

KENTUCKY'S TWO-LETTER PLACE NAMES

The Spring 1987 issue of the Bulletin included a reference to the Guinness Book of World Records on two-letter place names, and stated that Kentucky has but two of them. Actually there are eight such named places in Kentucky about which something is definitely known.

Ed, one of the two mentioned by Guinness, was an old Casey County post office established in 1898 and named for Ed Neff, an early settler.¹

Kentucky has had two post offices called Ep. One, in operation from 1881 to 1903, served the Owen County neighborhood of Greenup Fork. It was named for Penelope Wingate Sullivan who was affectionately known as "Aunt Ep" by the local children who could not pronounce her real name.²

The other Kentucky Ep was the original post office name of the Pike County village of Belfry founded shortly before the First World War for the Belgian-owned Semet-Solvay Company's local coal mine. The post office, established in 1921 and named for James Epperson "Ep" Runyon, a local sawmill operator (and later county court clerk) was renamed Belfry in 1926.³

The other name mentioned by Guinness is Uz. This sometime Letcher County post office and L&N Railroad whistle stop on the North Fork (of the Kentucky) River was named

for the Biblical land of Uz where Job lived. The story goes that as W.S. Morton, the resident engineer, was laying the Eastern Kentucky Division tracks through the area in 1911-12, he encountered every difficulty known to early railroad builders. ^X One day when his boss, J.E. Willoughby, had heard enough of his complaints, he compared them to Job's troubles in the land of Uz. Morton, doubting that his own frustrations were any less than Job's, conceded the point and asked if he could honor Job's homeland and name the new station Uz.⁴ It's been Uz ever since though always pronounced Yuzee. Not much remains of the place--the post office and station are gone--and though some Letcher Countians still refer to the site as Uz, most simply locate it as "down the river" from Whitesburg, the county seat.⁵

Not to be confused with the above is another post office and railroad station called Oz, pronounced like the name of the fictional land made famous by L. Frank Baum's series of children's books. In fact, this is the probable origin of the name applied to a McCreary County post office and coal camp established in 1907 by the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company and, a few years later, to the ^{local} rail station by the Stearns-affiliated Kentucky and Tennessee Railway. According to ^aStearns Company official and historian, Dr. Frank C. Thomas, the company "tried to think of a name that no one could mispronounce

or misspell and were dumbfounded to hear it referred to as Uz almost immediately." Other than this, no one recalls why this name was given. The vicinity has also been known as Paint Cliff, an older name than Oz by which it was replaced when the Stearns Company bought out its local predecessor, the Paintcliff Coal Company.⁶ The Oz post office was discontinued in 1914 but the mine retained that name until it was closed by a strike in 1953. Yet, for unknown reasons, when the local post office was re-established in 1918, it was given the Paint Cliff name and bore it for many years.

Another railroad station was E.K. Junction at the site of the present Carter County village of Hitchins. In 1881 the earlier built Eastern Kentucky (or EK) Railroad was joined by the Elizabethtown Lexington and Big Sandy (now C&O) Railroad, and the village that grew up here was named EK Junction. The local post office (established in 1882) was called Anglin for the telegraph operator there, and by these two names the community was identified until 1912 when it and the post office were renamed for E.S. Hitchins, the manager of a recently constructed fire brick plant.⁷

At the northern tip of Pulaski County was the old OK post office. When it was established in 1882, a short distance over the line in Lincoln County, local people were hardpressed to come up with a name that would be acceptable to the Post Office Department. An

unconfirmed local tradition tells how several names were rejected for one reason or another when finally the postmaster-elect, John McMullen said "O.K." For some reason that name was submitted and it was approved.⁸ Area historians can't vouch for what George R. Stewart called the "colloquial affirmative",⁹ but they have no reason to believe it was named for "Old Kinderhook"; Martin Van Buren's old New York home, nickname, and presidency had no significance to southeast Kentuckians several generations later.

From 1848 to 1849 and 1901 to 1907 the post office of No Creek served one of the oldest settled areas of Ohio County. a narrow strip of land along No Creek, Two accounts of the name of this Rough River tributary were given in Harry D. Tinsley's History of No Creek.¹⁰ According to one, "a stranger was journeying through the country and, for his directions, he was told to travel until he came to a certain creek. When he came upon the dry creek bed, he is said to have remarked, 'Why that is no creek!'" The other tradition tells of a number of "surveyors camped near a stream. One of them was loaded with whiskey, and he almost stumbled down the bank. When he was warned to be careful or he would fall into the creek, he replied, 'That's no creek.'"

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Not a railroad station or post office but another stream, in Letcher County, was Bo Fork which joins Kingdom Come Creek two miles above the recently discontinued post office of Oscalosa. According to local historian Marie Frazier Day, it was named for Boenerges Frazier, a nineteenth century resident who was locally called Bo and Bo n. His home is known to have been visited by famed Kentucky novelist, John Fox, Jr. who used this vicinity as the setting for his Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come.¹¹

In my continuing search for elusive Kentucky place names, I shall no doubt find additional two-letter names to add to this list.

Footnotes

1. Letter from Mrs. Gladys C. Thomas, Liberty, Ky.,
Aug. 21, 1987
2. "Ep Village Named for a Remarkable Owen County Woman"
The Owen County Historical Almanac for 1966, pub-
lished by the Owen County Historical Soc., P. 43
3. Letters from Clyde Runyon, Belfry, Ky., Dec. 3, 1979
and Dec. 13, 1979
4. R.R. South (pseud.) "Our Station Names" L&N Employees'
Magazine, Oct. 1949, Pp. 14-15
5. Interview with William T. Cornett, then of Whites-
burg, Ky., Dec. 24, 1977
6. Letter from Dr. Frank C. Thomas, Stearns, Ky., Jan.
29, 1979
7. Carter County Bicentennial Committee, Carter County
History 1838-1976, Grayson, Ky, 1976, Pp. 19-21
8. Interview with Mary Weaver, Somerset, Ky., March 23,
1979
9. American Place Names, New York: Oxford University
Press, 1970, P. 340.
10. Privately printed, 1953, P. 15
11. Letter from Marie Frazier Day, Whitesburg, Ky., Aug.
31, 1987