

Suzanne Chalifoux. (1866-1946)

Suzanne Chalifoux was born in 1866 at St. Albert, the daughter of Paul Chalifoux (b. 1833) and Genevieve Sapen dit Campion who were Metis from Lesser Slave Lake. Her paternal grandparents were Joseph Chalifoux and Josette Rabasca dit Blondin dit Tourbillion. Her maternal grandparents were Joseph "Ashatikew" Sapen dit Campion and Marie Nipissing. In 1885 Suzanne left Treaty to take her Metis scrip.

Chalifoux, Suzanne - Concerning her claim as a child - Address, St. Albert - Born, 1866 at St. Albert - Father, Paul Chalifoux, (Métis) - Mother, Genevieve Campion, (Métis) - Scrip for \$240 - Claim 793

Suzanne grew up speaking Cree, French and English. She was educated by the Grey Nuns at the *Couvent Saint-Albert* [Convent]. Suzanne married Louis Swift (1854-1941), a trapper and prospector, the son of John Swift and Louisa, on September 29, 1897. They lived west of the Athabasca River, 15 kilometres north of Jasper.



Suzanne Chalifoux

Prior to her marriage to Lewis, Suzette had a son, fathered by Adolphus Norris, and named of Albert Norris who would later play a big role in the guiding and outfitting industry of Jasper and Willmore Wilderness Park. The Swift children included Dean, daughter Lottie, Jimmie, Willis, and John. Willis and John died as infants. "On the walls and rafters of her house hung many roots, herbs and vegetables, as well as bacon, hams and swatches of sphagnum moss. It served her in place of cotton for many purposes—to line the baby's bed, to use as diapers, to scrub with and to wipe pots and pans." (*Quote from "Overland by the Yellowhead" by James MacGregor.*)

Suzanne made leather vests, gloves and moccasins with colourful beads and silk ornaments, which she then sold to passing travelers. Mollie Adams and Mary Schäffer, two adventurers who traveled in the Rockies in the late 19th and early 20th century, had the chance to meet this outstanding artist:

Then, Mme Swift pulled out a box from under the bed and showed us half a dozen dresses she had made herself [...].And then she showed us her fancy work [...]. She had many silk embroideries on doe skin, the softest I have ever touched. She dyed the silk herself and created her own designs [...]. There were gloves, moccasins and beautiful coats, we took everything wishing there were more [...]"¹

References:

Colleen Skidmore. "A Swift Encounter: The Genesis of Mary's Mountain Woman 'Look'." *The Beaver*, June/July 2007: 47.

Colleen Skidmore. *This Wild Spirit: Women in the Rocky Mountains of Canada*. Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 2006.



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¹ Colleen Skidmore. *This Wild Spirit: Women in the Rocky Mountains of Canada*. Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 2006: 8.