

Clemence Berger née Gourneau. (b. 1847)

In 1879, Clemence and Isaie Berger accompanied Pierre Berger's party into central Montana. Their family at that time consisted of: Isaie Berger age 35, Clemence Gourneau Berger age 29, Marie Louise age 8, Jean-Baptiste age 6, Marguerite age 5, Joseph and Marie (twins) age 3, Leander Patrick a few months old.

Clemence Gourneau was born on February 16, 1847, the oldest of eleven children of Joseph “Sooza” Gourneau¹ and Judith Delorme Gourneau. At the age of twenty-three years, she met and later married Isaie Berger. J. Sevir Isaie Berger was born circa 1846, the son of Pierre “Kitkaniapnatch” Berger and Judith “Chatka” Wilkie.²

Children of Clemence Gourneau and Isaie Berger were:

- i. Marie Louise, b. September 08, 1871, Baptism: November 03, 1871, Qu'Appelle Mission, NWT.
- ii. Jean Baptiste, b. January 10, 1873, Qu'Appelle Mission, NWT. Baptism: January 11, 1873, Qu'Appelle Mission, NWT
- iii. Marguerite, b. February 04, 1874, Malta, Montana; d. May 07, 1936, Lewiston, Fergus Co, Montana. Marguerite first married Jean Wells, then married Joseph Turcotte.
- iv. Marie Celina, b. January 07, 1877, Montana; married Maxime Langevin, May 01, 1902, Fergus County, Montana; b. Bet. 1876 - 1877.
- v. Joseph, b. January 07, 1877, Qu'Appelle Mission, NWT; d. Aft. 1911; married Elizabeth Sauvé, October 17, 1910, Fergus Co, Montana; b. Abt. 1890, Dearborn, Montana; d. Aft. 1911.
- vi. Leander Patrick, b. February 5, 1879, died September 29, 1931 at Lewistown.

¹ Joseph Gourneau also known as “Kah-isig-ewid” (Born on a Pile) and “Sooza” was born in November 1822, the son of Joseph Grenon and Angeliqe Kwayzancheewin (Folle-Avoine). He was the grand-son of Chief Wild Rice. His brother was Turtle Mountain Chief “Kah-ishpa” Gourneau (1817-1917). He signed the 1863 Pembina Treaty.

² In 1880, they are counted in census at The Judith Basin, Meagher, Montana: Ezra Berges, Self, Married, Male, NA, age 35, b. CAN, Hunter, father b. CAN, mother b. CAN / Clemar Berges, Wife, Married, Female, NA, age 30, b. Dakota, Keeping House / Louise M. Berges, Daughter, Single, Female, NA, age 9, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. Dakota / John Berges, Son, Single, Male, NA, age 3, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. Dakota/ Margrett Berges, Daughter, Single, Female, NA, age 6, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. DAKOTA / Joseph Berges, Son, Single, Male, NA, age 4, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. DAKOTA / Cindrilla Berges, Daughter, Single, Female, NA, age 4, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. Dakota / Bertrice Berges, Son, Single, Male, NA, age 1, b. MT, father b. CAN, mother b. Dakota.

vii. Justine, b. 1880; married James Patrick Turcotte, May 03, 1903, Fergus County, Montana; b. November 19, 1879, Fort Walsh, NWT; d. July 1967, Billings, Montana.

viii. Vitaline, b. circa. 1891; married Fred Laverdure, April 20, 1913, Fergus Co, Montana; b. circa. 1890, Lewiston, Montana.

CLEMENCE GOURNEAU:

The following is from the Lewistown Democrat News: December 31, 1943

*FUNERAL THIS MORNING FOR "GRANDMA" BERGER,
96- YEAR PIONEER; HER LIFE HISTORY*

Mass of Requiem rites to be held at St. Leo's Catholic Church at 9 o'clock this morning will mark the funeral of Mrs. Clemence Gourneau Berger, 96-year-old pioneer resident who died Wednesday at the home of her daughter, Mrs. James Turcotte, 304 North Dawes, following nearly 70 years residence in Central Montana.

Known as Grandma Berger, by her family and friends of this area, the 96-year-old pioneer leaves to survive her, three daughters, a son, 13 grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

Born at Pembina, North Dakota Feb. 16, 1847, Clemence Gourneau Berger was the oldest of the 11 children of Joseph Gourneau and Judith McMillan Gourneau, who were part of the members of the Red River half-breed "colonies." At the age of 23 years she met Isaie Berger and they were later married on Aug. 1, 1870 at the sits of what is now Walhalla, North Dakota.

Shortly after her marriage they came to Montana and resided a few years along the Milk river country, then came to Lewistown in 1879, and settled on a homestead at the Boyd Creek and Highway 87 junction where they lived and carried on what little farming was done in the early days. They were blessed with a family of 12 children. In 1902 they sold out and moved to the Forest Grove neighborhood and lived there till Mr. Berger passed away in 1920. Soon after that she moved to Lewistown where she has lived continually since and kept house for her sons until five years ago, when, due to advanced age, she had to retire and live with her daughter, Mrs. Jim Turcotte. "Grandma" Berger, as she was known, was a devout Catholic and was loved by all who knew her. She was always noted for her kindness toward all and was always willing to lend a helping hand wherever help was needed. In her immediate family she leaves to mourn her loss Mrs. Max Langevin, Mrs. Jim Turcotte, John Berger of Lewistown, Mont., and Mrs. Link Walker of Billings, Mont.; two brothers, two sisters residing at Belcourt, North Dakota; 13 grandchildren, 31 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Berger was not fortunate in having much schooling, but at that she was a bright and industrious woman: was very keen about telling her early life and how she came to settle

in the Judith basin, which is related here as she often presented it in her later life: "While we roamed the prairies of western Montana and the Dakotas we were always in the same company of people of part Indian blood, and traveled in many groups. We left Walhalla, North Dakota in 1870. shortly after we were married and set out traveling all over the Dakotas, just camping here and there without thought of settling permanently at any place, just following the buffalo trails. You might think we lived the life of real Indians, but one thing we had always with us which they did not ---religion. "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. In fact in those early days I believe people generally were more deeply religious than they are now. Every night we had prayer meeting and just before a buffalo hunt we would see our men on bended knee in prayer. "Yes, we endured many hardships. There were times when we could not find any buffalo or other kind of game, and occasionally even water was hard to find. Yet, somehow, we were all happy and with all our miseries we never heard any complaints. "Our men did all the hunting, and we women did all the tanning of the buffalo hides, jerky meat making, pemmican and moccasins. "For other supplies, we generally had some trader with us like the late Francis Janeaux and others who always had a supply of tea, sugar, tobacco and so on. "Coming west from the Canadian lines around the country called the Wood Mountains, where we lived for sometime, my first two children were born there. Then we left from there on to Milk River, the big bend, as we used to call it, which is below what is now Malta, Mont., where we would stay for a time then back again as far north as the Cypress hills in Canada. "However, we finally made our headquarters at the big bend after returning again to Montana. All told we spent about six years along Milk River as far up as the present site of Chinook, Montana.

We were at Chinook when Chief Joseph and his fleeing band of Nez Percés, were being pursued by our United States army. Those poor Indians were about starved. They traded their good horses for any amount of dry meat or bedding. It was a most pitiful sight to see their little children, heads sticking out of some sacks made for the purpose and fastened to each side of the mothers, riding on horseback. "As time went by buffalo were thinning out; and we had several meetings to decide on what to do next. We realized that we could not live on 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. "Of his daughter-in-laws, I was asked if I was willing to go along with them. I hesitated as I could not make up my mind at once, as I had always regarded Minnesota as my home state, and naturally wanted to go back there. But they finally got my consent to travel further west. "So in the spring of 1879, a band of 25 families headed by Pierre Berger started from Milk River by Fort Assiniboine, thence to Fort Benton, where we crossed the Missouri river and on down to Arrow Creek. We never saw such bad-lands, and believe me it was not pleasant riding in our Red River carts over a wild rough country making our own trails. Somehow we got through safely to the mouth of Spring Creek and on to where the Arrow refinery now stands, and around the Judith Mountains to the north and followed Box Elder to the Mussellshell, then around the Snowy Mountains. We came in by way of the gap to the famous Judith basin, which was indeed a

paradise land of plenty with game of all kinds, lots of good water and timber. What more could we want? After finding what we had searched for, our journey ended right there. “The only white man we found here was named Bowes. He was living with a Piegan woman. He had a little trading post situated near the site of the county farm. We were greatly molested by Indian marauders stealing our horses. This country was their main route. “Of the 25 families who came here with us, were, as I recall, all the Pierre Berger family; LaFountains, Fleurys, Doneys, Fayant, Wilkies, Ledoux and the late Ben Kline.

Our party all settled along the foothills of the Judith Mountains. One of this party named LaFountain, who was blind, settled on Blind Breed creek, which got its name from the poor unfortunate. Later the Doneys and Fayants moved and settled in the neighborhood of Fort Maginnis. “In the late summer of 1879, more of our people followed us here, including the Janeauxs, Morall (Morase?) Laverdures, Wells, Daniels and LaTray families. Mose LaTray helped to build the original log post office that still stands out in the city outskirts.

“The following year Antoine Ouelette and family came in. Janeaux, Morace and Ouelette took up their homesteads in what is now Lewistown. “Soon after this country was opened by more people, seems like other nations came flocking in and in no time we had a community. ‘The first death, shortly after our arrival was a man by the name of LaFountain. He was buried on the hillside, a short distance east, now known as the old J. I. Corbly ranch, which served our people for a number of years. A daughter of Mr. Antoine Ouelette died sometime after and he buried her on his own land. He later donated an acre of his property to be used as a Catholic cemetery in the year 1893, under the direction of our first Catholic pastor, Rev. Fr. Van Den Heuval, our people were asked to remove all the former graves and transfer them to the present site.”



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