

The Generic Component in West Jersey Place Names

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For the purposes of analysis, a body of place names is generally divided into two major categories, one denoting natural formations, the other marking man-made features. Those for natural forms are again separated according to their reference to land or water bodies. Since toponyms are generally comprised of two major components, the specifier and the generic, the latter indicating the type of feature which the designation marks, each of these constituents is considered separately. It is the generic element in names for land features that is the subject of this discussion.

The analysis which follows is based on names recorded between 1524 and 1703 respecting the area once known as the Province of West New Jersey. During this time various European countries were sponsoring the exploration of the American coast; and the British, Dutch, and Swedish peoples were vying for possession of territory which included all or part of the present state of New Jersey. The British, once having gained control of the land, established the provinces of East and West New Jersey, which were, by 1703, dissolved and merged into a single colony. The place names which these Europeans and the native Indian residents gave to land features provide the generic components which are examined here.

Toponyms given during or before the seventeenth century are difficult in some cases to classify with certainty, for some epithets occur with the generic constituent suppressed – a suppression found at times also in contemporary names – others occur only in nonce forms or in a single context with little or no additional information available to determine the referent or its type as a basis for a valid classification.

In some place names words like *brook*, *hill*, or *point* appear in final position, the spot ordinarily occupied by the generic component. The meanings usually attributed to such terms and their position suggest that they do indeed represent the generic constituent. But in certain designations words like these, so placed, fill no such function. Such names as *Ash Point*, *Helbeys Forest*, *Red Hill*, and *New Brook*, for instance, suggest that they denote respectively a point, forest, hill, or brook. Instead, they

mark land holdings or estates once so entitled. Now it is quite possible that these four appellations were transfers from names for natural features, that *Ash Point* was made up of a point of land, so named; that *Helbeys Forest* did indeed cover a thickly treed area; that the pigment of the soil at *Red Hill* was at that time of a reddish hue; and that the estate of *New Brook* lay on a brook of that name; but no evidence has been unearthed to support such conclusions. Therefore, names like these four have been assigned to the category of man-made features. They are regarded as designations in which the generic is not expressed. On the other hand, a name like *Middle Hooke*, which once labeled a tax district as well as a point of land, is considered here under two classifications: one with names whose referents are artificial features, the other with those referring to natural land bodies, since there is adequate evidentiary support for such a dual assignment. As the toponym for a land formation, the generic is obviously *hook*; but as the name for a tax district, the generic is just as obviously zero.

As has been stated, some place names contain only one constituent, generally the specifier, with the generic unexpressed. Of the 288 names that mark land features in this corpus, 31 suppress the generic.¹ Although most of these are made up of only one lexical item, like *Nahanen* or *Wingerworth*, such appellations are occasionally comprised of two words, like *Upper Dinidock*, denoting the northern part of an island; but none of these bears a term indicating the type of feature named.

In the remaining names for land forms, the generic is stated. Twenty-nine different English words, from *bank* to *wilderness*, are employed as this component with, in some cases, equivalent forms from the Dutch, Swedish, and Latin languages. A list of these terms with appropriate definitions taken largely from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles* follows on pp. 10-12. Among other dictionaries cited are *A Dictionary of Americanisms*, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Ekwall's *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, and *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.²

All meanings quoted from historical dictionaries are those for which there is evidence of seventeenth century usage; other citations given offer, according to this investigator, the most appropriate signification for a particular word as it was employed at that time. Where no pertinent definition is found in the works consulted, the sense presented is derived from the bits of information gathered regarding the referent of the name and from the alternate designations, if any, for the same feature. For example, *Mantaes Hoeck* has usually been equated with *Mantes Corner*; both names occurring in different translations of a Dutch document, one reading that *Mantes Corner* was "a spot about half a mile below the

destroyed Fort Nassau;”³ the other, that Mantaes *Hoeck* was “a long half league below the destroyed Fort Nassouw.”⁴ These and several other citations suggest that translators alternated *corner* with *hook*, each signifying a point of land. Furthermore, in its discussion of *hook*, *A Dictionary of Americanisms* comments that American usage was influenced by “the Du. hoek, a corner, nook (of land),” also equating *hook* with *corner*.

Since, in the seventeenth century, the recorded toponyms for this region reflect essentially four different groups of name-makers, that is, the Indian, Dutch, Swedish, and English – each of these long or briefly resident in West Jersey – and since the names of particular features vary often according to the language and dialect of the name-giver, it is not surprising to find words from these different languages for some topographic forms, occasionally for the same one. For example, *Cape May* appears with both Dutch and Latin forms for cape, as in the designations *Caep May* and *Caput May*.⁵ One finds also in *Gout Myn* the Dutch version of *mine* and in *Merchansio Bergh*, an Indian-Swedish hybrid, the Swedish *bergh* instead of the *hill* and *mount* employed by the British name-giver then living in West Jersey.

Although many of the early appellations are believed to have been made up either wholly or partly by the native Indian, all names of Indian extraction, regardless of length, are treated in this discussion as single lexical items. The variant spellings of such names recorded by the Dutch, Swedish, and English, the latter speaking the various dialects of London, Yorkshire, and Ireland, for the most part – each of these spellings reflecting the linguistic experience of the writer – confound the phonologist. Nineteenth century dictionaries and glosses of the Lenni-Lenape tongue are frequently disparate in significations offered for similar, even identical forms; and a valid grammar of the language once spoken by the Indian native to these parts is not generally available. Therefore, no attempt is made in this study to analyze names of Indian origin.

The toponyms collected offer many other alternating generic terms. For example, *isle* and *island*, or the Dutch *eijlandh*, are used interchangeably to denote one feature variously called the *Isle of Matinicock*, *Carrs Island*, and *Tinnecoeks Eilandh*, among others. Similarly, the designations *ye Island of Sepassing* and *Sepassincks Ile*, again alternating *island* with *ile*, reflect an identical signification for these two words, suggesting that at that time and among these name-givers and name-users, *island* and *isle* were synonymous and did not distinguish the size of a land mass surrounded by water as, according to current dictionaries, they do today.

Perhaps the feature for which the greatest number of variant terms occurs is that for a point of land. *Ffines Town Point* alternates with *Fynnstown Hook*; *Lucas Point* with *Luycas Hooke*, and *One Tree Point*

with *One Tree Hook*. Swedish *udden* and Dutch *hoeck* also substitute for *point*, as in the promontory variously dubbed *Plommon Udden*, *Plum Point*, and *Pruym(en) Hoeck*. If *udden* and *hoeck* are non-English equivalents for *point*, then so must *bank*, *corner*, and *head* serve as English alternates of each other and also of *point*, for the same feature was known not only as *Mantes Corner* and *Mantaes Hoeck*, but also as *Red Bank*, *Red Hook*, *Red Head*, *Roden Hoeck* and *Roden Udden*. Another substitute used for *point* at this time is *neck*, this variation expressed in the pair of epithets *Guy(e)s Point* and *Elsonborrow Neck*, both with the same referent, and *Groves Point* and *Fenwicks Grove Neck*, this duo again pointing to the same feature.

Of the place names marking land formations, the English term *hook* appears in thirteen with Dutch *hoe(c)k* occurring in five others. *Hook* is still found in some geographic names, as in *Sandy Hook* in New Jersey and *Marcus Hook* in Pennsylvania. It is therefore strange that the signification for *hook* as designating a “projecting corner, point, or spit of land”⁶ is not listed, nor any definition for *hook* with reference to a land formation offered at all, in such dictionaries as *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* or the *American Heritage Dictionary*. *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, however, does define it as a “spit or narrow cape of sand” Its first citation in the *OED* with this meaning is dated 1855, although documents show its adoption almost two centuries before.

None of the non-English terms for the generic, namely Dutch *caep*, *eilandt*, *ile*, and *myn*, Swedish *bergh*, *Ö*, and *udden*, and Latin *caput*, has been adopted by or adapted to the English language except for Dutch *hoeck*, already discussed. The senses in which two English words were then used, that is, *beach* as an alternate for island, exemplified by *Five Mile Beach*, and *corner*, designating a point of land, as in *Mantes Corner*, appear to be moribund, if not dead. Except for *Webster’s* unabridged, which notes that the term *beach* may, in the state of New Jersey, mark “a low sand island along the coast,” current dictionaries generally fail to list such meanings for these words. All other terms employed for the generic in seventeenth century West Jersey are still in active use, employing these early significations.

In nearly all the toponyms for land features the generic takes the singular form. In a few instances, where the name refers to more than one item, the form is plural, as in the *Capes*, which designated the two promontories lying at the entrance to Delaware Bay, or the *Seaboard Islands*, which, according to the John Worlidge map of 1690 and the Thornton map of 1704,⁷ named either two or four islands lying off the shore of the Cape May coast. *Newton Meadow* and *Onionicon Meadow* occur with the generic in both singular and plural forms, while *Stony Hills*

appears only with the plural suffix. It seems, from the little evidence available, that all of these designations at one time did refer to plural bodies. One name, the *Barrens*, marking, according to the *DAE*, land "having little or no natural vegetation except smaller trees or shrubs," appears only in the plural form, as it still does today in the name, the *Pine Barrens*.

In this corpus of names for land features, the generic term occurs as the final constituent in all but 20 instances. Only four of the generics, *mount*, *cape*, *island*, and *point*, deviate from this order. In the designation *Mount Carmell*, the generic component, *mount*, sits in primary position with the specifier, *Carmell*, following, thus representing the reversed order which generally occurs when the word *mount* fills the generic role. Yet occasional toponyms with this term, *Pine Mount*, for example, follow the more common syntax of place names which finds the specifier in primary position and the generic element in final place. *Cape* is found in three positions, initial, medial, and final, as in *Cape May*, the *Two Capes of Delaware*, and the *South Cape*, with the initial position the more frequent, should one include Dutch *caep* and Latin *caput*. In all instances of medial position, the generic constituent is primary, but the generic term itself generally follows the definite article or another modifier, with a prepositional phrase, now the structure holding the specifying factor, falling after the generic term. Like *cape*, *island* takes three positions, again with final place the most popular, while *point* in two cases sits in medial place, as in *ye Point of Rankokus Creek*. Occasionally, as in the name the *Island Bommelerweert*, the preposition is suppressed. Generally speaking, the generic terms for names of land formations fall into the slot in which this element is most likely to occur today, that is, final position.

These generic terms provide an interest to the historian and geographer as well as to the linguist. Actually, something of the locus of early settlement and exploration in the West Jersey province and clues to the topography of the region are revealed by the generic words found in these names. Of the 288 epithets recorded for land features, 65% employ a generic constituent which remarks the presence of or nearness to water, as noted in the terms *bank*, *beach*, *cape*, *corner*, *head*, *hook*, *island*, *isle*, *marsh*, *neck*, *point*, *shore*, *side*, and *swamp*, along with the non-English forms which were applied to these formations.⁸ Early attempts to settle this province were concentrated along the Delaware River up to present Trenton, along the Delaware Bay bordering the southerly part of present New Jersey, and on the southern section of the state fronting upon the Atlantic Ocean. These recorded names offer additional proof of the site of these activities.

In only 13 of all the land appellations, a mere 4½%, does the generic

indicate an elevation of land, in such words as *bergh*, *edge*, *hammock*, *hill*, and *mount*. This meager reference to the height of the land reflects the essential flatness which characterizes most of the terrain on which the province was built, indeed, of the lower half of the state of New Jersey today.

Generic Terms for Land: Their Meaning

- Bank: the "shelving or sloping margin of a river or stream; the ground bordering upon a river" (*OED* II. 8.); see also *hook*, below
- Barrens: a "tract of land having little or no natural vegetation except small trees or shrubs. Usually in pl." (*DAE* + 1.); first citation dated 1797. *DA* offers a 1651 citation but with a signification less appropriate to the New Jersey barrens
- Beach: (1) in New Jersey, any "of the low sand islands which lie along or parallel to the coast; also a portion of any of these" (*DAE* + 2.); first citation, 1743. (2) a "shore of an ocean, sea . . . covered by sand" (*WNCD* 2.a.)
- Bergh (pres. sp. *berg*): Du. or Sw. for *mount* or *hill*
- Cabo: a form for *cape* found on such Dutch maps as the *Vingboons Map*
- Caep (pres. sp. *kaap*): Du. for *cape*
- Cape: a "piece of land jutting into the sea; a projecting headland or promontory" (*OED* I.)
- Caput: Latin for *head*; here, *headland* or *cape*
- Corner: "an angular projection, as a point of land running out into the sea" (*OED* II. 3.)
- Edge: a "hillside, hill" (*ODEPN*)
- E(i)land(h)/Eyland(t) (pres. sp. *eiland*): Du. for *island*
- Fast land: "land not subject to overflow or flooding" (*DAE*)
- Field: "an open land area free of woods and buildings" (*WNCD* 1.a.)
- Forest: an "extensive tract of land covered with trees and undergrowth, sometimes intermingled with pasture" (*OED* I.)
- Hammock: a variant of *hummock*, a "tract of land somewhat higher than an adjacent swamp, creek, etc. and usu. well wooded" (*DA* 1.)
- Head: a "projecting point of the coast . . . ; a cape, headland, promontory" (*OED* 22.)
- Hill: a "natural elevation of the earth's surface rising more or less steeply above the surrounding country" (*DAE* *1.)
- Hoeck (pres. sp. *hoek*): Du. for *hook* or *point*
- Hook: a "projecting corner, point or spit of land" (*OED* 11.); first citation, 1855. The *DA* endorses this definition, stating that "the Amer. currency of the term may be the result of a borrowing here from the Du. *hoek*, a corner, nook (of land);" first citation in *DA*, 1670
- Ile: (1) a variant sp. for *isle*, e.g. *Sepassincks Ile*. (2) found on Du. maps marking either *isle* or *island*
- Island: in the usual sense of a "piece of land completely surrounded by water" (*OED* I.)
- Isle: used in this corpus interchangeably with *island*. The *OED* notes that this word is now "more usually applied to an island of smaller size."
- Marsh: a "tract of low lying land . . . more or less watery throughout the year" (*OED* I. 1.)
- Meadow: a "low level tract of uncultivated grass land, esp. along a river or in marshy regions near the sea" (*OED* 2.)
- Meadow land: "land that is or is used for meadow" (*WNCD*)
- Mine: the "place from which . . . minerals may be obtained by excavation" (*OED* I.)
- Mount: a "more or less conical hill of moderate height rising from a plain" (*OED* I. 1.)
- Myn (pres. sp. *mijn*): Du. for *mine*

Neck: a "narrow piece of land with water on each side; an isthmus or narrow promontory" (*OED* 11.)

Ö: Sw. for *island*

Pasture: a "piece of land covered with grass used or suitable for the grazing of cattle or sheep; grassland; a piece of such land" (*OED* 1.)

Plain: a "tract of country of which the general surface is comparatively flat; an extent of level ground or flat meadow land" (*OED* 1.)

Point: the "tapering extremity of any promontory or piece of land running into the sea; a tapering promontory, a cape" (*OED* B. 1. 2. b)

Shore: the "land bordering on the sea or . . . river" (*OED* 1.)

Side: in this corpus equivalent to *shore*, above

Swamp: a "tract of low-lying ground in which water collects; a piece of wet spongy ground; a marsh or bog" (*OED* 1.)

Udde(n): Sw. for *headland*, *hook*, or *point*

Wilderness: a "wild or uncultivated region or tract of land, uninhabited, or inhabited only by wild animals" (*OED* 1. b.)

Wood: a "collection of trees growing more or less thickly together . . . of considerable extent, usually larger than a forest" (*OED* 2.)

Generic Terms for Land: Frequency of Occurrence

Term	Frequency	Term	Frequency
ø	31	Island	39
Bank	4	NEE E(i/y)land(h/t)	(Du) 14
Barrens	1	Ö	(Sw) 2
Beach	3	Isle	5
Cape	6	NEE Ile	(?) 5
*NEE Cabo	(?)	Marsh	5
Caep	(Du)	Meadow	43
Caput	(Lat)	Meadow land	1
Corner	1	Mine	1
Edge	1	NEE Myn	(Du) 1
Fast land	1	Mount	7
Field	3	Neck	25
Forest	1	Pasture	3
Hammock	1	Plain	1
Head	1	Point	33
Hill	3	Shore	2
NEE Bergh	(Sw)	Side	1
Hook	13	Swamp	15
NEE Hoeck	(Du)	Wilderness	1
Udden	(Sw)	Wood	1

Total 288

*NEE denotes a non-English equivalent.

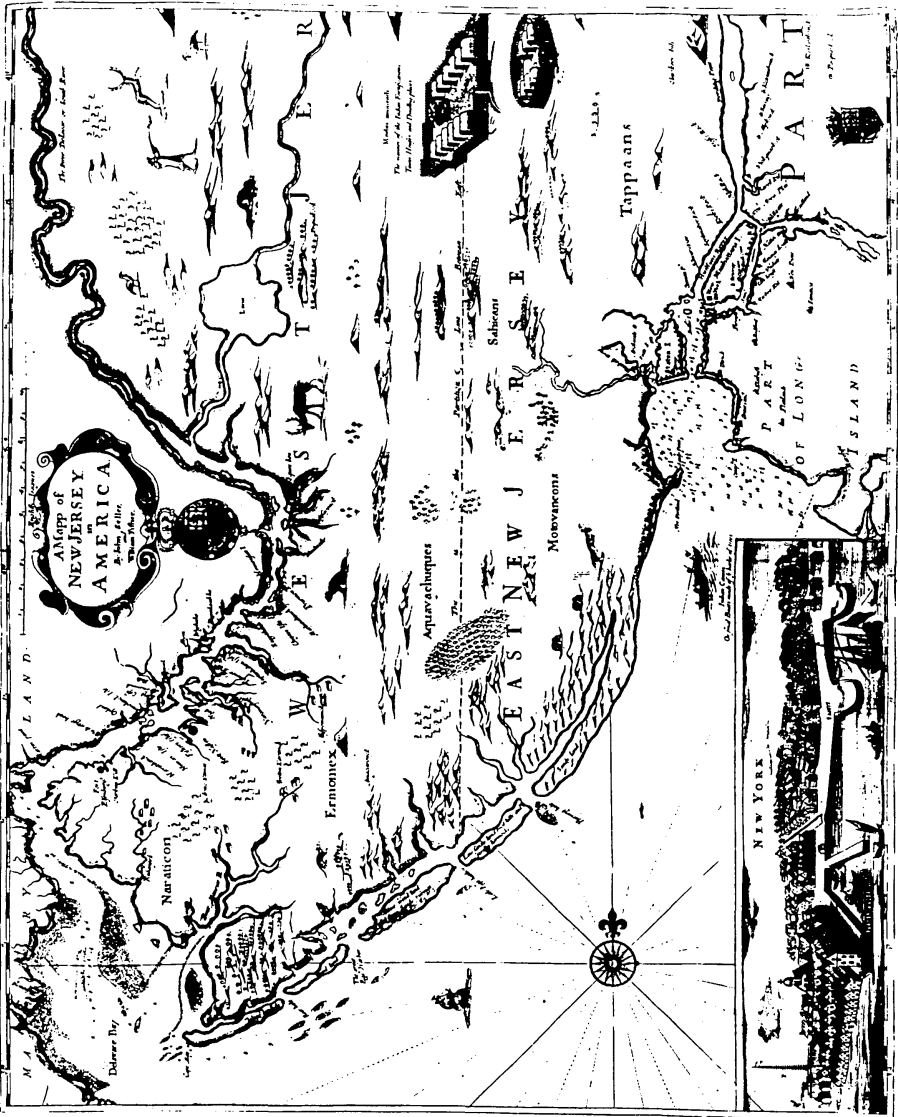


FIG. 11. A Mapp of New Jersey by John Seller. (ca. 1680). A later revision of his 1675 map, which was the first known map using the terms "New Jersey" and "New York." It shows Geo. Carteret's coat-of-arms. Western orientation was common among early maps of eastern America. Rutgers University Library.

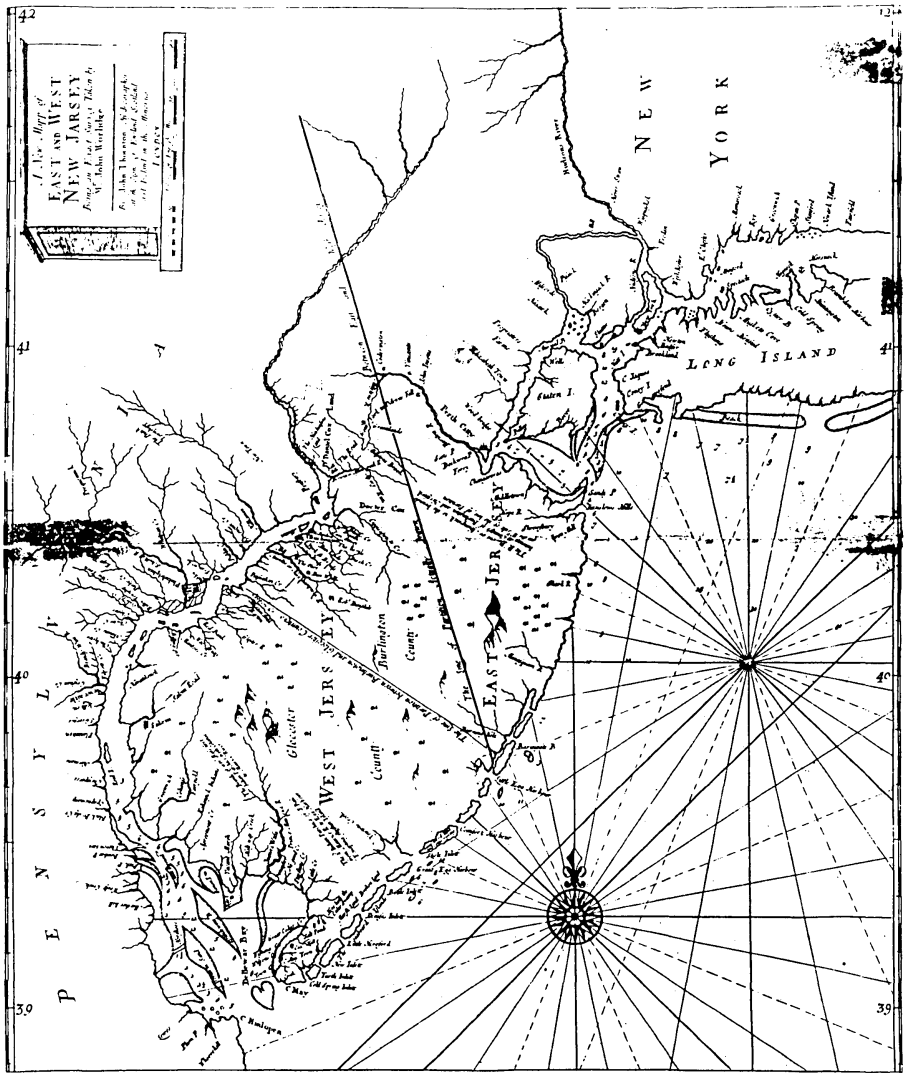
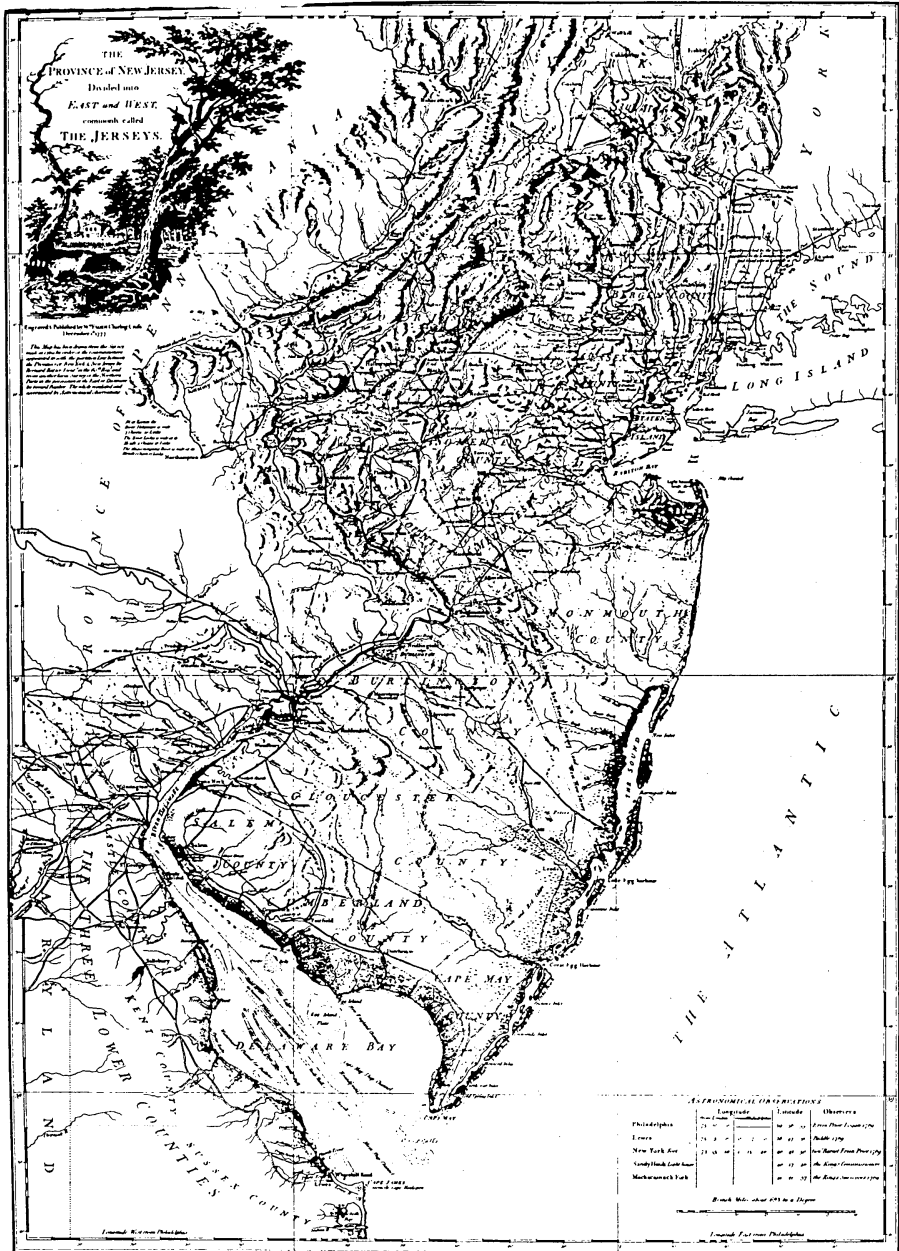


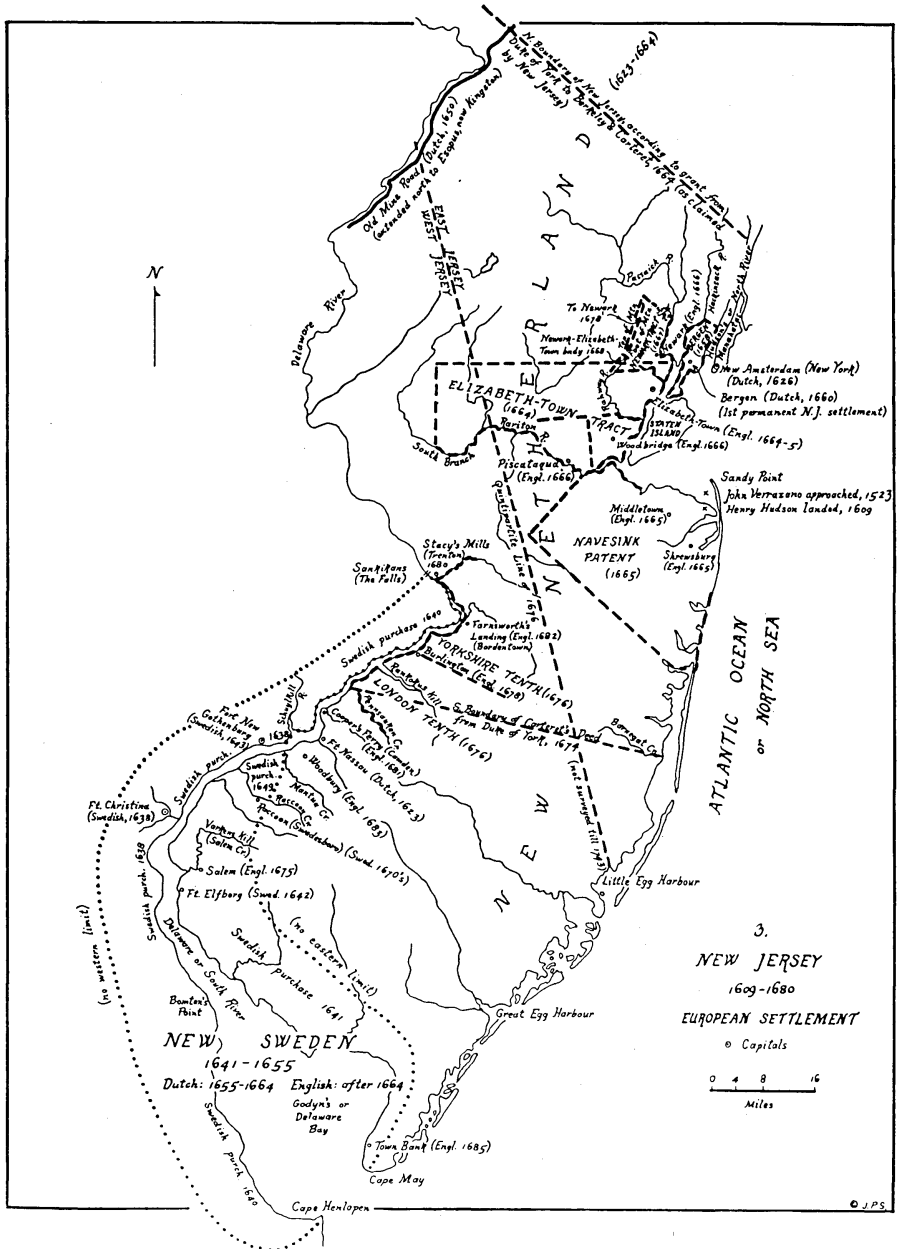
FIG. 111. A New Mapp of East and West New Jersey. (ca. 1700). John Wortidge's "Exact Survey" is obviously confined to southern Jersey. The Quintipartite line of 1676, rather than the Keith line, is shown dividing the provinces. Compare Maps 4, 5, and 11.

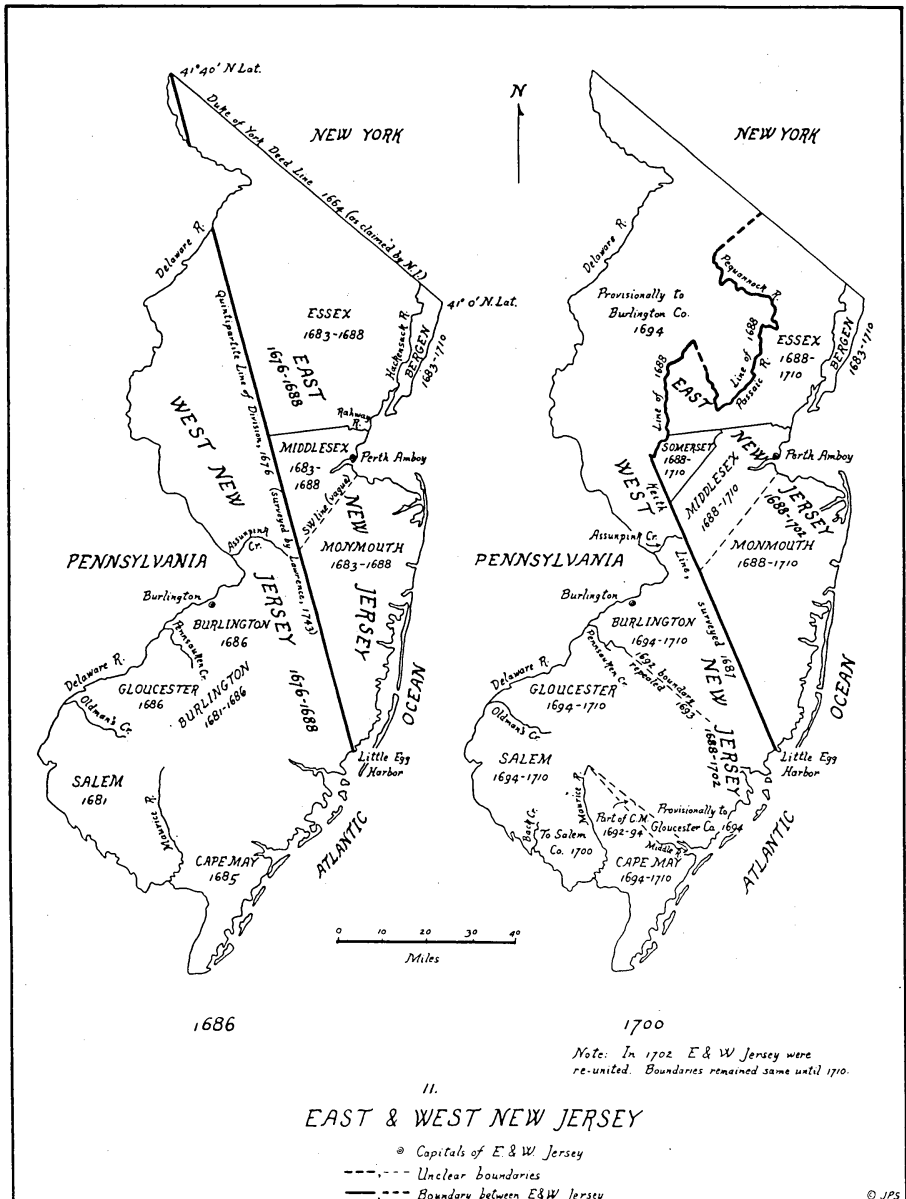
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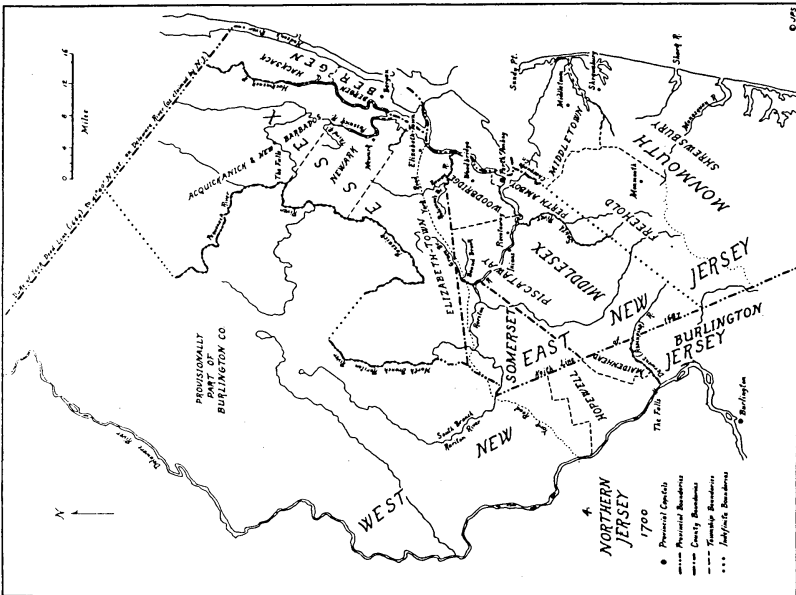
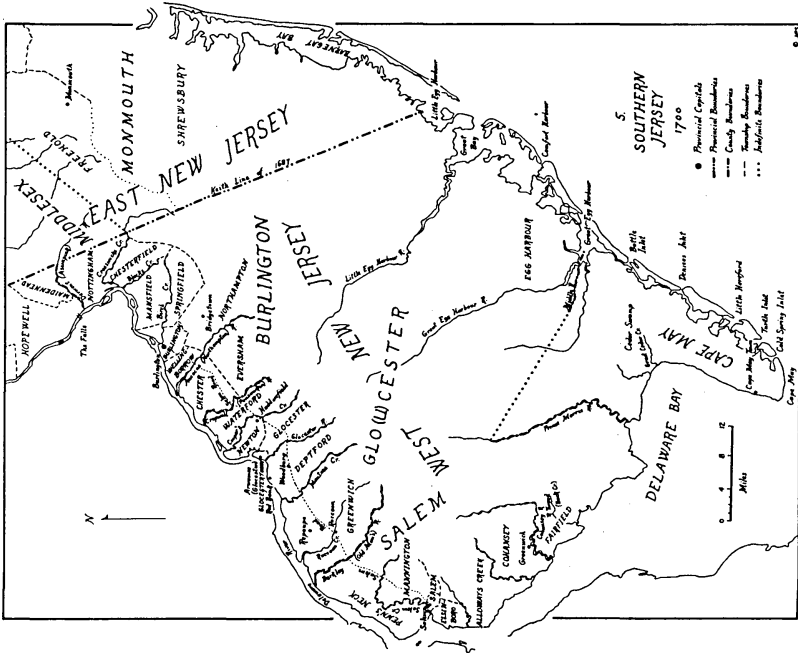


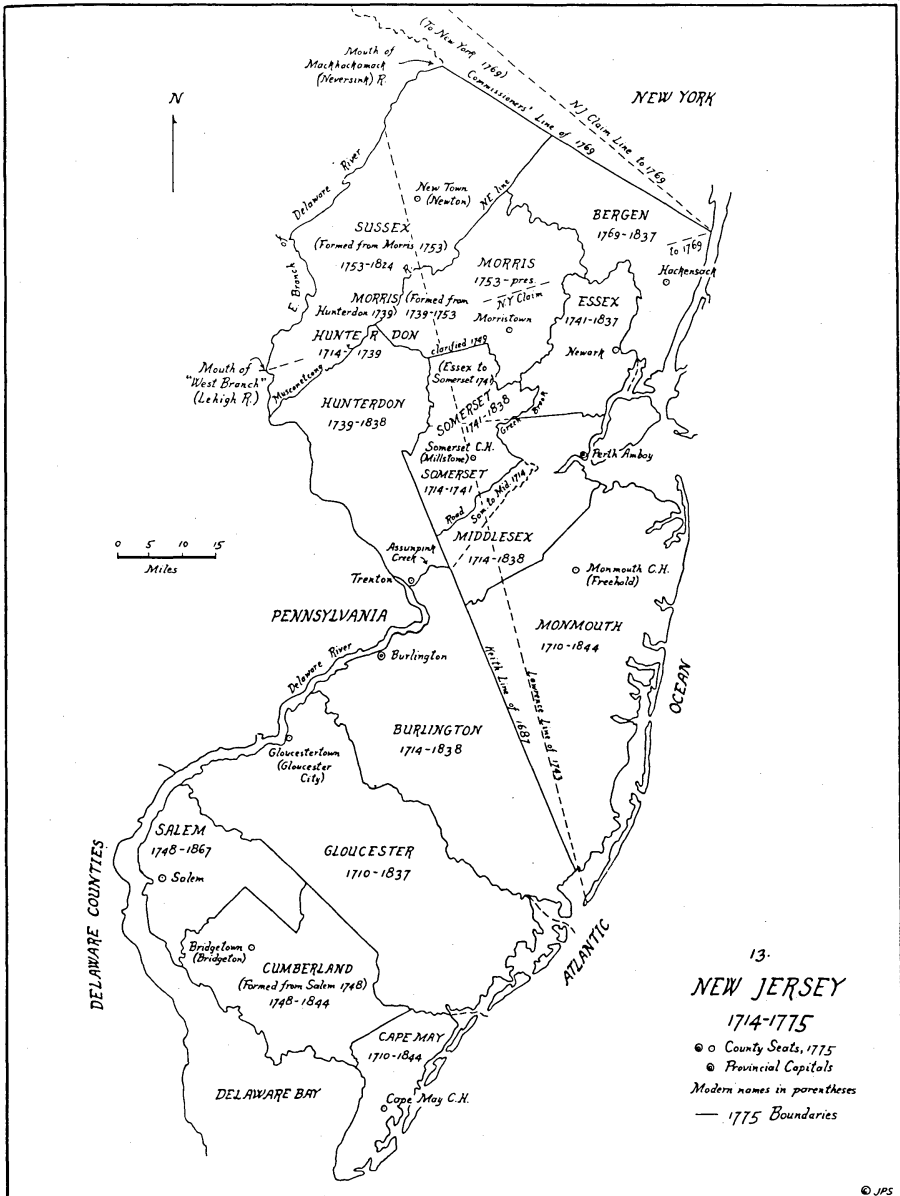
FRONTISPICE. *The Province of New Jersey, Divided into East and West, commonly called The Jerseys.* (1777). Published by William Faden in London in his *NORTH AMERICAN ATLAS*. Based on a survey by Ratzel. A second edition of 1778 failed to correct many of the serious boundary and location errors, but this is the classic early N. J. map. Compare Maps 6 and 7.

Copyright J. Warren Arnold, Cape May, N. J.









Notes:

¹Assigned to this group is the designation *Bonivetto*, applied by the explorer Verrazano to a headland believed to be the one long known as Cape May. To date, I have been unable to identify precisely the significance or meaning of this epithet. It has been suggested that the name may be made up of the two free words *boni* and *vetto*, which might be glossed as 'good' or 'fair cape,' but such an interpretation is accompanied by insoluble lexicographic and grammatical problems. I have therefore placed this name with those in which the generic component is suppressed.

²References to the various dictionaries cited in the definitions are abbreviated as follows:

- DA* for *A Dictionary of Americanisms*
DAE for *A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*
ODEPN for Ekwall's *The Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*
OED for *The Oxford English Dictionary*
WNCD for *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*
W3 for *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*

The Dutch and Swedish dictionaries consulted are:

Cassell's English-Dutch/Dutch-English Dictionary (New York: MacMillan, 1981).

Jacob Kramers, *Kramers Engels woordenboek: engels-nederlands* (Den Haag: van Goor, 1946).

O. Edmund Wenström and Walter E. Horlock, eds., *A Swedish-English Dictionary* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Soner, 1918).

Ruben Nöjd, Astrid Tornber, and Margareta Angstrom, *McKays Modern English-Swedish and Swedish-English Dictionary* (New York: David McKay Company, 1972).

³Samuel Hazard, *Annals of Pennsylvania, from the Discovery of the Delaware, 1609–1682* (Philadelphia: Hazard and Mitchell, 1850), p. 114.

⁴B. Fernow, ed., *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, XII (Albany: Argus Company, 1877), p. 370.

⁵Many of the official documents recorded in the seventeenth century were couched in Latin as were some or, at times, all of the notations made on maps drawn at that time.

⁶Unless otherwise noted, all definitions cited in this discussion are taken from the *OED*.

⁷"John Worlidge Map, 1690," reproduced in Horace G. Richards, *A Book of Maps, 1610–1878* (Cape May, N. J.: Cape May Geographic Society, 1954), fig. 9.

John Thornton, *A new mapp of East and West New Jersey*, being an exact survey taken by Mr. John Worlidge, 1704(?). (In New Brunswick, N. J., Rutgers University.)

⁸See Table of Frequency.