The Number of the beast

There are many stories surrounding the origin of the Jersey Devil – a gypsy curse, the doomed offspring of a extramarital affair, a mis-}

sealed clairvoyants spiritual revenge. The most common leg-

end is that the creature is the unlucky 13th child of mother

Leeds, a woman who some suspected of witchcraft. During this

unwanted pregnancy, she cursed the unborn child saying, “Let

it be a devil!” On a stormy night in 1735, Mother Leeds, assisted

by old midwives, gave birth to the unfortunate child. Al-

though born normal, once handed to the mother, the baby

quickly transformed into a horrible beast. The creature made

meals of the entire Leeds clan and the midwives. It then

punched through the roof with a shrill howl and escaped in-

to the woods and swamps of the Pine Barrens.

The Devil’s Reign

The birthplace of the Jersey Devil is believed to be an area

known as Leeds Point in eastern Atlantic County. But the creature really

likes to travel, having been sighted from Cape May County to the New York

border. Numerous sightings in 1909 were clustered near Philadel-

phia in Gloucester, Camden and Burlington coun-

tries. The creature has

been described in many

ways, ranging in height

from 20 feet to 18 inches. It

may have the head of a dog,

horse, cow or goat, the body of

a scaly kangaroo or serpent, the

legs of a pig or goat, huge bat-like

wings and horns or antlers. It has

the ability to run, swim and fly great

distances very quickly and silently. It is

also said to breathe fire, although it is

mostly said to have breath that is hot

and foul enough to kill fish and small

game.

Sources: The Jersey Devil and Phantom of the Pines by James F. McCloy and Ray Miller Jr., Leut’s Jersey Devil Page Illustration by ANDREW PRENDIMANO/Gannett News Service

Sympathy for the Devil

Some sightings would

suggest the Jersey Devil

leads a rather

active social life in the

realm of the supernat-

ural. It has been seen

cavorting with a beauti-

ful, glowing, golden-

haired maiden, frolick-

ing with mermaids in

the ocean surf, and

walking with the head-

less ghost of a pirate.

But mostly it is reported

to be alone. It has been

blamed for many mis-

fortunes: slaughtered

livestock, forest fires,

home and crop demoli-

tion. It has been hunted,

exorcised, shot, bumed

and electrocuted. But

like most legends, the

Devil defies destruction and

lives on to roam the

dense dark forests,

murky marshes and our

fertile imaginations.