

Michel Pablo a composite history

In the Pacific Northwest in 1844

By Chalk Courchane

Michel Pablo was born sometime in 1844 or 1845 probably at Fort Benton, Montana Territory, the son of Michel Pablo and Otter Woman, a Piegan Blackfeet. I don't know anything about his parents. Although his mother was Blackfeet he was still enrolled on the Flathead Reservation. He father is said to be Mexican, but the when, why and what of his time in Montana isn't known. He had two brothers Frank and Laurette "Larak" Pablo and one sister, Margaret "Maggie" Pablo who married James Todd. He was orphaned as a youngster and it "is related on seemingly reliable authority that Michel and his brother, Laurette, were the only survivors of an Indian raid on the white settlement at Fort Benton. Michel's first memory, after the skirmish, was of being wrapped in a buffalo robe in the company of the Blackfeet Indians."

Angus McLeod, brought him to Valley Creek in 1864 where Pablo was employed on McLeod's cattle ranch near Arlee, Montana, and remained there for two years.

On October 1, 1864 he married Agate (Agathe) Finley, the Pend d'Oreille daughter of Augustin "Yoostah" and Clemence "Cah-le-moss" Finley, at St. Ignatius Catholic Mission. They had at least 8 children: Charles, Margaret "Maggie", Eliza, Louie, Annie, Mary, Joseph Emanuel, and Alexander N. Michel was considered the "Cattle King of the Lower Flathead Valley" and Pablo, Montana was named after him.

In the St. Ignatius Mission, Montana Marriage Book 1856-1873 we find:

That Michel Pablo son of Pablo, and Agate daughter of Augustin & Clemos were married after 3 banns on 1 October 1864. Witnesses were Jaques Enfre Favre, Alexander son of Parel and Therese his wife. It said Michel Pablo was Pend d'Oreille from his mother and Spanish from his father.

In 1866 being fluent in English and Indian languages, he was employed by the Jocko agency as an interpreter, and continued in this capacity until 1870.

At this time, he moved to the lower Flathead Valley, and established what was later to become the Pablo Cattle and Buffalo Ranch. This ranch was two miles south of the present town of Pablo, which was later named in his honor.

In 1906-07, there were approximately 10,000 head of cattle grazing on the pastures and ranges controlled by Michel Pablo. As a stock grower, he was associated with Charles Allard Sr. and the pair prospered in their joint venture. Both played key roles in preservation of the buffalo on the North American continent. Together, they purchased a few head of bison. The animals multiplied into a sizeable herd. The Pablo-Allard enterprise became nationally famous and attracted wide attention when the herd was sold to the Canadian government

Michel Pablo and Charles Allard Sr. owned about 300 head of buffalo that roamed the unfenced Mission Valley feeding on the lush native grass. When Charles Allard Sr. died in 1896 the herd was rounded up and divided. Michel

Pablo retained 150 head and the widow, Louise Allard, and her four children received the other 150 which they sold.

At this time the United States government was making plans to open the Flathead Reservation for settlement in 1910. Already by 1910, many white men had claimed land in the valley. Free range was disappearing. Pablo asked the United States Government to set aside pasture for the buffalo, or even buy the herd. The government ignored both requests. However, the Canadian government, concerned with the near extinction of the buffalo herds offered Pablo \$250 apiece for the 800 buffalo, delivered to Wainwright, Alberta, Canada, a distance of some 1,200 miles. The Canadian offer was accepted, and in 1906 began the only successful buffalo roundup in history; a roundup that was not completed until 1912.

Michel Pablo hired 25 of Montana's best cowboys. When the task proved very difficult, more men were hired. Most stayed with the roundup until it was completed, others worked for only a season. Headquarters were at the Pablo

Ranch two miles south of Pablo, as it now stands. (There was no town of Pablo at the time.) It was planned to hold the buffalo bulls in corrals, load them into wagons reinforced to hold them, and haul them to the train in Ravalli. Some of the bulls weighed as much as 2,200 pounds so the wagon sides were raised to ten feet and well braced. Each wagon rack was built so that only one bull could stand in it. At Ravalli special corrals were built with chutes leading to reinforced stock cars owned by the Northern Pacific. Corrals, wagons, trains, and even men on horseback were completely foreign to the buffalo and their reactions were violent and dangerous, with many narrow escapes for both horses and riders.

The first summer found no buffalo shipped to Canada. Pablo decided to put Charles Allard Jr. in charge of the roundup. Young Allard was versed in the habits of buffalo and given complete charge, had corrals built about 25 miles from Ronan on the flats in the Big Bend of the Pend d'Oreille (Flathead) river, south west of where Round Butte is now - northwest of the Sloan bridge. The largest corral included about five acres with wings on both sides of the entrance, extending out and down to the river. Small corrals and a strong loading chute were connected with the large corral. Here the land sloped gently to the river, but across the water cliffs rose abruptly, broken by small coulees which led to the river. The fences, corrals, etc., had been built from cedar posts found in the groves along the river. Now at the edge of the cliffs, for some 26 miles, a fence was built, gradually fanning out to lead the buffalo to the center where a coulee led directly to the river, as most of the buffalo were on the west side of the river.

The roundup started in earnest, buffalo from as far away as 30 miles were herded into this natural trap, where they had to ford the river. When they came out on the other side the wings of the big corral herded them into it.

The first herd of about 300 was brought into the wings but the cowboys could not hold them. They finally ended up with 120 buffalo in the trap, but woke the next morning with one old cow. The rest had climbed the cliff and got away. The next day a very bad blizzard came and the roundup was called off until the next summer.

The next spring in May 1908, the roundup was resumed. It was not easy, for these wild, unruly beasts attacked horse and rider when cornered. Only fast work saved them from injury. The cows, calves, and younger bulls were easier to move into corrals but it was difficult to move the heavier bulls. Often, when a herd was almost in the corral, they broke and ran leaving only 10 or 12 animals in the corral.

A Butte photographer, N.A Forsyth, taking pictures from the river bank, was lucky, when the animals broke away, that he could hide in a nearby cedar grove and lose only his hat and part of his pants. The roundup brought photographers, writers, and noted men as well as the best cowpunchers from all over. One cowpuncher artist was Charles M. Russell, who came in 1907 and 1908 to talk with cowboy friends and sketch buffalo. He wrote back telling what a wide open town Ronan was for gambling.

When buffalo had been captured in the corral they were loaded in wagons and hauled over the hills to where Charlo now stands and then on to the waiting cars in Ravalli. Some tried to climb the corral fence and one big bull succeeded in getting over and running through the town. About 25 had to be killed as they were so wild they could not be loaded. One powerful bull crashed through the side of the stock car and had to be killed. As the shipments continued, many of the small bands were brought to Ravalli on hoof. The final shipment to Canada was June 1, 1912.

Cowboys taking part in the Buffalo Roundup included: Charles Allard Jr., Charles M. Russell, Marcel Mitchell, Joe McDonald, Jim Michel, Louison "Luizo" Ashley, Alec Pablo, Don Michel, Walter Sloan, Alec Ashley, Louie Pablo, Joe Pablo, Arthur Ray, Michel Pablo, Charles Metcalf, Johnny McDonald, Marion Deschamps, Jim Grinder, Fred Houle, Joe Marion, Billy Irvine, and many others."

"With astute management and hard work, Michel's ranch grew and prospered, and he became known throughout western Montana as the cattle-king of the lower Flathead. At the peak of ranch production, in 1906-07, there were approximately 10,000 head of cattle grazing on the pastures and ranges controlled by Michel Pablo. (A member of the family estimated that there were 30,000 head of cattle on the ranch at one time, and added the information that the grass was so high, when a cow laid down to chew her cud, she was completely hidden from view. It is thought that the estimate of the cattle is a lot like that grass -- too high."

From THE FEDERAL REPORTER, vol. 138, (July-Sept. 1905) pp 964-968:

"United States v. Heyfron, County Treasurer (Circuit Court, d. Montana. April 24, 1905. No. 690. Indians-Adoption of Half-Breed Into tribe - Tribal Rights.

The various acts of Congress relating to Indians, including those relating to the Flathead Indian Nation, as well as the practice of the executive departments of the government, recognize the right of a tribe to adopt as a member thereof an Indian of the half-blood who has continued to reside on the reservation as an Indian, and one so adopted has all the rights of a tribal Indian and a ward of the United States, including the exemption from state taxation of his property held on the reservation, so long as his tribal relation continues.

In Equity. Suit for injunction.

Carl Rasch, U.S. Atty. (Marshall & Stiff, of counsel), for plaintiff. Woody & Woody, for defendant.

Hunt, District Judge. The United States brought this bill against the county treasurer of the county of Missoula, within the state of Montana, praying for a writ of injunction to restrain the said treasurer from enforcing the collection of certain taxes which he was seeking to collect from Michel Pablo. It is alleged that Pablo is an Indian person and a member of the Flathead Indian Nation, and was such during the year of 1903, when the defendant attempted to collect taxes; that, under the laws of the United States and the treaties heretofore entered into by the United States with the Flathead Nation, the said Pablo became, and, as a member of the Flathead Indian Nation, is, a ward of the United States, and entitled to own and hold property on the said Indian reservation in his own right, free from taxation by the state and the county of Missoula. The answer denies that Pablo is an Indian or a member of the Flathead Nation, and denies that he is entitled to own and hold property on the Flathead Reservation exempt from taxation.

There is but one question presented by the pleadings, which is, was Michel Pablo a ward of the government of the United States, by reason of his being an Indian and maintaining tribal relations with certain Indian tribes? The facts are these: Michel Pablo was born about 58 or 60 years ago, east of the Rocky Mountains, in what is now known as part of the state of Montana, and which was at the time of his birth a section recognized as Indian country, occupied by Blackfeet Piegan Indian. His father died when he was young, and after the death of the father the boy accompanied his Indian mother to the Colville Reservation, in the territory of Washington. His mother died there, and he remained on the Colville Reservation until he was about 13, associating in his boyhood with Indian boys. Then he went to De Smet, Mont., which is now within Missoula county; and after staying there a short time he went to the Flathead Reservation, and has lived there ever since, or for about 42 or 43 years. About 4 years after he removed to the Flathead Reservation a council of Indian chiefs of the Indian tribes and Indians was called for the purpose of considering the question of the adoption of Pablo. This council was held in 1864. Pablo himself was present at the council. The chiefs announced his adoption after the council, and ever since that time he has been treated as a member of the tribe by the Indians themselves, and has complied with all the laws, rules, and regulations of the tribe. He married a member of the tribe, and has reared a family, and never has severed his tribal relations, but without interruption has maintained the habits and customs of the Indians. The government of the United States has made no difference in its treatment of Pablo from that accorded to the Indians of that tribe, and Pablo has participated and acted with the tribes and nations in tribal affairs and councils and otherwise. His name appears upon the official roll and the annuity roll of the government of the United States, and about 20 years ago, when the Northern Pacific Railroad Company obtained a right of way through the reservation, and paid the Indians about \$21,000 therefor, Michael Pablo received a share in the distribution of the fund, participated in the council of the Indians held in respect to the matter, and was in all respects recognized as entitled to the privileges and rights of membership in the tribe.

From these facts, and the law to be applied to them, I conclude that Michael Pablo was adopted by the Indians rightfully upon the reservation, and that he became tied to the tribes by a relationship lawfully made, and was and is, in law, an Indian sustaining tribal relations. That the Indians had right of adoption, without doing violence to the Stevens treaty of 1856, is inferable from the several acts of Congress bearing upon rights of Indians.....

As a result of these several considerations, I conclude that under the facts Pablo is a ward of the government; that his ties with the Indians were long since established, and, being unbroken, still exist; and that he is therefore entitled to immunity from state and county taxes.

The injunction will be made permanent."

From "I Will Be Meat For My Salish" - The Buffalo and the Federal writers Project Interviews Relating to the Flathead Indian Reservation, edited by Bob Bigart - The Federal Writers Project Manuscripts - The Pablo-Allard Herd by W.A. Bartlett, "The Pablo-Allard Herd: Care & Growth, pages 65-66:

"J.B. Monroe described Michael Pablo as half Blackfoot half Spaniard who was born on the great plains, and when quite young moved to Colville, Washington. His early life was one of hardship and rustle, and he seems to be a man who knows every phase of western life. About six feet two inches tall and weighing 240 pounds without any spare flesh, active and pushing, he seems to be a man thoroughly awake and alive to all business ventures.

Monroe gives us a good picture of Pablo's home and ranch as he saw it in 1902:
...His ranch is run like clockwork; a skilled Chinese chef runs the kitchen; two business-like men, a French-Canadian and a German, attend to the ranch and farm work; meals are had on time, horses curried night and morning, stables swept out, wagons, buggies and farm machinery under cover, fences and all buildings in good repair. Everything denotes push and progress. He has an elk park, and two cows, two bulls, and one last year's calf occupy a well-fenced, twenty-acre tract. I saw some wild geese, and some queer looking geese around the house. During our talk he told me he had some cross geese, between wild and tame. I forgot to examine them in my haste to catch the boat.

He told me of having had a white mountain goat which would get upon an ordinary rail fence and walk the top rail for a quarter of a mile. Some hounds one day caught it away from home and killed it. He is now negotiating with parties in the Northwest Territories for some antelope.

Large fine work horses are used on his ranch, and lighter horses for cow and driving purposes. In winter he runs a private school close to his ranch and pays the teacher. He has tried the mission schools, but they were too slow and worshipped the past. He wants his children to progress and look to the future. His wife is a full blood Flathead.

The ranch contains some 450 acres of good farming and grass land. It is situated on the east side of the valley close to the belt of timber. He has large irrigating ditches. He has a barn that will shelter 100 head of stock. All kinds of improved harvesting and haying machinery are carefully housed. The broad level prairie rolls away to the west. Here is all a western man wants, plenty

of fine timber, water and grass. His house is large and commodious, suitable for his business, and he is building an addition.

The cowboys or herders of the ranch are living about ten miles west, on the Pend d'Oreille [Flathead] River. They have a good ferry and a good house and stable."

"Raising Cattle on the Flathead Reservation

Cattle raising began on the reservation in the late 1850s when traders bought exhausted cattle from emigrants going to Oregon, usually in the vicinity of today's Pocatello, Idaho, drove them to the Jocko Valley to fatten, then resold them to other emigrants the following spring. Some of these cattle were traded to Indians for horses and were the source of the Indian herds.

During the 1850s Neil McArthur, first agent at Fort Connah, and Louis Mallet drove herds from Oregon into Bitterroot and Jocko Valleys for the winter, then drove them back westward to trade in the spring. John Owens recorded that in 1856 traders or stockmen who came to western Montana included Louis Brown and a Mormon trader, Van Etten, who was accompanied by George Goodwin, Bill Madison, James Brown and F. W. Woody.

The cattle ranching industry became concentrated among a handful of white men who were married to Indian women. Angus McDonald (who had a verbal lease to lands around Fort Conah) raised cattle near the fort. Other men (some former employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, some free traders) included Peter Irvine and his son William, Dave Cachure, Charles Allard, and Michel Pablo.

By 1889, raising stock had become nearly as important as farming. There were 5,782 horses and 12,250 cattle. (Annual Report of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of Interior, 1889, pp. 522-23). Most of the cattle were owned by Pablo and Allard. In 1894, more than \$40,000 worth of beef cattle was shipped to Chicago. The cattle were of good breed, having been improved over the years with Holstein and Poled Angus bulls. The horses were cayuses, small and of little value. Because of the mild winters, little supplemental feed was supplied, until the numbers of horses grew so large the grass was depleted.

By 1895, William Irvine drove six hundred cattle to Canada to winter because there was not enough grass on the reservation. About 13,000 horses were sold between 1903 and 1906 which took some pressure off the reservation grass. By 1904, tribal members began to fence their allotments in preparation for the opening of the reservation. In 1906, about half the reservation cattle were disposed of, thousands being driven to Canada.

Beginning about 1916, dairying became more important. By 1948, 1,100 farmers milked cows, about one fifth of whom got most of their money from their dairies."

<http://www.flatheadreservation.org/timeline/documents/cattle.htm>

"Michel Pablo Dies Suddenly At Ronan

Ronan, July 12. (Sunday.) Michael Pablo one of the oldest residents of the reservation country, died shortly after midnight this morning. He was stricken suddenly about 2 o'clock Saturday afternoon while working at his farm here. All that was possible was done for his relief, but the stroke was fatal. Whether it was induced by the heat or not is not known.

Mr. Pablo was one of the best known men on the reservation. For years he had been a successful farmer and stockman. He was associated with the late Charles Allard in the ownership of the famous buffalo herd that was afterward sold to the Canadian government for the Banff National Park.

In this connection Mr. Pablo acquired international fame. Scientists and hunters came from many regions to witness the loading and transportation of the large herd of buffalo. Old as he was, Pablo directed the handling of this herd personally; he was in the saddle with the young men of the reserve. Riding hard and managing the business, he won the admiration of visitors. He was a picturesque figure always.

As a citizen and father, Michel Pablo was a high class man. The Indian in him was good Indian and his white ancestry had left him the heritage of a gentleman by breeding. He was highly esteemed and will be greatly missed." From The Daily Missoulian, July 12, 1914, page 1

From The Ronan Pioneer, July 17, 1914, page 1: "Michel Pablo Dies Suddenly
The community was startled Sunday morning to learn of the death the evening before of Michel Pablo, one of the oldest residents in the valley. He was taken suddenly ill Saturday and a physician summoned but no one thought him seriously sick, and when about 10 o'clock that evening he attempted to walk across the room and fell and expired at once, his extreme condition became apparent.

He had not been in the best of health for many months but kept going all the time. He talked with some of his intimate friends about his condition and said many times that he did not expect to long survive, but little was thought of his condition being as serious as it was. He was considering a trip to Rochester, Minn., in hopes that he might be benefitted by their treatment but delayed the journey too long.

Michel Pablo was a man of great natural ability; unable to read or write more than his name, he alone carved out a fortune estimated at over half a million. It was he who sold to the Canadian government a large herd of buffalo, personally superintending the delivery of this sale which gave him thousands of dollars. He was a man of very few words, kept his own counsel, and made few intimate friends but retained all he made.

The funeral services were held in the Catholic Church in Ronan Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock, Father O'Malley, assisted by Fathers Sullivan and Cordon of the St. Ignatius mission, chanting the solemn mass. The services were impressive and after the mass Father O'Malley delivered a fine funeral sermon, in which he spoke feelingly of the deceased and told of his life on the Flathead and the means he had employed to gain and hold the esteem of all who knew him. He spoke of his high character, his steadfast adherence to the truth and right as his knowledge and education enabled him to see such things, and of his final preparations to meet his maker. The father told of his efforts to prepare the man's soul and to ease his mind and said that when the time came for him to go he was at peace with the world and with his God. The sermon left a deep impression on all who heard it and was a fine tribute to the departed.

The pall bearers were Joseph Bouchard of Ronan, Wm. Irvine of Polson, Pat Normandeau of Ronan, Duncan McDonald of Ravalli, Angus McDonald of Camas, and Theodore Lachambre of Missoula. Burial was in the Catholic cemetery at St. Ignatius, a large number of carriages and autos from Ronan and vicinity following the remains to the cemetery. Old time friends of the deceased from all over the reservation and Missoula were in attendance at the funeral, each paying their last respects to a departed friend.

He leaves a wife, three daughters and three sons. Mrs. Orson Dupuis, Mrs. Frank Ashley, Mrs. Tony Barnaby, and Joseph, Louie and Alex Pablo."

Pablo died July 12, 1914, on his ranch just southwest of the present Pablo town site, three years before the opening of the town site to settlement. He had been stricken ill while working the field the previous day. The July 16, 1914, edition of the Flathead Courier reported, "The funeral was held at Ronan Tuesday after which the body was taken to St. Ignatius for interment. A large crowd of people, estimated at 300, were in attendance at the funeral coming from all parts of the country. The pallbearers were all old-timers being William Irvine of Polson, Angus McDonald of Camas, F. Lachambre of Missoula, Duncan McDonald of Ravalli and Joe Bouchard of Ronan. Michel Pablo never lived to see the townsite, later named for him, become a thriving community. He died at the family home on July 12, 1914."

SOURCES:

"Early Flathead and Tobacco Plains"; p.44; "Flathead and Kootenay-the Rivers the Tribes and the Regions Traders"; Olga W. Johnson; p. 349; "The Last Great Round-up" by Newton McTavish (CSKT 741); "Historic and Scenic Missoula and Ravalli Counties: Souvenir Of The National Irrigation Congress, 1975 (CSKT 623); Courier-Pioneer-Mission Valley News Vacation Guide 1988-p64 (This article was also in the Flathead-Mission Diamond Jubilee Edition-1985-By the Ronan Pioneer and Flathead Courier, page 7); The Mission Valley News, 17 Sept.1980, p6:

"Early Days By Miss Beaver-History's longest roundup begins; and The Fabulous Flathead, J.F.McAlear, pp 47-48: