

The American Name Society: The First Fifty Years

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I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to our president, Tom Gasque, for the opportunity of speaking this evening in celebration of the golden anniversary of the American Name Society and to Christine De Vinne, who planned the program, and all who contributed to making this a grand occasion. I had hoped Kelsie B. Harder would be speaking tonight, because he knows the most about, and very probably has contributed the most to, ANS. He ran the organization for many years as our valued secretary-treasurer.

Term limits will now make unique my own experience of serving for over three decades of those 50 years of ANS on the executive council. Those years have, however, given me the chance to know very well how the organization has fared, how it has burgeoned, over the half century so far. Naturally I am glad to have survived to present a few thoughts about ANS here this evening.

Our parent organization was the American Dialect Society, in which I and a number of other ANS members have also long participated. Many of our members are still very active in ADS. Recently there was some discussion that our ANS annual meeting might be held with ADS, even when it went to meet not with MLA but with the Linguistic Society of America. We have tried meeting separately from MLA but the majority of our members seems to prefer to attend the MLA meetings in December rather than the LSA meetings in January. There are few linguists of the traditional type in ANS now and still the membership tends to be connected to the Modern Language Association, so here we are with MLA in New Orleans. This MLA association may or may not continue; it is a matter of where the preponderance of our membership prefers. There is a question also whether people will continue to travel to conventions as they have in the past.

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Years ago, during my two ANS presidencies, I arranged ANS panels at the Popular Culture and American Culture associations and elsewhere, and we have been represented at various regional meetings of MLA, but we have never undertaken joint meetings with geographers or sociologists or psychologists. We ought to try that, in my opinion. It would be nice if more scholars from those disciplines were more connected to names study.

That brings me perilously close, however, to politics both national and organizational, and I have promised myself not to intrude on this happy occasion any partisan contentions we may have experienced in ANS. Like all scholarly organizations, ANS has its occasional rifts and disagreements, of course, over where to meet and over other (often recurrent) questions, but disagreements are, with almost all academic contentions of the sort, usually trivial. To meet with or away from MLA will, I suppose, continue to be considered and often reconsidered. Decisions should be practical.

In the early fifties of what we all now are a trifle astonished to have to refer to as "the last century," it was not politics but a desire to make more of a specialty out of names study that led some members of ADS to decide that there ought to be another organization, one that concentrated on how proper nouns (a very distinct class of words) function in our language. A group gathered in Chicago on 29 December 1951 and set up the ANS. The first annual meeting was held 27 December 1952 in Boston. Already ANS had been invited to send representatives to the inauguration of two chancellors of California educational systems. One of them is a name you will recall: Clark Kerr.

Erwin Gudde was the first editor of *Names*. Vol. 1, No. 1 was March 1953 and included, besides Gudde on "Names and Trains," an opening piece on the name *America* by Madison S. Beeler, Robert L. Ramsay on "Irish Pioneer Onomatologists," Demetrius J. Georgacas on "Slavic Names in Cyprus," Aileen S. Bonestell on "Bacteriological Nomenclature," David Allen Stern on "Los Angeles," and Carl M. Weisman on the origin of the name *Brooklyn*. From the outset ANS was wide in its interests and attracted many specialists, some with large interests, some with many interests.

From the first there was a Mary Glide Goethe Prize in Onomatology for the best publication in the field during the year. We need to have such an annual prize. I won one once, but the prize seems to have been discontinued. Such a prize, I think, for ANS members and non-ANS members, ought to be reinstated.

Some of the founders were with us for quite some time and many ANSers well recall such stalwarts as Elsdon C. Smith, Margaret M. Bryant, Mamie Meredith, and others. I mention a few names in this connection (though many deserve attention), just to stress that ANS from the start involved both amateurs (in the best sense of the word) and academics: Elsdon C. Smith was a lawyer by training, Margaret M. Bryant a linguist (who also wrote a book on language and the law, among others). The American name organization sprang from US dialectologists; the Canadian one, surprisingly, can be traced to one man's interest in a single medieval list of Ukrainian names.

If I may be personal, I especially remember Margaret M. Bryant. I chose, when I was offered teaching positions in New York City, to go to Brooklyn College partly because the English Department faculty at Brooklyn in 1961 was graced by a number of leading scholars, and among those was Miss Bryant, a member of Brooklyn's faculty from the very beginning (in the thirties) and an acknowledged expert on American grammar. She was in fact the chair of the committee which hired me. Those of you who were privileged know her remember her commodious pocketbook, always full of flyers and application forms for the very many organizations in which she had a hand. She recruited many people. She persuaded me to attend a meeting at Fairleigh Dickinson University, where E. Wallace McMullen was beginning the Names Institute, and (that year—it was 1962) one of the most distinguished of British scholars in a field of English in which I had some interest (Professor C. L. Wrenn of Oxford) was going to speak. One of "Mac" McMullen's former students, Arthur Berliner, drove back from New Jersey after that day Miss Bryant, Allen Walker Read, and myself. I was impressed by them. I attended and read papers at *all* subsequent Names Institutes (unless I was out of the country on sabbatical leave) and most recently at the 2001 celebration of the 40th Names Institute, whose papers I am editing with Wayne H. Finke. After McMullen retired, having conducted the Names Institute at Fairleigh Dickinson for a quarter of a century, Wayne Finke took over and the Names Institute is now housed at Baruch College CUNY, where Wayne teaches Spanish, and is directed by him. It has been a long-lived and very successful ANS institution. I am proud to have read dozens of papers at NI meetings and I hope others in ANS will do so in the future.

The Names Institute inspired other regional meetings. Grace Alvarez-Altman set up and ran for most of 20 years an annual Conference on

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Literary Onomastics, generally meeting in Rochester, New York, and publishing an annual collection of papers, *Literary Onomastic Studies*. I spoke annually at the CLO meetings as long as the CLO lasted. Just as Wallace McMullen published a couple of books of Names Institute papers, Grace Alvarez-Altman with her colleague at SUNY Brockport, Frederick M. Burelbach, produced a book of selected papers from the CLO.

Other regional meetings grew from McMullen's success with the Names Institute. Fred Tarpley ran one for some years in Commerce, Texas, publishing annual proceedings. Gina and Arthur Berliner set up a Connecticut Onomastic Symposium at Eastern Connecticut State College. That ran for years and, after the Berliners moved to the South, Dean A. Reilein directed it until his retirement. He also published a couple of collections of the selected papers. For a few years the Berliners were able to stage an annual Blue Ridge Onomastic Symposium in Roanoke (VA). Also operating for several years were a North Country Community College annual names meeting, led by Murray Heller (it published three sets of proceedings), and a North Central Names Institute which was founded by Lawrence A. Seits and continued with Edward Callary as director. A selection of papers from this institute was published in 2000 in the Mellen Press series for which I was for a time general editor.

I set up that Mellen series partly to ensure that the papers of these regional meetings would get into libraries in useful reference books and not be lost. Recently the unpublished onomastic papers of Allen Walker Read, read at annual ANS meetings and at regional meetings such as these, have appeared. I edited those for publication and Richard Bailey of the University of Michigan not only provided a bibliography of all Allen Walker Read's work but has undertaken to edit (for Duke University Press) Allen's non-onomastic papers on the American language. I hope more of the papers read at ANS meetings over past years will be saved for posterity and suggest that for the future copies of all papers read at meetings be saved and from time to time selected papers be collected in anthologies. We have lost too much fine scholarship already.

Speaking of Allen Walker Read, whose work I have been especially careful to see we shall not lose, I want to quote a note he has by me sent for this occasion:

I am happy to feel that I was among the founders of this organization and have seen it grow so much over the years. I want to thank the present members, and acknowledge indebtedness to those no longer here, for what they have contributed. Also, I wish for the society in the future the continued dedicated scholarship it deserves.

I, too, am interested in such scholarship and have attempted to get it to print with an earlier onomastic series which I tried to establish (with Irvington Press) to start. A few onomastic books appeared, including a collection of "the best of the journal *Names*" and (edited by Grace Alvarez-Altman and Fred Burelbach) "the best of *Literary Onomastic Studies*," as well as A. Ross Eckler's *Names and Games*. For Mellen I arranged for some 35 or 40 scholars around the world to prepare volumes and, though I am no longer with Mellen, many of those books, some by members of ANS, will, I assume, in time appear. (Five of my own books done for Mellen are being published by 1stBooks now.) See news of them online. Already in print from Mellen are books of North Central papers mentioned above, the Allen Walker Read papers also mentioned, and the collected onomastic essays of Robert Fleissner, with collected onomastic essays by Dorothy E. Litt soon to appear. More will follow. Cleveland Kent Evans and others are contributing to a Mellen volume of essays on Mormon names, for example. Tom Gasque is collaborating with Claude Neuffer's son to create a volume of materials selected from the 30 publications that Neuffer published on the names of South Carolina. I hope that comes to fruition.

I want to encourage all of you to collect and publish your own work. It is difficult to manage both publishers and academic writers—I wonder if you have ever attempted to herd rabbits—but it was imperative, in my view, that all the work done in names study and either unpublished or published in proceedings that appeared in very limited editions must be saved for scholarship. Not all scholars have been able to find publishers for their work as, for instance, Robert M. Rennick has done for his books on Kentucky place names or Elsdon C. Smith did for his studies of personal names or Donald J. Orth and Kelsie B. Harder did for their toponymic studies, and so on. The Erwin Gudde book on the place names of California (brilliantly revised and expanded by William Bright), the place names of Scotland (a prize-winning publication by W. F. H. Nicolaisen), the two volumes of bibliography of literary onomastics published by Elizabeth Rajec, the two volumes of masterfully annotated bibliography of the psychology of names and

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naming compiled by Edwin D. Lawson, and many more standard works are now available for scholars everywhere.

I wish I had time to list all such important books, from those which captured the attention of the general public, such as George R. Stewart's *Names on the Land*, to those which met the needs of names specialists, either massive (such as Frank Abate's *Omni Gazetteer of the United States*) or smaller. Scholars such as Lewis L. McArthur, continuing the work of his father on the place names of Oregon, have devoted long lives to better and better books on a vast number of topics in place names, personal names, names in literature, names in commerce, indeed names of all types and not only in the US, because the American Name Society is the American society for the study of names, but studies of names everywhere, and in all aspects. As we reach the golden anniversary, ANS ought not only to encourage publication for the future but also to collect as much as possible of the work done in the past.

We must also note Jaroslav Rudnyćkyj and other early members of ANS; he is now recalled in a notice by Stephen Holutiak-Hallick. Under the direction of Alan Rayburn (who himself contributes James White and Robert Douglas), we have now posted online or soon will post online notices of the work of many ANS pioneers. Just mentioning the following names is in a way to write something of our early history. Notices already available include William Bright on Madison S. Beeler and Erwin Gudde and George R. Stewart; Richard Randall has done Meredith "Pete" Burrill, Thomas Gasque has done Edward Ehrensperger and Claude Neuffer, Robert Julyan has done Matt Pearce, Donald Lance has done Robert Ramsay, John Algeo has done Thomas Pyles, Alan Rayburn has done James White, and I have done Margaret M. Bryant and Robert A. Fowkes. Others ready now or soon to appear are: Henry Gannett and Will Barnes and Thomas Mendenhall by Donald J. Orth, William Ganong and Robert Douglas by Alan Rayburn, Demetrius Georgacas by Ladislav Zgusta, Frank Hamlin by Tim Nau, Lewis A. McArthur by Lewis L. McArthur, Elsdon C. Smith by Kelsie B. Harder, Jean-Paul Drolet by Helen Kerfoot, Virgil J. Vogel by Edward Callary, Thomas Field by William Withington, Byrd Granger by Lloyd Clark, Robert West and William Read by Randall Detro, Lurline Coltharp by Roberta Arney, Richard Sealock by his daughter Margaret Powell, Willis Russell and Virginia Foscue both by John Stanley Rich, Louise Pound and Mamie Meredith by Lynn Hattendorf-Westney, and Ernest Seary by Gordon Handcock.

You will notice in that list not only Alan Rayburn and other Canadians (Rayburn was president of ANS as were André Lapierre and Sheila Embleton) and this year term limits end the service of Helen Kerfoot on the executive council. She is still another of our valued Canadian colleagues. Many of us have read papers at Canadian meetings or published in the Canadian names journal, and Canadians have published in ours, and both Americans and Canadians have been active in ICOS.

Our journal *Names* has grown in strength over the years and under the retiring editor, Edward Callary, has been outstanding not only in coming out on time (which is rarer than you might think for scholarly journals) but in containing illuminating and varied articles on a wide variety of topics.

In addition to regular issues, *Names* produced with the assistance of a considerable number of scholars of great expertise as guest editors a fine clutch of special issues on a number of important specialties, from American place names and the psychology of names to slang and Shakespeare and more. (I edited the issue on Shakespeare on names and Marion Harris came to the organization's assistance when an editor of the journal at that time was desperately needed.) I believe these special issues are worthy of publication as books. Perhaps some day it may also be possible to publish as books some or all of the *Festschriften* created to honor various names scholars and full of expert articles on a variety of topics. In any case, the journal will in time be online and these contributions will be available, but for a generation or two or more the old-fashioned hold-it-in-your-hand publications will be sought in libraries and appreciated by scholars and regular readers.

The first 45 volumes of *Names* were indexed in lots of 15 by, respectively, Clarence Barnhart, Kelsie Harder, and Michael McGoff. Provost McGoff has taken over the editing of the annual *Ehrensperger Report* on publications and work in progress; it is a fitting memorial to still another cherished founder of ANS. In time I should like to see an anthology of the best of the *ANS Bulletin* insofar as small articles, rather than announcements, etc., are concerned. In time, if we can weed out from *Ehrensperger Reports* what may have been promised but never produced in the way of publications, that may be of some help in constructing something else ANS ought eventually to produce: a bibliography of all US publications on all types of names, put online and updated regularly thereafter. It will be a massive undertaking, for there

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are some 100,000 items in the Library of Congress catalogue on US place names alone. Those who think that onomastics is a mere hobby with basically few adherents and insignificant results need to be presented with evidence of what has already been done, and of course future scholars need to be able to build on what has been done without uselessly repeating what has already been finished. A comprehensive onomastic bibliography is a massive undertaking but it ought to be one of the major priorities of ANS over the next 50 years. The comprehensive Place Name Survey of the United States, the huge encyclopedia of names in literature, and other resources will take even longer. The banquet speaker at the 100th anniversary of ANS can report on what progress has been made by that time.

The first 15 volumes of *Names* were reprinted years ago by AMS Press in New York. I trust that the first 50 volumes (or more) will someday be reprinted as a set or put in their entirety online for scholars worldwide. Only then will the magnificent achievement of a series of talented and hardworking editors and contributors to *Names*, one of the oldest and most distinguished of American scholarly journals, be fully apparent.

I have been stressing published materials because these will be the legacy of the first 50 years of ANS that will be there for all to see. Published work establishes the discipline. Meetings at which papers are read promotes scholarship, all the better if it leads to permanent record. What is less palpable but still extremely important is the contact and camaraderie among scholars that regional, national, and international meetings (such as those of ICOS, where ANSers such as Bill Nicolaisen, Lurline Coltharp and Grant Smith have been officers) have fostered. As we celebrate a half century of ANS, all of us will remember the many talks we have heard, the many friends we have made at scholarly meetings, here and abroad. Some of those friends have left us but their contributions to name study are not forgotten. Some name scholars cannot be with us tonight but send their good wishes—but I have read you too many roll calls already.

It is, of course, the people who have made the ANS what it is today. It is they who have so often made participation a pleasure. I hope that in the coming years more and more scholars will be drawn into ANS and find it congenial and important in their scholarly endeavors. I hope to see, soon, more serious courses on names in linguistics programs and in geography and other departments, textbooks for its teaching at all

educational levels, even some dissertations. The University of California has accepted a dissertation on magic and the University of Utah has granted a doctorate for a study of how the angle at which the bat is held affects the bunt in baseball. Why not names, a scholarly pursuit that goes back importantly in English at least as far as William Camden in Britain and in the US to William Arthur, the father of President Chester A. Arthur? It is a respectable intellectual subject as old as the Greek who announced that the beginning of everything is the study of names.

In my day, names were not (to be frank) considered in most academic circles serious enough a topic to earn attention, respect, and promotion in leading colleges. I had to publish on many other topics and not do much on onomastics until after I had tenure and a full professorship. But that professorship came 30 years ago now. Names and their study have been good to me since the seventies. Kelsie Harder reported in his presidential address some years ago that at that time I had published more pages in *Names* than anyone else. ANS gave me the great honor of electing me president on two different occasions. ANS gave me that unique run on the executive committee following years of membership on the board of managers. You gave me the honor of addressing you this evening. For all, I am honestly grateful.

Inevitably, these brief remarks have been in large part a roll call of just some of the leading members of ANS, and time has prevented me from mentioning a great many names I should otherwise have included. Those of you who know ANS know all the names of those people—and how much name study owes to each and every one of them.

I ask you to remember and be thankful, as I am, for all the people who made ANS successful for half a century.

I note that ANS also gave me the opportunity to meet US government officials (such as Meredith H. Burrill, Donald J. Orth, and Roger L. Payne), internationally famous folklore specialists (such as Bill Nicolaisen and Wayland D. Hand), major foreign scholars (such as Ernst Eichler and Peter Raper), experts on literature and the American language (such as John Algeo and Donald Lance) and even slang (such as Peter Tamony and Gerald L. Cohen and Barry Popik), lexicographers such as Clarence Barnhart and Frank Abate, founders (such as Elsdon C. Smith and E. C. Ehrensperger), and recent members from many disciplines and countries.

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Donald Orth reminds me that it was Byrd Granger of ANS who wrote to Senator Barry Goldwater and launched the campaign that eventually put the US Board on Geographic Names on track to collect all US place names. From the USBGN computers Frank Abate got some 90% of the place names for his *Omni Gazetteer of the United States*. I trust that in future ANS men and women will influence scholarship not only in our own and other scholarly organizations but also in government agencies and commercial publications.

ANS is not in a position to create on its own any place name survey of the US, we discover, but we can add significantly to what the USBGN and others collect from maps. We can especially be useful in finding what is not cartographic but (as the poet says) hidden, “not lost,” in the diaries and publications of early explorers and settlers, in work of obscure local historians, in folklore and literature related to names, enriching the record of geographic names, even those too small or too evanescent to get onto maps, as well as addressing how names function in all departments of literature—we need to reach out more beyond the borders of prose fiction—and in commerce and to demonstrate better how naming as unique and significant human behavior enrich understanding of psychology, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, history, and other sciences.

Already, over half a century in this organization, men and women have dedicated themselves to those serious tasks and laid the groundwork for future successes. Those people came from a variety of disciplines and were united by an interest in onomastics, names and naming as scientific evidence, even in artistic and subjective creations. They all contributed to ANS.

Today we say “women and men” and not just “men,” as Kipling did, but Kipling’s lines in an old “School Song” (even though they are definitely old-school and “colonial” in our era when the “post-colonial” is all the rage—for a while) are still apt as we think of all those who made ANS great:

Let us now praise famous men—
Men of little showing—
For their work continueth,
Broad and deep continueth,
Greater than their knowing.