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Place-Names in Northern Canada.

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III.—*Place-Names in Northern Canada*

By JAMES WHITE, F.R.G.S.

(Read 27th September 1910.)

The geographical limits of Northern Canada have been taken as including the present North-West Territories which contain the so-called "districts"¹ of Ungava, Keewatin, Mackenzie and Franklin and the territory of Yukon. In considering in the large, the derivations of the place-names in this area, it is convenient to divide them into two groups:

1.—The names of the Arctic islands of the Arctic coast of the mainland, and of the coasts of Hudson bay and strait.

2.—What may be called the "inland" names, including practically all not in the first class.

Arctic and Hudson bay exploration in British North America can be divided into three periods of activity:—

(a) From Frobisher's first voyage in 1576 to James' and Foxe's voyages in 1631.

(b) From Ross's voyage in 1818 to the Belcher expedition, 1852-54.

(c) From the Nares' expedition of 1875-76 to the present time.

The first period includes the explorations of Frobisher, Davis, Hall, Hudson, Button, Baffin, Munk, Foxe, James and others. Between the first and second period, there were occasional small expeditions in search of the North West passage, by way of the north-western portion of Hudson bay.

The Ross expedition of 1818, followed Baffin's track and verified the discoveries of Baffin, made over 200 years before and which had been expunged from the 18th century maps as unfounded. Following the extensive discoveries of Parry, 1819-25 and Franklin's, 1821 and 1826,, the Admiralty, in 1845, dispatched the famous, but ill-fated, Franklin expedition. When a year and a half had elapsed, a feeling of uneasiness manifested itself and, in the next thirty years, over forty expeditions were sent out from England and America to rescue the survivors or bring home the records of the lost expedition. As the nature of the

¹The boundaries of these "districts" have been indicated in accordance with the Order in Council of Dec. 18, 1897, except that a narrow strip lying between long. 100° W. and the eastern boundary of Saskatchewan has been included in Keewatin. As the Order in Council was contingent upon subsequent legislation, and as the legislation was never had, these divisions never had any legal status.

search necessitated a minute examination of all the coasts of the great Arctic archipelago, one of the indirect results was the mapping of tens of thousands of miles of coast line and the naming of hundreds of topographical features.

Between the second and third periods, Hayes and Hall discovered Kennedy and Robeson channels—the northern extension of Smith sound—and the great sea of Palæocrystic ice that extends northward from the northern shore of Ellesmere island and Greenland.

During the third period, various expeditions attempted to reach the Pole and, last year, Peary's efforts were crowned with success. As one result, nearly all the names of features along the eastern coast of Ellesmere island, are named after citizens of the United States, more or less celebrated; the west coast of Ellesmere and the islands to the west of it were explored by the Sverdrup expedition and, therefore, bear Norwegian names. Elsewhere, British names are almost universal, though many non-British royalties and statesmen have not been overlooked.

The study of the place-names of Arctic Canada is an extremely fascinating one and involves the study of all the narratives of Arctic exploration, of the previous careers of the principal actors—their relations, friends, brother officers, past and present, of their former commanders, of contemporary officials of the Admiralty and scientists, particularly those interested in the exploration of the North, etc. Naturally, as about nine-tenths of the coast was explored by naval officers, the names of Arctic explorers, of naval officers and officials and of Arctic exploring vessels predominate, the most striking feature in a general survey, being the extreme paucity of native names, due, partly, to the uninhabited nature of the greater part of the region and, in a minor degree, to the lack of communication with the Eskimos owing to the failure to provide the expeditions with interpreters. To this rule, there is one exception, viz., along the south shore of Victoria island and along the Arctic coast of the mainland between Coronation gulf and the northern extreme of Melville peninsula. As these coasts were explored by Rae, Dease and Simpson, officers of the Hudson's Bay Co., they are a veritable directory of their contemporary chief traders and chief factors, of the Hudson's Bay Co.

Derivations of place-names are arrived at in a number of ways:—

1.—When a definite statement by the author is obtainable. Fortunately, there are many books of Arctic exploration and, during the Franklin search the reports made by the various expeditions were published as Parliamentary blue-books. Unfortunately, the reports of the two most important expeditions sent out during this period—the Austin and the Belcher—do not give much information respecting the

many names given by them. Apparently Austin named all the features discovered by his officers as their reports and the sketch maps accompanying them are devoid of new names. Belcher seems to have given his officers a fairly free hand in this respect but only one, Lieut. Mechem, gives anything like a full statement of the derivations of the names for which he is responsible. Richards, who gave more names than any other officer in the expedition, gives absolutely no information.

2.—Where there are circumstances indicating the derivation that almost amount to a demonstration, particularly when the name is an uncommon one.

3.—Where the attendant circumstances indicate a probability. In such cases, the suggested derivation is always prefaced by the word "probable."

The first explorers gave remarkably few names, usually contenting themselves with bestowing their own and the names of some of their more influential patrons; thus, Baffin, himself, is commemorated by a great bay and island. He named Smith sound after Sir Thomas Smith, Jones sound after Alderman Thomas Jones, Digges cape after Sir Dudley Digges, Wolstenholme sound after Sir John Wolstenholme—all patrons and subscribers toward the expenses of the expedition.

Hudson bay and strait, James bay, Baffin island and bay, Davis strait, M'Clintock channel, Franklin, Dease and James Ross straits, Parry archipelago, Fox channel and Simpson peninsula commemorate the achievements of the explorers whose names they bear; Victoria island and strait, King William, Prince of Wales, Cornwall and Prince Patrick islands, Adelaide peninsula and Prince Regent inlet are named after British royalties, past and present, while Coronation gulf reminds us that it was discovered on the anniversary of the accession of George IV; Somerset island was named after Parry's native county, and Devon island after that of his lieutenant—Lieutenant Liddon. Other islands have been named after Admiral Sir Wm. Cornwallis, Earl of Bathurst, Earl of Ellesmere, Earl of Eglington, Earl of Southampton, Admiral Sir Thos. Byam Martin, Comptroller of the Navy; Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, and Messrs. Heiberg and Ringnes, patrons of the Sverdrup expedition; Viscount Melville, first Lord of the Admiralty, has been immortalized by an island, a sound and a peninsula; Sir John Barrow, for many years Secretary of the Admiralty, by a strait and many minor features, and Sir Francis Beaufort, hydrographer, by the sea opposite northwestern Canada; Sir Robert Peel, sometime Prime Minister, by an inlet and a river; Henry Grinnell and Felix Booth, enthusiastic patrons of discovery, by Grinnell land and peninsula and Boothia peninsula and

gulf; General Lord Wellington, by the channel up which Franklin sailed in 1845; Robeson and Kennedy channels after United States Secretaries of the Navy; Committee bay after the governing body of the Hudson's Bay Co., and Jones, Lancaster and Smith sounds after the patrons of Baffin in his great voyage when he reached a latitude not surpassed till 1818, over two hundred years later.

"Inland" Names.—The "inland" names of Northern Canada differ from the "coast" names in that the majority of them are either native names or translations of native names. This is due to the fact that most of them were obtained by officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, who, as fur-traders, were in close touch with the native inhabitants.

Eastmain river recalls the Hudson's Bay Co.'s official designation of the east mainland coast of Hudson bay; George river was named by Moravian missionaries after George III; Koksoak is Eskimo for "big river" and Ungava signifies "far away"; Albany river after James, Duke of York and Albany, later, James II; Hayes river, after James Hayes, secretary to Prince Rupert; Nelson river after Button's master who died there; Churchill river after the victor of Blenheim; Backs river, after Admiral Sir George Back; Coppermine river after the reported copper mines that drew Hearne—first white man to sight the Arctic mainland coast of British North America—from Hudson bay; Dubawnt is corrupted Indian for "water-shore," and Slave denotes the contempt of the southern Indians for their less warlike northern neighbours; the Mackenzie bears the name of its famous explorer, Sir Alex. Mackenzie; the Pelly is named after one of the directors of the Hudson's Bay Company; the Frances, after the wife of its famous governor, Sir George Simpson, and the Lewes and Stewart after officers of the company; the Liard refers to the cottonwood trees ("liards") on its banks; Keewatin, as every student of Hiawatha knows, signifies the "north-west wind."

In preparing this paper, the historical interest connected with it and the fact that, so far as the writer knows, it has never been compiled before, has induced the addition of:—

- (a) A list of the various Arctic expeditions—including Hudson bay—from 1576 to 1910.
- (b) A list of the officers of these expeditions.
- (c) Bibliography of the principal works consulted.

NOTE:—Owing to the limitations of the space allotted to the various sections, the publication of the paper as prepared, was found to be impossible. In addition to the lists of expeditions, lists of officers and bibliography, it contains notes respecting the derivations of the names of upwards of two thousand features. It is now, February, 1911, being published as an appendix to the ninth report of the Geographic Board of Canada.