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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

OFFICE TREATMENT OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
IN CANADA

Presented by the Government of Canada\*

Introduction

1. The accumulation and recording of geographic names must be regarded as an important and essential task in any country. Dependent upon the degree of social sophistication, the process may range from simple unplanned listing on a private level to a nationally controlled endeavour presenting a complex and comprehensive pattern.
2. Canada's development in this field has progressed well beyond elementary levels. It involves the elements of national control, research, nation-wide inventory, the application of standards, regional co-ordination, decision-making and publication. Our experience extends over the past 75 years. The Permanent Committee has not yet ventured into the computerization of its geographic names, although a feasibility study on the subject has been made. An actual start in this direction has been made at the University of Laval in Quebec City, where a project to transfer the geographic names of the province of Quebec to magnetic tape has been initiated under the direction of Prof. H. Dorion.
3. This paper will attempt to outline the office methods used by the national control organization, the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. The methods used by regional authorities - in Canada's case, the provinces and territories of the Canadian federation - are basically similar, as each nominates a member on the national Committee.

\* Paper prepared by G. F. Delaney, Chief, Toponymy Division, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources; and Executive Secretary of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

4. The task of the Canadian Permanent Committee is to co-ordinate geographical name work throughout the country; to maintain established principles; to record and publish decisions; to ensure that federal Government departments employ such decisions; to provide advice and guidance to the provincial toponymic authorities and to aid in the solution of interprovincial and broadly national toponymic problems.
5. Individual provinces have decision-making autonomy. Each may, if it wishes, publish its decisions unilaterally; to date only one province, Quebec, has done so.
6. To carry out its work, the Committee is supported by an office staff supplied by the Surveys and Mapping Branch of the federal Government. This staff is directed by the Committee's executive secretary, and is responsible for the office processing of names ruled on by the Committee.

#### I. STANDARDS

7. Principles to be observed in the acceptance of geographic names for official purposes were established in 1897 when the Geographic Board of Canada (now known as the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names) was established by the Government of Canada.
8. These principles were carefully designed to be simple, broad and flexible. While some modifications have been introduced over the years, the basic structure has survived. These principles govern office treatment of geographic names. They are summarized below.

##### Principles of nomenclature

- (a) Names established by statutory authority are accepted unchanged.
- (b) Names in public use shall have primary consideration.
- (c) Names proposed for railway, postal or resource development use should be evaluated by the Committee.
- (d) Name duplication should be avoided.
- (e) Names of living individuals should only be used in exceptional circumstances.
- (f) Differing names for the same feature in the English and French languages should be recognized only if unalterably established in public use.
- (g) Native names (Indian and Eskimo) must be recorded in a recognized orthography.
- (h) Names characterized as follows are to be avoided: incongruous, multilingual combinations, Christian and surname combinations, qualified names, double names, corrupted, unduly cumbersome, obscene, derogatory or commercialized names.

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