

# TRANSPOSING THE STATE CAPITALS

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The subject of finding transposals for the US state names has been documented many times in *Word Ways*. However, I don't believe that any attention has been paid to seeking transposals for the names of the state capitals. I decided to have a shot at seeing how many of the 50 state capital names could be transposed. Initially, my hopes were not particularly high—I expected to find no more than a handful of transposable names, perhaps 5 or 6. In the event, I unearthed 20 transposals, some of them perfectly good dictionary words, and others requiring a little more flexibility on the part of the reader. The transposals are presented here, in alphabetical order of the state capital name, with thumbnail comments about the transposals.

## **AUSTIN Texas**

Two transposals here. The first is TUINAS, the plural of the noun TUINA, a Chinese therapeutic massage system, listed in *The Chambers Dictionary* (TCD). The second is UINTAS, the plural of UINTA, an Indian of northeastern Utah, listed in *Webster's Third* (NI3).

## **BOISE Idaho**

Three transposals here. The first is BOIES, the plural of the noun BOIE, a hangman or executioner, listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition* (OED). The second is BOSIE, a googly or type of ball played in cricket. This is a shortened form of the surname Bosanquet, a famous cricketer for whom it was named. BOSIE is listed in the OED. The third transposal is OBIES, the plural of OBIE, an off-Broadway award listed in the OED.

## **BOSTON Massachusetts**

Just a single transposal here, and not an easy one to find. BOTONS is the plural of BOTON, a 16th century variant spelling of BUTTON, listed at BUTTON in the OED. The word BOTONS actually appears in three illustrative quotations in the OED. There's a 1514 quotation at AGLET, a 1525 quotation at BUTTON, and a 1530 quotation at MILLINER.

## **CHARLESTON West Virginia**

The only transposal of this ten-letter name is HORNCastle, the name of a town in Lincolnshire, England. This is listed in *The Times Index-Gazetteer* (TIG).

## **DENVER Colorado**

A trio of transposals this time. First off, there's NERVED, a word in probably all dictionaries. Secondly, there's REVEND, one of the many RE- words listed in *Webster's New International, Second Edition* (NI2). And finally there's VENDER, an alternative form of VENDOR, listed in NI3.

**DES MOINES Iowa**

The only transposal here is DEMONISES, the -S form of the verb DEMONISE. This -ISE spelling is listed in British dictionaries such as TCD. NI3 only shows the -IZE form.

**DOVER Delaware**

A simple short name with at least five transposals. The first two transposals are a couple of simple, common words. There's DROVE and ROVED, both findable in every dictionary. A third transposal is the much less common DEVOR, a 14th-16th century variant form of DEVOIR, defined as duty or business, in the OED. A fourth transposal is VODER, an electronic device, listed in NI3. And finally there's VORDE, a Scottish form of WORD, listed at WORD in the OED.

**HELENA Montana**

The transposal here is ENHALE, a main entry in the OED, an obsolete form of the common word INHALE.

**LANSING Michigan**

The transposal here is LINSANG, a long-tailed cat from Asia, listed in NI3.

**MADISON Wisconsin**

A couple of transposals here. The first is DAIMONS, one of two plural forms of DAIMON, a demon, listed in NI3. (The other plural form given in NI3 is DAIMONES.) The second transposal is DOMAINS, the plural of DOMAIN, a field of control or area of influence, listed in NI3.

**NASHVILLE Tennessee**

The only transposal here appears to be the hyphenated ILL-SHAVEN. This occurs in a 1973 quotation under NAIL in the OED, where reference is made to "ill-shaven back-street throwers of nail bombs".

**PIERRE South Dakota**

A pair of similar transposals exist here. The first is PERIER, a 17th century variant of PERRIER, a cannon for firing stones, listed in the OED. The second is PERRIE, a word listed as a main entry in the OED, meaning "jewellery".

**RALEIGH North Carolina**

The transposal here is LAIGHER, the comparative form of the adjective LAIGH, a Scots word meaning "low". Though NI3 doesn't specifically show LAIGHER, this form is clearly given in Official Scrabble Words, Fourth Edition (OSW4).

**SALEM Oregon**

This is the most transposable of all the state capital names. There are at least 15 transposals, most of which can be found in mainstream dictionaries.

ALMES is the plural of ALME, a variant of ALMA, an Egyptian dancing-girl, listed in TCD. AMELS is the plural of AMEL, meaning “enamel”, listed in NI3. ELAMS is the plural of ELAM, a variant form of HELM, meaning “a handful of thatch”, listed in the OED. ELMAS is the plural of the female forename ELMA, listed in Withycombe’s Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names. LAMES is a form of the verb LAME, findable in most dictionaries. LEAMS is the plural of LEAM, a noun with a couple of different meanings, a gleam of light and a drain in a fen, both given in NI3.

MALES and MEALS are simple plurals of everyday words. MELAS is the plural of MELA, an Indian religious festival or gathering of people, given in NI3. MESAL is an adjective meaning “medial, middle”, listed in NI3. SALME is an obsolete variant of PSALM, given in the OED. SAMEL is an adjective applied to bricks, meaning “soft and crumbling”, given in the OED. SELMA is the name of a town in Alabama, courtesy of the TIG. Finally, SEMAL is a variant of SIMOOL, the silk-cotton tree of India, shown in the OED.

It wouldn’t be surprising if further words and names existed for this fecund set of letters.

**SALT LAKE CITY Utah**

No genuine transposal exists here, but there is a fine coinage, CATALYSTLIKE. There are numerous dictionary words ending in -LIKE, for example SAWDUSTLIKE and TORRENT-LIKE. Why not CATALYSTLIKE, formed in an analogous manner?

**SANTA FE New Mexico**

The single transposal here is FANTASE, a 16th century variant of the verb FANTASY, listed at FANTASY in the OED.

**SPRINGFIELD Illinois**

A coinage is required here. Dmitri Borgmann’s *Language on Vacation* referred to FRINGED LIPS as a transposal of this state capital name. While there is no dictionary entry for this term, it does seem fitting to include it here, especially given the existence of the term FRINGE-LIPPED. At the OED entry for FRINGE, there is an 1836 illustrative quotation referring to “the fringe-lipped lampern”. If a fish is fringe-lipped, it must be safe to assume that it is because it has FRINGED LIPS. This will have to do until a better transposal comes along.

**ST PAUL Minnesota**

Another state capital name with several transposals. One transposal here is PAULTS, the -S form of the verb PAULT, a 16th century variant of PALT, meaning “to pelt with missiles”. This is shown in the OED. A second transposal is PULTAS, a 16th-18th century variant of POULTICE, a substance used as a counter-irritant, in the OED. A third transposal is SPATUL, a form of

SPATULA, shown in the OED, A fourth transposal is TAPULS, the plural of TAPUL, a piece of body-armour, listed in the OED.

### **TOPEKA Kansas**

There are two transposals here. First off, there's OPTAKE, which appears in a 1297 illustrative quotation at the verb UPTAKE ("to pick up or take up") in the OED. Secondly, there's TO PEAK, the infinitive form of the everyday verb PEAK.

### **TRENTON New Jersey**

The transposal here is ONTRENT, an apparently Dutch word that appears in a 1668 illustrative quotation at NAMAQUA in the OED. It isn't obvious from the quotation as to the meaning of ONTRENT!

### **A Palindromic Puzzle Calendar for 2002**

2002, like 1991, is a palindromic year, the last one to occur before 2112. Roland Duerksen celebrates this event with a calendar containing a palindromic phrase for each day of the year. Aficionados will want to add his collection to Steve Chism's *From A to Zotamorf* and Michael Donner's *I Love Me, Vol. I*; send \$10 to Palindrome-A-Day, Box 6172, Oxford OH 45056.

Many palindromes make little sense, requiring an exegesis. Duerksen supplies this with a rhyming couplet on the preceding day, along with the positions of the vowels, giving the reader 24 hours to solve the puzzle. For example, the May 29 verse, "That pigeon's aim is very good / he's never missed a speeding hood" is further clued -E --O-- -A-E -A-- -O--, E-?, leading to HE SPOTS RACE CARS' TOPS, EH? On May 30. Thirty more examples of Duerksen's palindromes can be found in the February and May 2000 Word Ways.

Duerksen claims that his palindromes are original. This is to a large extent true; the only ones that I noted in the above two anthologies are NOT A TON, RED ROSES ORDER, NO MAN NICE CINNAMON, NEMO WE REVERE WOMEN, PUN WAS SAWN UP, BOLD LOB, LAMINATE PET ANIMAL, STRAW ARTS and RED ICE CIDER.