



51.1966.1 Site of Hindostan  
Martin County  
Marker Text Review Report  
4/7/2010

### **Marker Text**

First settled in 1818, Hindostan became county seat of Martin County, boasting a population of approximately 1,200. A “Great Sickness” struck in 1828 bringing death to the inhabitants. The town was never occupied again.

### **Report**

This marker’s text is misleading and in some instances incorrect. Some of the complications regarding this marker come from the subject’s bizarre nature. This marker essentially is about an Indiana pioneer town that disappeared shortly after its founders laid it out because of a mysterious “sickness.” The problem with this marker is that evidence is very difficult to locate. Secondary materials offer some explanation, however, they do not contain citations. Primary sources generally contradict the information presented.

The first part of the first sentence, “First settled in 1818,” is contradicted by Morris Birkbeck’s travel account, first published in 1817. This account, written by an English immigrant, described his travels from the Virginia coast to Illinois. In July 1817, Birkbeck traveled through Indiana. Several July entries describe southern Indiana and a stop that Birkbeck made east of Vincennes. “This beautiful country continues as far as Sholt’s Tavern on White River, thirty-six miles east of Vincennes.” The significance of Birkbeck’s entry is that a man named Sholts was instrumental in the founding of Hindostan. Additionally, the location that Birkbeck gives for the tavern also applies to the town of Hindostan, which was located approximately 36 miles east of Vincennes. Birkbeck’s account points to settlement in the Hindostan area before 1818, thus making the marker incorrect. See Morris Birkbeck’s *Notes on a Journey in America, from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois* (1818) for more information.

In addition to the area being settled before 1818, this first sentence gives the impression that people founded the town in 1818. This impression is incorrect. According to *Martin County Deed Records*, a man named Frederick Sholts sold the land that became Hindostan to a group that became known as the Proprietors of Hindostan on March 13, 1819. Before this date, the Martin County Deed Records do not record a place named Hindostan. *The General Index of Deeds for Martin County*, available in the Indiana State Library, first lists land being sold in Hindostan on August 29, 1820. Evidence suggests that Hindostan existed as a town by 1819. Richard Lee Mason, a War of 1812 veteran,



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wrote a journal about his travels, including journeys in Indiana. His entry for Friday, November 5, 1819 reads, "Traveled over an extremely mountainous country to White river (east fork), where a town was laid out last May. Promising little place, Several houses building, together with the industrious appearance of saw and grist mills, give it an appearance of a place of business. Little town is called Hindostan." Since people settled the area that became Hindostan before 1818 and settlers did not form the town until 1819, the 1818 date on the marker is incorrect. See George R. Wilson's "Hindostan, Greenwich, and Mt. Pleasant. The Pioneer Towns of Martin County.—Memoirs of Thomas Jefferson Brooks" in the *Indiana Magazine History* 16 (December, 1920) for more information.

The next part of the first sentence, "Hindostan became county seat of Martin County," is correct. According to George Pence and Nellie C. Armstrong's *Indiana Boundaries: Territory, State and Country* (1967), the town became the Martin County seat in 1820. The rest of that sentence, "boasting a population of approximately 1,200," has not been verified with research conducted by the Historical Bureau. The 1820 Census recorded 351 people who lived in Hindostan. The 1830 Census did not list a place called Hindostan so the population of the town cannot be confirmed with that information.

The second sentence reads, "A 'Great Sickness' struck in 1828 bringing death to the inhabitants." The most authoritative source regarding the sickness may be an 1821 speech delivered by Malthus A. Ward, a doctor who moved to Hindostan circa 1819. In this speech, Ward makes a curious statement, "As citizens of Martin County, I congratulate you on the encouraging aspects of the prospect before you. Hitherto a great degree of healthiness has prevailed. The general progress of the season has been favorable, and the present flourishing state of vegetation promises, not only an abundant harvest to the husbandman, the rich reward of his toil, but seems to impart an earnest reassurance that you will not be again exposed to the ravages of that dreadful mortality, which within the past year, has made such desolation in your houses, and in your bosoms." Later in his address, Ward praised settlers who would "change the nauseous swamps, emitting pestilence and death, into the rich meadows clothed with thick and verdant herbage." Ward's comments certainly point to a deadly sickness that struck Hindostan the year before (1820). Perhaps, this is the "Great Sickness" that the marker refers to. See Dr. M. A. Ward's "[An Oration, Pronounced at Hindostan, Martin Co. \(\[Indian\]a\) on the 45th Anniversary of American Independence](#)," *Indiana Magazine of History* 74 (June 1978) for more information.

In the previously mentioned article about Martin County pioneer towns, George R. Wilson agrees with this assessment. "The sickness of 1819 or 1820 caught the settlers in their log cabins and



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shanties, and the forest unbroken around them. They were unacclimated. All were sick but Rufus Brown and many died.”

Carlos McCarty differs on the years that the sickness hit Hindostan. In his 1914 article about Hindostan’s history, McCarty wrote, “But about 1826 or 1827, the exact date is unknown, the hand of fate closed down on the thriving city. The shriek echoed with the wail of Rachel weeping for her children. The death angel stalked abroad...There was no resident physician, hence we have no positive account as to the character of the malady which swept from the face of the earth the town of Hindostan...It is said that here were more dead than living within the bounds of the town at times.” Though McCarty was rather colorful with his language, he does not seem to have known about Ward’s speech given in 1821 and Ward’s references to a “dreadful mortality.” Even if McCarty’s account is accurate, it does not substantiate the marker’s claim that a “Great Sickness” struck in 1828. See Carlos T. McCarty’s ["Hindostan--A Pioneer Town of Martin County"](#) in the *Indiana Magazine of History* 10 (June, 1914) for more information.

The only account located by the Historical Bureau that might corroborate the 1828 date is a five-page paper in the Indiana State Library’s Manuscript Collection. It claims that the Indiana General Assembly grant Martin County the power to move its county seat from Hindostan in 1828 because of the “epidemic which decimated Hindostan.” This source has no citations and does not appear to be thoroughly researched. Given the evidence, the marker’s incorporation of 1828 cannot be substantiated.

The final sentence on the marker states, “The town was never occupied again.” According to the *Laws of Indiana* (1828), while General Assembly authorized Martin County officials to move the county seat from Hindostan in 1828, the town still existed after officials moved the seat. The *General Index of Deeds in Martin County* shows residents conducted land sales located in Hindostan from 1828 to 1848. Continued references to Hindostan after 1828 cast more doubt on the validity of the town never being occupied after that date. On April 10, 1830, the *New-York Morning Herald* reprinted an article from the *Louisville Public Advertiser* about an attempt to rob “the Vincennes mail, a short distance above Hindostan, Ind.” Though the article does not reference how many people remained in the burgh, the reference to Hindostan indicates that it still existed. The *Indiana Gazetteer*’s 1833 edition, on the other hand, proves that Hindostan existed after 1828 and references its dwindling population. The *Indiana Gazetteer* describes communities throughout Indiana and lists them alphabetically. The entry for



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Hindostan reads, “a village in Martin county, on the east bank of the East Fork of White River, about three miles south of Mount Pleasant. It was formerly the seat of justice of Martin county, but since the establishment of Mount Pleasant as the county seat, Hindostan has been gradually declining, and is now nearly depopulated.” This directly contradicts the marker’s assertion that after 1828, nobody lived in Hindostan. Instead, the population “gradually” declined after 1828.