

Whitwell's Nomenclature: An 1826 Zip Code

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AS THE TRADITIONAL WELCOMER of the outcast, America has a long history of separatist movements. Among these are the Rappist brethren, the followers of an individualistic German social and religious thinker, (Father) George Rapp, who founded his communal society first in Pennsylvania, later in southwestern Indiana and finally returned to Pennsylvania. The site of the Indiana group was at New Harmony, a small town on the banks of the Wabash flowing between Indiana and Illinois. Later, the entire community was sold to Robert Owen, an idealistic Scots economic visionary and reformer, who founded his own society there. The story of Robert Owen is given briefly in Robert Heilbroner's economic biographies, *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York, 1961, pp. 88–96), and the entire fascinating history of New Harmony (a picturesque settlement well worth a visit) has now been told in William E. Wilson's book, *The Angel and the Serpent* (Indiana University Press, 1964).

Communal societies are nothing new, but Stedman Whitwell, an English architect under Robert Owen, did have one unique contribution bearing on the study of American place-names, to report which is our present intent (see too Wilson's book, pp. 153–154).

Even in 1826, when his solution to multiple naming was proposed, Whitwell could write (in the *New-Harmony Gazette* for April 12, 1826, the source of nearly all the information here) that there were "18 Monroes, 16 Columbias, 15 Miltons . . . , 14 Lexingtons, 12 Franklins, 13 Jeffersons, . . . 8 Paris's, 9 Oxfords, 7 Athens's . . . , 3 Philadelphias" and so on in the United States of his day, now nearly 150 years ago. What he would think of the multiplied entries in today's *Postal Guide* can only be imagined.

Whitwell had a genuinely new solution to the problem of an existing nomenclature which not only gave many places the same

name, but which also let insignificant places vaunt a glorious name of history. He proposed that every community (and I presume, other landmarks as well) have an absolutely unique appellation which could be confounded with no other. This was to be done by deriving the name from the latitude and longitude of the location, according to a standard chart of equivalences for letters and numbers (in a manner reminiscent of numerologists who assign numbers to the letters of one's name and thus calculate everything imaginable). The basic form of this table is the following:

Numerals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
Vowel substitutes	a	e	i	o	u	y	ee	ei	ie	ou
Consonant substitutes	b	d	f	k	l	m	n	p	r	t

Since for any given number, either vowel or consonant may be selected, it is easy to avoid unpronounceable combinations. Thus, although there were two communities near New Harmony located at 38 degrees and 11 minutes of North latitude, one began with Ipba and the other with Feiba, while one at 38° 12' was styled Ipad for its first member. Similarly, the second members for this area centering around 87 degrees and 52 minutes of West longitude produced such second names as Evinle and Evifle. The resultant names of communities were Ipad Evinle, Feiba Peveli, and Ipba Veinul. (For the letter *v*, see *infra*.)

New Harmony itself, as the seat of the parent community, was to become Ipba Veinul (it was also known as Macluria after William Maclure, a co-worker of Owen), and the incorporation papers of a second community (as reported on p. 225 for April 12, 1826) actually begin, "The Name and Style of the Society shall be FEIBA PEVELI, [38.11, N. Lat. 87.53, W. Long.]."

Under Whitwell's system, a minimum of four letters per word would be required, unless the location was beyond 99° 59', in which event five would be necessary. He suggested that one-digit locations have a prefixed zero, so that 8° 7' would be ciphered as 08° 07'. In every word, the first four letters (or more, if the digraph variants for 7 through 0 were chosen) would denote the latitude, and the others, in the second word, would refer to the longitude. Whitwell supposed that in common parlance it would suffice to refer to well-known places near the speaker simply by the first word.

As North America lies wholly in North latitude and West longitude, it would not be necessary to have any particular markings for these directions, which would be implicit. However, the scope of Whitwell's proposal was not limited to one continent: it could not only denote New Harmony and environs but also the places of the world. Here, to avoid ambiguity, he used the marked-unmarked principle, according to which North and East were unmarked and South and West were marked, respectively, by the letters *s* and *v* (the latter as more euphonious than *w*, and admitting to combination better), to occur between letters of the appropriate word. This explains the *v* of Feiba Peveli, as *v* is not listed in the equivalences on the chart. The Cape of Good Hope, being at 34° 29' South latitude and 18° 23' East longitude, could be Siker-Beidi, and Cape Horn (55° 58' south, 67° 21' west) could be Lulesi-Meeda, the *s* in each name denoting south of the equator. (The last should more properly be Lulesi-Meveda, as he omits *v* to denote west.)

The sound values to be assigned to these names are also indicated by Whitwell according to certain key words, here retranscribed into a Smith-Trager type system. The letter *a* as in *all*, /o/; *e* as in *bey*, /ey/; *i* as in *divorce*, /i/, but perhaps also /i/ or /ə/; *o* as in *blow*, /ow/; *u* as in *lucre*, /uw/; and *y* as in *my*, /ay/. The digraphs *ee*, *ei*, *ie*, and *ou* are to have each vowel pronounced separately, although it seems to me this results in virtual homophony for *e* and *ei*, *o* and *ou*. He gives the mnemonic rules that *ee* can be remembered by the two vowels in *seven*, *ei* as in *eight*, *ie* as in *nine*, and *ou* as in *nought*. In the original proposal, no remark was given as to place of accent, but a few days later (April 19th, 1826, p. 238) we find his addendum, "To secure uniformity in pronunciation, the accent should be laid on the last syllable in each word, whether of latitude or longitude." The particular consonants were so chosen, according to Whitwell, as to reject "ambiguous, obscure or double sounds." The double vowels (digraphs) are to be used only when necessary (i.e., when the appropriate consonant might create a cluster), and then to be pronounced separately. Conversely, the occurrence of such figures as 22, 33 or 32, 23 in the latitude or longitude was not to be represented as *ee*, *ei* or *ie*, to avoid confusion with the digraphs denoting 7, 8, and 9.

Lastly, we may mention, following Whitwell (as does Wilson, p. 154), what a few well-known places become in the Whitwell

system. The nation's capital would be Feili-Nyvul, while New York is Otke-Notive, although here as elsewhere if slightly different coordinates were chosen, a different name might result. Pittsburgh becomes Otfu Veitoup and Baltimore is Irda-Evenop. In Europe, London is Lafa-Tovutu, and Paris is Oput-Tedou, while Istanbul (his Constantinople) is Kata-Deilie. However, as far as I have been able to discover, the nomenclature proposed never went further than its home area, so that no question of wholesale renaming ever arose. Another interesting consequence would be that there would be no need for larger or smaller subdivision names, as counties, states, or even countries.

Indiana University at Bloomington ("Pyfe Virat")

Editor's Page

American Name Society

FOURTH ANNUAL NAMES INSTITUTE

Fairleigh Dickinson University, Florham-Madison Campus

Saturday, May 1, 1965

Program

9:30 – 10:30 a. m.

Registration – Coffee

Gallery Lounge

10:30 – 12:00

Program – Dr. Meredith F. Burrill, Director, Office of Geography,

U.S. Department of Interior, presiding

Gallery Lounge

Professor Emma Lauberte, Grand Valley State College, Michigan

"The Name *Jānis* and Its Derivatives in Latvian Folklore"

Is the name *Jāni* and its derivatives Christian or heathen and what does *Jāni* have to do with St. John? The name itself has grown into the pagan tradition and its derivatives reflect the pre-Christian activities of the summer solstice. Only Latvians among the Baltic tribes have retained the old Indo-European tradition of the feast of Janis and through the centuries have developed it into a great national celebration.