

## The Place Names of *NEWFOUNDLAND* ...

By E. R. SEARY, M. A., Ph. D. From *The Book of Newfoundland. Vol. III. 1967.*

### *AMONG THE MANY TREASURES*

which Newfoundland is so richly endowed, her place names have a value not indeed to be counted in dollars and cents yet of inestimable value. For if our names lack the long history of some place names in Europe, they have a linguistic variety and often a charm unequalled in the New World. If we have our share of names that are commonplace, our scores of Seal Coves, Burnt Heads and Gull Islands, even they often reveal a facet of Newfoundland life though, in fact, they are overshadowed by others that are frequently unique: Kitchuses, Brigus, Dildo, Renewes, Ferryland, Gaskiers, Fermeuse, Come by Chance, Famish-gut, Quidi Vidi, to name a few.

Different people look at place names with different eyes. The man in the street, the browser through an atlas, the casual visitor will probably be struck by the unusualness, the quaintness of some of the names he sees and hears, and may be sufficiently interested to speculate on their "meaning." The linguist will see in them reminders and suggestions of place names and other words not only English but Portuguese, Spanish, French, Basque, Irish and Micmac. The historian and sociologist will see them as one kind of evidence about the discovery and settlement of the island and about the occupations and concerns of its people. The toponymist, the student of place names who must be something of a linguist, cartologist, historian and sociologist, will trace the names to their earliest citation to ascertain their origins and history and so attempt to arrive at their significance, and will analyze and classify them to reveal their structure and their kinds.

Examination of the structure of place names reveals that they fall into two classes. The first is composed of names which are a single word: Horsechops, Sugarloaf, Brigus, Fermeuse. The second is composed of names with two elements, a generic which distinguishes, for example, one kind of feature from another, as Gander Bay from Gander River, Turk's Gut from

Turk's Pond, and a specific which isolates a particular feature from others of the same kind, as Salmon River, South River, Rocky River; Conception Bay, Trinity Bay, Bonavista Bay; Burton's Pond, Kent's Pond, Parson's Pond. The specific may be one word or more, as in the Pond that feeds the Brook, and in English names commonly precedes the generic, though certain generics precede the specific, as in Mount Pearl, Mount Carmel. A qualifier may distinguish two places which without it would bear the same name: Upper Island Cove, Lower island Cove., St. Jones Within, St. Jones Without, Big Otter Pond, Little Otter Pond.

Both generics and specifics lend themselves to further analysis, with specifics revealing a wide variety of kinds. Descriptive specifics perform at least three functions: in revealing permanent qualities in the generic, as in Black Head, Green Island, Rocky River, or impermanent qualities as in Castle Hill and Woody Island, or a relationship as in Middle Arm, South Head, Left Hand Pond and Right Hand Pond. Incident specifics are such as Wreck Cove, Savage Cove, Mount Misery, though they may also be names of persons and animals associated with an incident. Occupations such as seamanship and fishing provide descriptive and incident specifics in such names as Starboard Island and Port Island, Oakbark Cove, Ringbolt Cove, Oil Jacket Cove. Possessive specifics contain a notion of ownership or habitation as in Mount Pearl, Tom Power Lookout, Cochrane's Pond, Frenchman's Cove, Spaniard's Bay. Commemorative specifics honour persons and are commonly of religious and patriotic significance: St. Mary's Bay, St. George's Bay, Prince William Place, Musgrave Harbour, though this class also includes place names transferred from other places, as in Mount Cashel, Kilbride, Skibbereen from Ireland, Torbay, New Chelsea, Eppworth from England, and Brehat, St. Lunair, Twillingate, Oderin from France. Euphemistic names are bestowed to make a good

impression, as in Bellevue and Heart's Delight, to remove a previous bad impression, as in the change of Famishgut to Fairhaven and Scilly Cove to Winterton, and, it may be suspected, sometimes ironically, as in Paradise. Manufactured names such as Ganova, a combination of Gander and Terra Nova, and Clarenbridge, a combination of Clarenville and Lethbridge, are rare in Newfoundland. They are formed to make convenient titles for organizations associated with more than one community.

Shift names occur where a specific is shifted from one generic to another in the same area to form a name cluster, as in Hawke(s) Harbour, imposed by Cook in 1767, to which have been added Hawke Bay, Hawke Flat, and Hawke Point.

Folk-etymology produces new names from old names through ignorance of the meaning of the old names, as in Ferryland, where the element

Ferry seems to be the English word for a boat which passes to and fro over a river or across a bay, whereas it derives from the Portuguese *Farelhao* - reef, steep rock, steep little island, or the French *Forillon* - cape, point; or from the English foreland. Associated with folk-etymologies are mistake names which arise from failures in transmission, as when Pigweed Pond becomes Pegwood Pond, and Watering Cove becomes Water Cove.

Places, whether natural features like headlands, mountains, lakes, rivers and bays, or man made objects like towns, villages, streets and bridges, receive their names in one of two ways. They are either deliberately imposed by known persons or they evolve by a process of spontaneous creation or collective usage. The origin of evolved names is something we have lost, but the authorship and circumstances of imposed names are often well authenticated....



**FERRYLAND** : Seen here around the turn of the 20th century it pictures the "Downs" leading out to the Lighthouse on the "Head" (background on horizon) and the isthmus area that today is under excavation to unearth the remains of the "Colony of Avalon".

(Photo Center for Newfoundland Studies MUN St John's, NL)