

Notes and Queries

As this is being written, scores of *ANS* members and their friends-and-relations have either left or are preparing to leave for many and divers places. N & Q will be in Amherst until mid-August, but follows most conscientiously both travelers and onomastic goings-on around the world. (A full report on the Amsterdam Congress will, of course, be forthcoming from *ANS* members attending.)

One orbit, and we find:

ENGLAND. A recent article in Britain's handsome weekly, *Country Life* (June 20, 1963, p. 1507ff., to be exact) is called "How America Got Its Name" and its author, Brian Dunning, states the case for Richard Ameryk of Bristol, a substantial investor in John Cabot's voyage to the New World in 1497. Making no attempt to demolish the Amerigo Vespucci claim, Mr. Dunning offers an ingenious concatenation of "mights" and "mays" — and who knows? Some earnest student of names will now perhaps follow the lines of both stories and demonstrate the probable truth of one. Mr. Dunning, well aware that he is "summer reading," isn't going out on any limbs. He concludes, "If we can prove his claim, he deserves a couple of statues. But, when all is said and done, calling the place America was a bit of cheek. It should have been Columbia all along."

SWEDEN, its filing systems and directories suffering from a surfeit of Johnsons, Olsons, Petersons, Swensons, and Andersons, has taken drastic measures. A computer obligingly has ground out consonant clusters and syllables tolerable in Swedish and presumably not offensive to Swedish sensibilities. Synthesized names are now available with, we understand, a bare minimum of legal fol-drol to effect the change.

Now make no mistake, N & Q is ever on the side of the renegade and the individualist, and we didn't object at all when American pharmaceutical companies set a computer to spewing forth pronounceable names for wonder drugs. Theirs was a commercial problem, since a distinctive trade-name is needed each time the child of a given chemical formula is marketed by a different drug

company. Fully aware of our presumptuousness, still we would like to recommend to the Swedes some of the methods of name-adaptation which the late Marjorie M. Kimmerle of the University of Colorado described in her doctoral dissertation done at Wisconsin some years ago. She chronicled and analyzed the surnames of two congregations of Norwegian Lutheran immigrants and the ways in which patronymics were supplemented and even superseded. Einar Haugen, who directed Miss Kimmerle's thesis, devotes all of chapter 9 in the first volume of his *Norwegian Language in America*, to the matter of names. Your N&Q editor admits to being half-Sogning, and to awareness of how unwelcome to any red-blooded Swede advice from Norwegians must be – or vice versa; it is heartening, though, to note how quickly they become friends when anyone seeks to malign Scandinavians!

GERMANY and the Berlin wall are often in the news, though seldom for etymological reasons. Recently, however, a Russian radio correspondent, adopting a chatty, informative line, offered a charming origin for Checkpoint Charlie that betrays his utter innocence of the Able-Baker-Charlie-Dog alphabet graded on so many American minds. It seems, says Ivan, that once there was an American soldier named Charlie . . .

This should be enough to send anyone to the antipodes for refuge; on to AUSTRALIA, reforming its currency system and deeply concerned over what to name its new basic unit which is neither a pound nor a dollar. When last we heard, the name chosen was said to be *royal* – a bully idea, since it spares the kind of confusion border states and provinces have over the synonymous but seldom equivalent currency of the United States and Canada.

It is quite likely that there is something going on in the new state of HAWAII that we ought to know about, but we've not heard; so on to CALIFORNIA, where *ANS* past president George R. Stewart was honored at the University of California (Berkeley) Commencement; the school he had served for 40 years conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree; the accompanying citation characterized him deftly, calling him, among other things, "... collector and connoisseur of place-names and of the

local history they represent . . ." In these days of growing cynicism over honorary degrees and the motives for granting them, we are cheered indeed to see one awarded in the very spirit and for the very reasons that are implied by the words *honoris causa*. George Ripley Stewart: gentleman, scholar, teacher.

Since we started around the world "withershins" rather than "deasil" we come to the Donner Pass from the West, rather than the East, which was the avenue of approach known to frontier visitors. Back in March, when we thought spring would never come, Mr. Stewart reported a to-do shaping up in Nevada County, California, concerning the name of this pass vis-a-vis a new freeway. The new road, he wrote, runs two miles north of Donner Summit, which is usually called Donner Pass, though the actual pass is still about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile further south. The squabble is between those who want to move the name to the new road (authenticity be damned, apparently) and those who propose a new name. Mr. Stewart, who has been consulted in the case, belongs to the latter group and favors Stevens Pass, for Elisha Stevens, who took wagons over this very place in 1844. As of late June, he reports nothing new. We'll keep you posted.

No *ANS*-oriented trip could resist stopping by Lincoln, NEBRASKA, to see what past president Mamie Meredith is up to *now*. Her latest communique, ebullient as ever, reports the Nebraska Folklore Society growing apace and apparently commanding increasing respect. We like to think Louise Pound, gone five years this June, would be pleased.

CHICAGO reports that Raven McDavid expects to see his revision of Mencken's *American Language* in print within the year. (General rejoicing!) From James Stronks comes an addendum to his collection of store-front church names, printed in this journal last year. (See "*ANS* Notes," this issue.)

In TEXAS, yet another past president, Jack Dabbs, has recently become a lexicographical innovator by putting the pronunciations of the words in his Bengali-English dictionary on tape. Mr. Dabbs pronounces the English words and Mrs. Sumitra Banerjee, a native speaker, pronounces the Bengali.

From PENNSYLVANIA, present president Alfred Senn went back to Madison, Wisconsin, in January, to help celebrate the silver jubilee of the Swiss music hour, a popular Saturday afternoon feature on WHA, the state radio station in Madison. Madison papers do not record any impromptu bursts of yodeling by our president. Pity, because it would have made great copy!

Responding to some of our recent posers on underworld nicknames, Lawrence Urdang writes from NEW YORK that his hunch on Tony "Ducks" Corallo's nickname is the "D.A." haircut (abbreviation expansion will be mailed in plain envelope on request); we've not seen a picture of Tony Ducks that will confirm this theory, but Mr. Urdang's say-so may be taken. We take polite issue with his other suggestion: that "Greasy Thumb" Guzik's name stems from his alleged functions as a bagman in a pay-off business whose practitioners are said to be inclined to let money stick to their fingers. But grease is a slippery word (cf. "Butterfingers"); and "Sticky Thumb" would seem to fit Mr. Urdang's theory, rather than "Greasy Thumb." Of course it's entirely possible that down in Louisville, KENTUCKY, Professor David W. Maurer, active member of our sister-society, the American Dialect Society, may have in his archives of criminal and underworld argot the answer we seek.

Returning to New England and Springfield, MASSACHUSETTS, we find a topsy-turvy note from Raymond Wilson, who edits dictionaries by day and collects names by night. Mr. Wilson, who departs from his prime interest in strange and wondrous personal names, asks about the frequency of local names that spell something backwards. He calls attention to *Yewed*, Oklahoma and *Notla*, Texas. The former - Dewey, that is - was named for the admiral at Manila Bay, but since the Territory already had a postoffice called Dewey, this one was reversed. Mr. Wilson suspects the place may have disappeared, since it is missing from recent maps. *Notla*, or Alton, a now-discontinued post office in south Ochiltree County, Texas, was named as a result of a similar situation, reports Mr. Wilson, whose family knew the Altons. These names arrived during the correspondence with Mr. Stewart on the Donner Pass matter, and he responded to an impertinent P.S. with characteristic

gentillesse: he said that "a curious book" called *Names on the Land* had a few words (p. 362) on reverse place-names. He also noted in passing *Ydalpom*, California; though taken to be *moplady* backwards, which in fact it is, it represents – etymologically – an Indian name and is verifiable as such.

And so back to Amherst, where your N&Q editor, deep in the Sunday funnies, reaches for the omnipresent 3x5 slip on the side-table to note that Orphan Annie and Dick Tracy characters, especially the wicked ones, often spell something backwards. ? DES FUN'

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