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FIELD INVESTIGATION OF NATIVE AMERICAN PLACENAMES

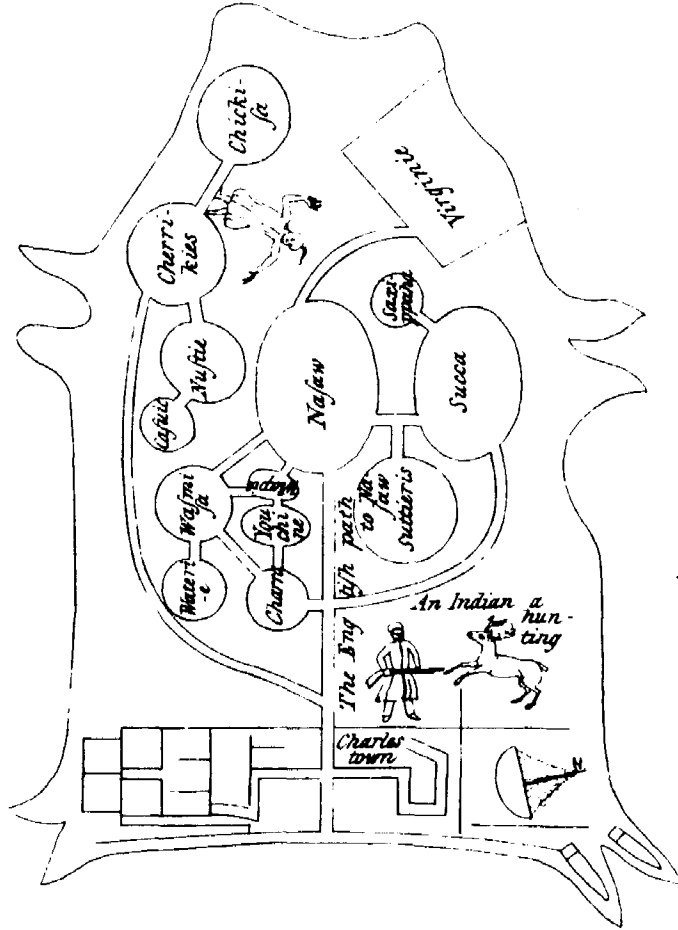
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U.S. Board on Geographic Names
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Geographical Names derived from the languages of Native Americans are an important and integral part of the cultural heritage of the United States. The United States Board on Geographic Names supports the official use of names recorded from languages spoken by Native Americans. Since these names are preserved mainly by oral tradition, field investigation is a critical link between the locally spoken name and the official written form shown on Federal maps and publications. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has published a pamphlet that serves as a general guide for those engaged in official or private field activities regarding the collection and recording of Native American geographical names. This brochure is designed to supplement the Board's policy regarding geographical names of Native American origin. The pamphlet is available free of charge to anyone and may be obtained from the display area in the Conference Room.

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Introduction

The names applied to geographic features by aboriginal people of the United States are an important and integral part of our country's cultural heritage. These names are preserved mainly in the oral tradition of the people living in their respective communities. Field investigation is a critical link between the real world of locally spoken name usage and the standardization process.

While the field investigation of Native American placenames may often be done by persons with little training in either names investigation procedures or Native American languages, good field work can be done if there is an interest in the work, a professional attitude is maintained, and appropriate guidelines are followed.

Purpose

The purpose of the field effort to investigate Native American placenames is to record the names and their applications as accurately as possible for subsequent analysis and treatment. This information can then be used to select what may be considered the best written forms of these names in a standard Roman alphabet for use on Federal maps and other publications. These instructions are intended to provide information necessary for a professional approach to investigating Native American placenames. It sets forth a methodology for field investigation to provide required data for establishing official written forms of the names for use on Federal maps and other publications.

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names is responsible for establishing and maintaining uniform geographic name usage throughout the Federal Government (Public Law 80-242). Official names are published under guidelines found in the Board's "Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names," a copy of which may be obtained by writing to:

Executive Secretary, Domestic Geographic Names
U.S. Board on Geographic Names
USGS National Center 523
Reston, Virginia 22092

The information contained in this document is intended to be used in conjunction with the above-named publication and standard Domestic Geographic Name Report Form.

Methodology and Information Flow

Every effort should be made to contact the Executive Secretary for Domestic Names, Board on Geographic Names, in advance of a names investigation and to notify your Board on Geographic Names representative of plans. The Executive Secretary should be consulted to help undertake a field investigation program on tribal lands and

obtain permission from the appropriate tribal chairman or council when necessary. However, it is recognized that the investigation of names information may be spontaneous and incidental to primary duties, and for this reason the following instructions have been prepared. A review of background information about the culture, history, and language of the people who will be interviewed and the geography of the area in which they live will be helpful.

The Matter of Ethics

All societies are governed by written and unwritten rules that prescribe standard behavior between individuals and organized groups of people. Courtesy, fair conduct, and good judgment are requisites for field investigation that involves interviewing individuals with a different heritage, mother language, and cultural background.

It is standard procedure to request permission to conduct a field investigation from the reservation or community leadership. Field workers should respect and honor the wishes of community leaders and those of the people interviewed. Photographs of persons and religious places must not be taken without permission. It is important that the community be kept informed of the progress of the program. This is often best done through an appropriate representative appointed by the Native leaders to work with the field worker in a team effort. It should be agreed in advance whether the Native government or community will be furnished copies of the field maps and reports after completion of the project.

Local Representative

Upon arriving on the Indian reservation or Native area in which the field work will be done, the investigator should first contact the person designated by the Native community to be their representative or contact person to assist in the collection of information on local placenames. The individual should normally be an elected member of the Native group, speak both English and the Native language fluently, and be knowledgeable about the local people, their customs, protocol, and the geography of the area. It is particularly important that there be a good working relationship between the field worker and the local representative. In addition to improving insight into local customs, the community representative may be able to:

- Provide office space for the period of investigation.
- Make the local people and officials aware of the program.
- Provide translation services.
- Make initial contact with potential informants and provide appropriate introductions.
- Assist with the interviewing and interpretation of information.

In some cases, the tribal representative may also be an expert on local placenames.

Field Interview Procedures

Protocol visits and initial contacts will likely be the keys to unlocking the information door. Because of the cost involved in field investigation, the selection and number of people to be interviewed is important so that repeat visits are not necessary. Care should be taken that

interviews be conducted in places conducive to studious and professional consideration to ensure few interruptions, eliminate peer pressure influence on those interviewed, and to assure good tape recording quality. The selection of informants must be undertaken with the aid of the tribal representative or expert. If such a person is not available, work should be done in cooperation with the tribal chairman or another representative of the tribal government.

Judgments and Procedures

Most interviews will involve a dialog between persons who are generally unfamiliar with each other and where personality and cultural differences can play a role. Personal interviewing requires tact, particularly when it occurs between people of different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. The presence of the tribal expert/representative at an interview is planned to help reduce problems based on personalities or the informant's lack of knowledge about the local use of geographic names. The field team also should make it clear in the beginning that the motive is to learn how each individual interviewed refers to the geographical entities within the geographic area in which he or she is most familiar.

Care must be taken to ensure that the person is not influenced by map usage. Local names are sometimes considered to be trivial and unimportant when compared to published names.

It is important that field workers ask questions without bias, do not lead the informant when asking questions, and do not make assumptions because of prior knowledge or information received from previous interviews.

Using the Tape Recorder

The tape recorder is useful, and in some cases--essential, for the collection of placenames derived from Native American languages. Its use during field investigation provides:

1. An excellent method of checking and analyzing data that could not be fully recorded by hand in the field.
2. A permanent record that others can use to reevaluate placenames.
3. Actual speech sound that language experts may use for accurate name analysis, annotation, and transcription.

Tape recording a conversation with every contact or informant is not necessary and, in some cases, may not be suitable. *Always ask a person's permission to tape an interview, AND honor the person's wishes.*

Placename Collection Procedures: Program Goals

Although the primary goal should be the investigation of Native American placenames, it is important that *all* names found to be in use by the people in the Native community be reported, regardless of language of origin. Non-Native names may be important when evaluating the selection of names for Federal maps and other

publications. Try to determine the priority of name usage in cases where more than one name is applied to the same feature. Also try to determine whether one name is mainly used in preference to the other when speaking a particular language or when speaking to a non-Native person.

The Matter of Language

Languages encountered may or may not have a recognized written form. For those that do, the names are simply recorded using the standard script developed for the language from which the names are derived. It will be useful if the informant or the tribal contact can provide their own written form. If the language involved does not have an established writing system, the names collected should be tape recorded if possible and, at the same time, written as carefully as possible using a form of phonetic notation.

Name Meaning

The meaning of all names should be recorded if possible, and all versions of the name should be recorded exactly as given and not reinterpreted by the field team. Some informants may explain why a name is used to refer to a particular place or feature instead of explaining the meaning of the name. For example, a name may be said to mean "turning place," which is an explanation of the name that is best translated as "change paddle side." Both kinds of meaning or explanations are important for name analysis. Not all placenames have recognizable meaning. Some names may be very old and the meaning unknown by current users. Borrowed names from other languages often have unknown meaning and are labels with only reference value. Do not encourage the informant to invent a meaning in order to appear knowledgeable.

Name Application

Important also is an understanding of the association between the names and the geographic entities they identify. That association includes such things as the place, type of feature, area, and other pertinent information that will help relate the feature to its name.

In general, the more distinctive a geographic feature is, the more likely it is to be named by the Native American. There often is a tendency for Native Americans to name minor features and to leave vague, major features such as mountain ranges unnamed. There is also a tendency to name visually indistinct places with names that have religious or other associations.

Indefinite Name Application

A field investigator must determine and identify the local applications of names and, just as important, report when local usage is either strong or weak. Such information is important to the Board on Geographic Names when deciding on the application of an approved name.

Sample Questions

The standard Domestic Geographic Name Report Form must be carefully completed, ensuring that all questions are answered. The following questions, however, may be used as guides during the interview, and are to emphasize the need for additional or slightly different information during the collection of Native American names information. Answers to questions should be recorded on the standard BGN form when possible under the most appropriate heading. When space is not sufficient, a blank page or additional form sheet may be used as long as these are carefully cross-referenced.

- Are there other names applied to the feature, and can you tell me about each name?
- What is the meaning of each name?
- Do you know why it was given the name(s) and when?
- Are there precise limits to the application of the name(s)?
- Is there a relationship between this name or feature and surrounding names and features?
- What is the nature of the feature; e.g., is it sacred?...does it reflect a significant event?...etc.
- From whom did you learn of the name(s)?
- Are there stories or legends connected with the name(s)?

Be courteous and use tact and imagination to obtain as much information as possible on the origin and meaning of Native American names. It is important also to be observant of the surroundings to determine possible associations such as a campsite, hunting or fishing place, or site of other activity; an occurrence of a historical event; or place of religious significance.

It is important to include the location of the place, feature, or area to which each name applies, a description of the nature and extent of each named feature, and--when applicable--an explanation of the hierarchical relationships between associated entities.

The field worker should attempt to learn as much as possible about what is named and to what the name(s) applies. Ask the informant to explain how people in his or her culture use each name and describe exactly what kind of place the name(s) identifies.