
Special Report

A Progress Report for the Placename Survey of the United States (PLANSUS)

Since my last report in these pages, PLANSUS has met twice – in May 1992 in Astoria, Oregon, and in December 1992 in New York. Recent work of this Commission has focused on the need to standardize basic aspects of placename study, specifically, the *terminology* used in our studies and the *format and types of attributes* compiled in computer data bases. No decisions were made at our meeting in Astoria to adopt any specific definitions or computer field descriptions, but deadlines were set for specific actions.

At our New York meeting, the *Terminology* subcommittee recommended that the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* approved in English by the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographic Names be accepted as the basic list of terms for PLANSUS. This recommendation was accepted with the understanding that the document will be circulated to all members of the American Name Society for comments. These comments will be circulated among PLANSUS members for discussion at our next meeting in El Paso, Texas, in September 1993. Most readers of this report are members of ANS, and we hope you will send us your comments on the *Glossary* as soon after you receive a copy as possible. Please mail them to me at MS-25, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA 99004.

As I mentioned in my last report, such a glossary should enhance the coordination of research already underway, as well as facilitate the training of people newly interested in toponymy.

The goal of the *Format and Attributes* committee has been to describe the types of information generally useful in placename study and to specify standard ways in which such information should be expressed. For the past year and a half, the subcommittee has been working on the assumption that a distinction needs to be made between required types of information and desired types, and that some desired types should be given priority rankings. At our New York meeting, the descriptions of the four required types were reaffirmed. They were listed in last year's report and are repeated here:

1. **Name** – free form exactly as found in source.
2. **Type of Feature** – any designation is acceptable, but it is highly desirable to specify the most appropriate category set forth in

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GNIS. Designations not in GNIS could be converted to a GNIS category.

3. **Location** – this is to be expressed in any of several data fields, listed here in order of preference:
 - a. geographic coordinates
 - b. civil divisions
 - c. map reference
 - d. county
 - e. nearby distance and direction from a well-known, other feature
4. **Source** – a coded indication of where the information was found, using, preferably, the MLA guide for documentation, some other standard bibliographic citation of the text or map, or the name, age, gender, residence, and employment of the respondent.

While these four types of information are considered essential and basic, our assumption about prioritizing other desired types has been abandoned. Papers presented at the ANS meeting in New York showed that many types are important and that which ones are used depend on the interests of the researcher. It was decided to refer to the data fields compiled by the Chair (included in these pages) and to solicit suggestions from the ANS membership of other data fields for consideration at our next meeting in El Paso.

It is still the feeling of most PLANSUS members that the Geographic Names Information System operated by the U.S. Geological Survey is a useful base to which placename scholars can add other types of information. GNIS includes the four basic types listed above. However, we very much need additional suggestions from ANS members in order to describe the many other types of information fully and accurately. Again, please mail your suggestions to me.

Other action at our New York meeting: We hope to communicate with ANS members more regularly with a newsletter, *Toponymic Notes*, edited by Don Orth. We also commissioned Don Orth to outline a manual for placename study that will be sponsored by PLANSUS. Finally, we hope to sponsor sessions devoted exclusively to toponymy at future meetings of ANS. Please mail me your comments and suggestions on all these items at your earliest opportunity.

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