

“UNCERTAIN”

--Observations of Places and Things--

Looking over a roadmap or an Atlas, you'd be struck by how funny (strange, even) are some of the place names you see. There's "Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania"; (Home of "Slippery Rock University") "Rough-And-Ready, California"; "Cut and Shoot, Texas".

But there's more. Much more.

In northeast Texas, nearby to "Karnack" (itself good for a double-take), is a place called, "Uncertain". The main street in Uncertain is "Broadway." I can tell you from having actually driven down that thoroughfare that, while the street is indeed "broad," there is not a whole lot else to see, except trees---lots of trees---the whole place is situated deep in a forest. I'm told that the huge automobile parts warehouse that pretty much comprised the whole town is still there. The warehouse was so big when I was there in the late-'seventies, the employees used roller-skates and wheeled carts to get around in the cavernous place. It even had a catchy address: "1000 Broadway". Trying to jog my memory, at this point, I'm uncertain if anything else was in Uncertain; I do recall a four-way stop in the middle of Uncertain, and those many tall trees. Certainly, all 202 inhabitants of Uncertain (according to the sign at the edge of town the last time I was there) must feel the same sort of pride the folks probably must feel who live in Slippery Rock, Rough-And-Ready, and Cut-And Shoot.

Moving over to Louisiana, there is a town named "Assumption", which I assume has something to do with selling Real Estate. Louisiana also has a locality named "Indian Hills", which is right next to "Indian Hills-Cherokee Section". You could assume that "Cherokee Indians" inhabit the "Cherokee Section." Or did at one time.

There are actually places called "Indiana, Pennsylvania" and "California, Pennsylvania." If that's not confusing enough, both towns have universities with football teams, which makes for tongue-twisting play-by-play of sportscasters delivering the scores on autumn Saturday afternoons.

Alabama has a number of localities with peculiar names, such as "Remlap" (that's "Palmer" spelled backwards); "Grassy" (which really does have lots of grass); "Buzard's Roost" (I guess buzzards do roost, there); "Margerum" (which has nothing to do with distilled spirits); and "Airplane Hollow" (a body of water that fooled pilots into landing their aircraft onto it during World War II. The wrecked airplanes are still down there on the bottom, they say.). I'm not going to touch "Bug Tussle." But it's there, too.

Still in Alabama, "Eclectic" would presumably be known for its varieties of things in and around the town. "Notasulga" might have been a "sulga" at one time, but is no longer such a

thing---at least, I didn't see any "sulgas" as I drove through and on out of town. Not a "sulga" in sight.

One time in Salt Lake City, Utah I spotted a sign proclaiming an establishment as "Sinn's Inn." (Seems like "sinn" always has been "in", even in Salt Lake.) Just down the same street was another sign announcing "Seagull Cleaners", which would explain all the clean seagulls I saw flying around Salt Lake City. (Yes, there are seagulls in Salt Lake City. In fact, the seagull is the State Bird of Utah.)

Still in Utah, down-state near Elsinore I spotted sign with a blinking arrow pointing to a gasoline station combined with a small diner. What got my attention was what the sign said: *'EAT AT BILL'S AND GET GAS'*. If you think I'm kidding about that one, I have a picture of the sign.

When our family took a driving trip to Florida in the summer of 1958, we passed a billboard sign that read, *'WELCOME TO AFRICA'*. "Africa?" My dad pounded the steering wheel. "We took the wrong road!"

In the California high desert is a sign that has become famous around the world. You can't miss it: on Interstate 15 just outside of Baker you approach the turnoff, *'ZZYZX Rd.'* and an arrow pointing to the right. Supposedly the man who named the place did so because "Zzyzx" is the last entry in the dictionary. For the really curious, there are springs and a health spa there, but not much else.

On Interstate 10, just east of San Antonio, Texas, motorists drive by a freeway sign notifying them that they are passing over *'WOMAN HOLLERING CREEK'*. (Any number of divorced men have insisted that the small waterway was named after their ex-wife.)

Just outside of Conway, Arkansas you'll find *'TOAD SUCK FERRY PARK'*. A short hike takes you down to *'TOAD SUCK FERRY LOCK AND DAM'*. It almost sounds obscene. So obscene, in fact, that a national survey voted "Toad Suck, Arkansas" the most "unfortunate" name for a town in the United States.

Rounding out that particular survey were other such "unfortunate" places as "Boring, Oregon"; "Hooker, Oklahoma"; "Assawoman, Maryland"; "Belchertown, Massachusetts"; "Roachtown, Illinois". Other places that made mention on the survey were "Loveladies, New Jersey"; "Squabbletown, California" and "Monkey's Eyebrow, Kentucky".

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In southeastern Pennsylvania is *'INTERCOURSE'*, which is fine, except you'll have to drive across the state a couple of hundred miles to arrive at *'CLIMAX'*. (The two towns together have

been the subjects of endless ribald humor, which continues here.)

Driving on the south side of Chicago in late-summer of 1959, we came across the '*SEE YOU LATER FUNERAL HOME*'.

My dad drove around the block again to see if we had read it right.

We had.

In Houston, for a long time there was a billboard in the courthouse district advertising a bail-bonding outfit that read, '*WE'LL GET YOU OUT (EVEN IF IT TAKES 20-YEARS)*'. At least they were being honest about it.

A sign I spotted in front of the "Halbert Baptist Church" (no kidding; that's the name) in Salem, Oregon admonished drivers, "*THOU SHALT NOT PARK HERE*".

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On the other side of the coin, there's the place called, '*HELL*'. (Don't want to go there unless it's to the town in Michigan.)