

Toponymy of Herschel Island (Qikiqtaryuk), Western Arctic Coast, Canada

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ABSTRACT. The official names for several of the features on Herschel Island are derived from the visit to the island by USS *Thetis*, Lt. Cdr. Charles Stockton commanding, on 15–16 August 1889. In 24 hours, Stockton and his crew surveyed the coast sufficiently to compile and publish a map, which included the bathymetry of Pauline Cove and the strait between the island and the mainland, now called Workboat Passage. Stockton named features after two whaling ships that were in the vicinity when he arrived (*Orca* and *Thrasher*), his own *Thetis*, his wife (Pauline Lethilhon King), three ensigns to whom he assigned bathymetric surveys (Robert Lopez, Edward Simpson, and Rogers Wells, Jr.), two of his other officers (Lt. Arthur Osborn and Ensign John Bell), and an officer of the Royal Navy (Capt. Sir Richard Collinson). Only one feature, Avadlek Spit, has an Inuvialuktun official name.

Key words: Herschel Island, Beaufort Sea, USS *Thetis*, Arctic toponymy, Charles Stockton

RÉSUMÉ. Le nom officiel de plusieurs des accidents géographiques de l'île Herschel découle de la visite de l'île par le capitaine de corvette Charles Stockton en tête du USS *Thetis*, les 15 et 16 août 1889. En 24 heures, Charles Stockton et les membres de son équipage ont fait des levés de la côte suffisamment approfondis pour pouvoir compiler et publier une carte, qui comprenait notamment la bathymétrie de l'anse Pauline et le détroit séparant l'île de la terre ferme, qui porte maintenant le nom de Workboat Passage. Charles Stockton a nommé les accidents géographiques d'après deux baleiniers qui se trouvaient dans les environs à leur arrivée (*Orca* et *Thrasher*), ainsi que d'après son propre bateau, soit le *Thetis*, sa femme (Pauline Lethilhon King), trois porte-étendards auxquels les levés bathymétriques avaient été confiés (Robert Lopez, Edward Simpson et Rogers Wells, fils), deux de ses autres officiers (le lieutenant Arthur Osborn et le porte-étendard John Bell) et un officier de la Marine royale (le capitaine Sir Richard Collinson). Un seul accident géographique, soit l'Avadlek Spit, porte un nom inuvialuktun officiel.

Mots clés : île Herschel, mer de Beaufort, USS *Thetis*, toponymie de l'Arctique, Charles Stockton

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INTRODUCTION

On 11 August 1889, seven ships of the American western Arctic whaling fleet (*Jesse H. Freeman*, *Grampus*, *William Lewis*, *Lucretia*, *Narwhal*, *Orca*, and *Thrasher*) crossed the 141st meridian and entered Canadian waters (Bodfish, 1936:45). The vessels came to hunt bowhead whales (*Balaena mysticetus*) in response to a report brought back to Alaska by Joseph Tuckfield, who had spent the previous winter in the Mackenzie Delta, that the whales in Mackenzie Bay were as “thick as bees” (Bockstoce, 1977). Tuckfield also described a harbour at Herschel Island that would be a safe winter berth. Tuckfield's reports initiated a short period of commercial whaling in the southeastern Beaufort Sea (1889–1921), during which the bowhead population was severely reduced (Cook, 1926; Bodfish, 1936).

The whaling fleet was followed by USS *Thetis*, a steam bark of the United States Navy sent to patrol the Beaufort

Sea, both as a revenue cutter and as a survey vessel, and to assist the whaling fleet (Fig. 1). *Thetis* was commanded by Lt. Cdr. Charles H. Stockton (1845–1924) (Fig. 2), whose career in the United States Navy was destined to be distinguished. Built in Dundee, Scotland, the ship was bought by the United States Navy in 1884 to be used in the Greely Relief Expedition. *Thetis* arrived at Herschel Island around midday on 15 August 1889, and after planting a marker on the west coast, her crew sailed around to the sheltered waters on the east side of the island. There Stockton met only *Orca* and *Thrasher*; the other ships had retreated to American waters when *Jesse H. Freeman* reported a “reef” (Stockton, 1890).

Stockton and his crew surveyed the coast of Herschel Island, and their map was published in 1890 by the United States Hydrographic Office (Fig. 3). The names on this map became official in the mid 20th century (see www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca), but most of the sources are not recorded

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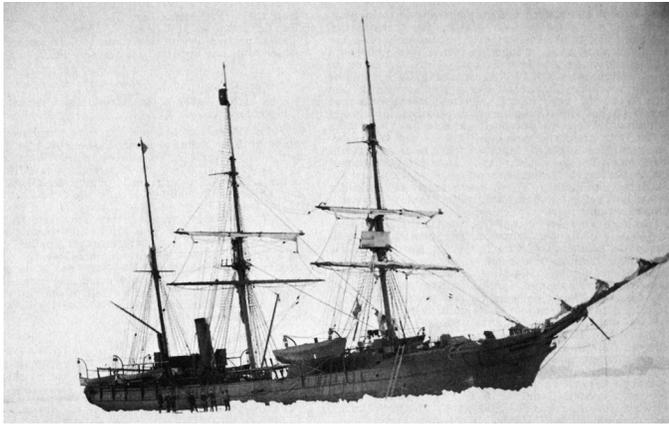


FIG. 1. USS *Thetis* in 1884. United States Navy photograph.

either by the Geographic Names Board of Canada (A. Byam, Natural Resources Canada, pers. comm. 2011) or in the records held by Yukon (G. Njootli, pers. comm. 2010). The purpose of this paper is to discuss the origin of the official names for the features of Herschel Island, including those given by Stockton. None of the names are mentioned by White (1911) in his early account of the toponymy of northern Canada, as they were not then official names.

HERSCHEL ISLAND

Herschel Island (69°34' N, 138°54' W) is a glacially ice-thrust ridge on the Yukon-Alaskan continental shelf in the southeastern Beaufort Sea (Fig. 4) (Mackay, 1959). It lies about 4 km north of the Yukon mainland across Workboat Passage, a shallow strait that was probably formed in the last 1600 years (Burn, 2009). The volume of the island above sea level is close to that of Herschel Basin, a depression in the continental shelf just east of the island from where the sediments were upthrust (Fig. 4) (Mackay, 1959). The island has a surface area of 108 km² and a coastline about 55 km long. Capt. John Franklin (1786–1847) named the island on 15 July 1826, during his second voyage in the Canadian Arctic, after Sir William Herschel (1738–1822), his sister Caroline Herschel (1750–1848), and his son John Herschel (1792–1871), one of the most distinguished scientific families of the time (Burn, 2009). Its Inuvialuk-tun (Siglitun dialect) name is *Qikiqtaryuk*, meaning “big island.” Franklin met three groups of Tuvurmiat people (Qikiqtaryungmiut) on Qikiqtaryuk when he camped there on 17 July 1826. The oldest archaeological site at Herschel Island, the Washout site near Simpson Point, has presented artifacts from about AD 1200, which were recovered before the site was eroded by the encroaching Beaufort Sea (Yorga, 1980).

The island was later visited by Thomas Simpson and Peter Dease in 1837 (Dease and Simpson, 1838) and by Lts. William Pullen and William Hooper of the Royal Navy in 1849 (Hooper, 1853). It was seen by Captain Richard Collinson, Royal Navy, in 1851 and 1853 (Collinson, 1855). The



FIG. 2. Lt. Cdr. or Cdr. Charles H. Stockton USN (1845–1924). Stockton's rank is determined from his insignia, but he signed the photograph “Captain,” suggesting that this portrait was taken while he commanded USS *Thetis*. Photo courtesy of Naval War College Museum, Newport, Rhode Island.

next recorded visitor from outside was Joseph Tuckfield in 1888 (Bockstoce, 1977).

STOCKTON'S TOPONYMY

Stockton's map, published in March 1890, presents names for several points and bays along the coastline (Fig. 3). The coastline presented by Stockton is a remarkable representation of the island (Fig. 5), given that *Thetis* left Herschel Island at 1 pm on 16 August, about 24 hours after arriving (Stockton, 1889:108–115).

Points and Headlands

Collinson Head (Figs. 3, 5) was named after Captain Sir Richard Collinson of the Royal Navy (1811–83) (Fig. 6), who commanded HMS *Enterprise* during the search for the ships of the third Franklin expedition, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*. *Enterprise* entered the Beaufort Sea through the Bering Strait in 1851 and spent two winters near Victoria Island (Barr, 2007). The ship was delayed near Herschel Island for a few days on each of her journeys past the island.

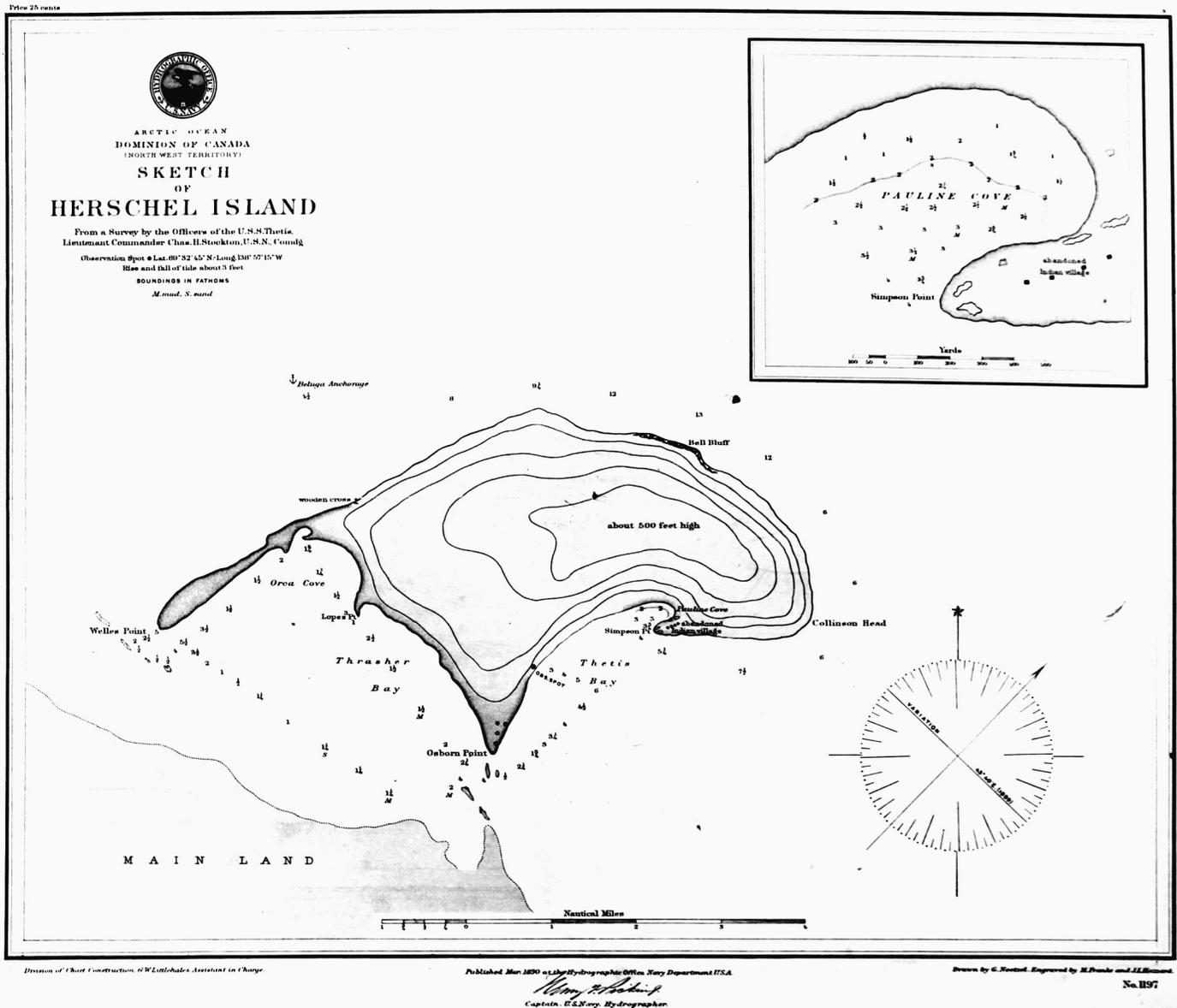


FIG. 3. Sketch of the Herschel Island area by the officers of USS *Thetis* from field measurements on 15–16 August 1889, published in March 1890 by the Hydrographic Office of the United States Navy. Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Stockton (1890) considered it unfortunate that Collinson's record was overshadowed by that of Robert M'Clure (1807–73), who commanded HMS *Investigator* and abandoned his ship in Mercy Bay, Banks Island, but traveled on to make the first transit of the Northwest Passage. The name "Collinson Head" was not in common use in the decades following publication of the map, however, for in his annual report for 1905, Royal North-West Mounted Police Inspector D.M. Howard referred to the feature as "Cape Point" (Howard, 1906).

Lopez Point (Fig. 3) appears on Stockton's map, but the feature is not given a name in earlier accounts. Stockton named it after Ensign Robert F. Lopez from Tennessee, who was a junior officer onboard *Thetis* at the time (U.S. Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1889, 1890). Stockton's log for 16 August 1889 states that he sent Lopez in a boat to relieve Ensign

Rogers Wells, Jr., whom he had earlier dispatched to sound out the water (now named Workboat Passage) between the island and the mainland (Stockton, 1889). The point's Inuvialuktun (Siglitun dialect) name is *Kublualuk*, which means "old thumb" (D. Esagok, pers. comm. 2010). The last shaman to live on Qikiqtaryuk was also named *Kublualuk* (Nagy, 1994:30) (Fig. 7). Franklin probably camped near this point on 17 July 1826 (Franklin, 1828:129–131).

Osborn Point is marked on the 1890 chart of Herschel Island (Fig. 3). Fraser (1962) suggested that the name might commemorate Rear Admiral Sherard Osborn (1822–75) of the Royal Navy, a highly gifted officer who edited the journal of Captain Robert M'Clure for publication (M'Clure, 1856). However, Osborn did not serve in M'Clure's *Investigator*, but rather sailed in the eastern Canadian Arctic, and Herschel Island is not mentioned in the journal he edited.

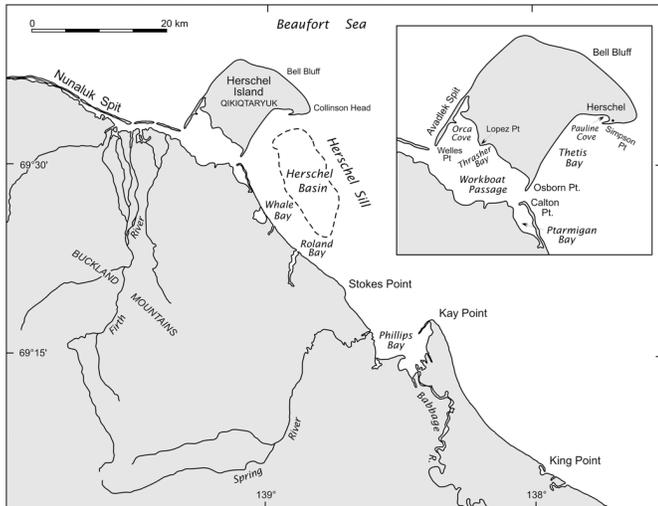


FIG. 4. Herschel Island and the adjacent western Arctic coast.

Investigator's track went well north of Herschel Island before returning south to the islands of the outer Mackenzie Delta (M'Clure, 1856). Sherard Osborn's personal connection with Herschel Island is therefore tenuous at best. Furthermore, Stockton's journal for 5 July 1889 (Stockton, 1889) and the Naval Register (U.S. Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1890) indicate that Lt. Arthur P. Osborn from Ohio was serving under Stockton's command on *Thetis*. Since two other points in Workboat Passage were named for officers of that vessel, we can be almost certain that Stockton named Osborn Point for his lieutenant. When Vilhjalmur Stefansson camped on the point in 1908, he called it Flanders Point, a name that was also recorded by the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913–18 (Stefansson, 1913:39; O'Neill, 1924:12A).

Simpson Point (Fig. 3) was almost certainly named by Stockton for Ensign Edward Simpson (1860–1930), another of his junior officers, whom he sent to sound out Pauline Cove on the morning of 16 August 1889. Bockstoe (1986) notes that Stockton's ice master was a James Simpson, but Stockton (1889:111) wrote in his diary for 16 August that "(i)n the morning Mr. Wells was dispatched to sound out between Herschel Island and the main land, Mr. Lopez following later in order to relieve him, while Mr. Simpson sounded out a small harbor on the eastern side." Stockton designated points on the south coast of the island after Ensigns Lopez and Wells, so it is most likely this point is named after Ensign Edward Simpson. The son of a serving naval officer, Simpson followed his father in reaching the rank of rear admiral in the United States Navy. Simpson's *Yarnlets: The Human Side of the Navy*, published posthumously in 1934, contains some notes regarding his time on *Thetis*, including the visit to Herschel Island.

Welles Point is the official name for the southern tip of Avadlek Spit (Figs. 3, 5). On 16 August 1889, Stockton sent Ensign Rogers Wells, Jr. in a boat to sound the water between Herschel Island and the mainland, now called Workboat Passage (Stockton, 1889:111). According to the United States Navy Register, Ensign Wells, who was from

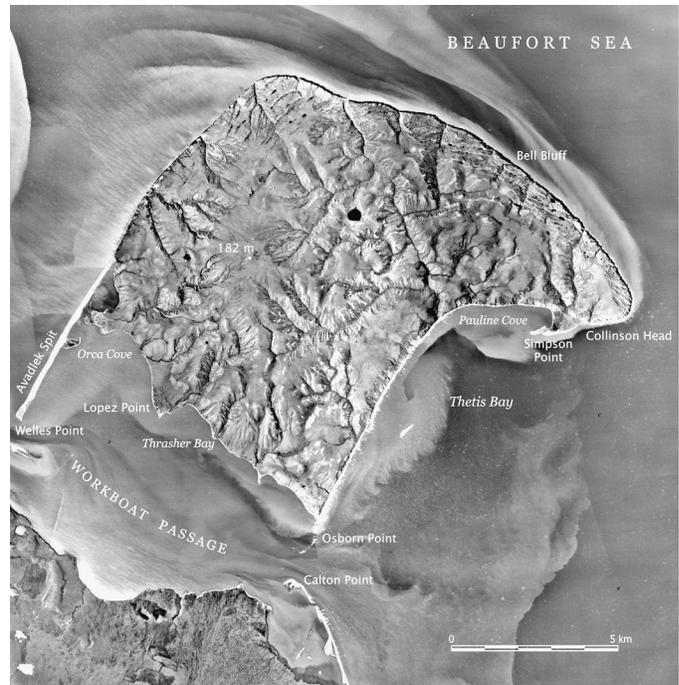


FIG. 5. Aerial photograph mosaic of Herschel Island. Reproduced with the permission of Natural Resources Canada, 2011, courtesy of the National Air Photo Library, from aerial photographs A22974 212-214 and A22975 23-25.

Connecticut, was one of five ensigns onboard *Thetis* (U.S. Bureau of Naval Personnel, 1889, 1890). "Welles" is likely a misprint for "Wells," as the second "e" is missing from the name in both Stockton's log and the Navy Registers.

Bays and Coves

Orca Cove was named by Stockton after the steam bark *Orca* during his 1889 survey of Herschel Island (Fig. 3). *Orca* was one of the seven whaling ships that arrived at Herschel Island on 11 August 1889. The flotilla had left the Colville River delta area after hearing about the potential harvest of bowhead whales in Canadian waters. Most of the vessels returned quickly after *Jesse H. Freeman* found a shoal because they feared the consequences of being stranded so far from home (Bockstoe, 1977), but *Orca* and *Thrasher* remained and were found in Thetis Bay by Stockton. Each vessel caught two bowhead whales and left before winter. *Orca* returned from San Francisco to Herschel Island and the southeastern Beaufort Sea each summer until she was crushed by ice off Alaska in 1897.

Pauline Cove was named by Stockton for his second wife, Pauline Lethilhon King, whom he had married in 1880 (Cogar, 1991). Pauline Stockton was the daughter of Peter Vandervoort King, a prominent New York businessman (Keim, 1887). She died on 4 April 1932 in Baltimore and is buried with Stockton in Arlington Cemetery. Stockton sent Ensign Edward Simpson to sound the harbour, and the survey is published as an inset on the 1890 chart (Fig. 3). The name "Pauline Cove" was in use when Frank Russell (1898) visited Herschel Island in 1894.



FIG. 6. Captain Sir Richard Collinson (1811–83), by Stephen Pearce, 1855. © The National Portrait Gallery, London.

Thetis Bay (Fig. 3) was named by Stockton for USS *Thetis*. *Thetis* was named for the sea nymph of Greek mythology and served in the United States Navy, often in Alaskan waters, until 1897. In 1899, she was transferred to the Revenue Cutter Service and served again off Alaska, often on patrol against seal poaching, until she was decommissioned in 1916. Ironically, the vessel was then purchased by W. & S. Job & Co. of New York City and converted into a sealer, which operated out of Newfoundland until 1950.

Thrasher Bay (Fig. 3) was named by Stockton after the steam bark *Thrasher*, owned by the Pacific Steam Whaling Company of San Francisco, which was part of the whaling fleet that entered the Canadian Beaufort Sea in 1889 and, like *Orca*, remained to cruise for whales after most of the fleet departed. *Thrasher* returned to winter at Pauline Cove in 1894–95 and again—involuntarily—in 1905–06, when several ships, including Amundsen’s *Gjøa*, were caught by freeze-up in early September. *Thrasher* made 21 Arctic voyages from 1884 to 1908. Around 1920, she was re-rigged as a schooner and renamed *Kamchatka* for the Siberian fur trade. Unfortunately, she burned and sank off the Aleutian Islands in 1921 (Bockstoce, 1977:87).

Bell Bluff

The highest portions of the northeastern cliffs of Herschel Island were named Bell Bluff on Stockton’s map (Fig. 3). Ensign John A. Bell from West Virginia was one



FIG. 7. Kublualuk and his family at Herschel Island, 1925. Kublualuk was the last shaman to live at Qikiqtaryuk. Photo courtesy of Yukon Archives, Finnie Family fonds, 81/21, #206.

of Stockton’s officers on *Thetis*. Stockton mentioned Bell in his journal for 7 June 1889, although he did not describe his duties at Herschel Island. The cliffs are almost certainly named after Mr. Bell.

AVADLEK SPIT

The name of this spit (Fig. 5) is derived from the Inuvialuktun word *avalliq*, meaning “farthest away,” or *ualiq*, meaning “farther place” or “farther over there” (R. Allen and R. Gordon, pers. comms. 2010). It is the only feature on Herschel Island that has an official name of Inuvialuktun origin.

CONCLUSION

All but one of the official names for features on Herschel Island were given by Lt. Cdr. Charles H. Stockton following the visit of USS *Thetis* to the island on 15–16 August 1889. We note the self-effacing generosity of Stockton in naming features after his colleagues and his wife and taking no priority for himself. Edward Simpson (1934:145) wrote of him: “Our Captain was a quiet man of cool fine nerve, an excellent seaman and leader, and a good churchman, and discouraged at all times the use of profanity aboard ship.”

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