

How Do You Pronounce Coppell?

A Discussion of the Different Pronunciations
of Coppell and its Origin and Meaning

By

Philip LaBerge

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This paper is a supplement to a presentation once given on the same subject by Wheelice (Pete) Wilson. Pete was born in Coppell and is a current officer, past President and long time member and dedicated supporter of the Coppell Historical Society.

In 1999, I moved to the Dallas area and took a job in Coppell. The first time that I uttered the name to a local I was quickly and quite sternly corrected, "We don't pronounce it COP-ul like Ted Koppel!"

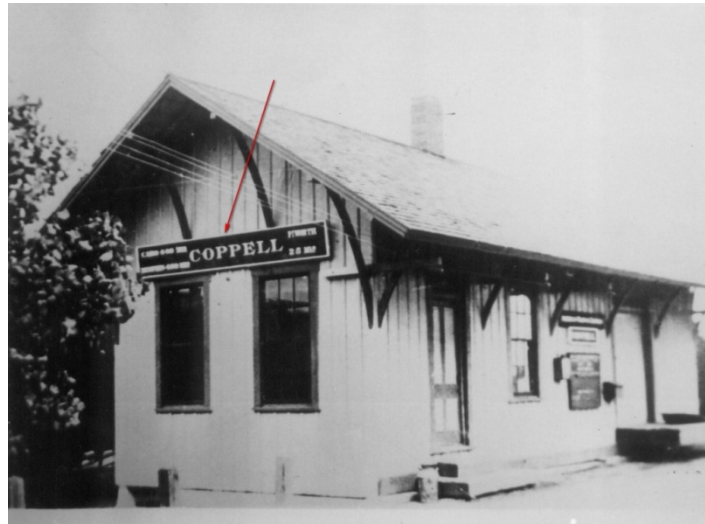
It wasn't until I started coming to the Coppell Historical Society meetings years later and learning more about the history of the city that the pronunciation started to make me curious. Why do we pronounce it the way we do? While many may think that this is an esoteric question, the answer sheds light on the history of the town, its people and the ancestry of those who chose to settle here.

A railroad depot is built and a sign is affixed to it with the name Coppell

In 1888, the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas Railroad built a railroad line through what was then named Gibbs. The stop was called Gibbs Station.



Two years later, they built a railroad depot and placed a sign on it with the name Coppell. The town adopted that name two years later.



At that point, there were probably less than 200 people living in the town. Consider the following:

- In the opening paragraph of Wheelice (Pete) Wilson's paper, *Information about Coppell's Probable Namesake, George Coppell*, he writes:

For about 48 years, I have been trying to find the person for whom Coppell was named. The only information available from old-timers in Coppell was that they heard that the town was named for the engineer of the railroad. I always suspected this was not true. A major new train depot would be named for someone more prominent than that. In 1998, I got my first hint about a possible connection.

- The railroad depot was named after George Coppell, a wealthy banker and investor from New York. George Coppell was a bondholder in the railroad and the stop was named after him; however, he never visited the town. He was born in 1838 in Liverpool, England where today they pronounce the name Coppell like the famous TV news anchor, Ted Koppel. That is most likely the way that he pronounced it.



- Because he lived in Tenafly, New Jersey and worked in New York City, It is unlikely that anyone except investors in the railroad would have come in contact with him personally and would have known the correct pronunciation of his name.
- There is no record of any dedication ceremony for the depot when it opened in 1890.
- When the post office changed its name in 1892 along with the name of the town, it would have fallen on the postmaster, W.O. Harrison, to assure proper spelling of the town, but there is no indication that he would have known the pronunciation of George Coppel's name or who even he was.

In Wheelice (Pete) Wilson's paper, he states,

Old-timers living in the town of Coppel always pronounced Coppel as COP-PELL, with equal emphasis on both syllables. Based on the birthdate of the oldest life-long resident who confirmed this pronunciation (Jewel "Jack" Kirkland, born in 1902), and noting that she affirmed that everyone she knew pronounced it that way, it can be assumed that this was the accepted pronunciation of the town's name from its beginning in 1890.

Newcomers starting to come to Coppel starting the 1960's often pronounced the name ca-PEL, with emphasis on the second syllable, and this makes sense since the word contains two p's and two l's. But to this day, the old pronunciation is still the most prevalent.

While I agree with Pete's synopsis, I differ with his last statement. I think people use them interchangeably today. Two examples would be:

- I live in Coppel (kuh-PEL). (Emphasis on last syllable)
- My children go to Coppel (KAH-PEL) high school. (Equal emphasis on both syllables.)

The pronunciation of Coppel as kuh-PEL (with emphasis on the last syllable) may have been influence by the pronunciation of other towns in Texas with similar names which put the emphasis on the last syllable. As the population started to grow in the 1960's, people coming from other towns in Texas may have pronounced it similar to the names of towns such as:

- Castell – kas TEL
- Cordele – kawr DEL
- Coryell – ko ri EL
- Montell – mahn TEL
- Odell – o DEL
- Parnell – pahr NEL
- Rochelle – ro SHEL

As we all know, there are many towns in Texas that are pronounced differently by locals compared to non-locals. Here are just a few:

- Alvarado pronounced Al Vuh Ray Doe, not Al Vuh Rah Doe
- Bexar pronounced BA är, not Beck Czar
- Boerne pronounced BER ni, not BURN or BORN
- Gruene pronounced green, not Groo-in or groon
- Humble pronounced UHM b'l, not HUM b'l
- Lancaster pronounced Lang k's ter, not Lan Cast Er
- Mexia pronounced Muh Hay Uh, not Mex E Uh
- Navarro pronounced Nuh Ve ro, not Nuh VA ro
- Rowlett pronounced ROW lit, not row LET
- Waxahachie pronounced wawks uh HA chi, not WAX uh hachi

There are many people with the surname Coppell living in England and elsewhere who pronounce it (COP-ul) like Ted Koppel. Rebecca Hearn, the great-granddaughter of Arthur Coppell. Wheelice (Pete) Wilson states in his paper:

Rebecca Hearn, the great-granddaughter of Arthur Coppell, says that she always heard that the family name was pronounced COP-pull, with emphasis on the first syllable.

The Meaning of Coppell

The original spelling of 'Coppell' was most likely 'Copp hyll' in old English.

The town of Coppull, England is located 25 miles northeast of Liverpool where George Coppell was born in 1838. From the paper *A History of Coppull*, written by Hubert Walsh, the author states:

The place name Coppull is a pleonastic name. That is, a name in which both the first and second elements of the name have the same meaning. The name means a "Copped Hill" or a "Hill rising to a peak.

Various spellings of the place name Coppull have been in use. In the 13th century Cophulle and Crophull were used. Cophull was used in the 14th century and in 1444, the modern spelling of the name occurs.

It is believed that the name Coppell is a variant of Coppull since they are both pronounced identically today.

The paper *A History of Coppull* written by Hubert Walsh can be read online at:

<http://www.lan-opc.org.uk/Coppull/downloads/CoppullHistory.pdf>

Pronunciation

The name of Coppell is pronounced differently based on the emphasis one places on its two syllables.

Empahsis on Last Syllable

- kuh-PEL: Example: I live in kuh-PEL.

Equal Emphasis on Both Syllables (with three variants)

- KAH-PEL: pronounced with emphasis on both syllables with 'P' on last syllable. Example: I go to KAH-PEL high.
- KAHP-PEL: pronunciation of 'P' on both syllables. Per Wheelice (Pete) Wilson stated that old timers pronounced it that way.
- KAHP-EL: equal emphasis on both syllables, but 'P' pronounced on first syllable. Example: That is the way that they pronounce it in Coppell, Ontario, Canada. KAHP-EL

Emphasis on First Syllable

- KAHP-ul: emphasis on first syllable and last syllable pronounced "ul" instead of "el".
 - Example: It is pronounced like the last name of a famous TV anchor named Ted Koppel. He was born in Nelson, England, 55 miles from Liverpool. His parents were Jewish and fled Germany with the rise of Nazism. They immigrated to the U.S. in 1953.
 - Here are some links to YouTube videos with people pronouncing the name. You don't need to listen to the entire video, but it is interesting to hear them pronounce the name.
 - the soccer coach Steve Coppell <https://youtu.be/RCA32cfmR7M>
 - the high jumper Harry Coppell <https://youtu.be/hr9Rnjlds38>
 - Example: People in the town of Coppull, Lancashire, England, located 26 miles northeast of Liverpool <https://youtu.be/a5-ADXiQyFw>

Conclusion

The railroad depot that was built in our town in 1890 was named after a wealthy banker and bondholder named George Coppell who never visited here. The family most likely pronounced the name like they do today in England. The family name was pronounced like Ted Koppel. Those living in Coppell were influenced by the pronunciation of other towns in Texas. Coppell is pronounced primarily two ways in the city of Coppell, Texas today:

- Emphasis on last syllable: kuh-PEL: Example: I live in kuh-PEL.
- Equal emphasis on both syllables: KAH-PEL: pronounced with emphasis on both syllables with the P' on last syllable. Example: My children go to KAH-PEL high.

In England, it is most likely pronounced the same way that the Coppell family pronounced it.

- Emphasis on first syllable and use "ul" instead of "el" on the last syllable. KAHP-ul: pronounced like Ted Koppel.

Knowing the different pronunciations of the name Coppell is an interesting facet of the history of our town.