

AH, MYTHICAL MUDSOCK. NOT EVEN RAND McNally himself seemed to know exactly your location or what secrets you once held. Stopping at the intersection of Roberts and Rome-Hilliard roads in Franklin County, I fumbled for both definition and my highway maps. All around me were buildings in various stages of construction. There was not, most assuredly, any sign for or sign of a town named Mudsock, Ohio. In fact, the antithesis of my imaginings about Mudsock—vinyl and particle-board—had managed to sprout all over the horizon.

The 1993 McNally road atlas showed only a black dot and the word *Mudsock* squarely at this point; the official state maps showed less. Obviously, Mudsock was missing. On Rome-Hilliard Road, I saw fancy housing developments called Western Lakes and Hyde Park. No Mudsock Manor. No Mudsock

Hills. No sign of country. The area is defined by a main subdivision street named Reebok Drive, which almost made Whispering Way sound sincere. Still looking, I drove west on Roberts Road into the green fields of August, watching a couple of lonely stone-chimneyed farmhouses jockey hopelessly with the new strip shopping centers, the twenty-first century nudging out the twentieth.

Quintessential Mudsock, ghost-town nonpareil, is one of those hidden places in history's twilight. In one century, Mudsock went from small town to large joke, and then it disappeared. Of all Ohio's nineteenth-century towns, the name *Mudsock* might be the oddest. It might also be the best example of that curious pioneer amalgam of eccentricity and practicality. People once named their towns

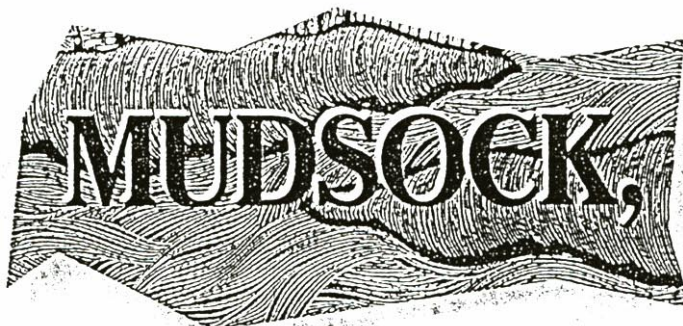
in the most pragmatic of ways, and in choosing *Mudsock*, the residents left no illusions about their community, nor did they try to impress neighbors with a pretentious euphemism. Now, these qualities have all but vanished, and Mudsock is a metaphor for dead towns. Its weary farmers of old certainly wouldn't need the Sundash Tanning Center in the shopping strip on Rome-Hilliard Road to give them that outdoors look, but they might appreciate a visit to its chiropractor at the end of a long day of plowing.

Always bluntly picturesque, the name was also popular, for at the turn of the last century, at least four small Ohio towns were named Mudsock. Today, only two can be identified—one in Franklin County, the other in Gallia. Franklin County's Mudsock popped up among the fields of Brown Township, which was formed in 1830 as the young county continued to grow. In 1847, a school for black children was estab-

lished there; in 1848, the Darby post office opened. From 1840 to 1850, the township's population increased from 425 to 681, a significant boom for that place and time. Today, as suburbia camps at its doorstep, the township is poised to receive a wave of new people who will forever change the face of their adopted home.

I wasn't present when this Mudsock lived or died, but I witnessed its internment on a humid summer day when big yellow machines scooped and loaded another field to make way for a subdivision. It happened within sight of Mudsock on Roberts Road, just past the Columbus limits sign. As the capital city expanded west, like a little galaxy of its own, it engulfed everything in its path.

People like Hubert Hayes, a farmer who has lived near Mudsock for 56 years, wait apprehensively. They



We Hardly Knew You

Ohio's Essential Podunk

BY RANDY McNUTT

