

Place Names in Jamaica

Sometimes names are not what they seem. "Danks" in Clarendon, was the name given to a property Sir Henry Morgan deeded to his German wife, who said, "danke", meaning "thanks".

"Save Rent", in Westmoreland, is not a pot for cheap living; the name is a corruption of that of a French colonist, M. Saverent, as "Shotover", in Portland, is a distribution of the French Chateau Vert.YS Estate

"Putogether Corner", near Mandeville, is the spot where market women stopped to put their goods - and their dress - in order before proceeding to town.

Plan in its message is "I-No-Call-You-No-Come" in the Cockpit country of St. Elizabeth. During their early years, Maroons did not have a very positive attitude towards unexpected visitors, if they did not sanction someone's entrance, he was led through the most torturous routes in the hope that this would lessen his curiosity.

Shoe Myself Gate: When persons who were unaccustomed to wearing shoes acquired a new pair, they would sling them over their shoulders until they arrived at their destination. At this particular "gate", they would "shoe themselves".

Gutters: This town aptly named. After heavy rains, water flows through the town from three directions, making it almost impassable. Gutters is located at the foot of Spur Tree Hill.

Y.S. Estate: The property lies near a bridge over the river of the same name. Some say that the curious name of the river derives from a Welsh word meaning "winding" (on early maps it is written "Wyess") and possibly the form Y.S. was first adopted as the estate mark stamped on hogsheads of the Wyess Sugar.

ACCOMPONG (Maroon settlement) is in St. Elizabeth. This name is said to be derived from the Ashanti word, Nyamekopon, which means "the lone one, the warrior". This name was also given to one of the brothers of Captain Cudjoe, the second Maroon leader. ACCOMPONG was established in 1739, and the compound. Is in the charge of a colonel, the army rank being honourable. The colonel appoints a major, several captains, and a council. This council functions like an open meeting. (see MAROOON TOWN).

AUGUST TOWN, in the hills of St. Andrew, is thought to have been named from the fact that freedom came to the enslaved people of this country on the 1st August, 1838. From that date, this day was designated and celebrated as "Emancipation Day" for many years. AUGUST TOWN became notable because at this place a prophet, whose name was Bedward, arose - the proponent of religion which became known as "Bedwardism". He had thousands of followers but outdid himself when he proclaimed THAT HE WAS God and could fly. He set a date for his flight, and when it did not occur his people lost faith in him. Bedward had folk songs written about him. The verse of one is as follows: "Dip him Bedward, dip him. Dip him in the healing stream. Dip him deep, but don't dip him too deep. Dip him Bedward, dip him".

Another song goes in part: "Run mongoose, you name gone abroad, Mongoose go into Bedward kitchen, eat out all him righteous chicken, run mongoose".

BLLENHEIM, in Hanover, is a place-name found also in south-central Manchester, and originates from Bavaria, Germany. Blenheim (in Germany) was a site of a great battle, which no doubt led to use of the name in Jamaica. BLENHEIM in Hanover is the birthplace of the Right Honourable Sir Alexander Bustamante, P.C., K.T., D.D., L.L.D., C.B.E., and National Hero. The house at BLENHEIM in which he was born has been designated a National Monument.

BOG WALK, in St. Catherine, was originally the Boca d'agua (water's mouth) of the Spaniards, corrupted to Bog Walk by the English after their occupation of the island in 1655. Bog Walk is now a centre for processing agricultural projects. It has a sugar factory, milk condensery, and citrus packaging plant.

CHAPELTON, in Clarendon, was first known as "Chapel Town", as the village took the name from the church. The Chapelton Church (Cundall tells us) was dedicated to St. Paul, and was built at the time when the present parish of Clarendon was divided into the parishes of Clarendon and Vere. The "Cross" Church, near May Pen, now in ruins, was then the Parish Church of Clarendon, The Chapelton Church was built as a "chapel of ease" to the Cross Church, and was the first place of worship of any size erected in upper Clarendon. The oldest records go back to 1666. (Cundall, Historic Jamaica, p.395)

HALF-WAY-TREE, in St. Andrew, was originally Half-Way-Tree Pen and is said to have been owned by the Hotchkyn family for 130 years. Robert Hotchkyn, Attorney General of Jamaica (1707), was a lineal descendant of this family. It is claimed that HALF-WAY-TREE was named after a cotton tree which was at the junction of four roads. The cotton tree is said to have existed there from before the conquest of the island (1655) and until 1866 it was halfway between two places: Greenwich in the St. Andrew Hills, where the English soldiers had their camp, and the fort near Spanish Town. The soldiers always rested at this spot before proceeding to the fort.

The earliest mention of HALF-WAY-TREE is that in 1696 the governor was informed that certain prominent citizens has assembled together “at halfway tree in the Parish of St. Andrews and had obleiged several of His Majesty’s subjects passing that way to drink a health to the late K. James” (Cundall, Historic Jamaica, p. 197).

The late sir Noel Livingston claimed that in his research he found the name HALF-WAY-TREE mentioned in a Chancery Suit filed in the year 1782 wherein a James Parker was described as “late of Half-way Tree in the Parish of St. Andrew”.

MILK RIVER, in Clarendon, was the Rio do Manatines of the Spaniards. The mineral baths are situated at the foot of a hill, which is of limestone formation. The water, which is extremely saline, issues from crevices in the rock directly into the baths, through which it flows at a rate of 240 gallons per minute, or 345,600 gallons per day. The temperature of the water maintains a uniform 91-92 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the year. Besides being rich in mineral salts, it possesses a highly radioactivity, which renders it of a therapeutic value unsurpassed by any mineral bath in the world. Gout, rheumatism, sciatica, lumbago, neuralgia, eczema, kidney and liver complaints are the ills for which this water is specially recommended. Milk River Baths are 54½ miles from Kingston.

PORUS is a town in Manchester. There are two reasons given for this name: one, that PORUS is possibly a confusion between Las Pocas (the pits) and should be called Pocos, or two, that since Porus was referred to by the Spaniards as “the district of Porras”, they must have named it after the brothers who were marooned with Christopher Columbus at St. Ann’s Bay for over a year. The Porras brothers finally mutinied against Columbus.

SAVANNA-LA-MAR, chief town and shipping port in Westmoreland, was the Sabana-de-la-mar (“the plain by the sea”) of the Spaniards. During English occupation of the island, the “de” was dropped, and the name became Savanna-la-mar, sometimes abbreviated Sav-la-mar.

SEVILLE, in St. Ann was the Sevilla Nueva (New Seville) or Sevilla de ora (Golden Seville) of the Spaniards.

SPANISH TOWN, St. Catherine, was founded by about 1534. it was once known as Santiago, the name given by Christopher Columbus to the whole island. The English, however, called the city St, Jago de la Vega, that is, ‘St. James of the Plain’, and that name remained in popular use for some years. Finally it was known as SPANISH TOWN. Source: Jamaica Library Service