

Maritime Troytowns and Places with "Eye"

In researching the origin of three Newfoundland placenames, two now called "Traytown" and one now called "Triton," a local historian has come upon the same spelling "Troy Town" used for all three at one time or another in their histories. He asked me for an opinion and I ventured that their particularly convoluted waterways led 18th and 19th sailors to refer to each place as a "troy town" (aka "troyton," hence modern "Triton"), meaning 'maze-like.'

I am familiar with the widespread use of "troy-town" in English and Scandinavian placenames for the sites of pre-historic and medieval mazes cut into turf, etc. One such place was not far from Poole, out of which port many Newfoundland settlers came. But I do not know of any such placenames in North America, other than these three in Newfoundland. Can anyone point me in the direction of a Troytown (or a Troy) in North America that was not named simply for classical allusion?

One of these Traytowns is on a small island now called "Ireland's Eye," the main harbor of which is shaped like a helix or volute. Convoluted indeed. I suspect the harbor was called the Island's Eye, a name which folk-etymologized into Ireland's Eye by the late 17th century. I would be stronger in my conviction about this if I knew of some other placenames, on either side of the Atlantic, with "Eye" referring to a kind of volute or spiral shape. Robert Kelly suggests, plausibly, that the "Eye" comes from "eyot" (islet) but, again without any other examples of eyot > eye in (North American or other) placenames, I am unsure.

If you can provide additional examples, please send them to:

Philip Hiscock
Folklore & Language Archive
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St John's, Newfoundland A1B 3X8
Internet:philiph@kean.ucs.mun.ca