NEW TRANSPOSALS OF NEW YORK

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In the November 1970 Word Ways, in his article An Adventure into the Unknown, Dmitri Borgmann presented “an exhibit of the finest results” of state-name transposals. For NEW YORK, he wrote: “An old form of the past participle of the verb wreak, now occupied by the word wrought, is Y-WROKEN*. If this seems too esoteric, consider the word KEY-WORN: worn out by overuse of a key, said of keyholes. So saith ROY KEWN, anyway.”

In the article, Borgmann stated that the asterisk against Y-WROKEN meant that the transposal was originally discovered by me. Given Borgmann’s extensive mining of earlier word puzzle and logological material, especially The Enigma (the journal of The National Puzzlers League), I surmise that he only became aware of Y-WROKEN when I pointed it out to him, and that it had never been published anywhere previously. I had discovered the hyphenated Y-WROKEN in Webster’s Second Edition, below the line. I think I can legitimately claim its discovery as a transposal of NEW YORK.

A year or two later, in the early 1970s, I discovered the unhyphenated form YWROKEN in both Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). And that’s where the transposability of NEW YORK remained until over 30 years later.

Around 2004-2005, I discovered WONKERY in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (second edition, 2004). That dictionary merely lists WONKERY as a run-on entry for the headword WONK, which it defines as “a studious or hard-working person, especially one who is obsessively devoted to academic studies at the expense of social activities; a nerd”. From that, it’s not difficult to deduce this definition for WONKERY: the quality or activities associated with being a wonk. And that’s where the transposability of NEW YORK remained until the first few days of 2019.

In January 2019, while searching for something else in the OED, I came across WROKYNE. There, at the main entry WREAK, was WROKYNE, a Middle English spelling of the past participle of WREAK (what today would be rendered as
What I find astonishing is that this transposal of NEW YORK has been in print ever since the first edition of the OED was published in 1933 (and presumably in the relevant W fascicle published in the late 1920s). WROKYNE has lain unremarked by logologists for over 86 years!

Buoyed by my discovery of WROKYNE, I began searching for other NEW YORK transposals. It didn’t take long to discover the unfamiliar surname YOWNKER. This was the surname of William Yownker, whose name appears in a list of England’s immigrants between the years 1330-1550. It seems that William Yownker was a French tailor who had come from France to live in England around the year 1544. Further information appears at this website: www.englandsimmigrants.com/person/62170

Also from the past is the individual ROY WENK, born about 1912, who was living in St Louis, Missouri, recorded in the US federal census of 1940. Details are at: www.ancestry.com

Other NEW YORK transposals can also be found by trawling social media websites. Facebook has an individual named YENWORK Negusie, with limited information. Also on Facebook is Lilah NEWORKY, but no other information is provided. Another Facebook individual is NEW ROKY. And WORKYNE can be found on YouTube, while NYEWORK and KNOWERY are Twitter hashtags. There are probably many more of these contrived names elsewhere in social media, invariably coined as transposals of NEW YORK. Can readers find others?