

Algonquin Legends

OF

Paw Paw Lake

BY

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No more for us the wild deer bounds;
The plow is on our hunting grounds.

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— OF —

Paw Paw Lake

Many, many bi-bon-og nin-go-twak (hundred years ago) tradition as sacred to us as Holy Writ to the white man, tells us that Paw Paw Lake was a bay at the extreme western limit of sa-gi-a-gan (a great inland lake) called by ancient Au-nish-a-naw-beg (the Indians) Ki-tchi-git-a-gan

meaning an earthly Paradise.

This great lake filled the valley of the Paw Paw river a canoe day's journey towards the rising sun; and further they tell us it extended from the foot hills just south of the present site of Hartford village to the foot hills just north of where Bangor village is now located.

At that time An-a-kan (Rush lake) and Wawbi-gan (Swan lake) now called Van Auken lake, were bays connected with this large body of water on the north.

One of the largest o-de-na-wan (Indian villages) then known was built around this

bay on the side towards the setting sun.

This village was called Waw-kwin (Heaven), a happy hunting ground. Near by it was A-ki Ga-besh-i-win (a tribal camping ground). The great mi-kan (trail) of all the northern and western tribes passed this place to and from mas-ko-de (the great prairie) beyond Lake Michigan.

It was indeed an important place. Mo-o-se (elk), pi-gi-ka (buffalo), maw-qui (bear) and suc-se (deer) in their autumn and spring migrations, either north or south, passed around the western limit of this great body of water; while unnum-

bered millions of me-me-og (wild pigeons) in early spring time filled all the trees in the big forest with their nests, extending west to Lake Michigan and northward sometimes beyond Maw-kaw-te (Black river).

This wonderful lake swarmed with gi-go (fish) and shi-sheb, ni-kag and waw-bi si (ducks, geese and swan) floated in clouds upon its waters. In fact this ancient tribe lived in such luxury and ease that the chase was abandoned, for they could procure all bi-nessi, we-i-was and gi-go (fowl, flesh and fish) they wanted to eat in bi-no-dan (near bow

shot) of their wigwams. While this favored tribe was living in the lap of ease and luxury, one night in early spring, they were aroused from their slumbers at midnight by a strange roaring sound, such as they had never heard before.

At first they thought it might be an-i-mi-ka (thunder) but as no waw-so-mo-win (lightning) flashed across the sky they concluded it must be an on-coming wan-a-ton (cyclone), yet that did not seem possible as not an-a-kwad (a cloud) was anywhere to be seen. Finally they started in

the direction of the strange roaring sound, men, women and children, followed by a multitude of o-nin-og (dogs) whining and cringing as they had never done before.

Moving cautiously southward they finally reached the headlands north of where the village of Watervliet now stands, and gazing into the valley beneath, they saw by the feeble light of the moon that the shore at the outlet of their beautiful lake which for ages had held it fast, had given way and a deluge of water, roaring like a whirlwind, was sweeping down

great trees and rocks towards Lake Michigan.

When morning came they beheld where Lake Sa-gi-a-gan lay when the sun went down, like an infant sleeping in its mother's arms, a dark roily stream which appeared like some monstrous snake pushing its way through slime and mud, boiling on either side with struggling fish. Turning from the revolting sight with saddened hearts, they returned to their village. Here they found to their surprise the bay had receded a bow's shot from their canoes, that lay the night before in circles around the shore,

and their beautiful wik-wad (bay) was changed into a lake as it now appears.

Coming to a more recent date, when our tribe the Potawattamies took possession of southern Michigan, it may be interesting to know that we called Paw Paw Lake Sa-bi-na go-na, meaning "It swallows the river in storm and spews it out in sunshine." This name was given because in wet weather the river runs into the outlet of the lake and in a dry time it runs out at the same place into the river again. Hence the name from the Algonquin words meaning swallow and vomit. Indians

in naming their children always give some reason for the name, and in naming places the same custom is adhered to.

Pokagon does not wish to complain of the white man, yet must admit he longs, in his heart, again to behold the beauty of Si-bi-naw go-naw, the o-de-na of his fathers. Here we killed the bear, the elk and the deer. Here we trapped ni-kig, es-i-can and aw-mik (the otter, coon and beaver). But alas, our forests have been cut down! Our woodland flowers, for want of shade, have faded and died! Our ancient trails cannot be

traced! Our fathers' graves
have been destroyed, and
where our wigwams once
stood and our children played
now stands the cottages of
the white man. All, all has
changed except gi-sis, tib-i-
gis and an-ang-og (the sun,
moon and stars), and they
have not because their God
and Ki-ji Man-i-to (our God)
in great wisdom and mercy,
hung them beyond the white
man's reach.

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