

Esquire

NEW YORK CHICAGO

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THE EDITORS

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Satire
Approximately 1500 Words

ISOPHID: An Interim Report

It was quite by chance that the International Society for the Preservation of Historic Dunghills came into existence. The chain of circumstances began near the village of Agincourt, France, where Henri Seguin, a farmer, was digging a root cellar. To his astonishment, at a depth of about four feet, he uncovered what appeared to be a deposit of horse manure in an unexplained state of preservation. Momentarily speechless, Seguin recovered his voice to cry excitedly for his wife, momentarily forgetting that she had gone to the village for the day's shopping.

However, his excited cries were heard by Dr. Erwin Plautz, the eminent American professor of European History, who was nearby. Fearing an accident, Dr. Plautz hurried to the edge of the excavation prepared to give assistance. Assured that Seguin was not physically harmed, Dr. Plautz turned to the curious find uncovered by the farmer and immediately felt an intuitive shiver of excitement that this might be a significant discovery. He had felt this indefinable excitement only once before -- when seeing the sunrise at Stonehenge at the summer solstice.

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In France on a foundation grant for a post-doctoral research project involving historical battlefields of France, Dr. Plautz was in this section of Normandy investigating the site of the confrontation between the army of Henry V of England and the forces of Charles VI of France. Persuading the farmer to relocate his root cellar, Dr. Plautz cordoned off the area, examined the deposit more closely and, although he could think of no reason for its retaining its identity through the years, decided that it was of undetermined antiquity and not a burial of recent years. Perhaps because he was so preoccupied with the Battle of Agincourt which had taken place on the spot four and a half centuries earlier, he could not rid himself of the feeling that this deposit had some relationship to that battle. Probing about the deposit, he uncovered a buckle which appeared to be of a type worn by the peasants of 15th Century England.

Scarcely able to contain himself, he hired the puzzled Seguin to erect a shelter over the site to protect it from the elements and hastened to Rouens to the University library. After spending the remainder of the day there, he decided that he would find more information in Paris. Consequently, the next morning he arose early and drove to Paris and went directly to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Intensive research, the technical details of which it is not necessary to recount here, placed the site at the approximate location of the stables of Henry V.

The most illuminating passage in the documents

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mentioned a venerable oak tree near the armorer's tent; subsequent search of the site uncovered the remnants of the root system of what must have been a prodigious oak tree. In addition, other 15th Century English hardware was found.

Convinced that this was the site of the quarters for Henry V's cavalry, Dr. Plautz approached the office of the French minister of the interior to see if the spot could be preserved as an historic site. France having been the loser of the battle, the ministry did not appear eager to preserve the site and gave little cooperation although the government did grant permission for the historian to continue his research there.

Dr. Plautz then sought aid from England for funds with which to purchase the land and erect a proper marker. The English, however, were still hoping to gain membership into the Common Market and were not anxious to aggravate the situation by reopening old wounds. Finally, Dr. Plautz decided to give up his original research and petitioned the foundation for permission to use the remainder of his grant to develop this new project. The foundation not only granted permission to use his grant for this purpose but gave an additional amount as well and had one of its staff obtain supporting funds from the Toilet Tissue Institute of North America.

This unexpected encouragement stimulated Dr. Plautz to search for the manure pile of the French cavalry of Charles

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VI. Because the French forces were so much larger than Henry's, it was a fairly simple matter to find the manure deposit left by the French horses. Again the detailed documents facilitated the search. One French historian of the period had written observations rather critical of the French strategy, born of overconfidence, in quartering their horses in a particularly exposed position. This information narrowed the search somewhat.

Eventually, Dr. Plautz published his findings in the Journal of International Historical Sites which gained a great deal of attention for his project and inevitably triggered an intensive search throughout the free world for other historic dungheaps. Alarmed, Dr. Plautz wrote a following article with the plea that no further digging be undertaken without the supervision of experienced archeologists, and the amateur activity gradually subsided.

After a few additional authenticated sites were discovered, the most noteworthy being a substantial deposit of manure found between Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl in Mexico attributed to horses in the party of conquistadores led by Cortes, several interested persons met in Cannes, France, to consider formal organization.

After considerable debate centering around the question of being frankly descriptive or euphemistic, a compromise was reached whereby instead of the ambiguous word, "deposit," the more direct and yet inoffensive word, "toilet," was to be used in the title of the organization. A minority

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objected that the word was needlessly coy, but the majority maintained that it was a generic term that permitted broadening the concept of such deposits.

Consequently, the Society for Historically Important Toilets was born. . .to last only until the proof for the stationery was delivered by the printers with all the type in deep blue except for the initial letters in glaring red. Dr. Plautz, who had been named executive director, hastily called an emergency meeting of the Board to consider a name change. Out of this session came the International Society for the Preservation of Historical Dungheaps, known affectionately as Isophid by its hundreds of members.

While the name of the organization has remained unchanged since then, its activities have increased greatly in scope. One of the early expeditions of the Society after its formal organization led to the excavation of several likely areas in World War I battlefields. No cavalry deposits were located, but a latrine used by English troops in 1916 was discovered. This information was established by a dated letter found at the site; it had evidently been used for a purpose not originally intended. This discovery extended the scope of the Society which had up to that time confined its activities to the preservation of horse manure sites. Shortly thereafter, the positions of Curator of Equine Dungheaps and Curator of Latrines were established.

A short time later when the site of a pile of

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pellets presumed to be the droppings of sheep herded by David as a shepherd boy was discovered and later certified, a Curatorship of Sheep and Goat Dunghills was created.

Similarly, the first discovery of fossilized feces led to the creation of the Curator of Fossil Dunghills.

However, the most curious curatorship came about in the following manner: Phil March, a former cavalryman who was a victim of the mechanization of the cavalry after having spent the early years of his enlistment prior to World War II currying parade horses, an activity he loved, had never recovered from the rapid mechanization of his beloved cavalry. Still embittered by the memory of that sudden and traumatic change in his life, he wrote a sarcastic letter to the Board of the Society to suggest that since armored vehicles were considered cavalry, it would be only just to categorize old oil and grease pits as dunghills.

The sarcasm was lost on the solemn members of the Board who all felt that there was merit and wisdom in the proposal. Consequently, the writer of the letter was rewarded by being offered the Curatorship of Mechanized Waste with a museum in North Africa where a very satisfactory greasepit created by Rommel's forces was found. The old cavalryman, finding his retirement pay inadequate, was glad to accept the post.

In the beginning, there were conservation problems, and in fact the exposure of the original Seguin-Plautz find

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to the atmosphere resulted in considerable loss of the original mass, but the development of synthetic materials has aided greatly in the preservation of the materials in the state in which they are found.

As the Society has expanded and grown, it has gained the respect of other professional organizations as well. However, a serious jurisdictional dispute erupted recently when a major pile of cowdung was found in Oklahoma just south of the Kansas border. A panel of experts dated its origins at the late 1860's and attributed it to cattle driven on the Old Chisholm Trail. The Museum of the Western Wrangler challenged the Society's rights to the discovery and claimed the privilege of removing the evidence to its headquarters. A major crisis was averted when a handsome replica in bronze was cast by the Society and presented to the Wrangler Museum.

On another occasion, the Society acted quickly and courageously in withdrawing recognition of the alleged Marco Polo caravan site in Afghanistan when an accusation of forgery was supported by carbon 14 tests; another scandal was narrowly averted when it was discovered that a junior member of an expedition tracing the route of Alexander through Persia was "salting the mine" so to speak. He was reprimanded and sent home before any damage had been done.

As a result of the infrequent chicanery, a system of accreditation has been devised assuring the Society of rigid

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professional standards. This has led to such respect for and confidence in the Society that several governments including three behind the Iron Curtain have contributed to a fund to underwrite an expedition's search for the Aegean stables and another to search for droppings left by Hannibal's elephants in the Pyrenees and the Alps.

Contributions by individuals are also badly needed to continue the work of the Society which in addition to its international headquarters in Cannes has offices in more than fifty countries.

Gifts in kind, however, are not accepted.