

# Conesus Lake Folklore

by Mrs. Joseph Lang - The Livonia Gazette

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## Installment No. 1

Conesus Lake, one of the four "Little Finger Lakes", the others being Honeoye, Canadice and Hemlock, lies west of the six major Finger Lakes of Skaneateles, Owasco, Cayuga, Seneca, Keuka and Canandaigua. Conesus Lake is about 7.8 miles long and in many places a mile wide. It covers approximately 2,184 acres and averages 818 feet above sea level.

The name, Conesus, is of Indian origin. William Boyd in his book, "History of Conesus," says "It comes from the Indian word Ga-ne-a-sos, which means always beautiful." On the other hand, Arch Merrill in his book, "The Lakes Country," says that in primitive times the Indians called it "Gahnuh-sas," after its sheep berries that grew along the shores. Another story told by the old timers is that Gan-ay-sas (Conesus) meant medicine lake to the Indians. Take your choice - they are all good stories, and all may be founded on a grain of truth as well as fiction.

The real history of Conesus dates back along a long time before the Indians or white men, to the days of the ice age. At one time, it was a river across a broad plateau. The ice age closed the river and piled rocks on rocks to form the rolling hills.

This region around Conesus was once under oceanic waters. The marine fossils found in the rock formations verify the existence of this ancient sea. The shale, sandstones, and rocks found along the Conesus Shores, in the glens, are the hardened or indurated sediments, deposited in these oceanic waters. These sediments were derived from contemporaneous areas of dry land over 400 million years ago.

One million years ago an extensive ice sheet flowed over the northern part of Central and Eastern United States. Tons of glacial debris, 10,000 feet thick, dammed the northward flowing rivers and streams in Western New York. The imprisoned waters became the famous Finger Lakes of Western New York.

One of the relics formed in the ice age and with which most Conesus Lakers are familiar is the famous Conesus Stone. These stones look like turtles - they are oval shaped like a turtle, and are usually smooth on one side and slightly rough on the other. The gray segments of rock forming a striated turtle-back pattern appear to be glued together with a dark lava or pitch-like material.

Where the creeks that drain the hills of Conesus have etched their way to form ravines, Conesus Stone can be seen partly embedded in the laminations of shale and partly exposed to the alternate erosion of sun, rain and freezing temperatures. This formation was first discovered at Conesus, and thus it got its name. Since, it has been discovered in Siberia and Iceland; but even there they are called Conesus Stones.

Conesus has reached its present development the hard way, like all other vacation resorts. It went through its slow horse and buggy stage when cottages were few and roads were untraveled, except in dry weather. In those days, the steamboats hauled cottagers and their belongings from Lakeville to their summer homes. The Erie train had a regular schedule between Rochester and the water's edge at Lakeville. In the early 1900's, daily commuter trains left the Erie Station at five o'clock and safely deposited their load on the shore for a boat ride to the nearest pier for 50 cents for a round trip.

The steamboat era is now history, like the march of Sullivan's men, but there are many present cottagers who will remember the "McPherson," the "Minnehaha," a sailboat which was the first on Conesus over 65 years ago; the first

steamboat, the “Jessie”; Dan Walkley’s “Alice M.” the “H. D. Jaeger,” the “Cyclone,” the “Rochester” and many others.

Conesus Lake has had and is still having its period of evolution. Evolution is a slow process. Automobiles and good roads gave commuters their own time table - and the Erie train passed into history. Motor speed boats replaced the steamboats. More cottages were built, dozens were converted to year-round homes. Each year more and more cottagers are installing heating plants and insulation.

It all adds up to the fact that Conesus Lake still has all the charm of the 1770’s. It may not have many fish, but there are still a few smart ones left that will test the skill and cunning of a real angler.

Today the lake is known as a famous summer playground for Rochester and the Genesee Valley. The theme song of the peaceful hill-girt lake that is nearest to Rochester’s southern door is “In the Good Old Summer Time.”

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