

MONSTER SEA SERPENT KILLED IN SENECA LAKE

JULY 15, 1900

The Otetiani, a side wheel steamboat belonging to the Seneca Lake Steam Navigation Company, officered by Captain Carleton O. Herendeen and Pilot Frederick Rose, was between Dresden and Willard a few minutes before 7 o'clock last evening, when Pilot Rose saw about 400 yards ahead, what appeared to him to be an overturned boat. He called Capt. Herendeen who examined the object with his glass. It appeared to be about 25 feet long, with a very sharp bow and long narrow stern. Amidships it was much broader and higher than at either end.

A number of passengers gathered around the pilot house and discussed the supposed boat. Among them were President Malette of the Board of Public Works, the editor and publisher of the Saturday Review, Commissioner of Public Works, Albert Fowler, and D.W. Hallenbeck, Police Commissioner George C. Schell, Fred S. Bronson, manager of the Geneva Telephone Company, and Charles E. Coon, a commercial traveler for a Philadelphia house, all residents of this city, and Professor George R. Elwood, of Guelph, Ont., a geologist who has been studying the country around the lake.

When Capt. Herendeen completed his examination of the object, the pilot signalled the engineer to slow down. The steamboat approached to within 100 yards and preparations were made to lower a boat. As the davits were swung outward, the supposed upturned boat turned and began to move away. "Full speed ahead", shouted the captain. The object was moving slowly and the steamboat gained on it rapidly. The object again turned, this time toward the boat, raising its head, looked in the direction of the boat, and opened its mouth, displaying two rows of sharp, white teeth.

The captain said that he would ram the creature with the boat and take it alive, if possible. Otherwise he would kill it, and either take it aboard or tow it to Geneva.

The boat was turned so that the creature would be approached from the side. The deck was crowded with passengers. These the captain ordered amidships in order to avoid any accident, should the creature attempt to come aboard after the attack was begun. The captain cautioned everybody to get a life preserver and keep cool, because he said he did not know what would happen when the boat struck the monster. Some of the women, who were in tears, retired to the cabin the others showed as much interest and excitement in the chase as the men. The boat fell away some distance and turned to make the attempt to ram the creature. The captain signalled full speed ahead, and in a moment the Otetiani was under way.

Every eye on deck was fixed on the monster and hardly a person was breathing normally. While the boat was yet some distance away from it, the monster again

looked at the boat, sank out of sight and the boat passed over the spot where it had been. Some of the passengers decided that they could see a dark outline of the creature's body.

The steamboat prepared to continue her course to the city. "There it is," suddenly exclaimed one of the women passengers, who was standing on the after deck. The 'thing' had come up. The passengers, with the captain in advance, ran to the stern of the vessel and within fifty yards the long, lithe body of the monster was lying on the surface practically the same position as when discovered. The Captain ordered the boat put about and the attack was renewed. Instead of trying to strike the creature full in the side, the boat was maneuvered so that the starboard paddle wheel would strike it about midway between the head and tail. The boat went ahead under full steam, the monster paid no attention to it, and the thud which all heard and felt, the steamboat struck the spot. The force of impact threw everyone off his feet, and the vessel careened violently to port, but quickly righted. For an instant, everybody wondered what would happen next. There was not a sound on board except the engine. Then the men on board cheered and some of the more timid of the women recovered from their fright and screamed.

Lying close beside the steamer, with a gaping wound in its side, was the monster. It raised its head, gave what sounded like a gasp, and lay quiet. Its spinal column had been broken and it was dead.

The life boats were quickly lowered and rowed to its side and with the aid of boat hooks, ropes were placed around the carcass. Other ropes which were fastened on board the steamer were then passed up and attached in the improvised swings. All helped to haul the monster in. The carcass was clear of the water when the rope near the tail slipped off, and the tail dropped into the water. The weight on the other rope then became so great that it began to slip through the hands of those holding it. They were compelled to let go or go overboard. As soon as the body struck the water it began to sink and disappeared.

At that point where the carcass was lost the lake is over six hundred feet deep, and as is well known, bodies of persons who have been drowned in that part of the lake never again rise or are recovered.

When the steamer arrived in this city shortly before midnight the stories of the monster were about the same. The most careful and perhaps most trustworthy account was given by the geologist, Prof. George R. Elwood, who was in one of the life boats that made a rope fast around the carcass.

"Do you know what a Clidiastes is?", the professor asked the Rochester Herald reporter.

"Well, that is exactly what the creature we saw last night seemed to be. It was about twenty-five feet long, with a long tail which tapered until within about five feet of the end, when it broadened out and looked much like a whale.

The creature weighed about one thousand pounds. Its head was perhaps four long, and triangular in shape. Its mouth was very long and armed with two of triangular white teeth, as sharp as those of a shark, but in the shape more like those of a sperm whale. Its body was covered with a horny substance which was as much like the carapace of a terrapin as anything else of which I know. This horny substance was brown in color and of a greenish tinge. The belly of the creature which I saw after the rope slipped and the carcass going down, was cream white. Its eyes were round like those of a fish and did not blink.

Rochester Herald (July 1900)

Reference: Dundee Area Historical Society Files.

(House built of field stone from the place) with a veneer of
 1 Charles Angus built Cobblestone house between 1832-1846
 2. W^m Daniel Angus owned and operated a tug boat on
 Seneca Lake, carrying grain in the good ship "Little Broadhorn"
 to Watkins. In 1880, he m off W^m Frey of May's Mills.
 See "Angus"

3. George Angus b 7 Mar 1882

Seneca's 'Sea Serpent'

A "Monster Sea Serpent" in Seneca Lake made the headlines a century ago. A dispatch from Watkins to the *Sunday Tidings* (Aug. 25, 1883) declared that lake dwellers had been hearing "a series of short, sharp barks, ending in a half howl, half moan" that seemed to come from the lake surface after dusk.

Some "bolder spirits" tried to locate the sound which, night after night, created a superstitious fear among many. After several attempts it was given up as a "hopeless mystery." But the conjectures as to what it might be "were kept religiously away from foreigners for fear that any such story getting abroad might give the lake and town the unsavory reputation of being haunted and keep many away who would otherwise visit us."

Enter two sportsmen fishing for pickerel and perch on the east shore near "Painted Rocks." As twilight decended, they heard sharp barks and dismal groans.

"Dropping their fishing tackle with blood fairly stagnated and hair standing on end, they looked towards the west shore of the lake and in the dim light a few rods from them saw what for a moment paralyzed them with fright — a huge misshapen head closely resembling that of a man's, with long, coarse hair streaming out behind and short stubby beard, a nose like an eagle's beak, under which was a mouth of wonderful dimensions from which two ugly looking tusks

protruded over the lower lip. Aside from the head only the shoulders could be seen, which were mammoth and apparently covered with hair. All this was taken in at a glance, for as soon as they got their breath one of the fishermen cut the anchor rope . . ." They reached shore and scrambled up the Indian pathway, leaving "fifty or sixty pounds of fine fish" in their boat. Both reached town in a very short time and the story swept Watkins. Next morning parties went to the scene to get the effects of the fishermen and the boat which belonged to the fleet of Commodore William J. Beckwith II. The boat was found stranded on the beach with the remains of the fish, which showed that the monster had gorged himself upon them and settled the question of his mortality. . . ."

The article continued:

"It is now supposed to be some huge sea monster, who has found his way into the lake through some of its submarine passages, and is either contented here or has forgotten his way out . . ."

Mr. Michener of the Glen offered \$1,000 for the capture and delivery of the monster. He wanted to put a ring in the nose of the strange critter and fasten him to a stake in the miniature lake of the Glen Mountain House.