

# Problematic Place Names in Vermont

<b>Problematic Place Names in Vermont</b>	<b>1</b>
Preface:	1
Problematic Place Names List:	2
Renamed Problematic Place Names:	2
Current Place Names with Historical Context:	2
Preliminary Research:	5
Next Steps:	7

## **Preface:**

The Vermont Truth and Reconciliation Commission (VTRC) “exists in a pursuit of community-centered, justice, and holistic healing centered on impacted ACT 128 communities”. The Place Names Project’s mission is to discover the history and truth behind place names in VT. The vision is to allow for truth to be discovered as be the first step in the reconciliation process. Our objective is to create a list of problematic place names in Vermont for the Commission so they can share it with future partners to further the research into the origins of these names. We define problematic place names as oppressive, assimilationist, and cultural eraser place names that continue different forms of systemic oppression and discrimination through the use of, or reference to slurs, stereotypes, and/or the continued erasure of the history of populations that the State has oppressed. The action plan or next steps for this project are shown through the questions to consider and examples of what other communities have done with place name projects.

## **Note from the authors:**

Us as a team are not experts in individual experiences. We occupy our own identities and created this list as a preliminary search. We are aware that identities influence how place names and history are interpreted, so this list is a living document that can be modified and updated to best serve the Commission and the communities it serves. We acknowledge the process of determining if a name is problematic or not is rooted in colonialism and white supremacy culture. We acknowledge that in order to combat this, it takes a team to engage with this list.

## **Navigating this document:**

We used *Vermont Place-Names: Footprints of History* by Esther Munroe Swift as a start and provide prompts and questions for next steps. We list additional citations to aid in further evaluation of these names.

## **Problematic Place Names List:**

### **Renamed Problematic Place Names:**

*These names have been identified as harmful and have been changed. We include them to acknowledge the past and evaluate how they have been renamed.*

Questions to consider for this section:

- Should the locations be re-named to better remember populations and individuals who were harmed? Can problematic place names be changed to honor the history of individuals' journeys to freedom?

#### Huzzy Brook<sup>1</sup>

#### N\*\* Hill

A settlement in St. Albans held this name because the Underground Railroad operated there before the Civil War. The name has since fallen out of use due to the “pejorative racial connotation.” (Swift, page 251) A current name is not apparent at this time and this place name deserves further research to allow for acknowledgement of the historical context of this place.

#### N\*\* Hollow

An area in Fletcher, VT once held this name to remember a Black man who died of smallpox while on his way to Canada for freedom. (Swift, page 238)

#### N\*\*head Ledge and Pond

These locations once held these names in Marshfield but have since changed to Marshfield Mountain and Marshfield Lake. (Swift, page 448)

### **Current Place Names with Historical Context:**

*These names are included because current names have replaced Indigenous names and serve as a cultural erasure. Some place names also acknowledge historical events that are centered around colonization.*

Questions to consider in this section:

- What are the next steps? Can there be education about its history that can be shared to educate people? How many other current place names were once Indigenous words? Do indigenous people want their language to be used in place names?

---

<sup>1</sup> Please see “Preliminary Research”

- If place names do have indigenous origins, what can be done with that information? What are the next steps? What is the full history, why did the name change?
- Who determines what indigenous names are kept at what locations? What is the significance of the places that hold indigenous names? Does this institution educate or acknowledge indigenous history?

### Brandon, Vermont

The original name was Neshobe which was derived from the indigenous word *Neshobe*. The Neshobe River that runs through the town is one of the only connections to indigenous place names in VT. (Swift, page 5)

### Camel's Hump

The Waubanaukee tribe's name for "Camel's Hump" is "Tah-wak-be-dee-ee-wadso" or Saddle Mountain. Samuel de Champlain and his explorers during the 1600s called the mountain "lion couchant," or resting lion. Ira Allen then used the name "Camel's Rump," in a historical map, which then became "Camel's Hump."

*Vermont State Parks - Camel's Hump*. (n.d.). Vtstateparks.com. Retrieved April 18, 2024, from

<https://vtstateparks.com/camelshump.html#:~:text=Waubanaukee%20Indians%20first%20named%20it>

### "Darkey Bridge"<sup>2</sup>

### Grand Isle, Vermont

Similar to Lake Champlain, the name originated from Samuel de Champlain giving the island the name "great islands." The VT legislature referenced this connection in the island's charter. (Swift, page 6)

### "Gypsy" and "Squaw" Street Names<sup>3</sup>

### Indian Brook Park

Located in Essex, Vermont, Indian Brook Park is a 575 acre park including a 60 acre reservoir, hiking trails, and a non-motorized boat launch. Sipekne'katik First Nation was founded in 1820 as a portion of land established as a reserve. The area was given the name 'Indian Brook.' In 2013, the official name was changed back to the original, Sipekne'katik, which means "where the wild potatoes grow." Despite the official name change, the brook is still commonly referred to with its settler's name.

---

<sup>2</sup> Please see "Preliminary Research"

<sup>3</sup> Please see "Preliminary Research"

Drayton, C., Frayer, A., Gerry, L., Lizotte, G., Mitchell, M., & Tapper, E. (2017). *Historical Analysis of Two Town Forests in Essex, Vermont*.  
<https://www.essexvt.org/DocumentCenter/View/1730/History-of-Indian-Brook-and-Saxon-Hill-PDF>

### Indian Hill

This name was given because this land was potentially a site where a fight between the French and Indigenous people happened during the French and Indian War. (Swift, page 408)

### Isle La Motte Town, Vermont

Named after a French war general who built a fort on the land during the French and Indian War. Named after the first white settlement in VT. (Swift, pages 264-265)

### Lake Champlain

Samuel de Champlain, a French explorer, found himself on land that held the lake and named it after himself for “founding” it. (Swift, pages 257-259)

### Molly’s Pond and Joe’s Pond-

“Ponds named by white settlers for an Indian couple who stayed after the American Revolutionary War ". These names have been translated to *Mali Bowk* and *Sozap Nebee*. (Swift, page 5)

### Mount Mansfield

Sources suggest Mount Mansfield was originally Mozodepowadso, or “Moosehead Mountain,” by the native Abenaki people.

*The Legendary (or Mythical) Origins of Mount Mansfield?* (2014, October 30).  
Vermont’s Very Best - Haunted Vermont, Folklore & Much More...

<https://www.vermonter.com/origin-mount-mansfield/#:~:text=An%20additional%20source%20suggests%20Mount>

### N\*\* Hill

A settlement in St. Albans held this name because the Underground Railroad operated there before the Civil War. The name has since fallen out of use due to the “pejorative racial connotation.” (Swift, page 251) A current name is not apparent at this time and this place name deserves further research to allow for acknowledgement of the historical context of this place.

### Plymouth, Vermont

The name of Plymouth was inspired by Plymouth, Massachusetts being a point of settlement and colonization. The town also had the name *Accomack* which is an indigenous name and the town name was changed due to its indigenous connection. (Swift, page 541)

### Saint Albans Bay

The Indigenous word for the bay was *Bellamaqueen* although “Dr. John C. Huden felt the name was basically Abnaki, with French influence”, so the accuracy is unclear. (Swift, page 251)

### Saint Anne Shrine

The name came from the French Fort Saint Anne which was a settlement for soldiers and also has ties to conversion of “Indians” to Christianity. This property was acquired by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Vermont, which named the place. (Swift, page 265)

### “The University of Vermont Perkins Museum of Geology Building”<sup>4</sup>

### Troy, Vermont

Similar to Brandon, Troy was previously Missisquoi, an indigenous word, but the name was changed. There is currently a Missisquoi River and National Wildlife refuge. (Swift, page 369)

### YMCA Camp Abnaki-

This is an all boys overnight summer camp run by the YMCA and named after the Abnaki tribe of the Algonquian Indians. (Swift, page 267)

### **Preliminary Research:**

#### “Darkey Bridge”

During the mid-1890s, there was a black minister by the name of John Harrison, who lived in Beaver Meadow, Vermont. According to town records, Harrison was one of the very few black men living there at the time. He was often harassed and abused by locals of Beaver Meadow, and was eventually murdered near one of the town’s small bridges. This location is now known as “Darkey Bridge,” and was previously interchanged with “N- Corner,” a racial slur left after John Harrison’s death.

*A Black preacher disappeared from Norwich in 1890. His alleged killer confessed, but was never charged.* (2024, January 22). Vermont Public.

<https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2024-01-22/john-harrison-norwich-vermont-1890-murder>

#### “Huzzy Brook”

This waterway in southeastern Vermont previously had a racist name, which has not been changed until recently. The Vermont Board of Libraries, the group responsible for naming mountains, lakes, and other natural formations in Vermont, voted on October 12, 2022, to change the name of “N- Brook,” located near the base of Bald Mountain, and through Townshend State Park in Windham County. The brook was renamed “Huzzy Brook,” after James and Susan Huzzy, a black couple resident in the area before the Civil War. The recency of this renaming calls for the continuing need for education and awareness of the many place names in Vermont.

---

<sup>4</sup> Please see “Preliminary Research”

Brouwer, D. (n.d.). *How a Two-Year Push to Rename Vermont's Negro Brook Failed*. Seven Days. Retrieved April 15, 2024, from <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/how-a-two-year-push-to-rename-vermonts-negro-brook-failed-33262686>

Thurston • •, J. (2022, October 12). *Vermont Brook's "Offensive" Name Is Changed After Months of Discussion*. NECN. <https://www.necn.com/news/local/vermont-brook-offensive-name-changed/2843874/#:~:text=NBC%20Universal%2C%20Inc.->

### “Gypsy” and “Squaw” Street Names

Residents in Bennington, Vermont have been calling for the renaming of two street names, and as of January 2024, there has been no change. Two residents of the town advocated for the name change of Squaw Hill Road and Gypsy Lane, as they are deemed offensive by minority groups. Bruce Lee-Clark, one of the advocates, reflected on his experience working with St. Regis Mohawk Reservation members in New York. He recited his education on the origins of words like squaw, which he declined to repeat, in light of his learning Indigenous groups consider it a slur. Residents of Squaw Hill and Gypsy Lane, however, oppose the changing of the street names. The debate regarding the street names came up during the town's 2022 meeting and was brought to light again in January 2024.

Correspondent, J. T., Vermont News & Media. (2024, January 23). *“We can do better:” Bennington Select Board urged to change “derogatory” road names*. Bennington Banner. [https://www.benningtonbanner.com/local-news/we-can-do-better-bennington-select-board-urged-to-change-derogatory-road-names/article\\_9293565c-ba31-11ee-b230-c3b00081cf17.html](https://www.benningtonbanner.com/local-news/we-can-do-better-bennington-select-board-urged-to-change-derogatory-road-names/article_9293565c-ba31-11ee-b230-c3b00081cf17.html)

### University of Vermont Perkins Museum of Geology Building

The building was named after George Perkins, a Vermont entomologist and geologist, who worked as a professor at the University of Vermont and later served as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1907 to 1932. The Perkins Museum of Geology is a small facility on the University of Vermont's campus, the mission is to educate those interested in the geological legacy of Vermont. The museum was named after George Perkins for his legacy as a professor and naturalist in Vermont, however, George Perkin's son Henry Perkins, became a biology professor at the University of Vermont. In 1922, Professor Perkins revamped the Biology curriculum and began teaching courses on Heredity and Evolution. His hereditary class provided the first known venue for eugenics education at UVM and inspired a "Eugenics Survey", a field station to study Vermonters. As Director of the Eugenics Survey, Harry Perkins emerged as Vermont's resident eugenicist and dedicated the second half of his career to “preserving the heritage, and the future of Vermont ” through eugenics (Vermont Eugenics: A Documentary

History). After a Black Lives Matter Flag was stolen from the University in September 2017, students demanded justice for the harm done, including renaming the Perkins Museum of Geology. Despite acknowledgment of Henry Perkin's lead in the eugenics movement, University of Vermont officials responded to requests saying, "To our knowledge, there is no evidence that George Perkins was involved in the eugenics movement in any way, nor is there information indicating that the subject of eugenics was taught in what is now Perkins Hall," (VT Digger). Since 2017 there have been no further efforts to change the museum's name.

University of Vermont WEB Grant. (2001, March 1). *Eugenics project: A documentary history*. uvm.edu. <https://www.uvm.edu/~eugenics/perkins.html>

Neubauer, K. (2018, February 25). *Students demand expulsion of UVM sophomore who stole BLM Flag*. VTDigger.

<https://vtdigger.org/2018/03/09/protests-uvm-board-forms-building-renaming-committee/>

### **Next Steps:**

This list is a step towards finding the truth and reconciling the State's past that has harmed and erased the cultures of Indigenous peoples, Black people and people of color, and people with disabilities. There have been communities that have gone through a similar process that the Commission is navigating and they can serve as an inspiration or guide for next steps.

The Department of Defense's Naming Commission renamed sites that had been named after Confederate soldiers. This process started in 2021 the implementation of renaming was finished in 2023. Forts, posts, ships, and street names were changed to honor historical military figures that have not been at the forefront of history due to being women or people of color. The Naming Commission of the DOD offers a framework for renaming on a federal level that can be used to drive renaming on the State level. For example, N\*\* Hill in Saint Albans could be renamed to acknowledge the individuals who aided the Underground Railroad. This would take some research and is one avenue to find the truth and reconcile it.

Website Link:

<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3260434/dod-begins-implementing-naming-commission-recommendations/>

The Anchorage Park Foundation in Anchorage, AK implemented their Indigenous Place Names Project starting in 2018. This process was a decade in the making and was started by Aaron Leggett, the Native Village of Eklutna Chair and CEO, Dena'ina scholar, and Anchorage Museum Curator, who wanted to have the Dena'ina language visible in Anchorage. The project has reached 32 locations in Anchorage and brings visibility to Indigenous land through sculptures featuring the Dena'ina language and an explanation of the area's cultural significance. The Foundation's website shares:

“The Indigenous Place Names Project is a step towards recognizing and honoring the Dena’ina language, knowledge, and innovations in Alaska. Place name art is one physical representation of this shirt, but there must also be a shift in processes, recording, mapping, experiencing, and celebrating.

From this project, we’ve learned that to change the paradigm and create a city that honors the Indigenous Place, there must be three components: 1. The leadership of a local culture bearer; 2. Advisory oversight from a broad base of stakeholders; and 3. Involvement of an Indigenous artist if it is appropriate to the project. It is the combination of these three elements that allow a project to become part of a Movement and live beyond initial contributors to the next generation of our community.”

This project can offer inspiration for bringing viability to the Indigenous land of Vermont. The Foundation’s website also offers Indigenous place names pronunciations. This project can be used as a framework for bringing visibility to the Indigenous names included on this list.

Website Link:

<https://anchorageparkfoundation.org/our-work/indigenous-placemaking/#:~:text=The%20Indigenous%20Place%20Names%20Project,knowledge%2C%20and%20innovations%20in%20Alaska>