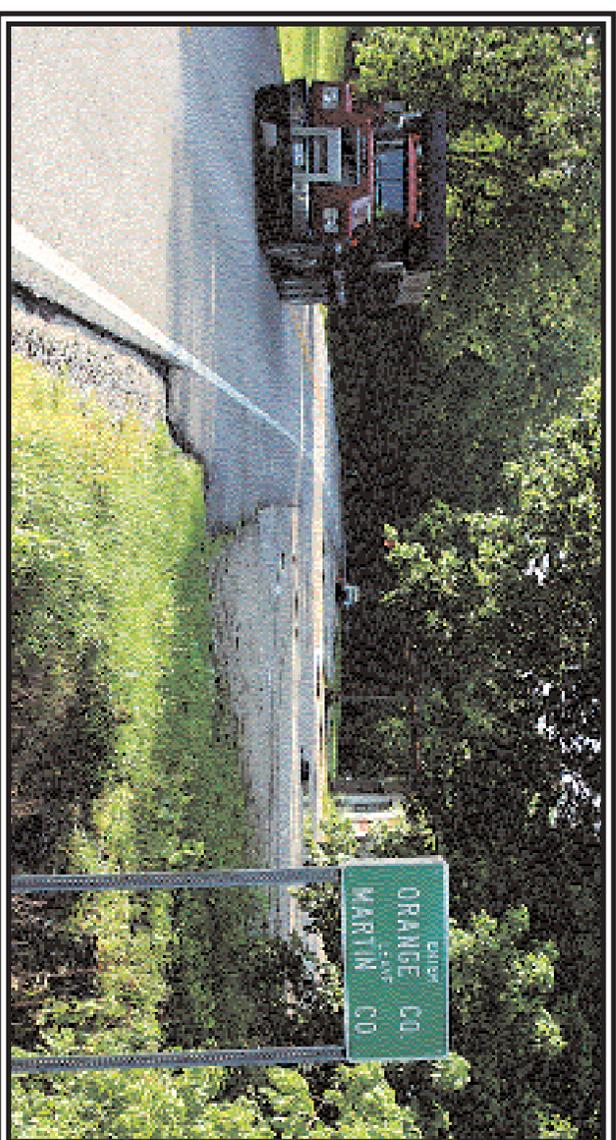


# Orange County, INDIANA

Welcome to Orange County...Indiana, about 600 miles from Orange County, Virginia. This Orange County did not acquire its name from us. Rather it is named after a county in North Carolina that was home to Quakers who resettled here in 1811.

Photo by Phil Audibert



**PAOLI, INDIANA**-We're running low on fuel, so we pull into a gas station a block away from the Orange County Courthouse...in Paoli, Indiana. We are amazed as a young fellow named Ty comes out of the service station and mans the diesel pump himself. When we hand him a credit card, he hauls out an old fashioned slide box to imprint the number and fills in the dollar amount with a ball-point pen. Wow, a service station with actual service and a manual credit card processor instead of a pump side computer! We're beginning to like this place. Even Ty's southern drawl sounds like home.

Orange County, Indiana ...about 600 miles from Orange County, Virginia. Although we have 10,000 more people, the two counties are about the same size in area, and our rolling country sides of woods, farms, fields and streams could be identical. We have already passed through Barboursville, West Virginia to get here and are amazed that in and around Orange County, Indiana are communities named Palmyra "where the folks are really friendly," Fredericksburg, Warrenton, Orangeville, and even a Locust Grove.

We wander around Courthouse Square, admiring the 1850 Greek Revival structure that gave it its name. We drop in on Annamae Holiday at the Chamber of Commerce. Feigning wide-eyed surprise, she seems both pleased and flattered when we tell her where we come from and why we are here. She loads us down with brochures promoting Patoka Lake and Paoli Peaks Ski Area and listens patiently as we tell her that Orange County, Indiana used to be part of Orange County, Virginia way back when.

son of the North Carolina governor of 1816, Pasqual Paoli.

We learn that local government is run by an "Auditor," an elected position, and we nod and pretend to understand as she explains their befuddling system of local government: 10 townships, four towns, three school districts, all overseen by three County Commissioners and a separate County Council. We shudder when we learn that LOCAL government is responsible for miles and miles of county roads. Just think if we had to maintain all roads that began with the numeral 6.

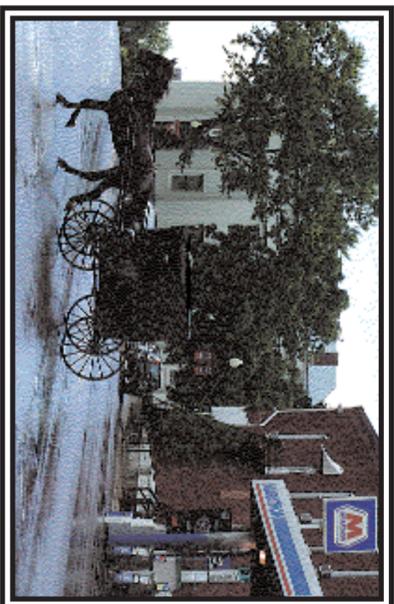
We have a lunch of fried chicken, meat loaf, mashed potatoes, green beans, rolls and apple pie in the old hotel building. We're the only people in the restaurant that the owner does not greet on a first-name basis. We thumb through current issues of the Paoli, Republican and the Spring Valley Herald and note that just like our *Orange County Review*, the obits

are on page 2 and the 2007 Miss Orange County 4-H queen, Abigail Freeman, has a dazzling smile.

We chat with editor, Dennis Ellis who tells us the hot button issue in Orange County is...the casino, and it is here that the similarities between our two counties abruptly cease.

About nine miles down the road from Paoli are the communities of French Lick and West Baden Springs. At the turn of the last century these two competing resorts, both with "healing springs," drew 12 passenger trains daily from Chicago and the upper Midwest. Even the likes of Al Capone came here to relax although he preferred the healing powers of seven illegal gambling casinos to the bubbling

Times changed. The West Baden resort closed 75 years ago. French Lick struggled on, but the gilded years were clearly over; until (sound a trumpet fanfare here) the arrival of Bill Cook, a billionaire whose hobby is restoring, renovating and rejuvenating historic buildings and businesses.



An Amish horse and buggy spurs a gas station as it crosses the street in Paoli, the county seat of Orange County, Indiana.

Photo by Phil Audibert

new office in French Lick doesn't even have a sign on the door yet.

Barely concealing his admiration for Cook, Rob says in 2005, the philanthropist closed down the French Lick resort to gut and renovate it. He gathered the 350 hotel employees and told them

that if they applied for unemployment, he would make up the difference if they promised to come back in a year. "Basically they got a year's worth of pay with benefits."

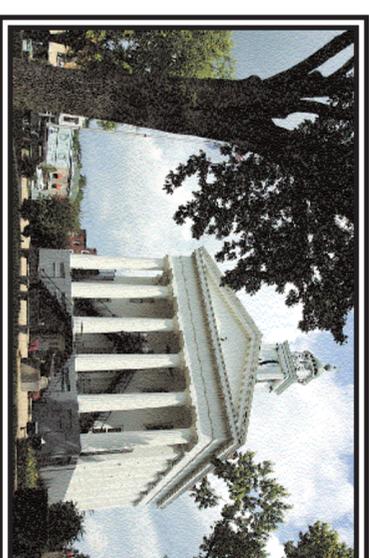
\$400 million later, every penny of it from Cook's pocket, the French Lick Resort Hotel has been restored beyond its former grandeur. Same with the West Baden Springs luxury hotel that had lain dormant for 75 years. Between the two, a gigantic riverboat style casino, complete with fake paddle-wheels, sits motionless in a manmade pond.

The closest river is the East Fork of the White River 13 miles away. How they got around that one took an act from the Indiana State legislature, and a local referendum that passed 65-35.

Denbo says before this economic miracle happened, Orange County was one of the poorest, if not the poorest county in Indiana, with the highest unemployment rate in the state. "Our unemployment rate went down two to three percentage points overnight," he says.

Today the French Lick resort complex employs 1,500-1,600 people. The hotel in summer is 98 percent occupied, bringing in 3 million visitors annually.

And there's more. Casino profits pump \$5 million into the community every year. Naturally, there is "a little bit of disagreement on where that money will go. Everybody has a dif-



The Orange County Indiana courthouse...built in 1850.

Photo by Phil Audibert

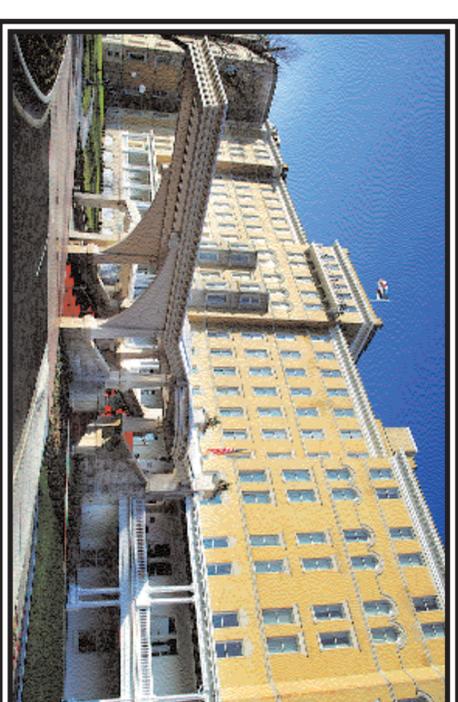


A typical Orange County scene both in Indiana and Virginia.

Photo by Phil Audibert

We ask Denbo how French Lick got its racy name. It seems it was a salt lick along the Buffalo Trace, a trail used primarily by buffalo herds leading to seasonal grazing grounds. Wildlife convened at the lick. French fur trappers noticed. They lay in wait for their quarry there. It was like shooting fish in a barrel, a sure thing, guaranteed winnings. For Orange County, Indiana, there's a modern lesson in all that.

Rob Denbo points over his shoulder to the casino across the street, and says "as long as people keep going in there and losing..." He lets the sentence dangle.



Built at the turn of the last century, French Lick Springs Hotel has undergone a multi-million dollar renovation thanks to philanthropist, Bill Cook of Bloomington, Indiana.

Photo by Ian Vaughn