



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.61/L.35
6 March 1972

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
London, 10-31 May 1972
Item 7 of provisional agenda

THE QUEBEC GEOGRAPHICAL BOARD AND THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Paper submitted by the Government of Canada*

The Geographical Board was first established by order-in council No. 1373 of 15 November 1912. Act No. 10, chapter 24, assented to on 14 February 1920, authorized the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council to officially establish the Board, to nominate its members and assign it its powers and duties. After the Act had been assented to, the first ministerial decree, No. 574, was approved to this effect on 6 April 1920.

The Geographical Board, which is represented on the Executive Council by the Minister of Lands and Forests, is responsible for selecting official geographical names in Quebec. It checks whether place names are correct and in current usage. If necessary, it checks established usage in situ by an oral inquiry. It re-establishes names by spelling them according to the norms of the French language. In addition to information obtained from miscellaneous sources, the Board may be called upon to carry out supplementary research into certain geographical names, either by communicating in writing with the persons involved (indirect inquiry), or by appointing a representative to interview people on the spot (direct inquiry).

For the last few years the Board has stressed the need for very thorough inquiries into the forms used in both old and new documents and into traditional forms, which are among the most valuable of stable elements. In accordance with the provisions of the law, the Board's decisions are subject to the approval of the Minister and become operative after their publication in the Gazette officielle du Québec.

The most important requirement for a map is that it should faithfully represent the regions of which it is in some way a picture; for this it is

* Paper prepared by J. Poirier, Secretary of the Quebec Geographical Board.

necessary to give priority in cartographic papers and documents to names in current usage. A map would rapidly become incomprehensible if amendments or changes were made to geographical names having stable oral forms.

The rule that names in local usage should be recorded on maps is one that should be followed as closely as possible. By so doing, the Board hopes to eliminate any risk of error and of arbitrary establishment of names.

I. NAMES TO BE COLLECTED

It is necessary to distinguish between the names of inhabited places and those of natural topographical features. The former are better known, precisely because of the frequency with which they are used. The latter identify geographical features such as lakes, rivers, mountains, hills, capes and, in certain cases, artificial constructions, such as bridges, fly-overs, tunnels, viaducts, etc.

The documentation to be collected should relate to the following points in particular:

- (a) Names of localities, hamlets and towns, of rows and, in general, of groups of houses;
- (b) Orography: peaks, hills, rocks, dunes, etc.;
- (c) Hydrography: lakes, rivers, streams, bays, coves, falls, rapids, ponds, pools, marshes, etc.;
- (d) Woods, nurseries, gardens, parks, terraces, cross-roads (circuses), paths, etc.;
- (e) Public roads or thoroughfares with well-known names, bridges, dams, etc.;
- (f) A number of other small geographical features, such as coves, viewpoints, scenic attractions, etc.

II. NAMES OF MUNICIPALITIES

It is important, before the name of a municipality is definitively fixed, to consider the historical events associated with the place or region, the natural topographical details, and the possibility that there is already in existence a name given to some particular spot nearby. These basic points must not be overlooked during research and, in addition, one should avoid as far as possible:

- (a) The use of a name already found in the Repertoire géographique du Québec;
- (b) Names which are too long;
- (c) The use of the cardinal points;

(d) Names which begin or end with the word "ville", unless it forms an integral part of the name itself: Banville, Verville, Villeneuve, Villeroy, Villemontel, etc.;

(e) Hybrid forms, i.e., those which are made up of elements from different languages;

(f) Use of the names of living persons;

(g) Appellations made up of names and forenames.

To sum up, careful research will make it possible, in most cases, to find a name which evokes an important phase in the history of the municipality or is connected with some particular feature of the area. The cadastral survey, in particular, is a source of highly valuable documentation which can be used to great advantage when selecting the name of a municipality.

It may happen that the public or authorities of a town or an inhabited area show a desire to change the name of the place in which they live or of a geographical feature.

Several reasons may be invoked by municipal administrations, public or private bodies and the population for changing the name of their municipality. In some cases, the old name is too long, in others, the name has an unpleasant sound or causes confusion; sometimes, it seems to be pejorative. The growing importance of the municipality or the elimination of a homonym are also good reasons for the desire to change geographical names which are considered obsolete or inaccurate.

It is not permissible for a change of name to affect the rights or responsibilities of the municipalities or taxpayers. A change of name becomes valid after publication in the Gazette officielle du Québec of a notice bearing the signature of the Mayor and of the Secretary-Treasurer of the municipality involved and after publication of the order of the Executive Council.

It is customary for the proposed name or names to have some connexion with local history or with the topography of the area. Research to this end may be easily undertaken by consulting regional monographs, parish archives, local groups and organizations, firms, clubs, chambers of commerce and other associations, as well as elderly citizens.

Lakes, water-courses, islands, hills and other geographical features may sometimes undergo a change of name, and this often happens unnoticed. It can also happen that the local population or authorities request a change of name, mainly to avoid repetition of commonplace terms such as long, croche, gros, grand etc., or to perpetuate the name of a citizen or some local dignitary.

The sponsors of such a move are required to make a written request to the Board, providing adequate information on the following points: the exact location of the geographical feature; the correct spelling of the proposed name; the source or origin of the name.

It is essential that the applicants provide all available information on the topography of the geographical feature or on established local usage. Wherever possible, a copy of the municipal council resolution supporting the project should accompany the application.

III. WRITING OF AMERINDIAN NAMES

On the basis of a resolution of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, of 22 November 1967, the Geographical Board has for the present adopted the principle of transcribing Indian toponyms by a system of phonemic notation. Eskimo place names give rise to several problems, notably that of their transcription. To avoid the difficulties inherent in writing these names, the Board adopted, in 1964, the principle of rational spelling of Eskimo place names, using the standardized system. The basic principle of this standardized orthography consists of establishing a writing system which conforms to the structure of the Eskimo language, and this is now applied by the Board to names collected recently.

IV. NAMES OF POST OFFICES

It is, above all, the local population and authorities who should propose new names for post offices. Those concerned are required to provide precise details on the origin of the names submitted. Where there are several suggestions, the application must indicate which one has the widest support.

Although post offices come under federal jurisdiction, the Geographical Board receives the proposed names from the central administration department of the Ministry of Posts, and, bearing in mind that the names of post offices are closely linked to the names of municipalities, it studies them and makes its recommendations to the Ministry.

The names submitted must be distinctive and exclusive in order to avoid any confusion in the processing and dispatch of mail. Additions to place names used to denote post offices are only permitted when they are necessary to distinguish more clearly between post offices with identical or similar sounding names.

In the case of an officially established municipality, the proposal must be supported by the municipal council. In all other cases, it must take the form of a request.