

# THE RELATIONSHIP OF NATURAL FEATURES TO THE PLACE NAMES OF CAPE ANN, MASSACHUSETTS

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In selecting names for places, both natural and cultural, one is apt to draw to a certain extent upon descriptive features of the environment. This is particularly true if the region possesses some outstanding features of natural beauty or commercial importance. An analysis of the place names at Cape Ann, Massachusetts, was made to determine the extent and nature of such choices. This region was selected because it is well known to the writer. It is a geographic unit with definite boundaries, and its settlement and development have centered around natural resources. Cape Ann was visited by Samuel de Champlain who applied the first name to this region based on natural environment. *The Historical Marker Erected by Massachusetts Bay Colony Tercentenary Commission 1930* reads as follows: "In September, 1606, Samuel de Champlain landed at Rocky Neck in what is now Gloucester Harbor, to caulk his shallop, and make an accurate chart of the harbor which he called Le Beauport." Place names have been assigned in this region since Gloucester was settled in 1623. On the eastern end of Cape Ann the settlement of Sandy Bay was incorporated in 1754, separated from Gloucester in 1840, and became the Town of Rockport. These two communities with their satellite villages occupy the promontory of Cape Ann, some thirty miles northeast of Boston. Each developed around a natural resource. Gloucester throughout its history has centered around the fishing industry, becoming one of the leading fishing ports in North America. Rockport developed around the granite industry, in which it was important until recent years. Both communities in recent times have become centers of the tourist trade because of the natural beauty and the favorable summer climate of Cape Ann.

This paper will attempt to show the relative influence of the natural environment on the selection of place names at Cape Ann. All names pertaining to natural features directly or indirectly are included. No effort has been made to trace the historical account or original reasons for assigning the names considered here. That such names were consciously and intentionally chosen because of the natural environment cannot be proved in all cases, but it is assumed that basically the environment has influenced the choice of name, and in most cases the relationship seems self-evident. In a few cases where it is known that a name suggesting a natural feature actually came from some other source, it was eliminated from discussion here. Information has been obtained from the various published and unpublished maps of Cape Ann, deposited in the Historical House of the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association and the series of city directories of Gloucester and Rockport published by Sampson, Davenport, and Co., Sampson, Murdock and Co., and Polk's City Directory. Babson's "History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann (including the Town of Rockport)" was also used. Acknowledgement is made to Professor Alfred Mansfield Brooks, Curator of the Cape Ann Scientific, Literary, and Historical Association and Professor Hallock F. Raup, Head of the Department of Geography and Geology of Kent State University, for their assistance in this study and for a critical reading of the manuscript.

#### NAMES OF PLACES, COVES, ISLANDS, ETC.

It would be logical to assume that marine life would play an important part in the local names of a region surrounded by the sea. Actually the number of place names with such an origin is less than would be expected. The following six are the only ones known: Lobster Cove, Mussel Point, Bass Rocks, Halibut Point, Alewife Brook, and Whale Cove. There are twice as many names derived from non-marine animals. These are: Goose Cove, Pigeon Hill, Pigeon Cove, Pigeon Harbor, Dogbar, Dogbar Breakwater, Dogtown Commons, Bear Skin Neck, Wolf Hill, Beaver Dam, Ram Island, and Cow Island.

An equal number of names has been based upon local plant life and vegetation. Such are as follows: Plum Cove, Grapevine Cove, Lily Pond, Fernwood Lake, Brier Neck, Magnolia (village), Magnolia Point, Magnolia Swamp, Riverdale Willows (or Annisquam Willows), Cedar Point, Arbutus Hill, and Mayflower Ledge. The village of Magnolia derived its name from *Magnolia virginiana* (formerly *M. glauca*) which was found to be a native shrub in the region, and represents the northern extremity of its distribution.

Topographic and physical features of the region are responsible for somewhat more than a third of the geographic names. These are nearly equally divided between those of marine and non-marine origin. From marine sources have come the names: Ocean View, Bay View, Riverdale, Riverview, Sandy Bay, Harbor Cove, Stoney Cove, Pebble Cove, Good Harbor Beach, and Salt Island. It should be kept in mind that the word "river" as used in place names at Cape Ann refers to a marine tidal inlet, the Annisquam River and its branches. The name Annisquam, derived from an Algonquin name, means "pleasant waters." Non-marine place names are: Freshwater Cove, Rocky Neck, Rockport, High Popples, Land's End, Gully Point, and Gully Point Cove.

The three main categories—animal life, plant life, and physical features have influenced the place names about equally. Out of a total of 124 place names currently in use at Cape Ann, 38 per cent are derived from these sources.

#### NAMES OF STREETS, AVENUES, ROADS, ETC.

Because of the early settlement of Cape Ann and its haphazard growth, streets and roadways were not planned but came into existence as conditions and circumstances directed. The result is an irregular pattern of many public ways of varying length and direction and date from various periods over 300 years' time. This has led to a large number of short streets and courts, but the multiplicity of names in a restricted area gives a larger sample for analysis in such a study as this. The table below of



certain selected years shows the growth in the number of streets in Gloucester and Rockport, the number and percentage of names derived from natural features, and the number of marine origin. It will be seen that the percentage of names derived from the environment has been nearly constant. Also, the total number of marine origin is smaller than one might expect from a seaport community.

TABLE I. STREET NAMES OF CAPE ANN

	Total No.	No. from Marine Origin	No. from all Natural Features	Per cent from Natural Features
1860				
(Gloucester only)	45	2	8	17.8
1870	131	7	25	19.1
1903	413	18	80	19.3
1948-49	633	33	125	19.7

Not many streets have been named after marine life, and all but one that bear such names are minor thoroughfares. These are: Mussel Point Road, Nautilus Road, Bass Avenue and Bass Rocks Road. One road in Gloucester, Dogtown Road, and two in Rockport, Pigeon Hill Street and Pigeon Hill Court, were indirectly named after non-marine animals. Plant names and vegetation, on the other hand, have been used often in providing street names. Those in Gloucester from native plants are as follows: (in this and subsequent lists the word street applies except where a term is given).

Acacia	Fernwood Heights
Barberry Lane and Way	Fernwood Lake Ave.
Brier Road	Forest Street and Lane
Brierwood	Grape Vine Road
Cedar	Grove
Cherry	Hickory
Chestnut	High Bush Road
Elm	Holly
Evergreen Road	Ivy Ct.
Fern Cliff	Ivy Hill Ct.

Laurel	Plum St. and Ct.
Locust	Poplar St. and Ct.
Magnolia Avenue	Sylvan St. and Ct.
Maple Street and Road	Vine
Maplewood Ave., Ct., and Place	Walnut
Oak	Willow
Pine	

In Rockport, only eight plant names have been used: Brierstone Road, Cedar, Forest, Oakland Ave., Pine, Thornwood Ave., Vine Ave., and Woodside Ave.

Topographic and physical features have been drawn upon for the greater part of street names that have been derived from the natural environment. These fall in two general categories. First, those associated in some way with the ocean or seashore, and those of non-marine reference. Those in Gloucester having marine connotation are:

Atlantic St. and Road	Marshfield
Atlantic Highlands	Ocean Ave.
Beach St., Ct., and Road	River Road
Beachcroft Road	Riverdale Place
Beauport Ave.	Riverside St., and Ave.
Beachmont Ave.	Rocky Shore Road
Harbor Road and Terrace	Salt Island Road
Harbor View Ct.	Shore Road
Marsh	Water

In Rockport those of marine reference are: Atlantic Ave., Beach, Cove Ave. and Ct., Cove Hill Lane, Long Beach, and Ocean Ave.

Gloucester Streets of non-marine origin are as follows:

Boulder Ave.	Gravel Pit Road
Clay Ct.	Highland St., Ave., Ct.,
Cliff Road	Place, and Road
Edgemoor Road	High Popples Road
Edgewood Road	Hillside Ct. and Road
Field Road	Lake Ave. and Road
Freshwater Cove Road	Ledge Lane and Road
Granite St. and Ct.	Ledgemont Ave.

Moorland Road	Rocky Neck Ave.
Mt. Ann Road	Rocky Pasture Road
Quarry St. and Road	Spring St. and Ct.
Rockland	Stone Ct.

In Rockport eight street names come from non-marine physical features: Granite, Headland Ave., Headlands, Highland St., Ave., and Road, Hillside Ave., and Spring Lane.

#### INAPPROPRIATE NAMES

Two names based upon natural features have been introduced on Cape Ann which are inappropriate since they do not reflect the character of the local region. In Rockport there was an avenue named Palmetto Ave., according to the directory of 1873, but this name, based on a southern group of plants, is no longer in use. Alpine Court in Gloucester, is scarcely high enough to justify the name from the viewpoint of expressing a real topographic relationship, in spite of the fact that it is located on a hill top. It is not known to the writer why the above names were employed on Cape Ann, but certainly they were not suggested by the environment of this region.

#### CHANGED NAMES AND OBSOLETE NAMES

Place names are occasionally changed for one reason or another, and some become obsolete or disappear in time. The older maps and directories of Cape Ann contain names formerly in good usage but now replaced or seldom used. Those which were based upon natural features of the area are discussed here.

On a "Map of Riverdale, Gloucester, Massachusetts, as of 1741," the hill now known as Riverview was called Huckleberry Hill, and the nearby island now called Cow Island was labelled as Skunk Island. On some early maps Rocky Neck was known as Peter Mud's Neck. The "Map of Gloucester by John Mason in 1831" gives the name of Whortleberry Hill for the section now called Wheeler's Point. Another map by John Mason entitled "Plan of Gloucester Harbor, 1834-35" uses the name

Spring Cove for what is now called Vincent's Cove. On some old maps (Map of John Mason 1831; Maps of Gloucester 1851, 1872) the present Main Street is labelled Spring Street, a name which persists today, but is applied to a different location. The same maps and the directories of 1870-71 and 1875, contain the name Sea Street for what is now the lower half of Hancock Street. Niles Pond at Eastern Point, originally known as Great Pond, is shown on the "Map of Towns of Gloucester and Rockport, Essex County, Massachusetts, 1851" as Oceana Pond. A few years later this was modified to Ocean Pond on "A topographic Map of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1856." Stoney Cove at Rust's Island very possibly got its name as the result of a typographical error. On the "Map of the Towns of Gloucester and Rockport, 1851," this was given as Story Cove, but on "A Topographic Map of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1856, it is labelled Stoney Cove. In the "Gloucester and Rockport Directory for 1870-71," and on an old, undated map, the present Bond Street is recorded as Apple Row, which is still used by some people today. The same map labelled Cherry Street as Fox Hill, while the directory of 1877 lists Marsh Street as Wolf Hill Road. Rose Bank has been corrupted into Rowe's Square. All in all, however, such changes have not resulted in the loss of any significant number of names bearing on natural features, as many changes merely substituted other names of similar origin, and the gains on one hand about equal the losses on the other.

In contrast to this situation, however, some names based on the local environment have been lost through disuse. Some which have been noted are as follows. Gravel Hill shown in "Map of Riverdale, Gloucester, Massachusetts, as of 1741"; Clam Rock off Duncan Point shown on Mason's "Plan of Gloucester Harbor 1834-35"; Raccoon Rock in Rockport and Sand Hill at Wingaersheek Beach found on "Map of Towns of Gloucester and Rockport, Essex County, Massachusetts, 1851"; and Oceana Bluff and Duck Rocks at Pigeon Cove used on an undated "Map of Ocean View, Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts" do not



appear on recent maps and apparently are not in current use. A number of street names reflecting the natural region which are listed in early directories but not in present use are as follows: In Rockport—Bay View (1870-71), Atlantic View, Bay Avenue, Harbor Avenue, Water, Mt. Holly Avenue and Walnut Avenue (1873); in Gloucester—Strawberry Bank (date ?), Cove Road (1875), Cove Pond (1879), Ferndale (1880), and Lobster Lane (1903), the latter in the village of Magnolia.

One case of inconsistent spelling has come to light which apparently has caused confusion in many parts of the world where the same name has been applied. This is the spelling of bivalve mollusks known as mussels. The problem has been discussed by the writer (Dexter, 1952) as it pertains to the rapids in the Tennessee River now generally known as Muscle Shoals. The older maps of Cape Ann used the spelling Muscle Point or Muscle Rocks for a headland on the southwestern shores of the Cape at the edge of Gloucester Harbor. It appears that way on the following maps: "Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann, by John Mason, 1831"; "Map of Towns of Gloucester and Rockport, Essex County, Massachusetts, 1851"; "A Topographic Map of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1856"; "Gloucester Sheet, Massachusetts, U. S. G. Survey, 1886"; "Map of Gloucester and Rockport in the Gloucester Directory 1886-87"; and the "U. S. C. and G. S. map Ipswich Bay to Gloucester Harbor, 1920." "A Geographic Dictionary of Massachusetts" by Henry Gannett (1894) also used the spelling Muscle Point, but refers to a similar headland at Barnstable Harbor on Cape Cod as Mussel Point. The roadway to the headland on Cape Ann first appeared in the Gloucester Directory for 1925 with the spelling "Mussel Point Road." This spelling has remained to date in the directories. The Lucas "Indexed Map of Gloucester and Rockport, Massachusetts, 1935" uses the spelling "Mussel" for both the point and the roadway. Since this is the preferred spelling in reference to bivalve mollusks, it should replace the older form.

## CONCLUSIONS

Place names at Cape Ann, Massachusetts, have been drawn from features of the natural environment to a considerable extent. Out of a total of 124 geographic names in current use, 38 percent were derived from that source. Animals, plants, and physical features have contributed about equally to the naming of places, but marine life has not inspired as many names as might be expected in a coastal area where the main industry has centered around marine resources. Only six names come from that source.

Street names from 1860 to 1948-49 have contained about 19 percent that reflect the natural environment. Again those having their origin from marine life are few in number (4), but considering all marine connotation, 33 out of a total of 633 street names in use in 1949 came from that source. Plant names have been used far more often than animal names, and those suggested by physical features have been used most often.

Two street names do not reflect the local environment (Palmetto, Alpine) and hence are inappropriate. A number of former names based on natural features have been replaced, but the total has not been significantly changed. Several place names and street names based on environmental features have become obsolete or have disappeared from current use in the course of a century.

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