

Jake Take & Mermaid Musing

I would estimate that old Jake shown here (first image) has been around for over 130 years. He is on display at Marsh's Free Museum, Long Beach, Washington, and he has appeared in a tabloid—with outlandish claims.

One odd thing is that Jake is not alone. He has a younger brother somewhere in Los Angeles. On a trip down south in 1976 I visited a free museum in Seaside, Oregon; they had on display the splitting image of Jake (although I did not know Jake existed), except the head was much younger, with straggly white hair.

I often wondered about the thing, and on another trip in the late 1980's went back to have another look. To my surprise, the younger Jake was no longer there. I questioned a man I met just outside the town at a view point, and he told me that the artifact had been sold to someone in Los Angeles.

On the way home, I visited Marsh's Museum and to my surprise, saw Jake. Thinking I had made a mistake as to the appearance of the thing, I asked one of the Marsh employees if they had loaned Jake to the Seaside museum. He said, absolutely not; Jake had been with them for many, many years.

It just might be that whoever made Jake also made the duplicate. The one at Seaside impressed me as being the upper portion of a child (mummified real child) fused with the body of a small alligator. Jake could be the same as far as his head, shoulders and arms are concerned (although inferior), but I'm not sure about the rest of the upper body.

Although a rather grotesque thing to do, I would guess that someone dug up the remains of a child to make the Seaside Jake. This was probably done back in the mid 1800's when I am sure children often died on wagon trains heading West.

Although not as impressive as Jake, there is a mermaid/man in the Ripley's Believe it or Not museum at Newport, Oregon (second image). I think this is the original one that was touted by Ringling or Barnum and Bailey. I believe the fish portion is a real fish, however, the human part is probably carved wood that has been treated.

Remarkably, there is also a mermaid that resides in



the back room of a large gift shop in Banff, called The Trading Post (third image). Again, the fish portion in probably real and the rest carved wood.

One could naturally do a much better job in making such "chimeras" at this time, but nobody would be fooled into thinking the creature was real—we are far beyond this sort of thing.

In recent times, displaying human remains has become illegal, except for professional purposes. As I recall, the Seaside Jake was much more real looking than the actual Jake (including the upper body), so perhaps the former was removed and buried.