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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON PROGRESS IN THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FOURTH CONFERENCE

Work of the United States of America since the Fourth United Nations
Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

Paper submitted by the United States of America

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WORK OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA SINCE THE FOURTH
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Since the Fourth United Nations Conference on Geographical Names in Geneva in 1982, the United States has continued active along several fronts in national and international names standardization. The program directions have been generated by the United States Board on Geographic Names, with technical and administrative support provided by the United States Geological Survey and the Defense Mapping Agency. Programs are in several categories as indicated below.

United States Board on Geographic Names. The Board functions in various ways to standardize geographic names for official United States purposes. First, it reviews and endorses work accomplished or proposed by its committees. These committees include the Domestic Names Committee, the Foreign Names Committee, the Publications Committee and the Executive Committee. The Board also creates short-term (ad hoc) committees to work with specified names questions. In addition, the Board establishes advisory committees to deal with approving names of features in areas outside of a single sovereignty or with other topics requiring lengthy study. The Board has one member and two or more deputy members from each of its nine member agencies, for a total of 23 persons. Members belong either to the Domestic Names Committee or the Foreign Names Committee; other committees are comprised of members in accordance with Board bylaws or as assigned by the Board. Members of advisory committees, however, are not Board members but instead are appointed because they have particular scientific or technical skills they apply to names questions.

Domestic Names Committee. This committee has members and deputy members drawn from six agencies (including one who also serves with the Foreign Names Committee) and each year processes hundreds of questions concerning names of geographic features in the United States and its territories and possessions. The committee meets each month to consider proposals for new names for unnamed features and for changes of names, and to generate programs as needed. During the past five years, the committee has continued to produce a series of gazetteers of the individual United States. These publications carry names appearing on the standard topographic map series of the United States at 1:24,000 issued by the United States Geological Survey. The names are digitized, transferred to a data base, and are then automatically printed. To date, gazetteers of the states of Arizona, Delaware, Kansas, and New Jersey have been produced and work is proceeding for Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, and South Dakota. Also in work is a "concise" gazetteer of the United States containing some 40,000 names. The committee also has established sub-committees to deal with certain questions. One sub-committee is working on a guide dealing with the pronunciation of United States place names. The need for such a guide has long been felt, inasmuch as there are several possible pronunciations for many places. The committee also has compiled a series of guidelines and policies dealing with its work. While previous committee activities were in accordance with accepted procedures, members felt it useful to review old policies and, as needed, write new ones and to combine them into a single package for easy reference. Members and staff of the committee attended

annual meetings of the Western States Geographic Names Conferences where they become familiar with concerns of some eight states in the western part of the country. The meetings also enable representatives of state geographic names boards to discuss issues that may be on the agenda of the committee. In this way, the Federal Board collaborates closely with local authorities to standardize names for official United States purposes. Staff for the committee and funding for its operations are provided by the United States Geological Survey.

Foreign Names Committee. This body continues to work with names of places outside of the United States and publishes about five new or revised gazetteers each year. To the extent possible, the committee collaborates with foreign names agencies to acquire the most authoritative names and to make them available to all interested organizations, including libraries and publishers. At meetings held every three months, the committee reviews lists of new or changed names prepared by its staff and carries out other functions related to foreign names. At each session, the FNC approves approximately 100 names. Otherwise, the committee contributes to the gazetteer program by endorsing (or modifying) research procedures for gazetteers, which each year can account for several thousand approved names in specified countries. Since the Fourth United Nations Conference, gazetteers of the following countries have been issued: Afghanistan, Angola, Bahrain, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gibraltar, Greenland, German Democratic Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Nicaragua, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia, and Zambia. The Defense Mapping Agency provides staff for technical and administrative purposes.

Alphabetization Committee. The Domestic Names Committee and the Foreign Names Committee have long worked with procedures they set up separately to govern the alphabetic sequencing of geographic names. Believing the committees should follow common methods to the maximum extent, the Board established the cited committee to carry out the task. Among problems the committee has analyzed are how to alphabetize names with Arabic or Roman numerals, with abbreviated words, or with hyphens or diacritic markings.

Boundary Names Committee. The Board created a committee to work with authorities in Canada to resolve problems of different names for features common to both countries. Meetings with Canadian names experts produced a document defining principles and procedures for dealing with boundary names.

Centennial Committee. As the Board approaches the 100th anniversary of its establishment in 1890, a committee was formed to plan an appropriate event to celebrate the occasion. Among items being developed is a short history of the Board that will include profiles of its members over the years.

Advisory Committees. At present, the Board has two special groups, the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (ACAN) and the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF). Both committees have about five members as well as a secretary from the Defense Mapping Agency to provide staff-support services. ACAN collaborates with similar agencies in other countries, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Requirements for new names are generated by

mapping programs; physical evidence is based on satellite photography and related ground operations. Since the publication of a gazetteer in 1981 containing 12,000 names, ACAN has approved an additional 600 names. The committee works closely with the National Science Foundation, the United States agency responsible for supporting all national programs concerning Antarctica. ACUF has productive working relationships with the scientific community in the United States and the committee also co-operates with similar bodies in other countries. Its work with the International Hydrographic Organization is important as both organizations follow common principles and procedures. Specifically, ACUF maintains close communications with officers of the Sub-committee on Geographic Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features of the Joint IOC/IHO Guiding Committee for GEBCO (General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans). Since the publication of its gazetteer in 1981 with some 6,000 names, ACUF has approved about 400 additional names.

International Relations. The Board also maintains an active relationship with other similar bodies. Since the Fourth United Nations Conference, the Board has met twice with its British counterpart, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN). These meetings are part of a series dating to 1948 which have identified and helped resolve a number of questions both authorities have encountered as they work with areas outside of their national territories. These questions include identification of authoritative sources of names and development of romanization systems. Periodic meetings and communications with members of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN) have characterized relations between the two bodies. Some activities have been of a personal or professional nature. For example, representatives of BGN and CPCGN have worked together in affairs of the American Name Society, or have consulted each other in connection with programs of joint interest. A meeting of the USA/Canada Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names took place in Washington, D.C. prior to the 12th UNGEGN Session. Both organizations are collaborating on ways to deal with differing names of boundary features.

Training Courses. The Board continues to offer training in names standardization to representatives of foreign Governments. In 1985 an individual from Australia and in 1986 two persons from Indonesia attended 6-week courses.

Board Officers. As of August 1, 1987 the following persons held Board offices.

Standing Committees

Chairman of the Board and Chairman of the Foreign Names Committee

Mrs. Sandra Shaw, Department of State

Vice Chairman of the Board and Chairman of the Domestic Names Committee

Mr. Rupert Southard, Department of the Interior

Chairman of the Publications Committee

Mr. Robert McArtor, Government Printing Office

Chairman of the Executive Committee

Mr. Rupert Southard, Department of the Interior

Advisory Committees

Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names

Ms. Alison Wilson, National Archives

Advisory Committee on Undersea Features

Dr. Jack Pierce, Smithsonian Institution

Executive Secretaries

Executive Secretary of the Board and of the Foreign Names Committee

Dr. Richard R. Randall, Defense Mapping Agency

Executive Secretary of the Domestic Names Committee

Mr. Donald J. Orth, United States Geological Survey, Department of the Interior
