# Russian Mike Will Be At Lak

By BARBARA WOLD
Times Staff Writer

One of the first homesteaders at Nancy Lake, Michael B. Ardaw, also known as "Russian Mike," who owned and operated the Nancy Lake Marina, will be buried Saturday at Nancy Lake.

Ardaw died April 30 at the Anchorage Pioneers' Home.

A graveside service is planned for 10 a.m. Saturday at his Nancy Lake homestead, where he will be buried next to his friend, Herbert "Happy Jack" Smith, on a knoll overlooking the lake.

A potluck picnic will follow at the Nancy Lake Marina.

"Happy Jack" moved to the homestead around 1968, living in a trailer on the homestead until his death in 1972.

Those who knew Arbaw, also known as "the White Russian," describe him as very open and generous, a rugged individual, and one of the most colorful persons around.

The life history of Russian Mike prior to his Alaskan days is sketchy and varies from one friend to the next.

"The whole story of Mike is not going to be factual," Arliss Sturgulewski said, "because different people knew a little bit of Mike and he confided different parts of a very complete and colorful past to different people."

Mrs. Sturgulewski said she first met Russian Mike in 1959 when she and her family started going to Nancy Lake.

"He was a super person, someone very special and unique. There won't be another Mike," she said.

"I think Mike undoubtedly will be special to a whole generation of kids," Mrs. Sturgulewski said.

"He thought each of the kids were special and I think young people responded to that," she said.

Every spring it was a ritual to watch the ice go out at Nancy Lake with Mike which Mrs. Sturgulewski fondly remembers.

"The ice goes out rather late at Nancy Lake and we used to sit on the shore and watch while Mike and the kids took long poles and pushed the ice to get rid of it," she said.

And every year, Mrs. Sturgulewski said, the ice would take out Mike's docks, which "were precarious at their best."

"He had a huge wooden mallot and he would be pounding his new docks and every year they would go," she said.

And, there were the annual Fourth of July picnics when everyone had gathered for bear spareribs until the bears moved on due to the increased population at the lake.

The picnic remained an annual affair, and after the bears left "it turned into a potluck affair and we used pork spareribs," she said.

According to records in the possession of another friend, Amos Johnson, Michael Arbaw was born on Jan. 10, 1892, in Siberia, Russia.

In 1914 he was volunteer on the Russian western front, served in the Self Defense Civilian Organization from 1917 to 1918, and served as an engineering officer in the Czarist Russian Army prior to the 1918 Russian Revolution.

During the Bolshevik Revolution in 1920 he fled Russia to India through Tibet.

Traveling on a steamer from China, he arrived in the United States in 1920 and was employed with the University of California recreating historic events for the National Parks Service.

Twenty years later, he came to Seward in 1940 under a one-year contract with the Army to do construction work.

He traveled to Anchorage by rail where he was assigned as a carpenter with one of the Army units building Fort Richardson.

Shortly after arriving in Anchorage, Ardaw performed his solo flight for his pilots license on Aug. 12, 1941, at Merrill Field.

In 1943 he bought his homestead at Nancy Lake from J. E. Wilson. The cabin on his homestead was the old roadhouse on the Talkeetna trail to Willow, which served as a rest stop for travelers.

Travelers, young and old, continued to stop and "Mike would meet the train in his Russian boots," said John Hale, former manager of the Alaska State Fair.

"He was a small man and was extremely energetic. He would put their things in a wheelbarrow and take it to the lake.

"He had a bunch of boats and old motors which he would loan," Hale said, "and he did everything for nothing.

Everyone who went through there knew Mike and everyone who knew him loved him," Hale said.

Another friend, Amos Johnson, who met Mike in 1965 while looking for lake property at Nancy Lake, said "Mike was quite experienced at living off the land and ran a trap line at the lake."

"He was a friend of many and corresponded with people who kept their friendship with him over the years and he received cards from people all over the world sending Christmas greetings.

"That shows how well-liked he was," Johnson said.

Hale said young children and college students would visit Mike during summer vacation. "He would take care of them, feed them and correspond with them.

"Twenty years later they would write to him from all over the world," he said.

Hale said Ardaw told him he took the name Michael B. Ardaw from a telephone book in San Francisco right after he escaped from Russia.

Another longtime friend, Bill Waldron, who operates the Nancy Lake Marina, said the fear of being traced was continuous "right up to his last couple of years he was worried about someone trying to hunt him down.

"As I understand it," Waldron said, "he was the only one in his family that was able to get out of Russia as far as he could tell."

Hale said Mike made no secret of his dislike of modern conveniences and that "he lived on his homestead using a lantern and cooking all his food on an old wooden stove.

"A friend once gave him an electric hotplate which he would use only in emergencies," he said.

Hale said Russian Mike was a protector of the environment. "He wouldn't let me cut down any trees for firewood," he said, "I had to dig fallen trees out from under the snow."

Hale said Ardaw seldom left his homestead but when he did a favorite place to visit was Kelly's Massage Parlor in Anchorage.

"He always liked to go to Kelly's for a steam bath," Hale said, and he even built a steam bath powered by

# e In Memories Of His Friends

a windbelt at his cabin.

His friends all had favorite stories about Mike and two of those stories were about his two pets, a moose and a black bear.

While out in the woods one day, Ardaw found a yearling moose which was suffering from a broken leg. Each day he worked with the moose, which he named "Willie," drawing the animal closer to his cabin.

Having won the confidence of Willie, Mike was able to set the broken leg.

However, Willie met an unfortunate end two years later when a friend who came to visit one day and shot the moose, unaware that it was Mike's pet.

The black bear, which actually ate and slept with Mike in his cabin, also met an unfortunate end.

One day while Mike was salmon fishing, he looked in the direction of his cabin and saw a cloud of white fluff coming from the entrance.

Arriving at the cabin he discovered the bear had shredded several old Army sleeping bags outdoors which he had torn up, making a bed outdoors to laze in the sun.

Losing his temper, Ardaw got his rifle and shot the bear dead.

Disaster struck in 1974 when a fire burned Mike's cabin to the ground, destroying almost all of his belongings, including numerous items he had brought from Russia and Manchuria.

Following the fire, an Anchorage friend, Craig Taylor, who owned a summer place at Nancy Lake, provided a mobile home for Mike to live in.

Craig was the president of Craig Taylor Equipment Co. in Anchorage until he retired to California about a year ago.

Ardaw was honored in 1970 when the Willow Center Organization created the Mike Ardaw Award to be awarded annually to a member of the community who had done the most to aid others.

And, another honor, the designation of "Ardaw Lake," is currently underway by park rangers in the Nancy Lake area to rename one of the Milo Lakes in memory of Mike Ardaw, Waldron said.

In 1974 just before his cabin burned, Ardaw placed his 100-acre homestead in a trust fund which he established to provide a place for people to enjoy the marina, boating, fishing and camping, Johnson said. Proceeds earned from the marina are to be used to provide scholarships for students at the University of Alaska.

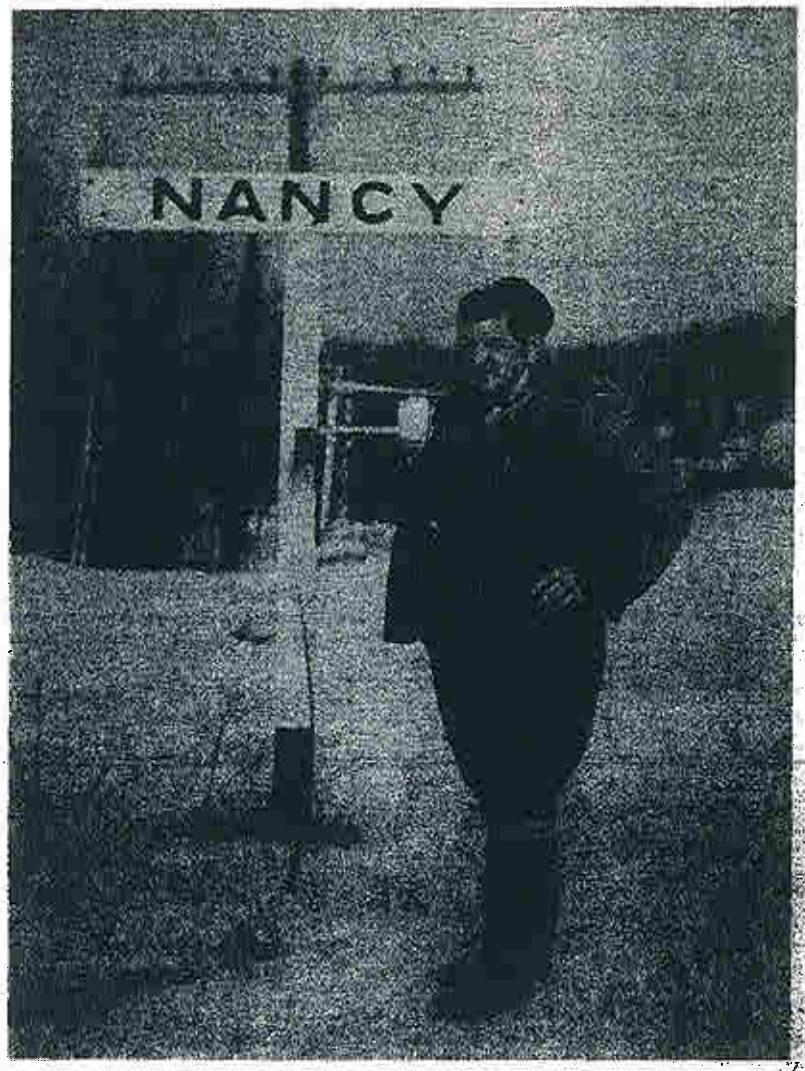
A trust committee, composed of 10 members, was formed to advise him on his the disposition of his property and those members are responsible to see that the trust is carried out.

Honorary pallbearers will be Arthur Waldron, Craig Taylor, Ralph Nelson, Arliss Sturgulewski, Amos Johnson, Chuck Stiegele, Lew Turner, Errol Simmons, Bob Dalton, Herb White, Bob Tuer, Jack Laub, Don Rust, Robert Hancey, John Gonzales, and John Johnson.

Pallbearers will be Bob Caprio, Carl Bonomo, James Clinton, Dr. Clinton Lillibridge, Bill Waldron, Chuck Stover, Gordon Barner, and Bob Lex.

Local arrangements were by the Witzleben Funeral Home.

Memorials may be directed to the Mike Ardaw Charitable Trust at the Alaska National Bank of the North, in care of Tom Duff, trust officer, 3301 C St., Anchorage.




**MICHAEL B. 'RUSSIAN MIKE' ARDAW**
Nancy Lakes Best Loved Resident Now Rests