Legends of the lake: sinking ice to petrified wagons

By GRACE R. DOVE Post Staff

Since its discovery by settlers in 1781, Harveys Lake has acquired its share of colorful legends, from disappearing ice and petrified people to sunken steamships. Here are a few of them.

How Harveys Lake got its name

According to F. Charles Petrillo in his book, Harveys Lake, the lake was named for Benjamin Harvey, who had been taken prisoner from his home on the Susquehanna River in 1780 by a band of Native Americans fighting for the British in the American Revolution.

He was taken to Niagara, New York, where he was held for several months and released in 1781.

Hiking to the Chemung River, he stole a canoe and floated down the Susquehanna to Bowman's Creek near Tunkhannock, where he again began to travel on foot because he was afraid that Indians might still be in the area.

Following the creek for many miles, he ended up on a hill overlooking a large lake.

After walking around the lake he found a creek, which he followed back to the Susquehanna River and his former home where Harveys Creek enters it at West Nanticoke.

During the 1870's, an unsuccessful attempt was made to change Harveys Lake's name to "Skandara," a concocted Native American-sounding name.

A second attempted name change to "Shawanese" in honor of the Shawnee tribe who lived in Wyoming Valley at the mouth of Harveys Creek also failed, living on only in the name of the century-old Shawanese Post Office at Sunset.

Disappearing ice

Wayne Smith heard this story from his father, Cornelius Smith, and old Mr. Sorber.

An old farmer from Noxen had seen a large hole in the thick lake ice at Point Breeze while walking to catch the trolley to town. When he returned after 12 or 13 hours, the ice had completely disappeared from the lake.

"That old guy went to his grave believing that the ice sank to the bottom of the lake in the spring and rose again in the winter,' Smith chuckled. "He knew that it was impossible to melt that amount of ice in such a short time, even if you put it on dry ground in July. This was the only way he could figure it out."

Smith said that a heavy wind had been blowing that day, pushing up large waves in the hole in the ice.

"The waves probably just chewed the ice right up," he said.

Tame bears

Squire Ralph Davis, the local justice of the peace, kept two pet bears during the late 1920's, Smith said.

"I was about seven years old

A diving helmet made from a water tank didn't work; the diver died

when he kept the first one," he remembered.

One day when Davis had the bear out for a walk on a leash, Smith's father was working behind the house.

"The bear got near Mrs. Templeton's pigpen at the same time that she threw out something for the pigs," he said. "They squealed so loudly that the bear jumped and ran. When I saw it, I took off like a shot and locked myself in my dad's car."

Bear #1 unfortunately met an untimely end when someone poisoned it, Smith said.

Davis' second bear had a special den dug into the side of the hill for it to use during hibernation, Smith recalled.

When the bear became too big for Squire Davis to handle, he donated it to Kirby Park, where it lived in a cage near the Susquehanna River until the 1936 flood

"All they could do to keep it from drowning was open the door and let it go," Smith said. "I think that it ended up on top of the mountain, where someone shot it."

The petrified wagon team and driver

During the winter when it was common to have a good 30 inches of ice on the lake, a popular shortcut for wagon and sleigh teams was directly across the ice to their destinations.

A horse team pulling a wagon loaded with logs is said to have gone through the ice, driver and all, despite rescue attempts.

Years later, swimmers and divers circulated stories that they had seen the driver, horses and wagon preserved in thick ice at the bottom of the lake.

Former police chief

has stories, too Harveys Lake has many such



Big doins

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The front page of this flyer promoted the mid-winter carnival of 1906 t the Outlet Alliance Hall, featuring Renard's Band, a popular group of the time.

"That darn fool just ran his Model T out onto the ice, hit a thin spot and went through." **Fred Swanson**

Former Lake Twp. police chief

stories, according to Fred Swanson, police chief of Lake Township from 1932 until Harveys Lake Borough was formed in 1952.

The cottages at the lake had their own ice houses to store ice harvested during the winter and delivered by horse and wagon or truck. Swanson said.

"Some of the road rights-ofway on the old maps actually go right down into the lake. The ice was their winter road," he said.

A sunken Model T Ford

Back in the days when Squire Davis was the justice of the peace,

a man from Beaumont wanted to harvest some ice from the lake and started cutting by Pole 48 or 49, near the old Sordoni summer home. "I told him how to get there and to be careful of the thin spots," Swanson recalled. "That darn fool just ran his Model T out onto the ice, hit a thin spot and went through."

The Model T is still there in 68 feet of water.

A sunken steamship

Although cars, bodies, horsedrawn wagons and many other interesting items are reputed to be entombed in Harveys Lake's cold waters, there is some disagreement about a sunken steamship.

"I don't think it's there," Swanson said.

The Wilkes-Barre Traction Company owned four steamboats - the Natoma, the Acoma, the Wilkes-Barre and the Kingston and a launch.

"The Acoma was the biggest one," Swanson said. "It was really huge - about 60 feet long. They used to load it to the gunwhales with passengers."

A family living near Squire Davis bought one of the larger steamboats, which sank at their dock. They raised, renovated and anchored it alongside their dock to use as a permanent place to host parties.

The ill-fated diving helmet Several adventurous men decided to make a diving helmet from part of an old water boiler with several lengths of garden hose attached for an air supply.

Wearing it over his head and shoulders, one of the men had successfully used it once before.

When a man drowned, they thought that they would use it to recover his body.

"I told them not to use it," Swanson said. "Those garden hoses didn't give the helmet enough air and the man drowned. I had to pull him out."

Indian encampments

No set of American legends is complete without Indians.

Early settlers of Harveys Lake said that they often found Indian arrowheads and other relics while plowing their fields in the spring.

An early map of the area, dated 1775, shows a large lake with Indian villages along a well-travelled Indian path to points north, which was interpreted by some historians as "proof" that Harveys Lake had been home to the Shawnee and other tribes.

Petrillo wrote that the map, once thought to be lost and later found in London, actually indicated Ganoga Lake near Ricketts Glen and not Harveys Lake.

Some material from these ar

Pole numbers— (continued from page 1)

"I was the only policeman in Pennsylvania who would stop, take off my gun belt and fix your washer." **Fred Swanson**

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Former Lake Twp. police chief

Swanson had warned one man cutting ice to sell in Beaumont about the thin spots, only to see him take off across the ice in a Model T Ford and go through the ice at a spot which Swanson had told him to avoid.

cut.

The driver survived, thanks in part ot Swanson's wife, Virginia, who helped thaw him out.

The Model T is still there, in 68 feet of water near the Sordoni summer home.

Because drownings were common, Swanson obtained a special marine light from Luzerne County president detective Dick Powell to use while searching for bodies.

"It was enormous, 24 feet long, with a boom in four-foot sections which bolted together," he said. "Its four 100-watt bulbs, powered by a generator, resembled a huge flashlight."

The light could also float, making it easier for searchers to handle it.

Its only drawback was that it could only be used at night because the sunlight reflected off the lake bottom during the day. Swanson recalls names, dates

and drownings with a policeman's computerlike mind - the man who fell out of a boat in 98 feet of water ("It took me a week to find him,") a boy struck and killed by a motorboat in 1939, a man using a homemade diving helmet who drowned while trying to locate another drowning victim.

He also investigated two murders - a lovers' argument and the celebrated American Tragedy murder, resembling a scene from the play, in which a woman is killed, then dressed in a bathing suit and cap and dumped into the

"We had to use a grappling hook to get her out," he said.

When Harveys Lake became a borough in 1952, Swanson left the police force and went to work as head electrician for the Kanarr brothers.

"Now it takes ten policemen to do what I did by myself," he said. "There's a lot more people, a lot more work."

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Today Swanson, 88, and his wife, Virginia, live in a quiet section of Lake Township, their home decorated with Swanson's paintings of wildlife and landscapes. Some are framed; others are actually huge murals covering the walls of their bright house.

By the time that Swanson got to him, wood planks from the Model T's bed were floating in the chill water and the man's clothes had frozen to his body. Swanson's wife, Virginia,

helped the hapless driver thaw

COURTESY OF WAYNE SMITH

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J. L. Williams, Practical Horseshoer, General Blacksmith and Repair Work. ROAD AND DRIVING HORSES A SPICIALLY. IDETOWN, PA. ANDY LYNCH





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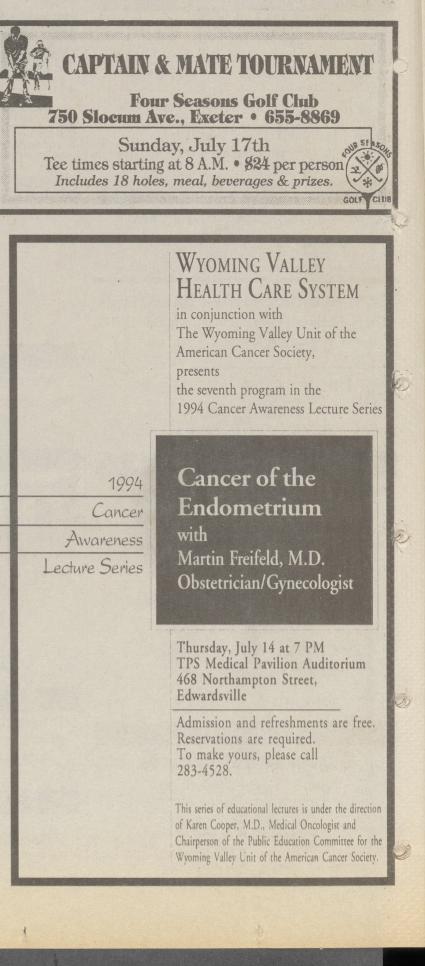
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