

Lady of the Lake creates her own legends

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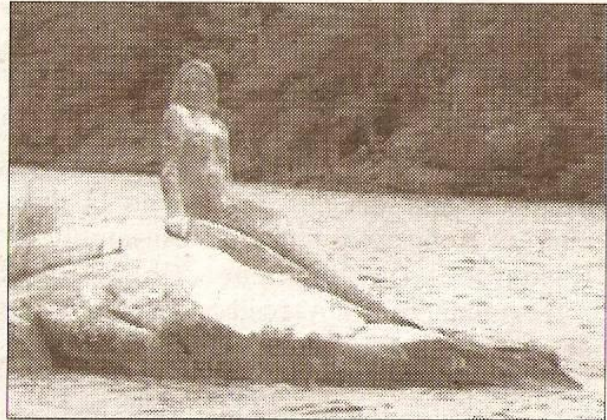
The year was 1932. The Winter Olympics opened in Lake Placid, New York; comedian Jack Benny's radio show airs for the first time and Fort France's Rainy Lake receives its mermaid.

Since 1932, the mermaid (a.k.a. Lady of the Lake) overlooks the activities in Silver Island Narrows or Water Narrows near Copenhagen Island on Rainy Lake.

According to local legends, the mermaid was at one time a siren who was in love with the stunning view when sunning herself on the rock one day. She became so smitten that as the days grew colder she refused to leave the beautiful scenery. As the lake froze over, she was left stranded and gradually turned to stone. Other legends have the mermaid statue as a lasting remembrance of a drowned girl by the man who had been with the girl in a boat which sank in Rainy Lake. Could it be that the owner of a nearby island lost his daughter in a boating accident, and created the mermaid in her honor?

Some people accept the tale that a renowned eastern sculptor fashioned the mermaid as a vacation project, perhaps in the fashion of Denmark's famed Little Mermaid that graces Copenhagen harbour.

But the truth of the mermaid isn't local legends or folklore. Gordon A. Schlichting (1914-1997) was a Minneapolis architect who carved the mermaid in 1932. Schlichting



Lady of the Lake overlooks Water Narrows on Rainy Lake

noticed a rock in the distance and decided that it would be an ideal location for a sculpture such as a mermaid.

Although Schlichting's mermaid sold many postcards he personally never cared too much for the stories she enticed.

"There isn't anything I can do about them (stories)" he told *The Daily Journal* in 1990. "Besides, it helps sell post cards," he added.

Schlichting's career was spent as an architect, designing schools and churches throughout Minnesota but he feared that he will forever be remembered "for that mermaid."

A metal mermaid sculpture was placed on the LaVerendrye Parkway in Fort Frances in 2003. The sculpture, created from the metal hull of a boat found sunken in the lake, celebrated the 70th anniversary of the original mermaid. Artists who created the tribute are Pam-Cain-Hawley and Mark Faragher.