George R. Stewart, Toponymist

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GEORGE R. STEWART is described in *Who's Who in America* as a "writer." He is not called there an educator, as are most academicians listed in that work, although he was a member of the Department of English at the University of California in Berkeley for almost 40 years (1923-62). Those included in that book prepare their own biographies; we may conclude that Stewart himself prefers to be known as an author rather than as a professor. His right to the listing as an author rather than as a professor rests on the some 30 books he has published over the past 50 years or more. The titles of those works testify to a catholicity of interest and expertise which cannot be matched by many.

They may be classified as novels and as studies of history, literature, travel, etc., not to mention for the moment his publications concerned with names. Many of these works, those at least with which I am familiar, manifest both a sense of place and a concern for the historical background which explain the present. This generalization is, I think, also valid for some of his novels. These are qualities which the efficient student of names should possess. To cite a few examples: two books about travel by automobile, *US 40* (1953) and *N.A. 1* (1957), treat of the areas described both physiographically and topographically, delve into their human histories, and pay much attention to the place-names (both have pages of photographs of signs displaying names). *The California Trail* (1962) celebrates the nineteenth century migration, and displays an intimate knowledge of Western topography. Even the novel *Earth Abides* (1949) contains an account of a journey by car across the United States. *Storm* (1941), *Sheep Rock* (1951), and *Fire* (1948) are other novels which demonstrate a profound familiarity with particular places and an understanding of man's interrelationship with them. Among his nonfiction both an earlier work *Ordeal by Hunger* (1936), telling of the tragedy of the Donner party, and a much later one, *Picketts' Charge* (1959), show these same concerns for places, for the history of the men and women associated with them, and for an understanding of the motivation of human actions. The subjects of Stewart's books, that is to say, call for the qualifications both of the historian and of the novelist, and it is these qualifications, it seems, which have determined the character of his work on place-names.

For it is in the study of place-names that Stewart has found his most

congenial subject matter; it is the field to which he has returned again and again. Three important books of his testify to this continuing fascination with names: *Names on the Land* (1945, and subsequent editions; I cite from that of 1958), *American Place Names, a Concise and Selective Dictionary for the Continental United States of America* (1970, when the author was 75 years old), and *Names on the Globe* (1975, published on his eightieth birthday, May 31). Stewart will tell you that his own favorite among all his books, is *Names on the Land.* He has often said this to me, and in print you may find the following (*Names on the Land,* p. ix): "People sometimes ask me which [among the rather large number of books I have written] is my own favorite. I tell them 'Names on the Land', and I think that I answer correctly. It is my favorite, I suppose, partly because I am possessed by the fascination of names . . . [and] because I feel that in spite of the difficulties I finally came closer to attaining what I set out to do than with any other of my books." And again (*Names on the Globe* p. 394): "Because of difficulty but final success the book ["Names on the Land"] has become perhaps my own favorite among my writings."

Stewart's own view of his work is not shared by all. James D. Hart, his colleague in the Berkeley Department of English, discusses his work in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (4th ed. 1965), calling him a "Pennsylvania-born educator and author." *Names on the Land* is merely mentioned here as one of his many books, and is not singled out for special attention. For Walton Bean, another Berkeley colleague, Stewart is essentially a novelist and therefore deserving of a place in a chapter devoted to California's "Men of Letters" (*California: An Interpretive History,* 1968, pp. 447-448). But Stewart's other literary activities are passed over with the remark that he "also wrote many works of nonfiction," none of which are mentioned. The implication is clearly that it is only Stewart's imaginative writings which will interest the general reader. Bean is doubtless correct in that: for most of these know Stewart only as a novelist. Stewart the onomatologist is not widely familiar to the educated public, and that is surely a result of the limited appeal which the study of names has hitherto exercised beyond the relatively narrow circle of the specialists. Onomastics is not a subject taught in more than a small number of schools or colleges, and so most of those who do come to it are those who feel, with Stewart, the "fascination of names." I know of no course given at Stewart's (and my) own University of California at Berkeley on the subject of names during the past 35 years or more. It may be that for some the study of names is not quite academically respectable; in any case there is no established tradition in this academy supporting the teaching of onomastics.

In order properly to understand Stewart's contribution to our

discipline we should first consider briefly what his predecessors had achieved, what their methods and their goals were. Much of the published research on place-names appears in the form of journal articles and monographs. Stewart's work in this field, however, may be thought of as consisting primarily of the three books referred to above; I will therefore contrast it with other studies of book length.

In this country there is, except for dictionaries of state place-names, very little of book length with which to compare Stewart's work. The only book in the field recognized by Stewart as a forerunner, is *The Origin of Certain Place-Names in the United States* by Henry Gannett, published in 1902 and reprinted in 1947. This is not a programmatic statement about the methods and goals of onomastic study; it contains studies of a large number of separate names, and so, like the various state volumes, may be said to anticipate Stewart's dictionary of 1970. Stewart's own views on the methodology, the purpose, the results of place-name research are contained, along with copious illustrative material, in his three books. They constitute the longest and most personal statement of an American scholar on this subject. The author claims, with some justification, that his work on place-names springs from a view of the field which is typically American, so American indeed, that his *Names on the Land* has never been translated (*ibid.*, p. x). From here it is a very short step to the claim that his views constitute *the* American view (*American Place Names,* p. xii). There are, however, many Americans who work with names, and they do not all hold the same opinions.

I will therefore pass in brief review three representative works of European onomastic scholarship of book length. The first is Albert Dauzat's *La toponymie française* (1946), a survey of over 300 pages of the place-names of France. Its scope is indicated by the subtitle: "Goals and Methods—Settlement Problems—Pre-Indoeuropean Bases—River Names—The Place Names of Gaul in Roman Times—A Regional Examination: the Gaulish and the Gallo-Roman Names of the Auvergne." This listing shows that the interest of its author centers in antiquity, and that he wants to demonstrate how the study of French names may contribute to the reconstruction of the history and the prehistory of the country. Dauzat's presentation makes plentiful use of the findings of archeology, geography, and of the historical sciences; he wants the toponymist to acquire familiarity with repositories of early name forms: "Où trouver les formes anciennes indispensable au toponymiste?" (p. 29). And he says (p. 24): "La toponymie est une science linguistique." and (ibid.): "La phonétique joue un rôle primordial."

Next I look at Adolf Bach's *Deutsche Namenkunde, vol. 2—Die deutschen Ortsnamen,* 1954 (*German Names, vol. 2—German Place-*

Names). Here the subtitle describes the contents thus: "German Place-Names from a Historical, Geographical, Sociological and Psychological Point of View. Place-Name Research as an Aid to other Disciplines." As in the French book we find here the employment of names to elucidate the settlement and migration story of Germany, the same careful search for the forms earliest recorded, the same importance attributed to geographical factors in the distribution of name forms, etc. But Bach gives an even greater prominence than does Dauzat to the linguistic aspects of the work. He writes: "In dem vorliegenden Buch sind die dt. ON als sprachliche Gebilde betrachtet worden, und zwar z.T. in bewusstem Gegensatz zu der herkömmlichen Beschäftigung mit ihnen, die sie auf weiten Strecken fast ausschliesslich als Zeugnisse der Siedlungsgeschichte und andrer Wissenszweige ausgewertet hat" p. 582 ("In the present book German place-names have been treated as linguistic formations, in part in conscious opposition to the traditional attitude toward them which so commonly uses them almost exclusively as witnesses to the settlement history and to other fields of learning"). He here emphasizes, that is, his concern with names as language, declaring that this aspect of name study ought to receive more attention than it does.

Over 20 years ago I published in this journal (*Names* 2: 1 [March, 1954], 55-60) an account of the first four years of a new German journal on onomastics, the *Beiträge zur Namenforschung*. It was there shown that the interests of the name scholars of Central Europe centered in the early periods of the Indoeuropean languages of Europe, were as a rule limited to toponymy, and strongly biased—if that is the proper term—toward etymology, toward a search for ultimate linguistic origins. Things may have changed somewhat in the interval, but not very radically.

I now turn to England, and summon as my witnesses, first, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th ed. 1960), by Eilert Ekwall; and second, two volumes (XXIII and XXIV) of the publications of the English Place-Name Society, those treating of the place-names of Oxfordshire. It should not be objected that Ekwall is a Swede (Sweden itself is the home of a long and distinguished tradition of place-name research); his dictionary is considered the best work in its field, and is accepted by all as authoritative. Both these works are characterized by a detailed and painstaking listing of all the variant forms of each name they deal with, and they both endeavor diligently to arrange these variants in a temporal sequence, from the earliest to the latest. This is particularly true for the EPNS publications: to the inexperienced reader, these long lists of only slightly differing forms can seem boring and not very useful. But the ultimate goal here, as in the French and German books reviewed above, is the discovery of the true source, the etymology; and, as one may read in v. XXIII of the EPNS, p. vi, "a wider range of

forms has sometimes enforced a different conclusion" from that presented in the standard handbooks. Both works strive also to supply a detailed documentation, in order that the interested reader may be able to check each statement made and each interpretation given. The amount of effort expended in assembling and ordering the vast quantity of data presented approaches the infinite; if one does not happen to agree with the conclusion offered, one is at liberty to derive one's own interpretation. Both studies possess a solid philological and linguistic foundation. In this day of wide ranging theoretical and abstract discourse frequently lacking a practical underpinning, it is a delight to encounter such sober scholarship as this.

These works, so summarily mentioned here, may be seen to have in common an emphasis on the linguistic form of the name, and an attempt at careful and accurate historical placing of the linguistic data; of less importance, it must be conceded, is here the geographical aspect of name study, the placing of the name in geographical space.

There are, of course, other perspectives from which the story of place-names may be viewed. Stewart remarks (*op. cit.*, 1970, p. xi) that "the study of place-names, comprising several disciplines, is all too conducive to a general prolixity and the amiable pursuit of hobbies. The linguist, the geographer, the historian, the folk-lorist—each may write upon the subject." The European work just reviewed is solidly founded in a careful study of the language of names, and only less so in that of the historical environment in which these names occur. Geographical considerations play a much smaller role, and the folklorist one even smaller. American scholars, by contrast, have much less interest in names as linguistic entities, and give a greater emphasis to names as a reflection of folk-tradition.

Of the four kinds of scholarship of those who write on names—linguistics, geography, history, folklore, Stewart himself, as we have seen above, established credentials in three. Only in linguistics, the field from which European onomatists* are so largely known, does he lack professional competence. His reputation as a historian is based upon numerous and excellent studies which, though centering in the early American west, show an interest in, and a profound familiarity with, the human background of many parts of the world. The geographer's interest in the physical environment, and in the scene of human history has been demonstrated in several of his works. The folklorist studies popular tradition as manifested in many areas of human

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* This term for onomatologist I first encountered in the "Preface" to his *American Place-Names* (pp. xii, xiii). I do not find it in any dictionary, and assume that it is Stewart's coinage; it has the merit of brevity when compared with its rather unwieldy competitor.

experience, one of which is the telling of stories. Stewart the novelist is himself a teller of stories; indeed, it is from his fiction that he has, as we have also seen, achieved the prominence he enjoys in American intellectual life. But he is not a professional folklorist. Perhaps we may see in him the investigator of place-names who has come to that discipline from the writing of fiction, with the fiction writer's essential interest in the motivation of human action. His recent work makes explicit that what he is searching for is an understanding of the why of naming.

A few quotations will illustrate this. In *Names on the Land* (pp. 3-4) there is the following passage: "Thus the names lay thickly over the land, and the Americans spoke them, great and little, easily and carelessly . . . not thinking how they had come to be. Yet the names had grown out of the life, and the life-blood, of all those who had gone before." And in *American Place-Names* (p. xii) we read: "In short, the chief problem of interest to the European scholar is the meaning of the name; to his American counterpart, the motivation of the namer." From *Names on the Globe* I take these quotations:

"The European scholar's lack of interest in the causes of name-origin is understandable." (p. 46)

"These methods of classification of place-names [in Europe] fail to grapple with the actual *giving* of place-names. The present work . . . is directed primarily at the elucidation of the naming-process." (p. 86)

"It [Stewart's system of classification of place-names] represents not names as dead things, but the approaches of the namer to his problem, whether or not he is conscious of what he is doing."

In this latest of his three major works on names, Stewart makes apparent by the organization of the book where his chief interest lies in the study of names. The first part is called "Man, the Namer"; the second "The Mind of the Namer"; and the third "Namers at Work." The emphasis is clearly on the human activity of naming; the philological and linguistic minutiae of the language of names do not interest the author. It is in this shifting away from the name itself to the human motivation of the naming process that I see Stewart's chief contribution to onomastics. He has given us some studies of individual names—such as those devoted to the name "Oregon" which demand our attention. But his enduring role in onomastic studies will not, I think, prove to come from investigations of the histories of individual names. He may someday be thought of as the man who humanized onomastics.

His ability to do this, according to him, lies in the concentration of his earlier interests in the study of the place-names of the United States. What distinguishes that study, in his view, from the work of his European predecessors is that in this country the giving of a large number of our names is so recent that a memory of the actual naming

has survived in the historical record. The names which the European onomatist works with were, in the great majority of cases, bestowed so long ago that no such record is available to us. Hence, for Stewart, the Europeans concentration on language; and hence the Americans' interest in the process of naming. There are, of course, American scholars who are as interested in etymology as any European, and Stewart's emphasis on the human motivation of naming may seem to some rather more characteristic of Stewart himself than of American students of names in general. There are, to be sure, many place-names in this country which are not subject to Stewart's approach: they are those which we have borrowed from the aboriginal inhabitants. Here we have the same problems as the European, rendered much more difficult by the great variety of languages once spoken here. It is a field which mistaken notions have long dominated, and one in which fertile ground remains to be cultivated for those who have the patience to acquire the requisite skills.

Growing out of Stewart's concern with man the namer, and characterizing his last two books on the subject, is a system of name classification which is a principal contribution of his to our science. It was developed after *Names on the Land* and first published under the title "A Classification of Place-Names" (*Names* 2: 1 [March, 1954], 1-13). Anyone familiar with Stewart's ideas about names will know this classification, and it will not be discussed critically here. It is repeated 16 years later, with scarcely any change, in the Introduction to his dictionary; and, having arisen from his study of names in America, is applied to place-naming throughout the world in his last book. The conviction is that its explanatory power is as effective in other parts of the world as it was in the United States. It serves, in this book, as the basis of the second part, "The Mind of the Namer"; the same ten categories set up 20 years earlier are here repeated, much elaborated, with the illustrative American examples being supplemented by appropriate ones from other countries. This section of some 80 pages is thus the best and fullest expression of Stewart's philosophy of names. His ten classes are these; he believes the namer's motivation for every toponym everwhere, ancient as well as modern, will fall into one of these groups.

1. Descriptive Names
2. Associative Names
3. Incident-names
4. Possessive Names
5. Commemorative Names
6. Commendatory Names
7. Folk-etymology
8. Manufactured Names
9. Mistake-names
10. Shift-names

To treat of the place-name patterns of all the globe in a bare 400 pages is a bold undertaking indeed, so bold that its author has had few prede-

cessors and is not likely to have many successors. Opinions will differ on whether this attempt has been wholly successful. Stewart remarks (*Names on the Land*, p. x.) that his *Names on the Land* was never translated or published abroad, "perhaps because it is so completely American." The "Americanness" of *Names on the Globe* is rather smaller in amount, because the subject matter is for the most part not from this country. Will this last book of Stewart's, then, have a greater appeal to foreign readers than his previous work in onomastics?

The boldness of the task becomes apparent when one considers that the number of names now and formerly in use in the world runs to many millions, and that much of that material, even when it has been competently studied, remains obscure. It is inevitable that any one author working on such a vast subject be subject to errors of omission and commission; here are some which one reader has recognized, and which scholars of the European persuasion will notice. The examples, unless otherwise noted, are taken from *Names on the Globe.*

Salsipuèdes, a place-name frequent in Spanish America, is said (p. 96) to mean: "Jump if you can!" This should be "Get out if you can!"

delphys, p. 197, the Greek for "womb," cited in the discussion of the place-name Delphi, is said to be a borrowed, not a Greek, term. The word is certainly native to Greek.

eskin-holt, p. 136, cited as a Germanic source for the French place-name *Aquenove*, means "ash-wood" and not "oak-wood," as stated.

Putah, the name of a northern California creek, is derived by Gudde, followed by Stewart, from the Patwin *pu* "east" (*American Place Names*, p. 392); the true source is surely the Lake Miwok *puṭa wuwwe*, the actual name of that stream in that language, words which mean "Grassy Creek."

Vogelkop "bird-head" is the Dutch name for the western, rather than, as stated, the eastern, end of the large island of New Guinea (p. 93).

Christmas Island, so named by Captain Cook in late December 1777, lies in the central Pacific Ocean just north of the equator, not "off the coast of Australia." (p. 107).

Strymon, is said to be "the ancient Greek name for the modern Vardar of Macedonia" (p. 230). The facts are rather that the river called the Strymon in both ancient and modern Greek reaches the northern Aegean about 50 miles east of another river, rising in Yugoslavian Macedonia and there called the Vardar; after this second river crosses the Greek border it is called the Axios, as it was in ancient times.

> *Society Islands*, are said (p. 125) to have been named by Cook "in honor of the Royal Society." This is an unfortunate perpetuation of an old misconception. Captain Cook, writing about his own discoveries, refers collectively to a particular group of islands some hundred miles west of Tahiti and consisting of those now called Huahine, Raiatea-Tahaa, and Borabora, as the Society Isles, "as they lay contiguous to one another." (J.C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook*, 1974, p. 194).

Such errors as these may be thought of as not very significant, and as easily correctible in second editions. We are fortunate to have a man like Stewart who is not inhibited by a fear of committing such mistakes from making the ambitious undertakings which his three books on names exemplify. Although Stewart in these writings carries on a kind of running fight against those whom he calls the "scholars," by which he means the linguists and the etymologists, there is, in my opinion, an obvious need for both approaches, the broad concern for the human motivation as well as for the competence in linguistic detail. It is the merit of Stewart the toponymist that he has made the strongest case I know of for the importance of the first of these two.

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CHARLES EDGAR GILLIAM

Charles Edgar Gilliam, 81, died January 28, 1976 in Atlanta. He was a resident of 412 Stuart Circle in Richmond at the time of his death. Funeral services were in Petersburg. A widower of Caroline Minor Gilliam, he is survived by two sons, Charles Edgar Gilliam, Jr., of Atlanta and William M. Gilliam of Richmond. Also surviving are four sisters and three brothers.

A native of Petersburg, he received his bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia in 1915, served as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Corps in France during World War I, and later attended law school at the University of Virginia. He worked initially for a Florida title and trust company and later was in private law practice in Miami from 1927-1929. He also worked for the Lodi Trust Company, Lodi, New Jersey, until he returned to Virginia in the 1930's.

He was appointed United States Commissioner (now a Magistrate) for the Eastern District of Virginia in 1938 and continued to practice law in Petersburg. He was a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Petersburg, a member of the Virginia State and Petersburg Bar Associations, and a member of the Virginia Archeological Society.

He was an authority on Indians of the Powhatan Confederacy and the history of Petersburg. He contributed articles on such topics to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Petersburg Progress-Index*, the *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia*, and *Garden Gossip* as well as *Names*. He also contributed poetry to *Garden Gossip* and to *Nature Magazine*.