

# The Beast Of Bladenboro Prowls Again!

If you are a reader of "Betty Lou! Betty Lou!" in the Observer's EXTRA section every Friday (Isn't everybody?), then you know a vampire beast is at large, as well as a mad punster.

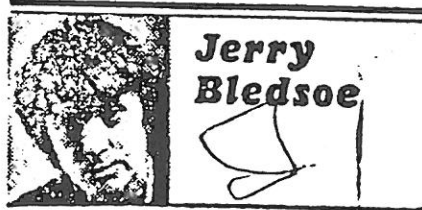
Could it really be the Beast of Bladenboro? I have it on good authority that Charlotte Anne Mecklenburg, who writes "Betty Lou," was terrified by the Beast of Bladenboro.

When the beast first attacked, Charlotte Anne was not yet 11 and nowhere near Bladenboro, which is in Bladen County about 120 miles east of Charlotte, but when you're 10 and have a very active imagination, you don't need to be close to experience terror when a monster is marauding.

This winter will mark 25 years since the beast caused such a sensation in Bladenboro. An Observer dispatch from the scene on Jan. 7, 1954, began with this breathless lead: "Hunting parties with a total of 500 men and around 50 dogs surrounded this terrorized mill village tonight as a maddened, blood-sucking beast continued to roam at large."

On that very day, yet another dog had fallen, believed to be "the ninth victim of the powerful blood-drinking killer." The reason for the uncertainty was that this dog still had all its blood. Previous victims, all dogs, had their skulls crushed and all the blood drunk from their bodies. The theory was this dog had run into a fence and broken its neck while fleeing from the "crazed beast."

Big cat-like tracks had been found. The wood of one doghouse door had



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been "cut to ribbons" by what appeared to be "talons."

As fear of the beast spread, people began showing up from all over to hunt for it. On one night there were more than 1,000 armed men and boys, more than the population of the town, and authorities were more worried about the nervous, trigger-happy hunters than about the beast.

Police Chief Roy Fores called on the Highway Patrol for help. He was reportedly worried the beast might get a taste for human blood. The Observer reported the beast "already... has attempted an attack on one human being, Mrs. Charles E. Kinlaw, who lives on the edge of this mill village. She was unharmed."

The hunters turned up no trace of the beast, thought to be lurking in the swamps near town. Within a week, a bobcat had been shot, a "leopard cat" run over and killed, and then the "eerie blood-sucking marauder," the "cunning vampire-like cat" struck again, dragging two screaming dogs into the swamps, crushing another's skull and drinking all its blood.



An Observer story from Bladenboro on Jan. 14 closed with this dramatic paragraph: "Tonight doors were bolted early and the cold grip of terror once more tightened on the town."

Although there were many reported sightings, nobody ever caught the beast or killed it, and after a while it apparently grew bored with sucking blood from dogs and went on to other activities, leaving behind a mystery, which is what all good beasts should do.

From the news reports, I was intrigued by the several mentions of the attack on Mrs. Charles Kinlaw. There were never any details. I wondered if she were still around, so I called information, got a number for a Charles Kinlaw and dialed it. I asked the woman who answered if she were the Mrs. Kinlaw who had been attacked by the beast; she said no, that was her daughter-in-law, and she wasn't attacked in the first place but only had seen the beast in her yard.

This Mrs. Kinlaw said she never

had any truck with that beast.

"I didn't look for it," she said. "I never saw nothin', and I wanted to see nothin', and I was at the mill at 5 o'clock every day. I said, 'Shucks, ain't nothin'.' Might be a big ol' dog gone wild. That's what I think it was. We ain't never heard no more from it."

She gave me her daughter-in-law's number, and I called her. She said she hadn't been attacked by the beast or seen it either.

"That was a lie," she said. "Just lies like they made up. It's all a bunch of bull."

I don't care what they say. I believe the Beast of Bladenboro has been out there somewhere, all along, just waiting for the right moment to strike again, if only in Charlotte Anne's imagination. I can't wait until Friday.

If the Beast doesn't get Jerry, his column will continue to appear on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in Carolina Living.