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## Letter from S.J. McElwain to Senator Langer Regarding the Naming of the Reservoir Made by the Garrison Dam, March 7, 1956

S.J. McElwain

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# GARRISON CIVIC CLUB

GARRISON, NORTH DAKOTA

March 7, 1958

Hon. William Langer  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D. C.

My Dear Mr. Langer:

May we present for your consideration additional data relative to the move on foot to name the impoundment behind the Garrison Reservoir in honor of the Indian Guide, Sakakawea.

This move seems to have originated at the Indian Agency in Newtown, North Dakota and there is considerable pressure on the part of the folks there to push this through quickly. While we appreciate their interest in maintaining something of the Indian heritage in this area we do feel that other factors merit very serious consideration before the selection of a permanent name for the lake.

Since the inception of the Garrison Dam and Reservoir Project, Omaha District, more than ten years ago the above identification has been used on all documents, maps, drawings and the like. These, of course, reach from the local offices of the Corps of Engineers on through the various divisions to Washington, D. C. We think of the cost involved in the renaming of the lake as an important factor. It will mean the resetting of the name on untold thousands of official papers and maps.

And we should not forget that thousands of men and women have worked on the Garrison Dam and Reservoir Project during the construction period and that they are now scattered throughout the world. They remember it by that name, The Garrison Dam and The Garrison Reservoir or Lake. They remember their work there, they talk about it wherever they may be. This publicity to North Dakota and to this area has value beyond measure. At a time when our State is struggling for recognition as something other than the icebox of the north we must not overlook this potential publicity. Let it remain the Garrison Lake or Reservoir, let these former workmen do part of our selling of this State to prospective tourists, and likewise to prospective businesses and in turn to homeowners who might be looking for new locations.

We could point out that the Indian Maiden Sakakawea was not a native of North Dakota but a sixteen year old captive who spent but a few brief months in this state. Her association with the State is only incidental in that she served as a guide to the Lewis and Clark Expedition as it continued on westward. The Expedition touched North Dakota briefly as it came up the Missouri and stopped near here for the

one winter encampment. Her service to Lewis and Clark was, of course, most valuable but her contribution to North Dakota or the immediate area of the lake was nothing.

Historically, the name Garrison has more basis in fact than Sakakawea. It was the military post on the banks of the Missouri some three miles upstream from the present embankment. It was here that the river steamers unloaded supplies for the start of the overland trip to Fort Totten near Devils Lake. Traces of that trail may still be seen where the virgin sod remains undisturbed. A portion of the fort at Old Garrison still remained to be covered by the lake. Hence, retaining the name of the Garrison Lake is not a matter of jealous pride on the part of a small North Dakota town. This is a point, of course, but not one of major importance.

When one considers the spelling and pronunciation of Sakakawea with the many variations he cannot help but wonder if in time it would degenerate to just "Lake Sak".

The Publicity Committee of the Greater North Dakota Association has recommended the name "Lake Sakakawea." However, replies to a questionnaire sent to the Board of Directors of the Association show that there is by no means a unanimous agreement on this. And there is not universal approval in the area surrounding the lake of the action taken by the Greater North Dakota Association.

An indication of the widespread opposition to the use of the name Sakakawea is to be found in the action taken at the State Convention of the North Dakota Jaycees in Williston recently. The State Jaycees endorsed a resolution pointing up many of the facts presented in this letter and urging the retention of the name Garrison on the lake behind the Garrison Dam. We understand that a copy of the resolution has been forwarded to your office.

Please be assured that we are not attempting to promote the interests of one small North Dakota town as we plead for the retention of the present name of that body of water. Rather, we are interested in the welfare of the State as a whole, interested in securing all the favorable publicity we can for North Dakota, interested in convincing the rest of our country that we live in a favored spot of the nation, a spot which they should visit as they plan their vacations, a place far different from the hustle, bustle, and confusion of our crowded centers of population, an ideal place to establish their homes and businesses should they feel the urge to move elsewhere.

Will you please help us by giving very careful consideration to any proposal to rename the lake? Whatever you may be able to do will certainly be appreciated.

Respectfully,

*S J McElwain*