

Editorial

In defense of Lincoln

Lincoln comes in 132nd in Rand McNally's 1985 listing of American cities. That might be understandable if it weren't for the cities ranked above us — there's no doubt that Lincoln is a better place to live than some of them.

Let's start with the No. 1 selection, Pittsburgh, Pa. Pittsburgh is known for steel. Steel factories, steel workers and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Hmm. It's a polluted place, and some say, quite ugly.

Who can compare clean, scenic, friendly Lincoln, known for corn, corny legislators and Cornhuskers, with dirty Pittsburgh? Or for that matter, who could compare Lincoln with Buffalo, N.Y., (It's said that "living in Buffalo" is a contradiction in terms), Cincinnati, Ohio, Oklahoma City, Indianapolis, Oakland, Calif., Trenton, N.J., or Detroit? All these towns were listed above Lincoln.

It's tempting to think that because these urban centers have more people, they have more influence in the rankings. But that doesn't explain Pittsburgh . . . nothing explains Pittsburgh.

Lincoln's biggest slap in the face comes from the rank given our rival city to the north — known to many as the "Paris of the Pigbelt." That's right. Omaha was ranked 37th. Ninety-five rankings ahead of us.

Some comfort can be taken in that Rand McNally's 1981 ratings placed Omaha 81st. Lincoln was ranked 70th.

Things haven't changed that much since 1981. Omaha is still famous for stockyards and the Mutual of Omaha. Lincoln is still smaller, cleaner and, well, we don't have the stockyards.

Robert McMorris notes in Wednesday's Omaha World-Herald that a 1977 study is more favorable to Lincoln and Omaha, although he is strictly concerned with Omaha. The study was made by the Center for Applied Urban Research. Lincoln was number one, with Omaha coming in fourth.

The survey was criticized, McMorris notes, because the center is at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Oh, well.

Rankings such as Rand McNally's are largely useless — and obviously dubious. But they do generate fierce shows of loyalty from indignant residents. Yuba City, Calif., came in dead last in the rankings and the Yuba-ites don't like it. The newspaper has printed editorials praising Yuba City and, perhaps coincidentally, a story about murders in New York.

Rand McNally has reminded us what a pleasant place Lincoln is to live in. We don't have subway vigilantes, nor subway criminals, nor a subway. Lincoln is safe.

Rand McNally based its rankings on some strange items. One was whether the town has a professional team sport. Lincoln has as close as you can get to pro football — and the fans to prove it.

Lincoln has a variety of entertainment, little pollution, two universities and several colleges, a good school system and a healthy-business community.

A contest for a nickname for Lincoln resulted with the bland namer, "Star City." "The Amazing City of Edible Dirt" was another entry. Lincoln may be somewhat bland, but it's home and it's a nice place to live. And whatever it's ranked, Lincoln isn't "The Amazing City of Edible Dirt."



About begatting begetting begatting

To me, chapter 5 of Genesis in the Old Testament is sort of the Who's Who of the Bible. It tells the tale of fathers who had sons, who then had more sons, who, in turn, had even more, ad infinitum. Back then, they called it begatting. So-in-so begat so-in-so until eventually Adam managed to begat himself all the way into Noah. Lots of begatting be happening back then. And to think it all led to now — and to us.



James A. Fussell

In my case, of course, my grandfather begat my father, and my father begat me. I haven't begun to begat yet, but I'm planning on it.

And I want my children to know a little about their background. With the advent of modern communications it's getting easier all the time to snoop on your ancestors. What you find can be surprising. What I found surprised me.

You might be surprised to know that one of my ancestors — Jacob Fussell — was credited with inventing ice cream. Yes, ice cream.

Jacob was a Baltimore milkman with a problem: He was overstocked with milk. This could have caused bankruptcy for a lesser man. But not for Jacob, who promptly froze the surplus milk into ice cream and marketed the creamy concoction for the bargain price of 25 cents a quart. The rest, as they say, is history.

Jacob moved entirely into the ice cream

business, and so did many imitators. Even today, if you visit Washington, D.C., you may find yourself stepping on a discarded ice cream container that reads: FUSSELL'S ICE CREAM — Jacob Fussell's gift to the world.

Among my many other interesting ancestors was a Dr. Bartholomew Fussell, a physician, reformer and militant abolitionist in the 1800s. In time, he became a stationmaster on the Underground Railroad that helped slaves escape to freedom in the North.

When the governor of his state denounced abolitionists as traitors, John Greenleaf Whittier defied him with this verse:

*Go hunt sedition! Search for that
In every pedlar's cart of rags;
Pry into every Quaker's hat
And Dr. Fussell's saddle bags,
Let treason wrap, with all its ills,
Around his powders and his pills.*

Great-ancestor Bartholomew was way ahead of his time, advocating temperance, free elementary education and professional training for women. He began giving medical instruction to women as early as 1840. Eventually, he founded the Female Medical College in Philadelphia, Pa.

Here's the part that always gets me. I was born in that very hospital precisely 100 years later.

I also have Paul and Ed Fussell in my family, somewhere, although I have yet to make a direct connection. They are alive and well and living in the East. Paul and Ed both have doctorate degrees in English and both are university professors.

Here's what my dad wrote to Thomas F. Fussell in Ballwin, Mo., about them.

"Paul and Ed are sons of a wealthy California lawyer-banker, now deceased. Both are millionaires and both are about as independent as a hog on ice."

Millionaires? Oh, they've got to be in my family. It's only right . . . right? Anyway, they've got my name, and that's close enough for me.

A couple of years ago, Paul Fussell was featured in a five-page bio in People magazine. With pictures and the whole works.

He is quoted in Kate Turabian's "A Manual of Style," published by the University of Chicago Press, and in Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

A teacher and author, his motto is "Thou Shalt Not Be Boring." He has been quoted as saying about his writing, "Crappy work I do twice. Good work I do three times." I like this guy.

I must not forget to mention my father's great contribution to this column: The research was his, but the family is still mine.

And you know, it's sort of a nice family. My dad's a writer, you know. Now I'm a writer. And so it goes. If I begat a son.

Daughters are wonderful, too, I'll take two or three. But you know, I'd kind of like to have a son, too. I've grown to like my name and the ancestors that go along with it.

But to continue the tradition, I need at least one male child. You see, my father's an only child, and I'm his only begotten son. Wish me luck.

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Reader says U.S. should buy Russia

There are times when the political factions entrusted with the defense of our country appear to display a complete lack of imagination.

As to the \$950 or so billions slated to be spent on armaments every year for the next five years, it is suggested that this money be diverted into a peace movement instead.

This, it is felt, could be done by informing the Russians that we are prepared to use the above amount as a down payment on the purchasing of Russia, much in the

same spirit displayed in the case of our purchase of Alaska in 1867, known as "Sewart's Folly."

Obviously, a plebiscite would be required to determine whether the offer would be agreeable to most Russian people. This after a commitment was made by our government stipulating the terms of the contract in which Russian citizens would be guaranteed for the first time in history, the unalienable rights, such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, which would of course include the right to stay or leave the country at will, even after most reasons for wanting to leave had been removed.

As an inducement to the governing body within the Politburo, considering the fact

that members of that body claim to be atheists and make no claim to after-life, members would be offered complete retirement on a pension equal to double their present salary so as to assure their enjoyment of what remains of this one, without fear of annihilation by an atomic blast, and further relieve them of all responsibility for the safety and welfare of their subjects.

Crazy? Perhaps, but the idea is certainly no more insane than our present course, which postpones but ultimately will most surely ignite the forces leading to our mutual destruction.

Andrew J. Soviet
E. Greenwich, R.I.

Letters