

Survival of Pre-English Place Names in Jamaica

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THE SPANISH PERIOD IN JAMAICA dates from 1494, when Columbus first landed and claimed the island for Ferdinand and Isabella, until 1660, when the last Spanish governor set sail from Runaway Bay (named for the event), harried out of the island by the English. The five years from 1655 to 1660 when the English were mounting their campaign of conquest and carrying it to a successful conclusion, were the only period when the two chief naming groups were together in Jamaica — and their togetherness was hostile. That a substantial body of Spanish and other pre-English place-names survived at all must be credited chiefly to the Negroes and the Portuguese Jews who were resident before, during, and after the struggle for sovereignty.¹

Some pre-English place-names did not survive at all, some survived only briefly, a very few have survived intact, and others — the most interesting — have undergone major linguistic surgery. This paper gives selected examples of all four types.

Columbus gave his discovery the name Santa Gloria, now completely gone, but his second name, Santa Ana, borrowed from a place in Valencia, which he thought it resembled,² survives in Anglicized form. The Spanish Bahía de Santa Ana is now St. Ann's Bay, and the town by that name is the capital of the parish of St. Ann, one of the twelve original parishes formed by the English in 1660. Typical of place-name confusion is the assertion by some

¹ General historical background for this paper has been taken from numerous historical accounts of Jamaica, but particularly from Francisco Morales Padrón, *Jamaica Española*, Seville, 1952. I am happy to acknowledge the valuable aid of Alan Soons, tutor in Spanish at the University College of the West Indies.

² Andrés Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos don Fernando y dona Isabel* (Seville, 1870), vol. II, chapter CXXV, cited in Padrón, p. 4, n. 3.

writers³ that the name honored Anne Hyde, wife of James II; her name may have helped to preserve the Spanish appellation.

Just to the west of the town of St. Ann's Bay, on a plantation called Seville, are the ruins of Sevilla la Nueva, founded by the Spaniards in 1510 as their first capital of Jamaica. Excavations have outlined some of the buildings and have also turned up some evidence of the earlier Indian village on the same site, Maima. French pirates sacked Sevilla la Nueva in 1554, and it was never rebuilt by the Spaniards although some people continued to live there, or lived there intermittently. The Spanish capital had been transferred earlier to Santiago de la Vega, near the south coast.

Two other very early Spanish settlements are less readily located. Oristan, named for Orista, a municipality in the province of Barcelona, must have been on the south coast of Jamaica, on Bluefields Bay. Richard Blome recorded in 1672 that "*Orista* regards the *South-Sea*,"⁴ and also reported an alternate form, Oristan.⁵ Hans Sloane, visiting Jamaica in 1688, speaks of Oristan as if it were still there at that date,⁶ but he mentioned several other places that he never saw. A third early settlement, Mellila, named for a Spanish town on the North African coast, has been variously located in Jamaica, but most reliably at the site of the present Port Maria⁷ on the north coast. Richard Blome dismissed Sevilla la Nueva, Oristan, and Mellila as being "now of no account,"⁸ a picturesque way of recording their decline before 1672.

A name that hung on more stubbornly was Cagua. The Spanish form, Caguaya, was applied both to the large anchorage now known as Kingston Harbor and to the port, Puerto de Caguaya, serving the permanent Spanish capital Santiago de la Vega. It was also applied, at one stage, to the river (now Rio Cobre) which empties into the harbor near by. Spanish maps and records fix the town's location beyond the shadow of a doubt; but the English casually moved the name across to the point later called Port Royal and also respelled

³ Cited in *Place Names of Jamaica*, ed. Frank Cundall, revised by Philip M. Sherlock (Kingston, 1939). p. 8.

⁴ Richard Blome, *Description of Jamaica* (1672), p. 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶ Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to Jamaica* (London, 1707), vol. I, p. iii.

⁷ Padrón, *Jamaica Española*, endpaper map and passim.

⁸ Blome, p. 37.

it as Cagway. In both the *Acts of the Privy Council* and the *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, the name Cagway persisted for some time after Port Royal officially replaced it: in 1661 it was referred to as "the fort of Cagway,"⁹ "Point Cagway,"¹⁰ and "Point Cagua."¹¹ Some entries reflect awareness of both old and new names: e.g., "Port Royal late called Point Cagua."¹² On July 2-3, 1661, the growing importance of the town was reflected in this order of the Governor and Council: "that 40 licences to sell drink be granted to the inhabitants of Point Cagua, 10 for the town [i.e., Santiago de la Vega], four for Passage Fort, three for Ligonee, two for Yallah, and two for Port Morant."¹³ This gives a clear notion of the places in Jamaica of any importance in 1661; and the topheavy grant to Point Cagua suggests that the town was already approaching the reputation Port Royal later earned as the wickedest town on earth. The name Cagway soon disappeared, although Hans Sloane on his visit in 1688 refers to Port Royal as "this Point, which was called Point-Cagway."¹⁴ Richard Blome in 1672 spoke of "Port Royal, formerly called Cagway,"¹⁵ but elsewhere spoke of silver mines west of Cagway.¹⁶ The earliest known English map, dated 1661, gives the form Poynt Caggoway.¹⁷ The Rev. George Wilson Bridges, in a book published as late as 1827, speaks of "Careening Point (Caguaya);"¹⁸ this is a rare reference to the Spanish name, Cayo Careno, for the long sand spit now named The Palisadoes, connecting Port Royal with the mainland. Bridges is generally unreliable, however; he may have misread Puerto as Punto in giving the form Punto de Caguayo, a proper enough form but one never used by the Spaniards in Jamaica.

Santiago de la Vega gave way with great reluctance to Spanish Town, the present name. Both names were often given, but the former was partly Anglicized to St. Jago de la Vega. Monk Lewis, reporting a trip in 1816, speaks of "Spanish Town, otherwise called

⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council*, I, 159, entry #511 dated 29 April 1661.

¹⁰ *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, vol. 2, 1661-1668 (London, 1880), p. 5, letter sent by Governor D'Oyley.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37, entry for June 18, 1661.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38, a different entry for June 18, 1661.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43. ¹⁴ Sloane, I, lix.

¹⁵ Blome, p. 30. ¹⁶ Blome, p. 27.

¹⁷ Edm. Hickerlingill, *Jamaica View'd*, 2nd ed., London, 1661.

¹⁸ *The Annals of Jamaica* (2 vols., London, 1827), I, 246.

St. Jago de la Vega,"¹⁹ and *The Jamaica Almanac for the Year 1832* speaks of "Spanish-Town, or St. Jago de la Vega, the Capital."²⁰

A few early names survived intact, or virtually so. The Spanish Punto de Morante and Bahía de Morante (named for one of several important Spanish families with that name) survive as Morant Point and Morant Bay. Mammee Bay, on Spanish maps Bahía Larga, got its name from the Mayma or Maima which was the original Indian village on whose site Sevilla la Nueva was built; the name occurs today in several parts of Jamaica — Mammee Bay at the eastern tip, and, in the interior, Mammee Ridge and Mammee Gully. Sloane lists the Mammee tree in his catalogue of flora;²¹ all the mammee forms may derive from this Arawak base.

Of nine *hatos* (grazing areas) known in the Spanish era, only one survives unchanged in form, Liguanea, but it has known several variants in spelling and pronunciation. It may be the Hispanized form of an Arawak word, *iguana*, meaning lizard; certainly lizards are common enough, feared by the uneducated natives and eaten, to their subsequent distress, by the cats. Related forms occur elsewhere in the West Indies. Visitors today often have trouble with the name; one mistake is pronouncing the final *a*, thus making four syllables. The records show similar difficulties among the early English settlers. The first English map spells it "Legonee."²² Other forms I have found include "Lygonee,"²³ "Ligonia,"²⁴ "Ligui-ania,"²⁵ "Ligonea,"²⁶ "Liguany,"²⁷ and "Liguanea."²⁸ Kingston has in recent years overflowed its corporate area and now fills most of the Liguanea plain, prompting a suggestion by Jamaica's most respected historian, W. Adolphe Roberts, that "some future generation will rechristen our capital Liguanea."²⁹ Unfortunately, place-name changes are seldom as sensible and plausible as this would be.

¹⁹ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Journal of a Residence among the Negroes in the West Indies* (London, 1861), p. 81.

²⁰ Kingston, 1832, p. 26. ²¹ Sloane, II, 123.

²² Hickerlingill, *Jamaica View'd*.

²³ *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. 2, p. 5, entry for July 2–3, 1661.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109, entry for September 2, 1662.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 1720–1745, p. 742, entry for December 16, 1742.

²⁶ Noel B. Livingston, *Sketch Pedigrees of some of the Early Settlers in Jamaica*, Kingston, 1909. ²⁷ Bridges, p. 177. ²⁸ Sloane, I, liii.

²⁹ *The Capitals of Jamaica*, ed. W. Adolphe Roberts (Kingston, 1955), p. x.

Other Spanish names with little or no change are Port Antonio, Negril Point (from Punta del Negrillo), Lucea (from Punta Lucía), and Montego Bay, presumably from *manteca*, meaning lard.³⁰ The Spanish river names commonly retain the "Rio" — Rio Cobre, Rio Minho, Rio Grande, Rio Nuevo, Rio Bueno; but modern pronunciation is sometimes startling: [ˈraio ˈnjuvou], [ˈraio ˈbjunou]. Mountain names, however, do not retain the "Sierra" or "Montanas;" instead, we find Mount Diablo, Don Figuerero Mountains, Mocho Mountains, Santa Cruz Mountains. The same is true of points, ports, bays, and other coastal features, and also of a few rivers: Cabaritta River, Montego River, Morant River.

Survivals in distinctively modified or mutilated forms are not numerous. One *hato* in southeastern Jamaica, Ayala, took its name from a prominent Spanish family. In 1661 two forms appeared, "Yallah" in an order of the Governor and Council,³¹ and "Yallowes" on the first English map.³² A 1664 form was "Yellowe,"³³ and from 1672 comes "Yallowe."³⁴ Hans Sloane in 1688 noted the form "Yallah."³⁵ A Jamaica resident named in 1778³⁶ was "Captain Yhallah's," but whether this personal name influenced the final form, Yallahs, would be hard to determine. Monk Lewis in 1817 reported both "Yallacks River" and "Yallack River,"³⁷ revealing his ignorance of the region. *The West India Atlas* of 1783 gave "Yallah" for river, point, and bay.³⁸

The best-known toponymic change in Jamaica turned the Agua Alta into the Wag Water River. Hans Sloane gives both forms: "at a place called Wague Water,"³⁹ and "about Agua Alta."⁴⁰ Blome in 1672 wrote it solid as "Wagwater."⁴¹ By 1783 the present form was well established.⁴² Ocho Rios is more troublesome. Padrón gives "Las Chorreros,"⁴³ meaning the spouts. The first English map garbled it as "Echucecas,"⁴⁴ and Hans Sloane added to the con-

³⁰ Sloane, II, 123. Another early form, Mantega, is suggested by W. J. Gardner in his *A History of Jamaica from its Discovery by Christopher Columbus to the Year 1672* (London, 1909), p. 13.

³¹ *Calendar of State Papers*, II, 43. ³² Hickeringill, *Jamaica View'd*.

³³ *Sketch Pedigrees*, p. 89. ³⁴ Blome, map. ³⁵ Sloane, I, vii, and map.

³⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council*, I, 761–73 (revised laws for Jamaica).

³⁷ Lewis, *Journal*, pp. 163, 171.

³⁸ London, 1783, Plate II. ³⁹ Sloane, I, lxix. ⁴⁰ Sloane, I, 180.

⁴¹ Blome, map. ⁴² *The West Indies Atlas*, 1783, Plate I.

⁴³ Padrón, p. 353. ⁴⁴ Hickeringill, *Jamaica View'd*.

fusion by speaking of "the place called *Ocho Rios*, corruptly *Chireros*."⁴⁵ By 1783 the *Ocho Rios* form was fixed,⁴⁶ but there is still public confusion caused in part by the fact that several small streams, possibly eight in number, there enter the sea. I have found no evidence of a "Bogua Agua" as predecessor of Bog Walk; the 1911 *Handbook of Jamaica* applies the name Bog Walk to the spectacular narrow gorge of the Rio Cobre between Spanish Town and the present town of Bog Walk. A form *boca agua* or *bogua agua* must be assigned only a conjectural existence.⁴⁷ Another conjecture derives Martha Brae from a Spanish form *Marta bran* as a possible corruption of *mar de brea*, meaning an oily-surfaced marsh such as now exists at the river's mouth. A Scottish settler ignorant of Spanish may well have applied the present form reminiscent of Scotland.

Jamaica place-names need a thorough study. The Yates-Thompson paper, read at Salamanca in 1955,⁴⁸ is admittedly provisional; so, obviously, is mine. It is to be hoped that the Caribbean Linguistic Survey, now in progress at the University College of the West Indies under the able direction of Dr. Robert Le Page and Professor Cassidy, will someday do the place-name job thoroughly. At the moment, however, the field is wide open for some adventurous husbandman.

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⁴⁵ Sloane, I, 228.

⁴⁶ *The West Indies Atlas*, 1783, Plate I.

⁴⁷ The *DA* lists *boca* as "the mouth of a river, gorge, etc." Professor Cassidy, in his MS *Jamaica Talk*, observes (p. 117): "... Bog Walk, one of the earliest Jamaica place names, is understood to be from *Boca de Agua*, referring to the deep gorge of the river," and again (p. 118), "when one thinks of the many distortions to which Spanish names were subjected, there is little difficulty in accepting *bogue* (or *bog*) as coming from *boca*." *Place Names of Jamaica* (p. 7) suggests that two Arawak words, *bogua* and *Cagua*, were telescoped as *bocagua* and later Anglicized as Bog Walk. The term *walk* is frequently found in such combinations as "cocoa walk" and "banana walk," meaning a specialized planting area smaller than or part of a plantation; it is also sometimes used simply as a pathway or trail. The present town of Bog Walk is just above the gorge of the Rio Cobre, well inland; most bogues in Jamaica were close to the sea.

⁴⁸ C. S. Yates and R. W. Thompson, *Algunas notas provisionales sobre la toponimia española de Jamaica* (6e Congrès international de Sciences Onomastiques, Salamanca, 1955).