

Place Names of Newfoundland and Labrador

1. **St. John's** – By local tradition St. John's Harbour was named by John Cabot who visited the harbor on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, on June 24, 1497. It appears however that the name was first used by the Portuguese, (R de Sam johan – Reinel Map 1519), Spanish (Sam Joham), and French, and later translated into English as the “The Haven of St. John” (Rut 1527), St. John's (Parkhurst, 1578), and Saint Jhons (Mason, 1620). The Anglicized form was thus well established by the late 16th century.
2. **Kilbride** – This area was established by a few farming families during the mid-19th century and the toponym repeats a common Irish place-name, of which the original, in Celtic form Cill-Bhrigde means Brigid's or Bride's Church. In another anglicized form, the name translates into St. Bride's or St. Mary's, two other place-names on the southern Avalon. Irish influences on place-names are very prominent in both the St. John's area and over the Avalon peninsula generally.
3. **Mount Pearl** – One of the fastest growing communities in Newfoundland, representing part of the suburban expansion of St. John's. The name derives from a country estate created during Sir Thomas Cochrane's governorship of Newfoundland, 1825-34. Sir James Pearl, a retired naval officer, who fought at the Battle of Trafalgar, was granted in recognition of his service 600 acres of land by the British Government, which has since been known as Mount Pearl. Before he died there in 1840 Sir James was active in developing his land for farming and also helping to promote Newfoundland's case for Representative Government. The site of his mansion which overlooked the Waterford valley leading down to St. John's Harbour is current occupied by the Government of Canada, Agricultural Research Station.
4. **Paddy's Pond** – This name contains one of the commonest of all Irish diminutives – the nickname for Patrick. Recently this locale has gained some prominence as a base for water-base aircraft.
5. **Cochrane Pond (Provincial Park)** – Like Cochrane Street in St. John's and Harbour Grace, and Cochrane Dale, Cochrane Park is one of a series of toponyms commemorating Sir Thomas Cochrane, Governor of Newfoundland, 1825-34. Cochrane has been recognized as one of the more enlightened colonial Governors. He inaugurated a system of road building (St. John's to Portugal Cove, Topsail; Harbour Grace to Carbonear); encouraged agriculture and built Government House.
6. **Donovan's (Industrial Park)** – The site of a recent industrial development associated with the expansion of St. John's. The area interconnects the Trans-Canada Highway, St. John's, Arterial-Topsail road accesses with what remains of the CNR (Newfoundland Railway) and houses warehouses and light manufacturing. The name derives from a farmer of Irish extraction who lived in the locality when the first railway was opened in the 1884 (originally Donovan's Station).
7. **Thomas Pond** – Probably named after the Thomas family of St. John's. The Thomas family of English (South Devonshire) extraction is a prominent St. John's merchant family, who owned a number of country estates around the town during the mid-1800's.
8. **Manuel's River** – Thomas Pond is part of the drainage of Manuel's River which takes its name from the settlement of Manuels in Conception Bay. It has been conjectured that

the name derives from “an old man-o’-war sailor”, who deserted his ship and took refuge in the locality, and another tradition relates that Corte Real imposed the name in honour of Manuel I of Portugal.

9. **Butter Pot (Provincial Park)** – Butter Pot or Butter Pots occurs as a name in three places on the Avalon, and is applied to prominent, round-headed, hills (monadnocks). Howley suggests that the name is a corruption of the term “butter pat”. He wrote that the rounded peaks bear some resemblance to pats of butter. Hence the name Butter Pats, given to them by fishermen”. The name however, was recorded as “Butter Pots” by Mason as early as 1626 for features he observed near Trepassey.
10. **Roaches Line (Road and settlement)** – Unnamed on the 1:50,000 sheet. The generic line seems to be a technical term of the 19th century surveyors. A “line of road” was used of a cross-country road linking a more important road with a settlement. The specific usually denotes the terminus e.g. Baoline Line, Witless Bay Line, Salmonier Line. The Roache family is a long establish patriline in the Conception Bay south area. The settlement of Roaches Line and the road improvements was mainly effected by the former Premier J.R. Smallwood. In partnership with his son-in-law Russell, Smallwood acquired land to establish a farming operation (Russwood Ranch), primarily poultry and pig-raising.
11. **General Comments on the Central Avalon** – The hydrographic features (ponds, lakes, and streams) and topographic features of the central Avalon exhibit a wide variety of influences in their nomenclature. The commonest inland hydrographic generic is Pond, used to describe almost any expanse of water. Juke (1842) first noted the Newfoundland use of pond for lake. “The term pond is applied indiscriminately to all pieces of fresh water, whatever may be their size.” The historian Prowse (1895) attributes this to the strong Devonshire background of early settlers. “There are no lakes in the west of England, only ponds, so all our lakes are called ponds”. Other terms used for a small expanse of inland water is Gully or Gullies. In most cases rivers are called brooks, and another common generic is the term steady or steadies with reference to part(s) of a flowing stream where the current is not visible. The more common generics for relief features include hill, peak, ridge, tolt and mount. The term mountain does not occur on the Avalon peninsula. Land areas, depending on their characteristics, are called Barrens (places where wood does not grow or moorlands) and marshes (peat bogs). The term Droke usually refers to a small belt of trees or a narrow wooded valley. In the central Avalon, however, as elsewhere in the less populated areas of the province, hundreds of features have only an oral, and locally-used nomenclature since the names have never been recorded and printed in gazetteers or maps.

The sign-posted names of features (mostly ponds) along the Trans-Canada Highway provide examples of varying influences:

Descriptive Names – Big Pond, Little Pond, Big Triangle and Little Triangle Ponds, Southwest Pond, Nine Island Pond South, Round Pond, Five Mile Pond East and West.

Incident Names – Soldiers Pond

Possessive and Ethnic Names – Brien's Pond, Gushue's Pond, Kellys Pond, Finnies Pond, Nord Pond, Kearneys Pond

Euphemistic Names – Grand Pond, Ocean Pond, Golden Gullies

Mistake Names – Pegwood Pond (for Pigweed Pond)

Commemorative Names – Cochrane Pond

12. Carbonear to Holyrood – some general comments

The 25 mile stretch of coastline between Carbonear and Holyrood in Conception Bay represents perhaps the most historic, most culturally complex and, the most densely populated district in Newfoundland. Within the district two of the first formal colonies were attempted (1610, 1617), and from that time onward settlements were effectively occupied by immigrants from Bristol, London, Devonshire, Dorsetshire, Hampshire, Somerset, Cornwall, in England, from the Channel Islands, from Wexford, Waterford, Kilkenny, Tipperary, and Cork in Ireland, and from Greenoch and Glasgow in Scotland, and indeed from many other parts of the British Isles. From the late 17th century to the present, this district has contained upwards of 40 percent of the total population of Newfoundland. In the Anglo-French war period, 1696-1713, it was the only district to ward off capture to the French attacks.

The oldest established families in Newfoundland – Batten, Butler, Butt, Davis, Dawe, Garland, Guy, Parsons, Pike, and Pynn – have a documented ancestry in Conception Bay from the 1670s or earlier, whilst scores of others have settler roots here from the early 1700s. Much of the nomenclature in the region, not only reflects these ethnic influences but indeed was established much earlier by Portuguese, Spanish, Basques, French and English fishermen.

13. Conception Bay – Much debate has centered upon the naming of this bay. One scholar maintains that Conception Bay was entered and named on December 8, 1497, the feast of the conception of the Virgin Mary, during an English survey of south Newfoundland. Another version states that it was named on August 15, the feast of the Assumption. Interestingly, the confusion seems to have prevailed in early times for the name is recorded in 1592 as Consumption, and James Yonge in 1670 notes “the bay of Conception (called Consumption by the people)”. On earlier maps are recorded ‘baia de coo (eicam” 1505-8, Abaia de (con) cipicion 1527, B de Consumption 1592.

14. South River – originally Southern Gut or South Gut. Gut as a generic in Newfoundland toponymic tradition refers to a narrow water passage, large enough only to admit a small craft. According to Jukes (1842) “(Brigus) is a wild rocky little place; but about three miles inland from it is a fertile valley, through which runs a brook forming occasional ponds, and emptying itself into the sea on the southern side of Port de Grave. It is accordingly called the Southern Gut”. In the same vein nearby North River was originally Northern Gut. According to Prowse (1895) some of John Guy's settlers 1610-1 settled in South River, “On Southern River they erected mills, houses, and farm buildings”.

15. Clarke's Beach – The reference point for North and South River. The name probably derives from John and Isaac Clark who were planters in this area in 1770. It appears that the name Port de Grave, now applied to a small cove, on the peninsula, was originally applied to all settlements in its vicinity, but the 19th century local settlements established their own identity. These include such communities as South River, Clarke's Beach, North River, Otterbury and Bareneed.

16. Otterbury – Several localities in Conception Bay bear this name. Seary (1971) believes that Jukes (1842) provides the clue to its origin; "Among the roots of these trees numerous otters have formed their burrows". Thus Otter-burrow in local pronunciation became Otterbury.

17. Bareneed – Again local phonetics have apparently changed the original "Bearing Head", a point of reference for mariners, to the more comfortably linguistic "Bare Need, or Bareneed".

18. Port de Grave – One of the oldest settlements in Newfoundland, and undoubtedly one of the most successful inshore fishing communities over the long term. Normally English place-names put the specifics before the generics. In Conception Bay, however, it is frequently the reverse as in Port de Grave, Harbour Grace or Bay Roberts. Port de Grave has probably as many different renderings as any place in Newfoundland. Thus we have in various documentary sources Graves (1669), P. Grave (1675), and thereafter Pt. Grave, Port Grave, Portdegrave (1775), Port du Grave, Port de Grave (1842), and Portgrave. Seary believes that the late intrusion of de may be seen as voicing of the final t in port. He also suggests a French origin for Graves, referring to the French practice of drying cod on the shingle beaches. Grave was used for gréve-shoal, or shingle beach. The feature that gave the names – Port de Grave and Bay de Grave – was apparently what is now called Clarke's Beach.

19. Ship Cove – A locality in Port de Grave, but at various times designated Sheeps Cove. Since it is the best harbor in Bay de Grave, this may account for its modern name. In the days of the English migratory fishery such harbours were used to shelter ships. From the early 1800s until about 1940 Port de Grave, Bay Roberts, Harbour Grace and Carbonear were much involved in the summer fishery on the coast of Labrador. Also many families from this district helped to colonize settlements along the northern coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador.

20. Blow Me Down (Back Cove) – Blow Me Down is recorded some 17 times on NTS in various parts of Newfoundland. It is a name apparently given to "abrupt or more or less isolated headlands, or bluffs, rising from, or near, navigable waters, and therefore such places as render vessels under their lee especially liable to danger from squalls". It appears to have originated among English sailors. Back Cove is another name generally used to distinguish one or two coves (or features) which lie behind the main or front one.

21. Hibbs Cove – Until recently Hibbs Hole. The generic hole has occasional use in Newfoundland to refer to a coastal indentation or a pond. The English family names Hibbs is no longer found here, but is found in several communities in the bay (Bell Island, Kelligrews, and Topsail). The name change from hole to cove was effected by a petition of the local inhabitants. Many other localities in this district bear the names of

early settlers – Mercer’s Cove, Webbers Pond, Buttermilk, Jones Head, Bishop’s Cove and Bryant’s Cove.

22. **The Dock** – A locality where vessels were hauled in for repairs, or where schooners and ships were built.
23. **Coley’s Point** – Originally Pointe agreeable (1744), later Cole Lee’s (1798) and Coldeast Point. Cold East is the name of a farm in Devonshire, a farm on the east of a parish sloping down to the sea. It is uncertain if the name is a transfer. If so, the name is much at odds with the French, Pointe agreeable (pleasant point).
24. **Bay Roberts** – The Bay Roberts-Port de Grave area has been identified by linguists as a unique dialect region in Newfoundland. One of the main features of the dialect is its “r-lessness”. It has not been determined what cultural (ethnic) influences contributed to this distinctive dialect. Although some of the early settlers came from Devonshire, others derived from London (cockney) and the Channel Islands (Jersey). The name B. Roberts occurs in “Blathway” 1630-40. Another source (1681) records Bay of Roberts, and Bay Roberts occurs in the English Pilot, 1689. It is likely of French origin.
25. **Shearstown** – Originally Spaniards Bay Pond, and name Shearstown around 1900. It is named after Rev. W.C. Shears, Anglican priest at Bay Roberts, 1868-1903, who also served at Spaniard’s Bay. In 1903 he retired to the U.S.A.
26. **Spaniard’s Bay** – This place-name does not appear to have been used until the mid-19th century. Settlers recorded living here in 1805 were associated with the localities of Mint Cove, North(ern) Cove, and Bread and Cheese Cove. Mint Cove comes from the mint said to have grown in the cove, as it does along the banks of streams in the area. Bread and Cheese Cove (now Bishop’s Cove), is still employed in local usage and is preserved on maps in Bread and Cheese Cove Pond. It is believed that Bread and Cheese is “a child’s name for the young leaves of the Hawthorne, the Wood-sorrel or ‘cuckoo-bread’, and several other plants” which were plucked and eaten by children. These trees are not indigenous to Newfoundland; but Bread and Cheese trees, cultivated hawthorne imported from Europe, are known in Harbour Grace. The name also occurs in a cove in Bay Bulls near St. John’s.
27. **Tilton** – At a meeting of the Nomenclature Board in the early 1900s the Rev. Dr. Pilot asserted that he had given the name to the settlement formerly called ‘The Tilts’. In Newfoundland tilts were temporary log houses built in the wood by hunters, trappers, and wood-cutters, and inhabited mainly in the winter.
28. **Riverhead (Harbour Grace)** – A fairly common locality name in many major harbours on the Avalon e.g. St. John’s, St. Mary’s, Calvert, Renews, Bay Bulls, Bay Roberts. The locality denotes the mouth of a river at the bottom of a harbour. One finds, almost invariably, that the riverhead sites were settled by Irishmen, who were secondary immigrants into settlements pioneered by the English.
29. **Otterbury (Harbour Grace)** – see earlier comments.
30. **Harbour Grace** – Before the name became standardized it was variously recorded as Harbor de Grace (Guy 1612), Haver de Grace,(1677), Havre de Grace (1697). There is a general consensus that Harbour Grace is a French name translated from Havre de Grace, now le Havre, which acquired much of the French transatlantic fish trade in the 16th century. The French apparently used the harbour for shelter. In 1610, the French

pirate, Peter Easton established a fort in the harbour which was later described by John Guy. After the failure of the Bristol and London Company settlement at Cuper's Cove (Cupid's), Bristol Merchants established a second colony in Harbour Grace in 1617, known as Bristol's Hope or the "Bristow Plantation". Thereafter, Bristol merchants maintained a strong interest in Harbour Grace and many Bristolians settled there.

31. Bristol's Hope - Now applied to the settlement formerly called Mosquito, Musketa, Muscita, and other variant spellings. There appears to be no agreement where the original settlement of Bristol's Hope was located. In 1910 Mosquito was proclaimed to be Bristol's Hope by the Nomenclature Board, but this cove was probably not the site of the original Bristol's Hope colony. Bristol's Hope was most likely associated with Harbour Grace. There are some suggestions that the Bristol merchants tried to supplant the name of Harbour Grace. A contemporary writes, for example, that Robert Hayman was appointed "governor of the plantation of Harbour-Grace, in Bristol-hope". As to the meaning of the element Hope, one historian suggests that it expresses a desire of the Bristol Hope merchant to build a successful colony and to regain (among English ports) prominence in the fish trade. Seary (1971) provides an alternative consideration. He claims Hope is a generic meaning "valley", "a piece of enclosed land", or "an inlet, small bay, haven", equates the term with 'plantation', and thus appears to favour the small cove (Mosquito) as the Bristol colony.

32. Mosquito – (now Bristol's Hope). The name survives (NTS) in Mosquito (Brook and Point). Seary rejects Howley's suggestion that the specific refers to the presence of "a company of Muskateers" and favours Whitbourne's (1620) reference to "a very little nimble fly (the least of all other flies)".

33. Saddle Hill – "a saddle-back hill"

34. Carbonear – Early variant spellings include Carbonera (Guy 1612), Carbonar, Carbonere, Carboniere, Carbineer, and initial spelling in present form Carbonear (1705). There are various theories on its derivation including that Carbonera suggests a Spanish origin. In Spanish 'carbonera' denotes wood prepared for burning in charcoal; also Caroneras is a small town in southern Spain. Carbonier and Charbonnier are French family names, both associated with the preparation or sale of charcoal, and La Carbonnierre is a Norman place name. The name has also been linked with Jerseymen fishermen who allegedly had charcoal pits there in an early period. The meaning of the name thus seems to have some transferred or local association with 'charcoal' but its origin remains inconclusive. There is strong evidence, however, that certain sites in Conception Bay were used to prepare charcoal for use by iron smiths. Guy's colonists, for example, in 1611 were engaged "in cutting wood for the collier". See also Colliers later. Localities and features in Carbonear reflect ethnic (settler) influences – Powells Brook, Pikes Road, Crockers Cove, Barrys Pond, McCarthys Pond.

35. Cupids – Earlier variants – Cupers Cove (Guy 1612), Cupurts Cove, Cubitts Cove, Coopers Cove, Cupids Cove (English Pilot, 1689). The exact etymology of the name Cupids is at present unknown, although Seary (1971) offers a partial explanation that the name Cupers Cove possibly indicates that coopering was practiced on the site or that the name might be a possessive derived from the surname Cowper or Cooper. It would seem that the name was established, in oral tradition at least, before 1610 when the

Bristol and London Company's Governor (Guy) adopted it. Other possible derivations which have been proposed include; the Latin word for copper, cuprum; the Dutch word kuyper meaning cooper. Cubitts was first used on the Blathwayte Map (1630-40) and Cupids Cove in an English census (1675), though later maps use Coopers Cove. It seems that – bitts segment in Cubitts was levelled to – pids to form Cupids. During its period of construction – 1610-12 the Cupers Cove settlement built a storehouse, a large frame dwelling, collier's operation, smithy, an enclosure 120 by 90 feet, and two saw pits. The Bristol investors withdrew in 1617 and started Bristol Hope colony. It appears that the Cupers Cove venture was abandoned during the 1620s-30s and the site was resettled by individual fishing families later in the century, the ancestors of the present inhabitants.

36. **Brigus** – At different times called Brega (1630-40), Briggs, Brigass in the North, (to distinguish from Brigass in the South near Ferryland), Brigues (1677), Brigges, Brigue (1763), and Brighouse (1796). Brigus seems to have standardized after being placed on the charts of Lane and Cook in 1775. For its origin Seary favours a French contribution from its original form Brega "an old French word of south-western France with the same meaning "and the same spelling variants on older maps, from the related Fr. brigues – intrigues, underhand work, corruption.
37. **Georgetown** – First used in the census of 1891 and named after George Gushue, a member of the House of Assembly.
38. **Marysvale** – Originally called Turk's Gut and named Marysvale by a proclamation November 7, 1919. The original name preserving the memory of Turkish (or Barbary) pirates ravishing the coast of 17th century Newfoundland is retained in the cove and a local pond, Turks Gut Long Pond.
39. **Colliers** – (See discussion on Carbonear re-charcoal pits). Seary feels that this is an English example of the same occupational name which is also a family name, and presents an insoluble problem of origin.
40. **Conception Harbour** – Until 1906 called Cats' Cove from Cat – the wild cat "localled known as the wood cat", or the wood marten (Howley, 1906). For a few months in 1906, Cats' Cove became Avondale North.
41. **Avondale** – Until 1906 known as Salmon Cove. It is conjectured that Avondale is transferred from Avondale Co., Wicklow, Ireland.
42. **Harbour Main** – Occurs as Harbor Maine (Blathwayt ca. 1630-40). Maine is a French family name as well as the name of numerous hamlets in France. Its form is also suggestive of a French origin.
43. **Holyrood** – Hollyrude (1630-40), Hollyrode (1675). According to Seary, the origin is obscure. He maintains it may have been a Scottish transfer from Holyrood House in Edinburgh from John Mason's Scottish associates in the 1620s. Mason's map 1620, however, does not contain this name. The author found that the name Hollyrood occurs in the parish of Crewkerne in Somerset and in Southampton. Southampton shipping was involved in the 17th century fishery, thus, this is another very probable origin.
44. **Seal Cove** – This name occurs 24 times on NTS and the specific in scores of other features (Islands, points, rocks, and brooks).

45. Riverdale – Originally named Lower Gullies and renamed Riverdale January 3, 1923. Lower and Upper Gullies were named after the gullies or small ravines formed by two streams flowing into the bay.

46. Kelligrews – Local tradition associates the name with a 17th century pirate, Captain Kelly, whose residence is said to have been on the mainland opposite to Kelly's Island at Kelly's Grove. Another version is that Kelligrews is a shift name from Kelligrews Head named by the surveyor Michael Lane in 1774. The most probable origin is that it is named after the Kelligrew family from Port de Grave who maintained some sort of residence (summer plantation or winter tilt) at Kelligrews.

47. Foxtrap – Fox is a common specific in Newfoundland place names, associated primarily with the animal. Local tradition maintains that Foxtrap was so called when the settlement grew up in a previously unnamed district where only foxes were caught in the rabbit-snares. In 1800 Lower Fox Trapp had one inhabitant, Chas Butler, and in 1801 Upper Fox Trapp was occupied by Michael and Joseph Feagan (Fagan).

48. Long Pond (Manuels) – See discussion of Manuels River. Probably named after the Manuel family, and English family settled at Carbonear and Lower Island Cove.

49. Chamberlain, now Chamberlains – An English family name, but rare in Newfoundland. The place is recorded in 1801/4 as occupied by Thomas Stickley and Nicholas and James Midcaff (Metcalfe).

50. Topsail – Probably a shift name from Topsail Head recorded by Lane (1775). Topsail Head is a “bold height... chiefly a mass of pure white quartz rock”, so called, according to Howley “on account of the very high land which stands out conspicuously to the view of vessels coming into the Bay. The sailors are accustomed to call high standing peaks of this kind by the name Topsails.” Howley and Seary reject local tradition that the name comes from Top’s Hill after the name ‘Top, Tap, Torp, or Thorp’ an old man who used to go out from St. John’s to live in a tilt and cut hoops, and staves, and lived on the side of the hill.

51. Bell Island – great Belisle (Guy, 1612), Belle Isle (1669), Belle Isle. Probably a French imposition, transferred from Belle Isle, off the coast of Brittany, The form of Belle Isle received official recognition by the Nomenclature Board, April 26, 1910. Two features associated with the island are Bell, The Bell, “a conspicuous conical rock, 122 feet high... which lies near the western extremity of the island,” from which one tradition claims it receives its name, and The Clapper (unnamed in NTS), a prominent rock 50 feet high lying off the southern extremity. Locality names on the island include Lance Cove, The Green, Wabana, Freshwater, and The Beach. Lance Cove derives its name from the lance or lawnce, a sand-eel, a long thin fish that appears in June and is used for bait. Wabana was imposed about 1895 by Thomas Cantley of Nova Steel and Coal Company as the name of the townsite for iron ore mining. Seary claims that Wabana is an arbitrary form of an Abnaki word form wabum, meaning ‘light’ ‘white’ with reference to the morning and the east, thus ‘east-land’ or ‘morning light’ – a very appropriate name since Wabana is one of the most easterly settlements in North America. Freshwater is a common specific in Newfoundland names i.e. places where ships could take on supplies of fresh water.

Acknowledgement

The composition of this itinerary is based almost exclusively upon materials contained in E.R. Seary's Place Names of the Avalon Peninsula of the Island of Newfoundland (University of Toronto Press, 1971).

W.G. Handcock