

INDIAN NAMES OF PLACES IN RHODE ISLAND

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Indian names of places in Rhode Island by Usher Parsons

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USHER PARSONS

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PLACES IN
RHODE ISLAND**

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INDIAN NAMES
OF
PLACES IN RHODE-ISLAND:

COLLECTED BY

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FOR THE R. I. HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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PREFACE.

The Narraganset nation or tribe by whom this vocabulary was used, were in early times the most numerous and powerful of all the eastern Indians. They inhabited nearly all the present State of Rhode Island, including the islands in the bay, Block Island and the east end of Long Island. Their dominion extended northward to the Nipmucks in Providence county, and by conquest, eastward from the Pawcatuck river to the Merrimack. They were the most civilized and commercial tribe in New England, and so numerous, that, at one time, they could bring five thousand warriors into the field, "and one could meet a dozen of their towns in the course of twenty miles travel."

The Narraganset language was considered a variety of the Delaware, and extended some hundreds of miles, but varied in its idioms within a comparatively short distance. It has ceased to be a spoken language in the tribe for nearly half a century. The best records of it remaining, are Roger Williams' key to the Indian language, and the Apostle Elliot's Bible and Grammar, and Cotton's Vocabulary.

In 1766, the Narragansets were reduced to three hundred and fifteen persons, residing on the Indian reserved lands, in Charlestown. In 1832, the number was precisely the same, but only seven of them were pure blooded. Last year, the number was reduced to two of three-fourths blood, ten of half blood, forty-two of quarter blood, and sixty-eight of less than quarter blood, the total being 122 who claim descent from the original Narraganset tribe, and all of them exhibiting marks of the race.

No attempt is herein made, by the author, to examine Indian names of places as a philologist or grammarian, but merely to gather such as were in existence when civilization commenced, within the State of Rhode Island, according to its present boundary, and to indicate, as near as practicable, their exact locality; and, in a few instances, give the meaning or derivation of the word used.

I was led to this enterprise partly for the amusement it might afford in leisure hours, but more for the purpose of reseruing from oblivion names of places in use among the aborigines, and for the convenience of those who may hereafter wish to apply them to their country villas, factories, or institutions, as has often been done in this and other states.

For a more particular and faithful recent history of this remnant of the Indian race in this State, the reader is referred to the elaborate general history of Rhode Island, by HON. SAMUEL G. ARNOLD, a work that reflects great credit on his patient and extensive research, and entitles him to the reputation of a candid, faithful and liberal-minded historian.

REMARKS.

The syllable *et* in Indian words seems equivalent to *place* or *location*. It is often found at the end of Indian names of places as hunting, planting, fishing, &c. Thus, *Seconnet* is a compound of *Seki*, *black*, and *konk*, *goose*. By dropping the syllable *ki* in the radicle *seki*, annexing *konk* and adding *et*, we have *Seconknet*, and by dropping the *k*, for the sake of euphony, and adding the syllable *et*, we have the word *Seconnet*, equivalent to wild or black-goose *place* or *haunt*. It is believed that in early times geese, in their annual migrations, stopped here to feed. The same meaning is attached to *Seekonk*, which has the same radical but not the affix *et*, probably it had gone out of use, the original name being *Seekouket*. Something analogous to this may be seen in our use of the word *ton* or *town*, as in *Waterton* or *town*, and *Stonington*, implying *Water-place* and *Stony-place*, the last syllable, *ton*, being affixed like *et* in Indian. It is a curious coincidence, that in one hundred towns or places, taken promiscuously, there will be found about as many *tons* or *towns* as there are *ets* or *ettes* in an equal number of Indian towns or places; and that in the several hundred words here collected it occurs more than forty times.*

Sometimes the terminal syllable of words is dropped, and

* The terminal syllable *et* is often, but improperly, spelled *ett*.