

UNITED NATIONS

---

Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names

*Fourteenth Session*  
*Geneva, 17-26 May 1989*

**WORKING PAPER**

---

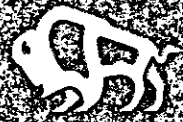
NO. 68  
19 May 1989

Agenda item 5

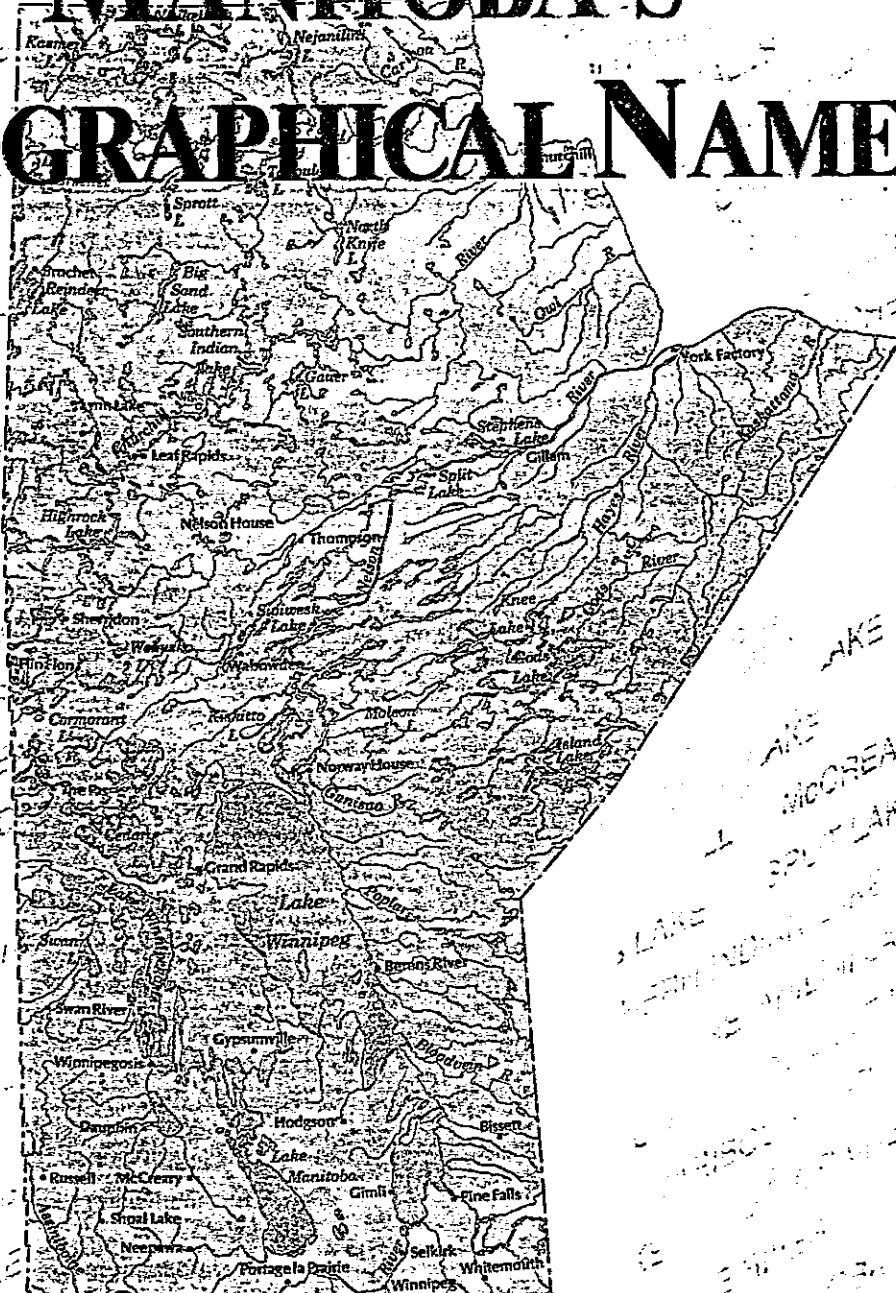
MANITOBA'S  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Prepared by  
Manitoba Geographical Names Program

Submitted by  
Helen Kerfoot, CPCGN Secretariat, Canada



# MANITOBA'S GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

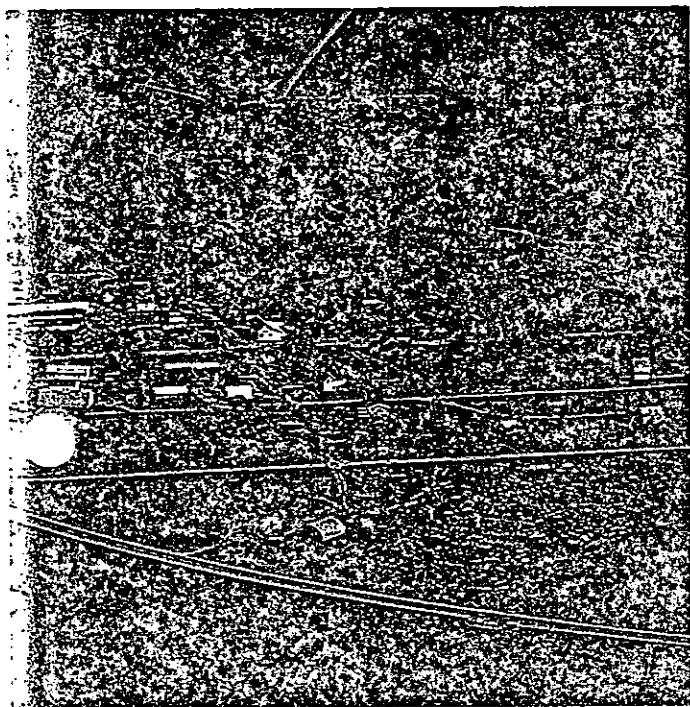


**GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES ARE NOT JUST WORDS ON  
MAPS AND SIGNS BUT ARE VITAL COMMUNICATION  
TOOLS AND IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF CULTURE.**

## EFFECTS OF OUR CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Visualize each geographical name as the title of a story revealing some aspect of Manitoba's cultural or natural heritage. The romance of the fur trade is remembered in such names as Portage la Prairie, Fort Gary, Norway House and York Factory. The cultural mosaic is illustrated by the names Blumenort, Gimli, Ile des Chênes, Scandinavia, Selkirk, Shamattawa and Zhoda. Among our 14,000 official names are many that suggest a physical characteristic of the landscape, such as Sickie Lake, Eight Foot Falls, Long Point and Hollowrock Island.

Geographical names are not just words on maps and signs, but are vital communication tools. Consistency and accuracy are essential in referring to places in the province to prevent confusion in everyday business and recreational activities.



### Westbourne

The names of many communities established during the late 1800s can be traced to their post offices or railway stations. These important service centres were named for postmasters (Holland — A.C. Holland), homesteaders (Morden - Alvey Morden) and Prime Ministers (Laurier - Sir Wilfred Laurier). They were also named for local features (Oak Bluff), hometowns (Petersfield from Petersfield, England) or the settlers' dreams of grandeur (Dominion City). Some were named at the whim of railway officials during construction of main and branch lines. For example, the Canadian National Railway stations westward from Portage la Prairie were named in alphabetical order starting with Arona, Bloom, and Caye, ending at Zeneta, Saskatchewan where the cycle began again with Atwater. Often the local settlers resented these names because they superceded those of their schools and churches. One instance is the imposition of the name Gregg for a station, even though the school was known as Dempsey and the church as Kerfoot.

## CANADIAN PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

To address the problems created by duplication and inconsistency in naming practices, the Geographic Board of Canada was created in 1897. Its successor today is the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN).

This committee is composed of twenty-three members representing all provinces and territories as well as various federal departments dealing with surveys, mapping, translation, archives, parks, defence and native affairs.

In Manitoba, the Minister of Natural Resources is responsible for geographical naming and has delegated the Director of Surveys to be the provincial member on the CPCGN and to administer the Manitoba Geographical Names Program.

## MANITOBA GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES PROGRAM

The program and branch support staff administer and maintain all nomenclature records, an automated names information system, a resource library, supplementary name location maps, a bibliography of name studies and a commemorative names project.

The objectives of the program are: to ensure the application of uniform standards and principles to geographical naming throughout the province, to conduct research on proposed and established names and to provide an information centre on nomenclature for the use of both government personnel and the general public.

### Geographical Names Information System

The program has taken advantage of computer technology and equipment to develop several computer based files. One of the master files is an alphabetical listing of names which provides additional data on the type of feature, the name's approval date and its location references. Examples of other listings generated from the master file are:

- a cumulative supplement to the *Gazetteer of Canada — Manitoba*
- separate listings by type of feature i.e. towns, villages, localities, lakes, islands and rivers;
- names within specific map sheet or rectangular grid areas;
- names approved within a particular time frame;
- rescinded and deleted names; and
- features named after war casualties.

In addition to the maintenance and use of provincial data, access to the National Toponymic Data Base in Ottawa enables staff to receive information on names anywhere in Canada.

## The Commemorative Names Project

The program is continuing the practice of naming geographical features after Manitobans who died during war service.

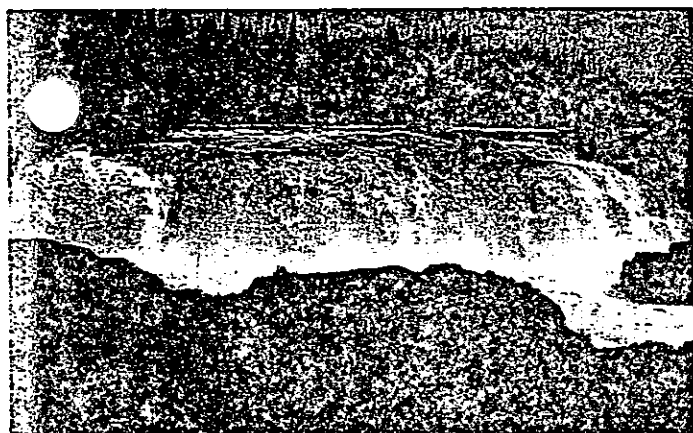
More than 2000 lakes, rivers, creeks, and other landscape features have been named for World War 2 casualties. Most of these features are situated in remote areas of the province.

Since 1972 the Surveys and Mapping Branch has provided to the eldest next-of-kin a commemorative name certificate which displays approval and location details. Duplicates are available at a nominal charge.

## RESEARCHING GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Place names provide the most useful geographic reference system in the world. The study of such names is called the science of toponymy from the Greek words 'topos' (place) and 'onoma' (name). Although such a study depends mainly on geography, it is equally concerned with history and linguistics.

In conducting a research project the toponymist not only relies on maps and local histories, but interviews the local residents to determine the names with established local usage. The exact application of the name, its specific language, its pronunciation and its origin and meaning are all important facts to be recorded during a name survey.



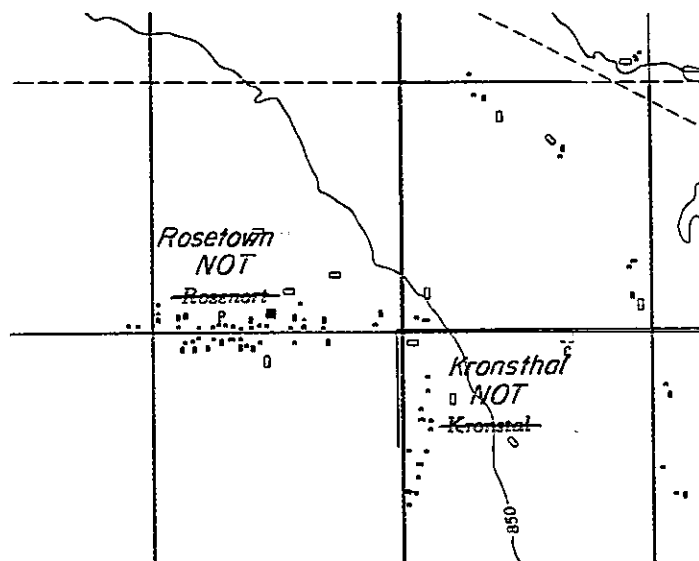
Pisew Falls, Grass River

Interest in the origin of these names has increased in recent years, often through genealogical and historical research inspired by centennial celebrations and local history projects. The toponymic resource material, if properly analyzed, can reveal patterns of settlement, exploration, commerce, transportation and immigration.

Besides their vast usefulness in communication, almost everyone finds something inordinately fascinating about place names. Many names tell their own stories: Devils Punch Bowl, Hoop and Holler Bend, Daredevil Hill, and Spoon Lake. Yet Salamonia Channel, Adams Point and Burwash Lake are among the names with no origin data recorded. A keen researcher may come across the first record of such names in a diary, a local history publication, on a map or in a telephone directory. Who knows, that person may be YOU!

## Why are some names changed?

Under certain circumstances geographical names may be changed. The community of Rosenort (near Gretna) was renamed Rosetown to differentiate it from the more prominent Rosentort in the same region of the province. Changes in the form of a name (like Kronstal to Kronsthal) occurred because of local usage and the desire for standardization with similar names in the area. Other changes have corrected spelling errors (like Rahts Island to Ralls Island) or conformed to local linguistic preferences (like St. George to St-Georges).



Supplementary name location maps are necessary in maintaining Geographical name data. Here a portion of National Typographic System (NTS) map 62H/4, has been amended to show current community names.

Years ago the perpetuation of unofficial names was commonplace. Today, cooperation between government departments and agencies has established more rigorous standards to avoid indiscriminate use of unofficial names. In the case of Neubergthal, an official decision was necessary to change the spelling from New Bercthal to Neubergthal before a new highway sign was erected. This type of cooperation is very encouraging and enables the program to maintain realistic and workable standards in geographical naming.

## PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES

### Guiding Principles

Manitoba adheres to the guiding principles and procedures established by the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. For proposals of new names or name changes each name is checked and verified as to its spelling, geographical coordinates and compliance with the following principles:

- names created by or resulting from legislation are accepted;
- first priority is given to names with well-established local usage;
- crown and private corporations must seek the advice and endorsement of the names authorities concerning the use of geographical names connected with their operations;

— names for rivers and similar features should apply to the entire entity to avoid approval of different names for sections of the same features;

— personal names are avoided unless applied in the public interest and only in exceptional circumstances will a person be honoured while still alive;

— preferred sources of new names include appropriate descriptive or historical names, names of pioneers, names of persons who died during war service, and names from native languages currently identified with the general area;

— names should be recognizable words or acceptable combinations of words in the Roman alphabet, and should be in good taste;

— names shall be adopted in either English or French, although both language forms may be accepted where in use and when sanctioned by the appropriate names authority. Names derived from other languages should be written in the Roman alphabet;

— the spelling and accenting of names should agree with the rules of the language in which they are written;

— duplications of names which may cause confusion should be avoided;

— the generic term, such as "river" in Red River, must be appropriate to the nature of the feature.

— qualifying words such as "upper", "new", "west branch", and "big" may be used to create distinctive names or to prevent duplication;

— except where local and historic usage dictates, the official approval of names of minor features should be guided by the relative significance of the feature, its usage, and the scale of mapping available.

### Procedures for a New Name or a Name Change Proposal

With an understanding of the guiding principles, individuals or organizations may propose a new name or name change for a specific geographical feature. Serious consideration will be given to those proposals accompanied by well-documented justification material. This information should include specific reasons for consideration, identification on a map or sketch, location by latitude and longitude, and the origin and meaning of the name.

Often comprehensive research is required to determine whether or not other local names exist for the feature in question. It may include interviews with area residents and government officials and a search of archival and land records for the purpose of determining or confirming origin and location data.

Once the name meets the established criteria it is included on a CPCGN decision list and duly signed by the Manitoba representative. The name is then entered in the provincial and national automated toponymic data bases and added to the supplementary name location map records. The name becomes available to compilers of maps and other documents, when listed in the *Gazetteer of Canada — Manitoba*, or its *Cumulative Supplement*. All official maps, plans and publications must use the official names so recorded.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Reliable and documented information concerning corrections in the use, spelling or application of geographical names on maps and signs, and in other publications is welcomed.

YOU can help by becoming more aware of the names you use each day. Your understanding of their significance will encourage you to share information and to discuss your concerns with our program staff. For instance:

- if YOU doubt the spelling or application of a name on a map or sign;
- if YOU have name origin data to supplement our records;
- if YOU discover that an unofficial name is being perpetuated on maps or signs and in reports and other documents;
- if YOU are researching a geographical name for use in an Order in Council, on a licence, permit or regulation;
- if YOU require additional information:

## PLEASE CONTACT

**S**URVEYS AND MAPPING BRANCH  
Manitoba Geographical Names Program  
1007 Century Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3H 0W4  
Telephone 945-1798  
or 945-8775

## SUGGESTED REFERENCES

- G**eographic Board of Canada, *Place-names of Manitoba*, Department of The Interior, 1933.
- Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, *Gazetteer of Canada - Manitoba*, Geographical Services Directorate, Energy, Mines and Resources Canada, 1981.
- Historic Resources Branch, *The Origin of the Name Manitoba*, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, 1984.
- Ham, Penny. *Place Names of Manitoba*, Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, 1980.

Manitoba  
Natural Resources



MG 15202