COLLOQUIY

Please note that a new electronic version of Word Ways will be available for next year’s volume. Subscribers will be able to view on screen the last five years of Word Ways and eventually all forty-two years of articles. See the back cover for details.

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Sir Jeremy Morse comments on Ross Eckler’s “Obamanastics”. (1) If formed by analogy with “onomastics”, shouldn’t the title have been “Obamastics”? (2) I believe Reagan was over weighted at 9.7, I make him 9.2. (3) A well-known person with a larger name but just lighter than Obama is Charles Babbage at 6.1. (4) The fine American chess problem composer Otto Wurzburg is heavier than any President at 17.2. (5) Among fictional characters George Eliot’s hero Adam Bede is only 4.4. (6) If Babbage and Wurzburg had female relatives called Ada and Suzy respectively, they would extend the range to 2.6 and 18.9.

Anil admired Martin Gardner’s poems especially “Never Make Fun”. Anil had composed a similar (but “less elegant”) little verse some thirty years ago called “Cryptoplepharus plagiocephalis”:

Smallest lizard I’ve ever seen,  
Think of what you might have been,  
A bird or a croc or a dinosaur!  
Or be at least as big as your name.  
To be so tiny is such a shame.  
Wouldn’t you like to be much more?  
I think I know, I think I dig  
You wouldn’t want to be so big.  
You’d rather be just what you are!

Arthur Schulman notes that the English language may have 2,231 synonyms for “inebriated” or “drunk”, as A. Ross Eckler reminds us in his 1985 talk (Word Ways, August 2008), but Yiddish has hundreds of terms for craziness (“mishegos”) and even more for foolishness (“narrishkeit”). Readers of Yiddish can revel in these varieties of nutty experience—Roget couldn’t have imagined such richness—in Nahum Stutchkoff’s extraordinary “Thesaurus of the Yiddish Language”, a 933-page work first published by YIVO in 1950 and reissued by them in 1991.

Andrew Grissom was prompted by Ross Eckler’s “Obamanastics” to mention two of his bosses over the years.

One boss was IZZY ZIETZ, containing a solid four Z’s and a rather high letter density of 19.1 (one in 10,000?)

The other had an interesting last name of FRISCHKNECHT, exceptionally long for only two vowels. How many FRISCHKNECHTS are there in the USA?

Finally, thanks for taking up the torch and producing the excellent new issues of Word Ways.
Ed Wolpow adds:

In Colloquy (p. 171-2), Alan Frank comments on a term containing J, Q, X and Z. There is, says Google, in Shasta County, CA, the “Ajax Quartz mine”. Also is reference to a “Ajax Quartz-mining Company”. Did the namers consider these rarest 4 letters in their name choices?

Darryl Francis discusses American “Town-and-State Name Transposals” (p. 234-8). There is a subgroup of these in the USA where whole words are transposed, not just letters. Consider WEST ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA and ARLINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA. There are 8 possibilities for the “Arlington” of that formula, including: ARLINGTON, AUGUSTA, CHESTER, GHENT, HGAMPTON, PETERSBURG, PINEY AND SPRINGFIELD. I couldn’t find any NORTH-SOUTH, SOUTH-NORTH swaps among the pairs of CAROLINAs or DAKOTAs.

Susan Thorpe’s “Amoebic Charades” (p. 239) leaves blank a lonely J-line. The Webster dictionaries will allow:
HAJ (pilgrimage) + JIB (sail) = HAJIB (Muslim chamberlain)
MUNJ (grass) + JEET (jet – variant) = MUNJEET (Indian madder)
RAJ (British rule) + JAB (poke) = RAJAB (Islamic month)
TAJ (Muslim cap) + JO (sweetheart) = TAJO (trench)

Al Stanger notes those Heath sisters, Sarah and Heather. Surely it’s not coincidence that Sarah found a husband with the last name PALIN. . .while her older sister, Heather, found a husband with the last name BRUCE. (Todd Palin and Kurt Bruce)

Rearrange the letters of PALIN BRUCE. . .and you get REPUBLICAN.

These siblings must have been quite dedicated to the GOP to go to such lengths!