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# ***The Serpent Chronologies***

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***Sea Serpents and other Marine Creatures from Nova Scotia's History***

*A Book About Stories*

***By Andrew J. Hebda***

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*Sea Serpents and other Marine Creatures from Nova Scotia's History*

*A Book About Stories*

Nova Scotia Museum  
Halifax, Nova Scotia



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Hebda, Andrew J.

The Serpent Chronicles Sea Serpents and other Marine Creatures from Nova Scotia's History  
/ Andrew J. Hebda

Includes references

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### **Front Cover Image**

Image of the Sea Serpent reported by the crew of the Louisa Montgomery off Pictou Island in 1879. Sketch created by author from description provided in the account.

All images and maps not attributed to a specific reference were created by the author.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of a number of individuals in assisting in the creation of this manuscript. No review of this nature can be accomplished without the help of a large number of people, each of whom has contributed one or several pieces to this great puzzle. These include, but are not limited to the following:

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*Gary Shutlak*, Senior Archivist at the Nova Scotia Archives who researched, in depth, the newspaper records of early Halifax and related publications within the province and

*Kim Franklin*, Administrative Assistant to the Nova Scotia Museum Collections Unit who not only took this mass of narratives and analyses, and formatted them into a document that was easy to read but also applied her creative talents in design of both the cover as well as the icons used throughout the manuscript.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution made by the large number of individuals who had the courage not only to share their observations of these unusual appearances, but did so in a public forum.

*for Gwyneth*

## ***The Sea Serpents and Monsters of Nova Scotia***

The occasional appearance of strange and monstrous sea creatures off our coasts and in our lakes has been recorded in many ways over time. Indeed, the occurrence of such creatures was ingrained in the minds of early inhabitants as well as those who created the first charts as guides to the safe sailing of our seas. These records vary from petroglyphs, or rock carvings, depicting creatures described by our *Mi'kmaw* predecessors to articles in the public press and even to descriptive articles in the scientific literature.

The fact that events were recorded and passed on to others is, for the most part, not in dispute. However the question remains: "What did they see?"

Unfortunately, the mischievous mind of man will still allow for some to use their imagination in order to gull the unsuspecting. Those types of stories and those who tell them will be with us to the end of time. Consequently as can be seen in some of the accounts reproduced from the popular press in this review it is evident that some writers have taken great pains not to be drawn into the company of such "creative" writers.

The purpose of this work is to examine the stories of these others - people who have genuinely witnessed an event or seen a creature that does not fall into the realm of their everyday life and experience. The literature is spotted with such accounts and on occasion the re-telling of accounts of just such events. One is constantly reminded that in fine Maritime tradition a good story always improves with its retelling.

In this book, I have attempted to provide a full presentation of such accounts from original sources where possible. When appropriate, I have tried to draw these articles into the realm of our current understanding of the natural world. In some cases, where original documentation was not readily available, I have had to rely on the recounting of these events by other writers who have been more fortunate in their searches and to them I wish to extend my profound thanks for their efforts.

These stories relate to the lands of and the waters around our province with an occasional foray into the greater world beyond. This is to show that what we as Nova Scotians have encountered and described is not out of line with that seen by others in the vast oceans of the world. Some of these are true accounts of events while others may be exercises in creativity in writing. In some cases, it is not obvious which is which.

These accounts are presented as a Chronology, with the texts of these historical records reproduced in their entirety where appropriate. I have taken the liberty, as a kind of editor, to comment on them and, perhaps, put them into a broader context of the time. I have also taken the liberty of inserting breaks in the texts and creating new paragraphs for ease of reading but have, however, retained the grammar and orthography of the original texts intact if for no other reason than to maintain the style and charm of original works.



## Sea Serpents and Other Mystical Sea Creatures in our Pre-History and early Mi'kmaw Record

With the exception of petroglyphs and oral history, our knowledge of pre-contact<sup>1</sup> encounters with creatures of the sea comes from the documenting of these anecdotes by contemporary chroniclers and from the writings of more modern-day researchers. In some cases these come to us as interpretations of the rock etchings while in other cases they come through the capture of the essence of oral history in writing. We should keep in mind that both of these may actually be shining a light on events that may have taken place hundreds if not thousands of years ago.

### Sea Serpents – Pre-History – the *Mi'kmaw* record

Several images found in amongst *Mi'kmaw* petroglyphs or rock carvings clearly relate to serpents or other eel-like creatures. It should be noted that the *Mi'kmaq* recorded images of people, animals, the acts of hunting, fishing, as well as decorative motifs in such carvings. As such, they made the first permanent record of elements of their relationship with the land and waters around them as well as the creatures within. Such petroglyphs can be found in several sites in *Mi'kmaw* lands, but of the known ones, most are found in two sites in south-western Nova Scotia (Kejimkujik and McGowan Lake).

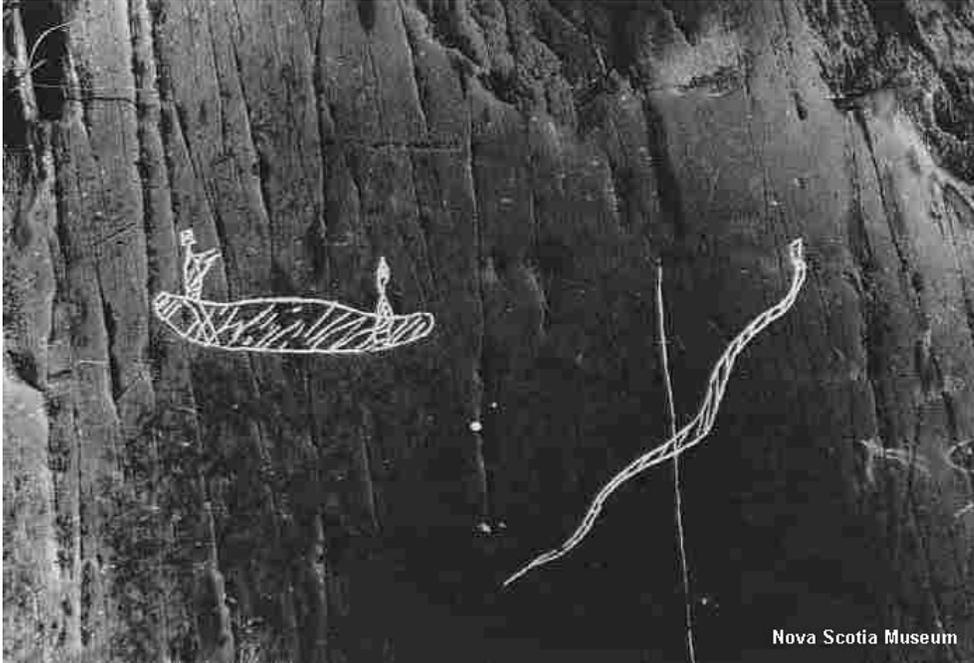
The inspiration for specific carvings is lost in the mists of time. As well, as in the example below of the canoe and serpent recorded at Fairy Bay, Kejimkujik Lake, it is not possible to readily confirm whether individual figures or elements depicted were created at the same time and represent a single event or were separate images depicting several events carved at different times.

If in this example the petroglyphs were created to recount a single event with the elements drawn to scale it would suggest that this serpent-like creature was encountered in the water. It is depicted as roughly twice the length of the canoe. The canoe that is outlined is of the ocean-going type (*apaqteu'lk*) suggesting an encounter with the creature on the open sea. Canoes of this construction were the mainstay of a culture that allowed its members to travel long distances across open water including on such extended voyages as from Cape Breton to Newfoundland.

This image depicts a simple serpent figure with no fins or limbs. As an aside, one's eyes cannot help but be drawn to the diagonal stripping on the body of the serpent. This type of marking is visible in each of the serpent images encountered in the petroglyph record. It may just reflect an attempt on the part of the petroglyph creators to provide some three-dimensional perspective in what would otherwise be a plain outline image. It may, on the other hand reflect body shape or pattern on the surface of the skin.



<sup>1</sup> pre-contact – the period before contact of the *Mi'kmaq* with European culture.



Another petroglyph with a clear serpent form (below) shows a modification of the serpent shape by the addition of what appears to be a fin-like structure near the tail end on its back (on the right of the image). The creator of the carving differentiated this feature from the rest of the animal by applying a cross-hatch pattern to this part of the carving. This could suggest a flatter anatomical element such as a fin. Since there are no fins (or appendages) present on any Nova Scotia serpents, it would appear to suggest an eel-like animal.

If the image was meant to represent *kataq*, the eel, then the fin would have wrapped around the top and bottom of the body, covering, roughly, half the body length. This fin has been added or appended to the basic serpent shape, so may not have been considered part of the basic body structure. It should be noted, that from the image and description, it is not possible to determine if the “fin” was included in the original creation, or was added at a later time. Again, as in the previous petroglyph, the diagonal stripes are present on the body.

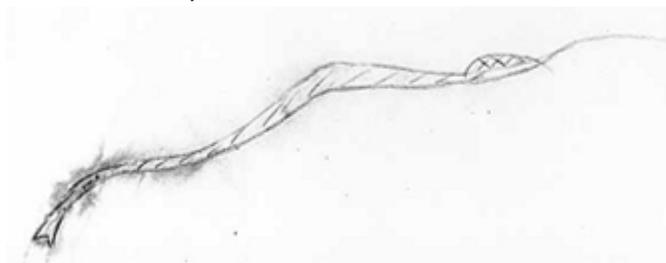


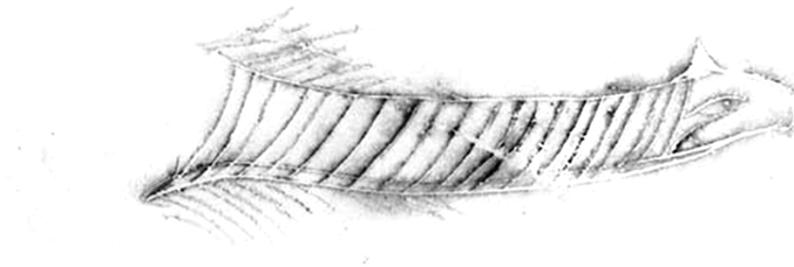
Image from Nova Scotia Museum



The following image of the *Horned Sea Serpent*, also from Kejimkujik, has been interpreted in several ways. The late *Muin'iskw* (Jean Labrador) summarized its story in the following manner:

*"Then there is the Great Horned Serpent, who is believed to inhabit the lakes here in Keji. Legends tell how the Horned Serpent would take young Mi'kmaq men, marry them, and take them back to their underwater world. In the same way, every year as the water levels rise towards the winter, the petroglyph of the Serpent returns to her home beneath the waves."*

Unlike some of the other examples noted later, this serpent was not one described as a *Jipijka'm*, the serpent-like entity that recurs in *Mi'kmaq* oral history.



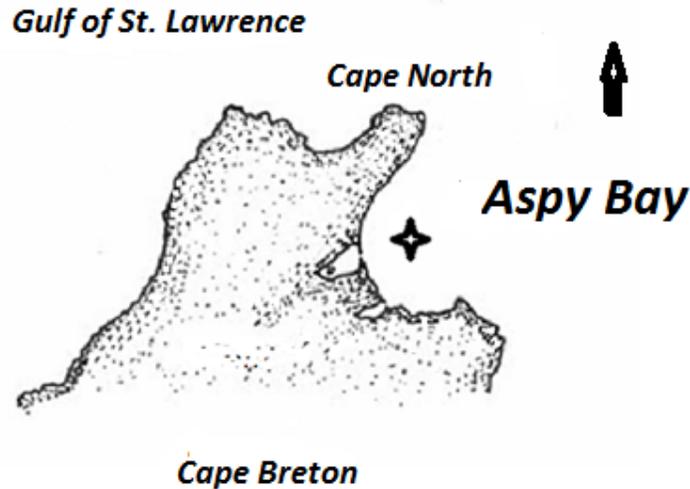
*Horned serpent image from Nova Scotia Museum*



Aside from these petroglyphs, there are several written descriptions of encounters in the water by *Mi'kmaq* with serpent-like entities, unusual creatures, or white or ghostly animals. In the documenting of these encounters or creatures, contemporary writers have usually annotated their accounts with comment on the effects these entities may have had on the observers, be it fostering respect, abhorrence or fear.

As an example, in his publication on the History of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, the Sable Islands &c. in 1837, Robert Montgomery Martin, historical writer and statistician, notes the following in his descriptions of Cape Breton:

*"The Indians have a story, that a huge animal once raised its head out of the water of the Middle of Aspy Bay, near Cape North, and so terrified them, that it was long before any would venture thither again."*



*Approximate locations of reported sightings noted by a four-point star*

There was some suggestion that this was a creature with a barrel-sized body which appeared in the barrachois.<sup>1</sup> The appearance of a large creature in the area would have had very significant consequences in that this location in northern Cape Breton would have been the nearest point of departure for *Ktaqamkuk* (Newfoundland), a route that would have been the principal conduit between *Mi'kmaq* on the mainland and Cape Breton and those of insular Newfoundland.

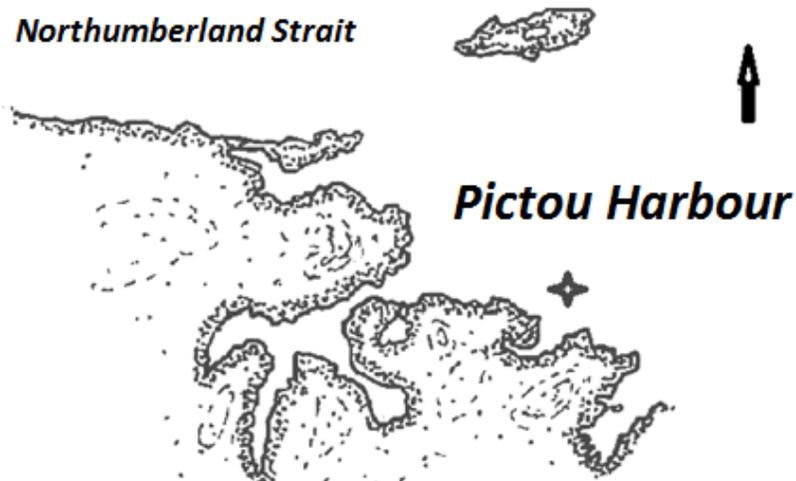


American anthropologists Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth Sawtell Wallis summarized their ethnographic studies of the *Mi'kmaq* nations in their 1955 book *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada*. They make several references to snakes and serpents and other creatures within these cultures including the following:

*“Near Pictou one can sometimes see a sea serpent not less than fifty yards long. It is hard to tell how big he is because he wriggles so rapidly through the water, half submerged. A sea serpent whose body is as large as a barrel enters the bays or rivers on August 15, when all the animals forgather.*

*Only since the coming of the whites have the Indians known that date; the white people read it out of books. (Probably the concept of an animal assembly on a given date is borrowed from the whites.)”*

<sup>1</sup> barrachois - a saltwater lagoon contained behind the barrier beach with access to the sea



This is an interesting description in that it alludes to a regular occurrence or part of a migratory cycle of not just a single animal, but perhaps of a larger number of other organisms as well.

The other point that arises is the concept of size. In today's terminology, we think of a barrel as a container with a capacity of about 200 liters (45 imperial gallons). However, until relatively recently, common containers in use in everyday maritime life were much more variable (and generally larger) in size. These would include puncheons (about 320-530 liters – 72-120 gallons), hogsheads (about 240 liters – 53 gallons) and other such containers of commerce. This should be kept in mind in considering the reports of size of a specific creature when described in those times.

Wallis and Wallis also discussed the concept of the entity called *Tcipitckaam* (Jibijka'm). This creature could have the form of an alligator, horse, serpent, worm or other creature.

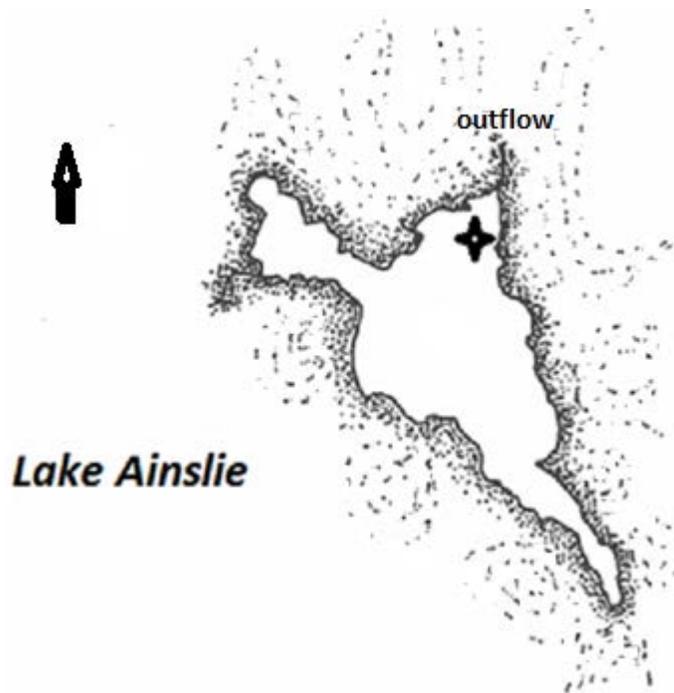
*“Belief in a giant serpent is spread so widely throughout the world that it is impossible to say that Micmac knew no Tcipitckaam before the coming of the whites with their dragon tales. Like various other mythic creatures in the Micmac world, this monster is both an individual as well as a species or race.”*

They then went on to give a more-contemporary example of its occurrence, as witnessed at Lake Ainslie, Cape Breton by John Newell (John Noel) who once encountered two “*Tcipitckaam*” in its waters.

*“They stood up in the water about an hour. I saw half of their bodies. They came up there every year. The male was black, and probably was larger; the other, brown, was the female. The head is shaped somewhat like that of a horse, but is larger.”*

As with the note of the serpent appearing at the foregathering of the animals near Pictou we see that it was noted as having a regular and possibly migratory appearance. Early Scottish settlers in the area around Lake Ainslie also reported an unusual creature in the lake. The *Beathach Mor Loch*

*Anaslaigh* (Great Beast of Lake Ainslie) is how the monster was known to members of that Gaelic speaking community. "Tales of it were common among the older people even in modern times" (Don MacLean, personal communication).



As a point of interest, research undertaken by fisheries scientists in Lake Ainslie in the 1960s did reveal an unusual event involving "large balls of entangled eels" in the north end of the lake at its outflow into the Southwest Margaree River. This could possibly account for some of the earlier Cape Breton reports. These eel aggregations were described as up to six feet in diameter and were occasionally reported "*bobbing on the surface*". Their investigations were summarized in a scientific paper by Carl Medcof in 1966 although whether these observations relate to the same phenomena reported by John Newell is not entirely clear.



In his account to Abbé Maillard in about 1740, *Mi'kmaq* Shaman Chief Lkimu confided the following relating to fierce fish attacking their canoes:

*"We have had our canoes, Father, from time immemorial, and they have always been the same as you see now. In olden times, instead of the birchbark we use now, our ancestors used moose skins, from which they had plucked the hair, and which they had scraped and rubbed so thoroughly that they were like your finest skins. They soaked them several times in oil and then they placed them on the canoe frame, just as we do with birchbark today, fitted them, stretched them and fixed them by sewing them, sometimes with animal tendons, sometimes*

*with spruce roots, and thus they sailed from the coast to a nearby island without ever going too far away from the shore....never further than seven or eight leagues...<sup>1</sup>*

*These are long journeys for us. We much prefer to make them in calm or good weather, since the Bad Fish which often infest these seas do not allow us to sail without worry and fear.*

*All too often, these malicious beings attack the sterns of our canoes so suddenly and without warning that they sink the boat and all who are in it. Some escape by swimming, but there are always some who fall prey to these voracious flesh-eating fish. When we see them bearing down on us, we stop paddling immediately, and, taking a pole tipped with a very hard pointed bone, we try to harpoon the fish if we can. As soon as it feels the wound the creature draws off for a time. We take advantage of the short respite to paddle as fast as we can; and if it returns to the attack we repeat our actions until we see land.*

*There is almost no way to escape if two animals attack the canoe at the same time. If we are caught without our spears, with fear and trembling we throw overboard any pieces of meat or fish we may have, one by one, to distract the fish behind us while the one in front paddles gently on without stopping. If we have nothing else to throw we take off our furs and throw them overboard. We have often thrown even our game-bird headdresses to the creatures.*

*At last, when there is nothing left to throw, we take the longest and sharpest of the bones we always have in our canoes and tie them as best we can to the ends of our paddles. Or else we tie several arrows together, binding the points as tightly as we can, and tie the bundle to the end of a paddle or an oar with a belt. Then we lie in wait to harpoon the creature. Of course, it is not as easy to harpoon the animal with this weapon as with the spear, because the paddle is never long enough. However, this makeshift weapon has often served us well.*

*Finally, when we have to make a journey (which we do rarely because of these fearsome animals), we take several very leafy branches and put them at the stern of our canoe, where they stick up about two feet above the rim. We know by experience that when these fish see and catch the scent of the branches, they draw away and do not come near us. Apparently they think it is a piece of land where they could become stranded."*

This narrative clearly points to the presence of a "Bad Fish" in waters further away from the coastline. These could travel singly or, on occasion, in pairs. Since there is no recorded *Mi'kmaw* word for Killer Whale (a species that has only been recorded from our waters in recent times) it is not entirely clear whether the reference may be to an aggressive species of shark or other creature.

The statement that the use of a real or makeshift harpoon "*has often served us well*" suggests that this was not an uncommon occurrence in their open ocean travels. In addition, the fact that Chief Lkimu describes precautions that could be taken suggests that these encounters were common enough for prescriptive actions to be considered before undertaking longer journeys.



<sup>1</sup> 1 league = approximately 5.6 kilometers

The Mi'kmaq were also aware of white, sea creatures in the Fundy although our knowledge of these comes from written reports by others from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Charles Morris, King's Surveyor (George II) was commissioned to evaluate many of the lands occupied at the time by Acadian Settlers in the area of the Annapolis Valley. During his surveys he encountered white whale-like creatures within the Minas Basin (upper Bay of Fundy):

*Wild Beasts* The Wild Beasts are moose, Bear, Wild Catts (Luscive, a kind of wild Catt), Beaver, Otter, Martyns, Foxes, Red Gray and Black, Rabbits in Great Plenty. There are no Poisonous Reptiles in this Country as in the other Plantations West.

*Fish* The Rivers abound with Salmon, Bas, Shad, Sardines &c. These are only at certain seasons of the Year, but Cod, Eels, Flounders, Smelts and a multitude of Fish are taken at all times peculiar to the Basin of Minas for they have not been found in any other Harbour in the Bay of Fundy are many White fish which the Inhabitants call Baline because they are in shape like a Whale we caught one about 17 feet in length and as big round as a large Ox, it yielded three Barrells of Oil I have seen thirty or forty sporting in the Waters at a time. These fish are also taken in Lawrence Gulph in Canada River.

National Archives of Canada (AC, MG, F10)

"Wild Beasts The Wild Beasts are moose, Bear, Wild Catts (Luscive, a kind of Wild Catt), Beaver, Martyns, Foxes, Red Gray and Black, Rabbits, in Great Plenty. There are no poisonous reptiles in this country as in the other Plantations West.

Fish. The Rivers abound with Salmon, Bas, Shad, Sardines, Sole. These are only at certain seasons of the Year, but Cod, Eels, Flounders, Smelts and a multitude of fish are taken at all times. Peculiar to the Basin of Minas for they have not been found in any other Harbour in the Bay of Fundy are many White fish which the inhabitants call Baline because they are, in shape, like a Whale. We caught one, about 17 feet in length and as big round as a large Ox, it yielded three Barrells of Oil. I have seen thirty or forty sporting in the Waters at a time. These fish are also taken in St Laurence Gulph (in Canada River)"



Bernard J. Gilpin, eminent Nova Scotia physician, author and naturalist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first systematic documenter of our mammalian fauna, wrote the following in his 1878 paper on the Small Cetacea <sup>1</sup> of the waters of Nova Scotia:

#### *The White Whale*

*“Of this beautiful species I only have the report of our Indians, of its casual appearance in the Bay of Fundy and on our coasts. They call it a white porpoise and all agree in its size and appearance. They have a superstitious dread of it and never attack it.”*

Had he seen the diaries of Charles Morris from 1748, he probably would have observed that there was, in those older times, a resident population of beluga whales in the Minas Basin, possibly a remnant from the colder (mini-ice age) period which ended in the late 1700s. During this colder era, beluga whales were probably more-widely distributed, not just restricted to northern areas but found down as far south as coastal New England.

The loss of such northern species, including other species of seal as well as walrus prior to the times of early European settlement would have explained peoples’ wonderment at observing, what were more common species of the past making occasional forays into what were now, for them, southern waters. Even today, the random appearance of a walrus or beluga whale in these southern waters induces surprise and in some cases, awe.



<sup>1</sup> Cetacea - Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises

Reporter, author and early ethno-historian, Clarissa Archibald Dennis, in her field notes on *Mi'kmaw* folklore and customs (as edited by Sable and Whitehead in 1992) records mention of young *Mi'kmaq* children playing on the large rock at the foot of Gabriel Falls, near Tusket being taken by a mermaid, "*never to be seen again*".



So, whether some of these oral accounts are metaphorical in nature or factually based, they do represent a clear statement of some of the mysteries that the seas around us presented to our first inhabitants, long before the coming of the Europeans.

## The Historical Period

Perhaps it is not so strange that as our ancestors pushed their frontiers beyond the bounds of comfort and personal security, they devoted a remarkable effort to either just trying to survive, be it through erection of shelter, searching for food or trying to grow crops. In a great many cases such endeavors were not successful, and many perished.

However, in the midst of this struggle for survival, there were some who had both the desire and the ability to put "pen to paper" and share their observations and thoughts, since that is, after all, the purpose of making a record. It is such privileged individuals, perhaps with the support of wealth or an understanding publisher who provide us with many of these early accounts.

The earliest such written account is that of an encounter of a fishing fleet with a Merman in Canso Harbour on the north-eastern point of the Nova Scotia mainland. This was provided to us by Nicolas Denys in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Nicolas Denys was a young businessman from La Rochelle in France who, with his brother, Simon, in the 1630s, established a number of fishing and timber-related enterprises from the South Shore, to Canso, then on to the Gaspé. In 1653, Denys "*was nominated by the Company of New France Governor of the whole coast of the bay of St Lawrence and the isles adjacent, from Cape Canso to Cape Rosiers.*" He produced the first extensive description of the Natural History of Acadie in his 1672 document "*Description géographique et historique des costes de l'Amérique septentrionale avec l'histoire naturelle du país*". This was translated into English by W. F. Gagnon in 1908, as one of the first publications of the then newly-formed Champlain Society.

The following was excerpted from this translation. It does not appear in the principal narrative he provides, but, rather with the "Collateral Documents" included with that text. This does not represent Denys' own experiences but rather is a second-hand account of an unusual occurrence in Canso Harbour in 1656, witnessed by a fishing captain Pierre Rouleau and his crews.

## **Merman – Canso Harbour, 1656 as recorded by Nicolas Denys**

**Nicolas Denys (1672) as translated by, William F. Gagnon (1908)**

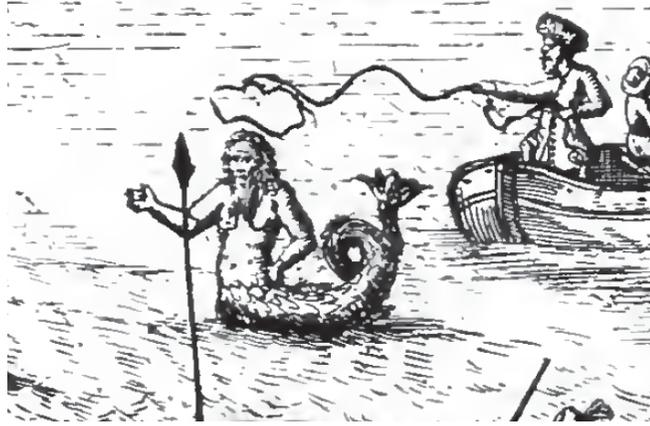
*“I must here make a little digression in order to relate a matter which deserves special notice and of which there have been eye witnesses enough so as not to bring the truth of the same into doubt. While in the year 1656 three ships were lying on this coast for the sake of catching cod, the men of Captain Pierre Rouleau, lying farthest away from the shore, noticed some distance away in the sea a peculiar commotion that was not caused by anything which had the form of any known fish.*

*They stared at it for some time without knowing what to make of it. Since the opinions about it were very much divided, as is usually among men who have little knowledge, they rowed in their boats to the ship to get a telescope. Then they saw, clearly that this fish, or to say, better, this monster, which still retained the same appearance, seemed to take pleasure in the beams of the sun (for it was about 2 p.m. and very clear and fine weather); it seemed to play in the gently undulating water, and looked somewhat like a human being.*

*This caused general astonishment and likewise great curiosity to see this strange creature nearby, and, if possible to catch it.*

*Upon the order of the Captain they therefore kept very quiet, in order not to drive it away by any noise, and descended quickly into the boats with ropes and other things, by means of which they thought they could most easily get the monster alive into their hands. But while the men of the Captain named were thus engaged, those also of the other two ships, although they had lain farther away, had caught sight of the same object, and being extremely curious to get a nearer acquaintance, had betaken themselves to their boats and had taken the oars in hand. Captain Rouleau, who was himself in one of his boats, rightly understanding that in this way they would by no means attain their end, but, on the contrary, would by untimely noise drive away the monster, beckoned all these vessels together and gave command to row out a long way on both sides, in order thus unforeseen to fall upon it from behind.*

*This was done in all quietness, but it came to pass that one of the sailors, or the fishermen, throwing out overboard away from the boat, cast a rope over the head of the Merman (for it was in fact a Merman<sup>1</sup>), but since he did not quickly enough draw it shut, he shot down through the loop and away under water, presenting in his lowest part, which because of the quick movement could not be well made out, the appearance of a great beast. “*



*Adapted from Denys (Dutch Edition, 1688)*

*“At once all the boats gathered round in order to catch him in case he should come up once more, each holding himself ready for that purpose with ropes and cords. But instead of showing himself there again above water, he came to view further out to sea, and with his hands, whereof the fingers (if indeed the things were fingers that stood in the place of fingers) were firmly bound to each other with membranes just as those of swan’s feet or geese feet, he brushed out of his eyes his mossy hair, with which he also seemed to be covered over the whole body as far as it was seen above the water, in some places more, in some places less. The fishermen distributed themselves again, and went a long way around, in order to make another attempt; but the Merman, apparently noticing that they had designs on him, shot under water, and after that did not show himself again, to the great dejection of the fishermen, who many a time went there to be on the lookout, and incessantly racked their brains to invent strategems to catch him.*

*I am sure this digression has not been unpleasant to the reader, yet one might have wished that the trouble of the fishers had had better success, and that they might have gotten that monster of a Merman into their power.”*

<sup>1</sup> Merman - male marine creature, having the head, torso, and arms of a man and the tail of a fish



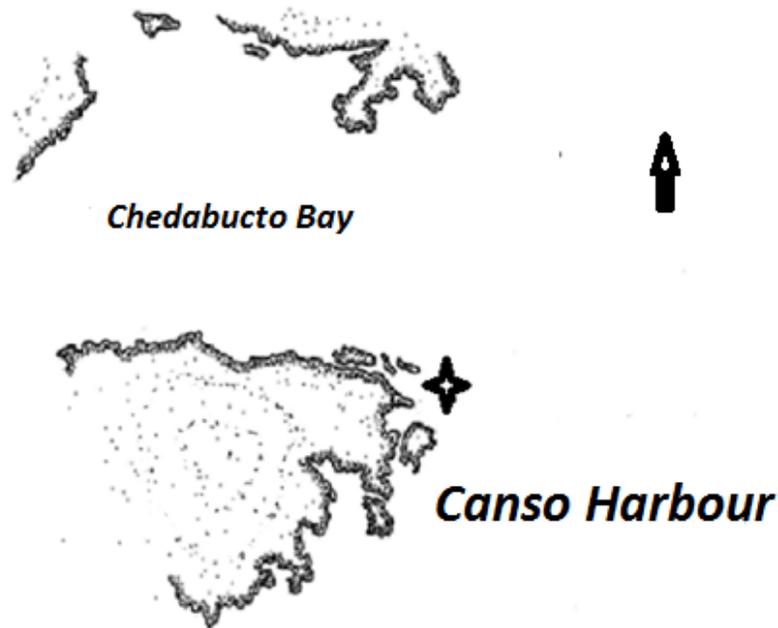
*Adapted from Denys (Dutch Edition 1688)*

This early narrative captures many of the elements that we encounter in the study of early accounts: an unusual object or creature sighted, followed by reports of an excited attempt to try to catch the creature, followed, further by lamentations of an unsuccessful attempt at capture. Then, ultimately, would come the re-capitulation of details of the encounter or observations of the animal, perhaps as an attempt to justify the unsuccessful effort made in the first place.

The descriptions then focus on what were considered to be the most note-worthy points: in this case, long fingers, joined by some form of webbing (note the comparison to swan's or geese feet), long, moss-like hair (perhaps akin to that seen hanging from the old-trees on the shore) covering of the whole body. The details are then summed up with a conclusion based on the experience of those observing the creature or those documenting the encounter. This is a pattern that will repeat itself to one degree or other with most accounts.

The above-given woodcut which appeared in the Dutch translation of Denys' works in 1688 illustrates both the initial attempt at capture as well as his second appearance and unsuccessful attempt at corralling. Note the proximity of the first boats to the "merman" in the foreground of the image and the distance being kept while surrounding the creature in the back-ground during its second appearance. The merman is presented in a "Neptune-like" image.

The artist differentiates the two merman images by altering the position of the hands, thus underlining that these were indeed separate appearances.

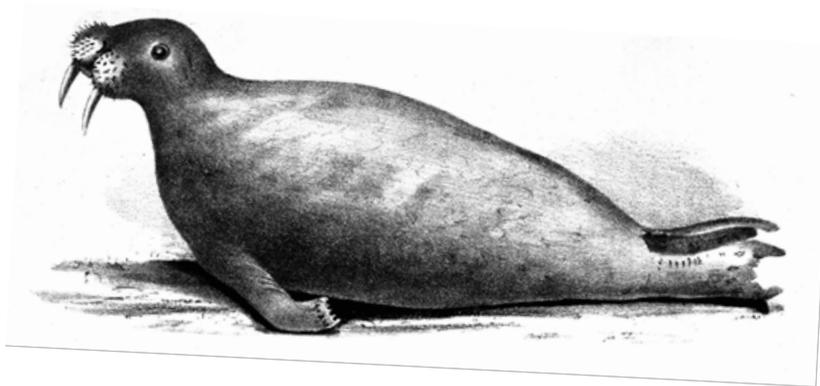


As noted earlier, this period, the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, places this event toward the latter part of the little Ice-Age, a period following the medieval warming period which had come to an end by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This colder time was characterized on land by the expansion of mountain glaciers and by the appearance of northern species in mid-temperate waters. Even on the mainland, species such as white-tailed deer were not found further north than what is now the southern border of Maine, with woodland caribou and moose dominating the barrens and forested landscapes of Nova Scotia. So the potential for the appearance of southern species such as manatees<sup>1</sup> which were occasionally confused for mermaids by sailors would be unlikely this far north, especially in near-shore areas in north-eastern mainland Nova Scotia due to the cold nature of the waters in those times.

However, one might then consider whether these fishermen would have encountered northern species of marine mammals such as walrus, ring and bearded seals, animals with which they would not be as familiar. One would think that walruses with their prominent tusks (including females) would be difficult to mistake for human form. However, unlike most other seal species, the ringed seal has a “cat-like” face, rounded with a somewhat foreshortened rostrum (snout), as opposed to the more common species with the dog-like face of a harbor seal or even the horse-head-like appearance of the gray seal with which many of us are more-familiar. In fact, many of the early cartographers used those familiar descriptions to illustrate their maps with dog or wolf-like or even horse-like heads on seal-bodies.

These northern species now rarely enter Nova Scotia waters with only the occasional report of walrus or beluga making its appearance in our waters.

<sup>1</sup> manatee – a large, tropical, plant-eating marine mammal (*Trichechus manatus* Linnaeus, 1758)



*Adapted from Gilpin (1870)*



## The Quiet Time

Reports of monstrous sea creatures from our waters were wanting for over a hundred years, although their documentation continued apace in Europe. In northern European waters, there was mention of terrifying sea creatures in the writings of such eminent documenters of Scandinavian natural history as the 16<sup>th</sup> century Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Uppsala, Sweden who recorded and interpreted the stories of Scandinavian seafarers and fishermen.

The image below illustrates one of the hazards of crewing a fishing vessel in those times.



**De magnitudine Noruagici Serpentis , & aliorum.**

*Adapted from Olaus Magnus (1555)*

There was also the Danish-Norwegian missionary to Greenland, Hans Egede, who reported a sea creature longer than his ship and taller than the crow's-nest on the mainmast of his ship while off Greenland in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.



*Sea Serpent according to Hans Egede – reproduced from Hamilton (1839)*

Erik Pontopiddan, Bishop of Bergen, also argued for the existence of sea serpents, krakens and mermaids in his *Natural History of Norway* in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. These authors did, in addition, provide us with some of the earliest illustrations of these creatures of the deep, images that still persist in many modern publications on the possible appearances of sea serpents.

Note, in the Pontopiddan image above, the artist has included several features of interest. The first is the serpent spouting a plume of water, not unlike a whale, although, in this case, from the mouth rather than through a dorsal blow-hole. The second is the presence of paired, fin-like appendages (with three digits). The presence or absence of limbs (or fins) has repeatedly come to the fore in serpent descriptions. Many describe or show such appendages, while those who don't, go to lengths to debate the method of propulsion of the creatures, be it through serpentine movements<sup>1</sup> of the body, or the "warping" or coiling the body in corkscrew manner.

The third feature of the image is the presence of both icebergs as well as small ice pans near both the vessel as well as the creature. Perhaps this has been done to underline that these were records of Scandinavian encounters in northern waters and not ones from the southern seas which we all know held many mysteries for the early mariner.

<sup>1</sup>serpentine movements - the s-shaped method of body movement used by terrestrial snakes – in a single plane



*Sea Serpent according to Pontoppidan reproduced from Hamilton (1839)*

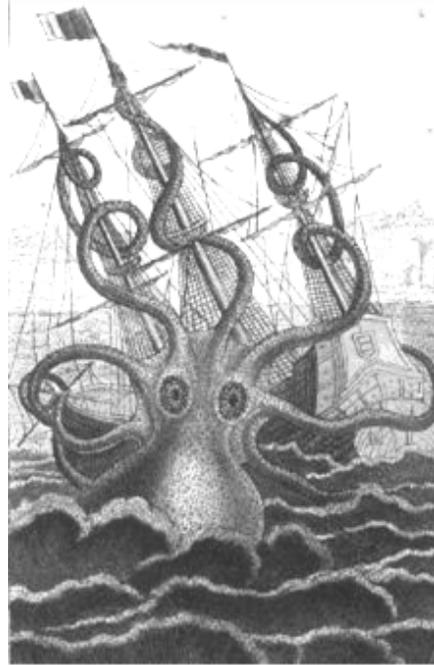
There were few references to such creatures in the North-west Atlantic, although perhaps this may have related, in part, to the youth of the countries in the New World and the relative early stage of development of both the scientific communities as well as the public (popular) press.



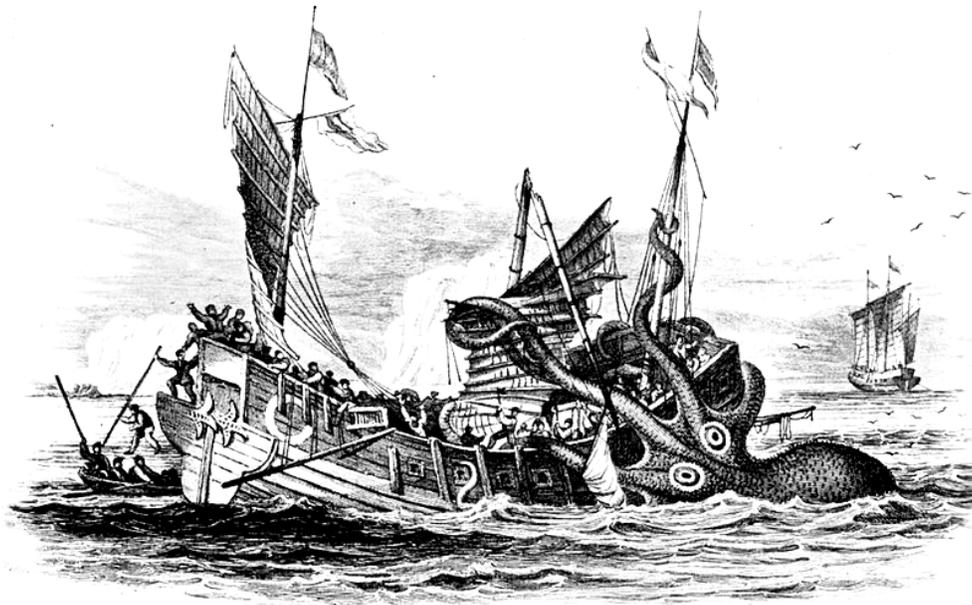
## **Kraken or Sepia Cuttlefish catching Ship off Angola, published in 1802**

The French naturalist Pierre Denys de Montfort published a two volume treatise called “Histoire Naturelle des Mollusques” in 1801/2 which, in one form or other was probably responsible for much of the public’s information about the giant Cephalopod, the *poulpe*, which was reported to attack sailing ships.

Off the coast of Angola, goes the story, a sailing ship was seized by a monster with arms that reached to the top of the masts. The terrified sailors vowed to St. Thomas that they would make a pilgrimage if he would save them, and with axes and cutlasses - and the support of the good St Thomas, they broke free. Therefore (according to Denys de Montfort) in St. Thomas Chapel at St. Malo there is a votive picture of a ship in the embrace of a monster. This image may have been consulted by a young Jules Verne. There is, according to some, hardly any question that Verne had read de Montfort’s study, it being the authoritative work in the field.



*Adapted from pen and wash drawing by Pierre Dénys de Montfort (1801)*  
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9d/Colossal\\_octopus\\_by\\_Pierre\\_Denys\\_de\\_Montfort.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9d/Colossal_octopus_by_Pierre_Denys_de_Montfort.jpg)



*Poupe colossale - Pierre Dénys de Montfort (1810) from Hamilton (1839)*



## Sea Serpent – Gloucester (Cape Ann), Massachusetts 1817

As mentioned earlier, there do not appear to have been any documented sightings in our part of the world for over a hundred years until accounts surfaced in the American press in 1817 of an appearance of a large sea serpent in Gloucester Harbour, Massachusetts on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August of that year. This was also sometimes referred to as the Cape Ann Sea Serpent.

The creature was seen by scores of observers, and depositions as to its size, appearance and behavior formed the core of a scientific investigation conducted by a committee of the Linnaean Society of New England (Anonymous, 1817). This study was the first organized attempt at data collection and cross-Atlantic comparison of reports based on eye-witness accounts both in the Gloucester area as well as in Europe.

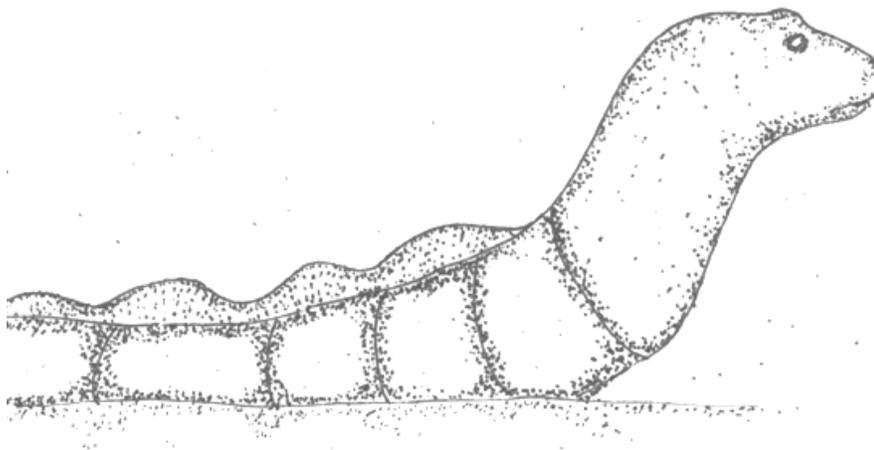


Image derived from descriptions provided in depositions to the Committee of the Linnaean Society of New England in 1817

Its final version was, perhaps somewhat compromised by a diversion of its investigators by the discovery of a snake at Cape Ann, which was designated as a juvenile of the Great Sea Serpent. It ultimately turned out to be a northern Black Snake *Coluber constrictor* with unusual protuberances due to deformity of the spine according to Joel Asaph Allen, Curator of Reptiles, Birds and Mammals, Boston Society of Natural History (1869). That, aside, the report was the first consolidation of serpent sightings to date, and systematic review of points in common in these observations.



## **First Published Report of Sea Serpents from Canadian Waters**

Despite this diversion, the publication of the report in October of that year (in addition to its prominence in the public press) resulted in the surfacing of a report of a serpent some thirty years previous in the Gut of Canso (Canseau or Canceaux). These observations remained unreported due to the potential of ridicule and even when they re-surfaced, care was taken by the observers to confer with credible members of the scientific community before releasing the details to a somewhat broader public audience.

The observers solicited the opinions of prominent members the naturalist community in New York such as Samuel L. Mitchill and Constantine S. Rafinesque-Schmaltz, to help validate their observations. It would appear that even with a general acceptance of the concept of large marine serpents at the time there was still hesitation in publically presenting observations of this sort.

The following is a result of these solicitations. This is the first documented report of a large sea serpent in our waters. Below is an extract from the *Niles Register* from September 1817, the same month as the release of the serpent report by the Linnaean Society.

The *Niles Register* was a Baltimore-based national and international newsweekly which, in the first half of that century, was as well-known as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. In that part of the 19th century it was considered the principal window through which many Americans looked out on their country and the world.

### **Sea Serpent - Gut of Canso, 1787**

***Niles Register*, September 20, 1817, pp 50-51**

#### ***“Sea Serpent”***

*“It is now an admitted fact – established by the testimony of so many witnesses as to prevent controversy about it, - that monstrous fishes, of the serpent kind, inhabit the sea, we have many accounts of such animals having been seen at different periods; which those who did see them, were prevented from saying much about, by fear ridicule for dealing in the marvelous. We already have some six or seven of these accounts. The following, being a copy of a letter from William Lee, esq. late consul of the United States at Bordeaux, and now accountant in the treasury department, to Dr. Mitchell, of New York is worthy of record, and may serve as a specimen of the rest.”*

Washington, September 2, 1817

My dear sir

*The description given in our newspapers of a sea-serpent, lately seen for several days in and about Cape-Ann harbor, has brought to my recollection one of this species.*

*On a passage I made from Quebec, in 1787, in a schooner of about 50 tons burden, while standing in for the Gut of Canso, the island of Cape Breton being about four leagues distant, one of the crew cried "a shoal ahead!" The helm was instantly put down to tack ship, when to our great astonishment, this shoal, as we thought it to be, moved off, and as it passed athwart the bow of our vessel, we discovered it to be an enormous sea-serpent, four times, at least, as long as the schooner. Its back was of a dark green color, forming above the water a number of little hillocks, resembling a chain of hogsheads.*

*I was then but a lad, and being much terrified, ran below until the monster was at some distance from us. I did not see its head distinctly: but those who did, after I had hid myself in the cabin, said it was as large as the small boat of the schooner. I recollect the tremendous ripple and noise he made in the water, as he went off from us, which I compared at that time to that occasioned by the launching of a ship.*

*My venerable friend, Mr. (name withheld by Mr. Lee), of your city, was a passenger with me at the time. He will corroborate this statement, and probably furnish you with a better description of this monster, for I well recollect his taking his stand at the bow of the vessel, with great courage, to examine it, while the other passengers were intent only on their own safety.*

*At Halifax, and on my return to Boston, when frequently describing this monster, I was laughed at so immoderately that I found it necessary to remain silent on the subject, to escape the imputation of using a traveller's privilege<sup>1</sup> of dealing in the marvelous.*

*That a serpent encountered the army under Regulus, in Africa, in the first Punic war historical fact. He was at length killed; and the skin, 120 feet long, with the jaw-bone of the monster, sent home to Rome. That serpent probably came from the sea, being first discovered on the banks of the river Bagrada. We also frequently hear of the Anaconda of the East Indies, from 30 to 50 feet long; which, we are told, attacks and kills, with entire ease, and devours, at once, the largest tygers of that country, the fiercest and most formidable of quadrupeds.*

*The sea-serpent still keeps on the eastern coast of the United States, feeding on herrings and other small fish. He has been seen lying on the surface of the water, coiled up and apparently reposing."*

<sup>1</sup> imputation of using a traveller's privilege - having to lie

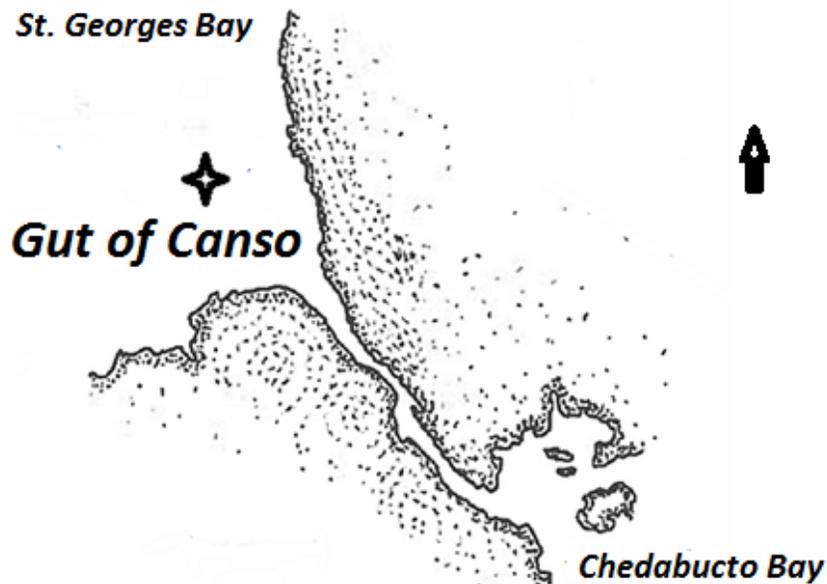
Note that Mr. Lee put the size of the serpent into the broader historical and biological context, indicating the documented existence of other serpents of comparable size in other part of the world, even as early as the early Roman Empire.



The following is extracted from the re-printing, three years later, of the letter presented in the Niles' Register report. It appeared in volume 5 of the new *Sporting Magazine* of London in 1820 with a couple of changes. The context was broadened from just discussion a large "serpent-like" creature to including the possibility of it being a *Kraken* or, as commonly named, a large species of squid or *cuttlefish*, a "mythical" creature said to dwell in the waters off Norway and Greenland.

It becomes evident that with the discussion in the public press as well as the publication of the report of the Linnaean society in 1817, the existence of sea serpents in coastal waters was becoming one of the popular issues of the day, and that any reports from "reputable sources" were in demand.

This specific report has added credibility because it has come from a "reputable person as opposed to the more - "common" sources of information for the earlier, Cape Ann, report in Massachusetts.



## Sea Serpent - Gut of Canso 1787 – further elaboration

The *Sporting Magazine* of London, volume 5, pp 16-17, 1820

### *“American Accounts of Sea Serpents and Krakens”*

*“The following further evidence to prove the existence of the kraken, in the ocean, and tending to show that this huge creature is a species of sepia or squid, is derived from three several communications of facts, made to Dr. Mitchill, by William Lee, Esq., Captain Riley, and Captain Neville, in September, 1817, communicated by Dr. Mitchill.”*

The contents of the letter, published in the *Sporting Magazine*, are virtually identical to those in the *Niles’ Register* three years earlier with the exception of the above-noted pre-ambule and of the fact the vessel was reported to be of 80 tons vs the 50 tons (noted in the former publication).

Note that the reference in this magazine is to a letter submitted by Dr. Mitchill who was referred to as Dr. Mitchell in the original *Niles Register* letter. Dr. Samuel Mitchill (Mitchell), physician, naturalist and scholar was commonly referred to as New York’s “most publicly universal gentleman... a man known variously as the ‘living encyclopedia,’ as a ‘stalking’ (walking?) library. It was he who submitted a copy of Mr. Lee’s letter to the *Sporting Magazine*. Dr. Mitchill appears have been considered one of the most accessible, prominent naturalists in New York at that time.

It should be kept in mind that the *Sporting Magazine* was the first English periodical of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries devoted expressly to the sportsman. Perhaps Dr. Mitchill may have felt its publication in that periodical would reach a larger (adventuring and seafaring) audience. On the other hand, it may have been done in an attempt to help bring out other such reports, thereby giving additional credence to the report of Mr. Lee.



Lee’s desire to obtain further scientific validation of his observations appears to have resulted in his correspondence with Constantine Samuel Rafinesque-Schmaltz, another noted 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist and significant name in the scientific (taxonomic) community of the United States.

This excerpt is from a larger article by Rafinesque-Schmaltz on the water and sea-snake fauna of the world, with descriptions of existing species and additions of new species to the list. This was first published in the *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* in 1817 and then was reprinted in the *London Literary Gazette* in 1819.

Although Rafinesque was a prolific contributor to the naming of new species in the North America, this particular addition was questioned by other taxonomic authorities in the following years.

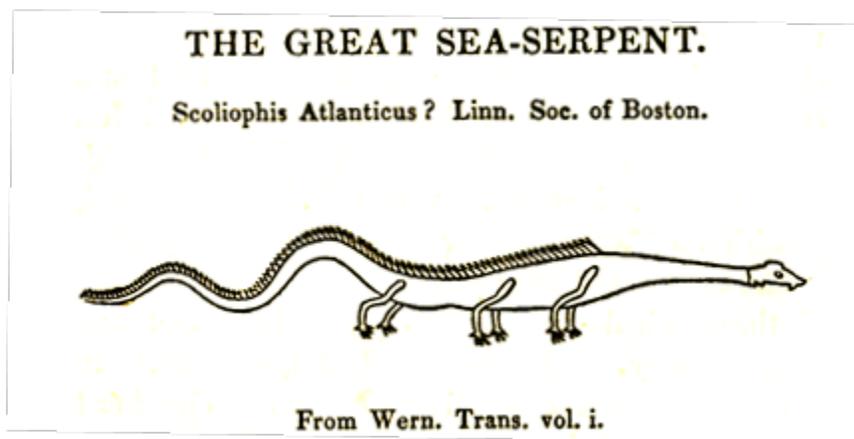
## Sea Serpent - Gut of Canso 1787 (the naturalists' literature)

Constantine Rafinesque-Schmaltz (1817) and *The London Literary Gazette* No 102, 2 January 1819, pp 694-695

### “a Dissertation on Water Snakes, Sea Snakes and Sea Serpents<sup>1</sup> by C.S. Rafinesque, Esq. “

“Mr. Lee has brought to notice another Sea Snake, seen by him many years ago, near Cape Breton and Newfoundland, which was over 200 feet long, with the back of dark green; it stood on the water in flexuous hillocks, and went through it with impetuous noise. This appears to be the largest on record, and might well be called *Pelamis monstruosus*; but if there are other species of equal size, it must be called then *Pelamis chloronolis* or Green-back Pelamis.”

This is a different conclusion to that drawn by the New England Linnaean Society, which named the Cape Ann Sea Serpent *Scoliophis Atlanticus* in their report of the same month (October 1817). Their proposed name is based on details from the interviews with observers (part of their study) as well as examination of the small snake killed on the shore at Cape Ann about 4 weeks after the initial sighting was made. This snake was reported as a “progeny of the great Serpent.” Rafinesque pondered whether the Cape Ann Serpent may have been *Pelamis megophias* (the great Sea Snake *Pelamis*) or possibly *Megophias monstruosus*.



*Adapted from Hamilton (1839)*

None of these species names appear to have persisted into modern times, although the name *Pelamis platura* is still reserved for the small, venomous, yellow-bellied sea snake found in some tropical waters.

<sup>1</sup> under additions of new species number 4

It should be pointed out at this point that with few exceptions, early scientific discoveries and observations were not published in a formal manner in the “journal form” with which many of us are familiar. This did not start in a substantive way until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most discoveries and observations were shared by letter among learned members of scientific societies, and would only on occasion be made available to a larger audience. An example of this is the consolidation of such observations shared as letters to the Royal Society in London, published as a compendium of its transactions in 1803. So other than through the medium of what could be considered “technical” books, on elements of Natural Philosophy such observations and scientific analyses either were retained in the pages of specialized books, or were not available to the lay reader.

Consequently many such accounts of encounters with nature were left to the pages of what could best be described the “popular press” such as newspapers or magazines. In such publications, the concept of critical or “peer” was not common although many newspapers did pride themselves on the accuracy of their reporting. On occasion there did appear to be instances of attempts at sensationalizing events, with no apparent printed counter or validation. Perhaps some things never change.



Where the details of the Canso report were provided to the naturalist (scientific) communities, the following report came to us from the popular press – the Halifax based *Nova Scotian*. It should be noted that in the following example from Halifax, serious attempts were made by editorial staff of the *Nova Scotian* (in its second year of publication) to put observations and the follow-up of such a serpent report into the context of known science. As well, as will be seen in the follow-up article the newspaper published, there is also an attempt to educate the general populace through the re-publishing of the latest knowledge on another unusual and “monstrous” fish species occasionally encountered in our waters.

### **Sea Serpent - Halifax 15 July 1825 (Bedford Basin)**

**The Nova Scotian, 27 July 1825 p 145 c 1-2.**

#### ***“Sea Serpent at Halifax”***

*“So much was said some years ago in the United States about the appearance of a Sea Serpent and so many marvelous stories were told about its magnitude, that we are aware everything corroborative of a similar phenomenon, is surrounded by an air of ridicule and may be regarded as the tale of some Wag, trumped up for the mere purpose of gulling the public. A report has been going about the town for this sometime back that an animal of the serpent species has been actually seen in our harbor; but upon mentioning the report to others, and making enquiry as to its authenticity; we were generally greeted with an incredulous smile, accompanied that knowing look, which a man would put on when he meant to tell you “that he was not quite such a fool as you had taken him to be”.*

*On this account we were willing to let the report die like every nine day wonder, but the appearance was yesterday related to us by an eye-witness, with such distinctness, that we took some pains to investigate the business thoroughly, and now state it as our honest belief, that a large Sea Serpent has actually been seen in this harbor. It seems to have been first discovered on the afternoon of Friday the 15<sup>th</sup> last. About 5 o'clock in the afternoon a young gentleman of the Town accompanied by some ladies, happened to be riding past the wharf at Mr. Goreham's tanpit on the Bason, when their attention was arrested by the appearance of a black object upon the surface of the water.*

*The young gentleman struck with the singularity of the sight, watched it narrowly, when having seen it impel itself forward without showing fins and by a wriggling motion of the body, he came to the conclusion that it could be no other animal but a sea serpent. His first impression was confirmed by what he afterwards observed. The animal raised its head apparently about 3 feet from the water: and then dipping it down, the after part of the body raised a coil which warped itself along to the tail, and this made it to be supposed that its extreme length was at least 60 ft. Its colour appeared to be black, and it appeared to be in circumference about the size of a large log. From the wharf it was scarcely 60 yards distant, so that there was a good opportunity for the view; but as it did not remain above the water longer than five minutes, no more accurate observations than above detailed were made.*

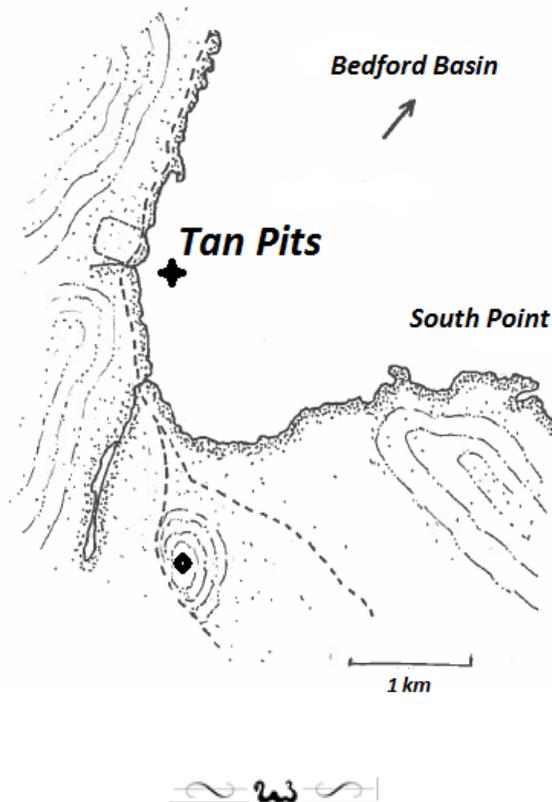
*This information we have from the young gentleman, whose character, whose education and scientific attainments render it impossible that he could either be deceived or willfully misrepresent the facts. Besides, it was seen by the ladies, by Mr. Goreham and by his family and servants; and so desirous were we to make our statements authentic that we went to the Basin last night, and had pointed out by Mr. Goreham the very spot in which the animal was seen.*

*The story however, receives additional confirmation from other circumstances. Mr. William Barry of this town was returning from Prospect in a whaling boat upon the same evening and had reached within York Redoubt about sundown. He was extremely unwell at the time, and lay stretched in the stern upon a bed, when his curiosity was strongly excited by the other persons in the boat occasionally ceasing to row, and observing the motions of a strange animal that was near them. Exerting all his strength, he raised himself up and there had a distinct view of this monster; and from its appearance and comparing it in his mind with the descriptions of the Serpent he remembered to have read he, at the time (and be it recollected, without having heard, without being in a situation where he could have heard one whisper of it being seen in the Basin) felt satisfied that it was a Sea Serpent.*

*It moved round the boat in a sweeping and circular direction and was at one time so near as to be within gun shot. He has drawn a sketch of its path and appearance, which he was kind enough to show us. He saw the head distinctly, and at one time eight coils of the body above water, each about a yard in length and with the same space intervening between so that he feels well assure that its length must be at least 60 feet. It moved through the water with*

great rapidity, and left a large troubled wake. It showed no fins – a remark which the fishermen in the boat observed and made. It was of dark, dingy colour and did not glisten, but this may be attributed to the sun having gone down and there being no vivid light to cause a reflection.

From all these facts and the respectability of the testimony, no reasonable man can doubt that a Serpent or an animal resembling it has been seen. By marking the times, too in which it was observed, we think it probable, that the animal was then on its way to the ocean, which fully accounts for its having never since offered itself to any one's notice."



In response to public discussion of the first article and the appearance of a second monstrous creature just south of the city, the editors of the *Nova Scotian* published a follow-up to their initial article. In it they firmly held to their previous assessment, and to prove their impartiality in such matters presented an explicit analysis of the creature that presented itself at Portuguese Cove some two weeks later.

## Sea Serpent - Halifax Aug 1825 – re-confirmation

The Nova Scotian, 3 August 1825 p 152 c 3

*“We last week laid before the public an account of the appearance of a Sea Serpent, or animal resembling it, in our harbor; and at the same time adduced the evidence from which our information was derived. During the course of the week it has excited a good deal of discussion and much difference of opinion – some cunningly insinuating that it was only a line of porpoises – others more kindly that it was simply a black log – and a third class, stout disbelievers, do us the credit of saying we were gulled and laugh at the very mention of the story till they show their teeth in a grin. – Every man has the right of judging for himself, God forbid that this prerogative should be taken away from anyone: but, at the same time, this can be carried to obstinacy, which is just as great a fault, as an easy yielding credulousness. That an animal like a serpent has been seen here, we think beyond dispute; and defying equally the argument of jibes, and the artillery of sneers, we shall continue to hold such opinion, till it is proved that the evidence of the senses is deceptive and the assertions of men of talent, respectability and character ought to have no force in producing conviction.”*

It is at this point that the article goes on to present information on the occurrence and the natural history of another “monster” that was caught in Portuguese Cove, south of Halifax. The account and description have been included here for several reasons, the principal one being that it showed the effort at research put in by the newspaper editors. In addition, the details provided are a useful guide to what has been, most probably, the most common “monster” species reported (usually as a beached carcass) on our shores. The details presented are a useful guide, even in modern times to one of our most spectacular monsters of the deep that even today we may encounter at sea, or cast adrift on a beach.

*“The report of the appearance of the Serpent gained very strong confirmation from news having reached the town on Friday morning last, that a sea animal of unknown species had been caught at Portuguese Cove – but upon inspecting it, it turned out to be of the species GLAUCUS MAXIMUS or BASKING SHARK. From the distinguished work upon natural history we extract the following account of this remarkable fish.”*

(This information appears to have been derived from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* 1797, extracted earlier from Thomas Pennant’s *British Zoology* Part 3, 1766/7)

*“This species has been long-known to the inhabitants of the south and west of Ireland and Scotland and those of Caernarvonshire and Anglesey; but having never been considered in any other than a commercial view, has till this time remained undescribed by any English writer; and what is worse, mistaken for and confounded with the luna of Rondeletius, the same that our English call the sun-fish. The Irish and Welsh give it the same name, from its lying as if to sun itself on the surface of the water; and for the same reason we have taken the liberty of calling it*

*the Basking Shark. It was long taken for a species of whale, till we pointed out the branchial orifices on the sides, and the perpendicular site of the tail.*

*These fish are migratory, or at least it is but in a certain number of years that they are seen in multitudes on the Welsh seas, though in most summers a single and perhaps strayed fish appears. They visited the bays of Caenarvonshire and Anglesey in vast shoals, in the summers of 1756 and a few succeeding years, continuing there only the hot months, for they quitted the coast about Michaelmas, (feast of St Michael, Sept 29) as if cold weather was disagreeable to them. They appear in the Firth of Clyde; and among the Hebrides in the month of June, in small droves of seven or eight; but oftener in pairs and continue in those seas, till the latter end of July when they disappear.*

*They seem to have nothing of the fierce and voracious nature of the shark kind, and are often so tame as to suffer themselves to be stroked; they generally lay motionless on the surface, commonly on their bellies, but sometimes like tired swimmers on their backs. Their food seemed entirely to consist of sea plants, no remains of fish being ever discovered in the stomachs of numbers that were cut up, except some green stuff, the half-digested parts of algae and the like. – Linnaeus says they feed on medusa. At certain times they are seen sporting on the waves, and leaping with vast agility several feet out of the water. They swim very deliberately, with the dorsal fins above water.*

*Their length is from three to twelve yards, and sometimes even longer. Their form rather slender like others of the shark kind; the upper jaw much longer than the lower, and blunt at the end; the mouth placed beneath, and each jaw furnished with numbers of small teeth; those Obefore are much bent, those more remote in the jaws conic and sharp pointed. On the sides of the neck are five large transverse apertures to the gills; on the back two fins; the first very large, not directly in the middle, but rather nearer the head; the other small and situated near the tail; on the lower part are five others; viz. two pectoral fins; two ventral fins, placed just behind the hind fin of the back; and a small anal fin. Near these the male has two genitals, (claspers) as in other sharks and between these fins is situated the pudendum (external genitalia) of the female.*

*The tail is very large, and the upper part remarkably longer than the lower. The upper part of the body is a deep leaden colour; the belly white; the skin is rough like shagreen but less so on the belly than the back. Within the mouth, towards the throat is a very short sort of whalebone.*

*The liver is of a great size, but that of the female the largest; some weighed above a thousand pounds and yielded a great quantity of pure and sweet oil; fit for lamps and also much used by the people who took them to cure bruises, burns, and rheumatic complaints. A large fish has afforded to the captors a profit of twenty pounds. They are viviparous, a young one about a foot in length being found in the belly of a fish of this kind.*

*The animal which has been caught here, (and has been lying in town these two days back for the purpose of exhibition) seems to be one of the largest kind – its extreme length being 32 feet – its circumference now 18 feet, although the liver has been extracted, which fills 2 hogsheads, and the length of the first dorsal fin 4 1/2 ft. The mouth is when extended, large enough to admit a small sized boat.*

*It was caught by having entangled itself in fishing nets, which were set for mackerel, within a short distance off Portuguese Cove. The persons who witnessed it say, that its struggles to free itself were tremendous, often rearing itself twenty feet from the surface of the water, and lashing all around it into froth and fury. We were informed by the inhabitants on the spot, that there had been caught before at least five or six of the same species. We may also add that an intelligent gentleman who has had experience in the navigation of the tropical seas, informs us that it bears a very striking resemblance to that species, which is vulgarly called the gar-fish.*

This follow-on to the re-statement of veracity of the initial report shows clearly that the editor of the *Nova Scotian* was indeed diligent in following up on and researching such reports, and went to great lengths to validate any such sightings with evidence from “primary” and respected scientific sources. It is of interest that the Basking Shark plays an on-going follow-on role in this sea monster saga, perhaps due to its size, unusual anatomy or its rarity in encounters with the casual observer. Accordingly, this second article of 1825 can play a more constructive role in the discussions of several other reports to follow.



## **Sea Serpent – Halifax 1825 supplementary information**

**Eugene Batchelder (1849)**

**1825**

### ***“Sea Serpent at Halifax***

*The Nova Scotian of July 27 contains a particular account, on the authority of several witnesses, of the appearance of a large Sea Serpent in the harbor of Halifax, on the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup>, It was seen by a young gentleman who happened to be riding past the wharf at Mr. Goreham’s tan-pit, accompanied by some ladies. He raised his head about three feet out of water; its body was the size of a large log, and appeared to be at least sixty feet long, and it forced itself along by a wiggling sort of motion. It remained above water for about five minutes, at a distance of about sixty yards.*

*The editor of the Nova Scotian went to the spot, and learned these and other particulars, which were confirmed by the young gentleman, the ladies, Mr. Goreham, his family and servants. It is also confirmed, with additional particulars by Mr. William Barry, of Halifax, who was going into the harbor the same evening in a whaling boat, and, with the men in the boat, observed it for some time. He saw the head distinctly, and at one time eight coils of his body above water, and is persuaded that he is at least sixty feet in length - Boston Daily Advertiser and Repertory.”*

This narrative, although somewhat more concise than the initial *Nova Scotian* article provides an additional fact - that the editor of the *Nova Scotian*, himself, went to verify the details.

Eugene Batchelder's book is an interesting mix of poetry, prose, narrative and scientific and popular discourse. That notwithstanding, its second edition has provided an up-to-date summary of serpent and creatures reported to that time.



Father Vincent de Paul, a Roman Catholic priest and Trappist was the sole cleric of the time to make missionary visits to parts of Cape Breton ministering to the needs of the *Mi'kmaq*. In his memoirs he makes passing reference to monstrous fish which were known by the *Mi'kmaq* to attack canoes at sea, somewhat analogous to the narrative presented by Shaman Chief Lkimu to Abbé Maillard in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Monstrous Fish (instilling Terror) - off Cape Breton, 1825-30**

**A.C. Pope (1886) – translation of the autobiography of Fr. Vincent de Paul**

*“Another time that I started on a mission to this same Cape Breton the Indians who conducted me in a canoe perceived three monstrous fish called marches, and they were frightened, as these fish are very dangerous. Their teeth are made like gardeners' knives, for cutting and boring, or like razors slightly bent. They are extremely voracious, and often follow boats, attacking them with violence. Bark canoes cannot resist them, they rend them open with their teeth, so that they sink to the bottom, which is why the Indians have such a terror of them. Happily for us these fish did not follow us...”*

“*Marache*” is one of the common contemporary French names for a Mako shark. Based on the description of the teeth and behavior, this is the likely candidate for the “monstrous fish” described by Fr. Vincent de Paul above. It should be noted that *Mi'kmaq* were recorded to apply deerskins, sewn together to the outside of their canoes (Roger Lewis, personal communication). With this canoe modification, aggressive behavior of this species and size of fish (up to 3 meters “plus”) one can readily see how the appearance of several of these fish (or even other larger species) could instill fear. (recall Abbé Maillard's earlier retelling of Bad fish attacking *Mi'kmaq* canoes)



The strong cultural and economic ties between Nova Scotia and the Boston States in the 18th and 19th centuries led to the long-time sharing of “common” fisheries resources, be it from the *Grand Banks* to “*St. George's*” *Bank*. This sharing extended as well to tales from the sea. The following event forms part of that shared narrative, a report of an event occurring on Georges' Bank, long before the politicians, lawyers and bureaucrats set out to so carefully “define” the line of partition between our nations.

## Sea Serpent – George’s Bank June 16, 1826

*New York Advertiser* of June 21, 1826, (reprinted as well in the *American Journal of Science and Arts*, Vol XI, 196

*“Capt. Holdrege, of the ship Silas Richards, which arrived yesterday from Liverpool, states than in passing George’s Bank, five days since, he had a fair view of the sea serpent. It was about ten rods<sup>1</sup> from the ship, the sea perfectly calm, and that part which appeared out of water about sixty feet in length. The head and protuberances were similar to the representations which have frequently been given to him by persons who had seen him near Cape Ann. He was going at a very slow rate, and appeared unmindful of the ship. He was visible about seven minutes to the passengers and crew, who were on deck at the time. A certificate has been drawn up and signed by the passengers, which with a drawing made by one of the gentlemen, gives a minute description of the serpent as seen by them. The number and credibility of the witnesses, place beyond all doubt the existence of such an animal as a sea serpent.”*



This article was followed within a few days by the publication, in the *Niles Register*, of a letter from Captain Holdrege providing details of the encounter and an attestation of the veracity of the facts.

## Sea Serpent – George’s Bank June 16, 1826

*Niles Register*, 24 June 1826 (Reprinted from the *New York Mercantile Advertiser*) – account by Captain Holdrege

### *“The Sea Serpent*

*The New York Mercantile states that captain Holdrege, of the packet ship Silas Richards, (Minturn & Co.) has sent the following extraordinary account for publication, accompanied by a representation in pencil of the monster seen, which is precisely of the form of the sea serpent which so often visited the neighborhood of Boston. The editors add that captain Holdrege, as well as the respectable gentleman named below, are ready to verify the statement with their oaths, if necessary.”*

<sup>1</sup> 1 rod = about 5 meters

*“To the editors of the Mercantile Advertizer:”*

*“Dear sirs – If you should deem the following statement worthy of insertion in your valuable journal, the veracity of it can be attested by the undersigned.*

*Ship Silas Richards, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 1826 lat. 41 30, long. 67 32 <sup>1</sup>*

*While standing by the starboard bow, looking at the unruffled surface of the ocean, about 7 o'clock P.M. I perceived a sudden perturbation of the water, and immediately on that an object presented itself with its head above the water about four feet, resembling the above figure, which position it retained for nearly a minute, when he returned it to the surface, and kept approaching abreast of the vessel, at a distance of about fifty yards. I immediately called to the passengers on deck, several of whom observed it for the space of eight minutes, as it glided along slowly and undauntedly past the ship at the rate of about three miles an hour.*

*Its color was a dark dingy black, with protuberances similar to the above sketch; its visible length appeared about sixty feet, and its circumference ten feet. From former accounts which have been given of such a monster, and which have never been credited, this exactly corresponds, and I have no doubt but it is one of those species called Sea Serpent. It made a considerable wake in the water in its progress.*

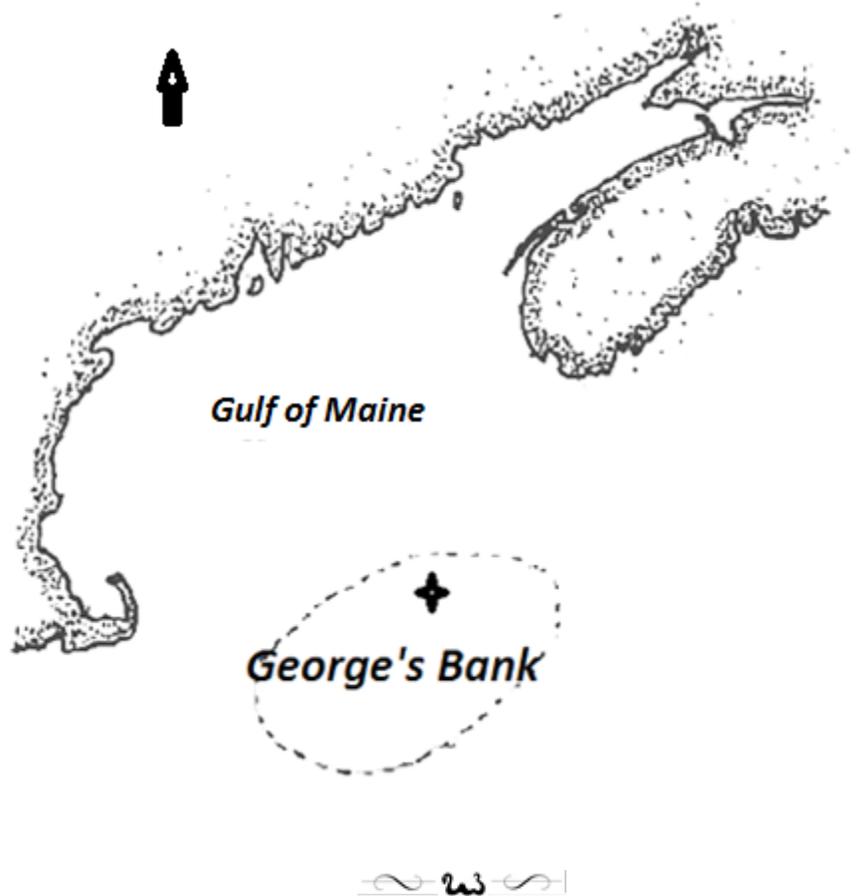
*I remain you obedient servant,*

*HENRY HOLDREGE, captain*

*The foregoing is attested by the following gentlemen, passengers; Wm. Warburton, of Pentonville, England, Duncan Kennedy [Clifford, England] Thomas Austin of Clifton, England, Thos. Silver, and Jas. Magee, of New York.”*

What is unusual in this report is that it comes from a respected Captain of a commercial vessel. In later times, a Captain would risk his command, if not his career in making such a report. It would appear, that with the discussions going on in the public media and scientific circles at the time, Captain Holdrege felt comfortable enough not just to share his observations with the local press, but, actually personally, submit his observations to them upon his making landfall.

<sup>1</sup> These co-ordinates place the sighting just south of the international maritime boundary established by the World Court of Justice in 1984



Captain Holdrege's account was then validated by the letter of one of the passenger's mentioned in his letter, Mr. William Warburton.

### **Sea Serpent – George's Bank June 16, 1826**

**Eugene Batchelder (1849) – account by passenger Wm. Warburton**

#### ***"The American Sea Serpent***

*The following letter respecting this huge animal was addressed to Robert Barclay, Esq., of Bury Hill, Surrey by Mr. Warburton, a gentleman belonging to the house of Barclay Brothers, & Co., London. The gentlemen, proceeding on his passage to America, on board the Silas Richards, Captain Holdridge, had an opportunity of beholding this sea monster, on Friday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, off St. George's Banks.*

Pentonville, 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1826

Dear Sir;

*Having been informed by your grandson, Mr. Robert Reynolds, that you were desirous of possessing a sketch of the Sea Serpent as seen by me in crossing the Atlantic, and to have some account of the same, in compliance with your wishes, I have annexed a rough pencil drawing of the monster, as it appeared during the time when its head was elevated above the water, and I shall state the particulars attending this novel exhibition.*

*The captain and myself were standing on the starboard side of the vessel, looking over the bulwark,<sup>1</sup> and remarking how perfectly smooth was the surface of the sea. It was about half-past six o'clock, P.M., and a cloudless sky. On a sudden we heard a rushing in the water ahead of the ship. At first we imagined it to be a whale spouting; and turning to the quarter from whence the sound proceeded, we observed the serpent in the position as it appears in the sketch, slowly approaching at more than the rate of two miles an hour, in a straight direction. I suppose were hardly going through the water so fast, for there was scarcely a breath of wind. I must premise, that I never had heard of the existence of such an animal.*

*I instantly exclaimed, "Why, there is a sea-snake!" "That is the Sea-Serpent!" exclaimed the captain; "and I would give my ship and cargo to catch the monster." I immediately called to the passengers, who were all down below; but only five or six came up, among whom was Miss Magee, the daughter of a merchant in New York. The remainder refused to come up, saying there had been too many hoaxes of that kind already.*

*I was too eager to stand parleying with them, and I returned to the captain.*

*In the same slow style the serpent passed the vessel at about the distance of fifty yards from us, neither turning his head to the right nor left. As soon as his head had reached the stern of the vessel, he gradually laid it down in a horizontal position with his body, and floated along like the mast of a vessel.*

*That there was upwards of sixty feet visible is clearly shown by the circumstance, that the length of the ship was upwards of one hundred and twenty feet, and at the time his head was off the stern, the other end (as much as was above the surface) had not passed the main-mast.*

*The time we saw him, as described in the drawing, was two minutes and a half. After he had declined his head, we saw him for about twenty minutes ahead, floating like an enormous log of timber. His motion in the water was meandering like that of an eel, and the wake left behind was like that occasioned by the passing of small craft through the water. We had but one harpoon on board, and the ship's long-boat was, for the time being, converted into a cow-house. We had two guns on board, but no ball.*

*Two days after we saw him, he was seen by another vessel off Cape Cod, about two hundred miles from where he made his appearance to us. This intelligence reached*

*New York about four days after we arrived there, and the description given exactly corresponded with the foregoing.*

*I dined one day at the hotel of New York with Sir Isaac Coffin<sup>2</sup>, who discredited the existence of such an animal, which was reported to have been seen by Capt. Bennet, of Boston, about five years back; but as I assured him I had never heard, previously, even the report of such a monster, and that I was an Englishman, he gave me full credit to it. The sketch I gave him corresponded with the description that was circulating at that time. The humps on the back resembled in size and shape those of the dromedary.*

*I remain, dear sir, yours respectfully,*

*'WM. WARBURTON'*

*(National Gazette of Philadelphia)*



This letter was vaulted from the pages of a local newspaper to the heart of the scientific debate on the existence of giant sea serpents with its publication in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* in 1827.

## **Sea Serpent – George’s Bank June 16, 1826 – a scientific perspective**

**Dr. Hooker (1827)**

### ***“Additional Testimony Respecting the Sea Serpent of the American Seas”***

*“That which has been the principal inducement for us to present this imperfect paper to the public, is a letter which we have had the pleasure of seeing addressed to Robert Barclay Esq. of Bury Hall, Surry (Surrey?), from Mr Warburton, a gentleman belonging to the house of Barclay, Brothers and Company, London. That gentleman, proceeding in his passage to America, on board the Silas Richards, New York packet, Captain Holdrege, had an opportunity of beholding this sea monster of Friday the 16<sup>th</sup> of June off St. George’s Banks. But his own plain statement must be presumed far more satisfactory to every candid mind than any account extracted from his letter.”*

Dr. Hooker then reproduced William Warburton’s letter in its entirety with no alterations. He finishes his article with the following:

*“We sincerely hope that these few bare facts may satisfy all upon this much agitated question; at least we think they must remove the ideal connection between “our” serpents and*

*“that sea-snake, enormous curled  
Whose monstrous circle girds the world”*

<sup>1</sup> bulwark – the sides of a ship extended above the level of the deck

<sup>2</sup> Sir Isaac Coffin – a retired, Boston-born British vice-Admiral (of the Blue), baronet

*“It can now no longer be considered in association with hydras and mermaids, for there has been nothing said with regard to it inconsistent with reason. It may at least be assumed as a sober fact in Natural History, quite unconnected with the gigantic exploits of the God Thor, or the fanciful absurdities of Scandinavian mythology. We cannot suppose, that the most ultra-skeptical can now continue to doubt with regard to facts attested by such highly respectable witnesses.”*

This insertion of a report from the popular press into the scientific literature of the time appears to have elevated the debate within the scientific community, Dr. Hooker having drawn the sea serpent out of the company of those icons of marine mythology, the *hydra* the many headed serpent of Greek Mythology and the *mermaid* of seafarers’ lore.

Dr. Hooker’s report resulted in the reading of a paper “On Sea Serpents” by John Shute Duncan to a meeting of the Ashmolean Society in Oxford (Duncan, 1833). He gave a summary on the state of knowledge of sea monsters, both ancient and recent and noted that:

*“The report of the Linnaean Society of New England, and the letter published by Dr. Hooker, leave no room for doubt that some imperfectly known animal or animals, of enormous magnitude, have been seen in the Atlantic Ocean.”*

The story passed from the pens of a sea captain and his respected passenger to the pages of the public press, to the pages of a prominent scientific journal to the ears of the members of one of the most respected scientific organizations of the time – a true testimony to the “power of the pen”.



In 1892 Anton Cornelis Oudemans, Director of the Royal Zoological Gardens at The Hague summed up the information provided in these accounts. He also includes the illustration of the serpent that was noted in the preceding reports.



(William Warburton’s sketch - reproduced from Oudemans, 1892)

He concluded:

*“The description of the sea-serpent given here, may be summed up in the following words: When it came to the surface a rushing of the water was heard. The part which appeared out of water was about sixty feet in length. It held its head some feet above the surface of the water, swimming at a rate of two miles an hour, and showing bunches on its back.*

*After some moments it gradually laid down its head (head?) in a horizontal position with its body in a straight line, using the mast of the vessel, evidently swimming with its body in a straight line, using its flappers. The wake which it left behind was equal to that of a small vessel. Nothing is said of the skin, which evidently was smooth, otherwise the scales would have been seen and mentioned, for the animal appeared not far from the vessel. Nor does the sketch show any scales. The position of the head in the sketch, making nearly a right angle with its neck, may have led others to say it resembled that of a horse, if we take moreover in consideration that some individuals have a mane. The individual seen by Captain Holdrege and Mr. Warburton had no mane.”*



## **Sea Serpent - Cranberry Lake Cape Breton c. 1827**

**Helen Creighton (1955)**

Helen Creighton, in her book *Bluenose Ghosts* makes reference to earlier appearances of the serpent described in the entry for Cranberry Lake, 1927. The reference is to recognize the appearance of the serpent over the last hundred years.



In 1831 Nova Scotia entered a new era of scientific discourse and education, not just limited to the professional classes, but also promoting educational opportunities among working and middle class men with the founding of the Mechanics' Institute in Halifax. This allowed a forum for the presenting and sharing of ideas and objects relating to the fields of Natural Philosophy and Natural History.



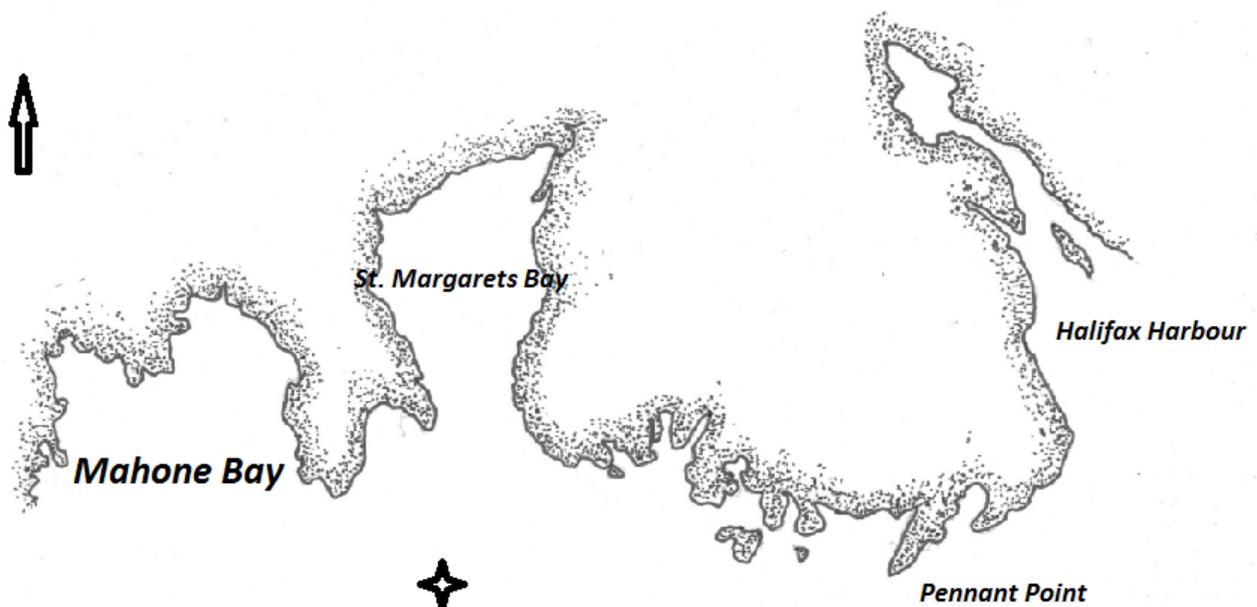
The following account comes from the recollections of several military personnel stationed at the small garrison town of Halifax, (half-way along the south-eastern seaboard of Nova Scotia), taking time off from the rigours of army life to relax and do some fishing. In many aspects, this has just the right feel for an unexpected adventure experienced by military personnel on their own time. It is noted that this British naval presence at Halifax was part of the Halifax/Bermuda posting, so it would not be unexpected to find the personnel would have had some exposure to the creatures on the sea.

## Sea Serpent - Mahone Bay, May, 1833

*The Zoologist*, volume 5, pp 1714 – 1715, 1847

*“On the 15th of May, 1833, a party, consisting of Captain Sullivan, Lieutenants Maclaughlan and Malcom of the Rifle Brigade, Lieutenant Lyster of the Artillery, and Mr. Ince of the Ordnance, started from Halifax in a small yacht for Mahone Bay, some forty miles eastward, on a fishing excursion. The morning was cloudy, and the wind at S.S.E., and apparently rising; by the time we reached Chebucto Head, as we had no pilot with us, we deliberated whether we should proceed or put back, but, after a consultation, we determined on the former, having lots of ports on our lee.*

*Previously to leaving town, an old man-of-war’s-man we had along with us busied himself in inquiries as to our right course; he was told to take his departure from the Bull Rock, off Pennant Point, and that a W.N.W. course would bring us direct on Iron Bound Island at the entrance of Mahone or Meckleburgh Bay; he, however, unfortunately told us to steer W.S.W., nor corrected his error for five or six hours; consequently we had gone a long distance off the coast.*



*Position of sighting estimated based on course and wind*

*We had run about half the distance, as we supposed, and were enjoying ourselves on deck, smoking our cigars, and getting our tackle ready for the approaching campaign against the salmon, when we were surprised by the sight of an immense shoal of grampuses<sup>1</sup>, which*

<sup>1</sup>At that time, the term “grampus” was used to describe what we now call the Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*, Linnaeus, 1758)

*appeared in an unusual state of excitement, and which, in their gambols approached so close to our little craft, that some of the party amused themselves by firing at them with rifles: at this time we were jogging on at about five miles an hour, and must have been crossing St Margaret's Bay: I merely conjecture where we were, as we had not seen land since a short time after leaving Pennant Point.*

*Our attention was presently diverted from the whales and "such small deer" by an exclamation from Dowling, our man-of-war's-man, who was sitting to leeward, of, "Oh! Sirs, look here!" we were started into a ready compliance, and saw an object which banished all other thoughts, save wonder and surprise."*

*At the distance of from 150 to 2 00 yards on our starboard bow we saw the head and neck of some denizen of the deep, precisely like those of a common snake, in the act of swimming, the head so far elevated and thrown forward by the curve of the neck as to enable to see water under and beyond it.*

*The creature rapidly passed, leaving a regular wake, from the commencement of which to the fore part which was out of the water, we judged the length to be about eighty feet; and this is within rather than beyond the mark. Were of course all taken aback at the sight, and with staring eyes and in speechless wonder, stood gazing at it for a full half a minute: there could be no mistake, no delusion, and we were all perfectly satisfied that we had been favoured with a view of the "true and veritable sea serpent," which had been generally considered to have existed only in the brain of some Yankee skipper, and treated as a tale not much entitled to belief. Dowling's exclamation is worthy of record,*

*"Well, I've sailed in all parts of the world, and have seen rum sights in my time, but this is the queerest thing I ever see," and surely Jack Dowling was right. It is most difficult to give correctly the dimensions of any object in the water. The head of the creature we set down at about six feet in length, and that portion of the neck which we saw, at the same; the extreme length, as before stated, at between eighty and one hundred feet. The neck in thickness equaled the bole of a moderate sized tree.<sup>2</sup> The head and neck were a dark brown or nearly black colour, streaked with white in irregular streaks. I do not recall seeing any part of the body.*

*Such is the rough account of the sea serpent, and all in the party who saw it are still in the land of the living, - Lyster in England, Malcom in New South Wales with his regiment, and the remainder still vegetating in Halifax.<sup>3</sup>*

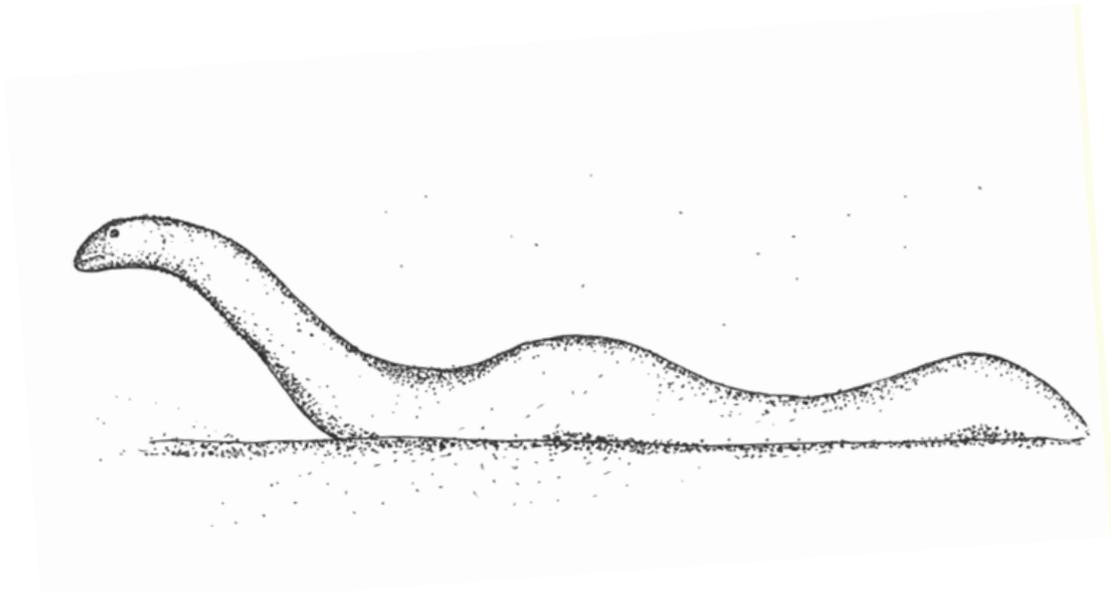
<sup>2</sup> One should keep in mind that what would have been considered a moderate-sized tree of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century would have been quite different from that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Based on the average size of red spruce and yellow birch trees of mature age that would give a diameter of about 50-60 cm (breast-height) at that time.

<sup>3</sup> an interesting observation regarding Halifax evidently being considered as a bit of a Military backwater

Signed: W. Sullivan, Captain, Rifle Brigade  
A. Maclachlan, Lieutenant R.B.  
G.P. Malcom, Ensign, R.B.  
B. O'Neal Lyster, Lieutenant, Artillery  
H. Ince, Ordnance Storekeeper, Halifax"

June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1831  
August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1824  
August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1830  
June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1816

*"[The dates are those on which these gentlemen received their respective commission. I am not aware of their present rank. I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Ince for this interesting communication; this gentleman received it from his brother, Commander J. M. R. Ince, R.N. It is written by their uncle, Mr. Henry Ince, the Ordnance Store-keeper at Halifax, Nova Scotia – Edward Newman (editor of the Zoologist)]"*



*Image derived from description in text*

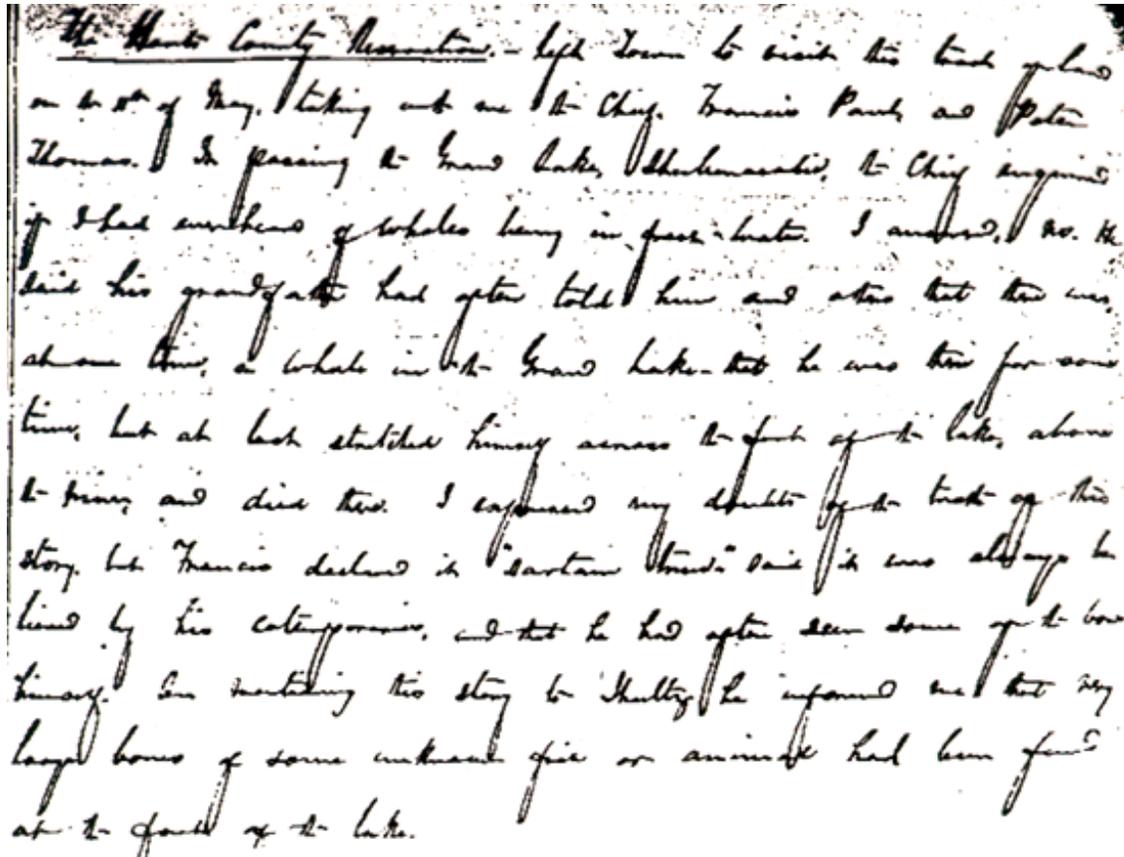


Reports of possible large aquatic creatures were not limited to marine waters. Indeed, the future Premier of Nova Scotia Mr. Joseph Howe was questioned about just such an occurrence in what is now called Shubenacadie Grand Lake in Hants County.

## Sea Creature – Shubenacadie Grand Lake, May 1844

Notes of Joseph Howe dated 11 May 1844

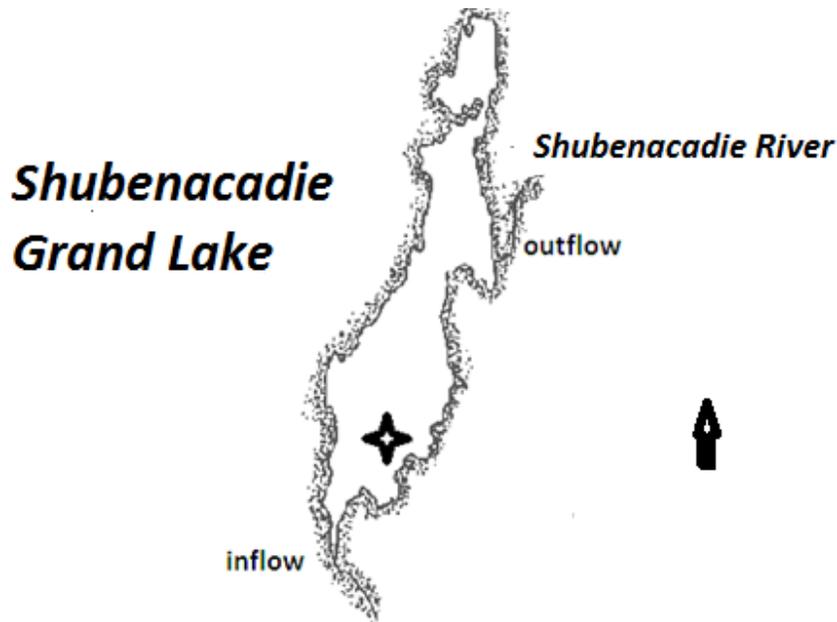
The following is extracted from the diaries of Joseph Howe:



The Hants County Reservations. - left town to visit this tract of land on 11th of May, taking with me the Chief Francis Paul and Peter Thomas. In passing the Grand Lake, Shubenacadie, the Chief enquired if I had ever heard of whales being in fresh water. I answered no. He said his grandfather had often told him and other that there was, at one time, a whale in the Grand Lake that he was there for some time, but at last, stretched himself across the foot of the lake, above the Pines and died there. I explained my doubts of the truth of the story, but Francis declared it "sartin truth" said it was always believed by his contemporaries and that he had often seen some of the bones himself. In mentioning the story to Schultz, he informed me that very large bones of some unknown fish or animals had been found at the foot of the lake.

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The Schultz family operated the Schultz Inn (early 19<sup>th</sup> century estate called “Summerfield”). This was considered a popular stop-over on the Post Road between Halifax and Truro, on Grand Lake. As such, being a prominent business family, it would have been the logical contact for queries by Mr. Howe (He had been noted as having stayed there in the past). There is, unfortunately, no evidence for the existence of those bones at this time as the original structures were lost in a fire in the late 1850s.



Due to the relative shallowness of the river at the outlet of the Lake into the Shubenacadie River even during spring run-off it is unlikely that it would be able to support the movement of a large cetacean into the lake. In addition, high waters in the spring would have been accompanied by increased current speeds, a feature with which large marine animals would not have been able to cope. The only recorded exceptions to this are smaller marine mammal species. There are records of porpoises, seals and possibly dolphins as far up as the Nine-Mile River near Elmsdale, Hants County.

There is an outside possibility the animal may have been a large Atlantic sturgeon since these have occasionally been recorded from the upper reaches of the Shubenacadie River. There is an early Museum record of a 2.5 m specimen being speared by Alex Horne of Enfield in 1896, about 1 ½ miles below Shubenacadie Grand Lake with another specimen having been washed ashore near Wellington (at the foot of the Lake) in the late 1990s. Atlantic sturgeon may reach a size of up to 4.3 meters. However, being from a somewhat “primitive” group of fishes in skeletal structure, it is unlikely that the large bones noted by Chief Francis would have been from this species since cartilaginous bones would not preserve well.



The following reports would best be classified as coming from the “scientific” literature. They appear in a book authored by Sir Charles Lyell, an eminent scientist. Sir Charles Lyell, Baronet, was one of the most eminent geologists of the time. He visited North America several times, documenting his travels of 1845-46 in his book published in 1849. In this book, he recounts two reports of “sea serpents” submitted by his friend and colleague Pictou-born Sir John William Dawson, who eventually rose to the position of principal McGill University, is considered one of the founders of the Geological Survey of Canada.

It should be noted that Lyell provides a report of a sea serpent sighting from 1845 before presenting the 1844 report.

## **Sea Serpent - near Arisaig, October 1844**

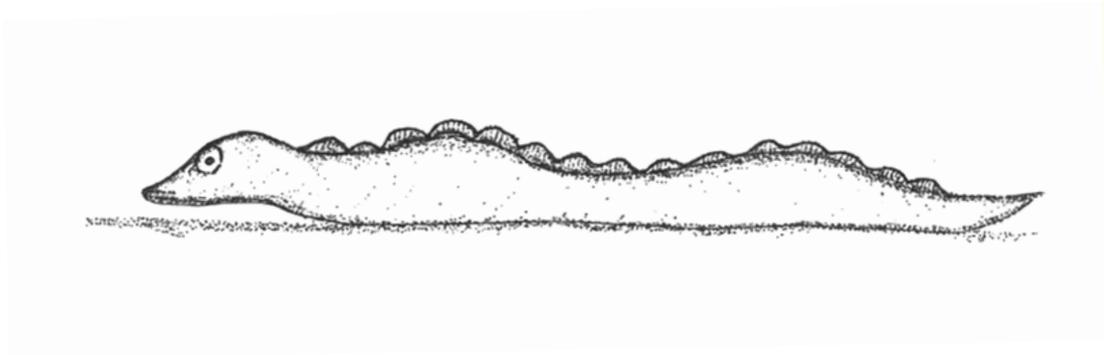
**Sir Charles Lyell (1849)**

*“A similar creature (see Merigomish, August 1845 - below) swam slowly past the pier at Arisaig, near the east end of Nova Scotia, and, there being only a slight breeze at the time, was attentively observed by Mr. Barry, a millwright of Pictou, who told Mr. Dawson he was within 120 feet of it, and estimated its length at sixty feet, and the thickness of its body at three feet. It had humps on the back, which seemed too small and close together to be bends of the body.*

*The body also appeared to move in long undulations, including many of the smaller humps. In consequence of this motion, the head and tail were sometimes both out of sight and sometimes both above water, as represented in the annexed outline, given from memory. The head, a. was rounded and obtuse in front, and was never elevated more than a foot above the surface. The tail was pointed, appearing like half of a mackerel’s tail. The colour of the part seen was black.*

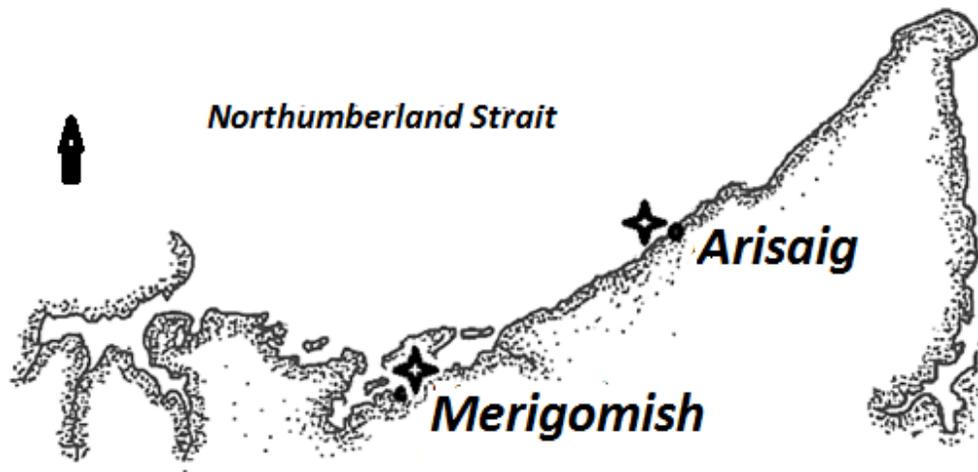
*It was suggested by Mr. Dawson that a swell in the sea might give the deceptive appearance of an undulating movement, as it is well known “that a stick held horizontally at the surface of water when there is a ripple seems to have an uneven outline.” But Mr. Barry replied that he observed the animal very attentively, having read accounts of the sea serpent, and feels confident that the undulations were not those of the water.”*

It is interesting to see Dawson try to determine the “profile” of the creature. This is a recurring issue with such reports in that there appears to be an effort made to confirm whether such serpents actually had “humps” or protuberances, or whether what was actually seen was bends in the body, suggesting a form of propulsion differing from that of the common serpent.



*Image derived from description provided*

There is further discussion of sea serpents in the context of sightings in Boston, Norway, etc. This is in the chapter devoted to discussions of possible fossil sea serpents or Zeuglodon<sup>1</sup>



The following is the second report in Lyell's book, also submitted by Dawson. Note the reference in the text to the observation having been made by two "intelligent observers", perhaps in an attempt to give the report more credulity.

<sup>1</sup> *Zeuglodon*, now named *Basilosaurus* was an Eocene epoch (56 to 33.9 MYBP) fossil discovered in Alabama in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Lyell and Dawson's time it was thought to be a reptile, but turned out to be a marine mammal.

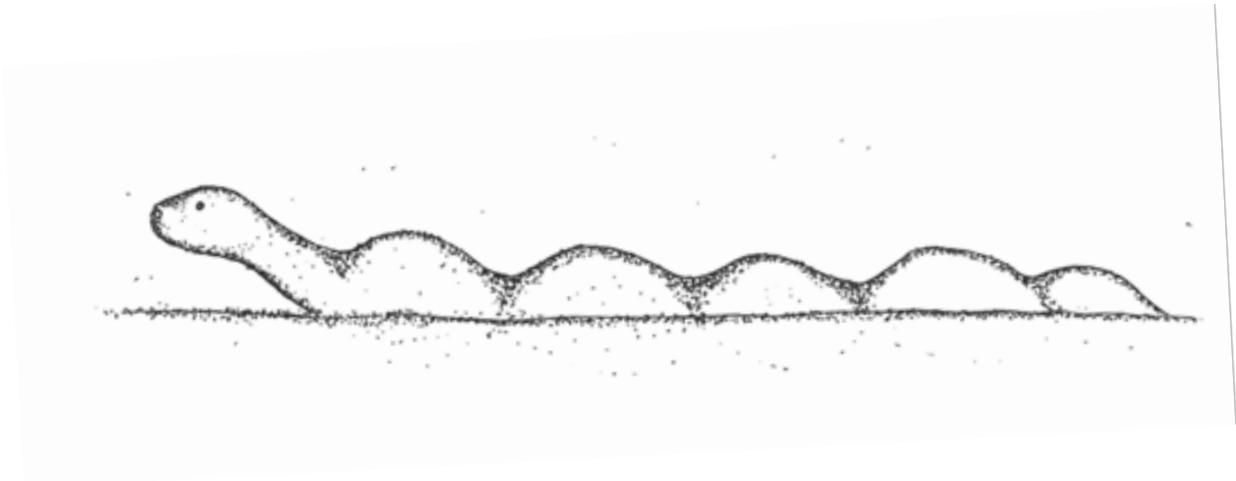
## Sea Serpent - off Merigomish 1845

Sir Charles Lyell (1849)

*“At the very time when I had every data to give an answer to the question whether I really believed the great fossil skeleton from Alabama to be that of the sea serpent formerly seen on the coast near Boston, I received news of the re-appearance of the same sea serpent in a letter from my friend Mr. J. W. Dawson, of Pictou Nova Scotia. This geologist, with whom I explored Nova Scotia in 1842, said he was collecting evidence for me of the appearance, in the month of August 1845, at Merigomish, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, of a marine monster, about 100 feet long, seen by two intelligent observers nearly aground in calm water, within 200 feet of the beach, where it remained in sight about half an hour, and then got off with difficulty.*

*One of the witnesses went up a bank in order to look down upon it. They said it sometimes raised its head (which resembled that of a seal) partially out of the water. Along its back were a number of protuberances, which in the opinion of the observer on the beach, were true humps, while the other thought they were produced by vertical flexures of the body. Between the head and the first protuberance there was a straight part of the back of considerable length, and this part was generally above water. The colour appeared black, and the skin had a rough appearance. The animal was seen to bend its body into a circle, and again to unbend it with rapidity. It was slender in proportion to its length.*

*After it had disappeared in deep water, its wake was visible for some time. There were no indications of paddles seen”*



*Image derived from description provided*

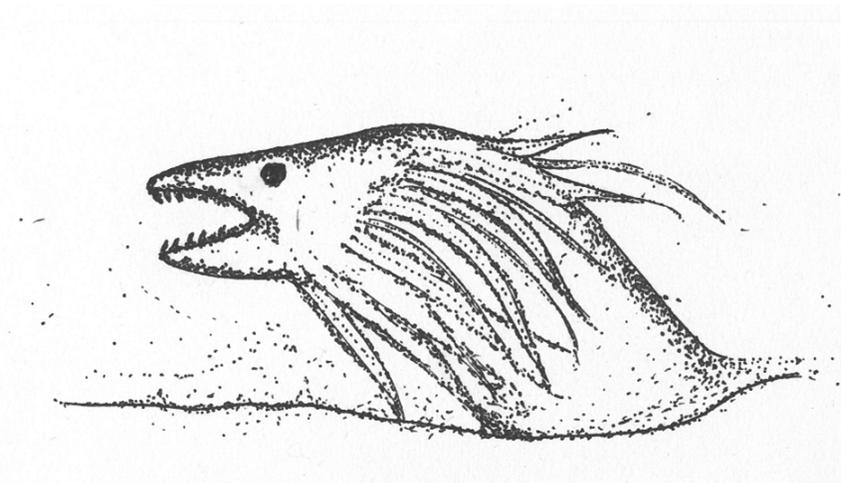


The following is one of four Serpent reports documented by the Rev. John Ambrose, a country parson and zoologist from the South Shore of Nova Scotia. He was an original member of the Nova Scotia Institute of Science (founded in 1862 upon the dissolution of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute) and was proposed as a member of the first Council, but as he lived at a distance from Halifax he could take but little active part in its work; and in 1890 was elected a corresponding member. The article from which these are extracted summarizes observations made and events recorded from the period when he worked as a clergyman at St Margaret's Bay, Halifax County.

## **Sea Serpent - in St Margaret's Bay - Mill Cove- 1846**

**Rev. John Ambrose (1867)**

*"In the summer of 1846, James Wilson, teacher, and John Boehner, both of Peggy's Cove, being on board a schooner lying off Mill Cove, on the west side of St Margaret's Bay, saw in the water at a distance, something which they took to be a large fleet of nets. Their attention having been for a few moments drawn off by the appearance of a school of grampuses entering the Bay, they were surprised, on again looking at the supposed fleet of nets, to see it straightening itself out, and moving off so swiftly as to leave a wake as large and as much agitated as that of a schooner in swift motion. They now perceived the object to be a large Serpent, with head about the size of a barrel, and a body in proportion, and with something like a mane flowing down its neck. It carried its head erect with a slight inclination forward. A fisherman belonging to Mill Cove, now came rowing with all his fast decreasing strength, to the schooner, and had barely leaped in over the side, fainted with terror on the deck. Wilson thinks the animal was about from seventy to one hundred feet in length. Its colour seemed to be a sort of steel-gray."*



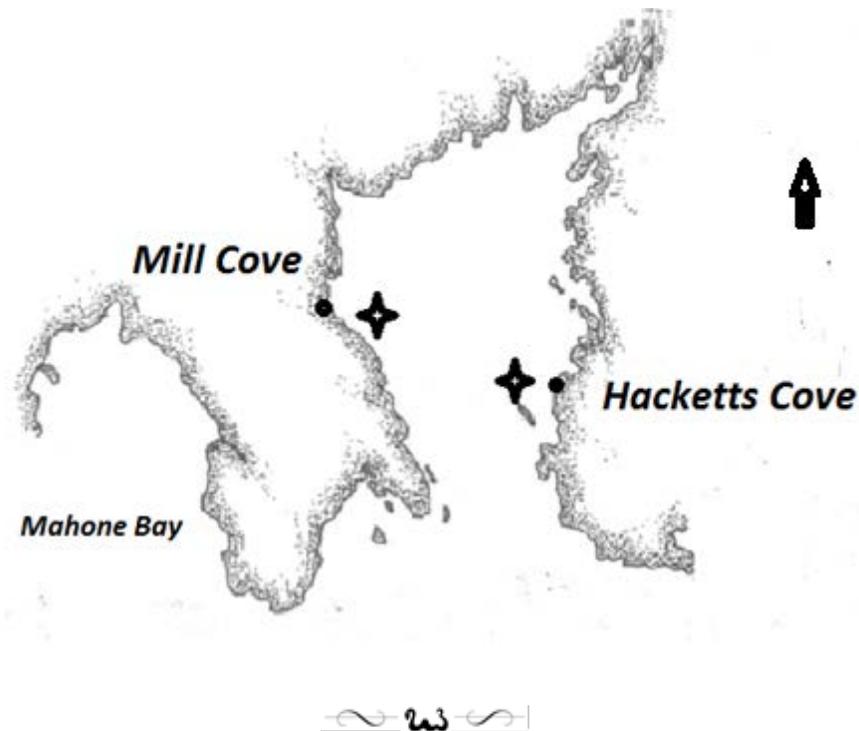
*Image derived from description provided*



## Sea Serpent - in St Margaret's Bay - Hacketts' Cove – 1846

Rev. John Ambrose (1867)

*“George Dauphiney, Esq of Boutilier’s Point Lower, Ward, also saw this or a similar serpent (Wilson and Boehner - 1846) near Hackett’s Cove, as he was inadvertently rowing over it in his skiff. He made no examination of it but rowed away from so dangerous a proximity, as fast as possible.”*



## Opening of Scientific debate on Sea Serpents - by the *Zoologist* magazine 1847

The editor of the *Zoologist* magazine, Edward Newman, opened up the pages of his journal to open-minded discussion of the topic of marine sea serpents. This was prefaced by an editorial taking critics to task for “*a priori* approaches which ignored fact and observation” on the grounds that the sea serpent “ought-not-to-be”. The *Zoologist* was a monthly natural history magazine first published in 1843, out of London, England, devoted to the animal kingdom, hosting full articles, notes, comments and reviews, and, as in this case, a forum for the discussion of current issues in zoology.



## A Plea for the North American Sea Serpent

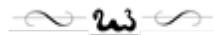
Dr. Charles Cogswell (1847)

Dr. Cogswell, eminent Nova Scotia physician, naturalist and philanthropist as well as a member of the Mechanics Institute and the first President of the Nova Scotia Literary and Scientific Society took up the challenge presented by Mr. Newman. In his article, published in the *Zoologist* in 1847 (vol 5), he put the whole question and approach into the investigation of sea serpent accounts into critical perspective.

He summarized the state of knowledge of marine serpents at the time. In addition he put into context the question of size of animals reported, pointing out that some species of tropical "land" serpents had been found of size quite comparable to those being reported in the oceans (This is very-much in line with the argument presented by William Lee in his 1817 letter.) His principal point was that observation by individuals should not be ridiculed, reports having been made by members of a wide cross section of society from fishermen to "*those whose character and station in life command respect*".

Regarding his own opinion on these *mostra natantia*, he concluded:

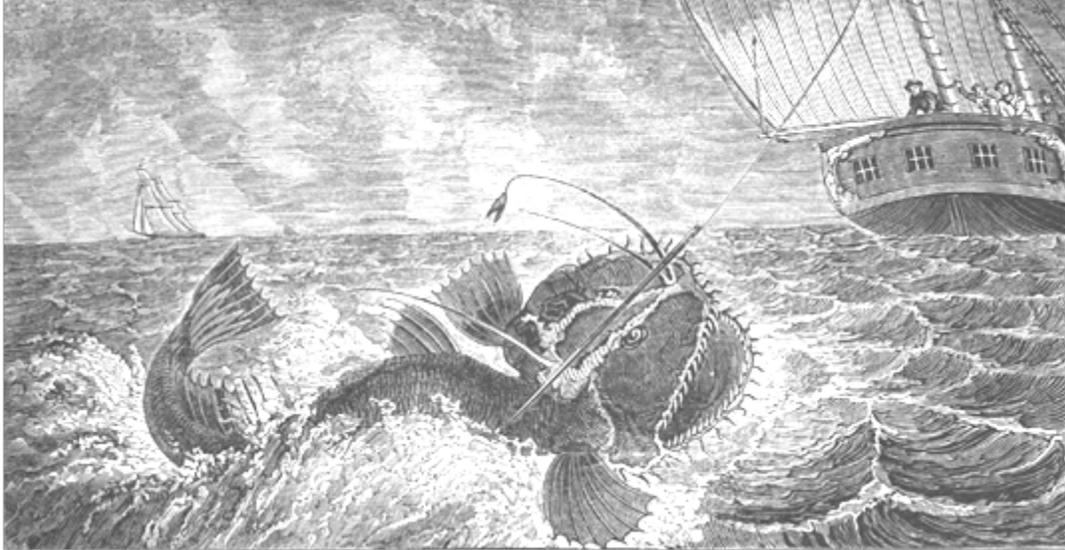
*"Without committing myself to anything more than a belief that the subject is one fairly entitled to be considered an open question — open to the unrestrained testimony of future casual observers, equally with the criticism of the scientific — I feel assured that I cannot better express the opinion which every candid peruser of what has been stated must be prepared to arrive at, than by using the words of a naturalist who has given his attention to these remarks: "The argument appears to me perfectly satisfactory in favour of at least a suspension of judgment on the subject."*



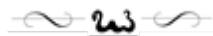
The concept of large and mysterious creatures inhabiting the seas captured not only the imagination of the public, but was, on occasion found in the writings of popular authors, who, perhaps may have equated strange looking creatures with "large" strange looking creatures.

### Popular literature 1848

John Sherburne Sleeper, writing under the *nom-de plume* of Hawser Martingale included the following illustration of one of the monstrous fishes his characters encountered. It was, in fact, a goosefish or monkfish. Note the suggestion of massive size by its juxtaposition with the vessel, as well as the size of the harpoon. This fish, *Lophius americanus* in fact only reaches a maximum length of around 1.2 m. However, the suggested size plays well into the narrative of monstrous creatures of the sea.



*Image from Sleeper (1848)*



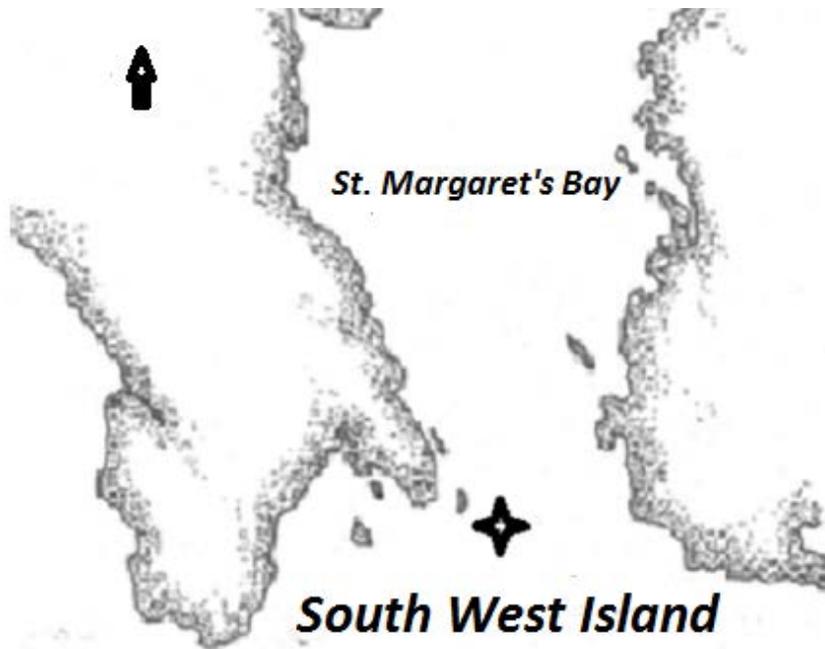
This is the report of the third sea serpent encounter in the article by Reverend Ambrose. The observations made and description provided by these four observers is exceptionally detailed when compared to most other reports. This account clearly shows that the power of careful observation is not just in the purview of the professional scientist, but lays in us all. Those who made their living from the sea or from land tended to be very observant when it came to change or novel appearances, as these novelties could have a profound influence on their well-being and livelihood

### **Sea Serpent - in St Margaret's Bay - South West Island - 1849**

**Rev. John Ambrose (1867)**

*"In the summer of 1849, Joseph Holland, now living near Port Medway, being in company with Jacob Kedy and two other fishermen, on South West Island, at the west side of the entrance of this Bay, saw something very large and long in appearance, swimming on the surface of the water, at some little distance from the land. Curiosity at length induced the men to launch a flat, and row out for a nearer inspection of the object, which apparently did not perceive them until they had rowed over where it was swimming. They now found it to be no other than an immense snake, about sixty feet in length, and as large in circumference as a puncheon. It was proportioned like an eel, i.e., tapering towards the extremities, with no caudal fin perceptible, but one very high fin, or row of spines, each of about one inch in diameter at the base, erected along its back, serving indeed for a dorsal fin, like the folding fin of the *Thynnus vulgaris*, or *albicore*..*

*This spinal erection seemed to occupy about one third of its length, each end of it being about equi-distant from the Serpent's extremities; and at a distance, somewhat resembling, in size and appearance, the sail of a skiff. The animal's back was covered with scales, about six inches long and three inches wide, extending in rows across the body, i.e., the longer diameter of scale being in the direction of the circumference of the body. The colour of the back was black. The men had no opportunity of seeing the belly, but what the Americans would call, "a smart chance" of becoming acquainted with the inside of it; for the creature, perceiving the boat, rised its head about ten feet above water, turned towards it, and opening its jaws, showed the inside of its mouth red in colour and well-armed with teeth about three inches long, shaped like those of a cat-fish. The men now thinking it high time to terminate the interview, pulled vigorously for shore, followed for some distance by the snake, which at length gave up chase and disappeared.*



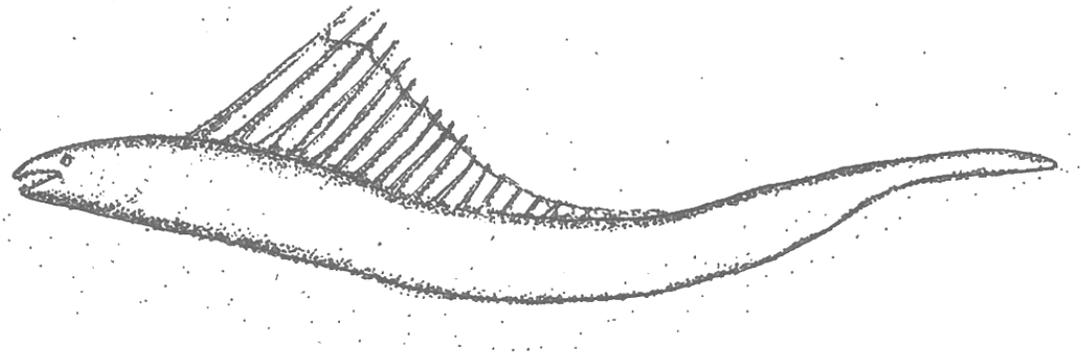
*Rev. Ambrose continues, in summation of the sightings...*

*"The Sea Serpent has not been seen in St Margaret's Bay since 1849. It is supposed by some of the inhabitants of the place, that there were two of these creatures in the Bay, at or near the same time. This may account for the differences between the descriptions, especially in colour, given by Holland and Wilson. It may be that, in these as in other animals, the sexes are distinguished by peculiarities of shape and colour.*

*I have not been able to ascertain the motion of these animals in swimming, whether vertical or horizontal in its sinuosities. Wilson's first idea of the corks would seem to indicate a succession of vertical motions.*

*The eyes of these Serpents must, like those of all their congeners on land, be small, as we never find much said of them in hurried observations, or by persons who have seen the animals from a distance.*

*The discrepancy which seems to exist between the descriptions of the mane, may be accounted for on the supposition that it is capable of erection or depression at pleasure, like the dorsal fin of a fish, and that the upper edge of it, when depressed, is pendulous. Indeed, the spines seen by Holland favour this hypothesis."*



*Image derived from description provided*

In this account, it becomes evident that the animal described fits more-closely with the general description of a large fish-like creature rather than that of a serpent. Within the scientific literature related to fish size, shape and form, this shape is referred to as “*anguilliform*”, or eel-like. So, with this particular report and description one’s attention is drawn to the possibility of this and similar reports, in fact, potentially relating to large species of hitherto undescribed species of fish rather than serpents.

A comprehensive review of the fishes of North and Middle American waters was not produced until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by David Starr Jordan.



This is the second report of a sea serpent within the confines of Halifax harbour. The relatively small size of this animal is noted in the second article, where it is suggested that this was not the “old fellow”, but rather just a young-one.

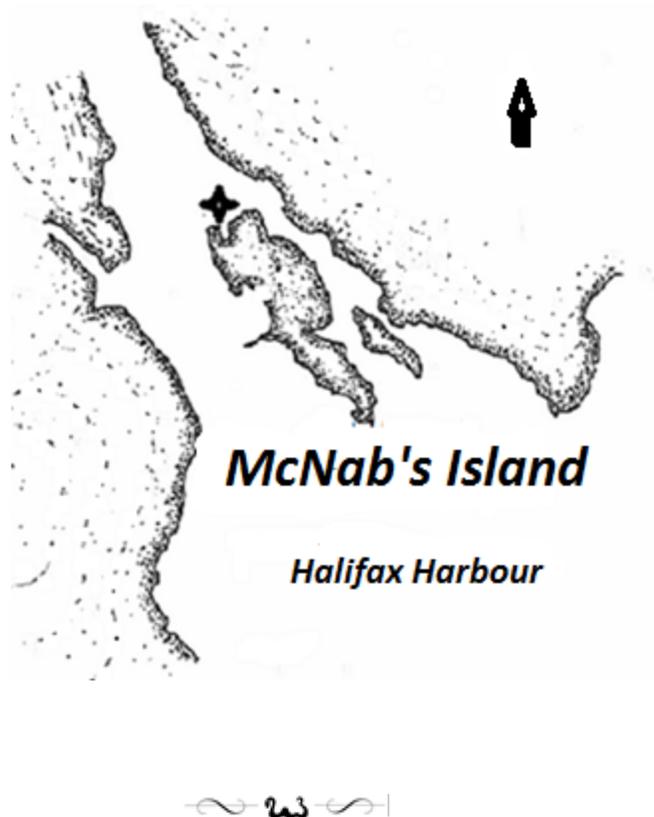
### **Sea Serpent – McNab’s Island – Ives Shoal 2 August 1853**

***The British North American, Wednesday August 03, 1853, page3 column 1***

### **Sea Serpent**

*'A miniature specimen of the famous sea-serpent was seen yesterday morning by Mr. Peter McNab Jr., between the red buoy<sup>1</sup> and the N. E. point of McNab's Island, going through the water at a rapid rate. The animal was visible for fully an hour, appeared to be about twenty feet long, and had a head like an eel. Mr. McNab communicated the intelligence to the Merchant Reading Room.'*

This sighting even made the rounds of the early version of the "gossip column" as presented in another Halifax newspaper.



<sup>1</sup> Red Buoy = Ives knoll

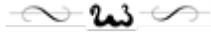
### **Sea Serpent – McNab's Island – Ives Shoal 2 August 1853**

***Acadian Recorder, Saturday August 08, 1853, page 2 column 4***

### ***“Talk about Town”***

*“The talk is, that the Sea Serpent is on the coast again, looking out for the fall fleet. The talk is, that a young Mr. McNab and one Capt. Simeon Gates both saw him inside the harbor one day this week. Mr. McNab gives his dimensions “over 20 feet long” – had a very small head, two or three inches above the water.” The talk is that is not the old fellow at any rate. He was 150 feet long and had joints on his back like a row of barrels lashed together. The talk is it was a young un – just out of the egg.*

*The talk is, that the chap Simeon “heard swimming swiftly around his vessel, making a great splashing and blowing like a whale for nearly three quarters of an hour,” which frightened him, that is the boy that does the mischief and requires looking after. The talk is very like a whale. The talk is, it warnt a Sea Serpent at all – it was that ere Criminal Information described by Annand the other morning, making its way down the harbor. Just about the same size. The talk is, that “Massa Quimbo” is going down there fishing soon, says he will cotch it if it will take the hook. Talk is, that the only bait for these fellows is a bit of lawyer’s tongue. Talk is, that people who come across the Sea Serpent had better shut their eyes, like Paddy, and look the other way.*



The following narrative, by Jesse H. Lord, a journalist from Connecticut, published in 1866, is a story of his visit to a small Southwest Nova Scotia town 11 years earlier. The popular magazine, *Beadle’s Monthly* published it with no comment. The author of the story passed away from self-inflicted wounds 11 days after its publication.

In many aspects, the narrative adopts the style of many fictional pieces of literature of the day. However, when one examines the descriptive details provided in the text, one can see anatomical and behavioural elements that can only be derived from personal observation.

(The complete account has been included, in part, because of the nature of the use of the English language in the narrative. This includes what appears to be one of the most engaging descriptive phrases encountered in the sea serpent literature to date – *“a hideous length of undulating terror”* a phrase that would still be a prime candidate for a newspaper headline, even today).

## Sea Serpent - Green Harbour August 1855

*Beadle's Monthly*, No. XL – November 1866 ---Vol. II, article submitted by Jesse H. Lord

### ***“Two Views of the Great Sea Monster***

*Educated to demand a reason for every appeal to my credulity, in which I had the example and teaching of my father, who scouted fancy and imagination as defrauders of the judgment, I grew up almost a cynic – at least a critic. No authority short of that of eminent authors, the minister, or the Bible itself, was sufficient to exact the allegiance of my faith. The old traditions of the wonderful kraken, the stories of mermen and mermaids, and the accounts of the sea serpent, amused but never convinced me.*

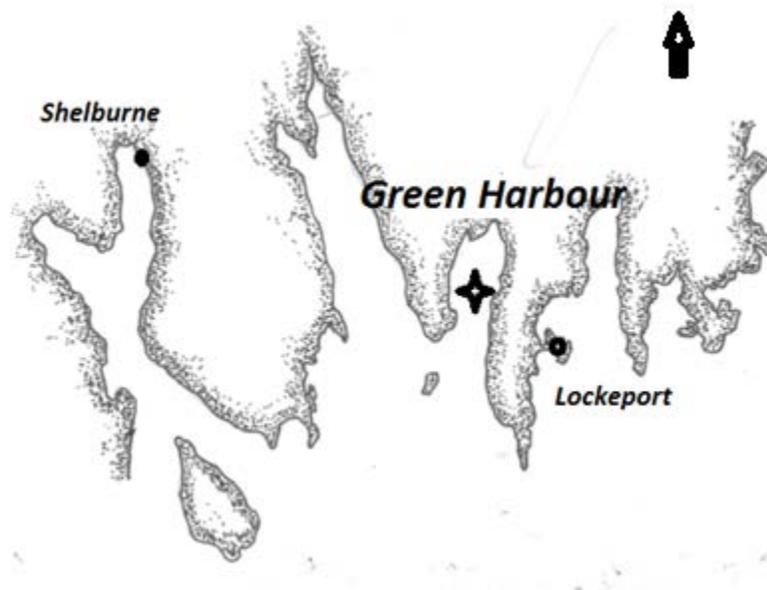
*Several years ago, however, I was afforded an opportunity to change my ideas in regard to the last-mentioned creature, and from memoranda and hastily written descriptions, penciled at the time, the following truthful sketch is made:*

*In the year 1855 I had occasion to visit the neighboring province of Nova Scotia, and was compelled, from the nature of my business, to remain there several months. I heard, while there, many curious stories related by persons well educated and intelligent, as well as by ignorant fishermen, which were so remarkable that I took the trouble of noting the circumstance, in the hope that time might give me the opportunity to unravel the mystery; and among these was the report of repeated appearances, in the harbors of the Province, of the veritable sea-serpent.*

*The shores of the peninsula, both on the Atlantic and the Bay of Fundy coast, are deeply indented with numerous capacious harbors, which, on the western side are subject to remarkable tides, or periodic currents, so powerful as to divert vessels crossing the mouth of the Bay from their course to the extent of many miles. All traders between Boston and Nova Scotia ports know the power of this current. To this fact may be attribute the frequent visits of the larger cetacean which seldom are seen near our shores. It is no uncommon thing, however, to see from some rocky point on the shore of the peninsula several whales of goodly dimensions almost in shore, and if the entrance of a harbor is open they sometimes come in on a visit. The warmth of the water in the Gulf Stream which impinges on the shores of the Province, may also account for the preference these animals exhibit for this part of the great sea; for the old idea that the icy seas of the polar circles are the chosen haunts of the whale is only half true. In the rearing of the young they prefer a warmer latitude.*

*In stating these facts I desire merely to indicate a possible reason for the visit of the sea-serpent to the shores of Acadie. These visits are not infrequent, as may readily be learned from a dweller on the lower shores of the Province, if he can be brought to overcome a sort of superstitious reticence which all dwellers in Acadie practice without perhaps accounting for it. The fishermen stand in dread of this monster although there are no reports of his ever having meddled with them. His presence is sufficient however to keep them on shore sometimes for weeks, and if horror of aspect and terror of magnitude in any case excuses fear, well may the hardy fishermen recoil even from sight of this hideous ophioidian.*

*In the month of August in the year named, I paid a visit, partly of business and partly of pleasure, to a small village called Green Harbor, situated on the southern shore of the Province. It was by nature a beautiful spot, with a fine, capacious anchorage, which with the outlying sea, afforded superior fishing grounds. The people were semi-agricultural and semi-piscatorial in their pursuits, tilling the land just enough to provide for their own wants, but depending on the sea for the means of barter and trade. The weighty portion of the farm work being done, the inhabitants of the village, male and female, busily engage in securing the ocean harvest. While the men fish, the women attend to the making and mending of the nets, and the dressing and curing of the daily catch of cod, mackerel and halibut. This last fish is cut into thin strips, which, being slightly salted, are spread upon the rocks, or laid on elevated stages of lattice and dried. They are then packed away for the winter's consumption or for barter. The cod and mackerel are salted in the usual way and constitute the principal exports of the place.*



*It was on the afternoon of a warm, quiet day in that month of August when I arrived. I drove up the one single street of the village and inquired for the house of Tom Larkin, whose acquaintance I had made on my trip from Boston. I found it without difficulty, a one-story cottage of wood, unpainted, and protected with an embankment of rockweed or kelp that reached almost to the window-sills. Great heaps of wood, in lengths from eight to twenty feet, rose behind the cottage almost to the ridge-pole, and, a barn of modest dimensions stood at the edge of a hill, at the foot of which the cottage was built. In front, across the rarely-used road, stretched a slope of grass and gray rocks, while beyond was the smooth water of the harbor and the boundless sea, whose restless surges beat upon the beach across the narrow strip which separated the cove from the Atlantic.*

Larkin, I ascertained, was not at home. He and his two boys were outside the harbor in their little sloop, "making a catch". His daughter, a stout, rosy maid of fourteen, led my horse to the barn and fed him. At her invitation, I partook of some cold salmon and barley bread, and we walked over to the "Pint", where half the women and children of the village were gathered. As we ascended the slope which overhung the mouth of the harbor, I noticed a great agitation among the women, some throwing up their hands, some running towards the village, giving utterance to screams of terror. 'Something's happened to the boats', said Jenny, "or one of the children has fell in". We sped up the hill, inquiring of the screaming fugitives what was the matter. The only reply I understood was, "The snake! The snake!". Jenny uttered an exclamation of alarm, but we went on. A fleet of fishing boats were pulling rapidly in for the mouth of the harbor with every appearance of apprehension. The men, we could see, were straining every nerve to reach shelter. It was an improvised race, each boat seemingly determined to outstrip the others. They did not appear to be a musket-shot from us as we looked down upon them from the cliff. I could see the agonized exertions of the men, and hear, plainly the swift and regular strokes of their oars. But nothing to cause the alarm was visible.

'It's a sheer panic,' said I, aloud.

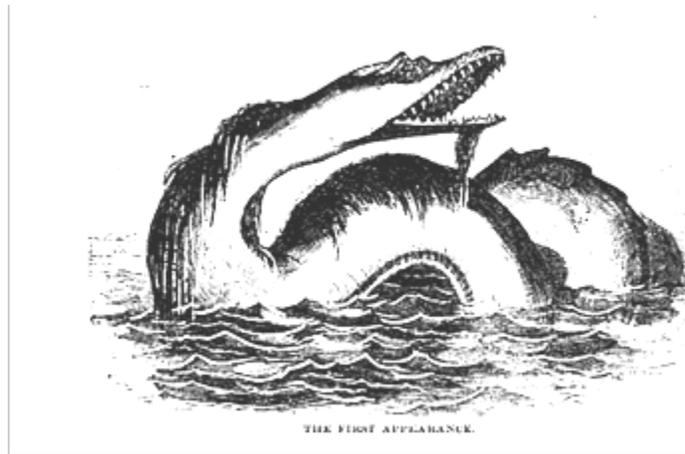
'It's the snake, and that's what it is,' answered Jenny.

'Can you see it?'

'No. He's sounding mayhap.' Then with a shriek she exclaimed: "There he comes! My God!" and she covered her eyes with her apron and pointed with her hand at the last lagging boat.

I looked, and sure enough, there was a monster apparently within a stone's throw of that two-masted white boat, whose crew of one man and two boys was making every effort to escape. Ah, never can I forget that sight! It was terrible! Slowly and majestically moved that hideous length of undulating terror, but fast enough to keep pace with the boats. Near what might be the head, rose a hump or crest, crowned with a waving mass of long, pendulous hair like a mane, while behind, for forty or fifty feet, slowly moved, or rolled, the spirals of his immense snake-like body. The movement was in vertical curves, the contortions of the back alternately rising and falling from the head to the tail, leaving behind a wake, like that of a screw-steamer, upon the glassy surface of the ocean.

The noise of the yells on the shore and the rattle of the oars in the row-locks did not seem to disturb him but on he came, and was now so near, as he followed the boats through the channel into the harbor that I believe I could have shot him from where I stood. In a moment he raised his head, from which the water poured in showers, and opening the horrid jaws he gave utterance to a noise resembling nothing so much as the hissing sound of steam from the escape pipe of a boiler. In spite of the knowledge of the security of my position, I shuddered as I gazed and heard.



*Image from Jesse Lord (1866)*

*He turned his head and displayed the inside of his jaws, armed with rows of glistening teeth, while from the lower section depended a long tuft of hair like a goat's beard. The deep-sunk, evil eye was defended by projection that gave it a most sinister expression. The head and upper portion of the body was of a dark dingy-blue, fading to a yellowish-white on the belly. Under the mane, as it floated about the neck, I could see the scales which defended the hide, glistening in the sun. The head appeared to be of a smooth, horny texture, and perhaps five or six feet long from the muzzle to the neck. I could see nothing like a fin, nor gills. I am thus particular in describing this monster, as I had a remarkably good opportunity to observe his appearance at a very moderate distance.*

*After the boats arrived at the shore, the monster turned slowly round and moved towards the sea, remaining at least ten minutes in full view, so that I had ample time to make two rough sketches of him. Before reaching the open sea and while abreast of the cliff on which I stood, he slowly sunk, while moving oceanward, and I supposed I had seen the last of him. But I was mistaken, as will be seen.*

*The little village was in a state of unusual excitement that night. Knots of men gathered about the two little stores, and in hoarse whispers talked of the cause of their panic. The great regret seemed to be that for a while, at least, their fishing operations must be suspended, none having the hardihood to venture out while the presence of the "snake" was suspected. I was anxious, notwithstanding the alarming indications, to have a day's fishing on the morrow, but could find no one to go with me. Larkin told me he "wouldn't go for the best catch of the season." One of his boys, however, a fine, manly fellow of seventeen, offered to go if we could prevail on Sam Hethcote to accompany us. Sam was found and promised.*

*Next morning was foggy, so that it was near noon before we had a clear sky. Then the fog dissipated, and we started down the harbor, two at the oars amid the warnings of old, grave-looking fishermen, and the evil prophecies of the women. Just outside the mouth of the harbor we anchored and prepared to fish. The water was of that transparent hue which, at times, allows the eye to pierce twenty or thirty feet below the surface. For more than an hour we enjoyed excellent success, when the fish refused to bite. After a long silence in hope of a nibble, Hethcote remarked, that "the snake must have come again or we'd do better" and proposed baiting for him. I, tired of the dullness, stretched myself along a thwart, and lay, with my head over the gunwale, gazing down into the clear green depths. By using my hands as a tube to concentrate my sight, it seemed as though I could pierce to at least fifty feet.*

*Thus silently musing on the wonders of the unknown depths of Neptune's dark empire, and particularly on that monstrous denizen who yesterday showed his huge proportions, I became aware of some immense moving mass in the line of my sight. First it was confused and indistinct, but presently as it assumed form, and I became aware of its character, the cold perspiration of fear started out from my face. It was the snake. Fear paralyzed my voice. I dared not, could not, speak. I gazed in entranced silence and in abject terror. There, not fifteen feet below my face, was the monster whom it seemed I could reach with an oar. Suppose, noticing the shadow of the boat, he should rise and crush us in his powerful jaws! The thought was agony; still I gazed silently. The tide was "making", and the serpent lay head to the current, which was flowing into the harbor, keeping up an undulatory movement just sufficient to retain his position. The shell-like head was just abaft the stern of the boat and the immense mane flowed wavingly, either by the motion of the current or the convolutions of the body. To my affrightened sight, that portion of the body in the line of my clearest vision appeared to be perhaps six or seven feet in diameter. It may have been, yet I think not.*

*The instinct of self-preservation nerved me at last. I turned to my companions, who were as listless as I had been, and placing my finger on my lips motioned them to look over the side. As they did so, one after the other, the ghastly appearance of their terror-struck faces showed that they comprehended the situation. Hethcote moves silently to the stern and cut the rope that held the 'kilick' and we drifted quietly with the tide into the harbor. At what was deemed a safe distance we put out the oars and pulled steadily forward. I watched the spot we had left as I pulled the after-oar, when I was startled by a 'breach', and the convolutions of the snake could be seen sculling his huge carcass seaward. He soon disappeared, and I had seen the last of the sea-serpent.*

*Unsatisfactory and limited as is our knowledge of the inhabited land, still less satisfactory and extensive is that of the ocean. It is a "waste of waters" of such extent that among the thousands of ships which sail its bosom, even in the tracks of regular trade, the meeting of two of them is a rare occurrence. There are yet unexplored portions of the watery world where the keel of the merchantman, the whaler or the frigate has never ventured. Three-fifths of this globe's surface is covered by the restless sea. Is it strange that such a creature as the*

*sea-serpent should exist and still remain unknown? Not at all. Even on the land which man has traversed for ages, additions are frequently made to our zoological list, and it might be expected that we should be more or less ignorant of a reptile whose chosen haunts are the dark depths of the illimitable sea, and whose habits are of the most solitary character.*

*But, the evidence of an immense ophidian<sup>1</sup> in the sea, exceeding in size those on the land, is conclusive, if human evidence is of any value whatever. The stories of its appearance at certain periods have been told ever since man attempted to vex the sea with his constructions. But, if tradition and fable are unreliable, the testimony of those who live in our own times ought to be considered worthy of some confidence, especially when, without the possibility of collusion, the statements of people in all parts of the world coincide in attributing an existence to the sea-serpent.*

*As for myself, all doubts have been dispelled by ocular demonstration which admits of no question. The sea-serpent is a verity, and when a specimen shall have been taken and his skeleton and stuffed skin exhibited, the sneer of "fishy" will cease to be directed to those who are courageous enough to relate what they have seen, although the story may tax common credulity.*



*Image from Jesse Lord (1866)*



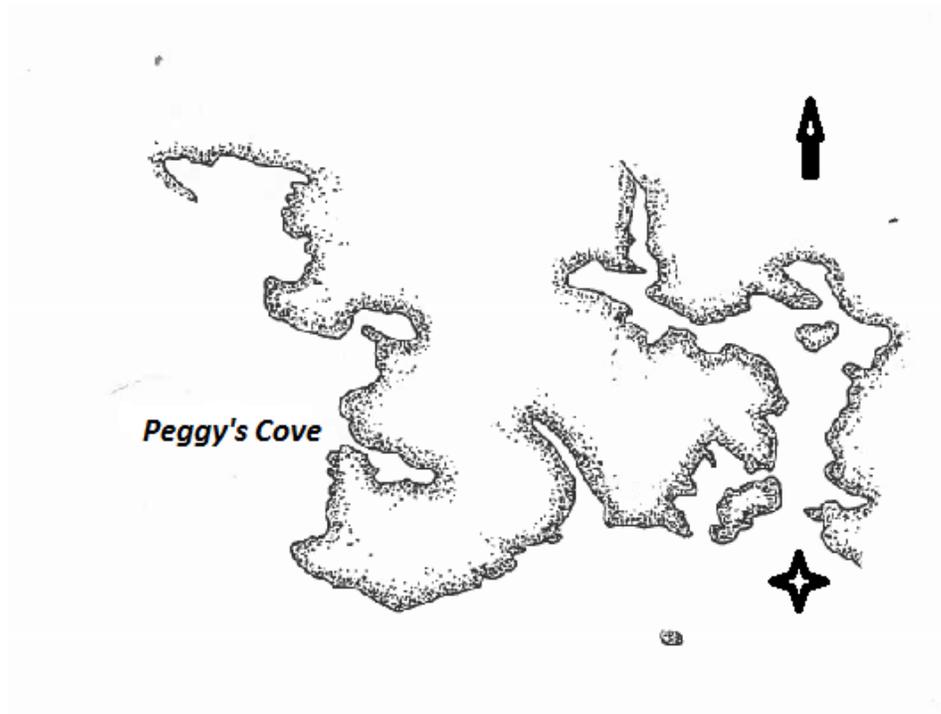
This is the last in the group of four serpent sightings reported upon by Reverend Ambrose. It differs from the others in being reported to have occurred near the shore as opposed to the others which were in more open water.

<sup>1</sup> Ophidians – a group of reptiles including modern snakes and snake-like reptiles (excluding lizards)

## Sea Serpent – Canal Lake Peggy’s Cove – Dover – 1860

Rev. John Ambrose (1867)

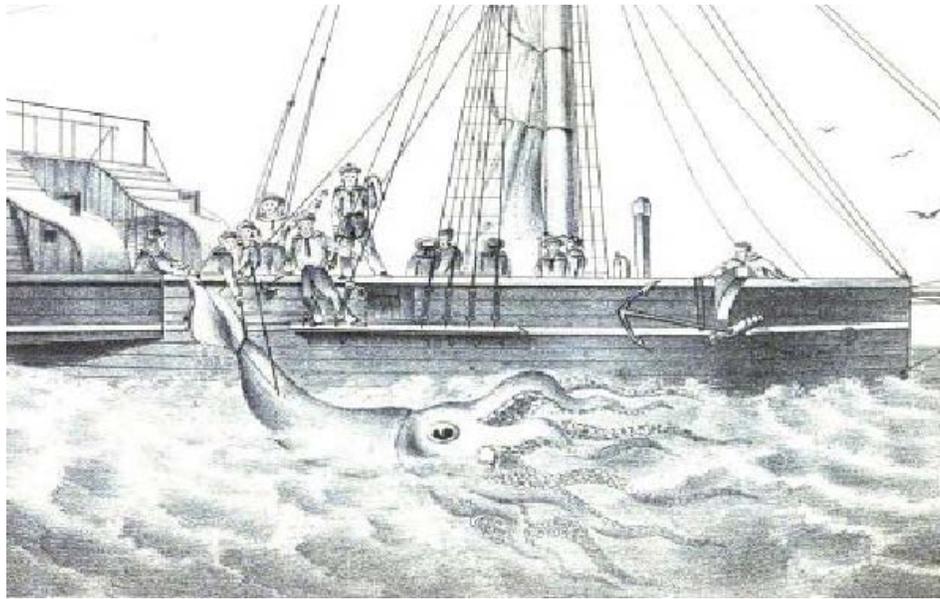
*“... an account given by Mr. William Crooks, a respectable inhabitant of Peggy’s cove, of a large serpent seen by him and his son Henry, a few years ago, at the entrance of the inlet to the Canal Lake, between Peggy’s Cove and Dover. It was, he affirms, not less than sixteen feet long, with a circumference of about two feet, and was of a dark brown colour. It was swimming and splashing in the landwash,<sup>1</sup> apparently endeavouring to get ashore, which consummation to its labours appears not to have been wished by Mr. Crooks, who, with his son, incontinently took to their heels, nor did they consider themselves safe until once more surrounded by the houses of Peggy’s Cove”*



<sup>1</sup> landwash – area of the sea between high and low tide marks

## **First Giant Squid caught – near Tenerife, 30<sup>th</sup> of November of 1861** **Kent (1874)**

This was the first documented capture of and sampling of a live the Giant squid, generally thought to have belonged to mythology. The event was recorded by commandant Bouyer as part of documentation of the voyage of 1861-62 by his vessel the French warship the *Alecton*. A partial specimen was collected by the ship's crew between the island of Madeira and Tenerife in the Canary Islands, off the coast of Morocco. This find was validation of the debate raging in the scientific community regarding the existence of such an animal in the previous decade.



*Image adapted from Kent (1874)*

The popular documentation of the encounter appears to have been part of the basis of the giant squid attack on Captain Nemo's submarine the *Nautilus* in the popular fictional work of Jules Verne *Twenty-thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (see below).

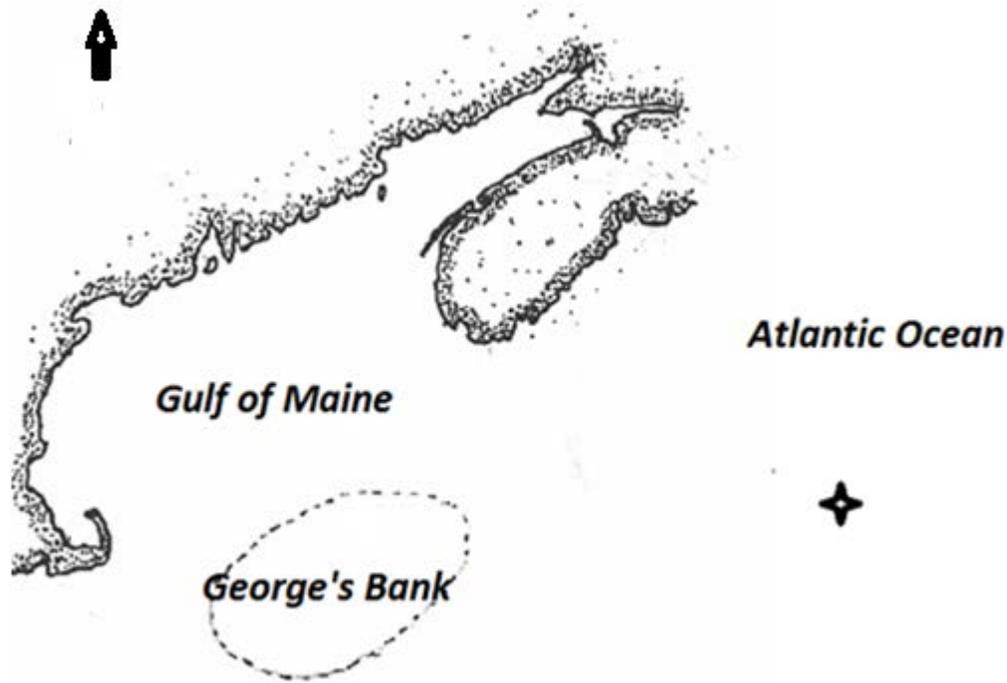
## **Sea Serpent in the Popular Literature – off Nova Scotia** **Jules Verne (1869)**

With the currency of Serpent reports in the media, the capture of the Giant squid off the Canary Islands and a rapid advance in the technologies of the age, Jules Verne captures the public's attention by weaving these three themes together in his "*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers (Twenty-thousand Leagues Under the Sea)*".

Verne's story takes place in 1864 at a time when the sea serpent still held sway in the public eye. This novel was originally published in serial format between March 1869 and June 1870 in the

*Magasin d'Éducation et de Récréation*. The first English translation was published in 1872 in England with an American version coming out in 1873.

Interestingly, one of the first reports in Verne's novel was the simultaneous sighting of a 100 m. "serpent" just off the Scotian Shelf at 42 15' N, 60 35'W (approximately 190 km SSE of Sable Island) by two vessels (*Helvetia* and the *Shannon*). So it would appear that even at that time, our waters were seen as potentially productive from the point of these marine ophidians.



*Location of first Sea Serpent Spotting from 20,000 leagues Under the Sea*



Again, the popular press presents details of another sighting in St Margaret's Bay.

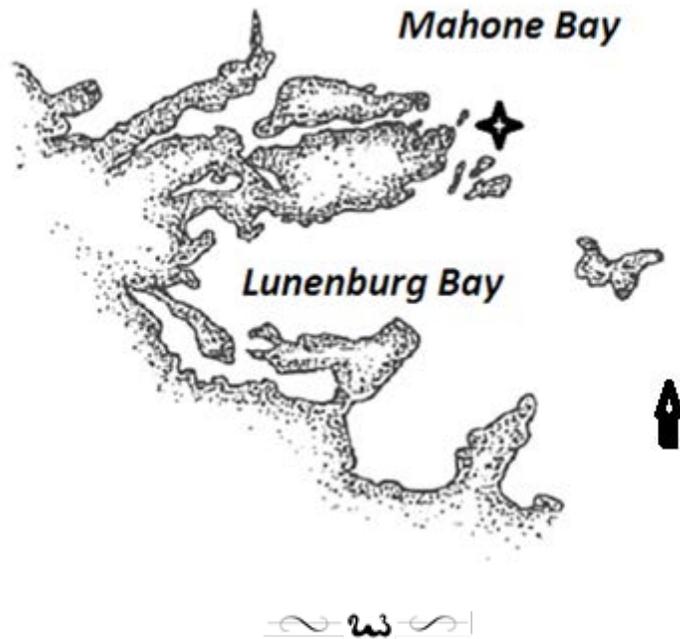
### **Sea Serpent – St Margaret's Bay - Miller's and George's Islands 3 August 1872**

*Acadian Recorder*, Monday August 5, 1872, p. 2 c. 6

#### ***"The Sea Serpent Seen***

*A gentleman who has just returned from a visit to St. Margaret's Bay, reports that the great sea serpent made its appearance on Saturday last in the vicinity of Miller's and George's Island. Something like a large barrel was observed apparently floating on the water, and a party*

*of fishermen went out to investigate the matter, when they discovered it to be the monster's head. On their approach the terrible animal stretched its jaws, disclosing a mouth of a vividly red color. The affrightened men at once turned and in haste rowed ashore. The animal was afterwards passed by another boat, the men in which affirm that they saw at least 30 feet of its length, and judged it to be considerably larger. It is said to be destroying the poor people's nets going through them, and rending them at its pleasure. It is also averred that this or a similar sea serpent appears in that vicinity about once every ten or fifteen years.*



It was thirty-four years since the last documented sighting of these marine creatures in the Northumberland Strait (see Dawson's descriptions in Lyell's Book) when the following report was published simultaneously in two American newspapers.

**Sea Serpent – off Pictou Island, 1879 (referred to as Picton Island in the narrative)**

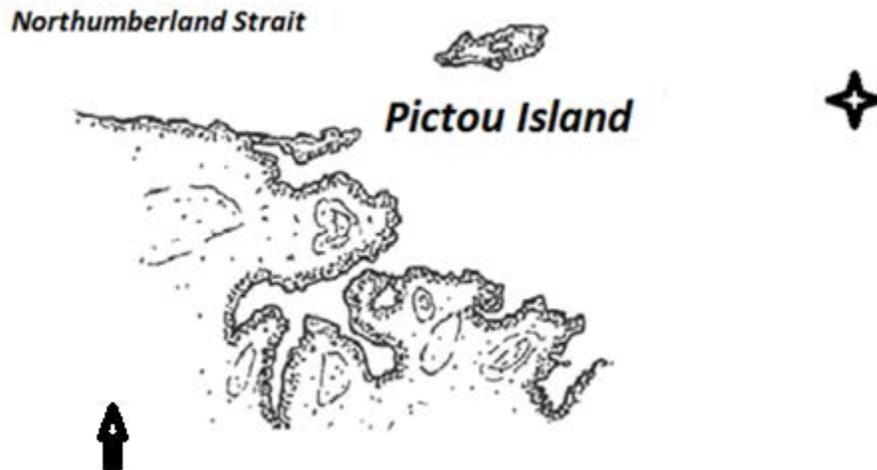
**The Reading Daily Eagle, No. 184, 30 July 1879, p. 1, c. 2, also the Meriden Daily Republic, No. 114, 30 July, 1879 p. 1, c. 3**

***“A Terrible Monster”***

*“Captain Sampson, of the schooner Louise Montgomery,<sup>1</sup> at Picton Nova Scotia, reports that about ten miles eastward of Picton Island, he saw an enormous sea serpent, which*

<sup>1</sup> The vessel was actually registered as the Louisa Montgomery, 27 T gross tonnage, in 1864. She was lost in 1883.

*appeared to be about one hundred feet long and about the size of a barrel. It was going straight along at the rate of seven knots an hour.*



*The terrible monster was first seen by the lookout, and appeared to be a whale, but soon its head was raised and it moved through the waves, which were not high, with an easy motion. The attention of others of the crew was called to it, but their terror was so great that they cannot tell what distance it was from the vessel, as they feared it would attack them. At times portions of its huge body rose from the waves, and its great bulk could be seen. A bushy protuberance back of the neck was said by some to be a fin, by others a sort of mane. The description of the captain is thought to be the most correct. Some of the sailors declare that it was quite close to them, and speak of it with a shudder. Old whalers at Pictou propose organizing an expedition to go in pursuit of the monster, but it is probably hundreds of miles away by this time.*

This is only the second time in reports reviewed that there is a reference to the serpent having a “mane”, the first one being in the 1846 Mill Cove report noted by Reverend Ambrose. The question of whether serpents had manes was also noted in the report of the Linnaean Society of New England in their 1817 investigations. They specifically asked each individual they interviewed whether the serpent encountered at Cape Ann had a mane.

The presence or absence of a “mane” could be an indication of the potential of the creatures observed being a very large and rarely seen species of fish called an Oarfish, *Regalecus glesne*, Ascanius, 1772.



*Image derived from description*



## **Sea Serpent - off Merigomish August 1879**

J.P O'Neil (1999) <sup>1</sup>

*“Late that August, a report from Merigomish, Nova Scotia, stated that a crew of mackerel fishermen saw something unknown to them. They said it was seventy to a hundred feet long and made waves like a steamer.”*



The following short narrative, initially published in the public press, then reprinted in the scientific press is of some interest. It is noted that the position provided is somewhat incomplete, with published location being over deep oceanic waters NW of the Azores. However, if the true location is a point just south of the Grand Banks, it would be from what we would now consider Canadian waters.

It should be noted that neither of the sources provided the complete latitude and longitude.

<sup>1</sup> J.P. O'Neil chronicled over 230 sea serpent reports from the Gulf of Maine and adjacent waters, including many in difficult to obtain newspapers in her landmark publication. Several of these relate to Nova Scotian waters.

## **Giant Turtle – Grand Bank March 30, 1883**

Initially published as “Monster of the Deep” in the *New York Times*, 27 April, 1883, then as “A Large Turtle” in the *Scientific American* of, May 12, 1883, volume 48: p 292

### **“Monster of the Deep”**

*“Captain Augustus G. Hall and the crew of the schooner Annie L. Hall vouch for the following:*

*On March 30, while on the Grand Bank, in latitude 40 10', longitude 33, they discovered an immense live trunk turtle<sup>1</sup>, which was at first thought to be a vessel bottom up. The schooner passed within twenty-five feet of the monster, and those on board had ample opportunity to estimate its dimensions by a comparison with the length of the schooner. The turtle was at least 40 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 30 feet from the apex of the back to the bottom of the under shell. The flippers were 20 feet long. It was not deemed advisable to attempt its capture.”*

It should be noted that there does not appear to be a vessel registered under that specific name in that time, although there was a fishing vessel, the Annie C. Hall (84 T) out of Gloucester, Massachusetts registered for fishing in Canadian waters (permit issued at Canso), and a Fishing captain by the given name, out of Gloucester recorded to be engaged in successfully fishing halibut on the Grand Banks at about that time.

This report is included even though the geographic description is incomplete. There is no Grand Bank west of or within the area of the Azores, where the latitude and longitude provided suggest. The Grand Banks of Newfoundland were commonly referred to as the Grand Bank in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



## **The Great London Fisheries Exhibition of 1883 -**

Henry Lee, part-time Naturalist at the Brighton Aquarium in England published a book entitled *Sea Monsters Unmasked* to coincide with the first international Fisheries Exhibition being held in London that year. His was the first effort to try to systematically analyze reports of sea monsters since the 1817 report of the Linnaean Society of New England report. He attempted to put them into a known Natural History context. His book includes the history of Krakens and other sea creatures, which he discusses in terms of the sightings and reports that were current at that time.

As an aside, it should be noted that Nova Scotia was well-represented in the Dominion exhibit at this exposition with an extensive representation of our fishing industry and species.



<sup>1</sup> Trunk turtle is the old name for leatherback sea turtle

## Mermaid – off Gabarus, Cape Breton, mid-August 1886

Cited as from the *Cape Brooklyn Eagle*, 22 August 1866 (reprinted, as well in the *Schuylerville N.Y. Standard* in 1886)

*“The fishermen of Gabarus, Cape Breton [an island off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada] have been excited over the appearance of a mermaid, seen in the waters by some fishermen a few days ago. While Mr. Bagnall, accompanied by several fishermen, was out in a boat, they observed, floating on the surface of the water a few yards from the boat what they supposed to be a corpse. Approaching it for the purpose of taking it ashore, they observed it to move, when to their great surprise, it turned around in a sitting position and looked at them and disappeared. A few moments after [,] it appeared on the surface and again looked toward them, after which it disappeared altogether.*

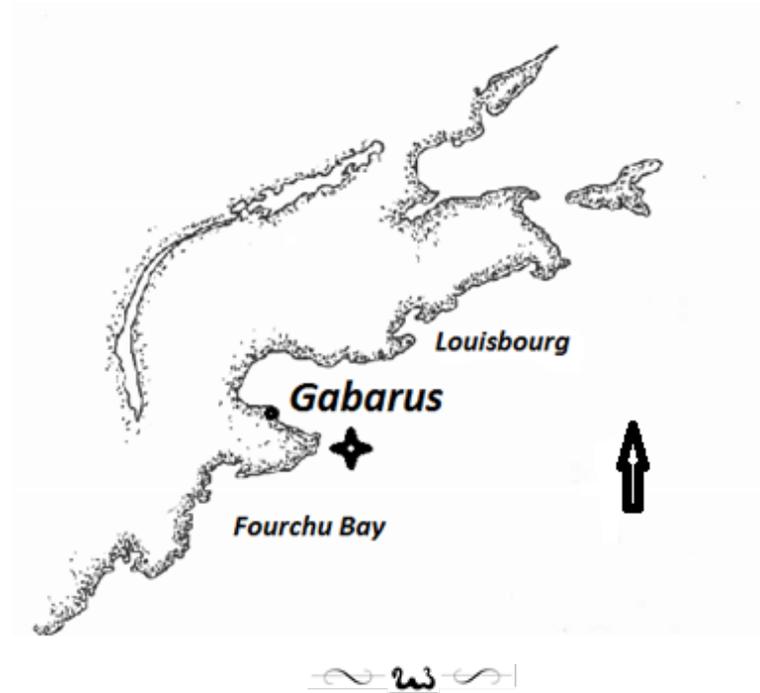
*The face, head, shoulders and arms resembled those of a human being, but the lower extremities had the appearance of a fish. The back of its head was covered with long, dark hair resembling a horse’s mane. The arms were shaped like a human being’s, except that the fingers of one hand were very long. The color of the skin was not unlike that of a human being. There is no doubt, that the mysterious stranger is what is known as a mermaid, and the first one ever seen in Cape Breton waters.”*

Was it not for the mention of the fingers, one would be inclined to identify this particular hirsute merbeing as a seal. Could it be that they encountered species of seal with a foreshortened muzzle, rendering its face superficially human-like and with flippers in which the digits are more prominently revealed than in other seals?

There is a species of northern seal, commonly called the Bearded Seal, *Erignathus barbatus*, (Erxleben, 1777) which is specifically noted to have a long toe in each of its front flippers, specifically the third toe. It has a small, rounded head with a relatively short rostrum or muzzle.

There are no published records of its occurrence in Nova Scotian waters and its current distribution is restricted to waters north of insular Newfoundland. That being said, is it possible that what Mr. Bagnall and the fishermen had encountered may have been a bearded seal? The absence of such northern species from the relatively southern waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and waters off the east coast of Cape Breton Island in modern times would have made such an occurrence unusual.

Again, as with other sightings, we have to keep in mind that one can only see the world through the lens of one’s own cultural experience and knowledge.



## Sea Serpent – Digby Gut area of Bay of Fundy 1890-1914

There are three accounts of sightings in the area of the approaches to Digby Harbour in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These are presented together, below, due to their similarities description, suggesting they may all refer to the same occurrence.

### Point Prim, 1890 - Unattributed report from web-source (Frontiers of Zoology)

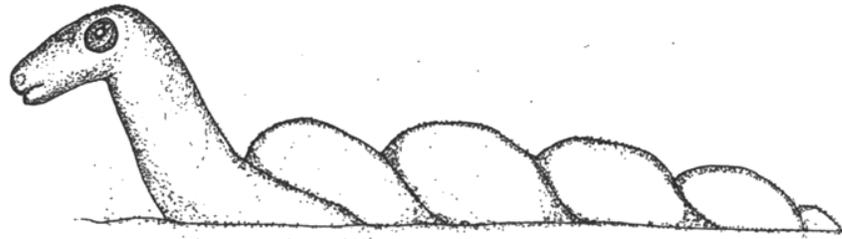
*“A fisherman, returning from Port George to Victoria Beach in 1890, held his ship parallel to the black basalt cliffs but became momentarily unsteady when he spotted a “horse-head” racing through the water. The captain claimed that “it rolled hoop-like” beside his craft, each loop taking up thirty to forty feet of water. Since the eyes were “as large as saucers” and the creature was following closely the crew put on extra sail in spite of a threatening gale. They were trailed as far as Point Prim light. Two other vessels made similar sightings before week-end, but it was not seen afterwards.”*

### Centerville Bay, Bay of Fundy, N.S. July 1896 - J.P. O’Neil (1999)

*“In late July, a creature with bulging eyes, traveling at great speed with its head six feet above the water, was seen by fishermen nearby in the Bay of Fundy”*

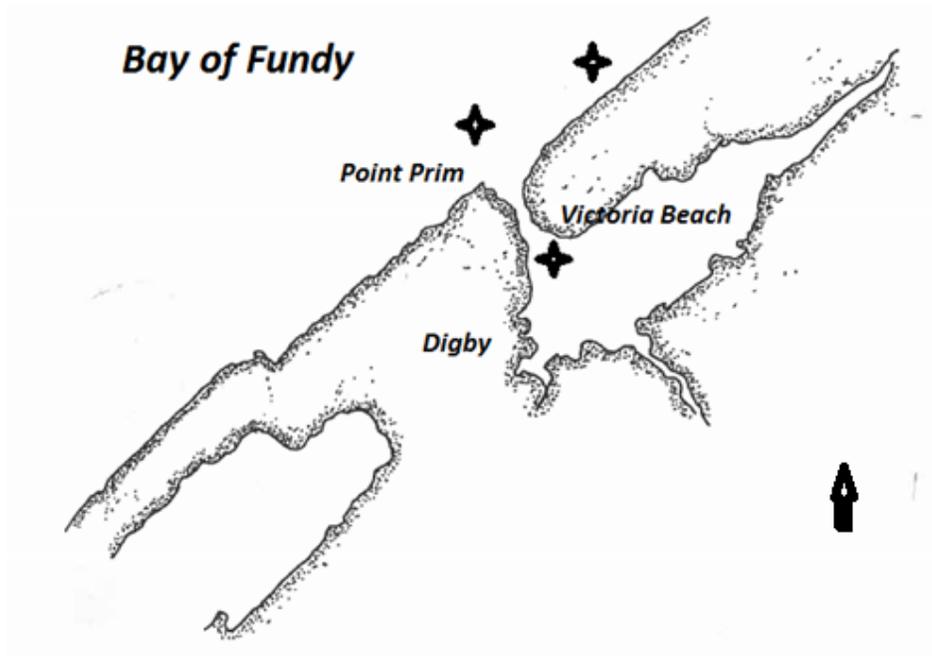
## Bay of Fundy, Annapolis/Digby County -Helen Creighton (1957)

*"The other "sea serpent" was reported at Victoria Beach (Annapolis County) and was seen forty years ago (pre-WWI) by a vessel sailing up the Bay of Fundy. The crew said it stood up forty or eighty feet in the air, that it had a head like a horse and eyes like saucers, and they described it as a wonderful (awesome) sight. They put on full sail and it followed them for sixty miles, all the way to Point Prim (Digby Gut). Later, when it was blowing a gale of wind, it was seen by another vessel going to the West Indies. Then a third vessel sighted it. This all happened about the same time, but they have never heard of it being seen since."*



*Imaged derived from given description*

Localities of all three reports are indicated on the map (below)



## **The Great Sea Serpent – Historical and Critical Treatise, 1892**

**A.C. Oudemans (1892)**

Anthonie Cornelis Oudemans, a Dutch Zoologist, published the first definitive, critical review of Serpent sightings. It was substantially more comprehensive and analytical than Henry Lee's 1882 *Sea Monsters Unmasked*. Although it covers an extensive part of the literature at the time, it unfortunately, only captures two of the reports noted for Nova Scotian waters.

In reviewing this massive treatise, it is evident that he was somewhat severe of conclusions of some naturalists. This includes those of Rafinesque's determination of the identity of the 1787 serpent reported by Mr. Lee in 1817. He does make several observations on the manuscript. His initial one is that, as with many other reports, that the length is probably exaggerated. He comments that the colour described probably falls into the category of dark blue-green, and cautions about the absolute definition of colour in such reports. He also notes in this case, as in others, that the term "flexuous hillocks" refers to nothing else than vertical undulations of the body, and that the noise the serpent made, in this case, was caused by the "fore-flappers" (flippers).



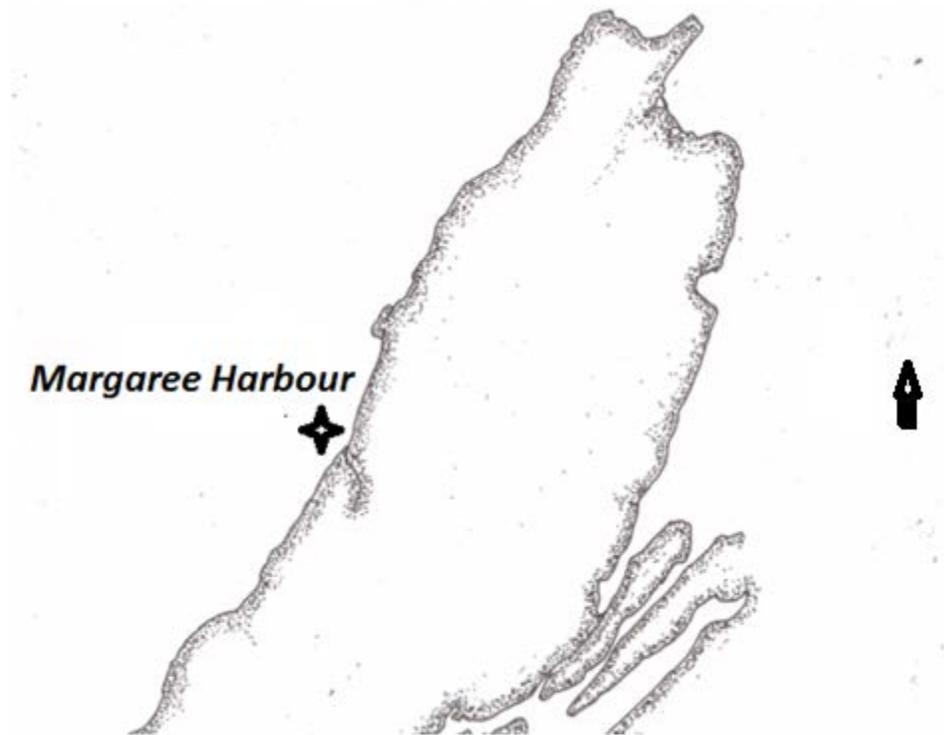
The following comes from the *Cape Breton Magazine* account attributed to the *Sydney Daily Post* edition noted. It picks up as an anecdote to a 1910 report (to follow) referring to discussion of previous serpent sightings and accounts.

### **Mermaid – off the Margaree – 1895**

***Sydney Daily Post* (14 July 1910) as reported in the *Cape Breton Magazine* issue 32**

*“Certainly it is a sea serpent. I saw one off Margaree about fifteen years ago. We were at anchor and another schooner was in the stream a little way off. The sea serpent came along at a great speed and passed right between the two vessels. There was a French fishing smack anchored between the two schooners and the great serpent seemed to be making straight for the smack.*

*All hands on the smack raced below and pulled the scuttle over, but the serpent never changed its course. When he came to the smack he made a clean dive under and came up on the other side. The serpent was about seventy-five feet long, others judged it to be a hundred, but I don't think it was over seventy-five. It was swimming on the top of the water with its head up and made a great swish in the sea as it went by.”*



The *Cape Breton Magazine* article then goes on to provide additional narrative on others' recollections and/or creations. The author then poses the question regarding belief in the existence of the sea serpent, summing it up with *¿Quién sabe?* - Who knows?



This is a report from the passengers on board the ocean liner *New England*, which docked at Boston after its voyage from Liverpool, England, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1899. Evidently they reported that they had encountered a sea serpent or great lizard on their voyage.

There are several versions on this report, suggesting this occurred south of Newfoundland. The latitude and longitude given (45°37' N and 58°09' west) put the sighting approximately 150 km east of Gabarus on the south part of the Laurentian channel, north-east of the Misaine Bank.

## Great Lizard – Misaine Bank east of Gabarus (Cape Breton) 1899

cited from the *Gloucester Times* and *Cape Ann Advertiser* of Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1899

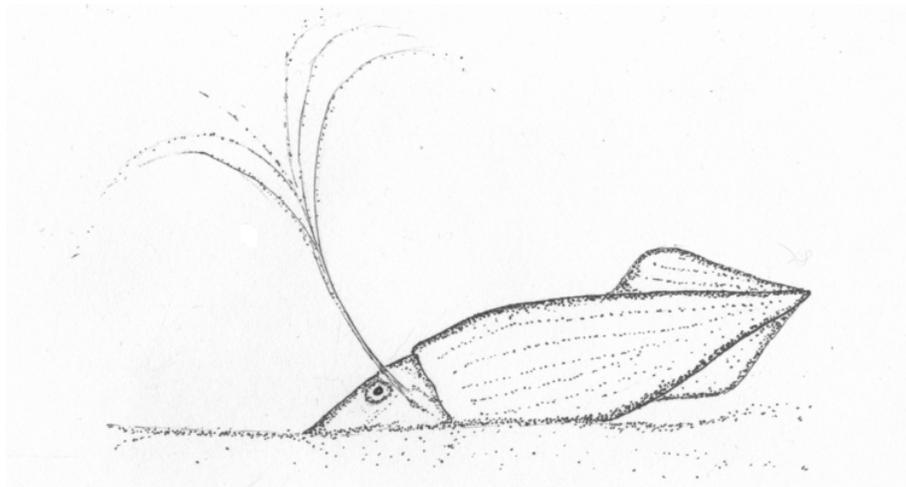
### *“1899 Passengers on Steamer New England Sighted Great Lizard”*

The following is a composite from several sources (the original texts were not available for review).

*“Capt. McAuley nor any one on board had never seen such a strange monster before.*

*The Captain said that his attention was called to an object off the starboard bow, which he first made out to be a ship's boat or part of a derelict. .... He bore two points out of his course to ascertain just what the object was, believing that it might be a wreck with some poor sailors in need of assistance. The steamer approached to within about 40 feet of the object, which still had the appearance of a submerged wreck. Suddenly a thin stream of water was thrown in the air and the animal - for it proved to be one - moved off at the right angles to the ship, going through the water at an eight-knot clip.*

*Capt. McAuley described the animal as about 45 feet in length, with a carinated<sup>1</sup> back which projected about six feet out of water. Its head was visible for only a few seconds when it raised it from the water to gaze unconcernedly at the big ship as she approached. The neck was elongated and the head hooded.*

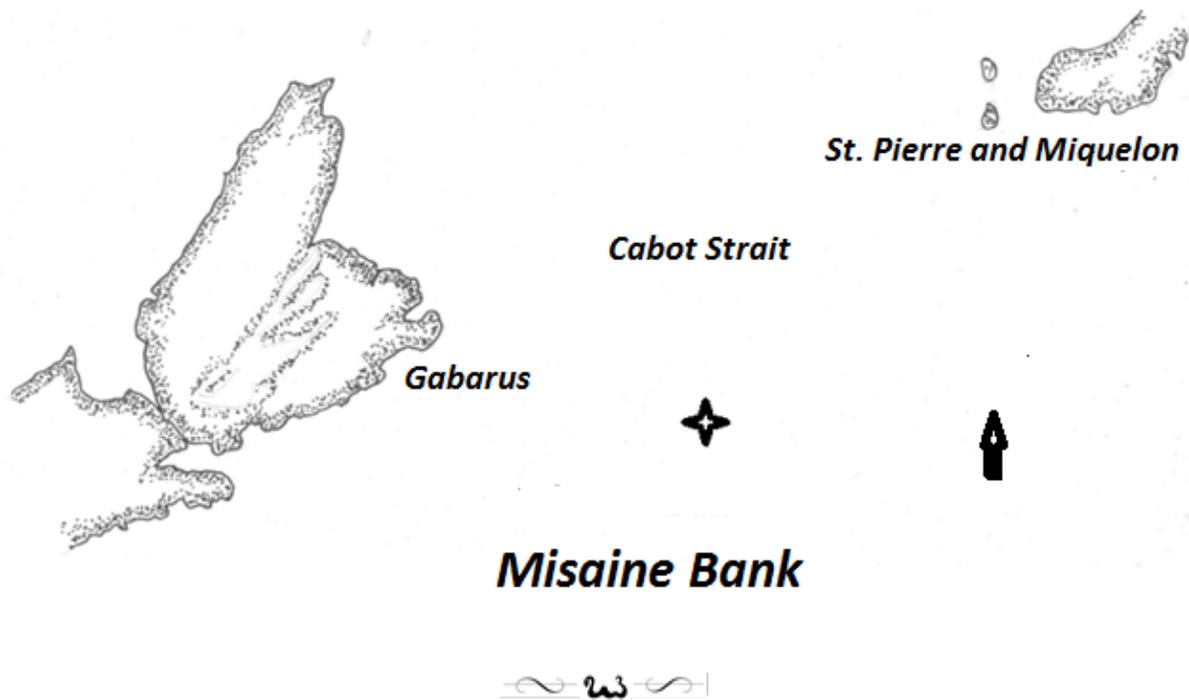


*Image derived from description in text*

*The captain did not say it was a sea serpent, but acknowledged it was the strangest animal he had ever seen in his 40 years' experience at sea.*

*The color of the animal was dark drab on top with lighter shading near the water. One of the saloon passengers said that he believed it was a giant sea lizard.”*

<sup>1</sup> carinated - ridged or keeled



## **Sea Serpent – Cobequid Bay, Colchester County, 10 June 1902**

*The Daily News (Truro), 10 June 1902*

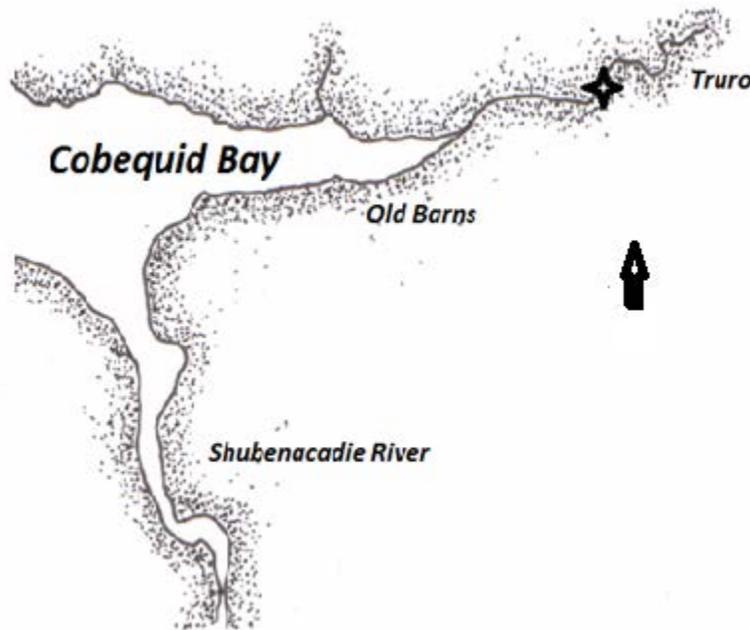
### ***“A Sea Monster in Cobequid Bay, a true story by well-known spectators***

*On Sunday afternoon, while Mr. and Mrs. Don McRae of Truro and Miss Annie Dickey of Lower Truro were standing on the shores of Cobequid Bay, some distance below the Board Landing Bridge, watching the rushing bore and tide, which was unusually high that day, their attention was attracted to an object coming up with the tide, which, as it came nearer, seemed to be like a huge snake.*

*The head was about two feet long and was supported by a neck about a foot in diameter. The head raised about a foot or more from the surface and was nearly black in color. The extreme length of the body could not be determined, but was judged by the size of the neck to be fully twenty-five or thirty feet long. When the monster serpent glided, noiselessly through the water and was but a few yards distant from Mr. McRae and party, one of the ladies gave a little scream from fear. When hearing this, the serpent plunged beneath the turbid water and disappeared from view.*

*This Mr. McRae and the others are all reliable people and vouch for the correctness of this story in every particular.*

The Board Landing at the mouth of the Salmon River was the furthest point of transport of goods by sailing vessel within Cobequid Bay. It was reported to be the point of landing for wood for the building of the first houses in the area (Burrows, 1981). The bridge erected at the site became the principal connection across the Salmon River located near the place of the new highway bridge by the site of the former Palliser Motel.



It has been pointed out that this part of the Cobequid Bay was noted for the occasional appearance of porpoises and blackfish and that during the Second World War, it was not unusual to see debris coming up with incoming tides (Les Blackburn, personal communication), so observers would always be on the lookout to see what the tide brought.



## Sea Serpent - Cranberry Head, Cape Breton, 9 July, 1902

*Sydney Daily Post*, Saturday July 12, 1902 page 1 column 3

### **"Huge Sea Serpent**

*Seen of Cranberry Head by South Bar Pilots"*

*"A large sea serpent was seen Thursday afternoon by the South Bar pilots and remained long enough in their view to make its identity clearly known. This monster of the deep was about 200 feet long, about 50 feet of which appeared above the surface at a time. The head and tail tapered to a point. It was first noticed off Cranberry Head working its way up the harbor. When well-up the entrance it turned its lengthy coil about and headed north.*

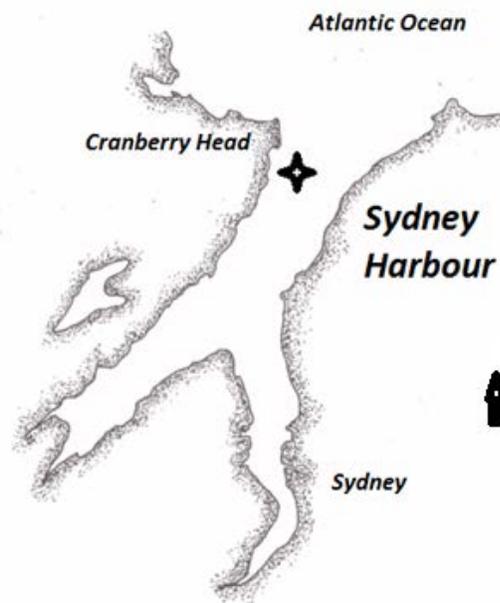
*Its shape was exactly like that of a snake; its middle was very bulky and of monstrous size. The skin was speckled like a leopard.*

*The American Yacht Wacouta was coming in at the time and the huge serpent laid in her course. The yacht hauled to the one side to give it room to go by. The serpent passed close to two fishermen who were out setting nets. Seeing the monster coming in their direction, they immediately pulled out of its path and rowed as quickly as they could to a schooner which they boarded.*

*The pilots were about a quarter of a mile away, but had a good view of it through their glasses.*

*It was going through the water very smoothly, but churned it to a foam when turning round and speeding northward.*

*This is the first time any of those sea habitants had been seen on the coast, and the sight of this one was not altogether a very attractive one."*



The following report was reprinted from an earlier article in the Cornerbrook newspaper, *The Western Star*. The *Wacouta* was approaching Sydney harbour after a voyage to Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **Sea Serpent in Cabot Strait mid-July, 1902**

*Western Star* (Cornerbrook N.L.), 1934, 02, 07

### ***“Sea Serpent Seen in Cabot Strait”***

*“In view of the stories of sea serpents coming from the Pacific Coast and Loch Ness, Scotland, we recall an instance when a sea serpent was seen in the Cabot Strait between Newfoundland and Cape Breton, nearly thirty-two years ago.”*

The following, is taken from the *Western Star* 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1902:

*“A large sea serpent was seen off Sydney, N.S. last week as J.J. Hill’s yacht Wacouta was entering port from a trip to Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>1</sup> The pilot says the serpent was about two hundred feet long and of monstrous circumference in the middle with ends tapering to points. About fifty feet of it appeared above water. The sun glistened upon its back revealing a speckled skin like that of a leopard. It glided through the water as a snake through grass, its head, tail and middle rising above the surface. The serpent when seen first was about three miles off shore and came up the entrance of Sydney harbor, where it turned, churning the water to foam, and headed towards the north keeping about a mile off shore. It was swimming very slowly, and was in full view of the pilots on Mr. Hill’s yacht, for about an hour.*



## **Sea Serpent – off Louisburg 18 August 1903**

*Gloucester Daily Times* 24 Aug 1903, cited in J.P. O’Neil (1999)

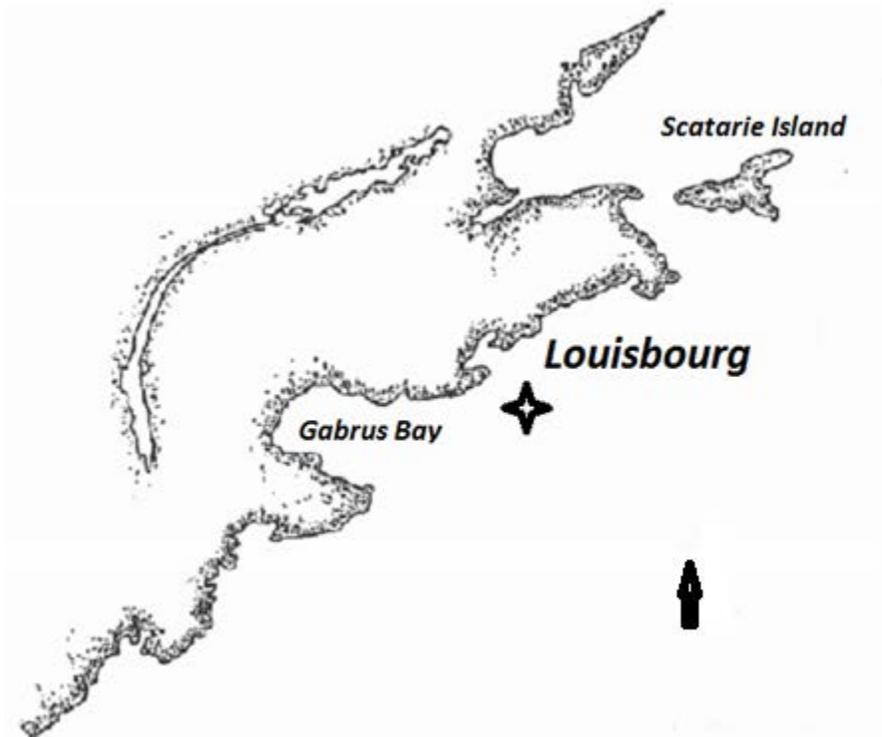
*“Later that summer, the creature was again seen in Long Island Sound. The following year, on August 24, 1903, the Gloucester Daily Times reported:*

<sup>1</sup> J.J. Hill was the President of the Great Northern Railway, although there is no reference to Mr. Hill being on board at the time

**Sea Serpent Seen:  
Monster 50 Feet Long Reported Off Louisbourg**

*The Captain of a schooner which arrived at Louisbourg, C.B. (Cape Breton) on Wednesday claims he saw a sea serpent off that port the day before. The monster was fifty feet long and was throwing up a heavy sea in his wake. The presence of a monster of this kind may account for the exceptionally large schools of mackerel which have made their appearance around the Cape Breton coast near that place the last few days.*

*More likely it was the other way around, and the "monster" was following the fish."*



**Sea Serpent – 40 miles off Sable Island 1 December, 1904**

*Boston Transcript 1904 cited in J.P. O'Neil (1999)*

***"He Really Saw a Sea Serpent:***

***H.A. Dawes, Second Officer of the Columbian, Tells of his experience in a Signed Statement***

... The sky was overcast, but the air was clear, and he had a perfect view of the creature. He says it was about 80 feet long, five feet across the back, while about twenty feet from the head was a fin about three feet across and twelve feet high, pointed at the top. The head was high and pointed at the top, and tapered down to a flat nose, with a wide mouth and thick lips. The eyes were about the size of a saucer, and were bright and glaring.... When the creature was abreast of the ship, it raised itself from the water, shook itself and then sank its body under the water, leaving the fin still sticking out. Mr. Dawes is a perfect matter-of-fact, unimaginative steamship officer, and there seems not the slightest reason to doubt his statement."

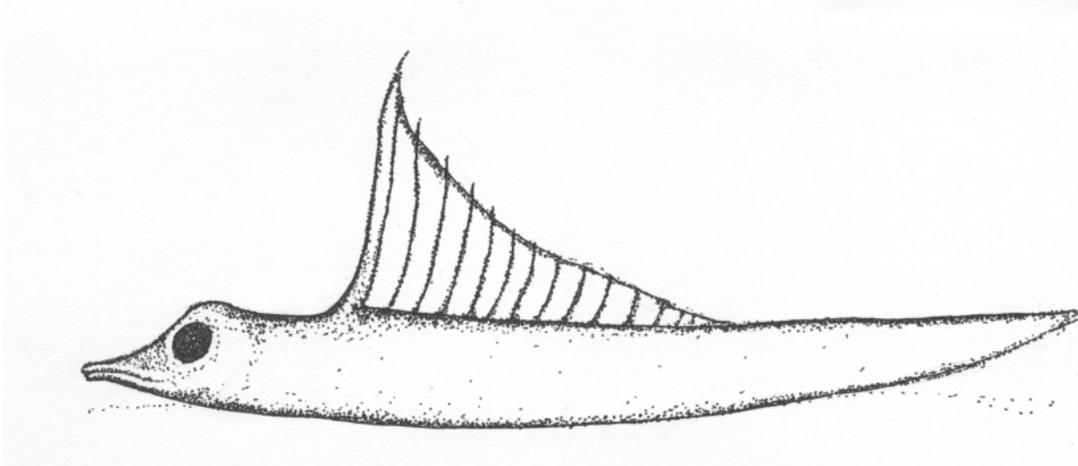


Image derived from description in text



### **Sea Serpent – Nyanza, Victoria County, Cape Breton, July 15, 1905**

**Cape Breton's Magazine, Issue 32, p 28, attributed to Sydney Daily Post, 18 July 1905**

*"Once again the far-famed sea serpent, which has been periodically reported from different part of the globe, and under many peculiar circumstances, has bobbed up serenely to the surface and in no less a place than the waters of the famous Bras d'Or Lakes.*

*Last Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>, while a party of fishermen from the yacht Curlew who had just left the mouth of Middle River, in quest of salmon, and who had just left the mouth of the river where it empties into the harbor, a strange commotion was noticed in the water about a half a mile seaward. The boat was laid to for a while and the party became very much interested in the cause of the strange agitation now become plainly discernable.*

*At first the heavy wave moving forward, was thought to be the bore of the tide coming up the lakes, crossing the sand bar and meeting the current crossing down from the river which backed the water up to such an unusual height. The strange phenomenon approached with startling rapidity straight up the harbor, then suddenly turned and swerved toward the shore,*

*where it soon reached shallow water and began to kick up quite a lively disturbance. It had begun to dawn on the occupants of the boat by this time that some strange monster of the deep had wandered from his usual deep-sea haunts, and finding himself in the unaccustomed landlocked waters, was making desperate, but ineffectual attempts to regain his old hunting grounds. Suddenly a huge snake-like head appeared above the water, and swinging slowly from side to side apparently took a reconnaissance of the surrounding country, and perhaps finding it not to his liking immediately sounded and headed out to deeper water, the undulations of the long snake like body being plainly visible to the onlookers as the leviathan<sup>1</sup> plunged into the depths. The more foolhardy and daring of the boat's crew were for giving chase to the uncanny creature, or at least making a nearer approach to the object so that a good view of it might be had, but the captain deeming discretion the better part of valor ordered the boat back to the yacht.*

*The noise of the oars moving in the water appeared to attract the fish as he changed his course and came along in the wake of the boat, a fact that led to the decided stimulus to the oarsmen who bent to their work with a will, very soon reaching the Government wharf upon which they clambered with alacrity. The serpent never varied in his course, but headed straight for the wharf with occasional raises to the surface giving glimpses of the lithe snake-looking body of about sixty feet in length. Many of the people of the village of Nyanza had noticed the peculiar water spectacle, and gathering on the wharf expressed no little curiosity as to the character of the strange monster who by this time reached to within about two hundred yards from where the sight seers were standing. A rifle was handed to your correspondent who took several pot shots at the head of the fish the balls apparently doing little damage, other than producing a savage shaking of the body of the monster.*

*After swimming up to nearly the bottom of the harbor the huge fish seemed to get his bearings, and suddenly turning, headed for the open sea, remaining about two feet below the surface. The monster went along at a terrible pace, sending the spray from his head, equal to that of a small cutter going through the water. He soon became lost to view.*

*The residents of both Nyanza and Baddeck have informed the writer that last summer a similar fish was to be seen in these water, the appearance of which caused no little excitement among the people. This second annual visit of the sea serpent will no doubt enhance the attractions of Cape Breton's famous island sea, and the chances of obtaining a glimpse of the scaly monster should entice many tourists to visit the scene of his yearly peregrinations."*

This account is presented in more of a "descriptive" manner than most, with not only comments made on the behaviour of the creature with its physical (marine environment), but also in how it responded and interacted with the observers in the boat.

There is, however an interesting observation offered in the text of how it reacted when it got into shallow waters. It was noted to "kick up quite a lively disturbance". This type of reaction to a shallow bottom is noted in a later report by a lobster fisherman at Alder Point, almost a hundred years later.



## Sea Serpent - Cape Smoky, Cape Breton, 14 July, 1910

*Cape Breton's Magazine*, Issue 32, p 28, attributed to *Sydney Daily Post*, 14 July 1910

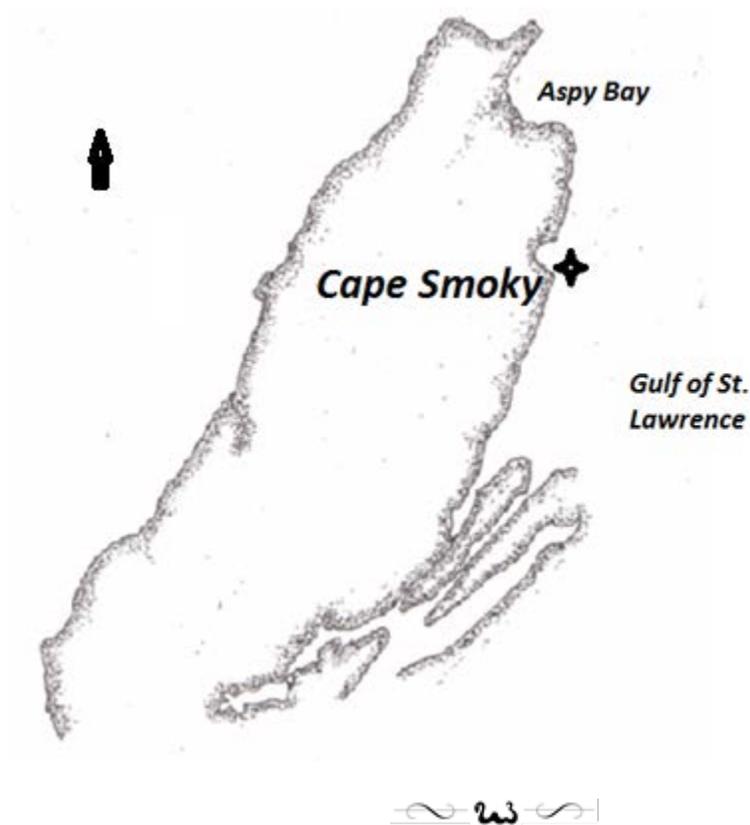
This is part of a longer narrative attributed to (McDuff) according to the *Cape Breton's Magazine* article regarding a casual steamer trip on a hot day, with an encounter of a serpent near "Smoky" by Ingonish.

*The sun was loitering above the billowy folds of the dark-robed mountains as the heaving line spun across the wharf and the steamer quietly swung up against her mooring on that glorious Saturday night. On sea and shore and mountain was spread the bewitching glamor of the summer night at the seaside. From the farthest somber peak behind the pale crescent of the moon, out to where the lazy waters of the bay lapped aimlessly on rock and sand there seemed spread over all something that might be seen by sightseers eyes and felt by the nerveless fingers of the dead. With such, language is a lost art and poets are wingless mocking birds.*

<sup>1</sup> leviathan - apparent local version of leviathan - a biblical term for monstrous creature from the sea or large aquatic creature, usually used to refer to a large whale

*Accidents are incidental to travel and incidents are accident to the aimless wanderers. On this occasion I had my first view of a sea serpent. I may as well confess that I never believed in the existence of such a creature. But this is what I saw. Out in the waters of the Bay, about three hundred yards from the shore, there was something disturbing the water. At times at one end of the disturbance a black object would protrude from the water, and at the same time along the line of disturbance there appeared other spots, they would protrude from the water, and look like a snake fence viewed across a grain-field.*

*Suddenly this whole mass, procession or whatever it might have been would move rapidly away, disappear for some time and then reappear. Now that is all I saw.....*



### **Sea Serpent taken off Baccaro, 1910**

R. Sheehy, *Out of Gloucester*, Article from the popular press - un-cited  
<http://www.downtosea.com/1901-1925/nserpent.htm> - July 22, 1910

#### ***"Sea Serpent Taken Off Nova Scotia***

*Seven Foot Monster Sold to Boston Museum of Natural History*

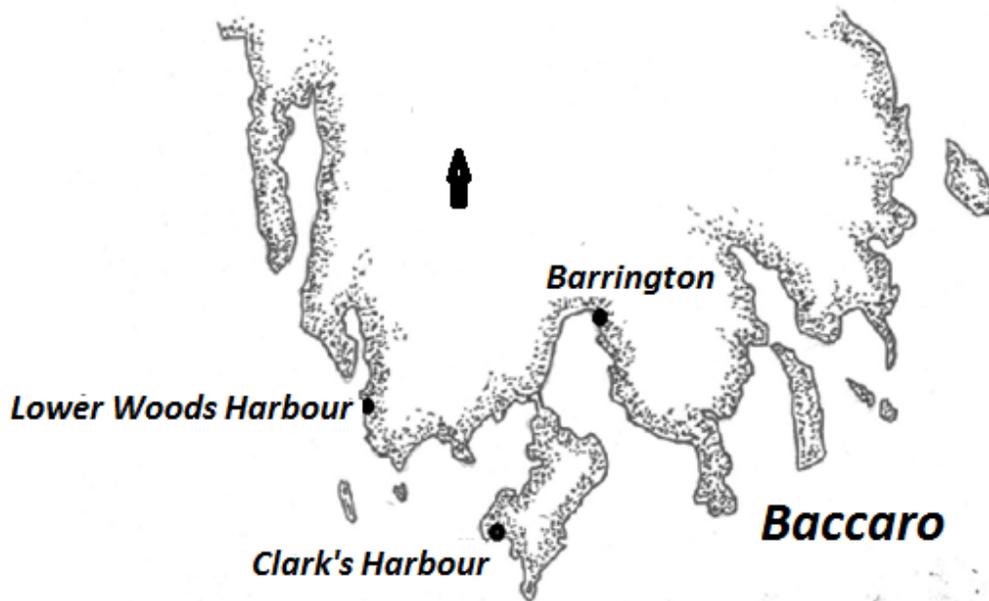
*Has his majesty, the great and mighty sea serpent permitted himself to be captured, after countless years of tumbling through the sea, and frightened the wits out of enthusiastic amateur fishermen, to say nothing of proving a great asset for summer hotel keepers along the Atlantic coast?*

*The sea serpent was brought to Boston yesterday from Yarmouth on steamer Prince George.*

*The monster was seven feet long, with a flattened head over a foot long, and its great mouth filled with a tooth-like structure. On its back was a dorsal fin composed of 28 spines, nearly a foot long, and connected by a thick, almost transparent skin. A huge, fan-shaped tail helped propel the marine monstrosity when it was alive, for be it known that the sea serpent was dead.*

*A Boston commission merchant was the consignee of the fish, which had been carefully crated and shipped to Boston. The merchant did not appear to be overjoyed when he was presented with the freight bill and also learned that he would have to pay customs duties. There was a bargain sale of a sea serpent and it was bid in by an Atlantic Avenue fish dealer for 25 cents, with the understanding that he would pay the duty and freight. The dealer, in turn, disposed of the curiosity to a representative of the Museum of Natural History, where casts will be taken and it will probably be mounted.*

*The monster was captured after a terrific fight by four fishermen off Baccaro, Shelburne County, N.S. It is said that 30 years ago a similar specimen was brought to Boston, but no one could be found yesterday who had ever seen anything like it.*

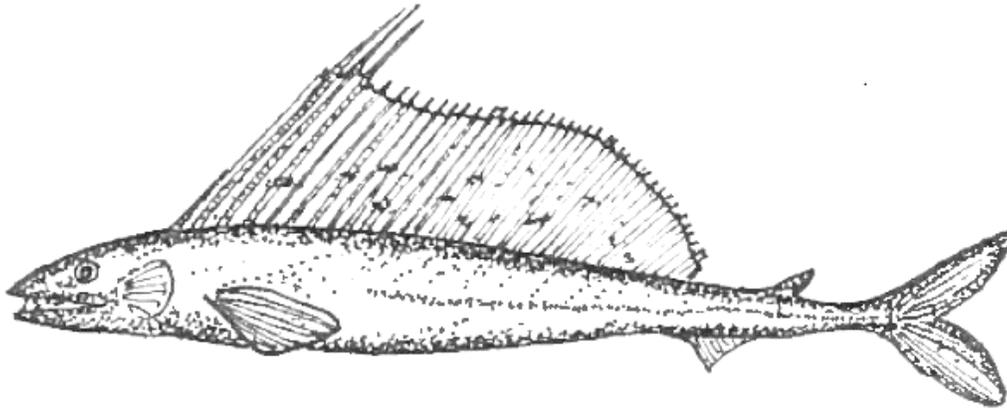


*One of the oldest dealers declared it was a species known as Alepedo-saurus ferox. Others were of the opinion that it was a saw-fish, which lives in 150 fathoms of water and is dreaded by every other fish that swims.*

*The sea serpent flourished around this locality several years ago, but the unbiased witnesses who got a glimpse of him solemnly asserted that they saw more than 100 feet of length, with other proportions of the great fish buried beneath the surface of the water.*

*The New England specimen of the sea serpent has not been seen around here for years. He usually made his presence known to fishermen who went out for a day's outing in a small boat, with a bait and other things to keep up their courage and enthusiasm in case the fish failed to bite.*

*He was the subject of many thrilling stories, both of prose and verse, and many of those who saw him formed what they called the Sea Serpent Club, which flourished for many years and for some time held annual reunions at Marblehead."*



*Alepisaurus ferox (Alepedo-saurus ferox)*

Investigation into this specimen revealed that it was accessioned into the collection of the Boston Society of Natural History in August of 1910 (accession number 5249). This collection was then transferred to the Boston Museum of Science. There is mention of this particular specimen in the BSNH's "Museum and Library Bulletin, No. 17, June 1911, p.2 where C.W. Johnson reports that the BSNH has made a cast of a peculiar "Handsaw Fish" (Alepisaurus ferox), a specimen of which was obtained from off Nova Scotia (personal communication Meg Trau (Curatorial Assistant), 24 July 2015).

## **Mermaid - off Southwest Nova Scotia (Brown's Bank) 1916**

**Nova Scotia Museum Harry Piers<sup>1</sup> correspondence collection**

This report comes in the form of a letter to Mr. Harry Piers, Curator and Archivist from the daughter of a steamer captain asking for information concerning possible mermaid. Her late father had confided in her that he had encountered one on one of his sailings to Boston, but had not shared the information with anyone else. The letter inquired if such an animal actually existed. There is no record of Mr. Piers' response.



## **Serpent - of Cranberry Lake Cape Breton ca 1927**

**Helen Creighton (1957)**

*"With all the people I have talked to I have only two reports of sea serpents. One being an inland lake, seems doubtful, so let us look at it first. Cranberry Lake lies roughly in the Sydney area. It is about a mile in length and is always full of water. One evening, about thirty years ago (ca 1927) a man was standing by the lake, looking for cows that had strayed away, when he was astonished to see something move on the surface that looked like a horse's head. Then the neck appeared. In a moment, the animal, or sea serpent went under water, turning itself over so that the last he saw of it was its tail. He judged it to be twelve feet in length and it seemed to be looking for something on the shore. It all happened so quickly that he could not recall any other details."*

*Others have also told of seeing it, and the stories have been current for a hundred years."*



## **Sea Serpent – Strait of Canso, 13 July 1936**

**Montreal Gazette, 14 July 1936**

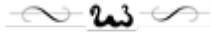
### ***"Sea Serpent Reported"***

### ***"40-Foot Monster Seen in Strait of Canso"***

*"Canso, N.S., July 13. -CP- A description of the sea serpent nearly 40 feet long encountered in the Strait of Canso was brought in here today by three fishermen. John Horne, his son Isaac and his brother Charles, said they saw the strange serpentine fish swimming through the water. They said they circled it several times, but they made no attempt to capture it."*

<sup>1</sup> Harry Piers - the Curator of the Nova Scotia Museum

*An ugly head shaped like a dog's with a lump the "size of a dipper" on it protruded from the serpent's neck which the fishermen said was 15 feet long and 10 inches in diameter. Behind the neck stretched a body 20 feet long and three feet in diameter, according to the description. It had a fin on the back near the neck and a tail forked like that of a swordfish."*



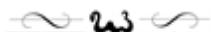
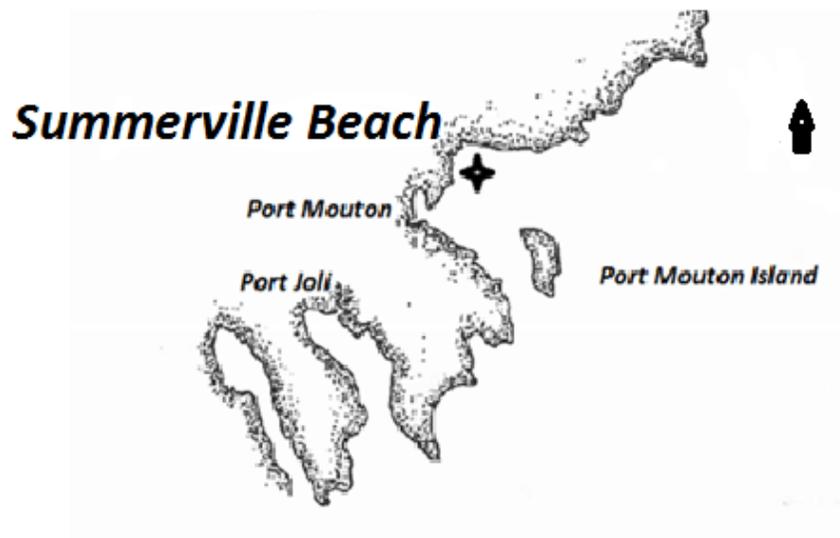
## **Sea Serpent - Summerville Beach near Liverpool, August 11, 1936**

**Winnipeg Evening Tribune 12 August 1936**

### **"Atlantic Kinsman of "Ogopogo" And "Caddy" Ducks Under Boat But Quickly Tires of Playing"**

*"Nova Scotia has a sea serpent and hundreds of bathers from Summerville beach, near here, will vouch for it. The "reptile fish." bearing striking resemblance to British Columbia's "caddy" and "ogopogo," and Scotland's Loch Ness monster, made its first appearance Monday in the ocean off Summerville beach. It was described as "something from 50 to 100 feet long, with the girth of a half - barrel and a small head carried high above the water.*

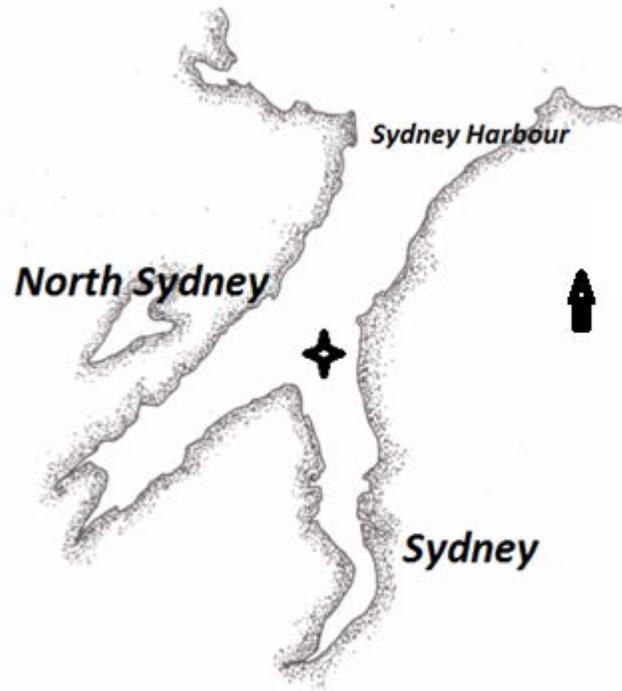
*Witnesses, including a number of prominent Liverpool business men, said the serpent travelled through the water"*



## **\*Sea Serpent - between Sydney and North Sydney, 1939**

J.P O'Neil (1999)

*“Bernard Heuvelmans writes that Charles Ballard, a resident of Sydney, Nova Scotia, also reported seeing the creature in 1939. In a letter written to Ivan Sanderson in 1947, Ballard described seeing an eighty-foot-long creature that resembled a “gigantic eel” swimming along about three hundred feet from shore in the harbour between Sydney and North Sydney.*



Alternate citation: McEwan, Graham J., 1978, *Sea Serpents, Sailors and Sceptics*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 133 pages, [noted as a multi-humped sea serpent].

There is some similarity in this observation and that of the 1902 report by the pilots aboard the *Wacouta*. The principal difference in this report is that this sighting places the serpent well down inside the harbor as opposed to appearing at the harbor mouth near Cranberry Point



**Horned Sea Monster - Peggy's Cove, February, 1940**  
*Chronical Herald, Halifax, 1940*<sup>1</sup>

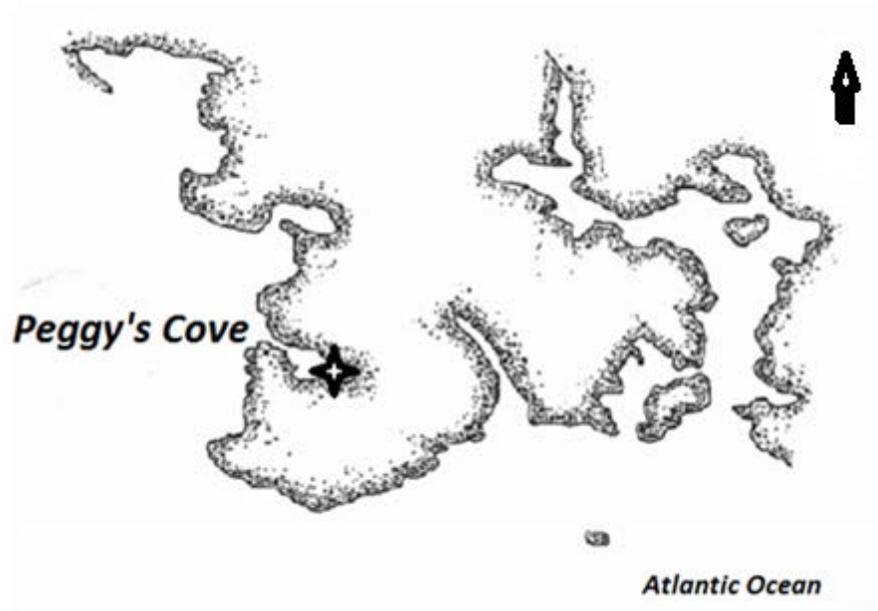
*The Peggy's Cove "What-is-it"*<sup>1</sup>



*"a mysterious porpoise-like horned sea monster trapped last Sunday at the western Halifax County village – will be preserved. Its owner, Lester Hubley of Seabright who purchased it from Richard Crooks of Peggy's under whose wharf the monster was caught, said last night he would place the carcass in cold storage at Halifax this week."*

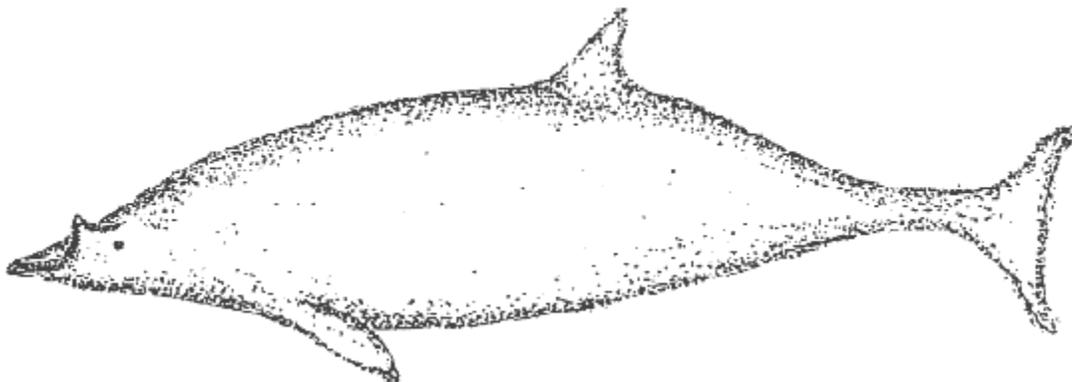
*"Above is shown the strange sea monster caught at Peggy's Cove last Sunday as photographed in the truck of Lester Hubley of Seabright, its owner, in Halifax yesterday. The inset is of the head and gives a comparison of its size with a man's hand. Presence of a set of horns on its head has scientists baffled as to its identity."*

<sup>1</sup> Text and image Courtesy of the Chronicle Herald



The actual identity of the monster was publically revealed two years later, when Professor Henry Raven of the Department of Anatomy of the *American Museum of Natural History* published his findings of investigation of the 7.7 meter specimen purchased from Mr. Hubley after he had travelled the province and charged people for a look at this Horned Marvel.

The animal turned out to be a rare specimen of a Beaked whale called the Blainville's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*, (Blainville, 1817)). What makes this species unusual is that it only has two teeth, in the strongly curved mandibles. The tips of the teeth stick up above the top of the head, giving the appearance of horns.



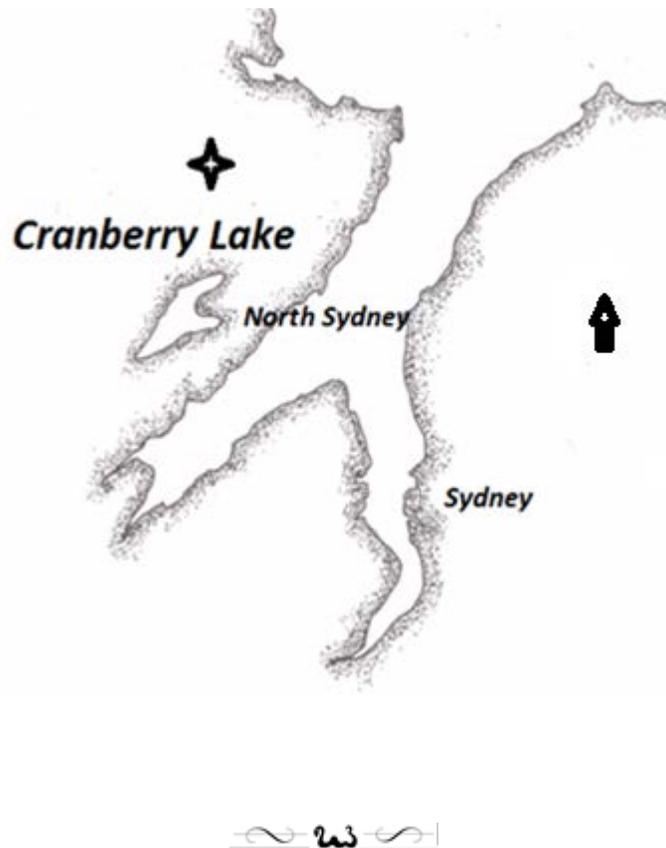
This was only the seventh specimen ever studied up to that point. The specimen is still in the collection of the AMNH in New York City



## Serpent – Cranberry Lake, Cape Breton, 1951

Helen Creighton (1957)

*“As recently as 6 years ago (1951) a man went to the lake to wash his car and, as he was working, it appeared again (see 1927 report). He was so frightened that he gathered his things together and fled. Shortly after this, a company was formed to go to the lake and kill the animal. It was winter and they had to work through the ice but they were unable to find it.”*



The following is a brief report of a sighting by the crew of the Liberian-registered freighter *Rhapsody* of massive sea turtle circulated by the news wire-service A.P.

## Large Sea Turtle – off Nova Scotia 6 June 1956

*The Troy Record* from Troy, New York June 8, 1956, p. 18

### *Sea Monster Loose in Atlantic*

(Chatham Mass, A.P.)

*“There’s a new “sea monster” loose in the North Atlantic. The Liberian freighter Rhapsody, Wednesday, reported the presence of a 45-foot, white-spotted sea turtle in the ocean north of Nova Scotia. The coast Guard warned all navigation to be on the alert for the giant reptile which, said the Coast Guard, has 15-foot long flippers and can rise eight feet above the surface of the sea”*

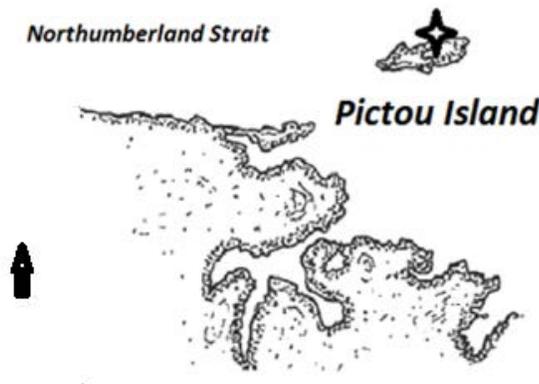


## Large Marine Animal – Pictou Island – undated

Helen Creighton (1957)

In her collection of stories of mysterious events, Helen Creighton recorded the following account of signs of an unidentified monster in the marshes of the island:

*“Pictou Island lies in the Northumberland Strait, nine miles offshore from Pictou Township and a few miles north of the Dawson sighting (see Merigomish. 1845). Here, bent grasses over an area of marshland on the south shore of the island convinced a group of locals that some large marine animal had come ashore. A few of the men suggested that the bent cat-tails and other plants gave the impression that a horse had been moving through the area but there were no horses on the island. It was concluded that “ it must be a monster from the sea that’s made the crawlings to our pond.”*



Helen Creighton goes on to recount how the men then attempted to flush the animal out of the grass using fire, but with no success.



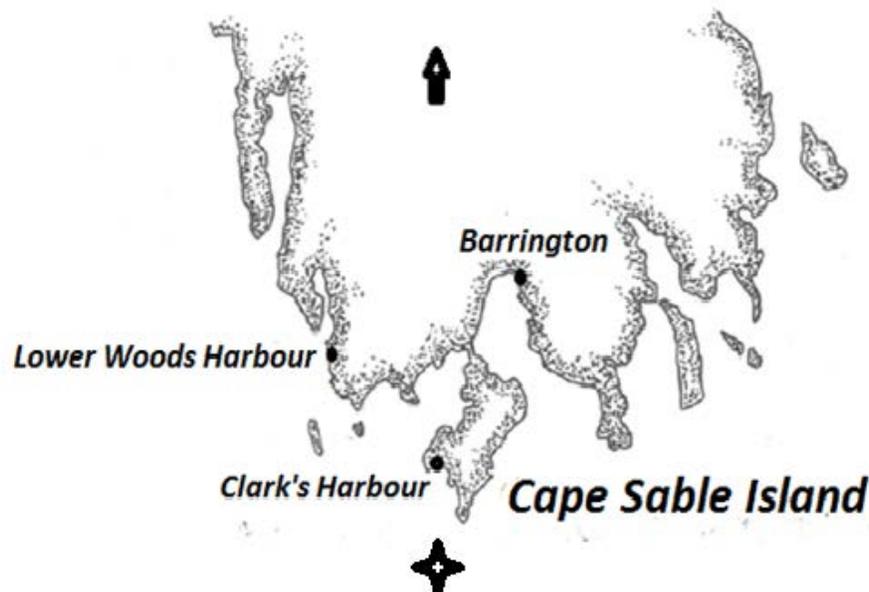
## Tusked Sea Serpent - Cape Sable Island, 1976

Shirley Elliott (1988)

*“Early in the month of July, 1976, residents of the fishing communities along the southwestern Nova Scotia coast were startled to learn an unidentified creature approximately fifty feet in length had been observed in the waters off Cape Island. On three separate occasions this monstrous thing surfaced in the neighbourhood of vessels engaged in fishing, causing occupants to scurry for shore in fear of their lives.*

*On July 5 Eisner Penny sighted the creature while hand-lining off Pollock’s Ledge; two days later Keith Ross and his son Rodney were anchored in the same area when it rose out of the waters adjacent to their Cape Islander; shortly afterwards Edgar Nickerson and his son Robert also sighted it in this same neighbourhood.*

*Keith Ross is reported to have said nothing like that was ever supposed to be in these waters, yet a creature answering to a similar description of the 1855s sighted near Green Harbour in 1855 noted in Ballou’s Magazine, August 1868 Edition)”*



## Tusked Sea Serpent - Cape Sable Island, 1976

John Gilhen (1984)

*"In more recent times, July 1976, along the southwestern coast of this province, a tusked sea creature was seen by a number of fishermen who believed it was a sea serpent... The tusked sea animal seen in July 1976 was probably a walrus, since one was photographed at Cape Sable Island, Shelburne County, on September 26 of that year by Mrs. Sidney Smith and companions."*

This image was taken near Yarmouth in July of 1976 (NSM Photo)



*Could this have been the basis for their sighting?*

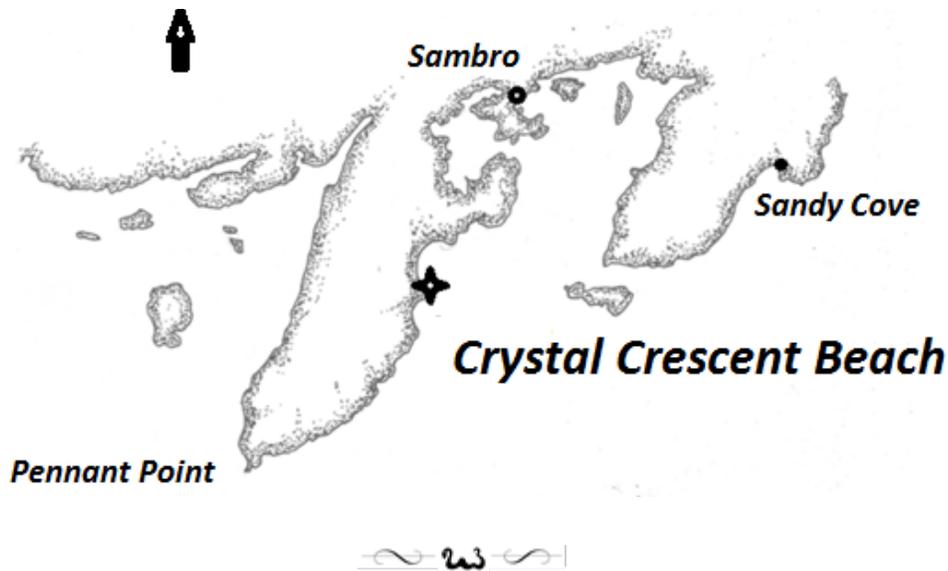


## Basking Shark - Crystal Crescent Beach 1976

(John Gilhen, Personal communication)

Zoological staff of the Provincial Museum of Nova Scotia were sent to investigate the remains of a large marine animal that had washed ashore at Crystal Crescent Beach, on the west side of Sambro Harbour near Pennant Point. The remains were found at the high-tide line, laid out in a curved position. They turned out to be those of a Basking shark of approximately 8 meters length.

One vertebral disc was retained for the Museum collection.



Yet another badly-decomposed carcass was found, washed ashore in Cape Breton, making the wire service circuit.

### **Sea Creature (Dinosaur) – Framboise (Cape Breton) 16 July, 1976**

*Calgary Herald*, 17 July, 1976 (a wire service story – Canadian Press)

#### **Sea Washes up Monster**

Residents perplexed, frightened... carcass has appearance of a dinosaur

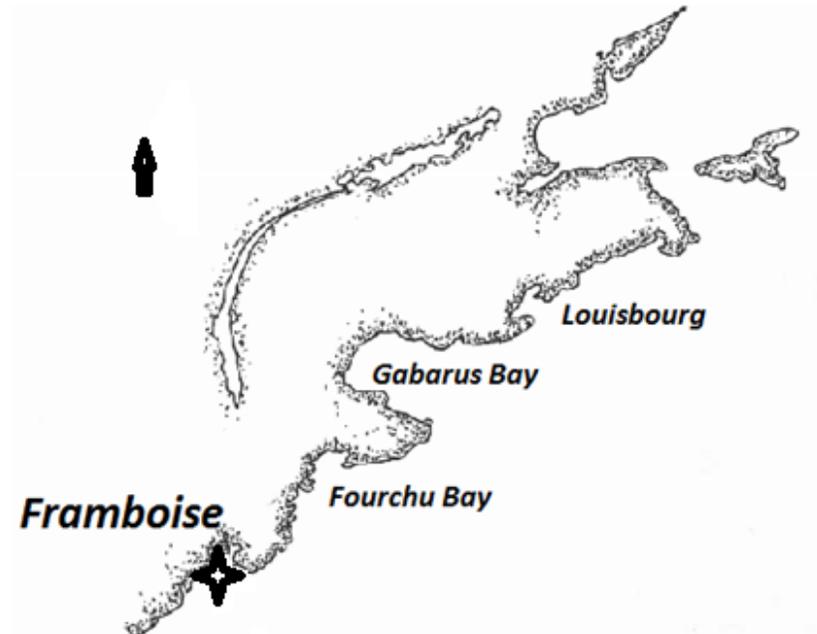
*“A marine biologist said Friday a dinosaur-like carcass that washed up on a beach at Framboise, N.S. appears to be that of a male basking shark. The badly-decomposed carcass, about 25 feet long, had the residents of the tiny fishing community 10 miles south of Sydney perplexed and some a bit frightened.*

*The carcass has a neck about three feet long with a 15-inch broad dorsal fin halfway down the back, two hind-leg like structures and a pair of flipper-like front feet. Parts of the body contained what appeared to be hair. It had a flabby stomach and no apparent rib cage*

*Dr. Paul Brodie, Marine Biologist with the Bedford Institute of Oceanography said the pair of hind protuberances appeared to be claspers all male sharks use in mating. The front ones would be the shark’s flippers. Although a shark has a large head only a small skull encases the brain accounting for the small skull and the apparent long neck. The jawbone and gill structures would fall away in decomposition.*

*Dr. Brodie said reports of hair on the animal probably could have been what was left of strands of decomposed and eroded muscle tissue.*

*The size, and the lack of a rib-cage fit the description of a basking shark. A whale carcass would have had a good prominent rib-cage. Of all animals in the ocean, decomposing bodies of basking sharks are the most likely to be mistaken for sea monsters Brodie said.*



The interesting factors behind this type of decomposition relate to the fact that basking sharks (described in the *NovaScotian* article in 1826) as all other sharks, have a skeleton that is made of cartilage and not bone. This means that very few of these skeletal structures remain after even preliminary decomposition. The other feature is that these sharks are not “aggressive” carnivores and scavengers, but, rather, gentle filter-feeders, much as the baleen whales. Instead of having fibrous plates suspended from the roof of their mouth they have coarse, fiber-like filter devices called rakers on the insides of each of their five gill arches.

The whole feeding apparatus is held open by large arch-like structures made of cartilage, which rapidly deteriorate during the decomposition process, leaving what appears, at first glance, to be a long-necked marine animal, perhaps similar to a plesiosaur .

What is generally describes as “hair” in such stranded behemoths is actually fibers of collagen. These strands are structural tissue that are used to reinforce other tissues such as tendons, ligaments etc. In decomposed basking sharks these are usually found in large numbers in the remains of the fins.

In many such strandings, the presence of such “hair” is used as the basis for suggesting that the animal is actually a large species of marine mammal.

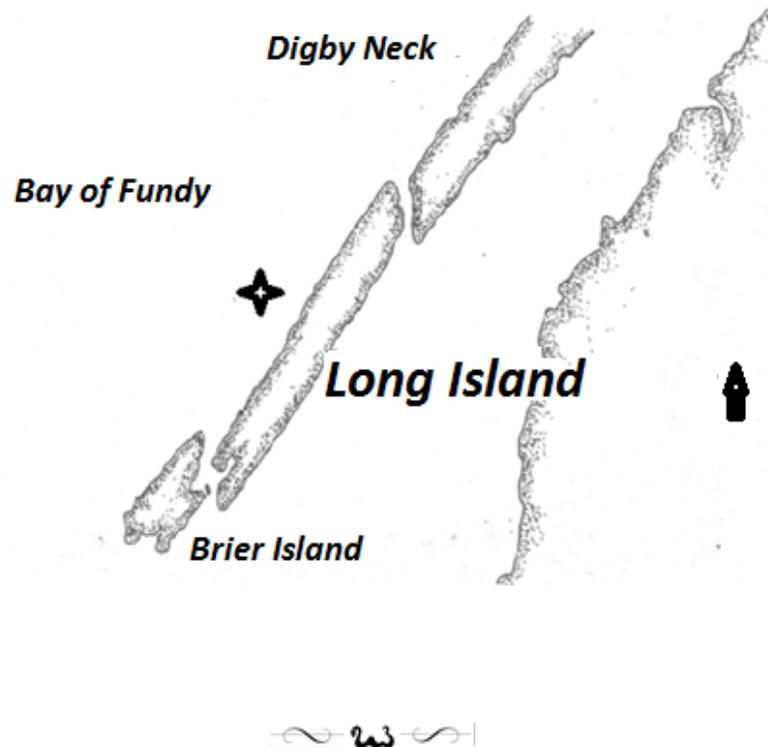
Ultimately, the finding of remains of one of these amazing animals on the shore often leads to great speculation of the discovery of a hitherto undescribed new marine species.



## Sea Creature – off Long Island (Bay of Fundy) – c. 1976

(Tony Buccola, personal communication, 2002)

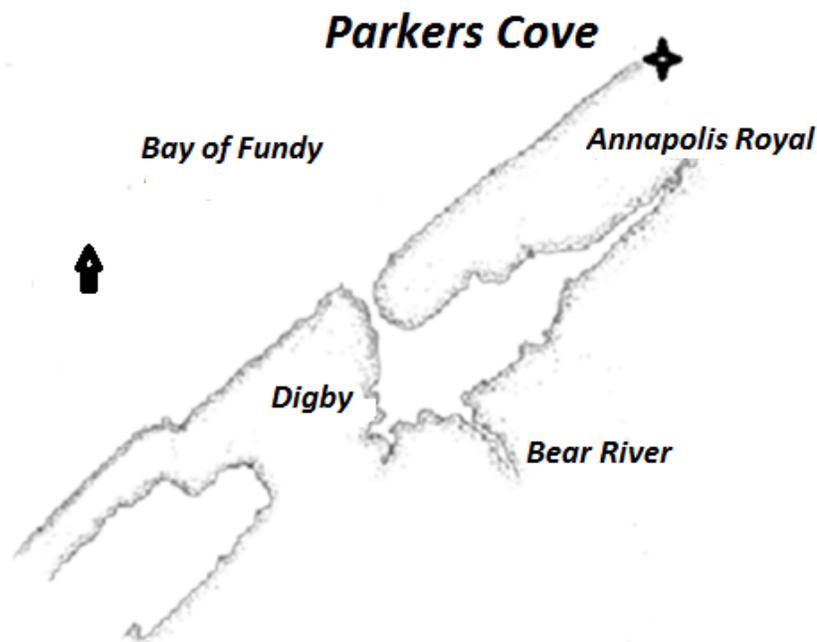
During investigation of the Basking Shark stranding at Parker's Cove in Annapolis County in 2002 (see below), Mr. Anthony Buccola was told of a giant non-whale found floating in the waters off Long Island (Digby County). The observer asked not to be identified.



## Basking Shark - Parkers Cove – 2002

An 8 meter long unidentified carcass of a marine animal washed up on the cobble beach at Parker's Cove, Annapolis County on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2002. It was determined by local residents that it was not a whale and the resulting discussions in both the local media and several web-based forums as to the appearance of remains of a prehistoric creature.

It was named "Parkie" by local residents.



Review of the specimen as well as images of the creature suggested it was a badly decomposed Basking Shark *Cetorhinus maximus*. Anatomical elements that created heightened interest in the community included the presence of “hair” (which turned out to be collagen fibers in the fins) and hooves (which turned out to be external secondary sexual characteristics of male Basking Sharks called “claspers”). Final validation of the identification was done through analysis of tissues by researchers at Acadia University. DNA analysis showed a conclusive positive correlation with published analyses for Basking Shark.

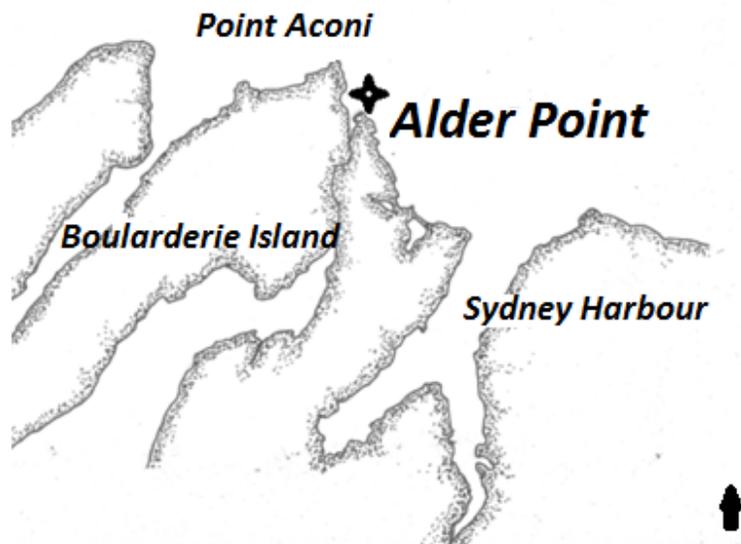


### **Sea Serpent – Alder Point Cape Breton 17 June 2003**

**Account of an encounter off Cape Breton, derived from a CBC Radio interview, 24 June 2003 and discussion with Mr. Cartwright**

Lobster fisherman Wallace Cartwright and partner spotted what they thought was a log of Point Aconi (near approach to Point Aconi light) 46°20N 060°17'W at about 2:30 p.m. of the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 2003. They were concerned about hitting it. Upon closer examination, it turned out to be an 8 meter long sea serpent.

They were coming in to the cove near the Point Aconi light. Both fishermen noted that it raised its head when it noticed them. The head was reported to be like that of a sea turtle, with a body like a snake. The body was about as big around as the diameter of a 5 gallon bucket. When approached, it disappeared under water. Mr. Cartwright noted that it stirred up the bottom, leaving the water muddy. The serpent re-surfaced several times.



They followed it for about 45 minutes, noting that it was following a predictable path, then resumed lobster fishing. Mr. Cartwright noted that he had been fishing in the area for over thirty years and had never seen anything like it.

Mr. Cartwright's account is perhaps the most intriguing of the recent sightings. The sizes he gives are very much in keeping with his personal experience.... The diameter was not given in absolute terms, but in comparative ones, ones with which he was most familiar.

The two additional observations he made were the most insightful. The first being that when the creature was disturbed, it headed down for deeper water, only to come across a relatively shallow muddy cobble bottom, evidently much closer to the surface that what it may have anticipated. This is similar to the observation provided in the Nyanza report of 1910.

The second relates to the fact that it was heading on a predictable course allowing Mr. Cartwright and his crew to follow it over a period of time. This suggests that it was not moving in a random manner, but may have been attempting to return to more-appropriate habitat. These observations suggest behavior with respect to habitat, something that was usually missing in earlier reports, which tended to be, strictly, descriptive.

What did he see? We don't know. However, we can all learn from his experience in recording as much detail as accurately as we can, using points of familiar context as reference, be it the length of the boat for size of animal, or comparative unit for circumference or diameter (e.g. 5 gallon bucket).

Finally, having a camera at hand can always aid, at least in part, in determining what the creature could be.



## ***Epilogue***

As one can see in the preceding pages, the reports of strange creatures in our seas, lakes and waterways reflect very much the prevailing societal attitudes and knowledge of those times.

The documented Mi'kmaw view of their world from such traditional sources is one that may not necessarily reflect specific events but rather may be showing us a perspective of a broader relationship they had with their environment and with the animals that lived within it. As an example, it becomes evident that the records of events that suggested the fostering of respect or fear of large marine animals clearly had a solid and practical basis from centuries of travelling through near-shore waters. The passage of time shows how the passing on of knowledge, can in a way, help shape the culture of understanding of such interrelationships.

The records from the historical periods give us additional insight into prevailing attitudes of the time and how we, as a society, treated events that were outside of the experiences of our normal daily lives. Indeed, we even get a glimpse into the gradual development of scientific investigation and communication. This, ultimately, has resulted in the availability of observations and findings to an audience much greater than that of the intimate scientific circles of the past. Yes, even members of the scientific community could be taken in by the excitement of the "story of the day".

It has also become evident that before the widespread availability of scientific knowledge to the greater public, the public press played a very important role, not only in passing of information of events, but putting those events into a broader perspective.

Did all these chroniclers see large ophidians or sea serpents or encounter mermaids or mermen? Probably not, but with a careful reading of their accounts and descriptions, it becomes evident that many had indeed seen creatures that would even by today's standards be considered marvelous, or even bizarre. As has been shown, the illustrations created based on some of these descriptions suggest a fauna that would astound the casual observer even in today's world. Mermaids, mermen, tusked sea serpents? Perhaps these could be a reflection of a fauna long gone with the change in the character of our near-shore habitats..... but then, we do not have the insight or wisdom of the people of those times to help us put those observations into their our modern perspective. As was noted at the beginning:

*"Some of these are true accounts of events while others may be exercises in creativity in writing. In some cases, it is not obvious which is which."*

We get additional insight into the world of those times. Barrels were not "45 gallon drums" but rather the much larger puncheons and hogsheads. Animals described as being the size of a moderate-sized tree were much larger than we would expect... moderate sized trees of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were much larger than those of the second-growth forests of today. Creatures were described based on their length and other measurements. Who would have thought that the fisherman or sailor travelling our

waters would, with great ease, pull out that old equation...  $c = 2\pi R$  and come up with the circumference of that creature that just crossed his path?

That then leaves the handful of reports of creatures that do not fit readily into the realm of species described in the literature, some perhaps with exaggerated dimensions, an occurrence not-uncommon when at sea, or of description or behavior that seem both plausible, and yet unfamiliar. It is those that fit in the category of unknowns.

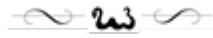
As was pointed out in the beginning:

*“Some of these are true accounts of events while others may be exercises in creativity in writing. In some cases, it is not obvious which is which”*

We should keep in mind what the late Dr. Fred Aldrich was reported to have said when commenting on marine marvels in the North-West Atlantic Ocean:

*We know more about the backside of the moon than the bottom of the sea.*

**The End**



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*...I went for a walk along the beach and found that a creature had been there before me.*

*It was a Mermaid.... she had left her purse on the sand..*

