

Ah, Cleveland

NOTE: An interesting post detailing some Cleveland folklore from USENET. I saved the post ages ago because of the interesting content, unfortunately, I don't have the author's email address.

Ah, Cleveland. Once known as "The Forest City" due to its major lumber exports taken from the green hills of Ohio, it has since become known as "Home of the Cleveland Indians" and the "Home of the Rock and Roll Museum." In any case, it's certainly one of America's largest cities, which is why I find it odd that it is completely ignored by most Mythos writers. Perhaps it is because its main thoroughfare is Euclid Avenue and not Non-Euclid Avenue. But let's get to the Cleveland/Mythos/Occult connections. First of all, Cleveland shows up in Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" as being the city of residence for the narrator's maternal relatives, the Williamsons. And it just happens to be the side of the family with that nasty Deep One strain flowing through their veins. Of course, by the time that the narrator visits in 1929, the only members left are his grandfather, James Williamson (who didn't have the strain himself, but married an Arkham-born Eliza Orne who did) and his uncle Walter (who doesn't have the strain himself but passed it on to his son, Lawrence, who has been spending time in the Canton Sanitarium since 1926). His Deep One grandmother supposedly died in 1907 (I think. The narrator says he was 8 at the time of his grandmother's disappearance. He also claims that he "came of age" in 1927. If "coming of age," means 18, then I'm right.) And his other uncle, Douglas, killed himself in 1906 or 1907 (again, if my original dating is correct) after a trip to Arkham and perhaps Innsmouth. BTW, looking through Michael Tice's greatly informative *Insanity Sourcebook, Taint of Madness*. I notice that there isn't a Sanitarium listed for Canton, Ohio. Since I know he likes to lurk and occasionally post here, I hereby publicly ask him (or anyone else for that matter) if he ever came across such a sanitarium. I'd be interested if Lovecraft was thinking of an actual mental hospital or just used the town for his own nefarious purposes. So there is the Lovecraft connection. I seem to recall Lovecraft saying some nasty things about Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Ohio in general in his letters. (Something about the view from a train car and the unsettling landscape of the state.) Since I don't have any of those source materials on hand, I'll leave that duty to Donald "Eric to his friends" Kesler to track down and transcribe.

THE ELIZA ORNE CONUNDRUM

There is a question that comes to mind upon relating the events of Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," and that is why did Eliza Orne leave the Atlantic shore to move to Cleveland? The obvious answer is that Cleveland is upon the shores of Lake Erie and that Eliza felt more comfortable near great bodies of water (lithophobia?). But this begs the question of why she moved to Ohio at all. Given the large assortment of "Innsmouth jewelry" owned by the Williamson family in their Cleveland home and safety deposit box, it seems obvious to me that Eliza knew full well what she would become and also knew that she would one day seek the underwater city below Devil's Reef in the Atlantic. If she didn't wish to become a Deep One, why go to an Ohio city so close to watery shores? Why not move to Topeka, Kansas? And if she looked forward to the change, why move as far away from Innsmouth as she did? Anyone have any theories?

LAKE ERIE: THE EERIE LAKE

In 1977, Jay Gourley wrote a book called *The Great Lakes Triangle* which, as you can probably guess, attempted to collect various weird vanishings and bizarre incidents from the Great Lakes' region in order

to “prove” that there was a place more frightening than the more popular Bermuda Triangle. Needless to say, it didn’t become quite the media sensation they hoped it would (or I wouldn’t have had to even mention his name). While Gourley finds far more mystery in the Great Lakes other than Erie (especially Ontario and Michigan) he does provide a few interesting tidbits. For example: On December 2, 1942, two ships, the “Admiral,” a tug boat, and the “Clevco”, an oil tanker, disappeared within 10 miles of Cleveland upon Lake Erie. Both ships had left Toledo tied to each other with a towline. The idea being that occasionally ships would run aground upon the uneven bottom of the lake and the tug would easily be able to “yank” the ship off the inconvenient embankment. On this occasion, the “Admiral” was in the lead with “Clevco” in tow. At 4 a.m., a lookout on the “Clevco” noticed that the towline was no longer leading out over the water, but was actually leading down into the lake itself. The inescapable conclusion was that the “Admiral” had somehow sunk to the bottom of the Lake with 14 men aboard it without a sound. The crew of the “Clevco” was understandably shocked by their discovery. So they stopped the ship in its course and radioed the Coast Guard for assistance. Their position was almost exactly 25 miles away from downtown Cleveland. The Coast Guard dispatched two cutters and a few motorboats from Cleveland to help. When the Coast Guard arrived at the location, they found nothing. Neither ship was at the coordinates the “Clevco” had broadcasted. But it gets weirder. When daylight broke, the Civil Air Patrol (remember this is W.W.II) joined in the search. Pilot Clara Livingston spotted the “Clevco” 15 miles from its original location within 10 miles of Cleveland itself. She reported its location and then claimed that the ship simply disappeared as a “cloud of snow” descended upon the ship. She then claimed that her radio failed her, so she returned immediately to base. For the rest of that day, the Coast Guard was at a loss at where the ship was. Eventually, the cutter “Ossipee” spotted the barge and got within 150 feet when once more a “snow storm” cut them off from the ship and they were unable to rescue it. At 3:30, the “Clevco” once more established radio contact with the authorities. They claimed that their ship was adrift and unable to be steered. The Coast Guard informed them to release oil into the water in order to help the search find the barge. At 4:40 p.m., the “Clevco” ceased radio contact and was never heard, nor seen, again. Early the next morning, two members of the crew were found dead, washed up along the Cleveland shore with “Clevco” lifejackets and stained with oil. Neither ship was ever found and no survivors were ever reported. (References for the story are given as the Cleveland Plain Dealer: 12/3/42, 12/4/42, and 10/10/69) The book also lists the unusual circumstances behind 11 airplanes and 5 other ships that have been lost upon the Great Lake Erie. Perhaps one of the most interesting is the case of the vanishing skipper George Donner. Donner was in charge of the “O.M. McFarland” which was sailing on Lake Erie from Erie, Penn, to Lake Michigan. The ship made it with the entire crew intact, all except for Donner who apparently vanished into thin air. While still upon Lake Erie, the skipper excused himself and went into his cabin. The second officer testified that he had heard Donner moving about within his cabin at 11:30 p.m. The next morning, however, Donner didn’t answer his door when knocked upon. Eventually, the second officer had to break down the door only to discover that George Donner was not within. A quick search of the ship revealed that Donner had simply disappeared without a trace. (Source given: The Cleveland Press 4/29/37)

Strange disappearances aren’t the only thing “wrong” with the eerie Lake; there are also stories about a sea monster living within the lake. Called “South Bay Bessie,” this monster has been around since the Erie and Iroquois Native Americans spoke about a giant sturgeon living within the lake capable of swallowing their boats while trying to cross the lake to get to the many small islands therein. In The Cleveland Plain Dealer of June 16, 1985, Dr. Charles E. Herdendorf, professor emeritus of The Ohio State University Department of Zoology, declared that it was indeed possible for a gigantic fish to survive within Lake Erie given just the number of walleyes present in the lake. Sturgeons have been known to live as long as 100 years old and to continue growing during their whole lives, according to the professor. And their usual bottom-dwelling lifestyle would explain why Bessie hasn’t been caught or seen that frequently. The professor also gave “South Side Bessie” a scientific name of Vertebrate Chordata

Ichthyoreptilia Obscuriformes Obscuridae Obscure Eriensis Huronii, which means “obscure Lake Erie life form.” The Dayton Daily News of 10/7/90 told the story of Bob Soracco who was jet skiing on the lake in late summer. Soracco got the scare of his life when he witnessed something that looked like “a huge porpoise” and described it as “big, black, and had gray spots.” So even though there has never been any specific reports of Deep One-like creatures within the Lake (unlike in Southern Ohio where “the Loveland Frog” made an appearance to two police officers prior to it jumping into the Little Miami River) there is something perhaps literally fishy going on at the bottom of Lake Erie. Of course, there is something else a bit nasty down under that murky water. A little thing known innocently as Kelley’s Tunnel. Among the small islands dotting the waters of Lake Erie is an island known as Kelley’s Island. The place is named for Datus Kelley, a businessman that owned the large limestone quarry upon the west shore of the island. Here, in the 1840s, immigrant workers from Italy dug a tunnel through the island and out under the lake itself. A vein of limestone was discovered leading from Kelley’s Island to Marblehead where another quarry was set up. Having more concern for profit than the lives of non-Anglo Saxons, the foremen forced the workers to continue mining tunnel under the Lake. Eventually, the workers began to fear for their safety. Working underground, miles under tons of water, understandably made them feel nervous. It got to the point where the workers were beginning to become violent in their language toward the supervisors. And one day, August 9, 1849, part of the tunnel collapsed. And dozens of men were trapped within the tunnel with no way out. The disaster forced the quarry to close down and Kelley’s Island gave up the limestone industry, but the memory of the incident remained. Forever after, it was said that ships carrying limestone from one of the other islands would have misfortune whenever it crossed that part of the sea, which existed over the tunnel. And legend has it that the ghosts of those workers still haunt that stale-air filled Kelley’s Tunnel below the waters, walking back and forth along the tunnel waiting for someone to dig down and save them. I’ll get to my own observations on the city of Cleveland itself in another posting.

A little more on Cleveland...

EUCLID AVENUE – WHERE PARALLEL LINES MEET

The site of Cleveland was a spot used quite extensively by the Hopewell Indians, prior to 1000 A.D. and this culture built various mounds throughout the Ohio Valley and two rather large ones existed within the present-day Cleveland city-limits. Both of them, however, were destroyed by the progress of the city’s development. The present intersection of East 9th Street and Euclid Avenue was the location of the now missing mounds. It seems that when the city was being built, the developers felt that the mounds provided a good focal point upon which the city could be planned out. If one takes into account the fact that many of the decisions that went into the placing of mounds were astrological in nature, this means that Cleveland was actually built inadvertently according to the ancient mound builders’ star-inspired placements.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE CLEVELAND SPIRITUALIST

According to Emma Hardinge’s *Modern American Spiritualism*, Lincoln visited a medium in Cleveland named Conklin before his election to the presidency. After his election, while visiting Cleveland and attending a reception, Conklin recognized the new President as one of his former clients. According to Conklin, Lincoln never actually engaged in any of the calling up of spirits but instead would sit quietly watching others engage in the practice. Lincoln stopped his visits when one day he suddenly stood up and told everyone present that a good friend of his had just died while he had been at the spiritualist’s. Apparently, the claim was accurate though there was no way of Lincoln knowing this at the time. Abraham Lincoln, himself, never addressed the incident and, not having a Lincoln biography on hand, I can’t tell if its even plausible or just an attempt by the Cleveland spiritualist to gain a little publicity. But

there you go.

THE OTHER PRESIDENT AND THE OTHER CLEVELAND SPIRITUALIST

While the Lincoln story might be completely false, the story of future president James A. Garfield is true. Garfield wrote in his diary on 6/4/1851, that he had, out of curiosity, decided to attend a spirit rapping by a "Miss Fish of Rochester" at Cleveland's Durham House. There he presumably contacted his dead father (at the reasonable price of \$1). While Garfield was too skeptical to accept everything that was happening, he did admit that he couldn't figure out how the rappings were themselves being produced.

IT CAME FROM THE CLEVELAND ZOO

In August of 1972, eight different people of the Brookside Park area, just west of the Cleveland Zoo, reported seeing a "monster animal" more than seven feet tall. The creature was described as being "huge, with large claws and empty eyes." What makes the report so unusual is that the creature was said to be walking away from the zoo and seemed to be "sometimes there and sometimes not." Zoo officials investigated, fearing that one of their gorillas may have escaped. All of their animals were accounted for, but behind a fence north of the zoo were found bushes matted down as if a large creature had pushed through. The incident was never properly explained. (from Warren Tribute Chronicle_ 9/14/72) (Dimensional Shambler?)

THE FRANKLIN CASTLE

Secret passages, a family curse, a 13-year old girl hung from the rafters, hundreds of hidden bones of babies, Nazis, a brutal ax murder, mass murder, and ghosts galore. There is little that the massive, dark, stone built house with a turret, several balconies and 4 foot high iron fence known as "The Franklin Castle" hasn't seen. Its been everything from a private house to a singing club to an illegal brewery during the days of Prohibition.

The story starts with Hannes Tiedemann, a German immigrant who made it big in the banking industry and decided to spend his money on making his family its own castle at 4308 Franklin Boulevard Northwest in Cleveland. The place was enormous by comparison with its neighbors. It boasted of 28 rooms, a ballroom on its fourth floor, and dozens of secret passages between rooms and sometimes to secret rooms of their own.

The Tiedemann family had its first tragedy soon after they moved in. Their 15-year old daughter died and soon every baby born to the couple died a few days after being born. The only survivor was a son, August. Eventually, every member of the family met an untimely end. August himself died at 41 from a stroke. His own two children died even earlier. Ironically, Hannes himself outlived his entire family only to die alone in a park from a similar stroke that had felled his son. There was many rumors at the time that there was a family curse taking its victims, one by one. The reasons given for the existence of such a curse ran from the house being built upon sacred ground to the whispers that Hannes had found his 13-year old niece trying to seduce his grandchildren and, in a fit of rage, hanged her within one of the secret closets off the majestic ballroom. No one was sure what the cause of the curse was, but they all believed it to be true.

Hannes Tiedemann sold the castle to a brewer around 1900 who in turn sold it to a German Singing Club in 1913. At some point during this time, it is said that a horrible ax murder took place in the front tower room of the building. And it is still said that sometimes, one can see the phantom figure of a woman in black, presumably the victim of the incident, looking out from the tower. During the 1920s, the house is said to have been used by gangsters to brew alcohol during Prohibition. The house's secret passages and

rooms gave the gang plenty of places to build stills and produce the much needed revenue builder. By the 1930s, the house became the local National Socialists headquarters. While the American Nazi party used the house to further their own ideology, they didn't take into account the divisions within their own party. Within a few years of moving in, a political argument got out of hand and 20 Nazi sympathizers were killed by a machine gun within the house. Legend says that while the police were investigating the crime, they stumbled upon a secret room containing a short-wave radio and tons of Nazi propaganda flyers ready for distribution.

In the 50s, the house became a medical practice. The events of the period were rather uneventful, but soon after the doctor left, another secret room was opened to discover hundreds of bones of babies. Some speculated that the doctor had been performing illegal abortions upon the premises, by when the Coroner examined the bones he is said to have found that the bones were ancient and predated the house itself. The doctor was never seen nor heard from again.

The Sixties found the house being rented out as an apartment building and eventually left unoccupied until 1968. In that year, the Romano family moved in. Their idea was to open a restaurant there, but the family's fortunes soon took a turn for the worse. The children claimed to see ghosts on the third floor and Mrs. Romano began to exhibit signs of mental illness as she claimed that she had "sort of made a pact with what is here in this house." Eventually, the family was forced into selling the house in 1974. At that time, the new owner, Sam Muscatello, thought about turning the building into a church. But the plans never worked out and the house was sold once again in 1979.

Michael DeVinko, who bought the house, was under the impression that he was destined to return the house to its former likeness. He spent over \$1.3 million in a quest to turn back the clock. DeVinko found himself the center of coincidences as various parts of the house, from its original keys to furniture bought by the Tiedemann family, continued to simply show up at local antique dealerships. His mission, however, was never completed because he was forced by finances to sell the place in 1994. Since then, I don't believe there has been much tragedy. But the ghost stories continue.

— Steven Marc Harris