

Jean Baptiste Lucier, dit Gardipe

By ~~Robert Newell~~
M. Kell Warner

About no segment of western population has less been written than the retired French Canadian engages of the fur companies, who formed the first stable agricultural settlements on the Pacific Coast. The lack of historical record may be set down to the nature of the population itself -- illiterate, humble and clannish, to whom no accomplishments may be credited beyond the raising of excellent crops of wheat on the virgin soil. The old men lived in a borderland culture between civilization as they had known it in their youth in eastern Canada and the simple savagry of their Indian wives and neighbors.

Early visitors to French Prairie in the Willamette Valley agreed the old Canadians were a carefree lot, having a reasonably easy life and great good will toward one another, but "as the Canadian population increased by nature and by immigration, this largest group in the valley became isolated from the rest of the population Resentment against them continued even after their number had declined and they were but a small minority in the valley's population".

One government surveyor, writing in the late 1850's, reported that "the French are not liked at all by the other citizens of Oregon. They speak their own language and have no more manners than the Indians -- care nothing for schools -- and are kept in ignorance by their Romish priesthood". 2

The metis sons of the old engages were held in even less regard and were dismissed as "shiftless and degenerate", and although they were granted the right to vote under the Provisional Government of 1843, the question had not been decided without debate.

"Well, now, Mr. Speaker, I think we have got quite high enough among the dark clouds; I do not believe we ought to go any higher. It is well enough to admit the English, the French, the Spanish, and the half-breeds, but the Indian and the negro is a little too dark for me. I think we had better stop at the half-breeds. I am in favot of limiting the vote to them, and going no farther into the dark clouds." 3

Such was the speech made by a member of the Legislative Committee, Robert Newell, who was a liberal minded man with a Nez Perce wife and half-blood sons of his own.

The metis thus had two ^{his} strikes ^{his} against them: the dislike of the pioneer Americans for their French Canadian fathers, and discrimination against themselves for their mixed ancestry. One may pursue the question of their eventual disposition with some interest: In the conflict of heritage within himself and in the bi-cultural society around him, what path did he take?

While for many the solution lay in retreat to the reservation along with their maternal relatives, some others held their own, to a certain extent, in the rapidly changing circumstances of a primitive area flooded with the waves of American immigration during the 1840's.

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One such survivor was Jean Baptiste Lucier dit Gardipe. Although he had no great accomplishment to his credit and died before his full potential might have been developed, he may be said to represent what was best in the forgotten metis who were at one time a pervading and problematic element in pioneer life. He was born in western Canada in all probability, between the years 1805 and 1810 to Joseph Lucier and his Cree wife Wewepihawisk. Joseph Lucier was a North West Company man, along with a Francois Lucier that was probably his brother, with David Thompson early in the century. Both were mentioned in Thompson's journal as being of his crew at Fort des Prairies on the upper Saskatchewan in 1804, at Fort Vermilion on the Peace River in 1809, where the two were camped together as "1 tent, 2 man, 2 women, 4 children", and again at New White Earth House on the ----- the following year, "1 tent, 1 man, 2 women, 6 children". 4

At least two of the children must have belonged to Joseph -- his daughter Angelique, born about 1804, and Jean Baptiste, somewhat later. Hereafter Joseph Lucier drops out of sight and may be presumed dead. His widow Wewepihawisk apparently then joined one Gardipe, of whom several were in the western fur trade, possibly the J. B. Gardipe who had been with Astor's Pacific Fur Company as bowman and was mentioned by Larpenteur as "a half-breed Creek, of the clear grit, killed many years later by the Sioux, when he was an old man". 5 In any case, Jean Baptiste Lucier became "dit Gardipe", going also somewhat impartially by either name alone. He is given both ways in the records, but his son Paul Jean made clear in later years that "my name is Lucier, though we were nic named Gardipe". 6

By the time young Lucier was old enough to make a hand, the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies had merged, Jean Baptiste had drifted down into the Oregon Country, and we see him a second generation engage listed as a hunter in John Work's Snake Country Expedition of 1830 - 31. This was a rough trip and a long one, which began at Fort Nez Perces (Fort Walla Walla) in eastern Washington, circled east and south along the Portneuf and Raft Rivers in Idaho to Great Salt Lake, and returned by way of the Humboldt River, Malheur Lake in Oregon and the Silvies and John Day Rivers. The expedition was beset with much hardship, not the least of which was hunger, and early in June Work divided his party, sending seven men -- three Findlays, two Plantes, Baptiste Gardipe and one Soteaux Indian -- to make their way back to Fort Nez Perces as best they might.

" . . . to proceed down the river if practicable, and thence by the usual road to the fort by the snake river, and endeavor to pick up a few beaver by the way, but principally to procure some animals to subsist on. These men are all half-Indians, some of them with large families, and placing too much reliance on their capacity as hunters did not take so much precaution as the other men to provide a stock of food previous to leaving the buffalo, they are, therefore, now entirely out of provisions and it is expected they will have a little chance of killing antelope and chevreau when only a few of them than when the camp is all together." 7

The seven reached the fort on the same day in July as did Work, and apparently with no greater deprivation, as they "had eaten one horse only".

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As the fur trade declined by reason of overtrapping and the growth of agriculture, the second generation "mountain men" were obliged to turn to some other means of livelihood. Scouting and trailblazing was a related calling for one like Lucier, who was still young and whose life from earliest infancy had been spent in the wilderness; his abilities came to be in fairly regular demand. He had taken a piece of land by squatters' rights near St. Louis, in the western part of French Prairie, on which he had paid a modest tax of \$1.07 in 1844, but as no improvements were then noted by Sheriff Tax Collector Joe Meek, his claim was apparently little more than a base from which to operate his pack trains and to graze cattle.

About 1834 he took as his natural wife, Catherine Delore, the 14 year old daughter of a neighbor, Joseph Delore and his Shuswap wife. Like Jean Baptiste, Catherine had been born on the trail, for Delore was a retired Company man whose service dated from 1815. "Lizette . . . travelled with Joseph when he was out with the fur trapping and trading brigades and . . . their first three children, Catherine, Pierre and Augustin, were born on the trail or at a winter camp in the mountains." 8

Upon the arrival of the priests, Lucier was baptized in the Catholic Church in November, 1840; for some unknown reason his wife was not baptized until the following July, at which time they were formally united by the Church and their three year old son Paul Jean "legitimized". The child had been baptized more than a year before, "the father being absent", no doubt on some distant trail. Four other sons were born subsequently, but only Paul Jean is known positively to have survived to leave descendants.

~~Early~~ Late in August, 1841, Lucier was hired as guide for the California detachment of Lt. Charles Wilkes expedition that was exploring the West for the United States Government. The southern party was headed by Lt. Emmons, and consisted of map-maker Eld, staff artist Agate, Lt. Colvocoressis, a doctor, a naturalist, two botanists, a geologist, eight privates and non-commissioned officers, the guide Lucier and six hunters, accompanied by "various immigrants for California", making a party of 39 in all. They did a thorough job of exploring, and the account written by George Colvocoressis makes excellent reading, only one should like to know whether the natural features they called "Guardapie Lake" and "Igneas Creek" were so named for members of their own train.

In 1846 Lucier was one of a party of ten setting out to map a road across the Cascade Mountains to Fort Boise, by which the immigrants could more easily reach the Willamette Valley. They followed the Santiam River well into the mountains, but were no more successful in finding a suitable pass than the missionary White had been the previous year, so the project was given over and the Barlow Trail around the southern flank of Mount Hood developed instead. Along with Lucier was his young brother-in-law, "Antonio" Delore, but as Antoine Delore was but eight years old, it seems unlikely though not impossible that so young a boy would have been included; it may be his older brother, Augustin, was meant. The latter often teamed up with Lucier. 9

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The following year the same pair joined a rescue party organized by Thomas Holt, a newly come American, with relief supplies for a band of immigrants who had become stranded in the mountains along the southern route to the Willamette Valley. Holt collected supplies by donation, recruited "one Frenchman and five half-breeds", and set out on the fourth of December with a train of 34 horses. As they met the foremost stragglers, they doled out a few pounds of flour per family--"They had had nothing to eat today -- the children are crying for bread--" and pressed on through deepening snow and flooded streams to the foot of the Callapooya Range, which forms the divide between the Willamette and the Umpqua basins. Here most of his party balked at going farther, leaving Holt with only "Batiste" Lucier and "Quine" Delore.

~~the~~ Dec. 11 The Frenchman and three half-breeds turn back this morning; they are afraid that if they go over the mountain they will not get back this winter. I told Baptiste that if he turned back I could not go any further. He said that he did not think that the people back (left ahead) had any money to pay for being brought in. I told him that if he would go, that he should be paid -- if the people was not able to pay him, Mr. Beers (of the Methodist Mission) would raise a subscription and pay him. He said that he owed Mr. Beers sixty dollars -- ~~the~~ that if I would see that paid he would risk the rest. 10

The natives of the Umpqua were always notably hostile, and apparently only Lucier's understanding of their nature and his ability to exact compliance gave the depleted party a passageway through their country. None-the-less, Dacier lost a horse to them and Delore his gun.

Dec. 14. Travelled 15 miles and camped on the North fork of Elk River; there are five families here. . . . They have neither flour, meat, nor salt, and game is very scarce. Baptiste killed two deer and divided the meat among them. I gave them 50 pounds of flour. 11

They turned back on the South Umpqua with the final stragglers, each taking one family as his own particular charge.

Dec. 21. Crossed the north fork of the Umpqua river. The Indians were very saucy; they told us that they would not let us have a canoe to cross -- told us to go and hunt a ford; they knew the river was very high and it could not be forded. We had to give a gun, valued at \$8, belonging to Delore, before we could get a canoe.

Jan. 1. Crossed the mountain -- the snow three feet deep in places. I cached some flour in the mountains, going out. I opened the cache today -- our mouths water for some bread, as we have been out some time.

Jan. 17. After lying by four days in consequence of storms and severe weather, travelled seven miles. . . . Crossed the Luckemute below the forks, swimming. Very stormy. Baptiste travelled on the 14th and crossed the Luckemute and drowned one of his horses. He left the two Townsend families at the forks. 12

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The entire seven-week rescue mission, including the supplies and lost stock, was estimated to have cost \$426.37, which, hopefully, would be subsidized by subscription from the immigrants already in the valley, but the outcome is left in the dark. ~~In~~ later years reservation Indians used to relate with humor the wry impressions the same Umpquas, who had seemed so intransigent to the trespassers, had handed down through the years, "We saw them from across the river. They called us savages, but to us they themselves looked like wild beasts, with hairy faces and staring eyes."

Hereafter Jean Baptiste Lucier drops quietly out of sight, with one entry in the St. Louis Church Register three years later:

S-19 Bapt. Lucier The 17 August, 1850, we undersigned parish priest of St. Louis have buried Baptiste Lucier dit Gardepi, deceased the day before aged 40 years. Witnesses, Louis Vandale, Joseph Dellart (Delore). 13

B. Delorme

He, and presumably his little sons, were buried in the old "lost" parish cemetery at St. Louis. His widow Catherine shortly married one William Lacerte, to whom she bore several children and died in 1858.

It is unfortunate that no picture of Catherine is known; Joseph and Lizette Delore left a host of unusually handsome sons and daughters to populate the Prairie, and Catherine may well have been quite lovely. A likeness believed, without solid proof, to be that of Jean Baptiste himself does remain to us. A pen and wash copy of the unpublished original, done in the same medium, appears in this present Volume, where the evidence may be assessed for what it is worth. "It was made by a man from a ship," has come down as a family axiom; the initials "J.L." and the date "1841" are hidden under the frame. The Wilkes Expedition immediately comes to mind.

Lt. George Colvocoressis wrote in his daily log, "September 1 (He was at Fort Vancouver) This morning I received other orders, namely, to be ready to join the Overland Expedition to California, commanded by Lt. Emmons. It is already organized and encamped on the banks of the Willamette River, and will, I am ~~to be~~ informed, consist, besides myself, of the following --" (His list includes the artist, mapmaker, scientists, and guide.) The delay at the outset while the party awaited the arrival of Colvocoressis allowed ample time for any of the ample talent in the group to have amused himself with sketching members (other), had he so desired.

As the study of a type, the ~~picture~~ ^{portrait} is superb. The ~~portrait~~ might stand for all the metis in the West in its patient acceptance of things not understood, but the long face and long nose ~~give it an~~ ^{distinctive} an individual aspect; the same traits of spareness and shape of the nose are characteristics of various Lucier descendants, even to the point of uneasy recognition as a face surely seen before. The portrait, of whatever subject and by ~~whomever~~ ^{whomever} done, was by no mean artist who could catch in a few strokes the brooding mind of a simple man. set

1. Johanson, Dorothy O. and Gates, Charles M., Empire of the Columbia (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1957) p. 231.
2. A. N. Armstrong, Comprising a Brief History and Full Description (Chicago, 1857) p. 15, quoted by Johanson, Empire of the Columbia, p. 221. loc. cit.
3. D. C. Elliot, "Dr. Robert Newell: Pioneer", Oregon Historical Quarterly IX (Portland, 1909, p. 113.)
4. Henry-Thompson Journal (cover)

5. Larpenteur (Cover - 1898 - Journal - p. 2151)
6. ~~Paul Lucier, Claim No. 7328, Indian War Pension Data, Q 165 (1902) Portland.~~
~~Paul Lucier, son of Jean Baptiste, and veteran of the ^{yakima} Indian War of 1855-6, in applying for a belated pension in 1902. Paul's daughter, Julia Courville, who died in 1969 at the age of one hundred three, explained the "nic name" ^{added to the} family legend, "When ~~any~~ ^{any} of the children ~~were~~ ^{were} rebuked with 'you act just like a Gardipe!' "~~

7. John Work, Journal of the Snake Country Expedition of 1838-1 (Oregon Historical Quarterly XIV, 1913; Ed. D. C. Elliot, Portland.) p. 299 ~~page~~
8. Mikell Warner, The Delore Family History (M.S.) -

9. William, Martha C., "Reminiscences," (Oregon Historical Quarterly, Vol XVII, 1916, p. 362)

Thomas Holt
"Holt's Journal";

10. The Oregon Spectator, March 4, 1847. (Oregon City,)

11. ~~idem~~ ibid.

12. ~~idem~~ ibid.

13. St. Louis Parish Record Book, Vol I, p. 24

14. Lt. George M. Crocker, Four years in a Government Expedition (~~New York~~, Cornish, Lampert & Co, New York, 1832), p. 259.