

Canada's geographical names

The sounds of Canada's names are melodious like Matapedia or harsh like Onderdonk Point. They conjure up the shape of a Lion's Head or the colour of a Vermilion River. They commemorate great persons in Borden and Nightingale and important events in Waterloo and Dieppe. There is the idealism of Utopia, steadfastness of Resolute, desperation of Starvation Lake and disappointment of Desolation Creek. And how many countries have an Adamant Glacier and an Overflowing River or a Choked Passage and a Bondholder Basin?

Preserved in Canada's names is the evidence of four centuries of exploration and settlement and the diversity of cultural origins that make up the nation. Some places bear the names of patrons, like the distiller Felix Booth and the two Ringnes brothers, both brewers, who financed early Arctic explorers. Others, like Arona, Barr and Caye, strung alphabetically along prairie railways, bear the names of convenience. They are monuments to railroaders who quickly passed through these open lands, leaving behind the ribbons of rail that link Canada together, and a string of stations to greet the homesteaders.

Some names, like Volga and Inverness, reflect the motherlands of the immigrants who settled in Canada and others — Ottawa and Igloolik — take their roots from Amerindian (Indian) and Inuit (Eskimo) expressions applied long before the Europeans arrived. Many, like Lac la Hache (British Columbia) and Port l'Hebert (Nova Scotia) reflect a former French occupancy although they have been English-speaking communities for many generations, while the reverse is true for such places as East Angus (Quebec) and Sheila (New Brunswick).

Canada's 250,000 official names reflect the nation's identity. There are at least two million unnamed features in Canada and naming them must be handled carefully.

Geographical names committee

Toponymy, the study of geographical names, involves determining their origin and meaning, and analyzing their linguistic development through time.

In the late nineteenth century, the Canadian Government saw the importance of toponymy and established the Geographic Board of Canada in 1897, entrusting it with the standardization of geographic names, or toponyms, for the entire nation. This agency has developed into the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. It is the authority on all matters of geographical nomenclature affecting federal departments and agencies in Canada and, in co-operation with the provinces, assures the establishment of uniform standards and adherence to specific principles and procedures in naming Canada's physical and cultural features.

Each year the Committee's secretariat processes 5,000 new names for Canada's stock of toponyms and verifies more than 27,000 others for use on Canada's topographic maps and in response to requests from the public.

Studying Canada's toponymy

The Committee's secretariat answers hundreds of inquiries each year on the background and use of names, and is continually updating its records. It has to determine answers to the questions that face all historians, linguists and geographers involved in the study of toponymy: How does a place name come to be? What dictates the choice of a toponym? How has it changed over the years?

Evidence of the Committee's work includes the names that appear, all in approved form, on Canada's topographical maps, marine charts and atlases; a series of 11 gazetteers that list geo-

Newfoundland's novel nomenclature

The names of Newfoundland deserve special mention. When the province joined Confederation in 1949, Canada suddenly gained thousands of new toponyms full of history, often descriptive and sometimes most amusing. To appreciate this, one has only to think of places like Hug My Dug Island, Goose Steadies, Enfant Perdu, Bay de Verde, Come By Chance, Bake Apple Island, Lac Fleur-de-May, Little Tumbledown Dick Island, Femme Shoal, Joe Batt's Arm, Uncle Dickies Burr, Gaff Topsail, The Funks and Change Islands Tickle.

graphical names with their latitudes and longitudes; a Toponymy Study series which, when completed, will include a publication on the origin and use of names for each province, the territories and undersea features, and various other reports. All are available from the Canada Map Office, 615 Booth Street, Ottawa, K1A 0E9, Canada.

For information on Canadian nomenclature and Committee principles and procedures write: The Secretariat, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, 580 Booth Street, Ottawa, K1A 0E4, Canada.

More Disraeli letters discovered by Queen's University

A new collection of letters written by Benjamin Disraeli, which had been considered lost at the turn of the century, has been purchased from a Hamilton, Ontario steelworker by Queen's University, Kingston.

The 27 letters were written to Sir William Hart-Dyke, seventh baronet of Lullingstone Castle, Kent, who served as chief whip of Disraeli's party in Parliament from 1878 to 1880, the last three years of Disraeli's term as Prime Minister of Britain.

The letters, passed on through the baronet's family, had reached Sir William's grandson, Sir Derek Hart-Dyke, the ninth baronet and an employee at the Steel Company of Canada in Hamilton.

An employee of Alcan in Kingston, who read about the university's Disraeli project remembered being shown the letters by Sir Derek when he worked with him. He told this to Dr. John P. Matthews, senior editor of the project, who went to Hamilton to investigate.

Sir Derek gave copies of the letters to the university for research purposes and recently the purchase of the originals was completed.

The Hart-Dyke collection contains "a very full and comprehensive day-to-day account of the business of Disraeli's cabinet", Dr. Matthews said. "We are very pleased indeed to have this new collection."

Queen's Disraeli project began in 1972. At that time some 2,800 letters written by Disraeli were known to exist. By 1973, nearly 10,000 letters