

## **Cecilia Wiseman née Larance. (1915-1983)**

Cecilia Larance was born on January 20, 1915 at Choteau County, Montana, the daughter of James Julian Larance<sup>1</sup> (1881-1966) and Mabel Clementine Fellers. Clementine, born August 11, 1896, was the daughter of Franklin Fellers<sup>2</sup> and Harriet June Gray<sup>3</sup>. James Larance was the son of Basil Larance Jr., born in 1860 at St. Vital, the son of Basil Larance Sr.<sup>4</sup> and Margaret Desjardins. James Larance was first married to Florence St. Germain (1883-1910), the daughter of Frederick St Germain and Julia Courtepatte, in 1907. When Florence died, James was left with three young children, Gillis born 1901, Marie born 1907, and Annabelle Helen born 1910. James subsequently married Mabel Clementine Fellers on January 28, 1914 at Choteau, Montana.

Cecilia Larance (1915-1983) married Albert Dale Wiseman (1896-1983) in 1931 and they lived in the Michif settlement in a canyon on the South Fork of the Teton River west of Choteau, Montana.

The South Fork of the Teton River was home to over 100 Métis, many are buried in the cemetery of the old community. Cecelia and Dale Wiseman's son Al (Alf) Wiseman and daughter-in-law Elaine (née Gray) maintain the Métis Cemetery in the old Canyon Community where they were born in Teton County, northwest of Choteau near South Fork of Teton River on land which is now owned by the Nature Conservancy. The surnames found in this cemetery are Bruno, Collins, Fellers, Gray, Larance, Parenteau, St. Germaine, and Talipson.

### **Cecilia's Grandparent's Métis Scrip:**

#### Maternal Grandmother

Fellers, Frank; heir to his deceased wife, Henriette Gray; claim no. 1315; born: 1876; died: 6 July, 1899; address: Chateau, Montana; father: Michel Gray (Métis); mother: Caroline Campion (Métis); scrip cert.: form D, no. 1322.

#### Maternal Great-grandmother

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<sup>1</sup> James was born May 16, 1881 at Pincher Creek, Alberta, the son of Baziel LaRance (1859 - 1913) and Mabel Clementine Fellers born August 11, 1896 at Choteau, Montana. Clementine was the daughter of Franklin Fellers and Harriet June Gray.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin Fellers was born in 1874 at Dupuyer, Montana. Franklin's parents were Adolphe Fellers born 1837 in France and Emilie Gariépy born August 31, 1855 at St. François Xavier.

<sup>3</sup> Harriet Gray was the sister of James Gray, who was the father of Montana Métis political leader, lawyer and rights activist Raymond Francis Gray (1900-1961). Their parents were Michel Gray (1843-1904) and Caroline Campion (1837-1923).

<sup>4</sup> Born in 1831, in British Columbia, the son Bazil Larence (b.c. 1789/95) and Agathe Michel L'Iroquoise.

Gray, Caroline; for her deceased daughter, Elise Gray; claim no. 1313; born: January, 1872 at Big Lake; died September, 1873; Address: Milk River; father: Michel Gray (Métis); mother: Caroline Sapin dit Campion (Métis and deponent); scrip cert.: form F, no. 1844; file ref. 660480.

Paternal Grandfather

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

H.B. 312

No. 188 Form J.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, CANADA,



**NORTH WEST HALF-BREED COMMISSION.**

Int. Made on 14 May 1885

**This is to Certify** that Basile Larance the younger

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

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

  
Chairman of the Commission.

Declaration by Basile Larance Jr

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

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

15. Can you produce baptismal certificates of the birth of your children? If so, produce them, if not, state reasons. *Yes*

16. Of those dead can you produce burial certificates? If so, please produce these, if not, state why not. *Yes*

17. Have you ever had a homestead entry? *Never*

18. If so, what became of it? *Yes*

19. Have you ever had any land claims in Manitoba or the North-West? If so, state nature of them, when and how acquired and what disposal did you make of them? *Never*

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

21. Did you ever receive land or scrip in Manitoba in commutation of the Half-Breed right? *Never*

22. Mention any names by which you have been called, other than your name given above? *Never*

23. Do you receive any annuity as an Indian, or in any way participate in grants to Indians? *Never*

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

*I expect to have a scrip for \$2400.00 worth of land  
than 2400 acres of land*

*I lived in the vicinity on some the 15 March last*

*Witness  
R. Gould*

*his  
Basile Karanovic  
Mark*



*Cecilia LaRance Wiseman shown here at age 15. She grew up on the Rocky Mountain front in a self-sufficient Métis canyon community on the South Fork of the Teton River.  
Photo courtesy of Alf Wiseman*

### **A Métis Girlhood**

Excerpted from *Women's History Matters*, Montana Historical Society

*Cecilia LaRance was born in 1915 in a cabin on the South Fork of the Teton River. Her grandparents were among the Métis families who had settled along the Rocky Mountains between Heart Butte and Augusta in the late 1800s. Growing up in the distinct [Michif] culture formed by the fusion of French, Scottish, Chippewa, and Cree heritages, Cecilia belonged to the last generation of children to experience the self-sufficiency and “old ways” of this Métis community.*

*The LaRance family settled along the Rocky Mountain Front in the 1870s. Cecilia's great grandmother, Marguerite Desjardins LaRance, wife of Basil Larance Sr., was the first person buried at the Métis cemetery nestled in the trees along the South Fork. Cecilia's father, James LaRance, was born at St. Peter's Mission west of Fort Benton. When James was left with three small children after his first wife's death, he married soft-spoken and hardworking Mabel Fellers, whose family had fled to Montana after the failed Northwest Rebellion of 1885.*

*The couple raised their family on a squatter's homestead on Willow Creek, furnishing their single-room cabin with a woodstove, a large table, and apple-box benches. James' rocker sat near Mabel's sewing machine by the window. The cabin lacked electricity and indoor plumbing, and the LaRances bathed in a galvanized tub behind two chairs draped with a sheet for privacy. Cecilia and her sisters shared a bed, their brothers slept on a foldout sofa, and the baby's hammock hung over the parents' bed. When guests visited, they slept in the only space left: under the table. "We didn't have room enough to keep a moth's suitcase in that house," Cecilia remembered.*

*Like other Métis families, the LaRances were self-sufficient. James LaRance was a trapper and woodcutter [known as "woodhawks"], supplying nearby communities with posts and poles that he traded for flour. Mabel sewed the family's clothes. Each child had two outfits—one for school, one for everyday wear. Mabel showed Cecilia how to make soap by mixing rendered fat with homemade lye and pouring it into a shallow wooden box to set. She also taught Cecilia how to can vegetables—grown in plots along Willow Creek—and how to store roots and cabbages in a cellar for their winter supply.*

*The family kept a cow, a pig, and chickens. Gathering the eggs from their free-roaming chickens made Cecilia nervous, because snakes also lived among the bushes where the chickens nested. Her other chores included cleaning the chimneys of the kerosene lamps, scrubbing the wood floors, and helping wash the laundry by hand. Each evening, Cecilia and her siblings stocked the wood boxes and filled the water buckets from the creek.*

*In summer, Cecilia picked serviceberries, strawberries, rosehips, and gooseberries, which she and her mother made into jams. She helped her grandmother pound buffalo berries and chokecherries into flat dried fruit that would keep through the winter, sometimes mixing the mashed berries with dried meat to make pemmican.*

*For supper, the LaRances ate venison or "le rababou" (rabbit stew) with "li galette" (bannock, a traditional Scottish flatbread), but Cecilia recalled that their lunches were often nothing more than lard on bread. One of her fondest childhood memories was the smell of newly made sourdough bread wrapped in a clean dishcloth and stored in the beer-crate-turned-breadbox.*

*Cecilia and her siblings found ways to earn money for things that had to be purchased. In the 1920s, Montana was attempting to eradicate coyotes and prairie dogs. The children drowned them in their holes and brought in the tails for bounty. The summer when she was twelve, Cecilia cooked full-time at a nearby ranch. She also herded a neighbour's sheep and gathered wool that had caught in fences. On a rare trip to town, she could sell the sacks of wool for a little spending money.*

*Town was too far away for the Métis families to seek medical care, so in this, too, they were self-reliant. They mixed pine pitch with cottonwood buds, which contain an aspirin-like compound, to make an analgesic salve and used skunk grease (the boiled fat from skunks) to treat chest colds. Cecilia's Chippewa-Cree grandmother gathered medicinal*

*plants and tied each bundle of dried wild herbs with a different color of string according to its use.*



Cecilia Larance Wiseman. Photograph courtesy of Alf Wiseman

*Their relative isolation also kept most Métis families, who were Catholic, from attending church, although they maintained their religious traditions. Families gathered at one another's homes to celebrate holidays, particularly New Year's Day, when celebrations lasted a week or more or "until the fiddlers got tired out."*

*Cecilia attended Bellview School, but to her regret, left school at fourteen. Her mother had attended Fort Shaw Indian School and then Chemawa Indian High School in Salem, Oregon, but Cecilia's father was only educated through third grade. He insisted that his daughters needed no more than an eighth-grade education, and in 1931 Cecilia was married at sixteen to a man nearly twice her age that she had met at a Bellview dance.*

*The Métis families left their rural cabins in the 1930s, looking for work in nearby towns. The LaRances were one of the last families to leave, moving to Augusta in 1943 after losing their homestead to the Gleason ranch because they had never filed papers on it. By then Cecilia LaRance Wiseman had a family of her own and was working in town, but she missed her childhood in the country when "we'd spend our days just walking in the hills and sitting down and watching what was going on across the way. We were happy."*

**Source:**

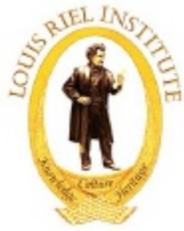
*Women's History Matters 100 Years of Women's Suffrage in Montana.*  
<http://montanawomenshistory.org/page/3>.

Wiseman, Alfred. Interview by Melinda Livezey, February 10, 1994. Métis Cultural Recovery Project. Oral History 1659, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

Wiseman, Cecilia. Interview by Melinda Livezey and Al Wiseman, February 18, 1994.  
Oral History 1656, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

Wiseman, Cecilia Interview by Melinda Livezey and Al Wiseman, March 1, 1994.. Oral  
History 1661, Montana Historical Society, Helena.

Grande, Irene Ford. Interview by Melinda Livezey, October 28, 1994. Oral History 1895,  
Montana Historical Society, Helena.



Compiled and edited by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research  
Louis Riel Institute