

Commemorative naming and guidelines associated with the process

including papers contributed by Canada to UNGEGN sessions and the UN Conferences

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Commemoration vs Local usage of personal names

Naming places and features for commemorative purposes has long been practiced – dating back to days of world exploration, when for example those sailing for colonial powers assigned names to recognize royalty or other leaders, to acknowledge their financial backers, or simply to honour family and friends back home. Conquering powers have used this means of oppressing the conquered, and politicians have used commemorative geographical names as a means of bestowing favour or recognition. Street names in many cities of the world are named for events thought to be significant or individuals seen as heroes, locally, nationally or internationally.

Unfortunately, bestowing personal names – particularly during the lifetime of the individual – can be the subject of considerable discord, and with the changing fortunes of governments or changing perceptions of the person's attributes, subsequent name changes are not uncommon. Such difficulties have been noted by UNGEGN since its earliest days. However, naming authorities may have only partial control, particularly as guidelines for commemorative naming have generally been lacking. In recognizing the often detrimental results of the bestowal of commemorative names it is noted that names of cultural or historic importance may be in jeopardy, through name change or lack of recognition.

On the other hand, in many instances a personal name may originate from local usage, and grow from the grass roots rather than being imposed by an authority. Numerous examples exist today of places and features being named for early pioneers or pioneer families in an area, or local community figures who have contributed to the growth of the community. For many names authorities, established local usage is a basic principle to be followed in the approval of toponyms, and should be distinguished from "imposed" honorific names not supported by local use.

Creating a UN resolution on commemorative naming (2002)

At the Eighth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in 2002, Canada, through a document prepared by the Commission de toponymie du Québec, submitted a proposal for a resolution addressing toponymic commemoration (E/CONF.94/INF.I 5 French and E/CONF.94/INF.I 6 English). In its final form this was passed as resolution VIII/2, Commemorative naming practices for geographical features. This resolution recommends that national authorities "discourage the use of personal names to designate a geographical feature during the lifetime of the person ..." and "include in their guidelines clear statements on the length of the waiting period they wish to establish before using a commemorative name."

Papers on commemorative naming subsequently submitted by Canada to UNGEGN/UNCSSGN

Since this resolution was passed in 2002, Canada has presented two documents on the subject.

- (1) WP 14(a) English and WP 14(b) French, submitted to the 22nd Session of UNGEGN in 2004, provided an **historical view of commemorative naming practices of the national names authority in Canada**. It was noted that in 1948, the Canadian Board on Geographical Names published its *Regulations, Principles of Nomenclature and By-laws* recommending that commemoration be confined to those “prominently connected with the life, activities or development of any locality”. By 1955, the *Regulations ...* indicated that “The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should be avoided”

With the advent of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names in 1961, similar principles were included under the *Personal Names Principle*, indicating that “The application of a personal name during the lifetime of the person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances” (1963) and that “Names should be derived from persons who have significantly contributed to the area of the features selected” (1969).

In 1987, the *Principles and procedures for geographical naming* concerned with *Use of personal names* and *Approving names for unnamed features* continued the same approach to commemorative naming, but included a note that “persons be deceased for one or two years before their names are to be considered for features ...” and several sources were recommended when approving names for previously unnamed features. The *Principles* of 1990 moved to “at least one year waiting period”; this was retained in 1999 and 2001. However, names of persons, whether alive or dead that were in common local usage, would be considered under the principle of names in well established local use.

The provinces and territories of Canada now have responsibility for naming in their jurisdictions and may follow the national guidelines or modify them to suit their own particular needs. For the length of time following death before the name of a person should be considered, it was reported that one to five years had been adopted by the various jurisdictions. Several provinces, particularly dealing with mountain naming, found it necessary to add that “geographical features are *not* named to commemorate the victim(s) or to mark the location of mishaps, accidents, or tragedies”.

- (2) For the Ninth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in 2007, Canada presented document E/CONF.98/102 (summary in the six UN languages) with E/CONF.98/102/Add.1/EN and /FR providing the full text in English and French. In 2004, the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC) had formed a Commemorative Naming Policy Working Group to draft **national guidelines on commemorative naming**. Existing guidelines were reviewed and formal guidelines and a set of procedures were developed to promote consistency across Canada. The new guidelines would address the naming of natural and cultural features to honour or memorialize both persons and events.

The new Guidelines and Procedures for commemorative name submissions (with a note on other possible alternative means of commemoration) were initially approved by the GNBC in June 2006 and following various amendments were adopted by the Board in August 2007.

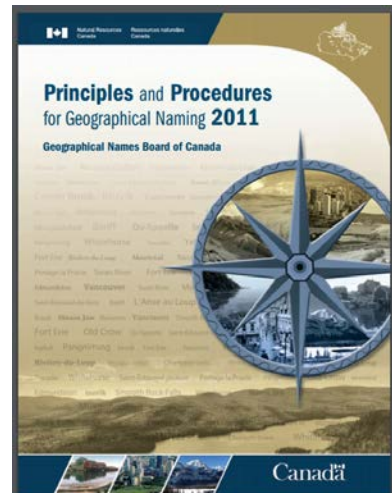
This information is now included as *Appendix 3 Commemorative naming guidelines*, in the *Principles and Procedures of Geographical Naming 2011* (see below for details).

The French version of the guidelines is included as *Annexe 3 Directives relatives aux noms commémoratifs*, in the *Principes et directives pour la dénomination des lieux 2011*.

Both English and French copies of the full GNBC Guidelines are downloadable from the web at:

English...https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/earthsciences/pdf/gnames/GNBC_english_accessible.pdf

French...https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/sites/www.nrcan.gc.ca/files/earthsciences/pdf/gnames/GNBC_french_accessible.pdf



References

The Canadian documents on commemorative naming submitted to UNGEGN and the UNCISG can be downloaded as pdf files as follows:

*Toponymie et mémoire : vers des balises internationales pour la commémoration toponymique /
Toponymy and memory: toward an international protocol for toponymic commemoration*

2002, Berlin, Eighth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

E/CONF.94/INF.15 http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/8th-uncisg-docs/inf/8th_UNCISG_econf.94_INF.15.pdf (French)

E/CONF.94/INF.16 http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/8th-uncisg-docs/inf/8th_UNCISG_econf.94_INF.16.pdf (English)

*Commemorative naming practices for geographical features in Canada /
Pratiques et désignation commémorative des entités géographiques au Canada*

2004, New York, 22nd Session of UNGEGN

WP 14 a-English <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/22-GEGN-Docs/wp/gegn22wp14a.pdf>

b-French <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/22-GEGN-Docs/wp/gegn22wp14b.pdf>

*Commemorative naming of geographical features in Canada /
Pratiques et désignation commémorative des entités géographiques*

2007, New York, Ninth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

E/CONF.98/102/Add.1/EN http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/9th-uncisg-docs/econf/9th_UNCISG_e-conf-98-102-add1-en.pdf

E/CONF.98/102/Add.1/FR http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/9th-uncisg-docs/econf/9th_UNCISG_e-conf-98-102-add1-fr.pdf (French)

APPENDIX 3 COMMEMORATIVE NAMING GUIDELINES

Definition: Commemorative naming

For the purposes of these guidelines, commemorative naming refers to the naming of natural or cultural features after persons or events, as a way to honour the person or event in question.

I Objective

To encourage the standardization of existing policies, principles and procedures associated with commemorative naming throughout Canada.

II Guiding principles

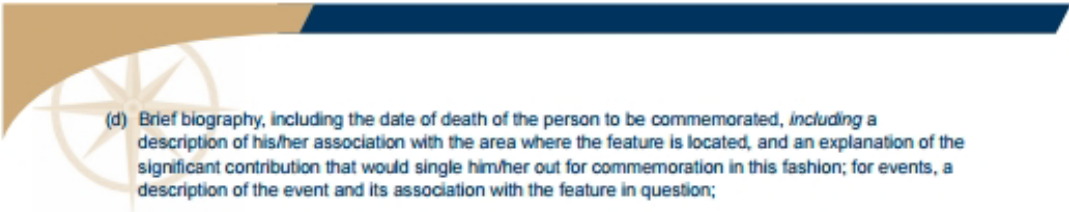
When proposing or considering a commemorative name, the following principles will be adhered to, unless they conflict with an existing policy of the naming authority in question:

1. A proposed name will only be considered for persons posthumously; a minimum of five years must elapse from the date of death before a commemorative name proposal will be considered. For events, at least twenty-five years must have elapsed since the occurrence of the event.
2. A commemorative name will only be considered for subjects with a strong association with the area or feature, or of outstanding significance to the cultural legacy or development of the area, the province, the territory or the nation.
3. A proposed name will be supported by the local community and reach beyond a single or special interest group.
4. A commemorative name will not be used to memorialize victims or mark the location of accidents or tragedies.
5. A commemorative name will not be considered for adoption if a well-established and acceptable name already exists for the feature.
6. Ownership of land does not confer the right or entitlement to apply a commemorative name to a geographical feature. The use of unofficial commemorative names in publications, or in landscape dedications or markers, is no assurance that they will be adopted into official geographical names records.

III Procedures

Before contemplating a proposal and undertaking the necessary research, proponents should contact the appropriate names authority in the province or territory where the feature is located, in order to obtain guidelines and procedures for establishing a commemorative name in that jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions have application forms, and most will require some or all of the following:

- (a) Map or chart delineating the feature to be named;
- (b) Rationale for the proposal;
- (c) Evidence that the feature is unnamed and that the proposed name is acceptable and has broad community support;

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- (d) Brief biography, including the date of death of the person to be commemorated, *including* a description of his/her association with the area where the feature is located, and an explanation of the significant contribution that would single him/her out for commemoration in this fashion; for events, a description of the event and its association with the feature in question;
 - (e) Statement of the proponent's relationship to the person or event to be commemorated;
 - (f) Proposals should be submitted directly to the appropriate names authority in the province or territory where the feature is located. The proposal should be signed and include a complete mailing address and daytime telephone number and/or e-mail address of the proponent.

IV Other means of commemoration

Besides the naming of natural and cultural features, other commemorative naming possibilities exist and should be considered. Please contact the provincial or territorial naming authority to determine its jurisdiction over constructed facilities. Or contact the local municipality, school board, university or college, etc., to determine criteria and procedures for commemorative naming.