

mutters something about you can't be too careful in this day and age. I guess he's right, but I have just as much right to walk the streets of this four-block-by-three-block settlement in the middle of an endless cornfield as he does. I learn that Orange, Indiana is not incorporated, has no mayor or council or police department...not even a post office.

But it does have an elementary school. Wringing information out of this crabby couple is like squeezing water from a stone, so I decide to check out Orange Elementary for myself. And here comes the boy on his bicycle. Curiosity has got the better of him.

"We're on the map?" says Clay Coyle, 14, incredulously. I show him his town on the map and show him mine some 1,000 miles away. He asks questions about our journey, tells me his town is home to maybe 75 people max, that his father is buried in the cemetery I visited earlier. There is an embarrassed pause. "You must be rich," he blurts looking at my diesel pick-up.

It is plain that this hamlet is not. It is run-down. Dogs of undetermined breeding are tethered on chains. Most buildings could use a coat of paint. In the middle of the road someone has long ago sprayed the words "Go home" in yellow paint. I take the advice.

Orange, Ohio (part II)-

There are only eight houses here, a church and a grange hall. I see no one, but somehow this tiny community just off of a busy four-lane highway in rural eastern Ohio reminds me the most of home. The countryside is rolling like ours. The houses, although modest, are neat and well-kept. The yards are mowed. The corn stalks are so tall that you can only see the roofs of the barns and sheds in the background.

Wandering through these little villages, I find myself wondering what is the definition of an American?

What do we all have in common? Common boundaries? Yes, that's true. Common language? Well, not entirely. Common religion? No way. Common race?

Absolutely not. But still, there's this intangible something that goes beyond politics and religion that uniquely defines us.

Maybe it is the marriage of our innovation and sheer might that, despite our blunders and misadventures at home and

abroad, makes us capable of forging ahead, of getting on down the road. It's got nothing to do with the White House and everything to do with a hometown baseball team.

Besides, whether we're from Orange Ohio, Orange Indiana or Orange, Virginia, we're all just Yoopers, Fudgies and Trolls.



Postcard photos by Phil and Susie Audibert



Postcards

Recently, my wife Susie and I towed a 29-foot, fifth-wheel camper on a 2,642-mile odyssey through the Midwest in search of the American Heartland. We may have found it in Wuerfel Park just outside Traverse City, Michigan. More on that later.

One of the reasons for this trip was to escape the Virginia heat by going to the 45th parallel, the exact half way point between the equator and the north pole. In this endeavor we failed. On July 31, the mercury read 102 degrees in Traverse City.

Another reason for the trip was to visit as many localities named Orange as we could find on the way. We found three, and they were all as different and as similar as our home town. We also predictably found... in the words of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz... that there is indeed "no place like home." But you already knew that.

First of all, I must preface my remarks by saying that this trip pales in comparison to the motorcycle adventures of Don and Marcelline Waugh. And I will not bore you, gentle reader, with a travel log. Instead, what follows are some random observations about this vast, bumbling, diverse, obese, innovative, ignorant, creative, wasteful and productive nation of ours.



Of Yoopers, Fudgies and Trolls-

Look at the palm of your right hand, keeping your fingers together and your thumb out. You have before you a reasonable facsimile of the state of Michigan. At the very tip of your middle finger, lie the straits of Mackinac (pronounced Mackinaw)...the connection between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. Controlling the straits is Mackinac Island. This is the place that determines whether you are a Yooper, a Fudgie or a Troll.

Across the straits lies a thin body of land that looks like it should be a part of eastern Wisconsin. It is the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, known as the U.P. People from the U.P. are called Yoopers and are generally considered to be rather dimwitted. They, in turn, call folks from the mitt of Michigan, Trolls because they live "under the bridge" that joins their two worlds. This bridge, by the way, was the one those guys from Texas were trying to blow up. Anyway, everyone else, all non-Michiganders, tourists and terrorist alike, are called Fudgies because they invariably buy Mackinac Island's primary export and invention...fudge.

We didn't buy any...can't stand the stuff, but we're Fudgies just the same.

The Road, the Automobile, and the Irony-

No cars are allowed on Mackinac Island. Everyone gets around by bicycle or real horsepower. There are street sweepers who hand-shovel 10,000 pounds of "exhaust" from the town's streets daily. Groceries, supplies, construction materials, mail...all of it from the mainland...are delivered by two-horsepower, eight-cylinder (one for each foot) "trucks." The island's highway is the most accident-free in the state. This "no cars" policy has been in effect since the invention of the automobile. Isn't it ironic that the very creators of that automobile, the Fords and the Durants may have vacationed on this resort island that banned their creations?

And isn't it ironic that we are spending \$3.09 a gallon to visit the birthplace of the factory-constructed automobile and its creator Henry Ford, a visionary who is widely credited with fine tuning the assembly line and coining the term, "mass production." In the 1920's, Ford established a museum and a replica Williamsburg-style 1920's-era village as shrines to American innovation and ingenuity. Bill Roberts and the Somerset Steam and Gas Show guys would go nuts in here...probably already have.

And consider this-Ford was best buddies with Thomas Edison, arguably the most innovative and

ingenious American of all time. Ford, Edison, and Harvey Firestone (that tire guy) would go off on camping trips together. In the evenings they sat at a round table under a tent like knights. They slept in the first RVs.

And isn't it ironic that on this day that we are visiting this extraordinary museum, a group of Amish tourists, have turned their backs on the car collection and instead are clustered around horse-drawn implements, excitedly jabbering in a strange language...High German or Dutch maybe? The teenage boys, muscles rippling under their plain shirts, posture in front of the coy, giggling girls. How did these people GET here? There are no horses parked in the lot. Perhaps, Mennonites drove them...automobiles...with internal combustion engines.

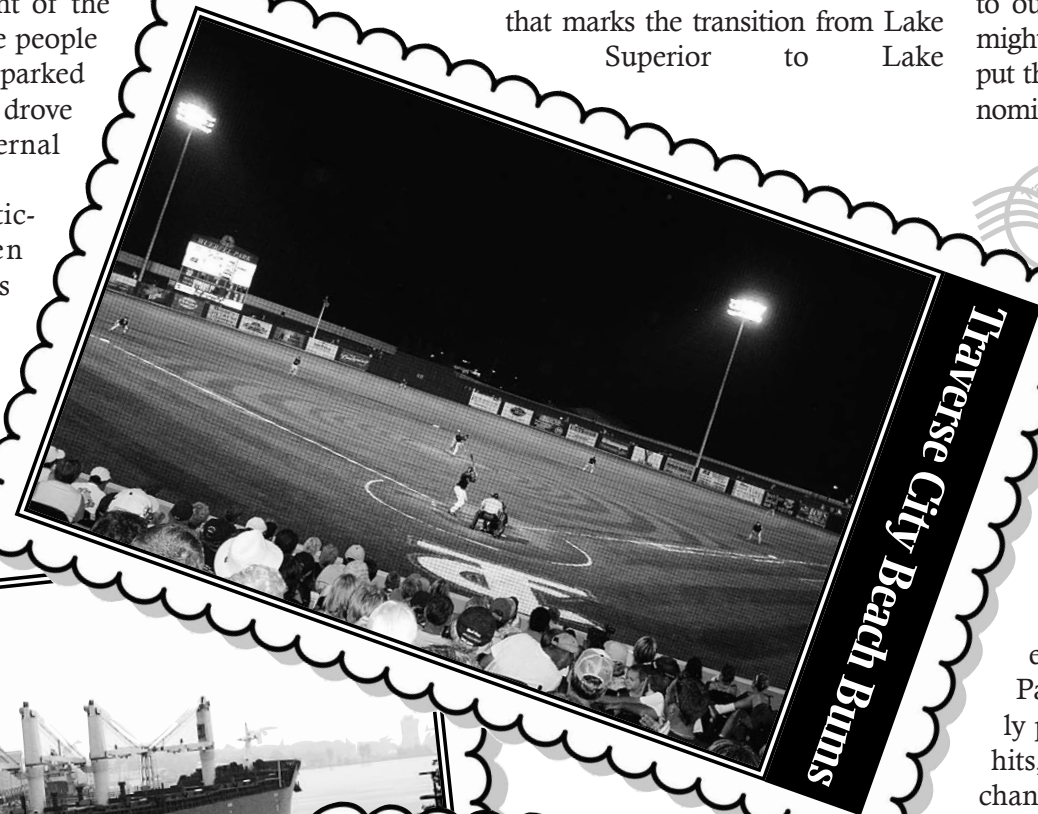
At the 1870s-era, authentic-down-to-the-breed-of-chicken Firestone Farm in Ford's Greenfield village, a period-dressed docent tells us how the Amish tell him his farm equipment is obsolete! He tries to explain to them that he must hold true to 1870 to be his

past the fields of wildflowers and spruce, through the sandy soil and the northern hay country, we spy not a speck of trash...not one. And as we travel through towns just like Orange, from Rudyard to Manistee, we marvel at the mile-long curbside plantings of red white and blue petunias, mirroring the red white and blue flags on every porch.

This is America, folks.

Soo Locks-

At the top of the U.P., at the border with Canada, lies another set of narrows that marks the transition from Lake Superior to Lake



America's Pastime

I'm a Bums fan...the Traverse City Beach Bums, that is. I'm a fan before I even arrive because for two days prior I have tuned in to the NBC affiliate in Traverse City to see what makes this community tick. And during the evening news sports segment, all talk is of the Bums. So, for my birthday, I want to go to a Bums game.

My wish comes true. On a blistering late July evening, we perch in the \$10 seats just a few rows behind home plate as our newly-adopted beloved Bums take on the Chillicothe, Ohio Paints. The Bums, before 4,262 loyal fans, handily paint the Paints 6-2. There are some well-placed hits, some great defensive plays, numerous pitching changes and the Manager of the Paints is thrown out of the game for kicking dirt at the ump. It doesn't get any better than this.

On one side of us is a grand dad who is treating his granddaughter to this most American of all our traditions. We amicably exchange comments about various plays and pitches without learning each other's names. On the other side sits John Olson, a local golf course developer. He explains this Frontier Independent Professional League team was started just this year by a local motel chain owner who sold several motels to build

the ball park. The team is doing well its first year, posting a 44-29 record by mid-August. Players earn \$1,000 a month. Local families host them during the

Huron. Because of a 21-foot elevation difference between the two lakes, a massive complex of locks raises and lowers ocean-going vessels from one lake to the other. A freighter with a Greek flag is raised



SOO LOCKS

torically accurate. They don't understand.

Leaving the museum complex and driving through the early 1960s time-warped streets of Dearborn, Michigan, the irony hits again. The automobile God is dying on the vine here. It has spread itself out from Indiana to Korea. Here, at the automobile's old home place, the '60s architecture gas stations lie abandoned; the "drive-ins" are derelict; the streets are tired and cracked.

But not dirty or trashy. Take note, Orange County...the roadsides in Michigan are pristine. As we head north, up through the birch and maple forests,

season. They play a 96-game season against similar teams from across the Midwest from Missouri to Pennsylvania. All this is happening in a city the size of Culpeper! We have found the American Heartland! It is where the last joint of the pinky and the ring finger touch.

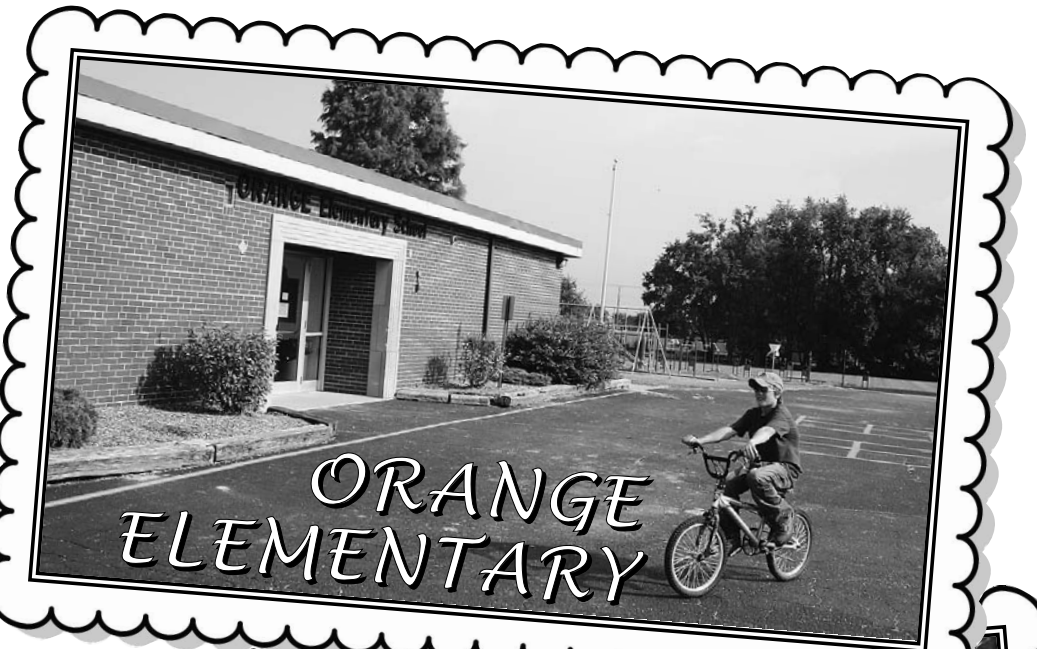


Orange, Ohio (part I)-

We knew something was up when we Googled these guys and learned that their median income is \$89,000. Located just 15 minutes from downtown Cleveland, Orange Village is almost like a gated community without the gates. It is less than four square miles of upscale residential neighborhood. There are no shops; they have no industry. Their biggest nuisance: wild geese pooping on the manicured lawns.

They do have a gorgeous brand-spanking-new government complex housing their police department, fire and rescue and their "village" council. Our town council would drool in envy. And they have a significant history; the first white settlers arriving in 1815! Orange County Historian, Frank Walker, says this Orange would have fallen within the boundaries of 1734 Orange County, Virginia. But the Ohio Orange Villagers say they were formed from the Western Reserve, purchased from the Connecticut Land Company and originally

deeded in 1662 to Connecticut by King Charles II. We asked the Mayor's Administrative Assistant, Kristin Dubyak, what burning issues are cause for concern in Orange Village. She responded with one word-"Development." Welcome to the club. "We're only 15, 20 minutes from downtown Cleveland," she says of the pressure they are feeling. "But we have the feeling of a rural community. We're zoned acre and a



Orange, Indiana



Orange, Indiana-

"Excuse me, but just who are you and what are you doing?" challenges a suspicious narrow-eyed man who is trying to attach chicken wire to a gate with the help of his scrawny, hard-scrabble wife. I have just bid hello to their son who is sitting on a decrepit porch rocking as I walk the streets of Orange, Indiana with a camera around my neck. I cheerily explain my purpose to this man, who