NOTES ON SOME
KENTUCKY PLACE NAME PRONUNCIATIONS
by
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As part of my continuing campaign to correct misimpressions about Kentucky place names, I recently compiled a sample list of those community and post office names that are not locally pronounced the way most Americans, and even many cosmopolitan Kentuckians, assume they are or believe they should be. While most Americans have no trouble pronouncing most of Kentucky's place names, they have been confounded by a number of names that defy the conventional rules of American pronunciation—that names are generally pronounced the way they're spelled and that the same names tend to be pronounced the same way everywhere.

The reasons for the discrepancies are as varied as the explanations of the names themselves and less likely to be successfully researched by the place name scholar. Assumptions about pronunciations are far less reliable than those on explanations. For none of the examples given below have we yet been able to learn the reasons for their eccentric pronunciations.

The only rule for the pronunciation of Kentucky place names is that each name should be examined on its own. The spelling of a name is not necessarily a reliable indication of its pronunciation. The acceptable or correct pronunciation of a place's name is simply the way it is pronounced locally, however that name may be spelled or pronounced elsewhere.
We need not be concerned with such issues as the relative importance of spelling or pronunciation or if one should properly reflect the other; with only a few Kentucky names do we know which was applied first. We have no evidence for any general assumption that people first sounded a place's name and then arbitrarily determined its spelling when it became necessary to record the name on a map, secure a post office in that name, or use the name in filing incorporation papers.

We also lack, with a few exceptions, a history of the pronunciation of individual Kentucky names. For few of our sample cases do we know whether the deviant pronunciation goes back to the beginning of the name's application or evolved in the course of its usage. And in only a few instances, usually inadvertent, were known changes in pronunciation accompanied by changes in spelling. Pioneer Kentuckians seldom considered spelling very important anyway for they were generally ignorant of, or at least indifferent to, the rules of orthography. Spelling errors made by postal clerks and mapmakers in Washington were not often locally corrected.

**A Key to the Pronunciations**

The pronunciation symbols used in this article are taken, in a slightly modified form, from the Kenyon and Knott adaptation of the International Phonetic Alphabet. To those unfamiliar with this alphabet the following pronunciation key should be helpful:
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<th>Symbol</th>
<th>as in</th>
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<td>i</td>
<td>tree</td>
<td>ʒ</td>
<td>further (accented syl. only, but r is silent)</td>
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<td>ɨ</td>
<td>spit</td>
<td>ə</td>
<td>unaccented syl. in system, above</td>
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<td>between ə and ɔ (water)</td>
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<td>while</td>
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<td>a:</td>
<td>between ə and ɔI (the broad southern ə)</td>
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<td>earn, further (accented syl. only)</td>
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<td>earn, further (accented syl. only)</td>
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<td>z</td>
<td>zoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʃ</td>
<td>earn, further (accented syl. only)</td>
<td>kw</td>
<td>quite</td>
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Symbol | as in | \( \) encloses pron. symbols
---|---|---
\( \) | show | \( \) around a single grapheme means that its sound is optional
\( \) | chance, watch | \( \) before and above the syl.
\( \) | treasure | \( \) before and above the syl.
\( \) | George, edge | \( \) the primary stress
\( \) | sang | \( \) the secondary stress
\( \) | sank | 

1. The most common phonetic deviations in my Kentucky sample involve the sounding of vowels in ways not expected of them in general American speech.

Most Americans are familiar with our mountain tendency to pronounce /aI/ as /a:/ and /air/ as /aːr/. But over two dozen other eccentric vowel sound patterns in Kentucky place name pronunciation may not be as well known. Perhaps the most common of these is the pronunciation of the /e/ sound as /I/ in such examples as Benton (Mernshall Co.), Benze (Clay Co.), Bennetstown (Christian Co.), England (Perry Co.), Gregory (Wayne Co.), Hobbardsville (Henderson Co.), Henshaw (Union Co.), Pembroke (Christian Co.), Penny (Pike Co.), and Wendover (Leslie Co.).

The characteristic Kentucky pronunciation of /a:\/ for the \( \) vowel in such names as Regina (Pike Co.), Tina (Knott Co.), Piso (Pike Co.), Nima (Clay Co.), Spiro (Rockcastle Co.), Nina (Garrard Co.), Constantine (Breckinridge Co.), Dirigo (Adair Co.), and Teresita (Bourbon Co.).
surprise most Americans used to hearing these pronounced /i/. The penultimate vowel in the name of Wilhelmina (Todd Co.) is also pronounced /aː/. Whitley County’s Clio is locally pronounced ʼ[ˈklɪəʊ], but inexplicably another Clio in nearby Pulaski Co. has been ʼ[ˈkliːo]. Several names like Tiline (Livingston Co.), Fisty (Knott Co.), Miracle (Bell Co.), Switzer (Franklin Co.), and Ermine (Letcher Co.) whose italicized vowels seem as if they would be pronounced /I/ are also locally sounded as /aː/. Less common is the reverse of the above pattern where the expected /aː/ sound is pronounced /I/ as in Vineyard (Jessamine Co.), Irvine (Estill Co.) and Elys (Knox Co.) The latter has also been pronounced ʼ[ˈilis]. In several other names like Keyser (Pike Co.) and Oneida (Clay Co.) the medial digraphs are pronounced /I/.

Another common phonetic surprise in Kentucky names is the tendency to sound as /a/ the o in such names as Colmar (Bell Co.), Moherly (Madison Co.), Olmstead (Logan Co.), Olney (Humphreys Co.), Robards (Henderson Co.), and Fogertown (Clay Co.) Robards is actually pronounced ʼ[ˈrɔbərdz]. Fogertown’s pronunciation may be suggested by its probable derivation from the dense fog said to have covered the area in the early morning.
A sound pattern visitors to Kentucky tend to notice quite early is that the /r/ in Lawrence and Laurel Counties, Lawrenceburg (Anderson Co.), Lawton (Carter Co.), Paw Paw (Pike Co.) Roselyn (Powell Co.), and Rossland (Knox Co.) is pronounced neither /j/ nor /i/ but somewhere inbetween using the grapheme /o/.

Just as common is the Kentucky propensity to sound /br/ as /ar/ in such names as Sorgho (Daviess Co.), Orndorff (Logan Co.), Corinth (Grant Co.), Corydon (Henderson Co.), and Coral Hill (Barren Co.). Similarly, in the mountains, some of the oldtimers tend to slur the /ar/ sound in Sourwood (Clay Co.) and Bauer (McCreary Co.) as /ar/, or even /o:/, and names like Moore are usually pronounced /mər/, while occasionally we still come across the digraph /ar/ in names like Powell (County) and South expressed as /ar/, giving us 'pəul' and 'sɔθ'.

The /oil/ sound in the names of Boyle Co., the various Boiling Springs in the south central part of the state, and the post office-communities of Oil Springs (Johnson Co.) and Royalton (Magoffin Co.) is usually given as the diphthong /ail/ 'boil', /oil spɔrl/, etc.

While the italicized vowels in such names as Angienda (Grayson Co.), Wimgood (Jackson Co.), Fearisville (Lewis Co.), and Meadersville (Whitley Co.) would elsewhere likely be pronounced /i/, in their respective areas they come across as /e/. On the other hand, the e in such names as Bremen
(Muhlenberg Co.), Panick (Marion Co.), Lobella (Christian Co.), and Yeadis (Leslie Co.) is locally pronounced /i/ instead of /a/, as expected, (or /eI/ in the case of Bremen, named for the city in Germany.)

In at least three cases--Athens (Fayette Co.), Cleopatra (McLean Co.), and Ammie (Clay Co.)--the familiar /ae/ sound is locally pronounced /eI/. And in two others--Cairo (Henderson Co.) and Dreyfus (Madison Co.)--we find the expected /aI/ phoneme also expressed as /eI/. This pronunciation of Cairo is most likely influenced by the traditional pronunciation of the name of the nearby Illinois city. In recent decades /'drez fas/ has become an accepted alternative pronunciation of the name of the French officer whose turn-of-the-century treason trial attracted so much press coverage in this country.

Buena Vista, a post office or community name in at least ten Kentucky counties, nearly always has been pronounced /'bi no 'vi stə/. Whether, in any case, it was named for the Mexican War battle or a beautiful view is immaterial. Three other Spanish-sounding names borne by Kentucky localities are Nada (Powell Co.), Nevada (Mercer Co.) and Cadiz (Trigg Co.) whose italicized a is pronounced /eI/.
Among the less common deviant pronunciation patterns in Kentucky are the following, each with only one or two known instances.

The italicized letters in Jordan (Fulton Co.) and Flournoy (Union Co.) are not pronounced /ɔr/ but /z/. Not the long ɔ sound but /ʌ/ is the local pronunciation of Buchanan (Lawrence Co.) and Cubage (Bell Co.).

The italicized vowel in Glover, the name of several features in Allen, Barren, Metcalfe, and Green Counties, is also pronounced /ʌ/.

The Crittenden Co. post office of Tolu is pronounced [ˈtu lu].

In contrast to the long ɔ sound of Rowan in West Virginia and North Carolina, the name of Kentucky's Rowan Co. is pronounced [ˈraʊn]. Not [ˈbo tɨ] or [ˈbu tɨ] but [ˈbu tɨ] or [ˈbʌtɪ] is the accepted local pronunciation of the Whitley Co. community name of Bouty.

Most of Kentucky's Cooper names, alone or in combination with ville or other endings, are pronounced [ˈkʌprə] as is the ʊ of Krupp (Whitley Co.).

Oldtimers in many Kentucky localities tend to give a broad a sound to Narrows [ˈnarz or ˈnarəz], the name of several post offices as well as a generic frequently applied to necks or straits.
While elsewhere Salyersville, the seat of Magoffin Co., would be pronounced with the flat (or even the long \(a\)), it is locally referred to as \(\text{[sq:(1) jərz vəl]}\) with the \(l\) barely sounded at all.

In the Upper Cumberland River valley the \(/\text{ər}/\) sound in names like Morrow is often heard as \(\text{[Mər]}\) which undoubtedly explains the several Morrow family cemeteries incorrectly labeled Marr on topographic maps.

Voiers (Lewis Co.) is inexplicably pronounced \(\text{['vAIR jərz]}\), while Pennyroyal, the name of the large central and western Kentucky region derived from that of a widely distributed herb of the mint family, has long been called \(\text{[pən i rəul]}\) or even \(\text{[pən rəul]}\).

Kessinger (Hart Co.) is locally pronounced with a long \(a\).

And instead of \(\text{[ˌdɛI vɪz]}\), Daviess Co. is sounded as if it were simply Davis \(\text{[ˌdɛI vəs]}\).

Elision and the general slurring of names has accounted for many unexpected Kentucky pronunciations.

Noviou (Adair Co.) is locally pronounced \(\text{[ˈhoʊ vəs]}\);
Iron Hill (Carter Co.) is usually \(\text{[ˈaɪrn HIL]}\); Marrowbone Creek (Pike Co.) is often \(\text{[ˈmər bən]}\) or \(\text{[ˈmərəbən]}\) while the creek and village of this name in Cumberland Co. is \(\text{[ˈmərəbən]}\); Danleyton (Greenup Co.) is \(\text{[ˈdæn əl tən]}\);
Nihizertown (Fayette Co.) is simply \(\text{[ˈnəI zər təUn]}\);
Richelieu (Logan Co.) is \(\text{[ˈrɪtʃəlu]}\); Daugherty (Butler Co.) is \(\text{[ˈdɔ̃tə ti]}\); Nazareth (Nelson Co.) is \(\text{[ˈnæzə ɾəz]}\) and that's near Samuels \(\text{[ˈsæm vəlz]}\); Boaz (Graves Co.) is
[bou]; Bauer (McCreary Co.) is [bou]; Lyons (LaRue Co.) is [lownts]; Airdrie, the name of an extinct iron furnace in Muhlenberg Co., has sometimes been called [eild rii]; Elkatawa (Breathitt Co.) is [el kæt di]; Shryocks, the family name applied to a ferry over the Kentucky River west of Versailles, has always been [sroks]. The name Hurricane, applied to nearly a hundred Kentucky streams and other features, invariably has been pronounced [haer ði kænt], and even [haer ði kænt], at least in eastern Kentucky.

Some other examples of slurred pronunciation are:
Savoyard (Metcalf Co.) as [sə 'voi ði]; Daniels Creek (Johnson Co.) as ['daen ði]; Disputanta (Rockcastle Co.) as [dis pu'taent ði]; Kerslake (Bourbon Co.) as [kæs laik]; Lovelaceville (Ballard Co.) as [ũləv ləs vəl].

Lulbegrud, the name Daniel Boone is said to have given to a Clark-Powell Co. creek after one of his companions had reported reading Gulliver’s Travels, is locally [lʌb al grəd]. Since Little Zion (Webster Co.), named for a local church, has long been pronounced as if it were Luzon, it was actually identified by the latter name on maps and documents until the Board on Geographic Names made Little Zion official in 1962.

Which brings us to the matter of the "proper pronunciation" of Louisville. Undoubtedly named for Louis XVI, the French king who had aided the American Revolutionary cause, it is said to have first been pronounced
["Ju Is vll] by its founder, General George Rogers Clark. By the early nineteenth century the name had locally assumed an approximation of the accepted French pronunciation, ["Ju i vll] which the city's intellectual leadership still seems to prefer to the increasingly popular variant ["Ju a vzl]. The reason for this growing inclination to corrupt the city's French name has been much speculated on by linguistic historians but I suspect it is simply our country's longtime tendency toward careless speech. I will not again venture an opinion on the correct pronunciation of Louisville except to say that there is no local consensus on this and no evidence that ["Ju i vll] is more commonly used than ["Ju a vzl]. The criticism of the latter that it is vulgar or at least inaccurate is highly subjective and unfounded.

The southern tendency to slur word and name endings can be exemplified in Kentucky by Monticello (Wayne Co.), Loretto (Marion Co.), Willow Shade (Metcalfe Co.), Meador (Allen Co.), and Sparrow (Anderson Co.), all pronounced with a terminal /a/. Sparrow has both the slurred ending and a terminal /z/, reflecting the unexplainable tendency of many Kentucky oldtimers to sound /s/s or /z/s where they are not indicated in the spelling.

Meadows Branch (Martin Co.) is variously pronounced ["med vzl] and ["med arz].
In such names as Woodburn (Warren Co.) and Wellborn (Todd Co.), in the south central part of the state, the r sound in silent, giving us [ˈwʊd bɔːn] and [ˈwel bɔːn]. The ville ending of a number of eastern and central Kentucky town names: Pikeville (Pike Co.), Paintsville (Johnson Co.), Pineville (Bell Co.), Burkesville (Cumberland Co.), Danville (Boyle Co.) comes through as /vəl/.

A long extinct railroad stop south of Hopkinsville (Christian Co.) was Fidelio pronounced [fələ 'dil jə] by local whites and [faː 'dil jə] by local blacks. Fidelio Sharp, the Christian County attorney and landowner for whom it was named, pronounced his name [fələ 'dil jə].

Another slurred ending is found in [ˈkɑrn dər], the local pronunciation of Orndorff (Logan Co.) The tendency to drop the final sound when the name ends in ia is not uncommon in eastern Kentucky. Two notable examples are Belvia and Bolia (Letcher Co.) which are sounded [ˈbɛl viə] and [ˌi o lɪə]. The consonant ending n is often dropped in the pronunciation of such names as Tarkiln (Lawrence Co.), giving us simply [ˈtɑr kɪln]. One even occasionally hears the /tæn/ ending in such names as Washington County locally slurred almost into nonexistence, giving us [ˈwɔr ˈʃæn]
Less often does one find in Kentucky the addition of a syllable where it is not expected. Seven cases come readily to mind: Pherba (Cumberland Co.) is locally pronounced [f3 bi a]; Sinai (Anderson Co.) is given as ['Sa:n i aI]; Charlotte Furnace, another name for the Iron Hill community in Carter Co., is usually [Jär 'lat i] or [Sär 'lat i]; Duane (Perry Co.) is ['dju eIn]; and Uz (Letcher Co.), named for the Biblical Job's hometown, is always pronounced ['ju 'zi]. Unless one knows that Cayce was the Fulton County home town (but not the birthplace) of famed railroad engineer John Luther (Cayce) Jones, he would probably assume it was pronounced [keIs], but it has always been locally ['keI si]. The Casey spelling came after Jones' death and was applied only to him and not the community. Then there is Juan, the Breathitt Co. settlement named for the Spanish-American War battle of San Juan Hill, which is pronounced both [wan] and ['dju 'aen]. Although considered an undesirable rusticism by class conscious residents, the tendency to sound the terminal a as /i/ in the names of at least sixteen eastern Kentucky communities is still the prevailing practice of some local oldtimers. This may be tolerated by the solid citizens of Martha and Louisa (Lawrence Co.) but nothing vexes them more than to hear outsiders, out of ignorance or mischief, pronounce their towns' name ['mar eI] and [lu 'iz i].
Less offensive and more commonly heard is the terminal /i/ sound in the alternative pronunciations of such names as Amba (Floyd Co.), Alpha (Clinton-Wayne Co.'s.), Alhambra (Robertson Co.), Bethesda (Wayne Co.), Burika (Robertson Co.), Burnetta (Pulaski Co.), Delvinta (Lee Co.), Evona (Casey Co.), Mt. Pisgah (Wayne Co.), Napar (Johnson Co.), Rowena (Russell Co.), Sitka (Johnson Co.), and Ulvah (Letcher Co.). Williba (Lee Co.), actually pronounced with the terminal /i/, is said to have been named for the English town of Willoughby, the alleged ancestral home of the area's pioneer settlers. According to local tradition, the name was corrupted when applied to the post office to make it short enough for the rubber stamp used to cancel the mail."

Somewhat less common in Kentucky place name pronunciation than vowel sound deviations are those involving consonants. For instance, there is the tendency, hardly peculiar to Kentucky, to pronounce the medial /t/ as a /d/ in such names as Metcalfe County, Tutor Key (Johnson Co.), Flaherty (Meade Co.), Boute (Whitley Co.), Kettle, Kettle Island, and Kettle Creek (Bell, Cumberland, and Monroe Co.'s.), and Botland (Nelson Co.)
Another example is the eastern Kentucky substitution of /z/ for /s/ in Roseland (Knox Co.), Tingley (Bell Co.), Keyser (Pike Co.), Kensee (Whitley Co.), Mt. Piggah (Wayne Co.), and Pooey Ridge (Madison Co.). This is also true of Casey (Butler Co.) though Casey County has nearly always been pronounced ["Kes'i]. Then there are the Gresley Creeks and Kentucky shares the southern preference for the medial /z/.

Other inexpectancies are the replacement of the /dʒ/ sound by /g/ in such names as Cottongim (Clay Co.), Cestville (Henry Co.) and Hugel (Knox Co.), and the reverse with Fulgham (Hickman Co.) and Ghent (Carroll Co.). In at least one name, Pinchard (Woodford Co.) the expected /tʃ/ is sounded as /k/ ["Pin'kard]. Latham (Christian Co.) is pronounced ["Læm].

Omitted medial consonants account for several curious Kentucky place name pronunciations. Richardson (in several counties) is heard as ["RItʃ]; Partridge (Letcher Co.) is pronounced ["paet rIdʒ]; and Robinson and Robertson (in several counties) are often ["rubʃ]. The medial /t/ is usually omitted in Twentysix (Morgan Co.); the /r/ is not heard in Conard (Pulaski Co.); and the /d/ is seldom sounded in Handshoe (Knott Co.), Landsaw (Wolfe Co.) Bondville (Mercer Co.) and Newfoundland (Elliot Co.) In Scape (Knox Co.), as in the family name from which it was derived, the /l/ is
never sounded. (Incidentally, Kentucky's Newfoundland is not pronounced as the name is in Canada, with emphasis on the first syllable, but as \[nu \, 'fauN \, l\,n(d)\]. Also, in Kentucky, we still tend to drop the initial /h/ in such names as Humble (Russell Co.).

Kentuckians have also been accused of adding medial consonants where, according to a name's spelling, none belong. Thus Baughman (Knox Co.) is often pronounced ['bok \, m\,n\] or ['bof \, m\,n\], and the Magoffin Co. communities of Evanston and Ivyton may be heard as ['\,n \,n \, st\,n\] and ['\,n \,n \, t\,n\], respectively. The tendency to add a medial /z/ is also common throughout Kentucky with ['r\,lz \,v\,l\] for Royville (Russell Co.), ['ro \,l\,n\,z \,b\,\,g\] for Rollingburg (Green Co.) and ['\,r\,n \,'\,n\,z \,b\,\,g\] for Moranburg (Mason Co.).

A third kind of phonic deviation in Kentucky is the stressing of a syllable that is different from what is customary in general American pronunciation. Kentucky, of course, shares with much of the Middle West and Upper South the tendency to accentuate the first syllable of names elsewhere stressed on the second as in Berlin (Bracken Co.), Calhoun (McLean Co.), LeGrand (Hart Co.), Select (Ohio Co.), Madrid (Breckinridge Co.), and Cabell (Wayne Co.). In addition, Adele (Morgan Co.) is ['\,l\,d\,l\], Dehart (Morgan Co.) is ['\,l\,\,r\,t\,\,r\], Dewitt (Knox Co.) is ['\,d\,\,t\,\,\,t\], Etoile (Barren Co.) is ['\,\,l\,\,\,l]\], La See (Cumberland Co.) is
[\textit{kei si}], Cortes (Ohio Co.) is [\textit{kor tame}], and Cadiz (Trigg Co.) is [\textit{kei diz}] or [\textit{kei disse}]. Decoy (Knott Co.) is [\textit{di koI}] though it was derived from the verb \textit{decoy}. (Curiously, Depoy in Muhlenberg Co. is pronounced [\textit{de'poy}]. While it may be assumed (though it has never been confirmed) that Defoe (Henry Co.) was named for the author of \textit{Robinson Crusoe}, whose name was pronounced [\textit{dI 'fo]}, the old post office was always [\textit{di fo}].

Several three-syllable Kentucky names are also accented on the first syllable: Anthoston (Henderson Co.) is pronounced [\textit{tAen t\og tame}], Cutono (Magoffin Co.) is [\textit{kju tame o}], Boliver (Christian Co.) is [\textit{bol var}], Costelow (Logan Co.) is [\textit{kastol o}], Burika (Robertson Co.) is [\textit{bju ro ki}]. Lamero (Rockcastle Co.), Revelo (McCreary Co.), and Monterey (Owen Co.) are also locally accented on the first syllable. A most curious and probably unique Kentucky pronunciation is [\textit{jo sam ait}] for Yosemite, an old Casey Co. post office and timber town named for the valley in California earlier visited by the founder's daughter.

On the other hand, where one might expect a name to be stressed on the first syllable, we can cite some examples of second or even third syllable accentuation. Magan (Ohio Co.) is [\textit{ma 'gaen}], Chenoa (Bell Co.) is [\textit{tsa 'no a}] or [\textit{tsa 'no i}], Arista (Taylor Co.) is [\textit{a 'ris tame}], Difficulty Creek (Wayne and Russell Co's.)
is [dɔ 'fIk əl ti], Donansburg (Green Co.) is [də 'naenz bə'g]. Elihu (Pulaski Co.) is [ˈE ˈlaː hju]. Bohon (Mercer Co.) is both [ˈbo hən] and [bə 'hən].

Galveston (Floyd Co.), Grahamton (Meade Co.), Newfoundland (Elliott Co.), Artemus (Knox Co.), Barthell (McCreary Co.), Genoa (Christian Co.), Helena (Mason Co.), Savoyard (Metcalf Co.) are also accentuated on the second syllable. Nolin, the name of several central Kentucky communities and a major stream, is pronounced with equal emphasis on both syllables, giving some credence to the pioneer tradition of the lost Benjamin Lynn. Most outsiders are taken unawares by the odd pronunciation of Caldwell County and Caldwell Station (Pendleton Co.) as [ˈkɔ ˈwəl] and [ˈkɔ ˈwəl], respectively.

Lafayette, as a Kentucky place name, has had several pronunciations. In Christian Co. it is now generally called [ˈlɛf ət] though local oldtimers and blacks have referred to it as [ˈlɛf ət]. However, the name of the Metcalfe Co. community that later became known as Center was [ˈleI fi ˈɛt].

Another unpredictable place name pronunciation is that of Kaliopi, a Leslie Co. post office, named by the local storekeeper for his mother back in their native Greece. We can anticipate the Greek muse of heroic poetry here and expect it to be [kɔ ˈlaI o pi] but it is actually pronounced more like the name of the musical instrument [kəel i 'o pi]. How mother's name was pronounced we have no idea.
7. I know of only a few Kentucky place names whose phonetic eccentricities are derived from their being pronounced precisely as they are spelled. The best known, of course, is Versailles (Woodford Co.) which is not \( V^e \) 'sai as expected. Others that come to mind are Subtle (Metcalfe Co.) and Sergent (Letcher Co.) I already mentioned Etoile (Barren Co.). I can also cite several Wayne County examples of how outsiders—probably government mapmakers—gave official spellings to cemetery names to conform to how they heard them locally pronounced: Murr for Morrow, mentioned above, and Carnder for Carrender.

6. In Kentucky one occasionally finds cases of spelling changes that, over time, have come to reflect pronunciations. Beallmont (Campbell Co.), which in the upper south has often been pronounced with the short \( e \), became Belmont. And a number of features—mostly streams—named for the once common panther, hunted or merely sighted in the vicinity in its early days, have long been recorded as Painter.

5. Then there are those pronunciations that defy any logic and are certainly unique: Gax (Gallatin Co.) is \( \text{gæ} \), Oneonta (Campbell Co.) is \( \text{oɪn} \ ' \text{jæ} \), and Xena (Powell Co.) is \( \text{iz} \ ' \text{ɪn} \). Oldtimers still pronounce Swearingen Branch (Lewis Co.) \( \text{'swæn} \ ' \text{ɪn} \).
Quisenberry (Clark Co.) is \[\text{[kU} \tilde{s} \text{} \nu] \text{'ber i}\] reflecting and early spelling of a family name. Quicks Run (Lewis Co.) is \[\text{[kriks rAn]}\]. When I first came across Buechel, the name of a Louisville suburb, I had no idea how it was pronounced. My guess of [bju kəl], [bɛtʃəl], or [bɔI kəl] were all far off the mark; I learned it was [bju tʃəl].

Finally, a Kentucky place name caution: Like others, many Kentuckians often feel they're being made fun of when their names are mispronounced. They resent hearing Martha and Louisa with the terminal /i/ and Louisville pronounced as if it had only two syllables, and see red when Hell For Certain Creek (Leslie Co.) is referred to as [hɛl fɔr 'sɔr tən]. Local people are certain that the latter is [hɛl for 'sər tən], to match the above, correct spelling.

The study of Kentucky place names is on-going. My book and the series of articles on the subject that have been published since are but the preliminary ventures in a long term and all-consuming passion shared by a number of persons and groups in the state. We hope that the readers of this publication will provide other examples of Kentucky's odd place name pronunciations for a more inclusive exposition in the future.
FOOTNOTES


3. I'm not sure that the use of these symbols will please everyone, and I don't think it is terribly important for, as Richard Grant White pointed out in his Everyday English (Boston, 1887), "it is almost impossible for one person to express to another by signs the sound of any word."

4. The counties in which the places are located are given in parentheses.

5. In Tennessee, New York, and Michigan the latter is generally pronounced [o 'nal döz].

6. Actually, we've been told, the plant that grows so profusely throughout the region may more correctly be called "prairie tea". (See "Joe Creason's Kentucky", Louisville Courier Journal, Feb. 1, 1968)

7. See Place Names of Georgia: Essays of John H. Goff, edited by Francis Lee Utley and Marion R. Hemperley, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975, for a discussion of the derivation of this word for a heavy windstorm.

9. Yater criticized my designation of ["ku:vəl"] as the only accepted pronunciation in my Kentucky Place Names Lexington: (University Press of Kentucky, 1984, p. 179)


13. One night, so the story goes, famed Indian fighter and later preacher Benjamin Lynn or Linn failed to return to camp. For several days his friends searched for him, but each night they would come back to report "No Lynn."

NOTES ON SOME KENTUCKY PLACE NAME PRONUNCIATIONS

As part of my continuing campaign to correct misimpressions about Kentucky place names, I recently compiled a sample list of those community and post office names that are not locally pronounced the way most Americans, and even many cosmopolitan Kentuckians, assume they are or believe they should be. While most Americans have no trouble pronouncing most of Kentucky's place names, they have been confounded by a number of names that defy the conventional rules of American pronunciation—that names are generally pronounced the way they are spelled and that the same names tend to be pronounced the same way everywhere.

The reasons for the discrepancies are as varied as the explanations of the names themselves and less likely to be successfully researched by the place name scholar. Assumptions about pronunciations are far less reliable than those on explanations. For none of the examples given below have we yet been able to learn the reasons for their eccentric pronunciations.

The only rule for the pronunciation of Kentucky place names is that each name should be examined on its own. The spelling of a name is not necessarily a reliable indication of its pronunciation. The accepted pronunciation of a place's name is simply the way it is pronounced locally, however that name may be spelled or pronounced elsewhere.

We need not be concerned with such issues as the relative importance of spelling or pronunciation or if one should properly reflect the other; with only a few Kentucky names do we know which was applied
first. We have no evidence for any general assumption that people first sounded a place’s name and then arbitrarily determined its spelling when it became necessary to record the name on a map, secure a post office in that name, or use the name in filing incorporation papers.

We also lack, with a few exceptions, a history of the pronunciation of individual Kentucky names. For few of our sample cases do we know whether the irregular pronunciation goes back to the beginning of the name’s application or evolved in the course of its usage. And in only a few instances, usually inadvertent, were known changes in pronunciation accompanied by changes in spelling. Pioneer Kentuckians seldom considered spelling very important anyway for they were generally uninformed about, or at least indifferent to, the formal or “correct” rules of orthography. Spelling errors made by postal clerks and government mapmakers were not often locally corrected.

A Key to the Pronunciations

The pronunciation symbols used in this article as shown below, are Roman letters, one or more for each sound in Kentucky speech. Though I would have preferred to use the more precise International Phonetic Alphabet to represent the sounds, I yielded to the limitations of this journal in accepting the more familiar and more economically produced Roman letters.
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Italicized syllables are stressed.
I. The most common phonetic deviations in my Kentucky sample involve the sounding of vowels in ways not expected of them in general American speech.

Most Americans are familiar with our mountain tendency to pronounce [eye] as [ə:] and [eyer] as [aː]. But over two dozen other eccentric vowel sound patterns in Kentucky place name pronunciation may not be as well known. Perhaps the most common of these is the pronunciation of the [eh] sound as [ih] in such examples as Benton (Marshall Co.), Bengie (Clay Co.), Bennettstown (Christian Co.), Engle (Perry Co.), Gregory (Wayne Co.), Highbardsville (Henderson Co.), Henshaw (Union Co.), Pembroke (Christian Co.), Penny (Pike Co.), and Wendover (Leslie Co).[^3]

The characteristic Kentucky pronunciation of [aː] for the i vowel in such names as Regina (Pike Co.), Tina (Knott Co.), Piso (Pike Co.), Hima (Clay Co.), Spiro (Rockcastle Co.), Nina (Garrard Co.), Constantine (Breckinridge Co.), Dirigo (Adair Co.), and Teresita (Bourbon Co.) surprise most Americans used to hearing these pronounced [ee]. The penultimate vowel in the name of Wilhelmina (Todd Co.) is also pronounced [əː]. Whitley County's Clio is locally pronounced [kləː oh], but inexplicably another Clio in nearby Pulaski Co. has been [klée oh].

Several names like Tline (Livingston Co.), Fisty (Knott Co.), Miracle (Bell Co.), Switzer (Franklin Co.), and Ermine (Letcher Co.) whose italicized vowels seem as if they would be pronounced [ih] are also locally sounded as [əː]. Less common is the reverse of the above pattern where the expected [əː] sound is pronounced [ih] as in Vineyard (Jessamine Co.), Irvine (Estill Co.), and Elys (Knox Co.). The latter has also been pronounced [ee lihs]. In several other names like Keyser
(Pike Co.) and Oneida (Clay Co.)⁴ the medial digraphs are pronounced [ee].

Another unexpected tendency in Kentucky pronunciation is the sounding [ah] for the o in such names as Colmar (Bell Co.), Moberly (Madison Co.), Olmstead (Logan Co.), Olney (Hopkins Co.), Robards (Henderson Co.), and Fogertown (Clay Co.) Robards is actually pronounced [rah/bardz]. Fogertown's pronunciation may be suggested by its probable derivation from the dense fog said to have covered the area in the early morning.

A sound pattern visitors to Kentucky tend to notice quite early is the pronunciation of the [aw] in Lawrence and Laurel Counties, Lawrenceburg (Anderson Co.), Lawton (Carter Co.), Paw Paw (Pike Co.), Rosslyn (Powell Co.), and Rossland (Knox Co.) as neither [aw] nor [ah] but somewhere inbetween.

Just as common is the Kentucky propensity to sound [awr] as [ahr] in such names as Sorgho (Daviess Co.), Orndorff (Logan Co.), Corinth (Grant Co.), Corydon (Henderson Co.), and Coral Hill (Barren Co.) Similarly, in the mountains, some of the oldtimers tend to slur⁵ the [our] sound in Sourwood (Clay Co.) and Bauer (McCreary Co.) as [aer], [ahr], or even [air], and names like Moore are usually pronounced [mawr], while occasionally we still come across the diphthong [ow] in names like Powell (County) and South expressed as [ae], giving us [pael] and [saeth].

The [oil] sound in the names of Boyle Co., the various Boiling Springs in the south central part of the state, and the post office-communities of Oil Springs (Johnson Co.) and Royalton (Magoffin Co.) is usually given as the diphthong [awl], [bawl], [bawl sprinjz], etc.
While the italicized vowels in such names as Anneta (Grayson Co.), Waneta (Jackson Co.), Fearisville (Lewis Co.), and Meadorsville (Whitley Co.) would elsewhere likely be pronounced [ee], in their respective areas in Kentucky they come across as [en]. On the other hand, the e in such names as Bremen (Muhlenberg Co.), Penick (Marion Co.), Lobella (Christian Co.), Yeaddis (Leslie Co.) and Santa Fe (Bracken Co.) is locally pronounced [ee] instead of [en], as expected, (or [ay] in the case of Bremen, which was named for the German city, and Santa Fe.) McBrayer (Anderson Co.) is also pronounced with the long e.

In at least three cases—Athens (Fayette Co.), Cleopatra (McLean Co.) and Ammie (Clay Co.)—the familiar [ae] sound is locally pronounced [ay]. And in two others—Cairo (Henderson Co.) and Dreyfus (Madison Co.)—we find the expected [eye] phoneme also expressed as [ay]. This pronunciation of Cairo is most likely influenced by the traditional pronunciation of the name of the nearby Illinois city. In recent decades, [dray fəs] has become an accepted alternative pronunciation of the name of the French officer whose turn-of-the-century treason trial attracted so much press coverage in this country.

Buena Vista, a post office or community name in at least ten Kentucky counties, nearly always has been pronounced [byu ˈnuːvəsta] instead of in the Spanish fashion [bway na vee stə]. Whether, in any case, it was named for the Mexican War battle or a beautiful view is immaterial. Three other Spanish-sounding names born by Kentucky localities / Nada (Powell Co.), Nevada (Mercer Co.), and Cadiz (Trigg Co.) whose italicized a is pronounced [ay].
Among the less common deviant pronunciation patterns in Kentucky are the following, each with only one or two known instances.

The italicized letters in Jordan (Fulton Co.) and Flournoy (Union) Co. are not pronounced [awr] but [ir].

Not the long u sound but [uh] is the local pronunciation of Buchanan (Lawrence Co.) and Cubage (Bell Co.)

The italicized vowel in Glover, the name of several features in Allen, Barren, Metcalfe, and Green Counties, is also pronounced [uh].

The Crittenden Co. post office of Tolu is pronounced [tu lu].

In contrast to the long o sound in Rowan in West Virginia and North Carolina, the name of Kentucky's Rowan Co. is pronounced [row ah].

Not [boh tee] or [bu tee] but [how tee] or [bow dee] is the accepted local pronunciation of the Whitley Co. community of Bouty. Belmont (Bracken Co.) has been pronounced [Behl mownt].

Most of Kentucky's Cooper names, alone or in combination with ville or other endings, are pronounced [koo ar], as is the y of Krupp (Whitley Co.)

Oldtimers in many Kentucky localities tend to give a broad a sound to Narrows [nahrz] or [nahr az], the name of several post offices as well as a generic frequently applied to necks or straits.

While elsewhere Salyersville, the seat of Magoffin Co., would be pronounced with the flat (or even the long) a, it is locally referred to as [sa:li] yarz vol with the l barely sounded at all.

In the Upper Cumberland River Valley the [awr] sound in names like Morrow is often heard as [mahr] which undoubtedly explains the several Morrow family cemeteries incorrectly labeled Marr on topographic maps.
Voiers (Lewis Co.) is inexplicably pronounced [va: yörz], while Pennyroyal, the name of the large central and western Kentucky region derived from that of a widely distributed herb of the mint family, has long been called [pehn ee rə:l] or even [pehn rə:l].

Kessinger (Hart Co.) is locally pronounced with a long a.

Tierney (Pike Co.) comes out in local speech as [tərn ee]

Instead of [dæv veez], Daviess Co. is sounded as if it were simply Davis [dæv vəz].

II. Elision (vowel omission) and the general slurring of names (which could be called "vowel reduction") has accounted for many unexpected Kentucky pronunciations. Hovious (Adair Co.) is locally pronounced [hoʊ vəz]; Iron Hill (Carter Co.) is usually [ahrn hihl; Marrowbone Creek (Pike Co.) is often [mərh bəhn] or [mərh o bəhn] while the creek and village of this name in Cumberland Co. is [mər bohn]; Nihizertown (Fayette Co.) is simply [nəiə zər təwn]; Richelieu (Logan Co.) is [rɪhʃ lu]; Daugherty (Butler Co.) is [dəh tə]; Nazareth (Nelson Co.) is [nəz rəθ] and that's near Samuels [sæm yəlz]; Beaz (Graves Co.) is [bohz]; Elliott Co. and nearby Elliottsville (Rowan Co.) are [əhl ət]; Bauer (McCreary Co.) is [bər]; Lyons (LaRue Co.) is [laːnz]; Elkatawa (Breathitt Co.) is [əhl kat ə oy]; Shryocks, the family name applied to a ferry over the Kentucky River west of Versailles, has always been [ʃrəhks]. The name Hurricane, applied to nearly a hundred Kentucky streams and other features, invariably has been pronounced [ˈhɪr kæn], [ˈhɪr ə kæn], and even [ˈhæər ə kæn], at least in eastern Kentucky.
Some other examples of vowel reduction are: Savoyard (Metcalfe Co.) as [sɔvɔyd]; Daniels Creek (Johnson Co.) as [dæn əlz]; Disputanta (Rockcastle Co.) as [dɨh̩s pə təntə]; Kerslake (Bourbon Co.) as [kərks ək]; and Lovelaceville (Ballard Co.) as [luvə ləs vəl]. Mt. Aerial (Allen Co.) is [ər əl] and even [ər əl].

Which brings us to the matter of the "proper pronunciation" of Louisville. Undoubtedly named for Louis XVI, the French king who had aided the American Revolutionary cause, it is said to have first been pronounced [lu ihs vihl] by its founder, General George Rogers Clark. By the early nineteenth century the name had locally assumed an approximation of the accepted French pronunciation [lu əi vihl] which the city's intellectual leadership still seems to prefer to the increasingly popular variant [lu ə vəl]. The reason for this growing inclination to "corrupt" the city's French name has been much speculated on by linguistic historians. It may be simply our country's long-time tendency toward "careless speech." Or it may reflect the nineteenth century Anglo-American tendency to pronounce the unstressed [əh] or any unaccented vowels, for that matter, as [ə]. I will not again venture an opinion on the correct pronunciation of Louisville except to say that there is no local consensus on this and no evidence that [lu əi vihl] is more commonly used than [lu ə vəl]. The implied criticism of the latter that it is vulgar or at least inaccurate is highly subjective and unfounded.

The southern tendency to slur word and name endings can be exemplified in Kentucky by Monticello (Wayne Co.), Loretto (Marion Co.), Willow Shade (Metcalfe Co.) Meador (Allen Co.) and Sparrow (Anderson Co.), all pronounced with a terminal schwa [ə]. Sparrow has both the slurred ending
and a terminal [z], reflecting the tendency of many Kentucky oldtimers to sound [s]s or [z]s where they are not indicated in the spelling. Meadows Branch (Martin Co.) is variously pronounced [mehd əd] and [mehd ərz]. The ville ending of a number of eastern and central Kentucky town names: Pikeville (Pike Co.), Paintsville (Johnson Co.), Pineville (Bell Co.), Danville (Boyle Co.) comes through as [vəl].

A long extinct railroad stop south of Hopkinsville (Christian Co.) was Fidelio pronounced [faː dɪhl یə] by local whites and [faː dɪhl یə] by local blacks. Fidelio Sharp, the Christian County attorney and landowner for whom it was named, pronounced his name [faː ˈdɛhl ə].

Another slurred ending is found in [ahrn ˈdəf], the local pronunciation of Orndorff (Logan Co.).

The tendency to drop the final sound when the name ends in ia is not uncommon in eastern Kentucky. Two notable examples are Belvia and Eolia (Letcher Co.) which are sounded [behl vee] and [ee əhl lee].

Reminiscent of such English renderings as [ˈleɪstər] for Leicester and [ˈwʊstər] for Worcester is the long term pronunciation of Little Zion (Webster Co.) as [ˈluː zɔn]. It was actually identified as Luzon on maps and documents until the U.S. Board on Geographic Names made Little Zion official in 1962.

III. Less often does one find in Kentucky the addition of a syllable where it is not expected. These instances come to mind: Pherba (Cumberland Co.) is locally pronounced [ˈfɪr bɛə]; Sinai (Anderson Co.) is given as [saːn ə ˈɛə]; Charlotte Furance, another name for the Carter Co. community of Iron Hill, is usually [ˈʃɑːr lɑːt ə ɛə] or [ˈʃɑːr lɑːt ə ɛə]; Silva (LaRue Co.) is [ˈsɪlə ˈvɛə]; Duane (Perry Co.) is [ˈduːnə], and Uz (Letcher Co.), named for the Biblical Job's hometown, is always pronounced [ˈjuː əz]. Unless one knows that Cayce was the Fulton County home town
(but not the birthplace) of famed railroad engineer John Luther (Cayce) Jones, he would probably assume it was pronounced [kays]. But it has always been locally [kay see]. The Casey spelling came after Jones' death and was applied only to him and not the community. [Hehlamz] is an often heard pronunciation of Helms by south central Kentucky oldtimers. Then there is Juan, the Breathitt Co. settlement named for the Spanish-American War battle of San Juan Hill, which is locally pronounced both [wahn] and [dju een].

IV. Though considered an undesirable rusticism by class conscious residents, the tendency to sound a terminal a as [ee] in the names of some eastern Kentucky communities is still the prevailing practice of some local oldtimers. This may be tolerated by the solid citizens of Martha and Louisa (Lawrence Co.) but nothing vexes them more than to hear outsiders, out of ignorance or mischief, pronounced their towns' names [mahr thee] and [lu eez ee].

Less offensive and more commonly heard is the terminal [ee] sound in the alternative pronunciations of such names as Amba (Floyd Co.), Alpha (Clinton-Wayne Co's), Alhambra (Robertson Co.), Burnettta (Pulaski Co.), Evona (Casey Co.), Delvinta (Lee Co.), Petra (Bourbon Co.), Mt. Pisgah (Wayne Co.), Nippa (Johnson Co.), Rowena (Russell Co.), Sitka (Johnson Co.), and Ulvah (Letcher Co.) Willibah (Lee Co.) is said to have been named for the English town of Willoughby, the alleged ancestral home of the area's pioneer settlers. According to local tradition, the name was corrupted when applied to the post office to make it short enough for the rubber stamp used to cancel the mail.
V. Somewhat less common in Kentucky place name pronunciation than vowel sound deviations are those involving consonants. For instance, there is the tendency, hardly peculiar to Kentucky, to pronounce the medial ˌt in such names as Metcalfe County, Tutor Key (Johnson Co.), Flaherty (Meade Co.), Bouty (Whitley Co.), Kettle Island (Cumberland Co.), and Batland (Nelson Co.)

Another example is the eastern Kentucky substitution of ˌz for ˌs in Rossland (Knox Co.), Tinsley (Bell Co.), Keyser (Pike Co.), Kensee (Whitley Co.), Mt. Pisgah (Wayne Co.), and Poossey Ridge (Madison Co.)

This is also true of Casey (Butler Co.), though Casey County has nearly always been pronounced [ˈkei]. Then there are the Greasy Creeks with Kentucky sharing the southern preference for the medial ˌz. 14

Other inexpectancies are the replacement of the ˌdʒ sound by the hard ˌg in such names Cottongim (Clay Co.), Gestville (Henry Co.), and Hugel (Knox Co.), and the reverse with Fulham (Hickman Co.) and Ghent (Carroll Co.). In at least one name, Pinchard (Woodford Co.) the expected ˌch is sounded as ˌk [ˈpinhərd]. Latham (Christian Co.) is pronounced [ˈlætm].

Omitted consonants account for several curious Kentucky place name pronunciations. Richardson (in several counties) is heard as [ˈrɪhɔn ə san]; Partridge (Letcher Co.) is pronounced [ˈpætridʒ]; and Robinson and Robertson (in several counties) are often [ˈrəbən ə san]. The medial ˌt is usually omitted in Twentysix (Morgan Co.); the ˌr is not heard in Conrard (Pulaski Co.); and the ˌd is seldom sounded in Handschwein (Knott Co.), Landsaw (Wolfe Co.), Bongville (Mercer Co.), and Newfoundland (Elliott Co.). In Scalp (Knox Co.), as in the family name from
which it was derived, the \( l \) is never sounded. Nor is the \( w \) apparent in Elswick (Pike Co.)

Airdree, the name of an extinct iron furnace in Muhlenberg Co., has sometimes been called [\textit{ayd ree}]. The terminal \( n \) is often dropped in the pronunciation of such names as Tarkiln (Lawrence Co.) giving us simply [\textit{tahr kihl}]. One occasionally hears the \( tuhn \) ending in such names as Washington Co. locally slurred almost into nonexistence as [\textit{wehr shan}]. Then there are such names as Woodburn (Warren Co.) and Wellborn (Todd Co.) in the south central part of the state in which the \( r \) sound is silent, giving us [\textit{wood b\( \text{uh} \)n}] and [\textit{wehl b\( \text{uh} \)n}]. Also, in Kentucky, we still tend to drop the initial \( h \) in such names as Humble (Russell Co.)

Kentuckians have also been accused of adding medial consonants where, according to a name's spelling, none belong. Thus Baughman (Knox Co.) is often pronounced [\textit{bawk m\( \text{an} \)} or [\textit{b\( \text{uh} \)f m\( \text{an} \)}], and the Magoffin Co. communities of Evanston and Ivyton may be heard as [\textit{ehv \( \text{an} \) stan}] and [\textit{aiv \( \text{an} \) tan}]. The tendency to add a medial \( z \) is also common throughout Kentucky with [\textit{royz vihl}] for Royville (Russell Co.), [\textit{rah \( \text{lan} \)z birg}] for Rollingburg (Green Co.), and [\textit{ma \( \text{raenz} \) birg}] for Moranburg (Mason Co.)

VI. A third kind of phonetic deviation in Kentucky is the stressing of a syllable that is different from what is customary in general American pronunciation. Kentucky, of course, shares with much of the Middle West and Upper South the tendency to accentuate the first syllable of names elsewhere stressed on the second as in Berlin (Bracken Co.), Calhoun (McLean Co.), LeGrand (Hart Co.), Select (Ohio Co.), Madrid (Brackinridge Co.) and Cabell (Wayne Co.). In addition, Adele (Morgan Co.) is [\textit{ay dehl}], Dehart (Morgan Co.) is [\textit{dee hahzt}], Dewitt (Knox Co.) is [\textit{dee wihnt}],
Etoile (Barren Co.) is [ee toy], La See (Cumberland Co.) is [lay see], Cortes (Ohio Co.) is [kawr təs], and Cadiz (Trigg Co.) is [kay dihs] or [kay deez]. Decoy (Knott Co.) is [dee koy] though it was derived from the verb decoy. (Curiously, Depoy in Muhlenberg Co. is pronounced [də poy]. While it may be assumed (though it has never been confirmed) that Defoe (Henry Co.) was named for the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, whose name was pronounced [dih fə], the old post office was always [dee foe].

Several three syllable Kentucky names are also accented on the first syllable: Anthoston (Henderson Co.) is pronounced [æn təs tən], Cutomo (Magoffin Co.) is [kəm tən oh], Boliver (Christian Co.) is [bələvər]. Costelow (Logan Co.) is [kəs təl oh], Purka (Robertson Co.) is [purkə]. Lamer (Rockcastle Co.), Revejo (McCreary Co.), and Monterey (Owen Co.) are also locally accented on the first syllable. A most curious and probably unique Kentucky pronunciation is [voʊ ˈsəːt] for Yosemite, an old Casey Co. post office and timber town named for the valley in California earlier visited by the founder's daughter.

On the other hand, where one might expect a name to be stressed on the first syllable, we can cite some examples of second or even third syllable accentuation. Magan (Ohio Co.) is [mə ɡæn], Chenoa (Bell Co.) is [ʃoʊ ˈnəʊ ə] or [ʃə ˈnəʊ ə], Arista (Taylor Co.) is [ə ˈrɪstə], Difficulty Creek (Wayne and Russell Co's.) is [ˈdə ˈfɪhk əl tə], Donansburg (Green Co.) is [də ˈnænz ˈbɜːrɡ], Elihu (Pulaski Co.) is [ˈelɪhu], Bohon (Mercer Co.) is both [bəʊ həhn] and [bəʊ həhn]. Galveston (Floyd Co.), Grahamton (Meade Co.), Newfoundland (Elliott Co.), Artemus (Knox Co.), Barthell (McCreary Co.), Genoa (Christian Co.), Helena (Mason Co.), Savoyard (Metcalf Co.) are also accentuated on the
second syllable. Nolin, the name of several central Kentucky commu-
nities and a major stream, is pronounced with equal emphasis on each
syllable, giving some credence to the pioneer tradition of the lost
Benjamin Lynn. Most outsiders are taken unawares by the odd pro-
nunciation of Caldwell County and Caldwell Station (Pendleton Co.) as
[kə wah] and [kə wəhl], respectively.

Lafayette, as a Kentucky place name, has had several pronunciations.
In Christian Co. it is now generally called [lə fə jət] though local
oldtimers and blacks have referred to it as [læ fə jət]. However, the
name of the Metcalfe Co. community that later became known as Center
was [læ fə hənt].

Another unpredictable place name pronunciation is that of Kallopi,
a Leslie Co. post office, named by the local storekeeper for his mother
back in their native Greece. We can anticipate the Greek muse of
heroic poetry here and expect it to be [kə leə] oh pee] but it is
actually pronounced more like the name of the musical instrument
[kəl ee oh pee]. How mother's name was pronounced we have no idea.

VII. I know of only a few Kentucky place names whose phonic eccentri-
cities are derived from their being pronounced precisely as they are
spelled. The best known, of course, is Versailles (Woodford Co.) which
is not [vər seylə] as expected. Others that come to mind are Subtle
(Metcalfe Co.) and Sergent (Letcher Co.) I already mentioned Etoile
(Barren Co.) I can also cite several Wayne Co. examples of how out-
siders—probably government mapmakers—gave official spellings to
cemetery names to conform to how they heard them locally pronounced:
Marr for Morrow, mentioned above, and Carnder for Carrender.
VIII. In Kentucky one occasionally finds cases of spelling changes that, over time, have come to reflect pronunciations. Beallmont (Campbell Co.), which in the upper south has often been pronounced with the short a, became Belmont. A number of features—mostly streams—named for the once common panther, hunted or merely sighted in the vicinity in its early days, have long been recorded as Painter.

IX. Then there are those pronunciations that defy any logic and are certainly unique: Gex (Gallatin Co.) is [djay]; Oneonta (Campbell Co.) is [ahn ee yeht a]; and Xena (Rowell Co.) is [ehx ee na]. Oldtimers still pronounce Swearingen Branch (Lewis Co.) as [swahn ee gan]. Quisenberry (Clark Co.) is [koosh og behr ee] reflecting an early spelling of a family name. Quicks Run (Lewis Co.) is [krihx ruhn]. Paoli, the long extinct candidate for the Clinton Co. seat, has sometimes been pronounced [pee ohl a]. Danleyton (Greenup Co.) is [daen al tan]. Lulbegrud, the name Daniel Boone is said to have given a Clark-Powell Co. creek after one of his companions had reported reading Gulliver's Travels, is locally [luhb al gruhd].

When I first came across Buechel, the name of a Louisville suburb, I had no idea how it was pronounced. My guess of [byu kal], [betch al], or [boy kal] were all far off the mark; I learned it was [byu chal].

X. Finally, a Kentucky place name caution: like others, many Kentuckians often feel they are being made fun of when their names are mispronounced. They resent hearing Martha and Louisa with the terminal [ee] and Louisville pronounced as if it had only two syllables, and see red when Hell For Certain Creek (Leslie Co.) is referred to as [hehl fir sahr tan]. Local people are certain that the latter is [hehl fawr sir tan], to match the above, correct, spelling.
The study of Kentucky place names is on-going. My book and the series of articles on the subject that have been published since are but the preliminary ventures in a long term and all-consuming passion shared by a number of persons and groups in the state. We hope that the readers of this publication will provide other examples of Kentucky's irregular place name pronunciations for a more inclusive, analytical discussion in the future.

Footnotes


2. I am sure that my use of the Roman symbols won't please everyone, and I don't think that is terribly important for, as Richard Grant White pointed out in his Everyday English (Boston, 1881), "It is almost impossible for one person to express to another by signs the sound of any word."

3. The counties in which the places are located are given in parentheses.

4. In Tennessee, New York, and Michigan Oneida is generally pronounced [oh neye da].

5. Some of my linguist friends have questioned my use of "slur", suggesting that it could be interpreted as a pejorative. I prefer to use this word, for want of a better one, in the American College Dictionary sense of "pronouncing a syllable or word indistinctly as in
hurried or careless utterance" (NY: Random House, 1967, P. 1139).
No disparagement is intended. "Vowel reduction"—the use of the schwa
in unstressed syllables—might be a more erudite way of putting it.

6. Perhaps not so inexplicably. See Thomas Pyles and John Algeri, The
Origins and Development of the English Language, 3rd edit., NY, 1982
for a discussion of this pronunciation.

7. Actually, we have been told, the plant that grows so profusely throughout the region may more correctly be called "prairie tea". (See "Joe Creason's Kentucky", Louisville Courier-Journal, Feb. 1, 1968)


10. Letter from Donald M. Lance, University of Missouri-Columbia, May 13, 1989

11. George Yater criticized my designation of [lu o va] as the only accepted pronunciation in my Kentucky Place Names, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984, P. 179


13. Interview with Nevyle Shackelford, Beattyville, Ky., July 8, 1978


15. One night, as the story goes, famed Indian fighter and later preacher Benjamin Lynn or Linn failed to return to camp. For several days his friends searched for him, but each night they would come back to report "No Lynn."
15. Kentucky's Newfoundland is not pronounced as the name is in Canada, with emphasis on the first syllable, but as [nu fawn lan(d)].

16. The La See post office was named by and for its first postmaster, William A. Lacy or his family. Its peculiar spelling may have been prompted by the need to avoid confusion with the Lacey post office in Magoffin Co.

17. One night, so the story goes, famed Indian fighter and later preacher Benjamin Lynn or Linn failed to return to camp. For several days his friends searched for him, but each night they would come back to report "No Lynn."

18. Interview with Robert Epperson, Kaliopi, Ky., April 12, 1980