

Hinsdale makes for a name worth sharing

Learn about two Hinsdales dating back to Colonial America and the expedition to find them

By Ken Knutson

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I have seen a summer day that slowly opens like a rose along a quiet road that wanders by and I have smiled and wonder'd where it goes.

— from “An American Hymn”

I sank into the driver's seat, started our 2008 Chevy Equinox and punched up the trip mileage display.

“0.00” stared back at me. It was 8:30 a.m. June 9. The sun was shining and my heart rate was quickening.

I remember fleeting pangs of anxiety on my wedding day as to my readiness for marriage. And when Shari was in labor with our first son a little more than two years later, I ruminated on my parenting fitness. (To which my beautiful wife would respond, “That must have been while you were CRASHED OUT ON THE DELIVERY ROOM RECLINER!”)

The prospect of a week-long cross-country road trip with our aforementioned son, Wyatt, now 7, however, unleashed a wide spectrum of emotions.

We would need to coexist in close quarters while covering in excess of 1,850 miles en route to our targets — Hinsdale, Mass., and Hinsdale, N.H. — and back. An exhilarating endeavor for a wanderlust addict like me, but muted by the reality that nothing commended either location to the amusement of a rising second-grader.

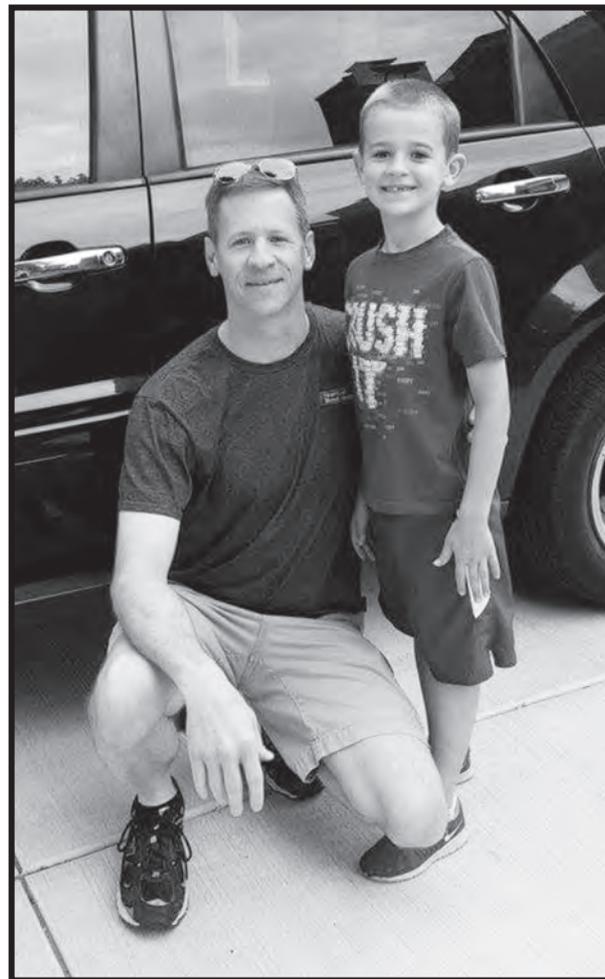
I had lobbied persistently for a series of firsthand accounts on America's four other Hinsdales to mark The Hinsdalean's 10-year anniversary. Time to put my mileage where my mouth was.

“What a cool idea!” friends told me. “Good father-son bonding time.”

“Keep praying that, will you?” I would think while nodding in agreement.

How would my son hold up? Just how many Happy Meals was I looking at? What if the car broke down? What if I broke down?

The question I should



Ken and Wyatt Knutson are all smiles as they prepare to head out the morning of June 9 on their week-long road trip to visit Hinsdale, Mass., and Hinsdale, N.H. By the evening of June 10 they were in Pittsfield, Mass., to see the local Suns baseball team play. The historic Wahconah Park still has wooden grandstands, and its westward orientation requires a 20-minute “sun delay” during night games for the sun to set below the batter's view. (Ken Knutson photos)

have asked: Shari, could you help me remember to bring the I-PASS?

Thankfully Wyatt's 3-year-old twin brothers did not understand what all the hugging was about. Next stop, Erie, Pa., the halfway point to Hinsdale, Mass.

“Oh crap!” I exclaim as the first Tri-State toll approaches. Wait, there's an online grace period. Crisis averted, and Wyatt's immediate tethering to the tablet meant he didn't hear my potty mouth.

A few minutes later I hear a disconcerting sound from the backseat. In short, Wyatt inherited his dad's susceptibility to motion sickness, which our two-and-a-half-hour drives to Indian Guides camp outs had not previously revealed. So much for whiling away road hours with digital distraction. And blueberry pancakes were off the menu for a while.

After pulling off to clean up, I felt strangely relaxed having put this initial traveling trial behind us. Soon Illinois would be, too.

“So, I'm going to visit five new states. That means I'll have been to nine states, right?” Wyatt asked, not counting Illinois.

The true total was six, but I had neglected Vermont in my tally.

“My brothers have only been to two!” he exclaimed with pride.

We scarfed down Burger King in Indiana, a state that seemed interminable. So did Ohio, although the glittering rest stops there were welcome oases in the farm-smothered landscape.

“Why don't you get out your license plate sticker map and look for cars from other states?” I suggested guardedly, wary of too much in-cabin reading.

“How much longer? How many minutes?” came the plaintive response. Soon at regular intervals.

“We should be getting to Pennsylvania soon, so look for the sign,” I said to alleviate his boredom.

Having shut off GPS to save my phone's battery, I missed an exit outside of Cleveland and scrambled to get us back on track to Erie. I was counting on minor league baseball to prop up Wyatt's trip tolerance, and the 7 p.m. first pitch of the Erie SeaWolves/Altoona Curve was approaching.

We crossed into the

northeast corner of Pennsylvania and reached our hotel in Erie's outskirts, with time to just refresh and head to the downtown stadium.

The lightly attended game felt more like a neighborhood gathering. Wyatt high-fived mascot “C. Wolf” on the way to the souvenir stand. Purchases to preserve his peace would become a temporary parenting policy for the week.

“Are you from Chicago?” a man asked during breakfast in the hotel the next morning. He pointed to my Wrigley Field shirt.

I said we were.

“So are we. Evanston. Are you going to Cooperstown?” No, I answered, slightly envious. Just a beeline to Massachusetts.

The New York thruway was gleefully smooth sailing, other than my ill-advised detour to see Syracuse. East of Albany the terrain starts rolling and roadways narrow. New England is close.

Our hotel is in Pittsfield, Mass., and we repeat the drop, refresh and go routine to catch the Pittsfield Suns and Torrington Titans.

■ HINSDALE 01235

This is the first in a six-part series on visits to towns named Hinsdale in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

“Do you think we'll run the bases?” Wyatt asks as we are guided across the muddy field to park.

“I don't know,” I respond.

We swing by the souvenir stand for a cap and head to our seats. Old wooden 19th-century grandstands frame a Norman Rockwellian scene. In the third inning a “sun delay” is called to let the sinking sun pass from the batter's line of sight.

A dad behind me and I seemed to echo each other as we instructed our sons on the finer points of the game.

Fireworks and running the bases (twice!) concluded a glorious night.

I'm worn out from two long days of driving but energized by the anticipation of getting to nearby Hinsdale tomorrow. Sure hope the nice weather holds out ...