

Alexandre Wilkie. (b. ca. 1831)

By Dr. Marty Foster and Lawrence Barkwell

The son of Jean Baptiste Wilkie and Amable Azure, born on September 1831. Alexandre Wilkie married Louise Gardepie (Gariépy). Louise was born in 1839, the daughter of François Gariépy and Louise Gladu. They married on June 14, 1852 at Assumption Parish, Pembina. The couple had seven children; Alexandre Jr. b. 1853, Marie Josephine b. 1854, Julienne b. 1859, Baptiste Jerome b. 1861, Louise b. 1865 and Marie b. 1872.

In 1866-67, Alexander, his wife and four children appeared on the annuity rolls of Little Shell's Band (#180); they received \$15 in 1866 and \$24 in 1867. He applied for land under the 1864 Chippewa Treaty. He appears as #176 on the "List of person's to whom scrip was issued to Half Breeds under the Red Lake and Pembina Treaties, this was issued on May 10, 1873. His father and older brothers Augustin and Jean Baptist Jr. were members of Little Shell's band in 1866-67 and members of Way-ke-ge-ke-zhick's band in 1868 (#144, #164, #143) before taking Half Breed scrip. By the 1870s Alexandre was hunting on the Milk River. With members of his extended family, Alexandre moved the Judith Basin in 1879. A year later he signed Louis Riel's petition to Major General Nelson Miles requesting land for the Montana Metis.

In the company of his sister's (Berger) and daughters' (LaFountains) families, Alexander Wilkie traveled with the first Metis to settle near Spring Creek and founded what would become Lewistown, Montana (1879). His two-room cabin was the largest in the area, having one room that measured twenty by thirty feet. This was quite a luxurious size for that place and time, but Wilkie planned ahead, knowing that the families would need a large room in which visiting missionaries could conduct services. A fiddler and singer, he had learned liturgical music in Pembina and Saint Boniface. In his new home, he organized a church choir, which sang the old hymns in French or "Cree" (probably Michif). Visiting priests, discouraged by what they considered to be depraved behavior in lively trading towns such as Fort Benton and Carroll, were pleased to find an orderly and welcoming community in Lewistown.

In 1886 Alexander Wilkie, with a party of friends and relatives, moved back to Belcourt, North Dakota to be with his aging parents and to take part in negotiations for the proposed Turtle Mountain reservation. Alexander, like his father Métis leader Jean Baptiste Wilkie, was concerned about Métis rights to land that they had hunted on for generations. He believed that he could not effectively fight for the recognition of Turtle Mountain aboriginal land rights from Montana. (See Martha Harroun Foster, "We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Metis Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2000).

Elizabeth Swan gives the following story about Alexandre Wilkie:¹

Our story would not be complete if we did not tell of the valiant work done by Alexander Wilkie to promote Catholic Action, also the service he rendered to the missionaries.

He came from a family of thirteen children and all were brought up to be useful and practical Catholics. He had a fair education in French and in the Cree Indian language, and had also taken music and played the violin very well. In his spare time in the evenings he taught religion to the children of the settlement at Milk River, besides he taught singing and had a choir and sang the music of the old "Basilan Airs." His daughter Josephine Lafountain² and niece Mary Berger Azure, nephews Peter, Isaie and John B. Berger, composed the choir. Peter who had been taught to serve mass when a young boy at school in Pembina, North Dakota was still assisting when necessary. And, when visited by the missionaries they were well prepared to do their part in their own settlement. They sang for the high mass, and for the low mass sang appropriate hymns either in French or in the Cree Indian language. Most of the congregation would join in the singing. The older people were taught to read and write in Cree by some missionary at Pembina, North Dakota. Some of the books are still in the possession of the children of the pioneers in Lewistown.



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¹ Elizabeth Swan, "A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers of Lewistown, Montana," file. 541, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, and in the Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, MC 27, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana. Elizabeth Swan was a granddaughter of Pierre Berger and Judith Wilkie.

² Marie Josephine Wilkie (1854-1937)

Julienne was born on September 1, 1859, at Pembina, the daughter of Alexandre Wilkie and Louise Garipey. She married Octave Lafountain, the son of Calixte Lafontaine and Charlotte Adam, on February 9, 1875 at Lebret.

