

The Naming of Moscovs in the USA

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Abstract

Since 1800, at least forty-seven populated places in the United States have borne the name *Moscow*. The reasons for having been so named fall into four classes of placename type: commemorative, anticipatory, transfer, and mistake. The stories of these communities and their namings tell much about the growth of this country, the flow of information within it, and each community's perception of itself.

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The names *Berlin*, *London*, *Moscow*, and *Paris* evoke images of European sophistication and Old World charm. Here in the United States, these and other European and classical names have been applied as place names to communities that bear no resemblance to the original cities. We have all seen them on our road maps: the Romes and the Petersburgs, the Viennas and Madrids. They have become commonplace to us. And there are many of each of them: not just one Rome, but thirty-five; not just one Cairo, but twenty-one. So the questions come up: Why were these communities named what they were? Who were the people behind the naming? What were the reasons for the names they chose?

It would be too large a task to examine all of the Old World names that have been used across the United States in the last two hundred years. However, I have been able look at one name and determine the reasons for its widespread use. The name that I have chosen to look at is *Moscow*.

Right now, in the United States, according to the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) of the United States Geological Survey (USGS), there are twenty-one populated places and locales that use the name *Moscow* or some slight variant like *Moscow Mills* or *New Moscow*. However, since 1800, there have been at least forty-seven places that have used the name. (See Table 1 for a chronological list.) Some have

changed the name. Some communities have died. Others never really existed, except as paper cities, hoping for a future. I have been able to determine the reasons for naming twenty-eight of the forty-seven. Although documentation for the remaining nineteen has been elusive, the stories of their origins would probably fall into the same categories as those that are known. I will be able to give only a few examples here.

I have divided all of the *Moscows* into five groups according to the reason for receiving the name: commemorative, anticipatory, commendatory, transfer, mistake, and unknown. These categories are based on George Stewart's ten classes of placenames, but I have limited my discussion to the first four classes. Dividing the *Moscows* into distinct classes was not an easy task in all cases. Often, a transfer name could also have been classified as commemorative and anticipatory. In the end, the *Moscows* placed into the anticipatory class are those that are strictly anticipatory, with no references to commemoration or transfer. This resulted in only two names in the class, though given the large number of unknown origin, it is reasonable to assume that a few other places would also fall into this class once the reasons for naming them are found. Research in other Old World names indicates that there was a tendency to name places for the anticipatory quality of the name. At least two Athenses, one in Alabama (Wolk) and one in Georgia (Stewart 26), were named in the hope that these new communities would become centers of education and culture in emulation of Athens, Greece. Glasgow, Virginia, was named after the Scottish city with the hope that it would become a major manufacturing town (Stewart 181).

There was an overlap in the commemoratives and the transfers when the commemoratives were honoring the old home and, at the same time, naming the new place for the old. In these cases, if a place had been named in memory of a previous home, I classified it as a transfer name because the name had actually moved from one place to another.

Commemorative Names.

The commemorative class of names, those that are meant to conserve a memory of a place or event or to honor a person or place, contains thirteen *Moscows* that can be divided into (1) those that were named simply for the city in Russia, (2) those that were probably named because of Napoleon's invasion of Moscow in 1812 and his subsequent defeat by the

Table 1. Chronological list of *Moscovs*.

State	County	Years of Existence	Classification
Mississippi	Kemper	1800 - present	Commemorative
New York	Tompkins	1800 - 1824	Unknown
Missouri	Lincoln	1801 - present	Commemorative
Kentucky	Hickman	1810? - present	Mistake
Maine	Somerset	1812 - present	Commemorative
New York	Livingston	1814 - 1917	Commemorative
Ohio	Wayne	1815 - 1878?	Anticipatory
Ohio	Clermont	1816 - present	Commemorative
Vermont	Washington	1820s?	Commemorative
Indiana	Rush	1822 - present	Unknown
Maryland	Allegany	1825 - present	Unknown
Tennessee	Fayette	1828 - present	Mistake
Missouri	Clay	1830 - 1960	Transfer
Michigan	Hillsdale	1830 - present	Transfer
Pennsylvania	Lackawanna	1830 - present	Transfer
Illinois	Schuyler	1832 - 1833	Unknown
Rhode Island	Washington	1834 - present	Unknown
Iowa	Muscatine	1836 - present	Transfer
Alabama	Sumter	1838 - 1910s?	Commemorative
Vermont	Lamoille	1839? - present	Commemorative
Missouri	Carroll	1840s?	Commemorative
Ohio	Licking	1841	Anticipatory
Alabama	Lamar	1844 - 1910s?	Unknown
Ohio	Morgan	1844 - 1854?	Unknown
Texas	Polk	1846 - present	Transfer
Wisconsin	Iowa	1847 - present?	Transfer
Missouri	Washington	1854	Unknown
Pennsylvania	Luzerne	1854?	Unknown
Ohio	Coshocton	1854? - present	Unknown
Minnesota	Freeborn	1855 - present	Commemorative
Illinois	Mason	1858 - 1860	Unknown
Arkansas	Nevada	1864	Commemorative
Virginia	Augusta	1865 - present	Unknown
Illinois	Union	1865 - 1977	Unknown
New York	Madison	1860s?	Unknown
Utah	Beaver	1870 - 1875?	Unknown
Kansas	Cowley	1875 - 1880	Commemorative
Idaho	Latah	1876 - present	Transfer
California	Sonoma	1880 - 1945?	Transfer
Kansas	Marion	1883	Mistake
Kansas	Stevens	1888 - present	Mistake
North Carolina	Bladen	1892 - 1907	Unknown
North Dakota	Cavalier	1894 - 1903	Transfer
Oklahoma	Woodward	1894 - 1906	Commemorative
Arkansas	Jefferson	1905 - present	Unknown
West Virginia	Hancock	1910s? - 1950s?	Unknown
South Carolina	Anderson	1911	Unknown

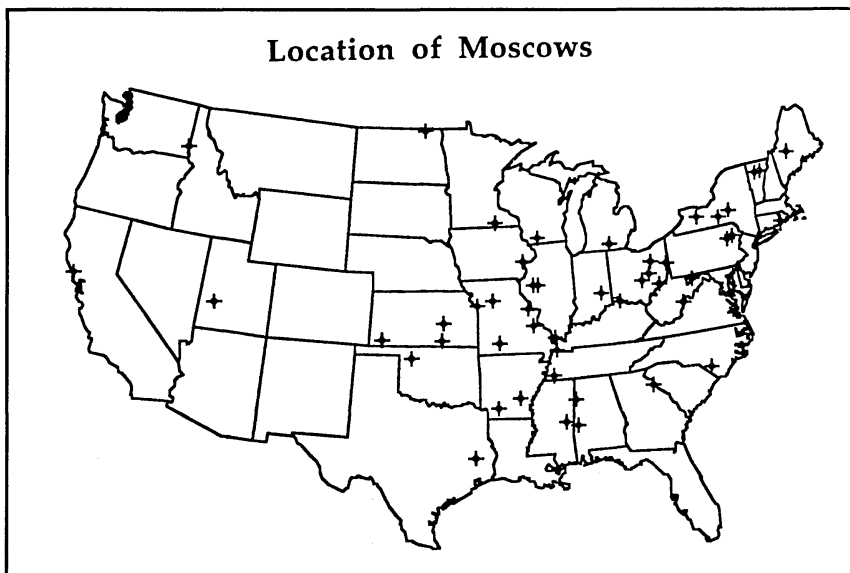


Fig. 1. Location of Moscows. See Table 1 for dates.

locals, and (3) the miscellaneous category: one place named for the Moscow River, another named for church bells in Moscow.

One of the places named for the Russian city was Moscow Mills in Lincoln County, Missouri (Ramsay Placename Files). This community was named in the 1810s, first as *Moscow-on-the-Cuivre*, for its place on the river of that name. The first cabin built here was in 1801 by Major Christopher Clark and his family. Soon after, Jeremiah Groshong came to the area and built a stone house. The village was officially laid out in 1821 so that lots could be sold. It was intended that Moscow would be competing for the county seat with a number of other communities in the area (Moscow Mills 5).

In the 1870s, when the St. Louis and Hannibal Short Line Railroad came through, the community began to grow. Moscow applied for a post office in 1878 and an office was established under the name *Moscow Mills* because Missouri already had a Moscow in Clay County. The 1880s brought new growth to the village. In 1911, the population of Moscow Mills was 395; in 1941, it was 347; in 1987, 484. The Moscow Lumber Company building has replaced many of the old storefronts. The post office is housed in a recently built building, the house of Shapely Ross—

one of the original settlers — is a museum, and there are two small grocery stores and a community center.

I find the Moscows that were named for Napoleon's activities particularly interesting. The village of Moscow in Leicester Township, Livingston County, New York, was founded in 1814 by Samuel Miles Hopkins, who had come to the county in 1811 from Oxford in Chenango County, New York. He had spent some time in Europe during the time of Napoleon's splendid Italian campaign (Brigham 43). Hopkins named the village, being influenced by his European experience, and had it surveyed with a rectangle of green space left in the center of the village as a public square (Brigham 44). Eventually, buildings surrounded this park. The first hotel was built in 1814; Moscow Academy went up in 1815. It was one of the first institutions of its type in western New York State and drew students from as far away as Buffalo and Canandaigua (Doty 739). A post office was established under the name *Leicester* on July 21, 1813. It was changed to *Moscow* on March 18, 1819, and back to *Leicester* on January 26, 1916.

In 1880, the population of Moscow was 245. There were two doctors, a number of general and drug stores, a few blacksmiths, some taverns and a hotel, and a number of churches. In 1907, the village was incorporated under the name of *Moscow*. By 1911, the population was up to 300. On March 20, 1917, the name of the village was changed to *Leicester*. This was done to conform with the train station and post office names, which had been *Leicester*, named for the township. The minutes of the meeting at which this proposition was made indicate that "there are a few people that maintain that the Moscow Revolution entered into the matter" (Mahoney).

The village of Moscow in Clermont County, Ohio, was laid out in 1816 on the northern bank of the Ohio River in Washington township, twenty-seven miles upriver from Cincinnati and twenty-one miles from Batavia. Visits from two prominent noblemen, the deposed King of France, Louis Phillipe, in 1815-16 and the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824 (Crawford A6) probably contributed to the village being named *Moscow*. In 1817, two large brick buildings were built to serve as hotel and store and to give the community an important air so that river traffic would stop (Everts 372). A number of elaborate houses were built on the banks of the river by steamboat captains before the 1820s. The post office was established around 1827. By 1835, the population was 196.

Growth was slow until the 1850s when the village was incorporated and the streets resurveyed. River traffic stopped at the cobblestone landing, and by 1880 the population had grown to 443. Around 1900, Moscow was known for the large quantities of brandy that it produced. However, Prohibition, a decrease in river traffic, and the growth of Cincinnati brought about the decline of Moscow in the early twentieth century. In 1937, the Ohio River flooded and ruined much of the village. In 1941, the population was down to 300, about where it was in 1987.

In the 1970s came the Zimmer Nuclear Power Plant, which employs many of the residents. The logo on the town's letterhead reflects this new industry: a drawing of an atomic symbol superimposed on an old-fashioned steamboat.

The township of Moscow, Somerset County, Maine, was originally settled mostly by the Baker family in 1773 and was called *Bakerstown* (Chadbourne 147), though there was another township by that name in Androscoggin County. The land was part of Bingham's Kennebec Purchase and a village by the name of *Bingham* bounds the south border of Moscow Township. Bingham was the post office for the town. The land was surveyed and platted in 1812. The inhabitants asked to incorporate the town under the name of *Northfield*. It was only in 1816 that the act of incorporation was passed. The name by that time had been changed to *Moscow* and the incorporation used that name. The change was made because the residents were very impressed by the news from across the sea of the French advance into Russia and the consequent retreat of Napoleon from Moscow (Chadbourne 148; Varney 376).

The village of Moscow in Sumter County, Alabama, was founded by Turner Brashears and first showed up on a map in the 1830s. It was named by one of the village's leaders, Count Lefebre Desnouettes, who is said to have ridden in the coach with Napoleon during the 1812 retreat from Moscow, Russia (Foscue 45). In the Sunday, 14 March 1948, Birmingham newspaper account, the local residents claimed that the name was an Indian word, though no one could say what it meant, and they denied a connection to "that" Moscow (House 1).

The last of the Moscovs named for something to do with Napoleon is in Freeborn County, Minnesota. This area was first settled in 1855. Sometime then, a large body of timber caught fire during the dry season and burned so fiercely that it reminded the people of the great fire in Moscow, Russia, during Napoleon's retreat. The forested area became

known as the *Moscow Timber* (Upham 202). From that came the names of the township and the village, which was platted in 1857.

The 1830s saw the naming of the Moscow in Lamoille County, Vermont, for a bell. This community, settled in the early 1800s, was originally called *Smiths Falls* for an early family that settled on the Waterbury River and established a number of mills powered by the falls (Swift 288). Lumbering and the related sawmills were both quite active industries in the area. The story goes that a sawmill blade was hung to act as a bell to call the community to work or to meetings (Swift 289). At this time, news that the Great Bell or Tsar Bell was on display in the Kremlin in Moscow had caused widespread interest. Over a century before, this bell had been cast as the largest bell in the world, but it had fallen and cracked while being hung back in the 1730s. Striking the sawmill blade in the little village in Vermont brought to mind the sound this Tsar Bell of Moscow might have made had it ever been rung. Because of this, the villagers began calling their community *Moscow*.

Transfer Names.

The transfer names, which include nine *Moscows*, when taken all together show a relocation diffusion pattern: they move from East to West and their naming covers the time period of the 1830s to the 1870s, as for example, Moscow in Iowa County, Wisconsin. The one exception to the East-to-West movement is the Moscow in California. That one, in Sonoma County, existed from about the 1880s to the 1940s. It was originally a community on the Russian River, along with Fort Ross on the coast, of fur traders who had come from Russia to catch sea otters for fur hats and coats worn back home (Nattkemper). Three other *Moscows* also appear to have roots almost directly from Russia. Moscow, Pennsylvania (Murphy 489), and Moscow in Clay County, Missouri (Ramsay Placename Files), were both settled in the 1830s. Moscow, North Dakota, was settled in 1894 (Williams 79). I will discuss the Pennsylvania community, in Lackawanna County, in detail.

Reverend Rupert built a log house in 1830 on the Moscow village site in what is now Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, four years after the opening of the Drinker turnpike, crossing the northeast corner of the state. Soon George Swartz, a shoemaker, moved to the area and a community began. It is said that Moscow was named for Moscow, Russia, by early settlers, possibly Russian-German Lutherans (Murphy 489).

Reverend Rupert built a sawmill in 1831 and ran a tavern from his log house.

The early years of the village were dominated by lumbering and agriculture. The Erie Lackawanna railroad came through Moscow, boosting the lumber trade. A post office was established in 1852. The turnpike was busy with traffic between Scranton and Stroudsburg, especially during the summers when people came to the area. Stores opened, and by 1880 the population was up to 500 residents. The population in 1911 was 650. In 1928, there were nearly a dozen churches and a number of cemeteries (Murphy 490). In 1941, the population was over 1000. Currently, Moscow is a quiet community just off Interstate 380 with a population of over 1,500.

The other transfer *Moscows* received their names by more complex routes. The area around Moscow in Latah County, Idaho, was settled in the early 1870s when Asbury and Noah Lieuallen came with about twenty families from the Walla Walla area of Washington. The community was first called *Hog Heaven* because of the great number of wild hogs in the area. The name was soon, understandably, changed to *Paradise Valley*. However, the community leaders felt that this town needed a name that would give it some prestige. They set up a committee, but had a difficult time coming up with something that they liked. One man on the committee, Samuel Miles Neff, ran the grocery store and the livery and managed the mail, though he was not the postmaster. As the deadline for filing the change-of-name papers with the U.S. Postal Service approached and no suitable name could be found by the committee, they left it to Sam Neff to find a name. Sam Neff named it *Moscow*. He had come from the east, having been born near Moscow, Pennsylvania, and had moved with his family to near Moscow, Iowa, before coming as far west as Idaho (Boone 68).

In the 1950s, with the Cold War in full force, the community received mail from other parts of the United States condemning the use of the name. The city did not bend, though; writers for the Chamber of Commerce thought the idea of changing the name foolish and wrote in June 1958 in the Moscow, Idaho, newspaper, "Better Moscow, Russia should change its name than Moscow, Idaho" (Anderson and Barackman).

Though people such as Sam Neff passed through it, Moscow in Muscatine County, Iowa, was not named by settlers from Pennsylvania. The earliest settlers in this area had come from Indiana (Vermillion County), Illinois, and Ohio (Clermont County), laying out the village in 1836.

This new community was probably named *Moscow* in memory of some of the Moscows in the states which they had left (Witmer 14). Other stories indicate that it might have been a corruption of an Indian word or name (Evans).

One of the original settlers in East Texas, in what is now Polk County, was David Griggs Green, who, in the 1840s, came to the area with his family from a village in western Tennessee called *Moscow*. He built a house and opened a blacksmith shop. Others moved into the area, and the community became known as Greenville. When the time came to open a post office, the U. S. Postal Service said that this community could not use the name Greenville because there already was a Greenville in Texas that had a post office. Thus, in memory of David Green's home in Tennessee, the post office was named *Moscow* (Heritage 278).

When settlers first came to Hillsdale County, Michigan, they farmed near the source of the Kalamazoo River and called their community Little Kalamazoo (*150 Years* 277). In 1830, one Silas N. W. Benson built a tavern, then two years later, a hotel, on what was becoming known as the Chicago Turnpike. Today, this is U. S. Route 12. Many of the early settlers came from central and western New York State, in particular from Cayuga, Livingston, and Erie Counties. One of the important first pioneers was Alonzo Kies, who came from near the village of Moscow in Cayuga County, New York. He was instrumental in the naming of the village *Moscow* (*150 Years* 277).

The area just to the west of the village Moscow is called *Moscow Plains*. In 1852, this land was given by Azariah Mallory for a community non-denominational church. This became the Moscow Plains Church and cemetery, still standing in 1987 (*150 Years* 280). In 1970, the tavern that had stood at the crossroads of U.S. Route 12 and Moscow Road was razed. Some of the old schoolhouses were converted into dwellings. Others were lost to fire (*150 Years* 283). In 1987, the population of Moscow, Michigan, was 150.

Anticipatory Names.

As stated earlier, there are only two *Moscows* in the anticipatory class. A number of the other Moscows were named not only because they were commemorative or transfer, but also because the name was to give the community some prestige. Moscow, Idaho, is such a case. However, because the overriding reason for its naming was that *Moscow* was the

name of the community where Sam Neff grew up, and only incidentally would offer an image of sophistication, it was put in the transfer class. The two *Moscows* in this class, then, are the ones for which there were no other reasons found other than the one of anticipated prestige.

The two communities were both in Ohio: Moscow in Wayne County and Moscow in Licking County. Their stories are similar, in that there were great hopes for each, but neither became what had been anticipated. The Licking County Moscow can serve as an example of both. On July 20, 1830, John Fidler surveyed and laid out the town at the request of Daniel and William Green. It was to be a village that straddled the National Road (U.S. Route 40), complete with a village square, named streets, numbered lots, and space for churches and schools. One end of town was bounded by Licking Creek. Across this creek there was a covered bridge (Kohser). Nothing ever came of this idea for a community. A photograph from 1913 shows the covered bridge and a farm house. In the 1920s and 30s, this farm bred foxes for their pelts.

Mistake Names.

Mistake names are those that are meant to be one thing, but become something else, in this case coming to resemble an Old World name. There are four *Moscows* in this category. Moscow in Stevens County, Kansas, is one victim of a misunderstanding. In 1888, the petition for a post office for this community was granted under the name *Moscow*. The name was to commemorate one of the officers in Coronado's expedition in the southwest in the 1540s, a man by the name of Moscoso. The residents had shortened it to *Mosco*, M-O-S-C-O, and sent it in with that spelling. However, some postal clerk in Washington, thinking he was doing the community a favor by fixing the spelling, added a W to the end making it conform to the city in Russia (*History of Stevens County* 224). As a local historian put it, "...the Russian thistle is the only Russian influence in the area" (Rydjord 196).

The other three mistake *Moscows* are in Fayette County, Tennessee; Hickman County, Kentucky; and Marion County, Kansas. There is evidence to indicate that the name *Moscow* in Tennessee came from an Indian word meaning "between two rivers," the Wolf River and the North Fork. The site lies on the old Mossac Trail from Mississippi to Kentucky (Sims 8). In Kentucky, though the name resembles that of one of the early settlers, John Muscovalley, *Moscow* is probably also a cor-

ruption of an Indian word (Rennick 204). The Moscow in Marion County, Kansas, bears a name bestowed upon a Ukrainian-German Mennonite community by the surrounding Anglo-Americans and was never used officially (Wiebe).

Conclusion

This project started out with a small question – why did settlers name their new communities *Moscow*? – and grew into an almost unwieldy study of many separate settlements whose name was the one characteristic that linked them all together.

The appearance of *Moscows* roughly followed the east-to-west movement of settlers of the frontier. The places were settled, as with most early places, along major rivers, then filled the countryside within. But this is rough; it is not really a clear pattern. More work needs to be done in examining other Old World placenames to see if what the *Moscows* show is applicable to those places as well. Along with this, looking at Old World placenames in proportion to all other new placenames in these same decades would give an indication as to whether the pattern of naming of places with Old World names is representative of all naming.

The disappearances of places was also of interest. It is not always evident why places stop showing up on maps or in gazetteers. In the case of the *Moscows*, only four that disappeared had changed their names and continued on as communities: McLean, New York; Leicester, New York; Centerville, Ohio; and East Calais, Vermont.

From George Stewart's system of placename classification, I used four classes which most fit the Old World placenames: commemorative, transfer, anticipatory, and mistake. As was seen, the transfer names exhibited a relocation diffusion pattern that matched the general movement of the population across the United States in the almost-200 years of the study.

In a sense, this is intuitively obvious: settlers, as they filled in the country, would take with them what they knew from home and apply it to their new homes. There is quite a bit of interesting historical and cultural material here. When these people went out to new places, were they frightened? Were they lonely? Did they name their new places for old because the name might provide them with that sense of community which they left and which they might be developing in the frontier?

The names in the commemorative class fell into three groups within the class: Moscows named after the capital of Russia; those named after something to do with Napoleon's invasion of and defeat in Russia in 1812; and miscellaneous ones named either after specifics within the city in Russia (a bell) or after the Moscow River in Russia. The two *Moscows* in the anticipatory class of names give just a hint of other paper cities that might have been named for such a foreign city as that in Russia.

It was necessary to determine the names in the mistake class in order to winnow them out from the group that were really named *Moscow*. It would be interesting to look at the mistakes made, especially in the case of corruption of Indian words, and see if the same mistakes had been made in different parts of the country.

This study of naming of communities brings up questions of information flow within a developing country such as the United States was in the nineteenth century. How did the people who did not travel overseas know about those places? How extensive was the media coverage of events across the globe? How fast did information travel and in what form? All of these are questions that would be interesting to answer in relation to the naming of new places in the interior of the wilderness.

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