

Mary Ernestine Wells, (Fleury). (d. 1952)

Mary Ernestine Wells, the daughter of Marie Edward Wells, married Antoine Fleury, Jr. on May 4, 1880 at Judith Basin.¹ Together they had nine children, and after the early death of her husband, Mary Ernestine adopted one more. She supported her children by cooking for ranchers, using her knowledge of medicinal herbs to provide medical services, and by acting as undertaker when necessary.

Providing food for her children in the traditional Métis manner, Mary Ernestine dried meat that she received as payment or that her sons brought home from hunting, kept a large garden, and collected berries, roots, and herbs, which she used both as food and medicine. Because Mary Ernestine was known as a healer, she was often able to add to her family's food supply with provisions given her in return for her services. She also worked hides and created beautiful embroidery. Some of these pieces and her hide working tools are still treasured possessions of the family. Resourcefully, Mary Ernestine took advantage of a variety of opportunities to support her family. When Turtle Mountain allotments became available, she applied but, like most of the Spring Creek band, was ruled ineligible. Shortly thereafter, taking advantage of the Homestead Act, Mary Ernestine homesteaded her own place near Spring Creek (Lewistown, Montana) as "head of family." (Martha Harroun Foster, "We Know Who We Are": Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Metis Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2000).



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¹ St. Peter's Mission record: Marriage 1880/ 5 / 4, Judith Basin, Anthony Fleury and Ernestine Wells [Hermestina Welsh]. Marriage performed by Father Damiani.