

Western Place Name Sketches

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THE STUDY of western place names has been underway since the middle of the nineteenth century,¹ but in only four of the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast states have place name dictionaries been published. These are *Origin of Washington Geographic Names* (1923), by Edmond S. Meany; *Oregon Geographic Names* (1928, 1952), by Lewis A. McArthur; *Arizona Place Names* (1935), by Will C. Barnes; *California Land Names* (1946), by Phil Townsend Hanna; *California Place Names* (1949), by Erwin G. Gudde. In the other states the collecting has been sporadic with occasional sustained drives sponsored by a historical society or an academic institution. The collection of Washington names contains 2813 entries, of which 771 are cross entries furnishing a guide to obsolete names encountered in the older documents. The analysis by Meany of sources showed for individual persons, 824; for physical features, 399; Indians and Indian names, 386; for other towns, states or countries, 191; for crops, trees, animals or birds, 115; freak names, 68; Spanish names, 33; for American ships, 17; for British ships, 6; Biblical names, 6.

McArthur described his *Oregon Geographic Names* as "the origins and analyses of Oregon's most important place names, including colorful anecdotes and legends associated with these places." In the second edition, which McArthur himself edited, he estimated that there were probably 50,000 geographic names in Oregon, about half of which deserved serious study. His second revision covered about 5,000 of these names, including practically all the best known names. The new edition in 1952 was enlarged by more than one hundred pages, and must contain a considerable amount of the material McArthur left. Will C. Barnes has about 4,000 Arizona place names in his collection. Professor Gudde's book numbers more than 6,000 entries, but it is his estimate that there

are more than 150,000 place names in California. I judge that he would agree with McArthur that not more than half of these have a distinctive history, and a much smaller portion are likely to interest any considerable number of people. Professor Gudde's statement about the linguistic sources of California's names is significant for a number of the Western states: "Indians who lived here before the coming of the whites, Spanish navigators from aboard their ships, European cosmographers from the narrow confines of their studies, uncouth soldiers and preaching missionaries, Russians and Chinese, French Canadians and Pennsylvania Germans, bawdy miners and hard-working surveyors, postmasters and location engineers, settlers from all states of the Union and from every European country—all have contributed to the names on the California map." McArthur checks the percentage of English place names in Oregon as 64.8; the Indian names total 22.6 per cent; then follow: German, 5.8; French, 3.5; and Spanish, Greek, Hawaiian, Latin, Portuguese, and Hebrew with less than one per cent each. As Western place name collections are completed, it will be interesting to see whether the proportion of place names with Indian origins is as high in all of the states as in Oregon. For the southwestern states it is a forgone conclusion that the Spanish sources will rival if not exceed the English.

It was to survey the situation as regards place name studies that a Western Place Name Committee was organized in July, 1950. The members were contributors to the column, "Names and Places," which appears in each quarterly issue of *Western Folklore* magazine. Randall Mills, of the University of Oregon, was the first chairman of this committee. Upon his death in 1952, the author of this article took over the plans he had made, and carried them on to what seems likely to be a successful conclusion. Arrangements were made for "Names and Places" to print a sketch of the place name literature in each far western state, describing the chronology of articles dealing with place names and indicating the progress toward a place name dictionary in that state. The first of these sketches appeared in October 1952 and was called "Arizona Place Name Records"; it was prepared by Edith O. Kitt and T. M. Pearce. In subsequent issues of *Western Folklore* the following sketches were printed: "British Columbia Place Names," by G.

V. P. Akrigg; "California Place Name Records," by Katherine Karpenstein; "Colorado Place Name Studies," by Levette J. Davidson; "Idaho Place Name Records," by Fritz L. Kramer, and "Montana Place Name Records," by Lucille Childears. Scheduled for appearance in October, 1954, is the sketch on the place name research in Nevada, and then will follow reports on New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

It has been the hope of the Western Place Name Committee that this series of surveys will stimulate field work and publication, with the end product a place name dictionary in each of the states where the surveys have been made. In New Mexico three small collections have been issued in mimeograph, between 1949 and 1952, and a collection of the chief place names is being prepared for printing in the fall of the present year. A revised edition of Barne's *Arizona Place Names* is scheduled for publication. It might be desirable to standardize the style and format of the contemplated state guides to place names. Since Henry Gannett's *The Origin of Certain Place Names in the United States* (1902, 1905) is long out-of-date, the importance of state collections cannot be overestimated. The members of the Western Place Name Committee intend to keep place name collecting active until the work has covered the majority of the names in all the western areas. The goal of collecting every place name may be unattainable, but substantial collections can certainly be provided. The Committee plans to persevere until this end is reached.

NOTES

¹The *Oregon Spectator*, between December 13, 1849 and September 13, 1851, printed a number of letters and editorials discussing the names of Oregon rivers: Long Tom, Tualatin, Clackamas, Calapooya, Willamette, and Rickreal. A report on the derivation of the names in several counties of California, by Mariano G. Vallejo, was published at Sacramento in 1850.