

## **Lake Monsters: Fact or Fiction?**

By **BARBARA H. BELL**

What is a lake without a mystery - or a monster?

A number of mysteries abound concerning Seneca Lake. A clipping from a Watkins Glen newspaper of August 1883 indicates that for some time people near the south end of the lake had heard strange noises in the night, seeming to come from the water. The description said there were short, sharp barks ending in half howl or moan. A few people launched boats to go look for what was thought to have been a dog, overboard from a steamer and grown tired of its struggle to reach shore. Upon reaching an area where sounds seemed to come from, no animal would be found, but the same noises could be heard off in an entirely different direction.

The story took on a new twist when a couple of fishermen were enjoying the perch and pickerel haul from a spot near the Painted Rocks. Suddenly, only a few rods away, popped out of the water what was described as a huge misshapen head with long coarse hair streaming behind. There was a nose like an eagle's beak above a short, stubbly beard. Underneath that was a mouth of "wonderful" dimensions, with two "ugly" tusks protruding from the lower lip.

The men also described "mammoth" shoulders apparently covered with hair. They cut the anchor rope to facilitate rowing toward the shore where they "bolted up" the rocks along what was a badly deteriorated path from the top of the cliff to shore. The article says that, under ordinary circumstances, neither man could have negotiated the precipitous escape route without ropes. Upon return the next morning, they discovered only scraps of the 50 or so pounds of fish remaining in the boat.

Mr. Michener, proprietor of the Glen Park at that time, offered \$1,000 to anyone who could bring the monster to him. He planned to confine it within the Lily Pond in the Glen as a tourist attraction. The creature never arrived there, but that was not the end of the tale of the Seneca Lake Monster.

A clipping from a Watkins paper in 1914, again in August, published an item disclaiming the accusations that stories of the monster were either a newspaper hoax or the products of some overactive imaginations.

It seemed there had been a couple in a rowboat not far off shore at Corbett's Point on the west side of the lake, in the town of Reading, a bit north of the salt plant. Their report said this large animal suddenly appeared and rushed toward deeper water, so frightening the young lady in the craft that she had to be quickly taken to a nearby cottage. The man in the story, accompanied by a friend with a .38 revolver, headed back to the locale of the sighting. After about a half of an hour, the so-called serpent hove to and was but a few feet from the boat, its head out of the water. The gun was fired twice and the "thing" disappeared in a swirl of water, never to re-surface.

Those who had viewed it estimated that it was about 10 feet long, snakelike, probably seven to eight inches around with a head as big as a man's and with hair that stuck straight up. Its body seemed to be black.

That same summer, there was another published report from an elderly gentleman “whose veracity cannot be questioned” that he, too, had been on the lake and had an encounter with the monster. At first he had thought he was seeing a floating log, until it reared into the air some three or four feet.

Still a third sighting that summer was mentioned in the paper. Neither the second or third report included any details.

Another time, a sighting was reported near Kashong. Residents spent about two weeks hunting for the monster. It was a concerted hunt with a virtual fleet of boats filled with people hoping to end this supernatural reign of terror and to return the lake to its customary enjoyable uses.

“It” was finally spotted and encircled by the hunters whose accurate shooting brought it to its demise. Its remains floated and were examined carefully. Someone had painted a ferocious face on a large oil drum and added two wooden “horns.” It had been cleverly balanced to float with a bobbing motion to seem to be alive.