HOW TO NAME THE RESIDENTS

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I read Mary Stewart Craig’s article “Do Mamaroneckers Like to Neck?” in the November issue of Word Ways with great relish. As an upstanding citizen, I immediately sat down and set down some regional epithets that popped into my head, trying to follow her example. I mailed them to Word Ways and returned to my mystery novel. In a few days I received a note from the editor, suggesting that I “elucidate and illustrate those principles that make for clever citizens’ names.”

In his recent book Names (Delacorte, 1986), Paul Dickson reminds us that the rules for forming legitimate citizen names are extremely broad. Even when game-players, with pen in hand and tongue in cheek, take a humorous approach to the task, guidelines are needed. The following are largely based on the editor’s suggestions.

When the spellings of the town name (such as Chattanooga) and the overlapping descriptor noun (such as nougat) differ, one probably should favor the spelling of the latter instead of the former (Chattanoouagat, not Chattanoogat). Since the user is more familiar with the name of the town, the descriptor noun needs to be stressed.

Ordinarily the latter part of the town name overlaps the first part of the descriptor noun. There is no reason why the town cannot be used as a jewel and the descriptor noun as a setting; i.e., the descriptor noun can fully encapsulate the town name. In such a situation, it is probably advisable to suspend the above rule when spellings differ, in order to make the town name clear.

Chaffinches from Chaffin MA
Captivators from Captiva FL
Scramblers from Ambler AL
Flamboyants from Amboy MN
Anagrammers from Amboy MN
Labbottomists (Lobotomists) from Abbott AR

The reverse gambit, embedding the descriptor noun in the town name, is also possible. Here, a difference in spelling is essential if the descriptor noun is to be recognized.

Antwerps (twerps from Antwerp NY)
Sharridans (harridans from Sheridan WY)
Alecsanders (sanders from Alexander AR)

The editor considers it highly desirable, though not perhaps essential, that syllabic stresses match in the town name and the descriptor names such as

Holyokels
New Havenels
Wiscassets
Tappannahs

It is permissible to make a difference in the vowel sounds.

Centralies
Valdostos
Temperoys
Buffelows
Witchbates
Monongahuns
Terre Hooms
Provers Paddles

The editors consider all of the above names to be acceptable.

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Like to relish. As down some follow her mystery suggesting i.e. for cleverness such as the following.

Holyokels (HOLyokels or hoLYokels?)
New Havengers (new HAvengers or new haVENGers?)
Wiscassettlers (wisCASsettlers or wiscasSETtlers?)
Tappanhandlers (TAPpanhandlers or tapPANhandlers?)

It is permissible to change a vowel sound, or even omit a final vowel sound, in the name of the town when constructing the meld.

Centraliens from Centralia IL
Valdostepaths from Valdosta GA
Temperors from Tempe AZ
Buffellowas from Buffalo NY
Witchators from Wichita KS
Monongahelers from Monongahela PA
Terre Hooters from Terre Haute IN
Provers from Provo UT

The editor feels, as I do, that consonant sounds are best left unchanged except when they are very similar in sound, such as D and T.

Alameteorites (meteorites from Alameda CA)
Bermutants (mutants from Bermuda)

If the town name ends in a short unaccented syllable, it is permissible to drop it.

Scrantelopes from Scranton PA
Toleaders from Toledo OH

What kinds of descriptor nouns work best? The editor stresses the desirability of using agent nouns (nouns with suffixes like -ER, -OR, -IST, etc.) as descriptors.

Wheelinguists from Wheeling WV
Champainters from Champaign IL
Bethlehemmers from Bethlehem PA
Wilkesbaritoners from Wilkes-Barre PA
Versalesman from Versailles IN
Niagaragers from Niagara NY
Spartians from Sparta NJ
Decaters from Decatur IL
Peorientals from Peoria IL
Davenporters from Davenport IA
Norwalkers from Norwalk CT

Animals, birds, or other living creatures can also be used as descriptors.

Armonkeys from Armonk NY
Walpolecats from Walpole MA
Bisbeavers from Bisbee AZ
Antioxen from Antioch AR
Hersheep from Hershey PA
Anacondors from Anaconda ID
Descriptor nouns for inanimate objects generally don't work as well, but may be better than nothing.

Belfast ords from Belfast ME
Topecans from Topeka KS
Woodstockings from Woodstock VT
Lebananas from Lebanon NH

There is little doubt that deprecatory terms are favorites for descriptors.

Chicagorillas from Chicago IL
Baltimorons from Baltimore MD
Trumbullies from Trumbull CT
Baragamuffins from Baraga MI
Amenials from Amenia NY
Bamboozlers from Bamboo FL
Swantons from Swanton OH
Syraccusers from Syracuse NY
Saratogres from Saratoga NY
Aliquipsters from Aliquippa PA
Anchoragigators from Anchorage AL
Carsonists from Carson AL
Moscondrels from Moscow ID
Texarcannibals from Texarcana TX
Palcoholics from Palco KS
Campobellowers from Campobello SC
Troisterers from Troy NY
Brandywhiners from Brandywine MD
Plechers from Fletcher AL
Woodruffians from Woodruff AZ
Waterloonies from Waterloo IA
Warrenegades from Warren ME
Molallapaloozas from Molalla OR

I have already noted Holyokers, Antwerps, and Sharridans.

The rules proposed in this article should be equally applicable to county names, state names, country names, and even college and university names.

The two commonest endings for town names are probably -VILLE and -TOWN. As Mary Stewart Craig pointed out in her article, the former can be readily converted to -VILLIANS, but there seems little can be done with the latter (unless it is amputated, a somewhat radical bit of surgery). What do you suggest for Morristown?