The Place Name Correspondence of Chester Arthur Brown

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The story is told of a prominent author who came to Fort Wayne, Indiana to lecture and who as a gesture of interest in his fellow writers asked all of the writers in the audience to join him on the platform. According to the anecdote, virtually the entire body got up to move forward, prompting a second statement to clear up an obvious misunderstanding – with the same result. For whatever reason – and a goodly number have been offered since the phenomenon was first noticed more than a century ago – a lot of Hoosiers have been interested in writing, and the number of them who have done at least some of it is altogether out of keeping with the size of Indiana's population, past and present.[1]

One such Hoosier writer, with an unpublished two-volume memoir of his travels to his credit, was Chester Arthur Brown. Brown's major writing project grew out of his use of a railway pass available to him through his work with the stores department of the Sante Fe Railroad from 1922 to 1952. The carefully typewritten copy suggests that Brown might have hoped to find a publisher for his manuscript, which is at once something of a diary, travelogue, and commentary on the country.

Of particular interest is a packet of some seventy letters preserved from Brown's correspondence in the 1940s and early 1950s with Hoosier postmasters concerning the origin of what he characterized as ''odd and unusual'' place names of Hoosier towns. Brown professed no scholarly interest in the names, indicating that he was only pursuing a hobby. The well-preserved letters, tucked in self-addressed envelopes and written for the most part on the once-folded sheet that Brown's brief inquiry was typed on, were passed down to grandnephew Kent Cook of Terre Haute, without instructions, analysis, or even a cursory outline. Mr. Cook sensed that they might be of interest in place name research and kindly made them available for study.

The letters may be of value as much for their picture of small-town American life as for the information they contain about American place

names. For this occasion, however, it seems fitting to make Brown's collection known and to mine it in some measure for contributions it may make to a better understanding of the naming of Indiana places. Observations about the towns and times appear in many of the letters, but the focus of this examination permits use of only a small portion of such material. The following analysis is organized in terms of the corpus of settlement names appearing in the major published collection of Indiana place name materials, *Indiana Place Names*, the publication of which followed Brown's work by some thirty years.[2]

Some of Brown's inquiries were about names of towns about which *IPN* contained no information, either because the names were no longer listed on the state highway maps of the years preceding publication (names on the 1973-74 map were arbitrarily taken as the potential corpus for *IPN*) or because no information of any sort was found about the names. Fourteen of the sixty-five names in the collection fall into this category, and these will be commented upon first. A second group of inquiries by Brown brought responses revealing new primary evidence about the names. Six names are in this category. The largest set of inquiries and responses essentially confirm the existing accounts as they appear in the place name survey files and *IPN*. About thirty-five names appear to belong in this category. Finally, letters connected with a dozen names provide additional naming information of interest. As one would expect, the separation between responses in category three and those in category four is not uniform or rigid.

I

Place names not listed in *Indiana Place Names*, but about which Brown sought information and received responses are the following: Bootjack, Convenience, Desolation, Fiat, Hardscrabble, Holy Cross, Lick Skillet, Mailtrace, Paragon, Rumble, Scaffold Lick, Slabtown, Starlight, and Stringtown. Names that were no longer shown on state highway maps by 1973 include Convenience, Hardscrabble, Holy Cross, Lick Skillet, Mailtrace, Rapture, Rumble, Scaffold Lick, and Slabtown. These were thus automatically left out of *IPN*. Nothing of use was learned about Bootjack, Desolation, Fiat, Paragon, Starlight, and Stringtown; and these names were simply omitted.

Of this whole group, Brown's respondents were able to furnish information on all but two: Desolation and Rapture. Perhaps there is little wonder. Notes on the remaining names follow.

Bootjack (LaPorte County): The name is descriptive, from the con-

figuration of the site, according to Postmaster Hester Warden, who wrote in August of 1945:

> . . .it is my understanding that Bootjack derived its name from the fact that at this particular point, the two roads, state road #2 and the National highway, joined at an acute angle, forming what was commonly recognized as a bootjack. Hence the name.

Convenience (Harrison): Formerly called Buena Vista and named Convenience because getting the mail at that point instead of going considerably farther to Elizabeth was more convenient. But as Postmaster Grace Pittman wrote Brown in May of 1947: "I suggest you write to Dr. Fred Bierley at Elizabeth, Indiana he can possibly tell you more all I know is hearsay." Nothing from Dr. Bierley is in the surviving correspondence.

Fiat (Jay): According to Postmaster Brunell Holt of Pennville, who wrote to Brown in January of 1949, Fiat got its name "from the name of older war time money that it was back in the days of the GreenBack money period and a form of money called Fiat."

Hardscrabble (Hendricks): In writing to the postmaster at nearby Danville, the county seat, Brown placed Hardscrabble four miles to the east of Danville. This location is the same or nearly so as the site of the village of Gale, which may have been simply a later name of Hardscrabble. Gale is now down to a single building or two. However, Hardscrabble Road intersects with U.S. 36 nearby. Of the origin of Hardscrabble, Postmaster Harry Thomson wrote to Brown in March of 1949: "I have asked some of the oldest people about your question, the only answer I got was that early settlers were hard up and there was very little money so they called it Hardscrapple."

Holy Cross (St. Joseph): Brown provided no instructions about Holy Cross in his correspondence. In a letter written in January of 1943, the Sisters of Holy Cross wrote: "When this little town of eight hundred odd inhabitants received permission for a Post Office, the majority decided that Holy Cross would be an appropriate title." A gazetteer from the early 1960s connects the name to South Bend. The name Holy Cross is not current, but the little village is probably St. Mary's, which has its own postal substation and is a part of the University of Notre Dame community.

Lick Skillet (Daviess): Brown placed Lick Skillet three miles south of Washington, the county seat, in a letter written to Paul Smiley, the postmaster of Washington. Smiley responded that no one knew how this "nickname" was given to this community, which then, 1946, was served by rural route out of Washington and was known formally as South Washington.

Mailtrace (Wabash): In his letter to the postmaster at Lagro, Brown placed Mailtrace five miles north of "your office." This would put the

site on SR 13 one mile north of the junction of SR 13 and SR 16. The village, such as it was, must have received its name from the name of the road on which it was located and which was blazed for carrying the mail from Lagro to Manchester and Warsaw. According to the County Atlas, cited by Postmaster Ruth Noonan in April of 1948, the road was near the site of an Indian trail along which the mail was carried. "The road was brushed out some time prior to 1837 but not cleared of large timber till 1844."

Paragon (Morgan): Located eight miles south of Martinsville, the county seat, on SR 67. Of the origin of the town's name, Postmaster Alva Costin wrote to Brown in March of 1943:

Dear Sir:

Paragon is located in the White river Valley, the Valley is about 6 miles wide lying between a ridge of hills and very fertile farm land. The story of how Paragon got its name is that one of the early settlers of this community was standing on one of these hills overlooking this Valley and small community that had settled here and was very much impressed by the beauty and richness of what he saw and called it Paragon.

Rumble (Pike): Placed "a short distance southeast of your office" in a CAB letter to the postmaster of Union in Pike County, Rumble was reported by Postmaster Frederich Lindy to have been named after Elijah Rumble, one of the first settlers of the community. Rumble was also known as Rumbletown. The time of settlement was given by old people in the community as the early 1800s.

Scaffold Lick (Scott): Located near Blocher, and according to the treasurer of the Scaffold Lick Baptist Church, writing in July of 1949, named for the practice of hunters in the early days of placing salt in a small ravine west of the church and using a tree scaffold built in a large beech tree to watch for the deer as they came to the lick.

Slabtown (Decatur): Located six miles southeast of Greensburg, and according to original inhabitants interviewed by Postmaster C.D. Samuels of Greensburg, given its name through a saw mill used to cut slabs, many of which were laid to make a road that extended southeast to Napoleon and northeast almost to Greensburg. Two other Slabtowns seem to have existed, one in neighboring Rush County, according to an 1872 gazetteer and another in Boone County, based on a 1953 map.

Starlight (Clark): Located south of SR 60 east of New Providence. Rural Route 1 carrier, C.J. Schleicher, a local historian, supplied the account of Starlight's naming in a letter written in May of 1950. According to the story, early settlers wanted to call the post office and community

St. Johns, after the nearby church. But there was another St. Johns in the state. At about this time the general store owner acquired a new lamp for his store. A fine lamp for the day, it gave a very bright light. "Everyone said there was a new star in the community. And so when the people were asked about a name, they said, 'Call it Starlight.' "

Stringtown (Boone): Located three miles north of Lebanon on SR39. Though the name suggests a narrow settlement strung out along a road, no one seems to know how Stringtown received its name. According to Postmaster Brian Smith, writing in April of 1952, his rural mail carrier No 5 learned that this town was founded by a man named Keys and was first called Keys Ferry, "because in bad weather wagons and buggies had to be pulled through with extra horses."

<center>II</center>

A small group of responses to Brown's inquiries provides new and probably definitive information about the naming of certain Hoosier places: Alert, Eminence, Jockey, Saffaras, Solitude, and Windfall.

Alert (Decatur): Alert is considered in existing accounts to be a probable commendatory name, but it is apparently a transfer name as well. Postmaster W.R. Meyer wrote to Brown in March of 1948:

> One of the early settlers of Alert, Indiana was Ben Peterson. When the people of this community found that they were to have a post office, they began to suggest names. One person suggested that they name it after the little town in Ohio, which Ben Peterson had come from. So Alert, Indiana was named after Alert, Ohio.

Eminence (Morgan): Treated in the Indiana survey as probably commendatory, the name of Eminence is apparently descriptive. According to an April 1943 letter from Postmaster Iola Warmoth, surveying for the Indianapolis-Vincennes Road (SR 67) revealed that the town site was the highest point between the two cities, and thus the present name was given.

Jockey (Warrick): The origin of this name has been uncertain. The explanation appearing in the Indiana materials and *IPN* is that the residents of the community were shrewd dealers, and so the town was named Jockey for this meaning of the word. A seemingly more substantive account comes from Postmaster Lora Perigo of nearby Folsomville, who reported in May of 1952 that there was a small race track at the site and a man there who traded horses a lot, and "that was the way it got named Jockey." The source was said to be the oldest man in the community.

Saffaras (Parry): a note from the postmaster of Saffaras, Indiana, written in March of 1944 makes plain the relationship between the first name of the town and the current one. It reads in full:

Dear Mr. Brown

   This is the answer to question on reverse side.

   During the time when Saffaras received its name there were lot of sassafras growing. The Postmaster sent the name of Sassafras and misspelled it thus leaving the post office named Saffaras.

<div align="right">Postmaster
Saffaras, Ind.</div>

The Brown account thus establishes Saffaras as a mistake name, and Sassafras as the intended name. As noted in *IPN* the change from Saffaras to Sassafras was made in 1957. The name Saffaras lasted for forty-one years.

Solitude (Posey): Described in *IPN* as "apparently a descriptive name," Solitude is that, apparently, and also another name about which a legend is told. The settlement came into being as the result of the building of the old Evansville and Terre Haute Railroad (later the C and EI and now the L & N). Wrote Postmaster Smith in 1945:

> Where the old New Harmony road crossed the new railroad there was an x marking the spot as a post office and one of the officials inquired the name of the place and being assured that it had no designation he took one look out of the window at the desolate surrounding and said we'll call it 'Solitude.'

Smith, who was a feature story writer for a number of years before becoming postmaster, added: "As to the authenticity of the foregoing I have only the word of one of our older citizens who gave me this bit of information, which you must admit appears logical."

Windfall (Tipton): It is stretching things to characterize the Brown evidence on this town's name as definitive, but it does add a conjecture to the current Indiana materials, which contain only the date the site was laid out. A note written by postal clerk Lenore Plummer in April of 1943 says, "Sorry the P. master overlooked your letter. He doesn't know just how Windfall got its name other than there was a windstorm here at one time." Plummer provided the name of a potential informant, but the collection doesn't evidence a response.

<div align="center">III</div>

   The largest group of letters in the Brown collection contains naming accounts that correspond rather closely to those appearing in the materials of the Indiana place name survey and *IPN*. These accounts add little in the way of significant detail about namings, though they sometimes include much of interest about the towns themselves. In view of the relative

harmony of the two sets of accounts, only an abbreviated entry is general-
ly given here:

Advance	Independence	Rising Sun
Beehunter	Lapel	Roll
Buckskin	Keystone	Santa Claus
Correct	Liberty Center	Shipshewana
Deputy	New Harmony	Spades
Domestic	Patriot	Strawtown
Farmers Retreat	Pinhook	Tab
Freedom	Popcorn	Tell City
Gas City	Pumpkin Center	Treaty
Harmony	Radioville	Wheatfield
Hope	Redkey	Young America

Advance (Boone): So named because advancement of the community
was expected. The Brown letter gives a pronunciation tip: the accent is on
the first syllable.

Beehunter (Greene): From a creek named for Chief Beehunter of the
Peankishaw tribe.

Buckskin (Gibson): From a deerskin operation in the community.

Correct (Ripley): First named Oxford, then Comet. When the Post
Office Department asked if this was the name for the post office, the
respondent replied, "correct."

Deputy (Jefferson): For James Deputy, a pioneer settler.

Domestic (Wells): Apparently a commendatory name. The subject of
the shortest letter in the Brown collection, a single line from Postmaster
Frank Neusbaum, written in August of 1945: "I cannot tell you."

Farmers Retreat (Dearborn): Thought by Postmaster T. J. Geisler to
be named for the post office established in 1852; apparently commendatory.

Freedom (Owen): For the proprietor, Joseph Freeland *(IPN);* for an
early settler named Freeman (CAB).

Gas City (Grant): For the "enormous quanities" of natural gas that
were discovered here, according to a 1944 CAB letter presenting a
detailed description along with the standard account.

Harmony (Clay): Both the *IPN* account and the local postmaster cite a
common source: "There is no reason to be assigned for the naming of this
town and the postoffice, also, other than that of euphony and suggestiveness."

Hope (Bartholomew): Named by Moravian settlers for an earlier Mora-
vian settlement in North Carolina. Called Goshen for its first few years
and renamed when a post office was established in 1833, apparently
because a Goshen had already been established in Elkhart County in 1831.

Independence (Warren): Founded by a scout for William Henry Harri-
son on grounds provided by the government for his services and thought
to have been named by postal officials for the post office.

Keystone (Wells): Named by founders for their home state of Pennsylvania.

Lapel (Madison): For the town site, originally confined to land situated in the angle created by the relation of an angling turnpike to adjacent railroad tracks. The resemblance to the lapel of a coat was noticed by one of the men who helped to draw up the plans for the town. Postmaster Theodore Aldred commented in an interesting letter written in May of 1943: "I chanced to be over Lapel in an aeroplane recently. The angling road is now paved and the sections of the town on either side of the road resemble [a] Lapel of a coat although one is inverted with respect to the other."

Liberty Center (Wells): for its location in the center of Liberty Township.

New Harmony (Posey): For Harmonie, Pennsylvania, site of the first settlement of George Rapp and his associates, who came to Indiana in 1814.

Patriot (Switzerland): For the patriotism of its people, according to one account; or for the "Patriots," veterans of the Revolution who settled here, according to another. The former possibility was suggested by Postmaster H.M. Smith in a 1950 letter attributing this belief to the older people of the community.

Pinhook (Elkhart; Lawrence): Both towns appear to have been named for the distinctive shape of the roads at the sites. Both involve legends about pins, however. The Brown correspondence on the southern (Lawrence County) Pinhook cites a familiar legend about a local merchant who to get around the law sold each customer a bent pin to use for a fish hook and then gave away a drink with each pinhook sold. The northern Pinhook was first called New Durham, for the local township, and it in turn for Durham, New York. The southern Pinhook also has a conventional name, according to an April, 1950, letter from Postmaster A.C. Clark of nearby Bedford, who wrote that "the true name, Mount Union, is little known and very, very seldom ever used.

Popcorn (Lawrence): Described by local resident Everett Wilson as "just a wide place in the road on the bank of Popcorn Creek," Popcorn was evidently named for the stream. But a local story, repeated by Wilson, tells of an outsider's visit to a relative, who after showing off his best acres was told, "Compared to what we grow, your corn is just popcorn." Popcorn has been thought to have been settled about 1880. But Wilson, in one of the best letters in the collection, wrote: "I came to Popcorn on March 24 – 1875 and have been a continuous resident to this date." He then went on, ". . . as it had its name at that early date what I could tell you would be to some extent legendary."

Pumpkin Center (Orange, Washington): For a local farmer's pumpkin patch, said to be the largest in the state (*IPN*). Postmaster Otho Wilson's detailed letter of April, 1950, indicates that the Orange County community first considered Midway (between Syria and Bromer) for its name but took the suggestion of young Stanley Cornwell and named the settlement Pumpkin Center, for the "enormous crop of pumpkins in that vicinity that year."

Radioville (Pulaski): Probably related to the contemporary development of commercial broadcasting in some way, but no accounts are offered.

Redkey (Jay): For a pioneer preacher, James Redkey, on whose farm the town was started.

Rising Sun (Switzerland): The existing accounts and that provided Brown are much alike, but the latter has a certain poignancy. Emma Binder, the assistant postmaster of the town, wrote to Brown in 1942:

> Rising Sun, Indiana was given its name by John Fulton and his son in 1814. And he landed hear in a flat boat. And the beautiful sunrise gave him the inspiration for this beautiful name. This is a beautiful quiet town on the Ohio River. And the smallest county in the U. States. And no railroad through it.

Roll (Blackford): Edna May, the postmaster of Roll, wrote to Brown in March of 1945: "Roll was named for the oldest living resident of this fine little berg, which happened to be a Mr. Roll." *IPN* gives the first name of Roll as Mathias.

Santa Claus (Perry): First called Santa Fe. When a post office was sought the people learned that an Indiana town already had that name. A letter from an anonymous postmaster written in February of 1942 offers one explanation as to what happened next: "So as it was near Christmas the people gathered together in the little church and renamed the town Santa Claus. In the year 1856." One *IPN* account has a man dressed in a Santa Claus costume showing up at a meeting called to decide what new name could be given. Someone suggested Santa Claus, and "since they were all pretty drunk," the place was so named.

Shipshewana (Lagrange): For nearby Lake Shipshewana, named for Chief Shipshewana of the Pottawatomies, who was removed with his band to Kansas in 1839 but allowed shortly after to return to his old camping grounds, where he died in 1841.

Spades (Ripley): For early settler Jacob Spades *(IPN)*. The Brown account, provided in a June, 1943, note from Postmaster Margaret Robinson, has the name as John Spade, owner of a large farm.

Strawtown (Hamilton): For an Indian named Chief Straw.

Tab (Warren): A note for Postmaster Roy Maddox, written in October

of 1943, expands a bit on the accepted account: "Tab Ind. received its name from the nickname of the man who gave the land for the railroad to go through his name was Harrison Goodwin. Always went by the name of Tab."

Tell City (Perry): Founded by a group of Swiss settlers and named for the Swiss patriot, William Tell.

Treaty (Wabash): For a treaty made with the Indians. *IPN* indicates that it was named directly for nearby Treaty Creek.

Wheatfield (Jasper): For a large field of wheat, the only distinguishing feature at the site. "So when they began to settle here forming a village first, they called it Wheatfield, after the large wheatfield that was sowed here." Brown's correspondent, Postmaster Lydia Parker, in her April, 1943, note adds: "Sorry I cannot tell you more about it. That has been several years ago." The Village was settled in the early 1870s.

Young America (Cass): Named for "Young America," which some- one wrote on the steam boiler Thomas Henry had bought for his saw mill. According to a May of 1942 letter from Postmaster Nellie Heinmiller, however, Young America was "formaly called Henryville," and the name of the town was changed after the christening of the steam engine.

IV

In this category of place names in the Brown corpus are naming accounts that generally go beyond confirmation of existing accounts in some way but that fall short of belonging in the Saffaras group of names:

Antiville	Friendship
Bean Blossom	Gnaw Bone
Blue Cast	Killmore
Door Village	Onward
Economy	Raintown
Fountain City	

Antiville (Jay): In a letter written sometime in 1946, Postmaster John Bonifas attributes the origin of the name to the fact that "the inhabitants were opposed to many of the conditions that existed when the site was established." This explanation, with clarification and elaboration, ap- pears in *IPN* as well. A more useful letter to Brown from a life-long resident, Harry Straley, written in June of 1946, describes in excellent detail both the town and its inhabitants. The people were strongly anti- slavery and equally opposed to masonry. "A man by the name of Shepard Black lived near here and was a free mason and gave it the name of Antiville for it was anti to every public subject," wrote Straley. Straley knew the town's anti-mason sentiments first-hand: "I must also say that I

was one of the boys that was put out of the church and was the first of the number (?) to become a free mason. . . .''

Bean Blossom (Brown): Postmaster Harold Campbell, in a 1945 letter written from Helmsburg, confirms the *IPN* account that the present name is for the creek along which the village was built. Drawing on his doctor grandfather's stories about life in the region, he wrote that early settlers raised beans as a main crop in the low and swampy valley and so named the creek Bean Blossom.

Bluecast (Allen): Asked to help by the postmaster of nearby Harlan, the cashier of the Woodburn Bank wrote to Brown in July of 1949 that old timers recalled that a Mr. Gouge named the town but they were unable to say why Bluecast was chosen. *IPN* characterizes Bluecast as probably a descriptive name but provides no hint as to the naming itself.

Door Village (LaPorte): A letter to Brown written in August of 1945 by Arthur Stewart of the LaPorte Historical Society asserts that Door Village was so called for its location at an opening in the forest between two tracts of prairie land. LaPorte County itself was named thus for the French word for door. Settled after the founding of LaPorte, the county seat, the village took the English word for its name.

Economy (Wayne): A 1943 letter to Brown from the postmaster of Economy states that the former name of the town was ''Ninevah.'' When the town was moved away from its low, unhealthy site along a creek to a higher spot, it was ''thought Economy'' to do so; and thus the town was given a new name.

Fountain City (Wayne): First known as New Garden, Fountain City received its present name ''for the fountain wells here,'' according to *IPN*. A one-line response from an anonymous postmaster writing to Brown in October of 1943 adds substance to the *IPN* entry: ''From Springs or fountains which people here still use instead of Ice Boxes.''

Friendship (Ripley): The Brown correspondence contains three letters from postmasters at Friendship, written in 1943, 1944, and 1952. Only the last letter offers an account of the naming of the town. Postmaster E.J. Sellus wrote to Brown: ''Some of the old timers say it was called Pauls Town in honor of a Mr. Paul. Later when he left a committee was formed to give it a new name. Someone said the community was built on *Friendship* and so it was named.'' The postmaster adds: ''I have no way of knowing whether there is any truth in any of these statements.'' *IPN's* account has the postmaster changing the name from earlier Hart's Mills to Friendship ''because most of the people were friendly.''

Gnaw Bone (Brown): Several anecdotes try to explain the naming of this southern Indiana village, as detailed in *IPN*. Joshua Bond, who

responded to Brown in August of 1945 on behalf of his postmaster in Nashville, the county seat, adds a twist to the "gnawin' on a bone" genre of accounts: ". . . someone was eating meat from a bone that the travelers named "Gnawbone." A somewhat likelier explanation is that the name was first *Narbonne* given by French settlers and reshaped into Gnawbone by folk etymology.

Killmore (Clinton): Now spelled Kilmore, Killmore was originally called Penceville for the man who laid out the town in 1854. According to the *IPN* version of the naming, the name was changed in 1872 for a nearby creek, itself named for John Killmore. But Postmaster James Shafer of Frankfort, the county seat, in a 1952 letter writes that railroad construction crews met with a "series of fatal accidents at what was known as Penceville, but now known as Killmore, Indiana." Shafer adds: "I am sixty seven years old and that story was told to me by my father when I was a boy." It is interesting to consider that Shafer's father probably was born early enough to have heard the legend from its earliest days.

Onward (Cass): In a November 1945 letter to Brown, Postmaster Orel Small of Walton wrote that he had not been able to find "any exact reason for that particular name," but his interesting account of the three sites of the town, the last one adjacent to the newly built railroad station, suggests a plausible explanation for the name Onward, which was bestowed after the last move. The earlier name had been Dow Post Office, according to Small. *IPN* cites a local anecdote attributing the name to a remark local citizens made after a loafing session at a village store: "I must now plug onward."

Raintown (Hendricks): Named for Hiram Rain, who operated a saw-mill here about 1870, according to *IPN*. But an informative letter written in June of 1950 by Maggie Wilson, a resident of nearby Lizton, contains the following paragraph: "A man by name of Hiram Rains owned and operated a saw-mill several little shacks were builded for his work-men and their families they named the place Rainstown. Later the *s* was droped it is now Raintown."

The preceding sections reveal enough about the Brown collection to suggest something of its interest and value. But the material calls for further examination, necessarily brief here. It will be useful first to recapitulate by categories the sixty-four or so place names that elicited some kind of response to Brown's inquiries. In terms of the existing *IPN* corpus, which was as indicated earlier deliberately limited to the names appearing on the state highway map of 1973–74, fourteen places in the Brown Collection involve non-*IPN* names, accounts of six names provide fresh, probably definitive information, thirty-three accounts essentially

confirm existing stories, and a dozen or so provide extra naming informa-
tion of some interest. Given the tenuous hold that these place names,
many of them those of villages, have on the Hoosier soil, the survival of a
high percentage of the names in the Brown corpus to the mid-1970s
probably says something both for the Hoosier's affection for small towns
and for contemporary mapmakers' interest in keeping names alive, in
some instances after virtually all evidence of settlement has disappeared.

But if the Brown Collection contains a number of place names no
longer appearing on the map, it apparently is missing a number of other
names still on the map that would seem to fit in well with the names about
which Brown did get some kind of response. A casual survey of *IPN*
entries produced about twenty-five such place names. It seems certain,
even without taking into account Brown's persistence in trying to find out
how Friendship got its name, that his working list of ''odd and unusual''
Hoosier place names was larger than the number about which he received
responses of some kind. On the one hand, it hardly seems reasonable to
suppose that none of the postmasters whose help Brown sought about
perhaps twenty-five additional names would have sent a reply of any sort.
On the other hand, even counting all of these added names, the overall
response to his calls would still be high. The possibility exists, of course,
that additional replies were received but somehow lost over the past
several decades. Perhaps further correspondence will turn up. In any
event, the Brown material stands on its own as an object of interest and
inquiry.

In evaluating and characterizing the collection it has been useful to
classify the names according to types of place names and to make com-
parisons between the existing corpus of settlement names and those
appearing in the Brown group. The settlement and other place names
appearing in *IPN* are classified into a dozen or so categories, using largely
traditional distinctions. Of the 2,023 *IPN* settlement names, 36 percent
are classified as personal, about 28 percent as transfer, 8.26 percent as
descriptive, and 7 plus percent as inspirational. One name, Santa Claus, is
considered to be humorous, and one name, Correct, is a mistake name, so
called.

Of the Brown place names, 20 percent are judged to be personal, 6
percent are transfer, 50 percent are descriptive and about 12 percent are
commendatory. Santa Claus, in at least one account of the naming, is a
humorous name. And Saffaras is placed in the category of mistake names
with Correct, though Saffaras was changed to Sassafras in 1957 as indi-
cated above. Thus the percentage of personal names in the Brown collec-
tion is little more than half that in *IPN*, the percentage of transfer names

about a fourth that in *IPN,* and the percentage of descriptive names some six times as great as in the general collection of *IPN* settlement names. It is obvious, moreover, that the names that turned out to be personal names carry a descriptive or designating force that fits them well for inclusion in Brown's list of ''odd and unusual'' names. It must have come as a surprise to Brown to learn that Spades, Rumble, Redkey, and Rain(town) were personal names.
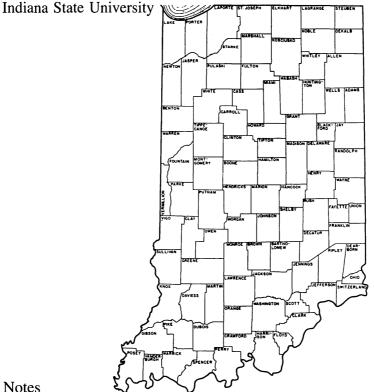
Though no other Brown names appear to be eligible to stand alongside Santa Claus as a humorous name, the earlier name of Stringtown of Boone County may reflect the humor of its citizens. Recall that the town was first called Keys Ferry – Keys for the founder and Ferry ''because in bad weather wagons and buggies had to be pulled through with extra horses,'' suggesting that the crossing was perhaps akin to the Wabash itself at these times.

As a whole, the Brown correspondence strikes me as a useful complement to the place name materials developed for the most part some thirty years afterwards. It provides information of varying degrees of value about a number of Indiana place names both within and outside the existing corpus, adding to the aggregate strength and substance of the place name survey. It conveys something as well of the processes involved in the naming of places. It demonstrates in particular the extent to which the place name accounts of some of the most obscure villages on the face of the land manage to survive generation after generation, in some cases after the villages are gone. And it affirms a closely related fact, that names are so interesting that people will talk and tell and write about them to amateur investigators, if the investigator is organized, courteous, and persistent.

All things considered, then, and though they are manifestly quite variable in form and substance, the letters appear to deserve a distinct if modest place as a part of place name literature. But not only as such; for, as I suggested earlier, they are of interest as well for their conscious and unconscious portrayal of small-town Hoosier and Midwestern life from the late 19th century up to about 1950. The letters portray small towns, indeed. Only a few are actually good-sized towns today; many are merely villages and have never been anything else. Some have held their own over the years; others have not. Eminence today has some 140 inhabitants and has hung onto its high school in the face of consolidation moves that have cut the number of Indiana high schools from more than 800 to fewer than 400 in forty years. Gnawbone has a general store and a few houses. Antiville was already down to a single shop and a couple of houses in the 1940s; today its name is on the Indiana highway map, surely, partly

because it would be a shame for it not to be. And Hardscrabble, as indicated earlier, is gone. Only a road by that name remains.

Finally, there is the matter of Chester Arthur Brown himself. Perhaps it is enough to say simply that in an issue of *Names* dedicated to a scholar who has inspired people from a variety of backgrounds and interests to study the place names of their countrysides, it is particularly fitting that the place name correspondence of Chester Arthur Brown – traveler, diarist, collector, and amateur student of American culture – should be brought to light and its findings offered as a contribution to the study of names on the American landscape.

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Notes

[1]Many explanations – some serious, others tongue-in-cheek – have been offered for Indiana's literary productivity, including "something in the air," the vigorous climate, and a "kind of compensation" for the derision involved in early Indianans' being called "hoosiers," at the time a term of opprobrium. See *Indiana Authors and Their Books 1967–1981* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1981), pp. ix-xiii. Compiler Donald E. Thompson's discussion entitled "Some Thoughts about Indiana Authors" provides interesting observations about the matter.

[2]Co-authored by Ronald L. Baker and Marvin Carmony, *Indiana Place Names* was published by Indiana University Press in Bloomington in 1975. A paperback edition was published in 1978. This collection is identified as *IPN* in the text; Brown's letters as CAB.