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EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE REPORT
OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS *

Problems of Domestic Standardization of Geographical Names

- (a) How to determine the actual name and its correct writing. What weight should be given to published usage, local usage established by field investigation or historical evidence under various conditions?

At present, the spelling, form and application of 95 per cent of the geographical names in Canada are accepted. Standardization has been proceeding for seventy years, yet field investigations disclose variations in local usage, unrecorded names of long standing, locally accepted corruptions and names no longer known or in use. The investigative methods used in field studies in Canada are by interview, often followed up or expanded by correspondence. Avoidance of leading questions in interviews is essential, as is also the development of the acumen of the interviewer in determining the competence of those he interviews. Only occasionally is significant illiteracy encountered, to the degree that the correct spelling of a name cannot be verified, but semi-illiteracy or disinterest may mislead the unwary interviewer.

Conflict may occur between local usage and establishment in documents, in particular maps. It is infrequent that the local residents are conversant with the nomenclature established on topographic maps, though the owners of small pleasure craft or commercial fishermen are usually well aware of toponymic errors on navigation charts. Commercial road maps reflect the nomenclature on topographic maps and tend to advertise local names more widely than other kinds of published maps.

In most cases, names with local or public usage should take precedence over names with establishment in documents, even if the latter demonstrably represents the earliest historical name. It has been found that local residents resist any attempt to have a name forced upon them that is different from that in local use. This lack of success in name-changing is naturally most pronounced when an entirely different name is proposed, but occasionally even minor changes in form result in enthusiastic opposition.

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Field interviews are not always satisfactory, as polls may not provide conclusive results. Some arbitrary decision must be taken in such cases and the action publicized locally. The cooperation of local newspapers, highway officials responsible for erecting signs, local historical societies or community groups can all be used to promote the selected name and eventually achieve some measure of general acceptance.

It is unlikely that local interviews can contribute effectively to the selection of the most appropriate orthography for a native name. Residents are not likely to be seriously opposed to minor changes in the spelling of Indian names, except for operators of commercial establishments who make use of the name in promoting their businesses. With other names, however, historical records may indicate that a corrupted form of the original name has unwittingly gained acceptance. If the change is slight, some effort should be made to correct it, but a radical change should not be forced on the local residents simply for the sake of historical accuracy.

- (b) How to determine the extent of physical features to which names properly apply, such as the limits of a mountain range or of a bay. Again, what weight should be given to published usage, local usage or historical evidence?

The application of a name to a feature, especially those types of features with contentious limits (ranges, bays, sounds, streams, archipelagoes, plateaus, etc.), may require discussion between specialists in physiography, international law or surveyors before a suitable agreement is reached. The extent of the larger features are not usually of concern to the general public who may, however, have certain strong opinions about the application of a local name for the entirety or a portion of a stream.

The limits of a mountain range or plateau should be decided as far as possible on the basis of physiographic homogeneity. Significant topographic breaks should form the boundaries but if published usage (in explorers' journals, geological reports, etc.) transgresses the natural limits, it may be desirable to extend the application of the name. A water feature such as a bay or sound is normally enclosed from headland to headland; if published usage in a pilot or other navigational document is long established, the application should not be altered except after careful consideration or if it is obviously quite inappropriate.

One of the principles of nomenclature in Canada specifically states that to apply different names to different sections of a river is an undesirable practice, even when the different sections are separated by lakes. Obviously this principle cannot be implemented in all cases, but our practice is to attempt to apply the same name from headwaters to mouth. In settled areas, persons living near the headwaters of relatively small streams may identify it by a name different from those persons living downstream. One name may have as much validity as the other and the only solution may be to make an arbitrary decision and attempt to convince those using the discarded name to accept the official one. Depending on the circumstances, it may be possible to apply the upstream name to a portion of the river as far down as its junction with an unnamed tributary, and to apply the downstream name to the headwaters of that tributary. In

most cases, however, it is preferable that the tributary should have a name different from the trunk stream.

As in the previous problem, greater weight is given to local usage than to other factors, but in unsettled regions, a name with establishment on historical maps or in old reports should be retained in preference to a newly adopted name.

(c) How to select one name from several having some basis for acceptance

Local usage should apply in the selection of one of several alternate names. If such local usage is not decisive, the principle involving duplication might be employed, or that concerning brevity.

(d) What to do about (1) names for parts of natural features that have names in their entirety, and (2) names for large features for which only parts have names

In the case of streams, the comments under (b) are applicable here. It is emphasized that this is a particularly difficult problem in settled areas, and it is Canadian practice that one name only be applied to the main trunk of a stream. In the case of lakes, it is preferable to name the whole using the generic term *lake* and parts of the whole using the generic terms *bay*, *arm* or *inlet*. If two lakes at the same level are joined by a narrow channel, each may be named using the generic *lake*. The general principle of unambiguous identification of each entity governs this problem.

(e) How to treat existing names from unwritten languages or from minority languages (written or unwritten) or from dialects and regional forms of the principal languages

In Canada, this concerns names derived from Indian and Eskimo words, and has been a problem ever since the first Europeans began transliterating the native names they encountered into the English or French alphabets. The lack of written languages and the wide variety of dialects gave rise to innumerable spellings for the same idea or thing. These variants became established on maps and in the literature and became accepted and stabilized especially in the more settled southern fringe of the country. Where different spellings for the same meanings are widely separated geographically, it is preferable that no attempt be made to standardize them. In many cases, the names may have only a spurious resemblance to one another and originally may have had quite different meanings, now lost in obscurity. Even in closely adjacent regions, the different orthographies used by French and English have resulted in slightly differing forms of the same names e.g., *Timiskaming* in Ontario, *Témiscamingue* in Quebec; *Restigouche* in New Brunswick, *Ristigouche* in Quebec. Where such variants are firmly fixed, they should be accepted.

(f) How to choose between syntactical or grammatical variations of the same name

Not applicable in Canadian toponymy.

(g) What to do about optional parts of certain names which serve as part of titles or to distinguish places of the same name

Canadian policy is to insist that the whole of the approved name be used on maps or in documents and to discourage the use of "optional" name elements entirely. Fortunately there are very few names which allow this problem to arise. One type of name includes those having the prefix *Fort*. For example, *Fort Simpson* is the approved name and *Simpson* is incorrect usage. In actual practice, *there is no option*. Colloquial variants occur, such as "The Hat" for *Medicine Hat*, "Tuk" for *Tuktoyaktuk* or "P.O.V." for *Povungnituc*. The names of post offices serving some communities differ from the statutory name of the settlement, such as *Niagara-on-the-lake* (p.o.) for *Niagara* and *Valleyfield* (p.o.) for *Salabry-de-Valleyfield*. These differences are necessary to eliminate the possibility of misdirection of mail, but only the community name would appear on official maps.

(h) What criteria should be established for retention of established names vs. substitution of new names?

The Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names recently approved an addition to the *Guiding Principles of Nomenclature* as follows: "Established names which have proved acceptable and satisfactory should not be changed or altered." It is considered justifiable to change a name that is blatantly unacceptable because of the likelihood of confusion due to duplication, or because it has become objectionable due to changing mores. Minor alterations may be effected for the sake of grammatical purity or the discovery that a feature had been named using the wrong spelling in commemorating a person. Occasionally the Committee will advise that the old name be printed on maps in brackets in conjunction with the new one, to allow proper identification until the new name becomes accepted.

(i) How much control of commemorative naming should be exercised, and in what manner?

The principles of nomenclature which guide the decisions of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names include one concerning personal names, which reads as follows:

"Personal names should not be used unless it is in the public interest to honour a person by applying his name to a geographical feature. The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Ownership of land should never in itself be grounds for the application of the owner's or donor's name to a geographical feature contained therein."

Though this is not a mandatory regulation, the intent is to discourage the practice of naming features after living persons. The Committee views this principle as a protection against political pressure. Each violation of this principle establishes a precedent and makes it more difficult to reject subsequent questionable proposals. In settled areas, it may be a gracious gesture to commemorate the names of worthy pioneer families. In unsettled regions, Canadian practice has been to commemorate the names of

Canadian servicemen who died in the service of their country during World War II. Nearly 7,000 such names have been adopted. Nevertheless, identification of the feature is the prime reason and commemoration the secondary one. Occasionally, a prominent feature is named to honour a person for outstanding public service and in such cases there may be no urgent, practical need to identify the feature; in so doing, previously unnamed features are selected. It is rare that approval is given to the naming of a feature for a person who is still in public life.

(j) What to do about duplication of names, and when is it excessive?

Avoidance of duplication of names is considered a most important aspect of the standardization of names in Canada. Non-duplication of names of populated places is of course the primary concern, for this is a potential cause of confusion, especially to the postal authorities or transportation agencies. It is unavoidable with some older names which are closely similar (*Saint John*, New Brunswick; *St. John's*, Newfoundland; *Saint-Jean*, Quebec) or identical (*Windsor* in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland): their location in different provinces allows discrimination. New names of populated places, however, are carefully considered to prevent duplication.

Duplication of names of natural features is less strict, the general policy being to avoid duplication of the names of major features within a province, whereas for a minor feature in a settled area, the limit need not be beyond the area of a small administrative unit such as a township or parish. Many examples occur of officially approved duplications. Two major rivers in Canada bear the toponym *Churchill*: they are 1,300 miles apart and thus are unlikely to be confused. *King Peak* occurs in British Columbia and adjacent Yukon Territory; they are 600 miles apart in unsettled country. There are twenty-seven officially recognized *Mud Lakes* listed in the *Gazetteer of Ontario*; another seventy-eight are listed by cross reference to the official names, indicating sometime usage of the name. The decision is often a subjective one dependent partly on the prevalence of public usage and exceptions are approved only when it is considered that no confusion may result.

(k) How to choose between systematic rendition vs. retention of forms in being, when they differ

As mentioned above (e), no consistent standardized orthography was available until recently for Eskimo names in Canada. Linguists have now agreed on an orthography which was developed mainly in northern Quebec and the eastern Arctic but is applicable across the whole extent of Eskimo territory. Names of Eskimo origin which come up for consideration on new maps, or as new proposals, are approved according to the new orthography. The Province of Quebec, engaged in the development of their northern district and in the preparation of the *Gazetteer of Quebec*, is changing all Eskimo names, no matter how well established in public use, into the new orthography. In some cases it takes a discerning mind to comprehend that the former *Keglo* is shown as *Queglo*, *Korok* as *Corok*, *Kogaluk* as *Cogaluc*. In the Northwest Territories, among other changes, *Takiyuak* has become *Takijuq*, but no attempt has yet been made to review the orthography of the great majority of established Eskimo names.

The orthography of many Indian names in Quebec is also being altered, such as Nakwagami to *Naquagami*, Nestawkanaw to *Nestaocano*, Papachouesati to *Pepeshquasati*, Manuan to *Manouane*, Ashuapmuchuan to *Chamouchouane*, Kowatstakau to *Caouatstacau*.

- (l) Shall printing form for names be made uniform and shall it agree with printing form for the language as a whole?

In general, Canadian practice is to separate qualifying parts of a name, but there are exceptions where the unification of words has become accepted, e.g., *Thickwood Hills*, *Blackwater Creek*, *Greytrout Lake*, *Firetrail Creek*, *Redpine Island*, *Hanginghide Creek*, *Siamile Brook*. There should be no difference between the form of a name on a map and that in running text. The only concession made to cartographers is to endorse the abbreviation *St* or *Ste* for Saint or Sainte in names of settlements or features. The generic term, of course, may be abbreviated at the discretion of the map producer.

- (m) What principles or policies can be adopted to reduce subjectivity in deciding names?

Subjectivity in selecting new names is unavoidable. All names, except truly descriptive names, are to a greater or lesser degree contrived.

- (n) How to bring about local acceptance of nationally standardized names

Under a democratic form of government, any attempt to bring name changes into acceptance by legislation will inevitably be frustrating to the standardizing body and irritating to the people concerned. Even slight changes in spelling or form of a name, no matter how well justified by grammatical rules or historical evidence, may evoke strong opposition (*Cortes Island*, B.C. is known locally as *Cortez Island*. Despite a decision of long standing, a recent complaint from local residents stated their preference for the form *Cortez*.)

- (o) How to determine and express the location of geographic entities to a precision necessary for all needs

For gazetteer purposes, Canadian practice is to locate geographic entities to the nearest minute. This is more than adequate for many large features and adequate for the smallest feature. There is seldom any need for any greater precision for named entities, in comparison with the necessity for high precision for benchmarks, geodetic stations, survey monuments, etc.

- (p) How to set up a standard designating procedure which will define geographical entities consistently and unambiguously

Geographic features, in general, are what they are considered to be by the local people or those who come into direct contact with them. There is no precise definition of a *creek* in English-speaking countries. Locally, it is usually thought of as a stream less in volume and/or length than a river. But no firm rule may be laid down as to when a stream should be called a creek and when it should be called a river. A creek in one part of the country may be larger than a river in another part. A creek is a creek

if people refer to it as a creek. A *coulee* in western Canada may be either the valley containing a permanent or a seasonal stream, usually the latter, or it may refer to the water-course itself. It is recognized that this problem requires research. It may develop that some designator terms defy standardization in a national glossary.

- (q) (1) How to write the names of all entities so that generic terms are distinguishable from designations accompanying names

Canadian practice is to indicate in gazetteers the kind of entity identified by a name having no generic part. If no generic term is listed in the name column (*The Palisades, The Gap, Hen and Chickens*), the user must assume that this is the whole of the name as officially approved. The designation column defines the feature (peaks, passage, rocks).

- (q) (2) How to write the names of all entities so that abbreviations are unambiguous

Abbreviations must be nationally standardized and agreement reached between the names agency and the map-producing agencies so that there can be no ambiguity. The only problem of this nature in Canadian nomenclature is Brook (Bk.) and Branch (Br.) in mapping practice, Brook (Br.) and Branch (not abbreviated) in gazetteers.

(r) Not applicable in Canadian toponymy.

(s) Not applicable in Canadian toponymy.

(t) Not applicable in Canadian toponymy.

- (u) How to provide such useful information on names as gender, position of stress and pronunciation

In Canada, no need exists for information on gender which is of importance in French language toponymy. The terminology logically follows French grammatical rules. In the matter of pronunciation, the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names is assisting the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in revising a handbook for announcers, showing stress and pronunciation for the more commonly used Canadian toponyms.

- (v) How to set up a name-standardizing body in a country that does not have one

The standardizing names agency for Canada was created in 1897 and having passed through several functional reorganizations was established in 1961 as the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. This committee includes representatives from federal government agencies with interests in nomenclature and a representative appointed by each of the ten provinces.

In setting up a names-standardization agency where no such organization presently exists, the main criteria to be considered should be *authority*, *workability* and *publicity*. Authority over all geographical names coming under the jurisdiction of the country should be vested by statute in the names agency and all government departments should be required to abide

by the decisions of this agency. Thus there must be some method of effective liaison between the names agency and those government bodies responsible for producing maps and charts (whether topographic, hydrographic or specialized maps), erecting highway signs, surveying, producing scientific or economic reports in which geographical names are used, planning commissions and archival institutions.

It is suggested that the advisory body should be composed of representatives of all agencies concerned with mapping, national archives and postal authorities and might well include specialists in geography and/or history from within or outside of government. These members should be appointed in the enacting legislation by virtue of their positions as executive directors of the various government agencies and provision made to appoint the extra-government members. Care should be taken to select the latter on the basis of their professed interest or competence; it should be stressed that their appointment is a working rather than an honorary function. It would be the responsibility of the names agency to adjudicate on all matters of contentious names and to formally recommend all new names or name changes. The names agency would be guided in its decisions by a set of rules of nomenclature which would be the first duty of the names agency to formulate, and it is suggested that they should be based on a thoughtful consideration of the various regulations presently in use by countries with names bodies of long standing, taking into account special circumstances or problems of their own country.

It is to be expected that the members of the names body will have other more pressing responsibilities and cannot be expected to devote a great deal of their time to the execution of decisions and none at all to the maintenance of records. Therefore it is recommended that a working staff to service the names body be established, headed by a competent secretary, whose responsibility would be the supervision of the day-to-day processing of names, maintenance of records and, with experience, to act on behalf of the names body in deciding on routine, non-contentious names.

It is recommended that the Minister of the Government responsible for the names body should not be required to personally approve all name decisions. It seems preferable that he delegate this authority to the chairman of the names body or the appointed secretary, reserving the right to make the final pronouncement on any particular name which might create public controversy or potential embarrassment to the Government. It is also suggested that unnecessary delay may result from the inclusion in the legislation of a requirement that all name decisions become final only after publication in the Press or a State gazette.

Name decisions must be disseminated in some manner so as to publicize them as widely as possible and promote their country-wide acceptance and use. This may be done to some degree by their appearance in an official State gazette but should also be followed or accompanied by the preparation and publication of a national gazetteer, revised from time to time as the need may arise. This gazetteer should identify each named entity by name, designate the appropriate generic term, and locate it by some system of geographical co-ordinates. It may be convenient to publish current decisions at regular or irregular intervals in the interim between revisions of the national gazetteer.