UPDATING PALMER PETERSON?

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Palmer Peterson, known to members of the National Puzzlers' League as 'Sherlock Holmes', was the greatest formist of all time. Peterson died in June 1979, and a memorial article to him appeared in the February 1980 Word Ways.

Peterson and I corresponded frequently in the late 1960s and the 1970s. My contact with him encouraged me to try my hand at many forms, and I was particularly pleased with one of my earliest efforts, the 8-by-8 square given at the right. Recently, while I was reorganizing a lot of old correspondence, I came across various small yellowed sheets of paper which Peterson had sent me. The papers contained various forms -- 9-squares, 8-squares, double 8-squares and a variety of other shapes. There were no definitions and no sources, just the letters. Two of the forms which particularly intrigued me were 9-by-9 squares. I thought it would be quite straightforward to identify the words in the two squares, and to send them to the National Puzzlers' League or Word Ways for posthumous publication. However, it wasn't that simple!

First of all, it wasn't that easy to identify all of the terms in the squares. Peterson, along with many other formists, used words from archaic dictionaries and gazetteers from the 19th century, long since out of print and unavailable in most libraries. There was little hope of finding all of the words in Webster's Third Edition or even the Second!

Even when I had managed to identify his words, I wasn't always happy with them. I felt that a number of improvements might be possible. Let us look at each of the 9-squares in turn.

Square Number One

| I M P E S T I N G |
| M O I S T E N E R |
| P I E C E R A T E |
| E S C H E R I T E |
| S T E E R E D I N |
| T E R R E N A T I |
| I N A I D A B L E |
| N E T T I T I L E S |
| G R E E N I E S T |
IMPESTING - this is the present participle of the archaic verb IMPEST, defined by Webster's Third Edition as 'to infest'.

MOISTENER - a simple word, one that moistens; it is in Webster's Third.

PIECE RATE - as a noun, this is the price per unit of production. Webster's Second and Third Editions and the Random House Dictionary all spell the noun as two words, but the Oxford English Dictionary spells the noun with a hyphen in the middle. Webster's Second also offers the hyphenated form as the corresponding adjective. No dictionary that I know of spells the term as a single, unhyphenated word.

ESCHERITE - this is a mineral which is a variety of epidote, a collection of calcium, aluminum and iron silicates. This word comes from Chemical Synonyms and Trade Names, by William Gardner and Edward Cooke.

STEERED IN - though this is a term which would seem to have an obvious meaning, none of the major dictionaries offers the verb STEER IN as an entry or in an illustrative quotation.

TERRENATI - this is a variant spelling of TERRENATE, a village near the headwaters of the Rio San Pedro, just south of the Arizona-Mexico border. This name is given in Frederick Webb Hodge's Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico. Though my copy of this handbook was published in 1965, the book was first published in 1906. Hodge's handbook takes the spelling TERRENATI from an earlier work, Adventures in the Apache Country, by J. Ross Browne, published in New York in 1869.

INAIDABLE - an apparently simple word, meaning 'unable to be aided', which appears beneath the line and undefined in Webster's Second.

NET TITLES - this is the plural of NET TITLE, a tennis championship, which appears in Berrey and van den Bark's American Thesaurus of Slang.

GREENIEST - the superlative form of the adjective 'green'. This is shown as a main entry in Webster's Third Edition.

Baldly stating the definitions and the sources gives no indication of the amount of effort which I put into investigating these words and terms. ESCHERITE, TERRENATI, STEERED IN and NET TITLES all gobbled up vast amounts of my time before I finally tracked three of them down.

I felt that this square ought to be improved, particularly with regard to items like STEERED IN and TERRENATI. So, what changes did I make?

The first change, a very simple one, was to replace IMPESTING with EMPESTING. This is the present participle of the verb EMPEST, meaning 'to infest', from Webster's Third Edition. I find it preferable to IMPESTING since Webster's Third shows IMPEST as archaic, but says no such thing about EMPEST.

The second change, still fairly simple, was to replace STEERED IN with STEEPED IN. This term occurs in various illustrative quotations at the entry for the verb STEEP in several dictionaries. For example, Webster's Second:

'...the moonlight was steeped in the annals of the world, as the moonlight is a na-pkin, steeped in the moonlight, thou art so sweet, by Coleridge, Sibyl.'

The third change would be the terms: TERRENATI to TERRE HALL - Index Gazetteers for the town of a population of 1581 and 1588; TERRENALL - 'terrenal', meaning 'lacking verdure' in Oxford English Dictionary, 1581 and 1588; NETTILLES - 'tity obsolete' in Oxford English Dictionary.

GREENLESS - 'lacking verdure', a superlative form of 'green' in Webster's Third.

So, the modified square reads: IMPESTING, EMPESTING, STEERED IN, STEEPED IN, TERRENATI, TERRE HALL, TERRENALL, NET TITLES, NETTILLES, GREENIEST, GREENLESS.
The third change, more complicated, involves replacing three of the terms: TERRENATI to TERRE HALL or TERRENALL, NET TITLES to NETTILLES, and GREENIEST to GREENLESS. What do these four new terms mean and where do they come from?

TERRE HALL - this is a two-word placename taken from the Times Index Gazetteer of the World, published in 1965. It is another name for the town of Hemlock, in Howard County, Indiana. The town had a population of about 250 in 1967. No other atlas or gazetteer which I have lists or shows TERRE HALL - - all refer to Hemlock.

TERRENALL - this is a variant spelling of the obsolete adjective TERRENAL', meaning 'terrestrial'. It appears in quotations dated 1581 and 1588 at the entry TERRENAL in the Oxford English Dictionary.

NETTILLES - this is the plural form of nettille', a 14th and 15th century obsolete variant spelling of nettle', which can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary.

GREENLESS - a main entry from Webster's Third Edition, meaning 'lacking verdure'.

So, the modified square now looks like the one given below (with H substituted for N in TERRENALL as a variant):

EMPESTING
MOISTENER
PIECERATE
ESCHERITE
STEPEBIN
TERRENALL
INAIDABLE
NETTILLES
GREENLESS

It is debatable to what extent I have improved on Peterson's original square. IMPESTING to EMPESTING is a marginal improvement, an archaic term being replaced by one which isn't archaic. STEERED
IN to STEEPED IN is an improvement. A non-dictionary two-word term has been replaced by a dictionary-sanctioned two-word term. TERRENATI to TERRE HALL is a difficult one to judge. Both are proper names; the former is a single word and the latter is two words. The former appears in a 1965 edition of a book first published in 1906, which itself refers to an 1869 book! At least TERRE HALL comes from a gazetteer first published in 1965. The fact that TERRE HALL has such a small population and is more frequently known as Hemlock doesn't make TERRE HALL an outstanding improvement. How much of an improvement is the variant TERRENALL? At least the latter isn't a proper name, but it does date back to the 16th century. On the other hand, TERRENALL is in the Oxford English Dictionary, a source more widely recognised and available than Hodge's Indian handbook. Is NET TITLES to NETTILLES an improvement? The former is a two-word term composed of common, everyday words, and is taken from a dictionary of slang. NETTILLES is but a single word, but dates from the 14th and 15th centuries. Further, NETTILLES is sanctioned by the Oxford English Dictionary, a far more august work than the American Thesaurus of Slang, admittedly an excellent volume of its kind. GREENIEST to GREENLESS is neither an improvement nor a change for the worse. Both words are main entries from Webster's Third.

So, have I really improved on the Palmer Peterson square or not? Can anyone improve on my version of the square? Four particularly appealing words that I tried to use in several solutions are given below; I offer them to the reader for whatever they may be worth. ESCHENITE appears in the Oxford; INAUDIBLE appears in Webster's Third; INAYDIBLE is a variant spelling of INAIDABLE which appears in the Oxford; TERRE HILL (spelled as two words) is in the Times Index Gazetteer of the World and the 1967 edition of the Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide, while TERRE HILL (spelled as one word) is in the 1897 Century Atlas, both in the index and on the map.

Square Number Two

UMBROSANT
MUIERIVER
BIANDRATE
RENTRANTS
ORDRYNGES
SIRANGOLI
AVANGOLE
NETTILLES
TRESSIEST

UMBROSANT - this is an obsolete adjective meaning 'shady', taken from Webster's First Edition.
MUIERIVER - this is presumably meant to be MUIE RIVER, though one can never be too sure until the term has actually been identified. The nearest that I could find was a town called Muie, in Angola, listed in the Times Index Gazetteer.
BIANDRATE - this is a town in Italy, listed in the Times Index Gazetteer.
RENTRANTS - this is the plural of 'rentrant', a certain type of card player. This is from Webster's Second Edition.

SIRANGOLI - an old spelling of 'sirango' (from 'gazetteer')
AVANGOLE - another name for AVANGOULE.
NETTILLES - an old spelling of 'nettles'.
TRESSIEST - spelling of 'tressiest'.

Given that I was pleasantly surprised that it read well, I'm sure the four awkward words are worth it.

Merely by changing BIANDRATE to BIANDRATA (the supplementary form), I've replaced BIANDRATE with a type of framework, as the possibilities merged in Webster's Second Edition. Externally, surprisingly, the slight M(consonant) has caused no problems. Can we fix the four awkward words with the idea of a better square? If it's not an obvious solution, the probabilities are SLIGHT. If we take the old spelling of AVANGOULE as AVANGOLE (the evangel of Taxle, a type of framework) and NETTILLES as NETTILES, possible replacements for the awkward words are:

UMBROSANT - this is an obsolete adjective meaning 'shady', taken from Webster's First Edition.
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BIANDRATE - this is a town in Italy, listed in the Times Index Gazetteer.
RENTRANTS - this is the plural of 'rentrant', a certain type of card player. This is from Webster's Second Edition.

If I made them both work, I'd have to put AVANGOLE up with a squa...
Both are two-word term.

ORDRYNGES - this is the plural of 'ordrynge', an obsolete variant spelling of the noun 'ordering'. This can be found in a 1315 quotation in the Oxford English Dictionary.

SIRANGOLI - I could not find this term.

AVANOULE - I could not find this one, either.

NETTELLES - this is presumably meant to be the plural of 'netelle', an old spelling of 'nettle', but I could not find it anywhere. The Oxford has 'netelle', 'nettelle', 'nettell' and 'nettyle' (all at 'nettle') and 'knetelle' (at 'knttle') - but no 'nettelle'. Did Peterson merge all of these and assume that 'nettelle' existed, or did he actually find it listed somewhere?

TRESSIEST - this is the superlative form of the adjective 'tressy', meaning 'having tresses', which is in Webster's Third Edition.

Given that I was unable to identify four of the terms in this square, I felt that it really ought to be improvable. What could I do to replace the four awkward terms with ones that were more readily identifiable?

Merely by changing one letter of BIANDRATE, I could get BIANDRATA (the surname of an Italian physician listed in Webster's Biographical Dictionary) or BRANDRATE (a 16th century spelling of 'brandreth', a type of framework, listed in the Oxford English Dictionary). If I replaced BIANDRATE with BRANDRATE, then MUIE RIVER would become MURE RIVER; and if I changed the U of that to another vowel, then I had the possibilities of MARE, MERE, MORE and MYRE as river names. Extensive checking revealed that none of these existed. Less surprisingly, no rivers named MAIE, MEIE, MOIE, MYIE or M(consant)IE exist, either -- assuming I left BIANDRATE in the square. Can any reader identify any of these river names? I toyed with the idea of replacing SIRANGOLI; STRANGELY, a common adverb, is an obvious contender, but I could make nothing work. Other possibilities are STRANGURY (in Webster's Third) and STRANGYLL (an old spelling of 'strangle' in the Oxford). Possible replacements for AVANOULE are EVANGILLE and EVANGYLLE (both old spellings of 'evangel' from the Oxford). Possible replacements for NETTELLES are NETTILLES, NETTYLLES or NET TITLES (all mentioned earlier). Possible replacements for TRESSIEST are CRESSIEST and DRESSIEST (both Webster's Third) and TRESSLESS (Oxford).

If I made three of these replacements (SIRANGOLI to STRANGYLL, AVANOULE to EVANGYLLE, and TRESSIEST to TRESSLESS), I ended up with a square starting off with two non-existent words:
Note that the second line is likely to cause problems because of that nasty ending, RTVER.

Some other words which I tried for a while were BRASSIEST and GRASSIEST (both from Webster’s Third), both suggested by the BIANDRATE-to-BIANDRATA change. GRASSIEST looks the more promising because the N of NETTELLES is better in front of the G rather than the B. Changing UMBROSANT to a derivative of ‘ambrosia’ (for example, AMBROSIAČ, AMBROSIAL, AMBROSIAN or AMBROSINS, all in Webster’s Third Edition) was worth investigating, but got me nowhere. Changing AVANGOULE to EVINCIBLE (in Webster’s Third Edition) and ORDRYNGES to ORDNANCES (also in Webster’s Third Edition) gave me problems on the fourth line with the gibberish RENTNANTS, not to mention some of the other lines.

There were several other dead ends which I followed, but I was frustrated each time. Thus far, I have not managed to improve Peterson’s second square to a state where it could be called complete. Can Word Ways readers take this second square and make it presentable?

AT JOE’S BARBER SHOP, UNISEX REARS ITS HEADS

This is the title of a one-pager in the February 1981 Smithsonian magazine (sent in by Richard Lederer of Scarsdale NY and David Fellman of Rochester MN). In it, the author briefly surveys punning barbershop names, much in the spirit of the May 1979 Word Ways article, “Hair-It-Is”. However, only four cities were surveyed: San Francisco (Prime Cuts, The March Hair, Head’s First, Hairloom, Shearlocks), Chicago, Washington D.C. (From Hair to Eternity, the Headmasters, A Cut Above, Shear Genius, Hair-Em, Stop Right Haire, and Rape of the Lock), and Manhattan (Lion’s Hair Den).

ANSWERS

MISSING THE B


COLLOQUIY

The answer to the puzzle is given below the right:

WORDS OF STARK


1. Mr. Carter what did you plant out front of my house? enough to animate the LEAST extra to HAIL 11. ISC
ta if she’d be sure DRAYS got TO bread 16. POL sentence, will she the FLOW of the Charleston 21. ter how hard I a city job? 24.