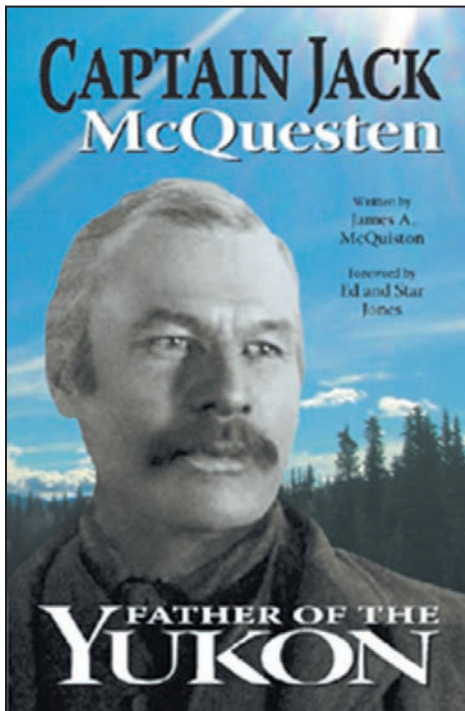


McQuiston, McQuiston, McQuesten, McQuestion,  
McCuiston, McCuiston and other related names.

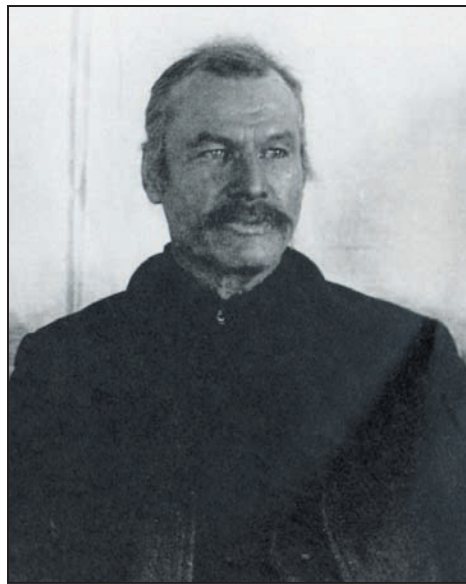
# Mountain Echo

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## Father of the Yukon



*The unretouched photo of Jack McQuesten on the right was combined with a picture of McQuesten River, taken in Yukon, Canada, in 2007, for the cover of my book on Captain Jack, Father of the Yukon.*

From January to October of 2007 I produced a book on Captain Jack McQuesten, known in his lifetime as the Father of the Yukon and the Father of Alaska.

I first read about him in Leona McQuiston's 1937 genealogy book on our family. At the same time I was reading Jack London stories about the Great White North, watching Pierre Berton documentaries on Canadian television, and also watching Sgt. Preston of the Yukon and his dog, Yukon King on a local station.

It really wasn't until recent years that I put all this together to realize how related all of these boyhood experiences really were. Most of my life I have collected anything I could find on Jack and in 1996 I posted what I had found on the internet.

Immediately I started hearing from fans of Jack including a museum in Seattle, the Indian tribe of Jack's wife, Kate, and other knowledgeable folks. Eventually, I met Ed and Star Jones, two Yukon historians who have been extremely instrumental

in preserving Alaskan and Yukon history. For instance, they were the driving force behind an historical library at the Dawson City, Yukon, Museum. A couple of years ago they were working on a cemetery project for the State of Alaska, and now they are working on a report, "Lost in the Yukon" for the Yukon government. They've written their own book called *All That Glitters*.

Ed and Star sent me some great little gifts. One was a copy of Jack McQuesten's own writings. These writings are the earliest of life in the Yukon and in them he names the Klondike River with its Indian name, Throndike, for the first time in history. He spells it three different ways. Another man spelled it in a way that it became misinterpreted as Clondike, which is how it was spelled early on. That mis-naming eventually became Klondike.

Before Jack McQuesten, the river was shown, on early maps, as Deer River. He also grubstaked the miners who found the first gold on Klondike tributaries.

A modern-day miner, one of the most successful on the Klondike, today, told me, "Dawson wouldn't be half the town it is without Jack

McQuesten. I feel just as indebted to him as any of the those early miners he grubstaked.”

I met this man, Jim Archibald, thanks to Ed and Star. I also met nearly every Yukon historian alive. A get-together was planned in the very shadows of Jack London’s reconstructed miner’s cabin, in the shadows of the home of the great Yukon poet, Robert Service, and in the shadows of the boyhood home of Pierre Berton, Canada’s premier historian.

Berton, just before he died, wrote the forward for Ed and Star’s book. They wrote the forward for my book. Berton’s mother was a close friend of Robert Service, who along with Jack London, used to visit Jack McQuesten at his Berkeley, CA, home to get ideas for Yukon poems and stories. So I indirectly inherited an incredible Yukon writer’s heritage. Ed says I am now part of Yukon history thanks to my book and to efforts I made to help bring about the plaque on the Yukon River dedicated to Captain Jack McQuesten as Father of the Yukon.

He also says I am the world’s expert on Jack, which I don’t doubt. I have spent nearly a lifetime studying him and the results are in my book and on the website -

[www.fatheroftheyukon.com](http://www.fatheroftheyukon.com).

I also have told Jack’s story at a few presentations that I have given. The first was at the Cleveland, OH, Siberian Husky Championships in 2008. Later that year, I repeated the show at a local library. Just this past weekend, January 24, 2009, I gave the presentation again to dog mushers and event workers at the Warren, PA, Winterfest dog sled races. I always get some great applause and lots of questions. I also learn new information about Jack or about life in the North at these events.



*Here I am with Dick North standing outside of Jack London’s cabin. Dick was one of three men who went into the wilderness to tear apart the cabin and rebuild it, half in Dawson and half in Oakland, CA. Dick is also a Yukon author and runs the Jack London Interpretive Center in Dawson.*

In fact, while sitting with the historians in Dawson City, Yukon, I said I wanted my book to be the definitive book on Jack. I was told by one man that it would be, right AFTER I published it, because I would get all kinds of letters and new information. Most at the table laughed and agreed. He was correct. I have gotten enough for at least half of another book. Some of this new information is posted on the website listed.

One thing I’ve come to realize about Jack, after the book was published, is that he very much believed in a show of force to deter problems or criminal activity. I cited a couple examples in the book but not necessarily in that context.

In one case, Jack always took his furs down the 2,000 or so miles to St. Michael in a flat bottomed boat with ten Indians, all over six foot, like he was. These eleven giants must have been intimidating to Indians along the river wishing to rob a

year’s worth of wages, especially because many of the tribes had men substantially shorter than six foot.

In another case, Indians at Fort Reliance had ransacked his trading post after his partners left and refused to return due to the “Indian troubles”.

Jack took a group of his Indian friends with him and went directly into the midst of this group of hostiles with no fear on his face. He said that most of the Indians he took with him thought they’d all be killed, and didn’t really want to go, but his bravery and boldness shocked the hostile Indians into quick submission.

Another time Jack had to pass Nulato, where his wife was born, in his riverboat. He was closing down his post there again because a few Indians were inciting others to riot. He waited just around the bend from Nulato for his partner’s father-in-law to arrive with a second riverboat. Then he proceeded upstream two

riverboats abreast. Before Jack's time most of these Indians had never even seen a riverboat. Now here he was with two of the monsters coming up river.

The hostile Indians backed off and let him pass without incident. He must have felt bad leaving his wife's people without supplies, or he wanted to show what a sincere man he was, but either way, he returned to Nulato to trade at least a few goods with the Indians so they would not starve during the coming winter.

There is also the case where Jack had a hangman's cross arm built onto his store in Circle City. The Mounties had come to be the law in Forty Mile which included taxing people like Jack for gold profits and liquor he was producing (He was the original Yukon Jack).

Jack simply moved over the line to Alaska where there was no official "law enforcement" to avoid the excise man. However, to make sure everyone in his new town behaved themselves, he built the highly visible cross arm on the front of his store right near the sign "McQuesten & Co." No one was ever hung there. The ne'er-do-wells got the message up front that you didn't mess with Jack.

When Jack went "out" to San Francisco to get supplies for the miners he asked the Alaska Commercial Company to double the amount of annual supplies because gold had just been struck at Forty Mile. They refused.

Jack left saying he would start his own supply company and leave them out altogether. They caught up with him a few days later and relented, luckily for the men on the Yukon who were growing ever more numerous by the year.

Even into his late 60s Jack and some old Yukon buddies went down

*RIGHT: This plaque, which faces toward the Yukon River, honors Leroy Napoleon "Captain Jack" McQuesten, Father of the Yukon. It was dedicated on August 11, 2007, a day which was designated as "Jack McQuesten Day" by the mayor of Dawson City, Yukon.*



*LEFT: This advertisement for Yukon Jack whiskey seems to show Jack looking over the Yukon River and its nearby mountains.*

*"Yukon Jack" was one of McQuesten's many nicknames and after emails with the manufacturer and conversations with many Yukon historians, no one has disputed that Jack McQuesten is the original Yukon Jack.*

to Mexico in defiance of the Mexican government to hunt for silver. He didn't need the money but he must have needed the adventure.

Jack came back from the Yukon with a reported two million dollars and apparently buried \$600,000 of it to hide it from the tax collectors. He invested \$87,000 in the Mexican silver mine but was captured by the Mexican government and sent back to the United States in a locked railroad coach car.

Ed Jones introduced me to Jack's grandson, Walter. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree and Walter is inspirational in his independent

spirit. At about 73 years of age he has a 19-year-old half-Eskimo son, a hero in his own right who recently dove through the ice of the Bering Strait to save his friend and became Man of the Year.

What a privilege it has been for me to be the one that Ed and Star Jones, and Walter McQuesten, and Fate chose to write this book about such a great, great man - Leroy Napoleon "Captain Jack" McQuesten, Golden Rule McQuesten, Old Jack, Yukon Jack, Father of his Country, the Daniel Boone of Alaska, Father of Alaska, and Father of the Yukon.

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