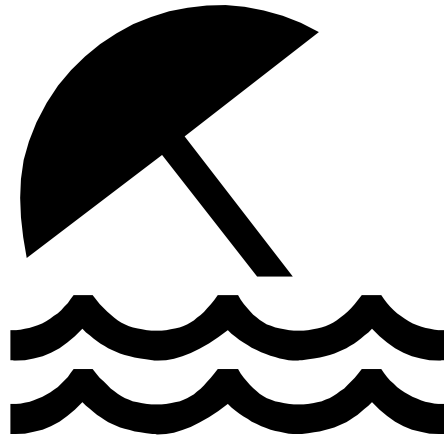


Places





A LAKE TALE THAT HAS THE IRS REFUSING COMMENT

Once again the silence has been stirred in one of the Internal Revenue Service's oldest, most exhaustive, and most comprehensive cases. The IRS was reluctant to give any details for years. The evidence increasingly indicates that the agency still has a strong desire to solve this mysterious maritime puzzle.

Subsequent developments occurred with the passing of a local man obsessed with history who took with him vital clues to the investigation that began over three decades ago. He had been the key figure in an IRS investigation looking into missing artifacts from the War of 1812. Issues of conspiracies, secret files, and well-hidden clues again came to their attention. The events that unfolded during the original and subsequent investigations began in the early part of the 1970's.

As I sat at the mortuary paying my respects, an old gentleman sat down beside me. I did not recognize him, but he seemed to know me. He leaned towards me and in a low whisper, he began by saying, "I guess the story can finally be told." This captured my attention and deepened my interest. I will now share with you his interpretation of what transpired.

After a failed business defaulted on loans and federal taxes, an official inquiry was launched by the IRS regarding unbelievably rare artifacts that were listed as collateral on several bank loans. The IRS intent was to confiscate these historic items for unpaid federal taxes. The list was quite extensive. The most priceless relics consisted of items used by Commander Barclay and his men of the British Royal Navy, on Sept. 10, 1813, during the Battle of Lake Erie.

When the IRS agents came to this lakeshore community to interview the various bank officials involved in the loans, to their dismay they were met with many closed doors and withheld records. This treatment only fueled the agency's case. Limited press coverage at the time had people captivated by the list of items. When the IRS held the inquiry and questioned the individuals involved, their personal accounts varied, by design or accident, to the extreme. The oddly conflicting testimony disclosed nothing to unravel the mystery of the location of the items. This led the agency to believe that all were involved in a conspiracy and scheming.

Thus began one of Lake Erie's greatest mysteries. The agency had always felt that the key figure in the case had hidden the items in an attempt to prevent them from being taken back to Washington, DC, by their agents. He was a renowned legend among historians for his knowledge about the Battle of Lake Erie. Many believe he was the chronicler and curator of the lake's history. His work will remain for years as the standard on the subject. With expertise and a reputation for accuracy and reliability, he was an individual that thrived on detail. Combining this with his enthusiasm, he could not be held back in his pursuit of history.

Although he kept a reclusive lifestyle, when he spoke about an event in history, one could only wonder if he somehow had been present. He knew how to find that "porthole" into the past and possessed the rare ability to acquire historic artifacts that were virtually unobtainable to others. A man of past vision and insight, he was a master of his craft. It was very fortunate for local history lovers that he preserved the heritage of many of the lake's treasures before they passed into oblivion. He felt it his destiny to care for these items so future generations could learn from them. He took this legacy very seriously.

Even after the main investigation, the IRS agents continued to comb through every document available. After significant amounts of effort, under duress, and in desperation, they finally came to the conclusion they still had no evidence! Years passed, but the IRS remained determined. In their pursuit of solving the mystery and finding the items, they refused to close the case. They harbored no illusions about monitoring individual bank accounts, keeping people under surveillance throughout the years, visiting local museums, and monitoring Maritime Antique Auctions across the country. Several times they used shadowy figures to approach collectors with discreet inquiries in an attempt to seek out any of the items, price always being no object.

In July, 1975, acting on what the agency considered a solid lead through an informant's note, they launched an extensive search using a U. S. Navy Dive Team. They searched an area northwest of Rattlesnake Island. The note indicated the items had been returned to the site of the battle. After days of continuous diving, the Navy's efforts were in vain. They realized they had been duped.

Until recently, still sensitive, they refused to publicly acknowledge the items are sought by the agency. The case once again echoes into the present. Speculation is that because the case still rubs a sore spot with the IRS, a cash reward may be forthcoming for anyone who provides valuable information leading to the recovery of the items.

As the old man finished his story, I was preparing to leave. As he shook my hand, he pressed a small piece of paper into my palm. Once outside, I unfolded the wrinkled paper and revealed a receipt from an Army-Navy surplus store in Cleveland. Listed was the sale of seven Navy water-tight containers dated Sept. 10, 1975. At that point it occurred to me. Who had outfoxed whom? Death may have

ended a life, but not the shroud of mystery surrounding one remarkable historian.

Philip Edwards

ALMOST HEAVEN

In 1925, in a little coal-mining village in West Virginia, there was a baby boom. Five baby boys were born to five different families: Homer Casey, Roosevelt Anderson, Rush Moorner, Richard Cunningham, and yours truly, Claude Victor Berry. We all grew up together. We were wild, young, and free. We didn't have anything that the world would call wealth, but we were happy with what we had.

As young boys often do, we tried to mimic the men around us. This was during the Depression, and jobs were scarce. Most of the men around there worked in the coal mines two days a week. We all thought it would be fine to work in a mine too. When the men left for the mines we headed for the hills to dig our own mines. We left early in the morning and were gone all day. After a while our parents began to wonder what we were doing all day long. We had to come clean and tell them. By this time we had tunneled twenty or thirty feet into the side of the mountain.

In the innocence of youth we had no idea of the risks we had been taking. Our parents were quick to explain to us how dangerous what we had been doing was. We never thought about the possibility of a cave-in or of its potentially fatal consequences. We had only thought of the adventure and excitement of being together.

Grounded from the "world of mining," we began to look for new things to do. We loved to build. We built a log cabin to play in. We built a beaver dam to swim in and a big swing. The swing was actually a sixty foot cable attached to a huge oak tree. You had to grab hold of the end of the cable with both hands and hang on tight while a couple of the other guys gave you a big push. Fortunately none of us ever fell. If we

had, we would have fallen about one hundred feet down the mountainside.

We never worried about the many different kinds of snakes in the mountains around our homes. Neither did we worry about the swift rapids in the rivers nor the high rocky cliffs in the mountains. To us it was a paradise.

The mountains gave us life. There was one spot, especially, that was about a quarter of a mile in size. It was like a Garden of Eden to us. It was beautiful, with apple trees in the midst of it, and a mountain stream brimming with nice mountain trout. There were all kinds of nuts and berries for us to eat as well. And, oh yes, I cannot forget the bull frog pond at the foot of a huge beechnut tree whose branches always seemed to be reaching up to the heavens in praise to God.

You might be wondering what ever happened to all of us. Well, Homer became a track star in school, and then lost his life serving his country. Roosevelt also lost his life in the service. Rush was in the war, but he made it back. Richard never went into the service. I also was in the war. God smiled on me, and I also made it back.

It has been many years since the five of us roamed the hills together. I will never forget the joy of growing up in the mountains of West Virginia. To me, it wasn't "almost heaven" -- it *was* heaven.

Claude Berry

MY UNEXPECTED ADVENTURE

When I was graduated from Leningrad University I received an interesting offer. It was to attend Caucasus Sport Camp. It was interesting for me because my physical and sports abilities weren't suited for this trip.

I had never seen the Caucasus, and I had dreamed to see such sights. My mother had won some money in the lottery, and the "putevka" to the camp was not too expensive, so I was able to take the trip.

My trip to the Caucasus was unforgettable. Now I have seen not only the biggest mountains of Europe, but I had clambered up several peaks. I walked on glaciers and watched the panorama of the Great Caucasus Mountain Ridge.

Before our three-day cruise to the mountains, we had two weeks of training. We also studied theory and practice of survival.

At the end of my trip, I had a swim in the Black Sea. I was very tired from my travels but very happy. Many, many years have passed but I still remember this trip very clearly.

Klara Trusova

VIETNAM

Scenic, Tranquil

Raining, Worshiping, Farming

Love and miss it

Homeland

Kim Hai Tran

JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF SURVIVAL

As a youngster growing up, I remember being very happy and looking forward to the many wonderful things life had to offer. It was my stepmother, Michi Bias, who gave me this outlook. She was truly a mother figure to me who gave me such strength and courage. She was a real inspiration to me, and I wanted to be just like her.

One special thing she did for us (my brother, Dewayne, and I) was to take us on a camping trip every summer. It gave us something to look forward to every year.

In the summer of 1978, it was very hot and humid when we got out of school for summer break. About ten of us were going camping that year -- three adults and seven children. We were all very excited and more than a little anxious to get to the campsite. But little did I know that we were about to embark on a journey that would take us to the edge of survival.

Upon arriving at the campsite, I remember looking around and thinking about how beautiful and peaceful it was. There were tall green trees everywhere. The trails were a jogger's paradise, and there were numerous campers of all sizes and shapes around us. The river's water was so peaceful; it was so pleasant to just gaze upon it. A feeling of excitement overtook us all. We immediately set up our sleeping tents, our miniature stove, and other miscellaneous items for the trip.

The next day, while the adults sat chatting, all the kids decided to explore the park. However, we were not aware of all the dangers that lay ahead of us. We came upon a beautiful waterfall. As we got nearer to the waterfall, we

noticed a rocky path across the top of it. It looked like it would be fun to try to walk across the top of the waterfall.

The older kids crossed first; then my younger brother and I followed. What happened next was just all too unreal. One minute my brother and I were walking on the rocks, when suddenly I slipped on some green moss and almost immediately found myself flying over the waterfall. The only thought I had going through my mind was "I can't die by myself." That was when I grabbed my brother and took him flying over the waterfall with me. What a frightening moment! I began to scream for help.

At the bottom of the waterfall was a raging river that seemed very angry. I knew that if something didn't happen before we hit the bottom of the waterfall, we would never survive the river below. About a quarter of the way down the waterfall my foot somehow slipped into a crevice in the rock behind the waterfall. I held onto my brother tightly, and we both screamed at the top of our lungs for help. The roar of the water was so loud that it took all our strength to yell loud enough for the others to hear us. But they did. The older kids came running back to where we had fallen. First they grabbed my brother and pulled him to safety. Then they were able to reach me and pull me up to my brother's side.

Once back on solid ground I remember feeling very frightened but relieved that we were safe. As I looked back over the waterfall, all I could see were the boisterous waves below me. I knew that if they had not been able to pull us to safety, we would have drowned that day. I also knew there had to have been a Higher Power looking after us that day. What could have been a tragedy turned into a triumph.

Since that day, I have learned that on the journey of life there are many snares, disappointments, and dangers lying in wait for us. However, with courage, strength, and help

from others, we can conquer anything in life -- through every tragedy there is also victory awaiting us on solid ground.

However, since that day, I have made it a point to not try to cross any more waterfalls!

Treva Jackson

