

LAKE COUNTY 'CURIOSITIES'

Ohio's smallest county with the most history is well documented. What is not as widely known are some of the many county curiosities. Melonheads, a lighthouse ghost cat, Fairport's Ice Palace, Willoughby Shepherdess Dorothea Davis, Mentor's escaped Circus Elephant, Perry's American Indian Princess and Duke the Fire Dog are but a smattering of some of these legendary tales. This month we share two of these quirky stories.

Farmer / Inventor John Cz and the Heads in the Pumpkin Patch

The story of unusually shaped gourds and a North Madison farmer named **John M. Czeszcziczki** (1908-1984) began nearly 90 years ago during the Depression era. Known as **John Cz**, this son of Hungarian immigrants was



a farmer who lived on **Dock Road** and grew pumpkins. According to John's niece Pat and other local Madison residents, John's pumpkin patch garnered legendary status in 1938 when his pumpkin creations with human faces attracted local and national attention.

John had spent four years in the early 1930s experimenting with several materials- including iron, lead, glass, bronze, concrete and aluminum to create a pumpkin mask mold. His design process began by placing a mask around a pumpkin while it was the size of a grapefruit and attached to its vine. The encased pumpkin took its shape during the initial fifteen-day growth phase. Cz would then remove the mold and the pumpkin continued its



natural growth retaining the mask features. In time, the pumpkin resemblance included facial features of eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Local legend and neighbor reports, including newspaper accounts, mentioned sharp explosions of iron molds bursting under the pressure of the ever-growing human-like pumpkin heads. As the four years

SERIAL NUMBER 332	1. NAME (Print) John Madison Cz		ORDER NUMBER 1432
2. ADDRESS (Print) Madison 3 Madison Lake Ohio			
3. TELEPHONE yes	4. AGE IN YEARS 31	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Cuyloga Ohio	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mr. John (M) Gyzagizski Father			
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON R.F.D. 3 Madison Lake Ohio			
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME John Madison Cz			
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS R.F.D. 3 Madison Lake Ohio			

passed, Cz perfected his creation process, eventually settling on clamps and several types of aluminum molds. Once patented, his creativity saw him fashion likenesses of celebrities with painted on eyes, corn teeth and corn silk mustaches. Pumpkin faces included Clark Gable, Greta Garbo and even





President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Selling his pumpkin creations for \$10 to \$50, Cz's knack for growing and designing eerie autumn moonlight faces became the subject of stories as far away as Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Toronto, Canada. A 1938 appearance on a nationally syndicated New York radio talk show, "*The Hobby Lobby*," led to one minute **Fox MovieTone** clips for newsreels shown in movie theaters. Fame continued with his pumpkin expertise being shared in Germany and other international locales.

John Cz continued this pumpkin face hobby for nearly a decade before retiring it altogether and focusing on the life of a farmer. Cz passed in 1984. He and his wife Margaret are buried in the **North Madison**



Cemetery.

His farm was purchased by local David Pethel who one day discovered many of these old molds in the overgrown brush that once were the

famous pumpkin patches. Despite some mask molds being lost forever, forgotten local history was returned to the present day. His son recalled many masks being hung in the family barn. Still his curiosities and story lives on as it became an exhibit at the **Madison Historical Society** in late 2021 (see photos above). It is just a one tank trip to W. Main Street in Madison Village.

The Big Water God

Another intriguing curiosity has its roots nestled along Lake County's north shore. This history is part of Ohio's Native American lore. Many have heard of the Whittlesey culture, Reeves Village, Fairport Village, Grantham, Perry or Indian Point sites. While Paleo-Indians and eventually the Mound builders can date back to AD 900 to 1650, this next sacred tale occurs just offshore. It is the story of **Lake Erie's Big Water God**. This bubbling brew lies just offshore Fairport's beach and has become part of Native American legend dating back 400 years as well as Fairport fishermen lore from the 1890s.



Native Americans believed that several Lake County areas, like Little Mountain, were home to the **Great Spirit** who resided among its caves, springs and rock formations. The Big Water God mentioned in the 1936 **Saul Olila** sketches documents in Fairport Harbor Village archives suggests the ever-bubbling gas spring in Lake Erie, near HTP Marina and the current Perry Nuclear Power Plant, is a sacred home to this deity. The spring, which still bubbles today, is two to three rods in from the shoreline. Early pioneers and surveying parties made mention of this. Native American lore claimed the area filled with fish was a special gift from the Water God when he was in good humor. Nonetheless local Fairport fishermen past and present can attest to its popularity as a rich fishing honey hole.



Sources - *The News-Herald*, October 27, 2021, Fairport Harbor Historical Society archives, *Lost Lake County*, Jennifer Boresz Engelking, 2022.

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