

The Wonderful World of Geographic Names: The Writings of Meredith (Pete) Burrill (Toponymist Extraordinaire). Compiled by R. A. Detro and H. J. Walker. *Geoscience and Man*, v.39. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP Geoscience Publications, 2004. xi + 435 pp. \$25 Soft covered. ISBN 0-938909-12-6.

Bringing together the articles and essays of North America's first professional toponymist to reproduce them in a single volume was a marvelous idea. Many of Meredith Burrill's articles and speeches had not been readily available for consultation until Randall Detro and Harley Jesse Walker produced this book. In the 1980s Detro had persuaded Burrill to transfer much of his collection of toponymic materials to him in Thibodaux, Louisiana, where he was the chief librarian at Nicholls State University. Ultimately, the collection will be deposited in Louisiana State University's archives.

Burrill was born in 1902 in Houlton, Maine. He was given a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1925 at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, after majoring in history and government. The following year he was awarded an M.A. at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he specialized in geography. Four years later he received a Ph.D. from the same university. His dissertation was on the industrial geography of Montreal. During the next ten years he taught a variety of geography courses at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Oklahoma State University) in Stillwater. In 1940 Burrill joined the General Land Office of the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. Three years later he was appointed chief of the recently created Office of Geography and designated the Executive Secretary of the United States Board on Geographic Names. During World War II his staff was grandly enlarged from four to some 175 geographers, map makers, librarians, and linguists. Their important duties were to provide accurate names and precise locations on maps of foreign areas of immediate interest to the United States. There are many professional toponymists, including Detro, Richard Randall, Don Orth, and this reviewer, who are pleased to acknowledge that Burrill was their mentor.

Burrill was a superb writer on all aspects of toponymy. As well, his presentations at meetings and conferences were always clearly delivered, with enthusiasm and wit. Privately, Burrill performed a stupendous study in the 1940s of some 2,000 generics as recorded on about 15,000 U.S. topographic maps. By compiling each name with a generic on a paper slip, he manually mapped the distribution of some 100 significant terms. He lived long enough to

see how computers could map similar distributions of generics in a few minutes.

The Wonderful World of Geographic Names divides Burrill's published works into three major sections. The first section, encompassing 30 essays in 247 pages, is entitled "Geographic Names"; the second section of 17 essays in 90 pages is called "Standardization of Geographic Names"; the third section, identified as "Weather, Fire, Industry and Other Topics," covers 80 pages and has 9 essays, 1 abstract, 11 reviews, and 2 obituaries. In the first section some 100 pages are devoted to Burrill's essays on toponymic generics. These essays had been read at conferences of professional societies, such as the Association of American Geographers (AAG), the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, and the American Name Society, and then published in their journals. In many of his presentations Burrill encouraged the scientists in his audience to break free from what he called their "mental sets." He stated:

One cannot blame them for some of the evidence certainly warrants skepticism, and many of my own unquestioned preconceptions met incontrovertible negative evidence at the outset. Recognition of some of my own biases on this subject and my involuntary reactions to the discovery has led me to look for and recognize more or less comparable bias in others. An understanding of bias may in the end turn out to be fundamental in understanding regional nomenclatures. (58)

In 1960, Burrill read an essay at a regional AAG conference on two concepts, topocomplex and *bedeutungsfeld*. He explains:

The concepts may be simply stated as follows: a topocomplex is a geographic entity of topographic scale made up of more than one discrete and separably nameable element but identifiable by a single term or toponym. For example, Pemaquid Point, in Maine, refers to a peninsula some six miles long and to its tip *Bedeutungsfeld* is the field or range of meaning of a word or compound-word term. This is a concept developed by German linguists, whose way of referring to it here is retained as a term for this concept However, we are only now becoming aware that common toponymic terms have a much wider *bedeutungsfeld* than others. Wider *bedeutungsfeld* means greater ambiguity and less effectiveness as a designator term. (139)

In two later essays Burrill again referred to these two concepts (207, 228). There is no evidence, however, that any American onomasticians have ever addressed the concept of *bedeutungsfeld* at conferences or in journals. This German word is just too opaque for names scholars. Perhaps if Burrill had created an English word for this concept more scholars might have pursued the range of meaning of toponymic generics.

The essays in the second section on the standardization of geographic names reflect Burrill's significant contributions to international toponymy. He may not have created the phrase "standardization of geographic (U.S. usage) or geographical (international usage) names," but he was certainly the person who spread the idea around the world. He promoted the concept at a variety of onomastic, geographic, and cartographic conferences, beginning in 1949 and ending in 1977 at the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in Athens. In 1960 he had been appointed the first chairman of the United Nations Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which became the United Nations Group of Experts on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNGEGN) seven years later. Burrill continued as its Chairman until 1972. The UNGEGN still meets every second year.

The third section, "Weather, Fire, Industry and Other Topics," presents a variety of subjects that Burrill wrote about outside the field of toponymy.

Throughout the volume there are several spelling errors. The compilers stated that the essays were reproduced as they had appeared in the various publications, but many of the errors must have occurred in the new compilations. Among such errors are "Steward" for "Stewart" and "Ramsey" for "Ramsay" (72), as well as the state of Maine as "Main" on three pages (134, 137, 205).

A list of "Selected Acronyms" throughout the writings comprises Appendix A. Most of the entries in this appendix are in fact initialisms. Appendix B provides a chronological list of the writings republished in this book.

It is noted in the book's Introduction that the source of Burrill's nickname was unknown. Other friends of his know that French-speaking neighbours in Houlton called him P'tit, meaning "little," because he was shorter than his brother. Burrill happily anglicized it as "Pete". When he entered Bates College he introduced himself as Pete, without asserting that it in any way it related to his

stature. Although he identified himself professionally as Meredith F. Burrill, he always readily answered to the name Pete. Burrill died in Washington, D.C., in 1997 at the age of 95.

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Colorado Place Names. William Bright. 3rd ed. Boulder: Johnson Books. 2004. 194 pp. ISBN 1-55566-33-8. \$15.00.

For the past half-century, William Bright's scholarship in linguistics and anthropology has resulted in nearly 400 articles, monographs, translations, dictionaries, and vocabularies. He is the editor of several outstanding reference works, including *Language in Society*, *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*, and *Oxford Studies in Anthropological Linguistics*. He is past president of the Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas and of the Linguistic Society of America, and he has served as the editor of *Language*, the journal of the Linguistic Society of America, for more than twenty years. With this stellar record, it is small wonder that *Colorado Place Names* demonstrates meticulous attention to detail and a lifelong passion for sociolinguistics.

With entries ranging from *Abarr*, a town in the sand hills of Yuma County, to *Zirkel*, located on the Continental Divide and named for a German petrologist, this book is an interesting and informative addition to a traveler's arsenal, state literature, and an important reference work for those interested in onomastics. Drawn from George R. Eichler's 1977 book of the same name and updated by Bright in 1993, the current edition includes a useful map for those unfamiliar with Colorado and its sixty-five counties. This guide not only reflects regional and contemporary pronunciation variations but, even more importantly, tackles the origins of names expressed in the languages of Native Americans, French trappers, and Spanish settlers. Throughout the nearly two hundred pages, Bright has been particularly sensitive to the Native American influence, noting, for example, that the name *Seven Utes Mountain* comes from the Arapaho *niisootoxuthi wo'teeneihithi*. He also attends to the historical context, explaining in this same entry that the Arapaho defeated the Utes in a battle on this site.

This book is an update of the two earlier editions, and the reference section, containing more than 20 entries, some dating to 1935, suggests that there is a long record of both lay and scholarly interest in Colorado placenames. A resident of Colorado since 1988, the author has utilized the skills and advice of over 60 local historians, librarians, and language scholars. This exacting methodology shows a keen appreciation for the vibrancy of local lore as well as a long-established interest in the origin of placenames.

The book will be of interest to Coloradans, who undoubtedly already know that the name *Colorado* can be traced to a Spanish explorer who, noting the red muddy water of a tributary, used the descriptive Spanish term for 'red river' to name the stream. Others less familiar with the state will learn that in 1861 Congress carved out and named the Colorado Territory based on the fact that its largest river was one of the major sources of the Colorado River. Although French explorers had originally named it the Grand River, the regularization of geographical nomenclature required rivers to have the same name from source to mouth. Consequently, *Colorado River* became the name of record.

Among the more than 2000 entries are those which highlight the discoveries of the early explorers. Bright describes how the 1776 Dominguez-Escalante expedition reported that *Tomichi* (from the Ute *tumuchichi*, 'dome-shaped rock') was the Native American name for the Gunnison River. The influence of French traders can be seen in an entry that describes how a French trapper, Jacques La Ramie, was killed in 1825 in northern Larimer County along a river that bears his name, the *Laramie River*. In another entry, Bright reveals that Creole fur trappers dug a hiding place for supplies when they were caught in a 1836 snowstorm. When the men returned the next spring and found their supplies undisturbed, they logically called the area *Cache la Poudre River* and *Cache la Poudre Pass*, after the French *cache*, 'to hide.'

Even a brief perusal of entries provides the reader with a rich glimpse into the history of the state. Military personnel set up forts along the frontier to insure the safety of homesteaders and ranchers who came to Colorado in search of fortunes, or at least a new start. Nine cities bear the remnants of this era with personal names appended to *Fort*. *Conejos*, the Spanish word for 'rabbits,' alludes to the huge rabbit population and names a river as well as one of the oldest towns (1855) in the state. The names of other places are linked to the rich veins of ore found in Colorado. *Tincup* was

named in 1861 after a prospector returned from there bearing a tin cup filled with gold. *Fairplay*, a tongue-in-cheek name, was coined by prospectors who, after being turned away from one mining camp with a rich ore deposit, founded an equally lucrative camp nearby. *Leadville's* name comes from the silver-bearing lead ore that was found there in 1876-77.

Some Colorado placenames are laden with the stories and struggles of its wilderness pioneers, both real and fictitious. Appropriating Colorado's nickname, the Centennial State, James Michener made the non-existent town of *Centennial* famous in his 1974 publication of a novel by the same name. Not until 2001 was there actually a town with this name. The town of *Meeker* commemorates its Indian agent founder who was massacred after his wife and daughter were taken captive in 1879. *Julesburg* (1888) takes its name from an early settler, Jules Beni. The town began as a ranch and stage coach station and later was the site of a junction for a branch of the Union Pacific Railroad. *Ludlow* is notorious for the violence that broke out when coal miners struck in 1914. Ushering in the age of the automobile, *Last Chance* (1926) warned drivers that this was their last chance to buy gas along the still deserted U.S. Route 36. The vast mountainous terrain plays a prominent role in both the ethos and the spirit of Colorado natives. *Dark Mountain*, a reference to the dark conifers found on its slopes, was not named until 1942, and although local mountain climbers referred to one rocky expanse as *Desolation Peaks*, they were not officially named until 1961.

Bright makes effective use of the humorous stories associated with placenames. He recounts how one landowner, when approached by railroad officials inquiring who owned a certain piece of property, retorted, "I own" it. Thus, the town *Ione* was named. In another example, *Gold Hill*, named during the gold rush, announces itself with a sign reading:

GOLD HILL	
Est.	1859
Elev.	8463
<u>Pop.</u>	<u>118</u>
Total	10440

Colorado Place Names appeals to a wider audience than just the onomastic and linguistic communities. Geologists will immediately recognize the names of minerals in towns such as

Gilsonite, Basalt, Diorite, Bedrock, and Gypsum. Chemists will appreciate the pragmatic naming practices of places called *Copper, Telluride, Tungsten, Uranium, and Vanadium*, all of which speak to the richness of Colorado's natural resources. Those interested in the flora and fauna of the state need only search this slim volume for insight into the many species found in Colorado. *Falcon, Culebra* ("snake"), *Coyote, Cochetopa* ("buffalo emerging"), and *Chicaree* ("pine squirrel") allude to the abundance and variety of wildlife. Towns called *Aspen* and *Columbine* are probably familiar to most readers, but the etymology of names like *Piceance* from the Shoshoni 'tall grass,' *Capulin*, from the Mexican Spanish for 'wild chokecherry' via the Aztec *capolin*, and *Pinon* from the Spanish 'pinon pine' highlight the holistic connections between place and the natural environment that are so important to the Colorado lifestyle.

Echoing Abigail Adams's famous words to her husband, neither the author nor Colorado has forgotten the ladies. After Mrs. Neil Donovan settled in Weld County, she chose her family name, *Grover*, as the town name. Frances Wetmore purchased 160 acres, had her husband survey it, and then named the town *Wetmore*. Other Colorado pioneers are only remembered in the towns bearing their feminine names, *Maybell, HESSIE*, and *Virginia Dare*.

All in all, *Colorado Place Names* is a fascinating book that effectively weaves folklore, facts, and well-researched linguistic, social, and historical data into a useful reference guide. The alphabetically arranged entries are both readable and informative and will surely interest the non-academic resident and traveler. Bright's up-to-date edition with attention to the etymology of placenames is a welcome addition to Colorado's travel, reference and historical literature.

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