

## **The Word “Hoosier”**

by

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I can tell you from experience that if you mention this in a book 250 people from Indiana will write to you with 250 different explanations and the unanimous view that you are a dunce. (Bill Bryson)

“Indiana is the Hoosier State, inhabited by Hoosiers, whatever they may be,” reads in part an article that appeared in the March 13, 1875 issue of the British magazine *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*. (“American Nicknames,” 1875, p. 171) A century later, the philosopher Henry Babcock Veatch, an Indiana native, spoke at a symposium dinner honoring him. During his address, “Can philosophy Ever be a Thing for Hoosiers?” he remarked, “I can hear our chairman, Wilfried Ver Eecke, muttering to himself, ‘But who or what, in God’s name, is a Hoosier?’” (Veatch, 1983, p. 1)

Michael Wilkerson in his essay “Indiana Origin Stories” asks, “What in the world is a Hoosier?” (Wilkerson, 1989, p. 13) On the eve of Super Bowl XLI between the Chicago Bears and the Indianapolis Colts (Colts 29, Bears 17), Charles Leroux put the question in his *Chicago Tribune* article of January 30, 2007, “So, what the heck is a Hoosier?” They are not alone in their puzzlement, rhetorical or not. What, then, is a hoosier? Where did the word come from? Or as Mario Pei wondered, “Who first inflicted Hoosiers on the people of Indiana...?” (Pei, 1967, p. 131)



Like barnacles, a thick crust of speculation has gathered over the word “Hoosier” to explain the origin of Indiana’s nickname. Popular theories, often sincerely advanced (and sometimes not), form a rich and often amusing body of folklore. Those theories include “Who’s here?” as a question to unknown visitors or to the inhabitants of a country cabin; Hussar, from the fiery European mounted troops; “Huzza!” exclaimed after victory in a fight; Husher, a brawny man capable of stilling all opponents; Hoosa, an Indian word for corn; Hoose, a term for a disease of cattle, sheep and goats that gives the animals a wild sort of look; and the evergreen Who’s ear? asked while toeing torn-off ears lying on the tavern floor the morning after a brawl.

Good evidence suggests that “Hoosier” was a term of contempt and opprobrium common in the upland South and used to denote a rustic, a bumpkin, a countryman, a roughneck, a hick or an awkward, uncouth or unskilled fellow. Although the word’s derogatory meaning has faded, it can still be heard in its original sense, albeit less frequently than its cousins “Redneck” and “Cracker.” From the upland South “Hoosier” moved into the Ohio Valley, where it was applied to the presumably unsophisticated inhabitants of Southern Indiana. Later it expanded to include all residents of the state and gradually lost its original, potent connotation of coarseness in manners, appearance and intellect.

As for the word itself, it may derive from the Saxon word “hoo” meaning promontory or cliff or ridge or rise or hill. Jacob Piatt Dunn, a thorough scholar of the word, believes in a Saxon beginning, and such a meaning survives in various place names in England. There is some sense in the notion, too, that those who uttered the insult and those to whom it was applied (and who understood it) came primarily from British stock.

The unusual (ier or sier) ending has always been difficult to explain. Might it be from “scir” the old form of “shire?” The Hoo Shire would then be the Hill Country, the High Places or the Mountain Region. Would that meaning then extend to those who dwelt in the hills, making them the “hooscirs” and later the “Hoosiers,” mountaineers, highlanders or hillbillies by another name?

Can that be right? Or is there another explanation? Maybe more than one? 250?

### **Speculation Begins**

Speculation about the origin of the word Hoosier as a nickname for residents of Indiana began in print as early as 1833. In the October 26, 1833 issue of the *Indiana Democrat* appeared an item reprinted from the *Cincinnati Republican*.

#### **HOOSHIER**

The appellation of Hooshier has been used in many of the Western States, for several years, to designate, in a good natural way, an inhabitant of our sister state of Indiana. Ex-Governor Ray has lately started a newspaper in Indiana, which he names “The Hoshier” (sic). Many of our ingenious native philologists have attempted, though very unsatisfactorily, to explain this somewhat singular term. Mordecai M. Noah, in the late



number of his *Evening Star*, undertakes to account for it upon the faith of a rather apocryphal story of a recruiting officer, who was engaged during the last war, in enlisting a company of HUSSARS, whom by mistake he unfortunately denominated Hooshiers. Another etymologist tells us that when the state of Indiana was being surveyed, the surveyors, on finding the residence of a squatter, would exclaim “Who’s here,” —that this exclamation, abbreviated to *Hooshier* was, in process of time, applied as a distinctive appellation to the original settlers of that state, and, finally to its inhabitants generally. Neither of these hypotheses are deserving of any attention. The word Hooshier is indebted for its existence to that once numerous and unique, but now extinct class of mortals called the Ohio Boatmen. —In its original acceptance it was equivalent to “Ripstaver,” “Scrouger,” “Screamer,” “Bulger,” “Ring-tailroarer,” and a hundred others, equally expressive, but which have never attained to such a respectable standing as itself. By some caprice which can never be explained, the appellation Hooshier became confined solely to such boatmen as had their homes upon the Indiana shore, and from them it was gradually applied to all the Indianians, who acknowledge it as good naturedly as the appellation of Yankee. —Whatever may have been the original acceptance of Hooshier this we know, that the people to whom it is now applied are amongst the bravest, most intelligent, most enterprising, most magnanimous, and most democratic of the Great West, and should we ever feel disposed to quit the state in which we are now sojourning, our own noble Ohio, it will be to enroll ourselves as adopted citizens in the land of the “HOOSHIER.”—*Cincinnati Republican* (Dunn, 1907, p. 15-16)

The same item, also credited to the *Cincinnati Republican*, appeared in the *Madison Republican and Banner* (Madison, Indiana) of October 31, 1833. The *Indiana American* (Brookville, Indiana) printed it on November 15, 1833. Later, the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana) carried it (without credit) on March 1, 1838.

### Jacob Piatt Dunn

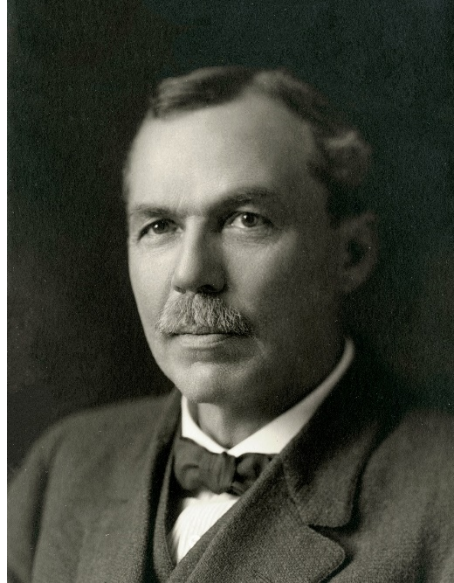
Perhaps the most serious student of the word “Hoosier” was Jacob Piatt Dunn, Jr., journalist, prospector, attorney, politician, historian, state librarian, and recording secretary of the Indiana Historical Society from 1886 until his death in 1924. In a series of works, he provides an exhaustive and detailed consideration of the term. His first contribution, “Facts Regarding the Origin of the Word Hoosier” (subtitled: “The Matter Is Here Carefully Considered, as Searchers May Have Been Heretofore Following an Entirely False Scent”), appeared in the *Indianapolis News* on August 23 (Part I) and August 30, 1902 (Part II). In 1905 the *Indiana Magazine of History* published in its second issue his “Origin of the Word Hoosier” with an editor’s note.

So far as we know Jacob P. Dunn is the only one who has made anything like a thorough study of the question, and because his conclusions seem to us the most reasonable theory in the field, and, in addition, are but little known, we think they will be of interest here. (Dunn, 1905, p. 86)

The editors further announce, “The entire study in a revised form will probably be published before very long in the collections of the Indiana Historical Society.” It was. In September,



1907, “*The Word Hoosier*” appeared as Indiana Historical Society Publications, Volume IV, Number 2. In 1911 he published a short update on his research, and his efforts as a whole became part of Volume II of *Indiana and Indianans: A History of Aboriginal and Territorial Indiana and the Century of Statehood* (1919).



Jacob Piatt Dunn  
Frontispiece, *Indiana and Indianans*

Dunn accurately writes that the 1833 article from the *Cincinnati Republican* covers “most of the ground that has since been occupied” only ten months after the publication of Finley’s poem “The Hoosier’s Nest.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 16) He carefully explores that “occupied ground” in *The Word Hoosier*, a detailed examination of the term, which nearly every serious researcher cites. Most of the suggested theories he dismisses with ease, but he finds three features they have in common:

1. They are alike in the idea that the word was first applied to a rough, boisterous, uncouth, illiterate class of people, and that the word originally implied this character.
2. They are alike in the idea that the word come from the South, or was first applied by Southern people.
3. They are alike in the idea that the word was coined for the purpose of designating Indiana people, and was not in existence before it was applied to them. (Dunn, 1907, p. 18-19)

The third characteristic, he observes, is true for many of the explanations, but untrue of the word itself, for it had long been used in the south as a derogatory term for a rough countryman. His correspondents assured him, too, that the term continued in use and meaning at the time of his research, without reference to Indiana.



Dunn does an admirable job surveying the various theories about the word “hoosier.” He also frankly admits that the “real problem of the derivation of the word ‘hoosier,’ is not a question of the origin of a word formed to designate the State of Indiana and its people, but of the origin of a slang term widely in use in the South, signifying an uncouth rustic.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 24) Although he declines to fix with certainty an origin for “hoosier,” Dunn concludes that the word “carries Anglo-Saxon credentials. It is Anglo-Saxon in form and Anglo-Saxon in ring.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 25) He find a potential source in the Saxon term “hoo,” meaning a high place, cliff or promontory, which survives in a number of place names in Britain. He also ran across the Cumberland dialect word “hoozer,” meaning anything unusually large. (Dunn, 1907, p. 29)

As possible support for derivation from the Cumberland word he cites in *Indiana and Indianans* an article from *The Northwestern Pioneer and St. Joseph Intelligencer* of April 4, 1832.

A Real Hoosier.—A sturgeon, who, no doubt, left Lake Michigan on a trip of pleasure, with a view of spending a few days in the pure waters of the St. Joseph, had his joyous anticipations unexpectedly marred by running foul of a fisherman’s spear near this place—being brought on terra firma, and cast into a balance, he was found to weigh 83 pounds. (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1153)

Dunn commented, “The sturgeon, with its covering of plates, is a rough-looking customer as compared with common freshwater fishes; and the obvious inference of the use of the word ‘Hoosier’ in this connection is that, while it was being applied to Indiana people, the ‘real Hoosier’ was rough-looking individual, like the sturgeon.” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1153)

Not everyone agreed with Dunn. Writers of *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State* (1941), produced by the Federal Writers’ Program, airily brushed aside the notion of a derivation from “hoo.” They observe, “Some students profess to find a connection with the old Saxon ‘hoo,’ meaning a hill dweller or rustic person (hillbilly in the modern sense), but this view is not widely held.” (Federal Writers’ Program, 1941, p. 3)

In his *John Finley’s Verse* James Weygand echoes Dunn’s statement that the word had long been in use and served as a term of disparagement. But he declares Finley innocent of knowing any particular meaning (like rustic or ruffian), let alone the origin, of the “good natured appellation.”

He had picked up the word — well he didn’t remember exactly where. It was in use orally in half a dozen localities where he could have heard it. He had first heard it thrown at his fellow Indianans by smart alecs who didn’t particularly like them, and he never knew if it had another meaning. In fact he was sure of just one thing: he had conjured up the word Hoosheroon when he needed a rime for spoon. (Weygand, 1947, p. 15)

As for the form of the word, Dunn points out that Finley spells it as “Hoosher” throughout the manuscript copy of the “The Hoosier’s Nest.” In later editions of the work it appears as “Hoosier,” and as Dunn says, “several years passed before the spelling became fixed in its



present form.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 8) In fact, it is seen as Hoosier, Hoosher, Hoozier, Hoozer, Hooshier, and even Hooshores in early spellings.

### **Moonshine, Hogwash, and Spook Etymology**

Writers investigating the word “hoosier” often take a pointedly skeptical view of some of its proposed origins. H. L. Mencken summarizes Dunn’s treatment of “Huzza!” as an exclamation of victory, by saying, “but Dunn, in 1907, dismissed this as moonshine.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 619) About an account by the Rev. Aaron Wood linking hussars and hoosiers he comments, “... this is folk-etymology at its worst.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 619) *Webster’s Word Histories* echoes Mencken when it declares, “Dunn dismissed most of these explanations as hogwash as far back as 1907.” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224) John Ciardi, the poet, translator, and etymologist, goes further and refers to “spook etymology” surrounding the word hoosier. (Ciardi, 1983, p. 138). George Stimpson finds many of the curious theories “ludicrous.” (Stimpson, 1930, p. 196) In his chapter, “The Saga of Place Names,” Mario Pei observes, “Legends abound... but they are legends.” (Pei, 1967, p. 131) He had also asked, “Who first inflicted Hoosiers on the people of Indiana...?” (Pei, 1967, p. 131)

The speculation, the “curious theories” (Stimpson, 1930, p. 196), the sometimes outrageous, sometimes endearing discussion of the word, creates a body of folklore perhaps more interesting than the plain truth about it. Since 1833 “Hoosier” has figured as a curiosity or a filler item for newspapers and in “Answer Man,” “Hot Line” or “Ask the Globe” columns. One exasperated inquirer asked, “There seem to be 500 different explanations of the origin of the term ‘Hoosiers.’ Can’t someone give me a straight answer as to where the term comes from?” The answer: “Probably not, because there are about as many stories about the origin of the term as there are people trying to explain it.” (Bloomington (IN) *Herald-Telephone*, August 10, 1987) Explanations of the term also appear in “Letters to the Editor.” One letter, submitted by Timothy Matherly, unlike most, ignored the origin of the word to make a statement: “The point is not the derivation but the meaning of the word. To be a Hoosier means to be at a distance from both New York and California.” (*Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 1987) The question lingers, though, because of the oddity of the word and the traditions surrounding it. The answers to “What is a Hoosier?” follow in glorious plentitude.

### **Moot or Moot?**

George Earlie Shankle begins his entry for Indiana in his *American Nicknames* with the assertion (which he repeats in his *State Names, Flags, Deals, Songs, Birds, Flowers, and Other Symbols*) that “the origin of the nicknames *Hoosier State* and *Hoosierdom*, for Indiana is a moot question.” (Shankle, 1955, p. 219) Moot? In which sense does he mean moot? Debatable, uncertain, unable to be firmly resolved? Or, primarily in North American usage, having no practical significance or relevance, academic? (*Oxford English Dictionary*. Second Edition, 1989) Does Mr. Shankle mean to put etymologists out of business? Would he stifle the likes of Mike Royko (possibly a good idea)? Hobble humorists? Send columnists out onto the



breadlines? Deprive Chicago of a favorite foil? Discourage the curiosity of hoosiers everywhere? Surely not.

### **The Indiana Historical Bureau Answers**

“Few subjects have matched the origin of the word, ‘Hoosier,’ in terms of sustained interest,” the Indiana Historical Bureau informed readers of the September 1965 issue of the *Indiana History Bulletin*. “We receive many inquiries each month. Consequently, we have prepared this little article on the subject.” In three pages, suitable for distribution, appears the quasi-official word.

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#### THE WORD “HOOSIER”

For well over a century and a quarter the people of Indiana have been called Hoosiers. It is one of the oldest of state nicknames and has had a wider acceptance than most. True there are the Buckeyes of Ohio, the Suckers of Illinois and the Tarheels of North Carolina — but none of these have had the popular usage accorded Hoosier.

The only comparable term in American experience is Yankee. And that started out as a synonym for New Englander. In the Civil War era Southerners applied it indiscriminately to all Northerners. Many a boy from Dixie doubtless felt a sense of shock when he discovered that in the eyes of our British (Limey) allies that all Americans were Yanks!

But where did Hoosier come from? What is its origin? We know that it came into general usage in the 1830’s. John Finley of Richmond wrote a poem, “The Hoosier’s Nest,” which was used as the “carriers’ address” of the Indianapolis *Journal*, January 1, 1833. It was widely copied throughout the country and even abroad. Finley originally wrote Hoosier as “Hoosher.” Apparently the poet felt that it was sufficiently familiar to be understandable to his readers. A few days later, on January 8, 1833, at the Jackson Day dinner in Indianapolis, John W. Davis offered “The Hoosher State of Indiana” as a toast. And in August, former Indiana governor James B. Ray, announced that he intended to publish a newspaper, *The Hoosier*, at Greencastle, Indiana.

A few instances of the earlier written use of Hoosier have been found. The word appears in the “Carrier’s Address” of the *Indiana Democrat* on January 3, 1832. G. L. Murdock wrote on February 11, 1831, in a letter to General John Tipton, “Our Boat will [be] named the Indiana Hoosier.” In a publication printed in 1860, *Recollections ... of the Wabash Valley*, Sanford Cox quotes a diary which he dates July 14, 1827, “There is a Yankee trick for you — done up by a ‘Hoosier.’” One can only wonder how long before this Hoosier was used orally.

As soon as our nickname came into general use, speculation began as to its origin. The speculation and argument have gone on ever since. On October 26, 1833, the *Indiana Democrat* reprinted an article published earlier in the Cincinnati *Republican*: “The appellation of Hooshier has been used in many of the Western States, for several years, to designate ... an inhabitant of our sister state of Indiana.” The Ohio editor then reviews three explanations of the nickname and concludes:



Whatever may have been the original acceptance of Hooshier this we know, that the people to whom it is now applied, are among the bravest, most intelligent, most enterprising, most magnanimous, and most democratic of the Great West, and should we ever feel disposed to quit the state in which we are now sojourning, our own noble Ohio, it will be to enroll ourselves as adopted citizens in the land of the “Hooshier.”

Among the more popular theories:

1. When a visitor hailed a pioneer cabin in Indiana or knocked upon its door, the settler would respond, “Who’s yere?” And from this frequent response Indiana became the “Who’s yere” or Hoosier State. No one ever explained why this was more typical of Indiana than of Illinois or Ohio?
2. That Indiana rivermen were so spectacularly successful in trouncing or “hushing” their adversaries in the brawling that was then common that they became known as “hushers” eventually Hoosiers.
3. That there was once a contractor named Hoosier employed on the Louisville and Portland Canal who preferred to hire laborers from Indiana. They were called “Hoosier’s men” and eventually all Indianans were called Hoosiers.
4. A theory attributed to Governor Joseph Wright was to the effect that Hoosier derived from an Indian word for corn, “hoosa.” Indiana flatboatmen taking corn or maize to New Orleans came to be known as “hoosa men” or Hoosiers. Unfortunately for this theory, a search of Indian vocabularies by a careful student of linguistics failed to reveal any such word for corn.
5. Quite as plausible as these was the facetious explanation offered by James Whitcomb Riley. He claimed that it originated in the pugnacious habits of our early settlers. They were enthusiastic and vicious fighters who gouged, scratched and bit off noses and ears. This was so common an occurrence that a settler coming into a tavern the morning after a fight and seeing an ear on the floor would touch it with his toe and casually ask, “Whose ear?”

The distinguished Hoosier writer, Meredith Nicholson (*The Hoosiers*) and many others have enquired into the problem. But by all odds the most serious student of the matter was Jacob Piatt Dunn, Indiana historian and long-time secretary of the Indiana Historical Society. Dunn noted that “hoosier” was frequently used in many parts of the South in the 19th century for woodsmen or rough hill people. He traced the word back to “hoozer,” in the Cumberland dialect of England. This derives from the Anglo-Saxon word “hoo” meaning high or hill. In the Cumberland dialect, the word “hoozer” meant anything unusually large, presumably like a hill. It is not hard to see how this word was attached to a hill dweller or highlander. Immigrants from Cumberland, England, settled in the southern mountains (Cumberland Mountains, Cumberland River, Cumberland Gap, etc.). Their descendants brought the name with them when they settled in the hills of southern Indiana.

As Meredith Nicholson observed, “The origin of the term ‘Hoosier’ is not known with certainty.” But certain it is that on the eve of Indiana’s 150th anniversary of statehood Hoosiers bear their nickname proudly. Five generations of Hoosier achievement have endowed the term with connotations that are strong and friendly. It is not without



significance that in the 1965 Indianapolis phone book there are two full columns of firm names that incorporate that word “Hoosier.”

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“The Word Hoosier.” *Indiana History Bulletin*. Vol. 42, no. 9. September, 1965. p. 134-136)

The Historical Bureau has posted a web page with the title “What is a Hoosier” (<https://secure.in.gov/history/2612.htm>). They note, “This page is a digital version of an early IHB publication of the same title, last revised in 1984. An update, including more recent theories, is forthcoming.” (Indiana Historical Bureau, online)

## **Beyond Dunn**

### **Mencken**

H. L. Mencken tackles “Proper names in America” in his *The American Language; Supplement II*. When it comes to Indiana, the Sage of Baltimore relies considerably on Dunn’s scholarship for his discussion of “hoosier.” Using Dunn as his guide, he reviews the various explanations of the term’s origin and observes, “The earlier American etymologists all sought to connect the term with some idea of ruffianism, and evidence was adduced that it was first applied to backwoodsmen in general, not only to Indianans.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 617) He moves along swiftly, from the “husher” theory to “Who’s here?” both of which Dunn rejected. He mentions the fanciful barroom brawls and “Whose year?” [Who’s ear] and Lehmanowsky and the “hussar” story. Sam Hoosier, the canal contractor, appears, as do hoosa, that Indian word for corn, and the exclamation, “Huzza!” He returns to Dunn and discusses three more possibilities: “hooze,” a cattle disease; “hoozer,” a Cumberland, England, dialect word applied to “anything unusually large;” and “huzur,” a Hindustani word used as “a respectful form of address to persons of rank or superiority.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 620) Mencken endorses no explanation, but says, “on one point all authorities seem to be agreed: that *Hoosier*, at the start did not signify an Indianan particularly, but any rough fellow of what was then the wild West.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 620) The term remains in more or less common use in the upland South “to indicate a mountaineer or other uncouth rustic.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 620) Mencken also notes that “in Indiana, however, the term apparently became restricted to a resident of the state at an early date.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 621)

### ***Webster’s Word Histories***

*Webster’s Word Histories*, like several other sources, errs when it says, “The use of Hoosier to designate an Indianan is attested in print as early as 1826.” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224) The item on which they base their statement, however, dates from 1846, not 1826, and it is a letter, rather than anything in print. The entry allows everyone at least a passing nod: hoo, whoosher, husher, who’s here, who’s ear, hooze, houssières, Samuel Hoosier, huzza, and hoozer.



“Some of these are interestingly far-fetched,” *Webster’s* asserts, not unreasonably. (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224) It points out that Dunn “dismissed most of these explanations as hogwash as far back as 1907.” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224) As for a derivation from the Saxon word “Hoo,” meaning hill, *Webster’s* finds little merit in the suggestion and asserts that “it never crossed the Atlantic” and “even in Britain it survives chiefly in place names.” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224) There is a bit of a stumble here, since Dunn, whom they mention later in the text, not “some would-be etymologist” as they called him, had seriously proposed a derivation from “hoo.” But *Webster’s* does find “most plausible” another possibility Dunn discovered.

Dunn’s most plausible source was a Cumberland dialect word hoozer which was applied to anything large of its kind. In support of this theory Dunn produced 1832 and 1834 citations using hoosier of a huge sturgeon and of giant pumpkins.

Dunn’s hoozer theory at least has some vestige of plausibility. (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 224-225)

A discussion of the derogatory use of hoosier follows, and *Webster’s* says, “... but there are no written examples of a generally pejorative *hoosier* until we find the expression ‘a Hoosier Texan’ in 1846.” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 225) Is the key word here *written*, rather than *print*? What is the difference? And why did they say earlier “... and many students and authorities—from as far back as 1835—believe that *hoosier* had a pejorative meaning before it was hung on Indianans”? (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 225) Yes, and those students and authorities can cite several sources that make an earlier pejorative meaning clear, among them Charles Fenno Hoffman who wrote in *A Winter in the West* (1835) that the term was “first applied contemptuously.” (Hoffman, 1835, Vol. 1, p. 226) The somewhat confusing entry leaves the reader with “[perh. Alter. Of E dial. hoozer anything large of its kind]” (*Webster’s Word Histories*, 1989, p. 226)

### **Baker and Carmony**

Ronald L. Baker and Marvin Carmony in their *Indiana Place Names* round up the usual suspects. They treat the “who’s ’ere?” query; Samuel Hoosier, the Louisville canal contractor; “hussars” or “hushers;” “houssières,” French for “bushy places;” “hooze,” an English dialect word for a disease in cattle; “hoosa,” a supposed Indian word for corn; “huzza,” the exclamation of victory or celebration; and “hoozer,” “a southern dialect word meaning something especially large.” (Baker and Carmony, 1975, p. 72) Other sources, when speaking of “hoozer” meaning something very large, refer to the Cumberland, England, dialect word. Baker and Carmony restrict their observations to the American South without mention of Cumberland or any other source in the north of England. To end their entry, the authors cite field records for the *Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States*, which “... reveal that in the southern states Hoosier is a derogatory epithet connoting uncouthness and is synonymous with hick, hayseed, and hillbilly.” (Baker and Carmony, 1975, p. 72)

Probably the term first was applied to early settlers in southern Indiana, themselves from southern states, who were considered uncouth rustics by their cousins back home in more



established states. Hoosier, as a derogatory name, is still current in West Virginia, the Upper Piedmont of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia; however, it is extremely rare as a derogatory term west of the Appalachians, where it simply means a native of Indiana. (Baker and Carmony, 1975, p. 72)

### **Ronald Baker**

In the introduction to his *From Needmore to Prosperity: Hoosier Place Names in Folklore and History*, Ronald L. Baker asks, “Who’s a Hoosier?” (The same question was the title of his 1995 article in *Midwestern Folklore*; the two items are nearly identical, with only small variations in the prose.) An excellent essay follows in which Baker describes the proposed origins of the term. First, though, he tackles the question of hoosier “as a synonym for boorishness and illiteracy.” (Baker, 1995, p. 15) He cites Meredith Nicholson who “says that ‘in many quarters’ there is an assumption ‘that the Hoosier Commonwealth is in some way set apart from her neighbors by reason of the uncouthness and ignorance of the inhabitants...’” But Nicholson rejected that idea and wrote, “the Indiana husbandmen, even in the pioneer period differed little or not at all from the settlers in other territorial division of the West and Southwest; and the early Indiana town folk were the peers of any of their fellows of the urban class in the Ohio Valley.” (Baker, 1995, p. 15)

Baker acknowledges the hoosier stereotype before passing on to the various theories of the word’s origin, like “husher,” “Who’s here?” and “Whose ear?” He includes “Who’s your ma?” and “Who’s your pa?” And he does not omit mentioning *huissier*, *huzza*, *hooze*, *houssières*, or *hoozer*. Throughout the text, though, there lurks the shadow of the “unpolished and uneducated.” (Baker, 1995, p. 15) And as he closes, he remarks, “Most scholars now agree with Dunn and McDavid that *Hoosier* comes from a southern dialect word meaning ‘a rough or uncouth person.’” (Baker, 1995, p. 24) Before concluding, Baker has one story to tell.

Hoosiers know that easterners think people from Indiana are uncouth, and they tell jokes about a Hoosier on the Harvard campus asking a Harvard person “where the library’s at.” When the Harvard person informed the Hoosier that “at Harvard we don’t end our sentences with prepositions,” the Hoosier replied, “Oh, can you tell me where the library’s at, asshole?” (Baker, 1995, p. 25)

### ***Dictionary of American Regional English***

The *Dictionary of American Regional English* provides a detailed and systematic treatment of the American regional lexicon, based on both written evidence and field work. The entry under “hoosier” gives the usual spelling and pronunciation (huʒə(r) also freq. huʃə(r)) and lists several variants: hoogie, hoojy, hoo(d)ger, hoojer, hooshier, hooshur. To illustrate the use of the word (and additional variations) the *Dictionary* records numerous quotations taken from a variety of sources dating from 1831 to 1980. Those examples of usage also identify the dates of their source and indicate a geographical area. *DARE* presents three definitions of “Hoosier.”



A hillbilly or rustic; an unmannerly or objectionable person. Such usage is chiefly Southern or of the Southern Midlands and often derogatory.

A White person considered to be objectionable, esp because of racial prejudice.

Among those skilled in a particular field, esp logging: an inexperienced or incompetent person.

*DARE* remarks, too, that term may occur in combined forms, like “country hoosier” and “mountain hoosier.” And as a verb, “hoosier” means “to be a farmer” (Berrey and Van den Bark) and “hoosier up” means “... to work incompetently; to slow down or shirk on a job, usually on purpose.” “Hoosier up” can also mean “to play tricks or take sides ...; to badmouth.” (*DARE*, 1991, p. 1090-1091)

*A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles* (Vol. 3, 1942) also includes with its definitions citations to sources, beginning with 1832. Its list, however, like that of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) is not as detailed as *DARE*’s. Both are limited solely to print examples and lack identification by region.

### **Paul Dickson and Senate Tomfoolery**

Paul Dickson in his *What Do You Call a Person from...? A Dictionary of Resident Names* explores the term and in easy prose discusses the ubiquity of “hoosier” in Indiana. He also reviews the “spirited Senate tomfoolery” (Dickson, 1990, p. 65) between Senators Dan Quayle of Indiana and Alphonse D’Amato of New York concerning the 1987 NCAA basketball championship game between Indiana University and Syracuse. (Syracuse lost to Indiana, 74-73.) The day of the game Senator D’Amato (a graduate of Syracuse and its Law School) toyed with the “sacred Indiana word.” (Dickson, 1990, p. 64) The *Congressional Record* of March 30 and March 31, 1987 recorded the action.

On March 30, 1987 Senator D’Amato rose to address the chamber. “I have wondered,” he declared, “and the question has come up repeatedly what on earth is a Hoosier? This has been debated by philosophers and scientists throughout the ages.” He continues by saying he has “done extensive research into this issue and, in fact, as you can see, I have been pulling my hair out over it.” The senator, of course, was very nearly bald at the time. He goes on to quote from *Webster’s Dictionary*, which he has brought with him so there can be no mistake about the definition. He also recalls from his school days that it is the first definition “which stands out when one is given the greatest use.”

“I would like to quote the actual definition of the ‘Hoosiers’ for the RECORD,” the senator continues. Then the trouble begins. “A hoosier One: ... an awkward, unhandy or unskilled fellow; Two: to loaf on or botch a job; Three: of or relating to Indiana.” After the New Yorker proclaims, “the outcome of the game tonight is a forgone conclusion and Syracuse will be victorious,” Robert Byrd of West Virginia asks the senator to yield. He reminds the President of the Senate that under Rule XIX “another Senator may ask the Chair to ask a Senator to take his seat if he speaks disparagingly about another State in the Union.” That was certainly not his intent, D’Amato innocently replies.



But what I have done, Mr. President, has brought the famous orange terrible towel that fans of Syracuse have used so many times in waving it in their symbolic victory cry, and I thought I would bring two of them for my distinguished colleagues from Indiana, and they can use this as a crying towel. (*Congressional Record*, March 30, 1987, p. S7248)

On March 31, 1987 the Chair, without objection, permitted Senator Quayle to speak out of order. Quayle reviewed the exciting contest of the night before, remembering to compliment Syracuse, who “played one heck of a game.” (*Congressional Record*, March 31, 1987, p. S7439) After mentioning several team members, punning on their names, he introduces a resolution (S. Res. 181). The resolution ends, “*Resolved*: That the Senate recognizes and congratulates Indiana University for its outstanding achievement in winning the 1987 NCAA basketball title.” (*Congressional Record*, March 30, 1987, p. S7440)

He had more, and placed in the *Record* “The Word ‘Hoosier,’” from the *Indiana History Bulletin* of September, 1965. He had still more and introduced a second, non-binding resolution.

A resolution clarifying the definition of the word “Hoosier.”  
Whereas Indiana University’s basketball team displayed the real name of the word “Hoosier” last night; Therefore be it  
*Resolved*, That a Hoosier is someone who is quick, smart, resourceful, skillful, a winner, unique and brilliant. (*Congressional Record*, March 31, 1987, p. S7441)

The Indiana senator still had not finished his crusade. He wrote to William A. Llewellyn, president of Meriam-Webster, in April, 1987. His letter begins, “It has recently come to my attention that *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* contains a rather disparaging and unflattering definition of the word ‘hoosier’.” The letter ends with a request.

Nowhere in my great state will you find someone who considers a Hoosier an awkward, unhandy, unskilled, or ignorant rustic.  
And I doubt very much at you’ll find a constituent of mine who believes for a second that to hoosier is to “loaf on or botch a job.”  
At any rate, I would ask that you review your description of the word hoosier and, if possible, alter it to reflect either common usage of the word today or, short of that, the long history of debate over its meaning and origin. (“Sense and Etymology in Settlers’ English,” 1989, p. 19-20.)

Llewellyn replied, assuring Quayle “that there is nothing in that book which should be taken to mean that inhabitants of the state of Indiana are inherently awkward, or rustic or anything like that.” He cannot, however, honor the senator’s wish. A discussion of the word hoosier would require other words receive the same treatment, and the dictionary already had some 470, 000 entries and weighed nearly fifteen pounds. In closing Llewellyn advises the senator, “The good news is that dictionary makers do not truly define words. Rather, they record the language as it is used. What this means is that if you use the word hoosier to mean quick, smart, skillful, etc., and others use the word in the same sense in edited text, then in time it will begin to appear in



dictionaries in that sense, and no one would be more delighted than we.” (“Sense and Etymology in Settlers’ English,” 1989, p. 20.)

Quayle’s office did take a parting shot at *Webster’s*. Vowing to fight on, the senator’s press secretary “suggested a new verb, *to webster*, which he said meant ‘to misdefine a word stubbornly and outrageously.’” (Dickson, 1990, p. 65-66)

Dickson also mentions that Quayle might have saved his ire for St. Louis, “where the meaning of *hoosier* that obtains is closer to the meaning which offended the Indiana Republican.” (Dickson, 1990, p. 66) In fact it is worse, much worse. Although Dickson cites a couple of possible origins of *hoosier*, he takes no sides, nor does he prolong the discussion. He has had his fun.

### **Indianian or Indianan?**

The general use of “hoosier” to identify residents of Indiana rather stifled debate over the relative merits of Indianian or Indianan. (Dunn favored Indianan; others routinely use Indianian.) Yet “hoosier” was never the official demonym or nickname for those living in the “Hoosier State.” Such a situation cried out for a remedy, and in support of the word “hoosier,” Indiana’s senators found bipartisan, common cause. On April 12, 2016, Senators Joe Donnelly and Dan Coats sent a letter to Michael Abramson, chairman of the Government Publishing Office’s Style Board. They asked that the Style Board change its designation of Indiana natives in the next edition (2016) of the *Style Manual* from Indianian (*Style Manual*, 2008. p. 93; rule 5.23) to Hoosier. Press releases from the offices of both Senator Donnelly and Senator Coats contained the full text of letter.

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April 12, 2016

Michael Abramson  
Chairman, Style Board  
U.S. Government Publishing Office  
732 North Capitol Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20401

Dear Chairman Abramson and Members of the Style Board:

As you work to complete the U.S. Government Publishing Office’s 2016 *Style Manual*, we write to encourage you to consider changing the designation of natives of the State of Indiana to “Hoosiers.” We appreciate your consideration.

For more than 180 years, the residents of Indiana have proudly called themselves Hoosiers. References to the term can be found in private correspondences, travel reminiscences, and local newspapers as early as 1826. However, it was not until John



Finley, a poet from Richmond, Indiana, wrote “The Hoosier’s Nest” that the term increased in appearance and general acceptance.

In one stanza, Finley wrote,

...The emigrant is soon located,

In Hoosier life initiated: Erects a cabin in the woods,

Wherein he stows his household goods...”

This famous poem was widely circulated throughout the country and even abroad. While Finley never explained what that term meant, his poem defined and solidified Indiana’s identity for those unfamiliar with this western land, and it instilled pride in the citizens of this new state.

Since that time, the term Hoosier has been embraced by the citizens of Indiana and continues to represent friendliness, neighborliness, and pride in the Indiana way of life. Although the 2008 Style Manual’s use of “Indianian” may follow established style precedent for naming the natives of a state, Indiana residents do not use this word. In fact, we find it a little jarring to be referred to in this way.

Our official state website notes that we are known as “The Hoosier State,” and the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Hoosier as “a native or resident of Indiana.” Amtrak’s Hoosier State line carries passengers through the Indiana countryside. Indiana’s rich agricultural history is celebrated with the Hoosier Homestead Award Program, and the Hoosier Riverwatch program is a testament to our state’s commitment to our environment and water quality. As you can see, whether we are cheering for the Indiana Hoosiers on the basketball court, hiking the Hoosier National Forest, or inviting friends over for some Hoosier Hospitality, we have always called ourselves Hoosiers.

As Meredith Nicholson wrote in 1912, “The origin of the term ‘Hoosier’ is not known with certainty. But certain it is that...Hoosiers bear their nickname proudly.” Regardless of its roots, the Hoosier moniker has endured since our state’s beginnings, and we urge you to consider its inclusion in the GPO’s next Style Manual.

Sincerely,

Joe Donnelly  
United States Senator

Dan Coats  
United States Senator



(“Donnelly, Coats ask Government Publishing Office to Call Indiana Residents ‘Hoosiers.’” [Press release] <http://www.donnelly.senate.gov/newsroom/press/donnelly-coats-ask-government-publishing-office-to-call-indiana-residents-hoosiers>. Accessed January 12, 2017)

Although the senators got it right, the preface to the letter in the release refers to Indianan, rather than Indianian. Some news accounts repeated the error, but most likely very few cared very much.

A press release from Senator Donnelly’s office on Thursday, January 12, 2017 (“Donnelly, Young Announce Government Publishing Office to Call Indiana Residents ‘Hoosiers’ Instead of ‘Indianans’”) announced success. (<http://www.donnelly.senate.gov/newsroom/press/donnelly-young-announce-government-publishing-office-to-call-indiana-residents-hoosiers-instead-of-indianans>. Accessed January 13, 2017) The new 2016 edition of the *Style Manual* declares, on page 95, under section 5.23: “In designating the natives of the States, the following forms will be used... Hoosier (Indiana).” It is official. An agency of the federal government has recognized residents of the Hoosier State as Hoosiers. Somehow the court scene of “Miracle on 34th Street” comes to mind.

Fred Gailey: Your Honor, every one of these letters is addressed to Santa Claus. The Post Office has delivered them. Therefore the Post Office Department, a branch of the Federal Government, recognizes this man Kris Kringle to be the one and only Santa Claus.

Judge Henry X. Harper: Uh, since the United States Government declares this man to be Santa Claus, this court will not dispute it. Case dismissed.

And yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, Indiana.

The news media picked up on the excitement and spread the word. The *Washington Post* ran an article, “‘Hoosier’ is now the official name for Indiana folk. But what does it even mean?” by Katie Mettler, on January 13, 2017. More in depth than other accounts, the item also features (as do other reports) a short video of two smiling, senators, Donnelly and Todd Young (Coats’s successor), congratulating themselves. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/01/13/hoosier-is-now-the-official-name-for-indiana-folk-but-what-does-it-even-mean/?utm\\_term=.99e044ac296b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/01/13/hoosier-is-now-the-official-name-for-indiana-folk-but-what-does-it-even-mean/?utm_term=.99e044ac296b) Accessed January 14, 2016)

### **Stalking the Elusive Hoosier’s Nest**

“For years one of the great mysteries of Indiana history has been the origin and true meaning of the word Hoosier,” George T. Blakey begins his essay, “Stalking the Elusive Hoosier’s Nest,” in the summer, 1999 issue of *Traces*. He continues, “Three people—John Finley, Marcus Mote and Monimia Boyd—unsuspectingly collaborated in popularizing the term as a nickname for residents of Indiana.” (Blakey, 1999, p. 5) Lightheartedly, in a pawky manner even, but with the eye of an historian, Blakey traces the appearance, disappearance, reappearance, dating, re-dating, speculative dating, and other curiosities surrounding three icons of Indiana history.



Finley's poem, "The Hoosier's Nest," is the best known. ("The voice that sang the Hoosier's Nest / Of Western singers the first and best," according to James Whitcomb Riley.) Blakey explains that Finley, "who never claimed to have created the word [hoosier], ... told his daughter that it was already in use by the time it appeared in his poem." (Blakey, 1999, p. 7) Although the poem's first publication was the 1833 New Year carriers' address for the *Indianapolis Journal*, Finley maintained he had written the poem in 1830. It was a separate printing and "cannot be located today with the newspaper for that date." (Blakey, 1999, p. 7) His daughter, Sarah Wrigley, inherited an original manuscript with a notation of the date in Finley's hand. She donated the manuscript to the Indiana State Library. It somehow got lost. The library has only a "literal copy" which she had sent in 1902 to Jacob Dunn for his research, being "apparently leery of lending her father's original manuscript to Dunn." (Blakey, 1999, p. 7)

Then comes Marcus Mote whose painting, also called "The Hoosier's Nest," dates from around 1844, or perhaps not. Blakey states, with some appreciation, "... it is plausible to think that in 1844 Mote translated Finley's words onto canvas in vibrant color. There, in stolid and literal fashion, a visitor encounters 'The Hoosier's Nest' with towheaded Hoosieroons peering from the cabin door, animal skins decking the walls, livestock grazing in the clearing, and wilderness looming darkly behind all the foreground detail. As a painter, Mote captured the poet's message, if not his rhyme." (Blakely, 1999, p. 9) The painting disappeared for a time, reemerged from an attic and was donated to the State Library, before being transferred to the Indiana State Museum. Was it the original, though? Why does the date 1891 appear on it? A reworking of the 1844 canvas late in Mote's career? A revised version of the older painting?



The "Hoosier's Nest" by Marcus Mote



Mote's "The Hoosier's Nest" was used as the cover for the September 1965 issue of the *Indiana History Bulletin*, which contained the short essay, "The Word 'Hoosier'".

Monimia Boyd also painted the subject and presented her work to the State Library in 1849. After a critic questioned its merits, so the story goes, her husband cut it from its frame and returned it to his wife. Following her death, the work seems to have gone here and there until "for the moment, Monimia Boyd's painting is, once again, a fugitive." (Blakely, 1999, p. 13) The fugitive, however, ended up in the Carnegie Museum of Art, a gift of the estate of Edgar W. and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, collectors of American naïve art. The provenance records its adventures.

"provenance\_text": "Indiana State Legislature for the State Library, 1849; the artist, 1850; the artist's husband, Dr. Samuel S. Boyd, 1862; Dublin, Ind., High School, 1865; unidentified descendant of the artist. c. 1929; Minnie E. Bunnell, Hagerstown, IN, before 1954, until 1956; Edward Eberstadt and Sons, New York, 1957; Edgar W. and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, New York, 1957-80; bequest to Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, 1981." (<http://www.cmoa.org/CollectionDetail.aspx?item=1021756>; <https://github.com/cmoa/collection/blob/02b4690282dbd92b70bac4c7ae0b5f57a7165d6f/cmoa/87a45b3c-9ec9-4cec-90d2-3315e5223b3b.json#L1> Accessed December 3, 2016)



"Hoosiers Nest" by Monimia Bunnell Boyd

### **Happy Anniversary and the Holy Grail**

Steve Haller celebrated the 175th anniversary of "The Hoosier's Nest" with an article, "The Meanings of Hoosier: 175 Years and Counting," in the fall, 2008 issue of *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*. He intends, he says, to examine the uses of the words "Hoosier" and



“Hoosier” which will “offer a glimpse of its connotations preceding its general acceptance by the 1840s.” (Haller, 2008, p. 5) The subject of his review, however, will not be the “subsequent litany of positive, negative, humorous and serious references.” (Haller, 2008, p. 5) Perhaps it is not a litany, but Haller does mention the various theories of the term’s origin and cites Nicholson, Dunn, Clark and Baker, among others who have searched for the “Holy Grail.” (Haller, 2008, p. 5) He includes Dunn’s observation that “the Indiana origins of the word itself” lay in “the commonly used southern expression for people considered rustic, rough class, backwoods, uncouth, or country.” (Haller, 2008, p. 6) And he adds another of Dunn’s comments concerning the acceptance of Indiana’s nickname.

Dunn was quick to point out that its adoption in Indiana was in spite of prior meanings and taken on with a humorous spirit at a time when westerners (today’s Midwest) were fond of adopting state nicknames, and that the “double-sense” meaning was essentially gone by the late 1830s. (Haller, 2008, p. 6)

Finley’s daughter, Sarah Wrigley, also turns up in the anniversary homage. Haller writes, “Wrigley also affirmed the notion that when her father wrote his famous poem the word ‘no longer designated a rough, uncouth backwoodsman, but a self-reliant man who was able to subdue the wilderness, defend his home, and command the respect of his neighbors.’” (Haller, 2008, p. 6)

Haller provides a nice slice of examples of “hoosier” in early use. He might have questioned Sanford Cox’s *Recollections*, which dates the term to 1827, but he does not count it as true, either. He does conclude, however, with a sugary quote (perhaps a certain amount of sweetener is inevitable for an anniversary) from Walter Havinghurst’s *The Heartland* (1962).

Whatever its origin, the name of Hoosier has had a lasting appeal for Indiana people and has acquired a quite enviable aura. For more than a hundred years it has continued to mean friendliness, neighborliness, an idyllic contentment with Indiana landscape and life. (Haller, 2008, p. 13)

He might have chosen to quote an equally tender homage from Edward A. Leary’s *The Nineteenth State: Indiana*. (Leary, apparently feeling the text was too good to use only once, included the same item in the same format in the *Indiana Almanac and Fact Book*, which he edited) Under the head HOOSIER—A PROUD NICKNAME (yes, all in upper case) appears as the closing paragraph.

Like many words, Hoosier has changed in meaning over the years. Today the word connotes a warm, friendly, gracious, strong and self-reliant people with a sense of the past and a firm grip on the future. “Hoosiers,” as Meredith Nicholson has observed, “bear their nickname proudly.” (Leary, 1967, p. 41)

## **Crackers and Hoosiers**



In their article “*Cracker and Hoosier*,” Raven and Virginia McDavid explore the geographical distribution of the terms “cracker” and “hoosier” among the “pejorative names for rustic, chiefly farmers.” (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 161-162) They write, “But though *cracker* was elicited somewhat oftener with reference to poor whites, and *hoosier* with reference to the isolated rustics, especially the mountaineers, both are found referring to both groups.” (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 163)

A map from the *Linguistic Atlas of the Atlantic States* illustrates occurrences of the two terms, found through fieldwork. The greatest concentration of *cracker* is in eastern North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

But what happened to *cracker* on the northern fringe of the Southern colonies? Its fate is suggested by the distribution of *hoosier* — often pronounced with a /j/, possibly related to *huge* through a northern British word meaning somebody or something monstrous, and most commonly occurring in the phrase *mountain hoosier*. (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 165) ... With its focus in West Virginia, it [hoosier] is very common in the Shenandoah Valley and in the upper Piedmont of Virginia (though not in southwest) and not unknown in the uplands of the Carolinas and Georgia. (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 165-166)

Hoosier, they also say, connotes, more than cracker, uncouthness. Informants attached to it terms like “ruffian,” “rough class,” and “rough people.” (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 166) But “west of the Appalachians *hoosier* is rare as a derogatory name, though well known as a designation for Indianian.” (McDavid and McDavid, 1973, p. 166) Rare, yes, absent no. The term still lingers in an exceptionally derogatory sense, current and tangy in St. Louis.

### **Would You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Hoosier?**

In his 1982 article, provocatively entitled “Word Magic, or Would You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Hoosier?” Raven McDavid recounts a personal anecdote. As a child, like other Americans, he understood a Hoosier to be a resident of Indiana.

But *Hoosier* had another meaning at home. To my mother—who has never yet visited Indiana, and probably never known anyone from that state—it was one of the most opprobrious epithets in her formidable armamentarium of abuse, and was frequently used to indicate her displeasure at my sisters and me. If we took larger bites of an apple than the canons of polite behavior dictated, we were *eating like a Hoosier*. If knife and fork were out of place on our plates, we had *the table manners of a Hoosier*. If our play became quarrelsome, we were *acting like a bunch of Hoosiers*. If my shirttail was out, I was *going around looking like a Hoosier*. (McDavid, 1982, p. 2)

A native South Carolinian, McDavid discovered, while a fieldworker for the *Linguistic Atlas*, that “the term was used in the uplands of South Carolina and Georgia to refer to someone conspicuously rural and usually at an economic or educational or social disadvantage.” (McDavid, 1982, p. 2) He writes, “The meaning is fairly constant: basically an uncitified—and



by implication, uncivilized—dweller in out-of-the way communities; in other words, *hoosier* was synonymous with such familiar terms as *hayseed*, *hick*, *hillbilly*.” (McDavid, 1982, p. 3) About *hoosier* in the old world, though, he can only offer a lament, eased slightly by a hint at its possible geographical origin.

Unfortunately there is little solid evidence on *hoosier* before it was transplanted to North America. The pattern of its American distribution, however, suggests an origin in the north of England, Lowland Scotland or Ulster—the areas from which came the pioneer stock of Western Pennsylvania and the Southern uplands.” (McDavid, 1982, p. 3)

McDavid closes with a personal statement, the answer to the title of his article, “Forty years ago, I could imagine the arbiters of local elegance in South Carolina scornfully asking, ‘Would you want your daughter to marry a Hoosier?’ Now that I have a daughter, I find she is about to marry one—and I am delighted. Perhaps other labels will be worn as lightly in the next generation as Hoosier is worn now.” (McDavid, 1982, p. 3)

### ***Hoosier: The Early Years***

Many usually reliable sources, including the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Second edition, 1989 and online), cite 1826 as the earliest written appearance of the word *hoosier*. They offer as evidence a letter dated February 24, 1826 that James Curtis of Holt County, Missouri, sent to his uncle, Thomas Beeler of Indianapolis. A portion of one sentence glows with significance in the *hoosier* saga.

... the Indiana hoesiers that came out last fall is settled from 2 to 4 milds of us ...

A research worker in the Indiana State Library discovered the letter, and the Library reported the discovery in the April 1949 issue of the *Indiana History Bulletin* (“The Word Hoosier Again”). The *Chicago Tribune* picked up the story and ran it as “Origin of ‘Hoosier’” on June 2, 1949, but improved the spelling and turned “hoesiers” into “hoosiers.”

The letter is real enough, but, as Jonathan Clark Smith, a professor at Hanover College, points out, the date is wrong, 1846 rather than 1826. 1826 is not smudged or marred in any way on the manuscript. An archivist or librarian, though, has indicated in pencil [1846] on it to correct the writer’s error. Professor Smith observes that Holt County, Missouri, was not created until 1841, and named for a man who died in 1840. Further research confirms the 1846 dating of the letter. Census records of 1830 and 1840 place James Curtis in Indiana. The letter itself refers to the marriage of C. J. Beeler and Margaret Vondy (born on the Isle of Man) on Thursday, February 5th. February 5, 1846 was a Thursday, and the Holt County Historical Society has published a list of “Marriages as recorded in the Holt County Missouri Courthouse.” (<http://holtcountymohistoricalsociety.com/history/marriages/>) One entry reads: G. I. Beeler. Margaret Vandy. 5 Mar 1846. (The dates listed are a filing date, not a marriage date.)

The error in dating appears in a number of books, articles, and reference works, besides the



*Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) and *Webster's Word Histories*—Smith gives a list of some of the offenders in his “Not Southern Scorn but Local Pride.” Howard Peckham, for example, wrote in his *Indiana: A Bicentennial History*, “Before 1833, the word *Hoosier* had been used in an Indiana diary of 1827 and in a letter of 1826 as a familiar term for Indianans; specifically, it was written ‘Indiana Hoosiers.’” (Peckham, 1978, p. 12) In truth, the letter, as noted above, spelled hoosiers as hoesiers, and without the capital H. He may have taken his information from the *Chicago Tribune*, which, again as noted above, cleaned up the spelling. The reference to 1827 is suspect, too. The unfortunate errors rather spoil a chapter nicely entitled “In the Beginning was the Word” and opening with the phrase “And the word was *Hoosier*.”

Chapter IX in Sandford C. Cox’s *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* includes an entry for July 14, 1827 from the diary of a schoolmaster in Black Creek, Fountain County. The (unnamed) diarist relates a story about a squatter who spread the false alarm that marauding Indians were active in the area in order to put together enough money to secure a land claim others had been eyeing.

The squatter, who fabricated the story and perpetrated the false alarm, took a circuitous route and returned home that evening; and while others were busy building temporary block houses, and rubbing up their guns to meet the Indians, he was quietly gathering up money, and slipped down to Crawfordsville and entered his land, to which he returned again, chuckling in his sleeve and mentally soliloquizing—*There is a Yankee trick for you—done up by a Hoosier*. (Cox, 1860, p. 53)

How reliable is Cox’s account? Not very, according to Jonathan Clark Smith.

An 1827 journal entry by Sandford Cox is often cited, but this cannot be taken seriously as evidence. Cox’s “Recollections,” first printed in the *Lafayette Daily Courier* in 1859, casually mixed the purportedly original letters and journal entries with reflective editorial comments. The reference to “Hoosier” at the very end of a piece is almost certainly the latter, and the word is used nowhere else in the letters or journals. (Smith, 2007, note p. 185)

Several sources, including the Indiana Historical Bureau, cite a letter (in the Indiana State Library Manuscript Section) from G. L. Murdock to Gen. John Tipton. In that letter, written from Cincinnati and dated February 11, 1831, Murdock replies to Tipton regarding an advertisement and offers to deliver goods by steamboat to Logansport. He mentions in closing, “Our boat will be named The Indiana Hoosier.” Dunn had always hoped that an earlier source of the word would turn up, but the Murdock letter seems to be the first verifiable instance of its use. In spite of much searching, no one yet has found previous evidence of the term.

The earliest printed instance of the word *Hoosier* appears in the *Vincennes Gazette* of February 19, 1831. A letter to the editor, signed RACKOON, comments on the increasing population of Indiana and concludes, “The ‘Hoosher’ country is coming out, and the day is not far distant, when some states which have hitherto looked upon us as a kind of outlandish, half-civilized race, will have to follow in our train. Let the ‘Half-horse, half-alligator’ coun [sic] country look to it.”



An item entitled “Steam Boat Racing” ran in the *Indiana Palladium* (Lawrenceburg, Indiana) on June 25, 1831. It was signed HOOSHER.

The *Frankfort Argus* of September 28, 1831, citing the (undated) *Louisville Advertiser*, devotes the entire front page and part of the second to a description of “A Republican Barbecue.” The barbecue celebrated a victory for Jacksonians in the recent Kentucky elections. Appropriate toasts were drunk, a lot of them, each accompanied by a musical piece. The tenth toast was to Gen. John Adair, a former senator now elected to the House, and the “excellent band” played “The Hooshier March,” by A.M. The General (“In his return to the ensuing Congress, Kentucky exhibits her lively recollection of and gratitude for his eminent public services”) did have an Indiana connection. He had fought in the Indian Wars as a major of volunteers under Colonel (later General) James Wilkinson. Among the engagements in which he participated were the battles of Ouiatenon in Tippecanoe County (1791) and Kenapacomaqua (1791), on the Eel River near present day Logansport.

Hoosier gets a mention in the *Indiana Democrat* January 3, 1832 “Carriers’ Address.”

“Your ‘Ways and Means,’ however great,  
May find employment in our State,  
While roads and ditches, rivers, lakes,  
Invite improvement;—and it takes  
The wisest heads and soundest hearts  
To harmonize discordant parts.  
Those purchasers of Canal lands—  
Whose cash we’ve got—ask from your hands  
A full compliance with all contracts  
Instead of ‘nullifying’ compacts;  
While Southern folks, remote and sordid,  
Stand forth to keep the Treas’ry guarded,  
Protesting in most touching tones,  
’Gainst taxes, troubles, debts and loans,  
In favor much of large donations,  
Ask for our ‘hoosiers’ good plantations,  
Urging each scheme of graduation  
As justice to the common nation.” (Dunn, 1911, p. 63)

The *Cass County Times* (Logansport, Indiana), Saturday, May 19, 1832 commented on the debate surrounding the sale of public lands, an important issue at the time, especially during a presidential election year.

These Editors may succeed in getting some of *their* readers to take the *bait*; but their brethern [sic] in the West will find, if they have not already, that it is not the genuine “*Hoosier bait*.” We have seen it tried, and we have found but one man who was any way disposed to “*nibble*.”



The same terms appeared in an article on the same topic in its issue of June 16, 1832.

The *Western Statesman* (Lawrenceburg, Indiana) carried on December 7, 1832 a jocular item headed “Obituary.” The piece reports on the marriage of Nelson Boon, editor of the *Liberty*, Indiana, *Portfolio*. It also refers to three other, unnamed, young editors in the neighborhood, who apparently, have managed not to fall victim to the “smiles of the Hoozier dames.”

“The Hoosher’s Nest,” by John Finley appeared as an “Address of the Carrier of the *Indianapolis Journal*, January 1, 1833.” Finley’s verse helped popularize the term Hoosier and for many years his poem was thought to be the first example of it. His spelling of the word (regularized to “hoosier” in later revisions of the work) and the use of quotation marks around it suggest that the word, while known, had not yet found its place in the dictionaries of the time. It does not appear, for example, in Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*.



JOHN FINLEY

“John Finley”

Dunn, Jacob Piatt. *Indiana and Indianans*. Volume I, p. 1147

Only months after the “Carrier’s Address” appeared, the *Alexandria Gazette* (Alexandria, Virginia) of March 15, 1833 published a portion of “The Hoosier’s Nest,” reprinted from the *Cincinnati Chronicle*. The item, entitled “The Hoosieroons,” begins, “The good citizens of our young sister, Indiana, are pretty generally known throughout the West by the singular appellation of “Hooshores. [sic]—The following rhymes, from a yong [sic] Hoosheroon, conveys [sic] a very graphical picture of Hoosher life on the frontiers of Indiana.”



The *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine) carried the same story, attributed it to the *Cherokee Intelligencer*, and corrected the spelling and grammar. The texts of the two excerpts from “A Hoosier’s Nest” differ in some instances, and both differ from the version included in Finley’s *The Hoosier’s Nest, and Other Poems*. (1866) The *American Advocate* printed its selection in its July 31, 1833 issue.

Oftimes in riding through West,  
A stranger finds a “Hoosher’s nest,”  
In other words, a buck-eye cabin,  
Just big enough to hold Queen Mab in;  
Its situation low, but airy,  
Close on the borders of a prairie;  
And, fearing he may be benighted,  
Hailing the house, has now alighted.  
The “Hoosher” meets him at the door;  
Their salutations soon are o’er:  
He takes the stranger’s horse aside,  
Which quick is to a sapling tied;  
Then, having stripped the saddle off,  
He feeds him in a sugar-trough.  
The stranger stoops to enter in,  
The entrance closing with a pin;  
And manifests a strong desire  
To seat him by the log-heap fire,  
Where half a dozen “Hoosheroons,”  
With mush and milk, tin cups and spoons,  
White heads, bare feet, and dirty faces,  
Seem much inclined to keep their places. ...

“The Hoosieroons” also appeared in the *Georgia Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia) of April 17, 1833 and in the May 1833 issue of *Atkinson’s Casket*.

Hoping to amuse its readers, *The Western Monthly Magazine* of April, 1833, ran a piece under “Wit and Wisdom.” The selection is the “Hoosier’s Nest,” although neither the author nor the title is given, and the word “hoosier” they regard as a “slang epithet.”

In our researches we stumbled upon the following lines, forming parts of a New Years address, written by some merry wight in Indiana, and which, were it not for the too free use of a slang epithet, which the good folks of that state apply to each other, would be very clever. We speak not of the poetry; for with that, as we said before, we meddle not — but only quote the lines, as being descriptive of manners in our sister state.

The Tuesday, June 25, 1833 *Portland Advertiser* ran “EXCURSION TO BANGOR — THE EAST,” an account of a search for the West. The writer, apparently the paper’s editor James Brooks, gets pointed ever westward each time he asks where the west is and laments that it



would take him a dozen years to find it. So he turns back toward home, and as he does, he begins to wonder, “But where is the East?”

Some thirty days ago I was inquiring in Cincinnati for the West, and they said it was among “the Hoosiers” of Indiana, or “the Suckers” of Illinois—cant names given the residents of these States.

The *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts) printed the same item, now entitled “Where is the East,” on June 28, 1833. Under the original title, “Excursion to Bangor — The East,” it appeared in the *New York Spectator* on July 8, 1833. The *Painesville Telegraph* (Painesville, Ohio) also picked up the story and ran it as “Down East” on July 26, 1833.

On August 14, 1833, the *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine) published an article with the headline “Opossum Hunting in Indiana.” The word “hoosier” does not appear, but “hoosheroon” does.

The *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin* in a section “By the Western Mail” ran a small notation on September 3, 1833, taken from the *Florence Gazette* of August 23d. It reads, “James Brown Ray, Esq., late Governor of Indiana, is about commencing the publication of a newspaper, at Greencastle, Indiana, to be called ‘the Hoosier.’” The *Niles’ Weekly Register* of September 7, 1833 also reported on the proposed newspaper and noted “the singular title ‘The Hoosier’.”

The *United States’ Telegraph* (Washington, D.C.) borrowed from the *Pittsburgh Statesman* and ran a short piece on September 25, 1833; The Logansport *Canal Telegraph* ran the same item on May 17, 1834.

“*Hoosier*”—*The Hoosier State*—The good citizens of our sister state (Indiana) have been called Hoosiers for some time past at home and abroad, sometimes honorably and sometimes the reverse—as the term has become general, it is high time that its origin and definition should be as generally known; before that section of the public lands were regularly surveyed—many families located and were called squatters—the surveyors on finding one of these, would ask *who’s here*, and place the name on their map—the question became so familiar, that on the first view of the smoke of a cabin, the exclamation of another “*who’s here*” became equally so, until it eventuated in the general term of Hoosier.—*Pittsburgh Statesman*

The *Virginia Free Press & Farmers’ Repository* on October 24, 1833 also printed the Pittsburgh article, shortening the item a bit, but citing it as borrowed from an issue of the *Baltimore American*.

References continued to appear the following year. The January 11, 1834 *Liberator* (Boston Massachusetts) under the title “Good” quotes a report from the *Indiana Weekly Messenger* on a coming National Convention in Philadelphia, of “delegates in favor of the abolition of negro slavery.” An agent of the American Colonization Society, which the article wishes dissolved, is



to visit Indiana soon and will impart “... other equally important facts, now unknown to us Hoosiers.” The article also promises him “some of the choicest hisses he ever heard in his life.” The term is now spreading around the country as a common term for Indianan, and the *Weekly Messenger* piece shows it is now an easy self-reference, used without quotation marks.

On March 3, 1834 the *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) reprinted “The Hoosieroons,” which had appeared in the *Georgia Telegraph*, taken from the *Cincinnati Chronicle*. In this case, though, the *Cherokee Intelligencer* is cited as the source.

A *Baltimore Patriot* correspondent reported on pending legislation under the heading “From Washington” in the paper’s April 4, 1834 issue, “The bill will probably pass—and the Marylanders, Pennsylvanians, Ohioans, Hoosiers and Suckers as they call the Indianians and the Illinois people, on the road, may rest easy—but by the way.”

The *Indiana Journal* (Indianapolis, Indiana) informed its readers on May 31, 1834 that “another No. of the Hoosier has been recently received in town, and that it contains quite a bitter complaint about our remark a week or two ago, that it has sunk into repose.”

The June, 1834 issue of *The Knickerbocker; or New York Monthly Magazine* ran an article with the title “A Peep at Washington: A Leaf from the Journal of an American Tourist.” Part of the exclamation-heavy text referred to Indiana.

What a people we are! What a county is this of ours! How wide in extent—how rich in production—how various in beauty! I have asked in my travels, for the West, in the streets of the Queen of the West— a fairy city, which but as yesterday was a wilderness. They smiled at my inquiry and said it was among the ‘hoosiers’ of Indiana or ‘the suckers’ of Illinois.

If that sounds familiar, it should, since it picks up the language of the *Portland Advertiser* of June 25, 1833. The *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine) in turn picked up the *Knickerbocker* item and published it in two parts, June 18, 1834 and June 25, 1834.

On September 13, 1834 the *Liberator* (Boston, Massachusetts) ran a feature with the lead sentence, “The Nomenclature of the West.” It cites the *Illinois Pioneer*, and provides the full text.

*The Nomenclature of the West*, is a strange one. It would puzzle us down-easters to detect its origin or its philosophy. The *Illinois Pioneer* gives us the following list of nicknames adopted to distinguish the citizens of the following states: In Kentucky they are called Corn Crackers; Ohio, Buckeyes; Indiana, Hoosiers; Illinois, Suckers; Missouri, Pukes; Michigan, Wolverines; the Yankees are called Eels. Give us any other name but that which stands for a Missouri man. The Yankees have reason to squirm under their title.



September of 1834 also saw the term appear under various headings, mostly dealing with state nicknames, in the *American Advocate* (Hallowell, Maine) of September 17, 1834; the *Pittsfield Sun* (Pittsfield, Massachusetts) of September 11, 1834; the *Torch Light* (Hagers-Town, Maryland) of September 11, 1834; and the *New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, New Hampshire) of September 4, 1834.

On October 13, 1852 the word made the not-yet-quite-august pages of the newly established *New York Times*, referring to Indiana, or at least to homesickness in the dull hinterland.

I am far away from home-land, and, by the decrees of inexorable fate, housed up here for a time, in Hoosier-land. As a matter of course, then, like a true philosopher, I must seize upon every possible expedient as a time-killer, a “blues”-devourer, and comforter in general.

Two months earlier, on August 4, 1852, the word had been part of another *Times* article, “Kitchen Alchemy,” in a slightly different context. There it carried the meaning of bumpkin, without any direct geographical reference.

This story, for example, is told of two Hoosier bloods, at a famous restaurant in Paris. They shocked the inflated *chef*, a very Napoleon of gastronomy, with:

“D—n your eyes! Why don’t you bring in *the dinner*—and take away that broth, and your black bottle? Who the devil wants your vinegar, and your dish-water, and your *bibs*, too? Bring us, if you have got it, a whole chicken’s leg *at once*, and not at seven different times! We’ve been all over Paris to get a beef-steak, and when we got it, it was a horse’s rump!”

The term “hoosier” became familiar in newspapers, increasingly appearing in articles from the mid-1830s on. It also began to appear in books, works of both non-fiction and fiction. A number of nineteenth century travel accounts include the word “hoosier.” Charles Fenno Hoffman, poet, novelist and editor set out on a winter tour of the Midwest in 1833. Hoffman recorded his journey in a series of letters, several of which, the author notes in the preface to his collection of them, *A Winter in the West* (1835), were published in the *New-York American*. In an entry from *A Winter in the West*, headed Letter XVII, Door Prairie, Indiana, Dec. 29, 1833, he writes about the “land of the *Hooshiers*.”

I am now in the land of the *Hooshiers*, and find that long-haired race much more civilized than some of their western neighbours are willing to represent them. The term “Hooshier,” like that of Yankee or Buck-eye, first applied contemptuously, has now become a *soubriquet* that bears nothing invidious with it to the ear of an Indianian. (Hoffman, 1835, Vol. 1, p. 226)

Joseph Holt Ingraham records the sight of flatboats on the New Orleans levee in his *The South-West* (1835).



Here are congregated the primitive navies of Indiana, Ohio, and the adjoining states, manned (I have not understood whether they are *officered* or not) by “real Kentucks”—”Buck eyes” — “Hooshers” — and “Snorters.” (Ingraham, 1835, Vol. 1, p. 105)

### **Let’s Make Fun of Hoosiers**

*Yankee Notions, Or, Whittlings of Jonathan’s Jack-knife* printed the *New York Times* story about the Hoosier bloods in 1875. (*Yankee Notions*, 1875, p. 323) It printed a lot of hoosier stories. Frank Mott, the historian of American magazines, says about the publication, “It was cheaply printed, and its wit was usually cheap also. It was copiously illustrated with rather crude woodcuts.” (Mott, 1957, Vol. 2, p. 182) After 1866 and under a new editor, it “deteriorated in paper, printing, and ‘art.’ At its best it had ‘P. B. Doesticks’ and ‘Petroleum V. Nasby’ for contributors. It did much clipping from the newspapers, and it satirized public affairs often. Probably its frontier material was the best stuff it published.” (Mott, 1957, Vol. 2, Note p. 182)

With its emphasis on humor, *Yankee Notions* had pretensions to becoming the American *Punch*. Rustic characters were among its favorite targets, including the hoosier, sometimes specifically identified as an Indianan, sometimes a general representative of the west. Either way, the humor, if you can call it that, perpetuated the term hoosier as the stereotype of an ignorant country bumpkin. One story, “A Hungry Hoosier in a Quandary,” describes a hoosier on his way to New York.

THE following occurrence took place on board the steamer “Delaware,” during a recent trip. Among the cabin passengers was observed a Hoosier personage, evidently green to the highest degree of verdancy—ignorant and awkward, and attired in the acme of flashy bad taste. Probably he had never been a cabin passenger before, but having got hold of a little currency by some means or another, he was determined to spend it like a gentleman, and go to New York and see the sights, of which strange and incredible rumors had reached him in his wilderness haunts. (*Yankee Notions*, Vol. 7, 1858, p. 195)

An untitled item from 1854 involves a yokel’s ambition to be in show business.

A gawky-looking, stage-struck Hoosier went to see one of our theatrical managers last week, and solicited an engagement. “What role would you prefer, my friend?” said the manager. “Well, square,” said the would-be western Roscius, “I ain’t partial to rolls, no how—corn-dodgers is my favorite.” (*Yankee Notions*, Vol. 3, 1854, p. 134)

[Roscius: Quintus Roscius (ca. 126 BC – 62 BC) was a Roman actor; by the Renaissance, Roscius formed the ideal for dramatic excellence. A corn-dodger is a small cornmeal cake either baked or fried or boiled as a dumpling.]

A hearty joke from 1854 turns on a countryman’s ignorance of city life.

BLIND TO HIS OWN INTEREST. — A St. Louis correspondent relates the following amusing incident as having occurred there a few weeks ago:



One of Health's sprinkling wagons that used to dampen the streets of our city by water from a large reservoir, containing several hogsheads, was proceeding slowly down Fourth street, engaged in the laudable task of flooring the dust, when the attention of a raw Hoosier was attracted towards the singular looking vehicle.

"Hullo, stranger!" said he, addressing himself quite audibly to the driver, "you're loosing all your water thar."

No answer was made by the person addressed.

"I say, old hoss," said the Hoosier, "you're losing your water right smart thar, I tell you, and I'll be dog-on'd if your old tub wont be dry, next you know."

The driver was still silent, and the stranger again addressed John.

"Look here, you fool, don't you see something's broke loose in your old cistern upon wheels and that all your water is leaking out."

Still the driver was silent, and the Hoosier turned away in disgust, saying—

"I'll allow that feller is a little the biggest fool I ever did see; but if he's so blind to his own interest as to throw his labor away in that manner, let him do it and be d—d!"

(*Yankee Notions*, Vol. 3, 1854, p. 370)

Young hoosiers were not spared.



**A Hoosier, having taken a looking glass home in his trunk, one of his hopeful offspring was curious to see the contents of the mysterious box. The mirror was on top when he opened it, and he gave one brief look, dropped the lid, and with terror depicted on every feature, cried out;**

**"Oh, mother, mother! father has brought home a cub! I seed him! A leetle young bear!"**

*Yankee Notions, or Whittlings of Jonathan's Jack-knife*, Vol. 2, 1853. p 154



Jonathan also treats his readers to “A Hoosier Wedding.”

#### A HOOSIER WEDDING.

The Ceremony of tying the nuptial knot is very much simplified in the Hoosier State, as the following scene will show:

Scene opens, discovering the Squire in his robes of office, *alias*, red flannel dressing gown, comfortably ensconced behind an enormous wooden bowl of hasty pudding and milk. Time, sunrise.

“What is your name, sir?”

“Matty.”

“Any relation to van Buren?”

“No.”

“What is your name, Miss?”

“Polly.”

“Matty, do you love Polly?”

“Wal, I does, hoss!”

“Polly, do you love Matty?”

“No mistake, squire.”

“Well, then you want to be tied?”

“I reckon so.”

“Well, then, I pronounce you man and wife.”

“Thank you, sir.”





“A Hoosier Wedding”

*Yankee Notions, or Whittlings of Jonathan’s Jack-knife*, Vol. 1, 1852. p. 22

And Who can forget “Evidence of Good Character”?

A Hoosier was called upon the stand, away out West, to testify to the character of a brother Hoosier.

It was as follows:

“How long have you known Bill Bushwhack?”

“Ever since he was born.”

“What is his general character?”

“Letter A, No. 1, ’bove par a great way.”

“Would you believe him on oath?”

“Yes, sir-ree: on or off, or any other way. (*Yankee Notions*, v. 1, 1852, p. 134)

The *National Era*, an abolitionist newspaper in Washington, DC, had run the same item under a different headline on October 26, 1848. Brother Jonathan, apparently had no qualms about borrowing (uncredited) material, although he was hardly alone in the practice.



According to Richard L. Power in something over a decade fifty such stories appeared in *Yankee Notions*, some borrowed, some original.

Sometimes direct, sometimes vague and oblique, often coarse, insipid and pointless, Hoosier stories appear to be a journalistic innovation intended to ridicule a type of culture which was antithetical to that of the Yankees. It was probably not accidental that a periodical founded to epitomize the Yankee genius of humor so promptly seized the Hoosier type as a way of lampooning a contrasting way of life. And it is perhaps not accidental that the Yankees chose the neutral ground of the Old Northwest as the place of deriding a way of life derived directly from the South. Literary history thus augments the broader records of cultural adjustment in emphasizing the Yankee and the Hoosier as outstanding native folk-types of nineteenth-century America. (Power, 1942, p. 109)

Jonathan had company in the comic derogation of hoosiers. Crockett almanacs, published between 1835 and 1856, contained frontier lore, putatively real stories, fantastic adventures, legendary characters, anecdotes and sketches. The editor's note in *Davy Crockett, American Comic Legend* states, "no more genuine expression of the epic frontier exists than in these quaint little almanacs, with their grotesque woodcuts and eye-straining print." (Dorson, 1939, p. iii) The exploits of Davy Crockett and other "ringtail roarers" (Dorson, 1939, p. xiii) fill the pages, but leave room for other items, such as the thumbnail sketch of "A Hoosier."

Now the Hoosiers are a different class o' human natur altogether. They are half taller an' bristles, an' so all-sweaten fat and round, that when they go to bed they roll about like a cider barrel in a cellar, an' therefor they're always obleeged to have a nigger each side on 'em to keep 'em still; an' when they wake up, they have to fasten down their cheeks before they can open their eyes. A Hoosier can eat a hog, tail, fur and all, and in the fall of the year, the bristles come out on him so splendifferous thick that he has a regular nateral tippet about his throat, an' a nateral hogskin cap on his head. I once had one of these half-starved critters to work on my plantation — till one hot day come, and if he didn't spill his hull self, nails, hair and all, into my hay wagon, then cut me up for shoe greasers; an' arter we cooled it, thar he was a complete cake o' hog fat, an' thar was enough on him to grease all the harnesses and wagons for a hull year. (Dorson, 1939, p. 123-124)





“A Hoosier”

Dorson, Richard M. *Davy Crockett, American Comic Legend*, 1939, p. 123

Hoosiers were aware of their reputation. A story entitled “A Hoosier and His Dog” appeared in the November 7, 1885 *News of the Day*, from Vincennes, Indiana.

We are all aware that it has become common for the inhabitants of other states (and particularly the older ones) to make the Hoosier the butt of their jokes and ridicule; but occasionally a “Simon pure” Hoosier escapes from the land of his nativity, and wanders out in the world, and sees what there is away from home to admire, and what to excite disgust. Such a Hoosier is one we shall now introduce to the reader.

There is a twist, as it turns out. John C—n, “who possessed his full share of native talent, and in all cases, judged of matters and things for himself,” set out on his voyage. He reaches a town where a hotel keeper, notorious for swindling travelers with outrageous prices for meals and lodging, presents a shocking bill. John refuses to pay beyond the usual village prices. The landlord seizes John’s well-stuffed carpetbag to hold until he is fully paid. About half a mile out of town, John tells his faithful dog what has happened. “The dog retraced his steps, entered the barroom and watched for a favorable moment to seize his master’s luggage. After waiting a short while, the landlord stepped outside the door, and without further ceremony the dog seized the carpet bag and in a few moments handed it over safely to his master. The wrath of the landlord, on discovering what had transpired, can be better imagined than described.”

Power has some interesting thoughts about the hoosier stereotype and its treatment by hack litterateurs.

Withal, the literary traffickers in the Hoosier folk-type did not drive too hard a bargain with the figure they purveyed. No weakling, his roistering courage in physical encounter belied his supposedly debilitating environment. The Hoosier’s sense of humor salted many a story. Although the Hoosier might be “green to the highest degree of verdancy,



ignorant and awkward, and attired in the acme of bad taste,” he was likely to prove “quite as sharp as city folks.” (Power, 1942, p. 112)

He ends his essay with a statement of admiration for the “robust” character of the hoosier, “In spite of its sometimes uneasy implications there are comforting reflections concerning the Hoosier stereotype. If peoples and regions are to be represented by tags and symbols, one may well prefer them to be of a thumping and positive sort. Gusty, full-blown and flamboyant, there was nothing half-way or milk-and-waterish about the Hoosier stereotype. In present days when it is common to deplore the prospect of eventual erasure of cultural variety it is a comfort that Indiana has the tradition of being different; a solace that Indiana was distinctive enough to generate a robust stereotype.” (Power, 1942, p. 121)

Not lacking a sense humor about themselves, hoosiers could tell tales of their own. The *Weekly Vincennes Gazette* published a short, self-deprecating piece on March 4, 1865.

LUDICROUS MISTAKE.—That was a good joke on a young and gallant Hoosier officer, who, on receiving a note from a lady requesting “the pleasure of his company” at a party to be given at her house, on the evening designated took his volunteers and marched them to the young lady’s residence. When it was explained to him that it was himself alone who had been invited, he said: “By golly, the letter said company, and I thought the lady wanted to see all my boys.”

In a later era, the Federal Writers’ Project collected stories. The most often repeated among those published in *Hoosier Tall Stories* was “Drive On!”

Jeff Dawson was said to be the laziest man in Fountain or any other county. His neighbors labored with him on behalf of his family, hard up because he was so lazy, but appeals were of no use. Finally, the citizens told him in so many words that there was no need of a dead man walking around on top the ground and he could take his choice of getting down to work or being buried alive. He chose to be buried.

On the way to the cemetery, with Jeff in a coffin on the wagon, they met a man who inquired the reason for such unusual doings, since the “corpse” was calmly puffing a corncob pipe. When it was explained to him, he offered to help Jeff get a start in life by giving him a bushel of corn. Jeff pondered this a moment and finally rose up to ask “Is the corn shelled?” “Why, no!” replied the Good Samaritan in astonishment. Jeff resignedly lay back again in the coffin. “Drive on, boys,” said he, “drive on!” (Federal Writers’ Project (Indiana), 1937, p. 24)

## **Ad Astra per Aspera**

### **Jocrisses?**

The Swiss-born paleobotanist Léo Lesquereux settled in Columbus, Ohio in 1848. He travelled around the southern and Midwestern states, concentrating on the geological science of coal deposits. Aside from his important geological surveys, he wrote of his experiences in



letters, travel essays really, recording what he had seen during his trips. One letter, dated Columbus, 30 December 1854, appeared in the *Revue Suisse* of June, 1855. Amid discussions of Mammoth Cave and hunting passenger pigeons, Lesquereux takes time out to comment briefly on the American fondness for nicknames.

Les Américains aiment particulièrement les surnoms. Chaque contrée a le sien, et chacun de leurs hommes célèbres est également caractérisé par un sobriquet qui, le plus souvent vaut un portrait. Le *Yankée* est proprement le peuple de Massachusett ou des contrées à l'est de New-York. Les *Buck-Eyes* ou *marrons* sont les peuples de l'Ohio. Ceux de l'Indiana sont les *Hoosiers*, un mot qui exprime la plate bêtise réunie à l'exquise finesse des Jocrisses. (Lesquereux, 1855, note p. 422-423)

[Hoosiers, a word that expresses dull stupidity joined with the exquisite grace of simpletons. (Jocrisse is a stock theatrical character known for stupidity and clumsiness)]

At the time Lesquereux was in Kentucky, not the home of “hoosier” admiration, but most likely he wrote with more amusement than malice.

### *Harper's Weekly*

An item with the title “Central America” in *Harper's Weekly* of February 21, 1857 uses the word hoosier in the context of American and British social structures and clearly supposes it to be understood.

Whatever may be the reciprocal feeling of the literary and commercial classes of the two countries—and we rejoice to believe it is one of growing respect and regard—the governing classes of the two countries—the democracy of the one and the aristocracy of the other—still look upon each other with mutual jealousy and mutual distrust. The manufacturer of Manchester and the banker of New York fraternize and hob-nob together, and hug each other *ad libitum*, but the American democrat and the English aristocrat, the hoosier and the feudal proprietor agree together like oil and vinegar, like fire and water.

Here the Hoosier represents sturdy democratic values and stands as a sort of proud and independent Jeffersonian yeoman. But ten years later *Harper's Weekly* offers a less flattering picture. The magazine's January 12, 1867 issue, featured eight cartoon caricatures of regional and racial types. With the caption “Citizens of the United States, According to Popular Impressions,” the illustrations depict the Yankee, a South Carolinian, a Hoosier, a Kentuckian, a Pennsylvanian, a Mississippian, a Californian and the “Everlasting Nigger.”



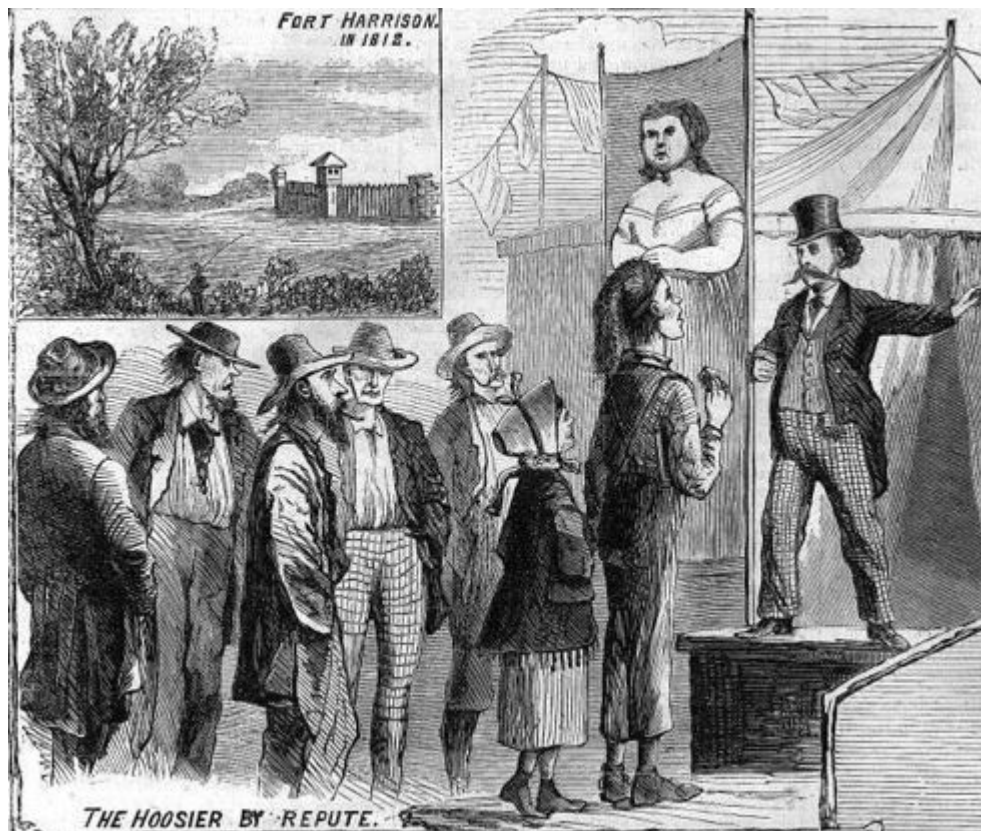


*Harper's Weekly*, January 12, 1867, p. 29

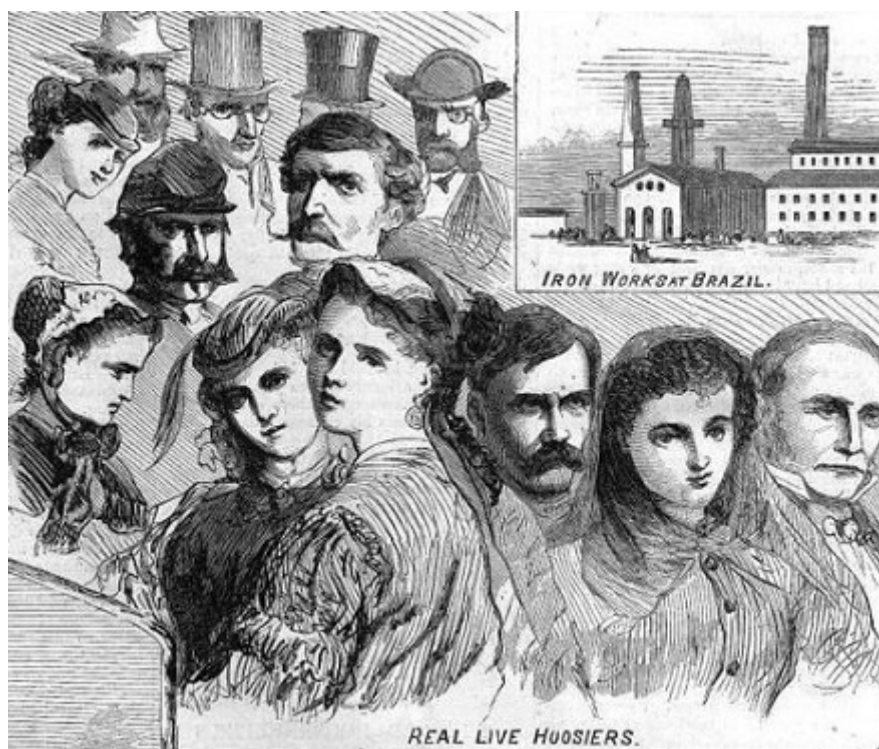
The casually racist language offends, but nothing about the engravings flattered any in the group. A number of Indianans wrote the magazine to protest the stereotype assigned to them, and *Harper's* made apologies in November when it published a piece called "Among the Hoosiers." The magazine tells its readers, "The modern Hoosier, repudiates, and very justly too, the old popular impression; and on pages 696 and 697 of this issue of the Weekly we endeavor to do the Indianians justice." (*Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, p. 698)

The endeavor (sincere or not) produced a double-page picture, "the result of a week's sojourn of our artist in the Wabash Valley, at Terre Haute ... chiefly drawn from observations at the State Fair, which was held at Terre Haute on October 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5." (*Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, p. 698) In the J. F. Gooking illustrations, however, in the upper left corner bumpkins still linger, as "The Hoosier by Repute." In the upper right corner the artist and editors admitted a more refined group of "Real Live Hoosiers." (*Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, p. 696 and p. 697)





*Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, p. 696





*Harper's Weekly*, November 2, 1867, p. 697

### **A Hoosier Michael Angelo and Dotty Dimple**

Walt Whitman in a letter dated March 19, 1863 and sent from Washington to Nathaniel Bloom and John F. S. Gray describes Abraham Lincoln.

I think well of the President. He has a face like a hoosier Michael Angelo, so awful ugly it becomes beautiful, with its strange mouth, its deep cut, criss-cross lines, and its doughnut complexion. (Whitman, 1961, p. 82)

Herman Melville writes vividly of a character in *The Confidence Man* (1857).

It was a rather eccentric-looking person who spoke, somewhat ursine in aspect; sporting a shaggy spencer of the cloth called bear's skin; a high peaked cap of racoon-skin, the long bushy tail switching over behind; raw-hide leggings; grim stubble chin; and, to end, a double-barreled gun in hand—a Missouri bachelor, a Hoosier gentleman, of Spartan leisure and fortune, and equally Spartan manners and sentiments; and, as the sequel may show, not less acquainted, in a Spartan way of his own, with philosophy and books, than with woodcraft and rifles. (Melville, 1857, p. 164)

In 1869 and by then established in the national vocabulary, “hoosier” shows up in a bit of children's literature under a variant, “hoojer.” In Sophie May's *Dotty Dimple Out West*, young Dottie is going with her father from Portland, Maine, to visit relatives in Indiana. On the trip, she speaks to a fellow traveler.

“I'm going to tell you something. Did you ever go to Indiana?”

“No.”

“Didn't you? They call it Out West. I'm going there. Yes, I started to-day. The people are called Hoojers. They don't spect me, but I'm going. Did you ever hear of a girl that travelled out West?” (May, 1869, p. 22-23)

Once arrived in Indiana, Dotty chats with her cousin, Horace.

“I'm glad not to be a Hoojer,” said Dotty, with a severe look at her cousin Horace.

“You don't ever see such bad men in the State of Maine. The whiskey is locked up; and I don't know as there is any whiskey.”

“Down East is a great place, Dotty! Don't I wish I was a Yankee. I mean a 'Publican.”

“But you can't be, Horace,” returned little Dotty, looking up at him with deep pity in her bright eyes; “you weren't born there. You're a Hoojer, and you'll have to *stay* a Hoojer.” (May, 1869, p. 145)

Although the term “hoosier” was firmly fixed in the American lexicon, Edward Eggleston fixed it further with the appearance of his novel *The Hoosier School-Master* in 1871. The story,



first published serially in *Hearth and Home* and soon after gathered into book form, describes the experiences of Ralph Hartsook, a young man in his first year of teaching in Flat Creek, Indiana. The tale takes place in the ante bellum years, rather than in a contemporary setting, a generation earlier than its publication date. Eggleston's plot is thin, episodic at best, the primary interest being the characters who inhabit Hoopole County. Eggleston uses the word "Hoosier," only once — in the novel's title — but with it comes its old evocation of unsophisticated country life. The book became a considerable success and made Eggleston's reputation as a writer. There were film adaptations in 1914, 1924 and 1935.

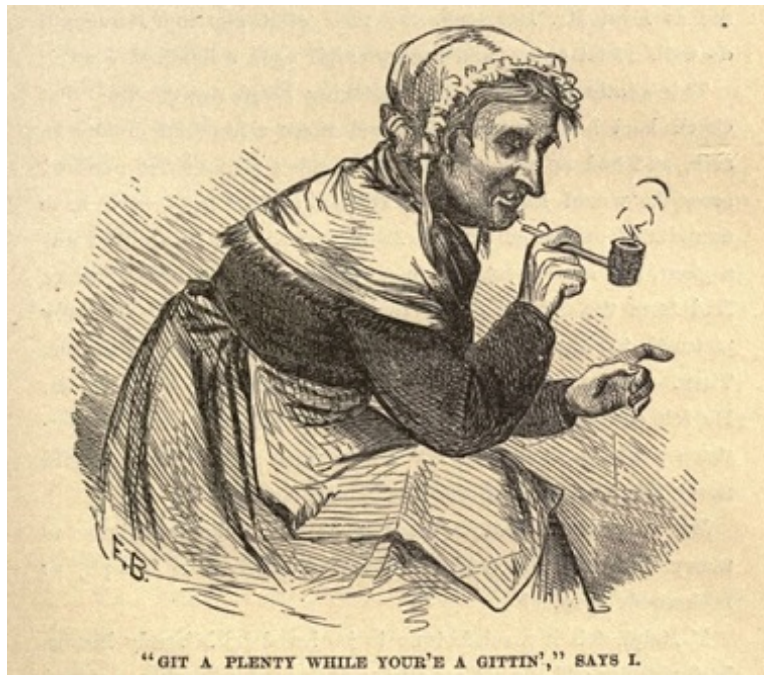
The Frank Beard illustrations in the first Orange, Judd edition of *The Hoosier School-Master* generally reflect a rustic environment, and his sketches of Jack Means and his wife might well confirm the backwoods image of typical Hoosiers of the book's time.



"Old Jack Means, the School Trustee"  
*The Hoosier School-Master*, p. 13

Jack turns out to be something of a sympathetic character. His wife does not. Three times the narrator describes her as an "ogre," corresponding to her appearance, her manner, and her nature. And their daughter, herself in love with Ralph, Eggleston describes as "the richest, the ugliest, the coarsest, and the most entirely contemptible girl in Flat Creek District." (Eggleston, 1870, p. 27)





Mrs. Means  
*The Hoosier School-Master*, p. 29



Mandy Means  
*The Hoosier School-Master*, p. 27



In contrast, Miss Hannah Thompson, the long-suffering indentured servant girl, who becomes Ralph Hartsook's love and eventually his bride, is portrayed in text and picture as an attractive young woman. (Not unlike those "real live hoosiers" of *Harper's Weekly*.)



"Hannah"  
*The Hoosier School-Master*, p. 57

Miss Thompson notwithstanding, Raven McDavid can observe, "... if one reads the works of Edward Eggleston with a sociologist's cold objectivity, he will likely conclude that in Eggleston's time the word still had its Southern meaning." (McDavid, 1982, p. 3)

Writing on Eggleston and dialect, William Randel quotes from an unpublished manuscript, "apparently an early draft of a talk Eggleston often gave: 'The Hoosiers and the Hoosier Language.'"

The settlers in these parts of the State or their fathers emigrated from Kentucky, or as they call it Kaintuck, from Tennessee, and from North Carolina (in Hoosier Karlina). They did not bring a large stock of erudition with them, and you would infer from quite a slight acquaintance with them that the school teacher was not much 'abroad in the land.' But the ever expanding railroad lines and the present excellent school system are all serving to introduce the English language & reduce the Hoosierishness of the Hoosier,



and we must hasten if we are to succeed in photographing him before he fades from sight.  
(Randel, 1955, p. 112)

### Slave Narratives and Call Me Mom

During the 1930s the Federal Writers' Project collected slave narratives which were assembled into seventeen volumes as *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves* and later microfilmed. Among the typescripts is an interview Samuel S. Taylor conducted with Allen Johnson, then about 82, of Little Rock Arkansas. In his session with Taylor, Mr. Johnson uses the word "hoojer" and explains its meaning.

A slave was supposed to pick a certain mount of cotton I have heard. They had tasks. But we didn't pick cotton. Way back in Georgia that ain't no cotton country. Wheat, corn, potatoes, and things like that. But in Louisiana and Mississippi, there was plenty of cotton. Arkansas wasn't much of a cotton state itself. It was called a 'Hoojer' state when I was a boy. That is a reference to the poor white man. He was a 'Hoojer.' He wasn't rich enough to own no slaves and they called him a 'Hoojer.' (Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, p. 4 [64])

Johnson's account confirms, providing the transcription is accurate, the varying spellings and pronunciations of the word "hoosier." (John Finley, after all, had originally written it as "hoosher.") His crisp definition also suggests that the term was well known in the south and that it applied, if not to a rough mountaineer or backwoodsman, at least to a lower stratum of white society.

Robert Morgan, born (1944) and raised in western North Carolina, also uses the "hoojer" variant in his poem "Man and Machine." The sense is more or less the same sense as Mr. Johnson's, although Morgan's "hoojer" is a bit more pathetic.

Winters Luther lived only for his truck,  
banging down the dirt road to Chestnut Springs  
for booze and women. But that was just  
occasional. Most days he'd brag at the store  
about his pickup, or be trading for another  
with even thicker tires, more horsepower  
and chrome, a gun rack in the window.  
At home he'd maybe tune a little,  
oil the plates of the planter.  
But off the machine he was just  
another stocky hoojer, yelling  
to make up for his lack of size  
and self-esteem, adding fat and blood  
pressure ... (Morgan, 2004, p. 93)



Unlike Johnson and Morgan, Kurt Vonnegut, Indiana's native son, uses "hoosier" in its more contemporary, non-pejorative meaning. It carries no heavy baggage, no sense of an unschooled rustic or loutish, poor white trash. There is no mountaineer left, no boob, no hick, no boatman, merely a neutral name, one that Hazel Crosby bears with (perhaps too much) heartland pride. John, the narrator, faces her gushing exuberance in the chapter "Bicycles for Afghanistan" in *Cat's Cradle*.

Crosby asked me what my name was and what my business was. I told him, and his wife Hazel recognized my name as an Indiana name. She was from Indiana, too.

"My God," she said, "are you a *Hoosier*?"

I admitted I was.

"I'm a Hoosier, too," she crowed. "Nobody has to be ashamed of being a Hoosier."

"I'm not," I said. "I never knew anybody who was."

"Hoosiers do all right. Lowe and I've been around the world twice, and everywhere we went we found Hoosiers in charge of everything."

"That's reassuring."

"You know the manager of that new hotel in Istanbul?"

"No."

"He's a Hoosier. And the military-whatever-he-is in Tokyo ..."

"Attaché," said her husband.

"He's a Hoosier," said Hazel. "And the new Ambassador to Yugoslavia ..."

"A Hoosier?" I asked.

"Not only him but the Hollywood Editor of Life magazine, too. And that man in Chile ..."

"A Hoosier, too?"

"You can't go anywhere a *Hoosier* hasn't made his mark," she said.

"The man who wrote *Ben Hur* was a Hoosier."

"And James Whitcomb Riley."

"Are you from Indiana, too?" I asked her husband.

"Nope. I'm a Prairie Stater. 'Land of Lincoln,' as they say."

"As far as that goes," said Hazel triumphantly, "Lincoln was a Hoosier, too. He grew up in Spencer County."

"Sure," I said.

"I don't know what it is about Hoosiers," said Hazel, "but they've sure got something. If somebody was to make a list, they'd be amazed."

"That's true," I said.

She grasped me firmly by the arm. "We Hoosiers got to stick together."

"Right."

"You call me 'Mom.'"

"What?"

"Whenever I meet a young Hoosier, I tell them, 'You call me *Mom*.'"

"Uh huh."

"Let me hear you say it," she urged.

"Mom?" (Vonnegut, 1988, p. 89-92)



## Barry, Royko, Bryson, and *The Youth's Companion*

Dave Barry, a Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist, wrote a piece he called “Stating your Case for the Stupidest State” that appeared in the *Miami Herald* of October 20, 2002. Under the heading “State Stupidity,” he speaks of Indiana and tells his readers, “For nickname stupidity, no state challenges Indiana, which proudly calls itself ‘The Hoosier State,’ even though nobody has a clue what ‘Hoosier’ means. It could be a Native American word meaning ‘Has sex with a caribou.’” Some ten weeks later Barry apologizes. He atones with a column entitled “Hey! Hoosier daddy, Indiana?” in which he aims to set the record straight and offers to “clear up this issue once and for all, here, according to the letters I received.” Seven explanations of the term “hoosier,” sent to him by readers, follow. With mock, that’s-what-they-said-didn’t-they innocence he archly combines the information he received.

So from now on, when you hear people proudly refer to themselves as “Hoosiers” you will know exactly what they are referring to: an inquisitive, one-eared, hill-dwelling Ohio River contractor, large for his kind, who has a lot of trouble with pronunciation but does NOT have sex with caribou. Who WOULDN’T be proud?! (*Miami Herald*, January 12, 2003)

While he is at it, Barry also tells his readers about a letter pointing out that New York has an official state muffin. It does, effective August 10, 1987. Title 6, Section 84 of the New York Code decrees: “The apple muffin shall be the official muffin of the state of New York.” (Indiana has a state pie, the sugar cream pie, thanks to Senate Concurrent Resolution 5, passed by the General Assembly in 2009; it did not become actual law, but few pie supporters seemed to mind.)

Mike Royko, the Chicago columnist, enjoyed poking fun at Indiana. He treats himself to a barrelful of giggles in his June 3, 1982 piece, “Hicks Get Their Licks,” a reply to objections made to his previous comments about the Indianapolis 500.

I quite accurately said: “For most males in Indiana, a real good time consists of putting on bib overalls and a cap bearing the name of a farm equipment company and sauntering to a gas station to sit around and gossip about how Elmer couldn’t get his pickup truck started that morning ...” (Royko, 2001, p. 186)

Royko, of course, is only warming up. He happily mocks the “defenders of the faith,” meaning those with a higher opinion of Indianapolis (and Indiana) than his. And naturally he gets around to the word “hoosier,” by way of the Hoosier Dome. He almost cannot wait.

Do you know why they’re called Hoosiers?

There are two explanations. One is the one they prefer, and it’s not accurate. The other is accurate and they don’t like it.

The Hoosiers will tell you that the word “hoosier” came from the tendency of early Indiana settlers to say “Who’s here?” when somebody rapped upon their cabin door.

Over the years, their habit of saying “Who’s here?” evolved into something that sounded like “Hooshere?” And finally “Hoosier.”



(That could explain why so many settlers kept going west when they got to Indiana. Who'd want to stay in a place where everybody was yowling: "Hooshere? Hooshere? Hooshere?")

But most reputable scholars, which are the only kind I deal with, say the word "hoosier" came about this way:

The early settlers of southern Indiana were mainly unwashed, uncouth mountain folk from Kentucky.

They were usually referred to as a "hoojee" or a "hoojin." As in: "Quick lock up the girls and the livestock—there's some of them hoojees and hoojins comin'."

And as years passed, the words 'hoojee' and 'hoojin,' meaning "a dirty person," according to one reference book, evolved into "hoosier." (Royko, 2001, p. 188)

Bill Bryson confesses in his *Notes from a Big Country* that he has begun to read license plates while driving. He particularly enjoys commenting on state slogans. "I like to make quips and comments on these," he writes, "so when, for instance, we see Pennsylvania's 'You've got a friend in Pennsylvania,' I turn to the passengers and say in an injured tone, 'Then why doesn't he call?'" (Bryson, 1999, p. 155) When it comes to Indiana, he observes, "Indiana, meanwhile, calls itself the 'Hoosier State' and has done for 150 years. No one has ever satisfactorily deduced (possibly because who after all cares?) where the term comes from, though I can tell you from experience that if you mention this in a book 250 people from Indiana will write to you with 250 different explanations and the unanimous view that you are a dunce." (Bryson, 1999, p. 156)

Bryson was neither the first nor the last to comment on differences of opinion concerning origin of "Hoosier." During Indiana's centennial year, *The Youth's Companion* contributed its own bit of wisdom (without a snide aside) to the feast.

To venture an opinion, at least in Indiana, on where the word "Hoosier" came from is like asking a roomful of boarders what the difference is between a cruller and a doughnut. It is sure to "start something." ("The Days We Celebrate," 1916, p. 370)

### **Lexical Data from the Gulf States**

Lee Pederson, a professor of English at Emory University and editor of the *Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States*, contributed "Lexical Data from the Gulf States" to the journal *American Speech*. In the article, he speaks about terms used for a rustic.

One of the most complicated items in the atlas work sheets concerns neutral, jocular, and derogatory terms for a country person, designated a *rustic* in the questionnaire. Here is the work-sheet item as it appears in the *Manual for Dialect Research in the Southern States* (1974):

69.9 a rustic /neutral, jocular, and derogatory terms/ \*mountain boomer, \*yahoo, \*hoodger, \*cracker, \*hillbilly, \*swamp angel, \*mossback, \*country- man, \*backwoodsman, \*cove-ite, \*hayseed, \*ridge runner, \*stump jumper, \*jackpine savage,



\*hay shaker. M: Somebody who lives out in the country, doesn't know anything about town ways, and is conspicuous when he gets to town. Of himself he might say, "I'm just an old \_\_\_\_." How would town people refer to him: e.g., children might say, "Look at that old \_\_\_\_." [Ask about people from particular locations—mountains, swamps, sandhills, piney woods, redclay country, etc.] Any particular terms used by blacks? Do you know the term *hoosier*? In what senses? (Pederson, 1980, p. 198)

Pederson lists the responses, which include those relating to "Hoosier."

Arkansas hoosier (2)  
backwoods hoosier  
Carolina hoosier  
country hoosier (32)  
Georgia hoosier  
hoogie (3)  
hoogie country  
hoo-hoo hoosier  
hoosier (73)  
mountain hoosier (28)  
nasty hoosier  
old country hoosier  
old hoosier (Pederson, 1980, p. 199-200)

He adds the text of an interview done in Tennessee.

In Shelbyville, Tennessee, Barbara Rutledge (F) interviewed a 91-year-old retired farmer (I) who provided useful geographical and historical information:

F: Are there any names for people that live way up in the mountains?

I: Yeh. Used to, when I was a boy, they called 'em hoosiers /huʒərz/ (laughing). Mountain hoosiers. I don't know where they got that hoosier business. But mountaineers or mountain hoosiers. Used to come down, when I was small boy, they used to haul apples down out of the eastern part of this state, fall of the year. In other words, they take a wagon team, load this wagon with apples, you know. Used to come out of the eastern part of the state, lot of apples growing up there, you know. Well, not exactly in the eastern part, it's the eastern part of the Middle Tennessee area. And they'd peddle those apples, you see. Sometimes go all the way down to Jackson, nearly to Bedford. And they'd call them mountain hoosiers, peddling them apples. Sometimes they'd have moonshine and apple brandy with them too (laughing).

F: Any other names for groups of people? What might they be called?

I: Oh, country hoosier or country hunks. I heard that expression used a lot.

F: Country hunks?

I: Country hunks. (Pederson, 1980, p. 201-202)

From the evidence amassed Pederson determines the pronunciation of "hoosiers" and finds it interesting that the word should tickle the informant.



Here the context clearly demonstrates not only that Cumberland mountaineers were called /**hužərz**/, not /**hujərz**/, by the Middle Tennessee valley people, but also that the term *hoosier* for these Cumberland peddlers remained amusing to the informant. (Pederson, 1980, p. 202)

## The Usual Suspects

### Who's Here?

“Who’s here?” (or its variants, “Who’s yer?” or “Who’s yere” or “Who’s ’ere?” or “Who’s heyer” or “Who’s there?” or even “Who’s air?”) is the most popular theory explaining Indiana’s nickname. It seems that travelers in Indiana hailed rustic cabins with “Who’s here?” Or the residents of the cabins called out to unexpected visitors, sometimes arriving at night, “Who’s here?” In some accounts, the travelers are surveyors. In others, the travelers are Hoosiers themselves, always curious to know who is in the cabins they find along their way. Occasionally they try the latch and inquire of those inside who they are. More often the residents of a cabin reply to a rap on the door with “Who’s here?” Asked from inside or out, “Who’s here?” naturally slid into “Hoosier” and hence Indianans became known as “Hoosiers.”

The entry for Hoosier in *Slang and its Analogues: Past and Present* supports the “Who’s here?” theory and states, “Perhaps the most reasonable of several ingenious explanations is, that in the early days the customary challenge or greeting in that region was, ‘who’s yer?’ (who’s here?): pronounced hoosier. —NORTON.” (Farmer and Henley, 1893, Vol. 3, p. 346) Sylva Clapin borrows directly from *Slang and its Analogues* and says (without acknowledgement in the text), “The most reasonable explanation of the word, is that, in the early days, the customary challenge or greeting, in that region was, ‘Who’s here?’ (pron. hoosier).” Or perhaps they both borrowed from Charles Ledyard Norton’s *Political Americanisms* where the text is exactly what Farmer and Henley use. (Norton, 1890, p. 55) There is room, “on the other hand,” Clapin concedes, for “husher.” (Clapin, 1902, p. 232)

*A Book of Indiana: The Story of What has been Described as the Most Typically American State in the American Democracy Told in Terms of Biography* contents itself with a single statement, “There is a tradition that Indiana was nicknamed the Hoosier State from the expression ‘Who’s yere?’ meaning, ‘Who is here?’” (*A Book of Indiana*, 1929, p. 29)

Almost all reference sources mention the “Who’s here?” theory. Some, like Allan Wolk’s *The Naming of America*, buy it completely. Without discussion of alternatives Mr. Wolk states that the nickname of Indiana “came about, according to folklore, when the early pioneers used to greet night callers by saying, ‘Who’s yere?’” (Wolk, 1977, p. 29) Basil Freestone, uninterested other possibilities, perpetuates the bald statement in *Harrap’s Book of Nicknames and their Origins*. This “comprehensive guide” maintains that the term derives from the “demand by early settlers to night callers: ‘Who’s yere?’” and cites Allan Wolk as its authority. (Freestone, 1990, p. 155)



The *World Book Encyclopedia* begins its entry for Indiana with “Indiana is a small state of the United States with a large population.” It explains that it is called the *Hoosier State*, although “Historians do not know the origin of this famous nickname” which “may come from ‘Who’s here?’ —the Indiana pioneer’s traditional greeting to visitor—or from husher—a slang word for a fighting man who could ‘hush’ all others with his fists.” The entry ends helpfully with “The cartoonist Jim Davis won fame for his comic strip, ‘Garfield’.” (*World Book*, 1994, p. 196) Thus does *World Book* enlighten its readers.

In his *Americanisms; The English of the New World* Maximilian Schele de Vere cites a passage from William Ferguson’s *America by River and Rail* (1856). About Indiana, Ferguson wrote, “The citizens of this state, known as Hoosiers, who gave the state its name, are proverbially inquisitive. They are said to have got their nickname, because they could not pass a house without pulling the latchstring and crying out, [‘]Who’s here?’” (Schele de Vere, 1872, p. 659) Schele de Vere also mentions *husher*, “an equivalent of the modern ‘bully.’” (Schele de Vere, 1872, p. 659) But “proverbially inquisitive?” Really? Crying at the cabin door from the outside? Not a question asked from the inside? And in sparsely settled country there might not have been a lot latchstrings, but tugging at each would hardly hasten a journey.

Cyrus W. Hodgin, a professor of history at Earlham College, writes from personal experience in his *The Naming of Indiana*.

But to my mind, the most probable explanation is that the word is a corruption of “Who’s here?” In my childhood, in the back woods of Randolph County, I often heard the response, “Who’s here?” to the rap on the door late at night, after the “latch string” had been drawn in. The word *here*, however, was pronounced as if speaking the word *her*, the sound of *y* had been inserted between the *h* and the *e*, making it *hyer*. “Who’s hyer,” or “Who’s yer,” as it was generally abridged, was a common response to rap of the visitor late at night. “Who’s yer” easily took the form “Hoosier.” (Hodgin, 1903, p. 12-13)

O. H. Smith tells a good story in his *Early Indiana Trials and Sketches*.

The night was dark, the rain falling in torrents, when the inmates of a small log cabin, in the woods of early Indiana, were aroused from their slumbers by a loud knocking at the only door of the cabin. The man of the house, as he had been accustomed to do on like occasions, rose from his bed and hallooed, “Who’s here?” The outsiders answered, “Friends, out bird-catching. Can we stay till morning?” The door was opened, and the strangers entered. A good log fire soon gave light and warmth to the room. Stranger to the host, “What did you say when I knocked?” “I said who’s here.” “I thought you said *Hoosier*.” The bird-catchers left after breakfast, but next night returned, and hallooed at the door, “Hoosier,” and from that time the Indianians have been called *Hoosiers*—a name that will stick to them as long as *Bucheyes* [sic] will to Ohioans, or *Suckers* to Illinoisans. (Smith, 1858, p. 450)

Not everyone agrees with the “Who’s here?” theory. George S. Cottman, founder of the *Indiana Magazine of History*, finds Smith’s story “far from satisfactory.” He adds, “Even if he



got such an answer, and thereafter hailed his rural host as ‘Hoosier,’ it is not easy to see why others should take it up, and why, as Mr. Smith assures us, ‘from that time the Indianians have been called Hoosiers.’” (Cottman, 1901, p. 6) Arthur Waldhorn, who preferred the *hoozer* theory as “most plausible,” called the “Who’s here?” and the husher explanation “patent examples of folk etymology.” (Waldhorn, 1956, p. 80) Dunn, too, had his doubts.

And there is no greater evidence of the use of the expression, “Who’s yere?” when approaching a house. As a matter of fact, the common custom when coming to a house and desiring communication with the residents was to call, “Hallo the house!” And this custom is referred to in Finley’s line:

He hailed the house, and then alighted

Furthermore, if a person who came to a house called “Who’s yere?” what cause would there be for calling the people who lived in the house “who’s yeres?” There is neither evidence nor reason to support it. (Dunn, 1907, p. 12-13)

John S. Farmer agrees and finds that “This fanciful derivation, however, may probably be dismissed with scant consideration, although Kentuckians insist it is a true one.” (Farmer, 1889, p. 304)

Indians figured in a letter to the North Vernon *Plain Dealer* of September 12, 1995. The writer’s father had told her when she was a child that “this happened way back when people were still fearful a few Indians might still be lurking about. When someone knocked on their doors, they would say, ‘Who is there?’ They were so frightened and said it so fast it sounded like ‘Who’s ther.’ This became to sound like ‘Hoosier’ and so this is how Indiana became known as the Hoosier state.”

A letter from Mr. H. P. G., of Newark, N. Y. to the *Christian Herald* (Vol. 29, no. 2. March 14, 1906) offers a variant on the “who’s here” theory.

When the Prairie Schooner, close on the heels of the Indian, invaded the small prairies of Northern Indiana, families camping in the tall Buffalo grass could hear but not see each other. They would hail, “Who’s there?” and from that originated “Hoos-ier.” This is from a pioneer of Northern Indiana.

The more usual “Who’s here,” becomes “who’s there.” A camp in a field of Buffalo grass replaces a cabin. No one is visiting or surveying or pulling latches. And the tale takes place in northern Indiana, not southern Indiana.

### **Samuel Hoosier**

Samuel Hoosier, Sam Hoosier, or just plain a man named Hoosier, it is said, was a contractor for the canal at the Falls of the Ohio (the Louisville and Portland Canal). He preferred to hire men from the Indiana side of the river, because he found them to be harder workers than those from Kentucky. These men became known as “Hoosier men” or “Hoosier’s men.” Eventually



the term shortened to “Hoosier” and “Hoosiers” and generalized into a term for all residents of Indiana.

After discarding other theories, the Indiana volume of the WPA Guide series, *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, supports the Samuel Hoosier theory.

Perhaps the most likely version springs from the fact that in 1825 there was a contractor on the Ohio Falls Canal at Louisville named Samuel Hoosier. He found that men from the Indiana side of the river suited him better than the immigrants usually hired for such work and gave them preference. Soon his gangs were composed largely of Indianians, with the result that they became known as ‘the Hoosier men,’ and later simply as ‘Hoosiers.’ When they returned to their homes the name naturally went with them. No matter how the term originated, Indianians are always Hoosiers everywhere. (Federal Writers’ Program, 1941, p. 4)

Like other sources that find the contractor theory attractive and term it “probable” or “most likely,” the *Guide* offers no proof of Sam Hoosier’s existence. That no such canal builder has ever been found (and Dunn searched vigorously for him) in no way discourages those who prefer this eponymous explanation.

Under the headline “Bayh Shows he’s a Hoosier Quiz Kid” the *Chicago Sun-Times* of July 6, 1989 reported on Governor Evan Bayh’s appearance on “The Pat Sajak Show.” The governor answered questions about Indiana and explained that the term “hoosier” derives from the canal builder, Samuel Hoosier, who “favored workers in Indiana and they became known as Hoosiers.” With state pride in his heart and politics on his mind, Bayh continued, “We’d like to think it’s synonymous with good workers.”

Senator Vance Hartke introduced into the *Congressional Record* an item by Sydney J. Harris, a columnist at the *Chicago Daily News*. Harris cites the Hoosier contractor story, mentions others, and alludes to “three or four other ‘reliable’ attributions ... not fit to be printed in a family newspaper.” Headed “Hoosiers Wear Name With Pride,” the article concludes, “All we can be sure of is that people can make or break a name, and that Indianans have worn the name of ‘Hoosier’ so proudly that it is a badge of honor rather than a slur.” (*Congressional Record*, June 16, 1975, p. S18983) Hartke also caused to be printed (there being no objection) an article he had introduced into the *Record* on February 26, 1966, “‘Hoosier,’ a Word with History All Around It.” (The same article with the same title had appeared earlier in the *Record*, in 1949, thanks to Senator Homer Capehart.)

Governor Robert Orr avoided taking a position on the origin of the term “hoosier” in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal* of April 27, 1987 (“First Hoosier Gets in Last Word”). After all, why risk offending anyone, voters for instance? He writes, “Even Webster doesn’t deign to delve too deeply into the meaning of Hoosier.” (Actually Webster does, just not in the dictionary the governor was using, if he was using one.) Orr dodges with the comment, “So I feel I am in distinguished company to contend that there is no real root from which we Indiana natives have been dubbed Hoosiers. It is preferable that it remain a mystery and is far more exciting,



therefore, to Hoosiers.” Apparently more exciting still is the opportunity to extol “Hoosier Hospitality.”

We make no mystery, however, of the fact that we are a friendly tribe and truly proud to be known for our “Hoosier hospitality.” Webster does a thorough job of defining hospitality as the act of welcoming guests with warmth and generosity; being well disposed toward strangers; having an open and charitable mind. That is a Hoosier, and that is what we’d prefer to have remembered about the name rather than trying to trace its etymology.

To be fair, one politician, William Hudnut, the Mayor of Indianapolis, bravely bit the bullet in his autobiography *Minister/Mayor*. In the first chapter, “The Guy who Stole the Colts,” he discusses the Hoosier Dome (the RCA Dome, after the sale of naming rights, and later demolished) and how its name was chosen. Hudnut briefly reviews various theories of the word “hoosier,” then admits, “At any rate, many people did not—and do not—like the word, for they believe it to be a pejorative term, a derogatory name implying country bumpkin or frontier hick. Consequently, when we finally announced the name ‘Hoosier Dome,’ some people in the press complained, asking how we could possibly have chosen such a dumb name for such a beautiful building.

But I liked it. To me it was an inclusive and generic name for Indiana.” (Hudnut, 1987, p. 17)

Politicians aside, others, like the *Guide*, favor the Samuel Hoosier theory. In their *College Nicknames*, Joanne Sloan and Cheryl Watts tell readers, “One explanation which seems to have more validity than others involves a Samuel Hoosier, a contractor on the Louisville and Portland (Ohio Falls) Canal. In 1825, he found that men from the Indiana side of the river were better diggers and thus hired more of them for his work force. They were known as ‘the Hoosier men,’ and later on as ‘Hoosiers,’ a name they carried back to their homes.” (Sloan and Watts, 1993, p. 129)

A puff piece by Alexander Wolff on Steve Alford, “That Championship Touch,” appeared in the April 13, 1987 issue of *Sports Illustrated*. It emphasizes the Indiana University basketball player’s hard work and dedication to the sport. When he mentions the word hoosier, Wolff naturally has to say, in keeping with the adulatory tone of his article, “it probably came from Samuel Hoosier, a canal builder on the Ohio River during the early 19th century, whose Indiana laborers were admired for their industry.” (Wolff, 1987, p. 37)

“Mr. George van Blaricum, an old resident of Indianapolis,” George S. Cottman wrote in *The Indianapolis Press*, February 6, 1901, had travelled to southern Tennessee where he met a number of people named Hoosier. One of them, a John Hoosier, assured him “that the sobriquet of the Indianians was derived directly from this surname.”

An uncle of his—Samuel Hoosier—he affirmed, was a contractor on the Louisville and Portland, or Falls, Canal. He employed many laborers, and, finding that men from the Indiana side of the river were more to his liking than the Irish and other foreigners customarily hired in canal work, he gave them the preference; those first employed being



followed by their relatives, friends and neighbors, until Hoosier's gang became distinguished as a wholly Indiana crowd. They were further distinguished or classed by being called the Hoosier men, or the Hoosiers, from the name of their employer, and as they dispersed back to their homes, they carried with them and spread abroad this appellation. (Cottman, 1901, p. 6)

The tale is familiar, and Cottman observes, "All that can be established for this claim is plausibility." (Cottman, 1901, p. 6)

## **Hussar**

The name of Colonel John Jacob Lehmanowsky (or Lehmanowski, or Lehmenosky or Leminousky) usually attaches to the "Hussar" theory. Lehmanowsky, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, lectured on his wartime experiences, and as he did, so the story goes, he pronounced the word "Hussar" as "Hoosier." A variant has it that those listening to his "Wars of Europe" talks heard "Hoosier" when the Colonel uttered "Hussar." A second variant proposes that men who used the word "Hussar" while boasting of their prowess as fighters mispronounced the word as "Hoosier." The Reverend Aaron Wood buys into one of the Lehmanowsky tales and records it as absolute truth.

The name "Hoosier" originated as follows: When the young men of the Indiana side of the Ohio river went to Louisville, the Kentucky men boasted over them, calling them "New Purchase Greenies," claiming to be a superior race, composed of "half horse, half alligator, and tipped off with snapping-turtle." These taunts produced fights in the market-house and streets of Louisville.

On one occasion a stout bully from Indiana was victor in a fist fight, and having heard Colonel Leminousky [sic] lecture of the "Wars of Europe," who always gave martial prowess to the German Hussars in a fight with the Russian Cossacks, pronouncing hussars "Hoosiers," the Indianian, when the Kentuckian cried 'enough,' jumped up and said, "I am a Hoosier." And hence the Indianians were called by that name. This was its true origin. I was in the State when it occurred. (Wood, 1883, p. 45)





“10<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars from 1819-1831”

R.S. Liddell. *The Memoirs of the Tenth Royal Hussars*, London; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1891, following p. 196

Reverend Wood offers a first-hand account, sort of, if you count being “in the state,” as being on the spot and believe it. But where did the “stout bully” hear Lehmanowsky? When? Dunn tried to follow Lehmanowsky’s whereabouts and declared, “The chief objection that has been urged to this theory is that Lehmanowsky was not in the State when the term began to be used, and the evidence on this point is not very satisfactory.” (Dunn, 1919, p. 1133) He adds, “These data would indicate that he came to Indiana sometime before 1830. The date of the deed to his farm, as shown by the Rush county records, is April 30, 1835.” (Dunn, 1919, p. 1133) Yet, according to the census rolls Lehmanowsky and his family were living in Washington, DC in 1830. Was Dunn perhaps being a little too generous? Maybe. But he does conclude that “it is not credible that a Polish officer pronounced ‘hussar’ ‘hoosier,’ or that from the use of that word by a known foreigner a new term could spring into existence, and so quickly be applied to the natives of the State where he chanced to live.” (Dunn, 1919, p. 1133)

A version of the Reverend Wood’s story appeared in the Saturday, January 28, 1860 *Rochester Sentinel* (Rochester, Indiana).

ORIGIN OF THE “HOOSIERS.”—In a recent lecture upon “The Unwritten History of Indiana,” the Rev. Aaron Wood gave the following as the origin of the word “Hoosier.”



“Louisville was a great resort for the Indiana folks, and very frequently rows would occur. The Kentucky bullies would swear they were ‘half hoss, half alligator and the balance snappin’ turtle.’ On a certain occasion a Mr. Short, who had heard old Col. Lehmenosky [sic] lecture on the wars of Napoleon, in which he related the battles of the Cossacks and Hussars, (the Col. pronounced it Hoosars) was in Louisville, and got into a muss, when he jumped up and swore he was a Hoosar; since which time we have been called Hoosiers.”

The story was making the rounds. The January 7, 1860 *Weekly Vincennes Western Sun* and the January 12, 1860 *Connersville Weekly Times* had previously printed it. And the January 25, 1860 *Weekly Council Bluffs Bugle* (Council Bluffs, Iowa) carried “Why Indianians Are Called Hoosiers,” with the statement that the Rev. Aaron Wood had “recently delivered a course of lectures in Greencastle on ‘The Unwritten History of Indiana.’”

Oscar Short recounts a family tradition involving his grandfather, Jacob Short, and his grandfather’s brother, Aaron, both of whom worked on the Falls of the Ohio canal. An incident occurred in 1830, when Aaron, it seems, accepted a challenge to fight from a big Irishman. Aaron emerged the victor, and in celebration leapt, kicked his feet together twice, and yelled, “Hurrah for the Hoosier.” Short adds that perhaps he meant “Hurrah for the Husher.” Or “Hussar,” mispronouncing the word “for hired British soldiers” as “hooser [sic].” He concludes, “... he and his crowd were, from that day forward, referred to as ‘Hoosiers.’ The name spread to all others living on the Indiana side of the Ohio and finally to all living within the boundaries of the State.” (Short, 1929, p. 102)

Short tells an interesting story, doubly interesting in that it combines several theories: canal workers, hussar, husher, and a variant of huzza! In his tale, though, the name Lehmanowsky does not appear.

Lehmanowsky, it seems, was an able speaker who knew how to work a crowd. An account published in the *National Intelligencer* and reprinted in the *Alexandria Gazette* of October 29, 1831 describes his style at a meeting of the friends of Poland.

Several speakers had addressed the meeting, some of them very eloquently, and all with effect, when Colonel LEHMANOWSKY arose and stated that he was a Pole by birth, but had the honor of being a citizen of the United States. Imagine a man of Herculean statue, with the bold, frank bearing of an old soldier, addressing a large assembly, amongst which are many ladies. He has just enough of a foreign accent to remind you that it is a Pole pleading for unhappy, heroic Poland—tears are slowly trickling down his face, and he says:

“I have seen much misfortune in my time, but it could never make me weep; now, I cannot restrain my tears, for I am pleading the cause of my native land before the inhabitants of a city which bears the name of Washington, and in his name I ask of you to aid the cause of liberty. —God is my witness! that, if ever the freedom of my adopted country should be threatened, I would shed the last drop of my blood in its defence. Yes! —and THIS BOY should also fight for America!” As he uttered these last words, he held up his son, a fine spirited-looking lad of about ten years of age. All this may look simple



upon paper, but the effect upon the meeting was electric; long, loud, and hearty cheering followed. Surely, thought I, this answers Demosthenes' definition of oratory; it is indeed "action!"

John Jacob Lehmanowsky was born in Warsaw in 1773. After university training he left Poland for France and spent twenty-two years in the service of the armies of Napoleon. Following the French defeat at Waterloo, the restored Bourbon regime imprisoned him for plotting the Emperor's return from Elba and, along with Marshal Ney, condemned him to be shot. But he escaped and found refuge in America, first in eastern Pennsylvania, later in Washington City and finally in Indiana, where he purchased a farm near Knightridge in Henry County and "cultivated the land until 1837." (Morris, 1878, p. 242)

The colonel had converted from Judaism to Lutheranism when a student, and while in Washington became an elder of the United German Evangelical Church (1834). In 1836 he was ordained in Boone County, Kentucky, by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West. At first he taught. Eventually he became active in the Immigrant Friend's Society. He preached, with some emphasis on temperance, but his lectures on Napoleon brought him more fame, and more money. He appears in newspapers of the 1840s lecturing on either or both topics in Boston, Columbus (Ohio), Milwaukee, Trenton (NJ), New Orleans, Philadelphia, and other cities. Apparently he greatly appreciated the German Hussars, although the Empress Josephine, whom he admired, also figured notably in his lectures. He died in Sellersburg, Indiana, on January 4, 1858. "He was well known throughout the West as a preacher and lecturer." (*Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, January 22, 1858)

#### LECTURES.

**C**OL. LEHMANOWSKY, formerly an Officer in Napoleon's Army, has the honor to acquaint the Ladies and Gentlemen of Columbus, that he will deliver a course of LECTURES, commencing this evening at 7 1/2 o'clock, and will continue the same to-morrow and Monday evenings, at the City Hall

The subject of the Lectures will be, the character, disposition and manners of Napoleon while in the military school, in the army and cabinet, intermixed with Original Anecdotes—Madame Josephine, Empress, and first wife of Napoleon; her character, disposition, and manners, with anecdotes; likewise, who were her enemies, and the true causes which brought on the divorce between her and Napoleon. The cause of Napoleon's fall and exile to St. Helena; his and Madame Josephine's death.

Admittance to each Lecture, 25 cts.

Aug. 11, 1843.

Advertisement for a Lehmanowsky Lecture, Admittance 25 cents  
*Ohio Statesman*. August 16, 1843

The Rev. W. A. Sadtler, Ph.D, presents his *Under Two Captains: A Romance of History* as an autobiography, written by Lehmanowsky in his ripe old age. The conceit is thin (Yes, we get it, the Emperor and the Lord) and the style smug. In Chapter IV (Westward Ho) the presumed



Reverend Colonel himself tells the hussar story and takes full credit for giving Indianans their nickname. For good measure he thumbs his nose at the “learned men” who have sought a different origin of “hoosier.”

In this connection I may mention an amusing incident that occurred somewhat later in a town in Kentucky where I happened to be for a day or two. There was a drunken brawl in progress on the street, and as quite a number were involved in it, the people with whom I was speaking began to be alarmed. I remarked just then that a few hussars would soon quiet them. My remark was caught up by some by-stander, and the word hussar construed to mean the men of the State of Indiana (from which I had just come), and thus the word “Hoosier” came into existence. Such is the irony of Fate! Learned men have labored long to introduce some favored word of the most approved classic derivation, and as a rule they have failed. Here a chance word of mine, miscalled by an ignorant loafer, catches the popular fancy and passes into literature. (Sadler, 1902, p. 188-189)

Julia Henderson Levering introduces a slight twist to the usual hussar theory. Like others she begins by noting the origin of the name hoosier “is lost in the twilight of the wilderness.” But to her, hoosier may be “a corruption of ‘Hussar,’ as applied to deserters from the ranks of the hirelings in the British army of the Revolution ...” (Levering, 1909, p. 366) Lehmanowsky does not appear. Her heart is not entirely in the Hussar theory, though. “At all events,” she writes, “the word has always been used by trans-Alleghany pioneers as a general term to designate a verdant or uncouth person, and later to outlanders, living across the Ohio River. In time it became attached to the extreme border territory of that period; which happening to be Indiana and Southern Illinois, it clung to that section.” (Levering, 1909, p. 366)

George S. Cottman questions the Hussar-Lehmanowsky connection, “But unfortunately the term occurs familiarly in literature as early as 1830, whereas Lehmanowski [sic] did not come with his lectures until years after that; hence these accounts are quite out of court.” (Cottman, 1901, p. 6)

## Hoosa

The “Hoosa” theory appears often enough but usually gets only a short mention, with the simple definition of “Hoosa” as “an Indian word for corn,” that precise phrase, without identifying which Indians or citing any authority. Some accounts, though, add the detail that boatmen carrying corn (hoosa) downriver were called “hoosa men,” hence hoosiers. Mike Lessiter in *The College Names of the Games* cites Governor Wright’s claim that “the term was derived from the Indian word, *hoosa*, which meant corn and that the Indiana flatboaters utilizing the Ohio and Mississippi rivers came to be known as hoosa men.” (Other sources, Aley and Aley, for example, at p. 277 place the Governor in the “Who’s here?” camp; Sulgrove does, too, at p. 72) Lessiter adds, “The only problem with this theory is that no one has ever been able to come up with such an Indian word.” (Lessiter, 1989, p. 82) The Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth sometimes appears in the “Hoosa” story, because, apparently, he was told while visiting Indianapolis in 1852 that “it [hoosier] came from *hoosa* the Indian name for corn.” (Havighurst, 1962, p. 324)



James Weygand records a rare story about hoosa, the truth of which he readily discounts.

In connection with hoosa there is a cock and bull story that in early times hoosa was some powerful stuff on which the redskins got very tight. So they named the paleface purveyors of the same—the French traders—hoosas. (Weygand, 1950, p. 18)

Corn squeezins and Frenchmen?

## Hoose

The English dialect word “Hoose” means roundworm, a disease of cattle, sheep and goats that gives the animals a peculiar, wild look. Many sources cite this term as a possible explanation of hoosier’s origin, and Dunn in his *Indiana and Indianans* gives a concise description. “The symptoms of this disease,” he says, “include staring eyes, rough coat with hair turned backward, and hoarse wheezing. So forlorn an aspect might readily suggest giving the name “hooser” or “hoosier” to an uncouth, rough-looking person. (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1143) Dunn does not believe it for a moment, though, and moves on to other matters.

The parasitic disease, also known as “husk,” presents more than a forlorn aspect. The animal is desperate to breathe. A section in the 1878 *Transactions* of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland describes a condition where “... the whole balance of functional arrangement is disturbed, the animal assumes a miserable appearance; the calf has a harsh staring coat, and the wool of the lamb is “clapped,” and probably falling off in patches; and as the cough continues to disturb the animals, they roam about uncomfortably, seeking rest and finding none—a number thus affected creating a continuous and distressing noise. (Highland and Agricultural Society, 1878, p. 206)

George Colgate contributed “On the Husk or Hoose in Cattle” in the form of a letter to *The Entomological Magazine* in 1835. He records, “The symptoms were precisely similar, being cough, with frothy discharge at the mouth, short breathing, weeping of the eyes, hanging of the head and ears, and continual inclination to rub the throat either on the ground or over a rail fence.” (Colgate, 1836, p. 433)

Ronald Baker records a story that adds coonskin caps and homemade whiskey to the “hoose” theory. The disease, as others attest, “causes the calves’ hair to turn back, and it gives them a wild, staring look.” Fair enough. Then comes the kicker. “The coonskin caps which the pioneer men and boys wore made their hair lay funny, and the homemade whiskey produced a wild-eyed look.” (Baker, 1982, p. 175) Hence, of course, the word “hoosier” to describe the unkempt, boozy bumpkins, who were the early residents of Indiana. Coonskin caps, funny hair, whiskey, and hoose? A rich combination. Baker makes no judgement. It was just something he found.

## Who’s Ear?



Dunn quotes the Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley as saying in a conversation, “These stories commonly told about the origin of the word ‘Hoosier’ are all nonsense. The real origin is found in the pugnacious habits of the early settlers. They were vicious fighters, and not only gouged and scratched, but frequently bit off noses and ears. This was so ordinary an affair that a settler coming into a bar room on a morning after a fight, and seeing an ear on the floor, would merely push it aside with his foot and carelessly ask, ‘Who’s year?’” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1133) Many sources credit Riley with making up the story because he had tired of explaining the origin of “Hoosier” to the curious. Dunn merely reports the tale and wryly adds, “... this theory is quite as plausible, and almost as well sustained by historical evidence, as any of the others.” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1133)

From the tavern, the ear story transferred to the gridiron. Murray Sperber writes that Knute Rockne, the legendary football coach of Notre Dame, when asked about the origin of “Hoosier,” replied in terms of his team and its fighting spirit, “After every game, the [Notre Dame] coach goes over the field, picks up what he finds, and asks his team, ‘Whose ear is this?’ Hence Hoosier.” (Sperber, 1984, p. 81) Coach Forrest “Phog” Allen of the University of Kansas, although better known as a basketball coach, relates the same sort of story.

When scrimmaging, these Indiana boys would grind their opponents’ heads into the earth with disastrous results. After the scrimmage, players would go about picking up the loose ears of their opponents and saying, “Whose ears?”

Ever since, Indiana teams have been known as Hoosiers. (Allen, 1947, p. 105)

Less often heard is a story that Baker includes in his *Hoosier Folk Legends*, “Who’s Ear in the Jar?”

When my dad was running for office this man was telling me how the name Hoosier came about. He said it was when the state capital was in Corydon. There was a tavern that most of the people went to and there was a jar on the bar that had an ear in it, and when strangers came in they would ask, “Whose Ear?” In time the phrase became popular and was eventually shortened to Hoosier for a nickname for people that came from around there. (Baker, 1982, p. 174)

In a jar? On a bar? No mayhem on the playing field? No carnage on the tavern floor?

A somewhat more bloodthirsty account appears in a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 1987. (That NCAA championship game really did cause a remarkable surge of interest in the word Hoosier.) John Pfister, offended by an earlier letter, writes, “When Indiana was the Wild West, settlers and Indians often took vengeance on one another by cutting off the ears of their enemies. These ears were often worn on belts and found later on dead warriors. A standing joke was made of the phrase ‘Whose ear?’ which was quickly picked up by the residents of Indiana as their nickname.” The introduction of Indians into the “Whose ear?” theory is unusual, as is the belt hanging with severed ears.



## Houssières

The best sources on “Hoosier” give at least a passing mention to the suggestion that the term may derive from the French word *houssières*, which is usually translated as “holly plantation” or “bushy places.” Collot’s *Dictionary* defines it as “places thick with hollies, bushy places.” (Collot, 1856, p. 449) And most often the word appears in the plural form. Since the ending “ier” is rare in English and common in French, the reasoning must have run, it would only be sensible to look to the language of those who pioneered the wilds beyond the British colonies.

James Weygand considers the *houssières* theory, among others, first connecting it to French settlers and later to flatboatmen.

But other folks blame it all on the French settlers. They say the word is a backwoods corruption of the French ‘houssieres’ which in plain English means bushy places. Or more loosely places or clearings lush with tangles of prickly shrubs, or briars. (Weygand, 1950, p. 14-15) ... So when their boatmen got to New Orleans and were ask [sic] where they hailed from they replied, ‘from the houssieres up the river’—from the braired [sic] clearings up north. Thus houssieres crept into use as a general term for scrubby settlements on the Ohio and Wabash and for their inhabitants. And sooner or later those shaggy boatmen made houssieres just plain hoo-shers, or hoosiers. (Weygand, 1950, p. 15)

Charles Collins, reviewing *The Indiana Home* by Logan Esarey in the *Chicago Tribune* of August 29, 1943, supports the French connection.

This book does not discuss the origin of the term, “Hoosier,” which is a mystery. No acceptable explanation has been offered. Therefore we have decided to solve the riddle. The earliest white folks in Indiana were French; moreover the English speaking settlers had connections, thru their flatboat river trade, with the French of Louisiana. “Find a French word,” we thought, “that resembles Hoosier.” We found it in less than a minute. It is *houssières*, which means “bushy places.” These pioneers from the Indian forests were, to the French, the Men of the Bushy Places, *i. e.*, backwoodsmen [sic], *houssières*. If this explanation is not the right one, it is so plausible that it ought to be right. This is its first time in print to our knowledge.

Mr. Collins is a really sharp guy, isn’t he? In less than a minute he solved the riddle.

Oddly there is a letter (quoted more fully later) from Dennis Hanks, Abraham Lincoln’s cousin, to William Herndon describing the Indiana wilderness. He writes, “I will jest Say to you that it was the Brushes Cuntry that I have Ever Seen...” (Wilson, 1998, p. 235) Brushiest? Bushiest? Bushy? It might give a person pause, but probably not for long.

## Hoozer



Under the entry “Hoozer” in William Dickinson’s *A Glossary of the Words and Phrases Pertaining to the Dialect of Cumberland* (1899) appears the phrase: “Said of anything unusually large.” Dunn found the same word and definition in Joseph Wright’s *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1902), and the Cumberland dialect term interested him greatly.

Although I had long been convinced that “hoosier,” or some word closely resembling it, must be an old English dialect or slang word, I had never found any trace of a similar substantive with this ending until in this publication, and, in my opinion, this word “hoozer” is the original form of our “hoosier.” It evidently harks back to the Anglo-Saxon “hoo” for its derivation. It might naturally signify a hill-dweller or highlander as well as something large, but either would easily give rise to the derivative idea of uncouthness and rusticity.” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1146)

In the sturgeon story (“A Real Hoosier”) from the *Northwestern Pioneer and St. Joseph’s Intelligencer* of April 4, 1832, Dunn finds confirmation of his notions about the nature of the word hoosier.

This publication accords with my conclusion, in 1907, that the word had been applied to residents of Indiana for some time before it appeared in print, and that it was originally a Southern slang or dialect word, signifying a rude or uncouth rustic. The publishers, of *The Northwestern Pioneer and St. Joseph’s Intelligencer*, at that time, were John D. and Jos. H. Defrees, who were Tennesseans, and no doubt familiar with the use of the word in the South. (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1153)

Dunn attempts to strengthen his case by listing the number of Cumberlands (plateau, mountain, river, gap, Presbyterians) in the South and by reminding readers that many of the settlers of the Cumberland Plateau came from Cumberland County, England. “Thence,” he says, “it was probably brought to us by their migratory descendants, many of whom settled in the upper Whitewater Valley—the home of John Finley.” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. II, p. 1146) Most serious works cite Dunn’s “hoozer” conjecture. He may be right, but his judgment should not lead the Morrisises in their *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins* to state flatly, without discussion, that the word “derives from the Cumberland dialect word hoozer, meaning anything unusually large.” (Morris and Morris, 1977, p. 291.) And although it mentions “uncertain origin,” *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*” (which repeats the 1826 dating error) also admits only Dunn’s Cumberland source in its short entry for “hoosier.” (Barnhart, 1988, p. 490)

*A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* endorses Dunn and a derivation from hoozer. It finds, “The most plausible of the many theories about the origin of this term is that advanced by Jacob Piatt Dunn (see his *Indiana and Indianans*, II. 1121-55) who relates it to the Cumberland dialect word *hoozer* (see *EDD*) used of anything unusually large.” (Mathews, 1951, p. 830) *Names & Nicknames of Places & Things* also supports the hoozer theory. Under the heading “Hoosier State, the,” it reads, “The official nickname of Indiana, so called either in reference to *hoozer* ‘hill dweller’ or ‘highlander,’ or to the settlers, who were said to be so inquisitive that they pulled the latchstring of any new house they passed by and yelled ‘who’s here?’” (*Names & Nicknames*, 1987, p. 129) Missing, though, is a reference to something large, or even to “hoo,” which would help explain why *hoozer* might mean hill dweller and



become the root of hoosier. Interestingly, the entry also specifies that those inquisitive early hoosiers did not pull the latchstring of all houses but of “any new house they passed,” a detail not mentioned elsewhere. (*Names & Nicknames*, 1987, p. 129)

The entry for Indiana in Stuart Berg Flexner’s *I Hear America Talking*, describes hoosier as “being a dialect word for big, hence ‘big man, mountaineer’ (the area was settled by mountaineers from Kentucky).” (Flexner, 1976, p. 338) The mountaineer comment seems borrowed from Brewer (1971), or from the *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1964).

*More Word Histories and Mysteries: From Aardvark to Zombie* favors the hoozer theory much the way Berg does. It identifies the dialect word and extends its application to the putative size of frontier settlers. Along the way, the entry repeats the erroneous dating of hoosier’s debut in written form.

The origins of Hoosier are rather obscure, but the most likely possibility is that the term is an alteration of hoozer, an English dialect word recorded in the Cumberland, a former county of northwest England, in the late nineteenth century and used to refer to anything unusually large. ... The first recorded instance of *Hoosier* meaning “Indiana resident” is dated 1826; however, it seems possible that senses of the word recorded later in the *Dictionary of Americanisms*, including “a big, burly, uncouth specimen or individual; a frontiersman, countryman, rustic,” reflect the kind of use the word had before it settled in Indiana. (*More Word Histories and Mysteries*, 2006, p. 111)

Not all are satisfied with Hoozer and its extended meaning. Anatoly Liberman, writing online for the *Oxford Etymologist* blog (OUPblog), remarks, “Dunn’s attempt to derive *Hoosier* from a word recorded in Cumberland, with the resulting meaning ‘a large man,’ has little to recommend it: the connection is tenuous, the original Hoosiers hardly got their name from their physique.” (Liberman, 2008, online)

### **Huzza!**

Irving Leibowitz contributes to the “Huzza!” theory in his *My Indiana*. He writes, “The Indiana men who manned the flatboats on the Ohio River were athletic and pugnacious and were accustomed, when on the levees of the Southern cities, to jump up and crack their heels together and shout ‘huzza!’” (Leibowitz, 1964, p. 186) Baker and Carmony mention the theory, too, in their *Indiana Place Names*, but they refer to the cry as “an exclamation of early settlers.” (Baker and Carmony, 1975, p. 72) Mencken also comments on “Huzza!”

In 1851, when the Hon. Amelia M. Murray, the English tourist, visited Indianapolis, she picked up the story that the term “originated in a settler’s exclaiming ‘Huzza!’ upon gaining victory over a marauding party from a neighboring State,” but Dunn, in 1907, dismissed this as moonshine. (Mencken, 1965, p. 619)



## Husher

Bartlett's 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms* defines Hoosier as "A nickname given at the West to a native of Indiana." It continues with an example that declares "hoosier" derives from a corruption of "husher," a term for bully.

A correspondent of the Providence Journal, writing from Indiana, gives the following account of the origin of this term: "Throughout all the early Western settlements were men who rejoiced in their physical strength, and on numerous occasions, at log-rollings and house-raisings, demonstrated this to their entire satisfaction. They were styled by their fellow citizens, 'hushers,' from their primary capacity to still their opponents. It was a common term for bully throughout the west. The boatmen of Indiana were formerly as rude and as primitive a set that could well belong to a civilized country, and they were often in the habit of displaying their accomplishments upon the Levee at New Orleans. Upon a certain occasion there, one of these rustic professors of the 'noble art' very adroitly and successfully practised the 'fancy' upon several individuals at one time. Being himself not a native of this Western world, in the exuberance of his exultation, he sprang to his feet, exclaiming 'I'm a hoosier, I'm a hoosier.' Some of the New Orleans papers reported the case, and afterwards transferred the corruption of the epithet 'husher' to all the boatmen from Indiana, and from thence to all her citizens." (Bartlett, 1848, p. 180)

After sweetly dismissing Barrère and Leland's nonsense about hoosieroons, Alfred Holt speaks of "the two leading guesses" in his *Phrase and Word Origins: A Study of Familiar Expressions*. First is the Husher theory ("the bully who 'hushed' his opponents"); the second is the "Who's yere?" question. "Or," he also says, "it may be from the Cumberland dialect, *hoozer*..." (Holt, 1961, p. 133) That he chose to use the word "guesses" (not even "theory" or "possibility") is refreshing. Others sometimes seem a bit too certain of their opinions, unless their tongues are in their cheeks.

John Ciardi proposes with some skepticism, "*Hoosier* may (???) be an alteration of *husher* in the sense 'powerhouse of a man'—as Hoosiers would still like the term to be received." Of course, he also speaks of "spook etymology" in the entry. (Ciardi, 1983, p. 138)

For his *Hoosier Folk Legends* Ronald L. Baker drew on the manuscript files of the WPA Indiana Federal Writers' Project and from the Folklore Archives at both Indiana University and Indiana State University. He presents nine stories under the heading "Hoosier: Origin of the State Nickname." The first story, "Hoosier is a Husher," involves Kentuckians who had settled in the newly opened public domain lands in Indiana. They returned home with "glowing accounts of the soil, the fine timber, the abundance of wild game ..." Of their listeners many "were the Pennsylvania Dutch, who had always lived in a mountainous region. They were especially incredulous. After listening to what they regarded as exaggerations, would turn away and say to others, 'Well, he's a hoosher' (meaning a husher, a silencer)." So, the "epithet became proverbial until all who returned from Indiana were facetiously called 'hooshers.'" (Baker, 1982, p. 171-172) The second tale, "Another Kind of Husher," concerns flatboat men who "were big enough to hush any man," hence hushers. (Baker, 1982, p. 172)



Ross F. Lockridge speaks of “hushers” in his *The Story of Indiana* as Ohio rivermen who could still or “hush” their opponents. He mentions “‘Who’s yere?’ with which Indiana pioneers greeted callers who hailed their cabins from the darkness” and accurately calls it the “more popular” theory. “Whichever its origins,” he concludes, “the term Hoosier was meant to describe the rough and sturdy backwoodsman of early Indiana...” (Lockridge, 1958, p. 233)

In *The Family Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge* F. M. Lupton gives little detail. He simply states, “This word is a corruption of husher, formerly a common term for bully throughout the West.” (Lupton, 1885, p. 489) John S. Farmer says much the same in his *Americanisms Old and New*, writing that husher “was a common term for bully throughout the West.” Farmer continues with text taken directly, word for word, from Bartlett’s 1848 dictionary. Although the story seems to amuse him, Farmer finds the husher theory “hardly more satisfactory” than other explanations. (Farmer, 1889, p. 304)

Chapter One of Heath Bowman’s *Hoosier* opens with the heading “What’s in a Name?” Bowman explains in story. He begins with the Ohio River and embroiders the adventures of Indiana boatmen in New Orleans, where the card sharps and prostitutes on the docks greeted the men with a roar of “*Hoozers!*” “The boys from Indiana took their measure. They knew what ‘hoozer’ meant: it was a common term of the South, whence most of them originally had come. It meant somebody who was tall and green and gawky, and ripped his side of meat apart instead of using a knife—things like that.” (Bowman, 1941, p. 15) The story continues, dramatically, with a brawl. When one of the Indiana boys returns home, he finds himself in another fight. Victorious, he says, “We don’t take to no argefying. We’re Hushers.” He explains further, “It means we kin ‘hush’ any rip-tail, screamin’ scrouger in this-hyar county. We’re half-men, half-alligators. We’re *Hushers*.” (Bowman, 1941, p. 16)

B. R. Sulgrove in his *History of Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana*, recounts a husher story.

It [“hoosier”] could not have been very old or generally known throughout the country if it originated, as the most credible accounts relate, in a fight among the bands employed in excavating the canal around the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville. Some big Irishman, after keeping out of the shindy as long as he could stand it, at last went in and knocked down four or five of the other party in quick succession. Jumping up in high glee he cracked his heels together, and shouted, “I’m a husher.” The boast crossed the river, and was naturalized by the residents there, and thence passed all over the State and into other States. (Sulgrove, 1884, p. 72)

Sulgrove’s account mixes details seen in different theories, in this case the canal and the husher, and huzza! complete with heel-clicking.

In a speech reported in the *Indianapolis Journal* of January 20, 1860, the Hon. Jere Smith of Winchester also connects the canal and the husher.



My recollection is that the word began to be used in this country in the fall of 1824, but it might have been as late as 1826 or 1827, when the Louisville & Portland canal was being made. I first heard it at a corn-husking. It was used in the sense of “rip-roaring,” “half horse” and “half alligator,” and such like backwoods coinages. It was then, and for some years afterwards, spoken as if spelled “husher,” the “u” having the sound it has in “bush,” “push,” etc. In 1829, 1830 and 1831 its sound glided into “hoosher,” till finally Mr. Finley’s “Hoosier’s Nest” made the present orthography and pronunciation classical, and it has remained so since. (Dunn, 1907, p. 11)

Yet another account mixes traditions. What seems to begin as a story about the canal turns into the tale of a husher, although the word is never mentioned. And the husher is not the bully; he stills one. He also springs up, as in the Huzza! tales to proclaim himself a “Hoosier.” Then the boatmen turn up. All this appears in a letter from John Vawter to the *Franklin Democratic Herald* of January 19, 1860, reprinted in the July, 1958 issue of the *Indiana History Bulletin* under the title “That Word Hoosier Again.”

Hence, a number of laborers from Clarke, Orange, Harrison, and perhaps other counties in Indiana were accustomed to go and work on the canal, and while the workers were engaged in their work, it was often the case that a two-fisted bully of a man from Louisville or vicinity would come along the line of workers, knock up a row, whip several of the hands, and go away crowing. One of these bullies coming around one day, a man living in Harrison or Orange counties, who was a laborer on the canal, told his fellow men that if the bully said anything insulting to him or any of the crew, he would whip him. It so turned out the insult was offered, and the *poor Indianaian* gave the bully a most terrible thrashing; and when it was over, like a game chicken, he sprang upon the bank of the canal and swore by G-d that he was a “Hoosier.” From that circumstance, public papers of the day in the vicinity of the canal, and boatman [sic] up and down the river from that, called Indiana the “Hoosier State.” (Vawter, 1958, p. 88)

Mr. Vawter is quite certain about the truth of his statement and concludes his letter, “The writer knows the above to be the origin of the word “Hoosier.” (Vawter, 1958, p. 88)

Senator Homer Capehart added to the *Congressional Record* in the extension of remarks (February 22, 1949, p. A1008) “Hoosier! A Word with History All Around It” from the *Washington Times-Herald* (Washington, Indiana, not Washington, DC) of February 21, 1949. The senator gives no reason for his contribution, and there was no objection.

For 33 years, or ever since the Indiana centennial of 1916, historians, teachers, and research scholars here have been delving into pioneer archives seeking the origin of the distinctive nickname: Hoosier. It is a term of dignity and character, they conclude, and applies to anyone native to Indiana or who is a resident within the state’s borders.

The *Washington Times-Herald* gets off to a rocky start. Dunn had published his research a decade before the centennial, even earlier if you count the items he contributed to *Indianapolis News* in 1902. And others had turned their hand to the question as far back as 1833. As for a “term of dignity and character,” that statement is historically untrue. The unnamed scholars



mentioned in the article also “have concluded the word Hoosier means: An important caller, and a dignified, self-reliant person.” Really? Important caller? The over-inquisitive passers-by? The surveyors? The bird-catchers out at night? The random stranger who turns up at the “Hoosier’s Nest”?

The *Times-Herald* then introduces hussars and a “resplendent” Colonel Lehmanowsky. “It is said,” the item informs the reader, “Colonel Lemanowski [sic], a Polish hussar of the Napoleonic wars, appeared so resplendent in his uniform of military braid and decorations during a sojourn across the new state of Indiana that he inspired coonskin-capped riflemen of the frontier militia to glorify themselves as hussars, which they pronounced ‘Hoosier.’ The scholars declare that in the war with Mexico and long after the Civil War all parade soldiers in Indiana were called Hoosiers.”

If it was said, who, exactly, said it? Other accounts of Lemanowsky’s activity in the United States make no mention of impressive military finery. And the militia, with or without coonskin caps, in no other account has turned up and pronounced itself hussars. But wait! There is another possibility. A third school of thought suspects that a “southern group of immigrants gave the word to Indiana and remarks that it was popularized by riverman Mike Fink from Pittsburgh. He was a man of invincible strength who picked up the word ‘husher’ and used it often while travelling up and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.”

“There is not another like myself in all this country. I’m a hoosher,” the keelboatman is said to have remarked with gusto.

Hoosher was Mike’s pronunciation for “husher” meaning mighty man. Researchers found husher is out of the peculiar dialect in the Carolinas and Georgia, who hailed from Cumberland, England. “Husher” means big, important, large, able.

Steady on, here. Even newspapers are not supposed to make stuff up, unless they are tabloids devoted to conspiracy theories, alien abductions, Elvis sightings, celebrity sex scandals, or brazen political lunacy. Yet here we have mashed together all possible theories, outrageously pummeled and stretched, embroidered with unsupported details, confirmed by invisible authority, and reeking with the ghost of Mike Fink. The odd piece ends, at last, with “His [Fink’s] skill and gusto gave the word ‘hoosher’ real meaning as it became hoosier and denoted a unique individual of exceptional abilities, the historians declare.” (*Congressional Record*, February 22, 1949, p. A1008)

Egad! Who are these historians? These scholars? These researchers? And while Mike Fink (c. 1770-1823) may have exhibited a full measure of skill and gusto, his reputation is rather less respectable than the article suggests. In spite of his repute, or because of it, he earned his place in the *American National Biography*, where “The following Fink boast is often quoted: ‘I’m half wild horse and half cock-eyed alligator and the rest o’ me is crooked snags an’ red-hot snappin’ turtle. I can hit like fourth-proof lightnin’ an’ every lick I make in the woods lets in an acre o’ sunshine.’” (Gale, 1999, Vol. 7, p. 924) And those were his good qualities. The *ANB* has more to say about Mr. Fink and his comrades on the water.



Keelboatmen when off duty drank heavily, danced and fiddled, gambled, brawled, and consorted with rivertown women. Stories of their feats spread and evolved into legends. Fink, challenging all comers, was rated the champion keelboatman of all time and in all respects-until steamboats began to threaten, as early as about 1815, to render keelboats comparatively slow, inefficient, and costly. (Gale, 1999, Vol. 7, p. 923)

Mark Twain, also has a few words on the subject of rivermen when he writes about barges, keel-boats, and broadhorns in the chapter “Frescos from the Past” from *Life on the Mississippi*.

In time this commerce increased until it gave employment to hordes of rough and hardy men; rude, uneducated, brave, suffering terrific hardships with sailor-like stoicism; heavy drinkers, coarse frolickers in moral sties like the Natchez-under-the-hill of that day, heavy fighters, reckless fellows, every one, elephantinely jolly, foul-witted, profane; prodigal of their money, bankrupt at the end of the trip, fond of barbaric finery, prodigious braggarts; yet, in the main, honest, trustworthy, faithful to promises and duty, and often picturesquely magnanimous. (Twain, 1903, p. 15-16)

But Mike Fink? Did the keelboat king really help christen the state with its nickname? Is that possible?

In his *Hoosier: Variations on a Theme*, James Weygand defines husher as “a hayseed, a jerk, a seedy rustic clown.” He goes on, “And because smart alec strangers who held themselves a bit above common ordinary everyday frontiersmen, in their arrogance were calling all Indiana settlers hushers: hill-billies, hopelessly backwoodsy in all things...” (Weygand, 1950, p. 7) Weygand explains further with Pittsburgers prominent in the story.

Some of them for instance blamed it on the Pittsburgh boatmen, a crew of unsavory characters who brought their dirty coal barges down the Ohio River. They, it was said, had started the whole nasty affair back in the early 1820s when, for reasons of their own – jealousy, or perhaps rivalry – they got sore at the Indiana boatmen. And began calling them hushers, along with some other mean things. (Weygand, 1950, p. 7) ... But no matter where those Pittsburgers [sic] had found it; they made good use of it. It stuck to Indianians and hushers they became, those shaggy Indiana boatmen who floated their fat hogs and flour down the Wabash, the Ohio, and Mississippi to market in New Orleans. (Weygand, 1950, p. 8)

George S. Cottman makes an unusual suggestion concerning husher. He writes, “It is quite conceivable that Hoosier, if once introduced with a swaggering meaning, might have transformed into husher, but the reverse is not so conceivable.” (Cottman, 1901, p. 6) So, husher did not necessarily become Hoosier; instead Hoosier might have become husher?

## Unusual Suspects

### Huissier



A number of letters concerning the term “Hoosier,” prompted by the NCAA basketball tournament, appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* in the spring of 1987. Under the heading “Letters to the Editor: More Theories of Hoosier’s Root,” the *Journal* of March 26, 1987 published one from Carter Eltzroth.

The term is, of course, a corruption of the French “Huissier,” a minor magistrate in 18th-century Vincennes, the administrative center of the French colony that was to become Indiana. The word came into common usage when the huissier would announce himself when serving process or executing judgments. In addition, each member of the group of Frenchmen accompanying a huissier to resolve a dispute between settlers and Indians would be known without differentiation as a huissier.

Thus, huissier or Hoosier was used first to describe the magistrate, then any Frenchman, and finally any non-Indian. As Americans settled in Indiana, the name was applied to them and so it has remained to this day.

An editor’s note to Dunn’s 1905 article chides Dunn for dismissing too breezily a French origin of “hoosier.”

Mr. Dunn is sometimes over-positive in his statements. Mrs. Emma Carleton, of New Albany, calls our attention to the old French word *huissier*, as used by Sir Walter Scott in “The Abbott” (Chapter 18). The “huissier” was an usher; hence Mrs. Carleton suggests, with some plausibility, that the word might have attached to the first French occupants of Indiana, as the ushers of civilization, or that the use of it by them “might have been the lingual forefather of Hoosier.”—*The Editor*. (Dunn, 1905, note p. 94)

### **Hats and Socks**

“Was ‘Hoosier’ a Headgear?” To Glen Tucker it was. He offers in the *Indiana History Bulletin* his explanation of the term “hoosier,” which for him is “the only plausible story extant of how and where the peculiar word sprang into being.” (Tucker, 1958, p. 141)

The Hoosiers were, in brief, those who wore hats made by the Hosier Brothers at the site of Clarksburg, now Rocklane, in Johnson County. They naturally supported the relocation of the state capital at the Indianapolis site. Much restiveness existed in the heavily populated southern counties over the loss of the capital to the wilderness tract along Fall Creek and White River. The northern crowd who wore the Hosier hats came to be known by the Ohio River boys, at first hostilely, as “Hosiers” or “Hoosiers” — an easy transition for a typesetter. Spreading from the Indianapolis area, the word eventually was used to identify all Indianians. (Tucker, 1958, p. 141)

Mr. Tucker mentions, briefly, a canal worker vanquishing a bully and refers to “Who’s Here?” But for him, in preference to the several other versions he has heard, he will “take for the present the chapeau route.” (Tucker, 1958, p. 142) He seems to be the only person travelling in that direction.



Another story with hosier at its heart but unrelated to hats, appeared as part of “Concerning the Hoosier” by Charles M. Walker in the *Indianapolis News* of January 4, 1908. The *Indiana Magazine of History* reprinted it in its March, 1913 issue. Walker wonders “why it [hoosier] should have been applied to them [Indianans] more than to the pioneer settlers of any other Western State” —a very, very good question. He then proposes a derivation from “hosier.”

It [Hoosier] is, doubtless, of old English origin, and was used in some parts of the South at an early day, locally and colloquially, to designate an uncouth, boorish person. In this sense it may possibly have been derived from “Hosier,” which, in old English, was sometimes used as synonymous with a low, vulgar fellow. In 1574, an English author wrote of “vulgar, obscure persons, like hosiers and tanners,” and Jonathan Swift, in 1731, wrote: “You are as arrant a cockney as any hosier in Cheapside.” This suggestion as to the origin of the word is purely conjectural, but is more reasonable than some of those adopted by lexicographers.

Mr. Walker found his references in the *New English Dictionary* (predecessor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*), Volume 5, published in 1901. He takes the usage examples from the entry for hosier and quotes two of them, one by John Dee and the other by Jonathan Swift.

Swift’s letter to John Gay teases the playwright over his laziness, his fondness for comfort and style, and his preference for city life. (Gay was at the time living in the county.) The reference has nothing to do with boorishness. Arrant means notorious, downright; Cockney was a term for townsman or city-dweller with the hint of the effeminate; a hosier is a men’s outfitter or haberdasher; and Cheapside is simply a market street, without etymological connection to the word “cheap.” So the Dean twits Gay for his softness and love of stylish, urban ease, not for any crudeness in character or manners. (Swift, 1761)

John Dee (the “English author”) wrote to his patron, Lord Burghley, the Lord High Treasurer, “urging his request to have an annuity of £200 a-year from the Queen, or her Majesty’s Letters patent for enjoyment of the royal privilege of Treasure trove during his life, promising Lord Burghley half the produce. Also to obtain the muniments of Wigmore Castle.” (Ellis, 1843, p. 32) He feels he deserves from his great services and sacrifices such a privilege surely as much as those “truly vulgar, obscure persons, as hosiers and tanners,” who “can (by color of seeking assays of Metalls, for the say master) enjoye liberty to content their fantasies to dig after dreamish demonstrations of places &c. May not I than [sic] (in respect of all the former allegations, of my paynes, cost, and credit in matters Philosopical and Mathematicall) yf no better or easier way, to serve my turn, will fall my lot, from her Magesties hands...” (Ellis, 1843, p. 38)

Dr. Dee may have considered hosiers and tanners vulgar, but “vulgar” would have meant that those hosiers and tanners were simply common, ordinary people. He adds “obscure” to reinforce the notion that, unlike him, they are not learned, nor have they contributed as much as he to the welfare of the realm. The good doctor had a high opinion of himself, and the editor says of him, “Dr. Dee was greatly eminent as a mathematician, but of vain and ambitious spirit, easily tricked, and himself an occasional imposter; trying how far he could take advantage of human credulity. He lavished money much faster than he obtained it.” (Ellis, 1843, p. 47)



Walker's speculation, it turns out, is not "more reasonable" than others proposed by the unnamed "lexicographers." And if his speculation is baseless, and Mr. Tucker's worthless, the Hoosier is now sockless and hatless.

### **Hauser, Hooser, Hoosier**

Randall Hooser promises to chronicle the "migration of the Hausers (pronounced Hooser) of the seventeenth century American [sic] to 1833." (Hooser, 1999, p. 225) He does, in some detail, in "The Nickname *Hoosier* and its Ethnohistoric Background," published in the *Eurasian Studies Yearbook*, 1999. Along the way, he points out, "Their old Alsace regional dialect pronounced *au* as an English *oo*, therefore *Hauser* when spoken correctly sounds like *Hooser*." (Hooser, 1999, p. 225) The Hausers, who had originally settled in North Carolina, "would migrate into Indiana starting in the 1820s, forming a 'Hoosier horseshoe' just under the city of Indianapolis." (Hooser, 1999, p. 226)

After a discussion of the Second Great Awakening, Moravians, slavery, and Hausers and Hoosers moving west, he reviews seven theories about Indiana's nickname. All seven fail his test, although the husher version is "mildly credible" (Hooser, 1999, p. 230) and the Samuel Hoosier version "is on the right track. It tries to connect the word with the roots—a family name of Hauser/Hooser." (Hooser, 1999, p. 230) At the end of his list, he comments, "These seven theories listed above are currently accepted in Indiana." (Hooser, 1999, p. 230) Accepted? Not in the usual sense. Commonly cited and often repeated, yes. What irks him, though, is that no one mentions another theory, one he now proposes: "*The Hauser-Hooser/Hoosier Theory*."

Hoosiers were Hoosers, and Hausers, from North Carolina eager to migrate west and take advantage of the available land grants and leave slavery behind. (Hooser, 1999, p. 230) ... It is my assertion that the original term Hoosier was first coined to tease North Carolinians from Hausertown willing to follow the migration of the Hoosers into Kentucky and more importantly Martin Hauser (Hooser) as he pioneered a family name into the state of Indiana. (Hooser, 1999, p. 231)

Hooser follows up with an online document, "Does Anyone Want to End the Hoosiering of Hoosier?" He begins with a trope involving Nicolaus Copernicus and Jacob Dunn. He tells the reader, "His theory espoused one clear message: the earth is NOT the center of the universe; and Indiana, in all due respect, neither is Jacob P. Dunn." (Hooser, online) Although Hooser has "the greatest respect for the author of *Indiana and the Indianians* [sic]," he cautions against "blind allegiance." (Hooser, online) Mostly he is upset by Dunn's hoozer theory and what he considers its general approval. He complains that "all of Indiana's historical inner circle will tell you his theory is most viable ... I now understand how he keeps his status after 1997, and three out of three historical groups in Indiana have dismissed my recent theory based on the Hoosier family name." Apparently, Merriam Webster's *Dictionary* is also part of the plot, but mostly his quarrel is with Dunn.



Mr. Dunn attempted to eliminate a family name as the source of his moniker. His pursuit was to eliminate the Louisville and Portland Engineer theory or ‘Hoosier’s Men’ and he tried to eliminate the Louisville baker. ... For reasons only Mr. Dunn can explain, he chose not to accept any spelling derivations on the family name of Hoosier. Please understand he was tracing the roots of Hoosier as a family name and yet he refuses to allow any variance. He actually found the name Hooser all over Tennessee and Kentucky. But alas the “I” was missing. Genealogical research without regarding Anglicization is like looking for the Holy Grail without regarding religion. ... [Our standing Hooser family question has been the same for most of this decade: Does the extra “I” in Hoosier stand for INDIANA??] (Hooser, online) [Brackets and italics in the original]

Anatoly Liberman cites the present writer and two other relatively recent contributors to “hoosier” lore. He does so “because all three authors, though extremely well-informed, missed a work that, in my opinion, deserves attention.” (Liberman, 2008, online) Before revealing the deserving effort, Liberman reviews the literature, the usual commentary on the origin of “hoosier.” Then the moment is at last at hand, the big reveal. The work in question is the article by Randall Hooser in *Eurasian Studies Yearbook*. “It is not for an outsider to solve the question that puzzled so many specialists in Indiana history,” he writes, “but if this publication makes R. Hauser’s [sic; Hauser? Or was that Hooser?] article part of the debate, it will have served its purpose.” (Liberman, 2008, online) He hopes to get responses to his blog, and says, “They will probably attempt to demolish my cautious defence of the Hooser theory. This is fine; etymology is a battleground.” (Liberman, 2008, online)

### Hoojee, Hoojie, Hoogie

*Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* finds that Hoosier “probably [derives] from *hoosier*, a mountaineer, an extension of *hoojee*, *hoojin*, a dirty person or tramp. The south of Indiana was mainly settled by Kentucky mountaineers.” (Brewer, 1971, p. 543) Is Brewer suggesting that Kentuckians were a bunch of dirty tramps? Can that be? In any event, it is unclear what he means by “an extension of *hoojee*, *hoojin*.” Or does he simply have it backward? The *Dictionary of American Regional English*, for example, records variants of hoosier as hoosher, hoogie, hoojy, hoodger, hoojer, hushier, and hooshur, not the other way around.

The *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* has an entry for “hoogie” and explains: “[perh. a phonetic spelling of a var. of HOOJAH; perh. directly an alter. of HOOSIER] *Black E.* a white person.—usu. used contemptuously.” Two related entries appear in *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*, edited by Clarence Major.

**Hoogies** n. (1940s-1960s) white people; same as “honky”; (CM, CW, Gayl Jones, “White Rat,” p. 375.) Kentucky use. (Major, 1994, p. 240)



**Hoosier; Hoogie** n. (1940s-1950s) a word sometimes applied to white racists in the midwest; redneck; hillbilly; filthy, uncouth person; rustic person (FGC, DARE, p. 1091.) SU, MWU. (Major, 1994, p. 241)

The citation to “White Rat” (1977) is to a widely reprinted short story by the Kentuckian Gayl Jones in which a light-skinned Black man speaks of reactions to his color.

... I don’t like to walk in no place where they say, “What’s that white man doing in here.” They probably say “yap”—that the Kentucky word for honky. ... and when we go to some town where they don’t know “White Rat” everybody look at me like I’m some hoogie, but I don’t pay them no mind. (Jones, 2001, p. 181)

A similar usage appears in *Truth Crushed to Earth: The Legacy of Will Parker, a Black American Revolutionary* by Harry W. Kendall. Drawing from an incident in Christiana, Pennsylvania, in 1851, Kendall’s historical novel has as its protagonist Will Parker, a fugitive slave. Part of the dialog in chapter seven includes an exchange between Will and his companion, Charles.

“We save some,” Will said, stepping into the street. “One a’ these hoojies might stop us and we got nothing, not even a pass.”

“A hoojie?” Charles said.

“Mean white folks like that one. He’d turn us over to the patterrollers quick as he’d look at us if he knew we was running.” (Kendall, 1999, p. 70)

Kendall spells the word “Hoojie,” the first cousin of Brewer’s “Hoojee” and Jones’s “hoogie.”

## Huzur

Dunn noted the existence of a Hindustani word huzur, “a respectful form of address to persons of rank or superiority.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 27) It appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) as: “huzoor hAzur. Also 8 huzzoor, huzur. [a. Arab. hudur (pronounced in India as huzur) presence (employed as a title), f. hadara to be present.] An Indian potentate; often used as a title of respect.” The trouble with this etymology is that there were very few potentates or persons notable for rank or superiority in southern Indiana (New Harmony perhaps excepted) during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Oddly, there is an unincorporated community named Hindustan in northern Monroe County, Indiana. And in the early nineteenth century there was a Hindostan or Hindostan Falls in Martin County. George Wilson edited the papers collected by Thomas Jefferson Brooks (1805-1882), who settled in Martin County in 1823, and presented them in an article in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, “Hindostan, Greenwich and Mt. Pleasant. The Pioneer Towns of Martin County. — Memoirs”. Several passages concern the naming of the community.

Captain Fellows, one of the company, gave the town its name. Captain Fellows had resided in India many years. Things now looked so bright for a fortune, he said, “let it be



Hindustan.” (Wilson, 1920, p. 285) ... Caleb Fellows becoming one of the proprietors, and being the eldest, as a matter of courtesy was requested to name the town. Having spent some time in India, and being partial to the country, gave it the name of Hindostan. (Wilson, 1920, p. 291)

The future was not as bright as Captain Fellows hoped.

The first settler came to Hindostan in 1817, and some six additional families arrived before the town was platted (1819). It was chosen as the seat of Martin county upon its organization (1820), but the site proved so unhealthful that it was abandoned. (Wilson, 1920, p. 293)

Nowhere in the texts is a mention of “huzur” or “hoosier.”

### Hoosieroon

The suggestion that “hoosier” derives from “hoosieroon” illustrates how a reference work can sometimes go preposterously wrong. The entry under “Hoosier” in Albert Barrère and Charles G. Leland’s *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant* cites Bartlett (1848) who cites the *Providence Journal*, which contained the husher theory. That, the authors say, “has the appearance of being an after-manufacture to suit the name.” It continues, again citing Bartlett, with the “who’s yere?” theory. Then the entry takes a peculiar turn.

However, the word originally was not *hoosier* at all, but *hoosieroon*, or *hoosheroon*, *hoosier* being an abbreviation of this. I can remember that in 1834, having read of *hoosiers*, and spoken of them, a boy from the West corrected me, and said that the word was properly *hoosieroon*. This would indicate a Spanish origin. (Charles G. Leland). (Barrère and Leland, 1889, p. 474; repeated in the 1897 edition at p. 447)

A Spanish origin? Well, perhaps the -oon suffix might indicate a word adopted into English from a romance language. But in Finley’s poem it is merely a diminutive, a cute word for a hoosier child that conveniently rhymes with “spoon.” It is similar to other extended forms of hoosier, such as Hoosierdom, Hoosierism, and Hoosierina, “meaning a woman who lives in Indiana.” (Morris and Morris, 1977, p. 291)

One curious reference to hoosieroon turns up in *The Knickerbocker* in 1834. An Amateur writes in a humorous style about ways to improve the sport of cock fighting.

To the honor of a few remote Kentuckians, or Indiana Hoosieroons, this eminent sport has found a few advocates in those distant quarters of our republic. Is it not time that the practice were forbidden to waste its exclusive elegance in the haunts of rural life, and that it were introduced into our cities? Should not cock-pits be built by sale of stock, and capacious coops be laid in? Should not *feeders* be imported, to deliver lectures on the subject—and ought there not be competent composers engaged, who shall produce a



series of *militant arias*, by means of which the cocks could fight with precision, and the ears of the audience be simultaneously delectated? (An Amateur, 1834, p. 390)

In this case, the writer may have found the sound of “Hoosieroons” too amusing to pass up, those long double o’s sounding funnier as they roll off the tongue than simply saying Hoosiers.

### Hoosier Bait

Occasionally stories link the origin of Indiana’s nickname to “Hoosier Bait,” which are the final words of Finley’s “The Hoosier Nest.” The term is absent in Finley’s published works, as are the last four lines of the original, which Dunn (1907) reprints in full from a manuscript copy.

One more subject I’ll barely mention  
To which I ask your kind attention  
My pockets are so shrunk of late  
I can not nibble “Hoosher bait.”

About the omission Dunn says, “The author used his privilege of revising his work, and while he may have improved his poetry, he seriously marred its historical value.” (Dunn, 1907, p. 4)

According to the second edition of Bartlett’s dictionary “Hoosier cake” is “a Western name for a sort of coarse gingerbread, which, say the Kentuckians, is the best bait to catch a hoosier with, the biped being fond of it.” (Bartlett, 1859, p. 202).

Jacob Dunn records a story told to him by the Rev. T. A. Goodwin.

In the summer of 1830 I went with my father, Samuel Goodwin, from our home at Brookville to Cincinnati. We traveled in an old-fashioned one-horse Dearborn wagon. I was a boy of twelve years, and it was a great occasion for me. At Cincinnati I had a fip for a treat, and at that time there was nothing I relished so much as one of those big pieces of gingerbread that were served as refreshment on muster days, Fourth of July and other gala occasions, in connection with cider. I went into a baker’s shop and asked for ‘a fip’s worth of gingerbread.’ The man said, ‘I guess you want hoosier-bait,’ and when he produced it I found that he had the right idea. That was the first time I ever heard the word ‘hoosier,’ but in a few years it became quite commonly applied to Indiana people. The gingerbread referred to was cooked in square pans—about fifteen inches across, I should think—and with furrows marked across the top, dividing it into quarter sections. A quarter section sold for a fip, which was 6 1/4 cents. (Dunn, 1905, p. 91-92)

In some tellings a Louisville baker named Hoosier baked the treats that so pleased Indianans. The *Indiana State Sentinel* of January 25, 1893, printed such a story in which it called Hoosier’s product “a large loaf of sweet bread.” According to the *Sentinel* an old Louisvillian told a *Courier Journal* reporter about the baker and the Indianans who had come to work, in 1826, on the Louisville and Portland Canal.



A Louisville man with an eye to business made it a point to be near the works at the dinner hour with a supply of edibles, and among those he dispensed was a large loaf of sweet bread, an article in which the majority of the Indianians invariably invested. The name of this bread peddler, as he might be called, was HOOSIER, and from his jovial manner and waggish air he was very popular. The men from Indiana, however, were his best patrons, and the novel sight of a large number of them, each munching a roll of HOOSIER's bread, was too much for the humor of the Kentuckians, who applied to them indiscriminately the nickname Hoosiers. Their fellow laborers took up the term, and soon all Indianians on the works were known as Hoosiers, and from there it spread throughout the country.

The canal builder has now become a baker.

### Hooshar

In *Popular Questions Answered*, George E. Stimpson includes the word *hooshar*, “which is said to represent the peculiar noise made by Indiana woodchoppers as they expelled the air from their lungs with each stroke of the ax.” (Stimpson, 1930, p. 196) Stimpson seems to be alone in discovering this possibility, very alone.

### Hoosie

Charles Collins contributed “More about ‘Hoosier,’” to the *Chicago Tribune* of June 16, 1957. After reviewing several theories, he cannot resist offering a new one of his own.

I believe that Hoosier, occasionally spelled Hoosher in early printings, is a name that is based on the traditional Indianan trait of affectionate attachment to home, home folks, and homeland. I believe that it started from the common noun “house” as pronounced in broad Scottish dialect, “hoose.”

To support his proposition, he adds, not unreasonably, “The frontier folk of southern Indiana were strongly of Scottish or Scots-Irish ancestry.” Later, he writes, “Migrants from more literate Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the New England states—were amused when they heard the dialect spoken by their predecessors on this frontier.”

They often halted at crude little cabins for rest or shelter and were welcomed with the traditional hospitality of the western border.

Their hosts would greet them with an invitation such as, “Come into the hoosie.” After their departure, they would chuckle over this, to them, odd expression. They soon began to call such characters “hoosie-rs.”

Well, there's my theory: simple, lucid, plausible.

It sure is simple. The same Charles Collins had previously pronounced the “houssières” theory as “so plausible that it ought to be right.” (*Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 1943) He would also



propose “Hoo,” an “obsolete expression of surprise,” as a source for “hoosier.” The *Tribune*, of course, has always enjoyed messing with Indiana.

### Who’s Your Daddy?

Ronald Baker includes “Who’s Your Daddy?” in his *Hoosier Folk Legends*.

Do you know how Indiana got the nickname Hoosier? When it was first settled everyone ran around saying, ‘Who’s your daddy? Who’s your daddy?’” (Baker, 1982, p. 172)

Baker offers no comment on any of the legends he records. Good. The less said about this one, the better. But “Who’s your daddy,” like its analogs “Who’s your ma?” and “Who’s your pa?” will not be going away any time soon. Nor will “Who’s your momma,” deftly adopted by its homophonic sisters, the Hoosier Mama Pie Company in Chicago and Hoosier Momma of Brownsburg, Indiana, maker of culinary cocktail mixes (the Bloody Mary mix was its early specialty).



<http://hoosiermomma.com/>

### On the Way to Michigan

“The definition of a Hoosier is a Kentuckian on his way to Michigan when his car broke down.” (Holl and Schweber, p. 97) This bit of cleverness pops up now and again. Oddly, though, if you consider late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American migration patterns and substitute wagon for car and Illinois for Michigan, the joke makes a certain kind of crazy sense.



## Vote for Harrison

On October 29, 1840, the *Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, Georgia) ran a brief item headlined “What’s a Hoosier?”

The Chicago American gives the following significant definition of this word.  
“What’s a Hoosier, mammy?” “A Hoosier, child, is a man dressed in jeans, who drives six yoke of oxen, carries a whip ten feet long and votes for Harrison.”

Election humor, 1840s style?

## Captain Hoosier

Writing in his *Where We Live: Essays about Indiana*, Michael Wilkerson muses on his boyhood in Terre Haute and the essential small town quality of Indiana. When he confronts the inevitable, “Tellings of How We Got Our Nickname,” he has an answer. Between mentioning “Who’s ’ere?” and “Who’s ear?” he asks, “Or was it the riverboat captain John Hoosier who gave us our name?” (Wilkerson, 1989, p. 13) There is no explanation of who the captain was nor hint to his identity beyond rank, name and trade. Has Mr. Wilkerson created a new and mysterious Indiana superhero of the river, a companion for Batman and Captain America?

## Whoosher

The entry for “Hoosier” in Richard Thornton’s *An American Glossary* offers as an example of the use of the word Hoosier from Florio and Torriano’s 1659 dictionary. “Torriano, in his dictionary,” he writes, “has ‘Ninnatrice, a rocker, a stiller, a luller, a *whoosher* or a dandler of children asleep.’” (Thornton, 1962, p. 446) The dictionary (Florio, John and Torriano, Giovanni. *Vocabolario italiano & inglese=A dictionary Italian & English*. London: Printed by T. Warren for Jo. Martin, Ja. Allestry, and Tho. Dicas, 1659) does indeed say that. But most likely Thornton borrowed the citation and definition directly from the 1933 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* where it appears under “Husher” within the entry for “Hush.” (There is no entry for “Hoosier” in the 1933 *OED*.) In any event, it is hard to see a relationship between the “whoosher” and “hoosier.” Mencken did not see it, either. To quote him again, “there was obviously no connection between this *whoosher* and *Hoosier*. The earlier American etymologists all sought to connect the term with some idea of ruffianism.” (Mencken, 1965, p. 617)

## Osier

The 1892 *Transactions* of the Grand Council of the Royal and Select Masters of the State of California reported on the condition of its Indiana brethren.



Forty-three Councils, with a membership of 2,086, and a balance in the treasury of \$2,469.40, is a good showing for the “Willow State” (miscalled “hoosier” from a mal-pronunciation of “housier,” or osier, a species of basket willow which once grew in great abundance in that State and from which the cognomen “Hoosier” is derived. It also means a plantation of hollies or shrub nursery. It also means a switch. This application, it is said, was also made of the latter by mothers to children not of their own maternity, caused by marriages after frequent divorces so readily obtained in Indiana, that the chastised youngsters were constantly making the inquiry of each other, “Who’s yer step-mother now?”) (Grand Council of the Royal and Select Masters, 1892, p. 308)

The “osier” suggestion is rare. And here it forms a peculiar trifecta with “houssières” (those hollies) and the equivalent of “Who’s your daddy?” Are the Select Masters serious, though? Or are they having a little bit of fun with their Midwestern brothers? They would not be the first, nor would they be the last.

### Hwswr

In a regular feature column, “A Line o’ Type or Two,” the *Chicago Tribune* of Aug 25, 1949 ran several short pieces, one of which was headed “Origin of Hoosier?”

“Hwswr,” pronounced “hoosier,” is a Welsh word meaning granger, a patron of husbandry. It was in common use among the early Welsh settlers of the agricultural sections of the United States, especially during the early farming period in Indiana and eastern Illinois when Granger units were organized for fraternal and social purposes.

The Welsh newspapers and magazines of that day indorsed the movement among the Welsh farmers and a pattern of life was set in their communities that holds to the present time. One of the surviving grange customs is the annual plowing match held in the old Welsh settlement of Big Rock, Ill., about 50 miles west of Chicago.

Gwendolyn Cadwalader

Another contribution from Ms. Cadwalader, “Taffy was a Hoosier,” appeared in the *Tribune* on January 2, 1951.

The word “Hoosier” originated in the Creole country along the Mississippi river. Welsh pioneers settled there on plantations.

The lowland planters were known as “hwsiwrs” [pronounced hoosiers] and those on the uplands of the river country were called “crimps” another Welsh colloquial word meaning dwellers on the highlands. Later, many of them moved northward by way of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and settled in southern Illinois and Indiana.

Gwendolyn Cadwalader

It is hard to be more Welsh than a Cadwalader (and a Gwendolyn, too), but most Welsh dictionaries give “hwsmon” as husbandman or farmer. There is, though, hwsmonwr with the same meaning. Take out the “mon” and you have Hwswr. *Cymru am byth!* The second



contribution is puzzling in its own way. It would send the Welsh “hoosier” up the river, rather than down, contrary to Jonathan Clark Smith’s theory and at odds with the general pattern of American overland and riverine population migration.

Charles Collins, who edited “A Line O’ Type or Two,” also archly suggested hoosie and houssiere and hoo as solutions to the mystery of Hoosier’s meaning. Here he introduces Ms. Cadwalader and the Welsh. Perhaps, like Mike Royko, he could not help himself, although he actually was born a Hoosier, in Madison, Indiana, in 1880.

### **Hausherr**

From French come the “houssières.” From Welsh come the “Hwswrs.” Why not a derivation from German other than Mr. Hooser’s Alsatian surname? On January 30, 2017, the Hotline column of the *Herald-Times* (Bloomington, Indiana) ran “‘Hoosier’ roots and streetlights.” A reader proposed the German word “hausherr.”

Recently, in my reading, I saw the German word “hausherr,” which means “host.” It occurred to me that maybe it is the origin of the word “Hoosier.” Since many Germans immigrated to Indiana during the 1800s (my great-grandparents included), wouldn’t it be possible this word was slowly colloquialized?

Many Germans did settle in Indiana, and the notion of “host” fits neatly with the idea of “Hoosier Hospitality.” Still, a professor of German, quoted in the piece, has to conclude, “So, no, I do not find this derivation persuasive at all, but then again, I know nothing about Hoosier German.”

### **Harry Hoosier**

Although Dunn rejects derivation from a patronymic, he did explore the possibility that “Hoosier” came from “Black Harry” Hoosier. In a 1995 article in the *Indiana Magazine of History* William D. Piersen of Fisk University again raised the question and pleaded the case for the Methodist preacher.

Professor Piersen reviews the common theories about the origin of the word “hoosier,” beginning with those in Bartlett’s 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms*. He gives each its due and easily dismisses most of them. That task completed, Piersen gets down to his real work, attempting to prove that the term “hoosier” came eponymously from Harry Hoosier, a black Methodist preacher. “Interestingly,” he writes, “in the years when the term ‘hoosier’ was finding its first use on the Appalachian frontier, there was an obvious African-American point of reference for the designation: the black evangelist Harry Hoosier who accompanied the Reverend Francis Asbury and other Methodist preachers on their traveling rounds.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 192) After giving what details he can of Hoosier’s life, he says, “Before his death in 1806, Hoosier’s homiletical gifts had made him a renowned camp meeting exhorter, the most widely known



black preacher of his time, and arguably the greatest circuit rider of his day.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 193)

About the preacher’s name, an issue he must tackle, Piersen writes, “Hoosier was illiterate when he took his name so that his surname has no definitive spelling. But the spellings contemporaries gave it—Hoosier, Hosier, Hossier, Hersure, Hoshure, Hosure, and Hoshur—suggest the phonetic character of what must have been his own pronunciation.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 192) In a note, he further explains his choice, “I have chosen to use ‘Hoosier’ as the spelling in this article for obvious reasons. For the man himself, all that counted was the pronunciation; and for that, considering the contemporary variants that survive in print, Hoosier probably comes closer to the sound than the Hosier spelling which is now more conventionally used. (Piersen, 1995, note p. 192)

To connect Harry Hoosier to the derogatory meaning of the word “hoosier,” Piersen makes several observations. Hoosier, he writes, “was particularly disliked by Virginia Baptists for preaching against the Calvinist proposition that those who were once in grace would always remain in grace.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 193) He adds, “Throughout the southern frontier Methodists were not only slighted as unsophisticated and unlettered but they were also denigrated for calling into question the virtues of racial slavery.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 193) “Therefore,” he deduces, “it does not seem at all unlikely that Methodists and then other rustics of the backcountry could have been called ‘Hoosiers’—disciples of the illiterate black exhorter Harry Hoosier—as a term of opprobrium and derision. In fact, this would be the simplest explanation of the derivation of the word and, on simplicity alone, the Harry Hoosier etymology is worth serious consideration.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 193) In support of this idea, he offers a reason why the word should settle in Indiana, rather than elsewhere on the frontier (the same question Charles Walker had asked in 1908).

An original antislavery and African-American reference in the term would explain why “hoosier” was charged with more negative connotations in the South than it was in the North and West and why the cognomen settled on the inhabitants of the free and more Methodist territory of Indiana after passing lightly over similarly uncouth frontiersmen in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky who were also often called “hoosiers.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 196)

Piersen does make a frank statement about the limitations of his proposition, but he concedes little.

The etymology suggested here—that the word “hoosier” was used sarcastically to characterize frontier backwoodsmen as primitive followers of Black Harry Hoosier and his mixed-race, antislavery, Methodist frontier democrats—is admittedly as circumstantial as all other hypotheses. But at least the Harry Hoosier connection would explain several problems that other etymologies cannot.” (Piersen, 1995, p. 196) ... Such an etymology would offer Indiana a plausible and worthy first Hoosier—‘Black Harry’ Hoosier—the greatest preacher of his day, a man who rejected slavery and stood up for morality and the common man. (Piersen, 1995, p. 196)



Readers may sense that the article has a certain wouldn't-be-great-if quality, as though the author perhaps never entirely believed in his own argument, or feared no one else would. The closing sentence reads hopefully, "It is also likely that in improving the reputation of Hoosiers in general, the citizens of Indiana have brought the meaning of "hoosier" back closer to its worthy origin." (Piersen, 1995, p. 196)

Stephen H. Webb, a Wabash College professor, supports Piersen's thesis. He acknowledges hoosier's general meaning of yokel or bumpkin in the South, but "By the middle of the nineteenth century, Indiana citizens had transformed this label of abuse and disparagement into a badge of pride and identity." (Webb, 2002, p. 30) Leading the reader along toward his real objective, he continues, "Hoosiers themselves, trying to put a more respectable spin on their name, sometimes told about a man with that surname who hired people from Indiana to work outside the state. Indianans were thus associated with a certain Mr. Hoosier." But, he comments, in agreement with other sources, "there is no evidence to support the existence of this mythological figure." (Webb, 2002, p. 30) "Fortunately," Webb announces, "it is unnecessary to invent a first Hoosier because one already exists, and he was a noted figure in his own right. (Webb, 2002, p. 30) The figure is Harry Hoosier, a black Methodist preacher "famous for his eloquence." (Webb, 2002, p. 30)

He was of middling stature; slim, but very strongly built, and very black; capable of great labour and much endurance. He also possessed a most musical voice, which he could modulate with the skill of a master, and use with the most complete success in the pathetic, terrible, or persuasive parts of a discourse. ... He was never at a loss in preaching, but was very acceptable wherever he went, and few of the white preachers could equal him, in his way. (Webb, 2002, p. 35)

Webb ends his article with the statement, "Without even knowing it, Indiana has preserved Harry Hoosier's name; it is one that does them honor." (Webb, 2002, p. 41) Earlier, however, he had to admit "... the evidence for the connection between his name and Indiana's nickname is circumstantial, which leaves room for skepticism." (Webb, 2002, p. 34) At the same time he also states, "Compared to the alternative explanations, however, this theory not only makes a better story but also has an explanatory power that the others lack. Surely it is more than coincidence that the evolution of this term followed the same path that the early Indiana settlers took from the Appalachian frontier." (Webb, 2002, p. 34)

### **A Bit More about Harry**

In his *Harry Hosier: Circuit Rider* Warren Thomas Smith attempts to reconstruct "from countless sources" the life of Black Harry Hosier, a "horseman for the Lord." (Smith, 1981, p. 9) "He was small," Smith quotes a source as saying, "very black, keen-eyed, possessing great volubility of tongue." (Smith, 1981, p. 27) That as a preacher he was eloquent is beyond question. Of him Benjamin Rush, among other things a signer of the Declaration of Independence, remarked, "Making allowances for his illiteracy, he was the greatest orator in America." (Smith, 1981, p. 25) Rush was not alone in his admiration.



Harry was small in stature, coal black, and with eyes of remarkable brilliance and intelligence. He had a quick mind, a most retentive memory, and such an eloquent flow of words, which he could soon put into almost faultless English, that he was pronounced by many “The greatest orator in America.” (Smith, 1981, p. 27)

The spelling of the preacher’s name is uncertain. Although Smith uses Hosier throughout his volume, he notes the variants: Hoosier, Hoshur, Hossier. (Smith, 1981, p. 17) He also draws from the unpublished journal of William Colbert (1764-1835), who writes the name variously as Hanry Hoshure, Harry Hoshur, Hanry Hoshure, Black Harvey, Henry Hersure, and Henry Hosure. (Smith, 1981, p. 53) The spellings, however, as Webb says, all “produce the same phonetic effect, and the way he pronounced the name is similar to the way Hoosier is pronounced today.” (Webb, 2002, p. 34)

The name aside, Hosier, it seems, did preach in Virginia and North Carolina to both Black and White gatherings, in the company of White representatives of Methodism like Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke. It also seems he spent more time in the middle states: Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, with tours of New England. Some suggest that the term hoosier entered the upland south carried by a western population movement from the general area of southeastern Pennsylvania, an area which may have heard “Black Harry.” But Smith never makes any connection between the circuit rider’s name and Indiana or frontier congregations or any other eponymous group, not even as an interesting sidelight to the primary story.

### **Screwin’ Cotton, and Rednecks and Wool Hats**

The term hoosier turns up in a sea shanty, “Lowlands or My Dollar an’ a Half a Day,” which appears in Stan Hugill’s collection, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*.

2. A white man’s pay is rather high.  
    Ch: Lowlands, lowlands, away, my John!  
    A black man’s pay is rather low,  
    Ch: My dollar an’ a half a day.
3. Five dollars a day is a hoosier’s pay,  
    Five dollars a day is a hoosier’s pay.
4. A dollar an’ a half a day is a matlow’s pay,  
    A dollar an’ a half won’t pay my way.
5. Oh, what shall we poor shellbacks do?  
    We’ve got no money an’ we can’t git home.
6. I packed me bag an’ I’m bound away,  
    I’m bound away for Mobile Bay.
7. We’re bound away for Mobil Bay,  
    We’re bound away at break o’ day.
8. Oh, say wuz ye never down in Mobile Bay?  
    A-screwin’ cotton all the day. (Hugill, 1961, p. 69)



Who are these hoosiers? Hugill explains.

This stowing of the cotton bales in the holds of wooden droghers was a most arduous task, originally undertaken by Negroes and Creoles, but from the 1830s and throughout the 1840s, white sailors took a big hand in “screwing cotton” as the job was called. In those days, they worked shoulder to shoulder with the colored hoosiers, although in later years a system developed whereby Whites worked one hatch and Blacks another. This “screwing cotton” meant forcing the great bales into the dark recesses of the ships by means of jackscrews. (Hugill, 1969, p. 50)

The five dollars a day in the shanty may be an exaggeration, perhaps for effect, although the work was rough enough for these “hoosiers,” as the stevedores were called. Charles Nordhoff writes about the rigor of the work in his *Nine Years a Sailor*, “Cooped up in the dark and confined hold of a vessel, the gangs tug from morning till night at the screws, the perspiration running off them like water, every muscle strained to its utmost.” But he also says of the wages for those screwing cotton, “Their pay is two dollars per day, and their provisions furnished.” (Nordhoff, 1857, p. 43)

Music also interests Patrick Huber in his master’s thesis “Rednecks and Woolhats, Hoosiers and Hillbillies: Working-Class Southern Whites, Language and the Definition of Identity.” Before discussing country songs, he talks about the working-class southern Whites of his title.

No group of Americans, except perhaps African-Americans, have had more derogatory terms heaped upon them than rural, Southern white working people: *Arkie, clay eater, conch, corn-cracker, cornpone, cracker, dirt-eater, hillbilly, hoosier, low-downer, mean white, Okie, pea-picker, peckerwood, pinelander, poor buckra, poor white, redneck, ridge-runner, sandhillier, tacky, tar heel, wool hat* and perhaps the most opprobrious slur, *poor white trash*. This, of course, does not exhaust the list. (Huber, 1992, p. 5)

It turns out Huber concentrates on the word hillbilly, but he has made the point that all the terms, including hoosier, are contemptuous references to “Southern white working people.” Usage of hoosier was not limited to whites speaking of other whites. It crosses racial lines, as in a passage Huber cites from Susan Tucker’s *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and their Employers in the Segregated South*.

“They were rich people, but that girl—oh—but I lived to see her get everything that she put out,” Althea Vaughn, a Southern cook and maid, bitterly recalled her white employer’s daughter-in-law. “... I couldn’t stand her for nothing in the world. She [was an] old redneck hoo’ger, those kinds that weren’t used to nothing.” (Huber, 1992, p. 121)

In a note Huber informs the reader, “Tucker’s footnote explains that *hoo’ger*, which is probably related to *hoosier*, is ‘a slang term that blacks use to refer to a common white, usually a common white woman.’” (Huber, 1992, p. 121)



## You Could Look It Up

Standard dictionaries, and dictionaries of dialectal usage, Americanisms, nicknames, slang or special vocabularies, include “hoosier” as a term for something other than a resident of Indiana. Generally, the definitions are less than flattering.

Adams, Ramon F. *Western Words: A Dictionary of the American West*. New Edition, revised and enlarged. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.

Hoosier

A logger’s term for a greenhorn. The term originated when a Pacific Coast lumber company recruited Indiana farm boys to come west as apprentice loggers. Thus *Hoosier* meant first a logger who did not know his trade, then one who could never master the necessary skills, and finally one who regularly slights his job.

Berrey, Lester V. and Van Den Bark, Melvin. *The American Thesaurus of Slang: A Complete Reference Book of Colloquial Speech*. Second Edition. NY: Thomas Crowell, 1953.

*The American Thesaurus of Slang* lists slang terms for a variety of people, places, and things, concepts, descriptions and occupations. Hoosier figures among them in the lists of synonymous terms.

SMALL COUNTRY TOWN; “HICK TOWN”. hoosier town

IMAGINARY “HICK TOWN”. Hoosierville

INDIANA. Hoosier State, Hoosierdom

RURAL DISTRICTS. hoosier belt, hoosierdom

BOORISHNESS; RUSTICITY. hoosierification, hoosierishness, hoosierization

BE PLEBIAN; BOORISH; UNPOLISHED. hoosierify, hoosierize

BOORISH; RUSTIC. hoosier, hoosierfied, hoosierified, hoosierish, hoosierized

STUPID. hoosier

GREEN; INEXPERIENCED; NAIVE. hoosierified

RUSTIC; BUMPKIN. Hoosier, John Hoosier; Who’s Hoosier, a farmer of importance

PRISONER; CONVICT. hoosier, *a prison visitor*

VICTIM; DUPE. hoosier

LOAF. *Spec.* hoosier up (on), *to idle on the job*

INHABITANTS OF STATES. Hoosier, *an Indianian*

Person of importance. Who’s-Hoosier, *a farmer of importance*

DRUG ADDICT. Hoosier fiend, student, *an inexperienced addict*

Patron. hoosier, *an out-of-town patron or a member of a small-town audience*

CIRCUS PATRON; TOWNSMAN. hoosier

INEXPERIENCED SEAMAN. hoosier

CULTIVATED LAND. hoosier belt

Blevins, Winfred. *Dictionary of the American West*. New York: Facts on File, 1993.

**HOOSIER** Among loggers, a beginning logger. The term started when a lot of inexperienced Indianans were recruited as lumbermen in the Pacific Northwest.

*Hoosier belt* is cowboy talk for farm country. [Adams] To hoosier up was to conspire against someone or malign him. [Adams]



Deak, Etienne and Deak, Simone. *Grand dictionnaire d'américanismes contenant les principaux termes américains avec leur équivalent exact en français*. Quatrième Edition Augmentée. Paris: Editions du Dauphin, 1966.

Hoosier

Mauvais ouvrier (ou ouvrier incompétent)

Sabot (quelqu'un qui travaille comme un sabot)

Gardien de prison;

Visiteur dans une prison

Rustre

Péquenot.

[poor worker (or incompetent worker); shirker, someone who works very badly; prison guard; prison visitor; rustic; hick]

*Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo*, Hyman E. Goldin, Editor in Chief. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1950.

**Hoosier**. 1. Any gullible or credulous person; a victim selected by pickpockets or by any organized mob of thieves. 2. A rustic or country dweller as differentiated from a **slicker**.

**Hoosiers**. (P) Sightseers or students visiting a prison. "Get a load of them hoosiers gandering (gaping at us) like we was monkeys in the zoo."

Lighter, J. E. (Ed.) *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Hoogie n. [perh. A phonetic spelling of a var. of HOOJAH; perh. Directly an alter. of HOOSIER] *Black E.* a white person. – usu. Used contemptuously.

Major, Clarence (Ed.) *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African American Slang*. New York: Viking, 1994.

Hoogies n. (1940s-1960s) white people; same as "honkey": (CM, CW, Gayl Jones, "White Rat," 2001, p. 375.) Kentucky use.

Mathews, Mitford M. (Ed.) *Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.

hoosier

1. (cap) A nickname for a resident or native of Indiana. b. A big, burly, uncouth specimen or individual, a frontiersman, countryman, rustic. Cf. mountain hoosier.

McCulloch, Walter F. *Woods Words: A Comprehensive Dictionary of Loggers Terms*. [Portland]: Oregon Historical Society, 1958.

*Hoosier* — a. A green man in the woods. b. To louse up the job.

*Hoosier up* — To play jokes on a green logger.

Monteleone, Vincent Joseph. *Criminal Slang: The Vernacular of the Underworld Lingo*. Rev ed. Boston: Christopher Pub. House, 1949.

HOOSIER (N) A prison visitor.

HOOSIER FIEND (N) An inexperienced drug fiend.



Montgomery, Michael B. and Hall, Joseph S. *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004.

hoosier *noun*

A variant forms *hoodger/hoojer* ['hudʒə].

**B**

**1** A person native to the mountains, esp one considered ill mannered or particularly rustic (In Joseph Hall's early research, mountain people often use this term to refer to themselves familiarly or jokingly.)

**1936** LMSAS (Swain Co NC). **1938**. Hall *Coll.* Emerts Cove TN People don't like to be called hoosiers now. (Glen Shults) **1941** Hall *Coll.* Morristown TN Hoodgers, people speak of god-dam hoodgers ... a fella who don't know nothin' except what they've learned in the mountains. In town they speak of "country hoodger" or "mountain hoodger." Here in North Carolina they speak of "Tennessee Hoodgers." In Tennessee they speak of "North Carolina Hoodgers" (Jerry Collins) **1942** Hall *Phonetics* 99. [DARE chiefly South, South Midland]

*Oxford English Dictionary*. Second Edition. Volume 7. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Hoosier, n.

A nickname for: a native or inhabitant of the state of Indiana. b. An inexperienced, awkward, or unsophisticated person.

Partridge, Eric. *A Dictionary of the Underworld: British and American*. Macmillan, 1950.

\*hoosier, or H—. A native of Indiana: s., not c. 'Allegedly derived from "Who's here?" (Irwin). —2. Hence, a rustic; a simpleton; tramps': 1899, Josiah Flynt, *Tramping with Tramps*, Glossary, 'Everybody who does not know the world as the hobo knows it is to him a "farmer", "hoosier", or outsider'; 1923, Anon., *The Confessions of a Bank Burglar*; Oct. 18, 1924, Flynn's, 'The "hoosiers"—yegg slang for farmers' (article by Wm J. Flynn); 1925, *Leverage*, 'Hoosier, n. A happy-go-lucky mark; an easy mark; a farmer; a rube'; 1926, Jack Black; July 23, 1927, Flynn's; 1928, J. K. Ferrier, 'Crime in the United States', in his *Crooks and Crime*; May 1928, *The American Mercury*; 1931, Stiff; 1931, Godfrey Irwin, 'An inefficient worker or a victim of some confidence game'; 1936, Lee Duncan, *Over the Wall*; 1939, Anon., *Twenty Grand Apiece* (an inexperienced thief); extant. —3. Hence, 'A simple, loutish person ... likely to be a rat; any person in disfavour with the speaker,' *Ersine*, 1933; extant. —4. Hence, a person given to prison- visiting: convicts': 1934, Howard N. Rose; extant.

\*Hoosier cop. A policeman in the service of the State of Indiana: 1911, *Hobo Camp Fire Tales*, 7th ed.; prob. dating from before 1900 and remaining c. until prob. not later than 1915. Indiana is 'the Hoosier State'; see cop, n., 1.

\*hoosier fiend. An inexperienced addict: drug traffic: since ca. 1920. BVB. See hoosier, 2. \*hoosier stiff. A worthless cheque issued or used by a tyro in the art of dud-cheque passing: forgers': since the 1920's. Maurer, 1941. See hoosier, 2.

Wentworth, Harold. *American Dialect Dictionary*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1944.

**hoosier**, n. A native of the mountains.

Cf. **hoojee**.



**1937-40 w. NC-eTenn.** | hudʒr |.

**hoojee**, *n.* A dirty or frightful-looking tramp. Cf. **hoopie**

**1927 Maine Coast**, hoojee. **1941 Va.** Negro in **n.W.Va.** |hu'dʒɪ|. 'mountain hoojy' =hillbilly

**hoojin**, *n.* A country Jake.

**1940 Penn.-W.Va line.**

Wentworth, Harold and Flexner, Stuart Berg. *Dictionary of American Slang*. Second Supplemented Edition. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975.

Hoosier *n.* 1. An incompetent or inexperienced worker; an unworldly person, a rustic, hick, or rube; a fool, a dupe. *Logger, carnival, circus, and hobo use c1925; archaic.*

*"Hoosier" – a citizen or resident of Indiana is the only nondisparaging use of this word.*

2. A new convict or prison guard; a prison visitor. *Prison use c1930.*

Hoosier *up* 1. To shirk; to malingering, to plot a slowdown of work. 1926.

The association of hoosier with prison seems a bit strange. But Carl Panzram, a serial killer (among his other crimes), is supposed to have said to his executioner moments before he was hanged in 1930, "Hurry it up, you Hoosier bastard, I could hang a dozen men while you're screwing around." (Ward, 2004, p. 71) Other reports of Panzram's farewell vary in language, but the prison officer with the noose is always "you Hoosier bastard."

Sources other than dictionaries also provide definitions of "hoosier."

Banta, R. E. *Hoosier Caravan: A Treasury of Indiana Life and Lore*, selected with comment, by R. E. Banta. New and enlarged edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975.

And there [New Orleans] it was that they received the name "hoosier": an epithet that had come originally from Lancashire, that meant a tall and green and gawky lad. A yokel, a hick. A backwoodsman who obviously didn't know much about book larnin'. (p. 6)

Holbrook, Stewart H. "Ghost Towns Still Walk." *American Forests*. Vol. 43, no. 2, May, 1937.

And when cheap help was scarce, the company took to advertising in the help-wanted columns of Eastern country newspapers: "MEN WANTED (ran the ads) to come West and learn the lumber industry in the Greatest Lumber Manufacturing Plant in the world. Experience unnecessary. Good chance for advancement. Fare paid to industrious men."

For some reason this slightly optimistic announcement was well received in the back counties of Indiana; and presently there came to Cosmopolis a horde of Hoosier farm hands, few of whom had ever seen a sawmill, much less the "greatest lumber manufacturing plant in the world." And their efforts to engage in such a strange industry were such as to bring the term *hoosier* into use to designate a man who doesn't know his job. (p. 217, 242)

Holbrook, Stewart H. "Wobbly Talk." *The American Mercury*. Vol. VII, no. 25, January, 1926.

Their efforts to handle lumber, if one is to believe eye-witnesses, were pathetic. Hence the word *hoosier* is applied to anyone who is incompetent. When a crew of workmen purposefully *hoosier up* on a company, it means what experts in sabotage term a "conscious withdrawal of efficiency." (p. 64)



Kane, Elisha K. "The Jargon of the Underworld." *Dialect Notes*, Vol. V, 1927.  
*hoosier*, n. An incompetent workman or tramp. (p. 451)

Maurer, David W. *Whiz Mob: A Compilation of the Technical Argot of Pickpockets with their Behavior Pattern*. [n.p.]: American Dialect Society, 1955. (Publication of the American Dialect Society, No. 24)

A farmer or yokel is called by old-timers a *rufus* (obsolescent) or a *hoosier*. "So he froze there, and he can't get his hands up. And I think he is reaching for something, you see. So I'm afraid to take my eyes off the 'hoosier'." (p.106)

Thus *hoosier grift* is the crowd at a country fair or a small-town street fair." (p. 174)

Perkins, Anne E. "Vanishing Expressions of the Maine Coast." *American Speech*. Vol. III, no. 3, 1928.

Why is a tramp who is dirty or terrifying a "hoojee" (surely not from Huguenot)? (p. 141)

### **Along the River**

Many stories about the word "hoosier" contain a common thread — the river. Samuel Hoosier constructs a canal to allow navigation around the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville. Flatboat men, including those Hoosa men with their corn, run their goods downriver to market. Along the banks Hushers still bullies and taunters with brawny fists. Brawls, resulting in victorious "Huzzas!" occur between Hoosiers and Kentuckians, each from across the water. Fights continue to the levees of New Orleans, where Hoosier hussars triumph again.

The river tales reinforce the idea that the term "Hoosier" belonged in the early nineteenth century to the rough men of the Ohio and Wabash River Valleys. Notably it applied to those in the newly settled areas to the west of Kentucky, meaning southern Indiana. Accepting the term, as Finley did, Indianans adopted it as its own, and eventually it spread to mean residents of the state without a sense of ruffiansm.





“The Jolly Flatboatmen” by George Caleb Bingham

### **Not Southern Scorn, Local Pride and River Culture**

In his article “Not Southern Scorn but Local Pride” Jonathan Clark Smith of Hanover College questions the idea that “the word [hoosier] had been term of contempt in general use in the South before it became specific to Indiana.” (Smith, 2007, p. 183-184) He points out, the first to do so, the incorrect date of 1826 on the Curtis letter (it is 1846 and confirmably so) often cited as the first written appearance of the word and discovered no evidence of the term before February 11, 1831, a fact significant in his attempt to bind the word Hoosier to the river trade.

Dunn had dismissed the explanation that rough-looking boatmen had acquired an “insulting nickname as they traveled through the South.” (Smith, 2007, p. 185) But, Smith writes, “Dunn may have had the origin and the effect reversed.” (Smith, 2007, p. 184-185) He links the term to “pride and river transport” and finds connections with the Wabash, the Wabash and Erie Canal (“Canal Hoosier”), and the name of a new steamboat (“The Indiana Hoosier”). He further cites an article from the *Wabash Herald* of July 8, 1831 mentioning the “Hoosiers (as the boatmen term them)” from which, he concludes, “With the parenthetical phrase ‘as the boatmen term them’ this writer not only identifies the original meaning as a farmer-boatman from Indiana but also the word’s origin in the Ohio River commerce culture.” (Smith, 2007, p. 188-189)

Professor Smith suggests that the term somehow grew up in Indiana around 1830. It then spread outward from the state, the vehicle of dissemination being the boatmen making their way down to New Orleans. As he puts it, “In particular, my discovery of two previously unnoticed print references helps refocus attention on details that suggest that the term originated around



1830 with specific reference to Indiana farmer-river boatmen; the more generalized and contemptuous use came later.” (Smith, 2007, p. 184)

Smith, “challenging the conventional paradigm of a southern insult,” (Smith, 2007, p. 193) points out the lack of early documentary evidence of “hoosier” as a derogatory term. He gives considerable weight to the 1833 article from the *Cincinnati Republican* and quotes its text, the key being, along with the date, that “The word Hooshier is indebted for its existence to that once numerous and unique, but now extinct class of mortals called the Ohio Boatmen.” (Smith, 2007, p. 185)

Thus, known evidence suggests a word of relatively recent coinage, sometime around 1830, associated for some reason with the Indiana flatboat or steamboat farmers, given currency by the Wabash-Erie Canal issue, and then rapidly embraced statewide after a celebrated poem on the first day of 1833. All of this remains consistent with the *Cincinnati* editor’s observation, in mid-1833, that many people were suddenly talking about this nickname, and wondering where it originated. (Smith, 2007, p. 192)

Smith admits, “this body of evidence still does not address where the word actually *did* come from or why it was peculiar to *Indiana* farmers.” (Smith, 2007, p. 192) Charles Walker had wondered about the latter question in 1908. So had William Piersen in 1995.

In the September, 2008 issue of the *Indiana Magazine of History* Smith adds to his earlier study. He ran across the RACKOON letter from the *Vincennes Gazette* of February 19, 1831, to the best of his knowledge “the earliest known printed instance of the word ‘hoosier.’” (Smith 2008, p. 293) He states that the item is consistent with his findings “that ‘hoosier’ was initially identified with farmers on the Wabash, while the final sentence gives further credence to the explanation in the October 14, 1833 *Cincinnati Republican* that the word began life as a fighting term.” (Smith 2008, p. 294)

Smith also cites *Western Life in the Stirrups* by Virtulon Rich, an account of a trip west to Indiana and Illinois in the spring and summer of 1832. The book’s title is the editor’s choice; the title page of the journal manuscript itself reads: A Sketch of a / Journey to the West / in the / Spring & Summer of / 1832. / By / Virtulon Rich / (Rich, 1965, introduction, p. xviii) The date of the writing is unclear, but Smith’s guess is the winter of 1832-1833, when the writer was in Indianapolis. This would correspond to the “hoosier fever” in Indianapolis in January, 1833, in the wake of the Finley poem.” (Smith, 2008, p. 294) He comments on how “freely” Rich uses the term “Hoosher,” and cites Rich’s “history of the word ... almost certainly earlier than the *Cincinnati* one.” (Smith, 2008, p. 294)

... for I had little thought of becoming a “hoosher.” (The people of Indiana are called “Hoosher”—a name which is said to have originated with an Indiana ruffian, who having severely flogged a Kentucky boatman of superior size, “jumped up” & exclaimed, “I am a hoosher”) (Rich, 1965, p. 71)

Rich spent two weeks in Indiana itself, from mid-month to the end of June, 1832, with a quick trip into Illinois. He mentions hoosier eight times in his account of those weeks, sometimes



spelled with a capital H and sometimes with a lowercase h, sometimes in quotes, sometimes not. He read law in Indianapolis during the winter 1832-33 (Rich, 1965, introduction, p. xii) before being admitted to the bar in Ohio.

### **Abe Lincoln, Flatboatmen, and Hoosiers in New Orleans**

Sometime in the late fall or early winter of 1816, Thomas Lincoln moved his family from Kentucky to Spencer County, Indiana (at the time part of Perry County), where his son Abraham grew from childhood to young adulthood. Lincoln later recalled the countryside in verse.

When first my father settled here  
'Twas then the frontier line,  
The panther's scream, filled the night with fear,  
And Bears preyed on the swine..." (Lincoln, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 386)

He later wrote of it in prose, "There was an unbroken wilderness there then, and an axe was put in his hand; and with the trees and logs and grubs he fought until he reached his twentieth year." (Lincoln, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 463)

His cousin, Dennis Hanks, less poetically described the "unbroken wilderness" in a letter to William H. Herndon, dated March 22, 1866.

I will jest Say to you that it was the Brushes Cuntry that I have Ever Seen in any New Cuntry Spencer County — Ia — all Kinds of undergrowth Spice wod Wild privy Shewmake Dogwood grape vines matter to Gaether so that as the old Saying gowes you could Drive a Butcher Knife up to the Handle in it Bares and wile Cats Deer turkyes Sqirls Rabbits &c (Wilson, 1998, p. 235)

During his Indiana years, Lincoln "learned to use the ax and to hold the plow. He became inured to all the duties of seed-time and harvest. [He drove] his father's team in the field, or from woods with a heavy draught, or on the rough path to the mill, the store, or river landing. He was specially ... adept at felling trees, and acquired a muscular strength in which he was equaled by few." (Barrett, 1865, p. 24-25)

When he was nineteen, an interesting proposition came Lincoln's way. Early in 1828, James Gentry, a local merchant, offered him a job accompanying his son, Allen Gentry, on a flatboat to sell a cargo of agricultural goods in New Orleans. The lad from Pigeon Creek accepted. (His father had made a similar trip in 1806, and Lincoln would again in 1830, this time from Illinois.) The voyagers Left Rockport in April and travelled 1,273 river miles (Campanella, 2010, p. 83), down into the slave South to New Orleans, the busiest slave-trading city in the nation.

Newspapers of the day describe the character and conduct of men on the river. One account of the flatboatmen in New Orleans, "EXTRACTS FROM THE CLOCKMAKER; *Or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville,*" ran in the Washington City *Madisonian* of October 20, 1838.



There's the hoosiers of Indiana, the suckers of Illinoy, the pukes of Missouri, the buckeyes of Ohio, the red horses of Kentucky, the mudheads of Tennessee, the wolverines of Michigan, the eels of New England, and the corn crackers of Virginia. All these, with many others, make up the population, which is mottled with black and all its shades, 'most of all supplied by emigration. It is a great caravansary filled with strangers, disperate enough to make your hair stand on end, drinkin' all day, gamblin' all night, and fightin' all the time. (*The Madisonian* (Washington City), October 20, 1838; also referenced by Campanella, 2010, p. 95)

Another version appeared as "Sam Slick's Description of New Orleans," in the *Barre Gazette* (Barre, Massachusetts), of January 25, 1839. (Campanella, 2010, p. 95)

A later "typical characterization," as Campanella calls it, appeared as part of an article by Albert Phelps in the *Atlantic Monthly* of July 1901.

Before the steamboat trade began, hundreds of flatboats came down the river, and the city swarmed with bargemen — a rough, disorderly class, which is by its boorishness of manner, lack of culture, and keen scent for a bargain, gave an evil savor to the name "American;" so that to this day many old-fashioned residents of the old quarter still look upon the Anglo-Saxon as a semi-barbarian, without polish or the finer instincts of intellect or art, and one still hears, occasionally, the negro expression *Méricains coquins*. (Phelps, 1901, p. 123; also referenced by Campanella, 2010, p. 95-96)

During the campaign of 1860 a Lincoln supporter, Richard James Oglesby, "sought an accessible symbol that would portray Abraham Lincoln as a frontier commoner with mythical proportions of strength and moral fiber." (Campanella, 2010, p. 226) From a comment on Lincoln's youth, he hit upon the image of Lincoln the Rail Splitter, which was quickly picked up by the press. (Campanella, 2010, p. 227) Lincoln the Boatman would hardly do, given the roistering reputation of the rivermen, early established by the life and legends of Mike Fink and confirmed, it seems, by Fink's companions and successors on the water. Besides, "piloting a flatboat—a group activity involving a bulky vessel—did not pictographically hold a candle to the individualized heroism of a tall, powerful frontiersman swinging an axe in a wilderness forest." (Campanella, 2010, p. 227)





Thomas Hart Benton, *Cultural Panel #4* (1933)  
Indiana University Auditorium

The *New Bedford Register* of July 7, 1841 gives a gentler description of hoosiers on the river.

HOOSIERS.—The Yankees have long been known and properly appreciated. Other aliases are coming into use among our countrymen, which it will be necessary to understand. The most important belongs to the Hoosiers. These are locally the people of Indiana, and generally the emigrants from the Southern States who settle in any of the free States of the N. West. They are a class who, like the Jews and the Yankees, can be known by their habits and customs wherever they are. The Hoosiers are found in great numbers in flat boats on the Mississippi. One of their cargoes down the river is corn and pigs. The corn is unshelled and unhusked. The pigs eat corn, and the Hoosiers eat corn and pig, until they get to N. Orleans, when the pigs, the remainder of the corn, and the flat, are sold, and the Hoosiers wend their way up stream again. Their apparel is much of it made of a peculiar domestic fabric which they manufacture without the aid of protection, called Hoosier Jeans. They are in almost all respects a people quite unlike the Yankees.

One article the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* (July 26, 1839) was extremely kind to Hoosiers. Gone from the account are the antics of drinking, gambling and brawling semi-barbarians. Instead there remains a description of men who might resemble Abraham Lincoln and his companion, Allen Gentry.



A Hoozier.  
“A bold peasantry, their country’s pride.”

There is a primitive and pristine simplicity of character and independence of mind about a Hoozier that pleases us much. His step is as untrammelled by the artifice of fashion, and as free from the constraint of foppery as the mighty rivers of the west are from obstruction in their impetuous course to the ocean; or as the path of the buffalo herd over the wild prairie. Born on the fructuous soil of freedom and unchecked in his growth by avarice or dissimulation, he rises to manhood with a mind unwarped and a spirit unbent, like the trees of the forest around him. He loves liberty—loves it in his heart’s core—he would fight—he would die for it. He raises not his voice for liberty as the demagogue does to ascend to power, nor as the sordid political speculator does to obtain place, nor as the mercenary tool of party does for a consideration of dollars and cents; but he cries from his soul, “long live liberty,” because the instinct of his free and unsophisticated nature tells him it is the inalienable birth-right and heritage of man; and he thinks that to live without the free air that wantons around his western home. He may be ignorant of the use of the eye-glass, but is his aim with the rifle less deadly? He may not know how to lead his partner through the mazes of a quadrille or French cotillion, but are his spirits less buoyant, or are the feelings of his heart less sensitive? He might not be able to discuss the merits of the last novel, but thinkest thou that he is ignorant of the cardinal principles of liberty? In a word, he may not be a *thing* with his face hid in a stock, in starch, long hair and a shirt collar; but does not his industry contribute more to the prosperity of the state in time of peace, and might not more confidence be placed in his brawny arm in time of war, than a whole regiment of such men of doubtful gender? A Hoozier has all the good qualities of a Yankee, without his genius for manufacturing notions.

He is frank, free and generous—of a noble nature, and his utter unbelief in deception and chicanery, too often make him the dupe of the dishonest and the victim of the vicious. We do love to see a Hoozier roll along the Levee with the proceeds of the plunder of his flatboat in his pocket. It is the wages of industry—of labor performed at the impulse of his own free will; and no lordly ecclesiastic or titled layman dares claim a cent of it. He feels the pride of his place, and would not barter his situation for the empty popularity, or the enviable notoriety which is often the recompense of statesmen, or of him who embarks on the troubled waters of public life. He feels that on his return to his home he is master of “all he surveys.” He can, sitting round the bright and blazing wood fire, relate city scenes or adventures of travel to his credulous neighbors; and although he may not do it with the elegance of a Willis, or the fidelity of an Irving, he does it in language understood by his audience, and in accents which never fail to interest. He knows there is no task master to say when he shall work and when rest—himself is sole arbiter in the case. He knows that he may aid at the “log-rolling,” join the “apple bee” frolic, go to the “corn hoeing,” “corn huskings,” or “coon hunt” of his neighbors, or indulge in any other amusement or occupation which his fancy may dictate. To use an independent though not very elegant expression, he knows full well that when he gets home he may do just as he “d—n pleases.” But let us take another view of him on the Levee. See with what pity he regards those who are confined to the unchanging



monotony of a city life, and observe how he despises uniformity of dress. He has just donned a new blue dress coat with silk linings and flowered gilt buttons. His new pants look rather short for the present fashion; but this is easily accounted for. They are of stocking fit or French cut at the instep, and thinking they pressed rather closely to be comfortable, he has curtailed them of some six inches of their fair proportions. He carries a dozen new shirts—some colored and some white cotton or linen in his hand, but glories in still sporting the same unpolished peg boots, and the woollen, round topped, wide leafed hat in which he set out for home. The Hoosier says, or rather seems to say—  
“A life in the woods for me.”  
and his happy and independent life attest the wisdom of his choice.

In its second issue of 1905 the *Indiana Magazine of History* printed the item from the *Picayune* with the title “The Primitive Hoosier.” The *Indiana History Bulletin* did the same in October 1969.

New Orleans seems to have been quite interested in hoosiers, in particular the flatboat men from upriver come down to sell their goods in the city. Were they merely a curiosity, standing out for their frankness and their wardrobe? Were those admiring words from the *Picayune* sincere? Do they really so “love to see a Hoozier roll along the Levee?” And were the hoosiers on the levee or loose in town all Indiana men? It is not always clear. In *Pickings from the Portfolio of the Reporter of the New Orleans*, one story (originally published in the *Picayune* November 13, 1840), “A Live Hoosier,” does refer specifically to Indiana, and professes affectionate regard.

We love to look at a real, genuine, live Hoosier, and we love to talk to him. We do not mean those fever and ague affected fellows who find their way into Indiana and out of it again, and who are little better than locomotive medicine chests; we mean those stalworth [sic] sons of the soil, with sound hearts and strong arms, who are “to the manner born.”

Another hoosier article (originally published in the *Picayune* September 15, 1844) appears in *Pickings*. The closest reference to Indiana, though, is a mention of Louisville; otherwise, the hoosier of the *Picayune* sketch could simply be a generic type.

#### A SKETCH “OWER TRUE,” HAVING A HOOSIER FOR ITS HERO.

An original character is your genuine hoosier. By genuine we mean such an [sic] one as has all the attributes that peculiarly belong to the back woodsmen of the west—one whose manners have suffered neither change nor modification by connexion or association with men of more conventional habits; one, in a word, who, like the trees of his native forest, had no other culture than that bestowed on him by nature. He may well be called a genuine hoosier. There is an originality in his phraseology, which, being the imitation of no other known idiom, by none can it be successfully imitated; and there is a primitive freshness in his manner and appearance, which show that while the fetters of fashion and etiquette enchain their millions among what is called the “enlightened



classes,” he, disdaining all such artificial incumbrances of both limb and language, dresses as he willeth, and talks as he pleaseth. Indeed, with the future antiquarian, it must be a matter of mystery, to account for the noble stand taken by the hoosier against the effeminate frivolity of our times, when almost all of those who pique themselves on being more refined than their fellows, are the victims of its enervating embraces.

So much for the hoosier in general, and now for the hoosier in particular. One of them—a fellow with thews and sinews sufficiently strong to cope with a bear—visited the city last week, and here he still remains. As he is no bad specimen of the class, we mean to chronicle, in part, his sayings and doings. But first of his appearance, as he jumped from his flatboat on to the Levee, when, by the way, he was heard to remark that he “didn’t see the reason of folks livin’ in a heap this way, where they grew no corn and had no *bars* to kill.” (Corcoran, 1846, p. 46)

The “Sketch” continues for another few pages and includes an illustration of the hoosier, who is chatting with a contractor about the possibility of a job.





"How are you, Squire—how d'ye rise!"—Page 47.

Corcoran, D. *Pickings from the Portfolio of the Reporter of the New Orleans "Picayune" ... with original designs, by Felix O. C. Darley*. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson [c1846], between p. 48 and p. 49.

As promised, the author does "chronicle his sayings and doings," with ample room in a few pages for the words and antics of a countryman in the big city.

Without illustrations the item also appeared, translated into German as "Der Hoosier; Treu nach der Natur" in Karl Ernst Richter's *Nordamerikanisches Volksleben. Aus dem Englischen*. Leipzig: C.E. Kollmann, (Vol. 3, 1853).

The term "ower true" used in the title means completely true or really true, or at heart true in spite of what you might think or what elements of a narrator's imagination might surround a tale. It is often associated with Sir Walter Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*, and frequently appears in



quotes as if a literary term. And Andrew Cheviot in his *Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions, and Popular Rhymes of Scotland* gives as its meaning, “It’s a pity but yet it’s true.” (Cheviot, 1896, p. 39) Such an avowal of truthfulness must lead to a suspicion of pretense, if you were not already wondering about the *Picayune* tales. To amuse its readers the *Picayune* provides comic stories about the uncultured from the wilds up North, awkward visitors to their sophisticated city. The writings are not news. Like the stories in *Yankee Notions*, they are fiction, some more transparent than others, but none opaque. There may be an element of admiration for such plain folk, or maybe not. Should there be, though, behind any esteem looms the stereotype. On March 6, 1853 the *Picayune* felt free to publish a letter that “accidently” came into their hands.

### A Hoosier at the St. Louis Ball

Those who were at the brilliant mask and fancy dress ball at the St. Louis Hotel will doubtless remember the Hoosier who excited so much amusement by his queer remarks and determination to exchange his turnips and potatoes for a quantity of calico to take up to his sweetheart Sally. The following letter from him addressed to her, which accidently came into our hands, will be relished by those who were there and those who were not.

The letter, clearly made up, contains an abundance of poor spelling, quaint constructions, and rustic vocabulary, ignorance of city manners, comic misunderstandings, and wide-eyed wonder. Ben Johnson (of *Sleepy Hollow*) finds the food strange, there being no bacon nor cabbage nor “punkin pie.” He is also concerned about the young women being hurt during what he calls the “porker dance,” apparently meaning a vigorous polka. He also has trouble finding a place to spit.

### Hoosiers in St. Louis

While “hoosier” may still be heard in areas of the south in its disparaging meaning of “uncouth rustic,” the term packs a far worse punch in St. Louis, a sense of pungent condemnation and social undesirability. In his article “You \$#^%?@ Hoosier!: Derogatory Names and the Derogatory Name in St. Louis, Missouri,” Thomas E. Murray carefully analyzes the use of “hoosier” in the Gateway City, where it is the favorite epithet of abuse.

Among the many conclusions to be drawn from this discussion, one especially begs to be noticed: with very few exceptions *hoosier* is the preferred term of derogation among St. Louisans, and especially so when the derogation is white or, even more specifically, white and male. (Murray, 1987, p. 3)

“When asked what a Hoosier is,” Murray writes, “St. Louisans readily list a number of defining characteristics, among which are ‘lazy,’ ‘slow-moving,’ ‘derelict,’ and ‘irresponsible.’” (Murray, 1987, p. 3) He continues, “... few epithets in St. Louis carry the pejorative connotations or the potential for eliciting negative responses that *hoosier* does.” (Murray, 1987, p. 3) After conducting surveys and interviews across lines of age and race, Murray tabulated the results and found the term to be ecumenically applied. He also notes that the word often is used with a modifier, almost redundantly, as in “some damn Hoosier.” (Murray, 1987, p. 4) In a



section of his article Murray considers the history of the word and cites Baker and Carmony (1975). For him one question remains, why Hoosier (in Indiana a “neutral or, more often, positive” term) should remain “alive and well in St. Louis, occupying as it does the honored position of being the city’s number one term of derogation.” (Murray, 1987, p. 7)

Elaine Viets contributed a column, “City Living Q&A for Outsiders,” to the magazine section of the May 27, 1990 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. When it came to “What is a hoosier?” she did her best (or worst) to answer.

A mean, nasty degenerate who infests city neighborhoods. Hoosiers often come from the country, and go back there every weekend and during hunting season. Do not confuse hoosiers with rednecks, who are simply ill-bred louts. Hoosiers are especially designed to irritate city people. They are slobs. Hoosiers’ private lives are messy, too. When a hoosier introduces you to his wife and his sister, she could be the same person.

A radio broadcast took up where Murray and Viets left off. During the program, “Fresh Air,” Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist and National Public Radio commentator, answered questions about regional nicknames. He cites Viets (also quoted by Paul Dickson), saying, “According to *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* columnist Elaine Viets, in Missouri a hoosier is ‘a low-life redneck’ somebody you can recognize because, as she puts it, ‘they have a car on concrete blocks in their front yard and are likely to have shot their wife, who may also be their sister.’” (Nunberg, 1998, broadcast) He continues more soberly to say, “The best guess is that hoosier is derived from a British dialect word hoozer, meaning ‘big or large.’ As early as 1832, the word was used in America to refer to a large or burly person; from there it was a short step to meaning ‘a big rustic, a galoot.’” (Nunberg, 1998, broadcast)

Under the headline “Hoosiers” Mike Seely also discusses hoosiers in the *St. Louis Riverfront Times* of March 26, 2003. He records an email exchange with Viets, the former columnist now a mystery novelist, who wrote him, “I’ve always defined a hoosier as someone who goes to a family reunion for a date,” and “In St. Louis, it means a low-rent person — much lower than a redneck. You can be born a redneck, but you must sink to hoosier status.” While still at the *Post-Dispatch*, she also wrote, as Nunberg quoted in the “Fresh Air” broadcast, and good enough to repeat, her classic description of a hoosier.

Hoosiers are destroyers: they get into fistfights and people are always calling the police about them. They have a car on concrete blocks in the front yard and are likely to have shot their wife, who may also be their sister.

Seely’s article, subtitled “The stereotype is all about cheap beer, fast cars and fat girls. But there’s a little bit of hoosier in all of us,” includes comments from a local musician, apparently made during happy hour. Asked to list some “common hoosier traits,” he does: “cigarettes, whiskey, fat girls, Milwaukee’s Best beer, NASCAR fanaticism, bumper stickers.” And in case there is any mistake, a woman can be a hoosier, too. “For every hoosier man, there’s a hoosier chick. Say you’re out on a date and she jumps up on the table and starts dancing to ZZ Top ... You just went out with a hoosier woman.” The musician concludes, “A hoosier might not be



able to put together a proper sentence ... but that [*characterization omitted for tender ears*] can rebuild your transmission.”

In his *What It Takes: The Way to the White House*, Richard Ben Cramer writes about Richard Gephardt’s early political success in St. Louis, where he was an alderman between 1971 and 1976. Gephardt was one of a group of younger politicians challenging the old order, and they mocked the “old farts” using the favored local term of disrespect.

After Board meetings, the other Young Turks would sit down to lunch, plan the next week’s mischief. They’d laugh about the old “Hoosiers” on the Board. (South to a certain line, those people had been in the city for years—they were the Hoosierocracy; a bit further out lived the Hoosieoisie; and way out, with the pickups and three wheelers, were the Hoosietariat.) Those Friday lunches were cackling self-congratulations for all they’d put over on the old farts ... hah! Never knew what hit ’em! (Cramer, 1992, p. 680)

The St. Louis hoosier found its way into literature. Glenn Savan’s *White Palace* follows the unlikely romance between Max (27), a recently widowed, compulsively neat former English teacher turned advertising copywriter, and Nora (43), a generally ill-kempt waitress at the White Palace, a greasy burger joint in South St. Louis. As Max drives to the White Palace to demand a refund for being shorted six burgers from a 50-burger party order, the narrator shares some of his thoughts.

Max, too, had grown up poor ... But that had been one kind of poor, and down here, south of Highway 44, was another—Max had never been deprived of the benefits of civilization. His gut reaction to what St. Louisans (not to be confused with people from Indiana) labeled as “hoosiers,” poor white trash, make him wonder what caliber of mind he really had. He didn’t like these surly downtrodden sons and daughters of laid-off brewery workers and transplanted farmers from the Ozarks; they made him feel uncomfortable; he had a hard time thinking of them as full-fledged human beings. (Savan, 1987, p. 18-19)

There is more, with reference to barbaric beards, shaggy hair, Budweiser T-shirts, cheap rubber sandals, tattoos, glum faces, general uncleanliness, heat, Busch beer, and rusted-out Oldsmobiles.

Nora and Max have their romantic ups and downs. During one of the downs, Nora tells Max, “You think I’m just a dumb, ignorant hoosier, don’t you?” (Savan, 1987, p. 78) On another occasion, she says, “I may be ignorant—I’m not denying that—but I’m sure as hell not stupid. Lord, you should just try and talk to some of the people I work with. Or some of the men I used to go out with. You never saw such a pack of mindless hoosiers.” (Savan, 1987, p. 198) In the film made from the book, also titled “White Palace,” the word hoosier appears only once, when Nora says, “I might be a dumb hoosier, but that’s one thing [*a reference to an action verb omitted*] I know how to do, baby.”



When Nora makes an effort to smarten up for a party with Max's mother and some of his friends, the best he can say of her is that "She looked ... breathtakingly presentable." (Savan, 1987, p. 250) The line is splendid.

### **A Kind Word or Two, Please**

In his *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, Harlow Lindley collected travel accounts of visitors to the new lands of what was then the American West. William Faux, recorded his impressions in *Memorable Days in America* (1823). "Now quite out of society," he wrote, "every thing and every body, with some few exceptions, looks wild and half savage." (Lindley, 1916, p. 292) Faux also complains about sleeping arrangements and food ("All was coarse, wild, and ill-flavoured."). (Lindley, 1916, p. 294) Things improve a bit, although, he sneers, "The refuse, rather than the flower of the east, seems, with some exceptions to be here." (Lindley, 1916, p. 297) Lindley dismisses Faux's accounts as "simply one line of ridicule after another" and names him "chief among those Englishmen who scorned everything American." (Lindley, 1916, p. 291)

Richard Lee Mason, a Marylander on his way to bounty land in Illinois, observes in his *Narrative of Richard Lee Mason in the Pioneer West 1819*, "The people of Indiana differ widely from Kentuckians in habits, manners and even dialect. Whilst hospitality, politeness and good sense characterize Kentuckians, ignorance, impudence and laziness has stamped the Indianians." (Lindley, 1916, p. 235-236)

Karl Postel in *The Americans as they are; Described in a Tour through the Valley of the Mississippi* (1828) at least does not call Indianans wild or savage or ignorant or impudent or lazy. His opinion of the residents of the young state, however, did not err on the side of flattery.

This want of inter-communication, added to the circumstance that the state of Ohio had already engrossed the whole surplus population from the eastern states, had a prejudicial effect on Indiana, its original population being in general by no means so respectable as that of Ohio. In the north-west it was peopled by French emigrants, from Canada; in the south, on the banks of the Ohio, and farther up, by Kentuckians, who fled from their country for debt, or similar causes.

The state thus became the refuge of adventurers and idlers of every description. (Lindley, 1916, p. 524)

Did no one have a kind word to say about early Hoosiers? Morris Birkbeck did. Two passages in his *Notes on a Journey in America from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois* (1818) illustrate his slightly surprised but favorable judgment of Indianans.

I have good authority for contradicting a supposition that I have met with in England, respecting the inhabitants of Indiania [sic] —that they are lawless, semi-barbarous vagabonds, dangerous to live among. On the contrary, the laws are respected, and are effectual; and the manners of the people are kind and gentle to each other, and to strangers. (Lindley, 1916, p. 177) ... The bulk of the inhabitants of this vast wilderness



may be fairly considered as of the class of the lowest English peasantry, or just emerging from it: but in their manners and morals, and especially in their knowledge and proud independence of mind, they exhibit a contrast so striking, that he must indeed be a *petit maître* traveller, or ill-informed of the character and circumstances of his poor countrymen, or deficient in good and manly sentiment, who would not rejoice to transplant, into these boundless regions of freedom, the millions whom he has left behind him groveling in ignorance and want. (Lindley, 1916, p. 180)

William Newnham Blaney recorded his experiences in *An Excursion through the United States and Canada, 1822-23* (1824). The captain's stay in Indiana was brief, Lindley notes, but his observations "have the ring of candor and genuineness in them." (Lindley, 1916, p. 276)

But when I began to enter into the company of Backwoodsmen, quite off the roads, and where a traveller was seldom or never seen, I found the character of the settlers quite different from what I had supposed. In general they were open hearted and hospitable, giving freely whatever they had, and often refusing any recompense. (Lindley, 1916, p. 279-280)

David Baillie Warden prepared *A Statistical, Political and Historical Account of North America*. (1819). A portion of his survey he devotes to Indiana.

Indiana is but recently settled; but many of the settlers are of a respectable class, and their manners are more refined than could be expected in a place where society is but in its infancy. They are sober and industrious; drunkenness is rare, and quarreling rare in proportion. They set a high value on the right of personal resistance to aggression. They possess great energy of character; and, though they respect the laws generally, do not hesitate sometimes to redress what they consider a public injury, by a more summary mode of proceeding. They are, however, friendly and obliging. Insanity is scarcely known, either in this or the other western states. (Lindley, 1916, p. 232)

Timothy Flint looks hopefully to the future of a fast growing state. He can almost see it. In a passage from *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley* (1828), he lays out a vision, "But the most pleasing part of the picture would be to see independent and respectable yeomen presiding over these great changes. The young children would be seen playing about the rustic establishments; full fed and happy, sure presages of the numbers, healthfulness and independence of the coming generation." (Lindley, 1916, p. 462)

## Westward Hoo

In his thesis, "The Southern-ness of Hoosierdom: The Nativity of Settlement Groups in Indiana by 1850," Gregory Rose explores the origins of Indiana's early population. "The strong Southern population element in Indiana was actually Upland Southern, and had significant cultural connections with Southeastern Pennsylvania, the initial source of the Upland Southern population," he begins. (Rose, 1981, p. ii) In 1795, a year after the Battle of Fallen Timbers, land opened to non-Indian settlement. Various treaties between 1803 and 1809 freed more land,



and with the New Purchase in 1818 about two-thirds of Indiana was available to those migrating west. “The most commonly traveled road through the South was the Wilderness Road,” Rose writes, “the main line of which reached Cumberland Gap after leading up the Shenandoah Valley, and tributary valleys in the headwaters area, from southeastern Pennsylvania.” (Rose, 1981, p. 124)

The journey west was generally accomplished by what Rose calls “stepwise migration.” (Rose, 1981, p. 149) Families stopped for a generation, or perhaps two, or remained in one place for a number of years before moving to another and continuing their movement west. The family of Abraham Lincoln, for example, followed this pattern as they migrated from New England westward to the new frontier.

Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Norfolk, England, left Britain for the colonies and settled in Hingham Massachusetts. His son Mordecai remained there, but the next Mordecai moved to Monmouth County, New Jersey, and later migrated to Berks County, Pennsylvania. An early Abraham remained in Pennsylvania, but his son John (known as “Virginia John”) moved to Augusta County, Virginia. Another Abraham, the grandfather of the president, left Augusta County for Kentucky where, family legend has it, he was killed by Indians. Thomas, the president’s father, left Kentucky and bought land in Spencer County, Indiana, where his family lived between 1816 and 1830. Another step took them to Illinois.

In *Abraham Lincoln: An American Migration* Marion Dexter Learned traces the Lincoln family’s migration and places it within the greater population movement of the time.

The migration of the Lincolns from Pennsylvania to Virginia and other parts of the South and West reflects one of the most important movements of American population — the movement along the Great Valley and across the mountains into the valleys of the Ohio and the Mississippi. It is along this route that the migration of the Lincolns moved from Berks County, Pennsylvania. (Learned, 1909, p. 138)

James Weygand cites a bit of (attempted) humor from Charles Collins (him again), a columnist (“A Line o’ Type or Two”) for the *Chicago Tribune* (“The World’s Greatest Newspaper”) who enjoyed toying with the word “hoosier.”

Charles Collins promulgated the theory hoosier came from hoo, an obsolete expression of surprise. A rustic who cried hoo upon seeing trappings of civilization—store clothing and the like—might be dubbed a hoozer. Or genteel travelers of the East, upon entering Indiana, might have been greeted by hoos of gaping backwoodsmen. So these aristocrats would naturally have told their friends back home the new country was full of hoozers. (Weygand, 1950, p. 21)

Notwithstanding Collins’s snickering at Indiana, he might have blundered toward something, although not a gasp of astonishment. Dunn strongly favored the Anglo-Saxon “hoo,” meaning hill or high ground as a good possibility for the source of hoosier. He also liked “hoozer,” the Cumberland dialect word. Cumberland (now part of Cumbria) is an historic county in the Northwest of England, bordering on Scotland. Among immigrants and native-born Americans



migrating west were considerable numbers of those whose heritage was Lowland Scots, Scotch-Irish, and Northern English. With them may have come both “Hoozer” and “hoo.”

### Back to the Dictionary

Anglo-Saxon dictionaries, dialect dictionaries, and dictionaries of English place names agree on “hoo” meaning a hill or promontory.

Bosworth, Joseph. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth ...* Edited and enlarged by T. Northcote Toller. Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1882-[98].

Hoh, hogh, ho, hoo. A form occurring in local names whose meaning is thus given by Kemble: ‘Originally a point of land, formed like a heel or boot, and stretching into the plain, perhaps even into the sea.’

Cameron, Kenneth. *English Place-Names*. London: B. T. Batsford, 1961.

The basic sense of Old English *hōh* in place-names is “spur of land”, but the spur may vary from a slight rise to a steep ridge. It survives as Hoe, Hoo and Hooe ... (p. 176)

Geeson, Cecil. *A Northumberland and Durham Word Book: The Living Dialect*. Harold Hill: Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1916.

Heugh. “Heugh” has at least five accepted meanings. It is use to describe, for instance, the top of a cliff, and also to denote the bottom of a coal pit!

It is a word used in Northern England and also in Scotland and was known to Sir Walter Scott and other writers. ... (1) A crag, cliff, precipice or steep bank. ... (2) The top of a cliff or precipice. ... (3) A glen, a deep cleft in the rocks, a grassy ravine without water. ... (4) A coal pit, or a coal pit shaft. ... (5) A hollow made in a quarry. ...

Kuhn, Sherman M. (Ed.) *Middle English Dictionary*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952.

hough ... [OE *hōh* ...] 1. A promontory, cliff; mountain or high hill with steep sides ... 2. A projecting ridge of land; eminence, piece of high ground, hill, hillock, artificial mound ...

Mills, A. D. *A Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Hoo, Hooe, ‘(place at) the spur of land’...

*The Scottish National Dictionary, Designed Partly on Regional Lines and Partly on Historical Principles, and Containing all the Scottish Words Known to be in Use or to have been in Use since c. 1700*, edited by William Grant. Edinburgh: The Scottish National Dictionary Association Limited. Vol. 5, 1960.

HEUCH, n., v. Also heugh; †hew; †haigh.

[Sc. jux, jax; w.Abd. jox, s.Sc. juxm; †hox, he; pl. †ju:z. See P.L.D. § 35.6.]

I. n. 1. A crag or precipice, a cliff or steep bank, esp. one overhanging river or sea

2. A glen or ravine with steep overhanging sides



3. The shaft of a pit or mine (Sc. 1808 Jam.); the steep face of a quarry or other excavation, also applied to the pit or quarry itself and
4. Phrs. and Combs.: (1) creeping heugh, a name formerly given to an open-cast coal-working,

II. v. To earth up plants in drills, to trench

[O.Sc. ho(u)ch, heuch, hewch, etc., in place-names from a.1100, = 1. from c.1420, = 2. from c.1470, = 3. from 1434, and = 4. (2) from 1539; North.Mid.Eng. hogh, hill, O.E. hōh, heel, projecting ridge of land, promontory, the same word as Hoch and Eng. place-name hoe. The pl. hews, O.Sc. howys, hewis, is the reg. development of O.E. pl. hōs (< \*hōhas).]

Another word in *The Scottish National Dictionary* deserves some serious thought. It has “hoo” as its root and its definition aligns with the tradition of the rough backwoodsman, uncouth boatman or dirty tramp, with hints of rubbish or trash. Tweak the pronunciation a bit and perhaps the hoosier appears.

HOUSTER, v., n. Also howster, hu(i)ster, hooster.

[ˈh(ʌ)ustər, ˈhøstər]

I.v. To gather together in a confused fashion (Fif. 1825 Jam., Fif. 1957), to hustle together. Hence ppl.adj. huistrin, bustling about in a confused manner, slovenly (Ib.).

II. n. 1. A badly-dressed, untidy person

2. Trash, rubbish;

3. “Soft, bad, nasty food; gen. a mixture of different sorts of meat [Etym. obscure.

If not houser or hooster, though, what do dictionaries say about a source that might turn “hoo” into hoosier? Should one look to the shires?

Bosworth, Joseph. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth ...* Edited and enlarged by T. Northcote Toller. Oxford: The Clarendon press, 1882.

Scír ... IIa. *the people of a district, a tribe ...* IIIa. *The people of a shire, the community inhabiting a shire*

*Middle English Dictionary*, S-SL, edited by Robert E. Lewis. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986.

Shire n. ... (a) A region, district, province; a county; also the inhabitants of a region or county ...

Does the combination lead to Hooscir, Hooshire, Hoosier? Who knows?

## Bicentennial

On December 11, 1816 President James Madison signed a congressional resolution that admitted Indiana into the union as the nineteenth state. To mark the 200th anniversary of statehood, the *Indiana Magazine of History* published in September, 2016 a bicentennial issue with the general title “What is a Hoosier?”



The short introductory essay by Dawn Bakken, the associate editor, asks, “What is a Hoosier? Where did the term come from, what does it mean, and when was it first used to refer to people who lived in Indiana?” (Bakken, 2016, p. 150) The article ends, “With the benefit of more than one century of scholarship and speculation within its pages, the *Indiana Magazine of History* herewith offers the widest variety of articles available in a single journal on ‘the Hoosier.’ But his or her complete identity remains an unsolved question for the next century of Indiana historians.” (Bakken, 2016, p. 153-154) Good luck, future historians.

A dozen items follow, all taken from the magazine, beginning with the initial 1905 issue. The selection includes Dunn (1905), Power (1942), Piersen (1995), Webb (2002), and Smith (2007 and 2008).

### **Who’s Yer Choice?**

At the end of a section entitled simply “Hoosier” in *Sesquicentennial Scrapbook*, the compiler, James Guthrie, grins and remarks, “And now, after giving the matter a lot of time in research and ending with no conclusion, who’s yer choice?” (Guthrie, 1966, p. 45) Good question. Who’s yers? John Ciardi believes the origin of “hoosier” must most probably remain “forever in doubt.” (Ciardi, 1983, p. 138) Dunn comes to nearly the same conclusion. Raven McDavid observes, “Unfortunately there is little solid evidence on *hoosier* before it was transplanted to North America.” (McDavid, 1982, p. 3) The lack of a definitive derivation for “hoosier” means the old stories never quite die. They linger in folklore. They are part of received wisdom, amusing frauds meant to entertain or favorites to repeat when an occasion arises, or as opportunities to satisfy some personal or political agenda. And if someone learns you are from Indiana, you will likely have to choose one tale or another to explain what a hoosier is.

### **Hussars Ride Again**

In his search for a mascot for Indiana University sports teams Professor Eugene Eoyang goes looking in Northern Indiana. The result of his quest for an answer to “What’s a Hoosier?” (the title of his article) appeared in *Hoosier Times* (Bloomington, Indiana) of March 10, 2002.

The most plausible explanation for “Hoosier” is that it sprang from Kosciusko County in the northern part of the state. Indeed, Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Polish noble who fought with George Washington in the Revolutionary War, may have been the first “Hoosier.”

For Professor Eoyang the origin of hoosier lies in its connection with Thaddeus Kosciuszko for whom the Indiana county is named, and by extension with hussars, European cavalry regiments. The trouble is, Kosciuszko did not have much to do with cavalry or hussars. Only briefly, in 1782, was he assigned command as a line officer which “provided him for the first time with an opportunity to lead troops in battle.” (Pula, 1999, p. 194) Trained as a military engineer, he achieved distinction by building fortifications, arranging defensive lines, and



scouting favorable positions. He was so successful at his job, so valuable, that no one, including George Washington, would have wanted to risk losing him on the battlefield.



Thaddeus Kosciuszko

Frontispiece, *Powstanie kosciuszowskie*. Warsaw: Wydaw. M. Arcta, 1917.

The hussar story has been around for a long time. Most researchers associate it with Colonel John Jacob Lehmanowky, rather than Kosciuszko and dismiss the idea of hussar giving birth through mispronunciation or otherwise to “hoosier.” Eoyang, though, is untroubled by contrary opinion. He also rejects all but his favored derivation by lumping them together with James Whitcomb Riley’s “Whose ear?” comment. Riley jested, and everyone knew it.

Eoyang finds “the military connotations of ‘hoosier’ are strikingly reinforced in the Journal of the Kosciuszko Guards by William Hemphill...” He refers to a Civil War anecdote in which a



“splendid Massachusetts regiment disdains to soil their hands with the chore of moving a massive rock.” The Indians pitch in to do the job. A “burly” hoosier in a “common soldier’s blouse” and a “slouch hat,” berates the Yankee leader, a second lieutenant, who threatens to arrest him. As it turns out, the hoosier is a Lieut. Colonel. Oops. Bad mistake. The hoosiers find the lieutenant’s embarrassment very funny and give their colonel three cheers. How the incident helps Eoyang sustain his argument is mystifying. If anything, the account suggests the Samuel Hoosier theory, which turns on a Hoosier’s willingness for hard work. The modest appearance of the Indiana commander also brings to mind the “hoosier” as a mountain man, a countryman, or a rustic. If anything, it is the natty Bay Staters and their lieutenant who seem best to fit the usual image of hussars. Eoyang has one trick left. He slickly transforms his soldier into common “grunt” (surely with true Midwestern values), but he then turns him back into a mounted warrior and calls for experts to dress him in a resplendent uniform.

There could be no more appropriate mascot for Indiana University athletics than the image of a Hoosier, which initially designated light cavalry horsemen, one of whom was a comrade-at-arms of George Washington, and later mutated into down-to-earth hardworking “grunts” of the 12th Indiana Infantry in the Civil War.

### **The Ax, not the Saber**

The word hoosier has a no martial or aristocratic past. Serious sources, like the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, among others, record its usage to designate a rustic, rube or hick. In the nineteenth century, the stock Hoosier character is a standard butt of humor. More than a century ago Dunn concluded, after considerable research, that hoosier had obscure but certain Anglo-Saxon roots, and he did not flinch from its meaning of a rough countryman.

Why invent a Hoosier hussar and propose it as a university mascot? Why deny “hoosier’s” origin in a one-time term of opprobrium, accepted with good grace, probably because it was once mostly true and cast by those who were hardly any better? Why not acknowledge the vigor and the toughness of Indiana’s early settlers?

Long and lank as the traditional Yankee; lean and hungry as the ‘poor white’ of the South that he was born; with the arm of a Hoosier that can ‘whip his weight in wild cats;’ with a backward length of skull, and feeble occiput which reminded one of the Indian characters; and yet with an eye full of softness, a voice full of affection and even delicacy; he stood the sum of a long column of Boones and Bowies, Pograms and Puritans. It was a physical necessity that this average American should have been born in the most central of the states—Kentucky—and a political propriety that he should have drifted into the State that represented the faintest divergence from the slave system—Illinois. (An American Abolitionist, 1865, p. 3)

Of course Professor Eoyang may be teasing. He may be guying poor, gullible Hoosiers with a tall tale of exalted descent, humorously imitating those genealogical hucksters who offer a coat of arms to anyone with a family name. If he is serious, though, one wonders why he cannot



accept the worthy Hoosier without frogs, braids and epaulettes. Why not honestly honor the one who swung the ax, not the saber? Why not investigate thoroughly enough to discover Raven McDavid's statement that "hoosier" was "a term suggestive of the raw strength of the frontier, of the yeoman farmers in contrast with the alleged refinements of plantation and mercantile society." (McDavid, 1982, p. 3)



"The Pioneer and His Home"

Goodrich, De Witt C. *An Illustrated History of the State of Indiana; Being a full and Authentic Civil and Political History of the State from its First Exploration down to 1875.* Indianapolis, R. S. Peale & Co., 1875, p. 44

Kosciuszko, engineer that he was, would not have appreciated Eoyang's feeble foundation. As a fervent democrat and egalitarian, he would have deplored the promotion of hoosier to a station it never needed.

### The Indiana State Seal



Lovers of the hussar story might have done well to consult the Indiana State Seal. Part of the Indiana Code, Section 1-2-4-1 (Acts 1963, ch. 207, section 1) states: The woodsman is wearing a hat and holding his ax nearly perpendicular on his right. The ax blade is turned away from him and is even with his hat. The woodsman and his ax, however, appeared on the seal well before 1963. In fact “the earliest recorded use of a seal for the Indiana Territory is on court documents signed by Governor William Henry Harrison in January 1801.” (Bennett and January, 2010, online)

Jacob Dunn discusses the seal in Volume I of *Indiana and Indianans*. The state constitution provided for one, and “by act of December 13, 1816, the Governor was authorized to procure a seal and a press...” He continues, “In the consideration of this act in the House on November 22, Davis Floyd moved to amend by striking out the word ‘device’ and inserting: ‘a forest and a woodman felling a tree, a buffalo leaving the forest and fleeing through the plain to a distant forest, and the sun setting in the west, with the word Indiana.’” (Dunn, 1919, Vol. I, p. 378)

A note reveals that due to disagreement with the Senate, the description of the seal was omitted. “But this was not the origin of the design,” Dunn writes, “for it had been used all through the Territorial period, the earliest known specimen of its use, so far as is known, being on the petition of the Vincennes convention of 1802.” (Dunn, 1919, Volume I, p. 378)



STATE SEAL

Dunn, Jacob Piatt. *Indiana and Indianans: A History of Aboriginal and Territorial Indiana and the Century of Statehood*. Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1919. Vol. I., p. 379

In *Slavery Petitions and Papers* Dunn includes a copy of the “Petition of the Vincennes Convention” dated December 28, 1802 and provides a note about the seal used on the document.

Note. —This is the seal of Indiana, setting sun, buffalo and man cutting tree, but not the same as now —the buffalo's tail is down and the head is opposite the sun. The word Indiana is on a scroll in the branches of the tree.” (Dunn, 1894, p. 468).



Except for 1787 when Indiana was part of the Northwest Territory, Indiana's territorial and state seals have consistently portrayed a woodsman with his ax.



1787



1800



1863



1950



1963

Bennett, Pamela J. and January, Alan. "Indiana's State Seal—An Overview," January 21, 2005. <http://www.in.gov/history/2804.htm>. Accessed January 31, 2010.

### **Hussars, Retreat!**

If Indiana University needs a mascot to represent toughness and finds the pioneer with his ax insufficiently vivid, there is no need to turn to the flamboyant hussar, glorious in ornate raiment. Why not choose the boatman, that half-horse, half-alligator, stout-hearted, carousing, brawling, ring-tailroarer? He could surely rip the moustaches off any hussar, any day.

### **Don't Stop Them**

If hussars can ride again, settlers will continue to call "Who's here?" from their cabins. Travelers and surveyors will ask the same question of the house. Sam Hoosier's men will dig the



canal, and hushers will tromp their opponents, sometimes clicking their heels as they jump up and shout “Huzza!” to mark their triumphs. Boatmen will deliver Indian corn down the river. The casually curious will inquire about severed ears scattered on barroom floors or playing fields. People will wander through bushy places or holly plantations, perhaps with a wild look about them. Bakers will offer gingerbread to those hungry for the sweet. Preachers will preach the Methodist gospel to their backwoods congregations. Bailiffs, hatmakers, hosiers, dirty tramps, Hindu potentates and Spanish hoosieroons will populate Indiana’s hills, hollows and flatlands. Ninatrices will lull infants to sleep, and young children will inquire about their fathers. You cannot stop them, and sometimes, although not always, you may not want to.

### **Would You Rather Be a Puke?**

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, states and their residents acquired popular nicknames. Walt Whitman used them in his poetry to evoke the strength and variety of the hearty men and women who made up a growing nation.



“A Puke”

Dorson, Richard M. *Davy Crockett, American Comic Legend*, 1939, p. 123

Whitman aside, the nicknames did not always suggest the finer qualities of the states. Ohioans are “Buckeyes,” which sounds innocent enough, if you don’t mind being called a chestnut. But would you want to be a Leatherhead (Pennsylvanians), a Sucker (Illinoisans), a Clam Catcher (New Jerseyans), a Corn Cracker (Kentuckians), a Mudhead (Tennesseans), a Beethead (Texans), a Weasle (South Carolinians), or a Bugeater (Nebraskans)? By contrast, “hoosier” seems, if not exactly historically flattering, at least tolerable enough, a “good-natured appellation” as Finley put it. Or would you rather share the nickname for Missourians? Would you rather be a Puke?



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