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COOPERATION WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL  
AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES: COOPERATION WITH  
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEDIA

100 years of official toponymy in Canada  
1897-1997

Paper submitted by Canada\*\*

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## **Introduction**

At a brief meeting in Ottawa . . . on May 15, 1946 seven members of the Geographic Board of Canada regrouped after a lack of such gatherings during the years of World War II. This rebirth of the Board increased the level of geographical naming activity in Canada, following the very limited duties undertaken . . . in the Depression and war years.

The next five decades would bring extensive changes to the operation of the Board, with increased provincial and territorial participation, and the creation of advisory committees to address particular areas of toponymic concern. They would herald major strides forward in methods of record-keeping and communication with the use of computers, and witness Canadian participation internationally in geographical names standardization. Field collection of geographical names would increase in importance, principles and procedures for naming would be updated, and dissemination of data in printed and digital form would increase in importance.

### **The first fifty years of Canada's names authority (1897-1947)**

The roots of Canada's national names authority can be traced back to the 1880s. For years surveyors, geographers, geologists and mapmakers had recognized the need for a single body to which questions of geographical nomenclature and orthography could be referred for decision. Inconsistencies in spelling and application of geographical names, particularly on federal government maps, marine charts and other documents could then be avoided. . . . action [was] taken by Order in Council of December 18, 1897 to establish the first national names authority - the Geographic Board of Canada.

The early days of the Board were ones of federal authority, with six members from different departments. . . . Rules of nomenclature were drawn up, the Royal Geographical Society rules of orthography (R.G.S. II System) were adopted, and departments were directed to use the names and orthography as approved by the Board. Quickly it was realized that participation of the provinces was desirable. A new Order in Council in 1899 gave each province and the North-West Territories (as it existed at the time) the right to appoint a member to advise the Board, provided that their government accepted Board decisions. . . . Despite assurance to provincial members that they had equal status with federal members, the recommendations they made to the Geographic Board of Canada were not always accepted without amendment . . . .

At monthly Board meetings members discussed names proposed for inclusion on particular topographic and geological maps, and hydrographic charts of various scales. Local usage became of prime importance, and new names to be considered for approval were divided between "established" and "contentious", usually based on the criterion of usage. Names for post offices and railway stations came before the Board, as did public submissions, such as lists of names supplied by explorers.

Between 1900 and 1928 the Board published nineteen reports, containing principles of nomenclature and decisions on names. . . . Various names studies were published by the Board prior to World War II. . . . including those for Prince Edward Island, Alberta and Manitoba.

In the late 1930s the Board was only able to meet on an occasional basis, and as the War years drew on, most of the work was carried out at the clerical level, with names lists for a large number of maps being circulated to available Executive Committee members for their concurrence.

### **Post-war developments (late 1940s and 1950s)**

After the war, meetings of the Board were restarted on a monthly basis and its purpose and functions of discussed. In 1947, a new Order in Council was passed providing the Board with staff and a publications budget; the Board's name was then altered to the Canadian Board on Geographical Names (CBGN). . . .

The Board continued standardizing . . . names for an increased number of federal maps being compiled for publication. Various issues required resolution, including increased emphasis on local usage, map sheet titles, alphabetizing standards, the use of possessive forms of names, and generic terminology.

With a larger staff, the new Board was able to address the need to publicize official names. The *Gazetteer of Canada* series was initiated in 1952. . . .

The original rules of nomenclature of the Board had been written in 1898. They received minor modifications through the years, until, in 1955, the CBGN undertook a complete revision of the principles and procedures and outlined the duties and responsibilities of the Board. . . . In later years, the publication *Principles and procedures for geographical naming* would be updated on a regular basis.

### **A new approach (1960s and 1970s)**

The Board was again reorganized in 1961 to create the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN). . . . appropriate federal and provincial ministers were given the authority to decide on names within their jurisdictions. Responsibility for names in the Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory, however, would still remain with the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development until devolution of these functions in 1984. . . .

The methods of collecting and verifying toponyms changed quite considerably in the 1960s and 1970s. Prior to the mid 1960s, the process of updating nomenclature on federal maps depended to a large extent on the survey crews of Topographical Survey and Canadian Hydrographic Service. Other sources of new names information came from the CBGN members and from the public. However, collection and verification of names at that time could not be considered either systematic or comprehensive.

Several field studies were then undertaken by federal/provincial cooperation. The first ... in Renfrew County (Ontario) in 1964, revealed that some 20 percent of existing names on federal maps needed correction when reviewed by local inhabitants for contemporary relevance. The field work essentially doubled the existing stock of toponyms in current use. Several systematic studies of complete provinces followed: New Brunswick; Prince Edward Island; Nova Scotia; and Manitoba. These detailed projects added substantially to the toponymic records for Canada, they reinforced the importance of local usage and, . . . laid the ground work for recognition of aboriginal names from unwritten languages. . . .

While some provinces entered into federal/provincial projects where costs and expertise were shared, others developed and implemented their own independent studies. . . .

Several years later, in the early 1980s, federal/provincial cooperation was again possible to initiate comprehensive field work in . . . Newfoundland . . . and helped improve the toponymy on topographic maps, many of which still showed only the names from the early British Admiralty charts. . . .

During the late 1960s and the 1970s the CPCGN appointed several advisory committees to provide expertise in areas of special interest to members. Two committees established at that time still have ongoing responsibilities - undersea features, and toponymy research. A third has recently changed its focus from the original nomenclature of glaciological and alpine features to the wider scope of nomenclature and delineation of geographical features.

In 1967 an advisory committee . . . was created to deal with undersea features in maritime areas of interest to Canada. Over 4000 names have been endorsed . . . .

The Advisory Committee on Toponymy Research (ACTR) was organized in 1975 to advise on issues and priorities of geographical names research. The committee has played a strong role in the promotion of workshops: on gazetteer production ... toponymic data bases ... Native names, and . . . transboundary naming. In the late 1980s, the ACTR was responsible for preparing the first strategic plan for the CPCGN, encouraging the production of the CPCGN video . . . .

Also in 1975, the Advisory Committee on Glaciological and Alpine Nomenclature (ACGAN) was established to develop guidelines for the treatment of names relating to permanent ice features and alpine regions. . . . In considering appropriate generic terminology . . . the committee cooperated with Translation Bureau of the Department of Secretary of State to produce, in 1987, Terminology Bulletin 176, *Glossary of generic terms in Canada's geographical names*. In addition, ACGAN developed the text for a pamphlet to assist the general public in submitting name proposals. . . .

In 1975, the CPCGN Secretariat started producing *Canoma*, a twice-yearly publication of news and views in Canadian toponymy. . . . this journal has become a useful collection of toponymic material about Canada, providing administrative and policy information on the CPCGN and ... programmes, as well as historical material on Canadian names. . . .

### **Days of language issues and data base development (1980s and 1990s)**

In the early 1980s, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages exerted strong pressure to have both English and French forms of geographical names recognized for official federal use on maps and in documents . . . . culminating in the policy . . . documented in TB circular 1983-58. This includes a list of some eighty "pan-Canadian" names (provinces, territories and well-known major features) endorsed by the CPCGN for use in English and French on federal maps.

Translation Bureau of the Department of Secretary of State extended this policy to develop guidelines for the use of geographical names in English and French in federal texts. . . .

Increasingly, the CPCGN Secretariat has been called upon to provide geographical names not just for maps of Canada, but also for international maps. As a result, in 1982, the CPCGN approved guidelines for "Names outside Canada for official Canadian use". This action has meant increasing Canadian acceptance of geographical names approved by names authorities of other countries, and Canadian use of names in keeping with Romanization systems recognized by the United Nations.

The years of the 1980s and 1990s have been ones of considerable progress in the conversion of geographical names record card collections into digital data bases, which include official and cross-reference names, with fields of locational and cultural attribute information. At the federal level . . . this step was first taken in 1979, primarily to facilitate the production of gazetteers and to improve . . . names compilation for National Topographic System maps. Since then enhancements to the system have led to a national-coverage toponymic data base, the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base, which contains records for over 500 000 names, of which about 70 percent are currently official, as approved through the CPCGN.

In addition, several provinces and territories . . . maintain their own files in a digital environment. . . .

To facilitate the development of a "vision" for Canadian digital toponymy, to develop national standards, and to guide CPCGN members in this . . . work, the CPCGN established the Advisory Committee on Canadian Digital Toponymic Services in 1992. . . .

The 80s and 90s have brought considerable increase in awareness of toponyms used by Native people of Canada. In 1979 the Commission de toponymie du Québec held a workshop on the writing and terminology of Quebec Amerindian names. In 1986, the CPCGN sponsored a symposium on Native geographical names . . . on collection, writing, funding and future prospects. Twenty-seven resolutions from the symposium were . . . endorsed by the CPCGN . . . Many names of Native communities in Quebec (in the 1970s) and in the Northwest Territories (in the 1990s) were changed to reflect local preferences. . . . field collection of Native names has been made in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Yukon Territory and British Columbia. Also the CPCGN has published reference tools, such as the *Guide to the field collection of Native geographical names* and *Native Canadian geographical names: an annotated bibliography*.

In the 1990s the tasks lying ahead of the CPCGN centre on collection, recording and dissemination of authoritative geographical names information. In March 1990 a new Order in Council (P.C. 1990-549) gave more appropriate recognition to the decision-making responsibilities of the provinces and territories within the CPCGN framework. The technical and cultural roles of geographical names authorities in the preservation of Canadian heritage have now been expressed and the CPCGN has reviewed its mission, responsibilities and goals while developing a strategic plan for the 1990s.

A major technological breakthrough has helped the CPCGN make geographical names information available worldwide. In summer 1994, the CPCGN records on the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base, maintained at Natural Resources Canada, were launched as the core of the GeoNames World-Wide Web site. The CPCGN became the first national names authority to provide on-line search capabilities on Internet. Access to the data base and information about the Committee, its publications, and toponymic issues, is now readily available to a rapidly growing Internet community. Since 1995, a toponymy module (with names histories and origins) has been started for educational purposes, as part of Industry Canada's SchoolNet project. . . .

## Provincial and territorial names boards and activities

Now the CPCGN has federal, provincial and territorial government members. Federal participation comes from departments involved with mapping and charting, archives, defence, national parks, statistics, and translation/terminology - all significant users of geographical names. In addition to one representative from the departments responsible for the geographical names programmes in each province and territory, the chairs of advisory committees have membership on the CPCGN during their terms of office. Currently (1997) there is a total of 25 CPCGN members.

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Geographical names activity varies in degree and intensity from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In some provinces and territories the responsibility for names authorization rests with one person or a few people who recommend decisions for their Minister's signature. More sophisticated procedures exist in jurisdictions where a committee or board has been established, in most cases by provincial (/territorial) law. . . .

**Quebec** Quebec has one of the world's most sophisticated toponymic authorities. Stemming from the Quebec Geographic Board created in 1912, the Commission de toponymie du Québec (CTQ) was established in 1977 within the framework of the Charter of the French Language. The Commission, a seven-member board, which meets ... to authorize name decisions, is supported by a full time staff . . . . The CTQ has had a prolific publishing programme and ... addressed standardization issues: publishing guides for editors and cartographers, developing general toponymic guidelines and methodologies, a research series, Native language names manuals ... and the dictionary, *Noms et lieux du Québec*. . . .

**Ontario** The Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB) was established by provincial legislation in 1968. Membership consists of five appointees from the private sector, the Surveyor-General for Ontario (ex-officio), and the Executive Secretary . . . . In 1975, Ontario published its *Principles of geographical naming*, subsequently updated in 1977 as *Naming Ontario*. The Ontario government has published jointly with the Quebec government (in 1987) *A manual for the field collection of geographical names*, based on the original French *Méthodologie des inventaires toponymiques*, published by Quebec in 1986. During the past two decades Ontario has been very involved in geographical naming in a bilingual context; of particular interest has been Ontario's ability to provide advice to other countries in the treatment of minority languages at a provincial level. . . .

**Newfoundland** In 1904 (over 40 years before Newfoundland joined Confederation) a names authority was established. The programme saw . . . feast and famine in the . . . geographical naming activity undertaken. A new act was passed on May 21, 1974 establishing the Newfoundland Geographical Names Board ... in 1991 its name changed to the Newfoundland and Labrador Geographical Names Board. . . .

**Alberta** Alberta set up its own geographical names authority immediately after World War II, followed in 1975 by establishment of the Historic Sites Board . . . . A Geographical Names Committee makes recommendations to this Board, which then reports to the Minister . . . . Alberta has developed its own principles, procedures and policies which were published in its *Geographical names manual* in 1987. With a strong emphasis on cultural aspects of geographical names, Alberta has produced publications for students, tourists and the public in general. . . . a four-volume reference series *Place names of Alberta*; was published between 1991 and 1996. Very valuable support has been provided by the Friends of Geographical Names of Alberta Society formed in 1988 . . . .

**Saskatchewan** The Saskatchewan Geographical Names Board was established in 1974. The Board . . . has developed a structure that over the years has represented the interests of Aboriginal groups, the Canadian Legion, the Provincial Archives, the Saskatchewan Natural History Association and the Multicultural Advisory Council. . . .

**Yukon Territory** In 1984 the responsibility for geographical names in Yukon Territory devolved from the federal government (DIAND) to the Government of Yukon . . . . Land claims settlements in the early 1990s have given rise to equal Native/non-Native participation on the six person board [Yukon Geographical Place Names Board]. Yukon concerns in the past ten years have been with Native language toponymy, as well as with other names of historical interest. . . .

**Other provinces and territories** In other provinces and the Northwest Territories geographical names decisions are made by a government minister, with the . . . recommendations of office staff . . . .

**British Columbia** has had an active names programme over the last half century. Thousands of detailed names records were collected on index cards, which became the source of names data for provincial mapping. . . . Today's programme is now supported by a digital toponymic data base with strong ties to digital mapping, and increasing cooperation with Native language groups in the province.

**Manitoba's** geographical names programme is also located within the provincial mapping branch. In the mid 1970s the federal/provincial field survey provided some 8000 decisions on names in local use, including many in Chipewyan, Sauteaux and Cree. . . . Provincial names data were converted to digital files in the 1980s [with] a major data base upgrade in the mid 90s. A brochure *Manitoba's geographical names* was first published in 1988.

The **Northwest Territories** government's cultural heritage programme took over responsibility for geographical names from DIAND in 1984. Since that time considerable emphasis has been put on field collection of toponyms and associated oral history from elders and various communities across the North. Thousands of new records have been created and a tiered names authorization system has been established, to cope with both straightforward and controversial situations. . . .

In **New Brunswick, Nova Scotia** and **Prince Edward Island** authority for names has fallen variously under mapping, municipal affairs, executive council, or taxation offices. Field work was undertaken by federal/provincial agreement in the late 60s and ... 70s; for each province this meant several thousand new names records - a work effort that has provided a good base for the decades to follow. . . .

### **International leadership and cooperation**

Canada has been active . . . in efforts to promote the global standardization of geographical names and . . . is one of the few countries that has participated in all six United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

In 1987, Canada had the honour of hosting the Fifth Conference in Montréal. Jean-Paul Drolet was elected President of the Conference; Alan Rayburn was Rapporteur; Helen Kerfoot was Assistant Editor; Henri Dorion a Committee Chairman; and Jean Poirier a Committee Rapporteur. In the work of the Group of Experts, Canada has contributed in a number of areas - for example, national programmes, gazetteers and toponymic data files, toponymy training courses, toponymic terminology, and toponymic guidelines for map and other editors. . . . Within . . . UNGEGN, Canada participates in two linguistic/geographic divisions, namely the USA/Canada and Romano-Hellenic divisions.

One very important element of the United Nations geographical names standardization activities is the support of toponymic training programmes. To further these goals, the Commission de toponymie du Québec (CTQ) hosted a session in Québec in 1988. . . . The CTQ has also been in the forefront of providing assistance programmes, for example, to Morocco and Cameroon. . . . Canada has participated by providing teaching staff [in training courses] in Cipanas, Indonesia (1989), Pretoria, South Africa (1992 and 1993), Wellington, New Zealand (1994), and in Riga, Latvia (1997).

Apart from . . . United Nations activities, Canada has contributed in various ways to international exchange of toponymic knowledge. Frequent collaboration has existed with the United States Board on Geographic Names since the early years of the century . . . . Canada has often provided toponymic information and policy advice - from Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaat) to New Zealand, and from China to Venezuela.

### **The road ahead**

1997 marks the 100th anniversary of a national names authority in Canada. Celebrations . . . included an exhibit *Every name tells a story: 100 years of official place naming in Canada*, prepared by Parks Canada and the National Archives, and an illustrated lecture *Geographical names of Canada: historical treasure chest*, presented by Henri Dorion, and jointly sponsored by the CPCGN and The Royal Canadian Geographical Society.

Quite clearly many steps forward have been taken since the first efforts to standardize the use and spelling of Canadian geographical names. Ahead still lie many challenges in policy development, toponymic heritage preservation and the dissemination of data files through new and exciting electronic media, increasingly reaching out to a wider public. Cooperation between federal, provincial and territorial governments will remain crucial to the authority and effectiveness of the work of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

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