



01 Jan 1987

Naming of Rolla, Missouri

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Cohen, G. L. (1987). Naming of Rolla, Missouri. Rolla, Missouri: Gerald Leonard Cohen.

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PORTRAIT OF PHELPS COUNTY, MISSOURI

Published By
The Rolla Daily News
a publication of American Publishing Company
Rolla, Missouri

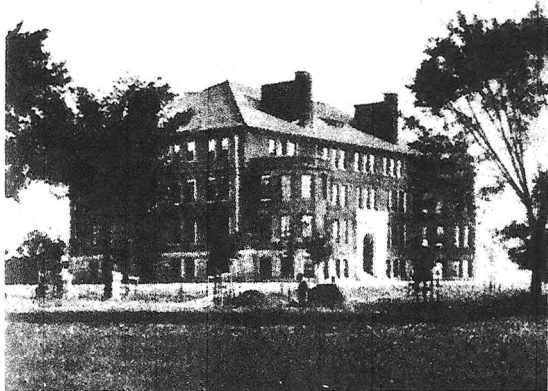
Compiled and Edited by Gerald Leonard Cohen

Printed in the United States of America

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James will never know greater excitement than it experienced on July 4, 1860, when the first train arrived. Farmers, ironworkers, and newly arrived immigrants came from far and near to see the "iron monster". Horse and rigs were hitched well away from the railroad tracks for fear of a run-a-way. Mothers shouted warnings to their children, and families clung to each other, torn between awesome fear and curiosity, for many had never seen a train. The more naive tied their horses a mile away and walked into town, having no idea what to expect and taking no chance., The more sophisticated were prepared. Mr. Ellis Evans (a Maramec carpenter) noted in his diary on July 3 that "Dr. N.N. Davis is making a flagpole for the celebration."

'...July 4, 1860 marked a new day for St. James. No longer was it an isolated trading post...'



Norwood Hall, Missouri School of Mines campus in Rolla, C. 1910.

Photo courtesy of Lucille Coffman

ROLLA

I. NAMING OF ROLLA

A. ROLLA WAS NAMED BETWEEN FEBRUARY 8, AND MAY 11, 1858

Clair Mann writes in his Story of Edmund Ward Bishop, P. 12:

'...February 8, 1858. As of the date just mentioned, there seems to have been no name chosen for the new county seat. However, the name "Rolla" was chosen between that date and May 11, 1858, for it appears an official deed in which Samuel Copp conveyed a parcel of land to the County as of May 11, 1858. It again appears in Proceedings of Phelps County Court as of July 7, 1858, where it is recorded that commissioners are to "lay out" a new road joining "Rolla" to Lake Springs.'

B. ORIGIN OF THE NAME ROLLA

According to local tradition Rolla was named in a discussion between first settler John Webber, town-founder Edmund Bishop, and local resident George Coppedge. Webber suggested the humorous name Hardscrabble, which Bishop rejected, proposing instead Phelps Center. Coppedge, allegedly from North Carolina, suggested Raleigh in honor of his former state capital. Bishop, originally from Pennsylvania, objected to a southern name but compromised; he would accept the name if spelled phonetically, i.e. with the Southern-variant pronunciation of Raleigh that

sounds like Rolla. They all agreed, and Rolla was selected.

What actually happened is a bit more complicated. Yeoman genealogical research by Vivian Bradford reveals that George Helm Coppedge did not come from North Carolina; he came from Kentucky. He was born in 1805 in Kentucky. His first son Anthony was born in 1825 in Kentucky. The 1850 Census of Crawford County (part of which is now Maries County) lists a George Helm Coppedge, 45 years old, born in Kentucky. At least four of his siblings were married in Kentucky. As for his direct ancestors, they too were almost certainly Kentuckians, and before that Virginians.

Also, contrary to the implication of the naming story, Coppedge did not reside in the Rolla area. He lived near Dillon, about six miles northwest of present-day St. James. So why was he even brought into the naming discussion? Why did town-founder Bishop find it necessary to compromise with him?

Lastly, in 1882 Bishop said that he proposed the present spelling to avoid a distinctly Southern name, but he contradicted this in his 1891 account by saying that he proposed Rolla because Raleigh is difficult to spell.

SO, JUST WHAT WAS GOING ON?

The picture now looks roughly like this:

1. Bishop's 1891 account reports that the Dillonites were permitted to name the new town after they lost out in the contest for the county seat, and this would explain the presence of out-of-towner George Coppedge in the naming debate. He

14 Portrait of Phelps County

evidently was permitted to participate as a sort of consolation prize.

2. Coppedge and Bishop could not have known each other very well, since Bishop was unaware of Coppedge's Kentucky origins. Coppedge's living away from the Rolla area and the hard feelings between the Dillonites and Rollaites explains their lack of close contact. So when Coppedge proposed Rolla, Bishop evidently assumed that the name honored the capital of North Carolina and that Coppedge must therefore be from that state.

3. Whatever prompted Coppedge to suggest Rolla, Bishop and fellow townspeople had Raleigh, North Carolina, in mind when they submitted the name to the Washington post office for the official approval. So in this sense, Rolla was named for that state capital.

4. As for the spelling, my suspicion is that Bishop simply did not know how to spell Raleigh in 1858 due to deficiencies in his formal education and was a bit embarrassed by this shortcoming. He therefore camouflaged the truth with his great-compromiser version of the naming incident and even added a touch of culture to it by referring to the Peruvian hidalgo (i.e. "Rolla" in Sheridan's play Pizarro).

5. Finally, what did motivate Kentuckian George Coppedge to suggest Rolla? On a speculative note I would seek a grain of truth in a 1927 account of Mrs. Montgomery, daughter of John Phelps for whom Phelps County is named:

"...The leader of the opposition party was so angry about not winning out in the contest to

name the county that he said: 'You can call the county seat Rolla, after a hound dog I own that isn't much good.' So they took him at his word and named the county seat Rolla..."

Bishop of course would have rejected Coppedge's suggestion of Rolla if accompanied by even a hint it referred to a hound dog. But suppose that Coppedge remained silent on the hound-dog reference, leaving an unsuspecting Bishop with thoughts only of the state capital. Coppedge and his fellow Dillonites would know what the real reference was; call this episode the Revenge of the Dillonites.

Mrs. Montgomery's account as a whole must be treated with great caution, of course. Writing some 70 years after the fact and having lived most of her life outside of Missouri (none in Phelps County), she could not recollect without at least some errors. For example, she presents the Rolla-naming dispute as one between her father and a leader of the opposition, but the only dispute her father plausibly engaged in was the one to name the county. If there is any truth to the hound-dog story, the hound-dog suggestion must have come in the Coppedge/Webber/Bishop discussion.

So, Mrs. Montgomery's account should be treated cautiously, but perhaps her hound-dog story should not be rejected out of hand. Psychologically it is plausible for a disappointed and angry Coppedge to surreptitiously fasten an unflattering name on a rival town—more plausible in fact than to suggest a name of someone or something dear to his heart.

II. JOHN WEBBER: FIRST WHITE SETTLER IN THE ROLLA AREA

by Hershel Dunham

Reprinted from the Rolla Daily News, September 6, 1987, Section B, pp. 1, 4

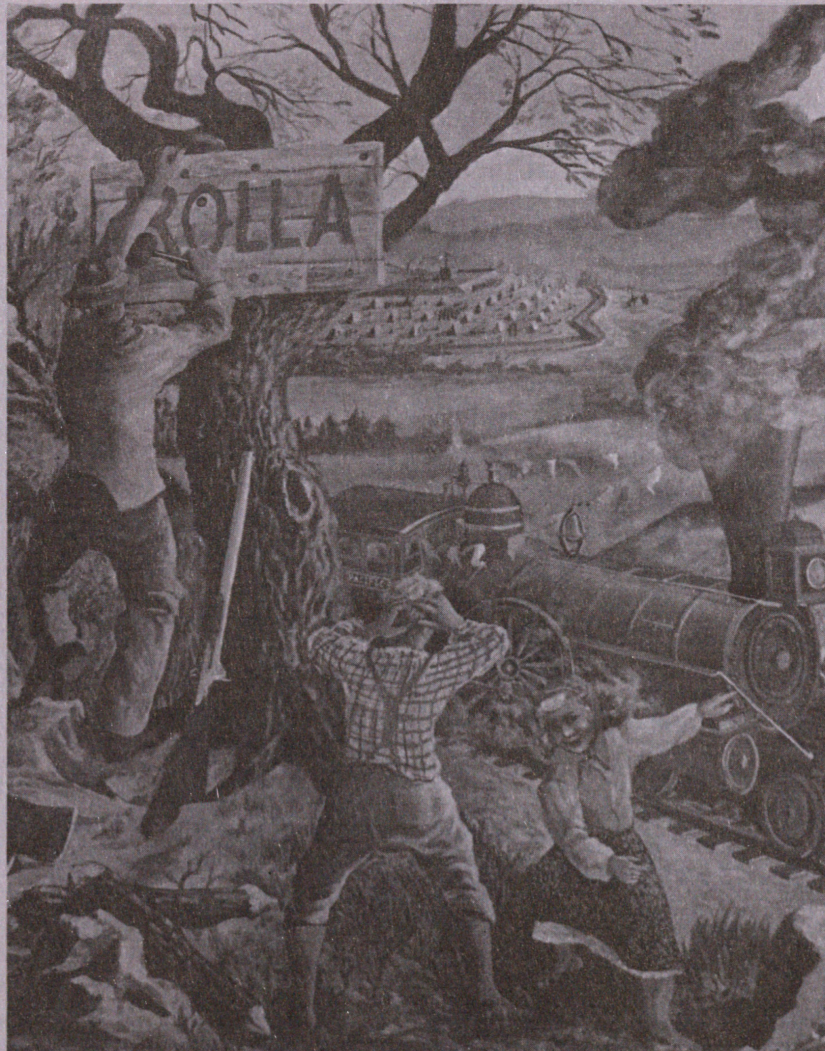
John Webber was the second child and first son of John Monroe and Elizabeth (McQueen) Webber. He was born in Philadelphia January 24, 1819...

His parents moved from Philadelphia to Rutherford County, Tennessee, in 1822, when John was 3 years of age. The family remained in Tennessee until 1830, at which time his father heard of a place in Illinois that seemed to offer a much greater future for him and his growing family. The urge was too great to pass up this chance of a lifetime so the family, along with another German immigrant family, moved to Saline County, Illinois, and bought land near a small settlement which would later be chartered "Galatia"...

John was now 11 years of age, but he was old and big enough to do a good day's work on the family farm. The air was filled with excitement during the first few months as the family was involved in building a home, clearing timber from the land, and so on.

John's parents realized the importance of their children getting a good education, so this became the first priority. Like children of all pioneer families, each was assigned chores to perform both before and after school.

NAMING OF ROLLA, MISSOURI



Panel from Rolla Mural

by:
Gerald Leonard Cohen

NAMING OF ROLLA, MISSOURI

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The picture on the cover is a panel from the Rolla Mural.

Painter: Sidney Larson
Rolla Daily News Office

Edmund Bishop, founder of Rolla, is nailing up a sign
to mark the new town, 1858.

Rolla, Missouri -- published by the editor.

1987

First edition, first printing

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Gerald Leonard Cohen
Rolla, Missouri

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provided only that it is done for non-commercial purposes.

The publication of this monograph is a non-profit undertaking, whose sole aim is the disseminating of information on the naming of Rolla. Any funds that might remain after the publishing costs have been met will be donated to a scholarship fund for liberal arts students at the University of Missouri-Rolla.

This monograph is dedicated to the memory of Clair and Bonita Mann, for whom the study of Rolla and Phelps County history was a lifetime labor of love.



1963 -- The Manns were given a silver platter by the Phelps County Historical Society in recognition of their work on local history.

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* * *

Addendum (see bibliography under Mann 1957): Coppedge as a Kentuckian
whose ancestors came from North Carolina --

* * *

PREFACE

About ten years ago I began collecting information on the naming of Rolla and gradually realized that the project was much bigger than it first seemed. The result is the present monograph, which attempts to compile and evaluate all the available evidence.

Many people have assisted me in this project, and they all have my deep thanks. Individual acknowledgments are made throughout the monograph, and as a start, a photograph of the Rolla Mural panel was kindly supplied by RDN editor, Stephen Sowers. Many thanks too to Dean Harry Sauer (UMR) for his encouragement of my place-name research.

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February 1987

ROLLA¹

ABSTRACT

No Missouri place-name presents as much complexity as Rolla does, but after much wild-goose chasing the following picture has emerged:

George Coppedge suggested Raleigh, just as local tradition says, but not because he was a former North Carolinian. Genealogical evidence indicates quite clearly that his roots were in Kentucky, and I can find no special reason for his selection of the name. As for the spelling Rolla, we probably deal with an explanation advanced as early as 1865, namely that no one in the embryonic town could spell Raleigh. The name was spelled as it was pronounced, i.e., with the Southern-variant pronunciation of Raleigh that sounds like Rolla. Meanwhile, town-founder Edmund Bishop muddied the waters with his conflicting explanations for the spelling. The now standard story that Bishop proposed the present spelling to avoid a distinctly Southern name (e.g., Bishop's 1881 account) is contradicted by Bishop's 1891 account: he proposed Rolla because Raleigh is difficult to spell. My suspicion is that Bishop really did not know how to spell Raleigh in 1858 due to the deficiencies in his formal education and was a bit embarrassed by this shortcoming. He therefore camouflaged the truth with his great-compromiser version of the naming incident and even added a touch of culture to it by referring to the Peruvian hidalgo (i.e., 'Rolla' in Sheridan's play Pizarro).

Meanwhile, if Bishop's 1891 account accurately reports that the Dillonites were permitted to name the new town after they lost out in the contest for the county seat, an explanation would exist for the presence of out-of-towner George Coppedge in the naming debate. His presence there had always troubled me, but he may now be viewed as having participated due to the concession of the Rollaites.

And although we will never know just what George Coppedge had in mind when he suggested Raleigh (Raleigh, N.C., for whatever reason? a person named Raleigh? a dog named Rolla?), this mystery is not of major importance. There is no doubt that Edmund Bishop accepted Coppedge's suggestion of Raleigh/Rolla at face value as a tribute to Raleigh, N.C. And when the townspeople sent their new town's name to the Washington Post Office, it was clearly with Raleigh, N.C. in mind.

Also, a competing etymology that sees Rolla as named by first settler John Webber for Raleigh, Illinois, can now be firmly set aside. Webber arrived in the Rolla area in 1844, while Raleigh, Illinois was founded three years later; Webber's home town in Illinois was the nearby Galatia, and any nostalgic tug could have come only from this place.

1 pronounced RAHluh.

I. VARIOUS THEORIES ON THE NAMING

A. ROLLA FROM RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

There are two main variants to the story that Rolla was named after Raleigh, North Carolina. The first centers on a disagreement of three specific individuals (Webber, Bishop, Coppedge) as to the naming of the new town, while the second speaks more generally of residents from North Carolina exerting their influence on behalf of their native state; this second variant makes no mention of any compromise but sees Rolla simply as a misspelling of Raleigh.

The first variant with its account of the disagreement has come to be the generally accepted one in the Rolla area, and so it appears in quite a few accounts. But the only firm evidence for it is Goodspeed's 1889 passage, and even this account may not be as trustworthy as a first reading would indicate.

1. ACCOUNT IN GOODSPEED 1889

Goodspeed (1889: 659-660) first presents some background information on the founding of Rolla:

'First Residents. - Rolla was a child of the railway and the county, and surely no child was ever born in greater throes of trouble; even its name was the result of wrestling between will and wits. The first "squatter" to erect a building on the site of it was John Webber, whose double log house and log store were located about a quarter-mile west of the court-house site. This was his home until after the war. In 1855 the railway contractors, J. Stever and Company, who had the contract for grading thirty-one miles east of the Gasconade, built their general offices near Webber's. This was what is now the home of Mr. E. W. Bishop, who was the resident partner. The suspension of the railway in 1857-58 left Mr. Bishop unemployed, and he turned his attention to entering land, having already chosen the site of Rolla about 1856. The Pacific Railway and E. W. James also entered land now comprised in the limits of the county seat. The location of the county seat then became a fight. Dillon or Webber's (the Pacific Railway offices) were the desires of two factions. Mr. Bishop offered fifty acres of land, and had maps to show that his site was nearest the point directed in the act of location, and after much shrewd management and hard legal fighting, the point was chosen in 1858.'

Immediately afterwards Goodspeed (p. 660) discusses the naming of Rolla:

'The Name. - The name was the next scramble. John Webber wanted¹ to call it Hardscrabble; Bishop wanted it Phelps Center, and an old Carolinian,¹ George Coppedge, wanted to christen it Raleigh. Mr. Coppedge's strong will, and Mr. Bishop's antipathy to fastening a Carolinian name to the town he was so instrumental in founding, made a compromise a necessity. "Yankee" wit was brought

1 (G. Cohen): 'an old Carolinian': no. Coppedge was born in Kentucky and his closest connection with North Carolina was the presence of some cousins there (discussed below, pp. 35-36).

into service, and Mr. Bishop proposed to accept Mr. Coppedge's name on one condition - namely, that the name should be spelled Rolla! His proposition was accepted. Mr. Bishop had remembered his youthful theatrical experiences in the well-known play in which Rolla and Alonzo made a cloak serve their friendship.¹

a. A FEW NOTES ON THE POPULARITY OF SHERIDAN'S
PLAY PIZARRO

A brief look at the play in which Rolla and Alonzo appear (Pizarro) may be helpful for understanding the excitement that this play produced in the nineteenth century; the character Rolla was therefore an inspirational one.

Pizarro was adapted by Sheridan from Kotzebue's Die Spanier in Peru, oder Rollas Tod and had an electrifying effect when it was first presented in England, 1799:

(Rhodes 1962: 5) 'It was not Sheridan the dramatist who adapted Pizarro to the English Stage: it was Sheridan the politician, the orator. "Never," wrote George Daniel a quarter century afterwards in his Edition of the play, "was a piece better timed than Pizarro. The English nation, viewing revolutionary France with horror and dread, threatened, too, with an incursion on their own shores, were excited to a high pitch of loyal enthusiasm, and rallied round their monarch, as one man, to preserve inviolate his rights, and consequently their own. At this eventful crisis, Pizarro made its appearance at Drury Lane, and was hailed with rapture by a long succession of as brilliant audiences as ever graced a theatre. Every allusion that bore, however remotely, upon public feeling, was seized with the utmost avidity, while the more direct and palpable appeals were applauded to the very echo".'

Here now is Rolla's speech, which to American ears a century ago would have been inspirational for its patriotism rather than its defense of royalty:

(Rhodes 1962: 11-12) 'My brave associates! partners of my toil, my feelings and my fame! Can Rolla's words add vigour to the virtuous energies which inspire your hearts? No! you have judged as I have, the foulness of the crafty plea by which these bold invaders would delude you. Your generous spirit has compared, as mine has, the motives which, in a war like this, can animate their minds, and ours. They, by a strange frenzy driven, fight for power, for plunder, and extended rule. We, for our country, our altars, and our homes. They follow an adventurer whom they fear, and obey a power which they

1 (G. Cohen): This last sentence is very possibly erroneous. Clair Mann's 1955 treatment on Edmund Bishop describes his early life but makes no mention of any theatrical activity. The result of this error and the one mentioned in the previous footnote is to cast some doubt on the accuracy of the rest of Goodspeed's naming account.

hate. We serve a monarch who we love - a God whom we adore. Whene'er they move in anger, desolation tracks their progress! Whene'er they pause in amity, affliction mourns their friendship. They boast, they come but to improve our state, enlarge our thoughts, and free us from the yoke of error! Yes - they will give enlightened freedom to our minds, who are themselves the slaves of passion, avarice, and pride. They offer us their protection - yes, such protection as vultures give to lambs - covering and devouring them! They call on us to barter all of good we have inherited and proved, for the desperate chance of something better which they promise. Be our own plain answer this: - The throne we honor is the people's choice - the laws we reverence are our brave father's legacy - the faith we follow teaches us to live in bonds of charity with all mankind, and die with hope of bliss beyond the grave. Tell your invaders this, and tell them, too, we seek no change; and, least of all, such change as they would bring us.'

2. MRS. McNUTT'S ACCOUNT: VIA PLAYED THE CENTRAL ROLE

The following account was related in the 1970's by Mrs. V. H. McNutt (d. 1983 at the age of 94) to Winona Roberts, who recently retired from the Office of Public Information, UMR. It was on tape, since lost, from which Mrs. Roberts transcribed the following notes:

'When we came here,¹ Mr. Via,² an old man with a long flowing white beard -- he had a white Spitz dog that always sat with him, I used to say, "Did you grow the beard to go with the dog or get the dog to go with the beard?" -- he lived close to us. He had a garden and used to give me vegetables. He was a member of the legislature when the School of Mines was chartered. ...I would say, "Tell me about the early days." I thought I was going to live in Rolla forever. ...Mr. Via said that people said "this is a new town. What shall we name it?" On the committee to select a name were Mr. Via and a man from North Carolina -- from Raleigh -- and another man who didn't care. The gentleman from North Carolina wanted to name it for Raleigh. Mr. Via said that was too Southern -- he wanted something Middle West -- something characteristic of the town. When the other man said "let's name it Raleigh," Mr. Via said: "I'll let you name it if you let me spell it," -- and he spelled it "Rolla". ...He was in his 80's by that time -- he looked very old. He had the best sense of humor -- very funny -- used to tell me tall stories of the early days. I also got a lot from Grandma Scott. Her husband was a circuit rider.'³

1 Mrs. McNutt came to Rolla in 1912 or 1913 as a bride in her 20's.

2 rhymes with rye.

3 These are the grandparents of John M. Morris, Jr., formerly of Scott's book store.

a. COMMENTS ON MRS. McNUTT'S ACCOUNT

It is first of all startling that in 1983 one could still speak with someone only one step removed from the 1858 naming of Rolla. -- In any case, no other source mentions Mr. Via as having anything to do with the naming, and perhaps Mrs. McNutt's remark that 'He had the best sense of humor' is pertinent here; he apparently reworked the Webber-Bishop-Coppedge story with himself as the central figure.

Mr. Via's story does offer some confirming evidence for the account in Goodspeed 1889, though. Via does not mention the name of the North Carolinian, but that can be filled in as Coppedge. And Bishop can be restored to his rightful place as the great reconciler. The point is that the accounts by Via and Goodspeed are essentially the same and differ only in some secondary details.

3. EARLIEST ACCOUNT ON THE NAMING OF ROLLA: KNOX 1865

Until recently the earliest noticed account of the naming of Rolla had been Goodspeed's 1889 book on Phelps/Dent/etc. Counties.¹ John Bradbury, however, sent me a copy of the following item from Knox 1865.

(pp. 58-59) '...I have heard a story concerning the origin of the name of Rolla, which is interesting, though I cannot vouch for its truth. In selecting a name for the county seat of Phelps County, a North Carolinian residing there, suggested that it should do honor to the capital of his native State. The person who reduced the request to writing used the best orthography that occurred to him, so that what should have been "Raleigh" became "Rolla". The request thus written was sent to the Legislature, and the name of the town became fixed. The inhabitants generally pronounce it as if the intended spelling had been adopted.'

4. ACCOUNTS BY CLAIR AND BONITA MANN

The Manns did extensive research on the history of Phelps County and Rolla, and anything they might have to say on the naming of Rolla is of special interest. A search of their writings turns up the following discussions on the subject:

1 Mr. Bradbury informs me: 'Knox was a journalist and correspondent, one of a group who called themselves the "Bohemian Brigade". He participated as an aide, or observed, all of the major campaigns in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas in 1861-1862. He left Missouri to follow the campaigns south, down the Mississippi River, so he had to have heard his account before 1863.

I am not sure if C. V. Mann knew of this account, although he was familiar with the work of Franc Wilkie and Alexander Simplot, both members of the Bohemian Brigade.' -- Mr. Bradbury is assistant manuscript specialist, Western Historical MSS. Collection, Rolla branch.

a. ACCOUNTS IN THE ROLLA DAILY NEW ERA, Aug. 21, 1944(1) (Section B, p. 1, cols. 1-2)¹

'...Nineteen hundred and fifty eight...will also commemorate the official survey and platting of the original townsite and the selection of a distinctive name, "R-O-L-L-A", which is the phonetic way of spelling "Raleigh", name of the capital of North Carolina, after which Rolla was officially named.'

(2) (Section B, p. 5, col. 5; article title: 'How Rolla Got Its Name'):

'We have already indicated that because it was almost exactly at the center of the new county, Mr. Bishop wanted to call the town "Phelps Center". The other pioneer, Mr. John Webber, thought it should be called "Hardscrabble", -- perhaps because he had found the farming here a bit difficult. Another early resident, Mr. George Coppedge, formerly of North Carolina,² let it be known that in his opinion the place ought to be called "Raleigh", after the capital of his home state. It is more likely that Mr. Coppedge, in pronouncing "Raleigh", did it in the same way as the writer has heard several residents of Raleigh speak it. For such a reason, Messrs. Bishop and Webber agreed to call the place "R-O-L-L-A" -- to that extent accepting Mr. Coppedge's suggestion -- but refusing the name if it were to be spelled "Raleigh".

b. THE MANN RADIO BROADCASTS (= MANN 1951)

'...Which leads me to belatedly say that in 1858, at the age of thirty-eight, Mr. Bishop married lovely and talented Jane Sellard - daughter of a family of French descent, of Bradford county, Pennsylvania. He brought her to "Rolla" the same year the town's first survey was made by a young A. E. Buchanan - in 1858. That same year Rolla was "christened" by a group of three - John Webber, who wanted the place called "Hardscrabble", because he had found it difficult to make a living on his Ozark farm: George H. Coppedge, who wanted the place named the namesake of Raleigh, capital city of North Carolina; and Mr. Bishop, whose map showed that the future town was almost exactly at "Phelps Center" - the name he wanted. Our "corrupt" way of spelling "Raleigh" (i.e., "Rolla") was finally agreed upon.'

c. 'STORY OF EDMUND WARD BISHOP' (= MANN 1955)

(pp. 12-13) '...February 8, 1858. As of the date just mentioned, there seems to have been no name chosen for the new county seat. However, the name "Rolla" was chosen between that date and May

1 article title: 'Rolla rises from Ozarks wilderness to thriving city of 10,000', by Clair Mann.

2 (G. Cohen): No, no, no! Coppedge was from Kentucky.

11, 1858, for it appears in an official deed in which Samuel Copp conveyed a parcel of land to the County as of May 11, 1858. It again appears in Proceedings of Phelps County Court as of July 7, 1858, where it is recorded that commissioners are to "lay out" a new road joining "Rolla" to Lake Springs.

And now the question arises, "How did Rolla get its unique and pleasant sounding name?: There are several answers or versions some of which seem to have merit. We select the following account as being the one most likely and most nearly established by objective evidence at hand. As we have already said, Mr. Bishop wanted to call the place "Phelps Center". John Webber, the area's oldest resident, wanted to adopt "Hardscrabble" as the name. He had found the land hereabouts so very hard to plow and make a living on! These two, arguing with George Coppedge (who lived in the "Safe" or "Spanish Needles Prairie" county nine miles north of St. James) learned that Coppedge's family, years before, had lived in North Carolina. He himself had come directly from Kentucky to Rolla. Coppedge argued that the new city should have a name it wouldn't be ashamed of - like "Raleigh", for instance, name of the capital city of North Carolina. His family's old home state. Then, too, "Raleigh" tied the name to Sir Walter Raleigh, and thus to Queen Elizabeth, of England. A name to be proud of.

But the way in which George Coppedge pronounced "Raleigh" was like we of 1954 pronounce "R-O-L-L-A". One has only to visit "Raleigh", North Carolina, to hear plenty of people pronounce that city's name as we do "Rolla"! This writer in 1928 had exactly that experience... The outcome was that Messrs. Bishop and Webber agreed to name the infant town "Raleigh", as Coppedge had suggested - but only on condition the name be spelled as Coppedge has pronounced it - "R-O-L-L-A". It was a deal - and the name stuck.'

d. BICENTENNIAL (ABBREVIATED) HISTORY OF ROLLA

The Manns have prepared a 1,200 page manuscript on the history of Rolla, with a very abbreviated version of it appearing in 1976 (edited by Sally White of the University of Missouri-Rolla). The naming of Rolla is treated briefly here but contains no new information:

'It would be 14 years [from 1844] before John Webber and two fellow pioneers would wrangle over the name the town should have -- and compromise by discarding Bishop's "Phelps Center" -- Webber's "Hardscrabble" -- and adopt Coppedge's name "Raleigh", provided that it be spelled as he spoke it "R-O-L-L-A". (May 11, 1958)'

1 (G. Cohen): My underlining. This is a new wrinkle, i.e., that George (Helm) Coppedge had once lived in North Carolina, although his departure to Missouri was from Kentucky. It turns out that Coppedge was also born in Kentucky, and so he would have had to move back and forth (Kentucky to North Carolina to Kentucky) before leaving for Missouri.

5. PAGES PREPARED BY ROLLA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

FIRST ONE¹

'...Several versions exist as to the naming of Rolla:

(1) In 1858, when the town was officially surveyed and laid out, Bishop wanted to call it Phelps Center, Webber wanted Hardscrabble, Coppedge favored Raleigh, his home town in N. Carolina. Others agreed with Coppedge, provided it didn't have "that silly spelling" but was spelled Rolla.

(2) In the engineering party was an engineer named Mr. Rolla. He had a stump smoothed and used it for a drafting table, he also painted his name on the stump so when someone was sent to see him, they would be told "go to Rolla".

(3) The railroad men had a mascot, a dog named Rolla. When they would be asked in St. Louis where they were going to work, they would say "Go see Rolla".

#1 is the accepted version.'

SECOND ONE²

'...There are a number of versions of the naming of Rolla. One is that a pioneer from North Carolina favored "Raleigh" but the spelling was too "high-faluting", so they changed it to R O L L A.'

6. FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH: EDMUND BISHOP SPEAKS

A. 1881 INTERVIEW

(ed.) Shortly after the appearance of my 1984 local newsletter attacking the North Carolinian origin of George Coppedge and hence of Rolla, Earl Strebeck³ drew the following opposing evidence to my attention: an 1881 newspaper article about an interview with none other than Edmund Bishop. And what did Bishop say? '...The question came up as to the name of the new city, and a man from North Carolina proposed "Raleigh" after the capital of his native state.'

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- 1 TITLE: 'Summary History of Rolla, Missouri'. loose page; available in Rolla Public Library (in box entitled: 'Rolla and Phelps County').
- 2 TITLE: 'Rolla, Missouri'; p. 4. Held in a box entitled 'Rolla and Phelps County'. The date stamped on the article is Feb. 18, 1975, but no author is given.
- 3 Former president, Phelps County Historical Society.

1. THE ARTICLE

The article appeared in the Rolla Weekly Herald, April 28, 1881, p. 3, col. 6 and is entitled 'Reminiscences of Rolla':

'The St. Louis Republic of last Saturday contained the following, the result of an interview with E. W. Bishop of this city.

Mr. Edward Bishop, a well-known citizen, the pioneer of Rolla, Mo., is stopping at the Laclede. ...At present Rolla has a population of over 2,000. Mr. Bishop went there in 1855 before a blow struck. He was one of the contractors for building what was then known as the Southwest Branch Pacific railroad, afterwards the Atlantic and Pacific, and now the St. Louis and San Francisco. ...

In 1859 Mr. Bishop sold out his interest in the railroad contracts and purchasing a large body of land in Phelps county, determined to found a city, which he intended colonizing with Eastern men. The question came up as to the name of the new city, and a man from North Carolina proposed "Raleigh", after the capital of his native state.

Mr. Bishop approved of the name, but suggested that the spelling be simplified into "Rolla", after the old Peruvian,¹ and the name was accepted as rather more novel, and having the same sound as the other...'

B. 1891 ACCOUNT

(ed.: Several years ago Professor H. Craig Miner drew my attention to The Rolla Weekly Herald, Oct. 1, 1891, p. 1, col. 7: "War Reminiscences". Civil War correspondent William Fayel had been in Rolla in mid-September for a reunion, and part of his resulting article (first printed in the St. Louis Republic) concerned the naming of Rolla. He probably received this information from Bishop at the reunion; but there is an outside possibility that he heard it in 1861 and is now recounting it from his journalistic notes, as he has done for much of the military information in the article):

1. THE ARTICLE

"...HOW ROLLA BECAME THE COUNTY SEAT

I also heard from the mouth of Mr. E. W. Bishop, the first pioneer and father of the city, the origin of the name of Rolla and how it became the county seat.

The place had no name except that given by the railroad men of "White House", so named from the residence built by Mr. Bishop for the engineers. There was then no Post Office, the nearest one being at Little Prairie, six miles distant. A Post Office was secured. Then commenced a bitter contest for the county seat with Dillon, an aspiring place, also on the railroad. Three

1 This is a reference to the character Rolla in Sheridan's play Pizarro.

Commissioners finally gave it to the town at the end of the railroad track.¹ Then came a contest for the name of the county seat, the selection being accorded to the Dillonites. They proposed "Hardscrabble", which was abhorrent. At length Mr. Geo. Coppidge,² a Dillonite and a North Carolinian, proposed Raleigh as a compromise. Mr. Bishop accepted it, but suggested, as the name was difficult to spell³, it be called Rolla, which carried, and it was thus entered on the court records. So that, Sir Walter, the discoverer of Virginia and the destroyer of the Spanish Armada, had his name thus transformed to that of the Peruvian hidalgo.

The writer of this first struck Rolla on the 12th of August 1861, two days after the battle of Wilson's Creek...'

7. 1916 ACCOUNT IN THE ST. LOUIS REPUBLIC

The following article appears in the St. Louis Republic, March 26, 1916, part II, p. 1; title 'Kowtow':⁴

'Rolla...is a town you ought to see before you go to Paris and die.

Rolla is not named for Rolla Wells of St. Louis.

Possibly Rolla Wells of St. Louis was named for Rolla, Mo.⁵ It is immaterial. They told me down there the story of the naming of Rolla.

Along about Civil War time the Frisco Railroad was building westward. It stopped at Rolla - or at the place which has come to be known as Rolla. There were other things doing in those four years of fratricidal strife and railroad building took a rest.

The chief construction engineer for the Frisco at that time was the late E. W. Bishop. Mr. Bishop liked the lay of the land down there, and he built for himself the first ambitious dwelling which still stands. Mr. Bishop was a man of Northern sympathies. When the place grew into a hamlet and promised to become a good-sized town, a name was desirable for railroad and postal purposes. Many of the early settlers were from the Carolinas and other parts of the South. They wanted to name the town, and they wanted a Southern name.

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- 1 (G. Cohen): i.e., Rolla.
 - 2 (G. Cohen): sic: misspelled with -i-.
 - 3 (G. Cohen): my underlining. This explanation is at variance with the usual statement that the spelling was changed to disguise the Southern nature of the name.
 - 4 My thanks to Lawrence Christensen (history professor at UMR) for drawing this item to my attention.
 - 5 (G. Cohen): No. Rolla was a popular first name in the 19th and early 20th centuries due to the hero Rolla of Sheridan's play Pizarro.

Mr. Bishop, seeing that he was in a considerable minority, made this proposition to the Southerners:

One Set Named Town,
Another Spelled it.

'You fellows may name the town if you will let me spell it.'
"Agreed"¹ and they named it Raleigh for the South Carolina capital.

"Fine!" said Mr. Bishop. "R-o-l-l-a, Rolla."

And Rolla it is.'

8. ACCOUNT IN EATON 1916: FINAL Y IS SPELLED A

(p. 341) 'From the Youth's Companion, Sept. 7, 1916'
HOW ROLLA GOT ITS NAME

"You have given quaint and beautiful names to some of the cities of your state", remarked a visitor in Missouri. "I have often wondered where you obtained them. There is "Sedalia", for instance. And there is 'Rolla'. Every student of history knows of Rollo, but whence came this more beautiful word? Has 'Rolla' any connection at all with 'Rollo'?"

"Not even the remotest", was the response of a professor in one of the state educational institutions, for to him the question was addressed.

"How, then, did the name originate? Can you tell?"

"Yes," answered the profesor with a smile. "The origin of the word in its present form is a part of the folklore of immigrants from North Carolina, who were not much given to the study of spelling, but who cherished a pride in their native state, and determined to give the name of its proud old capital to their new city in the West. The capital of the Old North State was named for Sir Walter Raleigh of 'the spacious days of great Elizabeth'. The Missouri immigrants, not recalling the correct orthography of the name, spelled it phonetically, as it seemed to them for they supposed that a final 'a' was equivalent to a final 'y'. They spelled it R-o-l, rawl, l-a, ly. And that was the origin of the word that seems to give you so much pleasure."

9. EATON'S ACCOUNT INFLUENCES READ'S 1928 TREATMENT

The eminent linguist Allen Walker Read wrote in his 1928 article:

1 (G. Cohen): Raleigh is the capital of North (not South) Carolina.

(p. 237) 'Many of the names have a story-book quality. Probably the best known story is that of Rolla. The patriotic immigrants from North Carolina wished to honor their native capital. Their spelling faculty failed them, however, and they began "Rol-". Then, thought they, if the names called "Anny" and "Rosy" are spelled Anna and Rosa, surely the "-leigh" is represented by -la. In this way, the North Carolina Raleigh became the Missouri Rolla.'

MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH READ ON HIS 1928 TREATMENT

In 1983 I wrote to Professor Read asking if he perhaps remembered where he heard the story (I had not yet come across Eaton's 1916 article). And shortly afterwards the following reply arrived:

'I have been trying to reconstruct the sources of my statements in 1928 about the origin of the name Rolla, and have even found hidden away in a box, long untouched, the folder of 55 years ago with my first draft and correspondence with the editor, Floyd Shoemaker. But the folder gives nothing about my sources. I am sure that Professor Ramsay was not the source, but it may have been, as you say, "a piece of common knowledge". Most likely of all, however, I probably took it from David Eaton's treatment in the Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 11, No. 3 (April 1917) pp. 340-341. His quotation from the Youth's Companion of September 7, 1916, seems very circumstantial. Later on I collected a body of material about the dramatic character Rolla in the well-known play Sheridan's Pizarro; and I think now that the name Rolla may represent a confluence of the two sources. That a name should have a "multiple origin" is not uncommon. My best example from Iowa is Osage, from "Orrin Sage", a founder whose signature was "O. Sage", and also the Indian tribe.'

10. A SECOND-HAND ACCOUNT: ROLLA AS A MISSPELLING OF RALEIGH

(in: The Rolla Herald, August 9, 1928, p. 2, col. 2)
 Title: 'Rolla's Three Red Letter Days'

'In the following radio talk, made August 1st on the Ozark Pennant Half Hour, over KMOX, Mary Belle Wimber, Secretary to E. D. Levy, President of Pierce Petroleum, said:

...The Atlantic and Pacific, a pioneer land grant railroad had just been extended from St. Louis into the Ozark Wilderness and paused at a point that was destined to be the townsite of Rolla, named for their beloved city of Raleigh, by North Carolinians, original settlers of the community. Although the new town was christened in honor of Sir Walter Raleigh and his North Carolina namesake, it was spelled by these frontiersmen according to their own idea...'

11. ACCOUNTS BY MAUDE MITCHELL AND J. D. GUSTIN

The 1927 accounts by Maude Mitchell and J. Gustin are presented below in connection with the dog-origin story about Rolla's naming. Both writers reject this story and insist that Rolla was named for Raleigh, N.C.

12. HOMER CROY'S UNRELIABLE ACCOUNT

Croy's June 8, 1946 article in the Saturday Evening Post says (p. 6):

'...The story of Corn Belt names could go on and on; let's end it with a mistake. When the present location of the University of Missouri's School of Mines was being named, a transplanted North Carolinian spoke so emotionally of the glories of the city he'd come from that the folks decided to call their town Raleigh. The committee chairman sent the name to the Post Office Department, and by and by the townsfolk were startled to find that Washington was officially and immortally calling their place Rolla. The chairman had spelled it the way the Southerner pronounced it. The citizens got over it, but, the Southerner was so mad he left town and was never heard of again.'²

13. JAMES WILLIAMS' UNRELIABLE ACCOUNT

John Bradbury drew the following item to my attention: 'Phelps County Historian', Rolla Herald, Dec. 20, 1928, p. 3, col. 3-4:

'James M. Williams, who was with Pickett's division of the 11th Virginia Infantry at Gettysburg, and was captured at the battle of Five Forks on April 1, 1865...is nearly eighty-three years old, and is known throughout Phelps County as "Uncle Jim".'

Uncle Jim was born in Bedford County, Va. After he was released by the Union forces, following Lee's surrender, he came to Missouri to join his brother, Samuel G. Williams, who came to Missouri from Virginia in 1867, just at the time when Phelps County was organized.³ His brother was a member of the legislature that legalized the naming of Rolla as the county seat of Phelps County, and was also a member of the Board of Curators of the University of Missouri at the time the School of Mines and Metallurgy was established in Rolla.

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- 1 (G. Cohen): My underlining. There is no evidence at all that this occurred.
- 2 (G. Cohen): My underlining. There is no evidence for this either. The only Southerner ever mentioned in the Rolla naming story is George Coppedge, and no early source mentions him leaving town in a huff. In any case, he never lived in Rolla, even before the naming.
- 3 (G. Cohen): No. Phelps County was already organized by the time Rolla was named and selected as the county seat (1858).

Through information furnished him by his brother, and through his own experiences here since 1865, Uncle Jim is an authority on history hereabouts. As such he takes exception to the tale that has been going around recently regarding the naming of Rolla.

Some historians¹ have said the town was named for a famous hound dog of the Ozark region, but Uncle Jim does not agree with this story. According to him, E. W. Bishop, who donated the land² for the Rolla townsite, wanted to name the county seat Hardscrabble.² Other names were suggested, but among the early settlers was a number of North Carolinians, who under the leadership of a man named Coppedge, wanted to name the county seat Raleigh. Bishop and Lyle Singleton, the county clerk, appreciating that Coppedge had the greatest following,³ went to him and agreed that he could name the county seat if he and his following would let Bishop and Singleton spell it. They did, but they simplified the spelling to Rolla. ...

St. Louis Post Dispatch'

a. COMMENTS FROM THE EDITOR (G. COHEN)

When I first read this account I was looking very hard for evidence that Williams had spoken directly about the naming with Bishop or Webber. But there is no such indication. And Williams' arrival in Phelps County was some seven years after Rolla was named. So despite his age, he is not a reliable source, and his story is clearly a mixture of the various hearsay accounts that circulated in the area.

* * * * *

B. ROLLA FROM 'ROLLA', A CHARACTER IN SHERIDAN'S PLAY PIZARRO

The source of the derivation presented in the title just above is Ramsay's 1952 Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names (pp. 77-78). It turns out that the derivation was based on Ramsay's misunderstanding the remarks on Rolla by Frank

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- 1 (G. Cohen): No. The only proponent of the hound-dog story was Mrs. Montgomery (daughter of Phelps), who hardly qualified as a historian of the Rolla area. She was born and raised in Springfield and left Missouri at age 22 right after her wedding, spending the rest of her life in the West.
 - 2 (G. Cohen): Goodspeed's 1889 book attributes the Hardscrabble suggestion to John Webber.
 - 3 (G. Cohen): 'greatest following'; it must be remembered that in 1858 there was hardly anyone in the Rolla area, and so visions of a populace in dispute are anachronistic. People other than the railroad crew did not start arriving in any numbers for a year or two. The Civil War then produced a dramatic increase, since Rolla occupied the strategic point of the westernmost extension of the railroad. To the extent that a dispute did exist, it was between the few Rollaites and Dillonites concerning which town would be selected as the county seat.

Weber, his M.A. thesis student, and normally could be just briefly mentioned and then set aside. But Ramsay 1952 is presently regarded as the Bible of Missouri place-name study and is thus the first work consulted by place-name buffs in the state. So, mistake or not, Ramsay's interpretation receives at least moderate credence from the public.

Incidentally, Ramsay was both troubled and intrigued by the etymology of Rolla, as indicated by his relatively lengthy treatment of it; his book is a survey of thousands of Missouri place names, and most items receive no more than a brief discussion.

1. ACCOUNT IN RAMSAY (1952: 77-78)

'One of the most puzzling problems of Missouri nomenclature is the true origin of the name of Rolla, the county seat of Phelps (County). Usually when we are compelled to leave unsolved the source of a place name, the reason is sheer lack of information, the records having been lost. In the case of Rolla, however, we have too many explanations rather than too few. At least three conflicting stories, none of them too well supported, have been told about its origin. Two of them must be fictitious; perhaps all three are merely products of our Missouri genius for inventing good stories when reliable facts are unavailable.

The story most widely repeated has it that when the town was laid out in 1858, the citizens, most of whom were North Carolinians, wanted to name it for the capital city of the Tar Heel State. Being no great scholars, however, none of them could remember exactly how the name of their home town was spelled. They did the best they could, and the result was Rolla; i.e., Raleigh as they then pronounced it. This tale harmonizes beautifully with our Midwestern habits of speech; for if Missouri in our mouths turns regularly into "Mizzoura", why should not Raleigh become Rolla? And yet, perhaps, this story is just too good a one to be true. Experience teaches us that the better a story is, as a story, the less likely it is to be authentic. Dull facts are usually more like real life than clever fiction.

Another explanation that has been given is naturally disliked in Rolla itself. According to the version, the town was named for a dog. It seems there was disagreement among the early settlers over the exact location of their new town. The winning faction tried to appease the disgruntled minority by offering to let them choose the name. But the losers refused to be placated. In disgust they decided to name it for one of the mangiest of the many "houn' dawgs" that roamed the Ozark countryside. The hound's name happened to be Rollo; but they changed it to Rolla because towns are usually feminine. Now it is known that several other Missouri communities have acquired canine names, and Rollo is plausible enough for such a name. But the anecdote is a little too ingenious to be entirely credible.

The third account affirms that the place was really named for a character in a play. Sheridan's "Pizzaro", a translation from the German dramatist Kotzebue, was just then immensely popular and was being performed throughout the country. In 1832, for instance, it was selected for the very first dramatic performance ever given in the drama-loving town of Columbia, Missouri. The subtitle of this old melodrama is "The Death of Rolla", for the leading role in it is sustained by a swashbuckling hero named Rolla, who was greatly admired by Missouri audiences. So the citizens of the prospective Phelps County decided to name their adventurous community for him.

The last explanation is, I think the one to be preferred, for the simple reason that it could hardly have been invented afterwards, seeing that the current stage success was soon completely forgotten. But there is one slight modification in it that could be made, to increase its likelihood. We know the old hero had many namesakes among Missourians, who have always liked to give their children high-sounding and adventurous names. One of them, for example, was the eminent Rolla Wells (1856-1944), Mayor of St. Louis from 1901-1905. He was too young in 1858 to be the name-father of the town of Rolla; but there were doubtless a sufficiency of other Rollas in the 50's who were admired in Phelps County...'

2. SOURCE OF RAMSAY'S ERROR: WEBER 1938

Weber's 1938 M.A. thesis had this to say about Rolla:

'Rolla (Phelps) -- The county seat, laid out in 1858. John Webber wanted to call it Hardscrabble; E. W. Bishop, who donated fifty acres of land to the town, wanted it Phelps Center; and George Coppedge wanted to name it for his old home, Raleigh, N. Carolina. Bishop, a northern sympathizer, agreed to accept Coppedge's name on condition it be spelled Rolla. The story that it was so spelled because none of the original settlers knew the correct spelling of Raleigh, is vehemently denied. More creditable to the culture of the pioneers is the suggestion that the form was suggested by that of a character in Sheridan's very popular play "Pizarro". (P. G. 1867f; Hist. Laclède, 660).'

Weber's last sentence turns out to be a potentially misleading version of what Goodspeed 1889 reported. Weber says nothing of the compromise involved in the spelling 'Rolla', and with this needed compromise out of the picture, one might misconstrue Pizarro's Rolla (> Rolla, Missouri) as being an etymology independent of Rolla (MO) < Raleigh. This error was in fact made by no less a scholar than Ramsay, who, not checking the original source, rejected Rolla < Raleigh and supports instead Rolla < (the character) Rolla (1952: 77-78).

3. ACCOUNT IN E. VIETS' 1978 NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

The following account is of course a very secondary one; it is included here for the sake of completeness and for its indication of the aura of authority that surrounds Ramsay's work:

'...It's been long argued whether Rolla was named after some forgotten local Rolla - or a dog, a Southern city, or the hit play of the 1850's. Local legend says when Rolla was laid out in 1858, the citizens, who were mostly North Carolinians, wanted to name the new town after their old state capital, Raleigh. Unfortunately, no one could remember exactly how Raleigh was spelled. Rolla was the best they could do. This explanation is not bad, Ramsay says. Any place that could pronounce Missouri as Missoura just might do that to Raleigh. People in Rolla do not care for the next explanation at all. Neither does Ramsay. This one says Rolla was named after a dispute over the town's location. The winning faction let the losers name the place. The losers picked Rolla, after the mangiest hound in the area. The third story says the town was named for the swashbuckling Rolla, hero of a melodrama called "Pizarro". Ramsay leans toward this explanation the most, unless records yield up some local Rolla.'

C. ROLLA WAS NAMED FOR A DOG

The silliest etymology concerning Rolla is that this town was named for a mangy hound dog. Surprisingly, though, this story goes back to no less a pillar of sobriety than Mrs. J. B. Montgomery, daughter of Governor John Phelps for whom Phelps County is named. Here is her account and the local reaction to it.

1. ACCOUNT OF MRS. J. B. MONTGOMERY

(in: The Rolla Herald, Jan. 20, 1927, page 2, cols. 2-3)

Title: 'Impressions and Observations'

Subtitle: 'How Phelps County and Rolla Were Named'

'Mr. Fred Lockley, a special writer for the Journal, published in Portland, Oregon, has recently published in that paper a series of interviews with Mrs. J. B. Montgomery. Mrs. Montgomery is a daughter of Governor John S. Phelps, after whom Phelps County, Missouri, was named. Mr. E. A. Dunham, who formerly lived near Craddock, in Phelps County, now residing in Portland, sent us these interviews with Mrs. Montgomery, and we are taking the liberty of reproducing the same in the Herald...

Mrs. J. B. Montgomery came to Portland with her husband on July 13, 1870. She had been married on October 23, 1866 at her home in Springfield, Missouri, going to Philadelphia immediately after her marriage. Mr. Montgomery had invested \$50,000 in Northern Pacific bonds, and came out to look the country over and find further opportunities for investment.

..."You asked me a moment ago about Phelps County, Missouri. It was named for my father, John S. Phelps, who at the time the county was created was a member of Congress. Later father was elected governor of Missouri, serving from 1876-1880...

"I must tell you how Rolla got its name. There were two factions when the county was created. One side wanted the county named for my father, and the other side was opposed, as they wanted it named for someone else. My father's side won out. Father wanted the county seat named Maryville, after mother, but it was decided to make a concession to the other faction, so they were told they could name the county seat. The leader of the opposition party was so angry about not winning out in the contest to name the county that he said: 'You can call the county seat Rolla, after a hound dog I own that isn't much good.' So they took him at his word and named the county seat Rolla, just as the town Keno, in Klamath county, is also named for a dog. Today, Rolla is one of the best towns in that district of Missouri, which only goes to prove that its the character of the citizens of a community that counts, and not what the town is named".'

2. J. D. GUSTIN'S REJECTION OF THE DOG-ORIGIN STORY

(in: The Rolla Daily Herald, Feb. 3, 1927, p. 3, col. 2)

Title: 'Rolla Was Not Named in Honor of Dog, but Sir Walter Raleigh'
 Subtitle: 'Clerk Didn't Know How to Spell Name and
 Wrote it Phonetically'

'Springfield Leader.

J. D. Gustin is of the opinion that Rolla was not named for a dog. Mrs. J. B. Montgomery, of Portland, Oregon, daughter of Governor John S. Phelps, recently gave a version of the naming of Rolla. She had been informed that a man who objected to naming the county Phelps succeeded in naming the county seat after his dog in revenge. Mr. Gustin believes this is an error.

Named for Sir Walter:

"Following the early settlement of Rolla", said Mr. Gustin, "the inhabitants desired the establishment of a post office. The matter fell under discussion of an informal gathering of citizens, and one of the number was designated to draw up a petition to be made to the post office department. Among these early residents were some who had come from North Carolina, and out of respect to their wishes it was decided to ask the department to name the new office "Raleigh". The scrivener, not being familiar with the North Carolina capital or the names of the heroic figures of the Elizabethan period, wrote it phonetically 'Rolla', and the post office department accepted the suggestion as written in the petition.

"I heard this question discussed by such prominent figures in Rolla history as the late Gen. E. Y. Mitchell, Judge C. C. Bland, Walbridge J. Powell, and others, and I am quite sure it is correct. I have been pretty well acquainted with that part of the state for nearly 50 years, and I have never heard of any other version of the naming of Rolla".'

3. MAUDE MITCHELL'S REJECTION OF THE DOG-ORIGIN
STORY; ROLLA AS A MISSPELLING FOR RALEIGH

(in: The Rolla Herald, March 3, 1927, p. 4, col. 1)
Title: 'A Letter From Miss Maude Mitchell'

Washington, D.C., Feb. 24, 1927

My dear Mr. Woods:

...I have been noticing the statements in your estimable paper about the naming of Rolla. My father, Gen. E. Y. Mitchell, was born in Jefferson County, Missouri, in 1831, and was very familiar with the early history of the state. He often told me that he was present when the town of Rolla was organized, and that it was intended to have the spelling of the name "Raleigh", but the person sending in the name did not know how to spell it, and so spelled it "Rolla", and it was recorded that way and was never changed. He never at any time intimated that the town was named for a dog, and I am sure Mrs. Montgomery is mistaken.

My father also told me that the first house built in Rolla was the E. W. Bishop residence, where the Bishop family lived for many years.

I write this because I think the "old timers" should help establish the facts.

Sincerely yours,

Maude M. Mitchell'

4. (G. COHEN): COMMENTS ON THE ABOVE DOG-ORIGIN DISCUSSION

Phelps' daughter was not from the Rolla area and in any case left Missouri right after her marriage; her credentials as an authority of Rolla history are therefore weak. My own guess is that the Phelps family was upset at the rejection of 'Phelps Center' as the name of the new county seat (i.e., Rolla) and then originated the dog-origin story.

There is no indication anywhere besides in Mrs. Montgomery's account that Maryville was ever proposed as a possible name for what was to become Rolla. Here too we very probably deal with a bit of folklore limited to the Phelps family.

It is truly striking that no mention is made of the Coppedge-Bishop-Webber debate. This debate is now firmly rooted in the consciousness of Rollaites with any interest in the history of their city, thanks to its mention in the works of Clair and Bonita Mann. But apparently in the 1920's this debate had not yet gained a firm hold over the public's imagination.

I had always assumed that the dog-origin story originated in one of the more frivolous male minds of the area, perhaps under the influence of one beer too many. The 1927 Herald material therefore came as a surprise.

5. A FRIVOLOUS VARIANT OF THE DOG-ORIGIN STORY

The following wrinkle in the dog-origin story is included here only for the sake of completeness; I quote from a 1977 newspaper article about Adolf Schroeder:¹

'..."Sometimes," said Dr. Schroeder, "we have little reason to believe a story is true. There is a rumor that Rolla was chosen by a man who stood a stick on end and decided that if the stick fell to the east he would name the town after his wife; if to the west after his dog. It fell to the west, and the town was named for Rolla, his dog. There is little reason to suppose that story is true, but we can't disprove it.'²

I have found no written attestation of this stick-falling story and therefore wrote to Dr. Schroeder asking where he encountered it. In a 10/08/1980 letter he replied: ...'The interesting (and incomprehensible) thing about the interview in Rolla is that I did not mention the story about the stick falling this way or that: this theory must have been advanced by someone in the audience.'

D. ROLLA WAS NAMED FOR AN ENGINEER

1. MRS. COLLUM'S ACCOUNT

Title: 'Latest Version of How Rolla Was Named'³

'This very interesting correspondence was read before the officers of the Phelps County Historical Society at their meeting held on October 3rd:

-
- 1 pronounced 'Shrader'. Dr. Schroeder is Professor Emeritus of German at the University of Missouri-Columbia and for several years was director of the Missouri place-names survey. He was interviewed for radio once in Rolla, with a local newspaper reporter sitting in, and later that day gave a talk on place-names; the result was the following article: 'What's in a Name? - Just Ask Adolf Schroeder' (by Margaret Menamin), Rolla Daily News, 3/29/1977, Sec. D, p. 1.
 - 2 The article continues: 'More than likely, but still unproved, he said, is the theory that local pronunciation of the terminal letter "a" resulted in someone hearing "Raleigh" and writing "Rolla".'
 - 3 (G. Cohen): I am grateful to Helen Carroll of Rolla for passing this item along to me. It appeared in the Proceedings of the Phelps County Historical Society, vols. 21-22, 1938-1939, p. 119, and first appeared in The Rolla Herald, Oct. 12, 1929, p. 7, cols. 1-4. -- I am also indebted to Mark Stauter for pointing out that a slightly abbreviated version of this letter is reprinted in the Missouri Historical Review, vol. 35, no. 4 (July 1941).

"San Francisco, Calif.
 Dr. C. V. Mann,
 Sec., Phelps County Historical Society,
 Rolla, Missouri

Dear Sir:

I am relating a story told by my grandfather, of how Rolla got its name. My grandfather (Patrick O'Malley) was with the engineers when the first survey for the Frisco railroad was made. At that time, the expected new road was spoken of as the "Southwest Branch". While the surveyors were camped in the vicinity of what later became known as Rolla, it became necessary (owing to the roughness of the country) to make new surveys. And each survey gave the engineers much work in their own line (i.e., figures and estimates).

Many surveys were made before a roadway was decided upon. The camp was situated among some very large oak trees. Many of the trees were cut down in constructing the camp. One of the engineers in charge - a Mr. Rolla - had one of the tree stumps sawed off flat on top so he could use it as a table and desk. He painted his name "Rolla" on the stump, and put his tent right by this stump. That was headquarters for the camp.

It was like this: "Take this to Rolla;" "Ask Rolla about it." "Go to Rolla for that;" and so forth. No one made a mistake in locating Mr. Rolla's "office" -- there was his name printed on the smooth side of that big stump. The extra work kept the camp in the same location longer than usual for such surveys. People passing through the country, trappers, and the few frontiersmen, spoke of the place as "Rolla" painted on its smooth side. It became a landmark, and gave the name "Rolla" to the place.

I regret that I am not able to give any information about this Mr. Rolla. There may be others whose grandparents, or great grandparents, knew this young engineer. Maybe files in the Southern Pacific Railroad Office would mention those surveyors and engineers.

At this writing, I cannot say just what year my grandparents settled in what is now Phelps County, but my mother's wedding day was March 15, 1852, and from that time on she lived in what is now Phelps

1 (G. Cohen): This possibility does not pan out. Patrick Stafford (Public Affairs Department, Burlington Northern Railroad, 176 East 5th Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101) informed me: '...I fear that the matter of how Rolla came to be named will not be proven from former Frisco records. Some of the records, such as the Frisco land patents and other major artifacts, were sent to St. Paul. But, the old employee records have been gone for many years.'

County. My grandmother, Mary Fergus O'Malley, my father, Martin Mooney, and my mother, Mary O'Malley Mooney, are buried near St. James in a little cemetery which my parents gave to the community.

None of my people worked at the Meramec Smelter. My father was a stone cutter, and stone mason. Much of his work is still standing in south central Missouri.

My dear Mr. Mann, I hope I have helped a little in getting the history of Phelps County right. I have a list of names of families who lived in the vicinity when my grandparents lived there.

Respectfully,

Mrs. Wm. M. Collum (Nee Kate Mooney)'

2. 1946 ACCOUNT IN THE ROLLA DAILY NEWS

The naming of Rolla once came briefly to national attention in a 1946 item in the Saturday Evening Post (reproduced above, p. 19). A reply to this article was made in the local Rolla newspaper and then reprinted in the MSM (Missouri School of Mines) Alumnus, June 1946, p. 8.¹ Title: 'Magazine Gives Version of Rolla's Naming -- But We Don't Believe It'. The rejoinder reads:

'The history of the naming of the City of Rolla has again come in for national attention, but this time we believe the story should be taken with a grain of salt.

The astute editors of the Saturday Evening Post, long considered one of the world's greatest publications, come out this week with a story in its "Report to the Editors" column, telling the story behind the naming of various cities and towns in America.

They call the naming of our beloved city "a mistake". According to the Satevepost boys, "Rolla" should have been "Raleigh", named after, normally enough, Raleigh, North Carolina.

According to the account in the magazine under the byline of Homer Croy, Rolla was supposed to have been named "Raleigh" after a transplanted North Carolinian who bragged constantly of his native city. The city fathers of the little Missouri town decided to name the town "Raleigh" in all probability in an effort to shut up the ex-Carolinian.

But it seems that Missourians in those days had a particularly bad habit of spelling words the way they were pronounced, so "Raleigh" became "Rolla". According to the yarns, the irate Southerner left town and was never seen again.

1 drawn to my attention by UMR history professor Lawrence Christensen.

But local amateur historians,¹ who in all probability know more about the actual history of the town than do the editors of the Saturday Evening Post, will all yell 'tain't so'. According to them, the most logical story about the naming of Rolla is tied in with the building of the Frisco Railroad through this section. It seems that while the railroad was slowly being laid through this section of the northern Ozarks, a certain straw boss of the construction gang was named Rolla -- spelled R-O-L-L-A. His office was the stump of a giant tree somewhere east of the present site of Rolla. He pulled a log up to the stump and bossed the entire construction program from that outdoor desk.

Workmen, when faced with a problem, had the habit of saying "Take it to Rolla" ... "take it to Rolla". Before very long "Rolla" became synonymous with this section of the country, and when the town sprang up here as the railroad went through the area, it was naturally named "Rolla". That's the historians' story and they will stick with it. And maybe it's because it has a bit of the romantic touch, and at the same time sounds a little more logical, but we like it a little better too, even though the mighty Saturday Evening Post thinks differently.

Besides, there's no "mistake" connected with our story.'

E. ROLLA WAS NAMED RALEIGH BY THE RAILROAD ENGINEERS (AND:
ROLLA HAD TWO EARLIER UNOFFICIAL NAMES)

The following account appears in H. Craig Miner (1972: 30):

'Rolla was an archetypal American railroad town. In January of 1860, the site of the town had been an unimproved prairie ridge; by July, it boasted of seventy-five houses and six hundred people. The transformation had been due entirely to the railroad crews, who called the town first "White House"² because of the color of the residence built for the engineers, then "Hardscrabble" for a

1 (G. Cohen): The most knowledgeable amateur historians on Rolla and Phelps County were Clair and Bonita Mann, but in their writings they do not set forth the story about the construction boss named "Rolla". They adhere rather to the version of a compromise on "Raleigh".

2 (G. Cohen): H. Craig Miner's footnotes do not give the source of this information nor of the following statement that Rolla had been called Hardscrabble for a while. I telephoned Professor Miner about this, and he informed me that the source is William Fayel: Oct. 1, 1891 article in the Rolla Weekly Herald, with Fayel's information coming directly from town-founder Edmund Bishop. The relevant portion of the article is reproduced above, pp. 15-16.

while,¹ and finally Raleigh. Raleigh became Rolla because that was easier to spell, though one of the educated objected that "Sir Walter, the discoverer of Virginia and the destroyer of the Spanish Armada, has his name thus transformed to that of the Peruvian hidalgo".²

F. ROLLA WAS NAMED FOR COMMANDER RILEY

1. STORY SUGGESTING THIS ETYMOLOGY³

The following account on the naming of Rolla was passed along to me by Carl Yelton (Rt. 1, Box 257, St. James, Mo.), a fourth generation resident of the area who received the story from his parents and grandparents:

As far back as before the Louisiana Purchase the Rolla area had a fort (Fort Denny, where Norwood Hall is now located). By the start of the Civil War this fort was replaced by Ft. Wyman (where the Wyman School was later built), whose commander happened to be named Riley. Anyone in the area with a particular request or errand was instructed to 'go to Riley', which as much as meant: 'Go to the area where Riley is', i.e., to Rolla. When it came time to find a name for the town, Riley was selected but appeared in a variant spelling: Rolla.

2. REJECTING THE ORIGIN OF ROLLA FROM COMMANDER
RILEY OF FT. WYMAN

Mark Stauter
Western Historical Manuscript Collection
Room G-3 Library, UMR
Rolla, Missouri 65401

In the last issue of the Phelps County Historical Society Newsletter there appeared an account of the naming of Rolla which claimed that the town was named for a man called Riley who was a commander of Fort Wyman during the Civil War. This account contained so many inaccuracies and factual errors that a detailed rebuttal is in order.

The account stated that "as far back as before the Louisiana Purchase [1803] the Rolla area had a fort..." This statement has

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- 1 (G. Cohen): Professor Miner is in error here. "Hardscrabble" was proposed as the town name but then promptly rejected. See the Oct. 1, 1891 article referred to in the preceding footnote.
- 2 (G. Cohen): Reference is here made to the character Rolla in Kotzebue's play (later adapted by Sheridan) Die Spanier in Peru, oder Rollas Tod (= The Spaniards in Peru, or the Death of Rolla).
- 3 (G. Cohen): This account first appeared in the Newsletter of the Phelps County Historical Society, vol. 2, #1, p. 11, and it called forth the following item by Mark Stauter in the next issue.

absolutely no basis in fact. There was no fort at what is now Rolla until the Civil War (1861-1865), and in reality no town until the arrival of the railroad in the late 1850's.

The article identifies the early fort as "Fort Denny, where Norwood Hall is now located". There was a Fort Dette, not Denny, built upon that site, but not until 1864. The claim is further made that Fort Denny (sic) "was replaced" by Fort Wyman. Again, this is not true. Fort Dette, actually a protected gun emplacement, was constructed after Fort Wyman, and was contemporaneous with it until both were dismantled after the Civil War.

It is related that the commander of Fort Wyman "happened to be named Riley". There is no evidence to support this claim. The first commander, of all of Rolla including the fort, was Col. John B. Wyman of Illinois, for whom the fort was named.

Finally, it must be said that the entire theory suffers from an obvious, and fatal, flaw. As postal records prove, Rolla was named by mid-1858. However, military records show that construction on Fort Wyman did not commence until August 1861. Thus, it would have been impossible to name the town after the commander of the old fort, since the town, and its name, antedated the arrival of the military to Rolla.

G. ROLLA WAS NAMED BY JOHN WEBBER FOR HIS NATIVE
RALEIGH, ILLINOIS

1. ACCOUNT OF W. E. WEBBER

The following newspaper clipping was sent a few years ago by Millard Webber to Vivian Bradford, who then kindly sent it along to me:

'HOW ROLLA GOT ITS NAME'

The various articles that have been appearing in the Herald and other newspapers as to how Rolla got its name has attracted the attention of Mr. W. E. Webber of the U.S. Treasury Department, located in St. Louis. Mr. Webber is a grandson of John Webber, the original settler at Rolla, and it is probable that his version is correct. His letter follows:

St. Louis, Mo., Feb. 5, 1927

Col. Charles L. Woods
Editor Rolla Herald
Rolla, Mo.

Dear Colonel:

The various discussions quoted in the Herald in reference to the naming of Rolla are incorrect. John Webber, the original settler

there, was born at Raleigh, Saline County, Ill., where he resided until early manhood, when he migrated ostensibly for Texas. But when his ox team became footsore, he stopped at the present site of Rolla and located there permanently.

Subsequently the inhabitants desired the establishment of a post office, and Mr. Webber suggested the name Raleigh, that of his birthplace, which was approved. Due to his meager education the name was incorrectly spelled Rolla.

Yours truly,

W. E. Webber¹

2. BUT TWO OTHER WEBBERS ACCEPT THE STANDARD EXPLANATION ON THE NAMING OF ROLLA

Shortly before Vivian Bradford received the above account from Millard Webber she wrote me the following note (Aug. 1981):

'In regard to the naming of Rolla, I mentioned to you my 1970 conversation with Mrs. Ida Webber, who was then in her 93rd year. She was married to James Henry Webber (b. 1876) who was a grandson of John Webber, the first settler in Rolla.

According to Mrs. Webber, the three men involved in the naming of Rolla, Edmond Bishop, John Webber, and George H. Coppedge, all differed in their choice of a name, but they finally accepted Mr. Coppedge's suggestion that the town be named after Raleigh, N.C. Again they differed, according to Mrs. Webber, because they did not know how to spell Raleigh, but they finally compromised on the spelling we now use.

I have recently talked to Millard Webber, Mrs. Webber's son, and he gives a slightly different version. According to him, the above story is substantially correct up to the part about the men not knowing how to spell it the North Carolina way. As he understood it, they didn't want to spell it the same way and so finally decided on the Rolla version...'

* * * * *

If W. E. Webber is correct that Rolla was named by John Webber for his Illinois birthplace, Raleigh, it is startling that the Webber family did not rally round this explanation.

1 (G. Cohen): The newspaper incorrectly spells this last name with a single b throughout the article. Also, the letter appears in the Rolla Herald, February 10, 1927, p. 7.

3. MORE FROM GRANDSON JAMES HENRY WEBBER: GRANDFATHER
CAME TO ROLLA FROM GALATIA, ILLINOIS

In a startling discrepancy, James Henry Webber in effect disagrees with W. E. Webber on the geographical origin of John Webber. In a 1944 interview granted to Clair Mann,¹ James Webber said:

'My grandfather, John Webber, was born in Philadelphia. His father had come to this country from Holland. Immediately before coming to Rolla, grandfather had lived in Galatia, in Illinois. My own father, William Elijah Webber, was born at that place,....'

The interview (actually a series of interviews) was in depth, and it is hard to imagine how the grandson could have overlooked Raleigh, Illinois, if John Webber were either born in that town or spent any number of years there.² Raleigh, incidentally, is located about 5 miles east of Galatia on present-day Illinois Highway 34.

4. SOLUTION: RALEIGH, ILLINOIS WAS FOUNDED ONLY AFTER
WEBBER CAME TO MISSOURI

John Webber came to the Rolla area in 1844, while Raleigh, Illinois was founded only in 1847. Even if Webber had later heard of the founding of this town near Galatia, it would have had no emotional importance for him. The only town with any claim to Webber's nostalgia would have been Galatia.

H. ROLLA WAS NAMED FOR RALEIGH TRAVERS, AN ANCESTOR
OF THE COPPEDGES

A. Maxim Coppedge (Coppage-Coppedge Chronicle, 1542-1975, p. 243) discusses a George Coppage (1760-?), incorrectly identifying him as the one who supposedly named Rolla, Missouri. As Vivian Bradford commented to me: 'This

1 Rolla Daily New Era, Aug. 21, 1944, sec. B, p. 1, cols. 7-8. article title: 'James Henry Webber Tells of Grandfather Webber, First White Settler in Rolla Area.'

2 Meanwhile, Mann 1944c writes with some authority on John Webber's background, evidently drawing his information at least in part from James Henry and Ida Webber. Of special importance; John Webber could have arrived in Raleigh, Illinois, no sooner than the age of 10 or 11; this does not rule out the suggestion of grandson W. E. Webber, but it does cast doubt on his reliability as an informant. Mann 1944c writes:

'John Webber was born in Philadelphia on Jan. 24, 1819. He was the son of John M. Webber and his wife, Elizabeth (McQueen) Webber. The father was born near the river Rhine, in Holland, in 1794, and in 1806 came to America and settled in Philadelphia. He was married to Elizabeth McQueen, a native of Prince George county, Virginia, born October 18, 1793. Up to 1823 the father followed the banker's trade in Philadelphia, but in that year the Webbers moved to Tennessee and engaged in farming. It is said that the father knew little or nothing about farming but was taught how to do it by his wife. In 1830 the family moved to Saline county, Illinois....'

must be erroneous, as he would have been 98 years old at the time.' Still, the hypothesis A. M. Coppedge advances here can simply be transferred to the correct George Coppedge, i.e., George Helm Coppedge (b. ca. 1800):

'...he is supposed to have named Rolla, Missouri (in ignorance)¹ for Raleigh, North Carolina, but in view of what has been said about Travers...possibly for his own ancestor Col. Raleigh Travers, who arrested Col. John Carter for cursing Cromwell's government...'

It should be noted that the Coppedges seemed to have been very conscious of their family history and often selected the names of their children in honor of this or that ancestor. And A. M. Coppedge (*ibid.*, p. 27) seems to speak of Travis and Travers as variants of the same name; the importance of this would be that the first name of G. H. Coppedge's father was Travis, apparently in honor of Raleigh Travers. So, the argument might go, G. H. Coppedge was honoring his ancestor Raleigh Travers (and perhaps indirectly his own father) by naming a new town Raleigh.

I don't really believe this, but there is the hypothesis anyway. The main argument against it would be that the logical place to start honoring an ancestor is in the names of one's own children. And none of George Helm Coppedge's children were named Raleigh (or Travis/Travers). Besides the whole idea of naming a town after a two-hundred year old ancestor, who in any case was not particularly outstanding, seems a bit farfetched.

I. ROLLA FROM SIR WALTER RALEIGH

It is only the desire for completeness that leads me to present this item. The dog-origin story and J. D. Gustin's rebuttal of it were reprinted in the Springfield Leader (Jan. 24, 26, 1927) from the Rolla Herald. The heading over Gustin's rebuttal is 'Rolla Was Not Named in Honor of Dog But Sir Walter Raleigh', but in fact the article makes clear that Gustin's Raleigh was the North Carolinian capital; this capital honors Sir Walter Raleigh, whereas Rolla is once removed from him.

But a direct connection between Rolla and Sir Walter Raleigh is made by an anonymous Springfield man. On Jan. 28, 1927 the Springfield Leader followed up its two earlier articles on Rolla with this item:

'Rolla, over in Phelps county, is confronted with the mystery of how it came to be named Rolla. Mrs. John B. Montgomery says it was named after a hound which had the reputation as given by the owner of not amounting to anything. It was probably flea bitten, heart broken and not worth kicking around. The county had just been named Phelps in spite of considerable opposition and to pacify the opposition the

1 (G. Cohen): Why ignorance?

2 (discussion about names): 'Travers and Travis must have come into the Coppedges two ways...'

leader was given the right to name the county seat. In a bit of disgust he named the town Rolla after his pet dog.

Comes now a Springfield man and takes issue. Probably he believes the dog story is not in keeping with the dignity and traditions of Rolla which is the seat of the School of Mines and something of a highbrow. He holds that Rolla was really named after Sir Walter Raleigh, who got it where the chicken got the axe. The Rollaites didn't know how to spell Sir Walter's name and this is why the town is called Rolla and not Raleigh. Since then the Phelps county people have learned to spell and the hound dog has been gathered to his fathers. The town, however, is still Rolla and will so remain.'

II. A BIT OF DETECTIVE WORK

A. COPPEDGE REALLY WAS FROM KENTUCKY, NOT NORTH CAROLINA

With yeoman effort Vivian Bradford worked her way through A. Maxim Coppedge's books on genealogy and drew up a set of genealogical charts of George Coppedge and his ancestors in the United States. David Copeland chipped in with some helpful leads, and A. Maxim Coppedge himself very kindly replied in detail to my requests for information. The following treatment is distilled from the very valuable material they passed along:

* * * * *

The roots of George Helm Coppedge are in Kentucky. The 1850 census of Crawford County (part of which is now ¹Maries County) lists a George Helm Coppedge, 45 years old, born in Kentucky, who is clearly the same George Helm Coppedge listed in Coppedge-Manahan (p. 266) as having been born in 1805. Meanwhile, A. Maxim Coppedge's Missouri Cousins mentions that G. H. Coppedge's son Anthony was born in 1825 in Kentucky. So:

1805: birth of George Helm Coppedge in Kentucky.

1825: birth of George Helm Coppedge's son Anthony in Kentucky.

Moreover, A. Maxim Coppedge's Coppage-Coppedge Chronicle 1542-1975 lists several of G. H. Coppedge's siblings as having been married in Kentucky:

(p. 267): Willis Coppage (b. 1810; 'married Sarah Steele. They lived in Adair County, Kentucky')

(p. 268): Fielding Coppage (b. 1812; 'married Sarah Kemper...of Montgomery County, Kentucky')

(p. 265): Jane Coppage (b. 1795; 'married Daniel Tucker of Raywick, Kentucky')

¹ mentioned in Lay (1970: 183). I also checked this information in the census myself.

(p. 264): Isaac Newton Coppage (b. 1797: 'married Frances Ann Price of Greenville, Kentucky')

And interestingly, A. M. Coppedge (*ibid.*, p. 31) comments: 'Lucy, and its cognate Lucinda (in Kentucky) seems a feminine name the Coppedges inherited through...' One of George Helm Coppedge's children was named Lucinda.'

As for George Helm Coppedge's direct ancestors, they too were almost certainly Kentuckians, and before that Virginians. G. H. Coppedge's grandfather, Moses Coppedge (b. ca. 1735) was born and raised in Prince William County, Virginia, and 'about 1777 to 1779 the Coppedges moved to Kentucky.'¹ There is no geographical discussion about G. H. Coppedge's father, Travis, but mention is made that two of Travis's sisters married Kentuckians (Elizabeth Coppage m. William Martin of Washington County, Kentucky, 1789; and Ann Coppage m. Isaac Neely of Washington County, Kentucky, 1793; *ibid.*, p. 270).

B. WERE ANY COPPEDGES IN NORTH CAROLINA?

Answer: yes. The first Coppedges in the U.S. lived in Virginia and the family spread to Kentucky and North Carolina. But the closest relatives George Helm Coppedge had in North Carolina were first cousins once removed.

C. SO, WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD COPPEDGE HAVE HAD IN MIND (IF AND) WHEN HE PROPOSED RALEIGH?

I have no idea. But the issue is not all-important, since Bishop and the other Rollaites clearly took Coppedge's suggestion as a bona fide proposal to honor the capital of North Carolina. It was with Raleigh, North Carolina in mind that Rolla was submitted to Washington as the name of the new town, and so the final judgment must be:

Whatever motivated Coppedge to suggest Raleigh/Rolla (and we will never know), Rolla, Missouri was named for Raleigh, North Carolina.

III. OTHER PLACES NAMED ROLLA

There are three other places named Rolla in the United States and at least one in Canada and Norway. A former linguistics student of mine, Michael Harbaugh, contacted Kelsie Harder, former president of the American Name Society, to see whether any information could be found on the naming of the U.S. Rollas outside Missouri. This checking was necessary, of course, to be sure that Rolla, Missouri was not named from one of these Rollas. Harder replied with some very helpful information, set forth just below, and the Rolla Daily News once ran an article on the Canadian Rolla (also reproduced). The gist of all this information is that Rolla, Missouri does not derive its name from the other Rollas.

1 A. M. Coppedge, *ibid.*, pp. 236-237.

A. ROLLA, NORTH DAKOTA

Harder's above-mentioned letter quoted from Williams (1966: 272)¹ for information on Rolla, ND (in Rollete County):

'...Platted in Sept. 1888 on part of Edward Owen's homestead... It was designated as the county seat in 1890; incorporated there as a village April 12, 1891; as a city in 1907. There are three versions as to the origin of the name. It was coined from the contraction of the county name, credited to Dr. Richard D. Cowan, local pioneer physician; named for Rolla, Missouri, by early settlers from there; named by Arthur Noyes, G.N.R.R. attorney, who suggested his brother's name, Rolla.

B. ROLLA, KANSAS

For Rolla, Kansas, Harder quotes from Rydjord (1972: 305):³

'In the southwestern corner of Kansas, Morton County has a town named Rolla. According to one account, the name had been Reit, named for a pioneer, but an error by the post office department⁴ made it Rolla. It is now spelled like Rolla in Missouri, which was the phonetic spelling of Raleigh, North Carolina, its source. Rolla Township in Morton County followed the same spelling.'

C. ROLLA (PRONOUNCED 'ROLLY'), TEXAS

Shortly before this monograph was being prepared for final typing, Ken Robertson (Dean of Students, UMR) drew my attention to Rolla, Texas (Collingsworth County). He, in turn, had only recently learned of the town from his brother-in-law, who mentioned that he attended school there.

For some reason the town's name is pronounced 'Rolly' (rhymes with jolly); maybe we deal with the same feature as the dialectal Missouri pronunciation of soda as 'sody' and Cuba as 'Cuby'. This is just a guess.

D. ROLLA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Information on a Canadian town named Rolla is found in the Rolla Daily News (of Rolla, Missouri):⁵

-
- 1 Mary Ann Barnes Williams, Origins of North Dakota Place Names, privately printed by the author, Washburn, North Dakota, 1966.
 - 2 (G. Cohen) = Great Northern Railroad.
 - 3 John Rydjord, Kansas Place-Names. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1972.
 - 4 (G. Cohen): Error? What sort of an error could turn Reit into Rolla?
 - 5 June 16, 1977, p. 1. title: 'Canadian City Named After Rolla'. This article is reprinted here with the kind permission of The Rolla Daily News. No author is cited.

'You may have heard of twin cities or sister cities, but you rarely hear of a parent city. Rolla, MO., is a parent city to a small town with a population of 72, Rolla, British Columbia, Canada.

Rolla, British Columbia, was named after this city in 1914 when L. H. Miller applied to the postal department for a post office to be located in the area he had homesteaded several years earlier.

Miller is the father of Emmett E. Miller, born in Rolla, Mo., in September 1901. Miller returned to Rolla, Mo., this week for the first time in 75 years. He related this story:

"In February 1902, my parents went by train to South Dakota and homesteaded and farmed in that area for seven years." Miller said his father was unsuccessful with his farm in South Dakota and left the area in 1909.

L. H. Miller and his family then traveled by covered wagon to the Peace River area in Canada, capital of Alberta. Miller decided to stay in the Peace River area and began to homestead again.

"In 1914 enough settlers had moved into the area that Dad decided it was time to have a post office. So he wrote to the postal department and inquired about regulations to open an office." E. E. Miller said.

One of the requirements in opening a post office was selecting a name for the area. Miller named his homestead Rolla after Rolla, Mo.

Over the years Rolla, British Columbia, has developed into a large farming area, producing wheat, oats and barley with several cattle ranchers in the area.

In 1973, E. E. Miller's son, G. D. Miller took over the operation of the Miller homestead, the third generation of the family to operate the farm.

During his visit in Rolla, Mo., E. E. Miller traveled throughout the Rolla area looking for the place he had been born.

"The other day we found my grandfather's grave marker in the Camp Creek Cemetery. I guess that must be the area where my family lived at one time," Miller said.

E. ROLLA, NORWAY

Just for the record, there is a Norwegian island named Rolla, described in Hovda (1969:53):

'Rolla is a massive imposing sharp triangle rearing up as much as 1015 metres or about 3300 feet.'

Its original pronunciation was something like Ró-~~old~~, with Ro- of uncertain meaning and old 'high' (: Latin alt-us). In any case, this Rolla has no connection with the one in Missouri.

F. JUST FOR THE RECORD: THERE WAS ONCE ANOTHER
ROLLA IN MISSOURI

For five months in 1858 there was a Rolla, Missouri in Polk County, whose name was changed to Rondo when the Rolla in Phelps County was named. It is not clear why the Washington Post Office accepted the second Rolla, since it was standard procedure to reject suggested place names that were already in use elsewhere in the state. In any case, here's what the Nov. 1980 newsletter ('The Resume') of the Historical Society of Polk County has to say on the matter:

'ROLLA ONCE IN POLK COUNTY!!!!'

Not many people, except for a few living in that area, know that Rondo was originally called Rolla.

The U.S. Postal records show that the post office was opened on January 1, 1858, and called ROLLA.

It may be that Rolla in Phelps County already had an application pending at the time the office in Polk County was installed, although they were six months later in getting it.

The office in Phelps County was opened on June 30, 1858 under the name of Rolla, while on the next day, July 1, 1858, the office in Polk County was renamed Rondo.

Information in a paper bearing the title of "Place Names" stated that the name "Rondo" was given to the place by a Mr. Schooley who named it for the first postmaster, Mr. Rondo.

The first postmaster was John B. Weaver, and among the sixteen postmasters there were none by the name of Rondo.

Other stories have been told as to the origin of the name, but more than likely it was given by the postal officials as a substitute name in length and similarity to Rolla.

When the office was closed on December 5, 1919...'

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- 1 Many thanks to Wayne Finke (American Name Society) and his Scandinavian colleagues for everything I know about Rolla in Norway. --- The references on Rolla, Norway are Hovda 1969, Rygh and Rygh 1911, and Sandnes and Stemshaug 1980.
 - 2 address: P.O. Box 423, Bolivar, Missouri 65613. My thanks to Mark Stauter (Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Rolla, Mo.) for pointing out this item to me.

IV. APPENDIX: A PRELIMINARY LOOK AT GEORGE COPPEDGE
AND HIS WHEREABOUTS¹

by David Copeland
Route 2, Box 464
St. James, MO

Although it is generally agreed that the origin of place-name Rolla is from Raleigh, North Carolina and that it was named by John Webber, Edmund Bishop and George H. Coppedge, there remain some unanswered questions about the individual George H. Coppedge.

The first two accounts of the naming of Rolla (Goodspeed 1889, and Weber's 1938 M.A. Thesis) state that Coppedge was an old Carolinian and neither account lists his middle initial. It was not until the Mann Reports of 1951 and 1955 that we find the insertion of the middle initial "H". The Mann Reports also bring out that Coppedge was not a Carolinian but a native of Kentucky, and that his home in 1858 was in "Safe" near the "Spanish Needles Prairie", facts which E. M. King would later bring out in his book The History of Maries County. But the exact location of Coppedge's home, which the Manns said was nine miles north of St. James, was actually only six miles northwest and as the crow flies about nine miles northeast of Rolla. Which brings us to the question asked by Gerald Cohen in "Comments on Etymology" (Vol. X, No. 8-9). If Coppedge was living so far away from what is now Rolla, why was he so influential in the debate over its name?

First it is necessary to go over the history of the area. Prior to 1829, most of the area in Missouri south of the Missouri River fell under the jurisdiction of Gasconade County. As the population grew, this area was divided and in 1829 Crawford County was carved out of Gasconade County and encompassed what is now seventeen counties including Crawford, Phelps, and Maries County. Maries County was separated along with it. This section of Phelps County which included the Rolla area, has therefore been under the jurisdiction of Gasconade County before 1829, Crawford County from 1829-1855 and Maries County from 1855-1857. These changes in County governments make it necessary to check each county for the records of an individual.

1 (G. Cohen): Mr. Copeland prepared this paper about 1980 at my request. At the time I was wondering why Coppedge had such influence in the Rolla-naming debate, since he seems merely to have been in the Rolla area temporarily. Meanwhile, much of the mystery has been cleared up. Coppedge was a Dillonite, and in the spirit of compromise Bishop let him select the new town's name after the Dillonites lost the struggle for the county seat. Still, Mr. Copeland's article contains useful information on one of the key figures in the naming of Rolla and is therefore presented here.

It is recorded in King that George H. Coppedge settled in Johnson Township Maries County about 1835 or six years after Crawford County was formed. In 1836, Coppedge is listed as being one of three Circuit Court Judges in Crawford County. The first County Court of Crawford County was held in 1829, at the home of James and Louise Harrison on the Little Piney near present day Newburg in what is now Phelps County. (Newburg lies about seven miles southwest of Rolla.) One of the lawyers commissioned in the first court was William Coppedge who had settled on the Little Piney about 1835. William Coppedge was the uncle of George H. Coppedge and records show that both men built and operated mills near their respective homes.

Assuming that the Crawford County Court met near the original site, it would seem logical that George H. Coppedge would travel through Rolla several times a year either for court duty or to visit his uncle, as the Copedges seem to have had close family ties.

George H. Coppedge has been recorded as having been a Justice of the Peace and performed the nuptials of Permelia Coppedge and Alfred R. Anthony (no date given). Phelps County Records show the marriage of Mary Jane Coppedge, George H.'s daughter, to John Milton Harrison on February 4, 1858. The Mann Report of 1955 (pp. 12-13) state that the name Rolla was chosen between February 8, 1858 and May 11, 1858. So it is conceivable that George H. Coppedge was in or near Rolla on or about those dates.

Information on his personal life, drawn mainly from Coppedge family records, tells us that George Helm Coppedge was born near¹ Bradfordville, Kentucky in 1805 and married Margaret (Peggy) Kitchen-Thornton¹ before coming to Missouri. The Coppedges were the parents of eight children. In the Dillon cemetery less than a mile north of their home, a stone marks the grave of Margaret Coppedge who died in 1886 at the age of 81. It can only be assumed that George H. Coppedge is buried next to his wife in an unmarked grave.

* * * * *

(ed.: Upon rereading his treatment, Mr. Copeland sent me two letters with additional information):

'Mann, in one of his radio broadcasts, mentions seeing George H. Coppedge's name on a stone in the Dillon Cemetery.'

'The home once occupied by George H. and Margaret "Peggy" Kitchen-Thornton still stands (barely!) north of St. James in a field across from the junction of Highways H and 68. The bridge on Highway 68 is marked Coppedge Creek on one end and Coppedge Branch on the other!'

'For the record, the "H" in George's middle name was for "Helm", his mother's maiden name.'

'John Milton Harrison and Mary Jane Coppedge (GHC's daughter; m. 2/4/1858) were my mother's great-grandparents.'

1 Kitchen was Margaret (Peggy) Thornton Coppedge's middle name (from her mother's maiden name).

letter #2:

'James D. Norris wrote in Frontier Iron, The Meramec Iron Works, 1826-1876 (pp. 101-102)¹ that in 1852 G. H. Coppedge supervised the loading and shipping of iron from Meramec Iron Works at the Gasconade landing, Paydown. Apparently G. H. was in a partnership with his son Anthony Kitchen Coppedge, as the bibliography mentions letters from G. H. and A. J. Coppedge to James and Chapman and from G. and A. Coppedge to James and Chapman.²

B. THE TWO-FOLD PRONUNCIATION OF RALEIGH
(NORTH CAROLINA)

Although Mann 1955 assures us that in a 1928 visit to Raleigh he heard the natives pronounce this name just like 'Rolla', some people I have spoken to still have their doubts: isn't 'Raleigh' pronounced only 'Rahlee'?

The issue of course is crucial to the derivation of Rolla from Raleigh, and so I wrote for clarification to Ronald Butters,³ and in his reply he speaks of 'the local variant [ralɪ];' the sign /ɪ/ is a phonetic designation for a sound very close to the -uh sound of Rolla. So two pronunciations for Raleigh have existed, much like Missouree/Missouruh, and George Coppedge presented Edmund Bishop et al. with the -uh (technically: /ɪ/) variant of Raleigh.

C. ROLLA "BULLDOGS" IN ROLLA, NORTH DAKOTA

A year ago the Rolla "Bulldogs" of Rolla, North Dakota (high school) were mentioned in Sports Illustrated, and the striking coincidence that the Rolla, Missouri high school teams are also called the "Bulldogs" prompted me to write a letter of inquiry on the matter. The similarity is only a coincidence, as is clear from the reply I received from the Superintendent of Schools in Rolla, North Dakota:

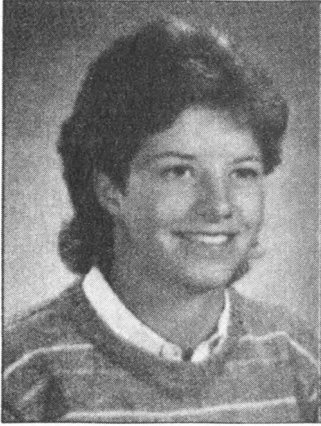
'March 14, 1986

Dear Sir:

As to your inquiry concerning the origin of the Rolla "Bulldogs" -- our records indicate that until 1946-47 we were the "Bluebirds". The boys home from the war promoted a name change to something more masculine. That school year the faculty, students, community, and alumni all had names suggested, and grades K-12 voted until the

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- 1 State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, 1964.
 - 2 These letters are in Volume 55 of the James Collection, Western Historical Manuscripts. There are four letters from George and A. K. and two letters to George/A. K. The last letter is April 29, 1854, from W. James and Company to G. H. Coppedge.
 - 3 Editor of the scholarly journal American Speech and Professor of English at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Bulldogs was chosen. By until - I mean they narrowed many choices down to a few by vote....



WHITNEY MEIER
ROLLA, N. DAK.

Whitney, a senior forward at Rolla High, scored 597 points this season and led the 22-3 Bulldogs to a fifth-place finish in the state basketball tournament. She is second on the state's all-time scoring list with 2,492 points.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Norm Baumgarn
Superintendent of Schools

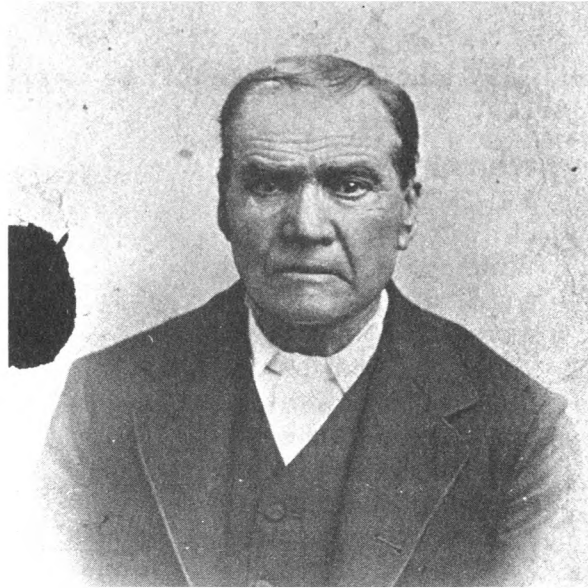
Sports Illustrated,¹
January 13, 1986, p. 109

D. 'ROLLA STUDIO' -- IN JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

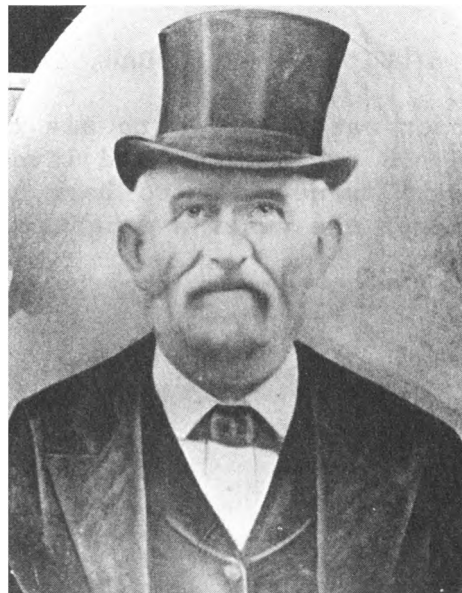
Rolla resident Ann Turner was startled to see the sign 'Rolla Studio' in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where she and her husband lived in 1984. She asked the owner about the name, but it turned out to have no connection with Rolla, Missouri; 'Rolla' is the name of the owner's daughter.



¹ Item drawn to my attention by Jim Wise (English Dept., UMR).



John Webber, first settler in the Rolla area.



This man may be Edmund Bishop. When 90 year old Ida Webber was shown this picture in 1971, she exclaimed: 'That is Ed Bishop!' (Rolla Daily News, 8/3/1971, p. 5A). She later backed off, suggesting it might be an Al Webber, 'though it still could be Bishop, she said.' In matters such as these I believe that strong first impressions are probably correct. In any case, 'distinguished' was applied to Bishop as if it were his title, and the above picture jibes well with this observation.



A Mr. Young as Rolla in Sheridan's Pizarro
From a tinselled print, 1834, reproduced beside the title page of Rhodes 1962.

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- _____ 1955. The story of Edmund Ward Bishop, co-founder of Phelps County, Missouri, and of Rolla, home of Missouri School of Mines. With chief facts about founding of county and city. Printed and published by radio station KTTR, Rolla, Missouri.
- _____ 1957. "Yesterday lives again" in Phelps County, Missouri. Rolla: Phelps County Centennial Association. Mann is not cited at the author on the title page, but on page 1 the president of the Association, J. Stricker, comments:
 'The "thumb-nail history" of the county is the personal labor of Dr. Clair V. Mann...'
 'Thumb-nail history of the county' refers to the entire book. --- I came across this book only after the present monograph had been typed up; the book contains the usual version on the naming of Rolla with one important new wrinkle: Coppedge is identified as a Kentuckian, albeit one whose ancestors came from North Carolina; this latter point is incorrect, however, since Vivian Bradford's research shows clearly that they came to Kentucky from Virginia. Here is the account on p. 71 of Mann 1957:
 'As the story goes, a hunt was on for a suitable name. In a group somewhere, three men talked the matter over. John Webber wanted the place named "Hardscrabble"--his efforts to raise crops on his farm seems to have suggested that. Edmund W. Bishop, town founder wanted it named "Phelps Center", because on his map the town was close to the county's center. But George H. Coppedge, A Kentuckian whose

ancestors had lived in North Carolina [underlining added] wanted the place named "Raleigh". Having southern brogue, the way he said "Raleigh" is like we of today say "Rolla". Bishop and Webber agreed to the "Rolla", but not to "Raleigh". It was so settled.'

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_____ 1975. 'Rolla, Missouri'. The date stamped on the article is February 18, 1975, but no author is given. From the glowing descriptions of the area and its facilities (all true), it is clear that this article was prepared by the local Chamber of Commerce. And see the item just above for the location of the article (actually, only p. 4, containing the Rolla etymology, is available).

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