

The Daily Independent (Ashland, Kentucky)

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News

May 30, 2008 Friday

The Daily Independent, Ashland, Ky., Stan Champer column

BYLINE: Stan Champer, The Daily Independent, Ashland, Ky.

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 681 words

May 30--Twenty years ago if someone had told me that one of the big local news stories of 2007-08 would be a proprietary dispute over a rock, I'd have said, "You've lost your marbles. A rock? No way, Jose."

Just goes to show what a poor track record I've had as a swami. Little did I know (or intuit) that over the course of the next two decades, the world would nosedive into a weirdness that grows and prospers on just such a diet.

So there it is, right out there in left field, and I'm forced to admit I'd be hard-pressed to produce a work of fiction rivaling the cold, hard facts of this tale that has surfaced in our collective consciousness.

Indian Head Rock, all eight tons of it, had rested on the bed of the Ohio River just off the Kentucky shoreline in Greenup County for how long nobody knows.

We do know that at times when the river was low, the rock broke through the surface to display carvings made long ago -- the initials of those who are no more, a chiseled face that some believe was the work of an anonymous Indian.

When construction of dams raised the level of the Ohio, the rock disappeared in the deeper water and remained out of mind until last year when it was raised and taken to Portsmouth by a band of Buckeyes or Buckeye sympathizers.

Told that the rock had been rescued from the river and was in his town, Portsmouth Mayor James Kalb was grateful, believing, for reasons perhaps more clearly understood from the north shore perspective, that the rock and Portsmouth history are intertwined.

Today, the eight-ton trophy sits in one of the city's maintenance garages.

And on this side of the river, people aren't happy.

Earlier this year, citing Kentucky jurisdiction well into the river, the state's House of Representatives adopted a resolution condemning the removal of Indian Head Rock and asking that it be returned to the very spot where it was lifted out of the water.

One of the state's lawmakers went so far as to suggest that perhaps a raiding party would be in order. Similar chest-pumping bluster has been verbalized on the other side of the pond, as well.

Then, two days ago, an array of Kentucky officialdom assembled in Frankfort for a press conference to call again for the rock's return, the state capitol once more lending the whole affair a ceremonious aura.

Back and forth it goes. For my part, I'm not all that concerned. I've said in this column -- just two weeks ago -- that I think we could do a better job of preserving local history, but my thinking was more along the lines of what our forebears did about carving out a future than where they chiseled their initials.

If you're looking for old initials, we have plenty of them on the tree trunks in Central Park -- and Indian mounds, too.

How this weird episode is resolved, and before the final nail is hammered, I think we'd all be well advised to push Indian Head Rock through one more hoop. I think we should put it on some supports, and crack it open -- just to make sure there's nothing inside.

Just to make sure it's not a fossilized dinosaur egg.

Just to make sure it's not a time capsule from the Ice Age with a saber tooth among the contents, giant walrus whiskers and a pine cone used by Moog-Oog and the little Oogs for brushing their teeth.

Just to make sure it isn't the Mother of all Seeds, dropped inadvertently in the river by E.T. and the Moonbeams when they were planting gardens alongside those mysterious landing strips.

If we cracked it open and found nothing, well, so be it. At least we'd have two halves, one for us to keep and one for the boulder bagging Buckeyes.