

LAKE MICHIGAN'S SINKING ISLAND

Phenomenon Which Much Alarms the Inhabitants of South Manitou

IT IS OF VOLCANIC ORIGIN

Hollanders Do Not Share in Terror, Others Believe It Will Dis- appear Suddenly

South Manitou Island, in the northern part of Lake Michigan, is sinking, says the Chicago Inter-Ocean. The south beach is rapidly being swallowed up, and the greatest concern is felt by those living there lest the entire area of 5,000 acres shall suddenly be submerged. The boathouse at the United States life saving station has already disappeared, and where a month ago there was a high and dry beach deep draught boats now plough through the water.

Vesselmen and officials advance two theories as to the cause of the phenomenon. One is that the island, which seems to be of volcanic origin, has been shaken by the seismic disturbances felt this year in a belt encircling the earth. The other is that the action of the water has undermined sections of the land, thus causing submarine avalanches.

The first intimation received by outsiders that the area of the island was diminishing came from Captain Laiberg, who has charge of the life-saving crew at Sleeping Bear Point on the Michigan mainland. He sent word to his superiors at Washington ten days ago that the boathouse at South Manitou had dropped out of sight during the night. Further news came from Lake captains, who said that many residents were alarmed over indications that the peculiar island may suddenly be swallowed up.

Not Shifting Sands

Soundings made during the last few days have served only to add to the alarm. A short distance off shore where shoal water was formerly from three to five feet deep, the sounding line indicated a depth of from twenty to seventy feet. No ordinary shifting of the shoal sands is regarded as being responsible for the great change.

The strange sinking of the land is regarded by many as being a warning to leave the island. Several have already left and others are preparing to go. They think they foresee a disaster that will erase South Manitou from the map and drown the entire population. Some are keeping a watch upon an unfathomable lake in the centre of the island. The Hollanders that inhabit the island do not share in the terror. They remain at their homes without fear, and while they are more or less amazed at the creeping in of the lake, they point to the sand hills, and say it will take a long time for the water to reach the top.

But it is not the gradual destruction of the island that is expected by the alarmists. They believe it will be swallowed up suddenly, and that all who remain to tempt fate will perish. They fear destruction from two sources, and look either for the land to sink beneath the surface of Lake Michigan, or for a volcanic eruption to rain fire down upon them. The cataclysm of St. Pierre and the tidal wave at Galveston are recalled and recited by the fearful ones.

Bed of Volcanic Rock

The geological formation of South Manitou is different from that of most of the neighboring bodies of land. It is composed of clay upon a rocky foundation and upon the clay the wind has built great sand dunes and hills. Excavations have shown a trace of scoriae rock, which invariably is cast up by volcanoes. The elevation of the islet is another thing that gives weight to the theory of seismic disturbances. It is piled up to a height of 350 feet and slopes away gradually to the north. The south side is formed of several plateaus, each of which is reached by precipitous inclines.

South Manitou island is inhabited largely by Hollanders. All told, not more than 100 families live upon it. These sturdy settlers have held possession of the majority of the acreage for many generations. The land passes from father to son in unending succession and many of the inhabitants have never been to the mainland. Vessels call at the harbor to take away the products the people have to sell and leave such merchandise as is required by them. The majority of the population is confined to the eastern and northern sides, which are furthest from the section that is rapidly sinking.

A map of South Manitou island resembles an artist's palette. It is shaped like an imperfect crescent, with the horns pointing southward. Between the horns is a deep harbor. The largest boats can steam in directly up to the beach, until their prows rest against the shore. Many deep-draught vessels are taken so close alongside the land that piers are unnecessary and a short plank will reach the gangway.

Boat House Gone

It is the west horn upon which the light houses and life-saving station are situated and which threatens to be the first part to disappear. The boat house, which was swallowed in by the lake, was built on the harbor side of the point. Where it formerly stood there is to-day twenty feet of water. The water is as clear as crystal and a pin dropped into the lake can easily be seen on the bottom.

Near the centre of the island is the bottomless lake. The inhabitants believe this lake is the crater of an extinct volcano, and from this theory has arisen the fear that the origin of the peculiar changes in the island was seismic. This lake is entirely surrounded by dense woods and is almost two miles long. Like the harbor, its waters are as transparent as glass. It is a mysterious body of water and resembles the one in the old crater of Mount Shasta in California. It is not fed by stream or springs, although its level has not lowered or risen perceptibly during the many long years the Hollanders have lived on the island.

No exact survey has ever been made by the Government officials, but casual observation leads them to state that the level of the little body of water corresponds very closely to the level of Lake Michigan. From this it is inferred that there is a subterranean connecting channel. The Hollanders argue that this does not solve the problem regarding the depth of the water. Soundings have utterly failed to determine its depth. Even very close to the rim of the supposed crater the water is

a great many fathoms deep.

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