

The Canadian Board on Geographical Names

THE CANADIAN BOARD ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES, formerly the Geographic Board of Canada, was established by Order in Council in 1897, only a few years after the corresponding Board in the United States. It will be recalled that around the turn of the century great progress was being made on the delineation of the International Boundary between the two countries, and it was obviously necessary to have official bodies representing both countries to settle any problems of nomenclature that might arise during surveys.

The original Order in Council, P.C. 3324, dated 18th December, 1897 is quoted in full below.

His Excellency, by and with the advice of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, is pleased to create a "Geographic Board" to consist of one member for each of the Departments of the Geological Survey, Railways and Canals, Post Office and Marine and Fisheries, such member being appointed by the Minister of the Department; of the Surveyor General of Dominion Lands, of such other members as may, from time to time, be appointed by Order in Council, and of an officer of the Department of the Interior, designated by the Minister of the Interior, who shall act as Secretary of the Board; and to authorize the Board to elect its Chairman and to make such rules and regulations for the transaction of its business as may be requisite.

His Excellency is further pleased to order and direct that all questions concerning geographic names in the Dominion, which arise in the Departments of the Public Service shall be referred to the Board, and that all Departments shall accept and use in their publications the names and orthography adopted by the Board.

In 1899 a further Order in Council, P.C. 2561, 14th December, 1899 permitted each of the provinces and the Northwest Territories to appoint a member to the Board provided that, in so doing, the provinces agreed to accept the Board's decisions.

Thereafter, there was no important change in the Board or its functions until its name was changed to the Canadian Board on Geographical Names by Order in Council, P.C. 3397 of August 3rd, 1948. This change was made necessary on account of the establishment of a Geographical Branch in the Government Service, resulting in confusion in their respective names and functions. The

present organization of the Board was established by Order in Council, P.C. 2421, 12th May 1950, which is quoted in full below.

The Committee of the Privy Council, on the recommendation of the Acting Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys advise that Order in Council P.C. 3397 of 3rd August 1948 relating to the Canadian Board on Geographical Names be revoked and that the said Canadian Board on Geographical Names be reconstituted as follows:—

1. The Board shall consider and determine all questions of geographical nomenclature affecting Canada which may be referred to it for consideration and decision.

2. All questions that arise in the several departments of the public service respecting Canadian and foreign geographical names shall be referred to the Board for consideration and decision, and all departments shall accept and abide by the decisions of the Board.

3. The membership of the Board shall consist of one representative from each of the following services and organizations, who shall be designated by the Minister in charge of such service or organization.

Topographical Survey
 Canadian Hydrographic Service
 Geographical Branch, Mines and Technical Surveys
 Geological Survey of Canada
 Map Compilation and Reproduction, Mines and Technical Surveys
 Army Survey Establishment, National Defence
 Post Office Department
 Public Archives
 Northern Administrations, Resources and Development

4. The membership of the Board may also include a representative from any Province of Canada that agrees to be guided by the decisions of the Board; such representative shall be designated by the Government of the Province and shall advise the Board concerning geographical names in his Province.

5. The Chairman of the Board shall be elected by the Board; the Secretary of the Board and such other assistance as may from time to time be required shall be designated or assigned by the Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys from that Department.

6. The members and officers of the Board and such persons as may be assigned to assist the Board shall serve without remuneration.

7. The Board may make such rules or regulations as may be necessary for the transaction of its business.

8. Provision shall be made for the funds necessary to carry out the functions of the Board by the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys in its annual Estimates.

The above Order in Council constitutes the present membership of the Board as regards the Canadian Government. However, in addition, it includes eight members representing that number of provinces who sit and vote with the Board when present. Four provinces have Boards or Committees dealing with the geographic names for their respective provinces. Two of these provinces are not offi-

cially represented on the Canadian Board but, as a rule, close cooperation is achieved. However, in case of disagreement, the rulings of the Canadian Board govern the nomenclature in all publications of the Federal Government.

The Canadian Board on Geographical Names has no authority over statutory names given to counties, townships or municipalities through appropriate acts or statutes by the legislatures of the Provinces, or by Parliament. The Postmaster General is, by law, authorized to determine the names of post offices. In practise, however, the Board is asked for advice and, at times, has recommended changes to make the post office name conform to established spelling or usage. Such recommendations are generally accepted.

The Board elects its own officers, which include a Chairman and an executive committee of three members. It makes its own By-Laws and Rules of Nomenclature which, in general, conform rather closely to those of the American Board. It is also responsible for names outside of Canada but depends on the British and American sources for this information on the rare occasions when matters concerning such names are referred to it.

It will be noted that a majority of the members of the Board, both from the Federal Government and the Provinces, are associated with mapping, charting or surveying, and the Secretary and clerical personnel of the Board are members of the staff of the Topographical Survey, which is the major civilian mapping agency of the Canadian Government. This close association with surveying and mapping is due to the fact that names are used on maps and charts to a greater extent than in any other type of publication, and the field operations of the surveying and charting organizations provide the major source for the names of topographical and marine features, while old maps and charts filed with the surveying organizations are usually the most authentic reference for original names.

The Canadian Board does not, except under very exceptional circumstances, initiate nomenclature or suggest alterations. Its function is to adjudicate on the names that are to be used in the publications of the government and more particularly to consider those appearing on maps. In practise, the publishing agency prepares, after consultation with provincial or territorial authorities, a name sheet and a list in which the names are broken down into three categories. Firstly, "established names" which include those that have

already been dealt with by the Board and have not been questioned: secondly, "new names" that have not previously been submitted to the Board and, thirdly, "contentious name" in which there are variations in spelling, more than one name for the same feature, or where previous decisions of the Board are being challenged for one reason or another. Only the last two classes are listed in the agenda of the Board or appear in its minutes, although the complete list is, of course, incorporated in its records. The agenda and minutes are mimeographed and distributed to Board members and organizations submitting names for its provincial board. Meetings are held monthly, usually the first Thursday, and the February meeting is in the nature of an annual meeting when as many as possible of the provincial members attend, and matters of policy and general interest are discussed. These annual meetings, which have been held for the past six or seven years have been extremely fruitful in maintaining coöperation with the provincial members.

In the first thirty years of its existence the Board published some thirty-six reports or other publications. During the depression years, the 1930's, however, all publication was suspended and has only recently been resumed. One report, a gazetteer of Southwestern Ontario, has already been published and another gazetteer of the place-names of British Columbia is in hand and nearing publication. Substantial progress has been made on other gazetteers and it is hoped to continue this series until the whole of Canada has been covered. The records of the Board contain a great deal of information regarding the origin and meaning of Canadian place-names but, unfortunately, at this time it is not possible to incorporate this material into the gazetteer series.

Canadian problems in nomenclature are more than ordinarily difficult which, in part, is due to the fact that the country is bilingual. Political changes during the Eighteenth Century and shifts in population in more recent years give rise to many cases where names of French origin are anglicized or English names are being used in a French form. This condition, at times, makes for considerable confusion and many names of hybrid origin.

A second factor that poses a continuing problem is that such a large percentage of the country is unsettled. These areas, however, are now on the routes of air travel and the constant and increasing search for minerals make them of economic importance. The cur-

rent active mapping programme is advancing rapidly into these remote areas which have never had any fixed population, the few natives being wandering nomads. The main rivers and larger lakes have been identified and named by early explorers but, in addition to these, there are literally hundreds of thousands of lakes and streams to which no names have ever been given. It is necessary on maps of new country to name at least a limited number of features for purposes of identification. Faced with this problem the Board decided to honour the memory of soldiers, sailors and airmen who gave their lives in the Second World War by naming features for them. For this purpose nominal rolls of fatal casualties have been obtained and the Board is prepared to supply lists of such names, selected without discrimination as to rank or arm of the service, to map producing agencies. This procedure has occasioned much favourable comment and already just over a thousand of these names have been supplied by the Board and used for this purpose in the Canadian North.

Native names present still another problem—Indian names or derivatives thereof, which in their present form are beautiful and euphonious, are frequent throughout Canada and establish a pleasing association with the history and pre-history of the country. In the north, many native names are almost unpronounceable by peoples of the European race. This is particularly the case in respect to Eskimo names. If they are shortened or simplified they lose whatever meaning they may have to the native and, in so doing, any justification there may be for their use. The Board endeavours to get the best advice available from linguists and ethnologists, but the problem still remains. It is increasingly a matter of concern as to whether it is preferable to re-name features with names of European origin or to attempt to use these native names.

Another aspect of the Board's work, and one which is frequently the cause of some difficulty, is the submission of names by volunteer explorers, scientists or pseudo-scientists, mountaineers or sportsmen, usually of foreign nationality. These people, as a rule, have made no serious contribution to our knowledge of the country and have no personal ties with it. Such names are usually unsuitable—relatives, friends, some trivial occurrence or, as too often happens, a desire to have one's own name perpetuated. The Board is not inclined to adopt names submitted by these volunteers as it takes

the view that Canada is a young country and it is not unreasonable to consider its nomenclature a natural heritage in which events and personalities important to Canada may, in the long years of its development, be given some form of commemoration. It might be added that the Board takes a similar view of names suggested by Canadians under corresponding circumstances.

In order to handle the current volume of work it has been necessary to organize the procedures of the Board somewhat on a straight production basis and omit for the time being those pleasing investigations into the origin of names which involve such a close study of history, settlement and even folklore. Possibly when all of Canada's four million square miles have been mapped, and the basis of its nomenclature firmly established, the Board of that day may be able to turn its attention to these more scholarly or diverting aspects of the subject.

This is not the place, in a brief summary of the organization and work of the Canadian Board on Geographical Names, to attempt to follow the course of Canadian history and of its exploration and settlement, and show their associations with the names that now appear on the maps of Canada. Each of the progressive tides of settlement, each of the wars in which Canada has been engaged, each of the phases of its political growth are recorded in the nomenclature of the country and, in particular, the names of those hardy souls, French, English and Scottish, who explored the hazardous and unknown Canadian Arctic Archipelago and the interior of the continent, even beyond our present borders, are written large on current Canadian maps.

The pursuit of the rare and curious in Canadian names is a rewarding pastime but one which cannot be properly even approached within the bounds of this article. Such names as "Come-By-Chance," "Seldom Come Bye," "Heart's Delight," the twenty-six different "Ste. Anne's" listed in the Board's records, and such native tongue twisters as "Digdeguash," "Kikkertorsoak" or "Ashuapmuchuan" seem to offer a fertile field for any enquirer into the peculiarities of geographical names.

This article was submitted by the chairman of the Canadian Board of Geographical Names, P. E. Palmer.