

## Pamphlet # 24

### Aboriginal Peoples Contributions to Place Names in Canada

#### 1 Provinces and Territories

The map of Canada is a rich tapestry of place names which reflect the diverse history and heritage of our nation. Many of the country's earliest place names draw on Aboriginal sources. Before the arrival of Europeans, First Nations and Inuit peoples gave names to places throughout the country to identify the land they knew so well and with which they had strong spiritual connections. For centuries, these names that described the natural features of the land, or commemorated significant historical events, passed from one generation to the next. The name of Canada itself, and the names of some provinces and territories, come from place names in Aboriginal languages.

The following is a small sample of some Aboriginal place names in Canada. For further information please refer to the sources provided in this pamphlet

**Canada** is from the word Kanata, meaning "settlement" or "village" in the language of the Huron.

**Saskatchewan:** This province got its name from the Saskatchewan River, which the Cree called Kisiskatchewan Sipi, meaning "swift-flowing river."

**Manitoba:** The likeliest source is the Cree maniot-wapow, "the strait of the spirit or manitobau." This name refers to the roaring sound produced by pebbles on a beach on Manitoba Island in Lake Manitoba. The Cree believed the noise sounded like a manito, a spirit, beating a drum. It has also been suggested that the name comes from the Assiniboine words mini and tobow, meaning "Lake of the Prairie." An additional source is Manitoo Ahbee, from the Ojibway meaning "Where the Creator sits".

**Ontario:** This Huron name, first applied to the lake, may be a corruption of onitariio, meaning "beautiful lake," or kanadario, which translates as "sparkling" or "beautiful" water.

**Quebec:** Aboriginal peoples first used the name "kebek" for the region around Québec City. It refers to the Algonquin word for "narrow passage" or "strait" to indicate the narrowing of the river at Cape Diamond.

**Yukon:** This name belonged originally to the Yukon river and is from a Loucheux (Dene) word, LoYukun-ah, meaning "great river."

**Nunavut:** This is the name of Canada's newest territory which came into being on April 1, 1999. It means "our land" in Inuktitut.

#### 2. Towns, Rivers and Mountains

Many Canadian towns, cities, rivers and mountains also have names that come from Aboriginal sources.

**Chilliwack:** (British Columbia) This is the name of the local tribe, chihl-KWAY-uhk. This word is generally interpreted to mean "going back up." It refers to the people's return home after visiting the mouth of the Fraser River.

**Coquitlam:** (British Columbia) A word derived from the Salish tribal name Kawayquitlam which can be translated as "small red salmon." The name refers to the sockeye salmon common to the area.

**Kamloops:** (British Columbia) A word likely from the Shushwap word kahm-o-loops, which is usually translated as "the meeting of waters." The name refers to the junction of the North and South Thompson rivers at Kamloops.

**Penticton:** (British Columbia) The name comes from an Okanagan word meaning "the always place," in the sense of a permanent dwelling place.

**Fort Chipewyan:** (Alberta) The town was named for

the Chipewyan people, and means "pointed skins," a Cree reference to the way the Chipewyan prepared beaver pelts.

**Medicine Hat:** (Alberta) This is a translation of the Blackfoot word, saamis, meaning "headdress of a medicine man." According to one explanation, the word describes a fight between the Cree and Blackfoot, when a Cree medicine man lost his plumed hat in the river.

**Wetaskiwin:** (Alberta) This is an adaptation of the Cree word wi-ta-ski-oo cha-ka-tin-ow, which can be translated as "place of peace" or "hill of peace."

**Saskatoon:** (Saskatchewan) The name comes from an edible red berry native to the area, which the Cree called mis-sask-guah-too-min.

**Qu'Appelle:** The town name is from the river, known to the Cree as *Kab-tep-was* which meant "*the river that calls*". The legend associated with the name tells of a Cree man paddling to his wedding, when he heard his name called out. He recognized the voice of his bride, who was still many days travel away. He answered, "*Who calls?*" and a spirit mimicked him: "*Who calls?*" He then hurried home to find that his bride had died, uttering his name with her last breath. French settlers in Saskatchewan perpetuated the legend by naming the river Qu'Appelle, meaning "*who calls?*"

**Grand Rapids:** This is a translation of the Cree word "*misepawistik*", or "*rushing rapids*".

**The Pas:** The name originated with the Cree "*opa*", meaning "*a narrow place*" or "*opaskweow*", meaning "*narrows between high banks*".

**Winnipeg:** This name, from the Cree "*win-nipi*", can be freely translated as "*dirty water*" or "*murky water*", to describe the lake and river.

**Kapuskasing:** This is a Cree word meaning "*the place where the river bends*".

**Etobicoke:** This word comes from the Ojibway word “*wah-do-be-kaung*”, meaning “*the place where alders grow*”.

**Mississauga:** This city is named after the Mississauga people who live in the area, and describes the mouth of a river. *Michi* or *missi* means “*many*” and “*saki*” means “*outlet*”, “*a river having many outlets*”.

**Oshawa:** This word is Seneca and means “*crossing of stream*” or “*carrying place*”, describing an old portage in the area.

**Ottawa:** The word comes from the Algonquin term “*adawe*”, “*to trade*”. This was the name given to people who controlled the trade of the river, The Odawa Nation.

**Chibougamau:** This is a Cree word that means “*where the water is shut in*”, describing a narrow outlet of the lake

**Chicoutimi:** This name comes from the Montagnais word “*shkoutimeou*”, meaning “*the end of the deep water*”.

**Gaspé:** This is a name believed to come from the Mi’kmaq word for “*end*” or “*extremity*”, referring to “*the northern limits of their territory*”.

**Listiguj:** This word likely comes from the Mi’kmaq word, “*lustagooch*”, believed to mean “*river with five branches*”.

**Rimouski:** (Quebec) This is a word of Mi’kmaq or Maliseet origin, which has been translated as “*land of moose*” or “*retreat of dogs*”, perhaps referring to its hunting grounds.

**Oromocto:** (New Brunswick) This word is derived from the Maliseet word “*welawelamooktook*”, meaning “*good river*”.

**Baddeck:** (Nova Scotia) This is a possible version of the Mi’kmaq petekook, meaning “*the place that lies on the backward turn*”. The word refers to Mi’kmaq travel on the river from Bras D’Or Lake.

**Musquodobit:** (Nova Scotia) This word comes from the Mi’kmaq “*mooskudoboogwek*”, which can be translated as “*rolling out in foam*” or suddenly widening out after a narrow entrance at its mouth.

**Shubenacadie:** (Nova Scotia) This is a name of Mi’kmaq origin that comes from the word “*segubunakadik*”, meaning “*the place where groundnuts (Indian potatoes) grow*”.

**Tuktoyaktuk:** (Northwest Territories) This is an Inuit name that can be translated as “*tuktu*” – “*caribou*”, “*yaktuk*” – “*looks like*”, or reindeer that looks like caribou.

**Pangnirtung:** (Nunavut) This word comes from the Inuktitut words meaning “*place of the bull caribou*.”

**Inuvik:** (NWT) This word comes from the Inuktitut word meaning “*the place of man*”

### 3. Sources

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Sources : Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (July 2001). Aboriginal Place Names contribute to a rich tapestry.

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