

UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
LIMITED

E/CONF.53/L.59  
6 September 1967

ENGLISH ONLY

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON  
THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
Geneva, 4-22 September 1967  
Item 7 of the agenda

Dual distribution

PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES\*  
(Submitted by the Government of the United States of America)

\* Limited number of copies issued only to participants

GE.67-17910

7. In the narrow rendering of names in, and their close transliteration into, the conventional alphabet, recommended for textual documents and particularly for gazetteers, the diacritical marks listed in 3, 4, 5 and 6 above, should be used. From the broad rendering in, and broad transliteration into the conventional alphabet, appropriate to maps and charts, these marks may be omitted. (This instruction applies only to the conventional alphabet and has no bearing whatever on (e) of the principles of nomenclature.)

#### ALPHABETICAL ORDER

The full conventional alphabet consists of the following thirty-seven symbols: a, b, ch or c, d, dh, e, f, g, gh, h, i, j, k, kh, l, m, n, ñ or ny, ng, o, ö, p, q, r, s, sh, or š, t, th, u, ü, v, w, x, y, z, zh, or ž, (‘), but

names written in it should be filed or arranged in common English alphabetical order, disregarding (‘).

#### DIRECTORATE OF MILITARY SURVEY (WAR OFFICE AND MINISTRY)

The Directorate of Military Survey is responsible for the spelling of names on maps and aeronautical charts. The principles followed are those stated above, as appropriate.

#### HYDROGRAPHIC DEPARTMENT OF THE ADMIRALTY

The Hydrographic Department is the authority on the spelling of the names of features in waters of the United Kingdom falling between the low-water mark and the hundred fathom line. It is also responsible for the spelling of names on hydrographic charts, and follows the principles stated above, as appropriate.

### PAPER PRESENTED BY CANADA\*

Alberta is the most westerly of the three Canadian prairie provinces and the second most westerly province in Canada itself. It entered recorded history comparatively late—in 1754, when the first European explorer, Anthony Henday, crossed the vast prairie hinterland and sighted the Rocky Mountains from the foothills. Alberta did not become a province until 1905, which is in living memory of many people. In those sixty-two years, it has progressed from a predominately rural area to one which is becoming more urban and diversified thanks to the discoveries of oil within the past two decades.

Even if Alberta was a latecomer to the historical scene, it came bearing a rich heritage of place names. The names of Alberta are derived mainly from three sources; Amerindian, French and Anglo-Saxon. Other groups have added to these names over the years, but the first three are the principal ones. The period covered is from the era of the fur-trader and later the missionaries and the time of settlement and railway building, which in its turn extended from the early nineteen-hundreds to the present day. As examples, there are such names as the Saskatchewan (both the north and south Saskatchewan rivers flow through Alberta), meaning “swift current” and derived from the Cree Indian “Kis-is-ska-tche-wan”. There is Lake Wabanum from the Indian word for mirror. Wesaskiwin, another city in the province, derives its name from “hill of peace”. Athabaska means “where there are reeds”. The list is almost endless and these names are in current use today even if they have been anglicized to some extent. The fur trade brought both French and Anglo-Saxon influences. Many French traders worked with the Northwest Company and Hudson’s Bay Company and left their mark upon Alberta, although most French names derive from the active missionary period when the Oblate Fathers were prominent. Lacombe is named after Father Albert Lacombe, OMI, a famous early missionary in Alberta. Lac Ste Anne, Lac Des Arcs, Lac La Nonn all date from this period in names. Isle Lake, a rather poor adaptation of a descriptive name, appears on old maps as “Lac Desisles” and no one knows why this was not retained.

The Anglo-Saxon influence was greatest after the Indian, for Alberta came ultimately to be settled both in fur trade times and later by persons of predominantly British extraction. Alberta itself was named after Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, fourth daughter of Queen Victoria and

wife of the Marquis of Lorne, who was Governor-General of Canada from 1878 to 1883. This gifted man wrote a sonnet dedicated to his wife in which he gave the name to the province. Edmonton was named after Edmonton, Middlesex, England (now a suburb of London), by a Hudson’s Bay trader, William Tomison, as a compliment to his chief clerk, John Peter Pruden, who hailed from Edmonton, England. The list is endless and would demand a paper in itself to do it justice.

The representation of Alberta on the geographic boards of Canada was originally limited to one member who was on the early Geographic Board of Canada and who did what he could to keep the central board in Ottawa informed. During that formative period, many names came into use—in many instances names that would better have been forgotten but which came into being through common usage. At first, there seem to have been no definite rules. This state of affairs however, informal though seemingly effective, continued until the close of the second World War.

It was in 1947, following one or two unfortunate incidents, that the Geographic Board of Alberta came into being. It had been felt that the naming of features was too haphazard and that the one person acting as the agent was likely to be subject to pressures from groups and individuals anxious to perpetuate memories of events and persons unworthy of such honours. The board early established liaison with the central board at Ottawa and, in 1949, the Geographical Names Act was passed setting out the duties and responsibilities for correlating, collecting and ruling on new names and controversial names already in existence. The legislative librarian acts as secretary to the board and Alberta member for the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names; three other members are appointed by order-in-council, while the fourth, the director of surveys, is, like the legislative librarian, a statutory member.

Since its formation, the board has been responsible not only for new names of geographical features but also for the checking of existing names. This involves not only the correct spelling but also the correct use and application of these names. In carrying out this work, it aims to cooperate with other levels of government—federal, provincial and municipal—as well as with all organizations and individuals concerned with geographical features. Examples of some of these are government departments, railway companies, outdoor mountaineering clubs and conservation authorities. To this end the board has built up a useful liaison with these groups.

\* The original text of this paper, prepared by E. J. Holmgren, Secretary, Geographic Board of Alberta and member of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, appeared as document E/CONF. 53/L.59.

The question may now be asked, why a provincial board? After all, the federal committee should be sufficient with one member in each province. The answer is that a single member in his own province is too often exposed to pressures and blandishments of individuals and organizations who might wish to perpetuate honours where such are not entirely forthcoming. Such pressures have been brought to bear upon single members who have all too often been unable to resist them. Secondly, the axiom that two heads are better than one holds true, and a thorough discussion of the merits of a name makes it easier to reach a wise decision. It should be clearly stated here that the Geographic Board of Alberta in no way intends to impose names upon features. Rather, it invites suggestions concerning new names and also arbitrates to the best of its ability any dispute that may arise. This is not always easy, for emotions can run high and it is sometimes best to let the matter rest until they have cooled. Some of the other provinces of Canada have taken steps to establish local geographic boards and in so doing they help the Canadian Permanent Committee, in that it will have the advice of the local bodies.

The relations between the Geographic Board of Alberta and the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names have always been very close. Close liaison is maintained, each body advising the other of new names or any changes in names that might appear. The Canadian

Permanent Committee often sends maps to Alberta for checking. These are verified so that as much information as possible about the location and source of the name is collected. On the other hand, if a new name is suggested and approved in Alberta, it is forwarded to the Canadian Permanent Committee for endorsement. If names are suggested by the Canadian Permanent Committee, they may be approved by the Alberta Geographic Board and subsequently endorsed by the Canadian Permanent Committee. This simple procedure has much to recommend it. There is always liaison between neighbouring provinces where names are close to the borders of the provinces concerned or common to both provinces.

It is expected that the Geographic Board of Alberta will continue its useful work in the future. One of its projects, which it hopes will eventually be realized, is the publication of a new edition of *Place names of Alberta*. This appeared in 1928, with derivations of all the names then known in Alberta and is of course out of date. The Alberta Geographic Board keeps a card file of names and their derivations, to which new information is added as it is received.

---

NOTE. A booklet setting out the principles and procedures of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names is available upon request from: The Director, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, 601 Booth Street, Ottawa, Canada.

#### PAPER PRESENTED BY BELGIUM<sup>1</sup>

When the Commission (now the Royal Commission) on Toponymy and Dialectology was first set up in 1926, its Flemish section was concerned at the anarchy prevailing in the spelling used in gazetteers of Dutch-language geographical names.

Except in the case of large centres of population, names of communes were written in an archaic form, entirely out of keeping with the modern rules of Dutch spelling. In addition, there was fantastic variation in the spelling used even in official circles.

Efforts at modernization had been made from time to time on the initiative of numerous Flemish cultural groups, but no permanent official solution had been found.

In 1928, a special commission composed of the Flemish section's toponymists embarked on a study of the problem. The results appeared in a booklet<sup>2</sup> tens of thousands of which were distributed, and the proposed gazetteer was approved and used by all the Flemish cultural organizations without exception.

The reform was fiercely opposed by conservative elements for a number of years but was officially accepted by the Belgian Government in 1937 and made compulsory for all official purposes.

Following the Dutch spelling reform of 1954, the gazetteer was simplified as necessary and these changes, too, have been officially recognized.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The original text of this paper, prepared in French by H. J. van de Wijer, Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology, Flemish section, appeared as document E/CONF.53/L.65.

<sup>2</sup> H. J. Van de Wijer, *De Vlaamsche gemeentenamen in modern spelling*, Louvain, Instituut voor Naamkunde, 1929.

<sup>3</sup> The new (bilingual) gazetteer is published annually by the National Statistical Institute. See "Official population census for the kingdom as at 31 December 1966", *Moniteur belge* (19 July 1967).

In general, the principles of the new gazetteer are also applied to the names of hamlets appearing in official publications. There is still, however, some work to be done on these names, and the publication of an up-to-date list of names of hamlets should come up for consideration in the near future.

The official orthography is normally used for street names as a result of the supervisory authority conferred by the Belgian Ministry of the Interior on the two sections (Flemish and Walloon) of the Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology.

A modern bilingual dictionary of Belgian communes has been in existence for several years.<sup>4</sup> In addition to much useful administrative information, this work contains the official gazetteer of communes and shows, for each commune, the names of hamlets and principal features (streets etc.). It was prepared by an official of the National Statistical Institute and is a useful working tool, but is in need of thorough revision.

The situation with regard to the Belgian ordnance survey map is excellent.

Since 1951, the two sections of the Commission<sup>5</sup> have maintained fruitful co-operation with the Military Geographical Institute of Brussels, under the Ministry of National Defence, on the linguistic and orthographic revision and modernization of the geographical names to be included in the new edition of the Belgian ordnance survey map on the scale of 1:25,000.

Some two thirds of the Flemish communes have been examined so far, and probably the same number of Walloon communes. Once this rather laborious task has

---

<sup>4</sup> A. Houet, *Dictionnaire moderne géographique, administratif, statistique des communes belges* (Brussels, F. van Muysewinkel).

<sup>5</sup> On the Walloon side, under the direction of Mr. J. Herbillon; on the Flemish side, under the direction of the author. Both are members of the Royal Commission on Toponymy and Dialectology.