NAMES ON DOMINICA

BY

DOUGLAS TAYLOR 1)

Dominica was occupied successively by speakers of Arawakan, Cariban, French, and English dialects, all of which have left their mark in place-names, as well as in the names of local flora and fauna. African influence appears to have been minimal in this respect. The Arawakan language of the island's early inhabitants survived that of the Carib invaders (from which, however, many words were borrowed), but the last native speaker died about 1920. Two languages are spoken today: English and a dialect of French Creole. The former, being the language of prestige, is usually employed by the more socio-economically privileged minority, the latter by the peasant majority, few of whom know much English. However, members of the first class often resort to Creole in their more intimate relations; while many among even the poorest peasants may be heard addressing young children in what they believe to be English, and chiding them for speaking 'Patois'.

One curious result of this situation is that not only local fruits, trees, fishes, birds, etc., but also many places — probably most of those that have ever been recorded in writing — have two (or more) names, the one employed in Creole and the other in English speech. So, for example, Grande Anse or Portsmouth is the island's second largest town, Charlotteville or New Town is a suburb of the capital Roseau (which has no other name), Cachacrou or Scots Head is a peninsula at the island's southwestern extremity, Cachibona of Clyde is one of its rivers, La Coudraie or Bath Estate one of its citrus plantations. In some cases a rival name has been defeated; Pointe Michel or Dalrymple's Point of late-18th-century maps

1) Author of "Diachronic note on the Carib contribution to Island Carib", Intern. Journal Amer. Linguistics 17, 1951, and (with IRVING ROUSE) "Linguistic and archeological time depth in the West Indies", ibidem 21, 1955. (red.)