

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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'Jabberwock' visited Harney in 1888
By Jay Graybeal

A friend of mine from Harney recently told me about a nighttime encounter with a strange creature. He was fishing along the banks of the Monocacy and reeled in what he thought was a large fish. As he reached down to pick up his catch, it wrapped its thick body tightly around his arm. Each time he tried to free his arm its body coiled more tightly and its tail whipped against the side of his head.

Stepping into the light cast from his nearby home he beheld a vicious set of snapping jaws with razor sharp teeth. Not quite sure what he had caught, or what was now trying to catch him, he took it home to show his wife. A scream and a few choice words sent him down to the river where he managed to extricate himself.

My friend's encounter reminded me of a remarkable incident from Harney. The *Westminster American Sentinel* of January 28, 1888 carried an article under the heading of "The Harney Jabberwock:"

"One night Mr. W.A. Dreamer was out late, and as he was passing through a woods he naturally felt a little timid, after hearing so much talk about the mysterious tracks seen in the vicinity. When right in the midst of the forest, to his utter surprise the Jabberwock attacked and quickly bore him beside a large stump, and commenced flopping him with its wings. Mr. Dreamer, in his struggle to get free, made such a terrific outcry that the animal was frightened away just as a friend, who heard the appeal for help, came to his assistance. As the night was dark and rainy they thought a hasty retreat the better part of valor, consequently they quickly retired to a more genial clime.

"A few nights after, ten or twelve of our citizens, with guns, pistols, clubs and lanterns, started to the woods in search of the beast, but after spending some time and finding no trace of it they finally gave up the search.

"Since then we have seen several dead chickens, but whether they were killed by the Jabberwock, or died from cholera, we are not able to say. But one thing we do know: there is a dead calf and a sheep, partly eaten, lying in J.H. Lambert's field, and, as the strange tracks were seen about his place, the supposition is that the Jabberwock is a very dangerous animal.

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"The excitement in our village is very great. Some are afraid to go out of the house after dark and not a few carry firearms in the day time.

"One of our young bachelors, who is teaching school in the silver regions, was not at home since the Jabberwock made its appearance until last Saturday. He started on Friday evening and, being afraid to travel after dark, stayed all night with a friend and did not come into town until Saturday, looking not unlike an Indian away from the reservation, from the fact that when first seen he was carrying an umbrella which, in the distance, resembled a bow and arrow.

"Mr. Daniel Shoemaker could scarcely wait until he received last Saturday's mail to see the proceedings of Congress. He, no doubt, has an idea that Congress will make an appropriation for the purpose of having the Jabberwock caught, and thus help to reduce the surplus in the treasury.

"One of our families has really broken up housekeeping. The wife has gone home to her parents and the young husband left for parts unknown. The house no stands idle and, no doubt, can be bought cheap by some one who is not afraid of the Jabberwock. Signed A.L. Bert the regular correspondent for Harney."

Jabberwock stories began to appear shortly after the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in 1872. From this writer's fertile imagination came:

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Harney, in the northwest corner of Taneytown, was home to the "Jabberwock" in 1888.