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TOPONYMIC DATA FILES

Report by the Chairman of the Committee

(H.A.G. Lewis)

Since the Tenth meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1982, there has been a remarkable increase in the application of computers and word-processors to all aspects of office work. Except for the simple letters exchanged in correspondence, the ordinary typewriter has become virtually obsolete. This development must lead to a new outlook by UNGEGN.

At the time of the Fourth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Geneva, 1982) we could discuss three types of gazetteer:-

i)   The traditionally compiled gazetteer, type-set in metal type, prepared by hand with hand-sorted cards and issued in hard covers and rather expensive binding.

ii) The same type of gazetteer but computer-compiled.

iii) The type of gazetteer which is based on the names appearing in a given map series, e.g. 1/50,000.

Today, I suggest, we need only concern ourselves with the second and third type. Manual compilation and the traditional methods of printing and binding are expensive and laborious. They are, therefore, a bar to progress. Revision, in almost all cases of gazetteers containing many thousands of names is almost impossible. Reprinting is very costly.

Mini-computers and word-processors are now so generally part of standard office equipment that UNGEGN should consider whether the manually-compiled gazetteer is not now an archaic product. There can be no question that the computer offers the most efficient and economical means of producing and maintaining gazetteers. They offer the only flexible method of preparing toponymic data files.

If UNGEGN agrees to the proposition outlined above future discussion will be centered on the computer creation and maintenance of toponymic data files. It will also agree that gazetteers of types (ii) and (iii) above will form the basis of future discussion.

Of particular importance to future work is the gazetteer (or index to names) based on a particular map series, so forming a toponymic data file directly related to maps and forming with map data part of a common overall file. Such toponymic data files are directly related to map production and revision and can be held permanently up-to-date and ready for issue at any time.