

CHERRY VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER July 2014

Welcome summer! Wishing all of you safe haven from the mosquitoes that have followed the very wet early summer we had. The fireworks in the valley were fantastic as usual. Soon it will be time for the Cherry Valley Festival Days in August. Rides, games, food and music make it a great time for the entire family.

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The following have passed away since our last newsletter:

Kay Eagleson	73	June 13
Barbara J. Kelly	84	June 12
Harold E. Loftis	76	July 3
Nancy R. Park	80	June 12
Evelyn Joyce Schwitters	80	July 3


The Dog Park by Lyle Wilt

That's what we called the area where the fire station is presently located. At the extreme west end (now the entrance to the garage) was a big hole in the ground, which was all that was left of a hotel after a fire. There was a lot of junk from the fire, and stuff that people had thrown into the hole. Just behind the burned out basement were two big bill boards. There is an old photo in one of the books at the historical society that shows the area and several of the billboards in the background. The rest of the land to the east towards the alley was a grassy area covered with good sized trees.

For a kid, it was a place to play and explore. In those days nobody kept their dogs tied up or in a fenced area. Also it seemed Cherry Valley was a handy place to 'dump a dog'. There were always a number of strays running around town. I remember one time the boys built a crude shelter on an empty lot just west of the playground at school for a 'mangy mongrel' that had a litter of pups. There was no garbage pick up, and if there was ever left over food, there was always a hungry dog around. The rest of the stuff was burned in back yard barrels or dumped. One place where stuff was discarded is where the shelter house by the ball diamond is now. I can remember exploring and hunting for treasures there. This was at the height of the depression; and Gene Ulmark and I found an old baby buggy. We took it home and made it into a cart. The wheels were very flimsy and didn't take long to bend.

Once I remember seeing a couple town drunks sitting on a blanket in the 'dog park' with a keg of beer. They stayed there for two days until the beer was gone.


Thank you to the Cherry Valley Village Hall for their wonderful support and assistance.

And to CV Methodist Church Nurture and Need group for their sponsorship.

Please let our sponsors know you saw their advertisement in the newsletter, we appreciate them!

Sam Knighton not only wrote the rest of the newsletter, but printed all the copies for us as well.

What a treat.....thanks so much Sam!

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H h h h h h

Editor.... Pam Jeske (golfnsew@aol.com)

Please feel free to drop a line, add some content, share some stories either to my e-mail, the Historical Society's e-mail (cv.historical186@frontier.com)

Cherry Valley Historical Society, Box 266, Cherry Valley, IL 61016

Or stop by, leave a note ...have a chat with a member!

The Mystery of Robinson's Pond



Robinson's Pond is a small, shallow body of water located in the heart of a dense forest. The pond is surrounded by tall trees and thick undergrowth, creating a sense of mystery and isolation. The water is still, reflecting the surrounding greenery and the sky above. The air is thick with the scent of earth and foliage, and the only sounds are the rustling of leaves and the occasional chirp of a bird.

THE MYSTERY OF ROBINSON'S POND

(Sam Knighton)

Cherry Valley was probably a pretty typical small Midwestern town in the late 40s and early 50s when I was growing up. It was in the process of recovering from the Great Depression which was followed by World War II, so many of the old structures were pretty much left as they were. Basements from buildings that burned or were torn down years before were still there and not filled in. The old stockyard north of the tracks was still there. The railroad operated a passenger train that ran from West Chicago to Freeport and back every day except Sunday. In addition, there was an old rundown mill, a town dump, and even a river that ran through town. All of those things combined formed the perfect backdrop and exciting world for a typical young boy to be a kid in. Especially during the summertime.

Every day I religiously heard the "don't" lecture from my parents; don't go to the dump, don't go down by the river, don't go to the old mill, and especially, do not go to Robinson's Pond. So naturally, a typical day would often start by playing baseball with some friends, which was then followed by a trip to the dump. Then, run up to the depot, just in time to watch the lunch-time passenger train make a quick stop on its way to Rockford and on to Freeport. During the afternoon there was always time for a swim in the river and or a little fishing. Finally, most days ended with a trip to the dangerous and mysterious Robinson's Pond before going home in the late afternoon.

Robinson's Pond was located behind the house that faced Genoa Street right where East Street intersects. It covered a little more than an acre and had been there longer than anyone could remember. The pond appeared on an 1859 Plat Map^(Appendix A) and there was reference to it in some old writings from residents of Cherry Valley that was even earlier.

To me, it was always a dark and secret place reminiscent of the jungle we frequently saw in the old Tarzan movies shown at the State Theater in Rockford. The pond area was always dark and damp because of the big trees that surrounded the pond. The water was always completely covered with green algae. But was it always that way? The Rockford Republic newspaper, March 11, 1919^(Appendix D) reported that Mr. Len Johnson was putting up ice that was ten inches thick from Robinson's pond which would lead one to believe that the water must have been somewhat cleaner than the later more common algae laced water that I remembered.

One evening when I was searching the Internet I stumbled across a website called Genealogytrails². There I found the transcriptions of two old Rockford newspapers that told about some unknown creature frolicking about in Robinson's Pond. The very next day I was armed with the dates of the two articles, fueled with heavy curiosity, and ventured to the library in downtown Rockford. I thrashed through the microfilm of old newspapers to see the articles for myself. Soon, I had found and printed each of the two articles mentioned on the website.

The first article was from the Rockford Daily Register newspaper of July 30, 1885^(Appendix B). The heading of the story proclaimed; "Sea Serpent. The Marvelous Monster Found in a Cherry

Valley Pond- Something Like a Whale or Sea Horse- Dynamite to be Used to Kill the Beast.” Interesting? How about unbelievable, incredible, fascinating, or maybe even fabulous?

The article stated that over the last three years there had been numerous unusual sightings of some unknown beast that seemed to be living in Robinson’s Pond. Excitement grew as more people reported seeing the creature, especially on warm, still afternoons and quiet evenings.

The creature appeared to be way too large to be a muskrat or common reptile, but rather it was about the size of a large, long hog with a head similar to a big Newfoundland dog, and looked nothing like any specie that was common around the area at that time.

Even Constable Reed saw the creature which, of course, lent considerable credence to the story. On one occasion, numerous people saw the beast chasing waterfowl that had naively landed on the pond as the creature appeared to be looking for its next meal.

Dr. Bean, one of the local physicians, thought that the animal should be captured so that it could be studied, put on display, and then sent to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. But, since it was aquatic and lived in the murky water of the pond the doctor felt that getting the creature alive would be too big of a risk, so he obtained a fair amount of dynamite to do the job. He felt that the concussion from the blast would kill the creature which then could be easily obtained with little danger. However, it was decided that because the pond seemed to be bottomless, all the creature would have to do to escape the dynamite would be to sink down to an unimaginable depth where it would be completely safe and the only result would be that the awful swamp water would be blown sky high with the local watchers getting drenched. The decision was made to just let the beast be for the time being.

The Rockford Weekly Gazette newspaper of August 2, 1885^(Appendix C) was the second article and continued the story. More people saw the terrible creature. Some said that was about six feet long, greenish on its back and sides that blended into a yellow underbelly. Others told that its head was about the size of a very large dog with a double row of teeth like a giant rattlesnake. There were also reports that it had a dorsal fin that started about two feet in back of its head and continued down the length of its body.

People formed patrols that stayed close by the pond and watched diligently and reported each sighting in gruesome detail. Stories now estimated the length of the creature to possibly be as long as 100 feet. One afternoon the creature gave out a loud sound similar to a hippopotamus ending with a gurgling roar. The patrols scattered and the village of Cherry Valley quickly came to high alert.

Something had to be done, but what? The patrols armed themselves with guns just in case the beast crawled out of the bottomless pond and tried to attack someone. Consensus was leaning again towards Doctor Bean’s idea of using dynamite.

One evening the creature appeared and slowly cruised around the pond seemingly feeding on the algae that covered every inch of the pond’s surface. After eating its fill it then suddenly turned, climbed up out of the water onto the shore which caused the people that were watching to again retreat in haste. Finally at a safe distance and at a predetermined signal they all drew their guns and fired. The helpless creature gasped its last breath and died.

After a thorough examination of the then expired creature all fears and hysteria were laid to rest. It wasn’t going to be embalmed and sent to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. as previously planned. It was discovered that it was just a lowly muskrat after all.

In retrospect it was quite plain to see in the old newspaper articles that there was a strong desire to kill anything that was unknown. But, have we changed as a culture in the 130 years since that scary incident terrorized Cherry Valley? Probably not very much.

But, you might ask, how could such a small little muskrat be mistaken for a large, slithering beast that was the length of a large hog, or what about the reports of the creature chasing waterfowl around the pond, or where was the double row of teeth? None of those characteristics seemed to be features of the deceased muskrat.

It was interesting though how a muskrat could have caused so much commotion. Many people at that time were very familiar with muskrats, beavers, and even river otters that inhabited the Kishwaukee River.

According to Wikipedia³ muskrats were small rodents with a full-sized adult possibly reaching twenty-eight inches long, with half of that length being its tail. Muskrats were usually most active at night and fed primarily on aquatic vegetation. They lived in families and built lodges from aquatic plants close to the edge of shore. All that didn't seem to describe the stories about the large, green scaly monster of Robinson's Pond.

One could possibly see how a muskrat might have been mistaken for a wild, savage creature that slithered in the algae choked pond water which probably accounted for the reports of its green color. Its body could have been mistaken for the creature's head being the size of a very large dog and the long snake-like body could have been the wake left by the muskrat's tail. Now taken all that in, and the crowd's hysteria of wanting it to be a real mysterious creature from the depth of Robinson's Pond, it sure made a great story.

Robinson's Pond was filled in around 1962 when the bypass was built around Cherry Valley. According to the present owner, even after fifty years had passed since it was filled, occasionally an area will still sink down and need to be refilled.

(Copies of both old newspaper articles are attached so readers can make up their own mind about fact and fiction.)

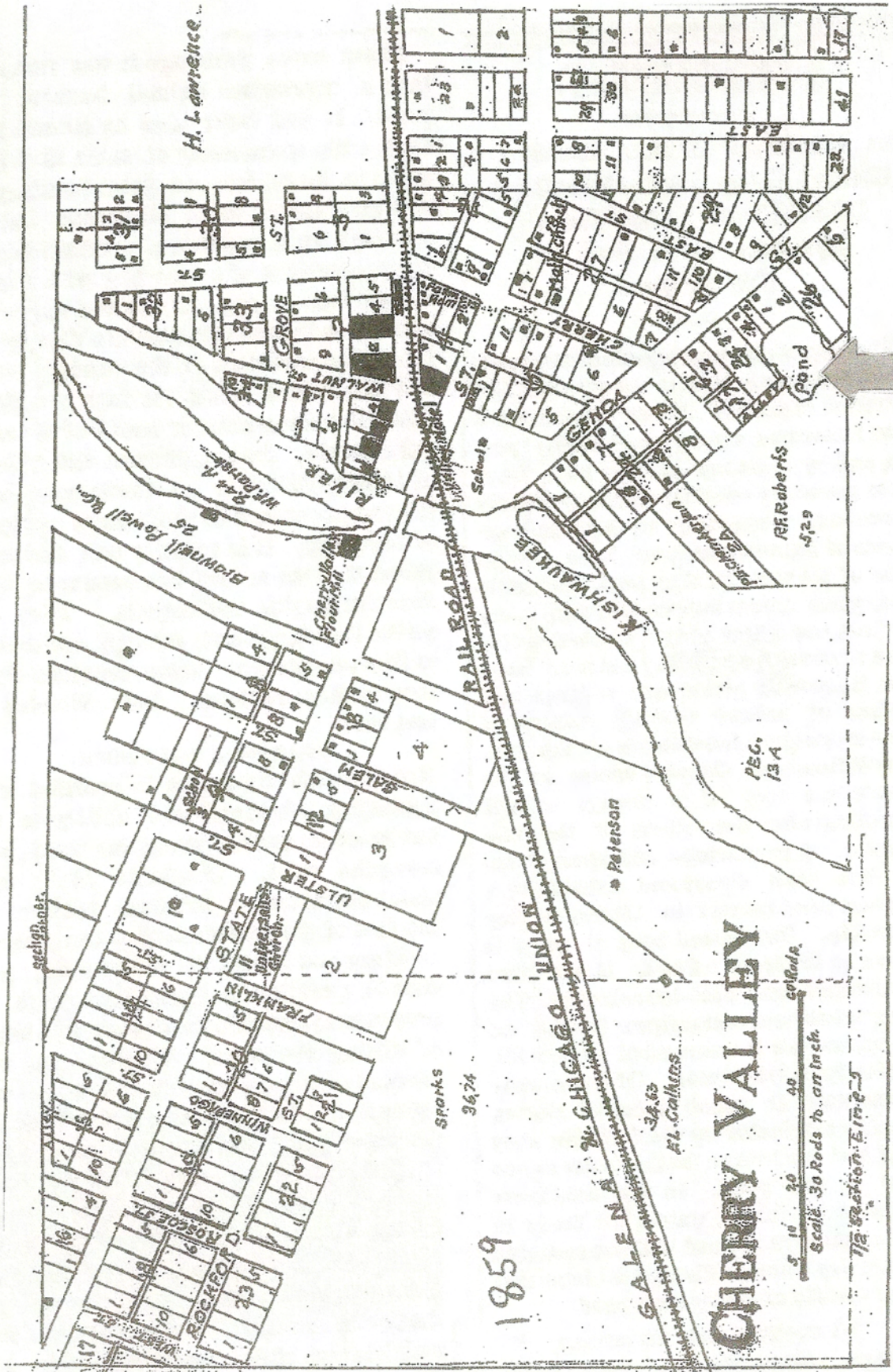
To a person unfamiliar with local Cherry Valley history it would probably never occur to them that an area somewhat oval in shape, surrounded by large trees, and carpeted with beautiful lush green grass was once the mysterious, bottomless, and scary place called Robinson's Pond.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Purple People Eater, written by Sheb Wooley in June of 1958.
2. Website: [Genealogytrails.com /ill/winnebago/cherryvalleyseaserp.htm](http://Genealogytrails.com/ill/winnebago/cherryvalleyseaserp.htm)
3. Website: En.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Muskrat

APPENDICES

- A. 1859 Plat Map of Cherry Valley, Il.
- B. Rockford Daily Register newspaper, July 30, 1885
- C. Rockford Weekly Gazette newspaper, August 2, 1885
- D. Rockford Republic newspaper, March 11, 1919



H. Lawrence.

Robinson's Pond

1859

1859

Appendix A

A SEA-SERPENT.

The Marvellous Monster Found in a
Cherry Valley Pond—Something
Like a Whale or Sea Horse—
Dynamite to be Used to
Kill the Beast.

From ages obscure legends of wondrous sea monsters, mysterious sea serpents and ferocious creatures of the waves have been numerous among sea-bathing people, and by them the stories have been quite generally credited and very widely circulated. Frequently we have had accounts of sea-captains who have caught sight of the wonderful serpent half a mile long, great scales half an inch thick, massive jaws and slimy body. Other descriptions of strange appearing animals have been frequently given until a large proportion of sailors actually believe in these mysterious inhabitants of the sea. Now Winnebago County comes to the front with a story of a strange animal something after the pattern of the sea-monster. A mysterious and strange being has been discovered inhabiting a stagnant pond located in Cherry Valley Township. This inland body of water is known as Robinson's Pond. It has been in existence from time immemorial. The oldest inhabitant remembers it and no one knows how it was created or how filled with its murky water. Of the early settlers used to relate fanciful stories, probably originated by the fact that they could find no bottom to the water at one point in the pond. In the bottomless depths of the black water the fancy of the imaginative roamed without restraint. To this day Cherry Valleyites claim that in the middle of Robinson's pond

NO BOTTOM CAN BE FOUND.

although plummete have been sunk 70 and 80 feet. The whole body of water is not over an acre in area. The liquid itself is always muddy, always well up on the banks of the pond no matter how dry the season may be.

About three years ago it was rumored that a mysterious animal haunted the pond. It had been seen by several persons, a big monstrosity of some kind that came to the surface on quiet evenings or still afternoons; long, black and bulky; too large for a lizard or a muskrat and of the proportions of a long hog with a head shaped like a dog. Upon the approach of human beings this creature disappears beneath the surface of the muddy water and is not seen again for days at a time. Little has been seen or heard of it until quite lately. Just at present the village of Cherry Valley is all excitement over the re-appearance of the strange occupant of the pond. It is actually and seriously stated that the animal has been seen by a dozen reputable individuals. They describe it as large and strange appearing, unlike any land or water creature common to these regions. Last Monday it was seen

CHASING A WILD DUCK.

Not that this new snake is credited with possessing wings and the ability to fly, but he swam swiftly about the pond pursuing the fowl. Constable Heald tells about the marvel. Dr. Bean believes in the fact of the existence of some strange creature and has, it is understood, procured a quantity of dynamite which he proposes to explode in the pond in hopes of killing the beast. Whether he will succeed or not an experiment only will determine. If the stories told of the unfathomed pond prove true, however, it is known that Winnebago County would be very richly rewarded for the discovery where it will be a great agency of man, nature and the great things right up a large size diving bell similar to the craft in which Jules Verne took his trip of 50 leagues under the sea. The solution of the mystery of the Valley's pond is left with time.

Rockford Daily Register
July 30, 1885

SEA SERPENT!

The Alleged Monster of the Deep
at Cherry Valley Finally
Killed--A Muskrat.

CHERRY VALLEY.

When Cherry Valley comes to the front with a sensation it is one of the kind to cause the eyes of the listening world to glisten with horror, or the mind to reel with the attempt to grasp the wonderful realities of the case. The accident by which Arthur Payne lost his life in such a shocking manner is now followed by the details of a reality that exists in the shape of a monster that rivals the Glyptodon or Ichthyosaurus of pre-historic ages. The small boy flees from the vicinity of the pond in the rear of Billmeyer's barn, even as the festive burglar flees from the ever ready clutches of a Rockford policeman. The pond in question is a place where the legends of early days say the banditti of the prairie threw several bodies of their victims, and other stories of an equally horrible character cluster about the spot. No outlet or inlet has ever been discovered, and the banks are always full to overflowing. Last Sunday evening while several persons were in its vicinity, an object was seen to rear itself from the center of the pond and give vent to a noise resembling the grunt of a Hippopotamus, ending with a horrible gurgling roar,—about 6 feet of its body was seen by those parties who describe it as being of a dark greenish color on the back, and sides, blending down to a bright golden yellow on the belly and under side of the head. A long fin shaped affair reached from about 2 feet back of its head, and continued along the back of the monster how long this dorsal fin (or what ever it might be called) was cannot be told, as it probably continued far along under the water. The head of the

serpent is shaped like a dog's (about as large as a good-sized Newfoundland), and the mouth which is large and capacious, is armed with a double row of teeth looking like those of a rattlesnake, only very much larger. No hair was discovered, although some declare he had a mane beginning at the sides of the large dorsal fin. The length of the reptile has been variously estimated at from ten to 100 feet, and the pond is being constantly watched by parties with guns, who propose capturing the creature, if possible. The blacksmiths were called into requisition and large iron hooks made, attached to strong wire, and other methods of capture were suggested. Dynamite seems to be the favorite now; but the unknown depth of the pond (the bottom never having been found) is used as an argument against the success of this plan. Until some concerted action is agreed upon, the pond will be patrolled by squads in hopes of a capture being effected by some of the means already at hand. Should the monster be captured a tent will be erected, and after properly embalming the creature, will be exhibited to the people of this vicinity, after which it will be shipped to the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, to have it properly classified and preserved for the edification of future generations.

LATER.

The sea serpent came to the surface of the pond last night, and was seen by the parties who were watching. After sporting about in its watery bed for a time it went to eating the fungus that accumulates on the surface of the water. After satisfying its hunger on this toothsome and slimy diet, it turned slowly toward shore and came out of the water. The spectators fell back before its heinous presence, and those having guns, at a pre-arranged signal, fired. With terrible contortions and withering of its hairy body (for it was now discovered to be covered with long hair) it gave up the ghost, and can now be seen by those who desire. It will not be sent to Washington for some time. It will be kept at Cherry Valley through camp meeting time at least. It proved to be a good sized muskrat.

Rockford Weekly Gazette
August 2, 1885

CUT ICE AT CHERRY VALLEY

Cherry Valley, March 11.—(Special)—

Considerable ice was cut last week after the merchants had almost given up hope of securing any for this year. The ice season is much later than usual, as it has been many years since ice has been put up during the month of March. The ice is about ten inches thick and will serve for refrigerating purposes. Len Johnson's ice house was filled from Robinson's pond, and Arthur Anderson secured ice from a pond on the Newberg road.

Rockford Republic
March 11, 1919

Appendix D



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