



Preface

This publication brings together the works of several people who have played important roles in establishing toponymy as a scholarly and a practical field. They represent academia, government, and various institutions, and some are retired. Their backgrounds and training cover several fields. But they are joined by a great and common interest in geographic names, and all have earned well-deserved kudos through their writings and efforts. They have another element in common: all have worked, in some capacity, with Dr. Meredith F. Burrill, who is universally respected for his many contributions to the discipline of toponymy. Their common admiration of Dr. Burrill has found extra expression in this *Festschrift*, which is published in his honor.

It would be difficult to speculate where toponymy would be today without the influence of Dr. Burrill. A reading of the contributions to this *Festschrift* clearly illustrates both the personal and the institutional impact he had. Like some others now active in the field, Dr. Burrill started his professional career not as a toponymist but as a geographer, which is commonly recognized as a logical starting point for toponymists, but by no means the only one.

His connection with geographic names can be said to have begun in earnest during the early years of World War II. There was a sudden requirement for cartographic products of areas in the Far East; while maps and charts were in plentiful supply, they needed to be romanized if American servicemen were to use them. The then-existing Board on Geographic Names did not have enough staff to handle the task. Therefore, a special office was established in the Department of Interior to carry out the task of romanizing literally millions of Chinese and Japanese names. Dr. Burrill, then working in another agency as a geographer, was selected to head the new effort. The result of that program is itself a candidate for fuller description.

After the War, the requirement for standardized names on a worldwide basis remained important. Under the guidance of Dr. Burrill, the Board on Geographic Names was recreated by a US public law in 1947 that provided increased authority and visibility to the interdepartmental body and that helped assure the continuation of its programs. Concomitant with the establishment of the new Board, Dr. Burrill was appointed as the Executive Secretary, a position he held for the next 26 years. During that time,

he worked to build the Board as an organization that relied on the support of other Federal departments and agencies and that carried out its mission in the face of difficulties often surrounding such service institutions.

During his tenure as Executive Secretary of the Board, Dr. Burrill also was active in other areas related to geographic names. He was a member of a number of professional and technical societies, and he climbed to the presidency of some of them. His list of memberships include the American Name Society, the International Congress on Onomastic Sciences, the Association of American Geographers, the Antarctic Society, the Explorers Club, and many other notable organizations. He also produced an impressive number of papers on toponymy and worked closely with friends and officials in academia, in government, and in international organizations to advance the field.

This is not the place to itemize the accomplishments of Dr. Burrill – a reading of the papers in this publication will indicate the scope of his influence – but there is one aspect to his career that needs some definition. For all his honors and his involvement in scholarly affairs, Dr. Burrill was employed by US Federal offices that expected – and received – practical results. Given the size and organizational complexities involved in the work of the inter-departmental Board, his employment was characterized at certain points by frustration and challenges that might have discouraged a lesser person.

While meeting these “opportunities” head on, Dr. Burrill retained his concept that the standardization of geographic names – which is the mission of the Board he led so many years – had an eminently practical purpose. Simply stated, the end purpose was to improve communications within the US government and, by extension, to other areas of American life as well. Today, the benefits of the Board’s work in standardizing and disseminating geographic names reach state agencies, the press media, and educational and institutional organizations. Dr. Burrill’s contributions to toponymy at the international level also reflect his influence as a key agent of the Board.

A review of Dr. Burrill’s accomplishments may give a picture that his wide-roving interests in toponymy strayed from pragmatic concerns, but how can one restrict or define his influence? There are a number of individuals whose careers in toponymy either were prompted by Dr. Burrill’s direct role in their budding professional lives or by his seminal ideas concerning toponymic theory. In this way, Dr. Burrill opened the door to many individuals in some degree to new ideas, to different concepts, to nagging challenges, yes, perhaps to difficult self-examina-

tion. The reader of this *Festschrift* will easily discern that Dr. Burrill played a role in several areas.

Finally, a personal note from the editor. I was pleased when Kelsie Harder asked me to serve as editor of the *Festschrift*. I have known Dr. Burrill for some 35 years and during this time my fondness and appreciation of him has grown. My first acquaintance began as a student of geography at the George Washington University, partaking of local field trips that he attended. Later, while working with government and with a major commercial publisher, I grew to know him further. In 1973, my current association began, for in that year I succeeded him as Executive Secretary of the US Board on Geographic Names (and Geographer of the Defense Mapping Agency as well). From that moment, I had the great privilege, conditioned to a large extent by tasks confronting me, of becoming even better acquainted with, and to be both edified and entertained by, this remarkable person. For these and other reasons, I am honored to have played a part in producing this *Festschrift*.

Richard R. Randall
Executive Secretary
US Board on Geographic Names
Washington, D.C.

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