Place-Name Generics in Providence, R.I., 1636–1736

CELIA MILLWARD

TOPONYMIC COLLECTIONS OF ALL KINDS have always had a certain amount of appeal, even to the nonspecialist. Because of this intrinsic interest in names and because exhaustive listings of names provide the primary source of information for more sophisticated studies of naming practices, the collection of name data is certainly justified. However, if toponymy is to be more than an anecdotal pursuit, we must go beyond listing, and attempt to relate naming practices to the total culture of a people or peoples. Such a theory of naming would certainly have important sociological, psychological, historical, and linguistic implications. Of course, various extrapolations from raw data have been and are being made, most notably in the area of dialect studies.

This paper has a threefold purpose: (1) to list the topographical generics and their meanings of the place-names used in the first 100 years of the settlement of Providence Plantations, and to discuss some of the generic terms familiar to the settlers but not used in place-names; (2) to show some of the ways in which written records can be employed in toponymic studies, other than as mere repositories of place-names; and (3) to suggest, whenever possible, how the naming practices of early Providence may provide valuable information about (a) the general language of the settlers, and (b) the attitudes of the settlers toward their environment. The first purpose is fulfilled fairly exhaustively, the second only casually. At this stage of progress, the third purpose is fulfilled very sketchily indeed; it is hoped that future work will be able either to justify and extend or to discredit the suggestions made here.[1]

The generics of the earliest place-names of any New England settlement are of interest in American toponymy if only because New England, as she sent out colonies of her own, helped establish toponymic patterns for the rest of the country. Providence Plantations was among the first New England settlements (1636) and, fortunately for the researcher, fairly complete town records for the first 100 years of settlement have been preserved.[2] Providence was not, of course, originally settled directly

[1] I should like to express my thanks to Professor Eugene Green for his helpful comments and advice concerning this paper.

[2] *Early Records of the Town of Providence, Vols. I–XXI* (Providence, R.I., 1892). The map of early Providence in Clarence S. Brigham, *Seventeenth Century Place-Names of Providence Plantations, 1636–1700* (Providence, R.I., 1903), was also very helpful.

from England, but rather by fugitives from the Massachusetts colonies – victims of religious intolerance and other persons with less meritorious reasons for fleeing their first homes in North America. Within a few years, however, Rhode Island received immigrants directly from England.

Factors in Naming

A number of factors influence the possible lexical items that will be used in naming a geographical feature. The dominant language of the first settlers is obviously one of a number of factors (the overwhelming majority of the first settlers in Rhode Island were from England and thus we quite predictably do not find such generics as *-kill* appearing in early Rhode Island names). A second factor is the nature of the topography to be named. Rhode Island, as the first settlers found it, was an area of low hills, flatlands, marshes, seashores, cut through by scores of smaller and larger streams. There were no high mountains, no vast plateaus, no deserts. Again, it is not surprising that we find no place-name generics such as *mountain* or *desert*.[3] A third, perhaps less obvious factor influencing place-name generics is that of the relationship of the people to the land (or sea) and their attitudes toward it. Little research has been reported concerning this factor, but it seems intuitive that a people dependent on the sea for their livelihood will be more apt to name, and to name in more detail, the topographical features of the shore and the waters surrounding it than will a people living in a similar area but dependent solely on agriculture for their livelihood. Similarly, residents of a modern urban area will be less likely to make fine distinctions about the nature of the vegetation in a moist area than will rural residents – if only because the uses to which the respective populations put the land will probably be different. Indeed, within the same community at the same time, some groups in the population may have names for topographical features that remain unnamed for other groups – if these other groups are even consciously aware of the existence of the topographical features at all. That is to say, while any feature sufficiently distinct to have been named by any one person is certainly *discriminable* by all normal per-

[3] It is of course true that pioneers have been known to exaggerate the characteristics of the areas they have encountered and it is also true that, for most people, such a term as *mountain* is a relative description rather than a statement of some absolute minimum altitude. However, the early Rhode Islanders seem to have been, on the whole, rather a matter-of-fact group of people, not normally given to exotic names or exaggerated descriptions. One amusing exception occurs in the Rhode Island records at a later date (1789) than that covered by this study. Here it is stated that a road in the more western part of the state "runs over large mountains, and through morasses." But here the tax money of the good citizens was involved, and hence the excitement is perhaps justified.

sons, it will not necessarily *be discriminated* by all people, although they will notice it if it is pointed out to them or they may become aware of its absence if it is removed.

Place-Name Generics in Early Providence

With these factors in mind, we can examine the repertory of place-name generics in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in Providence Plantations. The following list is merely alphabetical; no attempt at further subdivision is made at this point. The numbers after each name refer to the number of occurrences of the generic in different place-names, and not to the total occurrences in the records. (The latter figure would not be especially meaningful because, for example, one generic might occur many times in the records because it was applied to a feature within an area over which there was a great deal of litigation; yet this generic might be used only in this one place-name.) No claim is made for the absolute accuracy of these counts. Undoubtedly some place-names that were in regular use never appear in the records. Further, an examination of other documents would probably increase these figures somewhat. In addition, the figures are influenced in an undetermined way by the fact that the same feature (especially streams) sometimes had more than one name, either over a period of time or even simultaneously.

Table 1. Place-Name Generics in Early Providence

Bay (2)	Field(s) (8)	Lake (1)	Pond (25)
Bottom (2)	Flood (1)	Marsh (2)	River (26)
Branch (2)	Gutter (1)	Meadow (29)	Rock (3)
Brook (12)	Hill (27)	Neck (10)	Run (2)
Brow (1)	Hollow (2)	Pasture (1)	Swamp (15)
Butts (1)	Hole (5)	Plain (12)	Valley (3)
Cove (15)	Island(s) (4?)	Point (9)	Woods (2)
Falls (3)			

Finally, there exists the omnipresent problem of some arbitrary decisions as to whether a given construction should be considered a place-name or merely a descriptive term. This latter problem is especially vexing when dealing with older historical records: one cannot question a local resident, and the modern rules-of-thumb regarding the capitalization of proper names do not apply because capitalization conventions were much less rigid and recorders were often only semi-literate. One useful criterion employed in this study was the language of the sentence in which a questionable term or name appeared. Because of the legal or quasi-legal nature of much of the material in the records, certain frozen phrases were extremely common. Among these was the formula "called and known

by the name of. . . ." All items appearing after this formula were accepted as true place-names. Despite all the variables, however, it is felt that the numbers given are accurate in a relative sense; that is, in early Providence, *brook* was a far more common generic than *run*.

Occasionally an item has been excluded from the list as not containing a true place-name generic, but as representing *sui generis* a descriptive term that came, over time, to take on the characteristics of a true place-name. The uniqueness of these items is perhaps attested to by the fact that the majority of them are preceded by the definite article. They include *The Beaver Dam*, *The Cold Spring*, *The First* (*Second*, *Third*) *Opening* (of a given swamp), *The Keyes*, *The Landing Place*, *The Narrow Passage*, *The Thatch Bed*(*s*), *The Vineyard*, *Hearnden's Arm*, *Lowermost Still Water*, *Martin's Wading Place*, *Many Holes*, and *World's End*. The decision to exclude these items and not some others is of course somewhat arbitrary.

The relative paucity of place-name generics referring to the sea supports the suggestion made earlier that the features named reflect the orientation of the population to their environment. Early Providence was primarily an agricultural settlement and not an important commercial port or fishing center. Of the four occurrences of *island*(*s*) as a generic in place-names, only one is applied to a land mass totally surrounded by salt water. On the other hand, generics with agricultural connotations are very frequent; note the comparatively numerous occurrences of *field*(*s*), *meadow*, and *swamp*.

Meaning of the Place-Name Generics

Fortunately for the researcher, the early records often define by paraphrase or by synonyms the meaning of place-name generics. Such definitions are invaluable for determining the usage of certain terms. Furthermore, one can receive a fair amount of insight into what the early settlers felt were normal, expected generics for topographical features by the terms they used to paraphrase or define a given place-name. Place-names containing the most common generics are defined by that generic; for example, "the swampe Called the Cat swampe" or "y^{e} brooke Called Mashapauge brooke." On the other hand, place-names containing more uncommon generics are usually defined in terms of a common generic; for example, "a percell of meadow Calld Rumney marsh" or "a Small Brooke Calld & knowne by the Name of Robbins Runn."

All of these place-name generics were English words at the time of their application, and nearly all of them conform in their usage to at least regional British usage of the period. Further, most of them had long been

in the language as lexical items referring to topographical features. Exceptions or questionable cases will be treated in the following brief discussion of each of the items.

Bay. Conforming to British usage of the time, the term was limited to larger indentations of the sea into the land. Its low frequency can be attributed to the relative scarcity of the geographical phenomenon itself.

Bottom. The term was not frequently employed in place-names, but was apparently a sufficiently familiar term not to require further definition: "at a Place called Peticongsit bottom." (See the later discussion of *bottom, hollow, valley.*)

Branch. Again, this was not a frequent term, but it was a familiar one; it was, for all practical purposes, synonymous with *brook*; i.e., it was a stream of water flowing into another body of water. (Neither a *brook* nor a *branch* flowed into the sea.)

Brook. This was the most common place-name generic for small streams, and the one by which other generics were defined.

Brow. This term was used in only one place-name, but, again, was sufficiently familiar as a lexical item so as not to require further definition. (See the later discussion of *brow* and *brim.*)

Butt. The term occurs only in one place-name and the rare generic is further defined: "the two little hills called Bailyes Buttes." It is variously spelled as *buts, butts, buttes,* and probably is not directly connected with the later Western American *butte.* The OED cites the use of this term in the meaning of "mound, hillock" only from the seventeenth century.

Cove. This is the normal place-name generic for a small recess in the seacoast; the term *creek* does not appear in place-names during the period under consideration here.

Falls. The term occurs in only three place-names, but its use would naturally be limited by the occurrence of the physical phenomenon itself.

Field(s). This term is often but not exclusively used for areas not yet under cultivation by white settlers, though perhaps cultivated by Indians: "from Ossapimsuck Jndian ffields," "an old Jndian field Called walumpas field." [sic]

Flood. This generic is highly questionable. It appears only once, at an early date: "with 3 small pesse of meddow on Called Romles Marsh on called the litl^{e} Flood and the other the litle patch of meddow lying ouer against the litle flood" (1644). Since the area so named is called a *meadow,* the term does not seem to refer to a stream of water. (The use of *flood* to designate a body of flowing water is termed obsolete by the OED, but the OED does give a (nonpoetic) citation from as late a date as 1562.) It is conceivable that the area may have been flooded at one time or another, thus giving rise to an anecdotal name.

Gutter. The single place-name reference is late (1707) and the generic is further defined: "y^{e} place Called y^{e} Woolfe Trapp Gutter, & lieth on both Sides of y^{e} Sd Gutter or Brooke."

Hill. This is almost the universal place-name generic for a natural elevation.

Hole. As is still the case in Rhode Island, the place-name generic *hole* in early Providence seems to have been applied to various different topographical features. Of the five occurrences, the nature of the referent of three is uncertain, although they were all apparently land features: e.g., "a land called the dibles hol." The fourth reference is to a branch of a swamp and the fifth to a deep place in a river. All of these uses as topographical terms are attested by the OED as early as the tenth century in England.

Hollow. As a place-name generic, the term appears only in the eighteenth century in the Providence records. It is occasionally further defined in terms of another generic: "the north side of the Valley called y^{e} Great Meaddow Hollow" — but not always: "the hollow Called the halfe way hollow." (See the later discussion of *bottom, hollow, valley.*)

Island. It is not certain whether The Island and The Islands as place-names refer to the same area; hence it is uncertain whether the generic *island* is used in four place-names or in three. In any case, the term was not restricted to its present meaning of land surrounded entirely by water. Starvegoat Island was a small piece of land in Narragansett Bay surrounded entirely by salt water, but The Island(s) and Wallers Island apparently fit the OED definition of "an elevated piece of land surrounded by marsh." (Many, but not all, of the OED's citations in this meaning are from New England.) Descriptions of the latter include "the Piece of Meaddow Called the Jsland" and "in y^{e} swampe Called y^{e} Great Swampe, at, & about y^{e} place called Wallers Jsland." [sic]

Lake. This term appears in only one place-name, and it clearly did not have its present American meaning: "y^{e} Brooke Called y^{e} Third Laake." Each of the six listings of this place-name found in the records further define it as a brook, a stream, or both. The OED calls this meaning of *lake* obsolete, but it is attested since the tenth century in England.

Marsh. This is not common as a place-name generic, and apparently was not synonymous with *swamp*, although it could be synonymous with *meadow*: "a percell of meadow Calld Rumney marsh." The discrepancy with British usage appears to lie with the definitions of both *meadow* and *marsh*. (See the later discussions of *meadow* and *marsh*.)

Meadow. As a place-name generic, *meadow* is, at first glance, one of the most difficult to deal with. First, the decision as to whether a given appellation should or should not be considered a true place-name is not an easy one to make. Many such tracts of land wer, referred to by the owner's name; the name sometimes changed when ownership changede and sometimes the previous owner's name was retained. In other cases, an Indian name (Mashapaug) or a descriptive term (The Great) was used as the specific and was retained over a long period of time. A second difficulty is the meaning of the generic term itself. However, a comparison of all the many references to *meadows* in the records indicates that the term was normally used to designate a piece of low-lying, wet, uncultivated and unforested land near a body of water such as a brook, river, or the sea. Its wetness is attested to by the many references in the records such as "uplands, lowlands, or meadows" and "meadows or swampy land." The records make it clear that a *meadow* could be either salt or fresh, again supporting the definition of *meadow* as wet land. A *meadow* could be mown for hay, but the term was not restricted to lands used for this purpose. Despite its wetness, a *meadow* was obviously a desirable piece of land.[4]

Neck. A *neck* was a piece of land surrounded on at least two sides by water. The water was normally the salt water of Narragansett Bay or the rivers above the Bay, but Ponaganset Neck was formed by a hairpin curve of the Pocasset River.

---

[4] The following passage of poetry is by the early New England poet Edward Taylor; it was written in 1692, and shows clearly that the more pleasant connotations of *meadow* (as opposed to *swamp* and *bog*) applied in Massachusetts as well as in Rhode Island.

> A Crown of Glory! Oh! I'm base, it's true.
> My Heart's a Swamp, Brake, Thicket vile of Sin.
> My Head's a Bog of Filth; Blood bain'd doth spew
> Its venom streaks of Poyson o're my Skin...
> Becrown'd with Filth! Oh! what vile thing am I?
> What Cost, and Charge to make mee Meddow ground?
> To drain my Bogs? to lay my Frog-pits dry?
> To stub up all my brush that doth abound?

Edward Taylor, *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven, Conn., 1963), p. 63.

Pasture. There is only one mention of one place-name with the generic *pasture* in the records, and we must assume that it had its then-current meaning of a piece of land covered with grass suitable for grazing.

Plain. As the relatively high number of place-names in which the generic *plain* appears might imply, the term was sufficiently familiar to need no further definition ("Upon the Plaine Called Venter plaine"; "ye playne called Waybossett plaine"). A *plain* was a tract of comparatively flat arable land, larger than a *field* or a *meadow* because several farms could be located on one *plain.*

Point. The term *point* in place-names normally meant a piece of land jutting into a body of water, and was sufficiently familiar to be self-defining: "about ye poynt called Swann poynt." However, in at least one place-name, the term is applied to a hill: "to a high hill or hummock called the Great poynt"; that this application of the term was not the usual one is shown by the specific definition of The Great Point as a hill in several of the references to it. The earliest mention of The Great Point is 1661, a year earlier than the OED's first citation for *point* in the meaning "the peak of a mountain or a hill."

Pond. Pond was the universal — and the only — generic used in place-names for natural pools or lakes, either fresh-water or salt-water. According to the OED, the generalization of this term to include natural as well as artificial bodies of water was characteristic chiefly of Surrey; this fact is perhaps somewhat surprising in view of the fact that so many of the members of the early New England settlements came from more northern areas of England, and especially from East Anglia.

River. River, like *mountain,* is a relative rather than an absolute term and it is therefore impossible to state any precise limits for its application. Even very small streams might be called *rivers* rather than *brooks.* The converse, however, is not true: large streams were always called *rivers* and never *brooks.*

Rock. Large stones were very frequently used as boundary markers in early Providence, but such large stones rarely were given specific place-names. On the other hand, the three exceptions are mentioned frequently in the records.

Run. Run is the infrequent variant of *brook* in naming small streams. It was not a universally familiar term and the citations of both place-names containing *run* as a generic usually define it in terms of *brook*: "the Brook Called Observation Run"; "ye brooke Called Robbins Run." Furthermore, throughout the entire period under discussion here, Robbins Run was alternatively called Robbins Brook.

Swamp. As is well-known, the first citations for the topographical term *swamp* appear in America in 1624 in Virginia. However, the conjecture that the term must have been common in England prior to that time is supported by the pervasiveness of its use in New England just a few years later. It is extensively used in the early records of Providence in naming wet lowlands. Apparently the chief factor distinguishing a *swamp* from a *meadow* was the presence of trees on the former. Many of the specifics used in naming swamps support this: *The Ash Swamp, The Cedar Swamp, The Great Pine Swamp, The Spruce Swamp.*

Valley. Valley, like *hollow,* does not appear frequently in place-names. *Valley,* however, seems to have been the more universally understood term, for, while a *hollow* might be further defined as a *valley,* a *valley* is always self-defining: "the ualley called Reighnold his ualley."

Woods. Although the area into which the first settlers of Rhode Island came was probably fairly heavily forested, the place-name generic *woods* was not frequently used (nor, except for *swamp,* does any other generic implying the presence of trees appear). When the term was used in place-names, it was with reference to areas located quite far from the central settlement in Providence, implying that the term *woods* had the connotation of wilderness or of an uncivilized area in addition to its denotation of a forested piece of land.

The Topographical Features Named

From this list of place-name generics, we can extract some of the features of the topographical environment that the early colonists considered sufficiently important to specify. These features include:

(1) *Bodies of water. Bay* and *cove* are distinctly salt-water terms as opposed to fresh-water terms, and are distinguished from each other by relative size. *River* and *brook* specify streams of running water and, again, are distinguished from each other by relative size.[5] *River*, however, may apply to either salt- or fresh-water streams,[6] while *brook* is restricted to fresh water; a small salt-water stream was called a *cove*. (At a later date, *creek* became the regular place-name generic to distinguish a small salt-water stream from a small recess in the coastline, i.e., from a *cove*.) *Pond* refers to a natural pool, of any size, of standing fresh or salt water. *Falls* specifies a sharp declivity or sudden change in the altitude of a stream of water. Finally, there were several generics, all infrequent and all seemingly synonymous with *brook*: *branch, flood, gutter, lake, run.*

(2) *Altitude of the land. Hill* for a natural elevation was nearly universal, but *brow* and *butt* each appear once as synonyms. *Bottom, hollow,* and *valley* are in competition as place-name generics for low-lying land or a depression in the earth's surface. *Hole* seems to have been a catch-all term for a small, relatively deep depression, whether in land or water. No evidence was found for different terms to distinguish the relative magnitude or altitude of any two features (i.e., there is no *mountain* vs. *hill*).

(3) *Flatness of the land. Plain* and *field* were the neutral terms specifying comparatively flat land, the distinction between the two being one of size. *Meadow* also implied relatively flat land, but more specifically designated wet flat land. The one instance of *pasture* referred to the use to which the flat land was put.

(4) *Wetness of the land.* A *swamp* was a piece of wet land with a growth of trees, while a *meadow* had only smaller vegetation. A *swamp* was apparently watered by fresh water. On the other hand, a *marsh* was watered by salt water. *Island* was a term for a relatively dry piece of land surrounded either by water or by wetter land.

(5) *Vegetation on the land.* As was mentioned above, a *swamp* had trees, while a *meadow* was not forested. *Woods* specified a collection of trees, apparently not on wet ground. A *rock*, of course, had no vegetation at all.

(6) *Peninsularity. Neck* and *point* both refer to a peninsular piece of land with water on three sides. *Point* is normally restricted in its usage to a piece of land running into the sea; a *neck* is usually also so restricted, and is usually larger than a *point*. However, a *neck* may also be a piece of land enclosed within a sharp hairpin turn of a stream. *Bay* and *cove* are the corresponding terms for salt water surrounded by land on three sides.

All six of these categories represent features that would be of great importance to an agricultural, non-industrialized community such as Providence was in the first 100 years of its settlement. Water is essential to

[5] At first glance, it might appear that the earliest settlers used the term *river* almost exclusively, and that the term *brook* was introduced later. However, examination of the topography of the land itself shows that the size distinction is a valid one. That is, the earliest settlements were concentrated near the seacoast and on larger streams; settlements in the interior and around smaller streams came later.

[6] Interestingly, the distinction between a salt-water river and a fresh-water river was frequently made by means of a change in the specific of the place-name rather than in the generic: that is, the same river would have a different specific above the tide-water point.

any society, and its usefulness is limited by its saline content. Larger bodies of water present significant natural barriers to communication and travel; the constant concern over bridges shown in the records is ample evidence of this observation. Altitude presents another natural barrier, especially for a culture without mechanical power; declivity and altitude also limit the usefulness of the land for agricultural purposes. Flatness, on the other hand, can be a prerequisite for agriculture. The wetness of the land has both agricultural and building implications; wetness can also impede travel and communication. The vegetation on the land is of course also important to an agricultural community – the amount and type of vegetation determine the amount of clearing that must be done in order to prepare fields for planting, and land with a growth of trees supplies a source of lumber for building and fuel. The feature of peninsularity is of less obvious importance to an agrarian society. Bays and coves, however, do provide a measure of protection from sea storms, and the neck of land formed by a bend in a river would be more limited in access.

Non-Place-Name Generics

Even a cursive examination of Table 1 makes it obvious that some generics were very frequently employed in place-names, while others were infrequently employed. Why should this be so? As was suggested earlier, there are at least three possible explanations. The first explanation is physical: the phenomenon itself may occur relatively infrequently, and hence the occasions for applying the generic are rare. For seventeenth and eighteenth century Providence, this would be the case for *bay*, *falls*, and perhaps for *woods*. The second explanation is cultural: the physical phenomenon may occur frequently, but for various cultural reasons, the feature is not considered significant enough or is not considered an appropriate feature to name. This would seem to be the case for *rock*, *island* (in both its meanings), and perhaps also for *woods*. The third explanation is linguistic: a generic may not be used frequently because it – the generic term itself – is not considered an appropriate term for inclusion in a place-name. This third, linguistic situation falls into two further categories: (1) the generic term is not familiar to the speakers of the language, at least as a term for a topographical feature, and (2) the generic term is familiar to the speakers of the language, and indeed may be widely used in non-place-name contexts, but is not considered an appropriate term for place-names.[7] Not all of these categories

[7] A third category, worth investigating but not treated in this paper, is that of generic terms with different meanings when used in place-name and non-place-name contexts. This is certainly the case with *gully* as it occurs in Rhode Island today.

are exclusive. That is, infrequent occurrence of a physical feature may result in unfamiliarity with terms for that feature, or, if a feature is not normally named within the culture, the term used to describe it will, of course, not appear frequently in place-names. In the linguistic situation in which a lexical item is familiar as a topographical term to the speakers of the language but the term is not used as a place-name generic, there may be grammatical reasons within the language as a whole (and not just within the subset of place-name grammar) why the item cannot appear as a place-name generic.

With these considerations in mind, the early records of Providence were further examined for occurrences of topographical terms in non-place-name contexts.[8] It was found, first of all, that those topographical terms such as *brook*, *meadow*, *hill*, etc., that occur most frequently as place-name generics also appear most frequently in non-place-name contexts. This is, perhaps, not too surprising, but there are situations elsewhere (e.g., *Mount* Washington) in which a common place-name generic does not normally occur outside of the place-name context. Second, some terms are common in descriptions of topography but rarely or never appear in place-names. Among such terms never appearing in place-names in the early Providence records are *upland*, *lowland*, *stream*, *runnet*, *ditch*, *creek*, *hassock*, *bog*, *tussock*, *gully*, *ridge*, *mere bank*, *spot*, *rivolet*. Fairly common terms that are only infrequent in place-names include *bottom*, *hollow*, *gutter*, *marsh*, *valley*, *brow*, and *run*. Finally, terms that are infrequent in non-place-name contexts and that never occur in place-names include *gullet*, *hummock*, *brim*, *sink*, *triangle piece*, *moor*, *gore*, *nook*, *sprang*, *shore*, *drain*, *flats*, *knoll*, *beach*, *slip*, and *slang*.

Table 2 is a list of terms used in the records to describe the topography; many of them never occur as place-name generics, but a few items that

Table 2. Less Frequent Topographical Terms in Early Providence

beach	flats	knoll	rivolet	spot
bog	gore	lowland	run	sprang
bottom	gullet	marsh	runnet	stream
brim	gully	mere bank	shore	triangle piece
brow	gutter	moor	sink	tussock
creek	hassock	nook	slang	upland
ditch	hollow	ridge	slip	valley
drain	hummock			

[8] Omitted from treatment here are purely legal formulas appearing in deeds and wills; it was found that such formulas were apparently borrowed wholesale from British usage and often contained topographical terms that never occurred elsewhere in the records. For example, the terms *copse* and *grove* appear only in phrases of the type "with all the woody Groundes Soyles, Coppsses, Springs, brookes, Waterings, Trees, Stones, Quarries, & all other Comodityes therein Contained."

do occur infrequently in place-names have been included here for further discussion. Instead of treating each item separately, we shall group the items for discussion.

Ditch, drain, gullet, gully, gutter, rivolet, run, runnet, sink, stream. Of these many terms for a stream of water, *gutter* is used in one place-name and *run* in two. In non-place-name contexts, *stream* is very common; *ditch, gully, gutter, rivolet, run,* and *runnet* are fairly common; and *drain, gullet,* and *sink* are rare. *Stream* could conceivably be applied to a body of flowing water of any type or size, but the term seems to have been restricted to small bodies of fresh water. Indeed, almost all occurrences of *stream* are further modified by the words "small" or "fresh" or both. Often *stream* is equated with *brook*: "a Small Brooke or fresh Streame beareing the Name of Robbins Brooke." Many of the references to *ditch* are unclear as to whether the term was applied to a natural or an artificial waterway, but all the instances in which this distinction is made clear suggest that the term was applied to an artificial waterway: "bounding with an old Ditch" (no clear-cut references to natural waterways ever describe them as "old") and "Their being a Ditch *made* across y^{e} sd Meaddow" (italics added). Nearly all the references to *gully* clearly indicate flowing water and not simply a stream bed or a gorge cut by water. Typical are: "betweene two Gulleys which Jshu into the aforsaid west River" and "with the Gulley where it falleth into ye sayd pautuckett river."

Gutter is apparently synonymous with *brook*: "on both Sides of y^{e} Sd Gutter or Brooke [Wolf-Trap Gutter]" or "oppositt . . . a low Gutter, or a place that the water first Runneth out of the Pond into the meaddow." *Rivolet* is always equated with *brook* or *stream*: "being on Mashapauge brooke or Rivolit" or "a Small Streame of Water, or Rivolett Which Runneth downe. . . ." Interestingly, while *run* as a place-name generic is usually further defined as a *brook*, the term *run* in non-place-name contexts normally was not further defined; perhaps the very fact that it could be used as a place-name generic at all is significant here. It should be noted, however, that the further modification *run of water* (and not simply *run*) is regular though not universal. Typical citations include "y^{e} Second Runn w^{ch} cometh into y^{e} west River" and "the northward side of a small Runn of water." *Runnet* needs no such further modification, but its status as a diminutive is often emphasized by the adjective "small" or "little": "Bounded on the north with a little runnett" or "Neare a small Runnett comeing downe the hill." Although the terms *gullet* and *sink* are rarely used, both seem to be equated with *brook*: "two Gullitts which jsue into the forsaide Riuer" and "on the East side of a little sink, or Gutter." The references to *drain* are too inexplicit for further comment: "bounded . . . on y^{e} south with the draine."

Bog, hassock, marsh, moor, tussock. References containing the roots *bog, marsh,* and *tussock* are frequent in the records; references to *hassock* are rare; and there is a single, dubious mention of *moor.* A *bog* is clearly not a *swamp,* but rather a kind of *meadow,* apparently damp and with clumps of vegetation. One reason why *bog* does not appear in place-names seems to be linguistic: the form was never found in the Providence records as a noun, but always as an adjective modifying *meadow.* Typical examples are "his five Acars of Boggie Meadow," "a percell of Boggy or Tussicky Meaddow," and "it being Boggey or Hassekey Meaddow." *Marsh,* as was stated earlier, is usually used to describe a type of wet meadow. It seems to have been applied especially to situations wherein the wetness was caused by salt water; there are many references to salt *marsh,* but none to fresh *marsh.* Examples of citations include "with a peece of salt march," and "the meadow or marsh that Lyeth. . . ." The term is often used adjectivally: "a Salt Cove, or Marshy place, or Cove." *Tussock* is also used in describing a type of *meadow*; the nature of a *tussock* is nowhere clearly stated, but there is no evidence against assuming that it referred to tufts or clumps of matted vegetation. Typical citations are "that marsh, Meaddow or Tusekes that lieth on both sides" and "Boggey or Tussekey Meaddow." *Hassock,* though less often used, apparently meant the same thing as *tussock*: "standing in a place of Hassuckes" or "it being Boggey or Hassekey Meadow." *Moor* is included in this category because the single reference to *moor* seems to imply wet land: "own acor of Salt Mash And 2 of mungerel and fresh More."

Upland and *lowland* as topographical terms are ubiquitous in the records, although neither is ever used in place-names. Both terms apparently referred to dry, arable land (as opposed to a *meadow,* which was wet), and the distinction between the two terms is only that of altitude. A few examples should illustrate the distinction: "be it vpland, low land, or meaddow," "both vpland, lowland, Meaddow & swampye land."

Beach and *shore* were both infrequently used, again supporting the "land-directed" rather than "sea-directed" attitudes of the settlers. From the few references, it appears that *beach* was normally used only in connection with salt water, but that *shore* could, in theory at least, be used in connection with either salt or fresh water: "found dead upon the salt water shore," "to the Beach or salt water shore," and "on the east wth the sea and Beach."

Bottom, hollow, valley. These three terms seem to have been synonymous, and all three are occasionally used in place-names. *Valley* is perhaps the more universal term since it is more frequent and is not defined by the other two. *Bottom* seems to have been the least familiar term because it is very often defined by one of the other terms. Typical examples are

"the great bottom or Hollow that is there," "in a bottome or valley by a brooke side," and "lieing in a valley neere. . . ."

Knoll was certainly not a favorite topographical term and only one reference (repeated twice) to *knoll* was found in the records. It is identified with *hill*: "a little hill or knowle lying above the said meadow."

Ridge apparently referred to a particular shape or geometric configuration rather than to a specific geographic phenomenon. Like the terms *gore, nook*, etc. (see below), it is usually employed in a kind of partitive genitive construction. For example, "the Ridge of ground or banke Called the beauer Damm"; "a little Ridge of Rocks"; "a ridge of hills Called pamêchipsk." Both its peculiar grammar and its indefinite topographic reference seem to have contributed to its unacceptability as a place-name generic. (Note, however, that indefiniteness of reference does not prevent the use of *hole* as a place-name generic.)

Flats was found only once in the records and the reference gives little clue to the meaning of the term; indeed, it is not even certain that this one reference should not be treated as a place-name: "westerly bounding with an old Ditch and East by the flats."

Creek appears occasionally in the records, but always with further definition, indicating that the term was not universally familiar. It is either identified with a salt-water *cove* (close to, but not identical with, its present-day use in Rhode Island) or it is used adjectivally to define a kind of grass or thatch.[9] Typical examples are "a little Creeke or Coave lieing next unto Wachamoquett poynt" and "a Salt Cove, or Creek Thatch, or Marshy place, or Cove Called the Comon Cove."

Gore, nook, slang, slip, spot, sprang, triangle piece. All of these terms are used at least once in the records to refer to a piece of land, but all are infrequent. The shape of the piece is often more or less indicated by the term itself, but the nature of the land is not specified. Most of the terms appear more often than not in partitive genitive constructions (see the discussion of *ridge* above): "said Goare, or Slipe of land"; "some small Sprangs of meaddow"; "said slang of land"; "the which land . . . is a Triangle piece." Once again, both the lack of specificity of the terms themselves and their peculiar grammar seem to contribute to their unacceptability as place-name generics.[10]

[9] A dialectal variation within as small an area as the present-day boundaries of the state of Rhode Island can be found with respect to the term *creek*. In the Portsmouth, R.I., early records, *creek* was a widely-used term for a salt-water inlet as early as 1640: C. S. Brigham, ed., *Early Records of the Town of Portsmouth* (Providence, R.I., 1901).

[10] *Gore* does not appear in Providence place-names during the period under consideration here, but it was used as a place-name generic in the Rhode Island-Massachusetts area at a later date. Indeed, the Attleboro Gore was the center of boundary disputes between the two states.

Brim, brow. As was noted earlier, *brow* appears in one place-name during the period treated here. Both terms are fairly common in the records in non-place-name contexts and both terms usually appear in the partitive genitive construction discussed above. *Brim* apparently referred to the top edge of the bank of a stream ("a black Oake tree Standing upon the brimm of the banke of Said River"). *Brow* is most often applied to the top of a hill or to a projecting edge of a hill ("Bounded on the west with the brow of the hill"; "bounded with the Topp, or brow of a hill"). However, it is occasionally synonymous with *brim* ("on the side & brow of the banke against the salt water") and is apparently sometimes used to refer to all of a small slope or hill ("standing on a brow of Rocks").

Mere bank. References to *mere bank* are very common in the records, and always refer to a boundary. Typical examples include "prowided y^{t} it intrench not upon y^{e} Highway or meere-bank" and "bounding ... on the East End with A mere banke." The term never appears in place-names: boundaries as such of any sort were normally not features to be given place-names.

Conclusion

A comparison of the items given in Tables 1 and 2 shows clearly that the early settlers of Providence Plantations had "favorite" features of their environment for naming and that they had "favorite" place-name generics for these features. Their naming practices were efficient and there is remarkably little overlapping or ambiguity in these favorite place-name generics. However, the total vocabulary of topographical terms was much larger and included many synonyms or near-synonyms; it also included many terms for features that were not regularly given place-names. The practice of defining certain topographical terms by means of other topographical terms suggests the existence of a core of universally understood and accepted terms, together with a large number of less universal, perhaps even idiolectal, variant terms for the same phenomenon. Finally, the grammatical status of some topographical terms in the language as a whole seems to have precluded their use as place-name generics.

Boston University