

A Moot Point – Being a Modest Historical Abstract of Ersatz County’s First Century...nearly

“Hoosier Anomaly: The academic euphemism applied to the area comprising Ersatz County, Indiana. A compact area of hills, rock outcrops and rushing waterways, it is surrounded on all sides by the gently rolling land typical of northern Indiana, Ohio and Illinois. It is a geological phenomenon unexplained by scientists and its existence is considered embarrassing to them. Discussion of the Hoosier Anomaly is discouraged in the Geology Departments of all major universities and cartographers have regarded the area with blind eyes for more than a century.”

On a crisp October day in 1799, eighteen weary wanderers stood in a clearing and assessed their situation. Though the day was postcard perfect, it was not a day of joy for the travelers. This band had been pushing through the great western wilderness of their young nation for more than six months and now, like it or not, they had reached their destination.

They knew not where they were, but all agreed that this was the end of the journey, for the wheels had quite literally fallen off their wagon and there was no way to push further.

The eighteen were what could only be described as an odd lot, and included a brewer, a toymaker, an Amish, an ironmonger, a tinkerer, a witch, a strangely silent boy and a con. All born and raised in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, these friends, by necessity, had but one thing in common. They were to a man, woman and child, square pegs in the round hole of Bucks County.

Over a period of years, just as the black jelly beans in a jar seem to gather in the same corner, this curious group gradually found each other and formed a sort of informal association of the different. The brewer could not understand the local preference for hard cider rather than to a fine product of malt, hops and barley. The toymaker was universally viewed as superfluous since he made nothing of practical value. The Amish had bought a whale oil lamp for his home and was considered immodestly progressive by his neighbors. The ironmonger had a penchant for creating odd appliances which he described as, “Of beneficial value to enduring intimate relationship of husband and wife.” The town folk simply saw them as cuffs, shackles other devices of restraint and constraint. The tinkerer, who was a tinker by trade, was head over heels with every new gimcrack that made its way to town and talked of a day when carriages would not require horses and there would be no need to leave the warmth of the house to make use of the accommodation. The witch was merely a witch and although Bucks County,

Pennsylvania is far from Salem, Massachusetts...well, a witch is, after all, a witch. The silent boy could talk, but rarely did. When badgered about not speaking and asked when he would, he had once replied, "When I can improve on the silence."

Finally, there was the con. He was friendly, intelligent, imaginative, confident, charismatic and ready with a solution for any problem. His solutions invariably placed him in a roll of importance, of leadership and in the pay of those he had convinced to place him in charge.

The con was Worthy Grindle. A raconteur, and allegedly an educated man, a self-proclaimed veteran of the recent revolution, a surveyor/cartographer and explorer, Worthy had convinced the group that they were never going to be accepted nor comfortable in Doylestown and that the solution was to travel west into the vast, mysterious Ohio country. Grindle displayed a map showing an ideal destination near present day Waynesville, Ohio and the wisp of a dream began to coalesce.

The winter of 1798-1799 found this mélange of humanity quietly at work making plans for their great traverse. They were careful not to share any part of the scheme with their neighbors, thus avoiding further eye-rolling, derision and ridicule. On the first day of April, a date even then known as April fool's day, the eighteen left Doylestown and headed west.

Today, this trip of 500 miles plus pocket change would entail little more than eight hours. The travelers expected to complete the journey in slightly more than 60 days. At the time of the wagon's demise they had been in transit more than 190 days and even the witch felt like a part of the mass of Israelites fleeing Egypt and spending decades in the wilderness.

We now know that they had wandered from Pennsylvania through Virginia, touched upon present day Kentucky, Ohio and ended up not near Waynesville or Harveysburg, but somewhere north of Peru and east of South Bend in what was to soon become Indiana.

Worthy Grindle made no apologies for the extended journey and none in the group had bothered to do the math showing that Worthy Grindle would have been a mere gleam in his parents' eyes when he was allegedly serving as an aide to George Washington in his early surveying of the western lands, and would have been a toddler during the war for independence.

The next few days found the eighteen assessing their situation and formulating a plan for the future. Their supplies were terribly short; it was far too late in the year to plant and harvest; winter was approaching and shelter was lacking.

Klaus Pringle, the toymaker spent more than a day fashioning a crude doll's house from the wood and bark of a fallen poplar. At first this effort was seen with displeasure by the others. It was a waste of time at a time when their lives were on the line. Soon however the group realized that Pringle's doll house was a fine design for a simple lodging and within a week a tiny subdivision was under construction. Two centuries later architectural historians would consider this rude compound the inspiration for the groundbreaking concept of Levittown, Pennsylvania.

While shelter was soon crossed off the list of immediate needs, the reality of facing a cold winter without provisions loomed ever larger and more frightening.

This time the witch found the solution. While gathering herbs and medicinal mushrooms, Grettle Koetler was startled by a bronze-skinned man in deerskin leggings doing the same. Amazingly this native of the area showed neither fear nor aggression and spoke excellent English. Grettle had stumbled upon Chief Mellow Fellow (a rough translation of his tribal name), the chief of the Moxitoxic people. The Moxitoxic, he explained were peaceful, enjoyed the pleasures of the area's plentiful and potent medicinal mushrooms and had spent long days and nights with both French and English explorers, military and trappers. The result--a tribe of polyglots who liked nothing better than a basket of mushrooms and a cohort of friends.

With shelter in progress and salvation from starvation guaranteed by the charitable Moxitoxic, the Doylestown eighteen began to relax, explore and figure out just where in the world they were. The silent boy succinctly stated, "We're not in Ohio anymore." If he had been a bit more generous with words he might have added that they weren't in Pennsylvania, Virginia, or Kentucky anymore either.

Much of the final month or so of their long journey had been across gently rolling land. The horizon was far behind and in the distance ahead. There had been no sheer rock faces nor streams with roaring rapids. They had traveled with relative ease until the moment of the mechanically imposed termination. Now, as they took stock of the land about them they found that the terrain was as out of place as they were themselves. For nearly a full day's journey by foot in any direction they were faced with significant hills, rivers and streams that rushed rather than meandered. In one particularly odd area, a nearly rectangular plot seemed almost consciously carved out of the bare limestone and filled as deep as they could dig, with clean sand.

There was one final curiosity. In a large treeless area the Amish and the tinker found a massive earthworks. By climbing a tree at the crest of the nearest hill the

men could see that this was not a mere mound. It was the well defined likeness of a giant salamander.

The first winter was passed in peace and relative comfort and the eighteen began to think of their destination by default as home. Dreams were dreamt of farming, brewing, smithing, tinkering and governing. The silent young man moved out of the settlement—too much noise—and built his own cabin on a spit of land projecting into the northern edge of the large nearby lake. On a long January afternoon, made mellow with Moxitoxic mushrooms and herbal supplements, one of the participants referred to the silent young man's retreat as Mute Point. Later, when heads were clearer, someone noted the silent resident was not mute...merely silent. Grindle replied that the point was moot.

The name stuck.

On December 11th, 1816 Indiana was officially named the 19th state of the Union. By this time the Doylestown eighteen knew that they were not in Ohio, but in the Indiana territory. They had built a small but energetic community which they had named Grindle, at the urging of none other than Worthy Grindle. Worthy who had never been faulted for self-modesty, based his campaign for recognition on the premise that his vision and leadership brought them to this spot and those virtues deserved acknowledgement.

The proposal had been made on another long afternoon made mellow through a combination of mushrooms and the now popular ale produced by August Schexnaydor, the brewer. There were no alternative names floated; there were no strong opinions either yea or nay and acceptance seemed easier than soliciting, discussing, eliminating and eventually adopting what could be done immediately with no muss, fuss or bother.

The town would be Grindle. The name stuck.

The new state of Indiana was a political blank slate. Structure, policies, and procedures for governance were lacking, required and urgently needed. An assembly was called at the new Capital in Corydon and delegations from throughout the state made their way to the seat of government to define the future.

Not surprisingly, Worthy Grindle represented what was now Grindle, Indiana, and he chose as his second, the silent young man. Some in town thought the choice of the silent one as a delegate odd. Worthy thought it a stroke of genius. This associate would not interfere with his goals and plans, would not publicly question his stories of service in the Revolution, exploration with President Washington,

gifts as a scholar or skills as a leader. The resident of Moot Point was the ideal foil for Worthy Grindle.

Spirits were a major part of frontier life, especially frontier political life. Endless--often contentious meetings may have filled the days, but the real work with real results occurred in taverns at night. Many decisions were made over a pint or two...or three; others were the result of generous rounds of raw corn spirits, freshly distilled and consumed un-aged. Still others depended on the roll of dice, the toss of a coin or the lucky draw of a card.

Worthy Grindle was no teetotaler. He was, in fact, a prodigious consumer of Schexnaydor's superior brews. He was, however, unaccustomed to the potent products of the region's very active stills. Today Corydon is known for its popcorn. In 1816 Corydon's corn crop had a very different intention. After three days of seemingly endless meetings and three nights of liver-destroying revelry, Grindle was incapacitated. The duties of official delegate would have to be borne by the silent young man.

The fourth day of the convention was deemed the proper time to divide the state's regions in governable counties. This had been foreseen by all of the delegates and each had arrived with two or three favored names to be officially considered for application to the home district. Grindle had expected this and had lobbied for the job of delegate in order to propose his own name as that for the new county. Grindle's intention may have been known, or at least anticipated by the silent young man, but it was something...one more thing...he never discussed. One by one ninety-two delegates rose and solemnly stated the name proposed for their home districts. Ninety-two times the Speaker swung his gavel and announced the name of the new county. Marion, Franklin, Ripley, Jennings, Brown, Bartholomew, each had its brief moment of glory, until it was time for the ninety-third. The silent young man stood, looked around, took a deep breath and released, what for him, was a torrent. "Gentlemen and honorable delegates, I am not a delegate such as yourselves. I am a substitute, a mere imitation...an ersatz delegate who feels unworthy to speak for the incommoded worthy gentleman assigned this serious task."

Breathless and shaking from the unaccustomed burden of public discourse, the young man took his seat and waited. The Speaker seeing the chance to finally add some levity to what had been a humorless series of proceedings announced, "As we have an ersatz delegate, we find that he is the delegate of Ersatz. The ninety-third county of the State of Indiana shall be Ersatz County."

The gavel swung. The deed was done. The name stuck.

As Worthy Grindle came out of his stupor, he was dimly aware of laughter in the tavern room below his bedchamber. Struggling to his feet he staggered to join the crowd and learn the cause for the merriment. In short order he learned he had missed the entire naming ceremony, and that his second had failed to enter Grindle's name...or any other. He learned that he was now the representative of Ersatz County, the butt of a joke and the resident of a hoosier laughing stock.

The news drove Grindle back to drink, and the drink along with the humiliation of representing an...no...the Ersatz county kept him from attending any further sessions of the convention.

On the long trek home Grindle's bleary eyes gradually sharpened and he became aware of a faint smile on the lips of the silent young man. Grindle was a changed man. He made the trip in a silence as deep as his companion's, and by the time they entered Ersatz County he was morose and broken. He made no statement, no proclamation and no boasts of his accomplishments in the capital. He passed directly to his lodging and remained withdrawn and alone.

The silent young man was changed as well. He was smiling, and to the wonder of all, was eager to share his impressions of the legislative process. Within days he had moved from Moot Point to a room above the tavern. By month's end he had become a social animal and was courting tinker Roy's elder daughter, becoming by spring, part of the town council.

The news of the Constitutional Assembly was of limited interest to the residents of Grindle, Indiana. They were still an odd lot living in an odd section of the new state. Life was a full time proposition and that meant available energy and resources were devoted to the needs of the growing community.

Nearly all of the original Doylestown eighteen were raising children conceived and born in Grindle. Roy Lee Roy, the tinker, had, besides his daughters, a son, also Roy Lee Roy, Klaus Pringle was happily making toys for Hans and Gretchen Pringle, Amos Yoder was beginning to get help with the chores, thanks to Rebecca, Rachel, Sarah, Micah and Moses Yoder, and Goldsmith, the blacksmith, had fashioned a tiny pair of manacles and leg irons as Christmas gifts for his first-born. The Schexnaydors were expecting, and a crib fashioned from a mash tub was ready for the new arrival.

There were others swelling the town rolls as well. Additional Amish arrived. Hostetlers, Millers and the occasional Coblenz joined with the original Yoder clan. Bunt, the baker, appeared and the strangely fastidious Dillbeck, though disheartened by the general disorder of what he found, remained.

Dillbeck had heard rumors of Pleasant Plain, a community unlike any other in the new territories. In an age of make-do and rough and tumble, Pleasant Plain was clean, orderly, painted...a refuge for the anal retentive, the holy grail of the obsessive compulsive. Unfortunately while crossing through Ersatz County, Dillbeck's horse had pulled up lame and his wife had contracted a fever. While Grettel Koetler, the witch, provided a potion to deal with the fever, the horse was a lost cause. Much like the original settlers, he had to acknowledge Grindle as the end of the line. And like the original eighteen, Dillbeck was a square peg who soon managed to fit in nicely.

Through all of this the Moxitoxic smiled. Mellow Fellow and his wife, Lame Deer Dancing, were thrilled. They and their people were thriving financially. Mushrooms were the ideal cash crop—no sewing or weeding, no thrashing or milling—just simple gathering and sales. They also learned and loved the white man's games, especially their games of chance.

In 1847 now elderly Roy Lee Roy Senior's Doylestown era prediction came true in Ersatz County. The aged Roy designed and constructed Indiana's first steam passenger railway and people could travel in carriages not pulled by horses. At first the railway was a mere amusement, carrying the curious a scant nine miles from the edge of Grindle to the nose of the great salamander mound, but the younger Roy had a wider vision.

Within a decade, a web of rails connected Grindle and Ersatz County to Logansport, Royal Center, Beatrice, Outfall, Dithering and eventually Snit and Splunge. A golden age was at hand.

Pringle, the toymaker, had long been fascinated by pinwheels, and son Hans Pringle had developed the toy into the very practical windmill. With minimal investment, and no operating cost, the most remote farm could have water pumped for animal troughs, irrigation or household use twenty-four hours a day, with no physical effort. Soon the toy factory was expanded and renamed Pringle's Windworks.

The Roy's railroad, now identified as the Ersatz and Moot Point Railway Company enjoyed annually better bottom lines as they shipped ever larger quantities of raw materials to the windworks and growing quantities of finished windmills out of Grindle to water the surrounding states. As commercial travelers came to solicit trade, passenger revenues increased as well

Schexnaydor and family also turned their eyes beyond the Ersatz County line. The Schexnaydors viewed their brews as something close to a religious experience and one that should be taken to the four corners of the world, or at

least the four corners of the state. Private box cars were purchased and lettered with the legend “Schexnayder—More than a beer...a reason for life!”

While thirsty men in Indianapolis, Connersville, Terre Haute and Elkhart smiled at the rich foamy head and savored the creamy, smooth body of tall mugs of Schexnaydor lagers and ales, bookkeepers at the Ersatz and Moot Point smiled approvingly at ever growing income streams generated by incoming shipments of grains and departing liquid pleasure.

Goldsmith, the blacksmith, though long-retired from the forge, shared in the industrial good times. Sam and Margaret, Goldsmith’s children, had grown the business. The farrier’s trade was a tiny part of their commercial mix. Goldsmith the elder’s fine manacles, cuffs chains and other exotic paraphernalia had gained notoriety. Orders came from Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans, New York and the mysterious San Francisco. Soon the product line grew from domestic to include commercial and industrial offerings. Some of the nation’s largest cities and most imposing penal facilities employed shackles, cuffs, leg irons and jail cells proudly crafted by Grindle’s S&M Iron Works. John Roebling specified S&M Iron Works chain to be used in the construction of Cincinnati’s suspension bridge and later the famed Brooklyn Bridge. All of this heavy product left Grindle in freight cars and flat cars on the Ersatz & Moot Point, and the railway’s auditors were pleased with the results.

Life was good in Ersatz County and the future seemed bright. The final years of the fifth decade brought rumblings of unrest, but it took a lot to disturb the calm and contentment resulting from a good baked Amish chicken dinner with mushroom enhanced dressing. That was about to change.

January of 1861 brought news to Grindle of the secession of the South from the Union. At first this meant little to the Ersatzians. Northern Indiana was far removed from the Ohio River dividing line and few knew or cared what secession meant to the average man on the average day.

After the attack on Fort Sumter, things changed. Even Grindlites became engaged. A volunteer regiment, the Hoosier 18th was formed and a camp for the young enlistees was set up along the tail of the Great Salamander Mound. The S&M Iron Works was soon converted to war production. Their exotic bedchamber line was dropped for the duration. To be totally accurate, the exotic line was largely dropped. It seems one very highly placed member of the Union’s War Department had a particular fondness for several S&M products and claimed them vital to national security.

The Yoders smelled opportunity. They formed an association with the other Ersatz Amish and began war production of their own. While their religion prevented them from taking up arms in the conflict, it had no prohibitions to making a profit from it.

While enlisted men subsisted on fritters, salt pork and provisions commandeered from the locals, the officer corps was frequently treated to Amish Chicken, Amish Cheeses and occasionally Amish baked goods.

Decades before, Worthy Grindle's withdrawal from Ersatz County society and politics left a vacuum soon filled by the most unlikely of candidates, Deuteronomy Murphy, the silent young man. When his first name was finally made public, his long silence was understood. Murphy soon adopted the nick name Dutch, eventually making it his legal appellation.

Dutch Murphy was a born politician and had innate ability at working, and gaming, the system.

As the great war ground on, Grindle took its responsibilities to the nation seriously. The Hoosier 18th boarded a special three coach troop train and shipped out to Koontz Lake, a mere five miles distant. There they were assigned to a gun boat patrolling the lake's nine and one half mile shoreline. It was never clear what potential danger threatened Koontz Lake, but the brave boys of the Hoosier 18th served faithfully and vigilantly through the entire war, were recognized for bravery in the face of a rabid raccoon and upon their return regaled the Ersatz County homefolks with stories of life at the front.

The troop assignment was due to the clever, imaginative and effective political manipulation of Dutch Murphy junior, now serving as Representative Murphy in the Congress of the United States. He not only kept the Ersatz boys safe and close to home, he had arranged a lucrative contract for the Yoder and Coblenz boys to build the gunboat, a job completed in a single day in what was recorded as the nation's first boat-raising. S&M Iron Works received a share too, supplying armament and miscellaneous iron fixtures for the vessel. Even Pringle Windworks got a piece of the action with their design and installation of the windmill-powered propulsion system. The crowning achievement was the ship's eventual christening as the USS Dutch Treat.

The war finally ended and Ersatz County was briefly jubilant. Then news came of President Lincoln's assassination and the good people of Grindle attempted to ease their grief by creating some civic statement of respect. A citizens' committee lead by Roy Lee Roy Junior created a concept and codified a plan. The Ersatz and Moot Point Railway would clean and repaint a locomotive and first class

coach. The Coblenz brothers would craft Amish furniture for the interior; the Yoders would supply cheeses, chickens, pies, cakes, breads and buttermilk; the Goldsmiths cast a life-sized representation of Lincoln's dog, Fido; Schexnaydor would brew a special Honest Abe's Ale; and Pringle fabricated an animated diorama featuring six Union Soldiers saluting a portrait of the fallen President, powered by a small windmill mounted on the train car's roof. Representative Murphy would prepare and deliver an oration.

In short order all the components were assembled and Roy, Goldsmith, Coblenz, Pringle, Yoder, Schexnaydor and Murphy boarded the solemn train and left for Springfield.

There was but one problem. Lincoln's burial was to be in Springfield, Illinois, the place he had last seen steadfast Fido. Due to a misunderstanding, assistant dispatcher Grady Glover had prepared orders routing the train to Springfield, Missouri. The mistake was discovered only after they had reached their destination, a town struggling to recover from years of hardship and bloodshed. Lincoln was not a popular man in Springfield, Missouri and the Grindle delegation made a hasty retreat.

The Yoder's ample provisions along with Schexnaydor's peerless brew made the return trip a surprisingly pleasant experience, and one of the chairs crafted by the Coblenz brothers was judged an excellent design for use outdoors or on a porch. It served as inspiration for the first Amish deck furniture.

The turmoil was over and in Ersatz County life returned to normal. It was a mellow time. The Schexnaydors continued to provide the entire state with their proud product. Sam and Maggie Goldsmith quickly restarted production of the S&M line of intimate domestic offerings filling the pent-up demand created by four years' suspension of manufacture. The Ersatz and Moot Point was busy, and the Amish experimented with some early marketing, displaying a sign in Old English reading, "If We Weren't Amish, We'd Yodel for Yoder...but You Can." It was a bold and valiant attempt with little effect, and it would be more than a century before another company with an Amish heritage would hit the mark with the now-classic, "With a name like Smucker it has to be good."

The next decades found the United States invested in reconstruction, the construction and triumphant completion of the trans-continental railroad, amazing engineering feats and a major federal program constructing lighthouses along all of our seacoast.

Representative Dutch Murphy Junior knew an opportunity when he saw it, but puzzled how to use it to his advantage. Money was being poured into projects in

isolated spots from Florida to Maine and California to Washington. Louisiana and Texas had lighthouses, and Murphy knew in his Ersatz heart of hearts that Indiana deserved one, too. Finally, over a last snifter of brandy in Washington's posh Willard Hotel, inspiration came.

Murphy would propose a lighthouse to protect the shoals of Moot Point on Ersatz County's only significant body of water, Koontz Lake. The lighthouse was needed to protect the area's waterborne commerce and encourage expansion of "lake trade."

The concept was a magnificent sham. Worthy Grindle, the original con, would have been proud. The only waterborne commerce on Lake Koontz was the traditional shipment by Moxitoxic canoe of baskets of mushrooms for market at the Grindle Mercantile. Lake trade was a term that would not be used again for nearly a century when it would refer to the summer people in cottages ringing the lake.

Sham or not, the proposal succeeded. Bundled with a bill appropriating \$178,00 for the Currituck light, \$140,000 for the Bodie Island light and additional \$80,000 for the Cape Hatteras light, all in North Carolina, Murphy's Moot Point light got a respectable \$160,000.

Construction began in 1875 and completion was expected in 1877. Like the best of federally funded projects, unforeseen complications took a toll. By the time the Moot Point Light was dedicated July 18th 1887, the cost had risen to \$300,000 and the light itself stood at a height of 187 feet instead of the originally intended 60.

Dutch Murphy Junior made his final public appearance at the dedication. He extolled the beauty, utility and economic assets of the towering light. He was resolute that the Moot Point light would make the public safer and provide a beacon of hope for future generations.

That night the light with its first order rotating Fresnel lens was lit for the last time. Every 37 seconds the knife of white light would cut the darkness. Seven miles away Murphy retired for the night. Every 37 seconds the master bedroom of stately Murphy Manor was set ablaze by the Moot Point beacon. Murphy finally fled the room and spent the rest of the night with Mrs. Murphy, in her room.

On July 19th 1887 Murphy ordered the burner to be removed from the lighthouse lamp and the beam was never again seen.

The community of Grindle in Ersatz County was approaching its second century. Though none of the founding settlers remained, most of the residents could trace their roots back to the original eighteen, and like their predecessors felt a bit out of

place beyond the Ersatz environs. They knew that that they were square pegs. They also knew that square pegs, when gathered, fit tightly together leaving no gaps, and form a larger stable square. They viewed that as a good thing, and felt ready and well prepared for their own centennial and what they hoped would be a mellow new century.

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