

## American Influences on Canadian Toponymy\*

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### Introduction

At a meeting in Washington some years ago, Dr. Meredith Burrill commented that he believed he had a feature named for him both in Antarctica and in the Canadian Arctic. Given the role Dr. Burrill had played in national and international names programs, such a unique and double honor would not have been surprising. In order to establish the facts about this name, the writer later examined the records of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and located a *Mount Burrill* on Ellesmere Island, but to his surprise discovered that another Burrill was involved: Thomas J. Burrill, a noted 19th-century American<sup>1</sup> botanist. Without commenting on how the latter gentleman was related to the feature, the case points out a salient fact, namely, that an abundance of names related to American expeditions, climbing parties, prominent scientists and scholars, and others is found in the toponymy of Canada.

The United States has had a significant impact on many aspects of Canada's culture, business, recreation, and other fields. Its effect upon Canada's toponymy has been far reaching. The instigation to set up a federal advisory board on geographical names in Canada came about largely because the United States Board was authorizing usage within Canada. Private American map makers have been known to apply their own names on Canadian features. Leaders of American scientific expeditions have been responsible for a very large number of names, especially in the North. Both Americans who have immigrated to Canada and Canadians themselves have transferred a large number of names from the United States into Canada. Other influences, such as the presence of the international boundary and American preferences in generic terminology, are also examined in this paper.

### Establishment of Canada's Names Authority

In the late 1800s discussions were held in both Canada and the United

\*This paper is modified from a presentation made at the 33rd annual meeting of the American Name Society, San Francisco, December 29, 1975

States on the possibility of establishing official geographic naming authorities. In 1888 George Dawson of the Geological Survey of Canada proposed an official names board for Canada and outlined certain principles and procedures that should be followed. Several other public officials, including Edouard Deville, Surveyor General of Canada, endorsed the concept, and the Dominion Land Surveyors Association subsequently passed a resolution approving it.<sup>2</sup>

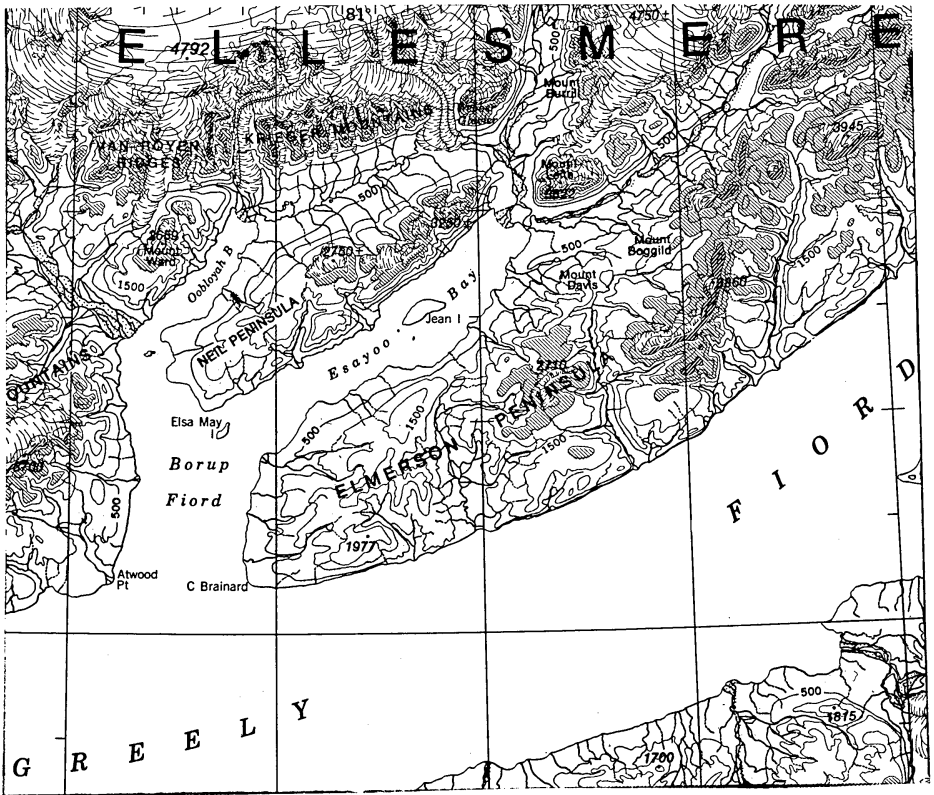
The initial result of the Association's resolution was to assign A.H. Whitcher, an officer in the Surveyor General's office, to undertake the arrangement and revision of the nomenclature of the then Northwest Territories, which then included most of Canada between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains, and all of the lands north of the 60th parallel. In 1892 Mr. Deville proposed the formation of a Board on Geographical Nomenclature to decide authoritatively upon all questions which might arise with reference to the giving of names to unnamed places or geographical features, the choice between alternate names, the prevention of duplication, the correction and simplification of orthography, and similar matters. In 1890 the United States had established its Board on Geographic Names. In asserting the need for a similar body in Canada, the Surveyor General pointed out in 1896 that the United States was making decisions on Canadian names and that these were being used by other countries. Therefore, the United States had a strong and direct influence in the formation of the Geographic Board of Canada, which was established by a federal order in council 1897 (later renamed Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names – CPCGN).

With the creation of a Canadian names authority, the United States Board on Geographic Names immediately acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Geographic Board of Canada over matters pertaining to Canadian toponymy. And, to this day, amicable relations and continuous cooperation have been maintained between the officials and the staffs of the two boards.

### Features in Canada Names for and by Americans

Non-Canadian explorers and scientists have had a considerable influence in the identification of geographical features in Canada, especially in the Arctic Archipelago. An examination of the section from NTS 340 S½, covering an area of Ellesmere Island, (Figure 1) indicates that hardly any name could be considered to be from Canadian sources. Most of the names on this map commemorate American scientists and explorers and were given by Adolphus Greely, who explored the area from 1881 to 1884, and by Elmer Ekblaw, who was there from 1914 to 1917. Examples

are *Greely Fiord*, *Neil Peninsula*, and *Elmerson Peninsula* (for Ekblaw's sons, Neil and Elmer) and *Atwood Point* (for Wallace Atwood, president of Clark University, Worcester, MA, from 1920 to 1946). Also on Ellesmere Island is *United States Range*, named by Isaac Hayes in 1861. The most northerly point of Canada is *Cape Columbia*, given by George Nares in 1876 in honor of the poetical name of the United States.



The honoring of American presidents alone in Canada's geographical names is quite extensive, with eleven commemorated in at least fifteen unassociated features in the two northern territories. Prominent among them in the Northwest Territories are *Buchanan Bay*, *Mount Grant*, *Franklin Pierce Bay*, and *Lincoln Bay*. Elsewhere in Canada there are *Roosevelt Peak* (BC), *Washington* (ON), *Lincolnvillle* (NS), and *Garfield* (PE).

Shortly after the assassination of President John Kennedy in 1963 several features were named or renamed for him in the United States, Canada, and in other countries. The highway between Quebec City and Jackman, Maine was dedicated in his honor. A street in Montreal was

renamed for him. A proposal to call the community of Sevogle in New Brunswick *Mount Kennedy* was officially resisted, although the reason chosen to reject it - that there was no mountain there - was rather specious, considering the religious connotation inherent in the word "mount." When another proposal to name a prominent mountain for the late president was put before the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names in 1964 it was initially rejected. The Geographic Board of Alberta expressed itself quite strongly on the matter:

At the recent meeting in September the Geographic Board of Alberta passed a motion as being opposed to the naming of features in Canada after citizens of countries other than Canada unless exceptional circumstances were involved - as, for example, a world figure who had an impact on Canada. A instance of this would be Sir Winston Churchill. As a result of this the Geographic Board of Alberta goes on record as not being in favor of naming a feature after the late President Kennedy.

Soon thereafter, however, the Committee was persuaded by Prime Minister Lester Pearson to reconsider its decision, and a mountain was ultimately chosen in the Yukon. Subsequently, it was climbed by Senator Robert Kennedy. When the latter was assassinated in 1968, requests were received to commemorate him in the name of another mountain, or to rename the one in the Yukon "Mount Kennedys," but these proposals were discouraged.

Many other famous American persons have been commemorated in Canadian places, such as *Greely* (ON) (for Horace), *Emerson* (MB) (for Ralph Waldo), and *Cape Vanderbilt* (NT) (for Cornelius).

Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in 1946 when Prime Minister Mackenzie King instructed the Geographic Board to rename *Castle Mountain*, a prominent landmark near Banff, Alberta, for him. The decision was not universally supported, especially in Alberta. A number of demands to replace it with the original name given by James Hector in 1858 culminated in a decision in 1979 by the governments of both Canada and Alberta to rename the feature *Castle Mountain*, and to designate its most prominent point *Eisenhower Peak*.

#### Features Names for American Places

The practice of transferring names from one country to another is universal, and it has been one of the most obvious sources of names in the United States itself, as names like New York, Syracuse, Berlin, and New Orleans bear witness. In fact, some American names have their roots in Canada, examples being *Ontario* (CA), *Klondike Township* (MN), *Toronto* (OH), *Orillia* (WA) and *Quebeck* (TN).

Numerous names in Canada have had their origins in the United States, many of them being given by people who emigrated. In the Maritime

Provinces several names were given by United Empire Loyalists in memory of the homes they abandoned when they objected to the newly established government in the United States. Examples that come to mind are: *Hampstead Parish* from Hempstead (NY) and *New Maryland Parish*, in New Brunswick; *Monticello* and *Roxbury* in Prince Edward Island; and *Medford* and *Tremont* in Nova Scotia. The name *Brooklyn* has been so favored in the Maritime Provinces that it occurs four times in Nova Scotia, twice in Prince Edward Island, and once in New Brunswick. There are also a *Brooklyn* in Newfoundland and a *Brooklin* in Ontario. All are named for the famous borough of New York.

*Long Branch* in the city of Etobicoke adjacent to Toronto is named for a place in New Jersey. *Alton*, *Nashville*, and *Bowling Green* in Ontario are namesakes of places in Illinois, Tennessee, and Ohio respectively.

Manitoba has *Miami*, possibly transferred from the place in Ohio, and *Plumas*, from a county in California. *Spiritwood*, *Cavalier*, and *Cando* in Saskatchewan are derived from places in North Dakota. In Alberta the following are named for American places: *Abilene*, *Alliance*, *Columbia*, *Coronado*, *Genessee*, *Groton*, *Oberlin*, and several others. British Columbia has *Rolla*, *New Denver*, and *Creston* as reminders of homes in the United States.

*Little Chicago* on the Mackenzie River in the Northwest Territories was occupied in 1898 by Americans from Chicago on their way to the Klondike. They liked the site so well that they stayed for a number of years. The name is still in use, although the site has been unoccupied for some time. The Yukon has *California Creek* and *Arizona Creek*, and the famous *Alaska Highway* crosses the territory.

In eastern Canada, especially the Maritime Provinces, there are a number of places called *California*, *Ohio*, *Missouri*, and *Florida*. Presumably most were given at a time when those states represented wealth and economic freedom. Some were said to have been given in derision because the places they described in Canada were poverty stricken and forelorn. Quebec has several features with the words *Américains* and *Yankee*.

Occasionally, some names in Canada appear to be almost certainly derived from American places, but historical facts often indicate otherwise, as with *Dallas*, a place in both Manitoba and British Columbia, *Youngstown* in Alberta, *Hearst* in Ontario, and *Cleveland Township* in Quebec.

#### Names Reflecting United States-Canada Contact

Adjacent to the United States boundary are numerous places that reveal

their proximity to the border. Included among such names are *Boundary Bay* (BC), *Borderland* (SK) and *Lac-Frontière* (PQ).

Incidents involving armed conflict between the two countries do not appear to have resulted in the giving of names to places. But the Civil War in the United States resulted in at least three places in New Brunswick acquiring the name *Skedaddle Ridge*, because draft evaders chose to flee their homeland rather than take up arms against their own countrymen.

*Smugglers Cove* in the St. Lawrence River east of Kingston (ON) and similar names suggest illicit trading practices between the one country and the other.

In an amicable way the two countries have disagreed on the spellings of names of several features common to both. Whereas British Columbia has *Okanagan*, *Kootenay*, and *Yahk*, Washington has *Okanogan*, and Montana has *Kootenai* and *Yaak*. A river rising in Maine is known as the *Prestile Stream*, and is locally pronounced "presteel"; it becomes the *Big Presque Isle Stream* in New Brunswick. This double usage was confirmed by field interviews throughout its length in 1968. *Rivière Tomifobia* and *Ruisseau Bachelor* in Quebec, become *Holland Brook* and *Stearns Brook* in Vermont, and *Montagnes Blanches* are called *White Mountains* in New Hampshire.

#### Generic Terminology Derived from the United States

English generic terminology in Canada has been strongly influenced by American usage. In fact, it can be said that the boundary would not appear to have had any restrictive effect on the movement of terms in both directions. *Butte* and *coulee* occur on both sides of the border in western Canada, and *pond* is widely used in Quebec adjacent to the New England states.

The most distinctive evidence of American influence in Canadian terminology is in the use and distribution of the term *creek*. In the Atlantic Provinces the term exclusively describes a tidal inlet, as befits the meaning of the word in Britain, except in those areas that were settled by the United Empire Loyalists, who migrated from the United States in the late 18th century. In New Brunswick, for instance the term *creek* occurs above tide in only two river valleys: the St. John and the Petitcodiac; elsewhere above tide the terms *brook*, *stream* and *river* describe flowing water features. In all the watersheds draining into the Gulf of St. Lawrence in New Brunswick, *creek* occurs only once above tide. In central, western, and northern Canada the term *creek* is used almost exclusively for water features tributary to rivers, and the words *brook* and *stream* are almost unknown or considered poetic.

## Canadian Features Identified in American Publications

In recent years there has been a trend toward a greater awareness among American scientists to seek endorsement of names they wish to use in journals and scientific articles. Nevertheless, some disturbing practices remain. Frequently geographical features have been identified in American scientific journals whose authors apparently did not take the time to ask for prior approval by the appropriate Canadian naming authority, whether it be federal or provincial. Occasionally, some authors have submitted their names and proceeded to use them before approval was granted: often such names have been officially rejected, but their occurrence in distinguished journals and their subsequent repetition by other scholars and authors has sometimes led to reluctant approvals.

Many map- and atlas-producing companies (Hammond, Rand McNally, Field Enterprises, Donnelly Printing) in the United States often consult the CPCGN Secretariat on the proper spelling and application of geographical names. The National Geographic Society has become quite meticulous in ensuring that the nomenclature it uses on its maps conforms precisely with the official decisions of the competent names authorities. In the January 1975 number of the *National Geographic Magazine* a map of the Maritime Provinces was issued. Prior to its publication the CPCGN Secretariat had detected 68 errors in naming, spelling, and application, including the use of *Grosvenor Lakes* for features named officially in 1974 in honor of Alexander Graham Bell, the distinguished inventor who made his summer home at Baddeck (NS). The Society apologized for the large number of errors, and pointed out that *Grosvenor Lakes* had been used on previous National Geographic maps, so it was assumed the name had been properly endorsed previously by Canada and Nova Scotia.

## Conclusion

The proximity of the United States to Canada has had a profound and widespread impact on the toponymy of Canada. The influences have come from Americans who have explored previously unnamed territory, and from American immigrants and even from Canadians themselves who have in numerous instances preferred to honor distinguished Americans and memorable American places. As Canadians are now tending to emphasize those elements that distinguish them from Americans, there is a noticeable trend toward a preference for names that have distinctive Canadian origins. In 1982 the CPCGN adopted guidelines on the use of personal names of non-Canadians. The guidelines require a strong associ-

ation in the development or exploration of an area in which a new geographic name is proposed. Nevertheless, no effort will be made to change names like *American Geographical Society Glacier*, *Yankee Hill* and *Presidents Seat* in order to reduce the influence of the United States on Canada's toponymy.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The word *American* throughout this paper means anything pertaining to the United States, including a citizen of the United States. Canadians resist, even resent, the extension of the word to include the territory of Canada.

<sup>2</sup>Memorandum prepared by the Executive Committee of the Dominion Land Surveyors Association in accordance with a resolution regarding geographical nomenclature and orthography in Canada. Passed at the annual meeting, held in Ottawa, March 15 and 16, 1888, and published by John Lovell & Son, Montreal, 1888, 12 pp.