STEWART

AMERICAN PLACE-NAMES

AMERICAN PLACE-NAMES

A Concise and Selective Dictionary for the Continental United States of America

GEORGE R. STEWART

New York
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1970

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 72-83018
Printed in the United States of America

To

M. R. E. and S. D. S.

who have something in common,

besides intelligence and courage

Preface

As accurately as can be at present estimated, approximately 3,500,000 named places—about one to the square mile—exist currently in the United States of America. In addition, there are probably a million more such names of places that are recorded, but are no longer in use. Though this density is low by European standards, the total figure is so high that merely to print the current names alone would require volumes. From the very initiation of the dictionary, therefore, I realised that the work must be selective.[1]

First of all, the focus had to be upon the names, not upon the places —the number of names, because of repetition, being much smaller than the number of places. A single name, for instance, such as **Sand** or **Long**, may stand upon hundreds or even thousands of places. The figure for the total number of names is a matter for guess rather than for estimate. If we merely assume, however, that names are repeated, over the broad extent of the country, twenty times on the average, their total number is 175,000, and this figure may even be larger because of the many names ocurring only once or twice. But to print even 175,000 names with the necessary commentary upon each would, once more, run into volumes. Some selectivity was still necessary.

1. In the present lack of a national gazeteer including both habitation-names and names for natural features, the total number of named places may be estimated from various place-name studies, and especially from the state gazeteers, of which three are both comprehensive and recent. Of these three, unfortunately, Delaware is too small to be very useful, and Alaska is too atypical (See *Bibliography*, under Heck and Orth.) There remains Thomas P. Field's *A Guide to Kentucky Place Names*, from which the density for that state may be readily determined at just about one to the square mile. From its history, population, topography, and folk-habits, Kentucky is to be considered a fairly representative state. Naturally there is some variation of opinion as to what should be counted as a place-name, but such differences probably do not affect the total figure greatly. Some less-well-based estimates which I have made for South Dakota, Oregon, and California tend to confirm the figure derived from Kentucky.

Since a dictionary is a work of reference to be consulted rather than read, the basis of selection should be the likelihood of anyone's trying to find a certain name in it. At first thought, to proceed on such a principle might seem merely to involve the author in a gigantic guessing game with the general public. But, practically, the situation is simpler. Anyone consulting the dictionary would be likely, I concluded, to be seeking information upon names which fall into one of three categories.

1. Names of well-known places, e.g. **Philadelphia, Mississippi, Mount Rainier.**

2. Repeated names, i.e. those which appear upon several or many places, e.g. **Lost, Big, Beaver.**

3. Unusual names, i.e. those which attract attention to themselves and thus become objects of curiosity, arousing controversy. Here can be included (a) non-English names,[2] especially those of Indian origin, e.g. **Vermilion, Reliez, Kokomo, Katahdin;** (b) coined names, e.g. **Snicktaw, Ti, Birome;** (c) 'mistake names,' e.g. **Nome, Tolo, Plaski;** (d) names of unusual or provocative suggestion, e.g. **Bloody, Goodnight, Christmas.**

A standard of admission creates automatically a standard of rejection, and by a brief presentation of it the scope of the dictionary becomes better defined.

1. By far the largest number of names to be omitted are those which are derived from persons. Very few consultants of the Dictionary will be concerned with such an obvious, commonplace, and even-to-most-Joneses-uninteresting name as **Jones Creek.** Moreover, with most such names little can be said of interest in the way of elucidation. A commentator can merely present the transparent fact that the stream was named for some Jones, may then give an identification, and, if data are available, present the reason (usually commonplace) why this individual's name was thus used. But such information passes over into the field of local history, and can be omitted from a study of naming with negligible loss. Nonetheless, a large number of names of personal origin have been included because they fell within one of the positive categories.

2. As already suggested, the obsolete names have been omitted. A

2. Since the dictionary should be usable by people who have no knowledge of non-English languages, even the simplest terms in French and Spanish, e.g. **Rouge, Grande,** have been made entries and translated.

few may actually have been included, because the determination of complete extinction is not always possible.

3. Names of most of the very minor places have been omitted. Few people would even know about (and would much less care to investigate) the name of some small stream in the Alaskan tundra or of a desert-bound railroad siding. In general, included are counties, but not townships; lakes, but not springs; many mountains, but few hills.

4. If little or nothing can be surely stated about the name of an unimportant place, it has sometimes merely been passed over, but such cases are rare.

5. Certain names have been omitted because they are what might be called 'obviously obvious,' e.g. **Dome Mountain, Highest Lake.**

6. The names of Hawaii (as the term *Continental* in the title indicates) have not been included. The reason here, however, has not been primarily to reduce the total number, but that Hawaii has names almost wholly of the native Hawaiian (Polynesian) language. Lacking overlap, they cannot be economically treated along with the others, and demand a volume for themselves [3]. . . .

The Dictionary is the work of a single author, with only secretarial assistance. Possibly, in these times of organized research projects, it is destined to be the last dictionary to be so prepared. Being thus not limited by computers and the least common denominator of research assistants, it has not been reduced to a mechanical conformity, and may, here and there, even display a touch of personal vagary.

By the necessity of wide coverage, however, I have been forced to forgo many pleasant diversions. The study of place-names, comprising several disciplines, is all too conducive to a genial prolixity and the amiable pursuit of hobbies. The linguist, the geographer, the historian, the folk-lorist—each may write upon the subject. The linguist tends to pursue etymology to its depths; the geographer is in danger of producing a gazeteer; the historian devotes a page as to whether a certain pond was named for Joe Smith or his cousin Hank; the folk-lorist endlessly records stories about names. The toponymist, if such a chimera may exist, attempts to co-ordinate the qualities of all four. . . .

American students of place-names recognize their great debt to the

3. For a recent study of Hawaiian names, see M. W. Pukui and S. H. Elbert, *Place Names of Hawaii and Supplement to the Third Edition of the Hawaiian-English Dictionary* (1966). See also my *Names on the Land* (1960) Chap. XLV.

long and magnificent tradition of European scholarship, especially that of England, as expressed most fully in the publications of the English Place-Name Society. Nonetheless, in the study of names as in other details of civilization, there is no place for a colonial attitude. Conditions, problems, solutions—all are different. European, including English, scholarship has been concerned primarily with the etymology of those names which are of no more recent origin than 1500. In the United States, however, etymology is seldom of interest except with Indian names and a few dialectal or distorted forms.[4] European scholars rarely concern themselves with the process of name-giving or its motives—obviously because no information on such matters ordinarily exists with medieval and more ancient names. On the other hand, an American scholar scarcely considers that he has done his work fully unless he has solved—or, at least, attempted to solve—the question why. One might even put it, paradoxically, that the European onomatist argues from probability; the American, from evidence. Having collected whatever evidence (such as early forms of the name) is available, the European scholar then works out, with deep erudition, the etymological answer which seems most probable. The American scholar, on the contrary, must frequently present a highly improbable, or even fantastic, answer, because the evidence so requires, in such names, for instance, as **Primghar** and **Modesto.**

The American namer used as the tools of his trade such processes as irony, negative description, humorous distortion, coinage, literary borrowing, punning.[5] Quite possibly such processes also helped form the European name-pattern, for there is no reason to suppose that the Americans have been any more complex and nimble-witted than were the Angles, Celts or ancient Greeks. But for the older periods, the record is lacking.

In short, the chief problem of interest to the European scholar is the meaning of the name; to his American counterpart, the motivation of the namer.

The American must therefore, in at least one respect, carry his work

4. Manufactured names and names shaped by folk-etymology also raise questions of derivation, though not in the usual sense of etymology. Even the difficult problem of the translation of Indian names may in some instances be approached historically by aid of notes in early records. Thus the meanings for **Chicago, Topeka,** and **Kobeh** are recorded by early travelers who had excellent contacts with the local Indians. Their statements seem to me more authoritative than any researches of modern linguistics can possibly be.

5. Because of such naming processes even the basic tenet of European onomastics breaks down, viz. 'Every place-name has a meaning.' No 'meaning' in any ordinary sense of the word can be assigned to such names as those discussed in the *Introduction, Coined Names.*

farther than is required of the European. His task is not easier, since the discovery of the proper historical record, or the proper deduction from an imperfect record, is often highly difficult. With record lacking, the penetration of the namer's mind, as in the European situation, may become impossible, and we may quote the plaint of an early onomatist on the trail of a certain W. A. Scott, known to be the namer of Org, Wisconsin, 'No one living knows why he so named the place, where he got the name, or what it means, if it means anything.' (See *Bibliography,* Stennett, p. 84.)

An essential core of the material here presented derives from my own researches into original sources, as already presented in *Names on the Land,* my other publications, and some unpublished notes.[6] To amass the additional material, much greater in bulk, I have systematically reviewed, collated, and synthesized the still-unsuperseded scholarship on the place-names of the United States. The Sealock-Seely bibliography (see *Bibliography*) served as an indispensable check list. The more important works thus used comprise the *Bibliography.* I have, however, used a large number of smaller studies, sometimes mere notes on one name. Though they have not been included in the *Bibliography,* they are available through Sealock and Seely. . . .

As author, I myself am doubtless more cognizant of the shortcomings of this work than any critic can be. Still, it seems to me useful for the present time, and in the future offering itself as a basis for revisions, as additional local and specialized studies become available for incorporation in it.

The errors of such a work as this are those of both omission and of commission. The fundamental problem of admission is discussed earlier in this *Preface.* Undoubtedly, however, some names have been omitted which should have been discussed. More serious, presumably, are the positive errors which cannot but have crept into such a wide-sweeping work. These must be of two kinds, not even to count mere clerical and typographical lapses. 1. I must sometimes have misunderstood or inadvertently distorted my sources. 2. The most serious origin of error lies in the sources themselves, which must be considered, with

6. The connection of *Names on the Land* and the present Dictionary is close. Many names have been much more fully discussed in that earlier work than has been possible in the present concise one. That work presents both the history and the theory of place-naming in a way which the nature of a dictionary renders impossible, and some acquaintance with it will be found invaluable for enhancing the significance of the material here included.

negligible exceptions as secondary works. I have, therefore, to protect both myself and the user of the Dictionary, always considered the evidence critically. In innumerable instances, especially for the translations of Indian names, I have inserted a warning 'probably,' in the belief that uncertainty is preferable to a possible entrenchment of error. In other instances, I have merely rejected the evidence of the source, omitting the name altogether, especially if the place was not of first-rate importance. In still other instances I have even gone against the source on the basis of my own information from other sources or from general knowledge of language, literature, history, etc., in which some of the early compilers were lamentably lacking. I should not wish, however, even to seem to disparage these local toponymists. Some of them may have been comparatively unlettered and linguistically naive. But they showed the true spirit in their industrious search for knowledge and its recording. . . .

The only previous work on a national scale is that published by Henry Gannett in 1902 under the modest title *The Origin of Certain Place Names in the United States,* and reissued without revision in 1947 under the more ambitious title *American Names: a Guide to the Origin of Place-names in the United States.* Though this work contains much sound information, it is also full of errors, having been compiled before a single study at the state level was available and when research on Indian place-names had scarcely started. Although I list it in the *Bibliography,* I have consulted it only for suggestions and have based no conclusions upon it.

Traditionally, though not altogether advantageously, American study of place-names has been based upon political units—commonly, states or counties. As the result, we have a kind of patchwork. West Virginia, for instance, is excellently covered, but just over the line Virginia is, comparatively speaking, *terra incognita.*

Fortunately, a study on a national scale somewhat shades these contrasts, since many names extend across political boundaries. Moreover, many names are repeated, so that an explanation applicable in a well-studied state may be accepted in an inadequately-studied one.

In general, a three-fold classification of states may be offered, with the usual proviso that some borderline cases exist, so that the classes shade into one another.

1. A number of states have been adequately treated, usually in a

single study. In these instances I have based my work almost wholly upon this volume, the problems then being chiefly those of selection, co-ordination, and condensation. I have, however, sometimes differed even from these authorities, especially because of advantages afforded me by study on the national level. Naturally, these works differ in quality, both in their comprehensiveness of coverage, their manner of presentation, and the authoritativeness of their conclusions. Particularly, their treatment of Indian names is, in some instances, superficial. Nonetheless, this group of studies forms the firm basis upon which the Dictionary has been developed.

These well-documented states are as follows, the reference to the *Bibliography* being given in parentheses: ARIZONA (Barnes-Granger); CALIFORNIA (Gudde); FLORIDA (Bloodworth); MINNESOTA (Upham); MISSOURI (Ramsay); NEBRASKA (Fitzpatrick; Link); NEVADA (Carlson); NEW MEXICO (Pearce); OREGON (McArthur); SOUTH DAKOTA (USWP-Ehrensperger); WASHINGTON (Meany); WEST VIRGINIA (Kenny); WYOMING (Urbanek).

2. The majority of the states fall into an intermediate class. The status of research may be termed 'spotty.' No single adequate work exists, but often the amalgamation of several smaller studies produces a result about as satisfactory as is afforded for the previous group. In some cases a good study of town-names is available, or of Indian names. In other states a brief general work has been published. On the whole, for the limited objectives of a concise dictionary the treatment of these states may be considered adequate—if barely so, in some instances. They are: ALABAMA, ALASKA, COLORADO, CONNECTICUT, DELAWARE, IDAHO, ILLINOIS, IOWA, KANSAS, KENTUCKY, LOUISIANA, MAINE, MARYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, MICHIGAN, MONTANA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, NORTH CAROLINA, NORTH DAKOTA, OHIO, OKLAHOMA, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, TEXAS, UTAH, VERMONT, WISCONSIN,

3. Certain states have been inadequately studied, although the major names have usually been treated and there is no state on which material is wholly lacking: ARKANSAS, GEORGIA, INDIANA, MISSISSIPPI, TENNESSEE, VIRGINIA. Fortunately the total area of this group of states totals only about 8 per cent of that of the United States.

Acknowledgments

To express my thanks to the many persons who have generously aided in the preparation of this work is my pleasure. These individuals have, indeed, been so numerous that some may have escaped my memory and record, but I shall include them in thought, even though they may be lost in name.

My thanks are particularly due to all of those (many of them no longer living) whose work I have used, and have acknowledged formally, in the *Bibliography*. Chief among these must be mentioned Richard B. Sealock and Pauline A. Seely, whose bibliography has been my constantly-used and essential book.

As often before, Theodosia Burton Stewart has given good counsel and support. Madison S. Beeler and James D. Hart have expended time and thought in useful criticism.

Among the many others who have aided in various ways I am happy to mention William E. Ashton, Jane Burton, John Thomas Casteen, Wayne E. Corley, Kenneth E. Crouch, A. R. Dunlap, E. C. Ehrensperger, Erwin G. Gudde, Harry E. Hammer and the Missouri Pacific Lines, Louise Hanley, Kelsie Harder, Robert Hitchman, Howard Hugo, John Rydjord, Elsdon C. Smith, Wallace Stegner, Francis Lee Utley, and C. A. Weslager.

I am also endebted to several libraries and other institutions, and wish particularly to thank the Inter-library Borrowing Service of the University of California (Berkeley) Library.

Berkeley
March 28, 1969

G. R. S.

Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to supply some aid in the use of the dictionary, not to present a general discussion of place-names. I have elsewhere delt with the history and theory of place-names (especially in the United States), and anyone wishing to make the fullest use of the present dictionary will be aided by some acquaintance with those treatises.[1] No such special knowledge, however, is required, and the present dictionary exists independently.

The Entry System

The dictionary consists of about 12,000 entries, alphabetically arranged. Each entry commonly has as its heading a single word (place-name specific), e.g. **Black, Big,** or less commonly, two or more related words which are distinguished by grammatical form, e.g. **Starve, Starvation,** or by variant spelling (see, e.g., **Lorraine**).

In some instances the full place-name (specific-generic) appears as the entry-heading, usually when the name occurs only once. Occasionally this usage is a notice that the explanation as offered applies to the specific as used with this generic only.

After the entry-heading the location, by Zip-code abbreviation of the state(s), is commonly given.[2] Omission of such a location means (1) that the name occurs in several or many states, or (2) that the place is too well known to require such statement of location.

Next in the entry the language and meaning (translation) of the

1. See *Names on the Land* (1945, 1960), the article *Name (in linguistics), Encyclopedia Britannica;* 'A Classification of Place Names,' *Names,* ii; 1, pp. 1–13.
2. See below, *Abbreviations.*

term are stated, unless it is a word in current American-English or a personal name.

Some detailed information may follow, e.g. the reason for the application of the term, the date of naming, the namer, and the occasion. In the numerous instances of repeated names, some specific examples may be given of typical or exceptional or of especially interesting or important occurrences.

General Background

Since the dictionary is for use by the general public, technical terms have been kept at a minimum, and almost anyone, it is hoped, can consult the text without special directions. A fuller understanding, however, will be attained by anyone giving some attention to the special topics here presented.

1. *Specific-generic.* On the analogy of biological terminology, the generic, e.g. *river, mountain, city,* indicates the class. The specific, e.g. *blue, Lincoln, battle,* modifies the generic by limitation, thus restricting the application to a single 'place,' although in practice many names are repeated.

In common usage either the specific or the generic may be omitted with resulting clipped forms, e.g. 'the river' or 'the Mississippi.'

The specific is commonly an adjective, or a noun serving as an adjective, and by regular usage in English preceding its generic, e.g. **Red Rock, Charles City, Wolf Creek.**

Double specifics are not uncommon. The secondary specific usually modifies the whole specific-generic combination. Thus **Big Black River** is distinguished from another **Black River** in the vicinity. Occasionally the secondary specific modifies the primary specific only, **Little Pete Meadows** being named for a man known as 'Little Pete.' In a case of double specific the user of the Dictionary may find it profitable to check both terms.

Because of direct or indirect influence of other languages (commonly, French or Spanish) many specifics follow the generic, e.g. **Mount Shasta, Lake Erie, Key West, Fort Wayne.** In the Dictionary these names are alphabetized under the specific, i.e. the second term.

A second type of specific consists of a prepositional (adjectival) phrase introduced by *of,* e.g. **The Gulf of Alaska, The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The State of Maine, The City of Chicago.** Omission of the prepositional generic with names of states, cities, and towns is regular, but the full form occurs in official usage and in special cases.

By common usage, chiefly with names of towns, generics have amalgamated, even in writing, with their specifics, as has regularly occurred with compounds of *-town, -ville,* and *-burg(h)*. The combined form is then treated as a specific, usually of the prepositional type, in such usages as **The City of Pittsburgh.**

Although the specific-generic combination may be considered as constituting the whole place-name, the specific is the element of interest in the ordinary name. Generics are essentially common nouns, and their meaning can be ascertained from an English dictionary. No special discussion of generics is here included. Frequently, however, the same terms occur as specifics, e.g. **City, Point, Mountain, Lake,** and in such instances they have necessarily been discussed.[3]

2. *The article.* The use or non-use of the definite article differs by localities and even by individuals, being highly complicated. It occurs with the prepositional specific, e.g. **The Gulf of Maine,** and with plurals, e.g. **The Thousand Islands.** It is commonly used with certain generics, e.g. *desert* and may or may not be used with others, e.g. *river.* See also the entry, **The.**

3. *Languages.* The great majority of the places bear names from the English language as spoken and written in the United States. Names from French, Dutch, Spanish, and various Indian languages are common. Eskimo and Aleutian names occur in their areas of occupation in Alaska, and some names survive from the Russian colonization of Alaska and California, e.g. **Tolstoi, Ross.** Small numbers of names are derived from the languages of other immigrant groups, e.g. **Shellpot, Hader.**

This direct derivation from a language should be distinguished from indirect influence through cultural or literary borrowing. For instance, *Mexico* and *coyote* are Aztecan words, but they were borrowed first by Spanish and then from that language were transferred to American-

3. For specialized treatment of generics, see *Bibliography* under headings, McJimsey, McMullan.

English. Some of the namings may be Spanish, none are Aztecan; most of them are American.[4] Similarly, Indian words taken into English, e.g. *squaw, moose, raccoon, opossum,* result in American namings. So also, literary borrowing has given rise to such names as **Paris, Odessa, Memphis,** and the acquired knowledge of classical languages has resulted in **Akron, Emporia, Eureka, Altus.**

Information as to linguistic origin with translation or explanation is offered for all names except those representing current American-English. But, to avoid excessive repetition, the different grammatical forms (such as those of French and Spanish adjectives and Spanish diminutives) are given only when such information seemed immediately pertinent.

In standardized languages (e.g. English, French, Dutch, and Spanish) modern spellings are used for entry-headings, and little problem arises. With Indian [5] languages no standardised form is commonly available, and some cross-reference is necessitated.

Since the dictionary is for general use, the system used for reference to Indian languages has been based upon practical considerations, and is not altogether consistent or likely to satisfy specialists. The name has generally been referred to the tribe, that is, to what may be in general considered the language, e.g. **Tunitcha** is labeled *Apache,* the linguistic stock, viz. *Athapascan,* not being noted. In certain areas, however, where tribal units were doubtful or where they were very small, e.g. in New England, the tribe from which the name was derived is usually uncertain, but the linguistic stock is known. Such a name as **Manatuck,** therefore, is merely labeled *Algonquian.* In some instances a double identification is given, e.g. *Muskogean (Creek),* or *Algonquian (Delaware),* especially since either of these terms may be wrongly taken if standing alone. Occasionally with obscure but separate units, such as exist particularly in the California area, a label of the type *Indian (Hupa)* has been used, since it was thought that many people would not even know that a tribe known as Hupa existed, and might suspect an error in spelling.

In a concise dictionary the detailed analysis of Indian names cannot

4. The term 'American' is used throughout as a convenient short term for 'English-speaking citizen of the United States after 1776.' In the colonial period the term 'English' is used primarily in a linguistic sense, but also to apply to the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies.
5. The term *Indian* is used always in the sense of American Indian.

be attempted, and details of phonetic shifting have likewise been passed over. Generally, however, the word order has been maintained in translation, e.g. **Bogalusa** being rendered as 'stream-black.'

The translation of many Indian names is difficult, and much research remains to be done. In some instances even the language is not surely determined, and a few names have been labeled merely 'Indian, language uncertain.' Many others, even with the language determined, have been denoted 'meaning uncertain,' or even 'meaning unknown.' The former designation generally indicates that different authorities give different translations and that, to the present lexicographer, no decision between them seems possible. Nonetheless, such names have been included in the Dictionary, since many people have an interest in knowing that a name is of Indian origin, even if they cannot learn its meaning. (See also *Tribal and national names.*)

Besides translation, Indian names offer many difficulties. 1. The forms have often been distorted in transmission through badly-informed or careless recorders, e.g. **Potomac.** 2. The names may be very old, so that they have already been transformed in the Indian context and their meaning has been obscured or shifted by folk-etymology; the significance of some names, e.g. **Tennessee,** was apparently unknown to the local Indians themselves. 3. Ambiguities exist because of homophones or near-homophones within the Indian languages, e.g. the element usually spelled in English as *talla-,* as in **Tallahassee,** may equally well represent a Muskogean term meaning 'town,' or 'stone,' or 'palmetto.' 4. Many Indian-appearing names may be more or less pseudo-Indian, i.e. they may have been coined by Americans from dictionaries or similarly produced by modern Indians, e.g. **Pasadena, Oklahoma.** In a few instances coinages have merely been made to resemble Indian names, e.g. **Wewahote, Itasca, Wewanta.** Such formations enjoyed some popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, especially under the auspices of H. R. Schoolscraft (see, e.g., **Algonac, Algoma**).

Even after the meaning of an Indian name has been determined, the reason for its application may remain difficult to fix. Most Indian names were based upon incidents (**Bear-in-the-Lodge, Boy Lake, Quilby Creek**) or were descriptive (**Mississippi, Katahdin, Kennebec**). The method of naming, however, was often different from the transplanted European methods of the colonists and later Americans. The