

Preface to the Second Edition

I have always had trouble explaining what this book is about to people unfamiliar with Rhinelander and its odd twist of local color. “It is a story about northern Wisconsin,” I tell them, “about the city of Rhinelander, lumberjacks, folklore.” Trying to sound smart, I go on, “its about economic diversification in the face of the declining lumber industry, the land trade, and late nineteenth-century city promotion.” “yeah, but what this Hodag thingy?” they say, pointing to the picture on the cover. “And,” I concede hesitantly, “its about a monster that lives in the woods and eats white bulldogs, but only on Sundays.” This, of course, doesn’t help me to convince them that the book is not just about some made-up legend, and that, in some sense anyway, the Hodag is real — or at the very least he is more than just a story.

Even my own daughter does not know what to think. She is six and afraid of the Hodag. Perhaps that is my fault. Occasionally after books are read and she and her three-year-old brother are tucked in bed we take turns telling stories. They retell fairy tales they know, talk about their friends and cousins, and quite often, inexplicitly, break into song. My stories, however, always take place at Grandma K’s, in Sugar Camp seven miles north of Rhinelander. They involve familiar characters, me as a little boy (the protagonist), my brothers and sisters (minor characters — cameos mostly), and Harvey the cat (who was old before the first edition of the book came out, but is somehow still alive). In these stories the Hodag makes an appearance and usually saves the day. Regardless of how pleasant a light I shine on the Hodag — how nice a monster I make him out to be — he is still a monster, and monsters are scary to kin-

dergartners. But he is more than just a scary monster to his home city.

The Hodag is alive and well in Rhinelander. Over a century after his introduction to northern Wisconsin, the Hodag continues to define the area's local color. Shepard's captured beast still makes his occasional appearances in newspapers, has a significant amount of dedicated cyber space (web sites and online discussion boards), and has not lost his position as a favorite advertising prop for Rhinelander-area businesses. Recently, in fact, there seems to have been a resurgence in Hodag interest. The Rhinelander Area Chamber of Commerce registered a Hodag image for promotional purposes and launched an advertising campaign a couple of years back. I know this because I heard all about it as I drove to work one day while listening to Minnesota Public Radio. Additionally, two Rhinelander natives have recently used Shepard and his Hodag as inspiration for two separate projects - a stage play and a movie script.

In the midst of this resurgence, *Long Live the Hodag*, first published as an adaptation of my master's thesis in 1996, went out of print during the summer of 2005. Given the atmosphere, I felt an obligation to do a bit more than just reprint the original book. As a result, I have significantly revised and expanded the second edition.

The research phase of this project never ended. In fact, the 1996 book itself opened many doors into Shepard's past that I had not known existed. Readers not only from Wisconsin, but from across the country tracked down the book (which outside of Rhinelander was a feat in itself) and contacted me with memories and stories about Shepard, his Hodag and northern Wisconsin. These conversations have kept me interested in Rhinelander's past and the Hodag's role in that story.

In addition to the inclusion of previously unpublished historic images and archival research, this edition allows Shepard to do what he did best – entertain. Several of his cartoons, two of his hand-written picture captions, and three of his long letters to Rhinelander's weekly newspaper, the *New North*, are reproduced in this edition. Other highlights include the incorporation of material from a 1963 interview with Shepard's son Layton and the inclusion of material from three unpublished scholarly papers: a bachelor's the-

sis focusing on Rhinelander's history, written in 1920, a recorded reading of an unpublished biography of Shepard presented before a local historical society in 1960, and a master's thesis focusing on the *Hodag!* musical's tour of France and Germany, written in 1968.

Many people have provided much-appreciated assistance in the course of the research, revision, and publication phases of this project. Anna Rice, who I first knew as a budding middle school historian and who is now an undergraduate at Harvard University, transcribed Shepard's letters to the *New North* that appear in the appendix. She also helped me map Shepard's movements through northern Minnesota – the results of which appear in the maps located in the appendix. Alexis Braun, a one-time colleague at the Historical Society and currently a Masters of Library Science student at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, was an incredible help in tracking down and sending me materials from the Wisconsin Historical Society archives.

Stephanie Zeman, an archivist at the Wisconsin Area Research Center at River Falls, saved me a trip across the border by photocopying materials and sending them to me in Minnesota. Paul Johnson an administrator in the Rhinelander School District helped me track down information and put me in touch with Patty Johnson who helped me locate historic yearbooks and photographs. Mike Skubal, President of Old Rhinelander, Inc., operator of the Rhinelander Logging Museum, provided me with access to historic photographs in their collections. Similarly the staff members at the Rhinelander District Library, specifically Susan Burleigh and Chris Honig, were a great help in locating and acquiring historic images from their collections. Jodi Hanson, President of the Rhinelander Area Chamber of Commerce, graciously provided the image of their Hodag published in this book.

Jeremy Weizel of The Sproket Designhaus provided much-needed layout advice for the book and designed the cover. He also assisted in the creation of a new web site www.hodagpress.com. Interested readers can go to this web site to purchase books online, read excerpts, review Hodag Press titles, and share Hodag-related stories.

Finally, I would also like to thank my wife Jill, my daughter Megan, and my son Max. I am lucky that I have been able to turn

my passion into my profession and have a loving family that provides unwavering support in my pursuit of both. And one last note to Megan (who has categorically disallowed any bedtime stories involving the Hodag) you shouldn't worry too much about the Hodag, he probably won't get you. Of course, you never can be sure — he seems to have captured a city. —KDK

Savage, Minnesota
February, 2006