

## Western States Geographic Names Conference

I wondered if the scenery and hospitality of South Dakota could match what we had experienced in El Paso, Astoria, and Santa Fe, but I went ahead and issued the invitation anyway. I am happy to report that my doubt was unnecessary; if the responses I have received from many who attended the eighteenth Western States Geographic Names Conference are an indication of general satisfaction, South Dakota has no need to fear competition from other states in the West.

More than fifty participants were in Rapid City, at the edge of South Dakota's Black Hills, from September 7-10, 1994, for the annual gathering of onomastic scholars, state mapping and place-name authorities, and federal officials responsible for making decisions about names on maps. The meeting gave all of us a chance to exchange ideas and hear about some of the research going on in the Western states.

Especially valuable to both state and federal agents was the all-morning round-table session on Friday, giving everyone a chance to talk out issues of policy and procedure, such as names in official wilderness areas, local versus historical use of names, names of features considered insignificant, and the use of diacritics with placenames.

The Domestic Names Committee of the US Board on Geographic Names, which meets monthly, usually in the District of Columbia, held its meeting on Thursday afternoon, and considered several proposals for new names or name changes. Robert McArtor, of the Government Printing Office, is chairman of the Committee. Roger Payne is Executive Secretary.

Several scholars made presentations, scattered over the two days. Professor David B. Miller of Black Hills State University in Spear-

fish, South Dakota, talked about the contributions that the Black Hills National Forest has made to the US Forest Service and about many of the names that are found in this area. Professor Grant Smith of Eastern Washington University in Cheney spoke on names of schools in Washington. Professor Dennis Lutz, University of North Dakota in Minot, presented an illustrated lecture on Montana towns named for cattle brands. And Professor Donald Lance, University of Missouri, gave us the most recent results of his long- range study of the pronunciation of his state (the majority of Missourians now say "Missour-ee").

There were also two other formal presentations. Wendy Hassibe of the Rocky Mountain Mapping Center in Denver discussed USGS plans for better distribution of information and products through the National Performance Review, and Wayne Furr, Oklahoma Geological Survey, issued a very enticing invitation to next year's meeting at Sequoyah State Park in eastern Oklahoma.

Several groups had an opportunity to meet during the conference. The Placename Survey of the United States (PLANSUS), was chaired by Grant Smith, and the Western States Geographic Names Council, the chief sponsor of the Conference, met under the guidance of Executive Secretary Jay Haymond of Salt Lake City. On the afternoon of September 7, just prior to the opening reception, a group of South Dakota people interested in organizing a state board on geographic names met to discuss the best way to get started. We were fortunate to have meeting with us most of the members of the US BGN as well as several others who were able advise us from their experience with state boards.

An especially interesting feature available to participants and to the public on Wednesday and Thursday was the Geographic Names Information System on CD-ROM, a digital gazetteer containing all of the names in the GNIS database. Robin Worcester of the USGS staff demonstrated the software, using a computer system lent by the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City.

But it was not all work. On Friday evening nearly everyone boarded a bus to Sylvan Lake Lodge, one of four fine restaurants located in Custer State Park, and had a specially prepared ovenbaked buffalo dinner. We then rode to Mount Rushmore in time to see the

impressive lighting ceremony. On Saturday, most of the day was devoted to the toponymic tour of much of the Southern Black Hills, with stops at Hill City, Blue Bell Lodge in Custer State Park for lunch, and Mount Rushmore once again. The route took us on the Wildlife Loop Road, where we had close-up views of antelopes, prairie dogs, buffalo, and friendly feral donkeys. We had a delightfully informative tour guide named Sue Hey. Finally, those with enough energy boarded the bus once again for an evening in historic Deadwood, which has been turned over almost entirely to the gambling industry. From what I was able to learn, more money was won than lost.

I began planning for this conference early in 1993 and was fortunate to have the support of my own University of South Dakota and its Statewide Educational Services (through the very able administrative abilities of Anita White); of my own daughter Susanna Gasque, a recent geography graduate of the University of South Carolina; of Western States Geographic Names Council Executive Secretary Jay Haymond; of BGN Executive Secretary Roger Payne; of BGN Publicity Chair Roberta Quigley; of the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce; of the staff of the Rapid City Hilton; and of many more. I'm now looking forward to next year's meeting in Oklahoma, where I plan to sit back and relax.

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