

Parsing Greater Washington's Namescape

Wilbur Zelinsky

Successive strata over time of a locality's placename cover provide insights into shifting toponymic fashions and, more deeply, into our collective subconscious — a principle amply evident in the case of Greater Washington with its intense episodes of nationalistic terms. Examining both the localistic and national significance of the temporal layering of placenaming, this study breaks new ground by considering names of businesses as well as the customary physical features, landmarks, and the like.

Like dreams, the names we give the people, things, and places around us can reveal much more about ourselves than we might be comfortable in admitting to strangers. The Washington situation is no exception. By scrutinizing the tens of thousands of past and present placenames in this metropolitan area we can learn a surprising amount about the peculiarities of this extraordinary locality and its residents, and quite a bit about the qualities of the general American psyche as it has developed over the past 200 years.

It may surprise many people, as it has surprised me, to realize that this sort of expedition into metropolitan toponymy is a sally into virgin terrain. As such it must be a bit tentative. There has been little scholarly work on any phase of placenaming in the Washington area, with the partial exception of street nomenclature. Furthermore, no one has ever compiled an exhaustive inventory of the whole range of placenames ever used in the District of Columbia and adjacent counties. Consequently, I must be selective and limit myself here to such items as happen to

appear on maps or in directories (with only occasional mention of who named what or why), and that means omitting all those unofficial terms, such as the pungent nicknames for certain corners, alleys, blocks, neighborhoods, office buildings, or individual homes, among other things.

Two central notions provide the basic agenda for this exploration. First, although Greater Washington's placename cover bears a strong resemblance to those of other major American cities, its status as a planned political capital and world-class ceremonial center makes for a uniquely loud nationalistic accent in the labels attached to many objects. The other theme is that the successive layers of names over time and a series of toponymic fashions testify to the changing character of our collective subconscious. In this connection, it is worth noting that the names we devise for places, and just about everything else, serve any, some, or all of the following five purposes: to identify and/or describe the object; to celebrate or memorialize something or someone; to advertise and sell the thing being named; to entertain and amuse ourselves and others; and (usually unbeknownst to ourselves) to feed certain psychic hungers.

The oldest layer of placenames — those acquired from the aboriginal population — is the least important locally. Indeed, aside from the *Potomac*, *Anacostia*, and *Patuxent* rivers, there is little to record for an area that was virtually bereft of Native Americans by the time serious European settlement began. Such other Indian terms as do occur in a few spots, the likes of *Cherokee*, *Iroquois*, *Oneida*, or *Powhatan*, are borrowed from other localities and bespeak a modern, romanticized view of the pre-Columbian scene.

The legacy of names bestowed by Europeans during the Colonial era is noticeably richer. Many of the names applied to various physical features during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries remain with us, but nearly all refer to the drainage system. In addition to the major more or less navigable streams, we have such secondary watercourses as *Rock Creek*, *Piney Branch*, *Broad Branch*, *Brier Ditch*, *Accotink Creek*, and at least 24 runs, e.g., *Donaldson*, *Spout*, *Coquelin*, *Four Mile*, *Oxon*, *Lubber*, and *Turkeyrock*, along with several points (*Haines*, *Buzzard*, etc.)

and islands (*Dangerfield, Goose, Three Sisters, Ruppert, etc.*) along or in the Potomac. The term *run*, incidentally, the equivalent of *brook* or *branch* elsewhere, is a Middle Atlantic phenomenon, and is rare or unknown in the Northeast, the Deep South, and west of the Appalachians. Some of the lesser water bodies have been bulldozed or paved out of existence, along with their names, or eliminated via other types of human intervention. You will seek in vain today for *Tiber* (or *Goose*) *Creek, Reedy Branch, St. James Creek, Alexanders Island, and Masons Island* or the springs entitled *Franklin Square, Smith, or Coffey's*. Or, jumping ahead in time, the Nineteenth Century *Washington Canal*, in the general vicinity of The Mall, is only a memory today, as are the *Alexandria and Falls Branch* canals. With the single exception of *Jenkin's* (now *Capitol*) *Hill*, upland features have remained anonymous. This is strangely true for the most important landform — and geological feature — anywhere in the area: the *Fall Line* or, more precisely, the *Fall Zone*. It is that rather abrupt slope (so visible on Connecticut Avenue, near the Washington Hilton, as well as along most other northward-trending streets within the northern section of the District) that separates the higher, cooler Piedmont country with its older, much harder rocks from the warmer, low lying Coastal Plain to the southeast with its younger, softer sediments. But the points at which the Potomac tumbles down the frayed edge of the Piedmont are well advertised as *Great Falls* and *Little Falls*.

The growth of urban Washington has obliterated all remembrance of pre-existing plantations (including *Rome Plantation*) and farms (*Mount Vernon* excepted, of course) and also the infant hamlets of *Ball's Crossroads, Hamburg, and Carrollsburg*, the latter two along the banks of the Potomac and, subsequently, the city's first suburb, *Uniontown*, of 1854 vintage. Also missing from present day maps are several earlier roads and paths, including *Taylor's Lane Road, Duff Green's Row* (on the site of the Folger), and *Brookville Road*. But, unlike other metropolitan behemoths that have gobbled up rural tracts and hapless hamlets in their outward surge, Washington has a rare, if partly forgotten, distinction. During the Civil War, the Union Army constructed a ring of 48 named forts around a capital city in imminent danger of attack by

Confederate forces, probably the most elaborate set of defenses ever erected around a large American city. Today the majority of the battlements have been levelled or await the archeologist's spade, but several, such as Forts *Stevens*, *Lincoln*, *Stanton*, *Dupont*, *Davis*, *Chaplin*, *Mahan*, *Totten*, and *Slocum*, linger on, as grass-covered lumps or in the names of parks and nearby business establishments.

The political machinations behind the selection of an unremarkable patch of real estate near the confluence of the Anacostia (or *Eastern Branch*) with the Potomac for the creation of a "Federal City" is an oft-told tale that will not bear repeating here. What is important for present purposes is the system of names and other features adopted for this very earliest of a series of modern national capital cities plunked down on vacant sites. But, of course, the outer portions of the ten-mile-square tract were already urbanized in the shape of the then thriving river port/commercial centers of *Georgetown* and *Alexandria* whose services and amenities lay within reasonable commuting range from the proposed new governmental offices (as did Mount Vernon). These annexed municipalities retain much of their Colonial nomenclature to this day, including in Alexandria's case the widespread pre-1776 practice of honoring British royalty and statesmen in street names, e.g., *King*, *Duke*, *Princess*, *Pitt*, *Queen*, and *Royal*, interspersed incongruously with the latterday *Jefferson*, *Patrick*, *Henry*, *Fayette*, and *Washington* streets or avenues.

The novel geometric pattern of thoroughfares and plazas worked out by L'Enfant, Washington, Jefferson, and various other luminaries derives in good part from various Old World inspirations; but the only meaningful antecedent for Washington's street-naming formula may be that of William Penn's Philadelphia. In fact, no package of urban design, that graticule of numbered streets intersecting others bearing arboreal names, has had anything like the enormous impact throughout the land that we can attribute to the Philadelphia model — a preview of things to come for both rural and urban America. Clearly the formulators of the Washington scheme were smitten with full-blown Jeffersonian passion for order and regularity in surveying, chopping, and labelling territory into convenient chunks.

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The full story of who conceived which aspect of the street-naming plan, exactly when, and how still awaits close scholarly scrutiny; but what is certain is that it all happened in the early 1790s when the first set of District Commissioners (not Congress), with no doubt quite a bit of kibitzing by Thomas Jefferson and others, not only decided to dub the area the *District of Columbia* and reached the most foregone of foregone conclusions by calling the city *Washington* but also hit upon an original idea for identifying the streets.

As all newcomers learn in their first few days, the city is laid out in four compass-oriented quadrants separated by the axial *Capitol Streets* (a notion rarely imitated elsewhere). Within Northeast Washington, etc., the north-south streets are numbered consecutively outward from *North* or *South Capitol*, while those running east and west are identified, within the first series, by letters of the alphabet (omitting only J, X, Y, and Z) as one works north or south from the baseline. Then, after the first alphabet has played itself out, a second alphabet commences in the Northeast and Northwest, but not in the truncated Southeast and Southwest, with a two-syllable alphabetic series honoring a mixed bag of national and local notables. Then the pattern repeats still further north with an array of three-syllable words, and, finally, in the pinched-in northernmost peak of the District, an alphabetic succession of floral terms culminates with the block-long *Verbena Street*.

Complementing the rectangular grid are the relatively wide diagonal avenues named after each of the 50 states and a related group of squares, traffic circles, and parks at various of their major intersections anointed with the names of presidents, generals, and other worthies. Concluding this array, mostly within the first alphabet, are a number of short, largely east-west streets, or perhaps alleys and mews, occupying the odd crevices within the grander arrangement and usually memorializing prominent local citizens, items such as *Corcoran*, *Church*, *De Sales*, *Swann*, and *Willard* streets or *Riggs*, *Wallach*, and *Ward* places, with imperfect acknowledgment of the alphabetic theme.

If I have created the impression that such a methodical formula for delineating and labelling Washington's public ways

was implemented throughout the District, I hasten to amend any such misapprehension. The city plan as set forth in Andrew Ellicott's engraved Plan of 1792 was fleshed out more or less faithfully only within the initial antebellum urban core; that is, the area east of Rock Creek and to the southwest of Florida Avenue (then Boundary Street), and was never implemented across the Potomac into the tract eventually returned to Virginia. With the remarkable expansion of the city over the past few generations, the mundane calculations of real estate developers, along with the difficulties imposed by broken terrain in many neighborhoods, have created a situation in which the original plan and its naming pattern are only fitfully implemented. This is most obviously true in the far western segment of the District, along the fringes of Rock Creek Park, and in much of the land southeast of the Anacostia. In such areas the choice of street names follows the same general principles apparent in most recent urban and suburban developments, about which more in a moment. We should also take note of some arterial roads that antedate the naming code or fall outside the system for some other reason. Examples include *Military*, *Colesville*, *Pine Branch*, and *Bladensburg* roads.

I have dwelled at some length on street names within the District because they are intriguing and obviously locally important, but also, as a package, unique. Many other American towns, such as Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, and Minneapolis, occupying relatively level terrain, have been able to execute a rectangular, compass-oriented street layout with much greater regularity; quite a few have adopted the Washington/Philadelphia pattern of sequential street numbering, or the notion of alphabetical progression; and a few have a network of avenues honoring various states. But, again, no municipality has completely emulated the D.C. example. Perhaps the most pervasive nationwide influence traceable to Washington has been the idea of thematic clusters, if not of states, then a sequence of streets named after presidents, important battles, women's names, colleges, famous cities, or Indian tribes.

Beginning in 1776, Americans began plastering nationalistic names on children, places, businesses, and all manner of objects

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with an abandon and passion unmatched elsewhere in the modern world. But no other American metropolis has so assiduously and persistently celebrated national heroes and ideological principles as has Washington, D.C. Already noted is the multitude of streets (including *Independence* and *Constitution*), circles, and the like honoring memorable statesmen, warriors, and historical events. In addition, and in the same vein, we must not forget the many nationalistic monuments and memorials, such bridges as *George Mason*, *Rochambeau*, *Theodore Roosevelt*, and *John Phillip Sousa*, or the schools answering to such names as *Bunker Hill*, *Coolidge*, *Franklin*, *Grant*, *Jackson*, and *Abraham Lincoln*. Although this particular fashion has pretty well died out in other American communities during the Twentieth Century, aside from the occasional item named after J. F. Kennedy or M. L. King, Jr., it is still alive and well in and near Washington as is obvious from the labels given to so many business enterprises.

Consulting the current telephone directories for the area, I count no fewer than 289 entries within the district beginning with the word *Capitol* and 304 in the suburbs, which, of course, embrace much more population as well as territory. The tally is 162 and 338, respectively, for the term *Capital*. The census of the terms *Franklin*, *Independence*, *Hamilton*, *Jefferson*, *Lafayette*, *Lincoln*, *Madison*, *Monroe*, and *Mount Vernon* also yields respectable figures for both inner and outer areas. But the most popular name within this genre seems to be *Washington* itself, a term that does double duty by acclaiming both man and city, with a grand total of 728 in D.C. and 228 in the outlying zone.

Apart from its one-of-a-kind street-naming system and the particularly heavy emphasis on nationalistic motifs, the progress of placenames in Washington and vicinity parallels the historical pattern for the rest of the country. Starting with the adoption of a greater or lesser number of aboriginal items, in that same early period we find names transferred from Great Britain and features in the physical habitat, along with property owners and local incidents and activities being reflected in the labels attached to places. With national independence comes a feverish nationalism that has only recently abated. Then, gradually, within the past hundred years or so, the bottom-line mentality comes to the fore,

and, among other less dominant trends, we get what I call "image-mongering," the deliberate fashioning of names that will sell places (and other commodities). By trial and error, the namesmiths have worked out several usable rules, I believe not altogether consciously. As far as places, and especially real estate, are concerned, the winning formula is to appeal to the prospective purchaser's innermost longings, to promise the fulfillment of those secret daydreams. (Hence the rampant exploitation of sex currently in pushing consumer goods).

No category of placenames more beautifully exemplifies this strategy than that batch of several hundred labels identifying recent residential subdivisions in the Greater Washington area. Indeed, in scanning the New Homes Guide, I have come across a veritable gold mine of psychological data, a bonanza that calls for a hefty dissertation rather than this skimpy account. Try rolling your tongue around the following euphonious examples for flavor, and then let the vibrations bounce around the imagination for a while: *Cypress Glen at Laurel Lake, English Meadows at Crestbrook, Woodside at Beauclaire Plantation, Fairfield at Mill Pond Village, The Preserve at Burleigh Manor, The Estates at Evening Hills, The Vistas at Bowie New Town Center, Old Plank Village at Red Rose, Foxtail Glen, and The Landings at Lake Ridge.* (Incidentally, I have trouble visualizing a "lake ridge.")

Table 1 presents the result of my count of real estate generics and specifics, and could save the enterprising developer quite a bit of time and perspiration in cobbling together future word combinations. I should add that a single subdivision name may contain two or even three generic terms. Since fauna and flora figure prominently in the vocabulary of latterday subdivisions, I have tallied those specific terms as well.

Given the special cachet of the hunt culture in this region, it comes as no shock to find *fox* literally leading the pack with 19 occurrences, while following in order are: *cherry, willow, aspen, heather, hickory, holly, maple, pine, deer, hawthorn, quail, walnut, and wolf.* Please note that the only live heather in the area is to be found in the National Arboretum, but since that sweet-sounding word happens to project the correct aura, physical reality doesn't matter all that much.

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Table 1. Name Elements of Recent Subdivisions in Greater Washington, D.C.

Wood(s)	91	Chase	9	Ford	3	Crossroads	1
Estates	62	Homes	9	Highland	3	-end	1
Ridge	53	Grove	8	Port	3	Heath	1
Oaks	41	Commons	7	-shire	3	Hundred	1
Hill(s)	40	Cove	7	Vale	3	Key	1
Farm(s)	30	Croft	7	Walk	3	Kiln	1
Manor	29	Hall	7	Waterside	3	Lofts	1
Meadow(s)	28	Square	7	-burn	2	Mains	1
Park	28	Court(s)	6	City	2	Moor	1
Brook	27	Green(s)	6	Den	2	Mountain	1
Run	27	Harbor	6	Gables	2	Preserve	1
Station	21	Leigh~Lea	6	Haven	2	Property	1
Gates	19	Townhomes	6	Heights	2	Province	1
View	19	Valley	6	House	2	Quads	1
Forest	18	Vista(s)	6	Lawn	2	Reach	1
Lake	18	Bridge	5	Mews	2	Residences	1
Village	18	Overlook	5	-mont	2	Retreat	1
Glen	17	Pond	5	Moorings	2	Roads	1
Mill	16	Acres	4	Orchard	2	Shores	1
Crossing(s)	15	Edge	4	Plaza	2	Subdivision	1
Field(s)	15	Hollow	4	Ridings	2	Towers	1
Point(e)	15	-hurst	4	Adult Community	1	Township	1
Creek	14	Spring(s)	4	Arbor	1	Trail	1
Landing	14	Terrace	4	Bluff	1	Villas	1
Crest	11	Chapel	3	Cliff	1	Vineyards	1
Knoll	11	Dale	3	Corner	1	Way	1
Place	11	Downs	3	Crescents	1	World	1
Hunt	10	Fairways	3				
Town(e)	10	Falls	3				

What do these subdivision names tell us? That the world so many of us secretly lust after is a cosy, soft-focus, old-timey, pastoral never-never land where we gentlemen farmers revel in manorial plushness and consort with our aristocratic neighbors in quaint villages beside meadows, brooks, and proper forests. It is a world that reeks of chic, one with ravishing views unsullied by the grime and sweat of mere commerce or industry, the thought or sound of modern machines, or any sort of strife. To make sure you get the message, certain words are excruciatingly antiqued-up in their spelling: *towne* and *pointe*. Readers will also have noted the prevalence of the trendy preposition *at*, although an occasional *in* or *of* does creep in. Evidently only "at-ness" lifts one to the necessary level of snootiness.

We are also dealing here with a thoroughly Britishized realm, not only in the featuring of typically English or Scottish plants and animals but also in the expropriation of British placenames and the fabrication of English-sounding coinages that never existed on the other side of the Atlantic. Within the British Isles, references to things Scottish seems to be most effective, although English and Welsh items are emphatically OK. While Irish elements seldom appear in this ethnically WASPish world of words with its many non-WASP inhabitants, there is the occasional allusion to France and the Mediterranean countries, but much less frequently than in suburban California, Florida, or the Southwest. It is a rustic squirearchy without a real historical past or serious reference to the glories of Americanism. Such a romanticized name as *Sentry Ridge at Bull Run* is the rare exception. Wit or humor are in short supply, as in the rather lame *Prosperity at Dunfarmin*.

The fantasy world I am reporting for Greater Washington is not peculiar to the area. In fact, many of these subdivision names are interchangeable with their ilk in the outskirts of Hartford, Tulsa, Seattle, Atlanta, or St. Louis. But, given the rapid expansion of Washington's suburbia and an exceptional level of affluence, national trends may be further along here than in most other metropolitan areas. In any event, you have only to compare the relatively sedate, unimaginative names (*Foggy Bottom* excepted) of District neighborhoods with the more poetic effusions in Fairfax, Montgomery, and Prince Georges Counties to see what a differ-

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ence time can make. If there is any faintly local accent in the suburban subdivision names, it is in the popularity of references to horses and the hunt or the anchoring of some names to nearby highlands, streams, or lakes.

In a related category of saleable product, we have the apartment buildings and complexes of Greater Washington with their carefully crafted vocabulary. As a group, their names tend to be appreciably stuffer than those invented by the go-go-purveyors of clusters of single-family homes, but they are still of much interest. If the element of fantasy is not as obtrusive here as in the suburban dreamland, there are two sly exceptions. In 1914, a certain developer built seven apartment buildings the initial letters of whose names spell out W-A-R-D-M-A-N, while in the following decade another businessman, not to be outdone, duplicated the feat with his set of seven, the names of which yield C-A-F-R-I-T-Z.

After perusing James Goode's splendid account (*Best Addresses*) of the area's more distinguished apartment houses over a hundred-year period, I have classified the names of 159 of them as follows: References to local places or features, 33 (*Cathedral Mansion, Meridian Hill Studio, Harbour Square, etc.*); swanky British, 31 (*Chastleton, Dorchester House, Marlborough, etc.*); street addresses, 20 (1870 Wyoming, N.W., 2407 15th Street, N.W., etc.); miscellaneous pretentious, 18 (*Embassy, Majestic, Hilltop Manor, etc.*); nationalistic, 17 (*Presidential, Mayflower Hotel, Jefferson, etc.*); named after owners or family members, 14; miscellaneous, 11; North American places, 6 (*Iowa, Newport West, Toronto, etc.*); exotic places or terms, 6 (*Cairo, Netherlands, etc.*); named after architects, 2 (*Worland, Woodner*); nautical, 1 (*Moorings*).

Massaging the client's or the proprietor's ego, and perhaps imagination, is certainly an important factor in choosing names for shopping centers, country clubs, and office buildings throughout the United States. For lack of space, we must bypass these topics as well as various classes of mostly non-business enterprises, such as cemeteries, parks, schools, hospitals, public buildings, airports, military establishments, and churches. But, in fairness to the area, I must note it has its quota of churches with colorful names as well as the run-of-the-mill sort. Such items as *Zion Fair*

First Born Church of the Living God, A Touch of Glory Deliverance Center, Breath of Life Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the Church of the One Lord One Faith One Baptism Inc. would brighten the day of any namewatcher.

But the richest treasure trove for the seeker after toponymic excitement is to be found in the suburban street names and the titles of business enterprises throughout the Washington area by reason of sheer numbers and diversity. Outside the District boundary, street geometry mostly follows the developer's whim, and, as happens in virtually every suburban American community nowadays, the result is curvilinear irregularity — except where the exploding metropolis has swallowed earlier towns, such as Alexandria, Georgetown, and Laurel, which have their distinctly old-fashioned set of street names, as well as street layout.

The fact that there are close to 20,000 public thoroughfares in the Greater Washington area, not counting cemetery lanes and park paths, results in a perceptible strain on the namer's originality. Unlike the situation with personal names, you must reckon with the postal authorities and other folks who frown upon local duplication. It just won't do to have a hundred Michael Lanes or a scad of Kimberly Courts. Amidst the riotous heterogeneity of the suburban street-name cover, one familiar basic theme prevails. It is an echo of the same mind-set that generates the labels for the residential subdivision: a vocabulary projecting the same sort of pseudo-bucolic, pseudo-British ambience. Swanky English and Scottish terms and the references to lovable plants and creatures or soul-stirring landscape features are so numerous I need not cite examples. The remaining motifs are perhaps more interesting.

As mentioned earlier, there is a small scattering of streets that remind us of matters nationalistic or historical, e.g., *Freedom, Liberty, Declaration, De Soto, Magna Carta, Runnymede, Minute-man, Gifford Pinchot, Ethan Allen, and George C. Marshall*. Much rarer, regrettably, are such names as *Chopin, Sibelius, Longfellow, or Lamarck* that salute culture heroes. A few developers display their classical erudition with the likes of *Hadrian, Lysander, Tarquin, and Calpurnia*, while the Bible and Christianity are not entirely overlooked, as evidenced by such streets as *Berea, King*

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David, Notre Dame, Ascension, and Dominican. A diligent search yields a fair catch of exotic names, e.g., *Tangier, Fiji, Innsbruck, Patagonia, Lourdes, Toreador, Alhambra, and Terra Alta*, along with a few distant American localities like *Tahoe, Nantucket, Juneau, and Fargo*. The worlds of fiction and legend are rather well represented by such choices as *Macbeth, Banquo, Maid Marian, Birnam Wood, Evangeline, and Elsinore*. Streets called *Gemini, Milky Way, Andromeda, Virgo, Taurus, and Constellation* attest to the popularity of astrology and astronomy.

There is decidedly less imagination exploited in street names that are merely locational (*Fire-house, Iron Forge, Patuxent, Academy*), directional (*North Perimeter, Central, West*), functional (*Medical Terrace, Merkle Press Drive, Railroad, Volkswagen Drive*), or a sop to family members (*Claudia, Frances, Karen, Elaine*). But one naming syndrome does put Greater Washington into a class by itself: the equine theme. Thus in this horsiest of large American metropolises (Lexington, Kentucky and Ocala, Florida are at least an order of magnitude smaller) we come across no end of streets with names like *Sulky, Tackroom, War Admiral, Tally Ho, Hitching Post, Houndmaster, Side Saddle, and Light Horse*, and sometimes clustered within particular neighborhoods. Although the suburbs lack numerical and alphabetical series or thematic clusters on anything like the scale observable in D.C., there are some minor examples. In Prince Georges County, *Forest Knolls* has its presidential sequence (*Washington through Monroe*), *Tantallon* features Scottish street names, and Arthurian items prevail in *Fort Foote Village*. Some neighborhood clusters within Bowie-Belair are alphabetically keyed, so that thirteen streets in Idlewild begin with the letter I, while the Ks dominate Kenilworth, the Rs Rockledge, and so on. Finally, an intriguing residue of names defy immediate explanation and invite local sleuthing: *Contention Lane, Deference, Legato, Generation, Brevity, Concerto, Percussion Way, Pollen, Subtle, Suede, Quid, Ad Hoc, Baritone, Crooked Crow*.

I have saved for last my favorite species of street names — those in the poetic vein. Coinages such as *Woodsong, Angel Wing, Elfin, Daybreak, or Autumn Leaf* speak to the imagination. But for sheer toponymic rapture I prescribe the map of Columbia, Maryland. Although this ambitiously planned town is nationally

renowned for other reasons, I maintain that its unique claim to fame is its array of street names, easily the most imaginative in America. Many of the individual names are gem-like mini-haiku and truly inspired: *Springing Step*, *Sleep Soft Circle*, *Sealed Message Court*, *Moon Portrait Way*, *Mossy Brink*, *Wind Dance Way*, *Deep Calm*, *Moon Gong Court*, *Perfect Hour*, *Opal Chain*, *Silver Sod*, *Sleeping Dog Lane*.

There is also a pattern here, at least within most of Columbia's neighborhoods and it is literature American-style with bows to a number of our better novelists and poets. In addition to the isolated *Barefoot Boy* and *Mending Wall* and other scattered tributes to Frost, Longfellow, Thoreau, Robinson Jeffers, Faulkner, and Wallace Stevens, entire neighborhoods are dedicated to Mark Twain (*Hannibal Grove*, *Log Raft*, *Sternwheel Place*, etc.) and Ernest Hemingway (*Farewell Road*, *Brett Lane*, *Macomber Lane*, *Old Man*, *Torrent Row*, *Big River Run*, *Afternoon Lane*, *Pilar Court*, etc.).

Before reluctantly leaving the wonderful world of suburban street names, I should point out the diversity in generic as well as specific terms. Outnumbering the staid old *streets* and *avenues* prevailing within the District are such with-it terms as *Circle*, *Court*, *Crescent*, *Garth*, *Lane*, *Mews*, *Place*, and *Way*.

We may not be accustomed to thinking of them in that way, but commercial establishments and other business enterprises can be just as "placy" as islands, boulevards, parks, or villages. Their names are almost beyond counting, and as yet academicians have scarcely noticed them. What follows, then, is a trek into terra incognita. It is certainly a populous territory in Greater Washington and elsewhere. During the single week of June 5, 1989, 117 new businesses were incorporated in this metropolitan area (and who knows how many unincorporated ventures opened their doors?). At that rate, the annual total would top 6,000, although, of course, many corporations would fall by the wayside in the course of a year. Obviously, the need for individuality, and thus originality, in names is urgent for both legal and economic reasons, and a good deal more pressing than uniqueness among personal monikers or even real estate-related items.

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Although the great majority of businesses hunger after recognition and attention, and thus indirectly a healthier cash intake, via their names as well as other tactics, a notable minority does not crave notoriety and/or makes their existence known by rather discreet means. In fact, recent times have witnessed a horde of companies opaquely identified by means of acronyms. The uninitiated can only guess what activities lurk behind the initials, the verbal equivalent of smoked glasses.

Clearly the sorts of names chosen for businesses vary considerably from one class of activity to another. In fact we can assume the existence of a specific naming code for each group of enterprises, even though it may be unwritten and largely subconscious. At the soberest end of the name spectrum we have such things, for example, as banks, the repertory for which is limited to a few boring adjectives and the names of their municipality or neighborhood. Even more buttoned-down is the usage for accountants, dentists, architects, and embalmers, who almost invariably use nothing other than the proprietor's own name. Personal names also tend to dominate on the shingles hung out by barbers, physicians, funeral directors, auto dealerships, engineers, electrical contractors, art galleries, and advertising agencies, among other businesses.

Moving toward the other extreme, we encounter immense variety, whimsy, and even outlandishness in the names adopted by boutiques, beauty salons, bookshops, antique dealers, balloon merchandising, and drinking places. The nature of the product or service can combine with the pressure of competition to make toponymic pizzazz almost mandatory. One common strategy is to coin neologisms. Some examples approach terminal cuteness: *Promotivations*, *Beautorium*, *Fudgery*, *Computhink*, *Shenanigrams*, *Cellufone*, and *Premaman* (maternity apparel). Or the names can strain for other types of cleverness. Included within this tribe are: *Last Tangle in Washington* (barber shop, of course), *Penultimate* (calligraphers), *A Head of Our Time* (beauty salon), *Forgotten Woman of Washington DC* (apparel), *Barbarian Book Shop*, *Oscar Taylor's Upper Crust Bakery*, *Delta Hair Lines*, and *Sew Divine* (dressmakers). Occasionally the name is so far out it provides no clue as to what is being offered, as in *Stone Age Enterprises*

(advertising), *Toast & Strawberries* (dressmakers), *Sneak Attack* (party planning), and *South Moon Under* (women's apparel).

The cognoscenti may be won over by allusion to items literary or theatrical. Thus Washington has its *Red Balloon* (children's wear), *Pied Piper Pest Control, Inc.*, *The Third Day* (plants), *Great Expectations* (dating service), *Rosebud Antiques* (if you need to have this explained, you are definitely out of the loop), *Mustard Seed* (books), and *Lamda Rising Bookstore*. On the other hand, would anyone familiar with Stephen Sondheim's great musical really wish to patronize *Sweeney Todd Unisex Hair Design*? In the same ballpark, we run across the occasional business with a label that would do a poet proud: *Ministering Angels Book Store*, *Moon Blossoms & Snow, Inc.* (women's apparel), *Pewter Chalice* (antiques), *Myth & Magic for Hair & Nails*.

The single business category with the broadest range of naming styles may well be restaurants, the number of which seems to be expanding exponentially in our major metropolises. Some are content to be known only by address or by name of proprietor or neighborhood. So many others, of course, are clones of a multinational franchise firm and are so designated. And then we have that burgeoning swarm of eating places featuring ethnic and regional cuisines. It is essential for them to announce their specialness to prospective diners. And that can be done by a variety of linguistic ploys, including an appropriate word or phrase from the language in question, the name of a thematic dish, or, most frequently, an exotic placename. Washington and vicinity abounds with dining places carrying such names as *Khyber Pass*, *Manila*, *New Orleans*, *Trieste*, *Alamo*, *Firenze*, *Caribe*, *Berlin*, *Addis Ababa*, *Belgrade*, *Marrakesh*, *Katmandu*, *Shanghai*, and *Dubliner*. It takes minimal geographical sophistication to imagine the menu.

Many other, mostly nonethnic, eateries feel obliged to resort to cuteness. The names can range from the merely roguish and marginally clever to the stomach-turning, as you can judge from the following sample: *Poseurs*, *Starvin Marvin*, *Bullfeathers*, *Hung Jury*, *Generous George's Positive Pizza Place*, *Impostors*, *Skin Flints*, *You Never Sausage A Place*, *Yankee Noodle Dandy*, *Madhatter*, *Flying Fruit Fantasy*, *Apple of Eve*, *Joint Committee*, *Anton's Loyal Opposition*, and *The Buck Stops Here*. But to this

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list I must add, finally, the restaurants with the wistfully poetic names, such as *Passage to India*, *Childe Harold*, and *Dove & Rainbow*.

All I can say in taking leave of the reader is that I have merely skimmed and bobbed across the surface of a vast and varied universe of local placenames, and one that is forever changing. Much remains to be discovered, and the basic equipment is nothing fancier than a set of attentive eyes and ears.

Pennsylvania State University

Work Cited

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