

**Gertrude Larance.** (1895-1994)

Gertrude Larance was a member of a girls' basketball team that was organized at Fort Shaw School in 1902. She was the team's "Mascot." In 1903, the team twice defeated the women's basketball team from Montana Agricultural College, once in Great Falls (36-to-9) and again in Bozeman (20-to-0). The Fort Shaw girls defeated nearly every high school and college girls' basketball team in the state, as well as several high school boys' teams. The team ended its first year as undisputed (if unofficial) state champion.

In 1904, school superintendent Fred Campbell agreed to send his girls' basketball team to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, better known as the St. Louis World's Fair, in St. Louis Missouri. To fund their trip, the team stopped at numerous points along the way to play exhibition games against other high school and college girls' teams. After each game, the girls donned traditional native ceremonial garb and charged a fee (50 cents) for a program of dance, music, and recitations.



Gertrude Larance, centre kneeling.

Over the course of five months, more than three million fair-goers gaped at Indian students demonstrating their skills in domestic and industrial arts, drama, and music. However, the almost all-white audience devoted most of its fascination to ten Indian girls

playing basketball and, between games, reciting Longfellow's "Hiawatha" in distinctive buckskin dresses. Standing (from left) are Nettie Wirth, Genevieve Healy, Josephine Langley, Belle Johnson, Minnie Burton, Sarah Mitchell, and kneeling (from left) are Emma Sansaver, Gertrude LaRance, and Rose LaRose. (Photograph by Andrew P. Williams, MHS Photo Archives PAC 80-79 M3)

Part of the United States' pavilion at the World's Fair was a Model Indian School. The girls would live and take classes at the school, and twice a week would hold intra-squad exhibitions. The girls also agreed to take on all challengers. The girls departed from Fort Shaw on June 1, 1904. The 11 girls defeated every single team they played over the next five months, earning themselves the title "world champions."



Gertrude Larance Parker holding Joan Parker (Robinson ), Buzz (Winfield) Parker, and Becky Parker (Tall White Man) in front.

Gertrude "Gertie" Marie Larance was born on July 30, 1895, the Métis daughter of Albert Jackson LaRance<sup>1</sup> and Elizabeth "Liza" St. Germain. Albert Jackson LaRance was

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<sup>1</sup> Albert was born on March 3, 1867 at Edmonton, the son of Basile "Champuse" LaRance Jr. (b. 1831) and Marguerite "Maggie" Desjardins/Gardiner (b. 1837). The family was part of the Teton River Canyon Métis group. Basile described himself as a buffalo hunter and freighter.

born March 3, 1867 in what is now Edmonton, Alberta. He married Elizabeth St Germaine on October 23, 1888 at St Peter's Mission, Montana. Liza was born circa 1873 in Alberta. Elizabeth was the daughter of Frederick St. Germain and Marguerite Courtepatte.

Scrip affidavit for St. Germain, Frederick; wife: Marguerite St. Germain; died: 4 January 1875; heirs: her children Elizabeth and Melanie; claim no: 2991; scrip no: 12537 to 12538; date of issue: 10 November 1879; amount: \$160.

Gertrude married Guy Winifred Parker who was born on September 28, 1891 at Lame Deer, Montana.

Reference:

Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, "World Champions: The 1904 Girl's Basketball Team from fort Shaw Indian Boarding School." *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2001), 2-25.

Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Full-Court Quest: The Girls from Fort Shaw Indian School Basketball Champions of the World*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008.



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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.