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TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE:
EXISTING EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

Guidelines for Beginning a Geographical Name Information File**

Paper presented jointly by the Federal Republic of Germany and
the United States of America

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide simple guidelines for developing a geographical names information file. It deals with:

- a. basic considerations and decisions that should be made before beginning work,
- b. methods of collecting and recording name information, and
- c. maintenance of the file after initial compilation is complete.

II. Basic Considerations

1. Why is a geographic names file needed?

There are many reasons why an up-to-date geographic names information file may be considered a valuable national resource. For this reason, the purpose or purposes for developing such a file should be clearly identified in the beginning. It is important to keep in mind, not only current needs, but also possible future uses of the file. A geographic names file can be designed for :

- a. a single purpose such as national standardization or assistance in map-making activities,
- b. many uses in government and in non-governmental areas of activity.

2. What kinds of named entities should be included?

After the purpose or purposes of the file are determined, two important decisions must be made:

- a. what kinds of named entities are to be put in the file?
 - cultural features (populated places, dams, buildings, roads etc.)
 - administrative areas
 - natural features (rivers, mountains, lakes, points, bays, etc.), and
- b. completeness of each category of named entities to be put in the file.
 - a relatively complete listing of each category chosen to be included, or

- a partial listing of each category based on some criteria such as size, importance, or appearance on a map series of a certain scale.

These decisions should be carefully considered and clearly defined in the beginning because they will determine the length of time needed to complete the project and the cost of the program. Overambitious programs often fail and remain unfinished because of these factors. If a relatively comprehensive file is desired, but available resources are limited, the program can be carried out in logically complete phases over a period of a few years.

3. What kinds of information should be compiled for each name record?

Decisions on the kinds of information to be compiled for each name record also may be affected by the stated purpose or purposes of the file and available resources.

a. Basic information for standardization and cartography should include:

- Official name(s)

- Location and identification of the geographical entity by administrative division, coordinates, and the topographic map or maps (all scales) on which it is shown
- Designator term identifying the kind of entity named (populated place, stream, lake, etc.)
- Variant name(s) (other than official name applied to entity).

b. Expanded information giving more information about the entity and the name itself can be added to the basic information. It is recommended that this be added at a later phase of file development. Expanded information may include:

- elevation of named entity
- population of a place
- size or length of a natural feature
- linguistic information about the name
- historical information about the entity or its naming.

III. Collection of Information

1. How is geographical name information collected?

After making decisions on what names are to be collected, work can begin compiling information for a geographical names file. It is important at this time to be able to identify official names as established by a national or other recognized authority. Names and attendant information are systematically obtained from one or more of the following data sources:

- a. a standard series of official topographic maps
- b. other published documents such as gazetteers, reports, and historical maps
- c. systematic field investigation.

2. How is the information recorded?

Information is hand printed on card or paper forms, preferably one form for each name record. Information on the forms are arranged in a specific predetermined format to meet gazetteer and/or automatic data processing input needs. Name form records should be keyed to a set of standard series maps in order to properly identify each named entity for review and for control of the compilation process. Names and data collected from other sources can be annotated directly on the set of maps and associated with the proper map symbols which identify the named entity. It should be noted that required geographical name information can be put into machine readable form directly from topographic maps by keypunching and plotting equipment. When the proper equipment is available, such a procedure is more efficient than collecting the information first on forms.

IV. Maintenance of the File

1. Is it necessary to maintain a geographical names information file?

Establishing procedures for keeping a card or computer file up-to-date is very important. The naming process is dynamic. A certain number of names are changed or become obsolete while new names can be collected every year.

Gazetteers become out-of-date as soon as published.
However a geographical names file can be maintained
on a continuing basis to meet the purpose or purposes
for which it was originally created.

