

INDIAN NAMES OF THE ISLANDS AND BAY OF NEW YORK

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The first name, which occurs, is that of the Hudson river. It does not appear that the discoverer² thought of giving it his own name. In the narrative of his voyage, it is called the Great River of the Mountains, or simply the Great river. This term was simply translated by his employers, the servants of the Dutch West India Company³, who on the early maps of Nova Belgica, called it *Groote Riviere*. It was afterwards called Nassau, after the reigning House,⁴ but this name was not preserved in. After a subsequent time, they gave it the name of Mauritius, after Prince Maurice⁵ but this name if it was ever much in vogue, either did not prevail against, or was early exchanged for the popular term of North River – a name which it emphatically bore to distinguish it from the Lenapihittuck or Delaware, which they called *South* river. [Zuydt Rivier.] That the name of Mauritius was but partially introduced, is indicated by the rely made by the New England authorities to a letter respecting boundaries

¹ Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was a very well-known American ethnologist. He also represented the US government in creating treaties with Native Americans in the northeastern United States. He married a woman from the Ojibwa tribe and was well-versed in their language. Additionally, Schoolcraft was known for his work in geology and in his exploration of the northeastern frontier. In an 1832 expedition, he discovered the source of the Mississippi River (“Henry Rowe Schoolcraft”).

² “The discoverer” refers to Henry Hudson, who first sailed up what would later become known as the Hudson River in 1609 while working for the Dutch East India Company (“Henry Hudson”).

³ This is a possible misnomer. As noted previously, Hudson worked for the Dutch East India Company at the time of his discovery of the Hudson River in 1609. The Dutch West India Company did not in fact come into existence until the year 1621 (“Dutch West India Company”).

⁴ This is a reference to the well-established Nassau Family of Germanic nobility. The Nassau Family acquired multiple Dutch properties as well. After the year 1544, it became known as the House of Nassau-Orange (“Nassau”).

⁵ Maurice (1567 – 1625), Noble of the House of Nassau-Orange in the Dutch Republic (“Maurice”).

of Gov. Kieft,⁶ in 1646, in which they declare, in answer to his complaint of encroachments on its settlements their entire ignorance of any river bearing this name.

Neither of the Indian names by which it was called, appear to have found much favor. The Mohegans called it Shatèmue. Shaita, in the cognate dialect of the Odjibwa, means a pelican. It cannot be affirmed, to denote the same object in this dialect, nor is it known that the pelican has ever been seen on this river. Ue is the ordinary inflection for locality. The Mineees, occupying the west banks, called it Mohegan-ittuck. The syllable itt, before uck, is one of the most transitive forms, by which the action of the nominative is engrafted upon the objective, without communicating any new meaning. The signification of the term is, Mohegan river. The Iroquois, (as given by the interpreter John Bleeker, and communicated by the late Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell in a letter to Dr. Miller in 1811,) called it Ca ho ha ta tè a, -- that is to say, if we have apprehended the word, the great river having mountains beyond the Cahoh or Cahoes Falls.

The three prominent Indian names for the Hudson are therefore the Mohegan, the Chatemuc, and the Cahotatea.

The river appears also to have been also called, by other tribes of the Iroquois confederacy, Sanataty. The word ataty, here, is the same written atatea, above, and is descriptive of various scenes according to its prefix. The English first named the river, the Hudson, after the surrender of the colony⁷ in 1664. It does not appear, under this name, in any Dutch work or record, which has been examined. It may be observed, that the term has not exclusively prevailed to the present day, among New Yorkers in the river counties, where the name of North River is still popular. It will be recollected, as a proof of the prevailing custom, that Fulton⁸ called his first boat, to test the triumph of steam, "The North River."

If the river failed to bear to future times, either of its original names, the island, as the nominative of the city, was equally unfortunate the more so it is conceived, as the name of the city became the name of the state. Regret has been expressed that some one of the sonorous and appropriate Indian names of the west, had not been chosen to designate the state. The colonists were but little regardful of questions of this kind. Both the Dutch in 1609 and the English in 1665, came with precisely the same force of national prepossession—the first in favor of Amsterdam, and the second in favor of New York—both connected with the belittling adjective "New." It is characteristic of the English, that they have sought to perpetuate the remembrance of their victories, conquests and discoveries, by these geographical names. And the word New York, if it redound less to their military or naval glory, than Blenheim, Trafalgar and Waterloo may be cited to show, that there was an early developed trait of character of the English, abroad as well as at home. It would be well, indeed, if their descendants in America had been a little more alive to the influence of this trait. Those who love the land, and cherish its nationalities, would at least have been spared, in witnessing the growth and development of this great city, the continued repetition of foreign, petty or vulgar

⁶ Governor William Kieft of New Netherland (1638-1646). Kieft was infamous for his poor governance and cruelty towards Native American populations ("William Kieft").

⁷ Referring to the temporary capture of the colony of New Netherlands by the English during the Anglo-Dutch wars. After its capture, the name of New Netherlands was changed to New York ("The Netherlands and Scandinavia in North America").

⁸ Robert Fulton, the inventor of the first steamboat

names, for our streets and squares and public resorts, while such names as Saratoga and Ticonderoga, Niagara and Ontario, Iosco and Owasco, are never thought of.

The Indians called the Island MON-A-TON—dropping the local [sic] inflection *uk*. The word is variously written by early writers. The sound as pronounced to me in 1827 by Metoxon, a Mohegan chief, is *Mon ah tan uk*, a phrase which is descriptive of the whirlpool of Hellgate. *Mon* or *man*, as here written, is the radix⁹ of the adjective *bad*, carrying as it does, in its multiplied forms, the various meanings of violent, dangerous, &c., when applied in compounds. *Ab tun*, is a generic term for a channel, or stream of running water. *Uk*, denotes locality, and also plurality. When the tribe has thus denoted this passage, which is confessedly the most striking and characteristic geographical feature of the region they called the island near it, to imply the Anglicised term, *Man-hat-tan*, and themselves *Mon-a-tuns*, that is to say, “People of the Whirlpool.” It is well known that the Indian tribes, have, generally, taken their distinctive names from geographical features. The Narragansetts, as we are told by Roger Williams,¹⁰ took that name, from a small island off the coast. Massachusetts, according to the same authority, signifies the Blue Hills, and is derived from the appearance of lands at sea. Mississauga, signifies they live at the mouth of a large river, and by an inflection, the people who live at the mouth of the large river or waters. Onondaga, means the people who live on the hill. Oneida, the people who sprang from a rock, &c. These names afford no clue to nationality, they preserve no ethnological¹¹ chain.

The tradition that this island derives its name from the accidental circumstance of the intoxication of the Indians of Hudson’s first visit, in 1609, is a sheer inference, unsupportable by philology.¹² That the tradition of such an event was preserved and related to the early missionaries by the Mohegan Indians, admits of no doubt, nor is there more, that the island was referred to as the place where their ancestors first obtained the taste of ardent spirits. That the island had no name prior to 1609, or if well known by a characteristic name, that this elder name was then dropped and a new name bestowed, in allusion to this circumstance of the intoxication, is not only improbable, on known principles, but is wholly unsustained, as will have been perceived by the above etymology. The word for intoxication, or dizziness from drink, in the Algonquin, and with little change in all the cognate dialects, is *Ke wush kwü bee*. The verb to drink in the same dialects is *Min e kwä*, in the Mohegan “Minahn”—words having none of the necessary elements of this compound. Very great care is, indeed, required in recording Indian words, to be certain that the word given, is actually expressive of the object of inquiry. Some curious and amusing examples of the mistakes of this kind might be given, did it comport with the limits of this report.

There were several Indian villages, or places of resort, of the island of Mon-à-ton, for which the original names have survived. The extreme point of land, between the junction of

⁹ *Radix*: An original word or form from which other words are derived. Now *rare*.

¹⁰ Roger Williams (c. 1603-1683), founder of Rhode Island and renowned supporter of Native American liberties. Also known for his translations of Native American dialects (“Roger Williams”).

¹¹ *Ethnological*: Of or relating to ethnology (the branch of knowledge concerned with human society and culture, and its development)

¹² *Philology*: The branch of knowledge that deals with the structure, historical development, and relationships of languages or language families; the historical study of the phonology and morphology of languages; historical linguistics

the East and North rivers, of which the Battery¹³ is now a part, was called Kapsee—and within the memory of persons still living was known as “the Copsie point”—a term which appears to denote a safe place of landing, formed by eddy waters. There was a village called Sapokanican, of the shores of the Hudson, at the present site of Greenwich. Corlear’s Hook was called Naghtognk. The particle tondk, here, denotes sand. A tract of meadow land on the north end of the island, near Kingsbridge, was called Muscoota, that is, meadow or grass land. Warpoes was a term bestowed on a piece of elevated ground, situated above and beyond the small lake or pond called the KOLCK. This term is, apparently, a derivative from Wawbose, a hare.

The islands around the city had their appropriate names. Long Island was called Metòac, after the name of the Metòacks, the principal tribe located on it. It is thus called by Van Der Donck in 1656, and in all the subsequent maps of authority, down to Evans’, in 1775. Smith calls it Meitowacks. In Gov. Clinton’s¹⁴ discourse, it is printed Meilowacks, but this is evidently a typographical error.

Staten Island, we are informed by De Vries,¹⁵ was occupied by the Mon-á-tans, who called it MONOCKNONG with a verbal prefix. The termination is *ong*, denotes locality. Manon is the ironwood tree, ack denotes a tree, or trunk, and admits a prefix from “manadud,” bad. By inquiry it does not appear that the Ironwood, although present, ever existed in sufficient abundance to render the name from that characteristic. The other, it is too late to investigate. It is believed the expression had an implied meaning, and denoted the Haunted Woods.

Thus far the colonial maps and records, so far as they have fallen under the committee’s notice. The vocabulary of the Mohegans affords, however, a few other terms, the application of which may be well assumed from their etymology. Of this kind is the term NOASH, for Sandy Hook, meaning a point surpassing others. MINNISAIS, or the lesser island, for Bedlow’s island; and KIOSHK, or Gull Island, for Ellis’s island. The heights of Brooklyn are graphically described in the term *Ihpetonga*; that is, high sandy banks.

The geological structure of the island was such as to bring it to a much narrower point, than it now occupies. By the recent excavations for the foundations of Trinity Church, and the commercial buildings on the site of the Old Presbyterian Church in Wall-street, the principal stratum is seen to be of coarse grey sea sand, capped with a similar soil, mixed with vegetable mould and feruginous¹⁶ [sic] oxide. From the make of the land, the Indian path, on the Trinity plateau, forked at the foot of the Park,¹⁷ and proceeded east of the small lake called the Kolck [Ageicon] to the rise of ground at Chatham square. Here, or not far from it, was the eminence¹⁸ called WARRPOES, probably the site of a village, and so named from its chief. The stream and marsh existing where Canal street now runs, gave this eastern tendency to the main path. At or beyond Warpoes, another fork in the path became necessary to reach the banks of the Hudson at the Indian village of LAPINIKAN, now Greenwich. In this route laid

¹³ A public park located on the southern tip of Manhattan Island.

¹⁴ Either Governor of New York DeWitt Clinton (1769-1828) or his uncle, Governor of New York George Clinton (1739-1812) (“DeWitt Clinton”).

¹⁵ Dutch captain and explorer (1593-1655) (“David Petersz De Vries”).

¹⁶ *Feruginous*: Probable misspelling or outdated spelling of “ferruginous:” Containing iron as a chemical constituent.

¹⁷ Battery Park

¹⁸ *Eminence*: An elevation on the earth's surface; a rising ground, hill.

the emineace¹⁹ ISHPATENA, late Richmond Hill, at the corner of Charlton and Varick streets. The path leading from the interjunction at Warpoes, or Chatham square, to NAHTONK, or Corlear's Hook, had no intermediate village, of which the name has survived. This portion of the island was covered with a fine forest of nut wood, oaks, and other hard-wood species, interspersed with grassy glades, about the sites of the Indian villages. The upper part of the island was densely wooded. Above Fortieth street it was unfavorable for any purpose but hunting, and much of the middle part of it, as between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, was either shoe-deep under water or naturally swampy. This arose, as is seen at this day, from a clayey stratum, which retains the moisture, whereas the whole island below this location, particularly below the brow of the syncitic²⁰ formation of Thirty-seventh street, &c., consisted of gravel and sand, which absorbed the moisture and rendered it the most favorable site for building and occupation. On the margin of the Hudson, the water reached, tradition tells us, to Greenwich street. There is a yellow pointed wooden house still standing at the northeast corner of Courtland and Greenwich streets, which had the water near to it. Similar tradition assures us that Broad street was the site of a marsh, and small creek. The same may be said of the foot of Maiden lane, once Fly Market, and of the outlet of the Muskeeg or Swamp, now Ferry street. Pearl street marked the winding margin of the East river. Foundations dug here reach the ancient banks of oyster shells. ASHIBIC denotes the probable narrow ridge or ancient cliff north of Beekman street, which bounded the marsh below. OCITOC is a term for the heighth of land in Broadway, at Niblo's' ABIC, a rock rising up in the Battery: PENABIC, Mt. Washington, or the Comb mountain. These notices, drawn from philology and, in part, the earlier geographical accounts of New Belgium, might be extended to a few other points, which are clearly denoted; but are deemed sufficient to sustain the conclusions, which we have arrived at, that the main configuration of the leading thoroughfares of the city, from the ancient canoe-place at Copsie or the Battery, extending north to the Park, and thence to Chatham square and the Bowery, and west to Tivoli Garden, &c., were ancient roads, in the early times of Holland supremacy, which followed the psimary²¹ Indian foot-paths.

Governor's island bore the name of Nut island, during the Holland supremacy, in Dutch Nutten; but whether, as is suspected, this was a translation of the Indian PECANUC, or "nut-trees," is not certain. As a general remark, it may be said that the names of the Mon-à-tons, or Manhattanesse, were not euphonious,²² certainly less so than those of the Delawares or Iroquois.



¹⁹ *Emineace*: probable misspelling of "eminence"

²⁰ *Syncitic*: probable misspelling of "syenitic:" Of, pertaining to, composed of, allied to, or having the character of syenite (A crystalline rock allied to granite, mainly composed of hornblende and feldspar, with or without quartz.)

²¹ *Psimary*: probable misspelling of the word "primary"

²² *Euphonious*: Full of or characterized by euphony; pleasing to the ear

EDITOR'S NOTE

“Indian Names of the Islands and Bay of New York” is significant for the modern reader for two compelling reasons. The first is that it carries many relevant historical and geographical references concerning the state of New York, especially in Manhattan Island. Schoolcraft’s intimate familiarity with the Native American nomenclature, as well as the geological landscape, of his era allows us to view this article as an excellent and reliable historical resource. The vast majority of the Manhattan-area titles discussed throughout the article are still in use today. Thus, at face value, this article offers readers an invaluable authentic take on the true origins of many of the titles of the various languages, tribes, and locations referred to throughout the article.

The second, and more intriguing, aspect of this article is that it seems to carry potential for gaining a unique glimpse into the sentiments of the author towards the Native American population of the time. Schoolcraft was extremely familiar with Native American culture and customs due to his wife’s Ojibwa heritage. Throughout the article, Schoolcraft establishes that he is clearly sympathetic to the cause of the Native Americans, especially in regards to the lost Native American nomenclature for the lands discussed in the article. This sympathy can be traced to Schoolcraft’s intimate familial ties with the Native American community.

Schoolcraft, in his capacity as a contributing author to *The Broadway Journal*, served as both a representative and a creator of the public mentality in the year 1845. Thus, in this sense, his work can be viewed as a microcosm of a sympathetic public mentality toward Native Americans in the year 1845. Nonetheless, even his clearly sympathetic view towards the Native American plight must also be placed within context of the concurrent public philosophy of Manifest Destiny during his era. In his capacity as a U.S. federal agent to the Native Americans, it actually fell upon Schoolcraft’s shoulders to broker the very treaty that displaced the Ojibwa tribe of his own wife’s heritage from northern Michigan in 1836 (“Henry Rowe Schoolcraft”). However, he, like many other U.S. citizens, was likely to have viewed this displacement as a natural, necessary step in the gradual expansion of the United States.

Nonetheless, this article, published nine years after the treaty was created, certainly carries an undertone of regret. His sympathy for the Native American plight manifests itself as a clear bitterness against the injustices done to Native American culture by the Dutch and English colonists. Naturally, as an American citizen during the age of expansionism, bitterness against the exclusionist practices of the original colonists must necessarily have applied to the exclusionist practices of the U.S. government as well. Thus, in our reading of this article, it is possible to detect a certain cognitive dissonance in the mind of this author. That is to say, although Schoolcraft may have considered himself a proponent of the Native American cause, he simultaneously was an essential part of the federal force that displaced the Native Americans. In this way, the anger that Schoolcraft expresses against the original colonists in this article may be a manifestation of a veiled or subconscious personal regret for the actions of the United States government.

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