



7 March 2017

Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: The farmer from Sleepy Eye?

Anyone who has read stuff I have posted to my website will have run across occasional references to my being a farmer from Sleepy Eye.

Anyone who has worked with me can believe the farmer stuff, but Sleepy Eye, sounds made up like Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon on Prairie Home Companion.

I have found the label useful in a place like this, being surrounded by people with fancy Ivy League degrees.

To be sure, I have used the characterization to my advantage in dodging questions I cannot answer. "I don't know, I am just a farmer from Sleepy Eye".

Indeed, for several years I used the characterization in conversations with my former dean to fend off questions I could not answer.

But, alas he wised up. Eventually, he came to see the gambit as akin to Sam Ervin's "I am just a country lawyer" as a prelude to a weathering interrogation of a witness in front of his Select Committee on Watergate.

A reason why one should not stay too long in any given place.

Yes. It is true. I was born and raised on a farm just a few miles west of Sleepy Eye.

Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, elevation 1,025 feet above sea level. Sleepy Eye is a town of about 3,500 people, where, as in Lake Wobegon "where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average".

Sleepy Eye is where I got my introduction to sampling and statistics counting pea aphids and corn borer egg masses for the California Packing Corporation, Plant 114.

Sleepy Eye is republican country - like much of rural America.

I grew up in a split household. My father was democrat and my mother republican. By the time I was ten, I knew they would cancel each others vote when they went to vote, but they never failed to vote. From that I learned that the act of voting was more important than who you voted for and why I have been compulsive about voting.

Sleepy Eye is located about 80 miles north of the Iowa border and 140 miles East of the South Dakota border. The town has about a dozen churches, a Hardee's restaurant, and a statue of Charles

Schultz's Linus from his Peanuts comic strip in front of the town library. It is there as a tribute to a local, Linus Maurer, who was the inspiration for Linus.

The town took its name from a Dakota Indian Chief encamped on Sleepy Eye Lake. His name was Ish Tak Ha Ba, meaning droopy or sleepy eyes; a condition likely due to ptosis.

You may have heard of Sleepy Eye if you watched Little House on the Prairie; a popular TV series (1974 - 1983) starring Michael Landon, Melissa Gilbert, and Karen Grassle based on "Little House on the Prairie", one of several books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

The setting is Plum Creek near Walnut Grove, a town today of about 850 people and many fewer in the late 1800s when Laura Ingalls was there.

Walnut Grove is about 40 miles west of Sleepy Eye. There were various occasions in the series when "Pa", by horse and wagon, went to Sleepy Eye for supplies.

A word of caution for any viewers of the series. The series was filmed in California. There are no mountains in Minnesota!

The elevation difference between Sleepy Eye and Walnut Grove is less than ten feet. It is flat country. The drive from Sleepy Eye to Walnut Grove is boring. All you would see in the summer would be miles and miles of corn and soybeans waving in the breeze. Boring, until you realize the majesty of the land that feeds us.

Everything is flat around Sleepy Eye. Indeed, the highest hill around is Airplane Hill overlooking the Minnesota river valley at Fort Ridgely.

Fort Ridgely, an Army outpost from 1853-1867, figured prominently in the last Indian uprising in the U.S.

The Indians were starving. A band of them from the Lower Sioux Agency went to the commander of Fort Ridgely, Captain Andrew Myrick, for food. His reply was "let them eat grass". A few days later he was dead with a mouth full of grass.

The uprising ended on 26 December 1862 with the execution of 38 Indians in Mankato about 40 miles from Fort Ridgely.

So now, next time you run across references to my being a farmer from Sleepy Eye you will have context for the reference.