

## Spotting Spurious Stream Names on Topographic Maps of Indiana<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The 1:24,000-scale topographic maps prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey constitute a vast reservoir of data of great interest to students of geographic names. For most states, the Geological Survey has also made available an alphabetical finding list of these names. There are nearly 19,000 names on the Indiana list; unfortunately, many of the stream names listed are spurious.

About 1960, during the heyday of topographic mapping in Indiana, in a misguided attempt to name all drainage features that appear on these maps, many fictitious stream names were arbitrarily applied during review of the maps by a former state agency. Many of these names are frivolous or fanciful; most of these can readily be detected. Others may be reasonably derived but have no local legitimacy. A few might be demonstrated to be in error through study of historic maps, reports, and legal documents.

When the Indiana Board on Geographic Names was organized, early in 1961, it requested an end to the practice of generating stream names, but much damage had already been done. Hundreds of topographic maps had been prepared, revised, reviewed, and printed during the period when the spurious names were being applied, and thousands of these non-valid names now are before the public.

Detection and avoidance of these names by those who are interested in the validity of geographic names range from ludicrously easy to rather difficult. Because of the expense and time required to research the names and to expose the phonies, many of these names probably will remain on Indiana maps for some time to come. Some may ultimately come to be accepted. It is the purpose of this paper to bring examples of these spurious names to view, to warn against their unwary acceptance, and to illustrate some of the ways in which the non-valid names can be detected.

### Examples: the Shoals Quadrangle

Table 1 lists drainage names for the Shoals Quadrangle, Martin County, in a sort of geographic order, comparing names on the 1960 edition with names on the 1950 edition. The later edition had, quite obviously, the very questionable benefit of the addition of many names — a total of 57 names as compared with 12 on the earlier map. This very high name density — something approaching one name per square mile of map — is the first clue that the names pattern has been tampered with.

The name Willow Creek is apparently legitimate because it appears on the older map, the map that was made when U.S. Geological Survey topographers actually spent major time in the field and made a serious effort to determine names of local usage. Poplar Creek and Elm Creek nearby are questionable only on the basis of their absence from the earlier map, but assuming that Elm Creek is a legitimate name, then American Run appears to have been inspired by that (i.e., American elm) and French Run and Indian Run (in possible reference to the French and Indian war) by American. Plaster Creek perhaps suggested Lime, which then suggested Lemon. Spout Spring, a legitimate name, apparently generated Spurt, Jet, Squirt, and perhaps Gushing. Most of these names I would classify as fanciful, and I am sure all are fictitious.

Mt. Union Church evidently evolves into Mountain Stream, Union Creek, and Church Brook. Any one of these might be legitimate, but in combination they disclose their spurious origin. Furthermore, the generic terms stream and brook are rare in Midwest

TABLE 1. Names of drainage features shown on the U.S. Geological Survey Shoals Quadrangle topographic map, scale 1:24,000, 1960 and 1950 editions. Names in parentheses are those of cultural and other features from which some of the drainage feature names may have been derived. Asterisks indicate names not present on 1960 edition.

1960	1950
Poplar Creek (Poplar Grove Church)	(Poplar Grove Church)
Houghton Run	
Willow Creek	Willow Creek
Windy Run	
Grove Brook	
*	(Beech Grove School)
Elm Creek	
American Run	
Indian Run	
French Run	
Plaster Creek	Plaster Creek
Lime Run	
Lemon Run	
Lacy Drain (Lacy)	(Lacy)
Virginia Rill	
East Fork White River	East Fork White River
Nubbin Ridge Branch	Nubbin Ridge Branch
Spurt Run	
Jet Run	
Squirt Run	
Spout Spring	Spout Spring
Gushing Creek	
Sherfick Stream	
*	(Sherfick School)
Beaver Creek	Beaver Creek
Beaver Creek (applied in error to a small tributary)	
Iron Creek (Ironton)	(Ironton)
Speel Creek	
House Rock Branch (House Rock)	House Rock Branch (House Rock)
Freemans Spring Branch	Freemans Spring Branch
Free Run	
Boggs Creek	Boggs Creek
Buzzard Run	Buzzard Run
Nest Brook	
Mountain Stream	
Union Creek	
Church Brook (Mt. Union Church)	(Mt. Union Church)
Knob Branch	
Buck Knob Creek (Buck Knob)	(Buck Knob)
Sod Run	
Seed Tick Creek	Seed Tick Creek
River Drain	
Beech Creek	Beech Creek
Nut Brook	
Limb Run	
Branch Run	
Root Brook	
Leaf Branch	
Peek Run (Peek Cut)	(Peek Cut)

TABLE 1.—Continued

1960	1950
Overlook Drain (Shoals Overlook)	(Shoals Overlook)
Hickory Run	
Cedar Brook (Cedar Bluff)	(Cedar Bluff)
Flood Run	
Indian Creek	Indian Creek
Opossum Creek	
Poss Creek	
Sum Creek	
Opo Run	
Hill Branch	
Dover Run (Dover Hill)	(Dover Hill)
57 named streams	12 named streams

usage. Beech Creek leads to Nut, Limb, Branch, Root, and that triumph of *double entendre*, Leaf Branch. Opossum Creek, probably 'Possum to the natives if it is valid at all, and it may be, is dissected into Poss, Sum, and Opo. These are not just spurious names, they are facetious.

#### More examples: the New Albany Quadrangle

On the 1965 edition of the New Albany Quadrangle, Floyd and Clark Counties (Table 2), there are Bow Run, Arrow Run, and War Run, all tributary to Little Indian Creek. In the same area are St. Marys Run, Church Run, and Cross Branch, all derived presumably from St. Marys Church. Perhaps the lamb of Lamb Run was in the churchyard. Falling Run has a confusing and probably spuriously named tributary, Fall Run, and the defunct Valley View Golf Course, most of which now lies beneath Interstate

TABLE 2. Names of drainage features shown on the U.S. Geological Survey New Albany Quadrangle topographic map, scale 1:24,000, 1965 and 1955 editions. Names in parentheses are those of cultural and other features from which some of the drainage feature names may have been derived. Asterisks indicate names not present on 1965 edition.

1965	1955
Clear Fork	Clear Fork
French Creek	French Creek
Pine Run (Pine Hill)	(Pine Hill)
Middle Creek	Middle Creek
Vincennes Run (Old Vincennes Road)	(Vincennes Road)
Corydon Run (Corydon Pike School)	(Corydon Pike, School)
Little Indian Creek	Little Indian Creek
Floyds Creek	
(Floyds Knobs)	(Floyds Knobs)

TABLE 2.—Continued

1965	1955
Crooked Run	
Bow Run	
Arrow Run	
War Run	
Atkins Run	
(Atkins Road)	
Lamb Run	
Cross Branch	
Church Run	
St. Marys Run	
(St. Marys)	(St. Marys Church)
Silvercrest Run	
(Silvercrest State Hospital)	(Silvercrest State Hospital)
Valley View Creek	
*	(Valley View Golf Course)
Hill Brook	
State Run	
(State Street)	(State Street)
Trinity Run	
Holy Run	
(Holy Trinity Cemetery)	(Holy Trinity Cemetery)
Green Run	
(Green Valley Road)	(Green Valley Road)
Lost Knob Brook	
(Lost Knob)	(Lost Knob)
Fork Run	
Fall Run	
Falling Run	Falling Run
County Run	
(County Infirmary)	(County Infirmary)
Silver Creek	Silver Creek
Town Run	
Grace Run	
Land Run	
(Graceland Cemetery)	(Graceland Cemetery)
Slate Run	Slate Run
Tabor Run	
(Mt. Tabor Road, School)	(Mt. Tabor School, Church)
Flat Run	
Rail Run	
(Monon Railroad)	(C. I. and L. Railroad)
Blackiston Run	
(Blackiston Mill)	(Blackiston Mill)
Jacobs Creek	Jacobs Creek
Bald Knob Creek	
(Bald Knob)	(Bald Knob)
Jay Run	
Friendship Run	
*	(Friendship Church)
Lewis Branch	Lewis Branch
Chapel Branch	
(Jacobs Chapel School)	(Jacobs Chapel School)
Uphill Run	
Carters Run	
(Carters Hole)	(Carters Hole)
Plum Run	Plum Run
Big Drain	
Mill Creek	Mill Creek
Cane Run	Cane Run
50 named streams	12 named streams

Highway 64, is memorialized in Valley View Creek. Now-vanished schools and churches also have been commemorated in stream names.

Cemeteries come in for their share of dubious glory. Trinity Run and Holy Run apparently were inspired by Holy Trinity Cemetery, and Grace Run and Land Run by Graceland Cemetery. Uphill Run is no doubt a frivolous entry, possibly in contrast to Flat Run nearby, and Jay Run probably was suggested by Jacobs Creek, to which it is tributary. In all, the 1965 edition of the New Albany Quadrangle map contains 50 named streams, compared with 12 on the 1955 edition.

### Summary and Conclusions

It is hard to estimate how many spurious names there may be overall. During the years 1958-62, more than 300 new topographic quadrangle maps of Indiana appeared, and as a first estimate, based on the examples given here, as many as 10,000 such names might be expected. This estimate probably is high by a factor of 2 or 3, however, because in northern Indiana many of the smaller streams have been ditched and in the process have been given legal names through court action. (The main problem with this process is that when the ditch needs to be re-dredged, it is likely to get a new name — the name of the new petitioner). For example, on the 1960 edition of the Greentown Quadrangle, Tipton and Howard Counties, 19 of the 35 named streams are ditches, and only 8 names are likely to be spurious.

Still, even as many as 3,000 fictitious names would be a very large number, and to ensure their removal from the maps or their replacement by valid names would require a very large program of field and library investigation. No such study is recommended here, but it would be wise for map users to realize that many, many names on some of these otherwise authoritative and accurate maps are not valid and are unknown to residents of the mapped areas.

If there is a moral to this tale it is this: geographic names are best established by local usage, not by agency fiat, and the validity of geographic names commonly must be determined in the field or from historical or legal records.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Publication authorized by the State Geologist, Indiana Geological Survey.

