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“JUST FOLLOWING THE BUFFALO” ORIGINS OF A MONTANA MÉTIS COMMUNITY

MARTHA HARROUN FOSTER

By 1879 the vast buffalo herds were all but gone from the Great Plains. Many of the remaining animals had moved south from the Milk River of northern Montana and Alberta into the Judith Basin of central Montana. In these rich grasslands, for a few more years, life went on as it had for centuries. Following the buffalo came many Indian bands, as well as Métis who had been hunting on the Milk River for decades. A buffalo-based economy had brought prosperity to the Native people of the Plains. The animals provided essential food and materials in addition to products for trade.

Key Words: buffalo trade, fur trade, Lewistown, Métis, Montana, Red River, Spring Creek, upper Missouri River

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For Métis people, buffalo had replaced beaver as the backbone of their fur trade economy. Their production of robes for the eastern markets and pemmican for the Hudson's Bay and American fur companies provided the economic base of a growing number of communities spreading westward from the Red River of Manitoba, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Among the people moving into central Montana was a group of Métis families who would settle where the old Carroll Trail crossed Spring Creek in the gentle hills watered and protected by the Judith, Moccasin, and Snowy mountains. Here they would found a Métis community, the Spring Creek settlement (Lewistown), where their descendents still live today.¹

The Spring Creek band's Métis roots go far back into the fur trade history of what is today Canada, the Great Lakes, and the upper Mississippi River drainage. Over the years their ancestors, like other children of European and Indian unions, entered the fur trade. Their knowledge of both European and Indian languages and customs made them an asset to the fur trade companies. Gradually they began to develop a distinctive culture, neither Indian nor European. They maintained a characteristic

village organization of long narrow lots fronting on streams and reaching back to commonly held grazing lands. They developed a language (Michif) that combined elements of Cree, French, and Chippewa, and they occupied an important economic niche centered on the buffalo trade. Their unique language, dress, music, and dance became characteristic and occupied a central position in an open, friendly, and generous social round in which Métis-style foods and holiday celebrations held a central place.²

Gradually, economic and environmental factors encouraged the fur trade's steady movement westward. By the early 1800s, beaver depletion decimated the traditional economic foundation of Métis communities in the Great Lakes region, upper Mississippi drainage, and eastern Canada. It was on the western Great Plains, with its plentiful supply of beaver, bison, and game, that the Métis established new communities. Here they created interconnected social and cultural centers on the rivers and streams that flow to the Red River of the North. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the Red River Métis, as the mixed-descent peoples of the Red River trade area came to be known, flourished, all the while absorbing new peoples and extending their far-flung kinship networks.

The Red River trade region extended from Red Lake and Lake of the Woods in present-day Minnesota and Ontario to the Rocky Mountains on the west, and from northern Saskatchewan and Alberta south to Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana, including the upper Missouri River. Various unrecorded non-Indian trappers probably reached the heart of this region, the Red River drainage, in the early 1700s. By 1743 Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de La Vérendrye, had established two posts in the Red River basin, one at present-day Winnipeg and another, just to the west, near Portage la Prairie. Métis families, including many ancestors of those who would later settle near Spring Creek, steadily moved into the area as beaver and the market for their skins disappeared. More and more families turned to the buffalo trade, especially of pemmican and

robes. But a buffalo-based economy has unique requirements, including the proximity of large herds. The Métis soon exhausted nearby game supplies, and individual, close-to-home hunting no longer yielded sufficient provisions for the communities. In response, by the 1830s, large-scale, organized buffalo hunts to distant areas became more prevalent. As before, meat, pemmican, and robes from these hunts supplied the Métis throughout the year, while surpluses (especially of pemmican) were sold to the Hudson's Bay Company, which provided a small but constant market.³

In addition to buffalo becoming scarce along the Red River, another development fundamentally changed the nature of the Red River fur trade after 1830. U.S. traders, eager for a supply of buffalo robes and other furs, opened posts on the upper (southern) Red and upper Missouri rivers. Métis and Indian hunters found that they could make greater profits by dealing with American traders whose access to cheap water transportation on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers made transport of bulky robes to eastern markets economical. Popular as bedding, wraps, boots, coats, and military clothing, the robes attracted American domestic and export markets eager to absorb all that the Métis produced. In response to this demand, U.S. trader Norman Kittson established a post at Pembina in 1844. Here on the upper Red River in U.S. territory, he actively courted the Canadian and U.S. Métis buffalo-robe trade. The forty-ninth parallel as yet made little difference to the hunters, who ignored it. No one enforced tariffs, nor could they in such a vast area still under Native control.⁴

With a good market established by the 1840s, the buffalo hunt took on grand proportions, becoming the principal support of many Red River Métis families. The success of the buffalo trade depended on an efficient means to move products overland to ports, especially St. Paul, Minnesota, where they could be shipped cheaply by boat or barge. Red River carts, organized into long trains, provided the Métis with a cost-effective mode of transport. Joseph

Kinsey Howard, journalist and historian, wrote a classic description of this vehicle:

The cart was built entirely of wood and the noise of its wheel hubs as they rubbed on the axle, which usually was an unpeeled poplar log, was a tooth-stabbing screech which was never forgotten by anyone who heard it; it was as if a thousand fingernails were drawn across a thousand panes of glass. . . .

The Red River cart brigades never sneaked up on anybody. On a still day you could hear them coming for miles, and see the great cloud of yellow dust they raised; and if the buffalo of the plains did finally flee into holes in the ground as the Indians believed—well, it was no wonder.

Hundreds of these carts now rolled across the prairie, carrying provisions to the hunt and products to river ports.⁵

But as the buffalo disappeared near Red River, it was the western plains, including the upper Missouri River drainage, that began to attract the robe trade. The Missouri, in addition to providing an inexpensive means of transportation, flowed through the heart of the Northern Plains herd. However, it was not until 1830 that Kenneth McKenzie, a former North West Company employee working for the American Fur Company at Fort Union (near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers), was able to open trade along the entire length of the Missouri River. The stumbling block had always been the hostility to the United States of the Blackfeet on the northern tributaries, who traded with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The Blackfeet had long resented and repelled American incursions into their trade area. To accomplish the dangerous task of meeting with the Blackfeet, McKenzie selected an experienced Métis employee, Jacque Berger, probably the father of Pierre Berger of the Spring Creek band. Berger proved an excellent choice, for he knew the Blackfeet, their customs, and their language, having traded with them while working for the HBC. With Berger, McKenzie

sent a small group of French Canadian and Métis who, as French speakers, he hoped would be less offensive to the Blackfeet than English-speaking Americans. Barely surviving the dangerous mission, Berger succeeded in bringing a Blackfeet trading party to Fort Union, thereby opening that profitable trade and bringing what is today Montana into the heart of the Missouri River fur trade.⁶

By 1832 Missouri River traders shipped robes regularly out of Fort Union. After 1832, as more steamboats reached Fort Union, the transport of heavy robes became easier, cheaper, and more profitable. Estimates indicate that between 1841 and 1870, traders transported the products (robes, skins, meat, and tongues) of approximately 115,000 buffalo a year down the Missouri River, far surpassing the HBC's 17,000 a year. In 1858 Fort Benton (Montana) alone shipped close to 20,000 robes. The HBC, St. Paul markets, and the Missouri River trade allowed the Métis buffalo hunters to enjoy competitive markets and good prices.⁷

Even though the buffalo trade was moving west, Métis families continued, as they had for decades, to organize their buffalo hunts in and to set out from Pembina (North Dakota). Although they increasingly participated in the Missouri River trade, Pembina (and later St. Joseph) remained the economic and social centers of Métis life south of the boundary. The 1850 Minnesota Territorial census (including, at that time, Pembina) shows that many of the families (or their parents) who later made up the central Montana Spring Creek band resided in Pembina. Representatives of each of the Spring Creek extended families (which included the relatives of married women and the in-laws of their sons and daughters) were in residence during September 1850. For example, Judith Wilkie Berger, daughter of respected elder and hunt chief Jean Baptiste Wilkie, her husband, Pierre Berger, and their children lived in the Pembina district. This large family later provided the core and leadership of the Spring Creek band. Also included in the census were Judith's father and her mother, Amable Azure. Their son and Judith's brother,

Alexander Wilkie, also joined the Spring Creek band in the company of his daughters' families. Catherine Charette and her husband, Peter Laverdure, were members of the band as were their daughters Virginia (whose husband, Francis Janeaux, became the band's principal trader and community leader) and Eliza (whose daughter married Janeaux's employee, Paul Morase). Nearby lived Michel and Magdelaine Klyne, the parents of Ben Kline, another of the band's traders. Two houses away from the Klynes, Isabell McGillis and her husband, Edward Wells, resided. Their son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren also joined the band. Joseph Fagnant, half-brother of Charlotte Adam Lafontaine (mother and sister of several band members), and his wife, Marguerite, were neighbors of Judith and Jean Baptiste Wilkie. The Fagnant's daughter, Madeline, married Joseph Larocque and accompanied cousins and other relatives in the band to Spring Creek in 1879. These extended families living in the Pembina district in 1850 included representatives of all the original Spring Creek band families and associated traders. They participated at the heart of Pembina community life, but as the buffalo grew scarce, many would be among those to move west.⁸

MOVING WEST

By the mid-1860s, while the prices received for robes climbed and hunting increased, the buffalo disappeared from the Red River vicinity. Many observers had been commenting on the shrinking range of the herds for years. The failure of the animals to return to the immediate area of Red River Settlement underlay tensions that resulted in the Pemmican War of 1814-16. By 1857 the Plains Cree of the Qu'Appelle River complained of the scarcity of buffalo, and again in 1858 the Cree reported the buffalo "very scarce."⁹

The Métis hunters had no choice but to move farther and farther west. At first, the wintering sites on the plains of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Montana were temporary communities where families lived in lodges. Occasionally

they would build rough cabins, but as these camps lasted only as long as the herds remained nearby, they would abandon the sites after a winter or two. The camps varied in size, as did the hunting bands that occupied them. Sometimes just one extended family traveled together; other times several bands, as many as two hundred individuals, would congregate. Band membership constantly shifted as groups broke up and reformed.

Gradually it became easier to remain near the herds year round, far west of the Red River. The Métis spent summers following the herds, making jerky and pemmican from the meat. In the fall, after the buffalo coats became prime, the families went out again for robes and fresh meat. In 1873 George Dawson, a member of the United States-Canadian boundary survey, noted Métis wintering camps at Wood Mountain and Cypress Hills, and along the Milk River and the Whitemud (Frenchman's) River. Dawson described a summer camp that resembled the hunting camps of the 1840s. The circle arrangement with the carts tightly side by side, trams outward, protected the band, their stock, and their supplies. Priests often accompanied the hunting parties to say Mass, perform marriages, and educate the children. In the winter, the band that Dawson observed moved to Wood Mountain, where they had already erected cabins. He reported that rather than returning to Red River markets, these Métis sent their robes out on the Missouri River, fifty or sixty miles to the south.¹⁰

By the early 1870s, wintering sites included the older ones of Turtle Mountain, Wood Mountain, and Qu'Appelle River as well as more than a dozen others scattered throughout present-day Alberta, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and Montana. Many of these camps grew into permanent communities, and ones such as St. Laurent (Batoche) played important roles in Métis history. Many remain Métis communities to this day. A favored wintering site, especially for the Pembina Métis and a number of their St. Francis Xavier (Red River) relatives, was along the Milk River and its tributaries. The Milk River winds across the

Canadian-Montana border, through the vast semiarid grasslands of north-central Montana and southern Alberta, which was among the last refuges of the buffalo.¹¹

THE MILK RIVER YEARS

As early as 1835, Métis were already making a living on the Milk River. Charles Larpenteur, a Fort Union employee, noted that "half-breeds" frequented the river valley, "which abounded with beaver." By 1853 the beaver were scarce, but Euro-American travelers wrote of Métis buffalo hunters pushing into the traditional territory of the Milk River peoples (Assiniboine and Gros Ventre). Large, organized bands of Métis buffalo hunters, including individuals who would later join together and move south to Spring Creek, were on the Milk River by at least 1866, when Ben Kline, a Pembina Métis (later a member of the Spring Creek band), found many Métis already living there.¹²

In 1868 Turtle Mountain Métis Baptiste Gardipee and his family left their game-depleted Dakota home and came to the Milk River accompanied by other Métis and their four hundred carts. When the Gardipees reached the Milk River they found a "great camp of breeds . . . somewhere in the vicinity of where Dodson [Montana] is now." Before traveling on to Fort Benton, they spent a few weeks resting, visiting, and hunting. Eli Gardipee, the young son of Baptiste, later recorded his memories of the Milk River Métis camp.

It was truly a happy life that these people were living. The camp was in the midst of the buffalo herds and they hunted and worked hard during the day but when night came they danced and sang the old French songs, until the late hours, arranged for many and divers horse races for the following day,—then slept the sleep of people who had no cares for the moment.¹³

Other accounts also stress the good life that the Métis led on the Milk River, recount-

ing the fun that they had, the plentiful buffalo, and their relative prosperity. Clemence Gourneau Berger, later a member of the Spring Creek band, described her life as a winterer for the *Lewistown (Montana) Daily News*. Born in Pembina in 1842, she was the oldest of Red River Métis couple Joseph and Judith McMillan Gourneau's eleven children. Her parents had moved to Pembina from Red River Settlement before her birth. Clemence Gourneau married Isaie Berger, son of Pierre and Judith Wilkie Berger, at St. Joseph in 1870. After their marriage the couple traveled extensively in Dakota, Montana, and Canada, as Clemence put it, "just camping here and there without thought of settling permanently in any place, just following the buffalo trails." Clemence's first two children were born at Wood Mountain (southern Saskatchewan) where her husband's family was hunting buffalo. They did not stay long in any one place. From Wood Mountain they moved back to the Milk River and then to the Cypress Hills (southern Saskatchewan and Alberta). As the herds became harder to find, they stayed longer in Montana, remaining in the Milk River area continuously for about six years before moving as part of the Spring Creek band to the Judith Basin.¹⁴

Clemence Berger remembered that "for . . . supplies we generally had some trader with us, like Francis Janeaux and others, who always had a supply of tea, sugar, tobacco and so forth." While the men did the hunting, "women did all the tanning of the buffalo hides, made jerky meat, pemmican and moccasins." Although her memories were pleasant, she noted:

We endured many hardships, too. There were times when we could not find any buffalo or other 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.¹⁵

Like many observers she remembers Métis cheerfulness in the face of deprivation.

While they "roamed the prairies," Berger noted that she and her husband were "always

in the company of people of part Indian blood" who traveled in "many groups." Her portrayal is consistent with traditional Métis band structure as well as that of their Chippewa and Cree ancestors. But while band organization and lifestyle had many similarities to that of Indian relatives, Clemence Berger was careful to point out the differences between her people and the Indians:

You might think that we lived the life of real Indians, but one thing we had always with us which they did not—[our] religion. Wherever we were we had some Jesuit missionaries with us. . . . Every night we had a prayer meeting. Just before a buffalo hunt, we would see our men on bended knee in prayer.¹⁶

Other accounts round out a picture of everyday life on Milk River that underscores the separate and distinct nature of Métis community life from that of their Euro-American and Indian neighbors. The Métis had what amounted to their own organized government, much like that developed years earlier for the large buffalo hunts. Samuel O'Connell, bookkeeper for Francis Janeaux, noted that the Métis on Milk River "had a code of laws and were governed by a council of Twelve, under their chosen [leader] Gabriel Ausur [Azure]." The laws, he remembered, were "in some cases very severe." For example, punishment such as "flogging and confiscation of their horses, carts, buffalo, etc.," resulted if "one of their number use[d] disrespectful language towards any of the women, or girls or offer[ed] any insult." Although strict, O'Connell continued, "there [were] not many occasions to administer the law as the infractions . . . were very few."¹⁷

In addition to explaining camp government, O'Connell also described Métis women's dress during the period. He remembered that "their garb was quite picturesque always clean and neat." The older women "wore dark colored dresses and double width broadcloth cloaks—with black handkerchiefs around their raven black hair," while the younger women and

girls "wore head gear of brighter colors." The women "always wore the insignia of their faith, a german silver cross about 5 inches long."¹⁸

As well as noticing their distinctive dress, many visitors commented on the lively dances the Métis enjoyed. In his recollections of an 1860s Milk River camp, Métis traveler Louis Shambrow, like so many commentators before him, noted what "a happy people" the Métis were and what good times they had. He reported that "one of the first things they would do when they got in a permanent camp was to build a dance house." They constructed the building from hewn cottonwood logs with hides stretched tightly over them to make a good floor for the dancing. He remembered that "the fun that we had was beyond telling." The dances were so important to the Métis community that, according to Shambrow, "the Priest could do anything with them but stop [the] dancing."¹⁹

Recorded memories of the Milk River years are of a pleasant life, carefree and happy as long as buffalo were plentiful. Most accounts underplay the harassment by territorial officials that began almost upon arrival. Growing ill feeling toward the Métis on the part of Euro-American settlers and business people ostensibly centered on suspected illegal sales of liquor and arms to Indians. Increasingly, they saw the Métis in terms of their Indian connections and feared them as an auxiliary of the Indian community. These Montanans also questioned Métis national identity, viewing them as illegal Canadian immigrants.²⁰

The problems faced by the Métis on Milk River were compounded when, during the 1870s, greater numbers of Métis moved onto the plains of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Montana. Several factors influenced this migration, including changing conditions in Red River Settlement after the 1869-70 Manitoba Resistance and the scarcity of buffalo on the Red River. But the Métis presence in Montana became particularly visible because of the profitable markets located on the Missouri River. One of the trading posts, Fort Benton, became an important export point for the robes gathered

in Montana, southwestern Saskatchewan, and southern Alberta. Gradually, though, as the increase in unregulated cross-border trade came to the attention of tariff collectors, the transport of robes across the boundary became both more expensive and more difficult. The Métis had traditionally avoided the 10 percent duty on robes by moving them unnoticed across the unpatrolled border. By 1874, laws not only increased the duty to 20 percent but also provided more effective enforcement.²¹

Montana ranchers' and business people's fears of the Lakota also threatened the relative peace on the Milk River. The Lakota had been moving into Montana since early in the century as agricultural settlement and the disappearance of the buffalo forced them west. During the 1870s, like other peoples dependent upon the buffalo, they moved into Montana in greater numbers. Fearful and not knowing the source of the well-armed Lakotas' supplies, guns, and ammunition, U.S. government suspicion centered on Métis traders and the traffic in merchandise from Canada. The U.S. Army and reservation agents launched several investigations to uncover any Métis plot to sell provisions, guns, or ammunition to the Lakota. Though officials found no proof, by March of 1874, Brigadier General Alfred Terry had become concerned enough about supposed Métis provisioning of hostile bands that he ordered Colonel John Gibbon to "break up" the "halfbreed settlement[s]" found illegally camped within reservation boundaries. Matters only worsened for the Métis after the 1876 army defeat at the Battle of the Little Big Horn when fear of the Lakota reached epidemic proportions. Many Montanans called for the removal of all Métis in Montana regardless of their U.S. citizenship.²²

Compounding the pressure to remove the Métis for military reasons were renewed complaints from reservation agents and U.S. trading company personnel (fearful of Métis competition in the Indian trade) demanding that the army expel all "Canadian" Métis. Tirades appeared in Montana newspapers, including the *Benton Record*, whose editor accused the

Métis of carrying "on an illicit trade with hostile savages."

These Canadian half-breeds pay no taxes; they produce nothing but discord, violence and bloodshed where ever they are permitted to locate. They are a worthless, brutal race of the lowest species of humanity, without one redeeming trait to commend them to the sympathy or protection of any Government.²³

Accusations of illegal arms and liquor trading, of Canadian citizenship, and of sympathy for their Indian relatives created a hostile climate for Métis buffalo hunters.

In response to these accusations against the Métis, the U.S. army complained to the Canadian government about "British half-breeds" and Indians on U.S. soil. But Canadian officials, in the person of British minister to the United States, Sir Edward Thornton, argued that since U.S. Indians and Métis were allowed to hunt in Canada, the reverse was only fair. In spite of Canadian objections, the army removed many Métis to Canada where the Canadians disagreed as to their nationality. In 1879, for example, the Canadian Indian Commissioner complained that Americans had arrested "about 140 half-breeds" despite that fact that most of these Métis claimed U.S. citizenship. General Nelson Miles, in command of the area, defended his removal of "Red River half-breeds" and confiscation of their goods. Despite the lack of evidence, he accused them of selling arms and ammunition to the Lakota and of Canadian citizenship.²⁴

At the same time, there was a great deal of confusion in both the United States and Canada not only as to the nationality of the Métis but also as to their rights as individuals. In general, those Métis who had not become enrolled members of tribes assigned to a reservation were not considered Indians or wards of either government. As non-Indians, if not already U.S. citizens, they should have been able to immigrate and register their intention to become citizens before a county judge—the

same rights accorded other Canadian immigrants. But their association with Indians in the minds of both the Canadian and U.S. governments led officials to deny them basic liberties. Their civil rights were often violated in the United States during the 1870s by reservation agents and government officials such as Miles, who arbitrarily sentenced them to expulsion and destroyed their possessions without due process. Nor did they receive protection from or compensation for Indian depredations. When, for example, Lakota raiders stole the horses of several Milk River Métis bands, they faced starvation. Nevertheless, the Métis were neither compensated for their lost property, as Euro-American settlers would have been, nor did the army help them retrieve their stolen property. The Métis were on their own as far as protecting themselves from raiding Indians. On the other hand, since the Métis were not reservation Indians, they did not receive rations to get them through the winter. Territorial and army officials had devised no fair, uniform policy that acknowledged the Métis as non-Indian citizens enjoying full rights, nor had they provided them with benefits similar to those of other Native peoples. Conservatively, there were more than 30,000 Métis in western Canada and the northwestern United States, but neither government had developed a consistent policy to deal with their rights and needs.²⁵

THE SPRING CREEK BAND MOVES TO THE JUDITH BASIN

As the army stepped up its program to expel Canadian Métis (in their opinion any Métis who could not immediately prove their U.S. citizenship), many Métis were already leaving the Milk River region of their own accord. The number of buffalo in the area declined sharply in the late 1870s. In the summer of 1878 fires had destroyed much of the grass in the Milk River region on both sides of the boundary, causing the herds to move south toward the Judith Basin of central Montana. Consequently, Métis bands were starting to

break up and move away. Some returned to Dakota Territory or Canada, while others traveled to new locations in Montana. Canada was a poor option because the buffalo had already disappeared there and many Canadian Métis and Indians were suffering from starvation. Things were not much better in the Dakotas. The Judith Basin seemed the best choice, but it was becoming crowded. Assiniboiné, Cree, Blood, Gros Ventre, Piegan, Pend d'Oreille, Crow, Lakota, and Métis were already hunting in the region.²⁶

It was in early May 1879 that a group of related Milk River families, under the leadership of Pierre Berger, formed what would later informally be known as the Spring Creek band and moved toward the Judith Basin. Like others, they had heard of the area's plentiful game and buffalo. The army encouraged, but apparently did not force, the families to make this decision. Nevertheless, to ensure that they reached the Judith Basin, Captain Williams of Fort Benton sent two soldiers and two civilians to accompany them. The band traveled from the Milk River to Fort Benton, where they crossed the Missouri River by ferry. They then continued on to Judith Basin accompanied as far as Cottonwood Creek by their military escort. From Cottonwood Creek the band traveled southeast to Spring Creek and camped at a site north of the Great Northern freight depot in present-day Lewistown.²⁷

After the families arrived on Spring Creek, band member Ben Kline remembered that two hunters set out almost immediately to search for buffalo. From Black Butte (a prominence several miles to the east, commanding a view of the surrounding countryside) they sighted the herds. The band moved again toward the buffalo. Ben Kline noted that the hunting was good and that the men "killed lots of them." The families then continued in a southeasterly direction toward Flat Willow Creek and followed that stream west. They circled south of the Snowy Mountains to the "Gap in the West," probably what is now called Judith Gap, where the Judith River makes its way between the Snowy and Little Belt mountains. Here

Ben Kline remembered that they killed so many buffalo that it took them a "whole week to dress and dry the meat." On returning to Spring Creek, they met trader Paul Morase (grandson-in-law of elder Pierre Laverdure and employee of Janeaux) camped with his family on Spring Creek at Reed's Fort, near the present site of Lewistown. The traders had followed the hunting families to provide supplies and market their buffalo products.²⁸

The Spring Creek band apparently left the Milk River just before public pressure to force all Métis from the area resulted in military action. In the midst of the confusion among officials and the non-Métis public as to who the Métis were racially and nationally, Colonel (soon to be General) Nelson A. Miles took matters into his own hands. In the fall of 1879, he broke up the remaining Milk River Métis camps, forcing many Métis across the border into Canada. He was concerned about raiding parties that had come down from Sitting Bull's camp north of the Canadian line during the winter. By summer, Sitting Bull's bands moved south of the boundary, where Lieutenant W. P. Clark of the Second Cavalry encountered them on Frenchman's Creek. The ensuing "sharp engagement" convinced Miles that something had to be done about the Lakota. He believed that the "location of such a large camp of hostile Sioux near the border was a menace to the peace and welfare of the citizens of the United States in that vicinity."²⁹

His campaign against the Lakota involved depriving them of supplies, especially of weapons and ammunition. To this end, he informed Canadian officials that "in the future all property—horses, carts, and cargoes—of any Canadian halfbreed found trading ammunition with United States Indians will be confiscated." In spite of much evidence to the contrary, Miles assumed all the Métis on the Milk River to be "practically British subjects, living most of the time on Canadian territory." In treating the Métis as foreign arms suppliers to hostile Indians, Miles justified their expulsion and the confiscation of their goods without due process. Even later, as he faced

the protests of U.S. Métis and the Canadian government, he insisted that the majority of Métis in the Milk River region were Canadian subjects.³⁰

Army records are not specific on the point, but Miles did not send all of the Métis still hunting on the Milk River to Canada. He proposed to settle at least one band in the Judith Basin where game was still plentiful and the land somewhat more suitable for cultivation. The Judith Basin was also far enough from reservation land to prevent illegal trading with reservation Indians and competition over their game supplies. In this, Ben Kline's version of events differs somewhat from that of Miles. Kline maintained that Miles "rounded up the breeds along the Milk River for trading with the Sioux and gave them their choice either to go to Canada or the Judith Basin." In any case, about fifty families did travel to the Judith Basin. Kline remembers that Miles's soldiers "escorted" the families, who with their Red River carts and possessions crossed the Missouri by steamboat near the mouth of the Musselshell River. This party probably included the Wells and Ouellette families who settled with their already established relatives near Spring Creek.³¹

The army under General Miles continued its attempt to remove all Métis from the Milk River area. These efforts resulted in a dramatic but temporary disruption of the Milk River Métis communities. Soon, however, despite the army's efforts, the Métis returned across the difficult-to-patrol border, and the army grew tired of its expensive efforts to keep them north of the line. Even today, the Milk River of north-central Montana secures the northern base of an inverted triangle, reaching to Lewistown in the south, that is home to the many descendants of the Milk River bands.

The Métis experience on the Milk River illustrates how U.S. government interests used confusion over Métis ethnic and national identity to solve perceived problems without regard to rights that other citizens and immigrants took for granted. When the Métis presence became suspect or inconvenient, as it did in

Montana during the Lakota troubles, Euro-American settlers and government representatives responding to their concerns emphasized the Métis' Canadian background. By ignoring their long history in U.S. territory, Montanans were able to rationalize Métis removal to Canada. Although this scheme ultimately failed, the perception of Métis as illegal immigrants lived on. Euro-Americans who settled in Montana and the Dakotas after the 1870s were celebrated as "pioneers." The Métis, who made the area home decades earlier, were labeled illegal Canadian aliens.

SPRING CREEK SETTLEMENT

As Métis continued to be harassed on the Milk River, the Spring Creek band settled along the tributaries of Big Spring Creek, using the area as a base from which to conduct their hunts. While they were the first Métis families to settle here permanently, they were not the first Métis to live in the area. Various other Métis had hunted and traded in the immediate vicinity decades before their arrival. Armell Creek, a few miles to the east of Spring Creek, was named for Augustin Hamell (Armell), a Métis trader and trapper who operated a trading post there around 1845.³²

The attraction of the Spring Creek drainage for the Métis was its abundant game, protected valleys suitable for summer gardens, and the nearby buffalo herds. The area held potential for both the band's traders and the hunting families. As they settled in the fall of 1879 and spring of 1880, certain residential patterns reflecting occupational divisions became evident. The trader group built homes and a trading post on Spring Creek about three miles south of the crossing of the Carroll Trail, which ran from Carroll on the Missouri River to Helena. Francis Janeaux, leader of the traders, Paul Morase, Pierre Laverdure, and Antoine Ouellette immediately took advantage of the promising location by applying for homesteads near the post on land that is now within Lewistown city limits. By doing so they became the town's founders.³³

The hunting families moved a few miles east, dispersing along the small tributaries of Spring Creek near hills rich in game. Much as they had done on the Milk River and in the Pembina region, these families settled in family clusters, far enough apart to ensure adequate pasture for their stock, sufficient garden or farm land, and plentiful small-game hunting territory, but not so far as to make frequent contact difficult. Relatively few of the hunting families applied for homesteads in the first years. The application process required cash for the filing fee (a rare commodity on the Plains) and considerable inconvenience. Filing on homestead land entailed traveling over a hundred miles to the southwest around the Little Belt Mountains and across the prairie to White Sulphur Springs, the Meagher County seat. Undertaking such a project required not only an appreciation of the importance of legal title, but also a need for such title. Of the hunting families, only the Bergers and Wilkies, who were experienced in Dakota Territory treaty allotments, applied for homestead land by 1883.³⁴

Residence and homestead filings reflect the occupational priorities of the band. The trader families clustered closely together, surrounding the trading post and, as noted above, filed for title almost immediately after arriving. Those who farmed as well as hunted (like the Bergers and Wilkies) were more likely to file for homestead land than hunters and likely to live closer to Spring Creek. Families concentrating most exclusively on hunting lived farthest from Spring Creek and were the least likely, or the latest, to obtain land title. Residential patterns also reflect class differences within the community. The relatively prosperous traders, the band leaders, and the few skilled craftsmen filed on homesteads early and on better agricultural land closer to Spring Creek.³⁵

The Berger family (that of band leader Pierre Berger) settled very soon after arrival, building cabins less than three miles east of the traders on and near Peter Berger's homestead on what was later called upper Breed Creek. Not until the following spring did the rest of the hunt-

ing families build homes, although during the winter they cut the necessary timber. Ben Kline located just to the south of Pierre and Judith Berger and their married and unmarried children, while Judith's brother, Alexander Wilkie, and his daughters' families (the LaFountains) settled to the northeast. Wilkie's two-room cabin was the largest in the area, having one room that measured twenty by thirty feet. This was quite a luxurious size for that place and time, but Wilkie planned ahead, knowing that the families would need a large room for visiting missionaries' services. Another cluster of families settled just beyond the "Berger place," closer to the Judith Mountains. These families established "a little village" near the head of Blind Breed Gulch. John B. LaFountain, husband of one of Alexander Wilkie's daughters, settled there soon after arrival. LaFountain was partially blind and his condition gave the creek its name.³⁶

The band quickly established a trail around the foot of Black Butte on the east end of the Judith Mountains. Known simply as the "half-breed trail," it led to the plains east of the Judith Mountains and to the buffalo, which were plentiful there. This trail passed the homes of the remaining band members. Joe Doney and his wife, Philomene LaFountain, and Joe Larocque and his wife, Madeline Fagnant, half-sister of Charlotte Adam LaFountain and therefore half-aunt of Philomene, located near this trail about twelve miles north east of the Wilkies and LaFountains. Eli Gardipee and his wife, Mary Larocque (Joe Larocque's sister), made their home even farther to the northeast, at the head of Bear Creek on the northeast side of the Judith Mountains in the midst of buffalo country.³⁷

Granville Stuart, an early Montana gold miner and cattleman, traveled through the area in the summer of 1880 and described both the new village and the hunters abroad in the Judith Basin. While searching for cattle-grazing land, Stuart met a large Métis hunting party with their fifty carts as they moved from McDonald to Flat Willow Creek (east of the Judith Mountains). The next day, on June 26,

he encountered forty more "carts and half-breed families" traveling from Black Butte. Describing "carts with two very large wheels in which the families ride," he remembered their "peculiar 'screechy' noise that [could] be heard for miles." While visiting the Métis, Stuart asked for information about good grazing land. One of the hunting party, Severe Hamlin, told him of fine pasturage in the Ford Creek area east of Spring Creek. Stuart took advantage of this advice, and after examining the land, established a large cattle ranch there.³⁸

Earlier, in May 1880, when Stuart passed through the Spring Creek settlement, he was favorably impressed with the village, noting that it was "quite a settlement." He approved of the plowed fields and the neatness of the post and homes. His only criticism was of the post's defenses, which he found insubstantial. "The logs are small so that . . . a bullet . . . would go right through them," he complained—an important consideration in an area where Lakota and Blackfeet horse-stealing parties were very active, and where, just three nights before, the Lakota had stolen thirty head of the settlement's horses. The community was far more to Stuart's liking than the rough Missouri River trade towns, and he commented dryly that "the houses of the Red River half breeds are in marked contrast to the posts of the white men through here."³⁹

That the Métis had built such a tidy and substantial settlement so quickly is all the more remarkable since they arrived with so little. Presumably Janeaux, as a trader, was well supplied with tools, but most families had only the axes that they always carried on their carts. Just one of the hunting families owned a shovel. Pierre Berger, who had experience in blacksmithing and tin working, had a few metalworking tools and a metal hoe, and Isaac Berger had a small number of carpentry tools. None had furniture, few had more than one cart, and all had only the few possessions that they were able to carry in their carts.⁴⁰

Cabins were especially difficult to construct with only an axe, and the carts, being too small to haul logs, were no help in this chore. All of

the logs had to be dragged, a few at a time, out of the mountains with a horse. Elizabeth Berger Swan described the building of the cabins and their furnishings:

Building the log cabins was quite a task . . . being they were skilful with the use of an axe they made all their roofing, flooring, framework and some furniture with smoothly hewn logs. No one had a stove and they cooked in the fireplace builded on a casing of small timbers and finished with a mortar, made with a mixture of grass and dirt. When the roofing is all up in place the cracks were filled with mortar and the top covered with sod, for the doors and windows the framework was covered with raw hide, was not altogether transparent, still gave plenty light inside and was weatherproof.⁴¹

From such meager supplies, the Métis quickly built a community. Before long they were ready for their traditional celebrations, which had long been a part of Métis culture on the Red River. Already, by Christmas of 1880, they were celebrating in their accustomed manner. Christmas, as it had been earlier at Red River Settlement and Pembina, was a relatively quiet family day, but it began a round of visiting and dancing that lasted until New Year's. On New Year's Day the traditional, large, community-wide parties and dances were held. The women worked for weeks cooking enough food for their guests. The entire community was welcome in each home, and groups of celebrants moved from house to house. When evening came and the meal was finished, they removed the furniture from one or two rooms to make space for dancing. Lively Métis fiddling and jigs would continue all night.⁴²

Although the Spring Creek Métis maintained their traditional way of life, they also attempted to learn the customs of the trickle of Euro-American settlers making their way into the Judith Basin. They established schools almost immediately, hired English-speaking teachers, and welcomed non-Métis newcomers. Many of the Spring Creek band elders were

educated and could speak and read French, as well as speak Cree, Chippewa, and Michif. Several of the younger members of the band had attended school in Pembina and could also read and speak these languages. Most could not speak English, but traders Francis Janeaux and Ben Kline could speak and read English as well as French and several Indian languages. These families valued education and made schools one of their community priorities. They organized the first school in 1880, and by the winter of 1881-82 had hired Edward Brassey, later Lewistown mayor, to teach. Brassey lived in Janeaux's stockade and taught in a nearby cabin. The cabin had no plank flooring, and the children simply sat on the ground while Brassey managed as best he could with few books and no blackboards. Thirty children attended this early school: twenty-six Métis and four Euro-American siblings. The next year, in 1882, the community built a one-room schoolhouse with seating for thirty-six students. It was often crowded, with three students sometimes sharing the double seats.⁴³

Non-Métis, including newly settled ranchers and a growing number of small-business owners, were also welcome to the Spring Creek band's religious services. The Métis families had made space and arrangements for these services from the very first. Francis Janeaux held services in his home, and Alexander Wilkie had built his log house large enough to accommodate Mass and religious instruction. A fiddler and singer, Wilkie had learned liturgical music in Pembina and St. Boniface. In his new home, he organized a church choir, which sang the old hymns in French or "Cree" (probably Michif). Visiting priests, discouraged by what they considered to be depraved behavior in such towns as Fort Benton and Carroll, were, as Joseph Kinsey Howard later described, "astonished and delighted to find this oasis of gracious worship in what they regarded as a desert of dissent and apostasy."⁴⁴

The 1880 census provides a snapshot of Métis life in the Judith Basin while indicating some of the problems that the people faced. By

the summer of 1880, the census taker (who prudently did not brave the open country—much of which was still under Indian control—to count the families temporarily away hunting) found thirty Métis families living in the Spring Creek settlement area. Some of these families supported themselves in the traditional manner, hunting buffalo and trading pemmican and robes for supplies. Many had also started farming. The relatively high proportion of farmers (as opposed to hunters) in residence on Spring Creek in mid-June is not surprising. This was still planting time in an area where the last snowstorm is very often during the first week of June. Families who were hunting that season had already left for the herds by the time that the enumerator arrived, leaving others, often older members of the community, to plant gardens and crops.⁴⁵

Interestingly, in addition to occupation, the 1880 census provided space for the notation of race. In the Montana census, "color," as listed there, was a very subjective matter but indicated the growing tendency of Euro-Americans to view Métis as Indian and not as a distinct people with ties to both Euro-American and Indian relatives. The census taker in enumeration district 23, which included the Spring Creek area, recorded all the Métis families as Indian. Traders Francis Janeaux and Paul Morris (Morase), who at least occasionally were identified by the community as white (or French-Canadian) but who were married to Métis women, were also described as Indian. Comparison to another community where many Métis lived suggests the subjectivity and socially constructed nature of ethnic designations in Montana. In enumeration district 3, Fort Benton, the enumerator handled the subject of "color" differently. He listed as "white" a Wells, an Ouellette (Willett), and a Laverdure family, all from Pembina and almost certainly related to the Spring Creek Métis families of the same name, while tabulating Antoine A. Janeaux and his children as white but his wife, Josephine, as Indian. On the other hand, this enumerator described the children of Robert S. Tingley as Indian even though Tingley himself

was designated white (his wife, Louise, was listed as Indian). Class may have entered into designations of ethnicity in Fort Benton, where mixed-descent families had been living off and on since the 1830s. Prosperous farmers, traders, and skilled laborers were invariably listed as white, as were their children. Eli Gardipee, a teamster, therefore somewhat lower on the local social scale, was entered as "<1/2> br" and his wife as Indian. Unfortunately, they had no children to show us how the enumerator would have solved that ethnic puzzle. Enumerators in both districts listed hunters and trappers as Indian. The Wells family again illustrates the contradictions inherent in establishing racial and ethnic identity. John Wells, a sixty-four-year-old trapper found by an enumerator in the Musselshell Valley, east of the Spring Creek drainage, reported his parent's place of birth to be Ireland. Nevertheless, the enumerator entered him as Indian, as he did John's wife, Mary, and their children.⁴⁶

Feelings about race ran high in Montana, and not everyone agreed with a family's own or the enumerator's designations. In enumerator district 4, Shonkin Creek, Chouteau County, the enumerator's original "w" (white) for Pierre (white) and Rose (Indian) Charboneau's children was heavily overwritten with a large "I." At the side, in different writing, is a heavy black "HB" (half-breed). Obviously, three commentators had three separate opinions as to these individuals' "color."⁴⁷

Confusion as to both their national and ethnic identity led to constant difficulties for Métis people in Montana. While the Spring Creek Métis were in part protected from the worst abuses because of their relative prosperity, they too suffered discrimination as "breeds" and "Canadians." Continued close ties to Indian relatives and Chippewa treaty designations of some Spring Creek family members as "Pembina Chippewa Half-Breeds" only compounded confusion and led to further discrimination as Indians. This confusion exacerbated ethnic tensions when Cree and Métis from Canada sought refuge after the Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan, the Little Shell

Chippewa (who included their Métis relatives as members) struggled to become enrolled members of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribe, and the Rocky Boy Chippewa and Little Bear Cree sought to avoid starvation by obtaining a reservation of their own.

In the face of discrimination, the families maintained both their Métis identity and their close ties to Indian relatives. They overcame obstacles such as language and custom differences to participate in building a community and welcomed non-Métis newcomers as they arrived. They built schools and churches and taught their children English, while creating ties to central Montana. Their adaptability, as it had throughout their history, served them well and enabled them to establish a vibrant new community quickly. Despite, or perhaps even because of, the buffalo's disappearance, the Spring Creek Métis community continued to grow. With the addition of new families, the Spring Creek settlement had a population of about 150 Métis families before many Euro-Americans joined the community.⁴⁸

By 1883, however, more Euro-American families moved to the area and gradually Métis economic and social domination ended in the newly named town of Lewistown. Recent non-Métis arrivals opened almost all the new businesses. Non-Métis began to take over the administration of the schools and even of the Catholic Church. In 1883 influential band trader and businessman Francis Janeaux, unable to meet rising debts, sold out to his creditor and supplier, T. C. Power. It is both significant to Janeaux's financial situation and symbolic of the Métis future that his business failure occurred in the same year that the last of the buffalo disappeared from central Montana.

CONCLUSION

From 1879 to 1883 the Métis of the Spring Creek drainage successfully established a Métis community, but the decimation of the buffalo herds and gradual control of the area by

incoming non-Métis settlers precluded Métis economic, social, and political dominance in their new community. Socially, in the Euro-American mind, they were linked increasingly to their Indian relatives. While the Métis, when speaking English, respectfully referred to themselves as "half-breeds," their Euro-American neighbors came to use the word "breed" to mean something more akin to a degenerate Indian—one who is Indian but inferior to "pure bloods." In Montana, references to the Métis, as those in the 1880 census, emphasized their Indian connections more often than their Euro-American ones, ignoring their distinctive values and lifestyle. Many Euro-Americans confused the Métis and their Cree relatives, with whom they often camped and hunted.

Their ascribed legal and social identities in conflict, the Métis faced the greatest challenge of their long history, the end of the fur trade. While the Spring Creek band welcomed and accommodated Euro-American newcomers to the most prosperous Métis community in Montana, their life in the Judith Basin had changed forever. By 1884 the Spring Creek Métis had not only lost economic control of their community, but also witnessed incoming Euro-American settlers reverse their numerical, and consequently, their political advantage. Above all, they watched in dismay as their economic base abruptly disappeared from the Plains.

That the Spring Creek Métis met the new challenges of the next century was apparent in 1979 when the Métis of Lewistown held a Centennial Celebration. The celebration honored the mixed-descent people of Montana, the Dakotas, and Canada with cultural demonstrations and a locally published history documenting their unique culture and common past. Hundreds of Métis, Indian, and non-Indian people attended events ranging from panel discussions to Métis dances, fiddling, and a powwow. Celebrations continue in Lewistown to the present in recognition of both the Métis past and their hopes for the future.

NOTES

1. The word "Indian" is preferred here rather than Native American, First Peoples, or other equally appropriate terms, especially when attempts are made to distinguish between Indian and Métis. Since the Métis are also "Native," the term Indian, even with all its colonial baggage, seems to generate less confusion. It is also the term employed historically and legally in the United States. A more troubling term is "half-breed." The word is offensive to many because of its historical and contemporary pejorative connotations. Originally, the term "half-breed" simply meant a person of mixed-Indian descent. Louis Riel, famed Métis leader, used it as the English equivalent of "métis" when speaking or writing in English. Even today, some Montana Métis use the term, respectfully, to distinguish themselves from whites or Indians. I use "half-breed" in this same sense unless exploring its historical usage. Additionally, my use of "Chippewa" (rather than Anishinaabe or other, perhaps more appropriate, self-identifiers in reference to the Ojibwa people) stems from current and historical use in Montana. Interestingly, many Montanans, both past and present, refer to all Métis, Chippewa, and Cree indistinguishably as "Cree." Finally, in any discussion of Métis people, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms "Métis" and "métis." Lowercase "métis," as employed here, refers to all people of mixed American Indian and European descent. The capitalized term "Métis" refers more specifically to an ethnic or social group that is, or is in the process of becoming, distinguishable from others.

These families, referred to here as the Spring Creek band, are also known as the Lewistown Métis. To avoid confusion with later arrivals, and since not all the families lived within Lewistown (many settled along the tributaries of Spring Creek well outside the present-day city limits), I will refer to the original related Métis families as the Spring Creek band rather than as the Lewistown Métis. It should also be noted that historically the Métis referred to their community as Spring Creek—it was Euro-American settlers who later named the town Lewistown. The term "band" is used here in the Anishinaabe sense of small groups of related families coming together for a specific purpose.

The Spring Creek families and their relatives who remained on the Milk River formed the kinship network that has come to be known as the Lewistown/Havre/Glasgow triangle or the Lewistown/Milk River triangle. Other of their relatives traveled southwest from the Milk River to settle at St. Peter's Mission and vicinity where Cree and Canadian Métis joined them. These families established

settlements along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains and became the second principal cluster of Métis in Montana. Members of the two networks, related before they settled in Montana, preserved and extended their common ties.

For early Métis on the Milk River, see Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872* (1933; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 75-76.

For an extensive look at the Spring Creek (Lewistown) Métis community and Montana Métis identity, see Martha Harroun Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006) and Martha Harroun Foster, "We Know Who We Are: Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2000).

2. There are several studies of the development of Métis culture and identity, including Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, *A Gathering of Rivers: Indian, Métis, and Mining in the Western Great Lakes, 1737-1832* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown, eds., *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985); Lawrence J. Barkwell, Leah Dorion, and Darren R. Préfontaine, *Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc., 2001); Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660-1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004).

3. V. Havard, "The French Half-breeds of the Northwest," *Smithsonian Reports* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1879), 311; A. P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804* (1952; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 32-33; Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest* (1952; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1994), 25-26; Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 38-39; Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild State* (1951; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 371.

4. William T. Hornaday, *The Extirpation of the American Bison* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1889), 443-44; Clarence Rife,

"Norman W. Kittson, A Fur Trader at Pembina," *Minnesota History* 6, no. 3 (September 1925): 232-34.

5. Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman, and Deborah M. Stultz, *The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1979). Gerhard J. Ens, in *Homeland to Hinterland*, 28-92, discusses the growth of both the Hudson Bay Company and free-trader buffalo production during these years. Howard, *Strange Empire*, 55-56 ("The cart was built").

6. Larpenteur, *Forty Years*, 90-97.

7. Merrill G. Burlingame, "Buffalo in Trade and Commerce," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (July 1929): 274-76; Larpenteur, *Forty Years*, 63-64, 72-80, 90-97; Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (1976; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 55; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade* (1935; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 338-39; William A. Dobak, "Killing the Canadian Buffalo, 1821-1881," *Western Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 42-46.

8. Nancy L. Woolworth, "Gingras, St. Joseph and the Métis in the Northern Red River Valley, 1843-1873," *North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains* 42, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 17, 20-21. After Pembina, St. Joseph (present-day Walhalla, ND) became the center of Red River Métis activity south of the boundary. Woolworth comments upon the isolated nature of these Métis communities; for example: "Between 1851 and 1858, the district elected Norman W. Kittson as Councilor and Joseph Rolette, Jr., and Antoine B. Gingras as its representatives to the Territorial Legislature. The sessions met in January in St. Paul, and the three men therefore had to walk almost 700 miles on snowshoes behind dog sleds to attend" (20).

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1850 Minnesota Territorial Census*, Pembina District, no. 54, house visit no. 94 (father and mother of Judith Wilkie Berger), 108, 75 (Klynes), 73 (Isabell and Edward Wells), 93; Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community," 130-31, 221-23; Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*, 41-42, 83-85.

9. D. Bruce Sealey and Antoine S. Lussier, *The Métis: Canada's Forgotten People* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975), 37; John Hesketh, "History of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa," *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, ed. O. G. Libby (Grand Forks, 1923), 5:107-9; William T. Hornaday, *The Extirpation of the American Bison* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1889), 489 ("very scarce").

10. George M. Dawson, "Surveying the International Boundary: The Journal of George M.

Dawson, 1873," *Saskatchewan History* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 19; Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 78, 213-14.

11. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 118, 213-14; Sealey and Lussier, *The Métis*, 99-100. Examples of Métis community and family histories include Catherine E. Bell, *Alberta's Métis Settlements Legislation: An Overview of Ownership and Management of Settlement Lands* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1994); Heather Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves: Aboriginal Ethnogenesis in a Canadian Family, 1660-1900* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004); Nicole St. Onge, *Saint Laurent, Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities, 1850-1914* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2004).

12. Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 75-76 ("which abounded"); I. I. Stevens, "Report of Explorations for a Route for the Pacific Railroad, I. I. Stevens, Governor of Washington Territory, 1853," 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1855, Senate Ex. Doc. Vol. 13 no. 78, Cong. Doc. Series no. 758, 148-49; John C. Ewers, "Ethnological Report on the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy Reservation and the Little Shell Band of Indians," in *American Indian Ethnohistory: North Central and Northeastern Indians*, ed. David Agee Horr (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974), 6:52-56. Ben Kline, interview with Oscar Mueller, 1931, "Ben Kline Reminiscences," SC942, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT (hereafter cited as MHSA), 2; Victor Van Den Broeck, "Sketch of Ben Kline's Life, Gathered by Father Van Den Broeck during Many Private Conversations with His Friend Ben," "Ben Kline Reminiscences," SC942, MHSA, 1.

13. Eli Guardipee, interview by John B. Ritch, 27 August 1940, "Eli Guardipee Reminiscence," SC772, MHSA, 2-3.

14. Clemence Gourneau Berger, "The Métis Come to Judith Basin," *Lewistown (Montana) Daily News*, 31 December 1943, reprinted in Alberta C. Sparlin, *The Trail Back* (Great Falls, MT: Blue Print and Letter Company, 1976), 11-12.

15. *Ibid.*, 11.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West*, trans. George Woodcock (1945; reprint, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), 2:405; Samuel O'Connell, "Juneaux's Trading Post on Milk River, Montana Territory: Story of Medicine Lodge Known as Juneaux's Post," Samuel O'Connell Papers, SC597, box 1, folder 1, MHSA, 1-2.

18. O'Connell, "Juneaux's Trading Post," 1-2.

19. Louis Shambow, interview by A. J. Noyes, 17 December 1916, "Louis Shambow (Chambeau) Reminiscence," SC 792, box 1, folder 1, MHSA, 6.

20. For a look at the motives of some Euro-American business people, see Paul F. Sharp,

Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

21. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 151-54.

22. William W. Alderson, Indian Agent, Office of the Milk River Agency, Fort Peck, Montana Territory, to Edwin P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1 May 1874, National Archives (hereafter NA), RG75, M234, roll 498; Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry to Major W. B. Sweitzer, Fort Ellis, 23 March 1875, NA, RG75, M234, roll 503 ("break up"); Michael J. Koury, *Military Posts of Montana* (Bellevue, NE: Old Army Press, 1970), 5 (after 1876).

23. *Benton Record*, 17 October 1879, 2. For further discussion, see Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community," chapter 3; Foster, *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*, chapter 2.

24. Sir Edward Thornton to William Evarts, 15 November 1879, NA, RG75, M234, roll 517, 2; Department of Indian Affairs, Dominion of Canada, "Annual Report, 1879," Ottawa, 1880, 88 (about 140 half-breeds); Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections and Observations of General Nelson A. Miles* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1897), 309-10.

25. H. M. Black to Captain C. H. Potter, Helena, MT, 26 November 1879, NA, RG75, M234, roll 518, 2; Black to Assistant Adjutant General, 28 January 1880, NA, RG75, M234, roll 518, 6; Mueller, "Ben Kline," 4; Ewers, "Ethnological Report," 85 (30,000).

26. John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 72; Giraud, *The Métis*, 2:413-14 (buffalo disappear in Canada). Frederick C. Jamieson reported that "[t]here were no more [buffalo hunting] expeditions after 1877, when the herds suddenly disappeared from the Great Plains of Rupert's Land." Jamieson, "The Edmonton Hunt," *Alberta Historical Review* 1, nos. 1, 2 (1953): 10. Andrew Garcia, *Tough Trip through Paradise, 1878-1879* (1967; reprint, San Francisco: Comstock Editions, 1981), 184-85.

27. Elizabeth Swan, "A Brief History of the First Catholic Pioneers of Lewistown, Montana," file 541, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, 1; copies also held by Carnegie Public Library, Lewistown, MT, and in the Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, MC 27, MHSA, Helena, MT; Van Den Broeck, "Ben Kline," 2-3.

Band members included Pierre Berger, his wife, Judith Wilkie Berger, their four unmarried children, four married sons and their families, two married daughters and their families (Turcotte and Ouellette), and a married granddaughter (Wells). Judith Berger's brother, Alexander Wilkie, and

his married daughters (LaFountain) and Judith's sister, Betsy Wilkie Fleury, and her married son and family also accompanied them. Two Doney families, the wife in each case a sister of the husbands of Alexander Wilkie's daughters (LaFountain), and the families of three Fagnant brothers and a sister (Larocque), all half brothers or the half sister of Charlotte Adam LaFountain (mother-in-law of the married daughters of Alexander Wilkie) also joined the band. The John Ledoux family, which was probably related to the LaFountains and Fagnants, the Gayion family, and Ben Kline, employee of Francis Janeaux, and Kline's childhood friend, Mose LaTray, and family made up the body of the initial party. (Swan, "A Brief History," 1; Van Den Broeck, "Ben Kline," 2-3). Other sources for information concerning these relationships and kinship diagrams may be found in Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community," 215-24, and *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*, 78-79.

28. Swan, "A Brief History," 3-5; Van Den Broeck, "Ben Kline," 3 ("killed lots"; "whole week").

29. Lieutenant Colonel H. M. Black, Eighteenth Infantry, to Assistant Adjutant General, Department of Dakota, St. Paul, Minnesota, 28 January 1879, NA, RG75, M234, roll 518 (Miles broke up the Métis camps). Miles, *Personal Recollections*, 306, 309 ("sharp engagement"; "location of such").

30. John P. Turner, *The North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1893* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1950), 1:466 ("future all property"); Miles, *Personal Recollections*, 309 ("practically British subjects"). Reference to this campaign is also found in the following: United States Secretary of War, Annual Report, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1879) "Miles' Report," (September 1879), 61-64; *Army and Navy Register* 16 (2 August 1879), 954; Virginia Johnson, *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 217-21.

31. Mueller, "Ben Kline," 3 ("rounded up the breeds").

32. Berger, "Métis Come to Judith Basin," 13; Swan, "A Brief History"; Joel Overholser, *Fort Benton: World's Innermost Port* (Helena: Falcon Publishing, 1987), 288.

33. Swan, "A Brief History," 4, 6; Dorman Jackson, "Early History, Lewistown and Missions," 1974, Catholic History File, St. Leo's Catholic Church Library, Lewistown, Montana; Homestead Entry Applications, Bureau of Land Management (hereafter referred to as BLM), Billings, MT, Montana Tract Books, roll 36, T15/R18, T15/R19.

34. Swan, "A Brief History," 6.

35. Homestead Entry Applications, BLM, Billings, MT; Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community," 269-79,

318-28, and *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*, 101-18.

36. Breed Creek, which parallels Boyd Creek just to the south, is a tributary of Spring Creek. Swan, "A Brief History," 3, 6-7; Van Den Broeck, "Ben Kline, 3; Homestead Entry Applications, BLM, Billings, MT; Marie D. Elhert (granddaughter of Elizabeth Berger Swan), interview with author, Lewistown, MT, 16 July 1996; Foster, "'We Know Who We Are': Multiethnic Identity in a Montana Métis Community," 269-79, 318-28, and *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*, 101-18.

37. E. C. Abbott ("Teddy Blue") and Helena Huntington Smith, *We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher* (1939; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 192; Isabelle Larocque, interview with Conrad Anderson, in Conrad Anderson, "History of Roy, Montana" (unpublished, undated), Fergus County, MC 978.6 AND, Carnegie Public Library, Lewistown, MT, 22.

38. Granville Stuart, *Forty Years on the Frontier as Seen in the Journals and Reminiscences of Granville Stuart*, ed. Paul C. Phillips (1925; reprint, Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1967), 2:142-44.

39. *Ibid.*, 2:134.

40. Swan, "A Brief History," 4-5.

41. *Ibid.*, 5.

42. Howard Paul, interview with Nicolas Vrooman, Great Falls, MT, excerpts reproduced in Nicholas Vrooman, "When They Awake: Metis Culture in Contemporary Context," video (Institute for Metis Studies, University of Great Falls, Great Falls, MT, 1995); Marie D. Elhert, interview with author, Lewistown, MT, 16 July 1996; Francis Morgan Shoup (granddaughter of Ben Kline), interview with author, Lewistown, MT, 16 July 1996; Sarah Larocque, interview with Nicholas Vrooman, Roy, MT, in "When They Awake."

43. Most informants identified Métis speech as "Cree" or "Chippewa" when actually it was Michif (John C. Crawford, "What Is Michif? Language in the Métis Tradition," in *The New Peoples*, 232, 238). For additional information see Peter Bakker, *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Howard, *Strange Empire*, 345; Swan, "Mrs. Swan," 22 December 1968, *Lewistown News Argus*; Francis Morgan Shoup, interview with author; Mercy Jackson, "Lewistown Schools," Mercy Jackson Collection, SC544, Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, 1; Margaret Jackson Seilstad, "George R. Jackson Family History," in *The Heritage Book of Central Montana*, ed. Babbie Deal and Loretta McDonald (Lewistown, MT: Fergus County Bi-Centennial Committee, 1979), 157-58.

44. Swan, "A Brief History," 3, 7-8; Howard, *Strange Empire*, 344-45; Marie D. Elhert, interview with author, Lewistown, MT, 16 July 1996.

45. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1880 *Montana Territorial Census*, Meagher County, Judith Basin, National Archives Microfilm (NAM), T9, roll 742.

46. 1880 *Montana Territorial Census*, Meagher County, Judith Basin, NAM, T9, roll 742, Supervisor's District No. 78, Enumerator District No. 23; Choteau County, Fort Benton, Enumerator District 3; Meagher County, Musselshell Valley, Enumerator District 23.

47. 1880 *Montana Territorial Census*, Choteau County, Shonkin Creek, NAM, T9, roll 742, Enumerator District 4.

48. Howard, *Strange Empire*, 344; Marie D. Elhert, interview with author, Lewistown, MT; Francis Morgan Shoup, interview with author, Lewistown, MT; Treena LaFountain, interview with author, 26 July 1996.