

On the Indian Place-Names of South Carolina

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OF THE MORE THAN 15,000 place-names that have been discussed in *Names in South Carolina* under the editorship of Claude Henry Neuffer during the past 24 years, a mere 230 are names of Indian origin. This fact alone reveals much about the naming practices of the predominantly English-speaking population that settled the state and eventually displaced the indigenous population.

For the most part the settlers chose names using formatives from their own language. Thus we find major cities bearing names of transparent origin: Charleston (originally Charles Town, named for Charles II of England), Columbia, Greenville, Spartanburg, Orangeburg, Rock Hill, and the like. Most of these are based on personal names or descriptive designations. Some can be found suggesting French influence, such as Port Royal,¹ or German influence, such as Dutch Fork,² a settlement of Pennsylvania "Dutch" (i.e., Germans who originally called themselves *Deutsch*). Spanish influence is found in a name such as Monterey, named to commemorate the Battle of Monterey in the Mexican-American War.³

The names of Indian origin are confined mainly to rivers and streams or to communities or plantations. Often a place-name appears to be based on a stream name, and in some cases a place-name may preserve an earlier stream name that has since been replaced by a non-Indian name. Many of the Indian names are found only in historical references, having been replaced in modern times by European formations or, in the case of names referring to now-extinct tribes, having fallen into disuse.

Although 230 names may seem like a small number to represent the original inhabitants of the state, the names are conspicuously different from other place-names in the area and thus invite special investigation.

¹ *Names in South Carolina*, 4 (1957), 12, hereafter cited as NSC.

² NSC, 8 (1961), 16.

³ NSC, 4 (1957), 4.

Even so, it is largely through the efforts of a single individual, Dr. A. L. Pickens, that these names have been brought to the attention of readers of *Names in South Carolina*. Dr. Pickens, a biologist who had long been interested in the study of Indian names,⁴ returned to this study following his retirement and published three major articles⁵ on the subject, contributed several shorter follow-up articles,⁶ and corresponded with other contributors⁷ prior to his death in 1970. In addition, T. Mark Verdery has written on the Indian names of South Carolina rivers,⁸ and other contributors have occasionally touched on Indian names in articles focusing on other topics. Much of the discussion has drawn on the work of Mooney,⁹ Hodge,¹⁰ Swanton,¹¹ Milling,¹² and to a lesser extent the primary sources used by them.

Despite these efforts, it must still be said that we know next to nothing about the Indian names of South Carolina. Special difficulties complicate the study of Indian place-names, making the study of other names seem simple by comparison. One can hardly claim to have dealt satisfactorily with a name of Indian origin simply by describing it as "said to be of Indian origin" or "said to mean 'x' in an Indian language." An etymology is never settled until the form in question can be traced to a definite language and an unbroken chain of transmission established from the language of origin to the present day. In the process, the morphological structure of the word must be analyzed and

⁴ A. L. Pickens, "Dictionary of Indian Place-Names in Upper South Carolina," *South Carolina Natural History*, Nos. 51-53 (1937), 1-10; "A Comparison of Cherokee and Pioneer Bird-Nomenclature," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 7 (1943), 213-221.

⁵ A. L. Pickens, "Indian Place-Names in South Carolina," Part I *NSC*, 8 (1961), 3-7; Part II *NSC*, 9 (1962), 20-24; Part III *NSC*, 10 (1963), 36-41.

⁶ A. L. Pickens, "Aboriginal Miscellany in Place-Names," *NSC*, 11 (1964), 33; "Some Latin-Amerind and Other Dubiosities," *NSC*, 12 (1965), 44-45; "From Conquistador to Tourist along the Savannah Valley," *NSC*, 13 (1967), 15-16; "Some Place Names along the Inner-Carolina Boundary," *NSC*, 16 (1969), 19-20.

⁷ *NSC*, 11 (1964), 55, 58-59, 61, 63; *NSC*, 13 (1966), 43.

⁸ T. Mark Verdery, "Indian Names of Major Rivers," *NSC*, 16 (1969), 30-31.

⁹ James Mooney, *Siouan Tribes of the East* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethology, 1894); *Myths of the Cherokees* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethology, 1900).

¹⁰ Frederick W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethology, 1907-1910; rpt., New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971).

¹¹ John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethology, 1946; rpt. Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1969); *The Indian Tribes of North America* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethology, 1952; rpt. Grosse Pointe, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1968).

¹² Chapman J. Milling, *Red Carolinians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940; rpt. with typographical corrections, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969).

the meaning of each component identified. This of course requires that the investigator be familiar with the supposed donor language and therefore able to verify the structure in question as grammatically and phonologically acceptable in the language.

These conditions are not easily met. During the contact period more than 30 different languages representing at least six distinct families were spoken in what is now South Carolina. These languages, grouped into families, are given in the accompanying table, along with a list of related languages spoken in other parts of the country. Although the six families fall into two superfamilies, or *phyla*, the relationships are by no means close. The Algonkian and Muskogean families, for example, are at least as remote from each other as are the Germanic and Indic branches within the Indo-European family. The South Carolina situation is complicated by the fact that virtually no linguistic data was collected from speakers *in situ* during the contact period, and most of the languages are now extinct. Of the original inhabitants, only a small group of English-speaking Catawba Indians in the vicinity of Rock Hill remain as direct descendants of the state's aboriginal population.¹³

Sufficient material on Catawba has been collected in modern times to classify the language as an isolate within the Siouan phylum.¹⁴ A substantial amount of data collected by linguists in the present century is available for Cherokee¹⁵ and Shawnee.¹⁶ Studies of the Muskogean

¹³ Other tribes suffered population depletion through warfare, slave raids, and exposure to diseases introduced by the Europeans. Survivors gradually moved westward and joined forces with groups living in areas that had not yet come into direct contact with colonists. In some cases remnant bands sought refuge with Creek Indians in Georgia, but in many cases small tribes were apparently absorbed into the Catawba nation—a fact that helps to account both for the disappearance of many small tribes mentioned in Colonial documents and for the ability of the Catawba to maintain sufficient numbers to survive. The Catawba Indians managed to hold onto part of the lands originally reserved for them and in recent years have initiated court action to recover additional lands ceded in dubious legal transactions in the nineteenth century. The Catawba language remained in use into the present century and, although no longer spoken by members of the group in South Carolina, is known by at least one person (Red Thunder Cloud, cf. n. 14) living outside the state.

¹⁴ Frank T. Siebert, Jr., "Linguistic Classification of Catawba," *International Journal of American Linguistics* (hereafter *IJAL*), 11 (1945), 100-104; Part II *IJAL*, 11 (1945), 211-218. See also G. Hubert Matthews and Red Thunder Cloud, "Catawba Texts," *IJAL*, 33 (1967), 7-24. For an exhaustive list of resources on Catawba and other Southeastern languages see James M. Crawford, "Southeastern Indian Languages" in James M. Crawford (ed.), *Studies in Southeastern Indian Languages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975), pp. 1-120.

¹⁵ Ernest Bender and Zellig S. Harris, "The Phonemes of North Carolina Cherokee," *IJAL*, 12 (1946), 14-16; Ernest Bender, "Cherokee II," *IJAL*, 15 (1949), 223-228. See also Crawford, n. 14.

¹⁶ C.F. Voegelin, "Shawnee Phonemes," *Language*, 11 (1935), 23-37; "Shawnee Stems and the Jacob P. Dunn Miami Dictionary," *Indiana Historical Society Prehistory Research Series 1* (1938-1940), 63-108, 135-167, 345-389, 409-478. See also Crawford, n. 14.

Native Languages of South Carolina

FAMILY NAME	SOUTH CAROLINA REPRESENTATIVE(S)	RELATED LANGUAGES	LARGER GROUPING
1. Catawba	Catawba, Waxhaw (?)	—	Macro-Siouan phylum
2. Iroquoian	Cherokee	Tuscarora, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk	Macro-Siouan phylum
3. Algonkian	Shawnee, Saluda (?), "Savannah"	Powhatan, Delaware, Fox, Menomini, Ojibwa, Cree	Macro-Algonkian phylum
4. Muskogean	Muskogee (Creek), Coosa (?), Yamasee (?)	Choctaw, Chickasaw, Alabama, Seminole	Macro-Algonkian phylum
5. Yuchi	Yuchi, Westo (?)	—	Macro-Siouan phylum
6. Siouan	Cheraw, Combahee, Congaree, Edisto, Enoree (Eno), Etiwaw (Eutaw), Kiawaw, Oconee, Pedee, Santee, Saponi, Sewee, Shakori, Stono, Sugeree, Usheree, Waccamaw, Wapoo, Wateree, Winyaw	Biloxi, Ofo, Tutelo, Dakota, Winnebago, Omaha, Ponca, Osage, Crow, Iowa	Macro-Siouan phylum

languages¹⁷ and Yuchi¹⁸ have also been undertaken in the present century and are still in progress, but relatively little published material is yet available. Limited amounts of material are available for the Siouan languages,¹⁹ but we shall probably never have any way of knowing how closely related the Siouan languages of the plains are to the now-extinct languages of South Carolina. Indeed, the South Carolina languages assumed to be Siouan are classified presumptively on the basis of known ties with other Siouan tribes rather than on the basis of positive linguistic evidence.

This paper should therefore be considered a first step in reviewing and appraising material published up to the present time. A definitive treatment remains many years in the future and will likely require the cooperative efforts of specialists in each of the six language families involved. Even then, it will probably be necessary to list many names as still of uncertain etymology. For the present I will attempt only to summarize in the appended list what can be stated with assurance about the principal river and place-names. In a few cases it will be possible to correct mistaken etymologies that have been circulated in the past or to verify others. In most cases it is possible only to identify a name as commemorating a tribal name while the meaning of the name—and even the language involved—remains unknown.

The problem of determining the correct etymological form of words calls for special comment. When Indian names were borrowed into English, they invariably underwent phonological modification as can readily be seen from reading through the sometimes lengthy lists of variant tribal names cited by Hodge.²⁰ The variants, however, can usually be seen as a collection of ad hoc efforts to spell a certain pronunciation, which can often be reconstructed in whole or in part. Once borrowed into English, of course, Indian names were cut off from paradigmatic association with related forms in the donor language and were therefore free to change rapidly in idiosyncratic ways. Similar developments have been attested in place-names in England, for example *-chester*, *-caster* as variants of Latin *castra* “camp.” The lack of

17 Mary R. Haas, “The Classification of the Muskogean Languages,” in ed. Leslie Spier, *et al. Language, Culture, and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir* (Menasha, Wis., 1941; rpt. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1960), pp. 41-56. See also Crawford, n. 14.

18 Günter Wagner, “Yuchi,” in *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), III, 291-384. See also Crawford, n. 14.

19 G. Hubert Matthews, “Handbook of Siouan Languages,” Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1958. See also Crawford, n. 14.

20 See n. 10.

documentation for South Carolina languages, however, leaves the American researcher handicapped in a way that the student of Latin is not.

A large number of South Carolina tribal names end in what appears to be a common formative *-ee*. The list includes Combahee, Congaree, Cusabee, Enoree, Pedee, Santee, Sewee, Sugaree, Wateree, and Yama-see. Many of the foregoing occur in varying forms, as for example *Corsaboys* alongside *Cusabee*, *Cusabo*, and *Cussabos*. In addition, *Shakori*, *Saponie*, and *Nachee* (*Nachez*) can be added to the list on phonetic grounds even though they exhibit different spellings. While it is tempting to suppose that all these names share a native formative, perhaps meaning "people," we know that at least one group, the Natchez, came from outside the state and brought their name with them. The formative seems to be the *-ese* suffix of Romance origin that is found in names like Chinese and Portuguese. The ending was commonly construed as a plural, giving rise via back formation to singulars such as *Chinee*, now regarded as nonstandard. In the case of South Carolina tribal names we invariably find both the singular and plural form recorded (e.g., *Sewee*, *Seweese*) although modern usage has tended to drop the plural and use the singular, without inflection, as an aggregate (e.g., the Sewee). With only a few exceptions (e.g., *Cherokee*, *Santee* as noted below) we can regard the etymological form of these names as lacking the final *-ee*. Thus Cusabee would appear to be formed from *cusa* + *ee* with *-b-* apparently assigned to the stem from the related *Cusabo*, itself from *cusa* + *bo*, described below under *Coosa-whatchie*.

As already noted, this paper is offered as a first step in reviewing and summarizing material published up to the present time. The list that follows is limited to the major river and place-names and is confined to data that can be accepted with a high degree of confidence. Numerous gaps remain in the etymologies. Some of these will no doubt be filled as additional language data is examined, but those names drawn from extinct languages are likely to remain obscure forever. In the case of questionable etymologies that have appeared in print I have included the proposed derivation while trying to offer my own appraisal of its reliability.

APPENDIX

Ashepoo—town in Colleton County and river located between the Edisto and Combahee Rivers. The name commemorates a small band of

the Cusabo tribe,²¹ possibly Muskogean, but perhaps a refugee band of Siouan or other affinity that joined forces with the Cusabo. The etymology is unknown.

Awandaw—town in Charleston County, apparently named for an obscure Indian tribe, etymology unknown.

Catawba—river and town near the North Carolina border in the north central part of the state. The name commemorates the Catawba Indians but is apparently a name applied to them by some other tribe, which could not have been Cherokee or Iroquoian since the name for Catawba is recorded in those languages.²² The Catawba self-designation was *issa* “river (people),” a term that entered English briefly in the form *Eswaw*.

Cateechee—town in Pickens County. Supposed name of a Cherokee princess in a story recorded by James Henry Rice Jr.²³

Cheraw—town in Chesterfield County. From a tribal name first recorded by DeSoto as *Xuala*. The Cherokee form was *Suali*. The name appears in early records as *Saraw*, eventually assuming its present form. The tribe was probably Siouan, but the meaning of the name is unknown.²⁴

Cherokee—name of upstate county in area once inhabited by Cherokee Indians. The name is from the tribal self-designation *tsálagi* ~ *tsáragi*, possibly borrowed originally from Choctaw *čiluk-ki* “cave people,” a designation similar in meaning to that used for them by Iroquoian speakers.²⁵

Cherokee Falls—town in Cherokee County, *q.v.*

Combabee—river formed by confluence of Salkehatchie and Little Salkehatchie. The name commemorates a small band of the Cusabo tribe. Etymology unknown.

Congaree—town in Richland County and river formed by confluence of Broad and Saluda Rivers at Columbia flowing into Lake Marion. Commemorates a tribal name. Etymology unknown.

Coosawhatchie—river emptying into Port Royal Sound and town in Jasper County. *Coosa* is apparently a name of Muskogean origin but of uncertain meaning, used with *-bo* possibly “people,” as a tribal name.

²¹ Milling, p. 35.

²² Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 90.

²³ James Henry Rice Jr., “Ninety-Six and her Traditions” in *Poems and an Essay on Ninety-Six* (Chester, S.C.: Enterprise Printing, 1893). The authenticity of the legend is doubted by Pickens NSC, 8 (1961), 4.

²⁴ Hodge, I, pp. 244-245.

²⁵ Hodge, I, pp. 245-246. The *r*-dialects, now extinct, were located in South Carolina; the *l*-dialects in North Carolina and Tennessee.

The final unit *bači* is the Muskogee (Creek) formative for "river." The *-w-* is orthographic.

Eastatoe—town in Oconee County, from the name of a Cherokee town in the area.²⁶ Etymology unknown.

Edisto—coastal island, town in Colleton County, and river in same area. From a tribal name, etymology unknown.

Elloree—town in Orangeburg County. Although it has the appearance of an Indian name, Pickens²⁷ doubts its authenticity. In any case, the etymology is unknown.

Enoree—upstate river flowing into Broad River and town in Spartanburg County. The name commemorates the Eno (Enoree) tribe, probably of Siouan stock. A tribe of the same name was located on the Eno River in Durham County, North Carolina.²⁸

Eutaw—as part of two town names in Orangeburg County (Eutawville and Eutaw Springs) and formerly the name of the present Cooper River in Charleston. Apparently an Anglicized form of *Etiwaw*,²⁹ the meaning "pine tree" has been offered but has never been authenticated. Speck³⁰ regards this meaning as doubtful.

Keowee—upstate lake. From the name of a Cherokee town in the area, etymology unknown.³¹

Kiawab—coastal island south of Charleston. From a tribal name, etymology unknown.

Oconee—name of upstate county. Taken from the name of a Cherokee village in the area, etymology unknown.³²

Pamlico—town in Florence County. Probably to be identified with the Pamlico Indians, an Algonkian tribe of coastal North Carolina. The *-p-* is intrusive. Etymology unknown.

Pee Dee—name given to a region of the state as well as a town and a major river system in the region. The name commemorates a tribe of the same name although the tribal name is usually spelled Pedee. The tribe, which may have been Siouan, eventually joined forces with the Catawba. Etymology uncertain although Speck³³ suggests, rather speculatively, *piri* "something good."

²⁶ Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 216.

²⁷ NSC, 8 (1961), 5.

²⁸ Hodge, I, pp. 425-426; Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, pp. 79, 96.

²⁹ Hodge, I, pp. 143-144.

³⁰ Frank G. Speck, "Siouan Tribes of the Carolinas as Known from Catawba, Tutelo, and Documentary Sources," *American Anthropologist*, 37 (1935), 221.

³¹ Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 216.

³² Hodge, II, p. 105; Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 216.

³³ Speck, p. 221.

Salkeatchie (and *Little Salkeatchie*)—rivers forming the Combahee River between the Savannah and Edisto. The second element is Muskegee (Creek) *bači* “river”; the first element is uncertain.

Saluda—name of county and town in piedmont region west of Columbia, and a river in the same region. The name is taken from a tribal name, etymology unknown, although the tribe itself was almost certainly a band of the Shawnee tribe.³⁴

Santee—river north of Charleston and town in Orangeburg County, both derived from a tribal name. Although Speck³⁵ suggests that the name is Siouan *iswāti* “the river is there,” a form with such a meaning seems improbable as a tribal designation. There is of course a branch of the Dakota Sioux bearing the same name. The Dakota name, according to Hodge,³⁶ is from *isañ-* “knife” (shortened from *isañtamde* “knife lake,” the Dakota name for Mille Lacs) + *-ati* “to pitch tents at.” The name is plausible as a tribal designation derived from a descriptive term. While there is no reason to suppose that the two groups known as Santee are directly related or that their names are connected, the South Carolina Santee were probably Siouan and their name therefore is likely to have a similar structure, although not necessarily the same meaning.

Savannah—name of the river separating South Carolina and Georgia; also a tribal designation given in varied spellings, including Savana. Since most, possibly all, the Indians bearing this designation are known to be Shawnee, it has been widely supposed that the name Savannah derives from the Shawnee self-designation *šaawanwa*, often contracted to *šaawano*. Adair³⁷ makes this assumption, and the assertion has been repeated by a number of reputable scholars up to the present day. I have shown elsewhere³⁸ that this is incorrect. The contracted form of the Shawnee name is indeed the source of the English tribal name *Shawnee*; the river name and use of *Savana* as a tribal designation derive from the English topographic term *savannah*, which was borrowed into English from Spanish in the 1500s and has been in continuous use in South Carolina from colonial days to the present. The use of *savannah* as a topographic term is amply attested in the pages of *Names in South*

³⁴ Milling, p. 89.

³⁵ Speck, p. 220.

³⁶ Hodge, II, p. 460.

³⁷ James Adair, *History of the American Indians* (London, 1775) rpt., ed. Samuel Cole Williams, *Adair's History of the American Indians* (Johnson City, Tenn.: Watauga Press, 1930).

³⁸ Bruce L. Pearson, “Savannah and Shawnee: Same or Different?” *NSC*, 21 (1974), 19-22; “Savannah and Shawnee: Same People, Different Names,” *NSC*, 23 (1976), 20-22; “Savannah and Shawnee: The End of a Mini-Controversy,” to appear in *IJAL*.

Carolina.³⁹ The Spanish term itself was borrowed from an Indian language of the Caribbean.

Seneca—name of a river and town in Anderson County. Although Pickens⁴⁰ doubts that the name commemorates the Iroquoian tribe of the same name, this tribe is reported on numerous occasions as being in South Carolina during the 1700s.⁴¹ The town of Seneca was established after 1760, apparently settled largely by Cherokee Indians who had relocated after abandoning villages closer to the ever expanding white outposts.⁴² The term *Seneca* was often used loosely for any Iroquoian Indian, regardless of tribe. Whether it was also applied to the Cherokee is less certain. The Seneca were closely associated with the Tuscarora and could possibly have been among the remnant bands that settled in the town. Even if no Senecas were present and the name was applied to other Indians in error, there seems little reason to doubt that the name is intended to commemorate the northern tribe, wandering bands of which had been active in South Carolina.

Tamassee—town in Oconee County. Probably from the name of a Cherokee town in the area, earlier recorded as *Tomassee*.⁴³ Etymology unknown.

Waccamaw—river, mainly in Horry County, emptying into Winyah Bay. From a tribal name, etymology unknown.

Wateree—town in Richland County; lake north of Columbia and river flowing from the lake to Lake Marion. From a tribal name of unknown etymology. Gatschet's well known suggestion⁴⁴ of a connection with Catawba *wateran* "to float on the water" is highly speculative.

Winyab—bay in Georgetown County. From a tribal name, etymology unknown.

Yemassee—town in Hampton County. Variant of the tribal name Yamasee; probably Creek, but etymology unknown.

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³⁹ See for example *NSC*, 11 (1964), 20; 12 (1965), 13, 32; 13 (1966), 22.

⁴⁰ *NSC*, 11 (1964), 61.

⁴¹ Douglas Summers Brown, *The Catawba Indians: The People of the River* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 142, 160-164, 169; Milling, pp. 91, 114-115, 237.

⁴² Milling, p. 310.

⁴³ Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 216.

⁴⁴ Cited in Swanton, *Indian Tribes*, p. 101.