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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Item 7 of the provisional agenda.

Reports by divisions and Governments on
the situation in their regions and
countries and on the progress made in
the standardization of geographical
names since the Second United Nations
Conference on the Standardization of
Geographical Names

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IN STANDARDIZING GEOGRAPHIC NAMES*

Paper presented by the United States of America

* Prepared by Richard R. Randall, Executive Secretary of the United States
Board on Geographic Names.

Introduction

Since the second United Nations Conference on Geographical Names, the United States has continued to be active in programmes for standardizing geographic names to meet requirements of the Federal Government. The management of these programmes has been exercised by the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), an interdepartmental body created originally in 1890 and established in its present form by a public law in 1947. This report will describe major developments concerning geographic names programmes in the United States between the second and the third United Nations Conferences.

General

As has been cited in documents made available at the previous conference, BGN operates in two major areas: domestic and foreign. Domestic interests are managed by the Domestic Names Committee, and foreign interests (here meaning areas under the sovereignty of other nations) are the responsibility of the Foreign Names Committee. In addition, the following committees are responsible for non-sovereign areas: Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names, Advisory Committee on Extraterrestrial Feature Names, and Advisory Committee on Undersea Features. Helping with the administration of over-all BGN programmes are the Executive Committee and the Publications Committee.

Several changes have taken place since 1972. Dr. Meredith Burrill, long-time Executive Secretary of BGN, retired in February 1973, after serving in this capacity since 1947. He was succeeded by Dr. Richard R. Randall. At about the same time, other persons long affiliated with BGN also retired. These retirements, associated with a government-wide occurrence of retirements, brought new people - and new ideas - into BGN with the result that certain procedures were changed. These and other changes will be discussed elsewhere in the report.

Domestic Names Committee

This committee added new members not only because of retirements but also because two departments decided to have three representatives (instead of the normal two). These new members helped introduce new ideas concerning committee operations. Out of these new ideas, many of which are still being developed, came one major improvement affecting committee operations. Formerly, it was customary for the committee to examine lists of names repeatedly at monthly meetings until all names had received final action (either approved or rejected) and lists were no longer subject to review. At the suggestion of new members, the committee staff now processes names that require routine examination, with the result that the committee, by seeing only a fraction of the names, has more time to study other important matters.

During the interval between the second and the third United Nations Conferences, the committee processed some 82,000 names. This entailed a variety of actions, including verification of names, review and research of conflicting names data for

the purpose of making a decision, response to official and public inquiries for names information, and consideration of proposals for new names or name changes. Of this total number, the committee made decisions to approve 6,211 names in behalf of BGN. These decisions were listed in the BGN quarterly "Decisions on Geographic Names in the United States".

Two major domestic names proposals that have occupied the committee's attention are worthy of mention. In 1973, the committee, acting in behalf of the full Board, voted to change the name of a geographic feature from Cape Kennedy (in Florida) to Cape Canaveral, the original name. The name, Cape Kennedy, had been applied by BGN, in the aftermath of the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, to a feature in Florida which was also the site of a new United States space exploration facility. Following the example of the state to restore the name Cape Canaveral several years later, and after a public hearing on the case that attracted national interest, the committee followed suit in 1973. The second proposal calls for a change of the name of Mt. McKinley (in Alaska) to Denali. The present name, which honours a former United States president, was applied in 1926. The proposal, initiated by the Legislature of the State of Alaska, seeks to restore the original Indian appellation, Denali, which means "big one". Many people believe that the feature should be renamed. Plans are now being made to hold a public hearing in view of the widespread interest in this, North America's highest mountain.

During the period between the two conferences, the Domestic Names Committee was also involved in a programme to develop a plan for automatically processing domestic names information. Called the Geographic Names Information System, this programme was initiated by the United States Geological Survey (which agency supports domestic-names programmes of BGN) to determine whether needs for names information could be met through automation. This programme, which already covers several states and which could constitute the beginning of a United States national gazetteer project, is described in a paper submitted by the United States under item 11 of the provisional agenda.

The committee has corresponded with its counterparts in Canada and Mexico to study various nomenclatural problems of features common to the respective countries. Despite the presence of long borders both to the north and to the south, there are actually few names problems, and they have been satisfactorily and expeditiously solved.

The United States Geological Survey of the Department of the Interior provides staff support for the domestic activities of BGN and is responsible for publishing various documents concerning domestic names.

Foreign Names Committee

In the period 1972-1977, the BGN Foreign Names Committee and its support staff continued with programmes to produce gazetteers, preparing 27 gazetteers covering nearly 30 countries. The following list indicates the areas or subjects covered, dates of issuance, and approximate number of entries.

UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES GAZETTEERS
Published since 1972

	<u>Entries</u>
<u>1972</u>	
Africa and Southwest Asia Supplement	3 150
Algeria	45 200
Asia Supplement	2 075
Australia, New Zealand and Oceania Supplement	700
Conventional Names	900
Dominican Republic	28 400
Hong Kong and Macao	3 000
Zambia	38 000
<u>1973</u>	
Haiti	13 000
Laos	21 000
Libya	37 500
Southern Rhodesia	22 500
<u>1974</u>	
British Solomon Islands and Gilbert and Ellice Islands	12 450
Republic of China	25 000
Fiji, Tonga, and Nauru	14 275
French Guiana	8 000
New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna	5 950
New Hebrides	4 500
Surinam	3 500
<u>1976</u>	
Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates	7 650
Bangladesh	33 700
Guyana	7 300
Nicaragua	7 500
Oman	5 600
Liberia	10 600
Yemen Arab Republic	10 600
People's Democratic Republic of Yemen	11 800

A reorganization of United States Federal agencies resulted in the establishment of the Defense Mapping Agency (DMA) in 1972. With this event, the staff supporting BGN foreign-names programmes was attached to the DMA Topographic Center, one of several DMA elements. At the same time, the Executive Secretariat for BGN was placed in the DMA headquarters.

These changes also affected the BGN Gazetteer production programme. Because these place-name reference works were to some degree duplicative of other gazetteer-like documents published by DMA, a decision was made to develop a single new publication. Planning for the new gazetteer (which will closely resemble BGN gazetteers) is now being completed, and the first work in the series should appear in 1978. In the meantime, work will continue of BGN Gazetteers already under production (Antarctica, Kenya, Papua New Guinea). In addition, a new gazetteer on BGN Conventional Names is scheduled for release soon.

Another important development was the 1977 programme to reprint all BGN gazetteers that were out of stock. Even though some of these are relatively old, their availability again should meet the requirements for gazetteers that come to BGN from many quarters. The titles reprinted in 1977 are:

- Chad
- Denmark
- Ecuador
- Hawaiian Islands
- Paraguay
- South Atlantic Islands
- Spanish Guinea
- USSR (vol. V)
- Algeria
- British Honduras
- East Germany
- France (vols. I and II)
- Mexico
- Poland (vols. I and II)
- Spain
- Turkey
- West Germany (vols. I and II)
- Yugoslavia
- Australia, New Zealand and Oceania (Supplement)
- Luxembourg
- Netherlands Antilles
- Switzerland
- Togo
- North Viet Nam
- Thailand
- Ireland
- Hungary
- India (vol. I)

(Persons desiring a complete list of BGN Gazetteers should correspond with the Executive Secretary of BGN, Building 56, United States Naval Observatory, Washington, D.C. 20305, U.S.A.)

To bring information about new or changed foreign names to users more expeditiously, BGN has developed a pamphlet series that will be issued periodically. This item, the first of which will be released in July 1977, will contain data concerning names approved by the committee (for official United States purposes) along with supporting information as required. It is primarily intended to provide users of the BGN Gazetteers with a means for updating their records.

The staff of the committee, while continuing work on gazetteer programmes, also performed a variety of tasks including responding to inquiries about foreign names from Federal and non-Federal agencies and individuals, preparing materials for consideration at the committee's periodic meetings, and supporting the Executive Secretary by preparing special materials required for international conferences and providing experts to accompany him to such sessions.

The staff for the Foreign Names Committee (and for the BGN Advisory Committees) is provided by the Defense Mapping Agency, which agency also prints and distributes gazetteers and other materials for BGN.

Antarctic Names

The BGN Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names has processed about 750 names since 1972, during the course of 20 meetings. The third edition of the Antarctic Names Gazetteer is now being planned. This publication will carry biographical information on persons commemorated by place names. As an interim measure, Antarctic names approved by BGN since the last edition of the gazetteer (1969) appeared in the March-June 1977 issue of the "Antarctic Journal", published by the United States National Science Foundation.

Extraterrestrial Names

In 1974, BGN established the Advisory Committee on Extraterrestrial Feature Names. The task of this body is to ensure that United States mapping and charting agencies can acquire names of extraterrestrial features in time to meet production schedules. Much of the committee's time has been occupied with establishing mechanisms to manage names information; close co-operation with the appropriate bodies of the International Astronomical Union is envisaged. Additional facts about extraterrestrial names are found in a report submitted by the United States under item 14 of the provisional agenda.

Undersea Features

The BGN Advisory Committee on Undersea Features continued to process names, with about 400 having been approved for official United States purposes since the second United Nations Conference. Attention has been paid to developing new terms and definitions to meet international objectives and to satisfy requirements for working with small features found on the United States continental shelf. A report on United States activities in this area was submitted by the United States under item 14 of the provisional agenda.

Bilateral and International Co-operation

In keeping with tradition, BGN maintained close ties with the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for Official British Use during the period. In addition to frequent correspondence about names problems, representatives of the two organizations held their tenth conference in London in September 1976. At that time, discussions covered a broad range of questions and led to agreement in many areas.

The United States and Canada also continued to engage in discourse on various topics of common interest. The report, submitted by the United States-Canada Division under item 16 (c) of the provisional agenda, covers the relations between the two countries.

As regards co-operative efforts elsewhere, the United States worked successfully with Guyana and Kenya in producing gazetteers. Of significance also is the fact that the United States responded to a request by the Yemen Arab Republic for advice about the establishment of a Yemen Arab Republic Board on Geographic Names. The advice included detailed suggestions for every phase of names standardization.

The United States also was active in the international arena through its work with the Pan American Institute on Geography and History (PAIGH). As described in a report prepared by the United States for item 16 (e) of the provisional agenda, Dr. Randall, Executive Secretary of BGN, has acted as President of the PAIGH Committee on Geographical Terminology since 1974. This committee is making progress on publishing a glossary of geographical (or generic) terms used in Central and South America.
