

# "CRYSTALANA"

## A JOURNAL OF

### Historical Reflections and Current Perspectives of Crystal Lake, Its Watershed, & Benzie County, MI.

As compiled by Dr. Stacy Leroy Daniels, a humble saunterer, and  
"President *pro tem*, Benzie Co. River Improvement Co., Est. 1873".

Vol. 1, No. 5, 2018.



*"I have often said, and oftener think, that this world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel – a solution of why Democritus laughed and Heraclitus wept."*

-- Horace Walpole, to Sir Horace Mann: (1769)

**Serendipity - a fortuitous occurrence of a "chance" event with beneficial results derived from unintended consequences of an intended action, coined by Horace Walpole in 1754.**

**"Crystal Lake will always be something special for me, because it symbolizes an emotion that goes beyond time and space." ... "It (Michigan) is wood and water, golden sand and blue lakes, emptiness and memories and the sort of isolation which it is hard for a city man to come by, these days." ... "This is good country to come from and it is even better to go back to. It is a land of memories and also a land of escape; a place where you can be utterly idle in more pleasant ways than any other place I know." -- Bruce Catton, The Real Michigan, Holiday Magazine 22(2), 26-39 (Aug. 1957).**

**Issue Theme: “The Tragedy” & “The Comedy” of Crystal Lake**

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**Prologue**

The sun awaits its birth o'er quiet Lake  
A glow behind the night, yet to dispense the dark.  
The lightening hills, still ghostly, anticipate the dawn  
But peace still reigns; no discontent lies within my heart.

And as I stroll along the rippled sands  
Peace walks with me – I wait and sigh  
For that beckoning voice beneath the ripple of the waves  
To tell me, "Be ye still, for God is neigh".

And so, yet lovely Lake, I pour out forth to you  
This message from my soul. No longer ache  
Forever after me as I depart this life.  
Remember calm and stormy inspiration, Crystal Lake.

-- Dr. Stacy Leroy Daniels, 29 Aug 1937 - ( ), *“The Comedy of Crystal Lake”*, 2015.

"The event was so epochal in its nature and has such a permanent bearing on the subsequent development of Benzie County that it is rightly considered as one of the major incidents of the county's early history."

-- Leonard L. Case, *A Bicentennial Reader*, 1976, pp 56-57.

"Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot."

-- Charlie Chaplin

"Man who have water on the brain, have lake in mind." – Confuseious (sic)

"I had water on my brain, but the lake didn't mind." – "A.J."

## **Historical Reflection: “The Tragedy of Crystal Lake”**

[BB 28(12), 1 (16 Nov 1922). Neighbor’s Column, Rev. H.S. Mills, “The Benzie Book”. (cont’d)]

The Rev. Harlow S. Mills (1846 - 1931), an astute observer of the Benzie community and author of “The Making of a Country Parish” (1914), wrote a thoughtful introduction to the “*Tragedy of Crystal Lake*” (authored by William L. Case).]

“An attractive little booklet has just been published bearing the title, “*The Tragedy of Crystal Lake*”. It contains an account of the lowering of the lake in the early days, and is a reprint of the articles that were written by Hon. W. L. Case and published in the Record-Banner some months ago. It makes a valuable record, but I am somewhat in doubt as to the appropriateness of the title.

A tragedy according to the dictionary is "a melancholy event in which human lives, or human interests are sacrificed". Doubtless the matter of the lowering of the lake at this time seemed rather "melancholy" to those most interested but no "human lives were sacrificed", and it is doubtful if in, the opinion of those now living in this region, any "human interest" really suffered.

It is true that the lake must have presented a scene of sylvan beauty as the high bluffs dipped their feet in its clear waters, and the overhanging trees were mirrored in its crystal depths. But the sandy beach with which it is now bordered, affording a road bed for the rail road, and space for the fine stone boulevard which is such a favorite with the automobile riders, is practically much more useful, if not more beautiful.

I am sure we should all prefer Crystal Lake in its present condition rather than as it was in the early days, before it was lowered, though in some places the beach is wider than either beauty or utility require.”

“Mr. Case has done this region a valuable service in this article, and it is well to have it put in permanent form. It is to be hoped that his facile pen will continue to be busy recording the events of the early history of this community. The Old Settlers are rapidly passing away and it would indeed be a calamity, if not a tragedy they should take with them untold, the story of their pioneer experiences.”

“I suppose that every community has an interesting history, if only it were fully known and truly told—a history that would be well worth recording because the community is composed of human beings, and every human life is fraught with intense interest.

But it would seem that for some reason this Crystal Lake region has more than its share of charming scenes and attractive localities, and that in its early settlement and its succeeding history there has been an unusual number of stirring events. Perhaps it seems so only because we know about them, but be that as it may, they are well worth describing and recording.”

## **Previous Author’s Note: “The Tragedy of Crystal Lake”**

“As far as the writer knows there is no written or printed record of the tragedy of the lowering of Crystal Lake in 1873 and of the enterprise and activity of the Betsie River Improvement Company in connection with it. It is now almost half a century since those events occurred and this chronicle is prepared from information furnished by a few old timers that were living here then, and by careful digging into the personal recollections of the narrator.” – William L. Case, 1922

[William L. Case (1856-1933), a local businessman and former state representative, masterfully told what was believed to be the authentic story based upon his recollections made almost 50 years after witnessing the event as a 17-year old boy.]

## Current Perspective: The “*Tragedy*” / “*Comedy*” of Crystal Lake in Retrospect

The “*Tragedy*” / “*Comedy*” is a well-known story of the lowering of Crystal Lake, in Benzie Co., MI. Archibald Jones founded the Benzie County River Improvement Co. in 1873, intending to improve water-lots on Crystal Lake, remove obstructions and construct slack-water canals between Crystal Lake and Lake Michigan, and build a steamboat to facilitate shipping of settlers and goods to and from the interior of the County to the nearby port of Frankfort. Ensuing events were unique among large inland lakes of NW Lower Michigan. The dramatic lowering of a very large inland lake by 20 feet and the creation of a 21-mile perimeter of sandy beach insured the future of Crystal Lake as a prime recreational area. The role of Archibald Jones, “the man who (allegedly) pulled the plug at Crystal Lake”, involved travels of a typical American family in the 1800s, searching for opportunities, experiencing adventures, and facing vicissitudes posed by the opening of the American Midwest. A “tragedy” depicts a protagonist overcome by superior force or circumstance; a “comedy” depicts a laughable person involved in a blunder without pain or disaster. The lowering of Crystal Lake has elements of both - a serious beginning with a happy ending with perceived foibles of human nature and realized unintended consequences of bold venture.

It is this author’s intent neither to disparage the “*Tragedy*” nor to exalt the “*Comedy*”. The “*Tragedy*” occurred during 1873 and its “tragic” aspects were felt well into the early 1900s. The transition into the “*Comedy*”, with its “comedic” aspects, is of more recent interpretation and still continues. The former remains forever indelibly inscribed in our collective memories; the latter only embellishes upon its virtues.

### **Current Author’s Note: “*The Comedy of Crystal Lake*”**

“*The Comedy of Crystal Lake*”, is a continuation of “*The Tragedy of Crystal Lake*”.

Part I. The Lowering of Crystal Lake is a critical review of recorded legends, contemporary accounts, and historical records that include: the original Stock Certificate, the Articles of Association, the Map of Proposed Improvements, and the Court Proceedings for the Benzie County River Improvement Company from the 1870s. Part II. The Biography of Archibald Jones is an accounting of the accomplishments of an entrepreneur and “bootstrap engineer” enjoined in the settlement of a new territory filled with challenges and opportunities.” – Dr. Stacy L. Daniels, 2014

[The author of “*The Comedy of Crystal Lake*” (2015), being the sequel to “*The Tragedy of Crystal Lake*”] (1922), had no original intent to create a “*Benzie Book*”. There are many local authors who have contributed flowing text and colorful illustration toward that goal.]

Contemplating upon a lifetime of experiencing the environment of Crystal Lake, its Watershed, and the surrounding County of Benzie, the creation of a “*Crystalana*” webpage became inevitable.

### **People: William Lucius Case**

“William Lucius Case, author of ‘*The Tragedy of Crystal Lake*’, came to the Benzonia Colony with his family sometime around 1860 and lived to be one of the last survivors of the original settlers. ... In his later years, he took time to prepare numerous articles and papers on matters of historical interest to Benzie County. / As one of the area’s pioneers. His historical narrations are drawn largely from his own recollections, and as such are wholly authentic. They have the added value of being written by an eyewitness to the events. / Among the most interesting and widely read historical accounts prepared by Mr. Case is his story of the lowering of Crystal Lake in 1873.”

“As one of the area’s pioneers, his historical narrations are drawn largely from his own recollections, and as such are wholly authentic. They have the added value of being written by an eyewitness to the events.” (“*Tragedy*”, p1) (\*)

[(\*) William Case was a 17-year-old “whipper snapper” when he first met Archibald Jones, Jr. sometime in 1873, a time when the only way to travel to Benzie Co. was by boat on Lake Michigan, or by paths through the woods. Young Wil probably had never seen a canal boat or a railroad train. He worked for Mr. Jones for two weeks at \$1.25 per day – enough to buy 1/2 share of stock.]

He described his employer and mentor:

“Mr. Jones was a man of patriarchal appearance with a long white beard and endowed with boundless energy and enthusiasm. Within a year Mr. Jones conceived the notion that by opening a canal between Crystal Lake and Betsie River, a channel might be made following the course of the outlet, that would permit the passage of small sized steam craft from Lake Michigan and Frankfort, by way of Betsie river and the outlet, up and into Crystal Lake. A part of the scheme being also to clear out and dredge the channel of Betsie river as far up as the Judson bridge.” (“**Tragedy**”, p6)]

W.L. Case assembled the “Tragedy” for J.W. Saunders, Benzie Banner Editor, to print as a pamphlet. Benzie Banner 28(11), 1 (30 Nov 1922). “The Tragedy of Crystal Lake” in Booklet Form.

“Some of the Record readers may remember a series of articles published last spring (1922) giving an account of the organization of the Betsie River Improvement Company (sic) in 1873 for the purpose of making the river navigable for steamboat traffic between Frankfort and Benzonia, for clearing the outlet channel between the river and Crystal Lake for a proposed canal connecting them, and for the construction of a river steamer for general commercial traffic purposes, then of the tapping of the lake to provide the necessary water course between it and the river about a mile away.”

“Then how the beautiful lake resenting the presumption of the promoters of the scheme poured her blue waters in an uncontrollable torrent down into the swamps below until the water line on the beach was far below the present level, greatly changing its appearance and leaving it surrounded with a wide waste of sand and stone.”

“Then of the great disappointment and financial loss sustained by the company when all of its plans proved of no avail. How in later years the lake came back in part and is now every day giving proof that our progressive and enterprising forefathers unknowingly planned for far better things than they ever realized.”

“As this seems to be the only record of the lowering of the lake half a century ago a number of readers have expressed the wish that the account might be preserved for its historical value.”

“Mr. J. W. Saunders recently suggested that if I would get the material together he would see to getting it published in booklet form. I have made slight revisions and turned the matter over to Mr. Saunders, who has the entire responsibility and whatever of credit may be in getting the narration in a convenient form.”

John H. Howard (\*) quoted from a letter by C. Elmer Spicer, who was one of the first to describe the “comic-tragic result” of the scheme “to place Crystal Lake on a common level” with nearby lakes and bring their combined waters down the Betsey River to Lake Michigan.

[(\*) Howard, J.H., The Story of Frankfort, 1930, pp 88-92.

“Mr. Spicer tells of a proposed “canal” that a visionary (!) pioneer (Archibald Jones) conceived of to place Crystal Lake on a common level with Long Lake and Platte Lake and bring their combined waters to Lake Michigan through Betsey River, and it how it actually lowered the waters of Crystal Lake ... It is in place here to state that the whole scheme and its comic-tragic result were thoroughly described by Hon. W.L. Case of Benzonia in a pamphlet.”

**Places: Bruce Catton (A Noble Body of Water)**

Catton, Bruce, *Waiting for the Morning Train, An American Boyhood*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1972, 260pp. Chapter Three, pages 49-51. <http://books.google.com/books?id=Pq5U3Xnf0NYC>

“Crystal Lake is a noble body of water, eight miles long by two or three miles wide, ... so crystal-clear that you can count pebbles on the bottom where it is twenty feet deep. It is surrounded by low green hills, and when the sun is out its color is a breathtaking, incredible, picture-postcard blue; spring-fed, it is deep and cold, and only the hardiest would care to swim in it at any time except midsummer, but when the weather is warm to go into this water is like dipping into the fountain of youth. A nice beach runs all the way around it, stony here and there but mostly white sand, and that beach exists because the good people of Benzonia made a profound miscalculation back in 1873.” (pp 49-50)

“The lake drains into the Betsie River through a sparkling little outlet (the only name it ever had) whose stream is about six feet wide and eight inches deep (which) wanders aimlessly through the flat lands for a mile or so and then goes into the Betsie, which is more of a river but still an unhurried, modest affair full of sandbars, with occasional islets covered with alders. (p50)

“So a man (Archibald Jones) who said he was a surveyor ... reported that the plan was perfectly sound. The level of Crystal Lake was only a few feet above the level of Lake Michigan; and once the temporary cascade had done its work, a few touches here and there would perfect the waterway. A corporation was formed, money was raised, men with shovels and horse-drawn scrapers were put to work, and one fine day the barrier was cut through and the waters of Crystal Lake were turned loose.” (p50)

“The result was spectacular. The water went out like the Yukon breaking through an ice jam, the roar of it heard in Benzonia three miles away. The surveyor had miscalculated; instead of being just a few feet above the level of Lake Michigan, Crystal Lake was a good thirty feet (sic) above it, and the flood went out in a destroying torrent. It did not scour out any channel; it simply flooded the whole river valley, killing livestock, destroying roads, and bringing farmers to the point of revolt. One man was drowned; another, a Baptist minister making his rounds by horse and buggy, lost his horse and barely saved his own life. (People remarked afterward that he was a spirited advocate of total immersion and so probably did not mind what happened to him.)” (pp50-51)

“So it was obvious that this plan was no good. The corporation collapsed in a cloud of debts. A small stern-wheel steamboat that had been built to use the new waterway went ingloriously to work towing schooners and lumber rafts about Frankfort Harbor. The level of Crystal Lake was eight or ten feet (sic) lower than it had always been, a dam was hastily built at the outlet to keep the lake level from going any lower, and there was a general agreement to forget the whole business(!)” (Page 51)

“There was one unexpected gain; Crystal Lake now had a beach. / Until then it had not had one. The hills came down steeply banked, with trees growing right to the water's edge, and anyone who tried to go along the shore on foot had to scramble from tree trunk to tree trunk. Now there was a good beach all the way around.” (p51)

“Also, at the southeastern end of the lake, at the foot of Benzonia hill, there were acres of dry land where there had been a swamp; a town ... (Beulah) ... prospered and eventually became the county seat. When the railroad was built southeast from Frankfort in the 1880s, it reached the lake by way of the outlet valley and ran for several miles along land that had been under five feet of water a few years earlier.” (p51)

“All of this, to be sure, had happened long before any of us small boys were born. We knew nothing about it, or if we heard our elders talk about it, we paid no attention; we simply accepted the lake and

its unending beach as something put there for our benefit, and all summer long we devoted our afternoons to swimming.” (pp 51-52)

A prominent theme of Catton’s was: “development becomes compulsive”. Witness Archibald Jones!

“Development becomes compulsive. It is never possible to call a halt. Once you take the first step, even if the last step goes straight off the edge of a precipice. It is fairly easy for man to assert his mastery over his earthly environment, but once he has asserted that mastery he has to go on exercising it no matter where the exercise takes him. The age of applied technology has one terrible aspect – each new technique has to be exploited to its absolute limit, until man become the victim of his own skills. The conquest of nature cannot end in a negotiated peace.” (Page 5)

### **Potpourri: Publication History**

“To those of our readers who have been following with interest the series of articles of historical and reminiscent facts covering the Evolution of Water Power on Cold Creek and Benzie's Greatest Corn Harvest by W. L. Case, we are pleased to announce that this eminent historian has prepared a series of articles of equal interest of the activities - of the Betsie River Improvement Co. (sic), concerning the lowering of Crystal Lake nearly a half century ago. The first article of this series will be published in our next issue.” [BB 28(27), 1 (02 Mar 1922)]

“The first installment of this article (the reserialization) was published in the Record last week (18 Jun 1931) without proper introduction. The (original) account was written early in 1922 and published as a serial in the Record at that time a little later. Mr. J. W. Saunders, former editor, suggested that as a historical record, the account ought to be permanently preserved. Then, at his own expense, it was published in pamphlet form. A portion of the edition was sold and distributed by him. The story as it now appears is copied direct from this pamphlet. It is likely that some copies may yet be available. [BB 36(43), 4 (25 Jun 1931)]

“The Tragedy” was reprinted a third time in 1987 with an Editor’s Note:

“If nothing else, the early history of Benzie County is the story of dreamers, entrepreneurs and developers - pioneers who sought to build a place to live, make their fortune and raise their families. The following is the first part of an account of one of those dreams. Written by W. L. Case, who died in 1933, the story relates the efforts to create a navigable channel from the present location of Beulah to the port of Frankfort via Crystal Lake and the Betsie River. / The author came to Benzonia Colony in 1860 and lived to be one of the last of that small group of original / settlers. For a number of years before his death, he took the time to prepare numerous articles and papers on matters of historical interest to Benzie County. / Originally published in serial form in 1922 in the Benzie Record, the account of the "Tragedy of Crystal Lake" records one of the more interesting chapters in the area's earlier history. The story has more than a little relevance to those who live and dream in Benzie County today.” [BCRP 98(40), 12 (22 Jul 1987)]

**Phenomena: “The Tragedy of Crystal Lake” vs. “The Comedy of Crystal Lake”**

A comparison can be made of similar and contrasting factors (\*) found in the **“Tragedy” / “Comedy”**.  
 [(\*) The combined factors of action, initiation, and result, i.e. assignment of assumed or accepted responsibility – to affix blame, or to heap praise - are diametrically opposed in this comparison!]  
 The following table is meant to alternate and to define point-by-counterpoint the distinguishing features of both stories which share the same plot, the same cast of characters, and the same locale.

Let you, dear readers, decide whether it be “Tragedy” and/or “Comedy” !

<b><u>Factor</u></b>	<b><u>“The Tragedy”</u></b>	<b><u>“The Comedy”</u></b>
Origin	Classic original story	Elucidating and continuing story
Chronology	Prequel (1922)	Sequel (2015)
Scope	Pamphlet (17pp)	Treatise (496pp)
Author	William Lucius Case	Stacy Leroy Daniels
Timeframe	Past 1873-1874	From past to present to future
Storyline	Perceptions and recollections of the lowering of Crystal Lake	Realities and reconstruction of the lowering of Crystal Lake
Plot	An attempt to build a canal from Crystal Lake to Lake Michigan	Development of Crystal Lake into a successful resort community
Event	<i>“The Tragedy”</i> : an original story, forever indelibly inscribed in our collective memories	<i>“The Comedy”</i> : a continuation, of the story that only embellishes upon its virtues.
Analysis	Ambitious, but ill-advised	Ambitious, but well-advised
Genre	Tragedy, a “sad” beginning	Comedy, a “happy” ending
Depiction	A “tragedy” depicts a protagonist overcome by superior force or circumstance	A “comedy” depicts a laughable person involved in a blunder without pain or disaster.
Consequence (*)	Zemblanity: sad, unfortunate, but expected discoveries made by design	Serendipity: happy, fortunate, but unexpected discoveries made by accident but with the sagacity of recognizing & moving energetically to a decision point.
Action (*)	Anthropogenic (man-made)	Naturogenic (natural)
Initiator (*): Archibald Jones	An inexperienced amateur to be blamed as a scapegoat for the perceived “failure” of an “ill-conceived” project?	A visionary “bootstrap engineer” to be celebrated as a local hero for the unqualified “success” of a “well-conceived project”!
Result (*)	A canal (“high-and-dry”)	A beach (“low-and-wet”)
Locale: Crystal Lake	A one- time beautiful lake, quickly shorn of her glory, and for a time at least, just a desolate looking common inland lake or mill pond.	A still beautiful lake, retaining her glory and for time immemorial, an uncommon inland lake in calm repose or fierce storm.
Event	Epochal in its nature, and having profound effects upon development, but wrongly considered an failure.	Epochal in its nature, and having a permanent bearing upon development, and rightly considered a success.
Life	“A tragedy seen close-up”	“A comedy in long-shot”
This world	“A tragedy to those that feel”	“A comedy to those that think”



"The whole thing was an enterprise well worthy of loyal backing of our progressive forefathers. The one and only fatal objection to the scheme as was realized too late, was that no reliable engineer was consulted regarding the difference in the level of the water in Crystal Lake and the river and in the dependable flow of water in the river itself." ("*Tragedy*", p7)

**In Reality:** "A.J." was a bootstrap engineer on "Clinton's ditch (the Erie Canal); several surveyors were involved. Crystal Lake situated high above Lake Michigan was an ideal location for a canal.

"As nearly as it can be determined it was early on a Saturday morning in the latter part of September, 1873, that Mr. Jones and a few willing men with teams and scrapers cut an opening at the outlet through a narrow bank of sand separating Crystal Lake from a ledge below, leading directly into the canal channel that had been prepared." ("*Tragedy*", p9)

**In Reality:** the white-capped waves of a severe storm washed out a temporary dam.)

"In 1873 an ambitious but ill-advised project was put through in an effort to connect Crystal Lake and Lake Michigan with a navigable channel. " (1978 Historical Markers)

**In Reality:** the project was ambitious but well-advised. An unexpected storm created "whitecapped" waves that washed away a temporary dam at the Crystal Lake Outlet the very morning that the Benzie County River Improvement Company planed to install a permanent set of canal locks. Under more auspicious circumstances the canal perhaps would have become a successful enterprise!

## Epilogue

The sun has set, and o'er the quiet lake  
His light still lingers, reluctant to depart.  
The darkening hills draw close, and over all  
Peace reigns, but discontent still fills my heart.

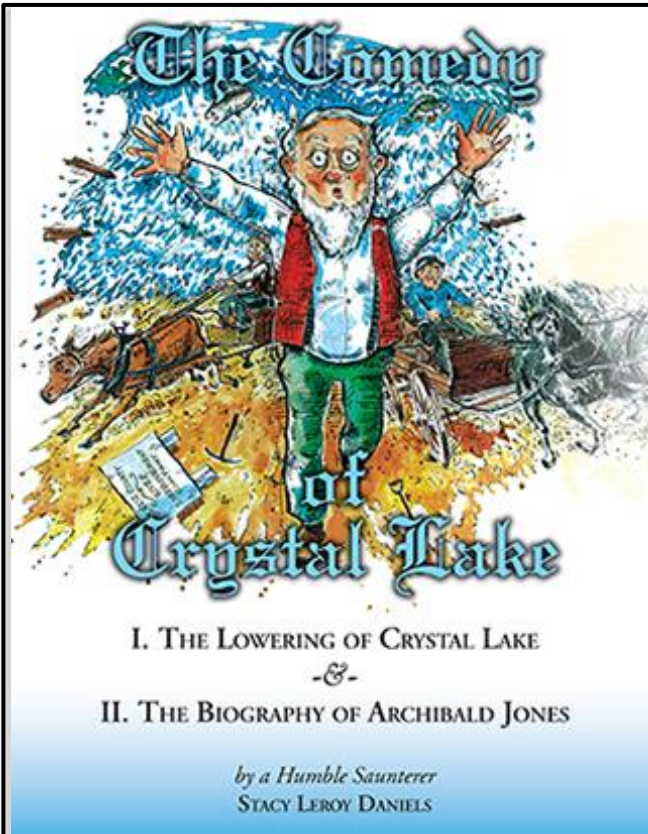
But as I stand alone upon the shore  
Peace also comes to me - I seem to hear  
A voice amongst the murmur of the waves  
Saying. "Be still and know that God is near."

And so, O lovely lake, you gave to me  
A message straight from God. And I still take  
That message with me as I wander far.  
And hope once more to see you, Crystal Lake.

**References:**

Daniels, Stacy Leroy, **“The Comedy of Crystal Lake”** , I. The Lowering of Crystal Lake; II. The Biography of Archibald Jones, Being a Summary Chronicle with Many More sidelights, written in Two Parts, of a seemingly Ill-Fated Historical Event, so epochal in its nature as to have had a permanent bearing upon the development and future of Benzie Co., Northwest Lower Michigan, together with myriad viewpoints of its diverse characters and sundry locales, &c, &c., Flushed With Pride Press, ©2015, 496pp. ISBN 978-0-692-21715-3 [www.CrystalLakeComedy.com](http://www.CrystalLakeComedy.com)

Case, William L., **“The Tragedy of Crystal Lake”** , “with Some Sidelights, By a Survivor”, 1st Ed., J.W. Saunders, Beulah, MI, 1922, 17pp. (A copy of the 2007 reprint is included in **“The Comedy”**.)



**“THE COMEDY OF CRYSTAL LAKE”**  
[ Sequel to the classic “Tragedy” (1922) ]

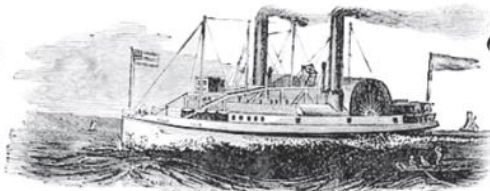
The story of Archibald Jones and the attempt to build a canal from Crystal Lake to Lake Michigan in 1873. The dramatic lowering of a very large inland lake and the creation of its sandy beach.

The epochal event that led to the development of Crystal Lake and Benzie Co.

Dr. Stacy Leroy Daniels, “President, *pro temp* Benzie Co. River Improvement Co., Est 1873”  
ISBN 978-0-692-21715-3 | Hardcover | 9” x 12”  
496 Pages | 200 Illustrations  
Flushed With Pride Press ©2015  
PO BOX 281, Frankfort, MI 49635  
[FlushedWithPridePress@gmail.com](mailto:FlushedWithPridePress@gmail.com)  
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