A Cluster of Dictionaries

British Dictionaries

Since the turn of the century, there has been an astonishing series of publications of dictionaries devoted to the placenames of Britain or to one of its constituent parts. These compendia, all compiled by well-known name scholars, integrate or utilize the rich new seams of toponymic knowledge that have been laid bare as the result of various scholarly undertakings, individual or co-operative, during the better part of the century which has recently come to an end. It is therefore appropriate that members of the American Name Society and other readers of *Names* should be made aware of their availability as guides to the place-nomenclature of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Some of them are in a handy, portable format; others are destined to find a suitable place on the shelves of study or library. With a few exceptions, they can be regarded as reliable sources containing modern information about, and helpful analyses and interpretations derived from, recent research in the field or from earlier lexicographical aids. Together, they provide easy access to an array of cumulative knowledge previously still in the making, but now contained in a wide variety of geographically or thematically defined publications or not yet published at all. It is understandable that, in addition to the potential for complementary treatment, there are considerable areas of overlap, as well as noticeable differences in their handling, of similar or closely related materials. There are also some complicated interconnections. It is hoped that, in the comments which follow, some of these special characteristics and emphases will appear although evaluative comparisons are, in general, not the main aim.

In 1999, Patrick McKay's *Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names* was published by the Institute of Irish Studies, the Queen's University of Belfast. It draws widely on the seven published volumes of "The Place-Names of Northern Ireland"

series, in which McKay was the author of Vol. IV (Antrim I: The Baronies of Toome), and generally on the database built up within the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project at the Queen's University of Belfast, of which the author is a member. The dictionary, which covers about 1300 placenames, therefore inherits, both on an institutional and on a personal level, many of the project's special qualities which have received so much laudatory approbation ever since its inception in 1987. It lays bare the tapestry of languages to which the Northern Irish inventory of names owes its origins: Irish (Gaelic), Scots, English, Old French, Old Norse, Scottish Gaelic, and Norman (French). Its major source is the *Gazetteer of Ireland* (Dublin, 1989) which has the advantage of including all places irrespective of their linguistic origin, an important desideratum in the scholarly selection and treatment of names on the map of Northern Ireland, in recognition of the complex cultural heritage of the nine counties of Ulster. As a further asset, the Gazetteer also includes names of prominent national features, such as mountains, rivers and headlands, the names of which have found their way into the *Dictionary.*

It is always risky, even misleading to try to represent the proportion of names of one linguistic origin or another statistically since so much depends on the criteria employed in their calculation, and to a certain extent on the degree of compatibility of the socio-onomastic significance or administrative status of the actual names incorporated in the count. Nevertheless, it is difficult to overlook the undoubted fact that the majority of names are of Irish (Gaelic) origin, in view of the frequently heard claim that there is no longer any speaker of Irish native to Ulster alive today. Names abound containing Irish *achadh* "field" (Aghagallon, Aghanloo)), *baile* "farmstead" (Ballinderry, Ballyastle), *doire* "oakwood" (Derry/Derrylee), *droim* "ridge" (Drumlee, Drumnakilly), *cill* "church" (Kilkeel, Kilrea), *loch* (Lough Finn, Lough Gowna), etc. The extensive list of placename elements requiring explanation also pays testimony to this observation, without

belittling the strong admixture of names of other linguistic provenance, especially English and Scots. Names transferred from outside Ulster must, on the whole, be regarded as linguistically unanalyzed, and their interpretation in their locations of origin do not normally matter in their new habitat. Sometimes attempts to ignore this principle go wrong, as in the explanation of Balmoral (p. 19) which, as an import from Scotland, did *not* mean "farm of the big clearing" in its "home country ," in a bizarre mix of Gaelic and Britannic elements. Occasional little slip-ups, however, only support the overall judgement that this is a book that is bound to satisfy scholarly needs and expectations and delight the general public.

The *Oxford Names Companion* published in 2002, contains, in its 1264 pages, three dictionaries previously published individually as separate entities, or in part: *A Dictionary of Surnames*, edited by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges (first published in 1988); *A Dictionary of First Names*, also edited by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges (first published in 1990); and *A Dictionary of British Place-Names*, edited by A.D. Mills and Adrian Room (incorporating the 1998 edition of Mills's *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, with additional entries on Scotland, Wales and Ireland). These three compendia have been brought together in a special edition for Book Club Associates. As the first two components, of 685 and 207 pages, respectively, are largely reprints of their independent predecessors, there is no need for subjecting them to detailed scrutiny again, more than a decade later, except to say that, while their weighty presence in this tripartite volume is to be welcomed in principle, it is to be regretted that, for instance, the substantial and informative original Introduction to the *Dictionary of First Names* has been curtailed to one page only, and that the very useful two Supplements of the original edition—one on "Common Names in the Arab World" and the other on "Common Names of the Indian Subcontinent"—have been eliminated altogether (although slip-shod copy-editing has failed to remove the

paragraph referring to their inclusion, from the drastically shortened Introduction, leaving the reader not familiar with the genesis of the revised version unnecessarily puzzled). Editorial intervention has also erased all traces of the supporting bibliographies which accompanied the dictionaries in their previous, independent existence.

This fate also befell the *Dictionary of British Place Names*, and one wonders why it was thought that the targeted new readership of this special edition would have no interest in pursuing their interest in names beyond a discovery of their etymologies. In contrast to the two anthroponymic dictionaries, however, the text of the toponymic one has been extended, in order to enlarge the geographic coverage from English to British. There are still recognisable reminders of that process insofar as the appended "Glossary of Some Common Elements in English Place-Names" is, indeed, restricted to England (pp. 1260–1264), and many of the additional names from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland somehow do leave one with the impression of lack of full integration. On the whole, the placename dictionary appears to be the only one in the *Companion* that is truly British whereas the personal name ones have extra-British dimensions. Accordingly, the Introduction to the *Dictionary of First Names* states as its aim "to record and explain [the] similarities and differences in the names of Europe and the English-speaking world" (p. 689). These slight incompatibilities are indications that *The Oxford Names Companion* was not initially conceived as a whole, although Patrick Hanks's general "Introduction" (pp. vii–xiv) ties the constituent parts together.

The two co-authors of the *Dictionary of British Place-Names* did, however, within a year of the publication of the *Compendium* produce their own parallel dictionaries with the same coverage, one (Mills) under the Oxford imprint, the other (Room) in the series of Penguin Dictionaries. Of these two, Mills's dictionary obviously has the closest affinity to the one included in the *Companion* and its selection of about 17,000

British placenames is practically identical with that. While the proposed derivations and the introductory comments echo their counterpart in Mills's earlier *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, the "Glossary of Common Elements" as well as the extensive bibliography are not just "British" in name. A brief comparison shows that the non-English entries in the main text have undergone considerable improvement in cases in which acceptable reliability is lacking in its partners in the *Compendium*. In comparison, Room's *Penguin Dictionary of British Place-Names*, like Mills's volume also in paperback, was, it seems, compiled before or contemporary with its author's involvement in the *Compendium* and contains, if the Scottish entries are anything to go by, numerous doubtful derivations, mainly because of the influence of out-of-date earlier works. His English entries may, however, well be more reliable as, like Mills, Room had the county series of the English Place-Name Society at hand. A detailed comparative scrutiny of the two dictionaries is beyond the scope of this review. Both works are illustrated by several helpful maps, although Mills's map of "Scotland: Counties and Unitary Authorities" erroneously assumes that there are still counties in Scotland when there are only "Council Areas;" counties were abolished in the early seventies. The introductions to both books do, in general do justice to the various matters they raise—historical, thematic, linguistic, etc.—but the designations "Pictish," "Celtic," and "Old English" confuse, even obscure, the inter-relations of the non-Gaelic Celtic languages of Scotland in the Penguin volume (p. xix).

Most recently, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) was added to this cluster of compendia. It was edited by Victor Watts, Honorary Director of the English Place-Name Society and author of *A Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names* (2002), who was expertly assisted by John Insley as Assistant Editor and Margaret Gelling as Advisory Editor. Sadly, Dr. Watts did not see his work come to full fruition because he

died only months before the publication of the *Dictionary*. Like A.D. Mills, he brought to this undertaking a long and close relationship with the English Place-Name Society and his expertise was honed on the Society's county volumes. To think of the *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* simply in terms of yet another work devoted to the subject would be severely understating its particular, impressive characteristics. Outwardly, it can best be described as a lavish production which provides a fitting home for its inward achievements. In scope, it contains names of cities, towns, villages, hamlets, rivers, streams, hills, and other geographical locations included in the *Ordnance Survey Road Atlas of Great Britain* (1983); each of these features is identified by county and by its own National Grid reference number and is therefore easily and precisely locatable. In addition, we are informed about the modern English "translation" of each name, its historical spellings, etymology, and pronunciation; these are accompanied by explanatory comments (for example, drawing attention to comparable names) and a reference to the sources of the evidence, thus providing the fullest and most satisfying entries of all the dictionaries examined. The larger-than-usual format of the volume allows not only for a fairly extensive documentation for each name but also for a series of larger and clearer distribution maps (understandable, but unfortunately, always ending at the Welsh and Scottish borders) and, probably the most innovative feature in a dictionary of this kind, an *illustrated* "Glossary of most frequently used elements" (pp. xlii–xlix).

For these and other reasons, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* is not just a worthy successor to the several editions of Eilert Ekwall's classic *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (1936, 1940, 1947, 1960) but a modern extension of it, especially in its emphasis on "the onomastic situation in present-day England which is particularly reflected by the selection of names for inclusion ... regardless of their antiquity or modernity" (p. vii). This bias

towards the present does, however, not exclude the diachronic considerations which we have come to expect of traditional dictionaries of placenames, although the potential uses of the *Dictionary* may well miss the kind of detailed linguistic guidance which goes beyond the short paragraph on p. xiv of the "Preface." Yet there can be no doubt that Victor Watts, in his *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names,* has set new standards in onomastic, particularly toponymic, lexicography. It goes without saying, however, that in this professional excellence, both in format and in contents, the publishers have also reached new altitudes in their pricing of the volume (£175!). Victor Watts's *Cambridge Dictionary* is obviously not intended for consultation "on the road" or "in the field ," whereas A.D. Mills's *Oxford British Dictionary* is easily carried.

Other Dictionaries

The current spate in the production of up-to-date onomastic dictionaries is not limited to Britain. In particular, two long-term projects have recently come to fruition in the area of personal name studies, both published in 2003. Of these, the three-volume *Dictionary of American Family Names,* edited by Patrick Hanks, is of special interest to readers of *Names.* It is a monumental work of anthroponymic scholarship which addresses the complex nature and multi-ethnic background of Family Names in the United States by the felicitous use of modern sampling techniques and the expert help of a large number of specialists in the relevant languages and cultures. This co-operative undertaking has resulted not only in a total of almost 2000 pages of alphabetically listed names (from Aaberg to Zywicki), but also in over a hundred pages of wide-ranging introductory commentary informing the user of the characteristics of naming practices in the various countries of origin onwards. Since the main criterion for inclusion is frequency, "all surnames with a count of 100 or more have been included, with the result that there are 70,315 entries in

DAFN. This reflects little more than 4% of surname types, but it represents the surnames of over 85% of the population of the U.S." (p. xxiv). This is a magnificent achievement which was only made possible through team-work and the utilization of modern technology. The three well-appointed volumes of the *Dictionary of American Family Names* surpass all previous publications in the field not only in scale but also in reliability. They are bound to find their way into every public and institutional library in the U.S., as *the* major source to be consulted by people interested in the origins of family names in the U.S. For a previous full review see *Names* 52 (March 2004):61–65.

While the successful completion of this project owes much to the co-operative team-work under the direction of its editor, Patrick Hanks, a recently completed four-volume dictionary on German first names has a single author. Wilfried Seibicke's *Historisches Deutsches Vornamenbuch* (Historical German First-Name Book) which, as its title indicates, has, in contrast to the DAFN, mainly a historical perspective, was published in four phases: Vol. I (A–E), 1996; Vol. II (F–K), 1998; Vol. III (L–Sa), 2000; Vol. IV (Sb-Z), 2003), with the actual alphabetical dictionary (Aafie–Zysa) containing a total of 2700 pages. It was even longer in the making following practically the author's scholarly lifetime. In keeping with its historical outlook, each entry provides (in some cases several hundred) references to the post-1400 dates and sources in which the name in question is recorded, with special attention being paid to prominent bearers of the name in question, not so much in a search for models but in an attempt to locate the name and its transmission chronologically and spatially. An impressive bibliography (Vol. I, xvi–lxxxviii, with addenda in later volumes) bears witness to the scale and scope of the primary and secondary sources used, an incredible collection compiled singly-handedly by the author. In support of the purpose of the *Vornamenbuch*, name spellings play an important role, with each spelling treated as a separate name but linked to related

names by a network of cross-references. Although the four volumes complete the coverage of the alphabet, an additional volume is still planned to follow. It looks more than likely that Seibicke's impressive compilation will, in addition to its own value as an end-product, be used as a handy tool in which the historical record of each name can be easily traced, saving future scholars thousands of hours of searching.

Another welcome addition to our growing shelves of works of onomastic lexicography is *Svenskt ortnamnslexikon* (Swedish Place-Name Dictionary) compiled by a team of scholars within the Institute of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research and the Department of Languages at Uppsala University, under the editorship of Mats Wahlberg (Uppsala 2003). The dictionary is intended for the general reader and contains brief etymological entries for approximately 6000 placenames in Sweden (provinces, counties, manors, farms, mountains, rivers, etc.). These include a large proportion of Saami and Finnish names from northern Sweden. In addition, the volume contains fifty survey articles on some of the most common toponymic elements (*bo, bod, bol, bor, by, harg, holm, härad, hog, kumla, land, löv, ond, ryd, socken, torp, tuna, vin,* etc.), over eighty illustrations, an extensive bibliography, an index of names mentioned with individual alphabetical entries, and an informative Introduction, dealing with the study of placenames, placename structure, placename categories and the standardization of placenames. Each entry has a reference to the location of the name, the status of the feature named, the date of an early, usually the earliest, recorded spelling (though not its source), and a short commentary pertaining to the etymology of the name. The *Swedish Place-Name Dictionary* is a very satisfactory example of scholarly team-work under the leadership of one of their own. Its advantages over the kind of solitary scholarship preparing similar national dictionaries are obvious and are seen at their best in this compilation. Such a co-operative venture certainly increases its trustworthiness by avoiding potential editorial

biases and individual quirks. The primary readership is clearly Swedish but scholars in other Nordic countries and elsewhere are likely to benefit from its findings, too. The volume is beautifully produced.

P.S. The seventh (and last) volume of George Broderick's *Placenames of the Isle of Man*, the first volume of which was published in 1994, is due to be launched in the Isle of Man in September 2004. Broderick's compendium will receive a separate review.

The dictionaries reviewed are:

Patrick Hanks, Flavia Hodges, A.D. Mills, Adrian Room (eds), *The Oxford Names Companion* (contains *A Dictionary of Surnames*, *A Dictionary of First Names*, and *A Dictionary of British Place-Names*). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. xvi + 1264. £30.00. ISBN 0 19 860561 7.

Patrick Hanks (ed.), *Dictionary of American Family Names*. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. cviii + 1971. ISBN 0 19 508137 4.

Patrick McKay (ed.), *A Dictionary of Ulster Place-Names*. Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1999. Pp. xiv + 159. Illustrations. £7.50/$15.99. ISBN 0 85389 742 5.

A.D. Mills, and Adrian Room (eds), *Dictionary of British Place-Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Incorporated in Patrick Hanks, et al. (eds), *The Oxford Names Companion* (q.v.).

A.D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. xxviii + 533. Maps. £8.99/$14.95. ISBN 0 19 852758 6.

Adrian Room, *The Penguin Dictionary of British Place Names*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003. Pp. xxxix + 549. £9.99. ISBN 0 14 051453 8.

Wilfried Seibicke (ed.), *Historisches Deutsches Vornamenbuch*. 4 vols. Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996–2003. Pp.

xlvii + 2701. ISBN 3 11 014445 X / 3 11 016196 6 / 3 11 016819 7 / 3 11 017540 1.

Mats Wahlberg (ed.), *Svenskt ortnamnslexikon*. Uppsala: Språk- och folkminnes institutet, 2003. Pp. 422. ISBN 91 7229 020 Y.

Victor Watts (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp. lxiv + 713. Maps. Illustrations. £175.00. ISBN 0 521 36209 1.

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The Post Offices of Kentucky's Big Sandy Valley: A Survey of the 341 Post Offices of Floyd, Johnson, Magoffin & Martin Counties. By Robert M. Rennick. Oregon: The Depot, P.O. Box 2093, Lake Grove, Oregon 97035. 2002. 140 p. (Maps, Photographs, Postmark reproductions). Soft Cover. (ISBN: 0-943645-24-7). $12.50. 21cm. 8.25 inches.

Robert M. Rennick continues his exploration of the post offices of Kentucky with the publication of his fifth volume on the subject. This survey covers four of the five counties of the Upper Big Sandy Valley; the fifth was explored in Rennick's 1992 volume *The Placenames of Pike County*. In the present volume Rennick describes, often in surprising detail, each of the 341 post offices of the four counties: Floyd, Johnson, Magoffin, and Martin. Each entry lists a primary name and, where possible, the location, "the date and circumstance of the office's establishment, and the name of its first postmaster or that person most influential in getting it started." Also included are "the date it closed (most did), the derivation of its name (and whether this has been confirmed or is merely assumed or suspected), and any other names borne by the post office or the community it served."

We are fortunate to have scholars like Robert Rennick who dedicate their time and energy to produce a work that, though it may have a limited audience, will serve researchers for years to come. It is valuable on several levels and includes contributions to settlement history, onomastics, language, and social interaction. The volume will function as a resource for some and can serve as an inspiration to many.

As with previous volumes, Rennick divides his work into chapters, devoting one to each county and considering them in the order of their establishment. Each chapter begins with a map of the county under discussion and on each map Rennick locates the post offices in terms of railroad tracks or contemporary roadways. Also, many post offices were situated by a stream like the residents who patronized them, so it is not unusual to have a post office described as "just below the mouth of Coldwater Creek," or "at the mouth of Hurricane Creek," or "a mile or more up Stumbo Branch, on the present Ky 201."

A helpful introduction to the entire work sets the stage for the reader with a map of Kentucky that geographically places all of the 120 counties in the state in addition to highlighting the counties under discussion within the state.

In a review of the *Placenames of Pike County Kentucky* in *Names* (40.3, 198-200), Rowan K. Dagget calls Rennick's studies "interesting, carefully researched, and sensible." In another review (also appearing in *Names*), Kelsie B. Harder calls Rennick "very detailed, exact, and thorough" (42.3, 209-211). During the years since those comments were made, Rennick has not lost his dedication to detail. His current offering does not disappoint. In fact, the reader is occasionally taken aback by the time and simple hard work that must have gone into finding the astounding amount of information that Rennick has discovered about some of these post offices.

Perhaps an excerpt of a specific description will serve to illustrate the effort that Mr. Rennick has expended on his reader's behalf:

Another station opened by the Lexington and Big Sandy (C&O) was ***Buffalo*** *in the east bottom of the Levisa, three rail miles above (south of) Meek. This station, like the creek a mile south, is said to have been named for the many wild buffalo that early settlers had seen grazing in the area. In 1905 storekeeper Thomas L. Spencer petitioned for the establishment of the local post office which he would call* ***Concord*** *for the four square mile neighborhood within a bend of the Levisa just above the station, across which the railroad tracks had been laid the year before. This name was derived from a church in the vicinity later identified as B.U. Station. But as* ***Concord*** *was already in use in Lewis County, and* ***Buffalo*** *was a LaRue County post office, the new Johnson County office, which opened on June 5, 1905 was named* ***Thelma****.*

Thelma *was the daughter of Warren Meek, the editor and publisher of the Paintsville* Herald, *who had moved to the Buffalo Station area to raise poultry. Virgie Childress was the first postmaster of* ***Thelma****, but was succeeded in March 1914 by Spencer, who served in this capacity until March 1928. Sometime in the 1920s the station was renamed* ***Buskirk*** *for another area family and retained this name till the end of passenger service on that line.* ***Thelma****, it must be noted, was the only name ever borne by this office on the present Ky 1107, four miles east of Paintsville, that now*

serves the Carl T. Perkins (Eastern Kentucky) Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center.

Such an excerpt makes it apparent why Kelsie Harder reported in 1994 that: "Rennick has become the nation's expert on postal history" (*Names*, 43.3 p. 236).

A word of caution, though, for the onomastically inclined—the primary reason for the production of this work is a survey of post offices. We should not expect too much in the way of onomastic content. As Rennick says in his introduction: "readers are cautioned not to expect more of this book than what is indicated in the title: It will merely describe the post offices in each of the four counties of the Upper Big Sandy Valley."

Does Rennick accomplish what he sets out to do? Undeniably! We marvel again and again at what he produces through his research, his impeccable fieldwork, and his obvious reverence for the subject matter. He acknowledges, however, that his task is "among the easiest named entities to study" since they are approached from "already available lists," unlike placenames. Clearly, though, the amount of work that went into the painstaking detail in this book could not have been "easy."

As to the names of the post offices themselves, they run the gamut from the mundane to the inexplicable. Many refer to post offices that no longer exist and a few to post offices that never existed—never having been opened after their official federal approval. Rennick notes, "at least half of the post office names seem to be personal names—many the same as an early postmaster's." So, he adds, examining census records and family biographies "proved fruitful in searching for derivations." He also notes that "Postmaster designates, or at least the persons who petitioned for the establishment of the office, were usually given the right to name it. Often the namer would select his own name or his family's, or that of some specific family member, a neighbor, or (for political or economic reasons) some influential local person." Others "were named for the streams on which they were located, nearby churches, schools, mills or landings; or they identified some ongoing economic or social activities of its residents." But, interestingly, "by 1900, in most states, all the good names had been taken," and "desperate postmasters were often

vulnerable to suggestions from outsiders, or they would select a name randomly from a book, or coin a name out of the blue, and thus the name would have no significance at all." Phrases like "is said to have been named," "inexplicably called," "probably named for," and "locally believed to have been named for" are found throughout the text. He does not definitively declare the origin of a name without absolute proof. Rennick does attempt, though, wherever possible, to discover derivations and report them. He wisely recognizes "the need to be wary of the seemingly obvious in placenames research, a trap all researchers sometimes fall into." Throughout the book when Rennick speculates on the origin of a name or reports on the speculations of others he clearly qualifies his statements. In some cases, he openly questions the prevailing belief about the derivation of a particular name. In the final analysis he readily admits "we may never know why most of the post offices—or almost any other places—were so named."

It is hard to imagine such a survey being any more meticulously researched, but the reader is occasionally left yearning for more information about a particular post office or a specific name. Rennick often whets the appetite for further exploration. Sometimes available information cries out for further study as with the section on **Brandy Keg** where Rennick was told by the local county historian, "someone had found a keg of brandy floating in the creek..." or "some early traveler had lost a keg of brandy while seeking his way up or down this early four-mile-long stream bed..." or, as another local historian suggested, "a group of early hunters that were camped on the stream consumed a keg of apple brandy they'd stashed there before a long hunt." Rennick dutifully reports these brief stories, as he should, even though they deliver the immediate impression of folk etymology. Rennick demonstrates once again, as onomastic scholars continue to observe, humans clearly have a need to be able to describe the origins of particular names and, when those origins are obscure, stories are somehow created and passed on as fact. There may be an element of truth in one or all of the stories in this case. It is just as clear, though, that we will never know the true origin of names like **Brandy Keg.**

In another example, which to the name scholar is clearly not based in fact, Rennick includes a story about the post office of **Jump**. He reports these stories because they are entertaining, but also because they are an integral part of the residents' onomastic realities. Though **Jump** is a Kentucky family name, it is held by some to have been chosen for the name of the post office in Floyd County because it was not one of the railroad's regular stops. The story goes that, in order for a local physician to visit his patients in the area, the train was slowed and the conductor would call out: "Jump, Dr. Walt, jump!" The study of onomastics would not be the same without the occasional addition of these amusing stories.

The text is interspersed with interesting, but clearly amateur, black and white photographs of 21 of the post offices. Largely from the 1960s and 1970s, they picture small, single-purpose buildings, most of which are little more than shacks. Also found at intervals in the text are reproductions of postmarks from 32 of the post offices, the earliest from 1919 and the most recent from 1982. These two features help to anchor the reader in the reality of these post offices in the daily lives of the local residents and the important function served by them.

Additionally, each chapter ends with a summary of that county's post offices, noting the number that are still active. The summary also categorizes and enumerates post office names as, for instance, deriving from personal or family names, name transfers, or referencing a geographical feature or descriptive. To give an indication of the amount of historical detail which would be unavailable without Rennick's efforts: Floyd County has only 33 of its 121 operating post offices still active; 18 of Johnson County's 68 post offices are still in operation; only six of the 102 post offices that have operated in Magoffin County are still active; and seven of Martin County's 31 post offices still operate. Rennick has salvaged a great deal of settlement history to be used by future researchers.

Each of the county chapters concludes with footnotes and a bibliography. These serve to enlighten the reader, offer additional detail and provide avenues for further exploration.

The volume ends with an alphabetical index of the post offices followed by an alphabetical listing of individuals

mentioned in the text with a county reference for each as well as the page numbers on which they can be found. These two indices are very helpful and add to the usefulness of the text. The second index would, however, have benefited from a header since the first index ends on one page with the second index following immediately on the verso. With no indication that a new index has begun, brief confusion can result.

Rennick occasionally uses phonetic representations to share local pronunciations of some of the names but, for me, not enough of the names received this treatment. While it is helpful to have a table describing the phonetic symbols used, I found myself wishing, as I have while reading other works, that onomastic scholars would standardize one system to represent pronunciation and stick with it.

Before ending, it must be said that one annoying aspect of the book's presentation has to do with weak editing. A strong editor would not have allowed the too frequent typographical errors to occur. Even cursory reading should have eliminated what are, for the most part, very obvious mistakes. I suspected trouble in this area when I noticed the word "of" in the subtitle doubled on the cover of the book.

Such minor criticisms should in no way overshadow what Robert M. Rennick has accomplished. He has in this work again demonstrated his willingness to research his subject most thoroughly in order to produce a document that will be beneficial to historians and onomastic scholars yet to come. In summary, *The Post Offices of Big Sandy Valley* is an important addition to the onomastic and historical literature of Kentucky. It can serve as a model for future studies.

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A Grammar of Turkic Placenames in the Mountain Altai by Olga T. Molchanova. University of Szczecin (Uniwersytet Szczecinski), Poland, 1998. 347 pp. Soft cover. ISBN 83-87341-76-2. English. 4 maps.

The Mountain Altai region is a rugged remote area in southwestern Siberia that is populated mainly by the Altai people who speak a Turkic language akin to Mongolian. For centuries the Altai have lived alongside Russians and Kazakhs, leading to some interchange in the adoption of placenames, but in this book, from the 7,400 placenames of the region, Prof Molchanova has focused solely on the 3,143 toponyms of Eastern Turkic origin and excluded hybrids or those of different origin.

The author lectures on Linguistics at Szczecin University in Poland. Though she has been researching and publishing on Altai placenames since 1968, this appears to be her first work in English, and will therefore reach a wider range of scholars. The work is a continuity of two monographs published earlier, *A Placename Dictionary of the Mountain Altai Region* (1979) and *Structural Types of the Turkic Placenames in the Mountain Altai Region* (1982), both of which are in Polish or Russian.

The book claims to be the first study of its kind, an in-depth analysis of the morphological and syntactical aspects of a limited and countable number of placenames (3,143), aiming to show how their grammatical structure functions in labeling features of the landscape. The 3,143 placenames studied are formed from 1,846 elements that refer to 5,322 natural and cultural objects in the region, mainly mountains and rivers.

The book is thorough and analytical, based upon principles and methods first propounded by Prof. Dul'zon of the Tomsk School in the former USSR, a leading influential scholar of Siberian languages and placenames. His method emphasizes collecting a large corpus of data in the form of card-indexes from which are produced isogloss charts. Despite concentrating on a small, defined area, the book discusses the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to placename research. The author considers this study as one more step along the road rather than the last word on the subject.

From the first third of the book, focusing on semantic aspects, the general reader may gain a useful insight into Altai placenames, which are grouped and translated. In a mountainous territory with an abundance of forests, pastures, wildlife, water sources (including 3,500 lakes), and valleys in which the Altai breed livestock and hunt wild animals, we would expect words such as *ayu* 'bear,' *kush* 'bird,' *boru* 'wolf,' *bulan* 'elk' *aspaktu* 'having aspens' or *baliktu* ' having fish' to predominate. The Altai nomads of the highlands (Russians generally settled in the lowlands) have produced a rich and varied nomenclature with a preference (shared with Mongolian peoples) for names reflecting their world-view, worship of nature, and the shape, quantity, and size of landscape features, such as *Kuday-Bergen-Oroy* 'mountain top given by God,' *At-Tudar* 'will catch the horse,' *Suu-Kadar* 'water will dry up,' *Teke-Taykan* 'sacrificed goat,' and *Ayu-T'ogolgon* 'bear got lost' (names are rendered here without accents). A striking element is also the great number of color terms, 35 lexemes in all.

Although the author has deliberately left out other connotations of a word that are unrelated to the toponyms, she points out that occasionally we come across two distinct but homophonous words. The most noticeable is *Kara*, which can mean 'black,' 'not covered in snow,' 'covered with dense forest,' or 'supplied with natural water.' In modern Turkish too, the word crops up everywhere, from *kara-bash* 'sheepdog' to *kara-yel* 'northwest wind.'

A great many of the Turkic Altai words exist in exactly the same form in modern Turkish: *kaya* 'rock,' *chadir* 'tent,' *uzun* 'long,' *sari* 'yellow.' Others are immediately recognizable: *kok/gok* 'blue,' *kichu/kuchuk* 'small,' *tulku/tilki* 'fox,' *karlagash/kirlangich* 'swallow,' and many others. Several suppositions are just as true of today's Turkey, such as a shared predilection for color references, whether the words are used as placenames, surnames, or shop names.

For those living in Turkey and the West, the Altai region was off-limits during the whole Soviet era. Although there are plenty of studies in Turkish about the naming practices of Central Asia—the homeland of the Turks from whence they migrated in centuries past—nobody in modern times has been able to actually visit the area to carry out on-

the-spot research. Even though this book was written in Poland, a country within the former Soviet orbit, little of it is based on actual fieldwork; indeed, most of the data has been transcribed from old maps and charts in Russian. There is a sense that the data and intense syntactic analysis has passed through a Russian filter, resulting in a Russian perspective rather than a Turkic or Turkish one.

Only devotees of linguistics and Turkic languages will have the stamina to wade through the main guts of this book—the section devoted to syntactic characteristics of the placenames themselves. Section 2.2.1.1.2.2, for example, enumerates nine placenames of three- or more- word non-possessive attributive phrases with two-word attributive phrases as defining elements, e.g. *T'oon-Moyin-Boom* 'Cliff like a fat neck.' There are some tables, but many more lists and charts would have been useful. Scanning it to extract key information is no easy task.

Appendix I is a full listing of all the Altai placenames studied, noting what surface features they refer to, but unfortunately, without translations (the language barrier again!). It is supposed to be in reverse alphabetical order, yet something is amiss when the first listed is *Kajaa* and the last *Muz*. Neither of these words appears in the more useful Appendix III, which does give page references.

Despite the author noting the importance of the interplay between language, tradition, and national psychology, there is almost none of this in the book. The human element is conspicuously lacking. We are presented only with a smattering of general information about the Altai people. We get little sense of the layout of the territory or the historical and social background of the people.

Several claims made in the book need to be questioned. One is that Turkic placenames are meaningful and self-explanatory in comparison with the majority of European placenames. While some of the Altai placenames are crystal-clear: *Kar-Kishi* 'Compressed Snow' or *Suak-Kandi* 'Filled-in Canal,' others cry out for further investigation. What are we to make of *Tiyin-Keldi* 'Squirrel Came' or *Ulay-Kokto* 'Sew one after another'? Who is to say they have not resulted from vowel shift or semantic change over the ages, or mistaken etymology or hearsay, in the way that names in Turkey,

seemingly meaningful and self-explanatory, may contain all sorts of contradictions. The small river flowing through Canakkale has changed within the last 50 years from *Koca-chay* to *Sari-chay*, though it is neither 'great' nor 'yellow.' Names in Turkey have been tidied up, Turkified, shortened, or renamed by bureaucrats. One should never take a name at its face value.

By saying that "it served our purpose to subsume semantics under grammar" one strays into dangerous territory, a question of which the author is well aware for she also states "placenames and culture should be studied together" and "the semantic reflection of the physical world is arbitrary and the 'semantic map' of one language differs from another." If one poses questions such as, "Is there a typical absolute set of lexemes in the placename lexicon which is characteristic of all languages?", then some sort of answer is expected. Occasional comparisons with English placenames is insufficient, what about Scottish, Hindu, Mandarin, or Spanish? A foray to penetrate into the inner structure of placenames to discover "the essentials of proper nomination underlying all 6,000 languages of the world" is a laudable aim, but first someone needs to actually set foot in the crags and ravines of the Altai Mountains themselves.

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