

Remembering the American Name Society

Sarah Evelyn Jackson

Georgia Institute of Technology

My introduction to the Name Society almost did not take place. I taught at the Georgia Institute of Technology from 1961 to 1995. When the chairman of the English Department retired, he happened to ask me if I would like his copies of *Names*. Never one to turn down a free book, even without knowing its contents, I accepted. Thus began the delightfully enriching association with ANS and those who make it a truly unique group. I submitted a paper on medical terms and soon was on my way to the meeting in San Francisco, the first of many.

Immediate acceptance has always been the distinguishing characteristic of the Society. Margaret Bryant and Lurline Coltharp invited me to sit with them, introducing me to other members and making me feel a part of the group. No one ever seemed left out. It is a group where inclusion is inherent.

People of all ages and all backgrounds and all interests find the topic of names intensely interesting. When I was gathering information for my ANS presidential address in 1986, respondents to my questions were intrigued by the whole idea of “The South and Southerners.” Those two words—which seemed so self-evident to me—suddenly took on new meanings depending on the perspective of the person responding. Questions about place—the South—elicited references to a variety of geographic areas around the core states, with “anything south of Indiana” one of the more amorphous ones. Foods, terms, attitudes, feelings, impressions—all provided additional insights into the many ways in which words work.

Research with names, whether of medical terms or places or groups of people or everyday activities or items, provides endless opportunities for today and for the future. The “new words” lists give only a small hint of the changing language, the dynamic naming process. Words can

Names 49.4 (December 2001):273-274

ISSN:0027-7738

© 2001 by The American Name Society

274 Names 49.4 (December 2001)

even change in meaning and significance. For instance, the term “ground zero” took on new meaning on September 11, 2001; and the words “World Trade Center” and “Pentagon” suddenly were on the lips of people around the globe. The many meetings I have attended and the many papers I have heard and read give striking evidence of the richness of the study of names. Recent technology has provided amazing new tools for the researcher, and the field gets ever more broad. The future is bright.

No reference to names and my experiences over the past 26 years is truly complete without the names of those who have been and are today my ANS colleagues and friends. We have shared meetings and trips in the warmth of a tour on the St. Lawrence River or the bitter chill of Chicago; we have shared meals and ideas and our lives. It is a rare and wonderful thing to do. To list them all would extend these comments beyond proper bounds; but those names, little black lines and curves and dots on membership rosters, are forever recorded in my heart with gratitude and love. So it is with names.