Names for Delaware

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In the year 1776 the strip of territory along the west bank of Delaware Bay and River now known as the State of Delaware emerged from colonialism. Before that time it had had various names, but for one reason or another no name had been generally adopted. To judge by the inquiries I have received about these early names, they are a matter of considerable interest to many people, as well as a matter about which a certain amount of misinformation persists. To clear up whatever confusion there may still be, and to make readily available an account of how a land area of some 2000 square miles achieved a distinctive name, the following paragraphs are presented.

Indian names for what is now Delaware, if there were any, did not find their way into the records. A reputed Lenape name for eastern Pennsylvania was *Winakaking* 'sassafras land'[1] and Delaware may have been part of the area so designated, although this is by no means certain. Perhaps the explanation for the scarcity of aboriginal names for land areas like Delaware is that the Indians were more inclined to name individual features such as rivers, islands, headlands, and waterfalls than large geographical areas.

The first European settlers on the Delaware River were Dutch. Having carved out for themselves a section of the continent which they called New Netherland (*Nieu Nederland, Nova Belgica, Nova Batavia*), and having established a seat of government in New Amsterdam, the Dutch usually referred to that part of their territory in which we are interested as the South River (*Zuyd Rivier*) of New Netherland, or simply the South River, in order to distinguish it from their other large river to the north (i.e., the Hudson, or North River).

The usual Swedish name for the area along the west bank of the

Delaware was New Sweden (*Nya Swerige, Nova Suecia*), but the Swedes sometimes added a phrase like *in India Occidentali* 'in the West Indies' to indicate the general location of their colony. The name "West Indies," as is generally known, used to be applied to continental America—not merely to a group of islands off the coast. More frequently, however, "Florida" was the term of identification, and men spoke of the South River of Florida, and of those interested in trade in this area as the Swedish Florida Company. This made sense at that time because "Florida" was then the name for a large section of the continent, which could be thought of as containing New Sweden.

As far as the English were concerned, the Dutch and the Swedes occupied the territory along the Delaware merely on sufferance. It was part of Virginia, or North Virginia, and had been since the time of Sir Walter Raleigh's grant.[2] But even the Dutch and the Swedes used "Virginia" as a term of geographical convenience. Thus we find references to Delaware Bay in Virginia, to Swedish Virginia, to New Sweden in Virginia, etc.[3] Lord Baltimore's patent of 1632 for territory extending "unto that part of the bay of Delaware on the north which lieth under the fortieth degree of north latitude" introduced a complicating factor, for he was disposed to consider the land bordering the west side of Delaware Bay and River his, and to include it under the name "Maryland." What he did not consider a part of Cecil County he set up as a separate county, for which the name "Durham" was first proposed, but which became, in the end, the county of Worcester.[4]

In 1634 there was granted to Sir Edmund Plowden, by Irish patent, the territory between New England on the north and Maryland on the south. For this sizable "plantation" was chosen that most musical of names: "New Albion." Just how far south New Albion was supposed to extend is uncertain. Most writers on the subject agree that at least some of Delaware was included.[5] Plowden and his supporters pushed the line as far down as they thought the law might allow, with the result that all of Delaware came within their bounds. But Baltimore's grant was clearly in conflict. When all is said and done, the question is a thoroughly academic one, since Plowden never succeeded in his efforts to occupy the territory. "New Albion" is consequently no more than a ghost name.

With full English control of the Delaware from 1664 on (except for a brief Dutch interlude in 1673–4), a new trend in names for the territory along the west bank is to be looked for. Instead of being a part of New Netherland, as the Dutch considered it, it then became part of the "Territories in America" of the Duke of York and was often included under such general terms as "the Duke's of York dominions in America" and "New York and dependencies";[6] but it was most frequently referred to by means of the name "Delaware"—which had been applied years before, as a geographical name, by the Virginians[7]—in phrases like "at Delaware Bay," "in Delaware Bay & Delaware River," "in Delaware River," "at Delaware," etc.[8] Thus, for example, we are likely to find, in documents of the period, reference to an event taking place "at Delaware," or to a journey that someone was making "to Delaware," or to a letter that had been received "from Delaware"; but we must not jump to the conclusion that the "Delaware" of that period equals the "Delaware" of today. "Delaware" then meant land along the whole stretch of the bay and river and thus indicated part of Pennsylvania as well as the lands now comprising the State of Delaware,[9] and it could also mean those parts of New Jersey along the eastern "shore," even if specific references to "the Delaware Colony," or "the Delaware Plantation," usually excluded the Jerseys.[10] This is an example of the time-honored practice of referring to a river valley by the name of the river which drains it. (The Dutch had used the name "South River" in the same way.) Not that this practice was without influence later on when the state was officially named, but for the period with which we are concerned it must be realized that "Delaware" was not strictly applied, as a territorial name, to the narrow strip along the west bank of the bay and river below Marcus Hook. The development is perhaps in that direction, but the tale is not done.

In 1671 the town of New Castle—or Delaware Town, as it came to be called—was made the center of authority for the whole river. It is not surprising, therefore, to find references to "the towne of New Castle, otherwise called Delaware," "the town of New Castle in Delaware River and dependences," "the Towne and Jurisdiction of New Castell," "the Towne or River of delowar," "the Towne of New Castle, and Plantations in Delaware River," "the Towne, and

all Plantations upon Delaware River," "New Castle and other parts in Delaware River," etc.[11] Here again we have designations for the territories up and down and across[12] the river, and not for the state as it is now constituted.

With the arrival of William Penn in 1682, the west bank of the Delaware—the Province of Pennsylvania—began to govern itself, as it had not done since the days of Swedish sovereignty. The tendency for those at the center of things, in Philadelphia, was to think of the strip from the mouth of the bay (and beyond) to the point where New Castle's twelve-mile circle intersected the river, as the lower part of Penn's province—an appendage. The records of the period are thus full of such appellatives for Delaware as the following: "the Lower Countyes," "the Three lower Counties," "[the Province of Pennsylvania and] Parts adjacent," "the lower Pensilvania," "the Province of Delaware," "[the Province of Pennsilvania &] Territories thereunto Belonging," "the three Lower Counties on Delaware," "Pensilvania Colonies," "the Territory of Pensland," "[our province of Pensilvania and] country of Delaware" (once shortened to "[Pensilvania and] Delaware"), "the Three Lower Counties, Newcastle, Jones's, and New Deal," "the three Lower Countys of New Castle, Kent and Sussex," "the Town and Tract of Newcastle, and the Two lower Counties upon the river Delaware," "[Pensilvania, and] territories annexed," "the . . . Countrey of New Castle," "the Government of the Counties of New-Castle, Kent and Sussex (up)on Delaware," etc.[13] These names, though adequate for the purposes of communication, were almost all cumbersome to use and at the same time humiliating to the inhabitants of the sector so designated.

The story of the mounting dissatisfaction of the counties of New Castle, Kent, and Sussex with the treatment they received as part of the Province of Pennsylvania, and of the gradual pulling away of the lower counties from the upper, need not be recounted here. It is enough to say that, no matter how strong the feeling of independence was, it did not effect, during the years before the Revolution, the widespread adoption of a distinctive name for the dissenting counties. Occasional use in this period, however, of such names as "Province of Delaware" or "country of Delaware" may perhaps be considered a straw in the wind. When 1776 came, the political

leaders in New Castle, Kent, and Sussex framed for their territory a constitution in which the area to be governed was called "the Delaware State." This name stood until the constitution of 1792 became effective. From that time on the counties of New Castle, Kent, and Sussex have been called "the State of Delaware."

In a journal entry for August 28, 1610, Samuel Argall referred to the cape "in thirtie-eight degrees twenty minutes of northerly latitude" as "Cape La Warr," a name given in honor of the Governor of Virginia, Lord de la Warr.[14] This governor's name was applied, by transfer, first to the river and bay whose entrance is marked by the cape (at least as early as 1621[15]), then to the river valley (in 1664), then in the 1670's to the town of New Castle, then (on occasion) to the counties which withdrew from Pennsylvania near the turn of the century, and finally—one hundred and sixty-six years after the date of the first recorded use of the name—to these counties as they came to constitute an independent political unit.

Territory and name were at last united. There is no prospect of divorce.

NOTES

[1] D. G. Brinton, *The Lenape and their Legends* (Philadelphia, 1885), p. 232; but cf. *Walam Olum* (Indiana Historical Society, 1954), p. 173.

[2] See, for example, *New York Colonial Documents* (Albany, 1853), III, 16.

[3] References to the examples cited are as follows: *Maryland Archives,* III, 21; *New York Colonial Documents,* XII, 47; Thomas Campanius, *A Short Description of the Province of New Sweden,* tr. Du Ponceau (Philadelphia, 1834), pp. 15, 71.

[4] *Maryland Archives,* V, 56, 57, 108–9, 547.

[5] See, for example, *William and Mary Quarterly,* 2nd series, XX, 70.

[6] *Record of Upland Court,* ed. Armstrong (Philadelphia, 1860), p. 36; *New York Colonial Documents,* XII, 530; *Records of the Court of New Castle* (Meadville, Pa., 1935), II, 56.

[7] See the second last paragraph of this paper, and footnote 15.

[8] References to the examples cited are as follows: *New York Colonial Documents,* III, 70; *The Duke of York Record* (Wilmington, Del., 1903), p. 23; *Record of Upland Court,* p. 46; *The Duke of York Record,* p. 24.

[9] It goes without saying that this use of the name "Delaware" for areas all up and down the river has made for a good deal of confusion. For instance, tracts of land "in Delaware," which the unwary often assume to be in the State of Delaware, may prove to be in Pennsylvania or New Jersey instead (*New York Colonial Documents,* XII, 547–52; *The Duke of York Record,* pp. 125–6; etc.)

[10] *New Jersey Archives,* 1st series, I, 51, 114 ff.; *Maryland Archives,* II, 528; *New York Colonial Documents,* III, 237, 239.

[11] References to the examples cited are as follows: *Pennsylvania Archives,* 1st series, I, 52; *New York Colonial Documents,* XII, 514; *Records of the Court of New Castle,* I, 3; *ibid.,* I, 63; *Minutes of the Executive Council of the Province of New York,* ed. Paltsits (Albany, 1910), II, 562; *ibid.,* II, 670; *ibid.,* II, 674–5.

[12] For evidence that the authorities on the western bank had jurisdiction over set-

tlements on the eastern bank see *Records of the Court of New Castle,* I, 37, 161, etc., and cf. *Record of Upland Court,* p. 80.

[13] References to the examples cited are as follows: *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1852), I, 104; C. H. B. Turner, *Some Records of Sussex County, Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1909), p. 294; *Pennsylvania Archives,* 8th series, I, 5–6; *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* LIV, 253; Penn Manuscripts, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, vol. XV, item 211; *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, loc. cit.;* Turner, *op. cit.,* p. 187; *New York Colonial Documents,* III, 622; *Pennsylvania Archives,* 2nd series, VII, 342; *New York Colonial Documents,* III, 536 and 537; *Pennsylvania Archives,* 8th series, I, 5; *Calendar of State Papers, 1702–3,* p. 509; *State of New Jersey v. State of Delaware* (U. S. Supreme Court, No. 19 Original, October Term, 1929), Defendant's Exhibit 625, p. 2; *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania,* I, 57; *New York Colonial Documents,* III, 835; *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Government of the Counties of New Castle, Kent and Sussex, upon Delaware* (Wilmington, 1770), passim, but especially p. 38.

[14] *Hakluytus Posthumus,* or *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow, 1906), XIX, 84; cf. J. R. Brodhead, *History of the State of New York* (New York, 1853), I, 51, 753–4, and Amandus Johnson, *Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* (New York, 1911), I, 167.

[15] *The Records of the Virginia Company of London,* ed. Kingsbury (Washington, 1906), I, 504.

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Kentucky Folklore Record is the name of a new quarterly published by the Kentucky Folklore Society (founded 1912). D. K. Wilgus, Western Kentucky State College, Bowling Green, Kentucky, is the editor of the journal.

Indian Tribes and Place Names.—In Bulletin 9 of the Archeological Society of New Jersey, our charter member and contributor, C. A. Weslager, published an interesting and thorough article, "Robert Evelyn's Indian Tribes and Place-Names of New Albion."

The Colorado Magazine of July and October, 1955, contains an excellent contribution to the cartographical history of Colorado by our charter member, Levette J. Davidson.