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THE JASPER - NEWTON PHENOMENON

by *Russell Wahmann*

A curious phenomenon occurs in American geography in that "Jasper" and "Newton" appear as names of adjacent, or conterminous, counties in five states.¹ I first came upon this while working as a compass and chain surveyor in East Texas in 1946. There seemed nothing unusual about this at the time. A few years later my work required me to be in Missouri, where I noticed the two names again, as counties, and again conterminous, in the southwestern corner of that state. A mental note suggested a coincidence. I discovered this coincidence again in Mississippi and still later in Indiana. It was now time to ask, "What is this all about?" Two counties with the same combination of names, always adjacent?

Examination of a map of counties of the United States reveals the incidence again in Georgia. Further inspection shows the names in association as city-county or as township-county. Where townships are named, rather than numbered, primarily in the eastern United States, this occurs several times (Table 1). The incidence of togetherness, as geographic place names, appear no less than eleven times.

Virtually every state has a resource reference that explains the origin and history of place names within that state.² Many place names honor individuals who have significantly contributed to the military history of our country. Generals, colonels, and politicians have little trouble being remembered and so honored. "Jasper" and "Newton" were sergeants who fought in the American Revolution. Both served under Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox" of the Carolinas.³

In the fall of 1779 the arrival of 6000 French troops off the coast of Georgia gave the Americans under Major General Benjamin Lincoln a temporary superiority. The French and Americans joined in a siege of the British base at Savannah. The British commander, Major General Augustus Prevost, took advantage of French delays in getting into position to strengthen his entrenchments and call in reinforcements from outlying posts. When the main assault came, the British repulsed the allies from strongly entrenched positions and the French and Americans suffered heavy losses.

Sergeant William Jasper (1750-1779), who had been a hero at the Battle of Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, a year earlier, was killed during the siege in an attempt to raise the American flag in a manner similar to the famed Iwo Jima flag raising in World War II. But

Russell Wahmann lives in Cottonwood, Arizona.

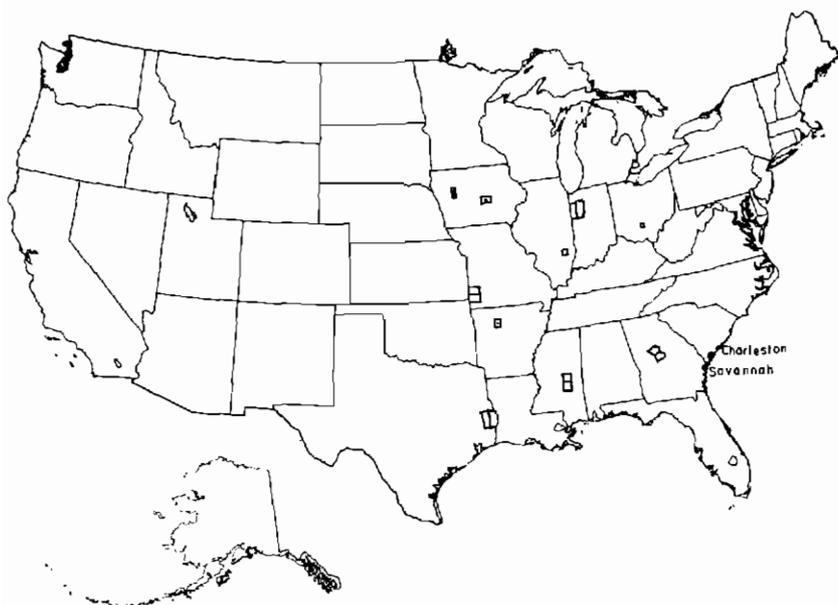


Table I
The Phenomenon of Conterminance

STATE	COUNTY	COUNTY SEAT	TOWNSHIP
Arkansas	Newton	Jasper**	
Georgia	Jasper *		
	Newton		
Illinois	Jasper	Newton	
Indiana	Jasper *		Newton
	Newton		
Iowa	Jasper	Newton	Newton
	Carroll		Jasper
			Newton
Missouri	Jasper *		
	Newton		
Mississippi	Jasper *	Newton	
	Newton		
Ohio	Pike	Jasper	Newton
Texas	Jasper *	Jasper	
	Newton	Newton	

* *Conterminance*

** *Not named for William Jasper*

he and his comrad, Sergeant John Newton (1755-1780), are remembered most for another reason. In October 1779 they conducted a daring raid to rescue ten American prisoners who were to be hanged by the British. This happened at a place now called Jasper Springs, near Savannah.⁴ The deed is commemorated in a painting that hangs in the Senate wing of the United States Capitol.⁵ In May 1780 Newton was taken prisoner after the surrender of Charleston and died soon afterward of smallpox on board a British prison ship.

Most of the Jaspers and Newtons in the eastern United States are named for these two heros. Some of course have other origins.⁶ One exception is Newton County, Arkansas, where Jasper is the county seat. This Newton is named for Thomas Willoughby Newton, United States Representative from Arkansas in 1847.⁷

William Jasper served in Colonel William Moultrie's Second South Carolina Infantry, a regiment of Marion's command.⁸ A statue of Jasper stands in Madison Square, Savannah.⁹ Newton was probably in the same unit.

Jasper County, Georgia, originally was named Randolph County in 1807, but because of Congressman John Randolph's opposition to the War of 1812, the county was renamed in Jasper's honor.¹⁰ In 1821, when a new county was formed from Henry, Jasper, and Walton counties, it was named for Newton.¹¹ Newton is a common name for habitation because of a combination of circumstances. It is a common English place name and a common personal name.¹² With the great surge of trans-Appalachian migration following the American Revolution and the War of 1812 from the antebellum South, the settlers took the memories of their heros with them and planted them in new locations. This is what happened with Jasper and Newton. Their memory is linked in this unusual display of place name proximity. As Newton and Jasper were side by side in life, fighting for a cause, so they remained side by side, their names on a map of the country they helped to create.

NOTES

¹Texas, Missouri, Mississippi, Indiana, Georgia.

²Texas: Walter Prescott Webb, (ed.), *The Handbook of Texas*, (2 vols., Austin, 1975). Missouri: David W. Eaton, *How Missouri Counties, Towns, and Streams Were Named*, reprinted from *Missouri Historical Review*, 10 (April, 1916). Indiana: E. Chamberlain, *The Indiana Gazetteer or Topographical Dictionary of the State of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1849). Georgia: Kenneth K. Krakow, *Georgia Place Names* (Macon, 1975).

³There are sixteen place names for Marion, three in proximity with Jasper and

Newton. In Webb, *The Handbook of Texas*, II, 277, Newton is mentioned as a corporal.

⁴Krakow, *Georgia Place Names*, 119.

⁵"Sergeants Jasper and Newton Rescuing American Prisoners from the British," John Blake White, c. 1810-1915. Gift of Dr. Octavius A. White in 1899. It hangs in the Senate wing on the third floor of the Capitol.

⁶George R. Stewart, *American Place Names* (New York, 1970).

⁷Joseph Nathan Kane, *The American Counties* (New York, 1960), 198.

⁸Kane, *The American Counties*, 147.

⁹Krakow, *Georgia Place Names*, 119.

¹⁰Kane, *The American Counties*, 147.

¹¹Krakow, *Georgia Place Names*, 161.

¹²Stewart, *American Place Names*, 327.