

Names Forever on the Land*

AUDREY R. DUCKERT

WHY IS IT," a visitor once asked, "that you have to keep using the same names for the places here? What ever became of Yankee ingenuity?" He was confronted with a relatively simple but at the same time complex problem: the abundance of the name *Hadley* in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts. South Hadley Falls is on the north edge of Holyoke; next upriver is South Hadley, where Mount Holyoke College is located; the Holyoke Range divides it from Hadley (the center) and from North Hadley. There is a Middle Hadley, though not on most maps, and an East Hadley, which blends into Amherst. No West Hadley, because the river gets in the way, but only to introduce North- West-, South- and Easthampton. Northampton, the oldest of the towns, is also the easternmost; Easthampton lies to its southwest, Southampton further to the southwest, and Westhampton to the northwest. And in all the above directions lies madness, since if one takes the bridge named for Calvin Coolidge that spans the Connecticut as a center point, all of these localities are within a 15-mile radius.

The question, then: why do some names get used over and over, carried from place to place sometimes even by those who claim to be glad to shake the dust of the earlier one from their clothes? The *some* is important; not all multiply-given names are reminiscent. American Indian names on the North American continent are many and varied, and we shall never know whether most of them were adopted by the early white settlers out of convenience, diplomacy, or sheer weariness in times when there was so much else to think about. (Tolman, "twelfth man," was called thus by his Norwegian immigrant parents when their twelfth baby came and they were out of names.)

But simple repetition, which takes Cambridge from England to New England and thence west, with each naming probably reminiscent of a previous one, is a rather uninteresting course, though there are at least a

* It is presumptuous, to say the least, to offer remarks on place-names to George R. Stewart, whose classic *Names on the Land* nurtured the early interest of many of us, and who has done so much for so long to show us the joy of American names. He has made us see that the names on this land are as much—no, *more* a part of us all than Plymouth Rock, the Grand Canyon, and the Redwoods. Our names are small, quiet, knowable, lovable—and George Stewart over the years has shown us why and how. It is indeed presumptuous to offer him these words; but I am going to do it anyway, with joy and thanks.

dozen progeny. One could chart—and someone probably has—the westering of Springfield from William Pynchon's English home to the town he founded in Massachusetts in 1636, all the way to Oregon; and along with it many other English names that have made similar journeys, each with its own tale to tell, each with its own anecdotage—enough for a book. It is not always possible to establish the links, and surely there are also independent namings.

AMHERST. Curiously, though the name is English, derived from *hemme-hurst* “edge of the woods,” there appears not to be a town by that name in England. The Massachusetts one, created when it separated from Hadley in 1759, was named for Lord Jeffrey Amherst, “a soldier of the King” as the well-known college song will tell you. The pronunciation has been a shibboleth for years. Locally, the [h] is not pronounced, and in generations past, neither was the [r]—this on the authority of Miss Ruby Hemenway, born 1884 in neighboring Leverett, who recalls her grandparents and “the older folks” saying only [‘æməst]. Towns of the same name in New Hampshire and New York say [‘æm, hɜːst], as does Amherst Junction, Wisconsin. Fashions, cycles, and mobility make it increasingly difficult to be precise about local pronunciations; just when you master the shibboleth, it shifts. Cirencester, England [sɪsɪstə] was being called [saɪrənsɛstə] by many Gloucestershire folk heard in the fall of 1973; but no one was heard saying [glausɛstə]—not yet, anyway.

The 1855 Lippincott *Gazetteer* lists nine Amhersts, and gives the pronunciation only at the first entry, which strikes the stern Kipling note:

Amherst am' erst A seaport town of the British Territory in Farther India, capital of the most N. of the Tenaserim provinces . . . on Amherst peninsula, 30 miles s.w. of Maulmein . . .¹

The 1909 edition of the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* says it is in Burma; the 1975 *Times Atlas* lists it only as a cross-reference to Kyaikkami, Burma.² Sic transit . . . , but there are still at least ten Amhersts left to weave a tangled web.

Who can say why a secondary settlement may or may not be modified by “New”? The fresh-start frame of mind may be even more important than nostalgia. New Salem, Massachusetts, some 80 miles west of the original, may be a case in point. It can claim the site of the oldest vocational school in the country, but no witches, no gallows. Stress in “New” compound-names varies, but generally it is either level or on the

¹ *Lippincott's Pronouncing Gazetteer, A Complete Pronouncing Gazetteer, or Geographical Dictionary of the WORLD . . .* J. Thomas, M.D. and T. Baldwin, eds. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1855).

² *The Times Atlas of the World*. Comprehensive ed. (London: Times Books, 1975).

second element, and this is current local usage in New Salem. A puzzlement arises, however, from map 2 of the *Linguistic Atlas of New England* in which both informants were recorded as stressing the "New." New Salem is not a large town, and repeated inquiries there, even among families of several generations of residence brought no verification. "All I ever heard or said was New Salem," was the usual reply. But Bernard Bloch was the field worker who did the two New Salem records for the *Atlas*, and it was not like him to get things wrong. An explanation has come just recently from a granddaughter of LANE 212.1, who says it was the way her great-grandfather said it—though no one else did—and he was living in the household when his son-in-law was interviewed. The sound recordings made by Miles Hanley in the town in 1934 evidence level stress in emphatic utterance and stress on the Salem elsewhere.

The addition of "New" allows for names to live twice in a state, sometimes more. There are two New Bostons in Massachusetts, but only the one in Berkshire County has a corporate existence. "New", of course, does not always imply an Old: New Haven, New Harmony, New Hope speak of renewal rather than reminiscence. If the "New" town is in the same state as the old one, the modifier seems necessary; elsewhere it is optional. There are 19 *Springfields* in the *Times Atlas* and not one *New Springfield*. New names reflect trans- as well as cis-Atlantic origins (New Berlin, New Braunfels, New Holstein, New Glarus . . .) and though with these as well the general pattern is second-element stress, 'New Paltz, N.Y. will have it otherwise.

As the name moves west, and that is the usual direction, the simplex is more used. Thus in Wisconsin: Arlington, Belmont, Cambridge, Deerfield, Fitchburg, Greenfield . . . (Curiously, there is no *E-* name from the East, though there is an East Troy without a Troy of any other direction.)

Changing the stress or the basic pronunciation may reflect an attitude or a change in one as a result of ill feeling toward the original. The *Berlin* place-names in this country are almost always ['bɜːrlən], with or without the "New." Vienna turns up as [vaɪjənə], at least in Dane County, Wis., but apparently not for any ideological reasons. Athens, Vermont is [eəθnz]; Lancaster, Wis. is ['læŋkæstə], though the earlier one in Massachusetts is ['læŋkæstə]. New Holstein, Wis. is [nə'holstain] to locals, but even within the state, the [stin] pronunciation crops up, inevitably, with all those homonymous black and white cows. Corinth, N.Y. is called [ke'rinə], and Cairo, Illinois—made famous by *Huckleberry Finn* if for no other reason—is [kero], though [kairo] has also been heard of late. A revenant?

To say whether or not being the fifteenth Springfield or standing in the

shadow of a “New” has an effect on the psyche of a place lies more in the domain of the *New Yorker’s* able gazetteer, Calvin Trillin. Certainly New York itself has not suffered from “junior” syndrome; it even keeps the NOVA EBORACI on its city seal, preserving the ancient half-Keltic name of its forebear.

Not all names in common are borrowings. Some arise simply from a function or a descriptive feature that occurs over and over. Market towns and places based on the Germanic root **kaup-* are such as Copenhagen, (Kjøbenhavn), Jonköping (Sweden), Kaupanger (Norway), Cheapside (London, England and Greenfield, Mass.), and the English Chipping Norton and Chipping Campden, in which the Chipping is sometimes folk-etymologized to “sheeping” in the wool country.

Some of the names-forever are, it must be said, just plain dull. It is depressing even to contemplate, let alone enumerate, the many places called Mill River, Mud Lake, Beaver Dam, Long Island, Bald Mountain after some obvious characteristic. It is a bit like naming a Dalmatian dog “Spot.” Slightly better, but onomastically uninteresting, is the commemorative procession of Washingtons, Jeffersons, Lincolns, and the like—names having little or nothing to do with the places or them that dwell therein. But, in another direction, it is amusing to know how many ways there are to say the same or similar names: New Town, Newton,³ Newnham, Newington . . . all within one language. Aldborough in Yorkshire and Oldtown in Maine answer from the other end of time; but the Mid- names such as Middleton, Middletown, Middlesex, Midlothian, Midway are terrestrially rather than temporally central.

And so, the names go on across the land, evidencing repetition, tradition, function, or appearance; they speak everything from homesickness to hope, from the pioneer spirit to commemorative zeal. A good name, like a good story or a good song, never dies.

University of Massachusetts

³ On the western outskirts of Boston are Newton, Newton Highlands, Newton Lower Falls, Newton Upper Falls, Newtonville, and West Newton. This has prompted the definition of Boston as “a universal center of gravity surrounded by Newtons.”