

Ode to Turtles

My lifelong interest in turtles rushed to the forefront on September 13, 2009. That day was the second for the Fort Klock Craft Fair. We were fortunate to have as our guest Tim Klock, a skilled chainsaw carver from Altoona, PA., and his son Elijah.

Our site interpreters, Dave and Darla Klock had discovered Tim through Dave's genealogical research. After several unique figures appeared from Tim's chainsaw, I told him there were two parts of a long pine log down in the shed there at the Fort he could use. They were rather special to me since they were cut from a Stone Arabia forest.

Tim began on the wood with no suggestion from me as to what to carve... Lo and behold, when he finished he had a finely executed turtle. He could not have come forth with any creature more significant to me.

Turtles had touched my life from my very first memory. For 16 years I lived at Marshville, NY. The house was close to the bank of Bowman Creek. In fact, sometimes too close. A creek, like fire, can be friendly or very unfriendly. During some of the year it can be a raging torrent capable of sweeping you into oblivion if one miss-step is taken.

In the lazy, hazy days of summer, the creek is shallow and listless. On those days I listened to the croaking of bull frogs and admired the turtles. One old lady who sometimes helped my mother said I, personally, knew each one of them. You could look at the stones which thrust their tops from the water and almost always see frogs and turtles. Most of the turtles were small and decorated by Mother Nature with beautiful colors.

As I became older I found that I was not the only member of my family who must have had a fascination with turtles. Stored high up over the garage was a huge sea turtle shell. I was inquisitive about that shell with iron rings fastened to it. On it was painted "Chicken Dinners, Home-cooked lunches, Ice Cream and Soft Drinks". I was told that it had belonged to my great grandfather Valentine Oscar Garlock (1846-1925) who started a liquor store in Fort Plain in 1882. The shell had been used as his sign for many years. Just what wording was on that sign at that time I do not know since it was repainted when my mother and her family started a lunch room in Marshville in the 1920s.

I often wondered where great grandfather got the huge turtle shell. He traveled around this country and to Europe also. No one ever seemed to know where it came from but it is a prized possession of mine and an example of a unique use of one of nature's creatures.

Within my collections of artifacts are several cast lead turtle figures which were found on local Mohawk Indian sites. They remind us that one of the clans for the Mohawks was the Turtle Clan. Why they thus honored this slow moving creature I do not know, but honor him they did.

When I see a turtle in the road, I pick it up and try to keep it safe as it reminds me of a youthful fascination with turtles. One I shared with the Mohawks who resided in our valley so many years ago.

Skip Barshied

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