Unreal Estate: Words, Names and Allusions in Suburban Home Advertising

Darrell A. Norris
State University of New York, Geneseo

Suburban subdivision naming practices are a revealing branch of toponymic study. However, cultural geographers have neither fully tapped these names in the landscape nor explored the parallel vocabulary of expression and emphasis in real estate advertising. Here I consider the allusions conveyed by the names of residential developments advertised in metropolitan Rochester, New York. A taxonomy of allusions shows how nomenclature had come to transcend the pastoral gentry theme typical of previous and mostly impressionistic writing on expressions of the suburban ideal. Selling this ideal goes beyond the charm of subdivision names. Classified advertising of resale homes fixes them in social and lifestyle space. The undercurrents of meaning of advertised features of lots and yards are also investigated. Subdivision names may and often do fade from general usage. In their absence, real estate advertising furnishes a kind of place identity and context for suburban settings.

Introduction

Two primary sets of images of the American suburban ideal can be drawn from the word elements employed in real estate advertising. The first image draws from the font of evocative names assigned to new single-family residential subdivision developments. These names impart place identity to a world which now houses the majority of the American population, a world often castigated for its "placeless" atmosphere. The names also comprise a vocabulary readily understood by potential homebuyers and just as readily (if not very creatively) supplied by developers and builders. The lexicon of suburban toponyms seems to be drawn from a narrow range of allusions which exploit Americans' nostalgic attraction to a pastoral idyllic landscape and to status typical

Names 47.4 (December 1999):365-380
ISSN:0027-7738

of a landed gentry rooted in some mythic mid-Atlantic past. Here I expand and qualify that perception, distinguishing the role played by natural environmental allusions from the messages conveyed by elements evoking an agrarian past, country gentry, *rus in urbe*, or more specific identities based on borrowed place names and family names.

The second image offers a more precise picture, one based on elements of the garden or yard as a principal feature of suburban identity and real estate advertising. Analysis of real estate classified advertising for single-family homes shows substantial differences in emphasis of garden-yard features. These differences reveal a spectrum of suburban settings much more varied and fine-grained than the span of imagery conveyed by subdivision development names. In effect, the home resale market uses an argot which invites and steers potential customers based on real constraints of price, status, and lifestyle, whereas the naming of subdivisions cultivates more embracing images that are partly (but not wholly) detached from more prosaic concerns of class, income, price, and the sectoral and center-fringe patterns of new single-family housing developments.

Both perspectives considered here are based on examples from Rochester, New York. With over one million residents, metropolitan Rochester typically advertises at any one time close to 150 named and advertised subdivisions and several thousand resale homes. Data for this analysis were drawn from the weekly home/real estate newspaper supplement and from free distribution real estate guides for Rochester in 1990-1991 and 1996. The results suggest further work in other and older housing markets to extract the geographical, chronological, and contextual diversity in the way words and names have been used to confer identity in American suburban settings.

Names and the American Suburb

A recent appraisal of the American-built landscape comments on our penchant for untruth in advertising in the naming of suburban housing developments:

> You could name a housing development Forest Knoll Acres even if there was no forest and no knoll, and the customers would line up with their checkbooks open. Americans were as addicted to illusion as they

> were to cheap petroleum.... They didn't care if things were real or not, if ideas were truthful. In fact, they preferred fantasy. They preferred lies. And the biggest lie of all was that the place they lived was *home*. (Kunstler 1993, 169)

Although this passage reflects Kunstler's attraction to hyperbole, giving places appealing or even intentionally deceptive names for some promotional purpose is an old practice, and not a distinctly American one. Nonetheless, the sheer scale of American suburban expansion has provided fertile soil for all sorts of new names, some of them generic terms (Clay 1994), others aimed at conferring place identity. Given cultural geography's concerns with sense of place (Relph 1976) and landscape imprints of culture, one might expect a large body of writings on suburban nomenclature and its meaning. Few exist, however, and these are generally quite limited since they are mostly impressionistic and apt to cite suburban names simply as evidence of American nostalgia for a rural ideal (Tuan 1974, 237; Zelinsky 1992, 167).

Works centered on American suburbanization have been equally mute on the question of naming practices (e.g., K. Jackson 1985; Muller 1976). Yet the names of subdivisions, streets, home models, and other features of the suburban landscape all afford opportunities for targeted expression of cultural symbols with meanings shared, understood, and accepted by both their authors and their readers (Entrikin 1991, 56).

Perhaps the neglect of suburban toponymy reflects traditions of scholarship in American place name analysis that do not readily transfer to practices and patterns of suburban nomenclature. American toponymic analysis has usually studied common name elements distributed in large numbers over broad areas, usually as traces of the migration and of the settlement of distinctive groups within American society (Detro 1982) and less commonly as evidence of popular cultural trends (Zelinsky 1955; 1967; 1990). Emphasis on distribution also characterizes the historical-geographical approach of British toponomists, who consider especially the names of early village settlements. Although interpreting the space-time patterning of distinct and numerous key generic terms was characteristic of much place name analysis, it was not well-suited to the name geography of suburbs in the United States. Complicating the situation is the fact that suburban subdivision names are locally known and (sometimes) signposted, but they are not usually shown on topographic or commercially produced maps. Their visibility (and also their

practical importance) is greatest during the period when the subdivision is new and actively advertised. Mapping types of subdivision names presupposes a useful typology, but subdivision names routinely include multiple elements, proper nouns and common nouns or adjectives that aren't very common. The point, after all, is to seem attractive and distinctive, if not necessarily concise. *Cranberry Ponds Highlands Estates* or the *Highlands at Brandon Woods,* both 1996 developments in metropolitan Rochester, seem at once evocative treasure troves and taxonomic nightmares.

In three related articles published between 1959 and 1961, Arthur Minton (1959; 1961) assessed the nomenclature of the real estate development names of metropolitan New York as found on municipal tax maps and tax arrears records for earlier years and in the *New York Times* real estate advertising sections in 1950-51. Minton's findings are of considerable interest not only because they touch on most of the sources of semantic allusion discussed here, but also because they show that the relative incidence of toponymic allusions associated with suburban tracts in the 1920s or earlier differed from that of the immediate post-World War II era, which in turn differed from that of the 1980s and 1990s in Rochester. Minton found, for instance, that the terms *villa(s)*, *plaza*, and *lawn(s)*, originally among the ten most common name elements, had fallen into general disuse by 1950-51. The once-dominant *park* had slipped to third place after *home(s)* and *estate(s)*. Minton attributed the early 1950s predilection for subdivision names incorporating *home(s)* to the wave of "ranch home" construction and associated advertising which was then current. He also noted the emergence of *acres* and *village* as increasingly common terms. Nearly a half century later—with hindsight—we can see that the semantic freight carried by *home* did not allow it to survive past the first great waves of post-war suburban naming (although, of course, the continued use of the word in magazine titles, mega-hardware and do-it-yourself store promotion, and other contexts is self-evident). The early 1950s emergence of *acres* and *village* is echoed by their incidence and also that of other name elements discussed here. What was understandably missing, however, from Minton's appraisal was a sense of the sheer magnitude to which environmental and/or rustic allusions would come to characterize suburban toponymic practice as sprawl proceeded in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

In what appears to be the only detailed published assessment since Minton's of subdivision development name elements, Wilbur Zelinsky (1993) drew on a *New Homes Guide for Greater Washington, D.C.*, and reported the frequency of 112 generic terms. The tally appears to have included some townhouse and condominium or apartment developments as well as detached single-family home subdivisions. His results are partially reported in table 1 with comparable findings for independent studies conducted in Rochester and Albany, NY. Zelinsky comments on the Washington results:

> 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. (1993, 353)

This assessment stresses pastoral imagery and nostalgia interwoven with evocation of a landed gentry in secure communities. The promise is apparently that of the garden without the machine (Marx 1964) and the "small-scale society where happiness comes from conformity to a generally accepted set of traditions and not from the pursuit of individual freedom" (J. Jackson 1961).

But perhaps some caution is warranted. Although Washington, Rochester, and Albany subdivisions are apt to be "estates near wooded hills and brookside meadows," there are also differences in the subdivision nomenclature of the three settings. Washington homebuyers, for example, are more likely to get a "run" for their money, while Rochesterians are more apt to be along (and perhaps even up) the "creek" (table 1). Babbling "brooks," steeped in New England and English associations, are common to subdivision naming in all three metropolitan areas despite a very different geography of early American usage (Zelinsky 1955). Some discrepancies in table 1 are hard to explain at first glance. Why, for example, are Rochester housing developments more likely to exhibit polite "manors?" Are Washington's "stations" merely exploiting the allure of mass transit accessibility, or are antiquity and status somehow part of the message? And why, in relative terms, should there be fewer suburban "villages" in Washington than in Rochester or Albany? Moreover, why should otherwise edenic Washington lack "gardens" and reasonably rural Upstate New York lack "farms?"

Table 1. Frequencies of Unclassified Name Elements in Undifferentiated Subdivisions

	Washington[a]		Rochester[b]		Albany[c]	
Element	N	Rank	N	Rank	N	Rank
Wood(s)	91	1	31	3	28	2
Estates	62	2	33	1	32	1
Ridge	53	3	9	11	10	5
Oak(s)	41	4	5	18	3	19
Hill(s)	40	5	22	4	25	3
Farm(s)	30	6	3	-	-	-
Manor	29	7	32	2	6	10
Meadow(s)	28	8	20	5	10	6
Park	28	9	12	9	8	7
Brook	27	10	14	7	7	8
Run	27	11	-	-	-	-
Station	21	12	-	-	-	-
Village	18	16	15	6	17	4
Creek	14	23	13	8	1	-
Garden(s)	-	-	11	10	3	19
Square	7	35	5	18	7	9
Crest	11	25	6	15	6	11
Lake	18	16	9	11	5	12
Court	6	41	8	13	5	13

[a]Zelinsky (1993).

[b]Norris (1991).

[c]Torchia (1991).

These kinds of differences partly relate, I am sure, to quirks of local usage. But a more important factor is that all three studies reported in table 1 included named subdivisions that did not necessarily consist of single-family detached homes. Furthermore, naming practices for medium to high density residential developments definitely differ from those for more spacious homeowner suburbs (table 2). Higher density developments are apt to incorporate the generic elements *manor, court, village* or *gardens,* making the most of architectural unity, density, and lack of private yard space. The sheer repetition of these name elements

for Rochester's apartment complexes accounts for the "country" atmosphere they seem to convey in table 2. Single-family subdivisions are more apt to be *estates* and if this spacious, rural, proprietorial element is absent it is most likely to be supplanted by an element which evokes the natural environment (table 2), the point being that single name elements as they are reported in table 1 may actually obscure tactics of allusion which draw on clusters of words conveying the same or at least very similar images. To what extent, for example, do the elements "ridge," "crest" and "hill(s)" convey much the same meaning to potential homebuyers and how much of that meaning embodies elements of status as well as an implied view?

Table 2. Name Allusions and Types of Advertised Real Estate. Rochester, 1990-91.

		Natural Environment		Rural Landscape, Country Gentry, *Rus in Urbe*		Places, People		Other	
	Total N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single Family Subdivisions	295	153	51.9	79	26.8	31	10.5	32	10.8
Apartment Complexes	199	67	33.7	82	41.2	23	11.5	27	13.6
Townhouses	78	37	47.4	14	18.0	17	21.8	10	12.8
Model Homes	35	8	22.9	2	5.7	23	65.7	2	5.7

Source: Home/Real Estate Supplements, Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*. July 1990-March 1991.

Briefly revisiting Kunstler's example of intentional hype in development naming, we can sense the archaism of *Forest Knoll Acres* (1993, 169). In 1991 there were just four *acres* in Washington and one each in Rochester and Albany. In 1996 no Rochester subdivision developments used the word. Kunstler was probably and unconsciously reviving real estate argot typical of the 1950s and early 1960s. And although "acres" directly addresses an American predilection for land it is surely not a name element which evokes a past pastoral Arcadia. As cleartext, did "acres" simply signify subdivisions with exceptionally large lots and expensive homes? Probably not. As the naming of

American suburbs has evolved since the early years of this century the shades of allusion and meaning have changed as potential homeowner values and aspirations have responded to overlapping esthetic, romantic, nostalgic, natural, elitist, ideological, pragmatic and doubtless other stimuli in their selection of what is to become place and home. (As a conservative estimate the United States now has a half million named suburban subdivisions and is annually adding at least 25 thousand new developments to this total. This new namescape matches in scale and cultural meaning the appropriation and naming of the American rural landscape up until the early twentieth century, making the paucity of work on American suburban toponymy all the more remarkable.)

New Rochester Subdivisions, 1996

In revisiting Rochester's real estate development naming practices after a five-year hiatus, I made two key changes in approach. First, I confined my study to single-family home subdivisions. Apartment, townhouse, and condominium projects were excluded because the sample of new medium or high-density housing projects was very small and because the toponymic vocabulary of these projects differed from the lexicon of detached home suburbs. I also developed categories of toponymic allusions to which single elements could be assigned, forming sensible groupings and composite totals (table 3). My main objective was to distinguish those elements which alluded to the natural environment from those which reflected human imprint on the environment. We cannot, it seems to me, assume that a toponymic reference to a natural feature necessarily evokes a disposition toward the pastoral; indeed, it seems at least equally likely that the natural environmental elements in subdivision names may intend to evoke sentiments which owe more to low-key environmentalism than to any dimly articulated but more active compact of humanity and nature.

The imprint of humanity on the environment is expressed in three different ways in subdivision naming (table 3). Some elements recapture the specific built and planted features of the rural landscape or celebrate its antiquity. Other elements evoke landscape features freighted with allusions of status in the countryside or (*rus in urbe*) a legacy rooted in the squares of eighteenth-century London's West End or in Bath's serpentine crescents. The third human imprint reflected in subdivision naming is the borrowed identity of other places or a place-person identity apt (most often) to perpetuate the former farm owner's name.

Table 3. Name Elements and Allusions in New Single-Family Home Subdivisions.*

Total N=146	N	%	
The Natural Environment	146	50.7	
Seasons and Elements	8	2.8	Autumn (3), Whispering (2), Wind, Sunrise, Breeze
Surface Geology	8	2.8	Stone (6), Drumlin, Cobblestone
Riverine Features	19	6.6	Creek (8), Brook (4), Run (4), River, Lake, Pond
Shoreline Features	15	5.2	Landing (3), Point (3), Bay (2), Cliff (2), Bluffs (2)
Elevated Terrain	34	11.8	Hill(s) (11), Heights (5), View (4), Ridge (4), Crest (2), Highlands (2)
Secluded Terrain	7	2.4	Valley (3), Glen (2), Hollow, Vale
Wooded Terrain	22	7.6	Wood(s) (17), Chase (2), Grove, Sylvan, Arbor
Trees, Plants, Animals	33	11.5	Pine (4), Hickory (2), Cherry (2), Trees (10), Plants (6), Animals (9)
The Rural Landscape	44	15.3	
Landscape Features	35	11.5	Meadow (11), Farm(s) (4), Orchard(s) (3), Hedge(s) (3), Commons (2), Country (2), Trail (2), Shire (2)
Antiquity	3	1.0	Centennial, Heritage, Legends
Built Legacy	6	2.1	Village (3), Corners, Mill, Station
Country Gentry, *Rus in Urbe*	50	17.4	
Proprietary	24	8.3	Estate (20), Manor (3), Preserve
Landscape Design	10	3.5	Park (8), Garden (2)
Streetscape	6	2.1	Court (3), Place, Square, Crescent
Architecture	4	1.4	Regency, Villas, Carriage House, Roman
Status	4	1.4	Images, Place One, Royal, Country Club
Urban Allusions	2	.7	Town, Boro
People and Place Identities	38	13.2	
Place Names	19	6.6	British (11), Colonial (4)
Native American	2	.7	Indian, Cherokee
Other Elements	10	3.5	
Cardinal Directions	7	2.4	
Positive Adjectives	3	1.0	Crystal, Crimson, Silver

*Based on 147 advertised subdivisions in metropolitan Rochester.

Source: Real Estate/Home sections of the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle,* 28 September through 2 November, 1996 and from free distribution home guides for the same period.

More than half of the 288 name elements used in Rochester's 1996 home subdivisions evoked the natural environment. Allusions to elevated terrain were common, perhaps because they double as a suggestion of social standing, which *hollows, valleys,* and *vales* apparently do not. Wooded terrain was a common allusion, just as it was in 1990-91. Stream name elements remained popular, and *run* had apparently made its way north into the Rochester developer's lexicon. Fauna and flora were important sources of natural environmental allusion and 1996 seemed to be more varied in this respect than 1990-91, viz. *buttonwood, sycamore, rosewood, hickory, cranberry, colt, wren,* and *quail.*

Among a wide range of rural landscape allusions only *meadow* stands out as a common element. The ranks of *villages* had thinned since 1990-91 because multi-family structures were not included in the analysis. For the same reason *manors* diminished from 32 instances in 1990-91 to just three in 1996. The country gentry ideals were still most commonly evoked by the word *estate,* but that readily grasped and overused word was less common and probably less impressive than it was previously. Developers seemed to be experimenting with quite extraordinary status allusions. Indeed, living in *Images* or *Place One* seems less suited to landed gentry status than to the everywhere-nowhere of the Information Age.

In 1990-91 more than two dozen Rochester subdivisions evoked British place names and a dozen more drew on Colonial American roots. Both practices were less common in 1996, but surname borrowing had increased. Specific place-people identities comprised 13% of all name elements and occurred in one quarter of all named subdivisions.

Geographical Variation

Property values are generally higher on metropolitan Rochester's east side and highest in the urban area's southeastern suburbs, most notably the towns of Pittsford and Mendon. The Xerox Corporation is located in Rochester's northwestern suburban quadrant. Eastman Kodak's larger and older industrial presence characterizes Rochester's northwest quadrant, and modestly priced family-oriented subdivisions in this part of the metropolitan area perpetuate a pattern that began in the post-World War II era. Rochester's southwestern quadrant is also an area of modestly priced and quite varied housing, owing largely to a mixture of non-residential uses which include the airport, commercial-industrial complexes, and three campuses.

These four quadrants exhibit similarities and differences of toponym incidence related to their physiographic and social content (table 4). Location quotients for subdivision name elements evocative of the natural environment show virtually no difference in relative frequency in the four quadrants. And any differences in geological, shoreline, and (mostly) elevation name elements are explicable in terms of post-glacial conditions in the SE quadrant and development near the Lake Ontario shoreline in the NE quadrant. But given the uneven terrain and generous vegetation cover of Rochester's affluent SE quadrant it is striking to note that new suburban developments there are almost never *woods* or *valleys*. Nor do developments in the SE quadrant often allude to farming, other than through the term *meadows*. Like natural allusions, rural landscape allusions are equally characteristic of three of Rochester's four quadrants.

Table 4. Sectoral Variation in Single-Family Subdivision Naming Practices.

	Quadrant[a]														
Allusion:	Southeast			Northeast			Northwest			Southwest			Total		
Natural	N	%	LQ[b]	N	%	LQ	N	%	LQ	N	%	LQ	N	%	LQ
Environment	36	52	102	57	52	102	39	46	92	14	56	110	146	51	100
Geology	5			2						1			8		
Shoreline	3			10			2						15		
Elevation	10			10			9			5			34		
Seclusion	1			5			1						7		
Wooded	1			10			10			1			22		
Tree Species	3			4			9			2			18		
Plants	4			1			1						6		
Rural Landscape	11	16	104	18	16	107	13	16	101	2	8	52	44	15	100
Farmscape[c]	1			6			6						13		
Meadow	4			5			1			1			11		
Country Gentry,	16	23	134	15	14	78	15	18	103	4	16	92	50	17	100
Rus in Urbe															
Estate	4			5			10			1			20		
People, Places	4	6	44	17	16	118	13	16	118	4	16	121	38	13	100

[a]The quadrants comprise the suburban towns and villages within *circa* 25 miles of Rochester's central business district. The SW quadrant includes the highest priced subdivision developments. Prices are lowest in the NW and SW quadrants.

[b]LQ=Location Quotients, the quadrant's percentage frequency of each allusion category divided by the overall percentage frequency of each category, multiplied by 100.

[c]Farmscape includes the combined frequencies of the name elements Farm, Orchard, Hedge, Commons and Field.

Source: Real Estate/Home Guides, Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, Summer—Fall, 1996.

On the other hand, country gentry and *rus in urbe* elements are quite characteristic of the affluent SE quadrant, even without much contribution from the (no longer exclusive) element *estate*. Allusions to particular places or people are equally uncharacteristic of the SE quadrant and about equally common everywhere else. Overall, the geography of new subdivision names is a simple and dual structure which distinguishes the mix of toponymic practices found in Rochester's most affluent quadrant from those used elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

Classified Advertisements

If the words used to sell new home subdivisions convey a degree of sameness over much of suburban Rochester the words used to resell homes are far more sensitive to social-geographical differences in the metropolitan area (table 5). A classified advertisement for a home resale begins in most cases by specifying the municipality or neighborhood in which the house is located. This is a fairly straightforward response to potential homebuyers' strategy of narrowing their residential search process down to a few particular areas for status or other reasons. The writer of the classified advertisement, usually a licensed real estate agent, will then select features of the property to emphasize in the few lines of text the classified advertisement affords. The features include asking price, affordability factors, nearby amenities, aspects of the house exterior, of such interior features as number of bedrooms, and of the house lot (including its size and general attractiveness). In the late 1980s, exploring the relationship between asking price and other emphasized features, I found (not surprisingly) that emphasis on "value" decreased as asking price increased. I also found that overall emphasis on interior features and nearby amenities was unrelated to asking price even though emphasis on particular features and amenities did differ from one price range to another. Furthermore, relative emphasis on the dwelling exterior increased with asking price; more expensive homes were described with greater architectural precision. Finally, relative emphasis on the lot and its features also increased with asking price.

These results led much later to a detailed appraisal of the specific word content used to describe and promote the features of the lot as selling points. The analysis was completed for all Rochester area home resale classified advertising in selected issues of the city newspaper's home/real estate supplements.

Table 5. Location Quotients* of Lot and Garden Key Word Emphasis in Real Estate Classified Advertising in Selected Residential Settings in Rochester Metropolitan Area.

Town	Mendon	Pittsford	Penfield	Webster	Greece	Irondequoit	Henrietta	Gates	Rochester	Rochester
Key Words (Number of Mentions)	SE	SE	NE	NE	NW	NW	SW	SW	NE	SW
Number of Acres (167)	719	138	113	82	118	13	40			27
Fraction of Acre (432)	90	186	128	121	85	75	62	86	20	74
Landscape(d) (57)	272	149	177	80	142	57	158			
Woods, Wooded (159)	219	176	127	157	89	89	28	47	27	
Trees, Treed (118)	33	103	192	193	80	9	152	32	18	39
Creek, Stream, Lake, Pond (52)	149	257	145	262	117	21	86			
Private (254)	107	168	134	143	85	77	80	44	42	36
Park(like) (82)	47	148	123	166	182	119		91		
Patio (106)	38	106	147		145	42	87	145	104	
Pool (197)	39	111	70	115	172	104	103	208	11	23
Deck (400)	68	88	98	45	130	68	202	121	101	68
Garage (749)	22	35	61	107	104	164	112	119	204	
Yard (353)	22	55	75	71	134	104	140	148	145	129
Fence(d) (153)		13	69	37	126	89	111	205	211	724
N of Classified Listings	54	172	166	92	309	193	93	56	96	46
Average Price (in Thousands)	155	190	131	110	92	93	88	81		

*Each Location Quotient is equal to the setting's percentage share of the occurrences of the key word divided by the location's percentage share of all classified real estate advertisements, multiplied by one hundred.

Source: Home/Real Estate section, Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle,* 13 April, 27 April, 13 July, 21 September and 28 September, 1991.

The principal words used to describe the lot are shown in table 5, where results are reported for two selected municipalities in each of Rochester's four quadrants plus two selected sections of the City of Rochester. Contemporary (1991) average home resale prices are reported for each of the ten districts analyzed.

Acre(s), already discarded as a name element in new subdivisions, proved to be easily the most distinctive feature of classified advertisements for homes in Mendon in Rochester's affluent SE quadrant. *Wood ~ woods ~ wooded,* which would soon become anathema as a subdivision name in the SE, was also a key diagnostic of lot descriptions for Mendon (and Pittsford) homes. The presence of trees, like that of the patio or garage, was apparently presumptive and not worthy of mention.

In the NE quadrant, on characteristically smaller lots with more modest homes, trees were a key selling point as was the fractional acreage of the property and the promise of "privacy." In the NW and SW quadrants the emphasis on lot size and the natural features of the lot was noticeably lower than that of Rochester's eastern suburbs. The western suburbs tended to stress family-oriented and useful amenities such as the patio, pool, deck, and garage.

Along the semantic spectrum from higher- to lower-priced settings, lots and acres eventually became simply "yards" and were increasingly likely to be described as "fenced yards." The latter tends to be a synonym for some level of promised security, privacy, and the buyer's option of keeping a guard-dog; this is about all that can be usefully said about a typical yard as a selling point for homes in Rochester's SW wedge, where lot- and house-widths typically preclude a garage.

Table 5 affords a signature glimpse of both the coarse and fine grain of place identity and character as realtors present them through a single advertising medium. But the message is low-key, quite hard to decipher in its broader profile, unexamined by those who require no engagement with the images it proffers, transitory in its detailed content, impermanent, and without the stamp of names other than those of established towns, villages, neighborhoods, and streets. Nonetheless, the real estate classifieds are landscape texts which echo and feed a sense of identity and appeal. And, as we have seen, the timely images they convey sometimes stand in sharp contrast to the initial and mostly immutable vocabulary established when new subdivisions are named.

Conclusion

My neighborhood in Rochester is part of the Town of Brighton—an early nineteenth century homage to English roots. It is part of a 1920s automobile suburban development articulated by three major axes, Monroe, Elmwood, and Winton, legacies of a nineteenth century proclivity to imprint presidential, pastoral, and local names on the landscape. These roads came together at the Twelve Corners, an apparently late nineteenth century vernacular invention. Developers of the 1920s selected salubrious subdivision names such as *Virginia Colony* and *Bel Air*. The former name, reasonably compatible with the colonial revival homes of the subdivision, has established strong place identity through perimeter signage, an active neighborhood association, press reference, and realtor usage in advertising and other channels of communication. The latter name, compatible only with the 1920s version of the California ideal but never given visible expression as such, fell into desuetude. Bel Air was revived in 1989 as the name of the neighborhood association but has not stuck as a familiar term among residents, local politicians, or realtors. To date there are no perimeter signs. In real estate classifieds the neighborhood homes are profiled simply as "Twelve Corners Area" or simply "Brighton," usually including mention of "Brighton schools." One wonders what the half-life will be of the millennial crop of new suburban subdivision names in metropolitan Rochester. Perhaps their fate will also rest on their "fit." Perhaps, too, their scale will mediate their survival; a simple cul-de-sac could prove a toponymic dead end. Community expression (associational, named structures and open spaces) seems certain to perpetuate some of the names, although few seem likely to be retained for long. Sheer coherence and visibility, such as obvious, marked boundaries, will probably be an important survival factor; new subdivisions do typically boast gateway signs suggestive of exclusive affluence but their life expectancy seems uncertain at best. "Fit" is surely the crucial factor, and if that is true much of the generic nomenclature characteristic of 1990s suburban subdivisions faces probable oblivion as time converts the homes into mere resales in a generally unmemorable streetscape. By then, however, the misleading and quickly anachronistic sobriquets conferred by subdivision names will have given way to more meaningful conventions of word selection and loaded meaning that fix each home in its wider setting. The real estate classifieds are simply one of many ways in which this dialogue occurs; media channels, cable television programming, multiple listing services, on-line access and the World

Wide Web all perform similar functions. Suburbs may become nameless, but they are never lacking an identity which words and related images can express. They are never placeless.

References

Clay, Grady. 1994. *Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America's Generic Landscape*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.

Detro, Randall A. 1982. "Language and Place Names." *This Remarkable Continent*. Ed. John F. Rooney, Wilbur Zelinsky and Dean Louder. College Station: Texas A&M U P, 121-48.

Entrikin, J. Nicholas. 1991. *The Betweenness of Place: Towards a Geography of Modernity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P.

Jackson, J.B. 1961. "The Many Guises of Suburbia." *Landscape* 11:1.

Jackson, Kenneth T. 1985. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford U P.

Kunstler, James H. 1993. *The Geography of Nowhere*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Marx, Leo. 1964. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford U P.

Minton, Arthur. 1959. "Names of Real Estate Developments." *Names* 7:129-53, 223-55.

_____. 1961. "Names of Real Estate Developments." *Names* 9:8-36.

Muller, Peter O. 1976. *The Outer City: Geographical Consequences of the Urbanization of the Suburbs*. Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper No. 75-2. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers.

Relph, Edward. 1976. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion Ltd.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1974. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. 1955. "Some Problems in the Distribution of Generic Terms in the Place-Names of the Northeastern United States." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 45:319-49.

_____. 1967. "Classical Town Names in the United States: The Historical Geography of an American Idea." *Geographical Review* 57:463-95.

_____. 1990. "A Toponymic Approach to the Geography of American Cemeteries." *Names* 38:209-29.

_____. 1992. *The Cultural Geography of the United States*. Revised Edition. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. First published 1973.

_____. 1993. "Parsing Greater Washington's Namescape." *Names* 41: 344-60.