

EARLY USES OF CREEK IN NEW ZEALAND ENGLISH

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Creek is commonly held to be a word which is in some ways especially "colonial". One of those ways is the use of *creek* for 'stream', which is deemed an innovation of American English. Another "way" is not so much a matter of the sense of the word but of its usage, which is taken to be imprecise among colonials or unacceptable to the genteel. *Creek*, in short, over the last couple of hundred years has often carried the hint of colonial vulgarity. In fact, the case may well have been that the word was vulgar, because it was plebeian. The effects of social class on usage are notorious, but they are cognate with the effects of "taste", and these are more insidious. I suspect that both "taste" and class-effects played upon *creek* in the eighteenth century and that they have not properly been taken into account in consideration of *creek* to date, but these are concerns of a broader study than the present one. I may, however, mention that my own interest in *creek* was sparked off by the coincidence of noticing an apparently unusual use of the word in the works of that very minor poet Thomas Tickell, and of reading within a day or so an article on language contacts in the South Pacific in which *creek* 'stream' is referred to as American English.

The casual enquiry which I then began into the whys-and-wherefores of *creek* soon led into ramifications. In this article I want to draw attention mainly to one of several considerations of *creek*, and to observe some of its early uses in the context of the New Zealand settlement.

If one talks about early uses of the word one must at some point talk about its first attestation. Just what a first attestation does in fact signify is debatable. A certain measure of conjecture moreover must attach to whatever one notices about the earliest recorded use. Dr H. Orsman very kindly supplied me with a list of early occurrences which he has recorded. The list is led by Samuel Marsden whose uses of *creek* and allied terms are the substance of what follows. In checking *The Letters and Journals of Samuel Marsden* my business was to ask: (1) How does Marsden use *creek* and allied terms? (2) Does he use *creek* 'stream' after a distinct fashion of American English? And (3), if his use of *creek* and such words distinctly departs from usages acknowledged for the English of the British Isles, are his departures reasonably to be understood as showing recent or remote American English influences?

Samuel Marsden was by birth a Yorkshireman, born in 1765 into an evangelical household. His father was a blacksmith and small farmer. According to Elder, who edited the *Journals*, Marsden was going on for twenty-one years of age before he left his village for higher education and eventual entry to his ministry. He spent two years at Hull before he went to the University of Cambridge in his twenty-sixth year. He was ordained in 1793 and in the same year sailed for Australia where he arrived March 10, 1794. He was thus close on thirty years old. We may reasonably assume that his habits of speech were pretty well established. His *Journals* show that although he was not immune to influence he was not readily given to accepting change. His background was not one in which susceptibility to American English might be expected to be at all strong.

Whether *creek* was in Marsden's vocabulary when he arrived in Australia, Elder does not disclose. It was, however, used by other settlers. Morris¹ records a use of *creek* in 1793, by Governor Hunter: 'In the afternoon a creek obliged them to leave the banks of the river, and go round its head, as it was too deep to cross...' and supports this leading example with G. Barrington, from 1802: 'They met with some narrow rivers or creeks.' Further, as samples, from 1809 (but not published until 1818): 'Through Rickerby's grounds upon the riverside and those of the Rev. Mr. Marsden on the creek'; and from 1826, an entry which says: 'There is a

1 Morris 1898: 107

very small creek which I understand is never dry.' From these diversified entries you may gather that a creek might be small, that it might be narrow (but river-like in its depth?), that it could be too deep to cross and so a definite obstacle, or it could be a tributary.

If Marsden's house was 'on the creek' he should have been familiar with the word. The house was the first parsonage at Parramatta. A painting of the time shows the vicarage and the "creek", with a fellow boating upon it. It is not "small" nor, judging by the angle of slope of the banks, was it shallow at the time at which it was painted.

Marsden came to New Zealand first from December, 1814 to February, 1815. His second visit was from August, 1819 to November, 1819; his third, from February, 1820 to December, 1820. He was again in New Zealand from August to November, 1823. He came again for a week, April 5-10, 1827, and from March to May, 1830. His final visit was from February to July, 1837.

His third trip, it should be noted, brought him much into the company of naval men who were prospecting for timber. He travelled overland too, in company with Lieutenant McCrae of the 84th Regiment, a detachment of which was seconded to H.M.S. *Dromedary*, and with Mr Clark who had been until April, 1820, sealing (sailing?) master of the American sealer *General Gates*.

I propose to examine Marsden's uses of *brook*, *branch*, *run*, *stream* and *river* along with *creek* and I should also take into account his use of *cove*, *bay*, and *harbour* for in Marsden as in the records of his contemporaries we are engaged with a complex of terms rather than with any single term. I shall deal with those occurrences which seem to me significant. I am not attempting to list below all the occurrences which I observed.

First, the only *brook* noticed, from 1830:

The land is very rich and in considerable quantities -- plenty of good timbers and fine fresh-water brooks in all directions, some capable of turning mills.²

Brook is not one of Marsden's habitual words, even in a context in which his readers, officials of the Church Missionary Society in London, might be expected to dispose him to use the word more readily. The fact that *brook* occurs only once may even be interpreted, for reasons which will appear later, as evidence that immediate American English influence was slight if it was present at all.

There are three occurrences of *branch* to be considered:

- (a) 1819: Within about a mile of one of the branches of the Shokee Hangha river, the wood rises to a very high summit from which there is an extensive view of the river and the shore.³
- (b) 1819; paragraph following (a): The descent from the hill into the river is very difficult from its exceeding steepness. When we arrived upon its banks we had this branch to wade through several times before we reached the first village, Ko Raka.⁴
- (c) 1819, of the village of Utukara which stood on the outlet from Lake Omapere: It is very populous, and situated in a rich valley. A branch of the Shokee Hangha, navigable for large canoes, runs through it.⁵

In (c) there would seem to be an admirable opportunity for the American English *creek* to be asserted in place of the existing *branch*. The use of *creek* in respect of an outlet of a lake is one of the uses to which James Fenimore Cooper objected in 1838, as a prevalent American misapplication. Marsden's non-use of *creek* in this situation seems to discount American English influence to a degree, unless one detects an Americanism in *branch* itself which is, in context, an alternative term for *river* by which the same tract of water is designated on another page, a designation which tends to discount Marsden's *branch* as an Americanism. Similarly, (a) and (b) above seem little American.

Run occurs in 1819: 'Shortly after meeting Tarrja's wife we came to his village situated on the banks of a fine run of fresh water and much rich land about it.'⁶ In the two paragraphs

2 Marsden 1932: 470
3 " " : 183
4 " " : 183

5 Marsden 1932: 189
6 " " : 97

immediately before this Marsden refers to 'branches of the harbour', 'the head of the cove', 'a fresh-water river', 'the salt water cove' and 'several fine streams', all of which are decidedly British rather than American English. You will notice that, again, Marsden is far from adopting any American English *creek*; he is not even using the word where it is apposite in British usage.

The characteristic of the American *run* is smallness, which hardly seems indicated in the quotation above. The notion of smallness is certainly conveyed by Fenimore Cooper when he uses *run*⁷ and also by Mencken.⁸

In other uses Marsden gives: (d) 1820, 'We had several runs of water and swamps to wade through'⁹, where one misses that "characteristically" American association of "creeks and swamps"; (e) 1830, '...in consequence of having wet my feet several times in crossing the runs of water on Tuesday on our way to Waimate...'¹⁰; (f) 1830, 'The land was rich and easy cleared and cultivated, the timber good and in abundance for building, fencing, and firewood, and runs of water in all directions.'¹¹ We may detect some notion of smallness coupled with impermanence, and a flexibility of use which is not altogether consistent with American English but is warranted in older British usage.

Comment on *branch* and *run* may be timely here. The *O.E.D.* in *branch*, I, 2 b, gives: 'U.S. spec. A small stream or brook.' Thornton¹² gives: 'a stream smaller than a "creek"; a brook', and defines *creek* briefly as 'A small river'.¹³ Since the Utakura branch is said to be navigable for large canoes, and the canoe in which Marsden embarked on the branch on October 2, 1819 is stated to be sixty-three feet long, *branch* in Marsden's 1819 uses is not characteristically American English, but acceptably British. The *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898) does not include *branch* so we may take it that Marsden's use is a standard one. The point does not need to be laboured. It seems fairly plain that Marsden's *branch* is standard English. But *run* may be a different matter.

The *O.E.D.* gives under *run* sense II, 9 a: 'A small stream, brook, rivulet, or water course. Chiefly U.S. and north. dial.' Chiefly, one notes, but not entirely so. The entry is supported by illustrations, including Dampier (1703): 'There is a Run of Water in the bottom, which empties itself into a fine small Cove or sandy Bay'; and from 1877, Marcus Clarke, speaking of 'several "runs" of fresh water around the bays'. Clarke's quotation marks betray the decline, if not the changed status, of the word which in Dampier's sentence is forthright and British as Marsden's uses, for although it may have changed, becoming less acceptable, after Marsden's day, *run* was acceptably British, even as a dialect word. The *English Dialect Dictionary* lists as its entry 26 under *run*: 'A small channel of water, a stream, a brook, runnel; a small dike', and mentions it as especially a Yorkshire word, and Marsden we recall was a Yorkshireman. Interestingly, the *E.D.D.* includes with its illustrations an observation from an Emerson, *Wild Life* (1890), on 'Creeks (locally called runs or drains)'. A further *O.E.D.* sense, II, 9 b, gives *run* as 'A flow or current of water; a strong rush or sweep of the tide etc.' When Marsden's uses of *run* or *runs* are considered, the case for immediate American English influence seems weak even where those uses do not go outright counter to American usage. His uses are better interpreted as either consistent with acceptable British standards or with Yorkshire uses. To invoke remote American English influences seems pointless. So far as *branch* or *run* may be alternative terms for *creek* the prospect of Marsden's *creek* being influenced by American English seems slight indeed.

The earliest occurrence of *creek* in Elder's edition is from 1815. The block of land purchased for the mission station at Rangihoua was defined in terms of natural boundaries. On the north side the boundary was 'a creek of fresh water'¹⁴ and if C.J. Smith¹⁵ is right in saying that one attribute of a stream is that it forms a natural boundary — an opinion which has historic support — then the Rangihoua creek is the earliest instance known to me of *creek* 'stream' in a

7 Cooper 1827: 11

8 Mencken 1945: 221

9 Marsden 1932: 298

10 Marsden 1932: 473

11 " " : 474

12 Thornton 1912: Vol I: 98

13 Thornton 1912: Vol. I: 222

14 Marsden 1932: 124

15 Smith 1882: 188

New Zealand context. The deed of purchase was signed by Kendall and Nicholas for the Church Missionary Society. Marsden may not have been solely responsible for the legal wording of the deed which was drafted in Sydney, leaving the boundaries to be described on the spot. Whether the description of the boundaries is entirely his or not he obviously took no exception to the designation 'a creek of fresh water' although *creek* does not appear elsewhere in the first *Journal*.

It is used again in the second *Journal*, of 1819:

[Whirinaki village] stands at the head of a large salt-water creek which runs up from the main river [the Hokianga] for about ten miles, and is there met by a very beautiful fresh-water stream which comes down from the neighbouring hills and passes through an extensive valley of rich land.¹⁶

The 'salt-water creek' here equates better with the *O.E.D.* sense I, 1, than with the American English *salt creek* as defined, for example, by Kurath.¹⁷ We may see also from 1819:

These villages stand at the head of a most beautiful valley into which a small creek, navigable for canoes, runs from the river [Hokianga] ... After remaining a few hours we left these villages with the return of the tide...¹⁸

This is one more tidal, salt, creek, more of an inlet than a tributary and again having more affinity with British than with American English usages. True enough that North American cases of apparent correspondence could be cited. From Craigie¹⁹, for instance, who gives an 1808 example (also instanced by Mathews²⁰) of *creek* as tributary to a tidal river, which was the fashion in which the Hokianga was viewed, but this 1808 example is deemed "rare" and so hardly strengthens the case for American English influence.

On this point of apparent correspondences something has to be said somewhere. It may as well be here. Where a use such as Marsden's seems to correspond with an American English use it is noticeable that in the main the leading illustrations given date back to the earlier seventeenth century, to a period when differentiation of British and American usages cannot be regarded as substantial. If anything, such illustrations argue that in spoken English on either side of the Atlantic there continued usages now particularly identified with North American language. I think that identification is specious. It is over-emphatic. It rests on the written word which we know is treacherous since the vocabulary of reader and writer is not necessarily of the same order as the spoken vocabulary. The written vocabulary may token but not faithfully represent the contemporary spoken vocabulary. The written vocabulary may indicate sporadically what is sustained in daily speech; equally, it may suppress it. In the case of *creek* it seems to me that the methods adopted by lexicographers have led them to be over-positive. The dictionary-makers have under-estimated the influence of class-characteristics in their samples at times, as at other times chauvinism has blinded commentators to the significance of the evidence which they themselves unwittingly present. If we deal with what I am calling correspondences we do well to remember that the relationship which that term supposes is rather less cause-and-effect than our standard works are inclined to urge.

An 1819 example from Marsden seems to point to a sense of the word *creek* being continued in British speech:

The stony creek through which the water from the lake continually runs appears as if it was covered with lime, from the sediment left by the water in its course, through the rocks, and all the stone in the creek was hard as flint ...²¹

This refers to the Ngawha Springs area. The "lake" is small, and might be called a largish pond. When Marsden saw it, it was covered with froth. Brimstone and rosin (kauri gum) lay about. Superficially, the creek as outlet of a lake appears to correspond with that vulgar American use to which Fenimore Cooper objected. But to the observer of this tawdry waterway

16 Marsden 1932: 191
17 Kurath 1949: 61
18 Marsden 1932: 195

19 Craigie 1940: Vol. II: 674
20 Mathews 1956: Vol. I: 432
21 Marsden 1932: 210

what was obvious about the appearance of this outlet? Surely, that it was a drain, a natural association since lakes are so often said to be "drained" by whatever waterway goes out of them, and here the *creek* 'drain' usage agrees with that which is recorded above from Emerson, which must be understood to have older ancestry than merely of 1890. So far as 'drain' and 'ditch' are interchangeable, the *creek* 'drain'/'ditch' is of long standing. It is instanced in the O.E.D. sense I, 2 a, from Izaak Walton (1653): 'A He and a She Pike will usually go together out of a River into some ditch or creek'.

From 1820 an instance of *creek* 'stream' may be found, where 'stream' may designate both a waterway as such and in addition convey a liveliness of movement:

[The warm spring] is situated in the wood on the bank of a small fresh-water stream. There are two warm springs opposite each other, one on each bank of the creek, about ten feet above the level of the fresh water, which runs below them.²²

The *creek* here has a well-defined bed, a sense not absent from the Ngawha example, and carries with it that connotation of depth which is attached to it by other people in the century. Because of its depth it may come within the category of being an obstacle to the traveller, at least in season. It illustrates the *creek* 'stream' exchange but this is probably a lesser aspect than its being an actual or potential obstacle. The sense of the obstacle is conveyed in another quotation from 1820:

We proceeded on our route early, but met with many difficulties from the creeks and rivers being filled by the rains, several of which we had to ford.²³

Creek is here distinct from *river*. It is distinguished again in another 1820 example where, again, depth is seen as an attribute of *creek*:

... my guides from Wyketto informed me that I could not return with them, because I should not be able to pass the rivers and creeks on the road -- they would be too deep for me to ford.²⁴

But distinction was not always easy, as appears from the entries for the close of 19 July and opening of 20 July, 1820:

I supposed that I was then on the banks of the river. When the day broke I was astonished to find myself on the banks of a creek.²⁵

The character of a *creek* which is almost a *river* and is too large to be a *stream* is reflected from 1820:

... I therefore, after taking some refreshment, got a canoe in the evening and went up the fresh-water stream which flows down between the high hills from the interior. A large body of water comes down this creek occasionally.²⁶

Stream here may signify both a type of waterway and a force of flow, but is less apt as a designation than *creek*, in part at least because of the passageway through the high hills which conveys to us that recurrent sense of a creek being associated with a ravine or deep cleft.

In these examples we are engaged with *creek* 'fresh-water stream' but within the same time Marsden used *creek* in regard to tidal waters (as arms rather than tributaries) and to salty waterways. A general application of 1820 goes thus:

... I felt my time to be in a great measure at my own disposal, and I spent it chiefly among the natives of the different bays in examining the creeks, woods, and natural productions, for about three weeks.²⁷

And also from 1820, in the neighbourhood of Te Puke:

22 Marsden 1932: 249
23 " " : 251
24 " " : 258

25 Marsden 1932: 263
26 " " : 260
27 " " : 257

A creek of salt water, about one hundred yards wide, runs from the main river round to the rear of the hippah till it meets a fresh-water stream. The creek was navigable for small craft where I crossed it.²⁸

The last seems to suggest depth and a quite marked breadth as characteristics which make the *creek* distinct from a stream, although the emphatic breadth is a less recurrent consideration than depth tends to be.

Yet this, if there is an implied distinction in the last example, is not a consistent distinction, for not long after the entry above Marsden wrote about the 'O Emanonee river' (the Ohinemuri?) as a stream which was rapid and where he experienced 'the ford breast high'. On the next page we find him writing of springs sending 'their tributary streams to the O Emanonee'; later he speaks of having 'a stream of water to cross, which was too deep to ford', and refers to this *stream* as a *branch* of a river.²⁹

The sense of the *creek* as obstacle is found too in 'I had crossed many swamps, creeks, and rivers'³⁰ which is an association of *swamp* with *creek* that looks attractively American English but cannot be taken as the sign of immediate influence, if it is American at all. Its immediate source is Australian usage, as far as one can see; but one may also see that the phrasing suggests not three separate items by a topographical complex.

A further sense of the tidal tributary *creek* can be given from 1820:

When we arrived the tide was down, and we had to remain upon the banks till two hours after dark before there was sufficient depth of water in the creek where the canoe was moored to carry her into the river... When the tide was turned we proceeded with great rapidity down the stream.³¹

Stream here seems plainly to indicate a forceful flow. Elsewhere a *stream* may be a *branch*: see, from 1820, '... we sat down upon the banks of a fresh-water stream where we dined. This stream is the head of one of the branches of the Kaipara.'³² (And of this, see more below.) Where we find a phrasing "a fresh-water something-or-other", that something-or-other has tended to be a 'stream' although, as noted, as early as 1815 Marsden might speak of 'a creek of fresh water'. In 1820 the flexibility of his uses became greater. For example, when he speaks about Whangaruru: 'The harbour runs up several miles: a fresh-water creek falls into it at the head...'³³ but his conventional phrasing is not as yet superseded for in 1830 occurs '... some land on a fresh-water stream, called the Wairoa, adjoining to their present settlement [at Waimate]'.³⁴ It may however be suspected that in 1820 Marsden was inclining to use *stream* as an indication of force and flow, as in 'The swamps and creeks were all full and the streams very rapid and deep'³⁵, that creek was becoming for him a comprehensive term, without being as inclusive as it was later to be. For instance, he refers to a waterway which would appear to invite, by reason of size and passage through the deep cleft, the use of *creek*: 'The small river (Kaeo) which falls into Wangarooa Harbour runs through ravines at the foot of the hills.'³⁶

I should perhaps draw attention to the appearance in that same paragraph of another association of 'swamps and creeks' and, finally, to another variation, 'no swamps drained, no bridges over rivers or creeks'.

Although to this point there are usages which seem to correspond with Americanisms, there are none, with the possible exception of 'swamps and creeks', which do so unequivocally, and none which to my mind point to recent American influence as an active factor governing the use of *creek* generally, still less the *creek* 'stream' association.

Space precludes observation of Marsden's uses of *harbour*, *bay*, and *cove*. His, and his fellows', uses of these terms repay study, especially of the relation of a *bay* to a *cove*, of a *cove* to a *creek* and to a *river*, as instanced from 1815:

28 Marsden 1932: 260
29 " " : 263
30 " " : 274

31 Marsden 1932: 292
32 " " : 316
33 " " : 306

34 Marsden 1932: 474
35 " " : 333
36 " " : 326

[I] found a fresh-water river falling on a bed of rocks which ran from bank to bank...
A regular bed of solid rock ran direct across the salt water cove and formed a dam...³⁷

which concerns the Waianiwa Falls at Kerikeri. You will notice this is a salt-water cove, not a "creek", although it may well be deemed a *creek* by those who recognise that such a cove is a place which may be legitimately called a creek in British English. But equally a cove may be something very different; Bream Bay, for one, is a "cove" on occasion, and a cove may also be of such a size as to allow for 'a harbour at the head of the cove into which a fresh-water river ran from the interior'³⁸. I cite this as an indication that *cove*, like *creek*, is so flexible a term that to attach to either any firm notion or dogma about sources outside the British Isles is as yet premature. *River* too is a term not rigorously applied. To us, the most obviously strange application is to 'the river Thames' with its nominal line of the mouth running from Cape Colville to Cape Rodney. But our concern is with the river which may be a *branch* but is not a *creek*. We are concerned with those small fresh-water rivers such as the Waikati which is too big to be a *stream*. A river may be 'five or six miles wide' as the Waitemata is said to be, and thus is to us a harbour. A river may be a 'salt-water river' and tidal. It may have a flow of water referred to as 'the stream'.

But *streams* which are not necessarily forceful flows must now be considered. From 1815: 'It is watered by several fine streams which seldom run through it more than a mile apart...'³⁹ or from 1819: '... they could easily water on his shore from a stream of fresh water which runs into the cove.'⁴⁰ And 1819 again: 'A fine stream of fresh water runs through the village.'⁴¹ and 1819 once more: 'This village stands in a fertile spot, sheltered by lofty pines, and watered by many beautiful small streams sufficient to turn a mill.'⁴² A *stream* may also be a *branch*, as in 1820:

We had one stream of water to cross, which was too deep to ford, about six or eight miles from the place where we landed from the canoe. This forms one of the branches of the Kiperu River.⁴³

The upshot of this is, I fancy, clear enough. The notion that *creek* is a replacement term for *stream* is unduly simplified. I have tried to show how Marsden used *creek* and allied terms, for *creek* 'stream' as a phenomenon has no significance in itself but only in the context of other terms for waterways. Where Marsden does use *creek* 'stream', the likelihood of direct American English influence seems small, while to ascribe that use to more remote American English influence raises far more, and more complicated, questions than that ascription can answer. On the whole, Marsden's uses of *creek* are explicable within the ample framework of British English and fall into place as evidences (one must suspect) of a continuing parastratum of English used transculturally, and with more effect of social levels and operations of "taste" than has been supposed for it.

Such a parastratum as the one postulated is at present ill-defined. Consequently, its potencies must meanwhile be little appreciated. Yet, unless we appreciate something of the mixture of peoples using English in the Southwest Pacific in the early nineteenth century we can see neither why American English should be credited with nor denied a considerable influence. And we cannot get a glimpse of what it was that "taste" discriminated against. One vignette may serve to show why any simple conception is not likely to be useful.

I take it from Dillon⁴⁴, a list of casualties in an engagement with irate Fijians in 1813: (1) Ship's first officer, English?; (2) son of the paymaster, N.S.W. Corps, Australian-born or reared?; (3) three lascars; (4) Louis Evans, said to be Governor Phillip's son, Australian-born presumably; (5) a Swede; (6) a "resident" of N.S.W., discharged from an American ship; (7) an Irishman, discharged from a ship out of Calcutta; (8) two Irishmen, discharged from an English ship; (9) a Londoner, deserter from an American ship; (10) a Chinese; (11) a Tahitian. Undoubtedly

37 Marsden 1932: 97
38 " " : 108
39 " " : 97

40 Marsden 1932: 160
41 " " : 192
42 " " : 208

43 Marsden 1932: 271
44 Dillon 1829: 24-5

the possibilities for American English being influential are there, but so are the potentialities of language for being moulded and adapted rather than simply appropriated.

Amongst the sealers, whalers and sandalwooders, the timber-ships or the more general "traders" which came on the Southwest Pacific shores, American vessels were included. This deserves a little notice. To the end of 1794 Collins, in his *Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, records only three American ships calling at Sydney, one from Philadelphia and two from Rhode Island, in 1792 and 1793. As direct sources for the dissemination of *creek*, these can in all probability be dismissed. Hunter, as instanced earlier, used *creek* in 1793 in a fashion, *vide* Morris, not foreign to Marsden. Collins, in a passage which can be fairly dated to 1789, also uses the word, in association with *stream* but not as an alternative term for 'stream': 'Some ground had been opened on the other side of the stream of water which ran into the creek'⁴⁵ where he observes a niceness which colonists found difficult to sustain, a difficulty comparable to the situation faced in New Zealand where a creek might be salt-water at its mouth but fresh-water further inland, and division perhaps became too arbitrary to be supportable.

Another observation must be made about American shipping, both for Australian and New Zealand contacts. So far as the early years of contact are critical, as in connection with first attestations they must be, it has to be noticed of the American vessels that as sealers or whalers they shipped polyglot crews, and that they sailed mainly out of New England or ports on the northeastern seaboard of the United States. Personally, I should have more regard for this area as the source of any American English innovation of *creek* 'stream' if there were more consistency shown on this point by the American commentators. Mencken⁴⁶ in *The American Language* argues that *creek* was differentiated from the British understanding of the word in the period between the Revolution and 1800. If this is so, we have to assume that the differentiation caught on fairly rapidly if it was going to be transmitted to the Antipodes in the 1790s. Collins, who we have seen may have caught some such shift of significance, was a serving officer in New England 1775-7; his wife, moreover, was an American. Hunter, whose *creek* 'tributary' is noticed above, also served on the American station. *Creek* 'tributary' was certainly in use in New England in 1788 and had indeed been there since 1638 if not since 1622, but I am unashamedly sceptical about indigenous American English at such dates.

There are some grounds for scepticism when it is found that later in the work cited Mencken⁴⁷ takes the shift of meaning from 'small arms of the sea' to 'shallow feeders of rivers' - which is anyway inconsistent with Hunter's use - and attributes the shift to Dutch influence, inferentially in the Hudson Valley in special and in New England in general and thence more widely spread. In his *Supplement I* Mencken⁴⁸ cites Samuel Johnson being offended by *creek* as an Americanism, which is rather out of step since Johnson held that a creek was a 'jut or prominence on the coastline'. In *Supplement II*⁴⁹ Mencken says that *creek*: 'which is mainly applied to an arm of the sea in England, has the same sense along the Chesapeake, but elsewhere it usually means a small country stream'. The American English characterization of *creek*, *vide* Mencken, tends to being freshwater, shallow, and tributary. There is a certain want of agreement with this and Australasian examples.

Let me take Mencken again:

Creek, in England means a tidal inlet of the ocean or of some large river, but in America it began to designate any small stream so long ago as 1637, and, along with *run* and *branch*, has since pretty well obliterated the English *brook*. It is still occasionally used in the United States in the English sense, as in Curtis creek (Maryland), and Deep creek (Virginia), but the English never use it in the more American sense.⁵⁰

Now, the two places named are not Northern states. We gather that in the North, *brook* is

45 Collins 1911: 58
46 Mencken 1955: 12

47 Mencken 1955: 115
48 " 1945: 3

49 Mencken 1948: 574
50 " 1945: 221

obliterated by *run*, *branch* and *creek* — but Kurath in *A Word Geography of the Eastern United States* says explicitly that *creek*

... is the most common word for a small freshwater stream in the Eastern United States. It is current everywhere except in the greater part of New England, where *brook* or *river* are the usual terms.⁵¹

Again, there seems to be some agreement wanting. But perhaps this is substantially a lack of agreement only about modern currencies. Was there a golden age in the past when the lexicographers spoke with one voice?

In 1816 John Pickering published a *Vocabulary or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America*. Noah Webster, a New Englander, is recorded by Mencken professing himself unfamiliar with some of Pickering's offerings, including *creek* 'an inland brook'⁵². James Fenimore Cooper later fulminated against the misuse of *creek*: 'a word that signifies an inlet of the sea, or of a lake, is misapplied to running streams, and frequently to the outlets of lakes.'⁵³ Cooper, in *The Prairie* (1827) favours *stream* or *river* both as discriminative terms and as synonyms, or alternatively uses *brook* or *run*.⁵⁴ (The one *creek* which he uses is exceptional, and Cooper shows it is a term of the lower orders.) But in spite of Cooper, within the early nineteenth century *creek* had a place in even Bostonian vocabulary: the *Boston Weekly Messenger* is cited⁵⁵ from 1817, reporting that 'Even the smaller branches were swollen into large creeks' which suggests that, since *branch* is commonly a synonym for *stream*, a creek is larger than a stream. The 1788 *Massachussets Spy*⁵⁶ spoke of 'two very considerable creeks' on the Ohio, so the idea of a creek being sizeable and navigable was not new, and it was persistent. And it is not as neatly to be disposed of as mention of 'the American English innovation *creek* 'stream' ' would have us incline to believe. In the sense of a waterway, tributary, tidal, as a branch of a river having plenty of water in it and fit for canoeing rather than wading, *creek* remained in the vocabulary of New Englanders and can be found in that eminently New England writer John P. Marquand's *Wickford Point*, a novel of Massachussets published in 1939. While Marquand's use may fit with one New Zealand understanding of *creek*, on the whole a hypothetical *creek* 'stream' stemming from New England seems unlikely. It is, rather, evidenced in New England as it is in Australia, and Baker⁵⁷, in some ways admittedly as chauvinist as the Yankees, will have none of it as an import from the United States.

If the source in New England is too neat and too simple an accounting, it still leaves one other point unregarded. If New England was a source of influence, why is *brook* so little found in the area where that influence is alleged to have been received? Marsden uses *brook* once, and Collins does not use it at all as far as I noticed. Nicholas, who came with Marsden in 1814-5, does not use it. Cruise (1820) refers only once to a *brook*. Dillon (1829) and his first officer, Russell, do not use the word. John Turnbull (1805) does not use it. These men were from Great Britain, so *brook* ought to have been in their vocabularies. They were in contact with Americans or those who had sailed with Americans. What have they instead?

Collins, in his Volume I which dates in publication from 1798 but is worked up from a day-to-day record, has the common complex of *bays*, *harbours*, *inlets*, *coves* and so forth which have to be weighed, and also eight occurrences of *run* and eight of *stream*, including *run* 'stream', and one *creek* with a tributary *stream*. He has the *branch* 'river' use and *branches* as drainage-ways from a swamp where we might expect to see creeks, plus a river with 'creeks or branches'. In lieu of a salt water creek he has an *inlet*. He has a *fresh*, and a *river* 'stream'. Through both volumes there are pointers to the way in which his terms were undergoing change by way of relation to *ponds*, in which respect some of his quotations from Bass are interesting. There is not space here to explore this, but the indications are that *runs* or *streams* ceased to

51 Kurath 1949: 61
52 Mencken 1945: 118
53 " " : 118

54 Cooper 1827: various
55 Thornton 1912: Vol. I: 222

56 Thornton 1912: Vol. I: 222
57 Baker 1945: 282

run periodically, leaving *ponds*, and when the rains came *run* and *stream* were no longer adequate terms. The ponds vanished into a temporary continuity and were supplanted by *creeks*. Much the same process of adaptation can be seen in North American language.

John Turnbull, who published in 1805 a three volume *Voyage Round the World in the years 1800, 1802, 1803 and 1804* furnishes four *rivers*, one of them shallow, and a 'navigable creek or river'. The last refers apparently to the Hawkesbury, a locality which seems particularly identified with *creek* in the early settlement of New South Wales.

John Savage, a doctor of the East India Company in Bengal, visited New Zealand and published *Some Account of New Zealand* (1807). I checked his book, and found him little interested in waterways. An unobservant man, a dull man.

J. L. Nicholas makes use of *river* as what was further back in the interior a *stream*, a development which followed when the stream divided into two *branches*, and the branches became 'two large rivers which discharged themselves into the head of the bay'. A *stream* might be small and meander, to issue through steep, almost perpendicular hills. Otherwise, *stream* is also a synonym for *river*. If a *branch* might swell to become a *river*, the contrary could hold, and a river could divide itself into two branches 'further up'. A *rivulet* appears shyly, and some of those *coves* which seem to be legitimately creeks, but the one *creek* which I noticed was both sizeable and salt-water:

A considerable salt-water creek runs for some distance up the country, into the head of which a fresh-water stream empties itself. Korra-korra told us that our vessel could easily sail up this creek...

Run does not seem to be in Nicholas's vocabulary although active enough in Marsden's.

Cruise has one *brook*, and a couple of *rivulets* doomed to become less lyrical creeks, one fears, in later years: "Through every ravine ran a rivulet of very fine water", and "On one side of a ravine, through which runs a rivulet". He has also a collection of accommodating *rivers*, from great to small. His *coves* are also comprehensive and even comprehended:

The river is wide and navigable for ten miles from its mouth, forms many deep coves, and branches into several smaller streams...

but may be distinct from his *creeks*:

There were many wild ducks and curlews in the creeks and rivers about the harbour...

A shooting party having gone into a creek on the west side of the harbour, found that it terminated in a rather large river.

Chevalier Captain Peter Dillon published his *Narrative* in 1829. Dillon has an Irish background. He visited New Zealand in 1809, in 1814 (with Marsden), in 1823, 1825, 1826 and 1827. He sailed out of Calcutta, was on the Australian and New Zealand coasts, about the Islands, and traded to South America. He uses *river* 'stream', *river* for both large and small rivers and for one 'of moderate size'. His stream may be modest, as at Kororareka Bay:

We landed at the watering place, where we found the stream very scanty, owing to the long drought;

and may therefore be synonymous with *run*:

The run of water on shore is very small at this season, the rains not having properly set in yet. The whole force of the stream was not greater than if it ran through a pistol barrel.

And again, with the *water-run*: 'the water run was not above the size of a stream from a goose-quill'. Away from New Zealand he found 'good runs of water'. A *run* might be a *stream* and a *stream* could on occasion be a *river*. A *river* could be a *creek*:

Rathea pointed out to me two small fresh-water rivers at the head of this bay. The one to the westward I named Frazer's River... and the other Greenlaw's River.

But on the map of the Island of Manicolo drawn in 1827 — I guess, by Dillon's subordinate, Russell — these features are shown as 'Frazer's Creek (Fresh water)' and 'Greenlaws Creek (Fresh water)'. Dillon uses *creek* in a New Zealand context: 'On proceeding up a narrow creek in his canoe...' where the accompanying sense seems to be of travelling some distance inland. Russell reporting on Manicolo uses *rivulet*:

We proceeded up the bay where I found two rivulets of excellent fresh water disembarking themselves into the bay...

and these he labelled *creeks* when he, apparently, mapped them. Russell's *rivulet* is, one feels, oversized: 'the banks of the rivulet abounding with timber' is out of scale. But he also admits into his report a *creek*, 'a small fresh-water creek, where I entered and let go the anchor'.

The examples above are from Marsden's contemporaries. They do not point to any neatly designated source for any of the terms, nor to any remarkable consistency. They bear tribute, rather, to a living language being exercised in accommodating to new circumstances without abandoning its old elements. They are evidences of flexibility, and adaptation. And they offer poor support to the lexicographers.

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