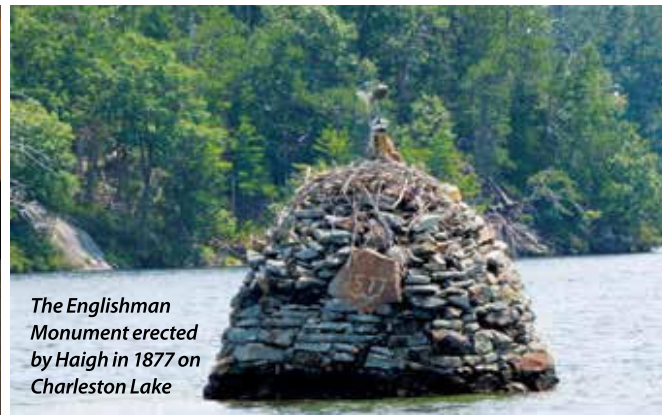




Beautiful sunset on Charleston Lake



The Englishman Monument erected by Haigh in 1877 on Charleston Lake

THE ENGLISHMAN'S MONUMENT ON CHARLESTON LAKE

By Sally Smid

Charleston Lake has been known as “Queen of the Lakes” and such a title certainly is well deserved. Its rugged beauty, glorious sunsets, and fabulous fishing make it a world class destination in many ways. That is most probably why “the Englishman” spent time on this beautiful lake, beginning in the 1870s, when visitors from distant locations were few. It has been said that he was one of the first to recognize Charleston Lake as a special summer resort.

This distinguished gentleman was William H. Haigh. He first boarded at Edward Duffield’s hotel in the Charleston village, then later at the home of Israel Slack on Slack’s Bay, south of Charleston village. The Kelseys were famed as fishing guides for many years. One of William’s first guides was Sammy Kelsey. Haigh had a houseboat built for himself that was towed about by one of the early steam launches. He was said to be “very wealthy, with a well stocked wine vault” and was even rumoured to have been of royal birth. He did admit to having aristocratic roots, was born in 1841, and left home when he was just 14. He had previously hunted big game in the Rockies. While he was considered to be quite eccentric, he was also very kind and did a lot to help

the needy. Stories were told that if he met a boy without shoes or proper clothing, he would quickly provide some from a store in Farmersville (Athens). He stayed in the area for 4 years, but left the Lake in the winter months. Many presumed that he stayed in Montreal.

One day when he was returning from a fishing trip, he and his guide rowed by a shoal off of Rock House Island, where they noticed piles of loose stones. The Lake was much shallower in those days. It was said that Sammy had the idea to pile the loose stones up “to make a haystack”. Haigh asked him to invite the local “loafers” of the village to come to Slack’s the next day, but did not explain why. When they arrived, he “treated them generously”, then led the way to the shoal, directing them to stack the stones, making a base that was 14 ft. in diameter and 6 ft. in height. In the centre, Haigh placed a pole, then nailed his felt hat to it. For a week, the men continued bringing stones from neighbouring islands to complete the cairn. Finally, it was whitewashed and labelled 1877 on one of the stones.

An announcement went out that it would be christened on the following Sunday.

Haigh was said to have broken a bottle of whisky on the cairn and christened it the “Englishman’s Monument”, a name that has stuck over all of these years. Haigh remained in the Slack home for another year and then departed as usual that fall, leaving his houseboat in Israel’s care. He never returned that spring and nothing was ever heard of him again.

Some believed that he knew he would never return and the erection of the monument was in tribute to all of the wonderful times he’d had at Charleston Lake or was it just one of his many peculiarities?

His houseboat was eventually made into a boathouse which later collapsed, the monument also fell into disrepair. In 1921, members of the Charleston Lake Association decided to repair it. Some summer cottagers worked with local residents to restore it as closely as possible to the original so it might be “preserved for posterity”. At that time, the pole was replaced and a wooden fish was attached on top to help mark the direction of the wind.

Anyone who spends time at Charleston Lake could be just as inspired as Haigh by its beauty. The Englishman built a monument 140 years ago that has been as mysterious as he remains to be for these many years. Is it really such a curiosity or is it an obvious testimonial to the tranquility and exceptional beauty of this amazing lake? The steam launches have been replaced by speedboats, but Charleston Lake still remains “Queen of the Lakes”. Perhaps Haigh’s attraction to the Lake and his interesting response to what he experienced, as a visitor for those years, is really not a great mystery at all! LH

Much of this information was gleaned from Writer/Historian, Edna B. Chant’s book “Beautiful Charleston” as well as Lois Stanford’s gleanings from “Athens Reporters”