

FOAFTALE NEWS
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Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
May 25-27, 2011**

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Reminder: Membership Renewal

On a cheerier note, it looks like the upcoming meeting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania will be outstanding. I hope to see you there!

Elizabeth (Libby) Tucker

**Perspectives on Contemporary Legend:
29th International Conference
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, May 25-27,
2011**

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that the 2011 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Twenty-ninth International Conference is to be held at the Hilton Harrisburg, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Proposals for papers on all aspects of 'contemporary', 'urban', or 'modern' legend research are sought, as are those on any legend or legend-like tradition that circulate actively at present or have circulated at an earlier historical period. Previous discussions have ranged in focus from the ancient to the modern (including Internet-lore) and have covered diverse cultures worldwide (including our own academic world).

The 2011 meeting will be organized as a series of seminars at which the majority of those who attend will present papers and/or contribute to discussion sessions. Concurrent sessions will be avoided so that all participants can hear all the papers. Proposals for special panels of papers, discussion sessions and other related events are encouraged.

From the Editor

As this issue of FOAftale News goes up on the Web, we are in the midst of a global Internet rumor-panic about birds and fish. Let's hope that this will prove to be an interesting area of study but not an environmental problem. Sith Thompson's *Motif-Index* offers plenty of bird and fish motifs, including A1002.2.4, "Unusual migration of birds as Doomsday sign" and A2231.9, "Fish are flattened with blow."

To participate in the conference, please forward a title and abstract (250-300 words) by February 1, 2011 to:

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Harrisburg Area Community College
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Registration forms, payments and any questions about dues or registration fees should be sent to:

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Registration fees
for ISCLR members
\$90 USD, \$92 CAD, £55, 65€
for non-ISCLR members
\$130 USD, \$135 CAD, £75, 95€
Student non-ISCLR members
\$115 USD, \$117 CAD, £67.50, 83.50€

Registration forms and other conference information will be available at:
www.contemporarylegend.org

Hotel, conference location and travel

The conference will be held in the Hilton Harrisburg Hotel, One North Second Street, Harrisburg PA 17101. Reservations for the hotel can be made through the website www.harrisburg.hilton.com or by telephone at (717) 233-6000. The room rate is \$124 per night, and be sure to mention that you are with the ISCLR group. Meeting rooms are in the hotel and will be provided to us free if enough

people stay at the hotel. The hotel is only three blocks from the Harrisburg train and bus station (with easy access from Washington DC and New York City via Philadelphia on Amtrak trains or bus), and is a 15 minute \$20 taxi ride from the Harrisburg International Airport. Harrisburg is a small beautiful city, and the hotel is only a very short walk from a lovely riverside park, a dozen fine restaurants, eleven local legends, ten haunted sites, nine baseball players, eight art galleries, seven swans a swimming, six decent pubs, five glorious days, four nice libraries, three dangerous bookstores, two micro-breweries (I know you are interested in local culture), and one huge ghost ridden battlefield (Gettysburg—30 minute drive).

Simon Bronner's graduate students at nearby Penn State Harrisburg are talking about arranging a legend trip and some sampling of local foods.

The Haiti Legend Revisited : Earthquake, Devil's Pact, Polone Nwa, Hoax and Online Comments

Violetta Krawczyk- Wasilewska

Earthquake

The Caribbean island of Hispaniola is shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and is ranked 149th of 182 countries on the Human Development Index. Haiti's population as of July 2009 was just over nine million.

Hispaniola is seismically active and has history of destructive earthquakes. During Haiti's time as a French colony called Saint Dominique, French historian Moreau de Saint-Méry (1750-1819) recorded destructive earthquakes in 1751 and 1770 in Port-au Prince. Other sources recorded earthquake damages (Sans-Souci Palace, Cap-Haïtien and other northern

towns) on 7 May 1842¹. Also, an earthquake struck Dominican Republic and shook Haiti on 4 August 1946, producing a *tsunami* that killed about 2000 people and injured many others². In addition to earthquakes, the island has frequently been struck frequently by cyclones, which have caused flooding and widespread damage, as well as being wracked by political chaos for much of its history.

The recent Haiti catastrophe occurred at 16:53 (21:53 UTC) on Tuesday, 12 January 2010, with an epicentre near the town Léogane, approximately 25 km west of Port-au Prince, Haiti's capital. By 24 January, at least 52 aftershocks had been recorded. The earthquake struck in the most populated area of the country, including Port-au Prince, Jacmel and other settlements in the region. The International Federation of Red Cross estimates that as many as 3 million people had been affected by the quake. The death toll reached about 100.000, about 300.000 inhabitants were injured, and about 1 million Haitians were left homeless. There were damaged or destroyed 250.000 residences and 30.000 commercial buildings as well as 90% of the government, public and notable landmark buildings (ex. Presidential Palace, Port-au-Prince Cathedral).

When disasters strike, one natural modern response is an outpouring of sympathy and support for those affected. Many countries responded to Haiti appeals for humanitarian aid, pledging funds and dispatching rescue and medical teams, engineers, and so on. That positive reaction of the world's public opinion was confirmed by comments on many web-sites.

Devil's Pact

On the other hand, the Haitian tragedy evoked old demons from the past. The day after the earthquake the CBN [Christian Broadcasting

¹ Quoted by Prepetite, Claude, "Tremblements de terre en Haïti, mythe ou réalité ?", *Le Matin*, No 33082 (9.October 2008).

² Jan M.J., bishop of Cap-Haïtien, *Documentation religieuse*, Éditions Henri Deschamps 1972.

Network] conservative and controversial televangelist Pat Robertson (host of the 700 Club programme)³ in his talk show invoked the legend to suggest that the poverty- stricken country's long history of natural disasters and political turmoil stemmed from a deal with the devil made by the leaders of its 1791 revolution against French rule. Robertson stated that revolt succeeded, but that ever since then the Haitians have been cursed by one thing to the another. Of course his words were immediately video recorded and quoted by CNN and other press agencies together with their web editions.

The old legend about Haitian-Satanic pact and "God's wrath" dates back to the decades following Haiti's independence in 1804. Probably tale started together with Roman Catholic crusade against voodoo rituals widely practiced there as the Afro-Haitian religion⁴. The legend has been disseminated because anti – slavery movements became more and more popular in the Caribbean, both Americas and Europe. The last aspect was underlined by Haitian history specialist Dr. Kate Ramsey (University of Miami) who was interviewed by CNN on 14th January. She stated as follows:

"They did become mobilized to discredit what was called the first black republic by outsiders, especially in the contexts of debates of abolition in the Caribbean and elsewhere. European colonists[...] believed that the Haitian slaves could not have possibly pulled this off themselves and must have outside help. Evangelical Christians have evoked the Haiti legend more recently and elaborated it.[...] It's utterly fabrication, and it's an extremely offensive one"⁵

³ Pat Robertson has previously linked terrorist attacks and natural disasters (like "Hurricane Katrina", which killed about 2000 people on the Gulf Coast in 2005) to legalized abortion in the United States.

⁴ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, London 1994, vol.12,p.430-431 [entry "voodoo"]; Łepkowski, Tadeusz, *Haiti.Początki państwa i narodu*, Polski Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1994, p.461-463.

⁵http://articles.cnn.com/2010-01-14/world/haiti.pat.robertson_1_dr-robertson-haiti-televangelist-pat-robertson? See also: Ramsey, Kate, *The Spirits and the Law.Vodou and Power in*

On 15th January CNN online published first 38 forum comments, mainly very critical, such as : “Pat Robertson, the greatest false prophet of our time, has done it again.” or: “The problem is here not what Pat Robertson has said, it is that people still believe in such archaic nonsense that they allow people like Robertson to anger them with his religious babble.” Our attention has been especially put to another comment that quoted a rumour based on all mentioned situation. This folklore text runs as follows:

“I heard some people said that Pat Robertson have recently had a nuclear test done in the Coast of Haiti just to kill all the Haitian people on behalf of the earthquake.”⁶

The belief that Haiti is cursed we also met during our work on anthropology of AIDS. In 80ties many believed that HIV spreads thanks to the most risky group called 4H: homosexuals, heroin users, haemophiliacs and Haitians still practising voodoo⁷. The ancient as well as European epidemics confirm the searches for scapegoats, allegedly responsible for the plague.

That is why Haiti legend is not only a longstanding trope of anti-Haitian venom. It is a part of a long tradition of the Plague notion and reflects its relation to the sacred and profane. It explains why common interpretations of the plague as a form of punishment or calamity which was brought upon society by external forces exist. The treatment of the plague as the “wrath of God” may be considered like an irrational occurrence as opposed to those which were regarded as natural ones. Traces of this way of thinking might be noticed as early as in the ancient times through the Old Testament and the times of European modernity which can be found

Haiti, The University of Chicago Press, pilot edition of Amazon, 2010.

⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/01/14haiti.pat.rober...>

⁷ Krawczyk-Wasilewska, Violetta, *AIDS. Studium antropologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2000, p.11. See also: Smallman-Raynor M., Cliff A., Hagget P.(eds.), *London International Atlas of AIDS*, Blackwell Reference, London 1992.

within certain European literary and iconographic works⁸. And the symbolism of the plague as a reaction to the breakage with taboo may be found throughout various folkloric texts stemming from the Middle Ages.

Polone Nwa

In Poland the recent Haiti quake by chance evoked completely forgotten legend of Polish descendants in Haiti. On 23 January 2010 the largest quality daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* published as a first one the interview with Geri Benoit, a Haitian ambassador in Rome (and ex-spouse of Haitian president René Prével), known in Haiti as Polone Nwa [Black Pole]. She said is very proud of her Polish ancestors and her place of origin - Cazale that is called a Polish village. In 2 month time Geri Benoit Belnowski has visited Poland for charity purposes. On 28 January the same daily published an article titled “Our compatriots from Haiti have been waiting 200 years for Polish help “⁹. The article was followed by impressive photos and life stories of the poor Cazale locals, proudly convinced they got Polish roots because of a few Polish sounding names, few blue eyes either more bright brown skin or European- looking fair hair. They dance local “kokoda” thinking it’s Polish one. When ‘ Polish’ Pope John Paul II visited Haiti (9 March 1983), the Cazale delegation with Polish flags greeted him ceremonially. This was confirmed by Prof. Leszek Kolankiewicz, a culture anthropology specialist, who was interviewed by *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 21 January and said the black Poles have not much idea about Poland and its language, but have a strong conviction that they are Polish descendants. In modern Poland, by contrast, society in general had no idea about Poland’s links to Haiti.

The tale dates back to 1802 and 1803 and the times of Polish legions fighting abroad “For Your and Our Liberty”. Many Polish soldiers,

⁸Krawczyk-Wasilewska, Violetta, *op.cit.*, p.44-64 and *Illustrations*.

⁹ Kaniewska, Barbara and Wojtkowiak, Światosław, „Nasi rodacy z Haiti. 200 lat czekają, aż Polacy przyjadą i pomogą”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28.01.2010, *Duży Format* [appendix] p.6-7.

hopeful to win back Polish territory, made alliance with Republican France and joined her army, but as distinct Polish units. That is why about 5200 Polish soldiers of Dąbrowski Legion were sent to Saint Domingue by Napoleon to quell the revolution. The old Haitian story has it that Poles had gone over the Haitian side and fought side by side with oppressed blacks. As friends of Saint Domingue they were rewarded by Jean-Jacques Dessaline (the Haitian emperor in the years 1804-1806) and settled in the territory of Cazale, La Vallee de Jacmel, Fond des Blancs and La Baleine, Port Salut and St.Jean du Sud.

In reality – according to historical research reveals¹⁰ – Poles were not prepared to fight in the style necessary by the place. Many of them did not speak French and the tropical climate was much too hot for them. At last more than 4000 died, primarily of yellow fever as it happened to 35 –year- old General Władysław Jabłonowski who died before his officers and soldiers arrived¹¹. Other Polish troops were killed or disabled, nearly 200 were sent to France and few were subsumed into the British Colonial Army. Finally, about 150 - 180 common soldiers (never officers !) saved their own lives by changing sides and settling in Haiti.

Another variant of the legend has been popularized in Polish literary works¹². According to the variant, Poles under the command of French Fressinet, who was afraid they would go to the Haitians, one day at San Marc bayoneted unarmed Haitian squad during morning muster. That could not be a true story, because Poles were in a very small number there - as historians stated.

¹⁰ Pachonski, Jan and Wilson K.Reuel, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence 1802 -1803*. East European Monographs, Boulder, Co., Columbia University Press, NY 1986. See also historical works about Polish Legion and legionists written by Adam Skalkowski at the beginning of XX century.

¹¹ This episode is mentioned by the great Polish romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz in his epics *Pan Tadeusz*, Paris 1834.

¹² Żeromski, Stefan, *Popioły*, Warszawa 1904.

Anyway, after the San Domingo revolution, Poles were well treated and esteemed by locals, so in their second constitution of 1805, which was also the first constitution of Haiti itself, included the preamble No 13, formulated as follows: "The preceding article cannot in the smallest degree affect white woman who have been naturalized Haytians by Government, nor does it extend to children already born, or that may be born of the said women. The Germans and Polanders naturalized by government are also comprized (sic) in the dispositions of the present article"¹³. In later Haitian constitutions the cited paragraph was deleted.

Intriguingly, just a few days before writing this, I have discussed the Haitian stories with an acquaintance who told me that the preamble was cancelled soon after football match with Poles in 1974, when the result was (Haiti) 0 : 7 (Poland). I was told this story during the time of 2010 Football World Cup, a very unsuccessful event for Poles.

The Ghanaian Hoax

On Monday 18 January, global online media followed BBC News and immediately informed about another rumour evoking serious panic in Ghana, which last experienced an earthquake 70 years ago. In consequence of the predicted quake, many Ghanaians, both in rural and urban areas, spent Sunday night sleeping outside or rather not sleeping at all. What happened is that on the evening of 17 January Ghanaian people began receiving the following text message:

"Today's night 12:30 to 3:30 am COSMIC RAYS entering earth from Mars. Switch off ur mobiles today's night. ?NASA BBC NEWS? Plz pass to all ur friends."

By early morning, people were also disseminating messages that the impending quake was an aftershock of the Haitian quake. At 4 am, the Ghana Deputy Information Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa called a BBC

¹³ The Document was printed in the *New York Evening Post*, July 15, 1805.

correspondent to check the earthquake warning as there was 'national panic' and fear. Before 5 am, the BBC Network Africa, Accra Peace FM and Ghana's Joy FM Station calmed down listeners by explaining it was all a hoax, a false rumour, or just a misinformative, a prank.

The above news met immediate online reaction. A few widely posted the alarm on their blogs¹⁴, but many reacted more personally. I quote a pair of examples:

"Here in Tajikistan we get earthquake rumors every six months or so. They spread by phone and text message, and everyone ends up standing in the street waiting for a quake to hit. I get the feeling, though, that the rumors predate cell phone.s.It's larger problem that has to do with fear and lack of information."

"What's a few minutes of lost sleep as compared to losing your life? All the same it was terrible for anyone to have started such a tale..."

The Ghanaian rumour and the online comments it triggered illustrate the power of modern digital technology in the disseminating of global e- folklore. It also illustrates the strength and weakness of communication networks, together with problems of individual ethics and privacy as well as control, monitoring, registry, or even censorship. There is also a problem of real and false information, and the role of global (NASA, BBC) and local (broadcast media) authorities.

As for the legend, that sleeps silently.... perhaps to wake up one day, in some distant place.

¹⁴ For ex.:
www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2010/01/19.

Epilogue:

On the Trail of *The Vanishing Lady*

Bonnie Taylor-Blake and Garson O'Toole

Our recent article on "The Vanishing Lady" [1] focused on our search for a version of the tale Alexander Woollcott had discussed in the late 1920s. This 19th-century telling, said to have been written by Karl Harriman for *The Detroit Free Press*, had proven elusive. In fact, we too were unsuccessful in finding within the pages of the newspaper a version bearing Harriman's name, but we did unearth "Porch Tales: The Disappearance of Mrs. Kneeb," a September 1898 telling attributed to Kenneth Herford, the paper's literary columnist. After some biographical sleuthing and comparison of Harriman's and Herford's writing styles (not to mention initials), we recognized that Harriman likely used "Kenneth Herford" as a pen name and consequently deemed him responsible for the September 1898 version of "The Vanishing Lady." We believed we had solved the small mystery of why no one had been able to find the 19th-century telling Woollcott had been told of, but had not seen.

Soon after our article appeared, we found in the archives of *The Free Press* confirmation of our hypothesis. "Quiet Home Wedding" [2] announced Edith Lee's marriage on 18 October 1899 to a certain *Free Press* writer.

This evening at the residence of her aunt, Mrs. Edgar Drury, occurred the marriage of Miss Edith Morse Lee, of Detroit, to Karl Edwin Harriman, of The Detroit Free Press, who writes over the nom de plume of "Kenneth Herford."

This find also confirms our suspicion that two frequently cited sentimental essays on Stephen Crane – one by Harriman and another by Herford, and both written during the last year of Crane's short life – had in fact been penned by Harriman, who had only just met Crane. (Harriman went on to write two more personal

commentaries on Crane, one published just after the author's death and another printed shortly before Harriman's death in 1935.) Crane scholars have rejected several details of Harriman's "fanciful" reminiscences of Crane and his work, noting that "a number of [Harriman's] anecdotes have become part of the apocrypha of Crane biography" [3]. That he was also responsible for "Kenneth Herford's" similarly styled essay on Crane and his craft may force a more critical evaluation of the Herford commentary.

We should point out that although Karl Harriman began his career as a big-city journalist he showed a lifelong devotion to the short-story form, both as a writer and as an editor of various literary magazines. It should not come as a great surprise, then, that he may have been more inclined to elements of fiction than to aspects of fact.

[1] *Foafale News* 76: 7-11, September 2010.

[2] *The Detroit Free Press*, 19 October 1899, p. 7

[3] Wertheim, Stanley. *A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997; p. 145.

REMINDER

Now would be a good time to check whether your membership is up-to-date. To renew your membership, send a check made out to "ISCLR" for US\$40.00, UK£20, CAN \$42.50, or E30 to Elissa R. Henken, Department of English, Park Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 30602, USA.. Thanks very much for your support of ISCLR!

FOAFtale News (FTN) is the newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. We study "modern" and "urban" legends, and also any legend circulating actively. To join, send a cheque made out to "ISCLR" for US\$40.00 or UK£20 to Elissa R. Henken, Department of English, Park Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 30602, USA. Institutional rates available upon request. Members also receive

Contemporary Legend, a refereed academic journal. Some back issues of **FTN** are available on-line at <http://www.folklore.ee/FOAFtale>

FOAFtale News is indexed in the MLA Bibliography.

This newsletter is called **FOAFtale News** for the jocular term current among legend scholars for over twenty years. The term "foaf" was introduced by Rodney Dale (in his 1978 book, *The Tumour in the Whale*) for an oft-attributed but anonymous source of contemporary legends: a "friend of a friend." Dale pointed out that contemporary legends always seemed to be about someone just two or three steps from the teller — a boyfriend's cousin, a co-worker's aunt, or a neighbor of the teller's mechanic. "Foaf" became a popular term at the Sheffield legend conferences in the 1980s. It was only a short step to the pun "foaftale," a step taken by a yet-anonymous wag.

The opinions expressed in **FOAFtale News** are those of the authors and do not in any necessary way represent those of the editor, the contributors, the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, its Council, or its members.

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