



Only a few facts have come to light. The *Deering* sailed from Boston in September, 1920, for Buenos Aires. Off Delaware the captain became sick and was replaced. Months later she began her homeward voyage from Buenos Aires, with Norfolk her destined port. In the West Indies the new captain told a friend he had no confidence in his crew. Later, the schooner lost her anchors in a storm somewhere off the mouth of the Cape Fear River. She was in trouble.

Was there a mutiny? Did the crew murder their unpopular captain and leave the ship in their lifeboats? Perhaps that is what happened. Or was the *Deering* captured by Russian pirates? For a while, rumor said that such was the case. A more likely story is that the disabled vessel, upon being stranded on Diamond Shoals, was abandoned by the captain and her eleven crewmen, and that subsequently the lifeboats were wrecked with all lives lost. Maybe so, but why were they in such a hurry that they left freshly cooked food untouched on their plates in the galley?



Bladenboro's Vampire Beast

Bladenboro, on the rich coastal plain of southeastern North Carolina, is normally a quiet farming and textile center. Nothing before or since has ever happened there like that week-long panic when a vampire beast terrified the place.

On December 29, 1953, a large black catlike animal with a round



face was sighted near the town as it dragged a dog into the underbrush. Though the dog was drained of blood, almost none of its flesh had been eaten. In the next few days three more dogs suffered the same fate. Roy Fores, chief of police in Bladenboro, organized a search party but came upon nothing in the swamp. After two more blood-sucked dogs were found, the party made another vain search. Their only discovery was "extremely large" tracks indicating claws an inch long.

At nightfall, Bladenboro citizens began locking their doors and staying inside their houses. What was "this thing"? A black panther? A large bobcat? A rabid dog or wolf? And why only blood? Audacious men went out with their hunting dogs, one of which was attacked only a hundred feet away from the pack and dragged yelping into the swamp.

On the next night, Lloyd Clemmons, who lived not far away, was at home eating supper when he heard his dogs growling. Looking out of the window, he saw "this thing" slinking away in the darkness. It was, said Clemmons, three feet long, twenty inches high, with a long tail and a cat's face. That same night a woman down the road was attacked by "this thing" as she stepped from her door.

Following reports in the newspapers about the vampire beast, professional hunters arrived by the hundreds. Only a rabbit was found, its head bitten off, its blood sucked. Hunters and curious spectators now numbered about a thousand, and Chief Fores called off the search, fearing the sharpshooters would start killing each other and the bystanders. There were a few more incidents, and then the scare died away. The mystery of the vampire beast has never been solved, but memories of the week-long horror live on in Bladenboro.