

Joseph Ladue and Joe Ladue:

WHO WERE THEY?

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Introduction

Yukon written history began when the explorers and newcomers entered the area and recorded their travels and impressions. Depending on what part of the Yukon you are in, the name “Joe Ladue” will identify two different men. During the Klondike Gold Rush, these two men came from dichotomous backgrounds, but their stories are intertwined and both men have had an impact on the Yukon and therefore have a place in recorded Yukon history. These men are Joseph Francis Ladue, a New Yorker, and Joe Ladue, a Northern Tutchone/Kaska man. Depending on what part of the Yukon one is in, the name Joe Ladue conjures up different images. If one is in the Dawson City area, Joe Ladue is considered the founder of Dawson City. If one is in the Ross River/Faro area, Joe Ladue brings to mind a Northern Tutchone/Kaska man who had a hand in the prospecting that lead to development of mining in this area.

Joseph Francis Ladue

Joseph F. Ladue was born on July 28, 1855, in Schuyler Falls, New York. After the death of his father when he was nineteen years old, Ladue headed west in 1874. He worked in Deadwood, South Dakota, before moving to Arizona and New Mexico. (Wikipedia) He arrived in the Yukon in 1882, nine years after Arthur Harper (Berton 1972 p 6). Harper was one of the first white men to enter the Yukon Basin. He came by way of the “Peace and Mackenzie River valleys (ibid).” There were two other men who entered the Yukon Basin early: George Holt, who “was the first white man to penetrate the massive wall of scalloped peaks that seals off the Yukon Valley from the North Pacific Ocean. These mountains were guarded by three thousand Indians (Tlingit) sentinels, and how he got past them no man knows (p 8).” The other early arrival was Ed Schieffelin, a wealthy businessman from the United States. He made a million

dollars by discovering silver and founding the town of Tombstone, Arizona. (p 9). Schieffelin and travelling party travelled by ship to St. Michael's, Alaska, and used a "tiny steamboat especially built to penetrate the hinterland (pp 9-10)." These three men were in search of gold. They searched, but eventually gave up, and "so, as it had eluded Harper and Holt, the gold of the Yukon eluded the gaunt Schieffelin (p 11). Harper travelled with Al Mayo and LeRoy (Jack) McQuesten who had arrived in the Yukon 1874 (Wright 1976 p 127).

Joe Ladue's mother died when he was young and his father died when he was nineteen years old, and the woman Ladue was in love with, Kitty Mason, was not allowed to marry him due to his lack of funds (Berton p 33). Ladue has been written in history as "obsessed with the idea of gold (ibid)." Ladue left New York State in 1874 (wiki), making his way west, first to Black Hill, South Dakota, then he moved even further west to New Mexico then to Arizona, before turning northward (Berton 1972 p 33). Ladue was one of the first white men to climb over the Chilkoot Pass in 1882 after men like George Holt and Edmund Bean, who climbed over in 1881 (Berton p 8 and Wright 1976 p 137).

Ladue came north with Captain William Moore, who was the founder of Skagway, Alaska (Yukon archives article: author unknown). Upon arriving in the Yukon area, Ladue spent time panning various streams and rivers from "the Stewart to Nuklayaket, including one gurgling stream whose name would later become world-renowned as "Bonanza" (Berton p 33)." Ladue had little luck finding his gold, but he wanted to make his way in the Yukon (ibid). In the winter of 1882 Ladue wintered at "Fort Reliance and worked at Fortymile and Sixtymile Rivers in the summer of 1883 (Wright p 137)." Fort Reliance was located a few kilometers away from the mouth of the Klondike River. This area would be a motherlode for Ladue in just a few years. Some of the men Ladue wintered with headed back to the Chilkoot Pass and left the Yukon

before finding any gold (ibid). During the winter of 1882-1883, he and his partners tried a new mining technique that would become very popular with miners in the region. It involved building a fire to thaw the ground. This way the gold-bearing gravel could be heaped up, ready for sluicing once spring arrived (K.S.Coates & W.R. Morrison. Land of the Midnight Sun, p 50).” Ladue discovered he was not a successful prospector, but he did find his niche by becoming a very successful businessman in the northwestern part of the Yukon. “Ladue was to become a trading partner of McQuesten and Harper, a sawmill operator, a saloon keeper and an unquenchable enthusiast for every reported strike was the Eldorado, which all the miners on the river were seeking (Wright p 137).” Ladue set up his sawmill at Sixtymile Island to make lumber for sluice boxes for the miners coming into the area (Yukon Archives Cor 119 78/73 F.36). It is quite ironic that Ladue and his trading partners Harper, Mayo and McQuesten came into the Yukon in search of gold and ended up becoming traders and businessmen who looked after the miners who actually found the gold (Berton 2007 p260). Historian and writer Pierre Berton (1972) suggests that “without these three men and a fourth named Joseph Ladue, who arrived a decade later, the series of events that led to the Klondike discovery would not have been possible (p13).”

It is recorded that Ladue left the Yukon to take a trip to New York “during the winter of 1895. He returned in the summer and worked with Jack Dalton (Yukon Archives Cor 119 78/73 F.36 p 2). In August 1896, “Jack Dalton took Joe to the mouth of the Klondike as Joe was running out of timber from his sawmill (Yukon News).” Ladue and Dalton had dinner in this area when they heard of the gold discovery by “Skookum Jim, his sister Kate, Dawson Charlie and Kate’s non Native husband George Carmack (Cruikshank 1991 p 121).” “Dalton said this might be a good place to stake a lot. Perhaps he was thinking that this could be a trading post, like the ones he had at Haines Mission on the coast and Dalton Post, a hundred miles to the

interior (Yukon News).” By August 27, Ladue had staked 160 acres and “sent a man to the Mounted Police at Fortymile to file an application for the land (Whitehorse Star and Yukon News).” Ladue named his townsite Dawson City “in honour of Dr. George Dawson,” who was a noted geologist exploring the Yukon during the 1880’s (McCourt 1969 p 75).

“That fall, while Ladue’s sawmill was turning out rough lumber for the first of Dawson’s buildings, Carmack was treating his friends to drinks at fifty dollars a round (Berton, 1972 p 63). By January 1897, “there were only four houses in Dawson besides Ladue’s, but the tents, like dirty white sails, were scattered in ragged order between the trees on the frozen swampland (p 68).” William Ogilvie, who was a government official, sent notice outside to the government, he sent seventy-three year old William Moore over the Chillkoot Pass with the news of the discovery (p 68). This news would not reach the bureaucrats until the early spring, “when it methodically moved through civil-service channels and was eventually published in an austere little pamphlet which caused not a ripple of interest (69).” Ogilvie sent more news out “estimating that season’s output at two and half million dollars (ibid).” But by the time the report was digested in Ottawa, others had carried the story to the world in more dramatic circumstances (70).” People fled the economic depression and headed for the gold fields of the Klondike as quickly as they could.

Dawson City grew steadily as miners left Fortymile and other areas and moved to the new town. “As the town of Dawson slowly took shape around Ladue’s sawmill and saloon, a subtle change began to work among those prospectors who for years had had nothing to call their own except a bill at Jack McQuesten’s store (70). “A night on the town – which meant a night in Joe Ladue’s bare-boarded saloon, drinking watered whiskey – could cost at least fifty dollars (71).” “It was January 1897, Ogilvie travelled to Dawson City ‘to lay out the townsite and survey

several other blocks applied for there (Wright 1976 p 300).” Dawson City continued to grow as the word of the gold discovery leaked out to Alaska. (Berton 1972 p 82) By April, 1897, there were about “fifteen hundred people in the community and the camp had become (sic) a carbon copy of Fortymile and Circle City, its customs and tradition as yet untarnished by any large influx of strangers (82-83).”

During the 1897, winter men climbed the Chilkoot Trail, eager to get to the gold fields of the Klondike. On May 16, the ice broke on the Yukon River, and “the first small vessels to arrive belonged to men who had wintered somewhere along the river, but the main body of boats was only a few days behind (83).” “The first city on the south bank of the Klondike was known officially as Klondike city, but rejoiced in the more common title of “Lousetown,” for it was the site of the old Indian salmon camp (ibid).” The saloon keeper of Lousetown had “erected a large sign – “Danger Below: Keep Right” – to mislead the newcomers and prevent them going on to Dawson, where Joe Ladue was planning to sell the last of his whiskey (ibid).” Ogilvie solved the problem by “tying down the steam whistle of Ladue’s sawmill, and as its piercing shrieks echoed through the Klondike hills the makeshift fleet left Lousetown and moved down to Dawson, which swiftly became the hub of the gold-fields (ibid).”

Ladue started selling off his town lots at five hundred dollars and by summer 1897 “town lots were selling as high as twelve thousand (Yukon Archives Cor 119 78/73 F.36 p 2 and Berton 1972 p 84).” Dozens of buildings went up “hotels, dancehalls, restaurants and stores – built of lumber from Ladue’s mill (Yukon Archives Cor 119 78/73 F.36 p 2).” “By summer’s end there were ten saloons in Dawson, none taking in less than three hundred dollars a night (84).” Ladue became a millionaire because of his store, saloon, sawmill, townsite property, and the Joseph Ladue Gold Mining & Development Co., but like his colleagues, Ladue had little time to enjoy

his new-found wealth. Once back in New York Ladue was diagnosed with ‘consumption’ or commonly known as tuberculosis. Ladue did marry his sweetheart Anna ‘Kitty’ Mason in December 1897, and they “adopted Francis Lemay, the son of Willis Lamay, who had accompanied Ladue north in 1895 (Lundberg).” Ladue’s legacy of being one of the Klondikers has continued with his family members coming north a number of times to celebrate the Centennial of the Gold Rush and Centennial of Dawson City’s incorporation.

Joe Ladue, Northern Tutchone/Kaska Man

Joe Ladue’s father was a Tlingit man with the English name of Olé McGundy. McGundy was of the Eagle or Wolf moiety and was from Juneau, Alaska. Joe’s mother, Olé’s first wife who was also Tlingit and was from Dyea. She was of the Crow or Raven moiety. McGundy was a Christian shaman (pc with Dorothy John). A Christian shaman is someone who believes in Jesus but at the same time practices shamanism. From the late 1800s into the mid-1900s this was common (pc with Josephine Acklack). Despite the fact that McGundy was a Christian he felt he was facing persecution from the American authorities because of his shamanist practices. He and his wife moved to Tagish to escape the American authorities sometime before 1895 (pc with D. John).

While McGundy and his first wife were living in Tagish they took a Tagish wife apprentice, Violet McGundy. Her Tagish name was Theya Me [Eagle Woman] of the Crow clan and she was born around 1883. Violet McGundy became a wife apprentice when she was between 12 and 14 years old. This puts McGundy in Tagish by 1895. Violet’s task was to learn to be a wife and help Mrs. McGundy. Sometime after that the people in Tagish were getting nervous about possibility that the American authorities would come to Tagish to arrest him. Not wanting him arrested or deal with the American authorities, they told McGundy that he should

move further north into Northern Tutchone territory (unpublished paper by Ukjese van Kempen p 1). McGundy moved his entire family to the Carmacks area and was adopted by the Northern Tutchone people as one of their own (Yukon Archives, source unknown).

McGundy had seven daughters and two sons from his first wife. He had two sons who were named Drury McGundy and Joe Ladue. When McGundy's first wife died, the apprentice Violet became the new wife and together they had several children. Upon becoming the new wife, Violet McGundy herself became a shaman (pc Gerry Ladue and Jimmy Ladue).

“Kaskas have come to use Euro-Canadian style given and family names as a result of their interactions with missionaries, traders, and other members of the dominant society (Moore 2007 p 285).” “The English speakers who came to the Kaska region during and immediately following the Klondike gold rush of the late 1890's gave Kaska men simple English names such as Bob, Dick and Charlie. These informally given English names came to be used as surnames (Peat Bob, Amos Dick, Mary Charlie etc) and eventually were adopted for use by both missionaries and government officials (ibid).” McGundy choose his name and all his children were given the surname of McGundy, except for Joe Ladue. Ladue was one of the “Ladue boys,” who worked for Joseph Ladue in Dawson City. Joe Ladue was probably called “Joe” and choose his name as he had worked for, and gotten along with, the Dawson City founder (Moore and van Kampen).

Joe Ladue was born sometime between 1884 and 1888. It is not known if he was born in Alaska or Tagish, but he was born before Violet McGundy became a wife apprentice in Tagish. Like most First Nations people, Joe grew up and lived in many different areas. Joe spent some of his preteen years in the Rose Mountain area and in the Glenlyon Lake area, which is about 40 kilometres down the Pelly River from Faro (pc R Ladue). By this time, Violet McGundy was his

step mother and was raising him. To differentiate between the two men, this paper will refer to the founder of Dawson City as Joseph Ladue and the Northern Tutchone/Kaska man as Joe Ladue. When Joe Ladue was about 15 years old, he worked for Joseph Ladue, the founder of Dawson City. Joseph Ladue had been in the Yukon since 1882 and had started a sawmill to provide lumber for the building of Dawson City (Lundberg). Joe Ladue always got along well with white people and around 1899 he was working for Mr. Ladue at the sawmill (pc with D. John).

After the Gold Rush years, Joe Ladue worked for a number of people and companies in the Carmacks-Ross River areas. Joe worked for one or more of the boats that went up the Pelly River, as far as maybe Pelly Banks (pc D. John). There were at least three boats that travelled up the Pelly River. "The Prospector" was making trips up the Pelly River as early as 1901, and later, other steamboats made trips, such as "The Thistle" in the 1920s and "The Yukon Rose" starting in 1929 (van Kampen). Joe cut wood for them and maybe worked aboard. Joe married a Tagish woman "Dusch'adle" or Edith Dickson, the daughter of Pat Dickson from the Watson Lake area and Jenny Dickson, a Tagish woman. Joe and Edith had eleven children: Mary, Peter, Lydia, Jimmy, Alice, Billy and Jack (various family memorial cards).

As shown in his diary of 1936-1937, his winters consisted of trapping and hunting in the Glenlyon Lake, Rose Mountain and Fishhook Creek areas. In fact, Joe Ladue's diary was found at Fishhook Creek in the late 1940s. Spring activities were muskrat and beaver trapping (Yukon Archives: Connolly MSS 16(82/188)). During the summer Joe and his family moved to Carmacks and cut wood for the steamboats, such as the White Horse, and Joe, as always, would fish and hunt. During the fall he returned to the trapline at Fishhook Creek. On Jan 13th, 1937, one of

Joe's babies was born on the trapline, most likely his youngest son Billy (Yukon Archives: Connolly MSS 16(82/188)).

Joe, and sometimes Edith, travelled all over the south central Yukon to places like Fort Selkirk, Whitehorse and Teslin (various memorial cards of family members). In 1942, Joe worked as a packer for the Trans Canada-Alaska Railway Survey. Joe built a cabin at Little Salmon Lake and later a cabin at Faro. Joe mostly lived between these two areas with the exception of living at Cowley Creek in the 1960s and time spent in Watson Lake while two of his sons Jimmy and Billy attended Lower Post Residential School (various memorial cards of family members).

Joe Ladue was well-known member of the prospecting team that discovered the Vangorda Creek lead-zinc deposit, he was also an artist. This lead-zinc deposit was located 48 km downstream of the community of Ross River. In 1953, Joe worked as a guide for prospector Al Kulan. He was part of a team Al Kulan hired which included Kaska men: Robert Etzel, Joe Etzel, Jack Ladue, Art John and Jack Sterriah (Wikipedia). The Vangorda Creek lead-zinc deposit discovery later grew into the Faro mine which by the mid 1970's was the largest lead/zinc mine in Canada and at one point was the largest operating open-pit lead/zinc mine in the world (Wikipedia)! As the result of Joe Ladue's prospecting he is part of the Yukon Prospector's Association Hall of Fame and his name is listed on the Prospector's statue outside of the Elijah Smith Building in Whitehorse (<http://www.yukonprospectors.ca/hall.html>).

Sometime after the discovery Joe moved to Cowley creek just south of Whitehorse with his family (van Kampen). Later in the 1960s, Joe Ladue moved his family back to the Faro area and lived between his cabin at Little Salmon Lake and his cabin on the Pelly River by Faro. While there he continued to hunt, fish and trap. He continued to carve and would take his

carvings into Faro to sell. People from Faro remember Joe as an easy going happy man who would be out trying to sell his carvings. On August 2, 1971 Joe was with a group of First Nations people driving into Faro and ended up in a head-on collision with a tractor-trailer truck. Everyone in the vehicle was killed except one woman. Joe was listed as 83 years old at the time (Raven vol 4 no 15).

Conclusion

Both Joseph and Joe contributed to the mining development of the Yukon. Joseph Ladue was in the midst of the heyday of the Klondike of the Gold Rush and Joe Ladue was involved in the one of the biggest finds of lead-zinc ore in Canada. Joseph Ladue had the foresight to claim and stake a site for a town which brought miners and dreamers together for over one hundred years. Joe Ladue worked with Al Kulan and had a hand in the largest discovery of lead-zinc in Canada. Both men have lead relatively quiet, modest lives just wanting the best for their families. Both of these men have earned a place in Yukon history and both men have rightly earned their places on the Yukon Prospector's Hall of Fame.

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