

Sarah Mitchell (1889-1933)

Sarah Mitchell was a member of a girls' basketball team that was organized at Fort Shaw School in 1902. Like many of her teammates, Sarah followed siblings to the school at Fort Shaw. 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.



Members of the 1904 World Champions Fort Shaw Women's Basketball Team pictured are (standing from left) Nettie Wirth, Assiniboine; Katie Snell, Assiniboine; Minnie Burton, Lemhi Shoshone; **Sarah Mitchell**, Assiniboine; and (seated from let) Genie Butch, Assiniboine; Belle Johnson, Piegan; Emma Sansaver, Chippewa-Cree. Not pictured are Genevieve Healy, Gros Ventre; Rose LaRose, Shoshone-Bannock; Flora Lucero, Chippewa. Jessie Tarbox took this picture of the Fort Shaw girls' basketball team in 1904 on their visit to St. Louis.

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."

Sarah Mitchell was born in 1889 on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, Montana, the Métis daughter of Joseph "David" Mitchell and Isabelle St. Germain. She married Philip Courchene, son of Jean Louis Courchene and Marie Alphosine Azure, on December 31, 1908 in Great Falls, Montana.

Sarah's parents, David Joseph "Bloody Knife" Mitchell (b. May 1841, Missouri, died circa 1900) and Isabelle St. Germain were married on August 18, 1862 in St. François Xavier, Manitoba. Isabelle was the daughter of François St. Germain (b. 1781) and Louise Saucier *dite* Chateau.

Sarah's mother, Isabelle St. Germain was born on June 14, 1841 in St. François Xavier, and died on April 3, 1929 in Roosevelt County, Montana. Isabelle was first married to François LaFrenière in 1859. She then married David Joseph Mitchell, the son of David Dawson Mitchell and Marie Deschamps on August 18, 1862 at St. François Xavier. Subsequently, she married Robert Burton on February 22, 1903 at Wolf Point, Montana.



Sarah Mitchell, standing on far right.

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)

Métis Scrip claims

Mitchell, Isabella; for her deceased daughter, Floréistine Mitchell; address: Wolf Point, Montana; born: 1876 at St. François Xavier, Montana; died: 1889 at Wolf Point; father: Joseph (Dave) Mitchell (Métis); mother: Isabella St. Germain (Métis and deponent); heirs: Daniel Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 802 for \$34.28; Isabella Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 804 for \$34.28; Marie Rose Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 806 for \$34.28; Hyacinthe Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 808 for \$34.29; Nancy Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 810 for \$34.29; Sarah Mitchell, scrip cert.: form D, no. 812 for \$34.29; Marie Louise Chase, scrip cert.: form D, no. 814 for \$34.29; claim no. 20.

Scrip affidavit for Daniels, Isabella; wife of Wm. Daniels; born: 1858; father: Colonel Mitchell (American); mother: Nancy Deschamps (Métis); claim no.: 2933; date of issue: May 28, 1879

Mitchell, Isabella; for her deceased daughter, Josephine Mitchell; address: Wolf Point, Montana; born: 6 October, 1878 at Cypress Hills; died: Fall, 1899 at Fort Shaw, Montana; father: Joseph Mitchell (Métis); mother: Isabella St. Germain (Métis and deponent); scrip issued to Daniel Mitchell, a brother of deceased, for 240 acres; claim no. 21.

Mitchell, Isabella; for her daughter, Marie Louise Mitchell; wife of John K. Chase; address: Wolf Point, Montana; born: 1872 near Cypress Hills, Assiniboine; father: Joseph Mitchell (Métis, deceased); mother: Isabella St. Germain (Métis and deponent); scrip cert.: form E, no. 165; file ref. 130805A; claim no. 19.

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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