



Small Town Songs

Recently I was asked for the lyrics to our song, **Belle of Boscobel**. Very flattering, because it's a nice song, but it was written by Chuck Schacht. We've been mistakenly identified as its authors often, probably because we've written so many goofy songs about small towns. At the risk of being a pompous bore, I'm going to mention a few of them here. It's fun to write such songs, and in my questionable role as folk lyricist mentor wannabe, you might say I'm doing this to encourage others to hop over the low bar that I have set and consider writing a small town song of their own.

Our first such song was the **Squirrelly Valley 2-Step**, written in the late 70s:

Me and my girl went up to Kaukauna, up by Kimberly and Darboy too / She said honey don't look so funny that Squirrelly Valley gotta grow on you...

The focus of this song was Wisconsin grammar and pronunciation (*Oh yah hey, get me a beer once*), and led one reviewer to write that we had a good grasp of Wisconsin "patios." I think he meant "patois," but on second thought maybe he did mean "patios."

The song **Oh Wonderful Madison** followed soon:

Oh Wonderful Madison, mother of cities / Queen of all Dairyland, waiting for me / Oh Wonderful Madison, jewel of Wisconsin / With more than one high school & cable TV.

The verses change often, depending on the shifting Madison scene.

We then branched way out and wrote a song about Waunakee:

Pack up a picnic; pick up a kayak / Take a boat ride out along the shores of Waunakee And if you say so we'll let the boat go / Hold each others' hands & drift completely out to sea

I won't go into it here, but starting in Waunakee's Six Mile Creek, you really could drift out to sea. Eventually.

Soon thereafter we wrote a romantic little ditty called **Weyauwega Moon**, because my wife Kristi and I vacation in the vicinity. Not a funny or a sad

song, just a song:

Kiki, walk with me, up by Weyauwega soon / I'm a fan, of the man, in the Weyauwega moon / When he shines, through the pines, on our Weyauwega farm / Yes when he's, in the trees, won't you please, take my arm

This year we wrote another moon song: **Mazomanian Moon**, written for a concert in Mazomanie. It was written from the standpoint of someone who has moved away and is homesick:

Well my nostalgia tends to drag me down / I miss the old architecture downtown / I miss the color of the autumn leaves / I miss the depot with the big wide eaves / I wanna see Lake Marion soon / Reflect the big Mazomanian Moon

Not a showstopper, but a joy to write and sing. Throwing in actual details -- like *the depot with the big wide eaves* -- is fun.

But we've gone overboard sometimes and have mashed too much into a town-song. We wrote one for Stoughton, about how the coffee break was invented there. It had eight complex verses like the following, for a total of almost 500 grueling words:

Now Coffee Street really was only the nickname that came from its pungent bouquet / For there for their fam'lies the women were all roasting coffee beans during the day / As budgets were meager in spite of their husbands employment they bought the bean green / And thus they were frugal but kept up their full Scandinavian dose of caffeine

Much easier to digest was one we wrote for Evansville, which was originally called The Grove. We had been asked to write the song by a passionate Evansville booster, so we included her presence in the song as though she was explaining the town to us:

Pretty soon the trees were planks / The planks became new homes & banks / And when the grove was gone, she said / They craved a second name instead / Right then when the times were lean / Young Doc Evans hit the scene / He said either pay my bill / Or call this village Evansville

Evansville, Evansville, she said I love Evansville / You can have Blueberry Hill, I found my thrill in Evansville

We did write a complex song about Limburger cheese, Monroe WI where it's made, and the village of Independence, IA. It continues to go over well, largely because the actual story is quite funny.

Here's one of the 13 verses:

In the Iowa village they call Independence a farmer named Kaiser took sick / The year 35 had been slow to arrive and the snow fell unusually thick / The rare diagnosis by Dr. McGready was chronic dyspeptic unease / Prognosis was fine if the farmer would dine on a smidgen of Limburger cheese

We wrote an alphabetic Rhubarb song for the Rhubarb Festival over in Lanesboro, MN:

...K is for the kidney stones that rhubarb helps to grow / L of course is rhubarb love in lovely Lanesboro...

...and a Pie Day song for the big pie town of Braham Minnesota:

...Raspb'ry pie and cherry-fudge pie / Eat-so-much pie it's hard-to-budge pie / I think I know where I am / I must be in Braham

There's our song **Poniatowski**, which is a tiny town on the confluence of 90° west longitude and 45° north latitude:

Exactly half the way from the equator to the pole / A quarter of the way around the planet as a whole / It's very hard to find it on a map of county roads / Ridiculously easy on a four inch globe / Poniatowski...

Then we have a few songs with LOTS of town names. In **Forward Hey**, we have two verses of them. Here's one:

Ashwaubenon Aniwa Manawa Milton / Dakota Kaukauna Lac Court Orielles Wilton / Glen Beulah Glen Flora Fort Atkinson Chilton / Excelsior Pelican Pardeeville Blair.

And a song wholly made up of town names, to the tune of **Chopsticks** (called **Chapsticks**), about Minnesota towns:

Nisswa, Waseca, Wadena, Sebeka / Wayzata, Zumbrota, Moorehead, Minneota / Ceylon, Ely, Waverly, Sheridan, Shakopee / Sleepy Eye, Eveleth, Albert Lea...

For **Simply Folk's** 30th anniversary show we wrote a song with a whole slew of Wisconsin town names. Some bits:

...In Manawa the rodeo / The fire up in Peshtigo / The Norsky Nook in Osseo / The songs of yellow oleo / The fancy loam of Antigo...

So my advice is, have at it! You must have a small town or two in your past, or maybe one in your present, and there's no town that deserves to be songless. If you catch the bug like I have, maybe someday you'll be asked for the lyrics to your song **Belle of Boscobel**.