

The Lady Of The Woods

CRATER LAKE, OREGON

During late summer of 1919 newspapers throughout Oregon and the West front-paged an astounding story. . . workmen near Crater Lake had discovered the body of a petrified woman. The nude body of stone was draped over a huge rock as though in abject despair and exhaustion. Rumors were rampant with vivid flights of imagination in explanation of the fantastic phenomenon, including one theory she had been petrified by the heat and ash from the exploding Mt. Mazama, as it created Crater Lake. Tourists flocked over the narrow, rough road to Crater Lake to view the "stone lady".

It was quickly ascertained that the petrified woman was merely a fine bit of stone carving. But by whom? No one knew. Even the old timers of the area could give no inkling of its origin or age. Obviously, it had been there for a long time, as Lichens stained both the lady and the rock. Park officials knew absolutely nothing of its origination, although Will Steele, father of Crater Lake Park, recalled mention by a trapper, several years previous, of a mysterious lady in the woods.

The mystery heightened. Had some famous sculptor, secretly searching for inner solace, hidden himself away in the wilds and then created this secret shrine, a Pagan praising perhaps to a dead or lost love? Why was it unsigned? How had it been accomplished without anyone's knowledge?

The continued publicity and unanswered questions heightened the interest of the public and more and more people traversed the rough road to "see for themselves".

In the summer of 1921 Anne Shannon Monroe, a writer for the Oregonian, made a trip to the area to investigate the Lady of the Woods. She was enthralled by the creation, by the puzzle of its making and by whom. She decided to unravel some of these fascinating secrets. With a party of interested people she began to search for signs of its origin. Minutely they examined the surface of the huge granite boulder upon which the stone lady rested. Digging away the dead leaves and soil at the base, they examined every inch possible of the boulder. Several enigmatic signs were discovered.

Under the seated figure, a deeply carved six-inch-long arrow was found. This arrow pointed in a northwesterly direction and, upon sighting along the arrow, it was found to point at another huge boulder, some 50 feet away. However, even after a detailed search, no markings could be found on the second boulder, nor could any relationship be established.

Further examination of the lady's boulder though, provided a startling discovery . . . what appeared to be the date 1843, a year far antedating any known white man's first visit to Crater Lake. The 1

was clearly visible, as were the 4 and the 3, with a space between the 1 and the 4 which appeared to be a faint 8. These were cut in old style figures and opened up a whole new field of conjecture. Could this be the marking for a grave? Obviously, the carving was of a young white woman, so some ancient, unknown Indian genius of the past was ruled out. Could there possibly have been some white woman who had traveled as early as 1843 into what was then an unknown, unexplored wilderness? Could the carving be a loving tribute to some woman from pre-pioneer days? This theory was further heightened by the additional discovery of what appeared to be two sets of initials, "M.A.Y.," in separate locations on the rock. It was a puzzling enigma to all who saw the stone lady and with the discovery of the additional signs, the whole mystery of the situation was merely heightened.

Anne Shannon Monroe wrote a tremendously moving article regarding the Lady of the Woods, which appeared in the Oregonian on August 28, 1921. This added further fuel to the fires of conjecture. However, it did shortly result in a revelation of the truth on the whole matter, causing a few red faces throughout southern Oregon. Still, it is strongly suspected that several people had known the story all the time and were merely going along with the entire hoax, feeling it would be good publicity for Crater Lake Park, which at that time was relatively unknown, having been a National Park for less than 20 years.

It was learned the Lady of the Woods had been carved in 1917 by Dr. Earl Russell Bush, a physician with the U.S. Health Bureau, attached to the U.S. Engineers, which was building roads within the park. Dr. Bush apparently developed an impassioned love for the beautiful wilderness area, resulting in his desire to create a lasting monument, now known as Lady of the Woods. Possibly, the huge granite boulder was worn so as to present a suggested outline. In any event, Dr. Bush had William Ivy, the government blacksmith, make him a set of sculpturing tools.

Fired with his vision of permanent beauty, the doctor fell to his task with ardor and zest, working feverishly, trying to complete his dream before snow fell and the camp was closed. From October 4 through 19th, each day he worked on his wood nymph dream . . . lavishing each spare moment on his creation . . . without a model, working only from his memory and knowledge of anatomy.

The statue was still not totally complete when the camp was closed, but it was unsafe to remain longer, for in those days the roads became impassable for months during the winter. The inspired young doctor must have reluctantly left his unfinished masterpiece behind. But, oddly enough most people agree that further efforts would probably have diminished the alluring beauty and mystique.

Dr. Bush was a native Aurora, Indiana, later a resident of Indianapolis and Cincinnati. It is not known if he ever returned to the scene of his inspired creation but, undoubtedly, he was aware of the uproar resulting when it was discovered a couple of years later. Surely, he must have oft times wondered what happened to his lovely maiden of the woods.

What motivated Dr. Bush to be feverishly create his languid lady is not known, nor is it known exactly what he was endeavoring to portray . . . beauty . . . sadness, or just a striking stone soliloquy to honor the magnificently beautiful wilderness surrounding Crater Lake and the long vanished Mt. Mazama.

Whatever the good doctor's motives may have been, he succeeded in creating a lasting monument to beauty and grace which should last for hundreds of years. Although, each year the weather extracts its token of wear on the statue and some of the signs found in 1921 are no longer visible. Unfortunately, over the years the Lady of the Lake has been somewhat forgotten. There are no longer road signs to show her location, nor does the booklet given each visitor by the National Park Service even mention her presence. However, if one stops at the Park Headquarters, it is only a few hundred yards over a fine trail to locate her. There, in the deep, green woods will be found the enigmatic lady, despairingly huddled in contemplation, viewed only by a few, awed visitors who find their way to the lovely shrine-like location. Among the towering trees she maintains her lonely, lovely vigil to the inspired talents of the young doctor and his feeling for the wilderness surrounding Crater Lake. But, the total mystery has still not been solved for the meaning of the arrow, the initials and the 1843 date still remains unanswered.

