

AN ONOMASTIC STUDY (PART 1)

DMITRI A. BORGMANN
Dayton, Washington

This is an age of extreme specialization. No longer can the general practitioner of logology aspire to verbal immortality. Those who dedicate themselves to selected branches of the science stand a much better chance of reaching those fantastic heights of achievement that remain shrouded in an impenetrable fog for the general practitioner.

For some time, I have been investigating the field of logological onomastics, which concerns itself with names rather than with words at large; more specifically, with a set of names that seems to be of perennial interest to considerable numbers of persons, both within and without the realm of logology: American place names. The time is now ripe for disclosing the fruit of my labors to the world.

Needed immediately is a definition of the term "American place names". For the purposes of this study, an American place name is the name of a community such as a city, town, township, village, or hamlet. Included in the concept of a community are post offices and railroad stations upon which names have been conferred, whether or not they are populated. Excluded are all other place names, both those designating physical features and those designating other man-made features. Experience has shown that most people are more interested in community names than in the names of mountains, lakes, and rivers. Don't ask me why, it just happens to be that way.

Several aspects of these names must be defined: space, time, and reference sources. American names are hereby decreed to be those included in the United States or in any territory that is a United States possession or commonwealth, or which have been included in the specified area at any past time, and which appear or have appeared in any reputable published reference work.

Some of the definitions in the two preceding paragraphs may seem arbitrary to you. This is undoubtedly due to an imperfect perception of the problem on your part, as each element in the definitions has been made mandatory by the Higher Logic of Logology, and is not for you to question the divine wisdom of which these definitions are but a routine expression.

Each community name in the text that follows is identified by state or other location. Given in parentheses is the name of the county or parish or census division or other appropriate unit in which the com-

munity name is or was found, and a numeral identifying one reference work in which the name is included. A bibliography listing these reference works numerically is given at the end of this article.

The first and most obvious pair of questions that can be raised about American place names must be: (1) What is the shortest such name? (2) What is the longest such name? Simple as are the questions, the corresponding answers are surprisingly complex.

Taking up the problem of the shortest name first, we find that two-letter specimens are too common to merit notice, except for the fact that there is an astonishing concentration of them in the Commonwealth of Kentucky: ED (Casey-2), EP (Owen-4), EP (Pike-2), EX (Grayson-3), O.K. (Pulaski-1), OZ (McCreary-1), UZ (Letcher-1), and VI (Pike-2). Consequently, our search focuses on one-letter names.

In West Virginia, we find a town named SIX (McDowell-5). Here is a name that could be, and presumably sometimes has been, written "6", a one-character representation. However, a numeral is not a letter, so we continue searching. In Kentucky, we spot the town of ZERO (Hart-2), which could be represented as "0". This character exhibits a dual aspect, since it is both a numeral and a letter. Still, it isn't the real thing, leaving us with a feeling of dissatisfaction.

In Michigan, we stumble on the genuine article: Y (Oscoda-3). The town is in the extreme southeast corner of its county. Unfortunately, the town belongs to another era, for the only human habitation anywhere nearby in that county today is the Old Baldy Tower of the United States Forest Service.

If a one-letter name is possible, why not a name with no letters at all? No sooner said than done! How about NAMELESS, Tennessee (Jackson-1) or NAMELESS, North Dakota (McKenzie-4)?

The problem of finding towns spelled with a negative number of letters is left as an exercise for the reader.

With a relatively easy problem solved, we turn to the far more difficult problem of locating the longest name. Long names fall into three categories: those written as one solid word, those that are single but hyphenated words, and those consisting of two or more separate words.

In the first category, the name that leaps instantly to mind is that of a crossroads hamlet in Virginia, scene of a famous Civil War battle in May of 1863 resulting in the death of Stonewall Jackson: CHANCELORSVILLE (Spottsylvania-6). The anti-logological forces of history have not been kind to this 16-letter name. Research uncovers the sad fact that its name was subsequently changed to SCREAMERVILLE (5), only 13 letters, and that it is known today simply as CHANCELLOR (1), a mere 10 letters.

Persistent efforts succeed in replacing CHANCELLORSVILLE with a variety of other 16-letter names: CHICKASAWHATCHEE, Georgia (Terrell-1), also spelled CHICHASAWHATCHIE (5); and numerous towns in Pennsylvania: McALLISTERSVILLE (Juniata-7), McLAUGHLINSVILLE (Westmoreland-7), MIDDLESMTIFIELD (Monroe-3), PENNINGTONSVILLE (Chester-3), and SOUTHAMP-TONVILLE (Bucks-3). The challenge becomes to find 17-letter place names.

Three have turned up: KLEINFELTERSVILLE, Pennsylvania (York-3), KLEINFELTERSVILLE, Pennsylvania (Lebanon-1), and MOOSELOOKMEGUNTIC, Maine (Franklin-1). Since various states boast towns named LIBERTYVILLE, there ought to be a 17-letter INDEPENDENCEVILLE somewhere, but it has not yet been found.

It seems impossible for 17 letters to represent the summit of American achievement. Our language permits entirely plausible one-word names of significantly greater length to be formed. A particularly meritorious example is the 25-letter concoction MacTHISTLE-THWAITESBOROUGH, derived from THISTLETHWAITE, Louisiana (St. Landry-1), adding the Scottish name prefix Mac- in recognition of the fact that the thistle is the national emblem of Scotland. Accordingly, the grim search for longer names has continued.

The key to success lies in taking a truly extended historical view of the problem. Once upon a time, somewhere in central New York, there was a Mohawk Indian village bearing the 25-letter name of KOWOGOCONNUGHARIEGUGHARIE (8). A casual examination of Hodge's monumental work will not locate this name, for it is buried in lightface type in a list of Mohawk villages included at the end of the article MOHAWK (see Volume 1, Page 924, Column 2).

It is a most curious thing. The 25-letter name is one of 14 Mohawk villages listed at the specified location. Each of the other 13 names, of little interest because much shorter, is also a boldface entry in its own right in Hodge's work. The 25-letter name is not, leaving us in the dark about its exact location and raising doubts about its authenticity. A typical logological mystery!

Next to be considered are one-word hyphenated names. Just as two-letter names are concentrated in Kentucky and solid one-word names in Pennsylvania, so are the longest hyphenated one-word names all in the State of New York. Examples ranging from 18 to 20 letters: HASTINGS-UPON-HUDSON (Westchester-5); CORNWALL-ON-THE-HUDSON (Orange-1); CHEEKTOWAGA-NORTHWEST (Erie-9); CHEEKTOWAGA-SOUTHWEST (Erie-9). The last two examples, evidently because they are the longest ones, are of suspect authenticity, because atlases such as Source 1 give these names as two separate words. There may well be longer hyphenated one-word names, but they are still in hiding, as it were.

Finally, we come to the multiple-word names. Here, a new refine-

ment of our definition of American place names must be introduced. In recent years, large atlases such as Source 1 have inserted into their indexes all sorts of strange entities that violate the concept of a community, but have exceedingly long, compound names: railway junctions, veterans' hospitals, shopping centers, correctional institutions, naval stations, air force stations, and others. We decide to exclude all such entities from consideration in the course of our search.

Typical of a very long town name of the "genuine" sort is the following 34-letter name: THE ALEUT COMMUNITY OF SAINT PAUL ISLAND, Alaska (Aleutian Islands-1). The name can probably be surpassed in length, but only by a tedious and cumbersome search, picking one's way past scores of longer but unacceptable names.

We cannot let the matter rest on that basis, and a wide sweep of references follows. First to commend itself to our attention is one form of the original name of Los Angeles, California: EL PUEBLO DE NUESTRA SENORA LA REINA DE LOS ANGELES DE PORCIUNCULA (Los Angeles-10). This name was bestowed on the community by the Spaniards in 1781 and remained in use, at least officially, until 1847.

While a 55-letter name is meritorious, it can be topped by some of the objectionable classes of names we are excluding. Consequently, an even longer name becomes imperative, and we continue our quest until a 69-letter specimen turns up: LA MISION DE NUESTRO SERAFICO PADRE SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS A LA LAGUNA DE LOS DOLORES (San Francisco-11). This was the name of a presidio or fortified settlement established in 1776 in the San Francisco area. It was subsequently absorbed by the nearby village of Yerba Buena, which later changed its name to become the San Francisco of today. "The Mission of Our Seraphic Father Saint Francis of Assisi at the Lake of Our Lady of the Sorrows" has carried the day for us. Note that the English translation of the Spanish name is even longer -- 79 letters!

American place names raise many, many questions of a logological nature other than what is the shortest name and what is the longest one. These other questions will be discussed in subsequent articles prepared expressly for Word Ways.

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