

LENS & PEN PRESS

Lens & Pen Press
4067 S. Franklin
Springfield, MO 65807



Tel 417 886 7124
Cell 417 894 4030
email lensandpen@yahoo.com

www.hypercommon.com
www.beautifulozarks.com
www.dammingtheosage.com

ABSTRACT

Lover's Leap Legends: From Sappho of Lesbos to Wah-Wah-Tee of Waco. Leland and Crystal Payton, Lens & Pen Press, February 2020

Across the United States are hundreds of cliffs designated Lover's Leap. Legends of Indian princesses jumping to their deaths from them due to an insurmountable obstacle to true love have been told, sometimes believed, but occasionally mocked. No evidence exists that they were derived from Native American traditions. Similar tragic tales are found in European literature going back to the ancient Greeks.

Lt. Zebulon Pike reported the first version with Indians in his 1810 account of an 1805 expedition up the Mississippi River. The next year a Baltimore newspaper ecstatically compared the Sioux maiden in Pike's tale to Sappho the Greek poetess who allegedly plunged to her death seeking respite from unrequited love. Realizing that Pike's narrative had literary parallels did not impede the generation of these fictitious fables. Few spas or resorts in the nineteenth century lacked a cliff with a tear-jerking legend.

Near the end of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) Mark Twain tells of a "disappointed Indian girl" who jumps from Maiden Rock, Wisconsin, and lands on her "stern parents" who were compelling her to wed a warrior she had no feelings for. She is unharmed, but her impact kills them. "There are fifty lover's leaps along the Mississippi ... (but) this is the only jump in the lot that turned out in the right and satisfactory way," the godfather of American realism wrote.

Notwithstanding, the ridicule of satirists these saccharine stories were the rage in an age that linked refinement with sentimentality. Over four hundred color illustrations of souvenirs and postcards of Lover's Leaps in the 352-page all color book attest to their popularity. A few locations, like Gadsden, Alabama, still vigorously promote their Lover's Leaps, but many of the cliffs where Indian princesses reportedly jumped are today only puzzling toponyms.

Key words: Lover's Leaps; Romanticism; Indian legends; folklore; fakelore; Sappho; Mark Twain, Zebulon Pike

Chapter 1: Dusty Legends of "Dusky Maidens"

This chapter asserts the authors, though academically uncredentialed, are qualified to write about an understudied phenomenon like Lover's Leaps due to their experiences as flea market pickers. By pairing ephemera acquired from antique dealers with old newspaper and magazine articles, a case is made that sentimental Romanticism has been a continuing force in American culture. Realists have countered this characterization of Native Americans as "Noble Savages" often employing humor. Tension between fact and fiction permeates the Lover's Leap trope and gives this study relevance to current concerns of distorted pop culture Indian imagery. Like Mark Twain, the authors find these pathetic melodramas perversely

funny if dispiriting reminders of our ancestors' addiction to sentimentality.

Key words: mass culture; romanticism; realism; fantasy; Indian imagery

Chapter 2: Legends and Scenery

Lover's Leaps have utilizations beyond commemorating the death of an imaginary Indian princess. Hannibal, Missouri's Lover's Leap is a much-visited city park. A small marker is inscribed with a standard legend. A few visitors pause to read it but most stroll along the barrier fence gazing out over the town on a bend of the Mississippi River. Americans are addicted to panoramic landscapes in art and life, a more legitimate aspect of Romanticism than jejune Indian legends. Lovers stroll hand in hand watching the grain barges push downriver by tugs. Dogs and children have fallen off the bluff, even cars. Miraculously, most survived. In 2018 a seventeen-year-old girl jumped to her death. Lover's Leaps have a real history as well as being invested with a literary myth. Hannibal is Mark Twain's hometown, but curiously he did not write about its Lover's Leap in any of his books.

Key words: Hannibal Missouri; Americans and landscape; Romantic esthetics; Mark Twain; suicide by jumping.

Chapter 3: Winona: Darling of Indian Song and Legend

Writers seized on Pike's bare bones story of an unnamed Sioux woman who "took the lover's leap." William Keating, in an 1825 account of a government expedition up the Mississippi, named the unfortunate Indian girl Winona, and the spot where she "fell a lifeless corpse," Maiden Rock. The legend had become so renowned that, sixty miles downstream, a town was named after her in 1857. Around 1900 a bronze statue of the heroic maiden was dedicated at Winona, Minnesota. Products, a trick shot artist, and an actress bear that name, which is a Sioux word meaning "first born girl child." Winonas have jumped from other Lover's Leaps across the country. Mark Twain must have been aware of the widespread misuse of the name as he asked the source of the Lover's Leap legend he parodied about "Winona: Darling of Indian Song and Legend."

Key words: Winona; Maiden Rock; Lake Pepin; Indian place names; Mississippi River expeditions; Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, William Keating.

Chapter 4: Sappho of Lesbos

Native American Lover's Leap plots only somewhat comport to the narrative of Sappho's jump 2,600 years ago from a cliff into the Aegean Sea. Comparisons between the suicide of the famed Greek poet and those of frontier Indian princesses were made beginning with the first installation of the story in America and have continued. Sappho of Lesbos was highly regarded by the ancients. Fragments of her poetry were extolled in the eighteenth century by Joseph Addison in *The Spectator*. To later Romantics, Sappho was not only a beacon of literature, but ambiguities in her use of gender pronouns led to her becoming an icon of female same-sex love.

Much western literature employs classical templates. American Indian Lover's Leap legends are derived from a mixture of the story of Sappho, the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe, and Romeo and Juliet, which Shakespeare got from early classical sources.

Key words: Sappho; Lesbian; Leucadian Leap; Greek mythology; Joseph Addison; The Spectator; Pyramus and Thisbe; Romeo and Juliet

Chapter 5: Cliff Notes

Many accounts of Lover's Leap legends are prefaced with the claim the tale was told to the author by "a very old Indian." The story of the Piasa monster is a fabricated Indian legend with some small claim to authenticity—once there was a petroglyph of a fearsome creature from Indian mythology on the face of a cliff along the Mississippi River at today's Alton, Illinois. That cliff also has a conventional Lover's Leap legend, but a succession of invented stories about a winged, people-eating monster has captivated the imagination of the local populace. Piasa's horrific image enhances product labels, is the high school mascot, and has been repainted several times on the bluff face.

Cliffs across America have been seen as ideal stages for made-up Indian dramas. William Cullen Bryant wrote a poem in 1824 about an incestuous Indian maiden's suicide off Monument Mountain. James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow used Indians in their work with indifference to their actual customs, similar to the fabricators of Lover's Leap legends. Such liberties with verifiable reality have not gone unnoticed by satirists.

Key words: Piasa monster; Father Jacques Marquette; Indian mascots; William Byrd II; William Cullen Bryant; Monument Mountain; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; *Song of Hiawatha*; James Fenimore Cooper.

Chapter 6: Leaping across America

By the time picture postcards became the rage in the early 1900s, cliffs with legends were scattered throughout America. This largest chapter of the book matches photographically created views of these bluffs with newspaper accounts of their sad sagas. Having a Lover's Leap was so prestigious to communities that commemorative silver spoons and souvenir china were marketed.

Regional topography and cultural differences affected these tales, but the plots are depressingly similar. During the era when resorts and spas offered unscientific water cures, many claimed unhistorical sites with Indian legends. Most of these once-celebrated places are barely remembered. Even Winona, Minnesota, is reluctant to disclose the origin of its name today.

By contrast, Rock City, a commercial tourist attraction aggressively promotes its perilous Lover's Leap cliff. For the most part, Lover's Leaps remain marked on maps, but their narratives are fading from collective memory.

Key words: regional varieties of Lover's Leaps; postcards; souvenirs; spas; Rock City.

Chapter 7: Legend Busters

Other humorists agreed with Mark Twain that the unbridled emotionalism of Lover's Leap legends made them prime targets. Occasionally these erstwhile Indian stories were attacked for their ignorance of tribal customs but more deadly were the arrows of satire. That there were so many Lover's Leaps with such similar stories made them vulnerable to ridicule.

In a 1919 *Harper's* magazine piece, Ellis Parker Butler revealed that these romantic landmarks were generated to bolster a town's list of amenities. He incorporated an absurd device of the lovers (not Indians) being blown into the air. A version of that premise has been used humorously at Blowing Rock, North Carolina.

A 1951 article in *The New Yorker* by Frank Sullivan mocks folklorists who attempt to classify Lover's Leaps.

Cartoonists grasped the humorous potential of Lover's Leaps as early as 1795. Many jokes, editorials and even advertising uses of the trope exploit its metaphorical and graphic possibilities. Lover's Leap tales are a superb opportunity for those with an agnostic legend-busting mentality.

Key words: Romanticism; satire; cartoons; Blowing Rock, North Carolina; legend busters

Chapter 8: Leaps for Life

Cliffs, as well as being platforms for suicidal Indian princesses, can be an opportunity to escape one's enemies. In this genre, Indians are usually the aggressors and the fleeing hero of the tale is a pioneer or soldier. Such depictions of Indian males as bloodthirsty savages contrast with the stereotypical portrait of native women as beautiful, sensitive, caring and amorous beyond reason. Thrilling chases culminating in a death-defying jump have been a staple of pulp novels and later became stock silver screen devices. In contemporary cinema, however, Native Americans are far less commonly portrayed as villains.

There are some unusual cliff-jumping tales. Rather than surrendering to the US Cavalry, a tribe of Apaches jumps off a cliff en masse. Tears of their women were turned into obsidian pebbles now sold in Arizona gift shops as Apache Tears.

Key words: stereotyped Indian men; daring escapes; mass suicide; Apache Tears; pioneer-Indian conflicts.

Chapter 9: World Lover's Leaps

There are cliffs across the globe with stories of local girls so distraught by disappointments in love they have jumped from them. Lacking Indian princesses, World Lover's Leap legends usually feature simple country lasses or oppressed minority girls. In an 1873 short story by Richard Doddridge, Frida takes "a hundred fathom plunge" accompanied by her loyal old dog when a London cad leads her on and then marries another. English versions show considerable novelty. In William Crossing's "The Lover's Leap," Rosine leapt from a cliff above the Dart River with a monk.

English writers began publishing these melodramatic tragedies in the eighteenth century, well before they caught on in the New World. Robert Southey, "Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom" wrote a 1798 poem, "The Lover's Rock." In it a Christian woman and her Muslim lover jump from a mountain in Spain. Antequera, a nearby town, has a prominent fountain statue of the couple.

Guam has a Lover's Leap that is a busy tourist destination. Jamaica's Lover's Leap is also a publicized attraction. Its tragic lovers are mistreated African slaves.

Because the English have been so taken with the trope, it might be expected that Canada would have a bounty of these legends. It does not. A search of newspaper files reveals 37,338 hits for Lover's Leap. Most are in the United States. Canada accounted for 240 responses, the same as Nebraska alone.

Key words: Romanticism; melodrama; Antequera; mixed race lovers; Robert Southey; The Dargle; Buxton; Guam; Jamaica; Canada

10: Water Falls

Near Gadsden, Alabama, is Noccalula Falls, named for a beautiful Cherokee princess who, the day she was being forced to marry a Creek warrior she didn't love, jumped from its lip. A nine-foot statue of Noccalula plunging into the gorge commemorates her heroic protest. In 2109 an onsite play based on the tragedy premiered at the Noccalula Falls City Park.

Cascading water is a scenic enhancement. Streams that encounter a cliff are uncommon and only a select few are settings of Indian folklore. Toccoa Falls, Georgia, Multnomah Falls, Oregon and Snoqualmie, Washington all have Lover's Leap legends. Unlike Noccalula Falls these places are celebrated today for their natural beauty, not a pseudo Indian legend.

Though technically not a Lover's Leap, there is an analogous legend about an unhappy Indian woman who takes her canoe with her children on a fatal trip over a modest waterfall that divides current Minneapolis and St. Paul. St. Anthony's Falls has been much modified by engineering and its grim story has slipped from its earlier literary prominence. Celebrated proto-feminist Felicia Dorothea Hemans wrote of the event in her 1828 poem, "Indian Woman's death."

Key Words: Noccalula, waterfalls, Multnomah, Snoqualmie, St. Anthony's Falls

11: Legend of the White Canoe, aka Maid of the Mist

Niagara Falls is an awesome spectacle. Adding an improbable Indian legend would seem unnecessary. Before improved transportation made it accessible to the middle class, Niagara was, to a small elite of educated travelers, the superb symbol of the sublime. A story of an Indian maiden sent over the falls in a canoe as a sacrifice to the Thunder God was concocted in 1850 to entertain the new, less transcendental tourists. Originally titled "Legend of the White Canoes" it mistakenly became known as the Maid of the Mist.

In 1892 Buffalo, New York, artist James Francis Brown painted a canvas depicting an Indian princess standing nude in her canoe about to plunge over the falls. That odd, mildly erotic, image was used on an amazing variety of souvenir ware and promotional literature.

Local tribes always insisted they never practiced human sacrifice but it wasn't until 1996 that Iroquois Nation activists compelled the Maid of the Mist tour boat enterprise to stop playing a recording of the sacrifice legends. Today the naked princess motif is taboo, even at local history museums.

Key words: Niagara Falls; Legend of the White Canoe; Maid of the Mist; James Francis Brown; Indian activists; Iroquois Nation; mass tourism

12: An Edgy Mythos

In the first chapter the authors acknowledged they are unqualified to judge the social and political implications of Lover's Leap legends. In the interest of fairness in this last chapter, authorities who have subjected these romantic fables to gender and racial analysis are quoted. Some clearly believe these sentimental fables are evidence of America's systematic injustice to both women and native peoples.

Mark Twain's opinion was that Lover's Leap legends are literary disasters, not crimes against humanity. As to claims these stories have a negative effect on Indians, there is little indication that Native Americans have been profoundly offended, the exception being the Maid of the Mist controversy.

These fabricated tales are transplants of European Romanticism with roots in ancient Greek forms. Indians did not participate in their creation and they are not credibly described. Indifference to verisimilitude is not unusual in popular culture.

What the future holds for the public's perception of Lover's Leap legends is a guess. Many once wildly popular art and entertainment products have recently been judged inappropriate or immoral. As this study points out, the geographic sites have value apart from their fading Indian legends. Lovers and families on outings will continue to come to these bluffs for the view.

Key words: Eurocentric; sexism; imperialism; patriarchy; feminism; racial guilt; squaw man