

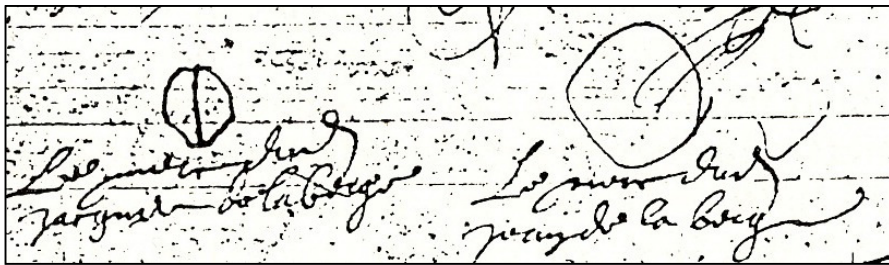
The Laberge Name and Its Many Variants....How do you spell it and why?

Written by Philip Charles LaBerge, Coppell, TX, on December 21, 2011

There have been many discussions about the spelling of our family name. Which one is correct: LaBerge, LaBarge, La Berge, La Barge or de la Berge?

The following is a brief review of the name's origin and its many variants.

Robert de la Berge was born in Colomby-sur-Thaon, France on May 24, 1638. All of the Laberges in Canada and the United States are descendants of him. His father Jacques and grandfather Jean were both illiterate and signed their names with a mark. They penned the mark while a literate witness penned their name below it based on how it sounded.



Robert was also illiterate and did not learn to sign his name until about 1671 after he had settled in New France in 1658, some thirteen years later.

The reference below was taken from the book "Research on the Basse-Normand and Picardie Origins of Robert de la Berge of Colomby-sur-Thaon and Francoise Gosse of Noyon, Pioneering family of L'Ange-Gardien in the seignery of Beaupre under Louis XIV" written by Pierre-Lionel De La Berge.

After his arrival in New France, Robert's name was seen in many variants, but here are a few:

- Robert de la Barge (Reg. Château-Richer, 2 February 1660),
- Rober de laberge (Auber, 22 October 1662),
- Rober de Laberge (Vachon, 4 February 1663),
- Rober De la berge (Reg. Château-Richer, 28 May 1663),
- Rober La Berge (Auber, 11 November 1663),
- Robert de la Bergue (JDSC, 17 November 1663),
- Robert Labarge (Ibid, 14 January 1665),
- Rober de la berge (Rageot, 27 March 1667),
- Rober la Berge (Auber, 3 July 1668),
- Robert Laberge (Duquet, 19 July 1671),
- Robert laberge (Vachon, 20 October 1674),
- Robert de laberge (Duquet, 22 October 1676),

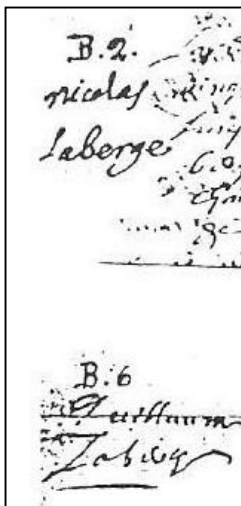
- Robert de la Berge (Becquet, 5 November 1677),
- Robert La Barge (Auber, 24 November 1678).

Starting in 1680, the form that prevailed almost uniformly and that we have adopted for uniformity is:

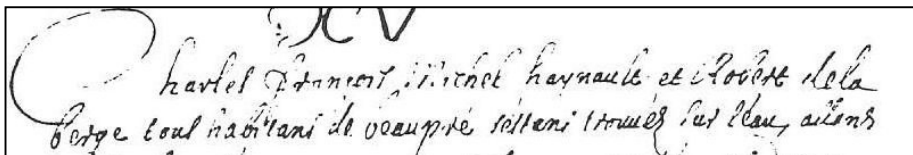
- Robert Laberge.

Robert began to sign (his name) around 1671 and he signed "laberge".

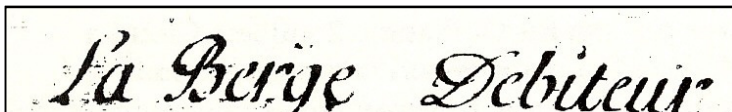
As an example, the spellings on the birth certificates of his two sons Nicolas and Guillaume, respectively born in 1672 and 1674 are Laberge. At this point Robert was signing his name and this may have been his pen.



However, the spelling in the description written in 1688 of "Le miracle de la bonne Sainte-Anne" when Robert was miraculously saved from drowning in icy waters of the Saint Lawrence, is written "Robert de la berge."



The spelling of "La Berge" was seen written on a debt ledger of Robert's as late as 1701.



There is no question, however, that the predominant spelling today in Canada is "Laberge."

How can that be the case if the predominant spelling in the United States is "LaBerge" followed by LaBarge and La Berge? (as non-scientifically revealed by looking at LinkedIn and Facebook)

One has to step back and look at history.....

In 1759, General Wolfe and his fleet of 49 English war ships attacked Quebec in the first Battle of Quebec to kick the French out. (In the 2nd Battle of Quebec in December of 1775, the American Colonial Army attacked and tried to expel the British defenders of the city.) Late in the summer of 1759, while camped on the Ile D'Orleans (across from Maison Laberge) after an unsuccessful attack at Beupre and prior to the decisive battle on the Plains of Abraham, his men (along with 4 companies of American Rangers who he had brought along) pillaged and burned all of the farms on the north coast of the Saint Lawrence. That unfortunately included Maison Laberge.

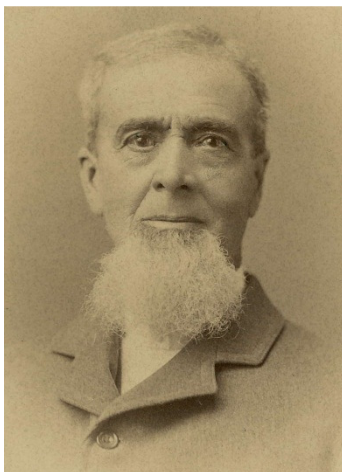
In 1704, Timothe Laberge, was born in L'Ange-Gardien and was a grandson of Robert. He fled prior to the attack in 1759 and settled in Chateauguay, just south of Montreal, where he raised his family. He died in 1772. Unfortunately, some of Timothe's siblings who remained in Quebec, as well as a large percentage of the populace, perished during the harsh winter of 1759 after the brutal attack by the British. Timothe's children, however, survived and prospered. Today, the largest concentration of Laberges is in Chateauguay, as reflected in the very large number of Laberges listed in the phone book and buried in its cemetery.

Walter LaBerge, after his visit there in 1983, described St. Constant where his grandfather Pierre Armand Laberge was born (and nearby Chateauguay):

From an area long used by trappers, the town grew in the early 1800's with the expansion of French Canadian farming into the southern St. Lawrence Valley, protected from Indians and Americans by a series of forts along the Richelieu river, most notably the one at Chambly nearby.

Difficult climate and paying out of the soil in the area caused a mass migration of most of its residents to the United States in the late 1860's and '70's. With the advent of crop rotation and new fertilization techniques, the land is again productive and the town of St. Constant again thrives.

My great-great grandparents Pierre (Peter) Laberge & Marie (Mary) Hedwige Lewis (his second wife) along with their children Pierre Armand, Mary, Rose & Vergie, packed up and moved to St. Joseph, Missouri in 1867.



Pierre (Peter) Laberge (b. 1822–St. Constant (Chateauguay), QC, d. 1883–St. Joseph, MO (?))

Note: in 1883 Peter is not listed on the St. Joseph, MO census for the first time and Mary is listed as widow. The above photo is of a Perter Laberge (which was handed down to Helene La Berge by Pierre Armand) dated 1890 in Kansas City, MO. By the 1900 census, Mary along with her three daughters are listed living in Kansas City in the home of her daughter Rose and husband Matthew O. Canfield . It is unclear when or where Peter died and where he was buried. Family historian, Marie-Claire Laberge Provost, from Valleyfield (Montreal), QC believes that Pierre is buried in the Cotes-des-Neiges cemetery in Montreal next to a daughter from his first marriage with Felicite Dumouchel. The daughter was Marie Amelie (Mélina) Laberge Trudel (b. 1851-Chateauguay, m. 1871-San Francisco, d. 1898-Montreal) So the fate of Pierre (Peter) Laberge is an unsolved mystery.

Marie (Mary) Hedwige Lewis (b. 1829 – Saint Anntoine-sur-Richelieu, QC, d. 1905 – Kansas City, MO)

While some Laberges had moved earlier to Vermont, Maine and the Ohio Valley, the migration in the 1860's & 1870's was part of a mass migration and westward expansion in the United States. On May 10, 1869 the last spike was driven on the transcontinental railroad. The railroad opened up the West replacing the steamboat which had moved people and cargo in the same direction by way of the Missouri River for the previous 50 years. (Learn more by reading about the great steamboat captain, Joseph Marie La Barge. His father, Joseph Marie Laberge, was an early fur trapper & trader, born in L'Assomption, just up river from Montreal in 1787. He canoed to St. Louis in 1808. Note the name change from Laberge to La Barge).

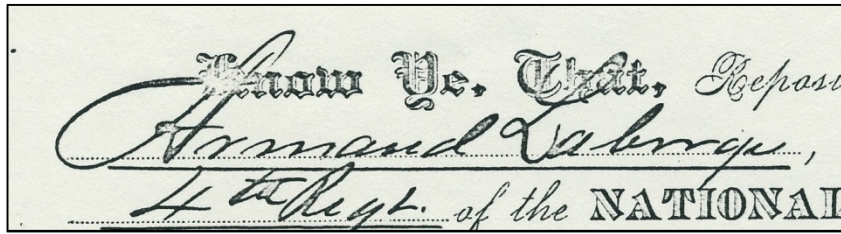
The Victorian Era is a name for the period from 1837 to 1901.

Victorian America was a time of uncertainty for the Americans with "old money." The wealthy were not yet sure what it was to be an American and they showed their uncertainty by borrowing heavily from European culture, especially French culture. Old money people ate French cuisine prepared by French cooks imported from France and drank French wines. Often, these families would buy up the entire stocks of a French vineyard for their house.

As witnessed in his early portraits, Pierre Armand was very much a Victorian. His daughter Helene described him as "overly strict, non-loving and inconsiderate of her mother" and a very stern figure.

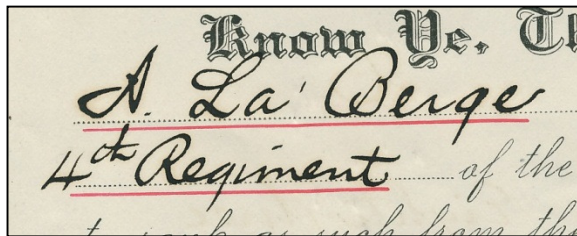


When Pierre Armand was promoted to Corporal in the 4th Regiment of the State National Guard on the 17th of July, 1882, he spelled his name "Laberge." At that time he was also a clerk for the Kennard & Fisher Company (specialists in teas and spices.) Tea was an important element of high society. Bigelow, Kennard & Company was a well known Boston company that produced ornate sterling silver and it is presumably the same Kennard of Kennard & Fisher. Shown above is a Bigelow, Kennard Co. tea set.



Know Ye, That, I deposit
Armand Laberge,
4th Regt. of the NATIONAL

The following year on September 4th, 1883, when he was appointed Sergeant, he spelled his name with a space and capital 'B'.

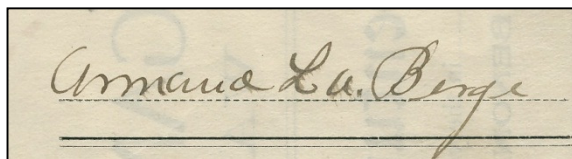


Know Ye, That
A. La Berge
4th Regiment of the

By that time he had become a "commercial traveler" for the H.C. Fisher Company. Perhaps Kennard had split with Fisher. Regardless, Pierre Armand was successful selling to high society and the spelling of his name as "La Berge" (with a space and capital flourished 'B') would have been beneficial in the French Victorian society in which he lived and worked.


As mentioned above, it is also in that year that his father, Pierre Laberge is believed to have died.

By 1887, Pierre Armand had left St. Joseph and moved to Chicago. At that point he was consistently signing his name "La Berge" as shown on a Warranty Deed signed in 1901.



Armand La. Berge

His son, my grandfather, Walter Colony signed the same way as can be seen on the signature of his WWI discharge papers.



Signature of soldier: Walter La Berge
Camp Grant, Ill. MAR 7 - 1919

My father, Dr. Walter Barber LaBerge spelled his name with a capital 'B' but no space as shown on his 8th grade report card

Archdiocese of Chicago	
School	St. James
Report of	Walter LaBerge
Address	308 So. 2nd Ave.
Grade	8
	19 36

He had a very unique signature:



I spell my name the same way as my father, but do so because it is easier when filling out forms and causes less confusion. Some of my siblings, however, include the space but all use a capital 'B'.

In conclusion, there is no right or wrong way to spell the name. Like the great General Lafayette said in 1825 to the 10 year old (future famous steamboat captain) Joseph Marie La Barge when he hopped up on his carriage when he was visiting St. Louis:

What is your name? The boy responded: 'La Barge'. 'Ah' said the General, 'then we are both Frenchmen, and the only difference is in the ending of our names.'