The Jasper-Newton Phenomenon

Russell Wahmann
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. 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. Many place names honor individuals who have significantly contributed to the military history of our county. 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.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>COUNTY SEAT</th>
<th>TOWNSHIP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Newton</td>
<td>Jasper**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Jasper*</td>
<td>Newton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Jasper</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jasper*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Jasper*</td>
<td>Jasper</td>
<td>Newton</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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. The deed is commemorated in a painting that hangs in the Senate wing of the United States Capitol. 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 heroes. Some of course have other origins. 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.

William Jasper served in Colonel William Moultrie's Second South Carolina Infantry, a regiment of Marion's command. A statue of Jasper stands in Madison Square, Savannah. 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. In 1821, when a new county was formed from Henry, Jasper, and Walton counties, it was named for Newton. 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. 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 heroes 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

1 Texas, Missouri, Mississippi, Indiana, Georgia.
3 There are sixteen place names for Marion, three in proximity with Jasper and

4Krakow, *Georgia Place Names*, 119.


8Kane, *The American Counties*, 147.

9Krakow, *Georgia Place Names*, 119.

10Kane, *The American Counties*, 147.


12Stewart, *American Place Names*, 327.