

Welcome to Gomorrah

There are places in the Bay State beyond your wildest imagination

BY JAMES V. HARRIGAN

EVER MEET A guy from Blubber Hollow? What about a chick from Podunk? If someone told you they were from Honey Pot or Fiddler's Green, would you know what they were talking about?

These places really exist, as part of Salem, Brookfield, Norfolk, and Bolton, according to the Secretary of State's office. There are 1,828 places on the list of "Village, Section or Neighborhood Names of Massachusetts Communities" (an average of 5.2 for each city and town), and it's not complete yet.

Municipal government is famously strong in Massachusetts, but some residents of places like Woods Hole in Falmouth, or Islington in Westwood, identify more closely with their village or neighborhood than with the collector of their property taxes. The same goes for those who summer on the North Shore at Magnolia or Prides Crossing, or on the Cape at Hyannisport or Buzzards Bay. Don't try telling them their fancy vacation homes are in Gloucester, Beverly, Barnstable, or Bourne.

Residents of Haverhill south of the Merrimack River call their home Bradford; people in the priciest neighborhood in Agawam are from Feeding Hills. Denizens of parts of Northampton say they are from Leeds and Florence.

Jeff Williams, director of the Secretary of State's Citizens Information Service, explains in an e-mail that the list was prompted by a telephone call from a Hollywood production company that was "looking to use a fictitious Massachusetts community in their plot" and wanted to make sure that "no such community name was known to exist." Williams referred to the 1920 edition of the secretary of state's *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities, and Towns in Massachusetts*, but he suspected that the list was incomplete, so he decided to check in with municipal clerks across the Commonwealth. He says that those 351 telephone calls and e-mails added about 10 names to his original list.

THE LIST NOW begins with Aldenville, a section of Chicopee, and ends with Zylonite, in the town of Adams (the latter named after American Zylonite,

a company founded in Adams that was one of the biggest makers of celluloid in the US in the late 19th century). In between, there's plenty of food for thought, including Artichoke in Newburyport, Apple Valley in Ashland, Rice Village in Barre, Plum Trees in Sunderland, and Bean Porridge Hill in Westminster.

Some of the names harken back to the Industrial Age and include words like furnace, forge, and mill. There's also the Box Factory neighborhood in Middleton, Shoe String Village in Carver, Charcoal City in Becket, Soapstone in New Salem, and Brickbottom (named for its abundance of clay suitable for brickmaking) in Somerville.

Bible scholars might take special interest in the neighborhood of Jericho, in Dalton, named for the ancient West Bank city mentioned more than 70 times in the Bible. And just a few miles away is the Zoar section of Charlemont, named for the Dead Sea town where Lot and his daughter fled from the city of Sodom. Perhaps less enticing is the New Marlborough village called Gomorrah. According to the Bible, its ancient namesake, along with Sodom, was destroyed by fire and brimstone in punishment for its debauchery.

Some community names have become less apt with the passage of years. Do you think there's still a community of Friends in Uxbridge's Quaker City section? Maybe, but they're probably about equal to the number of elms left in that town's Elmdale neighborhood.

If you dream of world travel and don't want to live in the tiny Berkshire hill town called Peru, there's always the section of Otis known as Algeria, or the Guinea neighborhood in Plainville. The reason why those towns have sections named for African countries has been lost over time. But according to the Scituate historical society, there's a generally accepted reason why part of that town is called Egypt. In Colonial times, whenever residents of less-fertile areas of Scituate would go there to buy its plentiful Indian corn, they were said to be "going down into Egypt," much as ancient desert-dwellers would head to the Nile River valley to get their foodstuffs.

Sometimes the explanations are more straightforward. The Scotland section of Bridgewater, for example, is named for the Caledonian roots of its original settlers, the Keith and Forbes families. Poland (in Conway) and Canada (in Sunderland) were coined for similar reasons.

If you'd rather live in an area with a name rooted in Native American culture, there are hundreds to choose from. Some are relatively familiar, like Squantum in Quincy, Chappaquiddick in Edgartown, and Nantasket in Hull. But others are likely known to few outside their nebulous borders, like Nissitisset in Pepperell, Squibnocket in Chilmark, Antassawamock in Mattapoisett, and Padanarum in Dartmouth.

Animals are another frequent source of Massachusetts place names. Some are pretty straightforward, like Bass Point in Nahant, Bass River in Yarmouth, and Bass Rocks in Gloucester. There's a surprising ursine influence stretching across the state, from Bearskin Neck in Rockport to Bearfoot in Charlton to Bear Town in Lee. You can also visit Beaver Brook in Danvers, Crow Village in Peabody, Donkeyville in Foxborough, Dogtown in Wellfleet, Duckville in Palmer, Foxtown in Shelburne, Horse Neck Beach in Westport, Lamb City in Phillipston, Otter River and Partridgeville in Templeton, Oyster Harbors in Barnstable, Pigeon Cove in Rockport, and Rattlesnake Gutter in Leverett.

Some of those names are pretty easy to figure out, such as the harbor with the oysters, the river with the otters, the island with the deer and the cove with the pigeons. But you need a map to see that Horse Neck Beach (the beach itself is called "Horseneck") is named for its equine shape.

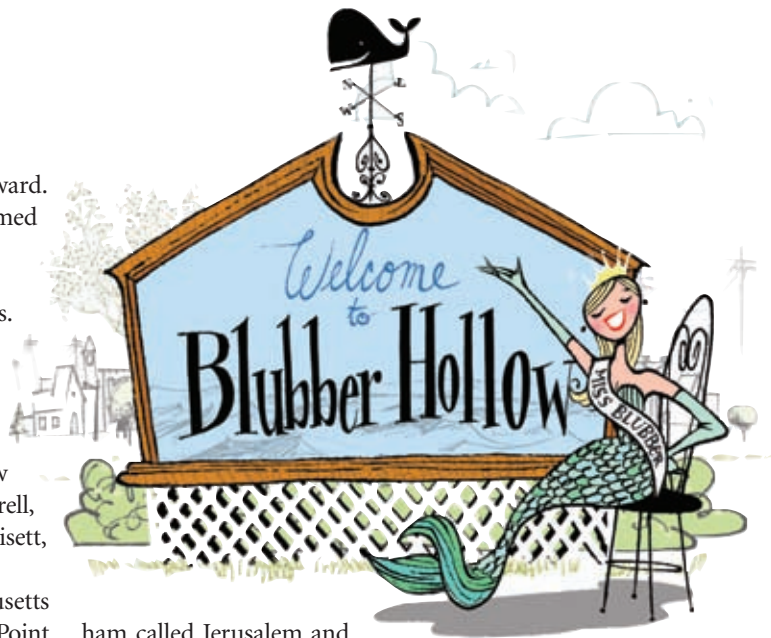
There are community names straight from a Hardy Boys novel, such as Maplewood in Fall River or Fairview in Chicopee. Others are so banal they recur across the state. If you call Glendale home you could be a resident of Everett, Middlefield, Wilbraham, or Easthampton; if you hailed from Brookside, you might live in Charlton, Dudley, Great Barrington, or Southbridge.

Others are one-of-a-kind, at least in Massachusetts. Gloucester may be the only place in the nation with a neighborhood called Two Penny Loaf. That could be true for the Caper Corner in Townsend, too. Wellfleet has its Money Hill, but Holyoke goes one better with Money *Hole* Hill.

THE LIST HAS plenty of surprises and curiosities, but how complete is it?

I grew up in Dedham, in the Greenlodge neighborhood. My family, friends, and neighbors all went to the Greenlodge School. Many of us considered ourselves residents of Greenlodge first and Dedham second. But Greenlodge is not on the list. Nor is the contiguous Manor section of Dedham, a neighborhood with parochial pride on a par with Greenlodge.

Curiously, though, the list claims there are parts of Ded-



ham called Jerusalem and Findlen. Where those names came from is a mystery to me. I canvassed every street in every neighborhood many times while working on political campaigns; I also own reproductions of old maps of Dedham. And I have read every town history ever written, from the first, by Erastus Worthington, published in 1827, to the last, by Robert B. Hanson, which came out in 1976.

Although I feel certain there is no Jerusalem section of Dedham, some claim there was once a tradition to name a delivery area after the local postmaster and that there actually is a Findlen, in honor of Joseph Findlen, who served as Dedham postmaster from 1921 to 1935. But I won't buy that until you show me sections of town named for other postmasters. There aren't any—unless their names were Oakdale, Riverdale and East Dedham.

Williams calls the document an ongoing project and says that his office is always willing to add a new place name "if we can confirm its existence," usually by checking with the town clerk and local historical commission.

As a former resident of Dedham, I hereby propose that Greenlodge be added to the official list of names. I have no doubt that both the town clerk and historical commission will confirm its existence.

But there is another way. Take an Election Day drive down Greenlodge Street; stop at the Greenlodge School. Ask any of the guys holding "Re-elect Bill Galvin" signs. They'll tell you they live in Greenlodge.

Although it would be nice to see the neighborhood I grew up in added to the list, I'm not hopeful that Jerusalem or Findlen will be taken off. Williams writes that his office is "always open" to suggestions, but draws a line in the sand: "No name has ever been removed, nor should it be, as that is the whole point of this exercise."

Well, then I guess the whole point of this essay is to convince Secretary of State Galvin that Greenlodge in Dedham deserves a place on the Citizens Information Service community names document, right between Green Harbor in Marshfield and Green Lodge in Westwood. **CW**