

Forty Years With the American Name Society

Leonard R. N. Ashley

*Brooklyn College of The City University
of New York, Emeritus*

I was, as so many others were, introduced to the American Name Society by Professor Margaret M. Bryant. Those who knew that indefatigable lady will recall she carried a large purse which was always full of invitations to join one or another of the many scholarly organizations she supported. In time I was to follow in her footsteps as president (like her, twice) of ANS, as president of the American Society of Geolinguistics, and (obediently, at her urging) as secretary and board member of the International Linguistic Association. Miss Bryant did more to recruit ANS members than anyone else I ever met.

I joined ANS and went with Miss Bryant to the second Names Institute, where Professor Christopher Wrenn of Oxford (whose work I knew) was scheduled to speak. Since the early sixties I have attended and read papers at all the Names Institutes save those held when I was out of the country on sabbatical leave. I have spoken at most of the regional meetings based upon "Mac" McMullen's successful Names Institute, the Connecticut Onomastic Symposium just about every year of its existence, for instance. I was instrumental in getting two other regional meetings started: the North Central in Illinois and the North Country in Upstate New York. I also spoke at almost all the meetings of the Conference on Literary Onomastics, founded by a woman as dynamic as Miss Bryant, Grace Alvarez-Altman. At all of these meetings I much enjoyed the company of fellow names scholars and I regret that even Dean Fred Tarpley's lively Texas regional meeting is no more. Only the Names Institute survives, thanks to Wayne H. Finke, my colleague in CUNY, and I have been happy to assist him in arranging its gala 40th anniversary meeting in 2001.

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ANS needs several regional meetings each year, creating articles that can appear in regional proceedings and occasionally in *Names* and offering a forum and fellowship to those who cannot travel to the ANS annual meetings. I hope the Names Institute will reach its 50th anniversary, offering an opportunity for names papers of all kinds, and I believe ANS ought to set up annual special meetings on literary onomastics and place names and perhaps other specialties.

The lack these days of go-ahead people in ANS who are willing to create and sustain regional meetings is regrettable. The journal is becoming ever more professional. It can, however, accept only a comparatively few scholarly articles each year. With regional meetings unavailable, there are too few outlets for researched papers. True, there is the large program of the annual meeting. However, despite recent efforts, still too few who will attend and speak there are members; many participants of late have been non-members who appear but once; ANS offering an easy way to get on the program of an associated meeting of the Modern Language Association. Without opportunities to publish—and I (if not the deans) count reading a paper at a convention a kind of publishing—onomastic scholarship will of course go on, but hampered. Publishing online offers new promise. I hope promotions committees will come to reward it.

To offer outlets (and incentives) for onomastic research, I have twice attempted to set up a hardcover series on names. The first efforts failed when most potential contributors waited until the bandwagon might roll. Only a few books (one of them an anthology of articles from *Names*, another select papers from the Conference on Literary Onomastics) appeared. One book that I fostered could get into print only in India. I am moving to have it reprinted in the U.S., though it is on the personal names of India.

Recently I attempted to establish with Edwin Mellen Press a series on names and naming. As general editor, I found nearly 40 capable scholars who wanted to contribute and weeded out the incompetent or lazy. I had to resign as general editor when the press began to reject some mss I had approved. I took back my own books. Five will appear from other publishers in 2002. In our “publish or perish” world, a book contract can work magic to stimulate research.

The first books in the Edwin Mellen series are now in print. I have edited the unpublished names articles of Allen Walker Read and other

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hands may collect the work of Claude Neuffer and others, anthologies (E. Wallace McMullen is providing selected papers of the Names Institute, Edward Callary selected papers from the publications of the North Central Name Society, etc.). These publications will provide libraries with a substantial amount of material that otherwise might be neglected or lost.

Equally important will be any stimulus to new research and writing. I will publish *Cornish Names* and will work with Ola J. Holten on *Swedish Personal Names* and commission other works. The textbooks on onomastics for which I called years ago in a keynote address to the Conference on Literary Onomastics will have to wait until others teach courses in which such books can be used. My personal experience with writing a textbook to *create* courses on a topic—my pioneering *Nineteenth-Century British Drama* was in print for 20 years with Scott, Foresman and was revised for University Press of America after that—convince me that textbooks and books of readings for courses should arise out of experimental courses. Also, it is well nigh impossible to get a publisher for any textbook (I have written many in drama, short stories, etc.) unless and until there is “a demand for them” by teachers ready and willing to adopt them. Who else will attempt the task of creating the chicken before the egg? When a good textbook appears, courses will be given. At least it cannot be said that there is no such thing as names as it was said that there was no British drama between Sheridan and Shaw.

In addition to publications aimed at scholars and students we need books on names and naming addressed to the general reader. My simple survey of the whole field, *What's in a Name?* (1989, revised 1995), is still doing well. A new book on place names should be as successful as George R. Stewart's acclaimed but now old books. That demands, however, a geographer with a novelist's touch. I do think, nevertheless, that such a book will come in time and will be well received. My experience with taking obscure and difficult matters of the occult and presenting them in a series that entertains as well as enlightens the general reader is encouraging: my series (published by Barricade Books) continues this year with the ninth paperback, *The Complete Book of Dreams and What They Mean*. Since 1995 books in the series have appeared in foreign translations, paperback and hardcover British editions, as a book club choice, etc. The occult is a limited and even difficult topic but everyone has a name or knows someone who has. A popular book on names and naming of any sort, if avoiding pompous

terminology and full of amusing and informative examples, will be—popular. A 10th book in the series is signed for Spring 2002 publication.

We need to present our subject to the inquirer at the reference desk and to the casual reader, as well as to create (as some ANS members have done) a gazetteer of United States toponymy (Frank Abate), a dictionary of place names (Kelsie B. Harder, and others), bibliographies (Elizabeth Rajec, Edwin D. Lawson, and others), and specialized studies of the names of individuals (Elsdon C. Smith, and others), countries (W. F. H. Nicolaisen, Alan Rayburn, and others), states (Donald J. Orth, Claude F. Neuffer, and others), provinces (Andre Lapierre, and others), cities, counties, names in literature and commerce, etc.

Without a credible number of worthy publications, scholarly and popular (so lots of people will know it exists), our subject will continue to be regarded not as an academic discipline but as a mere hobby. Personally, I have to say that despite my interest in onomastics, I did not dare publish “too much” in this unappreciated field until I attained a full professorship (1972) based upon more highly-regarded topics: *Authorship and Evidence in Renaissance Drama* and *A History of the Short Story* and other historical works, biographies of literary men (*George Peele: The Man and His Work* and *Colley Cibber*), anthologies (*British Short Stories: Classics and Criticism* and *Mirrors for Man: 24 Plays of World Drama*, etc.), editions (*Phantasms of the Living* and *Shakespeare's Jest Book*, etc.), textbooks and articles in encyclopedias on traditional “academic” subjects, even poetry, and so on. Had I published extensively on names, I think, my work would have been regarded not like my *The Air Defence of North America* but like my Ripley's “*Believe It Or Not*” *Book of The Military*.

Today the field of onomastics has attained, thanks to many dedicated scholars, a higher reputation in academe than it previously held but I dare say that there is still some resistance in academic circles to this branch of linguistics. We have all heard too often that, with the possible exception of toponymic studies in the old Teutonic tradition, name study, especially literary onomastics (in which Americans may well have surpassed the European scholars), is unscientific, unworthy of serious attention. Until we stop merely botanizing and start thinking theory we shall all lumped with the authors of casual what-to-name-the-baby books and the collectors of “funny names.” (Don't disparage them; from H. L. Mencken onward, fine and important work has sometimes resulted.) But we need taxonomies and hypotheses, not just specimens.

As ANS enters its next half century, effort must be made to increase professionalism and build greater acceptance in the Academy. Young scholars must be called to the colors in this battle. Support and encouragement must be given them. We need to reinstitute an annual prize for the best onomastic article. I won ANS' once. It seems thereafter to have disappeared. When scholars see that they can successfully write on topics of interest to linguistic specialists and indeed to every level of society, whose dynamics are always reflected in the giving and the use of names, no one can fail to respect and reward them.

The campaign must continue on two fronts: essential and substantial specialized scholarship and readable and reliable popular paperbacks—or e-books. I have recently completed two guide books on names of all kinds which are designed to enrich the English-speaking travelers' experience abroad: *What's in a Name in Mexico* and *Turkey: Names and Naming Practices*. As a retired professor I need not fear charges of "trivia." Such popular books are not trivial and in fact they depend a good deal on the author's demonstrated expertise in more "serious" writing. To use the leading poet Robert Graves' defense of his writing novels such as *I, Claudius*, these popular books can be the dogs one raises to feed one's cats. I continue with academic books: my *Linguistics and Modern Society* (published in the U.S., the U.K., and India) appeared in 2001 (more than a dozen geolinguistic essays).

To read papers at onomastic meetings—preferably meetings whose proceedings are published and put into libraries where they are accessible to anyone interested—or to write for the academic or popular markets, more and more people must come forward. They should be as dedicated and as talented as the many wonderful people I have had the pleasure in knowing in ANS, only a few of whom I have had the space to mention here. These new people will advance the study of and wider understanding of names.

ANS has a proud history and a clear mission. Its job is to create a fellowship for those fascinated by names and to assist them to proclaim to the world—and not just the academic world—the truth of Sir Francis Bacon's dictum that there is "much impression and enchantment" in names.

The most notable fact in my "40 years" is that I was on the executive council, repeatedly re-elected, longer than anyone else ever, several decades.