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## YUKON NUGGETS

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WHITEHORSE  
2007



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### Lake Laberge

And there on the marge of Lake Laberge, I cremated Sam MacGee. That lake, made famous around the world by [Robert Service](#) was named for a Quebecer.

Like many other place names in the Yukon, Lake Laberge had at least several native names. In 1862, explorer Aurel Krause recorded the Tlinget name as Tahini-wud. In 1883, the American explorer [Frederick Schwatka](#), recorded the Tagish name "Kluk-tas-si".

But it was [William Dall](#), director of the Scientific corp of the Western Union Telegraph expedition, who gave the lake its present day name. He named Lake Laberge after Michael Laberge of Chateauguay, Quebec. Laberge along with Frank Ketchum of New Brunswick, were explorers for the Western Union who came up river from Fort Yukon to Fort Selkirk in 1867. They were looking for a possible route for the Collins Overland Telegraph line being built from New York to Paris.

No-one knows for sure if Michael Laberge ever saw his lake, but it is clear that he had it described to him by native people who lived along the river. The Collins Telegraph line was never built, but the lake went on to become an important part of Yukon history.

It was a major obstacle in spring when the riverboats ran from Whitehorse to Dawson. You see, it didn't melt as quickly as the ice on the river itself. So the White Pass used to spread lampblack on the ice in a channel down the middle. The material would absorb the heat of the spring sun and hasten breakup so the boats could run earlier than otherwise possible.

The famed Taylor and Drury boat, the Thistle, lies at the bottom of Lake Laberge. It sunk here in 1928. Remains of the hull of the riverboat Casca #1 can be seen at Lower Laberge where the lake empties into the [Yukon River](#). There are remains of Mounted Police posts at both Upper and Lower Laberge along with historic native encampments.

So the next time you visit Lake Laberge or recite the poetry of [Robert Service](#), think of Quebecer Michael Laberge who gave his name to this famous Yukon lake.



Charles Laberge, a relative, served on the Northwestel Board. This photo of Charles wading in Lake Laberge on June 23, 1995. He took a bottle of water back to Montreal. [Click for larger view.](#)



Man in single masted boat on the shore of Lake Laberge. Date:1900. Yukon Archives. Anton Vogee fonds, #129. [Click for larger view.](#)

A CKRW Yukon Nugget by Les McLaughlin

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### Alaska purchase

Psst. Wanna buy a used bridge in Brooklyn? How about some ocean front property in Arizona? Con artists and

Seward had a big fight on his hands with the US senate that thought the deal was throwing good money after bad. Critics called the proposal "Seward's Folly". Why on

their marks are a dime a dozen. Always were.

Take for example back in 1859. That year, Czarist Russia offered to sell a huge land mass in North America to the United States. Russia had claimed this unknown land mass since 1725 when Czar Peter the Great sent mariner Vitus Bering on a journey to explore the North American coast.

On the journey, Bering found the coast line of this northern land to be teeming with wildlife and fish. The interior, which he did not enter, was filled with mountains and forests. The land - now called Alaska - was totally unexplored. But for the next century and a half, Russian traders toured the coastline trading with local native peoples.

As the United States expanded westward in the early 1800s, Americans soon found themselves in competition with Russian explorers and traders. Moscow, however, lacked the financial resources to support major settlements or a military presence along the Pacific coast of North America and permanent Russian settlers in Alaska never numbered more than four hundred.

In 1859, Russia decided to cut its losses with the land and offered to sell Alaska to the United States. The ugly U.S. Civil War delayed the sale, but after the war, Secretary of State William Seward quickly took up a renewed Russian offer and on March 30, 1867, agreed to a proposal from the Russian Minister in Washington to purchase Alaska for 7.2 million dollars.

earth would America want such a far off, no good, frozen land.

However, Seward's arguments won the day and on April 9, 1867, the US Senate approved the treaty. President Andrew Johnson signed the treaty on May 28, and Alaska was formally transferred to the United States on October 18, 1867. The purchase ended Russia's presence in North America and ensured U.S. access to the Pacific northern rim.

For three decades after the purchase, the United States paid little attention to Alaska, which was governed under military or, at times, no visible rule at all. Seeking a way to impose U.S. mining laws, the United States formed a civil government in 1884.

Skeptics of Seward's Folly changed their tune when a major gold deposit was discovered in the Yukon in 1896, and Alaska became the gateway to the Klondike gold fields. Alaska became the 49th state of the Union on January 3, 1959.

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