

## Compte rendu

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Gudde, Erwin G. *California Place Names : The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names*. Revised and enlarged edition with maps. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1960, 383 pages, maps, glossary and bibliography.

par Fritz L. Kramer

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GUDDE, Erwin G. **California Place Names : The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names.** Revised and enlarged edition with maps. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1960, 383 pages, maps, glossary and bibliography.

In the early 1940's George R. Stewart proposed the creation of an encyclopedia of United States geographical names, consisting of a separate volume for each state. The time was not propitious — the plan has not again been revived. But before the project dropped from sight it bore fruit : the volume on California — conceived to be the first of the series — was actually written. Its author, Erwin Gudde, is eminently suited to the task, being a linguist with a special interest in onomatology and a competence in California history extending over nearly half a century. He is one of the founders of the American Name Society, started the society's journal *Names* which he edited from 1953 to 1956 and is the author of several books and articles on early California.

After more than five years of intensive labor *California Place Names* was published in 1949 and immediately set a new high standard for works of its kind in the United States. This second edition was brought out a decade later not because the book needed revision but because the first had become exhausted. There are, of course, changes : between the time Gudde began the work and the appearance of this edition the population of California had doubled and consequently new names had to be added. Further research had also brought to light some additional information on older names. The five maps are new ; one is a color plate of the counties, the others show names given during each of four major periods in the state's history. Some changes are apparently due to the economics of publishing : a most unfortunate omission is the excellent introduction of the first edition.

One of the several outstanding features of this book is its rigorous scholarship. Almost all American place name works suffer from a gossipy provincialism, an abundance of irrelevant local lore which often overshadows the story of the names themselves. Gudde's professionalism has successfully avoided such temptations. This is not to say, however, that we have here a dry litany of factual information — far from it. The accounts are well written, readable, and often enlivened by humor as well as vigorous scholarly battle over controversial interpretations. This approach satisfies not only the serious student of toponymy but also the local history buff who is provided much relevant historical background. In fact, a great deal of western history comes pleasantly to life in the entries.

Remarkable also is the amount of material involved. A look at any large scale map of California will make this clear, as will the realization that the history of the state's place names encompasses more than four centuries. It is difficult to estimate the number of names Gudde deals with. There must be more than 6,000 main headings. Frequently, however, the main heading may be a generic term under which are listed a number of derivatives. So, for example, under the main entry « Canada » we find : Canada, Verruga, La Canada, Canada Verde, and Canada Larga o Verde. Or again under « Camp » are listed : Camp Meeker, Camp Steffani, Camp Curry, Camp Independence, and Camp Innis (none of these are military posts). Obsolete names are not separately listed. As the subtitle implies and as the preface specifically states only current names are considered. Yet many of the old names appear under the heading of those which superseded them (Hangtown under Placerville, Klink under Ivanhoe, Bullwinkel under Crannell, etc.). There are, regrettably, no cross-references, undoubtedly for reasons of economy. All in all there must be several tens of thousand place names mentioned in the volume.

The 25 pages of Glossary and Bibliography at the end of the book consist mainly of an annotated list of source material. This is not intended as a complete bibliography which obviously would have enlarged the size of the volume considerably. Such a bibliography in manuscript is available for consultation in several California libraries (p. 357).

Gudde's is not only the basic work on California place names (he objects, in the preface, to its being called « definitive ») but it must serve as a model for all subsequent American place name books and sets standards which will not easily be equalled or surpassed.

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