

## *Place Names of Atlantic Canada.* William B. Hamilton.

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## WILLIAM J. KIRWIN

*PLACE NAMES OF ATLANTIC CANADA* devotes 127 pages out of a total of 448 pages to entries on Newfoundland names. In addition there are further Newfoundland details in Ch. 1, "Windows on History and Culture," and in the concluding essay on source materials. A prospective reader might wonder what principle of selection guided Hamilton, if there could be found no discussion of one's home community (for example, *Cuckold Cove*, *Grates Cove*, *Grey River*, *Upper Gullies*). In the four provinces the author selected principal populated places, places with important historical connections, and locations with some striking or quaint quality to the name — those likely to arouse human interest ("Preface," viii). This approach makes for a popular collection, but one with cultural resonance, rather than an erudite reference work.

A typical entry in the chapter "Newfoundland and Labrador" provides for a name the current official spelling and its location in the province; rarely a pronunciation note: *Bay d'Espoir*, *Harbour Mille*; the story of the name; and usually an explanation or conjecture as to the derivation of the name. A useful feature is cross-referencing to similar names found in the chapters treating the other provinces (under *Blow Me Down*, *Cape Blomidon*, NS, *Sugarloaf*, NB). Consider a typical article:

**Byron Bay** (Labrador) Northwest of Holton. Named for Vice-Admiral John Byron (1723-1786), who served as governor of Newfoundland from 1769 to 1772. He took an interest in the Labrador fishery and issued several proclamations relating to

whaling in the STRAIT OF BELLE ISLE. His grandson was the poet Lord Byron (1788-1824).

The name is keyed to one of the five regions marked on the maps of the province, which, however, have no indication of scale (see 152-3), and related to a better-known nearby community. (Holton, though, has no entry in this work.) The place-name is traced to a naval officer who served as governor, and, to place him in history, Byron's dates are recorded, a useful convention adopted for all notable persons mentioned in the book. The capital letters for STRAIT ... signal a cross-reference to another entry to be found (266). Often in *Place Names* a light touch is added (the poet Byron) which has little to do with nomenclature or the province. Finally *Byron Bay* is typical, since documentation is not provided for most entries: the reader thus relies on the authority of this long-experienced official in Canadian names research or on whatever sources he consulted during the compilation.

If a reader is curious about any statement concerning meaning or source, therefore, he faces the problem of tracing down documented sources. These are treated in a discursive "Bibliographical Essay" (rather than in an alphabetical bibliography — see 491-502), with headings like Travel and Exploration, Surveys and Surveyors, Local and Regional Studies. There are many reference books and articles discussed in this section; nothing might be unusual about *Byron Bay*, but, after scanning, in which of these works does an inquisitive reader look for evidence lying behind entries like *Father Duffys Well Provincial Park*, *Triton*, *St. Shotts*? One frequently used source, it turns out, is the *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, but this authority too often cites conjectures or local traditions instead of references to early names on dated extant maps.

*Place Names* is an accessible, informative, well-organized reference work for the toponymy of the Atlantic Provinces, including Newfoundland, and an attractive book that will introduce many readers to the interesting selected names and the processes by which explorers, captains, mapmakers, hydrographers, activists, name boards — and mostly the people themselves — have assigned and perpetuated the names on the land and the waters.