

**INDIAN NAMES OF PLACES, ETC.,  
IN AND ON THE BORDERS  
OF CONNECTICUT: WITH  
INTERPRETATIONS OF SOME OF  
THEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649754496

Indian names of places, etc., in and on the borders of Connecticut: with interpretations of some of them by J. Hammond Trumbull

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**J. HAMMOND TRUMBULL**

**INDIAN NAMES OF PLACES, ETC.,  
IN AND ON THE BORDERS  
OF CONNECTICUT: WITH  
INTERPRETATIONS  
OF SOME OF THEM**



Stephen Salisbury Jr. Esq.  
with the cordial regards of  
J. W. Brewster

# INDIAN NAMES

OF PLACES ETC., IN AND ON THE BORDERS OF

## CONNECTICUT:

WITH INTERPRETATIONS OF SOME OF THEM.

---

By J. HAMMOND TRUMBULL.

---

HARTFORD:

1881.

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES PRINTED.

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE  
COMMISSIONERS OF THE  
LAND OFFICE  
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
FOR THE YEAR 1901

PRESS OF THE CASE, LOCKWOOD & BRAINARD CO.

F92  
T.77 6

## INTRODUCTION.

---

In 1870 I published in the second volume of the Connecticut Historical Society's Collections a paper on "The Composition of Indian Geographical Names." That paper was originally designed to serve as the preface to a list of Indian Names in Connecticut, but, when revising the list for the press, it was found to be so incomplete and unsatisfactory that I laid it aside until I could find time to improve it. In the ten years' interval I have made considerable additions to it and have corrected some of its mistakes; but the looked for leisure has not come, and I have been able to do very little of the much that was needed. I have decided to print a few copies of it as it is, and to leave to others the work of correction and completion.

Under the circumstances no apology seems to be required for the frequency of reference in the ensuing pages to the paper I have mentioned, or for repeating here some things that were said in it, concerning the nature and structure of Indian place-names.

"John Stuart Mill defines a proper name as 'a mere mark put upon an individual, and of which it is the characteristic property to be *destitute of meaning*.' If this definition be accepted, it follows that there are *no proper names* in the Indian languages of America. Every Indian synthesis—names of persons and places not accepted—must not only have a meaning, but be so framed as to convey that meaning with precision, to all who speak the language to which it belongs: and whenever by phonetic corruption or by change of circumstance it loses its self-interpreting or self-defining power, it must be discarded from the language. 'It requires,' says Professor Max Müller, 'tradition, society, and literature, to maintain forms which can no longer be analyzed at once.'

"In our own language, such forms may hold their places by prescriptive right or force of custom, and names that are absolutely unmeaning, or applied without regard to their original meaning, are accepted by common consent as distinguishing marks of

LIBRARY

JAN 20 '43

STECHEK



persons and places. We call a man William or Charles, Jones or Brown, and a town, New Lebanon, Cincinnati, Baton Rouge, Osceola, or Baltic, just as we put a number on a policeman's badge or a post-office box, or a trade-mark on an article of merchandise; and the number and the mark are as truly, and in nearly the same sense, proper names as the others are.

"Not that personal or 'proper' names, in any language, were *originally* mere arbitrary marks, devoid of meaning. The first James or the first Brown could, doubtless, have given as good a reason for his naming, as the first Abraham. But changes of language and of relations, and lapse of time, made the names independent of the reasons and took from them their original significance. Patrick is not now, *eo nomine*, a 'patrician'; Charles is not always a 'churl'; Bridget may be neither 'strong' nor 'bright'; and in the name of Mary, hallowed by its associations, only the philologist can detect the primitive 'bitterness.' Boston is no longer 'St. Botolph's town'; there is no 'castle of the inhabitants of Hwiccia' (*Hwic-wara-ceaster*) to be seen in Worcester, and Hartford has ceased to be either 'the ford of harts,' or 'the red ford' which its name once indicated.

"In the same way, many Indian geographical names, after their adoption by the Anglo-American colonists, became unmeaning sounds or mere vocal marks. Their original significance was lost by their transfer to a foreign tongue. Nearly all such names have suffered some mutilation or change of form. In many instances hardly a trace of the original can be detected in the modern name. Some have been separated from the localities to which they belonged and assigned to others to which they are etymologically inappropriate. A mountain takes the name of a river; a bay, that of a cape or a peninsula; a tract of land, that of a hill, or a rock, or a waterfall. And so 'Connecticut,' 'Massachusetts,' and 'Narraganset,' have come to be *proper names*, as truly as 'Boston' and 'Hartford' are in their cis-Atlantic appropriation.

"The Indian languages tolerated no such 'mere marks.' Every name *described* the locality to which it was affixed. This description was sometimes purely *topographical*; sometimes *historical*, preserving the memory of a battle, or feast, the residence of a great Sachem, or the like; sometimes it indicated some *natural product* of the place, or the *animals* that resorted to it; occasionally, its *position*, or direction from places previously known, or from the territory of the tribe by which the name was given,—as,

for example, 'land on the other side of the river' (Agamenticus), 'beyond the mountain' (Housatonic), 'the east land' (Abnaki, Wampanoag), 'the half way place' (Nashaway), etc. The same name might be, in fact it very often was, given to more places than one; but these must not be so near together that mistake or doubt could be occasioned by the repetition. With this precaution, there was no reason why there might not be as many 'great rivers,' 'bends,' 'forks,' and 'waterfalls,' as there are Washingtons, Franklins, Unions, and Fairplays, in the list of American post-offices.

"With few exceptions, the structure of Algonkin place-names is simple. Nearly all may be referred to one of three classes:—

"1. Names composed of two elements, which we may distinguish as *adjectival* and *substantival*; with, or without, a locative suffix or postposition meaning 'at,' 'in,' 'near,' or the like. [I use the terms 'adjectival' and 'substantival' because no true adjectives or substantives enter into the composition of Algonkin names. The adjectival may be an adverb or a preposition: the substantival element is often a *verbal*, which serves in composition as a generic name, but which cannot be used as an independent word: the synthesis always retains a verbal form.]

"2. Those which have only a single base-word, the substantival, with a postposition.

"3. Those formed from verbs, as participials or verbal nouns denoting a *place where* the action of the verb is performed."

To the first-mentioned class belong, probably, nine-tenths of the Indian names in New England. Two hundred years ago, when the Mohegan and Narraganset and Massachusetts were living languages, the meanings of most of these names could have been easily enough ascertained had any one cared to undertake the task: but now, for reasons I shall presently suggest, comparatively few can be analyzed or interpreted, with certainty.

In and about the borders of Connecticut four or five distinct Algonkin dialects were spoken, and each of these had its local idioms. In the speech of the *Pequot-Mohegans*, in the south-east, sonants and gutturals abounded. In the *Narraganset* and *Niantic* dialects, the surd mutes, *k*, *t*, *p*, were more common than the sonants, *g*, *d*, *b*, and nasals than gutturals. The *Nipmucks*, of the north-east, substituted *l* for the Niantic and Mohegan *n*, and

generally made the final *k* of place-names sonant (*aug, og, for auk, ock, etc.*). The tribes of the Connecticut valley preferred liquids and semi-vowels to nasals, and some of their local idioms were characterized by an occasional lisp, an original sibilant becoming a spirant *th*, sometimes passing to a soft lingual mute, *t*. In the dialects of the *Quiripi* (or Quinnipiac) Indians, near the Sound, from New Haven to the western bounds of the colony, the preference for liquid sounds was more strongly marked; *r* took the place of the eastern *n* or *l*, and there was a tendency to drop or soften final consonants.

Differences of dialect were not merely phonetic, but extended to the vocabulary, and especially to the names of animals and vegetable productions—which are often found as components of place names. The Mohegans and Narragansets had different names for the same birds, fish, and trees, as well as for the same rivers, ponds, and hills.

To these differences, and to the fact that in their negotiations with the Indians of one tribe, the colonists were very often obliged to employ interpreters belonging to another—or who were more familiar with the dialect of another—the marvellous corruptions of place-names, in old records, is partly attributable. A Mohegan name, taken down by an English scribe, as he had caught it from a Quiripi interpreter, would be almost as effectually disguised as is the French *Dieu* in the missionary-Iroquois "*Niio*."

Remembering how unsettled and capricious was English spelling in the seventeenth century, how absolutely every clerk and recorder was a law unto himself, and how often we find a common English word spelled in three or four different ways by the same writer and perhaps on the same page, in early colonial records,—uniformity in the spelling of *Indian* names was not to be expected. The variations which some of these names present are almost innumerable. Others have undergone complete transformation, retaining scarcely a suggestion of their original sounds. The strange sounds of a strange language were peculiarly subject to the operation of two causes of phonetic change,—error of the ear (*otosis*, as it has been termed,) a mis-hearing, or rather, mis-apprehension of the sounds uttered; and the universal tendency "to make the work of utterance easier to the speaker, to put a more facile in the stead of a more difficult sound or combination of sounds," and "to get rid altogether of irregular and exceptional forms."\*

\* Whitney's "Language and Study of Language," pp. 69, 28.