PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-28

“The Dowagiake” in print by 1833: an American account of Michigan Territory reprinted in Adam Fergusson’s Practical Notes

Michael Urbanski ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828 (https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8183-5828), Project Scroll · Issued 5 November 2026 · Version 1 · doi:10.5281/zenodo.23968685 (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23968685)

SUMMARY

Dowagiac, Michigan, platted beside the Michigan Central’s depot ground in 1848, took the name of the creek. The earliest printed form cited until now was “Dowagiake river” in John T. Blois’s *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan* (1838). Five years earlier the Scottish agriculturist Adam Fergusson printed, as Appendix No. I to his *Practical Notes Made During a Tour in Canada, and a Portion of the United States* (Edinburgh, 1833), an account of the “Territory of Michigan,” “From a small Tract of good authority, published in the States.” Of the south-west it says: “This part of the territory possesses several copious mill-streams, particularly Hog Creek, the Dowagiake, Christianna, Pigeon, Crooked and Portage rivers.” Of Cass County, “a population of about 2000,” it names streams with good mill privileges, “particularly the Dowagiake and Christianna, which are rapid and durable streams,” and a belt of rich timbered land “along the Dowagiake, from its source to its mouth.” The spelling is the one Blois would use.

THE RECORD

1. **Adam Fergusson, *Practical Notes Made During a Tour in Canada, and a Portion of the United States, in MDCCCXXXI* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1833), Appendix No. I, "Territory of Michigan," p. 320**

   > *"[From a small Tract of good authority, published in the States.] … This part of the territory possesses several copious mill-streams, particularly Hog Creek, the Dowagiake, Christianna, Pigeon, Crooked and Portage rivers, a few of which have already been improved, by the erection of saw and grist mills."*

   Internet Archive (Canadiana) · See the record (https://archive.org/details/cihm_35166)

2. **Fergusson, *Practical Notes* (1833), Appendix No. I, p. 330**

   > *"Cass County contains a population of about 2000, and is likewise watered by the St Joseph's River and its branches, several of which afford good mill privileges, particularly the Dowagiake and Christianna, which are rapid and durable streams."*

   Internet Archive (Canadiana) · See the record (https://archive.org/details/cihm_35166)

3. **John T. Blois, *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan* (Detroit, 1838), Cass County**

   > *"Water courses.—The St. Joseph is the principal stream. Christiana river, Corbett's river, Dowagiake river, Putnam's creek."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/gazetteerofstate00bloi)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The creek's name is in print by 1833, five years before Blois, and already spelled "Dowagiake." The same account was reprinted elsewhere in the 1830s; these are copies of one American text, not separate witnesses.

LIMITS

Fergusson reprints the American tract without naming it, its author or its date. Its remark that “the legislature in October last” formed twelve new counties points to the territorial act of October 1829, so the American original was probably printed about 1830. The account gives no meaning for the name.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Internet Archive full text for Dowagiake, Dowagiac, Dowagiack and Dowagiag to 1838; Rogers (1875), the 1882 history and Glover (1906); Vogel, *Indian Names in Michigan* (1986), which gives no early form; web searches (October 2026).

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

“New” means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note’s version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, “How Dowagiac Got Its Name,” *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/how-dowagiac-got-its-name/

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in How Dowagiac got its name (projectscroll.com/news/how-dowagiac-got-its-name/). In the discoveries register:

- `dowagiake-1833` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#dowagiake-1833)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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