

## STRANGE STORIES OF CHAUTAUQUA LAKE

For the Ham Radio Club, October 21, 2016

### INTRODUCTION

Chautauqua Lake is a favorite topic of many past and present local historians. In addition to the major general historians who have dealt with the lake, a number of specialists have concentrated on it. The ones who come to mind most prominently are the Victor Nortons, senior and junior, Jean Lawson (also deceased) of L-S Aero Marine and the late Martin Arend and Dan Lincoln. Malcolm Nichols is apparently responsible for much of the obscure material about the lake in the Fenton Historical collection. Homer Danielson included lake stories in his highly personalized writings. I tip my hat to these and others, living and dead, as I venture into their cherished territory.

#### 1 CHAUTAUQUA LAKE FOR DRINKING WATER

If you look in local history books and collections, you find very little about the history of community water supplies. This is part of the general neglect of technological history.

Through most of the 19th century rural drinking water came from springs and later dug wells, sometimes driven wells. Even in larger villages, Jamestown for example, the same situation prevailed. In that period the concern for public water systems arose from the need for fire protection. Domestic water use was something of an afterthought.

Around the early 1870's, a private system, windmill powered, began to provide parts of Jamestown with spring and driven well water. About 1874 this was supplemented, particularly when needed for fire fighting, by water drawn from the outlet by Holley pumps driven by two water turbines, six and four feet in size, locally cast.

The history books begin with the July, 1882 advent of the Jamestown Water Supply Company headed by A. F. Kent. This was intended as a city wide system. It drew from five driven wells, increasing to 26 by 1886. These were at Clifton Springs and the Marvin Tract, now Chadakoin Park. But the company also drew water via steam pump (first coal powered, later gas powered) from the outlet in emergencies as had been done before.

Customers complained that their water had a bad taste and was murky, especially when it had to be drawn from the outlet. Some found mud and algae coming from their taps. One even got a dead lizard, or so it was reported. The Jamestown Sun thought harassing the Water Company was a splendid way to increase circulation and it set about it with puckish zeal. It pointed out, among other things, that the outlet contained the sewage from all the resorts around the lake. In the winter of 1885 the Sun reminded Jamestowners that the body of fisherman Jack Wilcox who vanished from the lake in early November had never been recovered. Indeed, it remained lost in the lake until May. In March of 1885 the Sun even suggested, boldly but falsely, by means of a special flyer, that "a dead colored baby" had been found floating in the reservoir, which was then on Price Street.

By this time thoughts had turned to tapping the lake directly as a superior water source. Chautauqua Lake was considered to be exceptionally pure by late 19<sup>th</sup> century standards, and better than other city's sources. At the start of 1885 the Water company decided to build a crib in Chautauqua Lake and draw water from that. This crib, 30 feet square and covered, built in late March, served as a gravel and sand filtration device, on the same idea as the one used in the outlet. The company buried a ten inch pipe of a peculiar coiled cast iron design. It intended to use pumps at its building above the boatlanding to suck the water down.

That building was, by the way, one of the most beautiful in Jamestown at the time and much photographed. The grounds were carefully landscaped. They boasted 100 varieties of roses.

The suction immediately collapsed the pipe and further embarrassed the company. In 1886 the company employed between 40 and 50 men to replace the damaged pipe sections with a wooden conduit of matched two inch Norway pine planks, two feet by three feet. The company then apparently did use water from Chautauqua Lake when necessary, but in August, 1887 it leased 75 acres at Levant for drilling, and by 1889 it was already scouting the Cassadaga aquifer.

By the time the development of Celoron Park began in 1893, the crib was abandoned. In 1894 the Park built a 200 foot bridge out to the crib and constructed a boathouse for rentals and an electric lighthouse there. This was in use for at least 11 years. It later was used for the popular airplane swing.

As a footnote to this chapter on Chautauqua Lake as a drinking water source, I'll mention that way back in 1875 the water commissioners of Buffalo tried to buy the water in Chautauqua Lake and were rebuffed. I have no idea how they intended to transport it.

It is interesting that in all the discussion of Chautauqua Lake drinking water in the 1880's, including the yellow journalism and the technical test reports, no mention or awareness was evident of bacteria. The first chlorine treatment of city drinking water in the nation waited until 1908.

I'm amused by a newspaper clipping from April, 1891. "It is estimated that 5,000 barrels of sewage are emptied into the lake daily during the height of the season from the various resorts on the lake. This ought to be stopped and must be some day."

## 2 ISLANDS IN CHAUTAUQUA LAKE

The lower half of Chautauqua Lake is shallow. It averages 11 feet. The steamboats were confined to a narrow channel of sufficient depth. In the center of the lower lake are two particularly shallow spots now known as Grass Island and Whitney's Crib. They are frequently confused. Grass Island is between the west end of Burtis Bay and Sunnyside. Whitney's Crib is about 2,600 feet up the center line of the lake from it. Both are in Town of Ellery waters.

Holland Land Company and other very early maps, produced before any dam was built across the Outlet do not indicate or suggest any islands in the lake proper.

The earliest direct reference I have found to Grass Island is in 1875 in a remarkable little book, *Lake Chautauqua*, written and published by a 32 year old Jamestown Union School music teacher, Miss Emma C. Dewhurst. "(H)ere at the head of the outlet, if you will look over on the left side you will see that the water is quite shallow and the rushes are growing above it; this is 'Grass Island,' and used to be above water, and it is said that it was once inhabited. Such as it is, it is the only island in the lake."

In 1931 Henry Strunk's small Gideon Sherman genealogy mentions that Gideon and Aurilla Sherman frequently took their children out to Grass Island to swim. Aurilla died in 1859 when her youngest child was three.

At this point I bring in a fantastic legend attributed to a man who died in 1894, but which I derive from a May, 1923 newspaper article quoting William W. Conic of Jamestown and later Falconer. This comes through the collection of Martin Arend in 1955. "What an interesting history has been related in the past years about the so-called Grass Island, later known as Whitney's Island" (Note the confusion here even on the part of the redoubtable Arend), which lays about midway between Greenhurst and Lakewood."

"The first forgotten bit of history about this island was told by Squire Fenton, who was born near Fluvanna in the year 1800...and died at the age of 95 years old and had a wealth of tales which he told relative to the early days of this county."

Conic apparently means William Fenton who was born in New Haven, Conn., not Fluvanna, in 1796, not 1800, and died at age 98, not 95.

Continuing to quote Conic "One of his stories was that when he was a boy of 10 or 12, a stone fortress stood on the spot and before Warner Dam was built appeared above the surface during low water. Mr. Fenton says he had seen the building many times as a boy. He describes it as being circular in shape, and all around it, directly beneath the eaves of the roof was a row of small holes such as used in old time fortresses, and single story and quite large. He also told how someone who settled in Jamestown in the early years took a flat boat up the lake and tore the building down using the stones for a foundation of a house he was building. He also related it was quite probable that some early expedition which came through these parts erected the fortress as a means of protection, but what expedition it was will never be known."

I would take this story with a considerable grain of salt. As I said, no early map indicates any island in Chautauqua Lake. The 1749 journals of Celoron and Bonnacamps verify that expedition camped on the lake shore, but they mention no island nor the construction or existence of any fort. The detailed de Lery journal of 1754 is also silent on the subject as is every other known 18th and 19th century account.

Also, Young's History of Chautauqua County relates that Silas Tiffany built the first stone cellar and foundation in Jamestown in 1819 in his downtown store when Fenton would have been 22. Remember he claimed to have been 10 or 12 when the fort was removed. Elial T. Foote put in the first stone cellar and foundation in a private home in 1823 when Fenton would

have been 26. Both Foote and Tiffany obtained their stone from creek beds.

The story is, however, too luscious for oral tradition to drop. I was told by developer Paul Johnson that the house at 43 Fairmount is the one with a "foundation built from stones of the French fort on Grass Island." The location and apparent insufficient age of the house on inspection add to the improbability of the story.

On August 14, 1887 the Jamestown Sun quoted Charles Henry Brown, Jamestown correspondent for the Buffalo Express. "I heard this week a plan, devised many years since, but which seems practical today. Near Prendergast Point, at the head of the outlet is Grass Island, so called because the surface is generally below water and the tops of the grass can be seen waving above the surface."

I need to point out that for some years there were two Prendergast Points on the lake. This one since 1891 has been known as Celoron.

Continuing the 1887 quote, "It was proposed to erect here a hotel entirely surrounded by water. A gentleman who experienced great relief from hay fever while stopping at Prendergast Point thought that in such a building as this sufferers would find relief from the discomforts of this disease. A ferry could be established between the island and Prendergast Point, and thus another would be added to the attractions of Chautauqua."

The next bizarre chapter began August 24, 1892 when a severe storm tore loose at least two acres of land from Mary Jane Stoneman's farm at Ashville Bay and created numerous floating islands, some complete with trees.

To make a long story short, the largest floating island, about an acre in size, ended up near Driftwood in front of the farm of Charles D. Gifford. Accounts of subsequent events are confusing and contradictory. As I piece it together, the night following the storm, Lakewood's Major Milford Stevens, a rough and ready, land on his feet businessman, took one or more small steamers and some men and tried to tow the largest island away to rest on Greenhurst Island, thus making it habitable. I was told by someone, possibly Homer Danielson, that Greenhurst Island was a third shoal, not the same as Grass Island or Whitney's Crib. The Buffalo Express reviewing the incident in 1895 identified the intended resting place of the floater as Grass Island. I suspect it was the upper shoal which later became Whitney's Crib.

Perhaps even more prompt were the responses of John S. Prather and C. A. Niedhart who paid Mrs. Stoneman \$5 for the land the storm had deprived her of - and the response of Charles E. Wicks who paid farmer Gifford \$5 for the same land the storm had presented to him. Wicks even built a fence out to the island in an effort, comical though it was, to anchor the island and proof it against any tricks like the one so promptly attempted by Stevens. In any event, the efforts to anchor the island and the efforts to move it both proved futile. High water and high winds in the spring of 1893 first relocated the island to Fred Bentley's farm in Lakewood, and then dispersed it.

The 1895 Buffalo Express asked in a headline, "Is Chautauqua Drying Up?" A drought and

low water that year, it said, lowered the lake five feet and exposed many gravel bars and islands including Grass Island which it described as "high and dry above the surface..." "(T)he alluring possibilities it offers as a site for a summer resort have induced land speculators to stake it out, unfurl an American flag over the center and begin fixing a foundation for a building. The work was started several weeks ago and the present low water has encouraged them to proceed." This is obviously the same operation described in a June 21, 1895 clipping in the Fenton Historical Society files. "A syndicate with a deed of Grass Island, a spot in the center of the lake midway between Greenhurst, Lakewood and Celoron, made the first move toward filling in the island this week. It is the intention to raise a portion of the two acres staked out and make it suitable for building purposes. From a foot or two feet of water now cover it. When the work is complete the syndicate will build a summer house on the island, and an effort will be made to make the place as beautiful as it will be in a novel.

"A sail boat 20 feet long and 200 feet of sail is being used to haul boulders for filling in the island. The work will be pushed while the good weather lasts and the water is low.

"It is not expected that the work will be finished this summer. John H. Prather of the Chautauqua Building and Loan Association acting as trustee of the deed is at the head of the movement."

I have found no record of deed for Grass Island, but the miscellaneous records in the courthouse contain a map of a "Survey of Grass Island in Chautauqua Lake for John H. Prather" dated July 22, 1895. Prather, you remember, was one of those who tried to purchase the floating island three years earlier.

As if this were not all fantastic enough, in the same year, 1895, a woman named Susan Blodgett Pulver wrote a little book *Legends of Chautauqua*. It is full of Victorian pseudo-Indian legends influenced by Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, spacey poetry, and historical misinformation. I tried for years to find out something about this woman but could not. Thanks to the modern internet, just this month I found she was a Jamestown widow in her 40's at the time she wrote the book, and well known locally as an elocutionist. She remarried but died just two years later in 1904 at the age of 53.

Anyhow, one chapter was inspired by the floating islands. It is a poem, a long free verse poem. It tells about Norwegian Brownies, very popular in children's literature in that era, crossing the sea on shells and starfish and walking inland to Chautauqua Lake where they establish an Arcadian village at the site of Chautauqua Institution. She describes their little houses, and their clothes, and has them riding around on butterflies and dancing on the backs of turtles, and playing with flowers. But just as they were feasting on barley mush and honey, along came giants talking loudly with horse drawn graders and plans to change the land. I suspect this was a glancing protest of the initial construction of the amphitheater, the demolition of which has been more recently decried. The Brownies with the co-operation of nature worked to break the Arcadian village free as a floating island. Unfortunately, this parted a pair of lovers. The brave Oswald, the scout, was left behind and his turtle taxi was unable to overtake the island. The island floated past the fabulous castle like Sterlingworth and Moorish Kent House hotels at Lakewood. A minnow's attempt to convey Oswald to the island was unsuccessful. After the

island came to rest at Shadyside, Oswald was able to cross the water on a sunfish and they all lived happily ever after.

Whitney's Crib is considerably smaller than Grass Island. The structure was said to be 16 feet square. The deed specifies 100 feet square. This story has been told by Helen Ebersole in the October 6, 1990 Post-Journal Tempo magazine.

Willis Whitney, Jamestown native and 31 year old PhD and engineer with General Electric constructed this crib in the summer of 1899 and developed it as far as to build and use a crude fishing shack there. He somehow obtained a deed, made out November 6, 1899. It is probably the only deliberate joke in official county records of the 19th century. In legal and surveyor's jargon, it describes the plot at the intersection of lines referenced to the south sash of the first upper window from the north end of the house belonging to J. S. Weeks, the peak of the second highest tower on the Waldemere Hotel, the center of the first window from the east end of T. H. Smith's cottage, the north side of Cheney's big barn door on the east side, the east sash of the third upper window from the east end of J. T. Wilson's cottage, the peak of the west portion of the Chadakoin Club House, and the north tower of the auditorium at Celoron. This deed is made out to Willis R. Whitney and Frederick E. Armitage, his friend and summer companion on the lake. It is for one dollar and is from George and Francis Patterson. The Pattersons were legal owners of all lands never sold by the Holland Land Company and its successor, the Chautauqua Land Company. It was not until 1931 that New York State appropriated the land under all the lakes in the state.

There is a photograph supposed to be of Whitney's Crib. It is in the Fenton Historical Society Lake Room. I suspect it is actually a photo of the 1895 Grass Island development and not Whitney's Crib.

As the 19th century ends, so abruptly ends the colorful history of lake islands. However, in 1952 the Report of the Lake Improvement Committee of the Jamestown Chamber of Commerce considered the perennial question of dredging. It mentioned two possibilities for dumping areas for the dredged silt. One was the swampy shore areas. The other was a proposed crib "in the middle of the lake perhaps near 'the crib' and 'Grass Island.'" This new island would be about a mile square and 13 feet high containing 10 million cubic yards and costing anywhere upwards of three million dollars.

### 3 THE GOLD TREASURE

Anyone who has been around Chautauqua County history for any length of time has run across the legend of the Chautauqua Portage lost French gold.

Here is how the story goes as related in the July 13, 1968 Post-Journal. "Tradition has it that three French soldiers were going over the Old French Road (now a part of the Portage Road) when they were attacked by Indians near the Hogs Back. It is said they hid in a cave, and as the mouth was not large enough for the horses they were unsaddled and turned loose.

"The saddles and saddle bags full of French gold were hid in the cave. The soldiers made their

way to Button's Inn, but a story handed down through the years, claims that when they went back after their gold, they couldn't find the cave and it remains lost to this day."

Continuing to quote, "Years ago Mrs. Lottie Raynor of Westfield provided the Post-Journal with news of the famed Watershed, Hogs Back and The Lost Cave in reply to questions asked by countless tourists to the area."

*Lost Treasure* magazine printed another short version in its January, 1985 issue. In it the soldiers become voyageurs or explorers. The time is narrowed to 1739 to 1749. The saddle bags numbered two and the gold was to pay the expedition to which they were attached. The Frenchmen fought off the Indians, specified as Senecas, for a day and then made their way to a place "which later became known as Buttons." Button's Inn actually was built in the following century. This account says that Celoron's men in 1749 also unsuccessfully searched for the gold.

The magazine, pitched to metal detector hobbyists, doesn't bother mentioning sources.

No credible 19th century or modern historian reports anything to support this story. Buried treasure seemed to obsess many 19th century minds. Joseph Smith, discoverer of the Gold Bible, as it was called, and founder of the Mormon Religion, was far from alone when it came to digging in the ground of western New York for treasure. Panama Rocks attracted several stories of stolen and counterfeit gold. Indian mounds throughout the region also attracted the hopeful and the gullible. An old Canadian came annually to dig on French Creek for buried French gold into the 1880's. A 20<sup>th</sup> century man motivated by such stories which exist all down the Allegheny drainage, bulldozed an archaeological site at Waterford. In 1882 a chest of gold coins was actually found in Franklin, Pa., site of Fort Machault. The discoverer was allegedly guided in a dream by a French soldier.

What does all this have to do with Chautauqua Lake? Well, I was told by a Ripley resident, Dorr Town, on July 20, 1988, a version he had heard from two informants which claimed that the treasure was actually lost on the outlet between Jamestown and Falconer when the French expedition broke through the ice. One claimed it was hidden on a ledge along the river and is now under water. All rather unlikely considering the nature of the shallow Chadakoin.

There was curiously a sort of real iron echo of this golden myth. Glen W. Bergland's published reminiscences tell of his boyhood friendship with Asel Smiley, a member of the ancient Fluvanna Smiley family. Smiley had told him that his grandfather (that would be William) worked on the barges and towboats used to haul freight on the lake in the steamboating days. One year, just after the ice was out, according to Smiley, a barge was sent to Mayville to pick up a load of pig iron or cast iron bars which had come over from Lake Erie. At the first bend of the outlet, below Celoron, the barge began taking on water. A crewman took an axe and cut the 1 1/4 inch tow rope to protect the steamboat. The barge and iron went to the bottom forever.

Possibly related are cannon legends. Al Bowers of Jamestown told me on Feb. 20, 1995 that a story had come down in his family from Abraham Bowers (b. 1853) that the French or British had dumped a cannon into a pond near Frewsburg at the corner of Falconer-Stillwater and Quaint roads. He (Al) was certain he had seen an article about it in the Post-Journal in 1994. The cannon

was brass, the army was being pursued. Someone recently, according to the article, had searched for the cannon in vain. William Irvine's correspondence printed in the county histories mentions a sighting of a cannon on Chautauqua Lake, such a sighting is later alleged at Dewitville Bay, and one was unearthed on the bank of the outlet near Steele Street in the early 19th century.

#### 4 HERMITS AND ECCENTRICS

Chautauqua Lake has an unusually rich history of hermits and eccentrics. I covered these pretty well in old issues of the Chautauqua Genealogist. Briefly, the usually credited first settler of the Lake, Alexander McIntyre, was among the most colorful. Unlike the others, he was not a recluse or a bachelor. He had ears mutilated, he claimed, when he lived among the Indians where he also claimed to have acquired immense medical knowledge.

He built a stockade around his cabin to protect himself from the Indians, he claimed, or to protect his common law wife from her Meadville relatives as the cynical suspected. He hired a teen aged boy to venture out of the stockade each morning. The boy banged a frying pan and called out "all is well" three times if the coast was clear. Then McIntyre would emerge wearing a large hunting knife and carrying a spear. McIntyre was a man ahead of his time. About 1814 he built half a dozen cabins around an alleged mineral spring near Westfield and there established a sort of primitive spa. A couple of barrels of salt he had surreptitiously buried near there might have had something to do with the mineral nature of the springs.

Jonathan Smith, considered Chautauqua Lake's second settler, had land right where the Institution is now. He was considered a hermit and even his gravestone so identifies him, but his chief eccentricity was bachelorhood.

Truman Downs who died in the poorhouse in 1881 had lived on the lake 30 or 50 years according to different sources. He was an extremely intelligent, self-educated man from the State of Maine. His fiancé ran off with a sea captain and he became a recluse and an alcoholic, living first at the later location of Chautauqua Institution. He claimed to have tipped off the Methodists to that location when they were establishing their camp meeting grounds before the Sunday School Assembly idea was born. Thus he felt he ultimately determined the location of Chautauqua Institution. His claim may have been somewhat exaggerated.

He claimed variously to have been born on Venus, Mars, and Jupiter, and to have slid to earth on a rainbow. He said he nearly starved at first for want of his native diet of etherial air and electric fluid. Fortunately, he finally discovered that common whiskey was an acceptable substitute.

A similar character, a bit later, was Charles Cowden. He fished in summer and lived off hospitality, fiddling, wood carving, and storytelling in winter. He appeared on a post card in fake Indian garb in front of his shack.

Even the very respected and otherwise normal early settler, William Bemus had one eccentricity. He was certain he would live forever. He didn't. It seems, like Abraham in the Book of Genesis, he also may have planned to sacrifice one of his sons as soon as God told him which one to select for the honor.

## 5 STRANGE TRANSPORTATION

The first commercial craft of Chautauqua Lake was a giant dugout canoe launched at Crescent Creek, Lakewood in the spring of 1806. It was carved from a giant pine found by some Sugar Grove people in Busti or Pennsylvania when they cut a road to the lake in 1805. It was five feet across and at least 70 feet long. It was large enough to carry a settler's entire family and possessions, such as Uriah Bentley's wife and eight children in 1810. Actually it could carry 25 men. In 1816 the pilot and oarsman was said to be Jolly Tinkham and the fee 50 cents and a "junk bottle of whiskey."

Starting at the time of settlement, if not before, the lake supported a hearty freight traffic via keelboats. These were a craft made to be pushed up river by crews of polemen who positioned long poles between the river bottom and their shoulders then walked aft along the cleated running boards on each side of the boats. These were the toughest characters to ever cross our history. In their frequent fights biting off ears and thumbs was acceptable as was gouging out one eye, but not two. Things came to a head in 1810 in Mayville at the largest ever fight of boatmen against locals.

The lake had two horse powered boats, Elisha Allen's in 1824 and George Stoneman, Sr.'s in 1849. Both were slow and uneconomical and powered by four horses with four resting. I'm not certain if Allen's was a giant squirrel cage or a cleat disc tread power. Stoneman's was probably a sweep unit.

In 1822 a 35 foot keelboat passed down Oneida Lake and the Oswego River to Lake Ontario. From there it came up the Niagara River to five miles from the falls where it was placed on wheels. Then it went up Lake Erie to Barcelona where it was placed on wheels again and pulled over the portage to Chautauqua Lake. From there it floated down to Pittsburgh. It had several families on board.

## 5 WHISKEY BOAT

In 1896 two Celoron men, B. Tobias and West Frank, purchased a 90 foot steamboat that had been built 21 years earlier, burned and rebuilt twice. It had gone under the name of Mary Griffith, Winona, and Erie. The new owners turned it into a barge, based it at Celoron and installed a bar to serve customers who were dissatisfied with the dry laws at Celoron and other lake resorts. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the high point of the temperance drive and many communities were going nonalcoholic by local option. But no such laws, or at least no enforcement prevailed out on the water where the barge was towed. The boat was named John Raines as a sarcastic honor to State Senator John Raines, Republican from Canandaigua, who had been the author of the unpopular law that forbid Sunday liquor sales except by hotels to guests. The venture ran one season and ended in financial failure.

## 6 CHAUTAUQUA LAKE DIVIDED IN TWO

In January 1885 a letter from E. W. Keyes to the New York Tribune commented on their earlier interview of former State Senator Loren Sessions of Panama.

"Sir: I noticed in the Tribune of January 25th, a talk with ex-senator Loren B. Sessions, in which he said half a century ago, Chautauqua Lake was divided into two parts, which was separated by a narrow channel so overgrown with bushes that passage through it was difficult."

Keyes goes on to point out this is absurd. He was himself a passenger on a steamboat going through the narrows July 4, 1834 and that it had not differed materially in his memory of well over 50 years.

Sessions was a flamboyant and resourceful politician and he probably had been unable to resist the temptation to tell an attention getting tall tale.

## 7 DID CELORON EXIST?

A little book published in 1908 contained a letter written to the Oil City Derrick Feb. 18 of that year.

"The writers of local history are apt to believe and their statements are often tinged with unintentional sophistry as they pen their obtrusive facts to the people.

"I make this statement, 'Celoron De Bienville, or De Celoron is a myth and such a person never existed.'

"The people of Chautauqua County look upon this man as the discoverer of the shores of the magnificent lake. A noted biographer of Buffalo stepped into the office of the Journal and in due course the discussion of Celoron came forth. He said the people of Jamestown were deceived and honored a man who never existed and could prove his allegation, stating he had made a thorough search in the Buffalo library and such a name could not be found. The editor was inclined to think he must be mistaken and together we spent an afternoon in the Prendergast library and, with the skillful co-operation of the librarian, we were unsuccessful after a diligent search in the standard histories to find any trace of the alleged explorer, Celoron De Bienville.

"Therefore, I can state without any degree of hesitancy, Chautauqua county and the oil region together cherish the name of a man who never traversed the verdure of the hills and valleys we love so well. E. George Lindstrom."

Part of the gentlemen's problem was a chronic one for Chautauqua County historians. They can't get Celoron's name right. He was Pierre Joseph Celoron and his title was Sieur de Blainville. Thus he could be called Celoron de Blainville. Both De Celoron and De Bienville

are wrong. De Bienville was someone else entirely. Many historians have made these errors, notoriously Obed Edson and Dolores Thompson in their books. Helen McMahan and the Jamestown Marker Booklet got it right.

Celoron, more by implication than by overt statement, has often been given credit for discovering Chautauqua Lake in 1749. He did not. On the night of July 22 he and about 250 others camped on Chautauqua Lake. We don't know where. Almost certainly not at Celoron. The history books suggest Fluvanna on grossly inadequate evidence.

A number of people, including Susan Blodgett Pulver, have stated that Celoron buried one of his lead plates at Celoron or somewhere on the lake. He did not.

I wrote a creditable short biography of the man in the Post-Journal's Tempo March 19, 1983 issue.

## 8 FISH STORIES

What is a lake without a few fish stories? What was the largest fish ever taken from Chautauqua Lake? In 1884 an estimated five foot carcass was spotted. In 1888 a 60 pound carcass was picked up. In 1897 an estimated 65 pound live fish was netted at the hatchery.

The largest generally accepted live fish ever caught was a 50 pounder 53 inches long in 1903 by A. A. Walker of Jamestown. 50 pounds is considered the theoretical maximum for a muskellunge.

In 1872 a six foot, 120 pound mystery fish was found thrashing about and taken from the lake. Around 1890 a paddlefish or spoonbill catfish was caught, photographed, and measured at six feet two inches long and weighing 123½ pounds. Glen W. Berglund stated in a letter to the Post-Journal printed in 1943 that in 1916 he saw a fish on the bottom of the lake that was a good six feet long and looked like a bullhead but much lighter color.

Also in the Post-Journal in 1943 there is a letter from Errol Green of Green Brothers Lumber saying that his grandfather, Andrew Carpenter, sent to "Boston or some place" for carp which were recommended as highly delicious. He put them in a pond in his back yard. Neighbors moved some into Carpenter's mill pond. Soon after there was an enormous flood and the carp were washed into the lake.

An 1891 history of Chautauqua County called Dilley's *Cyclopedia* contains the following account of page 546 in the entry about William F. Strunk.

In 1865 he went to Forestville and bought nine bull-head fish with which to stock a pond his father had made; seven of these fish lived, and in 1867 the pond was washed out by Lake Chautauqua into which the fish escaped. By this means the lake was stocked with its present abundance of that kind of fish.

## 9 SEA SERPENTS

On the 4th of July 1817, partyers on Lake Erie off Dunkirk spotted a sea serpent. Similar spottings have been reported across the years. In the summer of 1883 there were several reports of a sea serpent in Findley Lake.

When it comes to Chautauqua Lake sea serpents, apparently around 1880 some local people began thinking or hoping for one. On June 20, 1881 the Journal reported one had been spotted, reported in vague, brief terms. Days later the Journal reported details but still tersely: It has come at last. We mean the sea serpent. It was first discovered by M. M. Skiff, who was on a fishing expedition. He did not advertise his find and the serpent was unmolested and unknown until this spring when Messers. Carnahan and Jenner rediscovered it. By various observers it is declared to be from eight to 30 feet in length.

The next notice is July 5: Mr. Ed Tousley is making extensive preparations for an onslaught on the sea serpent in Chautauqua Lake. He has purchased three bows and arrows and is putting his boar, the *Pumpkin Seed* in condition to meet and overcome a formidable foe. The date of the battle is not decided yet.”

A few days later the Journal reported that Skiff had produced a wonderful drawing of the encounter. Then, at the end of November the report was that, “The Chautauqua Lake sea serpent has gone into winter quarters.” 1882 seems to have been a slow year. In May the Journal reported no sightings.

Four years later, in 1886 we find a display ad for Roberts’ Museum of Statuary in Brooklyn Square. There you could see the “following artistic pieces carved from a solid block of wood: the diver, the mermaid, cupid, good night after the bath, plumed heron, Bust of Gen. Grant, Abraham Lincoln, T. T. Cluny, and the GREAT SEA SERPENT! Admission 10¢.”

In 1895 marvel hungry fisherman thought they might have captured the beast but it turned out to be a muskellunge that had tried to swallow a woman’s hand bag.

In the late 1890’s the reporters at the Journal, still desperate for a sea serpent to report on, contemplated making one up and suggesting that the beast had gained access to the lake via an underground tunnel from Lake Erie. They gave up the idea when the editor told them that too many people knew that Chautauqua Lake is several hundred feet above Lake Erie and any such tunnel would have drained it dry eons ago. Too bad those guys aren’t around for late night radio today.

About the only thing we find about Chautauqua Lake sea serpents since the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are a few quips in the 1920’s connected with bootleg liquor.

## CANALS

Chautauqua Lake has been the site of several canal projects of varying nature. First was a projected transport canal. Before the birth of railroads and even before the settlement of our area, there was interest in linking the Ohio and Great Lakes drainages. Canals, included with stream clearance projects as "internal improvements" were that era's golden pass to economic growth. George Washington, himself wrote to William Irvine to ask about possible routes in this region. Irvine recommended the Chautauqua portage.

The very year the Erie Canal opened, we got action. That was 1825 and the Erie Canal was the first big canal project and the most successful ever. Southern tier legislators had been equivocal about the canal but went along with the promise we would get something once it was completed. So that very year there were canal as well as road surveys all over the southern tier. Dr. Charles T. Whippo surveyed a Conewango route and a Chautauqua Lake route. The Chautauqua Portage canal would have been ten and a quarter miles long with a rise of 724 feet and a cost of \$398,685.

Orsino E. Jones, the Jones of Jones and Gifford Avenue, was the first to seriously try to exploit the swamp land along the west side of the outlet as was Richard P. Marvin on the east side. He probably worked throughout the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with stump pullers, drainage and fill. He cut a ditch about 15 feet wide by seven or eight deep from the lake to about the second bend of the outlet. This was an attempt to divert flood waters through and quickly away from his lands, but it was an exercise in futility.

Projects similar to this and many other ideas arose after severe floods of 1936, 1942, and 1943. Next the Army Engineers were called in. Their preferred recommendation was a diversion canal, not so different from the one proposed in the 1820's that would send flood waters into Lake Erie via the Little Inlet and Little Chautauqua Creek. They proposed to cut through the divide which rises only 58 feet above normal lake level, but the cut would have to be up to 75 feet deep and 16,740 feet long for a 1950 cost, with the rest of the project, of \$4,348,000.

#### CLOSE

Chautauqua Lake has been home to many other strange and colorful events such as the 1879 international rowing championship race which the Hop Bitters Company turned into a media and gambling circus. Somebody turned it into the biggest anti-climax and sports scandal in our history. Margaret K. Look discussed it in a chapter of one of her books and Fletcher Ward has recently produced an entire book about the episode and events leading up to it.

In the early 1830's some of the early Mormon's at the start of their epic continental trek, stopped for about a year in Jamestown. One was provoked to demonstrate that he could walk on water at Fluvanna as Christ had done on the Sea of Galilee. Phillip Sherman removed one of the boards he had rigged somehow just below the surface and the demonstration was a failure.

The stories never end, but I must before the lake freezes over, so thank you and good day.