



Amazing Montanans—Biographies

John L. Clarke

If you could neither hear nor speak, how would you live your life? In 1883, when John L. Clarke was two years old, scarlet fever swept through Highwood, near Great Falls, Montana. The disease killed five of John's brothers and left John deaf and mute.

But that did not stop him. Inspired by his teachers and the wildlife around Glacier National Park, John used art to communicate the marvels of nature to people around the country and the world.

John's father, Horace, had Scottish and Blackfeet Indian ancestors. His mother, Margaret First Kills, was the daughter of a Blackfeet chief. John went to school at the Fort Shaw Indian Industrial School near Great Falls. He also attended the Montana School for the Deaf, in Boulder, northeast of Butte. John later recalled his start as an artist: "When I was a boy I first used mud that was solid or sticky enough from anyplace I could find it. While I attended Boulder School for the Deaf, there was a carving class. This was my first experience in carving." John finished his education at St. John's School for the Deaf in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There he further developed his carving skills.

In 1913, at the age of 31, John returned to East Glacier and opened a studio. His skillful carvings of local wildlife and the Blackfeet people won him local praise. His first formal show was in Helena, in 1916. That year, John met Mary Peters Simon. They married two years later. Mary became John's business partner and interpreter. With her help, John's fame spread. Eventually, John's carvings appeared in galleries in New York, Boston, London, and Paris. He won many prizes, including a Gold Medal by the American Art Galleries, in Philadelphia.



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John Louis Clarke [no date]
Photographer Unidentified

Many famous people collected John's art. President Warren G. Harding displayed one of John's carved eagles in the White House. Before he died in 1970, John explained why he made art: "I carve because I take great pleasure in making what I see that is beautiful. When I see an animal I feel the wish to create it in wood as near as possible." John's Blackfeet name was Cutapuis, "The Man Who Talks Not." Nevertheless, he communicated to the world through his art.

Sources: Loren P. Pinski, "John L. Clarke: Cutapius, Man Who Talks Not," *Western and Wildlife Art Magazine*, available at <http://johnclarke.lppcarver.com/>.

Additional photos and biographical information available at <http://johnclarke.lppcarver.com/>.