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### BERT LAW: HE HELPED PROSPECTORS FULFILL THEIR DREAMS

By Jane Gaffin

*(This profile about the outstanding Law family has relied on James Joseph's 1952 American Magazine article, "The Laws of the Yukon", plus Jane Gaffin's 2005 Yukoner Magazine article, "The Law Family's Grand Adventures", as well as her book **Cashing In.**)*

The intrepid James Joseph saw the cheerful round sign announcing the Silver Dollar Lodge at Mile Post 843 and wheeled his car left from the Alaska Highway into the yard on a bitterly cold day in 1952.

The place wasn't as remote from the rest of the world as one might believe at first blush. Yes, the town of Dawson Creek, British Columbia, was 843 miles behind him and it was 75 miles farther to Whitehorse at Mile Post 918.

But on the opposite side of the road at the Squanga airstrip a telephone could link him with his editor at the *American Magazine* in New York City.

Mr. Joseph had reached the halfway point on the Alaska Highway, a wartime effort the American Army built 10 years before from Mile Post 0 at Dawson Creek. The 1,600 miles of road snaked into and through the Yukon Territory, and carried on into United States territory at Fairbanks, Alaska.

Tucked back among the evergreen stands was an inviting, single-storey L-shaped log structure, about 200 feet long to house 15 guest rooms. Smoke trailed straight up from the lodge's chimney. Several log out buildings served as workshop, garage and for storage. All were framed by a mountainous backdrop and inserted unobtrusively into an eight-acre wooded landscape that looked like a Christmas card ready for an artist's palette and brush.

Strains of "*shrimp boats are a comin', they're comin' tonight...*" seeped through the lodge's walls. Jo Stafford's voice carried a far distance in the brittle air.

In his travels, Mr. Joseph had discovered that practically everybody along the highway knew the California couple living here with their youngsters Frances, 9, Tommy, 7, and George, 5.

Tough-fibred American and Canadian homesteaders, big-game outfitters, hunting guides and lodge-keepers had enthused about the five-member Law family forging a lifestyle out of a new frontier against pressing odds. Unintended, the Laws had inspired and rekindled confidences of many fellow pioneers who were ready to pack up.

Sight unseen, the writer knew the Laws were the epitome of a well-integrated, outstanding family which was why they were selected as *The American Magazine's* Family of the Month.

When Bert Law (Honour Roll) heard about the accolades, he replied, "*Some folks along the highway have had it a whole lot tougher than we did.*" He likened his family's ordeal to a picnic. "*Only sometimes, there wasn't any mustard, and often no hot dogs or buns, either.*"

The writer lifted the homemade latch and entered the low-ceiling, Technicolor living room. "Vividly beautiful Indian blankets draped rustic log couches. The yellow-pine walls glowed like polished amber. In one corner were a couple of tables covered in Chinese-red linoleum.

"Bert Law's plaid logger's shirt, decking out his youthful muscularly thin six-foot frame, made a splotch of color in the already colorful room," the writer described in his 1952 article, *The Laws of the Yukon*.

What really impressed Mr. Joseph was the happy cacophony of blaring phonograph music and three bright-eyed children who couldn't play outside because the temperature was colder than 35 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

"Flaxen-haired Frannie, whom her father describes as 'delicate like a panther', was curled up by the hammered-copper fireplace. Oblivious of the raucous music, she was browsing through a 3rd-grade reader.

"George, a wide-eyed and chubby 5-year-old, was tacking his latest crayoned masterpiece to the wall over the Laws' 'school corner'--a cheerful, book-furnished alcove devoted exclusively to educating young Laws' minds.

"Nobody scolded Georgie for hammering tacks into the wall. The kids' drawings are A-1 priority stuff around here, Bert explained. Tommy, the family's mechanical wizard, was sitting cross-legged on the floor, fiddling with a toy steam engine."

Ellen, permed and fashionably trim, wore a dress, silk stockings and a fancy apron. She didn't look 30, despite her endless, heavy-duty chores associated with operating a highway lodge, tending a family, plus home-schooling the children.

After eight years of marriage, Bert and Ellen had decided to escape California cities and live in open spaces. Bert, a crackerjack mechanic, cleverly converted an International, 24-passenger panel bus into a self-contained rolling home with cooking and sleeping facilities and a carpeted play area for three small children.

Poking along in May, 1948, they waited in Calgary for the Alaska Highway's

spring mud to harden so the International could churn along in bulldog gear with its tires encased in chains.

They stopped short of an Alaskan destination when they spotted a place in the Yukon that appeared to be of temperate climate. From a big, red-headed chap at Morley River, they purchased a group of broken-down log structures nestled in the picturesque setting 66 miles up the highway.

What the Laws didn't know was that the owner of the abandoned army camp buildings was a shady character, who was not paying for the gasoline he hauled from Edmonton and was re-selling it without paying territorial taxes. He had sold the rough buildings three times to other unsuspecting buyers and repossessed them an equal number of times.

The buyers, always Americans, would invest their complete savings--as did the Laws--then be abandoned to starve or be forced to retreat across the border since Americans could not legally work for wages.

The red head announced he was going to Alaska and would buy lodge and restaurant supplies for Bert who gave him a long list of items, plus \$2,000--none of which Bert ever saw again.

"We finally got word that he had crossed the border into the waiting arms of the FBI," Bert said. "He was AWOL from the navy and had disappeared into Canada. I understand that he also was wanted in the States in a number of places for a number of wrong doings.

"So, that was the end of him. He was the sort of guy who wouldn't do anything honestly if he could do it dishonestly. He had quite a racket. But he didn't realize what a tough guy I was."

Their money gone, the Laws were stranded at Mile 843 on the Alaska Highway with their potatoes, oatmeal, occasional orange juice and milk for the youngsters, and a strong survival instinct.

"I do everything all or nothing--never halfway," declared Bert. "Maybe I go into things too much." He was once compared to an eager octopus who seemed to have four sets of hands when he worked.

An example was the run-down service station he had bought in California and worked hard to build up. The long hours almost killed him, but the station sold for a nice profit before the family moved north.

It was the service station that spurred Bert to go home early one evening and express his thoughts about pulling up roots and going some place different.

The more he worked at the station, the more convinced he became he was only existing--not living. He wanted to grow up with his kids and guide them. He didn't want them drifting into the lifestyle of punk teen-agers who sometimes hung around the station telling smutty jokes and smoking cigarettes. Bert knew some were from decent families but suspected their fathers weren't able to spend enough time with them.

Bert and Ellen sat up late, poring over maps and planning. First, they had to sell the business.

Bert had purchased the service station because good-paying jobs were difficult to find, especially after he shattered his left leg. For his disability he received financial compensation and good medical treatment, but was unable to continue working at Cutters, a pharmaceutical laboratory making blood plasma.

It was after serving in the army he had returned to Cutters as head painter. In his usual state of being overtired, he let a ladder slip out from under him and was knocked unconscious on the cement floor a great distance below.

The mangled leg healed. A bone specialist, reserved for the atomic scientists at the nearby University of California, laced Bert's crushed limb in a stainless steel case. The leg was destined to give him endless grief. When he was exhausted, the leg was susceptible to twisting and would collapse him unceremoniously on his backside, usually under a heavy armload of firewood.

He also was plagued with stomach ulcers, the reason he was sprung early from the United States Army. However, he was awarded American citizenship for his service. He was actually Canadian by birth, born in Hamilton, Ontario, on December 26, 1914. It was during the darkest part of the Depression he had drifted into the United States.

Bert had two sisters and a brother. He was 13 when the family moved to Ingersoll, Ontario, where the factory in which his dad worked had relocated. He stayed until 1934. With no hope for a job in sight, and his friends disappearing into a disaster of marriages, shacks, jalopies, poverty and children, which he wanted to escape, he hitch-hiked across the line to Detroit, Michigan, where he found a car lot in need of extra drivers to ferry vehicles to California. He was fired for getting lost in a maze of Texas highways.

He continued thumbing his way to Los Angeles where Bert found work in Studebaker's automobile assembly plant. Later, he moved to parklike Berkeley.

He was jerking sodas in Stu's Creamery when he met Ellen Astad, who was born in Norway in 1921, the daughter of a fairly well-off carpenter, and grew up in California. She had graduated from Berkeley High School the year before and was employed as a telephone operator.

She frequented the popular hang out. Her sparkling blue eyes captivated Bert. He was so rattled he made her a vanilla sundae instead of the chocolate soda she'd ordered. She smiled away his mistake, said Bert.

When business was slow, Bert and Ellen played blackjack for pennies in a back booth. "She was pretty and won all my money. She liked that. I proposed to her just a few weeks after we'd met."

Bert accepted Ellen's "no" as "goodnight" and "goodbye", until she rang

the next evening and asked to be taken to a movie. He almost hit a fence with his friend's car when she announced she had changed her mind.

They sent a box of chocolates to her mother and went to Reno in the friend's car, for which Bert had gas money with an extra dollar left over for the preacher. Ellen had \$30 and a payday approaching.

It was May, 1940. He was 25; she was six years younger. It was an elopement of sorts, except everybody knew about the marriage. Ellen had wanted to avoid the fuss of a fancy wedding.

At the relevant time, Bert was working at Cutters and sidelining as a mechanic. He fixed people's vehicles and re-built broken-down ones to sell to hot-rod buffs. As well, he was doing weekend carpentry and house-painting contracts.

After two and a half years of marriage, their first baby, Frances, was born in 1943, followed with second child, Thomas Herbert, in February, 1945, and then George in November, 1946.

In 1944, the Laws had pinched and saved a \$1,000. Bert borrowed some more money and invested with a partner in the service station. When the Laws decided to go north, he sold the station within a few weeks and paid off a loan advanced to buy out his partner's interest two years before.

Bert had \$3,000. It was added to a small savings and what Ellen accumulated selling all the furniture except beds and the sewing machine. They had \$4,000 for the trip.

They bought the war surplus 1942 International panel bus which was only six years old but had aged dreadfully due to the navy using it in the South Pacific. When he finished ingeniously refurbishing the unit into one of the first Winnebagoes, he was a \$1,000 poorer.

They set sail under the full understanding from authorities that if they chose to settle in Canada, American citizens couldn't work for wages. They would have to be self-employed. Virtually the only self-enterprise that didn't require special permits was lodge-keeping and they could homestead without forfeiting their American citizenship.

They rolled out of foggy San Francisco Bay to Calgary, Alberta, and on to Mile Post 0 of the Alaska Highway. "The minute we were on the road we felt like young marrieds all over again. We were not heading into adventure. We were setting out upon a new life."

Soon, despite the set backs brought on by the crooked red head, they were camped on their wooded empire. The Canadian government charged only a dollar an acre a year rental. After three years, government surveyors would set the boundaries, do an appraisal, and hand over the deed for a reasonable sum. The \$2,000 they had paid to the red head had only covered the price of the ramshackled buildings, plus the list of supplies they never saw.

The Laws had set to work on the original structure, cobbled hastily

together by the U.S. Army Engineers. The building nevertheless was solid and sturdy despite the beating it had taken from weather, vandals and neglect.

They peeled the ugly bark from the interior walls to find they had an amber-coloured, pine-panelled lodge. They calked the cracks with moss. They dug a basement and installed an efficient wood-burning Yukon furnace, fashioned from a 45-gallon oil drum.

One man's junk is another man's treasure. It was those hundreds of souvenirs the construction crews had scattered from one end of the Alcan Highway to the other that earned it the nickname of Oil-Can Highway.

The Laws crafted furniture and upholstered the couches and chairs with Indian blankets. Bert had bartered a few days of labour with a trading post 50 miles down the road to pay for the vividly-designed fabric.

Bert bartered with lodge owners for most of the supplies he needed to install piping for showers and bathrooms and electric wiring and fixtures.

On one such bartering mission for a light plant, part of the loot he brought home was a record player and a stack of scratchy 78 rpm records they played incessantly.

While spading up what would be her garden, Ellen hit what turned out to be long runs of buried pipe connecting their buildings. They dug up the good-as-new pipe which went into their plumbing system.

A scavenged copper coil was installed in a Yukon furnace and connected to a 45-gallon drum mounted under the rafters above the bathroom as a hot water reservoir for cooking and bathing.

First, Bert had to dig a well and was lucky to hit water. Until then, they had to drive six miles every day to the river.

After about six months on the property--and most of that time spent camping in the bus--the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came calling in the fall of 1948. Bert thought Inspector Cronkite was coming to collect. Until the Laws actually owned the land, they were supposed to pay 50 cents per cord of wood cut.

It seemed the Mounties had been keeping an eye on the Laws. "When we think you can afford to pay for the wood you use, we'll start charging you," offered the Inspector who probably knew what desperate straits the homesteaders were in but didn't want to embarrass them.

"That was our first experience with the power and the justice of the famous Mounties," Bert recalled.

The Laws had no income and no lodge facilities to offer highway travellers to start earning an income. They were down to eating hotcakes and oatmeal.

One winter day, a 1,000 pounds of potatoes magically landed on their doorstep. A Dawson Creek farmer claimed he was headed for Whitehorse but

the spuds would freeze before he got them to market. He insisted Bert was going to buy them.

Bert insisted just as vigorously that he couldn't. "I can't even afford the burlap bags." The farmer accepted his words as a deal. If the potatoes were of \$30 value to the Laws over the winter, Bert could send the money when he had it. Bert sent the money as soon as he dredged it together in the spring. Six months on the monotonous rations had saved them.

The turning point in their circumstances came in early 1949. The Laws were still flat broke but felt confident to put up the big Silver Dollar Lodge sign.

Highway travellers, police, public health nurses, truck drivers and tourists came in for coffee, a breakfast of porridge or a plate of potatoes. The Laws invested those pennies wisely into more food, more services, until the daily cash intake increased. Bert's mechanical skills were always in demand.

Soon, a Canadian Army lieutenant and a captain stopped in. They learned of the Laws' predicament. The two fellows drove into Whitehorse and somehow convinced the owner of Tourist Services Supermarket that the Laws were indeed reliable people and a good credit risk, a privilege denied them in the past. The officers returned to the Silver Dollar Lodge with grocery-stuffed cars.

On the strength of this new credit rating, which translated into a steady stream of customers, one day a construction foreman came in to inquire if the Laws could board about 10 men for the season. You bet your last silver dollar they could.

The crews were building the Atlin Road. The Laws fed them practically anything, and as much as, they wanted. The Laws stocked the lodge and tore into the food bank like starving refugees. Bert, whose body was literally falling apart at the seams from too much physical exertion on insufficient calories, said he regained strength in six weeks on his prudent diet of T-bones, ice cream, strawberries and whipped cream three times a day.

By 1950, business increased from accommodations, gas, meals and groceries offered to highway travellers and road crews. People came for coffee and steaks and potted veal.

The Laws paid their bills without fail. Every Thursday, a refrigerated truck from British Yukon Navigation (BYN), a division of White Pass, rolled into the yard with their weekly \$200 grocery, meat and ice cream order.

The mail truck delivered and picked up school correspondence lessons and library-loan books from Edmonton and Anglican Sunday School lessons from Whitehorse and any catalog orders for new Easter frocks or garden seeds.

The kids were rating As and Bs in their studies and reading at levels above their big-city peer groups. There was no way the Laws would have split up the family sending the two older children away to boarding

school. So, the tasks of teacher, principal and truant officer fell to Ellen.

In the "school corner" was a blackboard, a 10-volume encyclopedia and another 10 volumes of Book of Knowledge. The parents were avid readers and curious about everything, which rubbed off on the children.

The whole family discussed every subject under the sun and the moon. When they weren't outdoors star-gazing, they were indoors dissecting words. They played what might have been an early-day Scrabble game. "One night, for instance, we discussed the word 'guttering'," Bert remembered. "We would define, examine and chase the word all around to find out what it was about."

The Laws were busy, for sure. Traffic was steadily increasing along the highway. Among their treasures, they had acquired a wringer washer and a combination truck-snowplow and a 1937 convertible.

By 1951, business was brisk. The Silver Dollar came alive with a steady flow of people and parties. "Everybody came to the Silver Dollar expecting a party and they got one," exclaimed Bert.

Neighbours, looking for entertainment after a hard week's work, drove hundreds of miles to visit on Saturday nights. The Silver Dollar had a large dance floor and a brand new record collection of the latest hit tunes.

In 1952, another knock sounded at their door that was going to change the course of their lives.

Prospector Al Kulan (Hall of Fame) regaled the Laws with his prospecting adventures in the McDame Creek and Deadwood Lake areas of northern British Columbia and around Watson Lake, Yukon, where he had come in 1947.

Bert was impressed with the 30-year-old penniless prospector's infectious enthusiasm and charm. He brought out the best in others. He seemed to have potential to move ahead fast in life. Everything he did was quick, clean, smart.

The Laws had built up a small reserve and were willing to share. They invited Kulan to bring his wife, Wynne, and their young son, Barry, from Lower Post, British Columbia, to live with them. There was plenty of extra space in the winter at the lodge which could be used as a prospecting base. The Kulans must have thought they had gone to heaven to have such a generous offer. They had endured some hard times like the Laws.

The two men would stay up late into the nights, formulating a homemade strategy. Kulan insisted on a full partnership with Bert and an equal split of any profits. On this basis, they developed a five-year program that included the Ross River Indians.

It was easy to become enraptured with Kulan's enthusiasm and forget the lodge needed attention. One day, Bert had to refuse an invitation to go to the field with him. "I have to dig a hole for the new septic tank."

The next morning Bert crawled from bed to find an eight-foot-cube of a hole in the ground that Kulan had been digging since early morning so Bert could go prospecting. "He worked like a machine," remarked Bert, who did sometimes accompany Kulan in the bush. But mainly Bert was the grubstaker. He provided the money, food, shelter, airplane charters and had restored one of contractor John MacIsaac's decrepit 50-cent army trucks for Kulan's transportation conveniences.

Bert took Kulan into Tourist Services to introduce him to the lady in charge of the front end of the grocery store. Bert told Majorie Lester that his friend was going prospecting and needed outfitting with his food requirements. The bill was to be sent to the Silver Dollar Lodge.

Around 1952-53, Kulan was in and out of Tourist Services, charging back and forth between the Silver Dollar and the bush, coming in for supplies, going out again to prospect, staying in a constant blur of motion, moving at amazing speeds, never exhausting his endless whirlwind energy, but using an astonishing quantity of goods, supplies and equipment.

When Bert suddenly realized he had sunk deeper into grubstaking than initially planned, supplies and food bills had mounted to over \$4,000. He was supporting up to 10 Indians, who were natural prospectors, and whose dogs were used for transportation. As well, he was supplying the groceries to their families so the fellows were free to go prospecting.

In July, 1953, Kulan was on what was supposed to be his last outing before he had to find paying work in town. With him at Vangorda Creek, 30 miles downstream from the village of Ross River when the discovery was made, was Peter Thompson, a fresh-air fanatic and non-paying Silver Dollar guest from Montreal who replaced Bert Law in the field.

The contingent of Ross River residents consisted of Jack Ladue, brothers Robert and Joe Etzel, and Art John (Hall of Fame), whose boat was launched to travel down the Pelly River.

On July 10, Kulan and Thompson drove hell bent for leather from Ross River and burst excitedly into the Silver Dollar Lodge where Al and Bert fussed over the lead-zinc samples through the night.

Several days later, the prospectors obtained a verbal agreement with Ted Chisholm, exploration geologist for the Toronto-based Prospectors Airways.

Bud Harbottle of Whitehorse Flying Service landed them 150 miles northeast of Whitehorse on tiny Shrimp Lake. They pitched camp on the afternoon of July 15. In the evening, they staked their dozen discovery claims.

Bert's four claims were named the Elle May and Al's eight claims were the Wynne. Those claims encompassed the visible outcrop that became the Vangorda deposit's focal point. "It was a magnificent showing," Chisholm confirmed in a 1978 interview in Vancouver.

The two prospectors who believed in the "bird in the hand" adage, accepted Prospectors Airways' terms reduced to \$150,000 from \$250,000, and a 12 percent vendor share, decreased from 15 percent, in a new company called

Vangorda Mines.

As prevalent in mining deals, it would be 1984, after many shareholders were dead or infirm, before an agreement was haggled out in a Dome Petroleum appeal case in Vancouver that finally set the share's worth at \$8.00. Dome went bankrupt. It would be 1992, nearly 40 years after discovery, before the 10-million-ton Vangorda deposit would be mined by Curragh Resources. Clifford Frame's Toronto-based company also went bust.

Around 1953, the Laws had leased out the Silver Dollar Lodge and moved to the Indian village of Ross River, where they bought the old Taylor & Drury Trading Post. They did fur trading with the Indians, sold groceries and expedited oil and supplies to Vangorda Camp for a year.

The Vangorda deposit was jinxed with legal complications from the outset. As with most successful mining ventures, others smell money, and, rightly or wrongly, believe they deserve a portion.

The first indication of a pending lawsuit occurred when Prospectors Airways transferred the first portion of the payoff from Toronto to the Whitehorse banks, and the court seized it. Road contractor John MacIsaac had filed a statement on September 22, 1954, against Kulan and Law. MacIsaac claimed a 20-percent interest for his grubstake.

"We were real plums, fresh for plucking," Bert said. "Practically every lawyer in town had a piece of the action."

The five-day civil trial, heard in the Yukon's Supreme Court by Mr. Justice J.E. Gibben, started January 26, 1955, and focused on what constituted a partnership and when did the one claimed by MacIsaac dissolve.

As is common in civil cases, the judge never did rule on the matter before going to his grave. After two years, the prospectors were forced into action. "We had to move," Bert emphasized. "We had to get a settlement so that we could pay off the Indians. We wanted to pay them. We owed them."

In desperation, Kulan and Law made an out-of-court, take-it-and-run offer to MacIsaac for \$10,000 cash and almost an equal amount in stocks. Bert then made MacIsaac pay a rebate as partial compensation for his grubstake against MacIsaac's.

While Kulan and Law had been entangled in their own legal web, the Indians, who had always respected and trusted Kulan, had been presumably persuaded by MacIsaac, to sue for their portion.

Kulan and Law paid off through the Indians' lawyers, the King brothers. Stock certificates, issued in the Indians' names, were turned over to their lawyers but later burned in a fire that destroyed the lawyers' Whitehorse hotel and offices at the corner of Main Street and First Avenue.

When the matter of Vangorda Mines' shares initially came before the Vancouver court, Bert Law tried unsuccessfully to convince Indian Affairs

to represent the Indians' interests. Sadly, the feds would not do it.

"It was all very distressing," said Bert, who only had a \$10,000 house to show for his efforts. The remaining \$15,000 had been spent in various ways during the two-year limbo period pending the Gibben decision that never occurred.

"Everything was so near," Bert said. "Nothing black or white but in shades of gray. Things happened fast in a short period of time. Obviously, MacIsaac thought he had a legitimate beef. But if he'd paid his share in the first place--or at least a decent part of it--there never would have been such a huge problem."

Law and Kulan got into some gray areas in their own partnership, too. Bert abandoned prospecting and grubstaking forever but retained a brotherly-type relationship with Kulan who needed bailing out more than once from bad real estate deals.

The Laws sold the Ross River store to Kulan. In 1955, they moved to Whitehorse to lead a more normal life in the frontier burg of 2,600 residents. Ross River was no place the Laws wanted to raise their youngsters. And, for sure, they did not relish going back to the lodge. "The life was too tough," Bert added. "It almost killed us both."

The Silver Dollar Lodge lessee operators and vandals had decimated the place. What hadn't disappeared was burned for firewood. Bert didn't want to lose the lodge to taxes, which he couldn't afford. He approached local businessman Clyde Wann who gave him a cheque for a bit more than taxes owing. Bert paid the \$900 plus owing and signed the transfer papers to Wann. That was the end of the Laws' lodge-keeping.

Bert was occupied briefly as a commissioned salesman with Hume Insurance. One day, he decided he needed a job. "I could either be an undertaker or go into real estate. I chose real estate."

He had formed Yukon Realty, probably the first real estate office in the territory. "But there was nothing to buy or sell in 1955." Business gradually picked up and he became well-known and highly respected for his long career as a realtor, businessman, a politician and a gentleman.

In 1959, he had begun early flirtations with politics. He was elected alderman when Gordon Cameron was on his second and final term as mayor before being appointed Commissioner of the Yukon.

Afterwards, Bert ran for and was defeated twice as a mayoralty candidate. "The first time I ran for mayor I was sincere about winning. I ran for mayor because nobody else wanted the position. I got people too interested. About four other guys joined the race.

"When the smoke settled, I had finished last--so far last that when I walked a couple of blocks down Main Street more people said they'd voted for me than the actual votes counted in my favour."

Bert did go back into municipal politics and was adored by the electorate for his fair, practical, common sense approach. During most of his city-hall years, 1980 to 1988, he was also in the appointed position as Yukon administrator, the person entrusted to sign official documents in the commissioner's absence.

Whatever the Laws undertook was done with pride and perfection. They were avid gardeners, as was evidenced by their neat Whitehorse log house and gardens on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Jarvis Street.

One of Bert's pet projects was to encourage city council to preserve a small, violet-infested island in the Yukon River for its natural beauty. In 1986, the city officially attached the name Bert Law Park and erected a nice signage on the tiny piece of real estate, connected to Robert Service Campground with a foot bridge.

Almost 40 years to the day of when the five-member Law family came to the Yukon in 1948, asthma forced Bert to resign his fourth-term seat as city councillor four months prematurely so he and Ellen could move to Vancouver Island's more hospitable climate.

The Yukon pioneer, businessman and politician died on April 21, 1998, in Nanaimo, British Columbia, where Bert and his wife retired in 1988. He was 83.

Ellen Astad Law was 82 years old when she died on November 25, 2003, in Calgary, Alberta, where she had moved to be closer to her married daughter, Frances. The Laws' two sons raised their families in Whitehorse.

Bert and Ellen Law are remembered for their integrity, honesty, generosity and unconditional willingness to help anybody who needed help. But friends spoke first and foremost of the Laws as good, genuine people. One could not wish for a better legacy.

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*(Bert Law was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors' Association's Honour Roll in 2005 in recognition of his unwavering faith in helping prospectors fulfill their dreams. His name is engraved in the base of the bronze prospector statue that watches over Whitehorse from Main Street and Third Avenue.)*