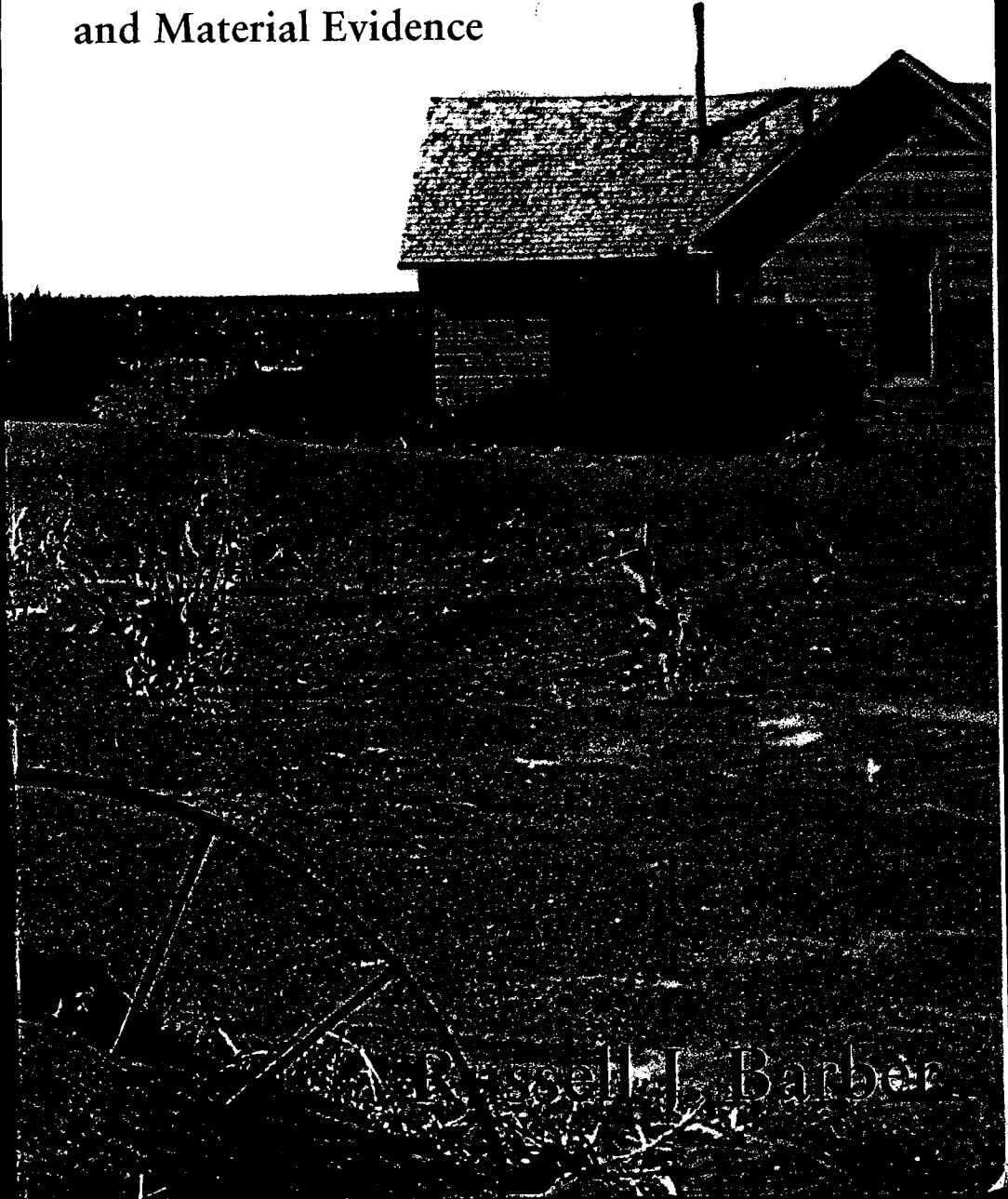


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ING HISTORICAL CHAEOLOGY

EXERCISES Using Documentary, Oral,
and Material Evidence



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USING TOPONYMY

1. Descriptive names. These names simply describe the landscape of an area, literally or metaphorically. *E.g.*, "Twin Peaks," "Green River," "Thousand Oaks," or "Furnace Creek" (in the heat of Death Valley).

2. Associative names. Associative names are ones that relate an area to its cultural features. *E.g.*, "Frenchman's Creek," "Mill Creek," or "Furnace Creek" (where associated with an iron furnace).

3. Incident names. An incident name is based on a particular event, either real or fictional, associated with the area. *E.g.*, "Big Bear" (any of several places where a large bear was seen) or "Show Low" (the Arizona town where a card game reportedly decided which of two rival families would leave town).

4. Possessive names. A possessive name indicates a person who is intimately associated with a place, often as a major landowner. Sometimes the name is merely a commemorative of a person of national or local importance, especially former rulers. *E.g.*, "Sutter's Mill," "Smithville," or "Jefferson."

5. Commemorative names. These names praise the places they describe. A commemorative name frequently is a public relations ploy to convince potential immigrants of the virtues of a place; sometimes, however, it is merely an extolling of the purported virtues of a place by its contented inhabitants. A special category of commemorative names includes mining camp names, where the founders often gave grandiose names in hopes of stimulating their good luck. *E.g.*, "Pleasant Valley," "Happy Camp," "Clearwater" (especially in an area with limited drinking water), "Running Springs" (especially in arid lands), or "Big Glitter" (for a gold mining camp).

6. Transfer names. These names have been transferred from their original (or at least earlier) homes along with immigrants. Consequently, they are often an excellent clue to the place of origin of the immigrant founders. *E.g.*, "Paris" (the Missouri town was named for a French prototype), "New Boston" (the Texas and Illinois towns were named for the Massachusetts city, which in turn was named for an English town), or "New York" (clearly named for "old" York in England).

7. Mistake names. A rare category, mistake names fossilize errors made by map-pers or transcribers. Some are corruptions of the original names based on the dialect or accent of a region. For example, in Australia, "Coldegar" is a corruption of "collector," "Camboura" is a corruption of "gunblower," and "Dilliget" is a corruption of "delegate." A few mistake names are simple errors, such as "Nome, Alaska," whose name originally appeared on a map as "no name" and was miscopied to its present form.

8. Manufactured names. These are made-up words, often whimsical, *e.g.*, "Zzyzx" (a California desert settlement whose founder and namer swore that it would always be the last listing in a gazetteer). One category of manufactured names is those that combine parts from names of adjacent areas, such as "Arrowbear" (a California community located between Big Bear and Arrowhead), "Kenora" (the area between Keewatin, Norman, and Rat Portage in Canada's Northwest Territories), and "the Delmarva Peninsula" (which includes land from the states of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia).

This typology of place names is neither exhaustive nor perfect. Some names fit no category well, and others may fit more than one category. Nonetheless, the terminology and concepts should be of use to you in completing this exercise.

To analyze place names sensibly, the analyst must ask why a place may have been named as it was and what that may imply about the place, its namer, or its occupants. Much of toponymy is based on common sense informed by a knowledge of words, their meanings, and their chronologies.

The dating of town founding on the basis of place names, for example, is based on the slow and more or less regular change in language over time. Over the centuries, typical word endings denoting towns have changed, and a local chronology of these endings can be used to date the founding of towns. (This method is predicated on the assumption that names of the towns have not changed in recent times, and that assumption usually can be reasonably assessed on the basis of documentary evidence. It also is based on the assumption that transfer names are not important in the area under study.) This type of analysis is most useful in a place with considerable time depth to its dominant cultural tradition, a place like Japan, England, or Italy; areas where the dominant cultural tradition is a modern overlay (*e.g.*, the United States or Australia) are less amenable to this type of analysis, partly because the time depth is so shallow and partly because transfer and manufactured names are so common.

An example of dating on the basis of town names comes from England. There, place-name endings are associated quite strongly with distinct periods, as Table 2-1 shows. These dates are applicable only to England, of course, and there might be significant regional variations in the dates within that country. By examining maps and dating the towns on them by the endings of their names, one can arrive at a preliminary picture of the history of the settlement of England.

On a different issue, the ethnicity or point of origin of the founders of a settlement often is indicated by the name they choose for their community. Naming a settlement with a French word, using the name of a French saint for a settlement name, or using a transfer name from a French community elsewhere can indicate that the initial settlers were French. Alternatively,

TABLE 2-1 Typical place-name endings in England and their dates of greatest usage.

ENDING	PERIOD	DATES
-enc	Celtic	pre-200 B.C.
-ain	Celtic	pre-200 B.C.
-ium	Roman	ca. 1 A.D.
-ham	Anglo	ca. 500 A.D.
-burg	Saxon	ca. 800 A.D.
-ton	later Anglo-Saxon	ca. 1000 A.D.
-thun	Norman	post-1066 A.D.
-ville	Norman	post-1066 A.D.

transfer names from Connecticut appearing in Indiana may give a clue to where the settlers of a particular community originated.

Finally, features of the past landscape sometimes can be recognized in the names given an area. An area presently swathed in California tract homes may have descriptive or associative names like "Badger Hill," "Bear Canyon," or "Big Cat Spring," suggesting that its pre-domestication past may have featured a somewhat wilder environment than the present land use would suggest. The neighborhood of Boston called "Back Bay" is a reminder of the era before wetlands were so extensively filled in, when that area was salt marshes, mudflats, and tidal water. "Lime Kiln Creek" gives a clear suggestion of a prominent past industrial use, and "Wild Horse Potrero" suggests a grassland. (*Potrero* is Spanish for "pasture.") In areas where native languages have been replaced by other languages, place names may fossilize a descriptive or associative name, such as "Squamcut" in Rhode Island, a place name from the Algonquian Indian language meaning "salmon fishing place." (Since Squamcut is entirely subsumed by urban Providence, the name is one of the few ways to recognize the former relationship to salmon.)

Some Cautions

The use of place names for historical reconstruction, of course, has its dangers. Names can be misleading, especially when it is unclear into which of several types a name should be classified. For example, "Potter Creek" could be named for the pottery-makers who lived along it (descriptive or associative name), for the Potter family who formerly owned the land (possessive name), or for a Potter Creek that was prominent in the area from which the original settlers of the region emigrated (transfer name); further, the name might originally have been "Potrero Creek" and Anglicized (a mistake name derived from a descriptive name), or it might even be related to the folklore that Jesse Potter, the famous outlaw, passed there once (incident name). Some names, like this one, will be ambiguous if there is no additional documentary or oral evidence to aid analysis.

Commendatory names are especially susceptible to lies, as when an unscrupulous developer labels a desert tract "Lakeview," in hopes of attracting unwary speculators who might purchase land unseen. Wily developers have been especially active in California, peppering it with unlikely names in unlikely places: "Apple Valley" in the Mojave Desert (where no apples could grow), several settlements named "Oro Grande" (Spanish for "Big Gold") where no significant amounts of gold were ever found, and various "Clearwaters," "Sweetwaters," "Running Springs," and "Cold Wells" in the middle of inhospitable and blazing deserts. Sometimes a namer wants to promote an old-fashioned or historical feeling and uses a purposefully old-fashioned-sounding name. Again, this has been particularly common in California, where most Spanish (or Spanish-sounding) place names date to periods

considerably after the political dominance of Spain and Mexico in that state; using Spanish in a name evokes a feeling of history that most California communities have not developed by virtue of their age.

Another danger in the interpretation of place names is related to ethnic references incorporated into them. While "Chinese Bar" or "Hungarian Flat" probably reflect early settlements by those ethnic groups, not all names are so straightforward. For example, "Germantown Flats" might have been settled by Germans, but it might have been settled by Dutch instead, since Anglo-Americans frequently confused those groups, and since most names preserved in records are those used by Anglo-Americans. Other groups often have been confused in naming, such as Serbs with Russians and Norwegians with Swedes.

Further, place names may be nicknames for ethnic groups, often derogatory ones imposed on the community from outside. For example, "Greaser town" in the Southwest and California usually indicated a Mexican settlement, though there normally was another, often unrecorded name used by the inhabitants of that settlement. The power of racist thinking sometimes has been strong enough to lead to the naming of a community because of the presence of only a single member of an especially despised ethnic group, as with some of the many "Niggertowns" across the southern part of the United States from Georgia to California.

Some names are whimsical and of limited value in reconstructing the past. For example, the sidings along the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad between Needles and Barstow, California, are in alphabetical order from A to H with names coming from Greek mythology. These names were assigned by an anonymous administrator who had never seen the terrain and certainly had no idea what sorts of towns might develop along the railroad. The variety of far-fetched interpretations that an overly zealous toponymist might develop from this case is sobering.

Finally, it is important to remember that the name of a community (providing the name has not been changed over the years) reflects only the conditions at the time of founding. The founders of a community may move on or quickly be submerged in a deluge of immigrants from different backgrounds, but the name lives on. "Chinese Camp" in California's gold country has no Chinese residents among its current 150 residents.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Prof. Theresa Highpockets, a well-known historical archaeologist and former student of Leslie Squarkmuffin, is planning a large-scale project in Plumas County, part of California's gold rush country. As part of her planning, she is conducting preliminary studies in a number of districts, enlisting the aid of selected graduate students, including you. Your task is to examine the data

available and to draw what conclusions you can on the basis of toponymy. This research is exploratory, so you should feel free to explore any avenue that seems productive relative to toponymy, but you probably will have greatest success trying to learn something of the ethnicity of settlers in the area on the basis of transfer names. (To do this, you will have to consult gazetteers and other sources to trace where names occur elsewhere, at earlier dates.) You may also be able to find some sort of pattern that relates ethnicity to the locations and dates of settlements.

The information necessary to complete your task is given in this exercise. Figures 2-1 through 2-4 provide information on the topography, settlement, and land use of your section of Plumas County, and Table 2-2 presents what is known about founding dates for the settlements, based on documentary research. A thumbnail sketch of the history and geography of Plumas County is contained in this section.

Plumas County lies in the mountains and western foothills of central California. It has moderate rainfall and good agricultural land in its valleys, as well as mineral wealth (principally gold) in its hills and mountains. At the moderate elevations of the area under consideration, there will be only a little snow in winter.

Euro-American settlement began in the 1840s and exploded with the gold rush of 1849. Most of these settlements have been abandoned and now are ghost towns (archaeological sites); a few are still inhabited, especially in the valleys. Documentary sources are very good for a few communities and virtually non-existent for others, especially the more ephemeral mining settlements. Early roads were passable only in drier seasons, but improved roads that were passable most of the year were built around 1860. The railroad came through this area in 1878 and established a station at Germantown Flats.

TABLE 2-2 Settlements and founding dates, selected section of Plumas County, California.

SETTLEMENT	FOUNDING DATE
Cork	1849
Germantown Junction	1878
Greasertown	1850
Montenegro	1853 or 1854
New Chillicothe	1848
Oro Grande	1849
Peiping	1851?
Penzance	1849
St. Ide	1850

FIGURE 2-1

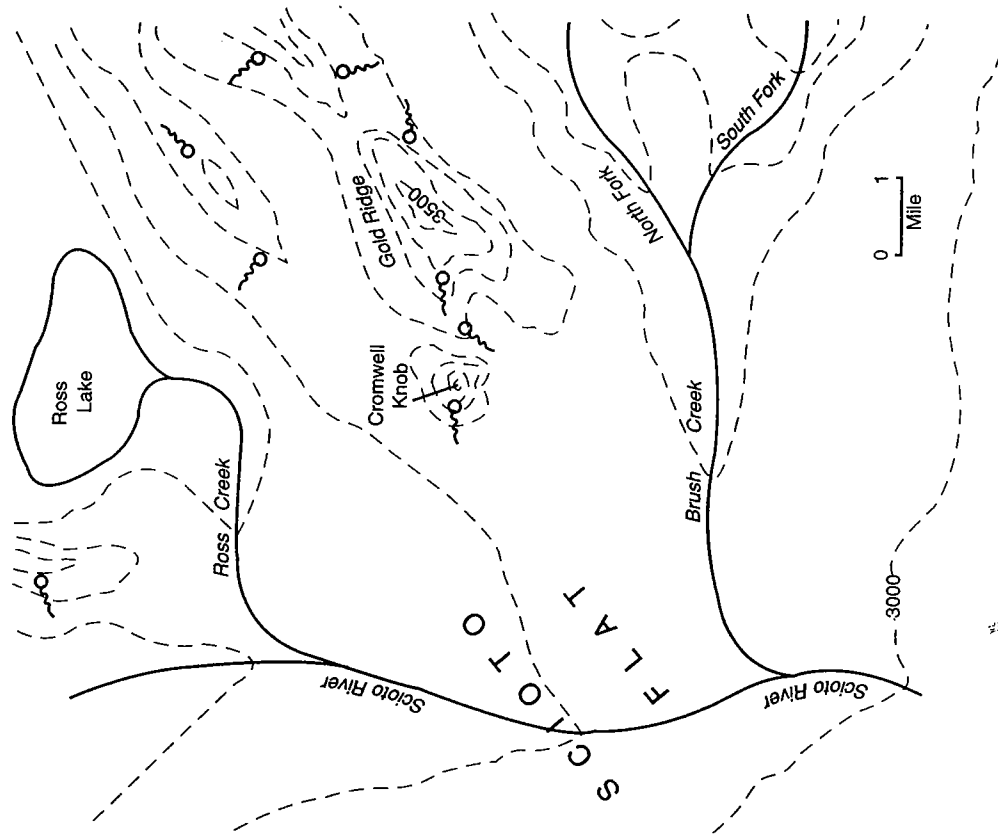


FIGURE 2-2

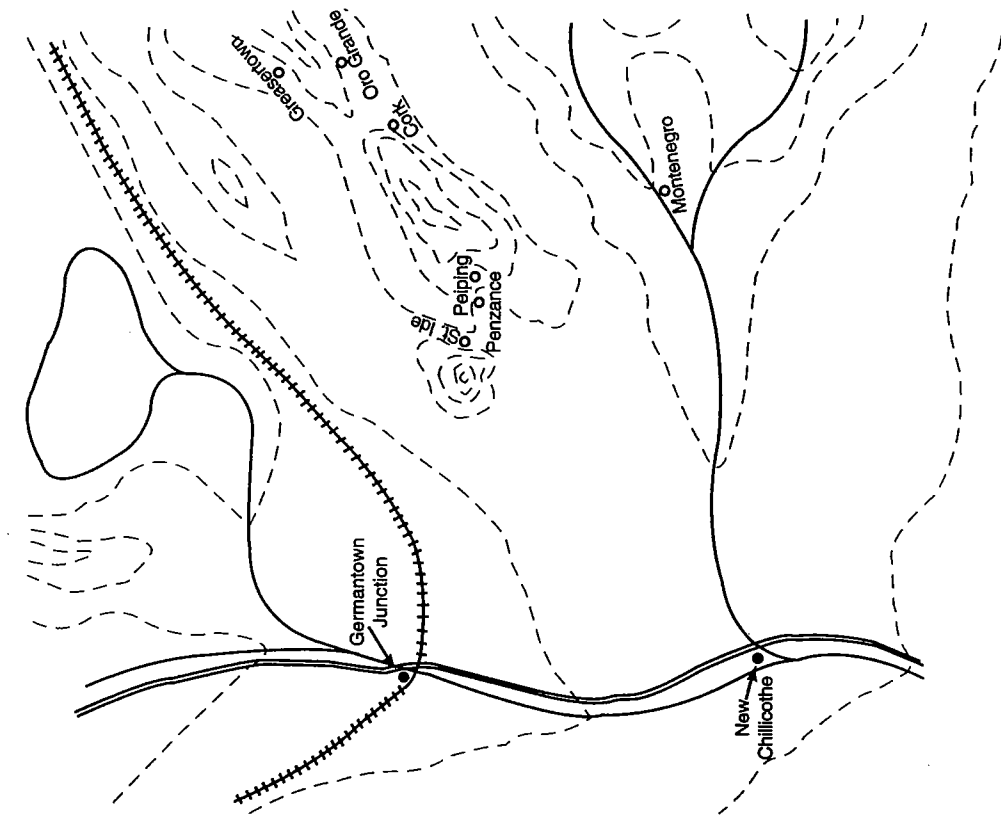


FIGURE 2-3

