

Why Did They Name It That?

by Jimmie Close

It was before my matchcover collecting days, and my sole reason for visiting Punxsutawney was to be able to say that I had visited the home of the country's most famous groundhog.

While I was there I had coffee with a gentleman who said he was almost ninety years old and had never been out of Punxsutawney except when he served in the Army during World War I.

He told me that the name 'Punxsutawney' was derived from the Iroquois Indian word 'ponsetunik', meaning 'living dust and ashes'.

Many years ago, there was a feared and hated sorcerer who was killed by members of the Iroquois tribe. His body was burned, and the ashes were dumped in a nearby swamp. Subsequently, huge clouds of living things seemed to rise from the ashes - the sorcerer had returned to curse the tribe.

The living things were actually gnats and were sometimes referred to as 'punkies'. To some, Punxsutawney became known as 'Gnat Town'.

