

Toponymy in Missouri

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Shortly after I came to the University of Missouri in 1969, I began hearing about Robert L. Ramsay and work he had done in place name research. When I became acquainted with Allen Walker Read at meetings of the American Name Society and American Dialect Society, he told me even more about his Missouri mentor and the beginning of place name study in the state.

Allen began his teaching career at the University of Missouri in 1926 after finishing a masters degree at the University of Iowa at the age of 20. His thesis treated Iowa place names beginning with A through F, and no doubt his enthusiasm for toponymy encouraged Ramsay to initiate a longer-range study of Missouri place names. Ramsay directed 18 graduate studies based on names in the 114 counties, with the intention of eventually publishing a dictionary of Missouri place names. Though he died before he could prepare the dictionary, he did complete *Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names* (published by the University of Missouri press in 1992 and reprinted in 1973), based on about 2000 names, and transferred information on 32,234 names from the theses to 4 x 6 index cards that are available to researchers in several locations, including the offices of the Domestic Names Committee of the United States Board on Geographic Names at the United States Geological Survey in Reston, VA. The suggestion for sending the file to Washington came from Henry Belden, a cartographer at USGS and son of Henry M. Belden, long-time chairman of the English Department at the University of Missouri and Ramsay's closest colleague.

Ramsay, Read, and a colleague, Esther Gladys Leech, published a monograph in 1934 (*Introduction to a Survey of Missouri Place Names*, University of Missouri Studies Series) that laid out useful principles and procedures for toponymists to follow. It caught the attention of scholars such as George Stewart and played at least a small role in the eventual founding of the American Name Society, for Stewart and Ramsay engaged in extended correspondence during the 1940s over the possi-

bility of forming a national organization called the Place Name Survey of the United States. Ramsay was a member of the committee that founded ANS in 1951. (Read taught at Missouri for two years before attending Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1928-31. He returned to Missouri to teach for a year before going on the University of Chicago for doctoral studies and a research position on the staff of the *Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles*.)

In 1974, when the state committees of the Place Name Survey of the United States, a committee within ANS, were established, I was a member of the Missouri committee, which was chaired by Adolf E. Schroeder (professor of German) until 1980, when Walter Schroeder (professor of geography) assumed that role. One of the goals of these state committees was to collect place name data and make it available to researchers and governmental agencies, including the Domestic Names Committee of the USBGN. In the late 70s and early 80s, USGS created a digital file of place names for the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) and initiated a series of contracts for researchers in each state to update and expand each state's portion of GNIS. Walter Schroeder directed the updating of the Missouri data in 1988-91, with much of the information coming from Ramsay's files. In 1993, at the ANS meeting in Toronto, I presented a paper on the expansion of the Missouri GNIS data base. The principal author of the presentation was Christopher Barnett, who had been a student employee on the project and wrote an M.A. thesis in geography on practical uses of a searchable file of the Missouri database.

In the meantime—out West—the Inter-Mountain Geographic Names Council was formed in 1977 in Salt Lake City, and about 1980 it expanded to include the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast States and changed its name to the Western States Geographic Names Council (WSGNC). About 1990 the Council expanded to include all states west of the Mississippi River and in 1998 decided to expand to include all of the United States and changed its name to the Council of Geographic Names Authorities (COGNA). This organization, with its annual conference, has become the primary professional venue for toponymists and individuals associated with state names boards and committees, some of whom are or have been officers in the American Name Society, notably, Don Orth, Alan Rayburn, Lewis McArthur, Roger Payne, Wayne Furr, Grant Smith, Tom Gasque, Helen Kerfoot, and Michael McGoff. The ANS-sponsored PLANSUS, the Place Name Survey of the United States, holds meetings at both COGNA and ANS. Annual

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conferences of WSGNC and COGNA have been chaired by Tom Gasque (Rapid City SD, 1994), Wayne Furr (Wagoner OK, 1995), Grant Smith (Spokane WA, 1999), and me (St. Louis MO, 2000).

And in the meantime—here at MU—I did a little toponymic study myself. The name *Missouri* is a rich and interesting example of “an Indian name”—both its origin and its contemporary pronunciations. I have enjoyed investigating the word and giving presentations at ANS and elsewhere. I published an article in the *Missouri Folklore Society Journal* in 1985 and have continued to do research on this term and other “Indian names.” I published an article on the origin of *Missouri* in the September 1999 issue of *Names* and still have a little work left to do on a couple of articles on the pronunciation of the *-ss-* and the final vowel in *Missouri* with historical evidence from the files of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States. My research on *Missouri* led me to look at possible relationships between early alternative spellings of “Indian names” and how the words are perceived and pronounced today.

I have given papers on “Indian names” at the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences in 1999 and the Canadian Society for the Study of Names in 2000 but still must do more research before feeling comfortable publishing anything in this area. When I had the opportunity to attend the 1999 International Conference on Jewish Onomastics in Israel, I did a study of biblical place names in Missouri, reporting on 108 such places, 55 of which had post offices at some time in the twentieth century and are mentioned in commercial ZIP Code directories even though the official postal directory does not list historic post offices. This paper will be published in a forthcoming volume of *These Are the Names*, edited by Aaron Demsky and published at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. Professor Ramsay’s file was of inestimable value in this study, and the data collection would have been at best spotty if I had not had online access to the GNIS files mentioned above.

From the 1970s onward, when I have gone to the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, I have always attended the sessions of ANS and ADS, with audiences that greatly overlapped, and I have particularly enjoyed the ANS dinners. Especially in the early days, the atmosphere at ANS was exceptionally warm and friendly, thanks to the personalities of those who regularly attended ANS meetings: Fred Cassidy, Ed Ehrensperger, Lurline Coltharp, Sarah Jackson, Keslie Harder, Virginia McDavid, Rita Miller, Allen Walker Read, Arthur Berliner, Marion Harris, Stewart Kingsbury, Fred Tarpley, and others whose names don’t come to mind but who can say “yes, and me too.”