Mauch Chunk…Say What?

By Francis Ferguson

Do I have your attention? This is an interesting story about a strange place name. Thank you to Phil Fettig for providing the material behind the story and to David Moore for kick-starting the discussion.



The story starts with a buying adventure helmed by Phil Fettig and Robert Dowrick to "evaluate" material from an estate that had been badly treated as it was housed in an unairconditioned pool house. When they arrive, they are informed that they have two hours to make a determination -- as an estate liquidator company was coming in -- to either toss the material or salvage anything of value as they see fit.

In Phil's words: "When Bob & I arrived at the appointed time to view the collection I was informed we had 2 hours to sort and choose what I wanted. Two hours later we had a small stack that I paid for and a much larger pile of mildewed and/or trashed philatelic items that were now worthless. My stack of 'keepers' included seven pounds of cancelled checks and drafts."

Bank checks are pretty common and depending on the design and the location of the bank normally sell for $1 to maybe $100 for truly extraordinary designs. First of all, the bank draft is for $250 in 1873, which equates to about $7,031.48 in 2026 – Wow!

Now let us delve into the name "Mauch Chunk". That has to be one of the weirder place names I have ever seen! The Internet indicates that the name is derived from a Native American word meaning "Bear Mountain". And now it gets even stranger.

Founded in 1818 as a mining and industrial boomtown, Mauch Chunk faced severe financial decline and population loss in the 1950s as the coal industry faded. In 1954 in a series of odd and frankly bizarre moves the town leaders reached out to Jim Thorpe's third wife Patricia to allow the burial of her husband in a grand

fashion and rename the town after the Olympic athlete "Jim Thorpe" – even though he had never visited the town in his lifetime nor had any connection to the place. Weird.

Further background -- Jim Thorpe was born in a one-room cabin on a Sac and Fox reservation near present-day Prague, Oklahoma (then part of Indian Territory).

Act three of this melodrama continues in 2010 when the surviving sons mounted a legal challenge – that failed – to return their father's body to Oklahoma for burial. There is so much more to the story of Jim Thorpe that involves a couple of gallons of ink.

Caveat Emptor, #49

New Math: One Cent Times Two Equals Zero. By Francis Ferguson



The listing reads; *"2 -Thomas Jefferson 1 cent Antique Postage Stamps Green Rare Vintage Collectible."* Starting bid of $325, with free shipping. Further details as they appear: "The product is a rare vintage collectible set of two Thomas Jefferson 1 cent antique postage stamps from the United States. The green stamps feature a historical figure and are in good quality. They are uncertified and have not been modified. These stamps would make a valuable addition to any stamp collection, especially for those interested in American history and vintage items." I would suggest this seller has taken a course in creative writing and did not do well!



Further investigation shows the seller is mostly selling jewelry at what looks like reasonable prices and then there are about a dozen philatelic related auctions -- all are common as dirt and all have absolutely ridicules starting prices. For example, this one cent very damaged stamp from the early 1950s has a starting bid of $1,600.

What an utter waste of time and effort.

What do you think?