

FOREWORD

American place-name study now stands at a crossroads in its progress. In Dane County parlance, it has arrived at its Four Corners or its Five Points. Or if we prefer to think of it as a stream rather than a road, we might say that it has grown from a mere brook or run into a branch or creek, and is well on its way to becoming a real river. The present study may perhaps be best described as what Wisconsin folk call a "spread" in the young river's course; and it is indeed, like Lake Koshkonong, a notable one—not only wide but deep.

Having lagged so long behind other countries in the exploration of our place-names and the discovery of what they have to teach us, we are at last beginning to take this comparatively new field of linguistic study seriously as a science. Much of our earlier and highly tentative approach to the vast and uncharted sea of American geographic nomenclature has been like that of Augustine's child standing on the seashore and examining a few interesting shells picked up along the beach. Too often in the past the making of amateur collections out of random specimens of toponymy has been, like philately or coin-collection, merely a dignified sort of boondoggling.

We are now beginning to put out to sea. New and better organized expeditions are being launched in many directions. Some of them are products of local initiative or individual ingenuity, still defective in their planning, one-sided and unbalanced. If we are the last to enter the new field of exploration, we must compensate for lost time by learning how to use and adapt to our needs all the best devices and methods invented and tested in other lands. Above all, we must make our work measure up to a new set of exacting and expert standards, improving on them if and where we can.

Any worth-while study of place-names must be a combination of geography, history, and linguistics. It is not a science at all without an adequate respect for geography and history. Geography in this connection means that the physical aspect of each place studied—its situation, area, landscape, and material resources—must be thoroughly known and sufficiently considered. Aid must often be sought from the kindred sciences of geology, botany, zoology, mineralogy, and agronomy. Nearly always

the place must be actually visited by the investigator before the bearing of all the physical factors that so often lie unsuspected behind the origin and significance of its name can be adequately estimated.

Yet here there is almost as much danger of doing too much as too little. The student of place-names must remember that he is not writing a gazetteer, nor should he attempt to do the work properly belonging thereunto. He must resist the temptation to which some of our great American dictionaries of common words have yielded, the combining of a fairly good dictionary with a second- or third-rate encyclopedia. Words and things have no legitimate right in the same volume, nor have place-names and places. Not "Wörter und Sachen," but "Wörter" with only so much "Sachen" as a full understanding of the words calls for should be our aim. It is always better to tackle one task at a time.

Respect for history means above all a respect for dates. We must discover if possible the exact date when the place-name was adopted or invented, must test all its possible origins by a comparison of dates; and if the name is obsolete, must do all we can to find out just when it was changed or disused. If precise dates are unobtainable, we must at least set down the dates of its earliest and latest recorded use, and arrange all the successive alterations in its form, spelling, pronunciation, and significance in their chronological order, as the English Place-Name Society has so well done with its material. Then with the correct chronology as a framework, we must record all that can be learned about the circumstances of its origin, the person or persons responsible, and the reasons or motives that led to its adoption, its alteration, and its passing out of use.

Our history must include the economic and sociological factors, often so much more important than the political for the place-name investigator. Above all it must keep an eye open for folklore and legend, which often offer factitious and "ex post facto" explanations for the names, but sometimes furnish under the guise of fiction useful clues to the real facts, and, whether fact or fiction, frequently shape and control their forms and fortunes. Naturally we are often able on matters of detail, circumstantial, historical, or personal, to do far more than our European colleagues could ever dream of doing; and we must take full advantage of our greater closeness to our beginnings. Yet here again we must remember

that we are not writing histories, but only using history for our purpose. Many items of local or regional or national interest, however fascinating in themselves, must be sternly eliminated if irrelevant to the central problem of naming. We must hew to the line, without stopping to pick up the flying chips unless we really need them.

Geography and history are basic and indispensable in our work; but of the three fundamentals the greatest, after all, is linguistics. When we have extracted all the help available from the special sciences that deal with space and time, without yielding to the temptation of trying to become geographers or historians ourselves, we must never forget that we are primarily engaged upon a linguistic investigation. Nor must any of the branches of language study be neglected. The student of place-names is concerned not only with etymology, but also with phonology, semantics, word-composition, and dialectology.

This means that the treatment of a place-name will remain inadequate until it is thoroughly studied not only as a name but as a word. We must try to understand all its sound changes and sense changes, and follow its development all the way from its parental language or dialect through the various steps it may have taken in the devious process of Anglicization, Americanization, and modernization. We must consider its component parts and how they have been put together. We must also relate our subject to the study of American dialects—a field in which not much more serious work has yet been done than in American place-names. Here probably place-names will have as much to give as to take. European students have already discovered that the dialect terms and forms used so characteristically and abundantly in place-names are peculiarly illuminating just because the names are exactly located and almost always fairly well dated. At any rate, these two largely unexplored domains will surely prove to have intimate connections.

This investigation by Dr. Cassidy admirably exemplifies the ideals here briefly and inadequately outlined for any future work in the field that is to bear the stamp of genuine scholarship. Painstaking and exhaustive in its assemblage of details, scrupulously cautious in its judgments and inferences, it is completely aware of all the wider relations of the subject, and penetrating in its exploration of them. It is above all intelligently and sanely

methodological. It is truly a "study in depth"—which means that, of course without boasting that it has got quite to the bottom of a river of research which is still young and steadily deepening, it does reach a notable distance below the surface.

Doubtless we shall find much more to learn about American place-names as we extend the national survey now just beginning. Like modern bibliography, which every year seems to discover something new worth observing and recording about books, so American place-name study will surely perceive unsuspected connections and underlying factors that are now hidden from our eyes. The solution of problems that are insoluble in Michigan or Missouri alone will emerge when we encounter parallel problems in Tennessee or Texas. But the thoroughness and insight here exhibited in the conscientious examination of a limited field like Dane County will not only establish some minimum entrance requirements for future investigators, but will set a shining mark to challenge the best American place-names work that is yet to come.

ROBERT L. RAMSAY
University of Missouri