she didn’t speak French either?

CB No, hunha. But Moses spoke French and several other Indian languages. But from my understanding she only spoke her language.

CZ So she was from Turtle Mountain area- that was where she was from originally then, and ah, I am assuming that they were very traditional, that she was very traditional?

CB Very traditional.

CZ Tell me a little bit about that if you know anything of her lifeways.

CB You know, she was just a Native American traditional woman, she would take care of the household, and she would do...ah...they had their own ways of doing their own medicines, through their herbs and stuff. She was familiar with tanning hides and putting up the teepees and consolidating things together so that, you know, the family system would work properly. Ah...very tightknit you know, cared a lot about her family and her family structure, her husband...

CZ You said music was a big part of their life?

CB Music was a big part of their lives, you know, through...Moses played the fiddle, but my understanding is some of the other family members learned to play too. But music was a huge part, and I think it was for a lot of the generations during that time period. When you have a hard day of work and you come home and play a little song, you’re not gonna be so crabby. Haha!

CZ Chuckles. Yeah, that’s a good point. So, tell me about the bangs and the...
CB So what is it...the bangs and the shots? (thumbs through papers) Bullets and the bangs! There it is! Yeah...bullets and bangs was a meal that they prepared when they had some sort of fun activity or get together in the community hall. And the bullets was made of meatballs, and the meatballs were rolled in flour and fried up and then they’d make a white gravy with it and then the bangs was the frybread. And they’d make the frybread and they would just use it...they would just use flour and water and baking powder. But eventually, later they got introduced to yeast, and they like it a little better with yeast as it makes it lighter, fluffier...not such a heavy bread...yeah...

CZ Umhuh, umhuh. So, they came to Montana, what was the reason they came?

CB They came down with Riel.

CZ Louis Riel.

CB Yep. They came down with him during the Rebellion and they were kinda on the border between Canada and Montana. And they set up a settlement there and they’d go back and forth to Canada, you know, to do the trading with their furs and whatever they were making at the time period to go back and forth. And they came down in the Red cart which they made out of an old cottonwood tree, and they would cut it, and they would hollow it out. And then they would make the wheels and an axle. And...that’s what they used to come down with. The Red cart. They said it was like the loudest thing you would ever hear when they would come down, because you could hear them from miles away because they had no axle grease. Just “Roh, roh, roh”, you know. So, when you’d see these people coming, they were coming with the Red carts.
CZ    And rough probably.

CB    Oh yeah, yeah.

CZ    So you said that he was trapping furs, woodhawking, and he was going back to Canada and he was trading. What was he trading back up in there?

CB    You know, we kinda figured he was probably doing whatever he could during that time period. You know he also worked on the Missouri River on the barges, he also traveled clear up into the...umh...we have records of him going clear as far as...into North Dakota and up into Minnesota and those areas. I think he even, I think I read he even made it down to Louisiana once.

CZ    Hum!

CB    But, pretty much whatever he could do for work. The family would always stay in one spot usually and Moses would travel. And the main headquarters were Zortman, Landusky and then Lewistown. Lots of Lewistown, and that’s pretty much where the family would reside. But he always kinda kept them off, it sounded like, where they were with their family members, but they were kinda away from, you know, the hustle and bustle of society. It sounded to me like he didn’t keep them in close proximity to cities being built or even Ft. Benton or stuff like that that he worked on. It sounded like it was a distance, ‘cause he always had to travel. In the things that you read, he left and he didn’t come back until like later in the seasons, you know, is when he’d come back home. So that’s how he, I think that’s how he kinda worked. But other family members may have different information, you know, when you are dealing with oral history everybody’s got a little different...
Little different story...

Different story. Not too much, I haven’t seen too much variation, but some had different stories.

Camey Bertolino standing by two mass Metis graves, Cavalry Cemetery, Lewistown

And they had 9 surviving children?

I think they, yeah, I am pretty sure there were just 9 that lived.

Unhuh, so Susan took care of them while he was gone?
CB   Yeah, she had a houseful of little monsters running around.

CZ   Chuckles.

CB   But I am sure she kept them really busy, I am sure they had to do chores and stuff.

CZ   Yeah, they’d have a lot of work to do. So…they settled in Central Montana eventually, you said he was a landowner here?

CB   Yeah, he owned some property here in Lewistown. Now, I don’t know…it would be in that big book I gave you.

CZ   Okay, we’ll have to take a look...

CB   But it was up by Fox Creek. And then he eventually sold it and moved back to Zortman.

But that was gosh, somewhere in his 70s or 80s when he sold that, ‘cause he said the town became too big for him. And he went back to Zortman.

CZ   Well, I saw where he had passed away in the 30s. Now when he was at Zortman was that more of a place he retired or was he working up there too?

CB   You know…from my understanding that kinda is where the family was. He landed in Zortman before he came this way (Lewistown) and then he sold that and he decided to go back to Zortman.

CZ   Do we have any idea of time period when these things might have transpired? Just off the top of your head if you remember.

CB   Would have to be the early 1920s somewhere?
Umhum. So, he passed away in the 30s...

Because he built the...he sold the land I think he had in Zortman, and then he built...and that was when he was here, in Lewistown, and built the first post office. Here in Lewistown.

So he built the first post office.

Unhuh.

And you said that family members worked there too?

Yeah, there were a lot of people involved in a lot of that stuff. Anda a...when they all...hire the Metis they pretty much probably are like when you bring in the Amish or the Hutterite colonies they come in as a family group. So, you’ll hear about all these other names that tied in with when they did work, you’d hear all these other names that were involved and they were pretty much related to one another somehow, whether through marriage. It was a daughter, you know, or granddaughter or somebody, but they were pretty much all tied in I think family wise. But there wasn’t a lot of people back then too you know, so...how could you not be related.

And they came in the 1870s.

Unhum.

So they were early, they were the first draft of people that came through...

They were early, he came to Lewistown in 1870, and a few years after built the communities first post office. And then he umnh... he was supposedly to have been the oldest
resident that was still now in Lewistown and that was, in 1983 when this was written about him. So, umhn…

CZ  Okay, family members wrote this?

CB  Yeah, and then Moses, who was long before the county was formed in 1886, he was here before that, and before the town of Lewistown incorporated. And that’s when he built the post office, before all that. And then you’ve got several years like in 1879 as a patriarch they became the largest group of residents having blood strains running back to the early days of the Indians and French forebearers. And then his residing daughters which was… which was Miss Jo Charletta (sp) of Zortman and that’s when, you know, a lot of the family was in Zortman.

CZ  I wonder, did they work in the mines at all?

CB  Oh...probably, you know from my understanding like when I was talking to my family members, they did anything they could, you know, to make money. I mean during that time period you just didn’t pass up an opportunity to have an income coming in, you know, whatever it is, no matter what they did. You know, and like I said Moses, he was kind of a jack-of-all-trades. So many different things to take care of his family and he was always busy. I know like you get into some old story telling, with Charlie Russell and Teddy Blue Abbott and those guys, they knew him. He knew...who was it...Kid...

CZ  Oh! Kid Curry!

CB  Yeah, Kid Curry, he knew those boys, or that boy, and unh, the interesting thing too is that during that time period, the Nez Perce tribe, and it’s written in here you will read, it’s really
sad, but when the Nez Perce were traveling, they thought they were in Canada. During that
time period Moses was actually traveling down to Ft. Benton and he was on that same route.
And we looked at that time period, Mark and I did, of when he would have been going down
and the Nez Perce would have been headed to Canada. And he said, “You know I’ll guarantee
ya, I’ll bet he was camped with those guys before they got killed”. And so, he knew the chiefs,
he knew the tribes, umnh…there were so many things that the man was about and knew. And
the thing was it sounded like he was never a threat to anybody. He was always welcomed into
camp. And then he spoke, when we said that he could speak all the native languages, we got to
talking, and we said you know I think some of it was sign language. Because that was kind of
the universal language of all Native Americans, sign language. You know, you can go to any
reservation and they all have that same sign language. So…it worked out really well for him to
be able to travel and communicate with the other tribes, you know. But there’s a lot of stuff
when you get to reading about these guys, oh my gosh you know. I can’t even imagine the
sadness back then.

CZ   And what about Sitting Bull? You said there was a story about him?

CB    There is a story about him. He was actually called into Ft. Benton, because they
captured Sitting Bull, and they had Sitting Bull tied outside by a rope that was about 6 feet. And
that’s all the further he could go. And they knew that he knew Sitting Bull. Now the reason the
family talked about he knew Sitting Bull was because he was actually asked by Sitting Bull to
take all his family members up to Canada because the government was after them. And they
knew that if they got caught, the family members of Sitting Bull would have to come in a little
quicker. So according to one of the stories I heard which I think is probably pretty true because
it just kinda feels right, they, the Metis and Moses and them guys got his family up into Canada to get them out of the way so the cavalry and those guys wouldn’t, you know, do whatever they were gonna do to them, which who knows. You know, a lot of them they just killed. And so, when they captured him at Ft. Benton they called him in. To talk to him, because he was the only one Sitting Bull would talk to. He asked for Moses LaTray. And they talked and…but he would never tell what they talked about.

CZ    Hmh.

CB    He never...he wouldn’t tell them.

CZ    Interesting, so I am curious, we have had a pretty good chat about his background and who he was. What about your parents and your grandparents? Do you know much about what experiences they had, did they have much prejudice in school, in the work place? What was life like for them, and you know you talked about your family relative being an illegitimate child, as you said, a breed, on top of that...must have been really difficult.

CB    You know, all my family members that talk about, you know the 1800s, and into the 1900s, people were too busy to be prejudiced during that time period. They had too much that they had to do. They say it’s not at all like you used to see in the movies. You know, where the Indians weren’t allowed to walk into some place, or the women weren’t allowed to do anything, you know...ahm...all the elders that I have talked to have said it was never that way. Like what you see in the movies. Ah, because they need everybody so much back then, they were a vital part of the communities, you know. They...at least with the Metis, they were...I can’t speak for any other native tribes, and umh, so no, up in this area it never sounded to me
like any of my aunts or great aunts, uncles never really ran into it because the Metis really conformed into society. Umh...they never wanted to be federally recognized because they wanted...they didn’t want...that was one thing they were really adamant on, MY relatives, was not to sign any of their sovereignty over to the government. You know, they wanted their freedom, they wanted to be a part of the United States of America. They weren’t looking for any benefits or any land given to them because they were hard workers and they felt they could earn it themselves. So...what I know is just what is in my family line of the strength and the honor to just be an American. Ahmmm...I think like with my Grandma Betty, my Mother’s mother, I don’t know...it seemed like she kinda, she just kinda had a tough go. My mom was born in 47 I think something like that. I think she is 76 now, would that be about 47? So, you are looking at the roaring 30s and going into the 50s and I think you’re seeing a little bit more prejudice then during that time period, you know. Cause when I was growing up in the 60’s I know there was a lot of prejudice in the 60s. So, but during that early time period, all my family members said that they were all needed, you know. That they didn’t have to deal with, you know, you can’t go to school. And you know, he took a lot of time to educate his children. And they were always well dressed and dressed in modern clothing. Now Susan, I still have pictures of Susan, his wife and she still wore the traditional, you know, buckskin, and robes type thing. But his daughters, they wore modern clothing.

CZ     And they were educated?

CB     And they were educated, yep. He took a lot of time to make sure that they went to school and they became something. Not...and I know Moses took a lot of pride in that. If
you’re gonna be a part of, you know, not be subject to the United States government, and stuff, you’ve got to stand up for yourself and get educated.

CZ   You also told me that there was some close mouthedness though.

CB   Yeah. They would stay within their own communities. Yeah. They stayed within their own communities. They didn’t really go out and socialize too much, but I look at like Mark, he’s Italian, Italians kinda stay within their own hubs. Then you got the Metis, you know, I don’t know if that was…I really don’t know why they did that. I think a lot of it was just social structure, protection, family, and just, you know, just staying within each other’s …you know a lot of people live together they say we are just family. You know, but...

CZ   Do you think that, I know you said that some of them had written white on some of their records. Would that be because they weren’t really clear on what their background was or is it easier just to be white?

CB   You know when we looked in, like, it’s even kinda funny because a lot of like Native Americans that are very famous now, I mean they even have a record of Sitting Bull being white, on a census. Now I don’t know, even, umh…you know, what’s his name, from South Dakota…Crazy Horse’s dad, not Crazy Horse but Red Cloud, was actually on a census of white too and they changed his name. But when they did the census’s they put down white because they didn’t want people to know that they were Native. And the white people didn’t want them to, the white people that did the census said well you need to just put down that you are white. So, a lot of them just changed it to white instead of being Native American. I think that a lot of that had to do with just trying to, oh I don’t know...when you are taking a personal
opinion, I think it’s just the government’s way of saying that they never existed that they were actually white people.

CZ  Hum. Interesting.

CB  You know that’s just how I look at things.

CZ  Yeah. Okay now I am curious because you had said earlier about the prejudice that YOU had experienced. I want to know about what your life was like growing up in the 60s.

CB  You know I lived in Billings, Montana, ha ha! So, it was tough, it was tough. My mom was Native American, my dad was Czechoslovakian Jew, you know. We just kind ended up during the time period of right after...you know you’re not that far off of WWII, and you still have people that don’t like those kind of things, you know, my nose...very Jewish. You know.

CZ  Hm, interesting!

CB  Oh yeah! I mean I’d get rocks thrown at me; I’d get called names. I remember going to school in the back alley ways just so I didn’t have to walk and wait for the kids to get out of class, so that I could go home, because they’d pick on me so bad when I was a little girl.

CZ  And it was because of your...

CB  My last name.

CZ  Your LAST name is why, isn’t that something, so they didn’t, there was no association with the Metis side at all.
CB  No, just the last name. So, my mom, she went to Senior High and everybody loved her, you know, but she was a Leischner then too, she wasn’t a Bear. She took on the last name of Leischner. But then I knew some girls that were Native American in the 60s and 70s, yeah they ...I remember when I owned the store in Pryor in the 90s, they didn’t, the Crow Indians didn’t even think they could go into Costco, and that was in the 90s.

CZ  Hm. Really.

CB  Yeah. I said you can go to Costco, you know.

CZ  So you owned a store down on the reservation, in Pryor, what did you do down there?

CB  Had a mercantile. Yeah. But they didn’t think that they could...I remember growing up on the rez there and we had wagons. Indians would actually go back and forth to Pryor in wagons. And that was in the 70s, you know. And they still hung their meat out and elders still ran around in their buckskin outfits, you know. That was the 70s. That was even the 80s and 90s too because I remember my store, some of the elders would come in full traditional, full traditional.

CZ  But not now.

CB  No, there ain’t too many left. Might be 1 or 2 you might see that will still come in in traditional way, but they’re way up there in their 90s now. Most of them are gone.

CZ  So it looks like from your information that you have, that your family has done a lot of research about the LaTray family. You’ve got a lot.
Yeah, we’ve got a lot of books. We actually helped with the Little Shell Tribe. Now I don’t remember my cousin, my mom’s cousin, name but he was one of the main, ah, he was actually one of their Chairman at the time when they were running it and this was in 98, 99 something like that. Maybe early 2000’s. Anyway, she did the genealogy, a lot of the genealogy with the Little Shell Tribe with the LaTray side to show, umh, that there was, that they existed, that they were together as a group. ‘Cause we had to prove that, you know, we were together and that they weren’t scattered, ‘cause they were always saying that well you know, they’re scattered all over the United States some. But most of them are still right here in this main pocket. You know between Lewistown, and then up on the Hi-Line, you know. A lot of them, and Anaconda’s got a lot of them, in Anaconda too. But...

And you said Winifred, too.

Winifred, Zortman, Zurich, and there are even some that are on the Blackfoot Reservation!

Yes, yes.

You know, and there’s a lot of them. And you get into old history and there’s a lot of them called Latraille, they weren’t called LaTray and they’ve shortened the name down to LaTray but they were called Latraille was the original sound of it, but...I don’t know, I think what they went through was pretty tough. I couldn’t imagine it. They said that, Teddy Blue Abbott said that when he’d come to town, in his book, he said that he always knew Moses was in town because he’d see his mule tied up outside the bar there. And he says he always knew he wasn’t a liar because he’d tell the same story over and over again.
CZ  HaHa!!! That’s great!

CB  So he was well known by a lot of people. But you know back then we were just people. We weren’t famous ‘til we died! We weren’t famous ‘til we died!

CZ  Well Camey, we’re right to the end of our interview, I appreciate your time so much.

CB  Okay. Well, look through those books. You’ll find some good stuff in there.

Grant from Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Vern and Julie (Laverdure) Durand
Ralph Laverdure’s grave, Cavalry Cemetery, Lewistown
Interview
Julie Laverdure Durand (JD) and Vernon Durand (VD) at their home, Great Falls, Montana
By Candi Zion (CZ)
1-11-2021

CZ   Today we are with Julie Durand, And Julie if you would tell me what your date and place of birth is?

JD   Lewistown, 7-5-29.

CZ   Oh, my birthday is the 6th! Interesting!

JD   Is that right? Mine’s the 5th, yeah.

CZ   Okay, and what was your occupation? I guess you said occupations in your case!

JD   I had a day-care for 37 years. But I also worked for...when I first started out, I worked for Eddy’s Bakery in Lewistown. And them from there, I worked for Tommy Don (sp) who owned the Cadillac Garage, and Mr. Moyer (sp) and them, and Dr. McKenzie, he was a dentist. I worked for them. And then I met Vern, and then from there we went all over the country with Boeing. And then when we moved here, I decided to run a day-care. All these kids, I took 3 out of the state orphanage when I was living in Lewistown. And ah, I kept them for a couple of years. And then I met, when I met Vern we traveled around, and after...when Boeing quit, we moved here and we’ve been here, how many years? 40?

VD   Since February of 1970 we came back here.

CZ   Long time.
JD  Yeah. So, we’ve been here ever since and I ran a day-care here for 30 some years.

CZ  I see, that’s a long time!

JD  If I had to do it again, I’d do it all over again the same.

CZ  Yeah. So, you were telling me a little bit about your grandfather, Ralph (Sr) Laverdure. Where did he come from, what do you know about him?

JD  He come from Canada. He come from Canada, and ah…my dad (Ralph Jr) I think was born around Lewistown. So, they been in Lewistown practically all their life.

CZ  And what year was Ralph born do you know, Ralph?

JD  My dad?

CZ  Your grandfather.

JD  Oh gosh, get my big book out, I got all that stuff in a big book.

CZ  I can look that up actually, I can find out. (*Ralph Sr born in Canada 1868, died in Lewistown 1939).

JD  Yeah.

CZ  What about your dad, when was he born?

JD  September…oh gosh…you should have asked me I would have got all that stuff out.

CZ  Oh, that’s okay, ‘cause we can get it later (*Ralph Jr born September 1896). Well, tell me a little about their ancestors. You said they were from Canada. What else was their heritage?
JD   Pardon?

CZ   Your, Ralph Laverdure, you said he came from Canada...

JD   I don’t know anybody from Canada, but I know he must have relatives back there. He was just a little boy when he came to Lewistown.

CZ   I see.

JD   My grandfather was. And then he married a lady (*Mary Charette born in 1850, died in Lewistown 1923) that had a bunch of kids (*7) and they only had my dad. And then after that, my grandpa remarried again to a real young lady (*Ada Burke) and they had 2 girls (*Juanita Margaret and Avis Francis). One of them is still alive. She’s way younger than me. But my Aunt Avis, she lives in Seattle. That’s my grandpa’s child.

CZ   Wow.

JD   Yeah. And ah...Anita, she’s deceased, his oldest daughter is deceased.

CZ   So Ralph, he was a little boy, Ralph Sr, when he came to Lewistown but he was born in Canada?

JD   Yeah.

VD   A lot of French.

CZ   A lot of French.

VD   Yes.

CZ   So do you then much about the French side?
Well, my mom (*Madeline) and dad used to talk French all the time, but they never taught us kids. When they wanted us to not hear anything, they’d talk French, haha! But I’m so sorry they didn’t teach us you know? Yeah...so...

So...but they were also Native American too?

Oh yeah.

Do you know much about that side of the family?

Ah...not too much, I have a lot of literature in this book. Umh...my grandma, the Dess side come from North Dakota or South Dakota. And they traveled here when he was, my grandpa Solemon, was just a little boy when HE came here to Lewistown. He grew up in Lewistown.

How do you spell the last name?

Dess. D-E-S-S. Solemon. Yeah, I got a picture of him up there of him ‘n grandma. Like I said I got that big book and I was gonna get everything out so you’d have it! HaHa!

So they (grandpa Dess) also Metis, or were they...any blood like that at all?

I am not sure...no grandpa came from North or South Dakota (*Devils Lake, North Dakota. Born in 1854 (*died 1941). At age 11 he came with family up the Missouri River to Ft. Benton). Grandpa Dess. Solemon Dess. And then he married my grandmother (*Mary) and her name was...how do you say her name...starts with a P...ah...oh my gosh...

Well we can look at that later...so you said that they (Laverdure) spoke French but you didn’t get a chance to learn that when you were...
JD  Well, my grandmother, she was, she had a lot of Indian in her. Grandma Dess. And…

Parenteau! That was my grandma’s maiden name. Parenteau! And ah...she had a lot of Indian in her. And then I think most of it come from there and then of course through my mother had quite a bit and then from my grandma you know. So that’s the way it went. But they’re all buried in Lewistown. Yeah. And that’s where we’ll go.

CZ  Yep.

JD  My mom and dad’s buried there (Calvary Cemetery), I have a brother and sister buried there, my grandparents, and you know, like I tried to find like my grandpa’s dad, and stuff like that. And we were trying to find Pierre Laverdure (*born Mandan village est. 1793; 1812-1815, worked as trapper, guide, buffalo hunter, guide and miner. Died in Lewistown 1902 at app. 109. Possibly went out into snowstorm.), he comes from way back. And I wished, like I said I had so many pictures I wanted to get out for you! And ah, we tried to find his grave but see, where my grandpa’s buried at, there’s graves back there with no stone. And some of the…the guy at the funeral home, he’s dead now too but, he told me that they lost a lot stuff. Of the records of Lewistown back then. So, all I know is my grandpa and my, his wife, is buried in that area. So, but there’s some back there they have no stone’s on ‘em.

CZ  You know I wonder, there’s two mass burials of those original people that came from a cemetery, on land a rancher owned, and he wanted them moved to a cemetery, the Calvary Cemetery. So, they interred, 60 to 80 some people, I think? The coffins were all rotten so, they just comingled the bones together in these two mass burials. And they’re marked with a…bumper, you know where you drive up to, big long rectangular stone and concrete bumpers.
JD  Where’s this at?

CZ  At the Calvary Cemetery in Lewistown. So, I’ll bet that that’s where he’s buried. If he’s in an unmarked grave than that’s probably where...

JD  Where is this located at?

CZ  Well, it’s gonna be located towards...

JD  Oh they haven’t done it yet...

CZ  Well, they’re there. Where your grandfather is buried, they would be behind that, on the very edge of the cemetery.

JD  Yeah, that’s what I am sayin’. A lot of graves there that probably...his dad and stuff is buried in there but there ain’t no stones, you know. So, I would sure like to know. We always look through the whole cemetery for Pierre Laverdure (*newspaper clipping indicated interment in Catholic cemetery). And no record of him...but he’s in a magazine. I got the magazine where Pierre was in and everything.

CZ  He was one of the first people to come! I think he was one of the first people to come to Lewistown.

JD  Yeah. Right. And then my grandpa and all them came. Umhum...

CZ  So, do you have any phrases or, words that your grandparents taught you that you would remember, that would have been the Metis type phrases or sayings, or songs?

JD  Like what?
CZ: Any songs? Did they teach any traditional Metis songs?

JD: No, I don’t remember that. I know my dad used to play the mouth harp. And he sang a lot of songs from when he was in the service. I remember that! But ah...no I don’t remember that...

CZ: Let’s talk about your dad. I’m looking at this wonderful picture of him from WWI. He’s a very young man. What do you know about him in the war?

JD: He went to Germany, he’d been to Germany and everywhere that they took him, you know. But I remember he was saying he went to Germany. And he had a good record and he was a good gunman. And ah, I don’t know what else to tell ya.

CZ: Did he ever talk about his experiences when he was there?

JD: A little. Not too much, you know the service men didn’t talk about the stuff that they went through over there. I know he rode the horses and stuff in the war and stuff like that. And I know he was a good gun man for sure. But he was pretty young. He lied about his age when he went to the service. That’s why he got in.

CZ: How old was he actually?

JD: He wasn’t old enough anyway! Whatever the age was back then but he did lie about his age so that he could go to the service. Yeah.

CZ: So...he...we know that he was in Germany, that he was probably cavalry or maybe associated with that...

JD: Probably, I got all his records too. Umhum.
CZ  So...I was thinking about...I was thinking about your grandfather again. Did they ever tell you, were you ever very close to him? Did you get a chance to learn any stories about them? Did he tell you anything?

JD  No, I don’t remember, we just loved him that’s all! Ha! We loved our grandpa. He was a very good grandpa.

CZ  Did he teach you any games?

JD  No, see my mom died when she was 38. And she had 10 kids. Two of them was born...ah, both of them are buried up there at the cemetery. The 2 babies are. But there are, still...I’m the 4th child and all of them are gone, even my youngest brother. All of them younger than me are all gone. I’m the only one left out of the bunch. So, I remember my mom saying, when they were doing dishes...New Years was a great day for everybody to get together. And my mother used to make these, they called ‘em bullets. That’s French, and meatballs. And she would make a great big kettle full, mashed potatoes and everything, and you didn’t have to invite people they just came. And ate. And I’ll never forget I was standing at the hall, we lived at 302 W. Virginia, and I went, “Oh no! More people!” and my mom ‘bout socked me over! “Don’t you EVER say that again!” she said. Cause we were doin’ the dishes! Ha!

CZ  HaHa!

JD  But they all came and ate. You didn’t invite people like you do now. People don’t get together like that anymore. They don’t. And ah...it’s sad, because I have, my daughter lives in Biloxi, Mississippi and my grandkids and my 2 great grandchildren. And ah...we have nobody
here except my nieces, my brother’s kids. And we see them once in a while. But, other than that, people don’t come around of course, with this stuff you know, but ah…

CZ So, when your mom was cooking bullets, New Year’s Day...

JD New Year’s Day.

CZ Were (was) there music, that was going on?

JD My dad played the mouth harp and there was always music and stuff but us kids don’t remember that stuff you know! Haha! ‘Cause I was pretty young then. I was pretty young when my mom passed away. And I thank God, the stuff that she taught me. ‘Cause I knew how to bake bread when I was 12. And nobody had to tell me how to measure stuff ‘cause my mom never measured anything. And I didn’t measure anything when I made bread. Last time I made bread here, I used to make it and give it to everybody. And I made a great big pan of…I always used a great big pan, and a lot of dough. And that day, I made it, I lifted it, I floured my board, and I couldn’t lift it. And then I cleaned my pan and put the dough back in, I couldn’t lift the dough back in there, so I said, “This is it! I can’t do it no more!” So, I don’t...I probably make a little bit, but...not much anymore. I did a lot of canning, I still can chokecherries. I have chokecherry syrup, that’s for sure! So, I do that every year. And I still got probably a few gallons of juice downstairs in a freezer.

CZ And you also sew too, I hear you are a very, very accomplished sewer.

JD What?

CZ That you sew.
Yes. I do.

Did you learn that from your mom?

Yes, yes, everything went...it’s just like she’s always told the other girls, someday she’s (Julie) gonna have to do it all. And I did. I raised my 2, brothers, my younger ones that was younger than me. And that’s why I didn’t get to go finish school is because I would have to get up and fix breakfast and go into school. Then I’d come home and have all the washing to do and that kind of stuff. But you know I’m not sorry for it? I did good in my life!!! Really good! And ah...but I had the will to do it. Yes.

So you had 2 siblings that passed away? Do you know what they died of?

You mean, the younger ones?

Unhh.

Childbirth. My mother...the first one, John, my mother worked in a cleaners, there in Lewistown. And the smell of that stuff, they think that’s what did it. And the other one, I don’t know. But they’re both buried together and I put a stone there. It’s not too far from where my grandpa’s at. And ah...grandma Dess and them are buried just before that. Before you get there, grandma Dess and them buried there, my grandma and them, and I put a stone there. Because they didn’t have one. I know my mother woulda put a stone there if she was alive. So, I did it. And I asked Ernie up there (cemetery caretaker) I said, “Ernie...how much would it cost to get that stone put in there? And he put his arm on me and he said, “Julie. Nothing. You’ve
done a lot up here. Nothing. I’ll fix it up for you.” And he did. And then on my grandma…my
dad’s mother…my dad made those stones. And that one was flawed on the...

CZ And that’s for Ralph and Ralph’s wife?

JD Yes. That’s my grandpa’s mother.

CZ Okay.

JD I mean my grandpa’s wife! My dad’s mother.

CZ The ones that are sandstone are interesting shapes, aren’t they?

JD Yeah, my dad made that! And he carved the names and I wrote with black in it so you
can see ‘em! Then my grandma…my dad’s mother, the stone laid flat, and I told Ernie one day,
he was up there, I said, “You know Ernie, who’s gonna do these graves when we’re gone?”
Nobody. The kids don’t do that stuff anymore. They don’t care about the pictures they don’t
care about nothing. And he said, “Just a minute, Julie…” so he went over to his truck and he got
a crowbar and he lifted that stone, and that stone is about that thick (holds hand wide). He
said, “You know what? I can stand that up for you.” I said, “Are you sure?” and he said, “Yes.”
I said, “How much will that cost me?” He said, “Give me a hundred and I’ll do it and send you a
picture.” And he did. Made a nice foundation on it, and set it up. So, I wrote on her name so
people could see it. And ah…so we got that done. And so, my brother that was killed in an
accident, he’s buried round the other side where you drive around and come down to go out.
And my brother Joe is buried there. We were both in that accident (*Julie’s in-laws the
Breckenridges also in car). 1950 (*Jan 1). Just not too far from Eddy’s Corner. Going towards
Harlowtown. We were comin’ to Lewistown but ah...there was 3 people killed there. Then I was unconscious for over a week. And then they...I got my last sacraments they said. I don’t remember any of that stuff, ‘cause I was out. But ah...thank God I’m here today.

CZ Absolutely. So. getting back to the headstones, didn’t you tell me an interesting story about that stone for your grandfather?

JD Oh, where, my grandpa? It came from Surenuﬀ. I don’t’ know if you know where Surenuﬀ is at? But it’s a...

CZ By Forest Grove isn’t it.

JD It’s toward Forest Grove, yep, up in the mountains there. My dad dug it up. They had beautiful stones there. And he dug it up and he carved it, and he did the name and everything on it and so...I ah...you couldn’t see ‘em before, but now you can see ‘em because I...they needed it done again. One more time. And I hope, I took some of my nieces up there and showed ‘em what I did. And they said they’ll help keep it up after I am gone, but who knows if they will.

CZ Hope so, Hope so. So, why did they pick the stone from Surenuﬀ, were they living around Forest Grove?

JD No, no, my dad was working up that way. And he found that stone and he brought it on a wagon. And he carved it up and put it up there for my grandpa. And then he found another one that, it’s pretty good size. And it’s really thick, and it’s standing up now where it was laying down so it will never get covered. So that is good.
CZ  What was he doing out there? You said he worked there?

JD   He was herding sheep up there. Yeah.

CZ   Do you know who he was working for?

JD   He was working for ah...John Stanley. John Stanley. And then he worked for John Gjerde. Yeah, yep.

CZ   So, he was a young man when he went into WWI, did he have a job before that?

JD   As a young boy? Not that I know of.

CZ   When he came back from the war, what did he do then?

JD   Well, I know he married my mom! HaHa!! So, I don’t know what he did before that.

CZ   Where did they meet?

JD   In Lewistown, yeah.

CZ   Do you know the circumstances how they met?

JD   At a dance. At a dance is all I know. Yeah. And I think that’s their wedding picture up there, up here (on the wall). That’s my mom and her brothers and I’m sure that’s probably their wedding picture. Because I’ve got a lot of pictures of her in that dress. And ah...and that’s my dad and mom right there too.

CZ   Okay. I’ll have to take a picture of that. So, I’m curious, was she Native, Native American too, part?
JD Who?

CZ Your mom?

JD Oh yeah.

CZ What was her...?

JD Dess.

CZ Okay, Oh, that’s Dess...

JD That’s the Dess side.

CZ Now does that go back to Parenteau or is it your other side?

JD What are you saying?

CZ Parenteau, is that how you say it?

JD Yes. That is how you say it.

CZ That was your mom’s...

JD That was my grandmother’s maiden name. Yeah. My mother is a Dess. That’s when she (Julie’s grandmother) married grandpa Dess. Solemon Dess.

CZ Do you know much about their family, where they came from?

JD All I know...well they come from North Dakota or South Dakota, I’ve got all that information, but I didn’t...you came too early!

CZ Yeah, too early. So, what about...did they...did your mom work too?
JD  She worked at the creamery in Lewistown. And she never worked after that.

CZ  She started having all those kids.

JD  Yeah, she had a lot of kids. In fact, that one there... (in a picture) she’s the one that’s holding me as a baby. That’s my oldest sister. My... Katie, and my brother Ralph. So, I was the 4th one there. In fact, here’s an old picture.

CZ  That is an old picture. ‘Cause you’re 91 now.

JD  Huh?

CZ  You’re 91 now!

JD  91 and ½! Haha!

CZ  91 and ½, right! Did they ever talk about Louis Riel or the Louis Riel Rebellion, or any...?

JD  Who?

CZ  Louis Riel up in Canada where they...

JD  No.

CZ  They never talked about that...

JD  If they did, I was probably too young at the time. And if they did, like I said they’d talk French a lot. Yeah... so...

CZ  Did they ever talk about being Native American or did they mostly say they were French?
JD  No, they never did. I know my mom went to a mission school somewhere. And I got that too, written in there. And ah...they all did. It was 2 girls and 3 boys, I think (*two babies passed as well). Uncle Jim and uncle Albert, and uncle Lee. And my mom and then Josephine. They’re all deceased now. Yeah.

CZ  And they went to mission school around Lewistown do you think or someplace else?

JD  They went to a mission! No, it’s someplace out of Lewistown, and I have that too, but I couldn’t find my mother’s youngest brother at the cemetery up there. And he was married to...not a very good lady! What I understand. But ah...I talked to Ernie about it and ah...I said, “Ernie, I walked the cemetery everywhere and my mother’s youngest brother is buried somewhere here.” And he said, “I’ll look at the other cemetery.” And I ‘ll be darned if he didn’t find it and send me a picture. He’s got a great big stone. And then there are 2 babies buried at the foot. But I don’t know if them was his babies or what, but he died of appendicitis. And his wife wouldn’t take him to the hospital. He was very young. And ah...he bled to death. More or less. And my aunt Josephine finally got him to the hospital...they were so mad at her. Because he could have been saved, you know. But ah...at least I know where he’s buried at and we put flowers there every year. We go back maybe 2 or 3 times a year and put flowers everywhere on the graves. My grandpa’s grave, ah, when was you there?

CZ  Just about a week ago.

JD  Huh?

CZ  A week ago.
JD  Were the flowers still around grandpa’s?

CZ  No…

JD  They should have been.

CZ  I didn’t see any.

JD  Probably didn’t pay attention.

CZ  Could have been…(pictures taken by CZ from week before show flowers still on graves).

JD  ‘Cause we were there…when was it we were in Lewistown?

VD  September.

JD  Yeah, September, I guess. Yeah. And then I just met a friend of mine that I used to play with when we were young kids. And we was up at the cemetery, and this girl was exercising, walking up there. He (Vern) never likes to talk to anybody, and I said, “STOP I want to talk to her.” And I said, “Were you born and raised in Lewistown?” and she said, “Yes.” And I said, “Well, I am too. I just wondered if you knew the Duffners?” She looked at me kind of funny and she said, “Yes I know the Duffners, ‘cause I’m one of ‘em!”

CZ  HaHa!!

JD  I said, “What?” I said, which one and she said, “Dad had the barbershop in Lewistown.” I said, “What about his sister, his youngest sister, Marina?” Was it Marin…

VD  Vereen.

JD  Maureen.
VD  (Spells name...) Just like my name with...

JD  So she rattled off her address and I never thought about it anymore, so we went out and ate, and we said let’s go for a ride. He...he remembers the dates and everything. And now he don’t, but he did...HaHa...that day. But ah...he drove right up to this house and I said, “What do I say?” He said, “You’ll know what to say, just go up and see.” So, I knocked on the door and this guy came and answered the door, and I said, “I’m looking for the Duffners.” He threw the door open, “You’ve got the right place!” and ah...there was my friend! We used to play together when we were little. Here she was. She’s the same age as me.

CZ  I’ll be darned.

JD  And she likes owls, I like owl things. She was married before. All our lives were about the same. Oh my God we just....

CZ  Must have been great. So, talking about...you were married before...when did you get married?

JD  Ah...In ’48.

CZ  And who was your fist husband?

JD  Justin Breckinridge. I’m still with his nieces and everybody, they all come here. We’re all invited to all their parties and stuff. And their mom and dad, everybody is gone from Forest Grove, they’re all deceased except the kids. And there’s Weesie, Louise, but I call her Weesie. All the kids are very much with me yet.

CZ  Good. So, Forest Grove, your family, a lot of your family settled around Forest Grove?
Well the Breckinridges, the girls married Lundeen (sp), and Isaacs. Both girls married somebody up there, so that’s how we knew Forest Grove so much.

I see. Yeah.

Yeah.

What about your grandfather, Ralph. I meant to ask you...what was his occupation when he came?

I think herding sheep and stuff like that. I think so ‘cause I’ve seen pictures. See my dad...my dad went to Hardin in a covered wagon many years ago. I was probably just a little kid. To work on a dam up there (Yellowtail) over towards Hardin. I’ve got that written too. And then when he finished the dam up there, we came back in a covered wagon. I remember that. I was just a little kid. But I remember that. We had 2 covered wagons. I got pictures of that. And then my dad bought the house at 302 W. Virginia, in Lewistown. So that’s where we at until my mom passed away. She was so young, yeah.

Yeah, my goodness. Did they talk about any prejudice toward them or did people even know they had Native American backgrounds or did they ever talk about that?

Not really. I guess we just knew. No. But I have stuff sayin’ where my grandma and them came from and where grandpa came from, from Canada. I’ve got all that stuff. But ah...I was pretty little back then too. So, you don’t think about all that stuff.

What about when you were a young girl and growing up in school, did you ever have any problems?
JD    Any what?

CZ    Did you ever have any problems with people having any prejudice towards you?

JD    No. Not...the only time somebody said something to me was after I was married. “Well, how come...if you got Indian in you, how come you don’t have a crooked nose?” Haha! I don’t know why...haha! But that’s about the only thing, nobody...but I never heard of, back then, before me, the Wells (*cousins) and stuff told me...the kids used to tease ‘em about being Indian and stuff, you know. In school. It was very bad. I didn’t, we didn’t have it. And my dad and my mom died, he tried to keep us and work, and he had went to this lawyer, and this lawyer got us into the (Pierre) Indian school. And we didn’t have enough Indian blood. Being my dad was in the service, and...he helped him get us there. We didn’t know anything about Indians. We were never around them. And we went to school there.

CZ    Where was that at?

JD    Pierre, South Dakota.

CZ    Pierre!

JD    Yeah.

CZ    So you had to board there then.

JD    Oh yeah. You slept there, you ate there. Everything.

CZ    And all of your brothers and sisters went too?
JD  Just a...just me and Louie and Joe, Dan and Harvey. That was it. Five of us. The
youngest ones. The others were already gone you know. Whatever.

CZ  How old were you when you first had to go to school there?

JD  When I first went to school?

CZ  In Pierre, in Pierre.

JD.  Oh. I am not sure. Pretty young there.

CZ  That must have been a really hard experience leaving your dad.

JD  It was. Because we didn’t know, when they were looking in our hair and everything,
what were they doin’ to us you know. We didn’t have bugs or anything like that, but I guess,
haha, they check you for bugs and what not. But we were very...didn’t know anything about
that stuff. ‘Cause we weren’t raised around a reservation. Ever.

VD  Your highest grade was 8\textsuperscript{th} grade.

CZ  8\textsuperscript{th} grade? So how...how did the Indian kids treat you then?

JD  Pretty good. Pretty good. Ahm...we just kinda fit in. I guess.

VD  They called me “white eyes”.

CZ  They called you “white eyes”?

JD  They ah, we got along pretty good there. I worked ah...I worked for the employees.
They had a place there. And a lady, oh, she just hung onto me. And she was a white lady. And
she did the cooking and everything there. So, she invited me to go over and cook, help her with
the stuff you know. And ah...when I left from there, there was a $20 bill inside one of the cookbooks. And I seen it there but I didn’t touch it. And when I left from there, she put her arm around me and she said, “You know what? You won this!” I said, “What?” She give me the $20! She said, “The last time I had somebody here they stole everything I had here. And you didn’t touch any of it.” So, she gave it to me.

CZ And this was at the school?

JD Yeah. And they bussed us. They had to, my dad had to bring us up to Great Falls and the bus here took us to Rocky Boy, and all clear up to South Dakota.

CZ Wow.

JD Yep. That was the hardest day of my life.

CZ So then you had to live with people in the dorm you didn’t know.

JD Oh yeah, oh yeah. Which it was very nice. Clean. Very clean. And ah...when I worked for this lady, she was an awesome lady.

CZ So, you worked in the (employees) kitchen, that was your job?

JD With her, with her, yeah. After school I’d go help her out.

CZ Well no wonder you’re a good cook? That probably helped!

JD HaHa!

CZ Or a cook for a lot of people!
JD  Yeah. Then I worked in the kitchen at the Indian School too. Made a lottt of peanut
butter and jelly sandwiches! Oh my gosh...we went, we took a, we drove through there and it
was all different you know. I’d have liked to go in and seen it just to go there.

CZ  Was it still operating as a school?

JD  Far as I know, they are. There’s, there’s Pierre, South Dakota and then there’s
Flandreau. And I think that’s in South Dakota, too.

CZ  But you were in Pierre.

JD  But I was at Pierre, yeah.

CZ  Did you play in any sports there, or...?

JD  Ah...the boys did. But the girls didn’t. They had dances there, they had music, church,
always got to go to church and stuff. And ah...

CZ  How did your brothers and sisters manage then?

JD  Harvey was just a little kid then too. And we always...in the evening we always meet
and walk around the place and stuff. Yeah. Yeah. At least we stayed together. And my dad
never did go on welfare, never, never did he ask for help. One time a welfare lady came, we
were still livin’ at 302...and she said, “I understand you need some help.” And my dad said,
“Well...in a way. But you seen that door you come in? Don’t let it hit you in the ____.” ’Cause
the guy down the street lost his wife and had a bunch of kids. And this was before she came to
our house. And they picked up all their kids and scattered ‘em everywhere. And my dad
wouldn’t allow that so he...ah...that’s why he kicked her out. He said, “I’ll come calling to you if
I ever need help.” We stuck together! The five of us. Went out to sheep camp with my dad, in the summer. And I look back and I wonder, how in the world did we do that! My dad had a big tent and he’d let...him and the boys slept in there and I slept up in the sheep wagon. But I think back, how did we ever do that!

CZ    Probably loved it.

JD    Yeah! I suppose! We enjoyed it, my dad and I’d get horseback and go to Teigen...not Teigen...Teigen I think it was. A little town. We’d go buy candy and stuff for the kids and stuff. Horseback ride back. But ah... I still wonder how in the heck I did that. I did the cookin’ and stuff! Ha!

CZ    I wondered that. So, you did all the cookin’.

JD    Oh yeah, oh yeah.

CZ    Were there other herders you had to cook for besides your dad and you family?

JD    Huh?

CZ    Were there other herders to cook for besides your dad and family?

JD    No, just us, just us. Yeah.

CZ    Who was he workin’ for at that time do you remember?

JD    He was workin’ for John Gjerde out at ah...let’s see...you. From Hilger, not Hilger, but from...is it Hilger? Not Hilger but...

VD    Go out of Four Corners...
JD  Grass Range. From Grass Range he lived way out and I worked for them. I was just a young girl, and ah, they wanted somebody to herd the dock pen, that’s with the babies you know. And so...my dad said, “I think my girl could do that.” ‘Cause I knew how to ride a horse and everything. So, they gave me a horse and my dad let me have his dog. But I stayed at the ranch with them. And they took me out when they...and I had to take ‘em down to water and let ‘em feed down at the water and just watch so the coyotes and stuff don’t get ‘em you know. ‘Cause they were all babies. With their mothers. And I worked for them one summer. That was my first paycheck!

CZ  Really! How old were you when that happened?

JD  I...probably around 15. 14, 15 years old. ‘Cause I wasn’t old enough to go in a bar or nothin’. But ah...yeah...

CZ  It sounds like hard work is important in your family.

JD  It was.

CZ  Was your grandfather...is that his feeling too? That...

JD  What?

CZ  Your grandfather Ralph, was he a hard worker and he instilled that in the kids?

JD  Oh yeah, yeah. My dad was too. And ah...my grandmother...let’s see, it’d be my great grandma, I guess it was, they said that they could eat off of her floor. So just about every Laverdure was clean people. My house is a mess right now ‘cause we’re...tomorrow they’re supposed to put our flooring in. So, we’ve got everything boxed up and what not, but
ah...‘cause my glass cupboard...I had to take everything out and move it. So, hopefully they’ll come and do our floor tomorrow and I can put everything back. But I had the walls washed, we had somebody come in and do it, we can’t do it anymore. And had the windows. My nephew came and helped us with the windows in the kitchen so, that’s all ready to go.

CZ Nice! New floor at 91! So, I’m curious, do you know very much about your mom’s side of the family?

JD All that is I know is grandpa came from North or South Dakota. Like I said I had all this stuff in a book and I was gonna get it all out for you!!

CZ Sure.

JD And he was just a little boy, he was just a little boy when he came here. And ah...I know they crossed the river somewhere when he was just a little boy. And ah, I don’t know. But I coulda told you a lot of that stuff.

CZ Well maybe what we should do is call the interview good and then go look at your information and I can add it to my transcripts.

JD Okay.

CZ K! Well, Julie I thank you so much!

JD Oh, you’re welcome! And if you need any more help, I said I coulda got the books out and everything!
Information added by CZ in (*) found in Julie’s books of which she spoke.

Granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Chuck LaFountain and his geodome house in Lewistown
CZ All right, we are here today with Chuck LaFountain. If you want to state your name, place of birth, and where you live.

CL Charles Alfred LaFountain, I was born in St. Joseph Hospital here in Fergus County. I live at 605 Lynn Street, Lewistown, Montana. I live in the first geodesic dome structure ever built in here in Montana.

CZ Really! Did you build it?

CL Ah, I had a lot of help.

CZ So how did you decide to build something like that?

CL Well, I was looking to be energy conservative and the temperature from the floor to the ceiling runs 2-6 degrees. And the money I saved in utilities paid for almost half of my house by the time I had it paid off.

CZ Wow, and when did you build it?

CL Ah...1980.

CZ 1980. That’s notable!!
Joe Dixon from Seiden Drug built the 2nd one and Richard and Teddy Mardicken built the other one; it was the only one I got sold. The economy collapsed and I had almost 4 dozen. I almost went bankrupt on that.

So, this is a design...did you buy into a company or is this something you created yourself?

No, I bought from a company in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. And...I liked the design. There’s no wasted space in it. It occupies 45 square feet in diameter. You go inside and there’s 3972 feet of floor space including the basement with one offset and the main floor with 2 offsets.

Wow, so was this occupation...we’re talking 80s...so, what did you do in your life?

I logged, I mined, I was heavy equipment, construction. I started off in the 4th grade at the Highland Park School as a janitor’s helper.

Really!

And then I was the boiler man for the Calvert Hotel in junior high. And I worked for the Coca Cola Bottling Company when I was out of high school. Then I went to the Marine Corp, then I came back and started working heavy construction. Wherever there was work, that’s where I went. I wasn’t always good at the projects I did but I was there because the money was there.

So in the Marine Corp...how long were you there?

Just a little over a year. Ah, I have Crones Disease and I didn’t know it at the time. But ah, I ruptured my stomach and I was medicaled out. I have an honorable discharge for medical
conditions. So, I didn’t see any combat; I was on my way to Vietnam when my stomach ruptured.

CZ  Really.

CL  Yeah. I ended up in the hospital for 23 or 28 days, I can’t remember. Been too long. And they sent me home instead.

CZ  Wow. That’s quite a story. So...what’s your spouse’s name, is she Metis?

CL  No. She’s not, she’s full blooded German.

CZ  HaHa!!

CL  She’s from North Dakota, she was probably born in Dickinson, or Mandan, or Judson. Her family was in the United States, that’s where they lived when they came over. Her ancestors are from Odessa, Russia and Strasberg, Germany.

CZ  And how did you meet your wife?

CL  Crossword puzzle, not a crossword puzzle but a jigsaw puzzle. She was putting it together and I was at a friend’s house, started putting pieces together. We’ve been together now for...oh probably 54 years. We’ve been married for 52 years this year.

CZ  That’s a long time. And, let’s get to your ancestors, I see you have an ancestral chart here. You want to tell me how the family line goes?
Well...I didn’t bring my reading glasses. It starts off with a...it looks like Cook, LaFountain and then there’s the Potters. Other than that’s and that’s as far as I know. Progressed to the point where I am here.

So, what time period? Do you have any dates on these ancestors?

You know, all of this could be gotten from the Turtle Mountain Reservation. There’s...you could probably access all this information from them.

So tell me a little bit about them then. They came from Turtle Mountain, your ancestors?

Yes, they did. Well...were here before America was here. And they settled them on the Turtle Mountain Reservation and there are some families that lived in Canada, but I’m from the Turtle Mountain Reservation. Being a band of the Chippewa Cree.

So- oh sorry you were going to say something, go ahead.

No, that’s fine.

So, North Dakota...is that were they ended up going to first?

As far as I know that’s the family line...now there is another group of LaFountains that...two different branches but the same start. And I met one of them in Billings in the store when I was buying new boots. And it’s almost uncanny it’s almost the same lineage as I have here. Part of it is, but it was in a different direction.

Interesting. So, when did... you’ve got some other names down through here...you want to just tell us who the people are through the line?
Ah...Charlotte LaFountain, John Plummer. And then, the others I really don’t know very well.

Plummers, were they Native or were they...?

Yes, they were all...and there’s an error with this tree...there was one of the gals they have listed on here was a full blooded Indian, but they’ve got her listed as white, so down through the lineage I’m actually 17/32nds and I don’t know how they figure that stuff. They’ve got me down as ¼ and my daughter down as 1/8, but my daughter’s actually ¼ not 1/8. But some place they made a clerical error along the way. And that’s what it turned out to be. Now...I didn’t know my grandpa LaFountain. The story goes that he didn’t ever drink anything in his life. And they were at a rodeo and it was hot and nasty and they had to walk everywhere they went, so they got home in the middle of the night and they had a jug of moonshine there and he says, “I’m gonna have 1 drink.” And before anyone could stop him, he just took the cork off the moonshine. Well, the old moonshine had fusel oil on the top of it...you had to mix it. He got a straight shot of fusel oil and by daylight he was dead.

What’s fusel oil?

It’s the product that comes with moonshine. I don’t know how they made it or what, but that was the story I was always told. When they say 1 drink won’t kill you...I can call you on that. One drink killed him.

Really! What year was that, do you know approximately?

No. My father was very little when that happened so I have no idea.
When was your dad born?

I don’t know. I’ve got his service records and stuff at home I coulda told you that but I wasn’t thinking about that part of it.

And you were born in what year were you born again?

1947, right after WWII. My father came back and...he was on the USS South Dakota. And that was one of the ships that was most attacked during WWII. He was actually a refrigeration man on the ship. But when it came time to fight, everybody fought. It didn’t matter what you did.

So...he would have been born in the 20s. So, when your grandfather died...that must have been in the teens or twenties, somewhere around there.

Somewhere in that area. But like I said Donna Walraven will have more information, probably better than I have here.

So your father was in the military, how long did he serve on the Dakota?

From the time he went in after he left boot camp and he went to the ship and he stayed there until WWII was over.

He was there a long time.

Yeah.

Was he ever injured or no?
No, they didn’t talk about that. They didn’t talk about their experiences in the war. He never once mentioned it, ever.

Did he ever talk about any prejudices that he might have experienced when he was a kid or in this situation in the military?

No he did not. If somebody lipped off to him and caused hard feelings, they got the crap beat out of them. Let’s put it that way.

Haha!!

Him and my uncle used to go to the bar and they’d start at one end of the bar, and the other end, and everybody was beat up by the time they got to the other end.

HaHa!!! I’ve heard the LaFountains were a pretty tough bunch, I’ve heard people say that before! HaHa!!!

I’m kind of a whimp compared to those boys.

HaHa! Well, I see when I go to the cemetery, too, I look at the gravestones and see that a lot of your relatives have served in the military.

Most all of them.

And it looks like a lot of men in the family?

Yes. I don’t know if any of the women served or not. They probably did, knowing them.

Your cousins and uncles that have served- how many do you think and who?
That would be tough to tell. Uncle Alex LaFountain was a Ranger in WWII and he was one of those that scaled the cliffs on the D Day Invasion. He was a corpsman.

Really.

And I noticed that on a lot of the stones the other relatives were corpsman or in the medical part of the service. But...I would love to know more about my family but it’s just not in the cards to know.

So...okay your uncle...let me make sure I got that right...your dad’s brother, he was the artist.

Yes.

And what do you know about him?

Mostly I know was Sunday dinner, we was always, we always had Sunday dinner at grandma’s house. And at times, I would see him sit and work on the same sketch, for weeks, months ‘til he had it the way he wanted it. He was very meticulous in his drawings and his artwork. It was the...the one that brings to mind is the guy riding a bear with the mountain lion for a pack mule and a rattlesnake for a whip and it says, “I’m getting out of this country she’s too rough for me.”

I’ve seen that!

And he worked on that actually I think for several years before he finally got it exactly where he wanted it. I have 1 piece of his artwork that was cast in bronze it was they call a peaceable work, it was a sow grizzly and she had 2 cubs and the 2 cubs were fighting. But they
separated that from the other one so they could make twice the money on that so I ended up with the 2 cubs and I had to buy that. I bought it from some people in Missoula, they had that. But I could have had it all for $500 but I could not raise 10 cents at the time. Or I would have owned it all.

CZ Who had the collection at that time that you could have bought it from?

CL Uncle Alex himself.

CZ Oh.

CL And, it wasn’t long after that he was in a...raft in the Missouri River and somebody was starting to drown and he dove in to save ‘em. Well, the water is really warm on the top, but once you pierce that top layer it’s really cold. And he went into an epileptic shock and he drowned, I didn’t know he had epilepsy until that time.

CZ Really.

CL Yeah.

CZ So he drowned trying to save the other person.

CL Yeah, the person ironically made it to the other bank, but he lost his life trying to save somebody else.

CZ Well, and I guess that would be in the keeping of the way the family had been serving in the military.

CL Yeah. That’s the way it is, he didn’t think about it he just did it.
CZ   Yeah. Right. So, you remember family...with your grandparents, do you remember much about your grandparents?

CL   Oh...my grandma Louise was very stern. Grandpa Davis was actually my step grandfather. My father’s stepdad. He was a conductor on the railroad for many, many years. When he retired, the railroad let him put his trailer on the tracks, beside the tracks here in Great Falls and he lived there. But he come down with cancer and passed away in Great Falls. That was tough to watch.
CZ  So that was the stepdad, did you ever know your grandfather then?

CL  No, my real grandfather’s the one that died of the fusel oil.

CZ  Oh...so he was, well yeah! He was a young man when that happened!

CL  Yeah.

CZ  So, his wife, then, married this Mr. Davis...did they live in Great Falls most of the time?

CL  No they lived just off of Pine Street and 4th Avenue they had a place there. And then when he lived in Great Falls it was different. But, Bill Davis from Roy and grandpa Owen Davis were both from Roy. And Bill worked for the county as a blade man, so that’s as far as I know with that.

CZ  And you said your grandma was a stern lady? What do you think her story was?

CL  I really don’t know she just never really talked to the kids at all. She might yell at you for getting too unruly or somethin’. Might put a knot on your head if you were misbehaving.

CZ  HaHa!!

CL  That is just what happened in those days. It’s not like now.

CZ  Yeah. How many kids did she have?

CL  I’m not sure how many she had. There’s Oliver, Monroe, Vern, Teddy Davis. Those were half-brothers to my father. Then there was my father, Loraine (sp) and uncle Alex are all the LaFountains that I know of.

CZ  So she had 7 kids that you know of? 3...
CL At least. Pretty small family actually. For then. Loraine had I think 22 or 23 kids.

CZ And Loraine was...

CL Father’s sister.

CZ Oh my gosh that’s a lot of kids.

CL Well she had at least 3 husbands that I know of, Walt Dahlsman (sp), before him was Breckinridge, and then the last one was a guy named Don Sandy (sp) and complete families with each one of them.

CZ Interesting, I talked to a lady yesterday that mentioned the Breckinridge family. She was a...think what her family was, but yeah, there may be a relationship there.

CL Well, Breckinridges and LaFountains were intermarried there.

CZ Were they Native...Breckinridges? Or were they...?

CL I don’t really know.

CZ Interesting in fact she was a... Laver...I’ll think of it later (Laverdure). So, your dad...what was your dad like?

CL Well, he was a hard worker, he was a very good fisherman, and he was very good at hunting. But he worked a lot and I really didn’t get to spend much time with him. ‘Cause with 5 kids and 2 cousins to feed and a wife, he spent most of his time working.

CZ What all were his occupations?
Ah, he worked in the mines in Butte, he logged for a fella named Hap Kramlic here in Lewistown. In fact, dad was working for Hap Kramlic when I was born.

And who was that person?

Hap Kramlic lived up towards Spring Creek, had a lumber mill there. My father worked for him.

And you were also in logging too.

Yeah, I did a little logging. Mining, heavy construction, I was a boilerman, ah...janitor, I sold insurance for a while and that’s not one of my favorite things to do. I feel ashamed of myself for selling insurance, but you have to pay the bills one way or another.

HaHa! Yeah. Oh...Laverdure, that is who the Breckinridges married...

Laverdures, yeah.

Are you related to them?

You know, somewhere along the line I am related to the Doneys, the Laverdures, the LaTrays, ah...the Kendalls on the white side of the family. At one time I was a relative, or shirt tail relative of one of the governors, Ayers here in Montana. My grandpa Turner and his brother Dwight, they made it through the Depression bootlegging. You had to do something to feed the family and that’s how you made it through. Ended up they lost all of their homesteads.

Now when you say they lost, who are they?
Ah, Lone Turner and Dwight Turner. They had homesteads out towards Grass Range on the right side. On the left side was a gal named Florence Racer she had a nice place there. I didn’t really know her very well. I knew uncle Dwight, I’d talk to him, you know, just little kid stuff. He died of asthma and emphysema in the hospital. At St. Josephs.

So, I’m curious, you talked about your dad and your grandfather, how is it that he came to this area. Did he come with his grandparents or his parents, or do you know much about how he got here?

No, I have no idea. Just from the, most of the information I have is just hearsay, and it was from the time I was probably 5 or 6 years old. Due to the circumstances this is just the way it was at that time. I didn’t really know the other family members. I knew they were related, but that was it. And then after my father and mother divorced, mom was really upset with him. She destroyed most everything that he had for records and stuff, burned it, just wanted to purge the memory.

So you have brothers and sisters, who are your brothers and sisters?

My brother Michael is buried up her in the city cemetery, he died of leukemia at about 14 years old. I had one baby sister named Ellen. She’s buried in the cemetery in Butte. She died of birth defects at childbirth. My father was working in the mines, the Victor Chemical Plant. That may have contributed to the fact. And our home in Butte was located on a mine shaft. They plugged it with timbers and rock; we were on a mine shaft there. On Washington Street.
So you lived in, I’ll let you finish telling me about your family, but I am curious about your Butte life.

My sister Margo lives in Alaska, and I’ve got one brother Dan who lives in Texas. That’s not far enough away.

HaHa!

Took a different path in life and we come to a parting of the ways. He’s my brother, but he’s not welcome, ever. My brother Richard lives in Port Angeles, Washington, he’s got like 3 or 4 college degrees, he could have been a nurse, a teacher, and a couple other things. But he married into a family out there and worked in the Dishoa American Paper Mill until he retired. And he spent 20 years in the military. Other than that, I don’t really know anything else.

What about Butte?

Butte, well my father worked for Anaconda Company, he was an underground miner for quite a few times.

How many...what years did he...?

That would have been in the early 50s. And he went to work for Victor Chemical Plant there, and when all that went to heck he came back and logged some more. And then John Montgomery from Hilger country hired him as a service man for his equipment. My dad was an equipment operator and a service man. That’s basically what I started doing in the construction industry, I was following in my father’s footsteps as an oiler. Then I went to operating later on.
So in other words, you were following in his footsteps, you came in the same company... he brought you in and said here’s my son, can he do this?

No, it was a long time after my father passed, I needed some work and they needed some help. John hired me and gave me a chance to work.

What did your father pass away of?

Ah... a gunshot wound. The lady who did it, shot him. In order for his sister not to lose her kids, ‘cause they were staying with him, they said he shot himself. Now I wasn’t there. I have no idea who was telling the truth, but she, this gal, apologized to me for killing him. She said she was trying to scare him. Well, it turned out bad. A bullet to the brain will do it every time. So, I really don’t know the truth on it. That’s as close as I can... she said she shot him, that she was sorry, and apologized. The sister, Lorraine Sandine (sp) at the time, said he did it himself. They lied to us so many times it was hard to tell.

That was his sister?

Yeah. She’s the one with the 20 plus kids.

So... how old were you when that happened?

I was in junior high, about 13, 14. Somewhere in there.

What are your memories of how you felt during that...?

It was pretty emotional, I decided to run away from home at that time. Ha, I was in jail... they kept me in jail for a week for running away from home. And it happened while I was in jail. My father come to visit, my brothers and sisters... ah... like I said, I was in jail so I didn’t
get to visit him. And it was right after that, a few weeks after that this happened. Just typical life, stuff happens and there’s nothing you can do about it. You can’t go back and change it.

CZ So, you must have been living with your mom at the time then?

CL Yeah, I lived on Montana Street between 5th and 6th.

CZ So, getting’ back to your grandma, your grandma was kind of a hard lady it sounds like. Did she ever cook, ah, you know like the bullets and typical kind of stuff?

CL She made everything. My grandfather Davis loved the catfish. He caught a lot of catfish at different times. ‘Cause they loved to fish and hunt.

CZ Where were they getting’ catfish at?

CL Probably the Musselshell River, the Missouri. I never fished with my grandpa Davis. And I did fish with my dad a little bit but not that much.

CZ So dinners, you don’t really remember? Did you have any kind of traditional Metis food that you know of?

CL At that time we didn’t know it was traditional, we just ate it. When you are a kid you don’t ask stupid questions you just sit down and eat.

CZ Right. When you were a kid did you know you were Metis?

CL No I didn’t.

CZ When did you find that out?

CL I was probably married to my wife when I found out! Ha!
Really!

I have a half-sister that lives in Vancouver, Washington. I was 30 years old before I met her. There’s a lot of secrets people don’t tell ya. But...she walked around the corner and I knew instantly that she was my sister ‘cause she looked...strikingly resemblance to my other sister.

That was my sister Margo.

Was this a random meeting or were you supposed to meet?

Oh, they arranged it so I would know her, meet her.

Okay, now I gotta make sure I understand. Was this a legitimate half-sister or a...

No to be honest my mom and this other gal was having a contest to see who could capture my dad. My mom won. They found that she was going out with my dad and they moved her out of the area so she couldn’t see my dad. Otherwise, I’d have had a different mother.

Really! So why didn’t they want your mom to see your dad?

Ah...well mom was okay...sort of. She was white. That wasn’t supposed to happen.

But you didn’t know that you were Metis until later so you wouldn’t have had a clue this happened until later on.

No. Like I said...I kinda heard bits and pieces, rumors and hushed talk you know. They’d wait until I went away to talk about it. But it was just somethin’ that happened. She was a really nice person (1/2 sister). Very talented...and ironically enough, she worked for a paper company too, James River, but they sold out. And she still lives in Vancouver, Washington.
CZ  Must have been hard. So, your mom...I’ve heard stories like this before where they didn’t want the people to be with the Metis person so there’s a problem with prejudice with that side of the family.

CL  The white side was extremely prejudiced; the Indian side was very prejudiced, too. So, like I said, I was mostly isolated so I don’t have much information like most people have.

CZ  I see what you are saying. So...it’s interesting you are saying both sides of the family were prejudiced...

CL  Against each other.

CZ  Against each other.

CL  That was a pariah. All of my brothers and sisters were not to be accepted by either side. As it turned out later on, we were accepted by both sides. But for a long time, I felt really bad about it. Later on, when I was growing up, it was a good thing to be isolated because I couldn’t be associated with the bad ones on the white side or the Indian side. So, I was by myself most of the time.

CZ  Wow, that must have been really tough, too...especially with your dad dying at (when Chuck was) 13.

CL  Yeah. Well, it was not a good experience. Stepfathers are...usually not good people. There are some good ones out there, but the one I had was not.

CZ  So...prejudice on both sides of the family. Did that...you said they finally got over it? What do you think happened that finally made them accept...?
The Indians started getting money. Then everyone wanted to be an Indian.

HaHa! So, how did they start getting money?

Oh, there were disbursements; the Ten Cent Treaty and other treaties. Ten Cent Treaty we ended up with $41 and change. It was crazy. On that note, the government, during the Obama Administration, wanted the Indians, the excuse they used, they wanted to make the reservation whole and get all of the non-white people out of there. But ironically, the only land they bought I had any title to was coal, gas, oil, other minerals and gravel. The stuff that wasn’t worth a damn...I still have 1 piece of land left that held some title to. But they only bought all this other stuff that was valuable then. They, the Obama Administration turned around and shut off the coal, and wanted to shut down the gas, and oil. I sold it all back to ‘em on the contingency that if they ever started getting’ royalties, I ‘m cut in on the royalties. But that’s the only way I would sell it back to them. It wasn’t a lot of money. But it saved a lot of paperwork for the government ‘cause we had like ...oh...6 or 8 tracts of land that I held part. There were so many relatives that you didn’t really own it, but you had some, you know.

Wow. So, I am thinking...getting back to this prejudice thing. When you were in school did you experience it? I know in your family you had that issue. Did you have it in school?

When I was in junior high, there was a teacher named Mrs. Nelson and we were studying history. And...she stood me up in front of the class and told me I should be ashamed of myself. And I should shut up and sit down. So, I sat down and very respectfully I raised my hand, and I asked, “What side should I be ashamed of? The white side because they killed the Indians and the papooses and the babies and stole the land? The white side because they stole
the land?” She sent me to principal’s office. That was just when civil rights were starting to get
going really well. And the principal looked at me and he says, “Darn it Chuck, what did you do
now?” So, I told him exactly what happened and he says, “Are you lying to me?” I says, “No, go
in and don’t let her talk.” I says, “Ask any one of the kids what happened.” So, he went up and
told her she couldn’t speak and about 6 or 7 of the kids stuck up for me. She had to come down
to the principal’s office, apologize to me, and never do it again. Lost her job that day, right
then, right there. Yes, I experienced prejudice in the system.

CZ  Yeah. I’d say. So, how old were you when that happened?

CL  Oh...around 13.

CZ  So this happened around the same time your dad died.

CL  Dad died...was the same year.

CZ  And you’d been in trouble before that. So, you’d...why did you run away?

CL  Mom was having trouble feeding all the kids. Kid that I knew...he was gonna go to
California, and he knew some people there we could get jobs and work. So, I thought, that
sounds good. Mom won’t have to feed me, and I have a job, and I could work. HaHa! So, I
did...HaHa! The best laid plans, you know, not thought out very well.

CZ  For kids of course!

CL  I paid a price.

CZ  The price being...
CL I was in jail for a while. For about a week or 10 days; I can’t remember. It’s been a while. The other kid...he got out right away, haha, they made me sit there for...

CZ So that’s...that’s really young to be in jail?

CL Yeah, it was up here at the old jail. I think they’ve...right behind the courthouse. Used to be the county jail, and that’s where I was. As I say, jail is not a fun place to be and I didn’t want to get back in there again.

CZ So, you never...or did after that?

CL No. When it was later on in high school, we were having a couple of beers driving around having a good time. Got into some mischief, and I spent 3 days there. Friday, Saturday, Sunday and I got out Monday morning.

CZ That was the last time?

CL That was the last time. They’d have to run really hard to catch me and put me back!

CZ Haha!! Wow...I got to take a look at my questions and see if there is anything else. Do you have any family recipes that you, ah, that the family passed on to your family?

CL No, not really. I gave the recipe folder that my mom had to my brother in Port Angeles. He’s got all that stuff.

CZ Did I ask you how your mom and dad met?

CL Country dance probably. That’s where most of them met was at a country dance.

CZ Did your dad...did he have an education? Did he go through high school or...?
CL  I don’t think he finished high school. The brothers and sisters and I were some of the first to finish high school. Some of my cousins about the same time, we were the only ones. Before that, most of them didn’t finish school. Ah...you had to work in order to live and eat.

CZ  It sounds like your family...pretty hard workers?

CL  For the most part. Most of them were. Lot of the people I worked for didn’t really like me but they couldn’t find anybody that’d work as hard as I did, so I always had good jobs. I worked for a few people that were really decent to work for but drove you like a slave. Well...it still goes on in the workplace today. You will or your replacement will!? Ha!

CZ  Right! So, your grandfather...what kind of work did he do? Was he loggin’ you said?

CL  Grandpa Davis...

CZ  I was thinking about the LaFountain.

CL  No the other grandpa passed away long, long before that. I don’t know what he did. They were ranchers, farmers. They worked the land mostly.

CZ  Did they have their own land or did they work for somebody else?

CL  They did at first for a while, then they’d sell off to somebody else and go do a different job. That Roy country is tough to make a livin’ out of at that time.

CZ  Is that where they were at was at Roy?

CL  Yeah. I think the Altenhofens ended up with most of the homestead tracts there.

CZ  Which ones were those?
The Altenhofens. They used to have the stockyards there.

CL  Oh, okay.

CL  They ended up with most of the land out there...ah...

CZ  Well anyway...

CL  Anyway, Davis out there...he kept his. He had it right up until the time he passed. Hard worker, lived in what you would consider a homesteader shack out there for many, many years. And he worked for the county as a blade man the last I knew...and they raised sheep and so...

CZ  So, in your job experiences, you had a lot of different things you worked at. Did you ever have prejudice? Or did you have prejudice in the Marines? Did anybody treat you...?

CL  In the Marine Corp you didn’t have prejudice. That was not allowed. They set us down, they didn’t set us down we stood there and listened to them. They says on the battlefield if you need blood you don’t want to, oh I don’t want a black guy’s blood, or an Indian guy’s blood, or a white guy’s blood, or a Chinese guy’s blood. When you need blood, there is no prejudice. You were all green and you belong to me. There...it was some going on there, but it was stepped on pretty fast.

CZ  What about the other work places you were at?

CL  Well, like I said, there was a lot of prejudice going on. Even...you just didn’t get stuff like everyone else did, you got the crap jobs. But...it happens you shouldn’t feel sorry about it. It made you who you are today. Everything you experience in life makes you who you are today.

CZ  And who are you today?
I’m a red blooded American. I’m a Marine...always was a Marine...always will be a Marine. I believe in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. And that’s the way I’m gonna go out. I’m gonna fight for it ‘til the day I die.

And with that Chuck, I think we’ll conclude this interview. Thank you so much.

Thank you, you’re welcome.

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News Argus clippings, 2020, np.
John Gervais and his painted saw
Interview
John Gervais (JG) at his home, Roy, Montana
By Candi Zion (CZ)
1-17-2021

CZ  We are with John Gervais and we are in Roy, Montana at John’s home. And John if you would give me your name, date of birth and where you were born and where you live now?

JG  John Gervais. I was born in Augusta, January 8th, 1946.

CZ  K. And you live in Roy?

JG  I live in Roy now.

CZ  What was your occupation or is your occupation?

JG  I am retired. I operated a ranch here in the Roy country for 35 years. My son took it over and then I went to work for what is now Frontline Ag Solutions in Lewistown.

CZ  Oh, okay.

JG  For 14 years and then I retired.

CZ  That’s where I have seen you before. HaHa! And what is your spouse’s name?

JG  Marilyn Gervais. Her maiden name was Grindheim.

CZ  Was she Metis or...?

JG  No.

CZ  K. And tell me about your parent’s and grandparent’s names.
JG  My dad’s name was John. My mom’s name was Rose. My grandfather’s name was Daniel. And his wife’s name was Mary.

CZ  And where did they come from?

JG  My dad and grandfather were both born in Augusta.

CZ  So, you were telling me earlier your family came out of Canada at a pretty early date. You want to tell me about that?

JG  What I know about it is my grandfather, I mean my great, great, great grandfather, and his brothers come from Canada into Montana in the 1877 time period. Which was about the same time Chief Joseph made his run to Canada. They went into what is now Rocky Boy country and they did some hunting and trapping. And...I think they were there less than a year before they moved on to the Augusta area and into a town...it wasn’t a town when they got there...it’s Clemens, Montana and it’s on the Dearborn River. Southwest of Augusta where they trapped and logged.

CZ  Do you know why they left Canada?

JG  I do not.

CZ  So...do you know their names, the great, great, great grandfather?

JG  My great, great, great grandfather’s name was Calphus.

CZ  Wow, that is an interesting name! Do you have any idea how to spell that?

JG  Yeah. C-A-L-P-H-U-S.
That’s a really interesting name. And you said that the Native tribe was what side?

Chippewas Cree and they are now with the Shell, Little Shell Tribe.

Little Shell Band. Are you registered there with the Little Shell then?

The kids are.

Kids are? What percentage would they be?

More than 1/8.

More than 1/8. And you said they were French?

My great, great, great grandfather, they were...he was French Canadian. And he married an Indian lady here in Montana.

In Montana then? Okay. Do you know anything about where her family came from?

I do not.

Interesting. Did you have any traditions that passed on, any family recipes, or...certain phrases or language?

Um...when I was in grade school, we used to go up to the Rocky Boy Reservation when they did their pow-wows. And...we learned how to make arrowheads, and do beadwork and we also went out in the fields with the guys and picked rocks; they worked on the ranches up there. Picked rocks. I don’t remember any of that...I don’t remember any...we learned the language but, I don’t remember any of that.

Umhum. So, you just went up and stayed for short periods.
JG Like a month. Maybe 45 days during the summer.

CZ Summertime...that must have been fun makin’ arrowheads.

JG Umhum.

CZ And you were talking about your ancestors, it was about the same time as Chief Joseph. Did they have any more stories they talked about?

JG I never did know them. I don’t know if they passed stories on. I just knew...I just knew the elder people talking about that was how they came...that was the route they came down. So no, I don’t. Um...I don’t know any other stories.

CZ The reason I asked, I talked to another lady that her...the LaTray family had come down around the same time. So, I’m wondering if they were all together traveling. Because they talk about Chief Joseph, too.

JG The LaTrays from Winifred?

CZ Yep. Are you related to any of the LaTrays?

JG I don’t think so. See...like we have a lot of relatives...Rosettes at Rocky Boy. My aunt married a Rosette and...one of my aunts, and the other one married a Rosette which was his brother. And I have a lot of relatives, a lot of cousins, Rosettes up there.

CZ Any other family names up there?

JG No, not that I can think of. I mean there’s kids married, and you know, I had all that stuff down and I don’t remember it, I mean...
CZ Sure.

JG My memory is not as good as it used to be.

CZ Yeah...I get it! HaHa!! So...you ended up here in Roy. How did you make it from...what was your story from when you were a kid in Augusta to now? What happened in that time?

JG Okay, when I graduated from high school in 1964...

CZ From Augusta?

JG Augusta. And I joined the Air Force. It was the Vietnam War. So, I joined the Air Force and I was stationed in Texas for 4 years. I was a jet engine mechanic and we were always on call to go to Vietnam. Because jet engine mechanics were pretty well needed over there, but I never did get to go. When I got out of the service, I attended Montana State University. I met a guy named James Taylor that used to own the Horse Ranch (out of Hilger/Roy). And I started working for them down in Bozeman ‘cause they had a ranch down there, while I was in college. When I got...my junior year of college, he sent me up here for the summer to work. And...during my senior year he asked if I wanted to come up here and manage this ranch. So, in 1972 I came up here with my wife at that time and took over the management of the horse ranch. I was there for 7 years. And, during that time, my wife then...she decided to go New Jersey, so she just packed up and left. With the kids, so...we got a divorce and I went back to college. I have a degree in range and animal science. I went back to college for a business degree. That’s where I met my wife now, was in college, and they had a ranch out northwest of here. About 7 miles from town, so I went out, we got married and I went to work down in the Judith Gap country for a couple years. And her dad and mom decided to retire. So, we had the
opportunity to take over that place and we were there until...my son was...25, so he took it over and I went to work in town at Frontline Ag Solutions.

CZ And how long did you work there?

JG Thirteen years.

CZ Thirteen years.

JG Thirteen and a half.

CZ And you said you are retired now?

JG Yes.

CZ Do you have any traditions now that your dad shared with you?

JG My dad and I were never really close. So, no. He didn’t, he didn’t really want to be associated with the Indian part of his life. And I did. So that is one of the reasons we didn’t do a lot of things.

CZ But it’s interesting as a kid you went to Rocky Boy, so how did that work if he didn’t really want to...

JG He went, the reason he went was probably for the money. He didn’t join in any of the other stuff we did. He and my mom and the other people that went stayed in town and we stayed on the reservation.

CZ I don’t know...did I ask you...was your mom part Native or was she...?
JG   She was part, umh, yeah. She was ah...born in Louisiana and she was part French and ¼ Indian at least.

CZ   From the southern Metis! Oh, interesting! How did they ever meet?

JG   Ah...she moved to Montana in the 40s, the early 40s. And they go married, they must have met at the...I don’t know, she didn’t really, neither one of them really talked about it much. ‘Cause they didn’t do that type of stuff, and probably in 1942 they got married. They lived in Augusta for most of their life, and then they moved to a town called Boulder, Montana where they both went to work for the school up there that took care of mentally ill people. They worked up there ‘til they both passed away.

CZ   Did they pass away suddenly?

JG   Ah...my dad did, he had a stroke and my mom, six years later...she passed away from a stroke.

CZ   Really, but they both were working up until the time they passed...

JG   Well, my mom quit a year before she died and my dad, yeah, was working ‘til he passed.

CZ   How old were they when they passed away?

JG   Dad was 66 and my mom was 69.

CZ   Pretty young. So...did he fight in WWII?

JG   No. He ah, had a disability with one of his arms. So yeah, he didn’t go...

CZ   Was that from a logging accident?
Probably.

You don’t know exactly what happened?

No.

Hmm. Yeah, my dad didn’t either because he had a hearing problem. And I don’t think
that was easy for them either to have...everybody else went and they stayed back. Did he ever
talk about it much?

No.

Sounds like he was pretty closed mouth about a lot of things? And it sounds like mom
too then!

Yeah. My mom was probably even worse. My mom was married to my dad’s older
brother who was in the war and he got killed. Before he left, she was pregnant, and she moved
up to Augusta where his family was from. And her...that’s how her and my dad got together, I
think. And my half-brother was born and my dad raised him as his own.

That’s marvelous! So, you said you weren’t...he wasn’t so much interested in the Native
side. Do you think his mom and dad felt that way too? Were they not owning the Indian side?

You know, I didn’t know his mom and dad. They both died at an early age. I think, if I
remember right, she died when she was about 40. And he died when he was 35. Alcohol
poisoning. So, I don’t know if that’s one of the reasons my dad and mom didn’t talk about
things much.
CZ  Did you know them at all...they’d be gone by that time. You were too young. Did you have family gatherings where everyone would get together and have big shindigs and music?

JG  Ah...family ones?

CZ  Yeah.

JG  Ahm...not very often. We, my dad’s sisters lived in Augusta and we would get together with them at holidays and stuff, but other than that, no.

CZ  So, I suddenly had this thought about the Buckhorn Bar downtown. I remember a story my dad talked about. Somebody brought a live bobcat in and turned it loose.

JG  I heard that story also, but I don’t know who that was or anything. But I’ve heard about those stories.

CZ  It wasn’t your family anyway then, I thought you were trappin’...

JG  Well, there were lots of people trappin’ up there at that time, but...

CZ  True, that’s true. Yeah. So, I was just wondering, when you had family gatherings if you had any certain traditional foods or anything...I guess if they weren’t owning the Indian side, they probably weren’t doin’ those...

JG  Well see we...I guess we never did any Indian meals except when we went up to the reservation. And...like I said I was in grade school and I don’t remember what they were.

CZ  And that was Rosettes you would stay with up there? Your family up there?

JG  Nods.
CZ  Did you know if they went to school at all?

JG  My dad and my mom both graduated...er...went to the 8th grade. My grandfather ah...my great, great grandfather, he didn’t go through school. He did...he mighta went through to the 4th or 5th grade. But most of them went through to the 8th grade.

CZ  And your grandfather, I guess...you don’t know what grade...the 8th grade too probably? There in Augusta? At the school in Augusta?

JG  Probably, well...where they went to school at was Bean..., Bean Lake Schoolhouse I believe?

CZ  Oh, okay.

JG  It was a country school not too far away from Clemens. And then there was the Dearborn School, I think, some of them went there. But they didn’t go to Augusta school.

CZ  Okay. Gotcha. Were there a lot of other Metis families that went to school there do you know?

JG  Actually...there wasn’t any other Indian type families around Augusta except for us.

CZ  Really!

JG  I think they all moved that were there. Well...actually I can’t...there was 2 other families. One of them was Trochett (sp) and Luceros that lived...one of them lived in Augusta and the other one lived in Gilman which is a little place north of Augusta on the road to Choteau.
So basically, just those 3 families you know of then.

Yeah. I don’t know if they did anything up around Clemens. I think they were more around…I know that the Lucero family worked for the railroad. Ah…and I think the Trochett family did too.

You know it makes sense, Gilman. Well, and then there were Molitares.

The Molitares...they lived in Augusta for a while. Most of them the parents passed, I don’t think they stuck around Augusta.

I remember the little old granny lived across the street from the Wagons West Motel. She’d have her grandkids down and I’d go play with them. She liked those carp you could get out of the creek down there. So...do you know, if they were the only Native families around there, if they would have experienced any kind of prejudice?

Hunuh. They didn’t.

They didn’t.

Actually you know, back in those days, that I remember, uh...there was no such thing as prejudice. People accepted you for work ethic and beliefs. And ah...you know, they...as far as I remember there wasn’t anything like that. And I don’t ever remember anyone saying anything about it. One of the things that I noticed in my life, is that back then, back in the 60s, 50s, and probably before, if you were part Indian and you left the reservation, you worked harder than most white people did just to prove that you were as good as they were. And if you lived on the reservation you worked off the reservation or had a farm or ranch business on the
reservation that you worked at. Those people worked very hard to get what they got. And now
days, it seems like they want everything given to them. They want to be recognized as an
individual society, yet they haven’t deserved it because they haven’t proven anything to people
that they deserve that. Ahm, you know...as a government we give these tribes and reservations
all kinds of money and you go look at a reservation, I wouldn’t want to live there. They are...I
don’t know. No respect for anything. They feel that the more you give the more they deserve.
And...I sometimes am ashamed to say that I am an Indian. ‘Cause I don’t want to be looked at
as one of those people. That’s my belief. And back in the day, those people were admired by
people for how hard they worked. And ahm, they were respected. You know I just...the times
have changed to where Indian people have become disrespectful and think everything should
be given to them.

CZ    So, you obviously worked hard because you have 2 degrees to show for your
educational work.

JG    Yes.

CZ    So you have...tell me your degrees again?

JG    Animal Science and Range Management, and Ag Business.

CZ    And those basically...your careers were based on what your education was. I mean you
put your career, your degrees, to work.

JG    Yeah. And anyway, I’m not saying all Indian people are all like what I just said. ‘Cause
there are a lot of, there are some younger ones that go to college and make a life for
themselves. But you know, you look at the ones that don’t, they raise their kids to be exactly like ‘em. And their kids are the ones that are causing mayhem in the world today. It’s just like, they expect us to give them what their ancestors got taken away. And we owed their ancestors somethin’ probably when they came in and took their land and put ‘em on reservations. Back, way back. But that was then, it’s not today. We don’t know, today’s society, what we owe their grandfathers. That’s my thinking.

CZ So...we were talking a little bit about the prejudice and what you are saying is that working hard was respected by people. Did you have any trouble when you were a kid at school, or people that...

JG Nope.

CZ You never experienced any kind of prejudice?

JG Nope.

CZ Did people know that you were part Native?

JG Yep.

CZ They did know? Military?

JG Nope. Not ever. Ahm...I , I ...like I said, I never experienced it in my whole life. And I believe that comes from your work ethics and your honesty and your...you know if you treat somebody else with respect, I believe no matter what color you are, they’ll treat you back with respect. You disrespect people, why should they respect you? That’s my view. When I was in the service, I had a lot of black friends. Chinese...I mean, different ethnic groups. But you
I wasn’t friends with all of the colored ones and all of the others. But you know, if you show them respect, they’d show it back. If they didn’t show it back then I didn’t feel it was worth pursuing as a friend. So. That’s how I think.

Good sound way to look at things. Did you have any family stories that have been passed down?

The only story that I remember being told was my great, great (great) grandfather Calphus. He lived to be 101. When he was 97 years old he broke his collarbone. Got bucked off a colt he was riding.

My goodness!

That’s the only story I remember. Well actually I remember them talking about hauling logs on wagons with 12 hitch horses pulling 3 freight wagons of logs to Great Falls from up at Clemens. And some of my other relatives did freight wagons to Mile City and back. You know, they kinda mentioned it in passing that’s what they did.

Did they ever talk about how they got the logs out? Did they skid logs out with teams?

Yep.

Can you tell us about that a little bit?

Ah...I you know...I’ve pulled logs with teams and stuff but you know they pulled ‘em out 1 or 2 at a time. And pulled ‘em down to a place where they were loaded on wagons. And then they were hauled...that’s how they broke horses for teams. Then once they had ‘em really well broke then they could ride ‘em, and sell them to the army. Made money doing that. That’s
how they did...I mean they went out and rounded up wild horses and put ‘em in teams and that...

CZ What time period are we talking there. About when do you think?

JG Probably 1890 to 1900? Maybe 1910 max.

CZ Let’s see...Boer Wars, they would have been selling horses for that. So, you, you’ve skidded, harvested logs too. Tell me about the methods that you remember when you were doing that?

JG When I was in, I think I was 13 years old I was driving teams. And we went up in the mountains cutting logs, ponderosa pine mainly. They were 6 to 8 inches across and probably 30 feet long, 40 feet long. And we pulled them out 5, 6 at a time with teams. And I did that when I was 13, 14. In the summertime, And ah...they made posts, set posts and the smaller ends they used for log rails and corrals. In the Augusta area.

CZ So...what kind of saws were you usin’ up in there?

JG Crosscut.

CZ Crosscut. One on each side?

JG Actually, the bigger ones they did 2, most of them were just a single cut crosscut. Like the one up here...(points to saw above doorway).

CZ Oh I see!!

JG That was one of them.
CZ    That was one of the saws you used? And somebody’s hand painted it now. That’s cool.
I’ll look at that on the way out. How long did you do that? You started at 13...

JG    Couple years, and then when I was 15, 16 I ah...worked on a couple of ranches breaking
horses. Driving teams. ‘Cause they did everything with teams back then. Mowed hay with
teams. We broke horses into teams. With the mower. A 7 foot mower. And ah, used dump
rakes, buck rakes, beaver slides. And when I was a senior, they went to square balers and
tractors and stuff, and we stacked square bales. There were 3 other guys, that’s what we did in
the summer, stacked square bales. And then, when I got out of school, I was a senior, I went
into the service. I did that my junior year, stacked square bales.

CZ    So, you went into the service after that, went to the service and then right to college?

JG    Yep.

CZ    Was that on one of the programs to...

JG    GI Bill.

CZ    GI Bill. Oh, that’s a pretty good deal.

JG    Yeah.

CZ    Yeah. So...breakin’ the colts. How did you...when you were breakin’ colts...were you
breakin’ with 1, 2 good broke horses and then add the colts to the team, or how did you break
your colts?

JG    Took 2 of them...if you’ve ever seen that side delivery, I mean a mower, a pull one?
CZ  Yep.

JG  Just...they drag really hard. I mean if they get wild you just drop it down and they will go a block and they are tired and just, I mean they are lined out. Next day you did the same thing ‘cause they were still spooky. Third day you’d turn ‘em over to the buck rake, fourth day you’d turn over to the buck rake or the dump rake, they’re plum broke.

CZ  That’s what you did! Then how’d you get ‘em from that point to rideable?

JG  Once the summer was over or once, when the haying season was over, you could do anything with them. You could throw a saddle on ‘em, ride ‘em. And they weren’t, they weren’t afraid of anything. And then we’d go drag calves on ‘em, rope the cows, whatever.

CZ  And so you broke ‘em to teams first. I could see where that would work. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your family or…?

JG  Ah...no, I think that covers it.

CZ  Covers it? Well, I appreciate your time and welcoming me into your home to do this.

Thank you!

*Gervais is a Metis family name recorded in the Great Lakes region and then later in the Red River colonies. Several Gervais fought in the Rebellions of the 1880s; the women also were involved digging pits for defensive works and melting cannon balls retrieved from the battlefields for bullets, all the while being shot at by the opposing forces.⁴⁷

Granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Carol, Camille, and Leah Latray.

Carol’s painting of her husband Les and Ervin Smith and horses ready for shipment at Winifred Stockyards. Ervin owned the ranch interviewer Candi Zion’s husband now owns.
CZ    Okay, we are here today with some descendants of the LaTray family and if you would just go around and say who you are and your name date of birth and where you live.

CL    My name is Carol Murphy LaTray, my husband was Leslie LaTray. My date of birth 1-22-39. And I live in Fergus County right now on highway, between, or between Hilger and Winifred, Montana. Is that all you need to know?

CZ    Yep, on that point.

LL    And I am Leah LaTray, and the daughter of Carol, my mom that just spoke and Les LaTray. And my date of birth...I went to school in Winifred High School, graduated in 1989, and my date of birth is 1971.

CAL   And I am Camille LaTray, and my father was Les Latray, my mom is Carol Murphy Latray and I went to grade school in Hilger, Montana at the 2 room schoolhouse, graduated from Winifred in 1985. Was born in 1967 in Lewistown.

CZ    K, So, tell me what are your occupations.

CL    This is Carol, I’ve been a daughter of ranchers, farmers and ranchers, but mostly ranching beef cattle and living in the country on ranches all my life.

CZ    And you are retired now sort of?

CL    Yeah, I am retired now.

CZ    So Leah, you’ve kinda carried that torch haven’t you then? But you’re educated also then, at the university?
Yes, right, right. So...from Winifred I went to Montana State University in Bozeman and graduated there with honors. So, then I went to Washington and worked in the medical microbiology field. And from Washington, I made a loop back to Montana and now ranch full time with Alan Vanek.

So what was your decision to come from that profession back to ranching?

Well...my dad was killed in 1997 from a farming accident here, right over there, and I think that when you have a traumatic experience like that in your life, I think it drives your decisions sometimes. So that his death, I guess, made me reflect on my place maybe in the western world, in the ranching world in the ag world and being away from Montana. I didn't come directly back here but it definitely influenced my decision to leave Washington. For sure, and train horses, and then ended up back here in Montana 10 years later. So...

After I graduated, I went to school in Missoula at the U of M and then managed a photo lab for almost 11 years and then moved to Seattle. Went to school for landscaping and then had a certified organic vegetable farm on Whidbey Island in Washington. And then decided to move back home. Got a job working on a ranch and, yeah...

Was that the same reason because your dad passed away or was it a different kind...?

No, umh, when my dad passed away, I was literally like, it was a month before I got married to my 2nd husband, umh, my mom moved in with us for almost 6 years during the winter time, she would come over to Seattle and when Leah says Washington, she means Seattle, Washington, not like Washington D.C. Washington. And we were both there and mom was over there with me at the time so actually after my dad passed away there was quite a long time I didn’t actually come back to the ranch ‘cause mom was always with me. And then after
that when I realized that I didn’t want to be in Washington anymore that I needed to in
Montana because, for a whole myriad of reasons, but...Montana agrees with my personality
and my constitution a lot more than Washington State and the west coast. It’s much more, I
don’t know...it’s much more grounded here.

CZ    So we talked a little bit about Mose LaTray and he is your great grandfather, so it would
have been your husband’s grandfather. So, do you want to talk a little bit about, or somebody
talk a little bit about Mose? Did you know him or was he gone by then?

CL    He was gone by then, before I came along into the family. But my husband knew him
well. Mose and his wife, Susan Morin LaTray, came from Pembina, North Dakota along with a
group. They started from there, and the trek from there to northern Montana took a few years.
He was a carpenter and built log cabins along the way and then he also was a woodhawk on the
Missouri River. Gathering wood for the steamboats that brought supplies up the Missouri River
at that time up to Fort Benton. And his wife and he lived there at ah...

CZ    Rocky Point?

CL    Rocky Point. That’s where they lived. And they had their children. The older girl came
with them from Dakota but the rest of their family, there were 13 children all together, were
born in Montana. So...what else you want to know about Mose?

CZ    He spoke several languages?

CL    Yes, he spoke French and he spoke English and he was good at the Indian sign language.
And he worked. They moved eventually after a few years. They lived in Gilt Edge neat Ft.
Maginnis. And he worked with the military there as an interpreter. So...
CZ  And the kids were born there. Gilt Edge and Ft. Maginnis (some of the daughters married soldiers).

CL  Yes, yeah, yeah.

LL  Well Teddy Blue Abbott mentioned him in that book, *We Pointed Them North* and said it was kind of a reference to Mose LaTray’s accent maybe? That he spoke English but it had a heavy accent you know it was, because I think he probably spoke French and English. But Teddy Blue Abbott mentioned him specifically.

CL  I think that French was his main language. He used to come and visit my husband’s family when my husband was just a boy. There was another family that lived close there and the 2 old men would get together and speak French. They…and…my husband was just a kid there and didn’t know French at all, he was amazed to just sit there and listen to his grandfather and Henry Parent or Parenteau speaking French. They loved to get together just to practice their French.

CZ  So, he was working as an interpreter for the military, why did he come from North Dakota in the first place? Do you know what the reason the trek was…?

CL  Well, yes. He said, and that’s recorded, in an interview that we have somewhere that we have, a copy, that he was tired of farming behind oxen with a wooden plow. He said, “I need horses! And I’m going to Montana and get some.” His intention was to get them and then return back and farm in North Dakota. Because that was home as far as he was concerned at that time. But afterwards, a number of years later, umh, he got horses and stayed in Montana instead.

CZ  Umhum. Now didn’t he have, didn’t he meet Chief Joseph’s band when they were…
Yes, they were, he and his wife and kids were living at Rocky Point at that time and he was working as a woodhawk. At that time, he was out gathering wood himself at the time Chief Joseph that came and crossed the Missouri there.

Where is it? Where did they cross the Missouri?

Right at Cow Island, yes, and that’s not far from Rocky Point. So, but he saw the result of...they made rather a mess at the river there.

Killed a couple guys, didn’t they?

Yes, they did, they killed a couple guys and split the sacks of flour open and, for some reason, I am not sure, but it was scattered all over the place. Grandpa Mose recalled seeing that. After he came back bringing wood back down to the river. It wasn’t that close to Rocky Point or his wife and kids might have seen it too, but they didn’t.

So, he went from there to...he ended up in Lewistown eventually, when he came to Lewistown, what is the story there?

Yes. Well after...one thing he did he was into gathering wood and they were building a fort up on the Havre area.

Fort Assinniboine (1879-1911).

Yes. And they needed, they needed firing because they were making bricks. And he worked there doing that while they were doing the building at Fort Assinniboine. Afterwards, he said, “I came back from that job with my pockets full of money!” That is what he said.

Haha!!! So, that was kinda fun.

That’s interesting. And interesting that it was from Ft. Assinniboine and the troops were chasing Metis after that and here the Metis were building for them.
CL  Right.

CZ  So, would you like to add something to that story Leah?

LL  I don’t know what I can add to it other than that’s just the history of the family, of who Mose was. I don’t want to forget Susan in that story, but she wasn’t, she wasn’t really Metis so it may not really be part of this. Because she wasn’t the French Indian, she was...we don’t know...exactly...

CL  We don’t know about her very much. We know...for a long time we assumed that she was all Assinniboine. They got married in Manitoba. When Mose was a young man he and his dad hauled freight on the Red River carts from St. Louis across the border to Canada. They didn’t even know where the border was at that time, yet. But they went up to Winnipeg. And they hauled the freight up there with the oxen pulling the Red River carts. And a whole line of carts, I think at one point he said there was up to 100 carts in their...in their train. That they went...

CZ  I’ll bet that was a noisy, creaky...

CL  Yes.

Overtalk...

CAL  Susan had a, Susan had a...

CL  That was one of the things he referred to...

CAL  But can you imagine being a woman of that area having 13 children first of all, and you know, and she...one of her babies died.

CL  While they were living at Rocky Point.

CAL  While they were living at Rocky Point and she trekked all the way down...
All the way up the river...

All the way up the river to Ft. Benton with the baby. With this deceased child and I guess all the other kids in tow.

No...I think maybe the oldest sister stayed with the younger children. And just Susan and the baby went...

But she wanted a Catholic burial, a blessing from the priest there.

So that baby is buried there...?

She went to Ft. Benton because her husband was in Ft. Benton at that time. He helped load the wood onto the steamships there. He went on the ship up to Ft. Benton to help unload, and he was there at Ft. Benton and that’s why at the time, his wife brought the baby.

So, he didn’t even know.

No.

Can you imagine walking from Rocky Point to Ft. Benton along the river?

She had a, she had a makeshift travois. I don’t think she had an animal to pull it, she pulled it herself.

We don’t know if she was Assiniboine, but Native to some degree? We just don’t know how much?

Yes. According to the 23 and Me and Ancestry, it seems that she was only partially Native American. Because the percentage is very low for the family here that have had it done through the genealogy thing of 23 and Me and...
What percentage do you think Mose was and that she was?

I’ll say 50% each. Probably French the other half. Or it could have been Scottish, you know. For her. We don’t know that. Because there were a lot of Scots people that settled in that northern, in a…Manitoba as well. And they married Indian girls.

Do you have any of dad’s DNA around, we could do a DNA on him.

I wonder if we do?

I was just, I was just thinking that myself! I’m gonna take dad’s DNA and send it in!

‘Cause he is one generation closer, and it would take all your, all your Irish out of it.

HaHa! Yes.

So, but now that you bring your dad…let’s talk about your dad. Because you married your… Leah and Camille’s dad, but you were quite a bit younger than he, weren’t you? How did you meet?

Yes, I was on my parent’s ranch. I had just, I had just graduated from Montana State University, I was working in Great Falls, in an art studio. But my dad became really ill, so, I quit my job in Great Falls and went back to the ranch to help. And Leslie LaTray was a hired man at my brother’s place there, just next door, so that’s how we became acquainted.

That was just shortly after that polo picture was taken?

Uhnun.

And he was a very handsome man.

Oh yeah, haha!!

And friends with Dick Tacke! (ironically CZ’s uncle)
Yeah!

Overtalk...

Who else was in that picture? Anyway...

Overtalk...

So you got married and then how did you end up here where you are at right now?

Okay, his parents had a... when Les was younger, before I married him, when he was married to his first wife in 1948, and that’s history at this point, but ah... his parents had a homestead on Box Elder Creek, there’s a lot of Box Elder Creeks. In Fergus County here, I just ahm... northwest of Hilger, Montana. So, they were living there, and when Les was a young man he lived with them. And he was a, he was very industrious. He was a horse trader and he was always looking for some way to make money, and he was a single young man and he... it was during the 30s, and there were people that were losing their places because of the recession, or because of the Depression during the 30s and Les had collected cash during that time. So, he bought 3 different portions of land there and owned them. They were adjacent to his folks’ place. So that...

So, mom, was that grandpa and grandma? Okay so was it Joe and Grace that filed the homestead claim on that place? Do you know that?

Yes, yes. According to... yes, I was looking at that notation right here.

That was my dad’s dad.

Overtalk...

So, that (Joe) was one of the sons of Mose, right? On the homestead?

Yeah, this is the actual homestead act...(deed).
That was in 1919 when he was finally given the land. So, he was probably on the land before that but then was given title to it in 1919.

Yeah, yeah.

Overtalk...

My dad was born in 1916. Interesting. So, Dad was 3 years old when they got their homestead papers. That’s interesting actually.

Yeah, it says that he paid it off.

Joe?

Joe.

So, how many kids did you have with your husband?

I...we have 5.

That was the picture I was looking for...

3 boys and 2 girls.

Overtalk...

All 3 boys are in California at this time.

Okay. So...I am curious, too, do you guys have traditions that were passed down from the LaTray family?

Overtalk...

It’s (family picture) leaning against the lamp over there...

Like any food...do you eat bullets (meatballs) or have any songs that you sing, or anybody play instruments, dances, anybody jig?

No.
LL  But dad...

CAL  Dad was incredibly intelligent.

LL  Well but dad...we had that video of the Metis Festival in here (note: Leah said later video from 4th of July, probably Lewistown) where dad organized the dancers.

CL  Yeah.

LL  He always danced at that. Well, not always, but he was dancing that day, and he organized the dancers. It's kind of a sweet memory. The video. Have you watched that?

CL  Hunuh.

LL  It's really cool because Rod Bailey is the, Rod Bailey in town here, the saddle maker, was the ...had all the amps, you know...the speakers, and stuff and dad was, umh...brought the Indian dancers in for the...

CZ  Was that the first one? The first Metis celebration (Lewistown)?

Overtalk...

LL  It was one of the first, it was definitely one of the first ones.

Overtalk...

CL  I am thinking...Leah, how old were you?

LL  It would have been early 80s I’m thinkin’. It’s a VHS tape I have here and I hope to come across it someday- it’s cool you should...yeah, ‘cause it was kinda funny ‘cause dad was...it’s just really funny ‘cause dad was...it just really shows his personality. He was super nervous you could tell, ‘cause he didn’t want to talk in front of people. But it was kinda cool, too!

CZ  And you were telling me about your dad being in a parade and wearing moccasins?

LL  Yeah. That’s a story mom told, but he was always in parades though!
He LOVED to go be in a parade for some reason it was just one of those things. If it was a parade in Lewistown or in one of the small communities around here why he always took part in those clear from the time he was just a young man. And one year he rode his horse in the parade with moccasins on, bareback. And someone was giving him a bad, time “Why don’t you wear cowboy boots?” And he said, “Why I can stay on a horse just as well in moccasins as I can in cowboy boots!” HaHa!!! But most of the time he wore boots.

So, I’m curious…I am wondering when you first were married...did your family, were they accepting of the fact that he was part Metis or how did they feel about it?

They were very accepting of it and that didn’t really, didn’t really come into the...they were more concerned with the fact that I had just graduated from the University and he had only gotten through the 8th grade. HaHa!!! That bothered my mother a little bit.

And the fact that dad was 26 years older?

23.

23 years older as well. That didn’t impress grandma. He was older. As far as him being Metis...

No she didn’t. She didn’t even THINK of that. I don’t remember her ever mentioning it actually.

But the thing that always struck me that even though dad didn’t…it’s like he only went through 8th grade in school, he was very literate, he was AMAZINGLY intelligent as far as like you’d never ever had thought. Yeah...I mean...

He could read well and write well.
CAL Yeah...

Overtalk....

LL We should back up a generation...

CAL Reading, writing and arithmetic, dad had...very well...yeah...it’s like you would never have imagined it.

LL So, we should back up a generation, though, I feel. Because we went from...we kinda skipped a generation.

Overtalk...

LL We did, ‘cause there were Mose and Susan, were the original family, LaTray family that moved to northcentral Montana, and then they had 13 kids and so THAT generation were the ones that, those were...they were breeds...they were French breeds. That’s what Teddy Blue Abbott called ‘em, called Mose and so I think, I ,think, well it’s like Camille was sayin’ there’s a lot of positives to that. I mean obviously, Mose LaTray contributed greatly to the community and was accepted, he was hired by the military, he built the Reed’s Fort post office, people...but you know...

CZ He was an undertaker (Giltedge near Ft. Maginnis)...

Overtalk...

LL The kids were...Joe...all these kids. They were...but I think that the men had okay times. So, Joe LaTray was one of the kids that was my granddad.

CL One of the younger ones of Mose and Susan’s.

LL That filed a homestead claim, but the women I think, had a harder time because they were...
Les LaTray 1940s, Lewistown
CL  Half breed girls...

LL  Half breed women, that I don’t think they had such a good time. And that’s the
generation that...what would the time frame have been...in 1900 to 1925? Somewhere right in
there?

CL  Right.

CAL  Even earlier. 1890 to 1900s, yeah.

LL  I think that was, that was really a tough time for those half breed women.

Overtalk...

LL  And that’s where that story of my dad’s aunt, one of those 13 children...

CL  Aunt Phil...

LL  Yeah, Phyllis...

CL  Philomen, it was Philomen (oldest).

LL  Right, she lived at Piper which is not that far from Gilt Edge. It’s just right across the
mountain. But she was destitute, she was very poor. I mean dad was, I mean she had gophers
in her house, she had dirt floors. He always marveled at the fact! HaHa! But she just lived
there as a single woman and she took, she walked to Lewistown to get supplies or whatever.

You were telling me about Aunt Phil...

Overtalk...

LL  I mean she was a hard person...

CL  Very hard person and lived to be 80 years old in such a manner so she was strong as
well.

LL  His other, his other aunt which is one of the other girls, Maggie?
Mose LaTray’s broad axe used to construct Reedsfort Post Office
CL Yeah.

LL She, she married a man that was up Spring Creek and then she got into the bottle and...

CL No, no.

LL Oh.

CL No, no, no. That wasn’t Maggie. That was Mary.

LL Oh, Mary. Maggie....There was a wild one that drank too much.

CL Yes, yes. Got into the liquor, one of the girls did.

CZ So, that generation, were they more closemouthed when you were talking about Philomen, was she...did she talk much about her life?

CL Course, I never met her.

CAL Joe was, my grandpa Joe and grandma Grace were, I mean...they, well for one thing they had a lot of kids too. And, they ended up being...

CL I think they had 6.

CAL They ended up, they ended up being...

Overtalk...

CAL Yeah, right but that was still a lot of kids, you know. And they ended up raising 2 sets of grandchildren because of, you know, right, problems in the family. A daughter, you know died in childbirth, and so her husband had abandoned her at that point, and so, grandpa Joe and grandma Grace, you know, took those 2 children in and raised them as their own from very small children. And then they had another one of their daughters and her husband get killed in a car wreck and then they had children, and so they raised those 3 children.

CL 4.
CAL  Had 4 (Joe and Grace had 6 children of their own) children as their own, too, and you know, all the time they were on the ranch and they, you know...

CL  Joe was the Metis. Grace was not at all. She had no connection to Native American.

CAL  Right, she was a little German. But you know Joe was successful as a rancher.

CZ  So, it sounds like they were pretty hard working people. I guess we didn’t talk much about what your great grandfather (not great), Mose’s son. We talked about Mose’s occupation and filing for the homestead, but there was something...

CAL  And Joe was the one, grandpa Joe, my dad’s father was the one that had the homestead, that filed the homestead at Box Elder Creek at the base of the Moccasins.

CZ  So, in 1919...

CL  The homestead was a 160, it was small.

CAL  It says it was 200. On this paperwork it says 200.

Overtalk...

CL  That’s an odd number for a homestead.

CAL  That’s what is says on this paperwork. From Woodrow Wilson.

Overtalk...

CZ  What was he doing then before the homesteading, he had to have been on the place provin’ it up probably but was he hawking wood, or...

Overtalk...

LL  What did Joe and Grace do, just ranchers.

CL  Grace was the women that he finally married. Grace...what was her maiden name...

Overtalk...
Movern, Grace Movern. She was born at the gold mine out of Hilger, what is it?

Overtalk...

Kendall. That was her family and she went to school at Kendall.

Was she Metis, or not at all.

No, German.

That was the German side you were talkin’ about.

Yeah, well she was mixed, she was mixed. She did have some German but a percentage of some, so... anyway. They were just young, in their 20s. He was just a... he was just making it all here and there. Wherever he could find it.

Worked in the mines too?

No, he didn’t work in the mines. Her parents, her family worked in the mines. Joe LaTray did not work in the mines. He was more of a horse trader or he liked to try to do some farming or day labor. But he ended up being a rancher. They filed for the homestead together and the rest is history, they were ranching from that point on.

Umhum. So, your husband, he was a rancher. He didn’t have any other occupations that was his?

No. Not really.

He did rodeo. Even down in Las Angeles.

Well, that’s an occupation. What did he do?

Calf roping, pickup man. Omoksees.

Yes, he was...

Polo.
And then later he was a pickup man, he was a calf roper, he was a horseman. And he was a horse trader as well. And what else...he worked at the stockyards in Los Angeles for a while.

Hunh! I’ll have to take a picture...this is a picture of Ervin Smith, (he owned) the place that we are on.

Yeah! You would be interested to see that! 500 head of horses at the Winifred yards!

Yeah, I’m not surprised. So that was a big part of their lives, trading horses, breakin’, sellin’ probably.

Yes.

I wondered if he was breakin’ tradin’ horses that time period during the Boer War and then WWI. The military was buying a lot of horses, maybe he...did they ever talk about that?

They were sending some of the horse on the railroad.

But dad was born during WWI right?

It was Grandpa Joe sending horses to the military.

Dad would have been more WWII.

Yes. 1947 you see...

Oh wow, so Mom, tell about dad wanting to be in the military and they wouldn’t let him.
CL Yes. About 1943, he went to Helena and he wanted to enlist in the military, I’m not sure which branch, he was overcome with patriotism at the time, the whole country was. This was right after Pearl Harbor you know. Which was 1942 (1941). Anyway, he went up there to enlist, he went through the physical and passed it with flying colors and they asked him, “what are you doing now?” He was ah...he was harvesting, he owned his own combine and he was harvesting wheat in Fergus County and Basin County for other people and for his parents. And they said, “well...you’re essential there” which he really was. He was doing an essential job and they said, “we need you here more than we need you there”. So, they didn’t let him enlist.

CZ Hm. Interesting.

LL But they didn’t give him any flack about being part Native.

CL Oh no! That wasn’t a part of the consideration, at all. It was just that he was doing an essential job. Many of the other young men from that same area, Fergus County and Judith Basin County, Montana had already enlisted. You see they were all just flocking to the military at that time. And he wanted to go too. But turned out that he was self-employed and had his own combine and he was going to people’s places...

LL National security! Imagine that! Food production!

Overtalk...

CAL Was so important that they turned him away. Yeah. The world has changed.

CZ So, when we were speaking of...we talked about prejudice a little bit there, not being in that particular instance, did you ever have any occasions where you noticed that this happened with your husband?
CL Very rarely if ever. There was any...my family for instance didn’t consider it to be a problem at all. Never considered it at ALL period. And ah, one time Les always told about, this was before I married him, he tried to join some organization in Lewistown. It was either the Elks or the Moose, something like that, don’t quote me on that. I don’t know which one it was. But...and they refused him because he was Native American. And he REALLY resented that was one of the times that hit him in the face. I can’t think of anything other than that. I believe that was the only time.

CAL Right, because he was on the Sheriff’s Posse, and...

CL And he was a deputy with the Sheriff’s, with Fergus County Sheriff’s.

LL Auxiliary.

CL Auxiliary.

CZ Was that mounted?

CL Yeah well, sometimes you would be mounted but not always.

LL It used to be. It used to be until the dumb 4-wheelers took over.

Overtalk...

LL So people at the Fair couldn’t hear him comin’ on the horse but they could hear the 4-wheelers coming!

CZ Yeah! HaHA!! So, did he have pride in being Native American, part?

CL Yes, he took it...don’t you think?

CAL Yeah, I do.

CL He was proud of it, but not overly proud of it. He was just proud of being a community member.
CAL  To me, I think that...I don’t know...he kinda instilled in me the notion that he was proud of the Native American part of it, but he was also proud of the fact that the tribe (Little Shell) that he was connected to didn’t sign the treaty (McCumber Treaty, 1892). They instead...like his grandfather, had chosen to interpret for the cavalry, for the military.

Overtalk...

LL  That’s true!

CAL  Instead of you know, instead of basically bowing to the white man that had come.

Overtalk...

CAL  The family said, “you know what, we can help you, don’t categorize us over here” and it goes with what I was saying earlier about being...they were very well respected members of the community already and the military embraced them because of it. And it’s why we have such an extensive LaTray family genealogy and history and it’s why we know so much to, because it’s like they didn’t...none of the LaTrays suppressed that side, instead embraced it and share it, you know, instead of getting angry and frustrated by it, I guess.

CZ  Well and you were original people here.

CLM  Yeah, yeah. In the Lewistown community and central Montana.

CL  Not as original as the Blackfeet, not even close.

CZ  Good point.

Overtalk...

CL  And I should mention not as original as the Crow either. Of course, the Blackfeet and the Crow, they would both want to be recognized.

CZ  Absolutely. They’d fight for it too!
They would, haha! They would.

So…Camille, you brought a good memory, I just remembered that Mose, about the treaty and the Little Shell Tribe didn’t sign a treaty so were landless, but Mom you told me sometime about Mose not wanting to be on the reservation, because it’s that separation thing. Like he specifically came to Lewistown, right, to not be in the middle of bickering, the problems that had gone on...

Being pushed to a reservation. It didn’t happen. Right.

Being pushed to a reservation type situation. I think he specifically rejected that notion. Which is good, I think.

And that was right from the beginning. From North Dakota.

I think it’s very good. Right, right. ‘Cause basically he said instead of categorizing us and sending us, let me help you. I will help you and in turn help each other...

The steamboats on the Missouri not to mention the building of bricks up at Ft. Assinniboine and he built log cabins ALL across northcentral Montana. As he came along and finally ending up building the log cabin Post Office in Lewistown.

So, speaking of everything they’ve done, and what they experienced, your family history, when did…what generation started this genealogy. Would that have been your generation?

No it wasn’t. It wasn’t our family that did it at all.

What group of people would have done this?

My father’s age.

Your father’s age. That was the people started pullin’ this together.
CL: Yes.

CAL: Or mom’s age.

CL: But, it wasn’t even a connection to the family at all it was a couple of women in Lewistown (Mary Ann Quiring and Lily B. Zwolle, 1985) that were doing a masters...

CZ: Thesis.

CL: That was their master’s thesis. And they are not Metis people at all. They just chose the LaTray family to do that.

CZ: Wow! That’s pretty nice! That was a good choice in families to pick.

LL: Do you ever watch that Ancestry, Finding your Roots?

CZ: Yep, yep. Know what you’re talking about.

LL: That is like a Master’s Thesis they always look at the details of a person’s family. And I just kinda marvel at like, wow. They get really detailed...

CZ: So now I am curious about you 2 ladies. Your experiences in school, I mean we’ve talked a little bit about some of the prejudices. Did you experience anything in school because of your heritage?

CLM: I didn’t. But I was, I was the 1985 version of Cody that just sat with my book in the bedroom the whole time! Haha!!

CZ: Cody being Leah’s little boy. Not so little anymore.

CLM: Yes. Not so little anymore. The size of the couch, umh. You know, I didn’t actually experience any of it at all. Until much later.

CZ: Later?
CLM In my life and, yeah. It was, yeah, it was actually within the last 6 years thrown in my face.

CZ Really!

CLM But it...and yeah.

CZ What were the circumstances?

CLM Just people being angry. But it was something that just came from 1 individual and you take things at face value and you move on from it. And you know like, it wasn’t, it didn’t, like I said it was from 1 individual that decided to go, you’re an Indian and not as good as I am. But did it have any lasting effect on me? No.

CZ So what about you Leah?

LL I guess in Winifred I didn’t feel any repression. But I had mentioned before I had that, I had a nickname of “Squaw” when I was in Junior High. That’s, I definitely, but it was ...

Overtalk...

LL But I was sassy enough it didn’t bother me. I guess I just kinda let it roll off.

CLM My nickname was “Camel” so I don’t know where that came from.

Laughter...

CLM And that came from the teacher! I’ll never forgive her...no I am kidding!

LL You’re nomadic!

Laughter...

LL They picked the wrong tribe!

CZ So, when they called you “Squaw” you didn’t really think about the implication about what that means for some people.
Yeah, it didn’t bother me calling me “Squaw”, but I, I remember feeling pretty defensive like, if you would even down my dad, I’m gonna be really angry about that. But I didn’t ever feel...you know, and you know, the community is always a mixed bag. There are always people with...that have stronger opinions that other so...

I remember going up and playing Rocky Boy when we were in high school for like football or basketball and going, damn these Indian boys are cute, why aren’t you Winifred guys as cute?

Laughter...

And Winifred had a select few to pick from!

It was a bigger school then!

Was it?

Yeah. It was a bigger school then.

‘Cause you both went to school there...

‘Cause we both graduated from Winifred, all of the, all of the 5 kids graduated from Winifred. You know I guess, and this is not coming from Leah but it’s coming from me, but the other time in our lives, you know, as LaTray girls, that we experienced kind of racial slurring against us was in Texas. When it was in the court system and it was kind of thrown at Leah that they were going to use her Native American, you know, against her in a divorce settlement. And it’s like you’re gonna do what?? You’re gonna bring up the fact that I am Native American and try to use that as a bad thing against me? And they were like, yep, we are. And it’s like, no, you’re not. Not gonna work. And it didn’t work. But they were thinking about it. And I mean it was vocalized they were thinking about it.
I’d forgotten about that.

Good thing to forget.

Just, you know, going through a divorce, it’s a stressful time anyway. They say you don’t always remember the details...

Right, but that was in Texas it wasn’t in Montana. And I yeah…I didn’t really feel like there was any sort of stuff like that when I was in high school for sure.

Well you said earlier…you were talking about hard work and the kind of person, people that you are in the community. Tell us again, because it was very well said what your feelings were that way.

I just think that people can take the stance that they are, be downed by other people, and take a “woe is me the world owes me something because” kind of attitude, or you can approach it like, hey, I…this is who I am and I can contribute. And this is what I am doing and this is me, and I’m taking the positive route of contributing back to the community and the world and showing people that I am an individual. We don’t have to fall into that, the world owes us something. Because of being a Native American or being a Metis. Our family never did. It’s like…and I think that was one of the things my dad, you know was like, how did he view being a Native American. I know that he was proud of the fact that grandpa Mose chose to take the positive route and go be, yes, I am an Indian, but let me help you. And let me show you how many ways I can help you. And they embraced him because of it. And he was successful and respected in the entire community and still is. Even to this day, you know. Here we are, sitting and talking about him, you know. And all of the things he accomplished and the LaTray family and the impact that they’ve had. And it’s positive things.
LL  You just made me. You just reminded me, I mean it’s not...yeah...I agree with everything
you just said because...anyway...I was just remembering an incident of social media, on
Facebook, and this guy on the random comments on the Billings Gazette. He said...well I’d said
something about voting, and he said well if you voted, if you didn’t. it was something about...

CAL   It was something about the woman governor of South Dakota.

LL  Oh yeah. Kristi Noem. This man basically told me that if I...he said that my eyes must be
brown. Which he meant that I was full of it, so I said, “Well, yep they are, and I’m an Indian girl
too”...and said, “Well you must be a hypocrite then if you voted for Trump because, or you like
Kristi Noem because, basically Indians are gonna want handouts from the government.” This
was like a month ago. And I went, am I reading what I just think I am reading?  Cause I thought
on social media that was a...

Overtalk...

CL   That was a racial slur.

LL  It was a slur against Indians.

CAL   It absolutely was.

LL  And I said...I have never taken, I don’t live off the government, ‘cause he said something
about all your subsidies, and all your money you get from the government...you must be...and I
said, no, I pay taxes, and I even pay taxes on mules, my little white mule I pay taxes on, and
somebody should claim you ‘cause apparently you’re a jackass!

Laughter...

CAL   Right, but it does...see it’s that attitude. That you can take...it’s like grandpa Mose
instilled this, this sense of just acceptance and, like we can show you that we are who we are
because we are hardworking, contributing members of this whole community, and yes, we’re
Indian and we’re proud of it, and let us help you with all of that as well. It’s like, you need to
talk to them? I’ll go with you and help you talk to them. And I can talk to the French, and I can
talk to the Indians, and I’ll help you do any of that. And, he didn’t sign the treaty because as the
Little Shell Tribe, they didn’t want that. They had enough, you know...it...I don’t know a sense
of pride is too strong of a word but they just had a sense of like, we can do this on our own. We
don’t...we are already hard working contributing members of this society, we don’t need to be
on the government dole, we don’t need to be stuck back on a reservation. And...and dad was
proud of that. My dad, my dad was very proud of that. I know my grandpa, even my grandpa
Joe was proud of that. You know it was very much a...yeah. We don’t need that but if you want
us to help you, sure! We’ll lend a hand.

CZ  Well...with that I think we should probably call it an end to the interview and start
looking at some of these pictures.

LL  Perfect!

CZ  THANKS you guys!

LL  Thank you!

Grant by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in
partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Ken Doney and Marjorie Miller; (Doney Collection) Doney family Aunt Clara, Uncle Bill, Florence, Alice, Rosey, Grandpa John, Uncle Clifford
Ken Doney (KD), his wife Marjorie Miller (MM) and his brother Leon Doney (LD) at the Mountain Acres Recreation Room, Lewistown, Montana

By Candi Zion (CZ)

1-26-2021

CZ Okay. We are here with Ken Doney and Marjorie Miller. So, Ken you want to tell me your name, your date of birth and what your occupation was?

KD My name is Kenneth L. Doney. My date of birth was 12-10-33.

CZ And where do you live?

KD I live here in Lewistown.

CZ And what was your occupation?

KD Well...I started out as a truck driver. And then I moved to Lewistown. And I got acquainted to the sheriff back then, Jimmy Kaaro and George Stephens was the sheriff and Kaaro, undersheriff. Loren Rate (sp) was one of them. I just got interested in it. Jimmy asked me if I would be interested in the law enforcement, I said, “Well, it’s interesting”. He said, “Well, I’ll put you in.” And one of the main things I did was the investigation of a, of a homicide of a next door neighbor, Charlene Bacon. And ah...I did a lot of interviewing on that. In fact, I probably still got a lot of that...reports I did on her.

CZ So you didn’t know, they didn’t know who killed her at first?

KD No. Hunuh. But I followed up on that and who she run around with.
‘Cause didn’t you say he showed you where the burial was? How did you get to that point where he confessed?

Where she confessed?

Where he confessed? Or you found out?

Just investigating him. Tell him what I knew and what had been done. What he was like. And he slipped a few times, I just followed him up on that. And ah...he finally come out and...admitted it. He even told me where she was buried. He took me up there and we uncovered the grave. She was covered with a blanket or so...her body was pretty well preserved, but we got her out of there and took her in for an autopsy and everything.

How did he kill her?

Strangled her. He raped her and strangled her afterwards. But he’d been acquainted to her before.

And you said that Jimmy Kaaro is the one that got you in this, he was a trick rider, too wasn’t he.

Roper.

Roper.

Yeah. He did a lot of tricks on a horse.

Yeah, he was on the Johnnie Carson Tonight Show.
CZ  Yeah. So, tell me, you had...truck driving was one of your occupations from young!

When did you first start truck driving?

KD  Oh gosh...well my dad was drivin’ truck and I used to ride with him. And I used to just watch him driving, and ah...one day he just says, “You want to try it?” And I said, “Okay.” So, we had a load of sheep on. And ah...that’s how I got started.

CZ  ‘Cause your dad was working for sheep ranchers?

KD  Yeah. Well, he was...yeah, he was working for the Hansen, Phillips Ranch. And we lived in Landusky. He was a...he used to shear sheep by hand. You know and, he had strong hands.

CZ  So maybe we should jump into your dad and your grandfather. You said you were born down there close to the Missouri at Slippery Ann (was named for Cyprian Matt who had a nearby trading post, later called Siparyann). You want to talk about that a little bit?

KD  Well, I don’t remember too much on it. I do remember my grandmother. She was a midwife. She delivered me. In an old log and tar paper shack. And ah...just growin’ up, ridin’ the country with dad. And, we rounded up wild horses and took ‘em in. Sold ‘em to the Phillips ranch. And the Hansen Ranch.

MM  Tell her about you gettin’ lost in the band of sheep.

KD  Haha...I was bald headed when I was small. And ah...I was out walkin’ around with them sheep out there, and I was right in the middle of them. And they lost me! They were calling for me. And dad had gone up to the house there and looked around. He seen my bald head out there in the middle of the band of sheep! HaHa...that’s where they found me.
CZ  HaHa! So, you must have been a little guy! A little, little guy!

KD  Unhun. I was. HaHa!

CZ  Well, didn’t you tell me about a story of being in the wagon or buckboard with your mom and somethin’ happened?

KD  Oh Yeah! We were in a buckboard. We were going to the Phillips Ranch, that’s where the, I’m not sure if there was a doctor there or nurse or what. But anyway, the road was…you never know roads, you just made up your own road, and ah…she was holding me, grandma…who was holding me? And mom was drivin’ or one way or the other. Anyway, they hit a big chuckhole and the wagon bounced and she dropped me. I was wrapped pretty good, course this is in December. I was, like I say, I was born the 10th of December so just a few days later, dropped me off the wagon. Picked me up, took me on in there. I survived that. HaHa!

CZ  Haha! Did your grandparents live with you too?

KD  They lived right in that same area. Back then ah…there wasn’t that many homes. And they had tents and stuff that…they stayed in them.

CZ  Wintertime too? They were staying in…you mean like wall tents? With a stove and such?

KD  Yep. They built their wood stove in there. And they had a bed and a bunk on top.

CZ  Were they using sheep wagons too?

KD  Yeah. Those are a little different than a tent. But the sheep wagons, you know they had a big bed and a bunk on top. And then the sideboards there.
CZ  You remember the sheep wagons?

KD  Unhun.

CZ  Did you go work with them and stay in those too, or...

KD  No, no. Well, I did...as I got older, I stayed there. Ah, my grandpa, I stayed with my grandpa. And ah...he was out checking his band of sheep, and I was in the tent, in the camp. And ah...he, he...there was a rifle there. Curious as I am, I went and got that rifle, ejected a shell in it. And I shot. When grandpa got back, he said, “What was you shooting at?” Hee, hee. I told him I just shot in the air.

CZ  How old were you when you did that?

KD  I was young...probably around 4 or 5.

CZ  Oh gee. Did you get in trouble?

KD  No I didn’t. He said, “Don’t you ever do that again unless there’s somebody with you.” Yeah. But...the good old days. HaHa!

CZ  Yeah. Did your grandma work at the sheep camps too?

KD  No, no.

CZ  She didn’t cook or anything?

KD  She did for the family.

CZ  For the family.

KD  Yeah. You’ve heard of bannock?
CZ Tell me about it.

KD It was a...bread. Yeah. And ah...grubadore (sp), that was your meatballs and stuff like that. We did good. Ate good, happy family.

CZ Yeah. Big family?

KD No. It was just me (before other siblings), mom, dad, grandma, and grandpa. And then there was other families that lived in that area that got together.

CZ And what about your mom, did she work at the sheep camps?

KD No, no. She didn’t. As the years, I got older she worked at the Phillips Ranch there. She helped my Aunt Josey, my dad’s sister cook. She cooked for the ranch hands at the Hansen Ranch and the Phillips Ranch. Aunt Clara, she cooked up at the Phillips Ranch.

CZ And I think you told me before, your grandfather, he woodhawked and did some other things. You wanna tell about what your grandpa did too besides the sheep?

KD What was that hon?

CZ Oh, that your grandpa was a woodcutter and he did other things besides workin’ with sheep.

KD Well...he cut wood, sold it, put it in a wagon, hauled it into Landusky and around there.

CZ Firewood or posts and poles?

KD Firewood.

CZ Did he do post and poles too, or...?
As...got older, he got ah...fence posts. Set ‘em up fences around the camps there. It’s been so long ago it’s hard for me to remember.

Did he trap too?

Yeah, he did. One of the things I remember, dad was doing. He was setting his traps, he ah...checking his traps and ah...he went down there to look and there’s a skunk in there. Shot him in the eye. Heh, heh. That skunk...burned him he said.

Yeah. Not fun to have in your trap! HaHa! So, your dad, it sounds like your dad was doin’ the same things that your grandpa was doin’?

Well he had to...he had to support the family an everything. And ah...relatives around there, we’d go to visit. Whenever we went to somebody’s house, we didn’t do it on purpose, we were just visiting, roamin’ around. And they always had something on the stove. (Unintelligible) It was quite interesting.

Did any of your family play musical instruments or do you remember?

My grandfather and uncle played the fiddle. And mom, she used to play the guitar. She didn’t do it professionally but she was always there strumming on it. And she, she tried playing...oh, had an organ. And she used to play on that. She was a self-taught musician.

So...did she, did they do the jigs? That kinda music they were playing- they were jigging?

Oh yeah, yeah. Ahm...they had a name for it too. I can’t remember what it was. It was jigging. They went to a dance they waltzed and stuff like that. And square dancing you know. But ah...that jig, that was something. Kinda like tap dancing you know?
CZ Yeah. Did your parents or your grandparents ever talk about their lives before? What it was like where they came from or their parents?

KD No, the rough times...they had good lives, you know there was...but they adjusted to the living wherever they were. Course they didn’t have towns or anything like that. Your neighbors once in a while would bring you somethin’ or vegetables, something a little bit, but most of theirs was a wild animal meat. Deer. Elk.

CZ Where did your grandfather come from and your grandmother?

KD My grandfather came from...right there, Malta, Phillips county. Like I say, a place called Slippery Ann. Originally it was called Slippery Ann I believe because, there was a little hill getting up over that old shack there. Slippery...that’s where the name came from.

CZ That’s where it came from, okay. Did your family originally come from Canada?

KD No. Mom came from up there, over there, North Dakota, Belcourt, North Dakota. That’s where her relatives were. And dad, he was born and raised right there in Phillips County out of Landusky there.

CZ So. Your mom was from Belcourt, your dad was born right there at Landusky. Do we know about his mom and dad? Your dad’s mom and dad? Do you know where they were born?

KD My grandfather was Gregory Doney and my grandma was Ellen Doney, Guardipee.

CZ I wonder...did they ever talk about being French Canadian?
KD  No, they didn’t talk about that. If they did, being kids we didn’t hang around there listening to the older people talk.

CZ  So, I wondered did they...do you ever remember did they talk about being part Native American?

KD  No, they called...breeds. That’s what they called ‘em. You know, half breeds.

CZ  Did people call them that or did they...?

KD  No. When they talked about certain people, you know...you know the breeds live over there, somethin’ like that.

CZ  They’d talk about certain people that’s what they’d say?

KD  No they didn’t talk about each other, stuff like that. Umh...I don’t remember all that ‘cause I was a kid. Didn’t hang around listening to the elders talk and visit.

CZ  Did they speak any of the Native languages around you?

KD  Yeah, they did. They had a...the Cree and the...Chippewa. But again, something I didn’t understand. I learned some of the cuss words!!

CZ  What are the cuss words?

KD  You don’t want to hear! Haha!!

CZ  HaHa!

KD  La shen (sp), now that’s a woman’s name.

CZ  What does that mean?
KD La shen, that was older woman, that was grandma.

CZ So you said you got your start driving truck when you were, a real young teenager.

KD Oh, yeah, yeah, I’d just ride with my dad. He’d haul, he’d haul livestock. Sheep, cattle, horses. And I’d be sittin’ up there in the truck cab with him. And I watched him when he’d shift when we were going up a hill and stuff. And a, we were...once I got older, I was ridin’ with him...comin’ back from a ranch that had some cows on it. Cattle. And he said, “You wanna try and drive?” I said, “I can try it.” So...I learned how to drive there. And we went out to the ranch again to get some more cattle. And he was in another truck. And he asked me if I wanted to drive that. And I said, “I can drive.” Well, we was goin’ up hill, and I come down into the back end of his truck. So, we stopped and loaded the cattle up. HaHa!

CZ Oh! Oh!

MM Where are you going?

KD Go back here a minute.

CZ So, while he’s goin’ back there Marjorie, we can talk for a minute?

MM Yeah.

CZ So, you and Ken are married or are together.

MM Yeah.

CZ So, tell me about your relationship with Ken? How long have you been together?
MM  Like I said, the first time I met Ken I was married and workin’ on...as a laborer, workin’ out of town and come home and my husband was mixed up with, shall I give her name?

CZ  Well, uh, yeah. It’s probably time...long enough now...

MM  Right. Gloria Wells. Who at the time was into drug trafficking then and maybe still is, so I contacted Ken Doney who was the sheriff at the time. And...that’s how I first met him. After the divorce (Ken comes back) he come and asked if I’d go out with him and we’ve been together ever since. Good, bad, or ugly.

CZ  How many years?

MM  I think it’s 38 or 40, I’m not sure.

KD  That we’ve been together? 47.

MM  No it ain’t 47. HaHa!

KD  HaHa!

CZ  Long time.

MM  Long time.

CZ  Long time. So, gettin’ back to your truckin’ days. You worked for a company at Malta? What did, you said you worked at Malta in?

KD  Yeah for Benson. Ah...It was a Dray Line. And he had ah, some trucks. He hauled stock and stuff. And I used to go with dad, ‘cause he worked for him. And that’s where I learned to truck drive was with him.
CZ  How many years did you drive truck for Benson?

KD  Oh gosh...

MM  31 years, I think. Wasn’t it 31 or 41? 31!

KD  41. I think it was 41.

CZ  And you said you were also...let’s see...you went to school at Malta and Dodson too?

And what level of education did you complete?

KD  Oh, I went to the freshman, sophomore. The only reason I stayed in school was ‘cause
of athletics, basketball and football. And as I got older, people I used to run around with, they
graduated and here I am all by myself. And ah...course the girls...haha...but I went to school in
Dodson, got to know those boys over there. Then I moved to Harlem, Fort Belknap, Harlem.
That’s going way back and I barely remember.

CZ  Was that high school, or where did you graduate high school?

KD  ’54.

CZ  In 54? And what school?

KD  Malta.

CZ  Malta?

KD  I didn’t graduate. I just walked out. I got tired of the teachers. Had some mean
teachers back then.

CZ  Mean, how?
Sheriff Ken Doney

Doney Collection
KD You didn’t do your work you stayed after school and you didn’t do it then...the discipline was pretty tough.

CZ Were they tough on everybody?

KD Oh yeah.

CZ Did you ever have any...any kids ever make fun of you or fight with you because you were part Indian?

KD Yeah, they used to call me “Deefie”. ‘Cause I was hard of hearing. Yeah, but it was...you know...a certain family that did that. Yeap, a family called Bishops. One of them was that...and really that...his name was Stanley Bishop but we called him “Blackie” because he was dark complected. Jimmy was his brother. Mervin was another one that was wild. He liked to fight. And I got into a fight with him...he was a mean kid. I got over him.

CZ When you say you got over him you whipped him.

KD Shakes head yes.

CZ Did you fight a lot in school?

KD No, not really. No, I had teachers back then.

CZ What about after school? When you were old enough...

KD After school?

CZ Yeah. Like when you were done with school, when you were older.
Well...I’d go do anything I could. Rake leaves, cut wood...just anything to make a few dollars. I’d go to the movies...

And then you said you liked to fight too. You told me at one point.

Yeah...boxed a lot. My brother Doug. He was the fighter of the family. He was younger than me but, he really took up fighting. He ah...him and I were fighting. He hit me on the side of the head, I’m not sure if it was right here (points to scar).

Yeah, I see a scar!

I went to move and cut...yeah. But the family was like that. Do I have any sisters...


All of ‘em.

Haha! Leon who was supposed to be here today, and we can’t get hold of him.

Leon was the kid brother. I’d always tease, oh, there’s my baby brother! He was the youngest.

Irma is the youngest.

Who?

Irma.

No, the boys.

Oh.
CZ  How many kids in your family total then?  How many does that make?

KD  Well Nono is a step-child.

MM  Ken, that’s your daughter.  She wants to know your brothers and sisters.

CZ  How many did you have in total?

KD  Well let’s see...brothers, Doug, Wayne...

MM  Leon.

KD  Leon.  Sisters there’s Nona...

MM  No.  Irma.

KD  Irma.

MM  Myra.

KD  And Myra.

MM  Bernadine.

KD  And Bernadine.

CZ  Who else, who else do we have Marjorie?  That’s everybody?

MM  I think so.

CZ  That’s a pretty good size family.  Did they, were they all raised down there in the Slippery Ann area?

KD  No, they were raised in the Malta area.  Malta, yeah.
CZ  Were you the only one that was down in the Slippery Ann?

KD  No, let’s see. Yeah, yeah.

CZ  So, did your dad or your grandpa own land down in there? How did they come to...

KD  No, most of that stuff back there was the Phillips Ranch. And the Hansen Ranch. Those are the ranches around there that had property. And workin’ for them, they used to call shacks, you know tar paper shacks, log cabins. (Leon comes in)

CZ  I’ll bet that’s Leon then!

KD  That your boyfriend?

LD  What are getting interviewed for?

CZ  Yeah! This is for the Montana History Foundation so we’re, have a seat!

LD  This is for the History Foundation.

CZ  Yep, we’re recording right now.

LD  Now?

CZ  So, Leon...this is your youngest...?

KD  This my BABY brother!!! Hehehehehe.

CZ  Baby brother! Okay good, well we were just asking some questions about...oh, everything from the grandparents, where they came from, in fact we don’t know a lot about the great, great grandparents. Where the great, great grandparents came from. Do you know anything about them?
LD  The great, great grandparents? They came from Canada.

CZ  Tell us about that.

LD  That’s about all I know...ah...the great grandparents.

MM  What was their names?

LD  They were French! Ha! They were French Canadian. So, there is not a lot about them.

Not a lot to know about them because, jes...‘cause my dad’s dad was born in the 1870s so it goes way back. I think a lot of them were from around North Dakota. And Minnesota. Ah, the Chippewa band of natives, and you know, it started in Minnesota, into Canada. I don’t think there was even a border back then.

CZ  No.

LD  You know. Ah...that’s ah...jes, I got paperwork on it somewhere but, Id’ have to find it.

CZ  We know in 1879, John Doney came down and he was married to, I believe married Virginia LaFountain? But it said that he was livin’ at Fort Maginnis and he was one that signed the Louis Riel petition.

LD  Yeah.

CZ  I wondered if he was a relative?

LD  Yeah, jes, I had a lot of uncles that was born...one of ‘em was a stage driver. Drove the stagecoach. I think it was Uncle Charlie Kelsey that did that. And he was a mail, he run the mail.

CZ  Here in this area?
LD  There was a bunch in Lewistown back then. And there’s nothing left but an old shack out there at Fort Maginnis. Bunch of old rocks.

CZ  So where…

LD  Buildings, yeah.

CZ  Where they lived, there’s still...

LD  Well there was a little town. Well, it was a fort…wherever there was a fort there was natives. Heheh! And that’s…Fort Maginnis was…jez it’s been a long, long time since that’s been...

Overtalk

MM  It was a stage stop wasn’t it?

LD  Yeah, it was a stage stop, fort too. Stage stop. Charlie used to, my dad’s half-brother was a stage...was it dad? Dad was born...down on the river, on the Missouri River.

CZ  When was your dad born?

LD  1915.

CZ  1915. And what about your grandfather? You know when he was born?

LD  Oh my grandfather…no…he was grandpa Gregory died a long time...he died right after HE was born. And that was…they lived on the...I don’t know if you remember where the road that goes to Hays to Malta? They lived right, kitty corner there. And that’s where he was born. There used to be a little house there and that’s where he, grandpa Gregory died. There.
Slippery Ann.

And ah...they had to keep him in a shed most of the winter.

Before they could bury him?

Before they could bury him. He’s buried there at Hayes at the mission. Grandpa Lollie (sp) was in Canada, wasn’t he? Yeah. He was a buffalo man.

So Lollie, was he a Doney then?

Yes. They were half-brothers, I think.

And he was...he’d been a pony express rider too.

And he was a buffalo hunter too?

They say he shot the first white buffalo. They said it was the one that was in Cody, Wyoming.

Oh really! And what was his name again?

Yeah. Lollie. He was a (undiscernible). They had like 16 kids. A bunch! And ah well...oh my gosh...I can’t tell you how many Doneys came out of that bunch.

There’s a lot a Doneys aren’t there.

Well Lollie was my mom’s great granddad. And Gregory was my granddad, so, there was some relations...I think they had to get permission...my mom and dad had to get permission from, to get married. ‘Cause they were relatives.
I think I’ve heard that before too.

Huh?

I think I heard that before.

Yeah.

They were...okay...tell me how they were related?

My mom was pregnant so they had to get married. They had to get permission from the church to do it.

Because they were related? They were cousins?

Yeah, they were a generation apart...or...something like that.

Okay, tell me how that went again ‘cause I am confused.

Well, grandpa, grandpa Gregory, he was my dad’s dad. And grandpa Lollie was my mom’s granddad which would be my great, great grandad. And that was the two family sides. And then I think, jes, grandpa John was Grandpa Lollie’s youngest son...grandpa John.

I think so.

Do you, oh I’m sorry, go ahead.

Most of ‘em are buried in Malta. And then there was Latouc (sp) he was from...the Blackfeet. Was it Bowdoin? Bowdoin?

Yeah.
LD Out there by Saco (Bowdoin Lake nearby). Saco is where he was, where he lived. His name, Latouc was his name. He came from France. That was my mom’s uncle. I think he was grandpa John’s half-brother. Or somethin’ like that.

CZ So was it the Doney side that originally was French then?

LD Well, they’re both Doneys.

CZ Oh well, yeah, that’s right ‘cause you were saying...

LD Yeah, we all come from, we’re all ah...

MM French Canadian.

LD French Canadian side. See, we’re all enrolled in North Dakota.

CZ Oh, okay, so Turtle Mountain then.

LD Turtle Mountain.

CZ Everybody, okay. Okay. Interesting.

MM Have you ever contacted Turtle Mountain? They’ve got lots of information.

CZ Umh...no.

Overtalk

CZ Well, I am looking specifically for local people. I’ve looked at some of the rolls.

KD Where are you from?
CZ  Winifred right now.

LD  Winifred? There’s a lot of information on Doneys in Great Falls.

CZ  Oh yeah, I would imagine that’s true. Everywhere here too.

LD  I think of...jes I can’t think of her name. Edna! Edna Gray. She has a lot of information. She’s at the Native American Center in Great Falls.

CZ  Oh, perfect.

LD  So you could get a lot of information from her.

CZ  Sure. So, I am curious, we were talking earlier about, if there was any prejudice from being Native American in part. Did you ever have trouble with that when you were a kid or later in life?

LD  Every day! Hehhee!!

CZ  Really?

LD  YEAH! Being in Malta, they did NOT like Natives. Yeah, there weren’t too many days I didn’t get in a fight with somebody. Because...you know what? It, that was probably a good thing that happened to me because once I fought ‘em, we became pretty good friends. It was just a continuation, even here in Lewistown. Yeah, but there was name calling, there was a lot of prejudice, especially in Malta. You know, yeah.

CZ  That’s interesting with the two reservations and a lot of native people bein’ there too. That they would...fight cha.
LD  Well...the...we were landless.

KD  Landless Indians.

LD  Yes, Landless Indians. Yeah, we didn’t have a reservation really. If we did have a reservation it was up in Canada someplace.

CZ  So they picked on ya because of being landless too?

LD  Oh I don’t know if they knew that. They picked on us because we were native.

CZ  Yeah. What about when you got older and start...

LD  Didn’t do ‘em any good to pick on us. We were a lot tougher than most of them were, haha!!

CZ  Sounds like it! That’s kinda what I gathered from Ken here!

LD  Yeah, we just, we didn’t put up with it.

CZ  What about in the workplace?

LD  Well it depended on how good of a worker you were, I guess. You know, but most us I know were really pretty darn good workers.

KD  Umhum.

LD  And you know that’s one thing...what I’m kinda proud of, my dad always said, “You’re gonna work for somebody, work for ‘em.” That was his favorite thing to say.

Overtalk
He said, “It didn’t matter what it was, if you’re gonna work, be the worker.”

We learned a lot from him.

Yeah, he was a hard worker. So...

Sounds like it.

What are you doin’, somethin’ for Winifred?

No this is for a grant. I’ll tell you after the interview.

Oh a grant!

I’ll tell you afterwards, yeah.

Well, a grant...

Yeah, I have a whole list of questions...

There are people buying (undiscernible) this aren’t they?

HaHa!!

Somebody that’s trying to buy out everybody in our family.

Oh really?

Yeah.

Oh seriously?

Yeah. I don’t know it is, some relative by Saco up in that area that they’re...I know they sent me a letter asking permission. And it isn’t a hell of a lot of land that...together with all the
people that are landowners up there, it’s a bunch. With just one person it’s not a hell of a lot.

But it’s north of Saco where that’s happenin’.

CZ    I’ll be darned.

LD    And it’s...

MM    When their mom and dad had their 50th wedding anniversary down at the Eagles...

CZ    Yeah...

MM    Grandad, he was 75 or more.

KD    Somewhere around there.

MM    He danced every dance. HaHa!!!

LD    He always did that!!

Everybody laughs

MM    He didn’t care what it was he danced every dance!

LD    Well I remember at our, me and my first wife’s wedding reception, he would...he danced
‘til he couldn’t walk. Couldn’t breathe! That was out at Cottonwood. Were you there?

MM    At the?

LD    At me and Patty’s wedding dance, or wedding...not the wedding but the reception?

Yeah, you were there, the whole family was there.
Well do you remember...you know when you are talking about stories back then, do you have any stories they told you when you were little, about your grandparents that you remember, or any experiences that you had?

The only ones that I remember are like that, grandad, that was frozen and that they had to keep him in a shed most of the winter because they couldn’t get to, there wasn’t any place to...too cold too frozen to bury him. That’s one of the stories and the other one was grandpa always being the...I think he drove a stage from Lewistown to Malta or somethin’ like that.

Ah...Jez I got a book. I got the frontier...in fact I just looked at it today. It tells a lot about the Doney family. Article written in there by Frontier Times or somethin’.

Oh yeah, sure. Frontier Times.

And I think there’s still a lot of literature at the library here.

Oh yeah. So, it sounds like you’re beeping. How many years were you sheriff?

Oh my food!

Being sheriff, I was probably...I’d say 12 years or somethin’ like that.

You were undersheriff for a lot longer than that. Yeah, 25 years.

Yeah George Stephens, Jimmy Kaaro...

Well, Jimmy Kaaro was sheriff when you started.

Yeah. George Stephens was his sheriff when they hired him.
LD  That was back in ‘67 I think. When you became undersheriff...or weekend warrior type sheriff.

KD  Chuckles

LD  So he was, yeah.

CZ  So what about you, what was your occupation?

LD  He threw me in jail!

CZ  Oh really!! Put your own brother in jail, huh?

LD  Well, he didn’t put me he said I got to go.

CZ  What happened that you had to go?

LD  I can’t remember exactly what it was, I think it was a fight. Yeah, he put me in jail twice. I was in every jail in Lewistown. HaHa, the old courthouse one, I don’t remember what that was all about. Oh, I got in a fight with a kid and he pressed charges. When I was in there, one of the stinkiest places I’ve ever been. But he did that to teach me a lesson. It’s the other guy shoulda got put in jail!

CZ  HaHa! So, what you been doin’ all...what’s your work been after all this time?

LD  Well, I’ve been just about everything. I worked construction, I worked...oh my gosh...I worked at a...lumber company. I was a dishwasher, haha. Well, like I said, dad said, “You can’t find a good job find a bad one.” And that’s pretty much what I did. Down there in Arizona I
washed dishes and drove a delivery truck. Oh my God...I did that for years. Delivered food to
the restaurants.

CZ  Oh. And you had kids then?

LD  Yeah, I got two kids.

CZ  Two kids?

LD  Two.

CZ  Military service anyone?

LD  My son is a Marine. He was a Marine over in Iraq.

CZ  What’s his name?

LD  ....Mark. And then I have a daughter in Chicago, her name is Danielle.

MM  Danielle.

LD  And she had three kids, two girls.

CZ  Three grandkids? And (asking Ken) we had some of the names of your kids, I’ve got
that, but I was curious, two of them...let’s see one of them is in the military and a grandson is in
the military, too don’t you?

KD  Yeah.

Overtalk

CZ  Was Bonita...
Ken’s daughter Bonita
MM  His grandson is making a life out of it too and he’s stationed down in Oklahoma right now.

CZ   Did you have military service or?

KD   No, I couldn’t because of my hearing, but I was able to get into the National Guard. Umh, I don’t know how that happened, but ahm…my experiences with the military was through the National Guard, that was in the ‘50s. I wasn’t very old when I did that.

CZ   Did you serve in the military too?

LD   Yeah, I was in Vietnam.

CZ   You were in Vietnam? And where did you go and how long were you there?

LD   I was there for like 11 months. And I was all over Vietnam, South Vietnam. I was in artillery. We were like...heavy artillery. We, we were...we went everywhere. We ah...we were mobile. Mobile Unit. 101st. And we were all over Vietnam. We were #1 gun in Vietnam. Which was, it was one of them things that always happened to me. I always got on a real good outfit, no matter where I was at. We fired the last heavy artillery in Vietnam.

CZ   Really!

LD   Yep. I was just looking at that today. And ah...I couldn’t find it on the phone, but I got it.

CZ   That’s interesting. Well, thank you for your service too.

LD   Yeh...

KD   Well the other brother, let’s see there’s Wayne...
Wayne was in Vietnam for 10 years. He did 5 and 5. He did 6 months in Vietnam and 6 months in Okinawa. Yeah Okinawa. He was on, he was on...medic.

Medic?

Yeah, he was triage. He took...they’d go to Vietnam and he was on medical team, he was on medical sanctuary. That’s what he did. He did that for 10 years. Really screwed him up.

Did you have other brothers or sisters that were in the military?

No, I think it was just me and him. And his National Guard.

Wayne was in the Navy.

I was the first one drafted in Lewistown...in the lottery.

Oh were ya? Oh, lucky you! Chees...

Yeah, that was me. I think there were two guys from Grass Range and one from ah...Moore. That was...that was 71. I was drafted in 70 and I went in when they called me.

Went to Ft. Lewis, Ft. Sill in Oklahoma for artillery.

How much younger are you than Ken?

17.

17 years.

17.
KD    What year were you born?

LD    ’50.

KD    33...(Ken’s birthdate)

LD    17.

CZ    So mom was busy. She had...

LD    Well...I think dad was busy!!!!

Everyone laughs

CZ    Well guys, that brings us to the end of my interview. I appreciate you both a lot, and

Marjorie, thanks so much for your time.

LD    What is the reason you’re doing this?

CZ    It’s a...

Explains this a project granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain

Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.

*According to Teddy Blue Abbott in We Pointed Them North, Joe Doney had a homestead near

Black Butte. He is noted as shooting Rattlesnake Jake’s partner, Edward Owen (also called

Fallon- confusion re: last names), in Lewistown, July 4th, 1884 with a 22 caliber revolver. It

started when Doney rode into town, tying his distempered horse next to those belonging to

Jake and Owen. Jake threatened Doney who promptly shot Owen in the stomach and then in

the hand; the shooter escaping into the T.C. Power’s store. The men had been harassing the
townsfolk and shooting up the town, eventually shot down unmercifully in the middle of the street by citizens in the store, saloons, and from behind buildings who emptied and reloaded, and “...emptied them again until they could no longer pull a trigger.”

Alisa Herodes; (Herodes Collection) Grandparents Guy and Helen Larson
Interview
Alisa Herodes (AH) Dantes Restaurant, Great Falls, Montana
By Candi Zion (CZ)
1-3-2021

CZ All right, we are here today with Alisa, and if you want to give me your name, date...

AH Alisa Herodes. 6-30-65.

CZ And where do you live?

AH Great Falls, Montana.

CZ What is your occupation?

AH Design. I do kitchen and bath design.

CZ What’s the name of your business?

AH Dimensions Cabinetry.

CZ How long have you been doin’ that?

AH 11 years.

CZ So what is your spouse’s name?

AH I do not have one, we’re divorced.

CZ Oh, okay. Umh...what about your grandparents and parents, what were their names?

AH Grandma was Helen Larson, well it was her married name. Helen and Guy Larson. They got married in 1920. And her maiden name was Berger or Berger (says with accent- sounds like Bersjay). And I actually remember her telling me how to pronounce her last name and I thought...she was a trickster, she used to joke around all the time and had a pretty fun sense of humor, but when she was telling me it’s Berger (with accent)! Ha!
Because it’s spelled Berger...

Yeah, B-E-R-G-E-R.

Okay. And that was your grandmother.

Yeah, and my grandfather is from Galesburg, Illinois and he’s not Metis.

Now the Berger...go ahead...the Berger side goes back to...tell me about them? I know they were early settlers (Central Montana).

Umh...oh yeah, well. There was Pierre Berger and Judith Wilkie Berger that are touted with founding Lewistown because they brought a bunch of Metis families with them through like that Milk River area on into...ah, ‘cause they heard there was fertile land, there was water...it was, I think from reading, Pierre heard it through somebody in the military that they traded with or knew somehow that there was good land here and that’s where he ended up. Come to think of it too...there’s several books I have of the Metis, I mean like a little mini library. But this is...I’m sure you’ve seen photos of them?

Yes!

At the (Lewistown) library?

Yep. Very strong looking people (examines photo).

Aren’t they? I mean could you imagine? She, they had 13 children!

And it seemed like a lot of the families did have that many kids. Why did they come down- because you said the land...what happened to them in Canada that they felt they needed to leave?

It wasn’t the Red River Rebellion. No. As far as I know they were not part of the Red River Rebellion.
Waitress brings out lunch.

AH  I wanted to share this photo with you...

CZ  So while we’re looking at the photos...tell me more about Pierre. It was not the Red River Rebellion. And we can look at those later, too.

AH  Yeah, but I just wanted to show you...

CZ  Ahhh!!! This PHOTO! Wow it’s awesome (original and most well-known photo of Pierre and Judith)!

AH  I think somebody had this photo and did the painting from it. I’m almost sure of it!

Overtalk

CZ  It is! So, tell me about, not the Red River Rebellion...

AH  Oh, can I grab one of those? Oh, nope they’re right here (eating utensils)! Ah no. As far as I know they were not part of the Red River Rebellion. But I do have a...my grandmother kept diaries and, it wasn’t even really a diary. She’d write little snippets of stuff. Even on a calendar. Like, I can look back in the 60s, Guy and Helen, who’s my mom and dad, came to visit.

And or...the Japs...yes...the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Ha! And it was a couple days before that when I’m reading, they’re like...they actually wrote about they think it was gonna happen.

So, when they see it was not a surprise reading my grandmother’s little stuff, just penciled in this book, it’s like, well they must have known ‘cause there was talk about the Japanese attacking somewhere. Well maybe they didn’t know where, but, things, ah, just like that. And, one thing that I did see somewhere down the lines is that during the Red River Rebellion, they were keeping an eye on us thinking we were gonna take up arms against them, too, the Metis, the half breeds basically. Which I know that my grandmother hated that word being called a
Judith and Pierre Berger, Herodes Collection
“breed”. But that’s the only reference to the Red River Rebellion. Was...they were...and this is

Tyler, Montana area I thinking and Lewistown and that area. Battrick, Montana where the
families lived a lot. Which are now ghost towns, but umh...

CZ That was where they kinda settled then.

AH Yeah. Like my mom was born in 1929 in Grass Range.

CZ Unhun, unhun, (crunching). So...Tyler, Montana. They were French and...?

AH They were Scotch.

CZ They were Scottish!!

AH French and Scottish. Yeah, my mom’s line is Chippewa, LaFromboise was her mother’s
maiden name. And then umn...her mother’s name was Cadotte. C-A-D-O-T-T-E.

CZ Okay.

AH But that line of the...right. HaHa!!

CZ So, Cadotte...All of them were from, they were French, or they were Canadian mixed?

AH Well, kind of the Hudson Bay.

CZ Cadotte was French Canadian wasn’t...?

AH We’re talking back in the 1600s when they came over with the Hudson Bay Company in
that era, and I think that’s where the Luejkes (sp) came from, from Scotland. And ahm...

CZ Okay. So, we’ve got Berger, Wilkies, Cadotte, and Lafromboise, LafromBOISE
(pronounces correctly).

AH Lafromboise (restates pronunciation). Rasberries! Ha!

CZ HaHa!! Did they speak the Scottish language do you know? Any of the family?
Ah...I know that the Wilkies spoke 5 languages and I think some Scottish and French.

Mischief. And I think also my great grandfather spoke 5 languages. But my great grandmother, D’amatille (sp) LaFromboise did not, she spoke Chippewa. Chippewa only, yeah, she didn’t speak any English.

Was she full blood?

Was she what?

Was she full blood, no LaFromboise...was she half then?

Well...no, I don’t know, ha! I’m not sure how it all works but my sister and I are part of the Little Shell Tribe. Chippewa. And I think, I don’t even know the percentage but, they have me as ¼ and I don’t think I’m that much, but I don’t do the math, they do. So...

Umhm. Right, right. Well, that’s a pretty good percentage, I mean for as many generations that have come down.

Right. I would think I’m half of that but I don’t know. But like I said I don’t...

Umhum. So, they all came down together in the same group or I know there were a couple different groups.

Well...there was a couple different groups but it was Pierre Berger that brought the families and there were families of Ouellettes, LaFromboise, LaFountains, and I know it was Elizabeth Swan also wrote a story about how they come over in the creaky Red River carts and at some point, you know, they just had the settlement and umh...

In (what later became ) Lewistown?
Yeah. Right outside of Lewistown. And ah, I think there, was Bernard LaFountain got sick along the way and died. He’s like the first buried in that Metis section, wherever they started burying people. Apparently, they took a part of a Red River cart and made a coffin and gave him, you know, the Catholic service as best they could, because there wasn’t a priest there at the time but...

Wow. And you said Swan. Tell me again how you are related to Swans?

My grandmother’s cousin, Elizabeth. And I remember visiting her when I was little.

You remember visiting Elizabeth Swan when you were little?

Yes, I was very little.

Really!!

I remember...white haired, umh, she had glasses like my grandmother’s. They looked like the same glasses with the black and the, you know, cat eye kinda? With I think they had metal on the bottom of them? Worn linoleum with a certain pattern. It’s like I have a picture in my head. And she was sitting by, just like a wood stove, in a chair and yeah. That’s about all I remember, I was little.

That was her home in Lewistown?

I’m guessing it was because we went there to visit her. And I guess it happened a few times, but I don’t really remember specifics. You know when you’re a kid...I remember going to another cousin’s, Fergus, who is also a Metis. And all I remember...I can...barely, the reason I remember him, he was in a wheelchair. But I remember the geese in the back yard chasing me. Haha!! But I don’t really, you know, it’s like what did the house look like, I couldn’t tell you. Or where it was, or anything.
CZ:  Right. So, I’m curious about your mom. Did she ever experience any kind of prejudice?

AH:  Well…not that she’s ever told me. I’m gonna guess not. Um…because…she looks white. She’s got, well…I shouldn’t say she looks white, but, yeah. When she was in a rest home, just like for a couple of weeks, she passed away 6 years ago and…umh…she bowled a 200 and two days later she was in the hospital. She was in transitional care at this point for a couple of days and I remember a nurse asking me, “Is your mom Native American?” And I was like…how do I answer that. Just because, is it gonna affect her care. And I was worried about that, which God forbid that was the reason. You know but ah…I’m proud of it and I’ll own it, but…I was still a little, kinda wondered if it would affect her care, so. I did say yes, but I did hesitate to do so. That’s terrible when you think about it. In this day and age? Hah...

CZ:  Yeah, yeah. I know what you’re sayin’. So, she had…you were talking about the bullets, were those more her family recipes that passed down?

AH:  Ah…I’m guessing so. My mom wasn’t a very good cook. HaHa! But ah…I know her and dad would get together and make it. Oh God! I love them still to this day! They really bring back memories of just…I have some cousins from…and I might get you in touch with them too if you’d like to, ‘cause they really…I know this is a dumb thing to say…even though I belong to a Native American tribe, they’re more Indian than we are but we are from the same bloodline and we’re the same like…my great grandfather, and their great grandfather were brothers. Haha!! But…they were raised more Native American if that makes sense and we didn’t have a lot of customs, we didn’t have a lot of…I was probably 6 or 7 years old when I found out I was Native American. Grandmother told me. And I remember it was after dinner, mom’s in
washing dishes and in the kitchen, we’re on the other side of the wall just visiting, where the tv’s at, and grandma was saying, “Did you know you were Native American?” and I said, “Hunuh!!” and she started telling stories, you know. Grandma and her stories. But I did hear my mom from the other room, “Mom!” HaHa! You know like, careful where you go with that kinda thing. My mom went to college, she was in a sorority. I think that she probably kept it under wraps because she was afraid of being...ah...judged maybe. It was that era! ’54, ’55. ’53, ’54, 55.

CZ Where did she go school at?

AH Ah, Bozeman and the College of Great Falls. Yep, yeah. She ended up being a school teacher back at the N Bar Ranch School.

CZ Really!!!

AH Yeah, ‘cause that’s where she went to school when she was young.

CZ Oh!

AH Yeah! HaHa!

CZ So, she was raised in Lewistown. Where were you raised at?

AH Here in Great Falls.

CZ Here in Great Falls. So, she came here when she married her husband?

AH Well, ah, she came here for work. And got her teaching degree and she taught school out at Sun River and some here in Great Falls later, but I remember, I’ve got paperwork that she had to get an emergency license so that she could teach. And before the paperwork and everything went through. And my grandfather worked for N Bar Ranch way back in the day before he ended up buying a place of his own in the Grass Range area.
So, that’s a question I should ask. What kind of occupations did your family members have when they lived in the Lewistown area, those old timers on down then to your grandparents?

Ah...well I’m sure my great, great grandfather and my great grandfather were still fur traders and trappers as best as they could be. I’m guessing my great grandfather maybe...I don’t know had...you know, not the opportunity ‘cause things, the buffalo disappearing, etc.

Ah...and then my grandmother actually had the mail route for Fergus County, in that area. Well...Grass Range to Tyler, in that area. She just did the mail route.

When would that have been?

I’m gonna guess ‘30s. ‘30s ‘40s. And there is a book called The History of Lewistown and it irks me when I read that because...ahhh...there’s a little blurb in there about my grandparents. And they talk about my grandfather, Guy Larson, a handsome strapping man from Galesburg, Illinois married to a small be-speckled woman. Small, dark, be-speckled woman, meaning my grandmother!

Haha!!

And I’m like, I don’t think of her ever as small and dark?

Hahahhhhaaa!!!

And that HE had the mail route! It wasn’t his, it was hers!

Ahhhh...
AH  Yeah…and it’s like, no that’s not it. HaHa. And it’s irksome because I think…she was Native American. They probably didn’t understand how THOSE two got together. You know, or whatever but...

CZ  How did they meet?

AH  Umh…I don’t know how they met but I know that, umh…she went to St. Peter’s Mission, grandmother did. I still have her little Catholic School bible from there and ah, I actually have a post, a post card from St Peter’s Mission from one cousin to another saying, “Remember the fun times we had here?” which...

CZ  Haha!!

AH  I do remember…I know!!! But just because, I remember my grandmother saying that she spent afternoons peeling potatoes and stuff in the kitchen. And I’m sure it’s because…she also told me this story that she was rounded up and…a horse and buggy came by for her and her sister.

CZ  To go to school or to be...really?

AH  Yeah! Yeah. So…I’m like...

CZ  In Lewistown they were rounded up or?

AH  Yeah. And brought out to Cascade, ‘cause they lived here.

CZ  What time period would that have been do you think?

AH  She was born in 1894 or ’96. I’ve got paperwork that says both dates. So, maybe 1895 just to span between them. But ahm…and she got her 1st communion at ah...1906, and the same father, I’m guessing at Cascade, married Guy and her in 1920.
CZ  Oh...cool!

AH  Yeah!

CZ  So, part...

AH  So, he’s been in the family a long time.

CZ  And when they came here (Great Falls), it was probably in the 00s or teens when they rounded her up as a child.

AH  Well no, I think it was pretty early.

CZ  So, when you said 1890s...

AH  Yeah, in 1895 she was born so, and she did her 1st communion in 1906, so...I’m guessing around that time 1906 time frame that maybe...and I didn’t believe her. I was just like, nobody does that! Well yeah. She told me that story several times. And I’m like, mom is that for real? ‘Cause I said...grandma was a trickster. She was just that woman! And...God I learned so much from her! Stories she told, and I just wished I paid more attention.

CZ  Do you remember other stories?

AH  Ahm...just, yeah just about life and...but she talked a little bit about school, and...it didn’t, it’s surprising that one Indian cousin to another saying the fun times we had here because it didn’t seem all that glorious, I guess. Ahm...which she did a lot of kitchen work it seemed. Just from stories.

CZ  Kitchen work not at the school but other places?

AH  No at school. No definitely at school.

CZ  At school, okay.
AH And maybe that’s what she remembered most about school. But...I can tell from her writings that they educated her well because, you know, she DOES write well and does...I notice mistakes...haha!!! So, I’m like, huh that’s not spelled right or that doesn’t make sense, you know. She DOES make sense.

CZ So she would’ve...did she go through 8th grade or more do you think?

AH At least. Probably 8th grade. Ahm...and I don’t know, I do have report cards from different years. The Lucky Ford School, wherever that was. I’ve got a report card of hers from...God I don’t know if it’s dated or not. It might be and I could take a look at that.

CZ Lucky Ford? Would that have been Lewistown area or we don’t know for sure?

AH I don’t know. Something that I need to look into, ‘cause I’ve been curious.

CZ How did she meet her husband then do we know?

AH Umh...he wanted to be a cowboy. And came out to Montana. And ahm...I have a post card from his parents to him and it was probably...and I think he came out, and I think he was probably 3 or 4 years younger that my grandmother, but he came out in...what year was it? Maybe in 1918 is the date on the post card. Why haven’t you written! Obviously, he got it ‘cause I still have it. But it’s like, why haven’t you written!! Like where are you and what are you doing you know his family is...hahah!! And that’s all the post card, like one line basically. Haha!!

CZ Powerful. Haha!!!

AH HaHa!!! Hint, yeah.

CZ So...did ah...did the family have any prejudice, the white side towards the Native American...did you ever hear any stories like that?
AH You know, if they did...I didn’t catch it. I know that Guy’s family moved out here and homesteaded themselves.

CZ They did!

AH Yeah. From Illinois. And I don’t know the correlation but there’s some Davison family with the Larsen family that this...but I didn’t hear stories about him maybe because it was so sad. But his name was Ronald Davison, and he died during WWII, during Operation Market Garden. And he...

CZ What was the operation?

AH Market Garden. It was in Norway where they kind of...the troops were supposed to land and I think a lot of them parachuted into the water and they were sitting ducks basically. I don’t know it didn’t go well for the United States, but Thank God they won the war, but anyway, he got killed there. And it’s so funny I haven’t talked about it but...like there’s artwork from school with his name on them and little books like original Peter Rabbit with his name inside of it. And different things and...ahhh...where I don’t know, you know the cor...how he fits in that well, and anyway...he is non-Metis.

CZ Non-Metis.

AH Yeah. So, I’m guessing no. The family got along great. And the people that came from Illinois had, didn’t seem to have a problem because they kinda just, they came and, you know...Aunt Julia that made pies at, Guy’s sister Julia made pies for the Fergus Café for years in Lewistown. And won all the pie...Haha...in the state fair, you know.

CZ Haha!! Cool.
So no. I think there was...around town I think a little bit. Just that blurb in the book about small, dark, be-speckled woman. It really irks me.

And that it was Guy’s mail route, it was grandmothers. She also was...what county, if it was Fergus County...head of the Democratic Party. Which I think it was a different animal back then but I’m not sure when that all changed.

What was her name again?

Helen Larsen. Helen B. Larsen. So, Helen. She didn’t have a middle name but B for Berger but...

Oh, I see.

Mom’s name was Helen also, so, little Helen...

So, little Helen and Big Helen.

Helen and Little Helen haha! Never was big Helen. My mom was taller than her. Haha!

HaHa! Did any of the family serve in the military, the Metis side?

Yes. So, another cousin. Again, the Fleurys, its ah...John Fleury and his brother Alfonse. I have some photos of them. I know that John Fleury...I don’t know if he lived with grandmother or lived with her family, I’m not sure how that all fit in again. I just...there’s so much stuff I haven’t read, like I have a suitcase full of letters that I want to go through. But there is one that I found it was during WWI when John was serving over in Germany, there’s this letter it says, “Dear sis”, to my mom, or to my grandmother, “Dear sis,” he goes, “there’s a field of wild roses, I’d love to pick you a bouquet” and you can tell there was one in there ‘cause there was a little green smudge on the paper. And ahm...he talks about, just what he’s doing,
who he’s met. Later after the war he worked for the CDB, or for the …Civil Conservation Corp, CCC.

CZ  Oh CCC, oh yeah.

AH  CDB (meaning CCC), I don’t know why, what does that, mean, anything. But anyway…and worked on the Vandalia Dam. Broke horses in between working at the dam and ah…yeah, yeah. Honestly, I have a crush on this guy. I know he died before I was born, but he just seemed like a “Dude” you know!

CZ  Yeah. Haha!!!

AH  He did, he just really did! Like…I’ll bet he’s probably a foot shorter than I am but I was just like, he’s just cute and he seemed like a character. Just, yeah, like a lot of fun. Him and my grandmother were close.

CZ  Is this…was he the only person that served in the military? Were there others?

AH  Ahm…There’s…I have pictures of some Ouellettes from WWI. And ahm…one of them is in uniform. Some Pauls but again, I don’t know who they are. I don’t know…I grew up around Oulettes or Oullette. Ahm…and again, when you are a kid, it’s all peripheral. The LaFromboises, I remember several dinners with them, you know before they passed. Even as a kid I remember that, but...

CZ  What were dinners like with family members?

AH  Oh, just any dinner, the fried chicken, potato salad kind of thing! It really wasn’t any ethnic much. Ah…Bannock wasn’t a thing, ah…fry bread wasn’t a thing…but the bullets were a thing in our house! Haha!!! God, I love ‘em! Haha!!

CZ  Any dancing, jigging, any musical instruments?
AH Ahm...yes. Oh my God, music, yes. There’s...I think my grandmother coulda won an award for the amount of crosses and musical instruments pulled out of her house when she passed.

CZ Angels for my mom.

AH Ha! Indiscernable...Everything for my mom! But my grandmother...yeah, we have violins, old ukuleles, guitars and we kept ‘em. Harmonicas, I mean...yeah...I’m glad we kept ‘em.

CZ Umhum...

AH Some are like...the instruments are in pretty good shape, but the cases themselves are just deteriorating. But ah...

CZ I’m assuming they probably had all kinds of parties, I mean was it family...

AH I don’t remember a lot of dancing but I do remember once when I was a kid, and I remember I was sick. And...they...it was morning I was still in my pajamas or maybe I was still sick and I was in my pajamas I don’t remember. But I was staying with grandma and grandpa. So...during the summer, I have a sister, my sister Guyla and I, we would...mom and dad and I...the four of us would go to Lewistown from Great Falls and we’d stay overnight, and they’d drop Guyla off for a week, and I’d go home with mom and dad for a week. And we spent time just with our parents and then after the weekend, or after the week was over, they’d drive ME out there, drop me off at grandmother’s and then Guyla went back with them. So, we each had time with our parents and our grandparents on our own and I think everybody should do that. It was great! It should be a thing families do! Haha!! Give ‘em the time just with that child. I think it’s just...get to know ‘em better and...
And it was just you two in the family?

Unhuh. My sister and I, yeah, and...but I do remember those...fishing and stories that grandmother told once when I was older that...the down of cattails is what women used for sanitary napkins. They wrapped it in a cloth and I’m like, gross! Why would you tell me that? But, it’s ingenious!!

Unhun. Yeah.
So we’re down there and I’m pulling off the down from the cattail. Telling me that story I was just like, what? Gross!! She said, “No, no. We put it in a cloth and pinned it in.” Like, wow. Haha!!

So, what else do you remember, do you remember other traditional lessons or things like that?

No, No! Honestly, totally, totally…

That’s amazing (story about cattails).

We lived a white life. I grew up white and umh...yeah. I think about, you know, gosh, the traditions of sage or smudging and it’s sad to me, because...I don’t know. But they also being mixed. But then, my grandmother’s mother, didn’t even speak English. So, I am thinking, where are the traditions and maybe...I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t say she was silenced or whatever, but she was, because of not able to speak the language, didn’t carry it on as much. But I’d bet my grandmother probably spoke to her when she was younger. And then forgot it when she was assimilated into...you know...ah...St. Peter’s Mission. ‘Cause you know any word that starts with the letter “Ass”...can’t be good. Haha

So...I’m thinking about those traditions being lost. Do you think that...do you think that your mom, your grandmother, would have claimed the white side, just what I am thinking, finding interviews about whether or not it was easier, perhaps...did you ever hear anything like that?

No, uhm, other than I...it wasn’t until I was older and able to think about it that I bet my mom just was white because it...I don’t know maybe it made it easier for her. But I don’t think my grandmother could have passed as white. So...there’s that! HaHa!!
Umhum, umhum.

You know. Being a small, dark be-speckled woman!

HaHaHaaaa!!!

No, I’m not over it yet. I was pissed. I had to see who wrote the book. And I’m like, who the heck! Somebody gave them that information, you know. Neighbor, whatever.

Umhum. Yeah, right, right, oh my gosh.

Yeah, I do remember though, that a neighbor, when they lived in Lewistown on West Water Street, 1412 West Water Street. I’ll always remember that. Umh...that grandmother was out doing something in the garden and she was like, “What’s your grandmother doing?” and I didn’t even, I probably said what she was doing at the time and she said, “Do you know us other neighbors watch what she is up to and when she starts planting stuff, we’ll plant stuff. HaHa!!! Like, okay!! HaHa!!

HaHa!!

And it didn’t even, until I was older again, realize it probably was maybe...just...HaHa!!! I don’t know!!

So, I’m curious, did you experience...what about yourself. Any prejudice when you were growing up or later on in life?

No, no.

Never had anything like that?

No. It was kind of a funny story and this was my being a dorky kid, and...I look...I think back and I shake my head, my God, how did you survive this world, but...umh...when my mom had passed away and we were clearing out the house there was two, you know, big
Tupperware boxes with my name on it, one with my sister’s. And I’m like...all old artwork from way back, you know. And I’m just like, oh my God, what do we do with this, I don’t really want it. And then I come to these little white bags with the valentines we used to decorate at school? You put your name on it, people drop the valentines in ‘cause they’re all on a border or a wall somewhere. And I’m pulling them out thinking, oh, I wonder, oh I bet this is my friend that was, Debbie G. at the time, Debra Gunther. And then I see another Michael G. and I go, Oh, I bet that’s Mike Garretty and I’m thinking...and there’s a few of them that said, “How...would you like to be my Valentine?” And I’m like...there sure is a lot of them. And it brought back a memory that...I stood up one day for Show and Tell and I told everybody I was Indian. Ha! And...I’m sure the teacher looked at me like, sit down, what do are you talking about. And then other, maybe Native American kids in the class looking at me like, what is she talking about?? But I kinda told them the story about my grandmother and you know, just coming over here, and like, Lewistown. Having been picked up by a buggy and taken off to school...and...I’m, I’m just like, Oh my God! And it probably boiled down to that’s why I ended up with those valentines. After that I was Indian! Haha!!!

CZ Haha!!!

AH But it didn’t, you know, bother me. Ha! I don’t think it ever reflected on me at all but...

CZ They never...they never said anything that would have been negative?

AH No.

CZ Good. Well, that’s good.

AH Yeah, thank goodness. HaHa!
CZ You mentioned quite a few names...Ouellettes, Pauls, Fleurys, in addition to the ones you already mentioned. Are you related to all those families?

AH I think that the Metis are so related. So, I don’t know if the name Nicholas Vrooman came up or you know who he is...

CZ Yes, I do.

AH Well...I read his book, *The Whole Country Was One Robe*, and I’m just blown away when I’m looking through it because I’ve seen these photos that I have, like those cabinet cards of, I’m like, who is, who is this guy? And...my goodness, I have that photo and I’ve got THAT photo and I’m like, that one looks like about the same time taken as another one I have and...umh...and it was again after mom passed away, and I’ve known that Metis, yes, that we were Metis. We were Chippewa. You know, when I definitely, yeah...

CZ When you were a kid?

AH Grandma let the cat out of the bag! HaHa!!

CZ HaHa!!

AH But...umh...I went up to the library, or up at the...here at the library...the Genealogy Society, with some, with a bag...not like this (points to her bag full of binders with family info and photos)! ‘Cause this was not put together at this point. And I don’t want to hear...I want to learn more about my family’s history. And it was Jen Thompson up there that is who I talked with and she is like, and starts throwing these books out. And I’m just like, what, what? I’m like...there’s this whole, like section of their library about the Metis people. And she was so knowledgeable, and she was friends with Nicholas’s wife Linda. The she goes...I got to know Jen a little better and she’s like, hey, Nicholas and Linda are coming over. And I said, “Can I meet
them?” So, I had dinner at my house, I had sister come and, I was married at the time so my husband at the time was there. And ah...they came and he brought this thumb drive of my family’s genealogy back to the 1600s...

CZ  Oh wow!

AH  And all these other like charts and graphs and this whole, this like this whole spiral graph web of how the families are connected.

CZ  Wow.

AH  And it was wow, I mean it was mind blowing and I even said to my sister Guyla, don’t let me fall all over this guy because I have so many questions, I don’t want to be like this. Ha! You know. But him and his wife were so cool, I just really, really liked her. She was nice.

CZ  And God bless him, he’s passed away now. A year or so...

AH  I know. Yeah.

CZ  Well, you know we should probably let you get to eatin’ lunch and we can look at these pictures later.

AH  That’s true. Do you need to get going?

We stay and look at photos and documents from Alisa’s family.

This is a project granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Mass Metis Graves, Cavalry Cemetery, Lewistown
Interview
Re: Metis Cemetery and Mass Graves
Alisa Herodes (AH) Dantes Restaurant, Great Falls, Montana
By Candi Zion (CZ)
1-3-2021

AH    Umh...yes about the cemetery at Lewistown (the original Metis cemetery). What prompted us to start talkin’ about that?

CZ    Well, we were talking about...over in the...by the old hospital.

AH    Oh, right, right!

CZ    The OLD cemetery.

AH    Where the Metis first settled when they got to Lewistown, that, during the Homestead Act, Jacob Corbly (also spelled Corbley) ended up with the property. And he went to Father Van den Henvel and asked, basically...there’s headstones on my property and I don’t want my sheep trampling them, what can we do? And so, Father Van den Henvel who is like the second priest of St. Leo’s...and St Leo’s itself wasn’t built until like 1906 (1916), the brick structure that we know now. So, it was a smaller wood structure that they had as their church. Umh, he went to the Metis people who were his friends, and I guess Father Van den Henvel spoke French because I think he was from Belgium or something? Don’t quote me on that because I’m probably wrong (the name is common in Holland, although Holland and Belgium are strongly connected). But he kinda had a kinship because of speaking Metis. And ahm, but he went to them and said that... what do we do? So, they built a bunch of coffins. The women apparently had taken nails and nailed, using nails, made a cross on each of the coffins. And Father Van den
Henvel out of his own money bought white cloth to go over that and they had like a 2 or 3 day requiem mass in the old St. Leo’s or the original St Leo’s and then reburied them, umh, at Calvary Cemetery which I believe...

Waitress interrupts to move plates

AH But ahm...just...yeah...but I do believe that it could have been Ouellette but, it could have been another last name and I can’t remember what that was at the time. That had donated the property (for the Calvary Cemetery). A Metis family donated the property to the church...God, I wish I knew. But, and that might not even be true. It’s just stuff I’ve read or gotten a hold of. Ahm...they reburied ‘em there. And there’s actually two different sections of the cemetery where they’re buried and ahm...smallest to largest. And I think there’s about 74 to 79 people buried there, interred in these graves. And I think what’s really interesting, and I think the Canadians would find it really interesting is Madeleine...Judith Wilkie’s sister Madeline Ouellette, married Louis Riel. I’m sorry, not Louis Riel. Louis Riel’s military commander, Gabriel Dumont. So, Madeleine Dumont is one of the people buried in that.

CZ I saw that!

AH And that to me is a very big deal!

CZ It is!

AH I mean that’s a lot of Metis history. And they went there to escape the Red River Rebellion after that. That’s how Madeleine ended up there.

CZ Ended up there in Lewistown.
Umhum. And apparently, she had consumption at the time and...a common cold, is that what it means basically (tuberculosis)? And then I think a cart over tipped and she ended up dying and getting buried there, and then reburied at Calvary.

So, you said that...you were talking about the Red River carts that they used for the caskets. Initially?

Well, that was when they first came over, ahm...I think they went from Milk River over to Lewistown and settled there in Lewistown, but there was a Bernard LaFountain that got sick along the way, dying. So, they stripped a Red River cart, formed a coffin, and buried him. And did their best to...because there was no church at the time to ahm...well and I’m not sure. There might have been a church at the time they just didn’t know, being so new I don’t know. But they ended up doing the best they could giving him a Catholic mass to bury him.

Where was the location of that first cemetery?

Um...I think it...I think it’s guessing, or...I don’t what led me to believe it, but kinda where Shopko (now Big R) is in Lewistown. Where that Shopko building is that’s now closed isn’t it.

Umhum.

I don’t know why I think that? But I guess it would be easy to figure out where Jacob Corbly got his homestead (Corbly owned land in Section 5 near the current Lewistown Disposal). Figure out where the property is. I do remember reading somewhere that there’s water along that. And this is from Elizabeth Swan from her writings for the Church, and I think
they did end up at the Montana Memory Project but I’m not sure. But I know she wrote ‘em for the Diocese.

CZ K. So, you’re interested in seeing some monuments. Because right now, what do they have up there at the Calvary?

AH Nothing. It’s, it’s…and I did talk to the church…it took almost 2 years to kinda…I asked if I could come to their meeting and solicit that fact that I’d like to put a monument of some sort there. And, umh, I’ve got all that paperwork on it. And I finally did get okayed, and I said, “Can you put it in writing?” And they didn’t do that or wouldn’t do that but I do have the people’s names and…it’s still the current priest now ‘cause he was brand new then I think. And ah…I can’t remember the lady’s name…but...

CZ Well right now, so, all it is…parking bumpers. One’s stone and one’s asphalt (concrete).

AH Right, but…well…she said where they believe it is and I think…cause I kind of have a pin dropped on a map. Where the two are. On a Google map…but...

CZ I’ve got a picture of it on my phone.

AH Yeah, yeah. So. There’s basically trees back there, she said it wouldn’t obstruct other…we could probably build it higher? High enough. Because it wasn’t going to obstruct other graves. You know. And I do think there’s a mausoleum of some sort there. Somebody’s got a little outbuilding or some sort of something for the family...

CZ Back…not close. Yeah.
AH    Right, right. So, I’m like, well that’s high, but it doesn’t work that way apparently. HaHa!

But I’m all for it!

CZ    Well we need to talk about this further then so, I’m gonna...

End of interview

This is a project granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain
Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Toni Gies and Shirley Barrick
Interview
Shirley Barrick (SB) and Toni Gies (TG) at Shirley’s home, Lewistown, Montana
By Candi Zion (CZ)
2-23-2021

CZ  Okay, we’re here today with Shirley and Toni, if you want to give me your name, date of birth, and where you live?

SB  Okay, I’m Shirley Barrick. And I was born December 1, 1941 in Lewistown. And I was raised on a ranch 12 miles east of town. And so, I’ve lived in Fergus County all my life. And I went to the Skaggs School, a 1 room rural school for the first 8 grades and then I came into St Leos’s to high school. Went to the College of Great Falls and taught for 3 plus years and had my first child so I became a stay at home mom and raised my kids. And then in 1983 I became the Fergus County Superintendent of Schools and I was there for 24 years. And now I’m retired just enjoying life.

CZ  And you’re also on the board to do with history…

SB  Well I’m on the Museum Board, I’m Chairman of the Lewistown Historic Resource Commission, and we just published that book on Lewistown. And I’m president of about 3 or 4 other organizations too, so…

CZ  Haha!!! Okay, thanks, how about you Toni?

TG  I’m Toni Gies. I was born in Missoula in 1944. But I came to Lewistown when I was about 2 and lived at 602 West Virginia Street for at least 20 years. And...I went to St Leo’s grade school, Fergus High School and graduated from the University of Montana and I became an Art
and Fact teacher, it was Home Ec. then. So, then I taught in Billings, and Helena at Mountain View School for girls. And umh...Roundup, and Wolf Point. And then I retired and moved back to Lewistown. Where I live now.

CZ And you’re involved in some boards too.

TG I’m on the Historic Resource Commission and the Museum Board. And when I came back here I ran the Central Montana Youth Mentoring for 3 years, maybe 2 and a half, I can’t remember. And umh...I work at the Community Cupboard. I don’t really do as much as I used to. I worked on the book with Shirley and Nancy (Watts) and the Resource people.

CZ The name of the book is?

TG **Lewistown Memories.**

CZ **Lewistown Memories.** Okay. So...Toni...do you know anything about the schools here in Lewistown where the Metis went to school?

TG Well, when I went to St. Leo’s there were Granots, and LaFountains, and probably more. But I really didn’t know any of them except Johnny Granot. And the older Granot boys were my older brother Karl and Paul’s ages I believe. So, I didn’t...you know...knew who they were, and I knew the Granots in church of course. And Mr. Granot was, I never knew the parents except who Mrs. Granot was. Downtown, probably no, seeing him. But Mrs. Granot was the chaperone at our 8th grade graduation when we went to Warm Springs. I just remember thinking how I could not have had this woman in my life ‘cause she was so wonderful! As a little kid I fell in love with Mrs. Granot! But then I never saw her again, you know. Except in
church. So...in my part of life...of course you know, I’d only lived on my block and had about a 4 block radius of friends and that was it. And I was a little girl amongst a bunch of boys so I was pretty sheltered, I think as I look back. And I wasn’t much aware of Native Americans except that...they were sort of invisible, even in school. Yeah.

CZ So Shirley, you were involved in the, as Superintendent for over 20 years...oh and the book by the way is Lewistown Memories, There is Only One Lewistown, the Heart of Central Montana. But you’ve been the Superintendent for years. What was your experience with the Metis, and then others living in this area?

SB See, when I went into office in 1983, there was the 8 one room rural schools. And, of course the Class C schools and the Lewistown school district. And I don’t...there wasn’t any Native Americans in any of our schools and 4, of the 8 of the schools, 4 were Hutterite Schools that just had the Hutterite kids. And ahm...the Maiden School had kids whose parents were up there with the Bible College. And at the Brooks School, there were just kids from all the ranch families from around. And the Cottonwood School was all from the ranch kids around. And, ah...the Hilger School...you know, just ranch kids and people that lived there in the Hilger School...and there may have been 1 family that I never had...I never had dealt with any of them, you know, any of the families directly. Or...I was too late being there when there were some of those families (Metis), early families that lived around the area.

TG How about St. Leo’s?

SB See, and Tom LaTray...I went to...high school with Tom LaTray and he was the jock of the basketball team and football team. And his father worked at the Civic Center and was very
well respected. And ah...he died several years ago of a heart attack. And so that’s my only dealings with any Metis people. Would have been with Tom in my high school graduating class.

CZ So, you don’t have a lot of experiences, personally, but you have observations of people in the area, living here it sounded like.

SB And then when I was growing up, we had at least 1 Doney (actually Granot) that helped stack bales in the summer time, and Gene Jackson who was also Native American, and he lives in Geraldine now. He was there and so that’s the most experience I’ve had with young kids growing up. And my observations were that some of the guys that you would see drunk on the street, they were just considered as “half breeds”. That I never knew them. Like I said, I grew up in a very sheltered life out on the ranch. And so, I didn’t know a lot of things that went on in Main Street Lewistown.

CZ Didn’t you tell me about somebody that was outside the bank?

SB Yeah, and then there was a man that had a leg that got shot off in some kind of an episode, and so, he used to stand there by the First National Bank with his crutches and he used to stand there a lot. And ahm...I don’t know what he did, or where he lived or, whatever. But he was there...probably high school, maybe even...he was probably there in the summer time when I was I in college. And then I don’t know what happened, ah, to him or his family. So...

CZ What were the people’s perceptions of him and other Metis?

SB Well, I think that they just figured that they were a lazy “half breed” and that he just hung out at the bank corner, and I don’t...see because I didn’t know a lot of people in
Lewistown, you know. When we did come to town, my dad did the business and we went home. But I know that conversations came up if there was anything in the paper about the fights or DUls or whatever. ‘Cause they were always referred to as “half breed”. And so…I didn’t know anything about them until the Metis name. Probably until…I started teaching school probably? And anyway, the name came up and I thought, oh, these people did kind of have a name. But like I said, I didn’t grow up with having to deal with them and a lot of discrimination.

CZ So, Toni you told me that your father owned a bar, bars in town?

TG Yeah, my father owned the Glacier, the Midway, and then my brother Karl owned the Majestic. And my dad and ahm…maybe Johnny Hruska, one of the Hruska’s, built the Bar 19 and before that he owned the Willow Inn which is out there where the old refinery used to be. Somewhere out there. Umh…that was his first place. The Willow Inn and it burned down. Umh…as a kid the Midway had the front door clientele and the back door clientele. And I don’t ever remember Native Americans much. But…Sam Swan worked as a hired hand out at the ranch and he worked with my brother Paul. So, Paul knew Sam pretty well. And I just remember Sam as kind of a quiet man who really seemed to know a lot about everything. You know as a little kid we thought he did anyway. And ah…you know he was a good worker. So that, that would be the person that worked for us, but…I don’t remember Native Americans in the Midway, now the Glacier and the Majestic were places I didn’t go. Even though my family owned ‘em, I wasn’t really allowed to go to those places much. And in school I don’t remember much about Native American kids, but I think…the Granots I was pretty aware of them. And there were older Granot boys and I just remember they were pretty tough boys. But my
brother Karl knew them and he liked them a lot. And ah then...John Granot was in my class or the class right behind me. A really nice, wonderful kid. Really quite kid. And ah...I just don’t...if you weren’t socially around town you never ran into Native American much. Kinda says a lot about it, doesn’t it? Ah...even in stores. So...

CZ What do you think that says then?

TG Well that says they were apart from us. Which is a sad thing. I don’t remember in Catholic School they being treated differently, but then Catholic School was pretty regimented. You were kinda watching your own back most of the time really, I mean the kids were wonderful but the nuns were really strict so you were...you know you were just towing the line most of the time. So, I don’t remember much about any of that in school. I will say there was a guy, and it would be interesting who he was, when I was a little kid at Christmas time, at St. Leo’s. One of the Native American guys would show up in his whole outfit. Man, he looked beautiful. He had the big headdress and everything. And I often thought as a little kid, you know it took a lot of guts to do that. Even as a little kid I realized. But I thought he’s just honoring God and who he is. Even as a kid we were all in awe of this guy who showed up occasionally in full regalia and I have no idea who it was. And there’s the sad thing, none of us talked to him. ‘Course you didn’t talk in church in those days to anybody even afterwards. So, ah...except your own family. So, I don’t even know who that guy was.

CZ Hum. When you were talking about your dad and the bar, and your grandfather, and maybe the sentiment was a little prejudiced towards the Indians? What do you remember there?
TG  I know my grandfather...he was awf...he said he wouldn’t even walk across the street to see and Indian. Ha. Once I remember him saying that. And I have no idea why he said that. I just remember at the time it seemed kind of strange. And ahm...I don’t remember my dad saying much about any of the...Native Americans in town. But...he really...he really did not like...he didn’t like anybody of color. And said so often. So, he was pretty, he was terribly prejudiced. And my mother was just the opposite, you wouldn’t hear her say anything like that in her house or you wouldn’t be fed I don’t think. So ahm...you know, she had a different take on the whole thing. But...I don’t really remember any of those kids...you don’t remember any of those kids at birthday parties or anything. Power Mercantile was a big place to go in town, But I don’t remember ever seeing Native Americans there. And like Shirley said, you saw the usual “suspects” in front of the bank and that’s about it.

CZ  So...where were they going to school then? That’s what you said earlier, they weren’t in a lot of the schools. Where were they going to school?

SB  Well I’m sure that they were...the Garfield School had a lot. Because so many of them lived there in Buckskin Flats and then some of them lived down there...down there, kinda in that coulee below Garfield School, so I think most of the kids went to public school.

CZ  Is Garfield here in Lewistown?

SB  Unhun. And so that would have been the school. And then, I just got to thinking, there ah...the Kelly family lived just down close to Boyd Creek. And their daughter, Mrs. Glidewell worked as a nurse’s aide in the hospital for I don’t know how many...and there are still some Glidewell family here in town. But anyway...she was the most hardest working person that
there was up at the hospital and my dad always said that she was the best person. The few times he was in the hospital, she was the one that should have been a nurse. Because she was such a good person at the hospital and was so conscientious and took such good care of the people. So, like I said...and I don’t know what Mr. Glidewell did. And there was Sonny and Sissy and...several down the line, but...and I think there’s still some Glidewell family living here in town. But anyway, they were a family that...everybody that was in the hospital knew Mrs. Glidewell. And I can’t tell you what her first name was (Rachel).

TG Well, that would be one kid from school I hadn’t thought of, and I don’t remember in high school so she maybe went to public school. Roxanne Glidewell. And she as a really pretty girl. And they lived at my house, 701 5th Avenue South, Glidewells, but I don’t know if that was her family or not. For a while.

CZ Lived there at your house?

TG Yeah. Before I lived there. Rented it maybe.

CZ Umhum.

TG A bunch of Glidewells. But she lived...I thought when I was a kid, the only place I saw her, now that I think of it, is at the roller skating rink. Out on...where was that? (phone rings) That was out on where the Reed and Bowles...out there at the...

CZ Oh, it was out towards there? The poor farm, out in that area?

TG Yeah. Somewhere out there. The skating rink was out there. And it was an indoor roller skating rink. And ahm...later on she lived in Billings because when I worked for the Girl
Scouts of America I ah... I dated this really nice kid that I met through the Girl Scouts from the base. There, the Air Force base and ahm...I think I saw her at a party I went to once there.

That’s the only time I remember running into her after school. But she knew all about me and I knew very little about her, isn’t that interesting? Ah...

CZ  So, you said the Girl Scouts...you were involved with them for a long time...

TG  I was a professional Girl Scout. When I got out of college, I worked for the Girl Scouts of America and I lived in Billings.

CZ  So, did you work with them here in Lewistown as a Girl Scout leader?

TG  No, because that wasn’t part of our Council. They were the Great Falls Council.

CZ  I gotcha. Okay.

TG  So I...the only time...and they wouldn’t be Metis. I had a whole troop that came up from, I think Lodge Grass, one year to our camp in Red Lodge. Boy, they were wonderful kids. And ah...they wanted to do something for me at camp, I remember that, because they liked me so well. And I said, “Well, I just, I didn’t need presents.” And ahm...but I said, “You know, I’ve always wanted my own teepee even as a little kid I wanted a teepee.” And later on in life I still have my teepee. I have a big teepee that we used to put up in our yard in Billings for the whole summer and leave it up. And sleep in it in the summer. But those little girls made me a teepee out of scraps of tenting that they found, probably in our storage at the camp, it was called Timbercrest Scout Camp. And they made this little teepee and put it up for me in front of my cabin. I remember, gosh it was a cool thing, and so I took that teepee and I put it up at the
entrance of camp the 3 summers that I was up there. Yeah. They, they were wonderful kids and they sure had a good time at camp. And I think they only came 2 summers and whoever their leader was went by the wayside and they didn’t come again. Yeah.

CZ Hum. Well, we were talking again about Metis people that lived in this area in settlements. Where were people living? You talked about Glidewells lived in the house before you did. Where were they living?

SB Well, the Glidewell family lived down on East Montana Street and when you go up to the Catholic Cemetery (Calvary) if you look off to the right, the barn, and Boyd Creek ...‘cause I think they had a few little livestock and a few things, but anyway that’s where they lived. Tom LaTray was in high school with me, they had a little house down on Pine Street in between 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} or somewhere, and there ah...I know the Glidewell (actually LaFountain) family lived over on Evelyn Street on the corner of 4\textsuperscript{th} and I think they’re still...In fact the LaFountain family still lives there. ‘Cause they bought...ah...my aunt and uncle’s house, yeah, that lived next door and then they lived next door to...it’d be my husband’s aunt and uncle. They’re on Evelyn and 4\textsuperscript{th}, and they kinda became friends. And then like I said, I think some of that family still live in the house. Ah...

TG So, didn’t the Granots live like on 3\textsuperscript{rd} Avenue South?

SB I don’t know where the Granots lived.

TG Right down there below where I live now. 7\textsuperscript{th}, so you’d go backwards up, I think right along the creeks. Maybe not that far, maybe 4\textsuperscript{th} Avenue.
SB Oh! And I think that some of the families used to live, kinda down behind where Searle Greenhouse is, kinda behind where the kitty litter place is now? Kinda back in there.

TG Yeah, right. And I don’t remember who lived there but somebody did, I can’t remember who.

SB Yes, I think there were several of those (Metis) families living there. But they really cleaned up that area. But at one time there were lots of little houses and little shacks and stuff there.

CZ And didn’t you say too, that east of town there were some places?

SB Well, see and up Boyd Creek were the EARLY ones. Were all up there...Half Breed Creek, Corbley Road, up on...Limekiln. See that whole part towards Ruby Gulch? See that’s kinda all where they settled and I think some of them all filed homesteads in there? And so that’s why that cemetery was up in there someplace. ‘Cause that’s where they all kinda settled.

CZ Where Corblys, Corbly bought it and had it moved out...the bodies (to the Calvary Cemetery).

SB Yeah, and I don’t know what the real history of that is. And I know that Jim Wilkins who was an early day attorney here, his family...he was raised up in there, so, somewhere the Wilkins’s bought the land in there, and I don’t know what that history is. But the granddaughter would probably know the history and I think Bill Spoja owned some land up in there probably at one time. Some...
TG Yeah, we forgot about Bill. You should be interviewing him. He’d be a really good resource for all of this.

CZ K.

SB Yes, because he’d have gone to St. Leo’s here. You know.

TG And he’s older than me. He’d played with a lot of those kids maybe and stuff. I bet he did.

CZ Unhum.

SB Yeah, so he’d be a REALLY good source because, where he lived, down there just east of town. Just past the BLM. And so, see that whole area in there was all those early Metis people. So, he would probably be a wonderful source because I’m trying to think of people that are older than Toni and I! HaHA!!!

TG That are older than us and still alive, yeah.

SB That…were kind of...Native people that lived here, you know the white people but, they would have had associations with those...

CZ With the older...

SB Yeah, with those older Metis people.

TG And I know Jill Weizer told me, you could look up the address, she lived down there...she lived in a Janeaux house. She researched it and Janeaux’s had lived there. And it would be...

CZ Yeah, I know where the house is.
TG Yeah, that was a Janeaux house.

CZ Yeah, so, what about Buckskin Flats (Metis settlement)? Where was it?

TG Back behind there across the creek wasn’t it?

SB Well, and all that area, kinda where Sims Park is? And all that down there around the creek. But I think that part of Symmes Park was all Buckskin Flats. And a lot of that land...

TG It was a lot wetter there when we were kids. You remember that?

SB See Bill would know all this.

TG Yeah, Bill would know all this.

CZ But I want to talk to you guys right now. So, tell me about Buckskin Flats more, did that go all the way then to the creek across from the Fairgrounds?

TG Yep.

CZ It did.

TG On and off, yeah.

CZ Are there still some old shacks down there, ‘cause you can see there’s still some smaller buildings, I wonder if those were some of the old Metis places down in there still.

TG Probably are.

SB Well, down there on the way to the Fairgrounds on the right hand side...see when I was in high school, that was kind of the “jungle” down there. And...
CZ  The “jungle” being, what did that mean?

SB  Well…the winos...

TG  But there were some nice houses tucked back in there, right along…2 or 3 like Beets Taylor lived in there. Maybe that was his parent’s house. There’s 2 or 3 real old houses there. I think I’d go knock on their door and ask what they know about the history of the place. Because those would be Metis people down there I believe.

SB  Well, when I was in high school, we were forbidden to go down there because that was where the wi…the homeless people lived. In some of those shacks. But I don’t know if they were Native Americans or...

TG  I think they were a conglomerate of everything down there. But those 3 old houses there (phone rings) that have been in there forever.

CZ  Yeah.

TG  And maybe one of (phone rings) kids still lives there.

CZ  I kinda wondered about that little gas station affair.

TG  That was…God, who was that guy…I even worked out there once.

CZ  Was there, was…Metis owned that, or?

TG  No that was ahm...

CZ  Somebody else then?
Maybe Shirley will remember. Coopers! Was that called Coopers? She might remember (Cooper Oil).

So Shirley, you were talkin’ too about the caves. Tell us about the caves you had heard of.

Well, my mom, or my dad was the Clerk of the School District for 30 years. The little 1 room rural school they went to and up Ruby Gulch was part of that school district. And so, they used to have to go up and take the school census for all the kids. And they didn’t, those kids that lived there did not go to Skaggs School because you had to been over the Judith Mountains. They came in here to town and the Skaggs School had to pay tuition for the kids to come in to the Lewistown School District. So...and I know that this was when I was in college, so somewhere between 1960 and 1964, and maybe even after that. My mom and dad would drive up Ruby Gulch, park, and then they’d have to walk up this trail. And there was a LaFountain family that lived there and they would have to take school census and about every year there was a baby, a new baby. And ah...my mom could see inside where they’d...had carved out the dirt and there was kind of like layers apparently, where the kids slept. And there was no electricity. You know. Or heat up there. I know that there was some kind of a camp stove or something out front apparently, where they cooked. And when I was in high school, I know he came to town and they were selling kindlin’. And ah, like I said it was just too bad that my parents aren’t here because mother could describe this cave a lot. And she was always very curious and always wanted to go in further to take a better look at this. But like I said, this was in the 1960s. Then eventually they moved to town. And then they were no longer on the census. And I don’t know how many years they were there but I can, I’ll certainly do some
research. But I know it was several years that they lived up there. And ahm...I know nothing about the mother but we could find that all out from the school census what her maiden name was and all that kind of thing. And so...I will do some research about that family. But, anyway, like I said, this was as late as the 1960s when they were doing the census, and like I said, I don’t know how they moved there and I don’t know how my folks knew that the family even lived there*. Except they were probably told one time when they stopped to...the family...where they parked their car...

TG  Where did they park their car? Down on the Gulch road somewhere (Fairburn’s yard)?

SB  Well, there was a family that lived there and I’m trying to think of their name (Fairburn). One of the girl’s names was Betty Lou, and Vic...anyway they parked and went. And I don’t know who owns the land. I don’t know any of those things. But I’ve been gonna go up there and search this out all these years and I haven’t done that but I...still hope that I can do that while...I’ve always been curious of how they were or if they were just camped up there or had permission from that family, I don’t know.

CZ  Yeah. Well, Shirley it sounds like we’ve got some research to do and some more people to talk to so, we should probably call this interview good and we’ll take a look at these books, too. Thank you, thank you ladies!

*Shirley checked the school census records and discovered Frances and Barbara LaFountain lived in the cave with their children from 1958 to 1960/61. They moved to Lewistown and are reported living there in 1961-62. They had 9 children: Ernest- 13, Gerald- 12, Lester- 6, Mary-16, Melvin 16, Susan 8, Thomas- 4, Lawrence- 9 months, and Clinton born in 1960.
One of the children, Ernest, talks about living in the mountains during a 2001 interview for the Veteran’s History Project collection #AFC/2001/001/111441. He doesn’t talk about the cave, but he does say that he and his dad built a cabin in the mountains, living there for three years. He talks about living off the land, having a big garden and learning to hunt, killing only dry does. Ernie had a tenth grade education and was working in the lumber industry when he enlisted, serving three tours in Vietnam as a combat engineer operating heavy equipment. He and four of the seven brothers served in Vietnam. He talked about fighting the “Four Strikes of Lewistown”: being a “half breed”, wearing thick glasses, being Roman Catholic and poorer than poor.

This is a project granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Karin Ludeman and picture of 16 year old Katie Abbott; Martha Boyce and picture of Karin and Martha’s father, William Swanson Jr.

CZ   Okay. Today we are here with Martha and Karin. If you would tell me your names, date of birth, place of birth and occupations.

KL   I’m Karin Swanson Ludeman and my date of birth is March 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1945. And I was born in St. Joseph’s Hospital in Lewistown. (After graduating from Fergus High School, I attended Montana State College, MSU, for one year then married and began my working career) And I’m now retired for 1 year after working in several different medical offices in Bozeman, Montana. I’ve worked every job in the front office including being office manager. I (have) certification as a professional office manager. And I’ve also done medical transcription for many different specialties and usually did that as a sideline at my home.

CZ   Retired now?

KL   Retired now.

CZ   Couple years.

KL   One year. One year.

CZ   Thank you!

KL   Yes!
I'm Martha Swanson Boyce. I went to school at...I was born March 16th, 1948 at St. Joseph's Hospital in Lewistown. I went to school at a country school, Cheadle (ran as a summer school from March to November because of heavy snow in winter), for the primary grades and went to Lewistown Junior High in the 8th grade. Fergus High for my high school years, graduated in 1965, went on to Billings Business College to become a medical secretary. From there I was married...my husband and I put together a machine shop because he was a welder/machinist. Went through a divorce, was a single mom for 10 years with 2 daughters, Brenda and Bridgette. And...I put together a secretarial service during those years on which I did medical transcription and bookkeeping. And from there I remarried to Gene Chapel and moved to Fort Benton. I was the medical record director at the Fort Benton Hospital and consultant in Big Sandy. And Gene and I did the Choteau County Fair for 9 years. He passed away in 1997, I moved back to Lewistown, met my husband Dee Boyce, and he was a rancher. After that, I worked at the Central Montana Medical Center as a transcriptionist/decoder and helped him on the ranch...on...October 26, 2020, he passed away, so, now I'm just single, but I still live close to Cheadle which is my home. Thank you.

So, you’re...you have a connection between the Dee Boyce...and the place that you own right across the road too. So, you were neighbors then.

Yes. He always teased that I jumped the cattle guard.

Everyone laughs
CZ: Yeah! So, tell me ladies, about your connection to Granville Stuart and Teddy Blue Abbott and then your great, great grandma? Great, great...the Shoshone woman.

KL: Okay. This is Karin, Granville Stuart was our great, great grandfather. And we are very grateful for the journals he and his brother James kept because that is how we are aware of a lot of things besides other documentation and letters that other early pioneers in the Montana Territory, Montana kept. And records that have been kept. I’ve always admired the fact that as a white man who married a full blood Shoshone Indian young lady, that he didn’t abandon his family. He...honored that, however was proper in those days, in the 1800s. And...they had a large family together. They lived in Deer Lodge, they lived in Virginia City, they lived in Helena, and then he moved his family to the DHS Ranch in central Montana. And...that is where they lived until after her death. And then...

CZ: And she died at 97?

KL: She died, Awbonnie (Tootanka), at 42.

CZ: Oh, oh!!

KL: After their last child was born. About 6 weeks after the last child was born.

CZ: I’m jumping generations.

KL: Yes. And, our grandm...our GREAT grandmother, was their oldest daughter. Her name was Mary Stuart Abbott, and I need to correct that. She was not their oldest daughter. She was their 3rd child. There was a Kate Abbott, and a Thomas, or Kate Stuart, excuse me. And Thomas Stuart and then our (great) grandmother Mary Stuart Abbott. And she married Teddy
Blue Abbott or Edward Abbott...he is not the author but the source of the information that Helen Huntington Smith used to write the book, *We Pointed Them North*. And their oldest daughter, Kate, is our grandmother.

CZ So, tell me a little bit about Granville Stuart’s wife then. She was Shoshone. Where did he meet her at?

KL She was a sister to Fred Burr’s wife and she was living with Fred Burr and her sister in Deer Lodge, Montana. And that’s where he met her and married her there. And there’s a conflict of opinion about age. Some say she may have only been 12. Some say she was 15. I’d like to believe she was 15 because he was 27.

CZ And she died when she was in her 40s?

KL 42.

CZ Do you know, what did she die of again?

KL It probably was complication from childbirth. I have found documentation of 11 children. And 3 of them died very early...the others ranged in age (from early 20s)...to Irene, who...was...the baby...Irene and Harry for sure were sent (to the orphanage at St. Ignatius)...I don’t know about any of the (other younger)...(this happened) after Granville Stuart married his second wife (Allis Belle Brown Fairfield).

CZ She...there was no love loss there between her and the children?

KL That’s our understanding...Granville Stuart passed away in 1918...and his second wife was a widow until she passed away in the late 40s. And we understand that she...reestablished
a relationship with some of her step kids (and step grandkids) when she was a much older lady. But we really don’t know much about that.

CZ Interesting. So, Teddy Blue Abbott. How did he come into the picture? You told me some really good stories about him in Miles City too.

KL Yes. He arrived in Montana following a trail herd from Texas. And…if you read in his book, We Pointed Them North, that can’t have been easy.

MB No, he made 2 trips. He came up from Texas twice.

KL And where they came into Montana was Miles City, eastern Montana country. And when he stayed, you heard about these various cattle outfits and who was good to work for and who wasn’t and that sort of thing, and the DHS had a very good reputation. And so, a lot of the cowboys would work the other ranches until they could find a way to get hired on at the DHS, which he finally did. And he knew the brands of the cattle that were on the ranges, in the 1800s, 1880s, and that sort of thing and eventually became a representative (these men were called “reps”) for the DHS when they rounded up all the cattle in the fall and separated them out for the various ranches before shipping. And, of course there was the reputation of the Granville Stuart daughters who were so beautiful, and so well dressed. And he said if there was any inkling, if the cowboys had ANY inkling at all, that those girls were gonna be around, they wore their white shirts, even for branding.

CZ Really! Haha!
KL  Yes. To impress the girls. And he said he always had an eye for Mary. But the mother, Awbonnie, the Indian mother believed that the oldest daughter should have a beau and get married first. So, she was against Teddy Blue seeing Mary, and so they kinda had to sneak around about a little bit. Because, he said, “I wasn’t interested in the older daughter”. He only had eyes for Mary. Well, then you know, as things progressed, Mary kinda told him she wasn’t going to see him anymore because he drank and smoked. And chewed. And... he quit. She meant that much to him that he quit. And then the mother died. After the last baby was born. So, they had to wait, ‘cause they did want to get married, but they had to wait because the mourning period was proper and to be honored, and when they thought that they could start setting their wedding date, the older sister died of tuberculosis. So, they had to wait yet again for a while. And her dad actually bought her red velvet, a length of red velvet fabric from Helena. He used to go to Helena all the time because that’s where the Territorial legislature met and everything. And they made her wedding dress out of red velvet...

MB  She was buried in that dress.

KL  Yes, and she was buried in that dress. And the buttons...I wish we had one of those buttons, I really do. It had buttons down the front and it is said that they were Italian. I don’t know whether they were ceramic or whether they were...we don’t know. But anyway, yes, she was buried in the dress. And her youngest daughter Mary who she had lived with for many, many years had said that we’re just gonna bury mom in her dress, it still fits, and there’s not going to be any fight in the family about who gets it.

CZ  Did you want to add anything to that story?
MB I got to know my great grandmother Mary very well. She attended my high school graduation and joined us afterward at home. I have a picture with her and I’m very proud of that. She gave me a pair of earrings that her father, Granville Stuart had made for her in Helena. Those are very precious to me. She was a wonderful woman.

CZ And they were gold, too, weren’t they?

MB Yes, they were. They were gold.

CZ And cloisonne.

MB Yes.

KL Umhum.

CZ I’m interested in the fact that he married a Native woman, and then the book (Forty Years on the Frontier, a book of James and Granville’s journals)...the forward piece talks about how at one time he considered divorcing her because he had come up in society and was involved in the Legislature and big time Montana. You’re shaking your head. Tell me about it.

KL Well...when he and James and Reece Anderson first came into what is, what became Montana Territory and then the state of Montana, it was Washington Territory. And then it got broken up and it was Idaho Territory. So, they actually came into what was called Idaho Territory. And it was very acceptable in the, in the Beaverhead Valley, Dillon area, and all that area, and Bannack and Virginia City, Deer Lodge; the Indian bands moved through there a lot. And culturally, the Indian tribes were okay with trading their daughters for skins and horses and whatever’s, and they probably weren’t official marriages, but they just started living together
kind of thing. And things wouldn’t go right and the girls would go back to their tribes...but some of the men did marry Indian woman that they stayed with. And I think Granville was fine with that for a very long time. James, his brother seems to have had a lot of different Indian women live with him over many years. But a lot of the white men would have abandoned their families or the families would go back to and rejoin their tribe, their Indian families. But Granville and she always stayed together. And even though he kinda felt that he was being held back in society because of his Indian family and the mixed blood children, he didn’t leave them. I doubt that she went to any function ever with him. No matter where they lived. I, I just don’t think she was part of the scene. He was a married single man...whenever he went to anything. And after they moved to the DHS Ranch, I’ve never seen any mention of him taking the family to Helena, when he went, and he would be gone sometimes weeks at a time.

MB Because it was horseback. So, he would leave the ranch here and go to Helena and she stayed at the ranch and took care of the children.

CZ ‘Cause she had a lot of them.

MB She had a lot of them.

KL And Reece Anderson and his family were there and Reece’s wife was also Native American and they had a family. So, the two women were there, and of course there were ranch hands around, and that sort of thing. And yeah, they took care of those things. It’s my understanding that Awbonnie had been trained very well. Maybe when she was in Deer Lodge. She learned how to do laundry, ironing, apparently cook and all that sort of thing even as a young girl. And it was said that Granville Stuart had a clean white, ironed, starched shirt every
single day. And she had a white table cloth on the table. But if company came, even to the DHS Ranch, seldom did they ever see her. She just stayed out of sight.

CZ Were they actually married?

Overtalk

KL Well, the journal says, James wrote that particular thing, he says that, “Granville was married today.” So, whatever that means...and it was from that time forward they were together.

CZ So tell me about...Teddy Blue then married the daughter. Did he experience the same kind of feelings or do you know?

KL His family back in Nebraska was very unhappy. Unhappy that he had married a mixed blood somebody. And I don’t know that she ever went with him.

MB I never heard that she did.

KL I never did either. He did go back to Nebraska. I don’t know how many times. I don’t think very much after he was married. But it was my understanding he went by himself. Now I’m wondering if he took grandma Kate. Because she got acquainted with the cousins...

MB But I never heard her say that she got to travel. I thought maybe it was through letters.

KL And that’s entirely possible...so, there was friction there too. His family was not happy about it.

CZ And you knew Mary, you had a chance to know her. What kind of person was she?
Oh, she was a sweetheart. She was a tiny little lady and at the time we knew her she had grey hair...her daughter Mary, the youngest of the family that she lived with always...braided her mother’s hair and it was back into a bun. Is that how you remember it Marth?

Umhum.

And she was very soft spoken, very gentle. Always so pleased to see you but very reserved. I mean you weren’t going to get hugged or anything like that. Always wore a dress and an apron.

Did she ever teach you any family recipes, any bannock, anything like that passed down to the family?

We have written, well I have one written recipe and it’s how to make mincemeat?

And that’s from your grandmother?

Umhum.

Okay, tell us!

Oh! Well...you could use venison. Or you could use beef. Cooked. And then it was chopped up or ground up, and lots of apples, and apple juice and somehow or another they had access to dried fruit. So...it got shipped in from somewhere. And so, it was dried apples, it was currants, it was raisins, umh, it was apple cider that probably was homemade.

Probably some chokecherries?
KL Could have been, I don’t know about the chokecherries. But then it was all cooked together. But they put whisky or brandy in it. And it was kept in a crock in a cool place. And they needed the alcohol in it to keep it from spoiling. Had sugar in it (cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves). And they kept it in a cool place, like a 5 gallon crock. I mean it’s a huge amount, and, oh! It had suet in it as well so there is some fat. And...and then they just took what they needed out of the crock at the time to make a pie or...

MB Cookies.

KL Cookies. Yeah, yeah. And I still make it.

CZ That’s wonderful.

KL I don’t’ keep it in a crock though. Haha!! I do can it or freeze it...

CZ So that would be a generational recipe of how many generations?

MB Great grandma, grandma, mom learned how from grandma. And that’s four.

KL Four that we know of. Yeah...

CZ Yeah, that’s great. Did you know, was she reserved, did she tell you any stories about her family or about her (mom’s) marriage to Granville, what her past experiences were. Did she ever talk about that or was she pretty reserved?

KL You know we were young.

MB And did not ask enough questions.

KL We didn’t ask, because I think she would have told us.
I think she would have shared, but were just, you know, graduating out of high school and didn’t think to ask a bunch of questions about the family history.

When she spoke of her dad, Granville Stuart...her voice was always soft and she’d say, “Father.” She called him “Father.” Where you know, most of us were “dad” or “papa” or whatever. She called him “Father.” It was very respectful and...her voice would get really soft. Like she really thought the world of him.

Did she speak any of the Shoshone language?

I don’t think so.

I never heard it if she did. If she knew it, I never heard it.

Was she educated then? You talked about Granville’s library.

He, no matter where they lived, he tried to make sure there was a school for children. Like when they were on the DHS Ranch, he provided a school and a teacher. For all the kids that were in the area that could come there.

Really!

And he, he truly believed in education for the children.

Is that school still standing?

Ohm...I would think not ’cause I would bet it was right there next to the ranch.

Yeah, it would have been the Ft. Maginnis...
KL  And see that’s how he...that’s how he...originally met his second wife. Well, she was a teacher that came there and taught the kids.

CZ  At that school?

KL  Umhum.

CZ  Really!

KL  And she went on her way...we don’t know anything about any other teachers. We don’t know where she went. Whether she went to eastern Montana, we don’t know. But then after Awbonnie passed away, somehow or another he got back in touch with her. So...what my dilemma is, is she knew these children were half Indian. ‘Cause she had taught them. So, why after she married him, would she not want to have anything to do with them and send them to an orphanage.

CZ  I don’t know.

KL  And he allowed it!

CZ  Hummmm...so they grew up in an orphanage basically at St. Ignatius?

KL  They DIED there.

CZ  They died there? How old were they when they died?

KL  We don’t know for sure.

CZ  They were kids though?

KL  Yeah.
They got tuberculosis.

Ohhhhh!!! Man, yeah. Oh....Hum...

Tuberculosis was prevalent. And...it doesn’t say in anything about Edward Stuart who was one of our great grandmother’s brothers. He died when he was only like 22 or 23. And it just says he died suddenly. And I have never been able to find out what he died from. But one of her sisters, well Katie, the older sister died of tuberculosis. That’s documented. And then her younger sister, Lizzie, who lived with them (Mary and Teddy Blue) also for a little while...started working for a ranch family in the Miles City area. And she died of tuberculosis when she was 30. So, it was prevalent.

And I’ve wondered if more prevalent to the Native Americans than the whites.

Possibly.

I don’t know.

You know, speaking of Native Americans I’m thinking of what I read in Granville’s book about the Metis here, when they (Granville Stuart, Reece Anderson, etc.) made that big circle and came around this area, and he went down to the camp of Metis and said, “Where can I go find lumber, hay, land for my livestock, and water?” ‘Cause that’s what he’d been lookin’ for. And the Metis said, “I’ll take you over here and show ya.” So, do you know about that story?

Nothing more than that.

What’s in the book...

Yeah.
Mary and Teddy Blue Abbott

Ludeman Collection and We Pointed Then North

CZ: To me that’s really interesting that the Metis showed him where the ranch (could be) was, where he needed to put his roots down, he planted there, and then as I read further...part of, or some of the people that he strangled (by) the Stuart Stranglers, were Metis.

KL: Well...and if they were rustlers, they were gonna get hung!

CZ: They got hung.
Yep, they got hung up! So...you’ve got the good and the bad going there too...

And he talks about the Metis that helped him, that showed...the nice camp of people and how clean they had everything set up and very well organized, and then he talked about the Canadian Crees in a different tone. Which they’re both Canadian Crees yet this was different. He was speaking of different people that were coming down from Canada and stealing his horses and his stock and taking them BACK to Canada. So, I know they were different, they might have been related to the folks here, but they were different then the Metis here.

They were different...

Because these were people that were settled and were becoming established.

And don’t you think part of those that were coming out of Canada were part of Louis Riel, part of...

...Yeah...he was kind of a rogue. And trying to change politics and...yeah...government control and that sort of thing. And so, you wonder who he had rounded up, and they were needing supplies, and they were needing horses, and they were whatever. So, they were coming across the border and...

And it could be a lot of the same people were related to these folks here...

Oh, they probably were!
CZ the Metis here signed petitions for land grants with Riel so there is definitely a connection but we can’t find just where...

KL And who it is...

CZ Or who they were (stealing horses and stock).

KL Yeah.

CZ Did you ever hear any stories about the Stuart Stranglers or...that’s a fascinating history.

KL We don’t really...I didn’t.

MB The only story I heard when we’d drive to Ft. Maginnis, dad would say, “I think that’s the tree they hung ‘em from.”

KL Yeah.

CZ Really!

KL Yeah. It was right along Ford’s Creek. Yes, that’s true he did...

CZ Hunh! Which is part of the ranch!

KL ...Oh yeah!

MB Yeah.

KL It was...the ranch was east of...I want to say east of Ft. Maginnis itself, and this tree would have been between the ranch and the fort. Yeah. Right along Ford’s Creek.
CZ So, I want to ask, we’ve got few minutes left, about prejudice that YOU might have experienced growing up. Tell me about your life as part Native, in other people’s eyes.

KL Oh gosh...It was...to me it was an unspoken thing. But it was kinda like when we’d go to Lewistown. And I don’t know why mom and dad chose what they did, or what had been said to them that they made these choices, but we would go to town and...we ate at the restaurants that were more on the east end of Main Street in Lewistown. And we shopped at the stores that were around the east end. And I can remember...well, we would go to Penny’s and Woolworth’s. And that was about half way up Main Street. And it seemed like mom never went shopping at the stores that were to the west of there. And we never ate in the Gem Café because that’s where the business owners ate. And it was a little more uptown kind of thing. And yet that’s where the Greyhound Bus came to. And...we went to Montgomery Ward, and we went to the frozen meat lockers at the Creamery, and that sort of thing. But it was kinda like, being careful not to rub elbows with people that you thought were higher in society? And yet it was an unspoken thing. Didn’t you feel like that?

MB Right. I guess I always felt it was because our dad was a coal miner. And mom was a housewife. And so, she maybe felt that she didn’t have their level of money and did not know those people. Where...where she went, everyone knew her by name and they were happy to see her. I think it was a comfort zone for our mother.

KL Well, and our parents only had 8th grade educations. By their parent’s choices because a lot of young people their age were given the opportunity to go on to high school. But our parents weren’t given that opportunity. So, I’m sure that they felt inadequate in that way. My
dad particularly would have LOVED to go on to school and when he finished 8th grade here at Cheadle School, the teacher was qualified to teach high school. And she knew that dad was really sharp, loved to read and all that. So, she had him come back and she taught him part of freshman year of high school in our little grade school that we went to. Which I think was a real up for him. Umh...and why, why our grandparents, on both sides of the families chose not to send their kids on to high school, I don’t know.

MB      I think it was all due to finances. Because our dad, his dad was a coal miner also and our dad went to the coal mine right after he got out of the 8th grade. He was 12 or 13 and he went to the coal mine with his dad. But his younger brothers and sister went to high school and he said because he could help his parents provide the money for them to go on. And I believe it was the same with mom.

KL      Could be.

CZ      And you were saying earlier you thought your father experienced the prejudice?

MB      Yes, I do. I do. He didn’t mention it too often, but there again it was an unspoken feeling. Umh...he was very well respected by everyone. And we hear that to this day from people how well respected our dad was. But he would not put himself in a position to be with very well educated or umh, people that had more wealth.

KL      Umhum. That’s true. And because he was so well respected, he actually was invited to join the Masons here in Lewistown. Which, he was so honored to be invited but he never did it. And he said, “Well I just don’t feel like I can afford it.” Which was valid. But I think part of it
was he just didn’t know how he could handle it socially. But he would mention that once in a while. So, you knew it was an honor to him to even be thought about.

CZ Well we’re getting close to the end of our conversations, is there anything else you’d like to add about your ancestors?

KL Uhm, yes! I want to tell you about our grandma Kate, she was grandma Kate Abbott Swanson. She loved nature. And she loved to putter in her yard and her garden and she could, she would let you know when the first crocus, wild crocus came up. And yellow bell. And shooting star, and she would tell you that this was gonna happen weather wise or season wise and she could talk to the chickadees and they would come and sit on her hands.

MB And the chipmunks.

KL And the chipmunks! But not only that, she had a lot of knowledge medical wise, and she had this great big medical book and if people needed some nursing and care, they would come and get grandma.

CZ Wow!

KL And she would go and she would mend people. She would help them heal. And...like she made homemade horehound candy for sucking on for sore throats and that sort of thing. She also worked out for some of the neighboring people when they did harvest. And she would go and cook.

MB And cook.
Five generations: Mary, William, Katie, Karin, Kathy 1966

KL With the housewife at that house. And she would go to various places. And I think that is how she had some cash for herself. ‘Cause otherwise, they didn’t have any money.

MB Grandma also was a very good artist and her youngest sister Mary was a very good artist.

KL Grandma was a photographer too!

MB And grandma was also a photographer.

KL And she developed all her own black and white pictures.

MB Plus she sewed beautifully.
And she was making things out of herbs she knew had medicinal properties too, which makes you wonder if she learned that from her ancestors.

Yep, yeah.

Right. And she would always say in the wintertime, watch the trees. When they turn kind of a bluish color, the cold air is coming in. They will be a darker color when the air warms up. And if you watch the trees, that’s true.

Wow, interesting!

Yeah.

Wow, ladies, well thank you so much I’ve enjoyed this immensely! Thank you!

Well, good!

We have too, thank you!

Thank you!

This is a project granted by Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.
Today we are here with Marvin, and Marvin if you’d give me your name, where you were born, date of birth, and occupation?


What were your occupations?

Little bit a, I worked a lot of ranches and I went in the service and then I ended up working for Fergus County High School for 34 years. Retired from the Army as Sargent 1st Class. Combat Engineers.

Did you see action with that?

No. Most of mine was in peace. I made ah, two trips to Germany, one to Korea and one to Honduras. Honduras and the United States was sticking its nose in where it shouldn’t have been.

And what about ranching, what did you do on the ranches? When did you start doing that?

Real young age, ’cause I didn’t like school. I quit school, worked there in Winnett for Joe King and Sons. Worked there quite a while.
So, when did you start workin’ on the ranches? How old?

Oh well, I should have been goin’ into the first year of high school, but school was never, school wasn’t my...we spent too much time goin’ over everything, and I didn’t need that.

Did you go to Catholic School or public?

Ah, I got kicked out of Catholic School, I got...sorta been asked to leave junior high. I was just a little rascal!

What were you doin’?

Oh, everything I shouldn’t!

Tell us!

Haaaha! In Catholic School I’d always grab the football and go throw it in the creek and we’d chase it way down the creek. We come back, we were already late. What got me and Leland kicked out of there was a nun bent over to pick up the ball before it went under the bridge and Leland kicked her right in the butt. She went under the bridge, got out the other side, wringing wet and mad as a rooster or something. We was always doin’ somethin’.

Leland your brother?

Yeah, he’s dead now. He’s the one I loaned the book to (by Donna Walraven). I loaned it to him ‘cause he really wanted it when he found out I had the book. His daughter says they can’t find it.

So tell me about your working for the school district you said?
MG: Yeah. 34 years.

CZ: What did you do there?

MG: Custodian.

CZ: Where at?

MG: Fergus High School in Lewistown.

CZ: That’s interesting that you didn’t really like school but then went back to school!

MG: I liked working but I didn’t like...yeah but, (in reference to being in school) they might say Lewis and Clark went from here to this point on Monday...on Friday they’re back at the same thing. You went from this point to this point. I didn’t need that, all I needed was once. One of my best friends, Don Boss, he says I don’t know where I get it, where I store all this information (taps his head).

CZ: So, you’re pretty smart. Hehe! So, tell me about your years in school. I’ll jump right into it right now. I’m curious if you had experienced any prejudice in school, or as an employee of the school?

MG: Yeah, back that time in the 40s, we were known as “half breeds”. You’ve heard that expression before. And a lot of ‘em would push it. Well, I...bring it on buddy. That was okay with me. It was okay with Leland too. We done a lot of fightin’ over that. And in later years, hell, people don’t think nothin’ about it. It was like at the Legion now I’ve got one friend I call the “white man”, I got another friend I call “the white man from the swamp”, and most of them around there call me “chief”.
HaHa!

So, what a difference!

Yeah! Yeah, it is. You fought a lot. Did you ever have teachers that gave you problems like that too?

Ehhh...not really. There was some good teachers and there was some knot heads. So...but the Catholic School was really the worst. You know most older, you know the older Metis people, they were real religious. I didn’t know if you knew that or not. Well, grandma talked my mother into sending me to be an altar boy. Well...we didn’t get very far there either. Ah, I got summoned to early mass, 6:00, I didn’t like that. So, me and my buddy we went, but we got caught drinking the Father’s wine. So, I went home. Mom says, “Ain’t you supposed to be altar boy today?” And I says, “Well...sister sent us home.” “Well, what’d you do now?” “The sister caught us drinkin’ the Father’s wine.” That was me.

Was that the end of you bein’ the altar boy?

Yeah. I was happy as hell!!

HaHa!!! Oh my...Well what about when you worked for the school district, did you ever have any trouble at work? Did people ever give you a bad time?

No, No. Hunuh. No, no, hunuh. I really enjoyed those years. Yes.

What about when you were back in the 40s then, were there certain places that you wouldn’t go into ‘cause of being part Native, or did you ever feel like you couldn’t go someplace?
No, if I wanted to go somewhere, I just WENT. That was me.

So you punched a few noses like you were sayin’.

Yeah.

From the time you were a kid to on up, when did you quit that?

I don’t know. Whenever people started behavin’ their selves.

Well let’s talk about your family, I looked at your…oh…go ahead!

I, you know, Peltier, you probably came across that name before in your deals.

How do you spell it?

Shit if I know, I don’t…

Well anyway, go ahead.

Well, my brother Leland was a foreman for COPs, I think it was, in Billings, when he retired. That’s all he done was construction with them bridges. They were down in Yellowstone Park after the Park closed doing some work. They’d always go to this little bar every night and drink. And ah, brother, he had a hell of a alcohol problem too. But that’s okay, he was a hell of a guy. Took care of his family. But anyway, this guy was gonna pick on Gary, (undiscernible), and Don Rogers was one of his friends and a guy he knew pretty well, said Leland stepped up and said, “Now Gary’s a lover, but I like to fight!” So, they went to it. Don says they tore that damn little bar up when they got done, but Leland finally cold-cocked him and he slid him under the pool table. Well, the guy come to and he come up and told Leland,
“Boy, nobody’s done this to me in a long time, I want to buy you a drink.” So, him and Leland had drinks together. Well, if it’d been me, I’d have hit him again. That’s being me. They got talking, Leland kinda worked it, they found out the Peltier he was from was the same one grandma come from (Mary Rose Peltier Turcotte was Marvin’s grandmother’s mother. She is listed as full blood).

CZ       Really!

MG       Don couldn’t wait to get home and tell Marilyn about it. That was Leland’s wife. Frist thing out of her mouth, “Only Leland could find a relative in a bar fight!”

CZ       HahaHa!!!! Yeah! You said he had a drinking problem?

MG       Yeah, ah...when he got to drinkin’ he liked to fight.

CZ       Did you have a drinkin’ problem?

MG       No.

CZ       You fought whether you were drinkin’ or not.

MG       No I would back out if I could. They’d give me room, I’d back it out ‘cause I didn’t really like to fight. But you want to bring it on then, kept a comin’, probably gonna come out worse for you than me.

CZ       Umhum, umhum. Well, tell me about your family. So, you are related to Chuck, how are you...Chuck LaFountain. How are you two related?

MG       His dad...woulda been...a uncle to my mother. That’s how.
CZ  Oh, his dad was an uncle to your mother.

MG  Yeah. Chuck’s dad was a...shu,shu,shu,shu,shu...he’s a...

CZ  That’s okay, I’ve got that information, so...yeah, we don’t have to go there, but...

MG  That’s how.

CZ  Okay. So, your...do you know anything about your ancestors, why they came to this country?

MG  Well, they kept gettin’, following the buffalo, well a lot of it started with that 10 cent, 10 Cent Treaty. You’ve heard of that one? And some of them just didn’t buy in they followed that one chief, I forget his name now, anyway...

CZ  Oh, Rocky Boy? Maybe?

MG  No it wasn’t Rocky Boy...

CZ  Little Bear! Not that one.

MG  No, and anyway...and he ended up over on the Milk River in that area and then they came this way. And I was told that grandma and them come from Dakotas in a Red River cart.

CZ  Do you have any stories, did they tell you any more detail about that?

MG  No. I wished I’d paid more attention when I was younger. And there was a time when grandma was alive, I could speak some of the nativ...some of the tongue. But...you don’t use it, you lose it.

CZ  Do you remember anything? Was it French or Cree?
MG   Cree.

CZ   Cree. And that was your grandma...would speak it?

MG   Oh yeah. My son really likes that Indian music. We go down in Colorado, I got a
daughter lives, not a daughter, my son’s daughter lives at Cortez. Right there on the edge of
the reservation. When we left there, he had a stack like that (holds his hands far apart) of tapes
he bought of Indian music. He really...

CZ   He likes that. Well...your, so, your grandmother spoke it. They were all (part) Cree.
That was the LaFountain side? (LaFountain was the grandfather)

MG   Umhum.

CZ   What was the other side of the family? You said the Turcottes too?

MG   Yeah it was, the Turcotte was related to grandma. I mean the ancestry is mind boggling
how all them people got together (Marvin’s pedigree on his mother’s side indicates he is
descended from Turcotte, Peltier, Demo, Henry, Adams and Ross).

CZ   Do you know the names of the people you’re related to then? The last names?

MG   No. I really don’t. As it is, I have people come up to me every once in a while, tell me
they’re related to me. And I go...(shrugs)

CZ   HaHa!

MG   And I will tell you another true story. My wife (Bernice) and I when we was going
together, we’d go down to the house and my mother is kinda like my son. You take care of
your elders. Grandma was living with mom and dad and she always...Bernice said, “Does she speak any English?” And I said, “No, not really.” One day we walked in and she looks at Bernice and she says, “How you doing today Bernice?” OH did she get mad at me! She said, “You lied to me!” Said, “She understood!” I said, “Probably most of it.” Then after that she talked with Bernice but it was a while, you know, she talked her native tongue.

CZ So, was she kind of a close mouthed person?

MG Yes. But real religious. She’d go to morning services when she could and evening too.

CZ And what was her name?

MG Mary Rose LaFountain.

CZ Mary Rose LaFountain. Mary Turcotte being her maiden name (she was Mary Rose Turcotte LaFountain born 1871 died 1963, listed as full blood).

MG Yeah, yeah.

CZ And that was your grandmother!

MG Yeah.

CZ Did your dad speak any...or so, would it have been your mom from that side, or how did the descendancy go then?

MG Everything’s on my mom’s side.

CZ Oh, okay. So, your mom didn’t speak any...she DID speak the language?

MG Oh yes! Her and grandma did.
CZ  Huh! Did your mom work in town or did she...?

MG  She didn’t work.

CZ  She took care of the kids? What was your mom like?

MG  Spitfire.

CZ  What was her name?

MG  Ah, Dorothy (pedigree states she was ½ Chippewa).

CZ  Dorothy?

MG  Yeah.

CZ  Did they cook the traditional food? Any bannock recipes or...what all did they cook?

MG  I don’t, I didn’t pay much attention. What really got my attention was an old trapper that’d bring grandma beaver tails. They’d fix it up. Grandma really liked beaver tail. You imagine, people now-a-days you’d tell them that...

CZ  Yeah.

MG  But them old timers, they’d eat, there’s nothin’ that went to waste.

CZ  Were they all in town or did they have a place outa town?

MG  Who?

CZ  Your grandma...
Well, they had a place at Roy and they lost it in a crooked deal. Most of ‘em like grandma and grandpa, they couldn’t read English or any, you know, they couldn’t write it, they couldn’t speak it. They lost it in a crooked deal. But grandpa...they tell me that grandpa damn near killed the guy. A couple a days later he run into him at the hardware store or something. And so, they lost the place at Roy.

Do you know what time period that would have been?

No.

20s, 30s...earlier...

Had to be earlier.

Hum. Yeah. Did they move to Lewistown?

Yeah.

What did your dad do, when he moved to Lewistown?

Oh, my dad didn’t move...it was grandpa on my mother’s side lost the ranch.

Oh, yeah, right, right, right.

My dad was born on Warm Springs Creek.

Was he Metis also?

No. He was English...Irish...and German.

I see. Well, I should have said when your grandpa lost the place, when he has swindled out of it...did he come to Lewistown to work or did he retire?
MG  Oh no, he moved into Roy for quite a while. Ah, went to the river, cut log, ah, cut lumber, ah, firewood and sold it. In later years him and grandma moved to Lewistown.

CZ  That saw (points to a painted saw over the doorway)...did you use it to cut firewood or...?

MG  No. I just dinged around with it. I ain’t that ambitious.

CZ  Yeah, what about your gran...your great grandfather, do you know much about, him what they did when they moved to this area?

MG  No.

CZ  But you figured they came from, the EARLY people came from Dakota down...

MG  Well the Chippewas, you know, and I agree they was originally from Minnesota and in that area and they kept gettin’ pushed, and pushed, and pushed.

CZ  Do you know any stories from those early days when they came down?

MG  Not really.

CZ  You were tellin’ me about the snake bite kids that died from that. Can you explain what happened there?

MG  Well...Maxine...he got bit...

CZ  Now who was he?

MG  He’d been, ah, mom’s brother, brother to my mother. And by the time they got to Lewistown, it was muddy and they had to come by horse, buggy and horse, and he died. And
this Doney cut the rattle off, and stuck it in his pocket. And they say the kid pulled it out, and they didn’t pay too much attention to him, and he sucked on it quite a while...(and died).

CZ And how old were those two little kids then?

MG About 2 years...

CZ That was the last...the Doney boy, what about your mom’s brother?

MG He was about 2.

CZ Oh, really! Ah...that’s a long way to come from Roy to Lewistown.

MG Yeah, in a buggy and especially when it’s wet and rainin’. They had a tough time.

CZ Umhum.

MG And both of those boys are buried side by side.

CZ Yeah. You were tellin’ me a little bit about the Calvary Cemetery. About the mass (Metis) graves up there. What do you know about that?

MG Well, when they first come, they buried ‘em, a lot of ‘em on the old Cooley place which is down the end of Brassey, and you turn the corner right out there. They were burying them there. Some guy bought it...I can’t remember now...

CZ Corbly?

MG I think so. Anyway, he talked to the Catholic priest and he talked to the Metis and they agreed to dig ‘em up, clean ‘em up, wrap ‘em in new blankets , whatever, and buried ‘em all in one grave. They say that grave is probably, is in the oldest part of the Calvary Cemetery.
CZ Yes. I’ve seen that. It probably was the first place people were buried wasn’t it? One of the first.

MG Yeah.

CZ Where...is that in town, the end of Brassey? Within the city limits?

MG Where...where they were buried at first?

CZ At first, yeah!

MG Yeah. Yeah, Cooley’s...these teeth...and so they dug ‘em up.

CZ Wow.

MG One of the first one’s buried there was a LaFountain.

CZ Was that the blind gentleman?

MG I think so.

CZ Do you know anything about that?

MG Well I know he was blind and they took care of him and you know...not so much today but back them, most of the people that had Indian blood in ‘em, the Metis and half breeds, they took care of their people. There was no putting ‘em in a home or anything.

CZ You talked about...you talked about being in trouble. Were you ever thrown in jail?

MG Yeah.

CZ Oh you were! Fer fighting?
MG  No, I was home on leave from the service and I wasn’t old enough to drink yet, but I was old enough to go to the service at 17 which I did. I come home I got picked up by a deputy, I’ll never fo...I knew him real well anyway, had a real good looking daughter. Charlie McCartney. And oh boy, I said, “I got myself in a mess don’t I.” ‘Cause I had to be in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas in a few days. But I got out.

CZ  Was that the only time you’d been in jail?

MG  Yeah. So, they got me for possession. Underage drinkin’.

CZ  Yeah, right. Well, it looks like there’s a lot of LaFountains that served in the military.

MG  Oh yes.

CZ  You know anything about that?

MG  Well, Alex served in the 49th Ranger Regiment. He climbed that wall in Normandy. He was a medic. Through the war.

CZ  Hum. And that would be your great uncle?

MG  Let’s see that would be mom’s brother’s boy. Alex and Alfred both. And Alfred served in the Navy.

CZ  Do you know anything about the people that were earlier than that? I saw some had served in the First World War, too.

MG  Yeah, well all I know is one of ‘em come home, mustard gas or somethin’ got him. That it did a lot of damage. He ended up drinking himself to death.
CZ   Hmmm...was your wife Metis?

MG   No, my wife was a Dutch German.

CZ   And...what about...let's see...levels of education. How far did your mom go to school?

MG   8th grade.

CZ   Eighth grade. Did she go to Catholic School too, or a one room?

MG   No. She went to Roy School.

CZ   What about her parents? Do you know how far they went to school?

MG   No, 'cause they couldn't read or write. So that tells me where it went.

CZ   Would have been your mom's dad, was he Metis or was he...?

MG   He was French Canadian.

CZ   He was French Canadian then.

MG   And...

CZ   And what was his name again?

MG   ...ahh...

CZ   It's in your pedigree, we can look later (Ezear LaFountain, born 1868 and died 1949. Indicated as ½. Son of Antoine).

MG   What was grandpa's name...everyone called him "Joe".
CZ   Okay. I think I’ve got that info, yeah. Did they ever talk about any prejudices that they would have experienced? How did people treat them?

MG   My mother seemed to be treated pretty good. And I never really heard much bad from grandma or grandpa, either one. Course, I was only about 10 when grandpa died (1949).

CZ   Oh, you remembered...you remember your grandma then. How did she...make it?

MG   She was 93 or 94 when she died (1963). Mom and dad kept her home all that time and took care of her. Mom...there was no way they were gonna put here anywhere. They kept her. And she got so she couldn’t take care of herself, they brought her in.

CZ   Did they have big gardens and things like that?

MG   Yeah, and we poached a lot of animals. Deer and elk. ‘Bout got caught with...well some of the things...today if we done, I’d probably be in Deer Lodge!

CZ   HaHa!! Just trying to survive I suppose!

MG   Umhum.

CZ   Yeah, you weren’t tryin’ to go for heads, you were goin’ for the meat.

MG   Tel you a little story about...my son and I went and got a elk. This was a legal elk. Got home, pulled it out of the pickup on the ground, and he had a real nice graveled driveway. An old retired Navy Chief come over and he says, “What are you, smart? You got no place to hang this animal and skin it!” And I said, “Go get a chair and set down right there. I’ll show you how a poacher does it.” So, I skinned that whole elk out laying on the ground. Says, “I didn’t know you could do that!” Yeah. I said, “You poach enough you learn all that!”
CZ  HahaHa!!! Did you ever here the story about a LaFountain family that lived up in a
cave? Up here in the mountains someplace?

MG  Francis.

CZ  Oh really! What was...what do you know about that?

MG  I didn’t like him, his wife was nuts. Barbara.

CZ  Hm.

MG  Yeah, that took up here in the Judiths one winter.

CZ  In the Judiths? Do you know where it was at?

MG  No, at one time I did, but I couldn’t find it today.

CZ  Yeah. You said she was nuts? What seemed to be the problem?

MG  I just thought she was nuts!

CZ  How did she act?

MG  Stupid.

CZ  They had a bunch of kids.

MG  Oh yes.

CZ  Looked like maybe some of them were born in that cave. I think they were there for
two, maybe two years.

MG  I don’t know. Coulda been. They had a whole slug of ‘em.
CZ  Do you know why it was they lived there? Musta been tough.

MG  Yeah.

CZ  Musta been pretty poor to live like that.

MG  And he didn’t have a...he didn’t have much gumption about him.

CZ  Umh...so, that might have been part of it. He really wasn’t workin’.

MG  Umhum.

CZ  Was he a drinker too, or...?

MG  No. Just lazier than a...lazier than a skunk, I think.

CZ  Hum. I think they had like nine kids. Yeah, so tell me, we’re getting’ to the end of our interview. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your family or yourself, or your history, or anything?

MG  Nope.

CZ  Well, I really enjoyed talkin’ to you, this has been fun! You filled in a lot of blanks, too! I appreciate it!

MG  I did?

CZ  Yeah you did!

Afterwards, Marvin told me he has always been proud of his Metis ancestry.
This is a project granted by the Montana History Foundation through Snowy Mountain Development and in partnership with Montana Memory Project.