

1. INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

For almost a century and a half after the first pilgrims touched land on the eastern coast, there appear to be no personal records left by American travelers crossing the Appalachian Mountains into the Ohio Valley. When the early travel diarists and journalists eventually reached this area in the middle of the eighteenth century, they were confronted with topographic features they had not seen before, so that they found it necessary to supply appropriate topographic terms. The purpose of this monograph is to study these terms. Two major studies devoted exclusively to topographic terms in limited areas of the United States have been published: *Topographic Terms in Virginia*, by George Davis McJimsey,¹ and *English Topographic Terms in Florida, 1563–1874*, by Edwin Wallace McMullen, Jr.² The present study is intended to continue these investigations and is indebted to them greatly for both the stimulation they provided and the methods of research and presentation they suggested.

The topographic terms in this study are presented in two sections: in the glossary and in the commentary which is based on it. The purpose of the glossary is to list, to define, and to illustrate the uses of all topographic terms discovered in the source material. The purpose of the commentary is to answer the following questions: What new topographic terms, if any, recorded by early travelers in the Ohio Valley are borrowings from the American Indian, the Spanish, and the French languages? What topographic terms show an extension of meaning in the Ohio Valley? How are such meanings frequently extended? Which of the terms show a limitation of meaning? What are the methods by which such limitation occurs? Which terms are recorded in the glossary prior to recordings in the *DA*, the *DAE*, and the *OED*?³ Which terms are Americanisms and Ohio Valley localisms? And finally, what variety of meanings and distinction of usages can be observed when the terms are studied on the basis of related topographic features?

In addition, it is hoped that the glossary will help provide a basis for the orderly study of place names in which the terms occur as

combining elements.⁴ A knowledge of topographic terms has long been important in the work of the English Place-Name Society, and as American scholars continue to show increasing interest in onomastics, especially through the American Name Society and its publication *Names*, a greater awareness of the historical use of topographic terms seems more and more desirable in this country as well.⁵ This sort of historical study will also complement the work of Professor Frederic G. Cassidy and his associates on the Dictionary of American Regional English, a project long planned by the American Dialect Society, and which, together with the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, constitutes the most exciting major linguistic study now in progress in the United States.

DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The nature of this study of topographic terms used in the Ohio Valley by early travelers can be clarified further by discussing a few definitions. As used here, a topographic term is a word or a group of words which designates a permanent, natural feature or characteristic of the terrain, exclusive of all place names and proper names. Adjectives and participles are included in this study only when they appear as unified elements in compounds (e.g., *dry branch*; *farming land*).

It is almost impossible to define precisely an area which is as large as the one under consideration. However, throughout this study the term *Ohio Valley* refers to the area lying along both sides of the Ohio River between the Allegheny Mountains on the east and the Mississippi River on the west; the term is meant to include roughly the extreme west-central part of the present state of Pennsylvania, and the lower two thirds of the present states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois on the north, and the southwestern corner of the present state of Pennsylvania, and most of the present states of West Virginia and Kentucky on the south. Since the mountains to the east do not end abruptly at precise locations, and since there are no clearly defined physical features either to the north or to the south of the Ohio River by which the area may be defined, it is sometimes impossible to decide exactly where the Ohio Valley begins and ends.

The most outstanding topographical feature of the area as a whole is the hilly and mountainous area to the south and east of the Ohio River (the Allegheny Plateau gives way to the Appalachian Mountains), an area generally covered with forest and woodland; to the north of the River and to the south before the hilly regions begin are rolling hills, plains, woodland, and grassland. The Ohio River interlaces almost the entire valley (to the north and to the south) with tributaries; these tributaries, in turn, are formed by innumerable smaller streams, so that one of the most outstanding features of the Ohio Valley is its watercourses. These streams are important, among other reasons, because of the well-watered, alluvial soil which they afford the neighboring countryside, and because of the means of travel which they often make possible. According to the early travelers, pine, oak, beech, cedar, cypress, cherry, and walnut are the trees which occurred most frequently; thickets of cane and of plum trees are not infrequently referred to, and much of the area is said to have been virgin timberland. Although both marshy land and swampy land are mentioned sometimes, the early records indicate that neither type of land is as frequent as is the land only occasionally overflowed and consequently very rich.

In general, the terms *diary* and *journal* may be defined according to the following criterion of William Matthews in his *American Diaries*:

I understand a diary to be a day-by-day record of what interested the diarist, each day's record being self-contained and written shortly after the events occurred, the style being usually free from organized exposition. Between a 'diary' and a 'journal' I have generally made a conventional distinction, that a diary is written for personal reasons, and that a journal, although otherwise similar to a diary, is kept as a part of a job. . . .⁸

These distinctions are not always made by the early writers considered in the present study, but are important ones to be kept in mind, since Matthews' book has suggested the bulk of the sources here considered. The primary field of concentration in the present study is that of diaries and journals which have been published; however, other profitable sources of whatever character are included whenever feasible. Only English works are considered. It should be carefully noted that the terms in the glossary are largely those used by *travelers* into the Ohio Valley, who bring with them

eastern terminology, except, as is often the case, when they themselves must modify or add to their own topographical vocabulary or adopt the usages of other travelers or settlers. The point is that a writer's use of a particular term in a certain way does not *necessarily* reflect usage characteristic of the Ohio Valley in the succeeding decades.

The period considered is 1748–1800. The study is confined to this period because none of the diaries and journals found is dated earlier than 1748, and because the sources from the remainder of the eighteenth century supply adequate information for this study; further, an extension of the investigation into the nineteenth century would involve a period during which much if not all of the Ohio Valley was explored and even settled,⁷ with the result that types of literature other than those receiving primary consideration here would be important.

The definition of a topographic term given above leaves little to be said about the general nature of the terms selected for inclusion in this study. The problem can be defined more easily, however, by discussing primarily the kinds of terms which are *not* included. Words of a very general nature such as *area*, *district*, *environs*, *frontier*, *part*, *quarter*, *region*, *territory*, *tract*, and *vicinity* are excluded. Words which are too vague to be of much specific topographic meaning are excluded also; examples of such words are *arch*, *border*, *boundary*, *edge*, *floor*, *growth*, *height*, *margin*, *patch*, and *top*. It seems necessary, however, to include such general terms as *ground* and *land* when they are preceded by specifying terms indicating the nature of the soil. Words which are recorded only infrequently and which seem to be more formal are omitted, such as *ascent*, *confluence*, *declivity*, *glacis*, *junction*, and *vortex*. And, somewhat arbitrarily, all terms formed with *-side*, such as *hill-side* and *river-side*, are omitted.

Since the definition of a topographic term excludes temporary phenomena, a number of words which sometimes are given topographic meaning are excluded here, such as *counter-current*, *drift-wood*, *eddy*, *flood*, *fresh*, *freshet*, *high water*, *high-water mark*, *low*

water, low-water mark, snag, suck, suction, swell, underbrush, undergrowth, and whirlpool. Similarly, a sizeable group of terms relating to Indians in one way or another and denoting unnatural features which normally might be considered in a topographic sense are excluded here, such as *basin, breast-works, ditch, entrenchment, grave, hunting country, hunting ground, Indian country, Indian grave, Indian shore, mound, mount, parapet, and wall.*

A large group of terms is excluded because the terms are seldom used without qualifying phrases. Such terms are those which follow: *angle* (of land), *base* (of hill), *belt* (of land), *body* (of land), *bottom* (of hill), *brow* (of hill), *chain* (of rocks), *clump* (of trees), *cluster* (of trees, rocks, or islands), *curve* (of stream), *entrance* (of stream), *face* (of rocks), *flow* (of stream), *foot* (of hill, bar, or island), *mouth* (of pit), *path* (of stream), *pavement* (of rocks), *piece* (of land or water), *range* (of country or hills), *sheet* (of water), *slip* (of land), *strip* (of land), and *top* (of hill or mountain). However, since the following terms are usually recognized by the dictionaries as having common topographic meaning, they are included in the present study, even though they are usually accompanied by qualifying phrases: *bed* (of stream), *bend* (of stream), *bottom* (of stream), *course* (of stream), *head* (of stream or coast), *mouth* (of stream), *neck* (of land), *point* (of land), *rise* (of land), and *source* (of stream). Also, the phrase *reef* (*of rocks*) is included.

NOTES

¹ *American Speech*, Reprints and Monographs No. 3, New York, 1940 (henceforth usually referred to as "*VIRG*").

² Gainesville, Florida, 1953 (henceforth usually referred to as "*FLA*").

³ A list of abbreviations is given on pp. 111 ff.

⁴ For the most comprehensive bibliography of American place-name studies, see Richard B. Sealock and Pauline A. Seely, *Bibliography of Place-Name Literature, United States and Canada*, 2nd ed., Chicago, 1967. See also the supplementary bibliography by the same editors in *Names*, 16, Pt. 2 (1968), 146-160.

⁵ Francis L. Utley, former President of the American Name Society, stresses the need in this country for a dictionary of the combining forms found in Indian place names and calls attention to the linguistic importance of other topographic combining forms, whether new themselves or applied to new geographical features ("The Linguistic Component of Onomastics," *Names*, 11, Pt. 3 [1963], 145-176, esp. 160-162).

⁶ William Matthews, *American Diaries. An Annotated Bibliography of American Diaries Written Prior to the Year 1861* (University of California Publications in English, 16, 1945), p. ix.

⁷ Kentucky already had become a state in 1792; Ohio was granted statehood in 1803.