In previous Word Ways articles (February 1971, May 1971, August 1974) I have examined vowel trigrams and vowel tetragrams. Since so many vowel trigrams exist as parts of words and names, I wondered how many could exist as words or names in their own right. I use the term "vowel" to include the six letters A, E, I, O, U and Y, though in several of the words presented in this article Y is clearly being used as a consonant. Could a significant proportion of the 216 all-vowel three-letter sequences be verified as genuine words or names?

I initially checked four major dictionaries -- Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Second Edition), Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language, and The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary -- in a meticulous way. Following that, I checked a number of other major references in an attempt to plug the gaps. All, I should hasten to add, have been in print sometime after 1945, the majority after 1965. Of course, by turning to out-of-date and ever-more-esoteric references, the 107 items on my list (just one short of 50 per cent) could probably be expanded to the full 216. Just to prove that older references do harbour items that fill the gaps on my list, my 1897 Century Atlas contains AIU and YOA, and my 1885 Columbia Lippincott gazetteer contains EOA and OOI.

A   E   I   O   U   Y
AA  aaa  aai  aua  aay
AE  aea  aei  aeo  aeu  aey
AI  Aia  aie  Aio  Aiy
AO  Aoa  aoy
AU  aua  aue  aui  auu
AY  aya  aye  Ayo  ayu  Ayy
EA  eaa  eae  eau  eay
EE  eea  eee  Eeu  eey
EI  eie  Eiy
EO  eio  Eoy
EU  Eua  eue
EY eya  eye  Eyo
In the following list, which indicates which words and names came from which sources, a number of items are followed by a bracketed term. This indicates where the word or name can be found in the source indicated, as not all of the words and names occur in their strictly correct alphabetic positions.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language: aie, aue, aye, ayu, eau, eye, iao, ioa, iyo, oye, yae, Yao, yea, yeo, you

Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (Second Edition): aea, Aa, auu, aya, eie, iya, oii, yee, yoe, yoi, yoy

Funk & Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language: aeo, auu, oio, Yeu

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: aay (aye), aei (any), aeu (you), aey, eaa (ea), eae (eye), eay (ea), eea (aye), eey (eye), eou (you), eue, eya, iaa (yea), iee (eye), ieu (Jew), iey (eye), ioi (joy), ioo (yea), iou (you), ioy (joy), iue (Jew), iuu (Jew), iye (eye), oeu (you), ocy (woolly), yaa (yea), yay, yey (eye), yie, yio, yoo, yue (yew), yuo, yuu, yuy, yye
The Times Index Gazetteer of the World: Aiy, Aoa, Ayy, Eeu, Eiy, Eua, Oae, Oeo, Oia, Ooa, Oue, Oui, Ouo, Oya, Oyo, Uia, Uui, Uyo, Uyu, Yal, Yei, Yiu (Yiu Shui), Yua (Yua Sebat)

An Archaic Dictionary, William Cooper, 1969: aaa, aai, aau, aui, iua, uau

The American Language, Supplement II, H. L. Mencken, 1967: Uue

The English Dialect Dictionary, Joseph Wright, 1970: eee (he), oey, yau (you)

Webster's Geographical Dictionary, 1969: Uea


A Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words, James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, 1968: aoy
