

NAMES:
*Their Significance and Importance
in Teaching*

A Lecture by
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THIS publication is a literal transcription of a lecture delivered before an audience of teachers and students at the University of California on July 28, 1952. It does not claim to be a contribution to the science of onomastics; to scholars in this field it will offer little that is new. However, since it is one of the aims of the American Name Society to endeavor to make the American public aware of the interest and importance of names in human civilization there may be some merit in publishing the lecture and in making it available to a larger audience.

The information given in the lecture is based partly upon the author's own studies in geographical, horticultural, and personal nomenclature, partly upon two standard works: George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land* (New York, Random House, 1945) and Elson C. Smith, *The Story of our Names* (New York, Harpers, 1950), and upon two articles in the forthcoming first volume of the journal of the American Name Society: Madison Beeler on the etymology and application of the name America, and Ingo D. W. Hackh on the nomenclature of chemical elements.

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ONE of the problems we teachers have to face is how to make a subject attractive to the students who are not or are only mildly interested in it. Long before I became actively engaged in the study of nomenclature, I learned that most students showed interest when mention was made of the origin and meaning of names which occurred in the course of instruction. Whether the subject is English or a foreign language, history or geography, any natural science or even a commercial subject—there will always be names. The purpose of my lecture today is to give a general picture of the field of onomastics, the scholar's term for this particular branch of knowledge.

The importance of a name lies in the very fact that names are an integral part of our existence and that utter confusion would reign if some superior power would suddenly conceive the idea of abolishing them. We can not imagine our human society, the world we live in, our activities, our studies, without names. Moreover, names are interesting. Even names which seem to be commonplace reflect the history, culture and psychology of peoples and the natural history and development of a country. Many names challenge our curiosity; some are veritable historical monuments which may reveal a story where other sources of information fail.

Yet, interesting and important as names may be, the origin of name-giving is not at all romantic. Names were given to identify a person, a place, or an object. A name was a simple description. If a man had red hair he was called the "red one"; if a woman limped she was called the "limping one". A river was called the "running water", a lake the "still water". A family that lived in a house larger than the others was called "those of the big house". There is indeed nothing very interesting in this principle of primitive name-giving; it merely serves a practical purpose.

Very often we do not need names but can identify things by numbers, as we do with streets in many of our cities, or with convicts in our penitentiaries. If the chemist or alchemist who discovered carbon or sulphur, or whatever the first element was, had been conscious of the fact that he had discovered the first of the series of fundamental substances which make up our cosmic matter, he could very well have called it Element No. 1. As a result we would have today not a bewildering but interesting number of names for the substances of our universe but simply Elements 1 to 98. For practical purposes, it would not make any difference and an unimaginative scientist might even prefer it. In fact, each element does have not only a name but also a number—though not in chronological order.

We may wonder why primitive people did not make more use of numbers to identify persons until we realize that they could not count beyond five or ten. After that they simply said "many". A traveler told me recently that he had come across a tribe in Africa whose members could not count above five. If a father had five children, he identified them by numbers. If his wife presented him with a sixth, he would call it "another", and if a seventh offspring arrived he would call it "still another", and so on. From this story we learn that even most primitive people were obliged to use "names", that is "descriptions", of persons or objects because of their limited ability to count.

Personal names form the class of names which naturally concern us most. Originally purely descriptive, they developed in the course of centuries into actual "names" with the original descriptive meaning often completely obscured.

We all know that, if a man's name is Baker, his ancestor who first took the name for his family was doubtless a baker by trade. But very few people know that the common English surname, Fletcher, means arrow-maker, because the honorable profession of fletching, arrow-making, gradually disappeared after the invention of gun powder. Two names which no American could help hearing and reading about in recent weeks, Eisenhower and Kefauver, are of German origin. Anyone with a slight knowledge of German will have no trouble interpreting the name Eisenhower; it means "iron beater" and the name-giving ancestor was probably a blacksmith. But even a person with a good knowledge of German will stand helpless before the name Kefauver. It requires a philologist to discover that the first Mr. Kefauver was a maker of lances or javelins.

Chronologically, not our family names but our so-called Christian names should be discussed first. Probably in all linguistic groups throughout the western world human beings had at first only one name. The Jews clung to this one-name idea in some districts until the nineteenth century and sometimes had to be forced by the authorities to adopt a family name. The Icelanders, individualistic and independent, even today have no family names but add to their own given name that of the father plus -son or -dottir.

The first social class to take on a second name was the so-called nobility. It was obviously their desire to stand out above the mass of the people by displaying two names, the given name usually supplemented by the name of their estate. Needless to say, prosperous peasants and well-to-do merchants soon aped this custom. But there was another and a more important reason for adding a name to the given name, namely increase in population. Today, especially in the United States, we are at liberty to christen our babies with any name we like—a privilege which is often misused by thoughtless parents who burden a child with a name under which he or she may have to suffer for a lifetime. In the Middle Ages, however, a fixed set of recognized names was developed. These were either biblical like Mary, Elizabeth, John and Thomas, or else Teutonic like Margaret, Eleanor, Robert and William. No others were used. As towns and villages in Western Europe increased in population, there were soon not enough names to go around. Appellations had to be added to distinguish the various Charles and Georges. The natural way was to add the trade or profession of the person. Thus Richard the Smith was distinguished from Richard the Butcher. Another method which we find especially, although not exclusively, among Celtic and Scandinavian peoples was to distinguish persons of the same name by adding the name of the father or the name of the clan. Thus, Andrew McDonald means Andrew of the Donald clan; Jack Peterson means Jack, the son of Peter; Edna Valgirdottir means Edna, the daughter of Valgir.

A very large class form the names derived from locations. Names like Berkeley, Underwood, Hill, Atwater, Wellman, Church indicate the place where a person had his farm or his shop when the family names originated. In other cases, especially when a person moved to another place, the name of the place whence he came was added to the Christian name. The family names of Jack London, Felix Frankfurter, Edward Stettinius clearly indicate the original home of the name-holder. In still other cases, especially when a person went to another country, the name of his nationality was attached to him. Hence the names Scott, French, Walsch, Fleming, Russ and others. To give again an example from current American history: the distinguished admiral Chester Nimitz bears

a Slavic name, yet his family was German. The root of the name means "German" in various Slavic dialects; hence when the admiral's family migrated to a Slavic country, they were called "Nimitz"—German by their neighbors.

Still another kind of name, given to distinguish the various Josephs and Henrys, was the descriptive name, which, as I mentioned before, was probably the oldest type of name at the dawn of our civilization. Even today any group of boys will invariably call a red-head "Red". The common English name Red or Reid in most cases goes back to an ancestor with red hair. Gray, Fair, Black, White originated the same way—either referring to the hair or the complexion. Short, Long, Little, Big, referring to stature, comprise a large class of names. In one country, Hungary, the names Nagy meaning "big" and Kisch meaning "little" constitute a large percentage of all family names.

It is, of course, impossible to go into detail about all possible origins of family names. But let me mention two or three more groups because of their interest. Among the common English surnames are King, Duke, Pope, and Bishop, and we find the corresponding names in other languages. These may have developed as family names because the original bearer was in the service of a bishop, or because he was thought to look like a king, or because he was the illegitimate offspring of a duke. Often, however, the name became attached to a person because year after year he played the role of one of the dignitaries in the pre-lenten and other public plays performed by the townspeople in medieval times. Perhaps the most curious name going back to these folk dramas is the name of the German officer who was attached to the American Ambassador James Gerard in Berlin. To the astonishment of Gerard, the officer was introduced to him as Pfortner zur Hölle—gate keeper of hell.

Another small but interesting group are Jewish names. As stated before, in Europe the Jews were the last people, with the exception of the Icelanders, to hold out against the acceptance of a second name. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the West European countries granted full rights of citizenship to them and obliged them at the same time to adopt a family name. Many took the name of the father plus the suffix "son"; others chose Cohn, meaning priest, or Meier, meaning teacher, and other Hebrew appellations for trades and professions; still others called themselves after their place of birth. A considerable group, however, decided to make the best use of the opportunity and chose beautiful and unusual names. Thus originated the names Diamond, Goldstein, Lilienthal, Veilchenfeld and many others, suggesting precious stones and lovely flowers.

After family names had been established, they gradually became the important element of a person's name. The given name simply became a modifying element to distinguish individuals who bore the same family name. If in 1300 a man might have introduced himself "My name is Paul, Paul *Smith*", three hundred years later a man by the same name would be obliged to say "My name is Smith, *Paul* Smith". In other words, formerly the appellation Smith served the purpose of distinguishing the several Pauls while now the appellation Paul serves to identify one of the many Smiths.

Until the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation the old Teutonic names and the biblical names predominated. Most popular were the names which were borne by holy men. This, of course, was at the period when the custom of a family name in addition to the personal name had become well-

established almost everywhere in Western Europe. The intellectual revolution of the sixteenth century had its influence upon personal nomenclature as upon all other phases of life. The humanists, seeing their ideal in Greek antiquity, not only translated their family names into Greek but tried to replace the old Christian names by classical appellations. Augustus, Cornelia, Dorothy, Julius, Theodore, Virgil are the most commonly used of the names which were introduced by these humanists. The religious phase of this upheaval directed its name reform mainly against the holy names which were considered "popish". On the other hand, the proponents of the various movements against the Roman church held that the old biblical names were the only ones suitable for bestowing upon infants. This tendency has prevailed in some churches to the present day.

The Puritans, not satisfied with the popular but to them meaningless names of the Old Testament, began to give their offspring biblical quotations and pious exhortations: Flie-fornication Andrews, Sorry-for-sin Jones, Fight-the-good-fight-of-faith Baker. Elsdon Smith tells us that in the eighteenth century there resided in Rhode Island a man by the name of Through-much-tribulation-we-enter-the-kingdom-of-heaven Clapp. Or a man in London bore the appellation: If-Christ-had-not-died-for-thee-thou-wouldst-have-been-damned Barebone. We can understand that this name was shortened to Damned Barebone. This craze was naturally shortlived; yet, traces of it have survived to the present day. Some 25 years ago there lectured in the summer school of this University a visiting professor. Although a frail infant at birth, he had nevertheless survived, and his parents called him "whom the Lord preserved" or simply Preserved Scott. His students called him affectionately "Canned" Scott.

During the nineteenth century the custom of adding a second or even two or more Christian names arose. As in the Middle Ages, when family names were created, people, especially the upper classes, believed that several Christian names added distinction to the family name. But again, there was the practical reason of identifying a person with two common names by adding a third name or at least an initial, a practice now quite general in the United States. Whatever the reason, some helpless babies are still burdened by a string of names, of which Elsdon Smith cites a number of examples. A draft board in Ohio during the late war drafted one Noah Harvey Herman Daniel Boone Buster Brown David Longworth. It is not the worst specimen.

Much more numerous than personal names are geographical names. In Europe the study of place names is an important branch of philology. In many cases, where written documents are not available to throw light upon the early history of a people or a country, names will tell the story. Names, like the Alps, the Rhine, the Thames, reveal with dramatic clarity the historical fact that Celtic people once dwelled on the land which is now occupied by the English, the French and the Germans. If all historical evidence concerning the history of England before the Norman conquest were destroyed, the place names would still tell how far the Anglo-Saxon and later the Danish conquests extended, where the Scots and the Welsh held their own, where the population mingled. In some countries all documentary evidence of the early history is actually lacking, but the place names still reveal the kind of people who originally dwelt there and the delineation of their habitats.

In America, too, the Indian names tell us something about the history of the continent before the coming of the white man but this information is rather

meager. Place names which tell stories do not develop until people learn the rudiments of agriculture and stock raising and settle down to these pursuits. The Indians, however, had not advanced beyond hunting and foraging and no definite conclusions can be drawn from their place names. The great majority of our American geographical names were applied in the broad daylight of history and the origin and meaning of most of them can be established. While not as important for the historian as the place names in old countries, our place names nevertheless reflect the character of our land, the history of our people, and since place names have their role in all subjects where a geographical distribution is concerned they are worthy of the teachers' interest.

Again, not all geographical names are interesting and important in themselves. Many are transfer names from Europe, usually given by settlers who came from a certain city or a certain district and carried the name to their new home. The etymology of Paris and Bristol and Warsaw may be very interesting, but their application to American communities often only shows a lack of imagination on the part of the name-giver. Innumerable are the names given in honor of persons, first settlers, postmasters, Indian chiefs, politicians, businessmen. Many such men doubtless deserved the honor, others bought it by donating a church-bell or a fountain or promising to use their influence in getting a post office to a certain place. In one instance which has come to my attention, the procedure was reversed. When a promoter named a mining town in Southern California, Tecopa, for a Paiute chief, the latter demanded two hundred dollars for the use of his name.

Many names honor our military and political leaders, and the many Washingtons and Jeffersons, Jacksons and Lincolns, together with the Arlingtons, the Bunker Hills, the Lexingtons, and the Saratogas testify to the patriotic fervor in the westward movement of the American people. Syracuse, Troy, Sparta indicate the classical, Delhi, Peking, Cairo the oriental trend in name-giving. Even though none of these names show great originality, they have contributed to the diversity of American geographical nomenclature and reflect in many instances political and cultural phases of our nation.

Another group of names tells of the flora and fauna and resources of the country. It was natural for our pioneers to call a level area studded with oaks "Oakflat", or to give the name "Rattlesnake Creek" to a place where they killed one of the reptiles. Gold Hill or Coalmine Canyon are self-explanatory. The expected precious metal may never have been found and the coalmine might have been shut down long ago for lack of yield—yet the names remain. A prospector once discovered a layer of decomposed shale rock which could be used as a soap and a typical American boom developed only to collapse as rapidly as it had developed—yet the name Jabon Canyon (meaning soap canyon) stayed on and puzzles those who do not know about the rock soap. In California, silk raising was attempted about a century ago. Mulberry trees were planted with great zeal and silk worms were imported with considerable expense. Alas, the worms died, the trees were neglected and finally they too disappeared. Today a few places named after the mulberry tree is all that remains of the silk boom.

When the great wave of humanity swept over the west of our continent, many of our native animals were almost completely exterminated. Yet the designations which places had once received because of their presence remained: the Beaver Brook, the Buffalo Meadow, the Grizzly Peak. When the cities were

built and the lumber companies began their work, whole forests disappeared and today only the names of Redwood City or Oak Grove or Pine Canyon testify to their one-time presence.

Most interesting are, of course, those names whose origin is lost in the dusk before the coming of the white man. There seems to be a sort of historical justice in the fact that many important names in America—states, mountain ranges, rivers—bear Indian names. Again peoples, cultures, and languages disappear, their names remain to remind us of their existence. These colorful Indian names, too, were in their origin purely descriptive and to read sentimental and heroic stories into them is the work of American romanticists. Tahoe meant "big lake", Mississippi meant originally "big river", and Yosemite meant actually "a band of killers" applied to the lawless inhabitants of the beautiful valley by their neighbors who suffered from their deprecations.

But who would want to miss such names upon our map—strange sounding though of commonplace origin? They have become an integral part of our American scene and they commemorate peoples who were no worse than we and who had to succumb to a higher stage of civilization.

There are many other classes of place names. Some names arise from an error. George Stewart has shown that the names of Wisconsin and Oregon go back to the same source, namely the Indian name of the "river of the west", spelled first by the French *Quisconsink* and later corrupted by map makers until two great but apparently unrelated state names evolved. Or the incidental names. When one of the petitioners for a post office complained that the Post Office Department had turned down a number of suggested names and that it was "likely" that they would not find a suitable name, a fellow petitioner cried "What's the matter with Likely?", and Likely became the name of the post office. Or the colorful and often bawdy names of the wild and woolly west, Pettycoat Slide, Delirium Tremens, Louseville, Shirttail Gulch.

The complexity of a geographical name may well be illustrated by outlining the story of our greatest name—America. We know that this continent was named in honor of the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. All other theories are figments of the imagination. Perhaps nothing illustrates better the cosmopolitan character of the civilization we call American than the circumstances of its naming. A German cosmographer, teaching in a French college, wrote the name of an Italian explorer on a Latin map showing the new continent which was essentially Spanish at that time. And this name was to become one of the greatest names in the English language.

The first controversy about the name was caused by the apparent injustice done to Christopher Columbus. Our philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson declared angrily that Vespucci was an impostor, who cheated Columbus out of the honor of having the new continent named for himself. Modern research has shown that Vespucci was not only absolutely innocent of such misdemeanor but that Martin Waldseemüller, the professor who named the continent, was perfectly justified in the choice of the name. While Columbus must be credited with the discovery of the West Indies, it was Vespucci who first set foot upon the southern part of the continent and explored it.

The second controversial problem is the lack of conciseness in the application of the name as it has developed in the last few centuries. "America", to be sure, is in a geographical sense the name of our continent or rather of our two conti-

nents. In the narrower but more universally accepted sense, it refers to the United States. If we say "I am an American", we do not mean that we are inhabitants of the American continent, but that we are citizens of the United States. Our brothers north and south of us do not call themselves Americans but Canadians and Mexicans. United States is really not a name but a description. Attempts have been made to provide our country with a melodious, characteristic name: Columbia, Fredonia, Usona—all have come to naught. When I myself made a weak attempt to suggest the name Americana for the United States in contrast to America, the continent, I was properly put in my place by the comment that one thinks of an encyclopedia and not of a nation when one uses the term "Americana". I am afraid that we shall have to continue to call ourselves Americans although the official name of our country is not America.

The third point of discussion has been the etymology of the name Amerigo. Not only place names preserve the memory of cultures which have long disappeared but personal names often do the same. During the first centuries A.D., Germanic tribes left their habitats between the Rhine, the Danube and the Vistula, swept through the provinces of the Roman Empire and founded new states on the ruins. Except for Britain, where the Roman influence has never been very strong, these Germanic tribes succumbed to the languages and culture of the romanized Celtic peoples they had conquered. But besides the geographical names—Burgundy, Catalonia, France, Lombardy—a great number of personal names had been accepted and kept by the conquered people. Amerigo was one of them. The name goes back to the old Gothic princely family of the *Amaler* and the name Amerigo appears in the Latin form of Amalricus as well as in various Germanic forms. Since the first syllable probably means "work" and the second "rich" or "mighty", an enthusiastic admirer of the name has used this etymology to proclaim the symbolic meaning of Amalarich-America: "Rich through work". We might let this stand on its own merits. It is certain that the good professor had no intention of prophesying that the continent he named would become rich or mighty through work. Indeed, he was doubtless ignorant of the meaning and origin of the name Amerigo.

May I add, as a final word on geographical names, that in modern times places actually *have* been given fanciful names in anticipation of future glory and riches. The best known of such a name is probably "Golden Gate". In 1846, the great explorer John C. Fremont bestowed the name upon the entrance to San Francisco Bay because he believed that the riches of the greater Orient would flow through this gate as the riches of the lesser Orient had flowed through the Golden Horn between Europe and Asia Minor. Only two years later the discovery of gold gave the name a new and deeper significance.

The third large group of names are the horticultural names—those of our trees, flowers, fruits, vegetables, and weeds. When we look at these names, a wide panorama of world culture opens before our eyes. The names of the apple, the birch, the rose show the same root in many Indo-European languages, a proof that they were known in Europe since times immemorial. The plum, the pear, the peach were introduced into Europe when the Roman Empire extended its tentacles into Africa and Asia, and these names have a Latin root. The names of some of our plants are of Arabic origin, introduced into the nomenclature of our Western civilization when the Arabs ruled Spain and when the crusades tried to wrest the Holy Land from the Mohammedans. The tulip, for instance,

is the Latinized form of the Arabic turban, in allusion to its shape. But the palmy days of horticultural nomenclature set in after America was discovered and the traffic with Africa and Asia developed. Thousands of new flowers and fruits, vegetables and herbs were brought to Europe and each one had to be named.

It was at that time that the idea of modern botanical nomenclature began to develop. The interest in sciences and in scientific nomenclature was a result of the great humanistic movement of the sixteenth century, and since the ideal cultural state of the humanists was classical antiquity, horticultural nomenclature was based on Latin and Greek—at least in form.

In 1542, the humanist Leonhard Fuchs published a book—in Latin, of course—in which he laid the foundation for botanical nomenclature which two centuries later was brought into a rigid but most convenient and still prevailing system by the greatest of all botanists, Karl von Linné. The botanical names which commemorate these two great scientists may serve as an example of the vagaries of Clio in bestowing honors upon great men. Fuchs is honored by having his name immortalized in one of the most beautiful of exotic flowers, the Fuchsia, while the more important Linné is honored only by the name of an insignificant and unimportant species of the honeysuckle family.

Since the time of the humanists we have in horticulture, as well as in zoology and other natural sciences, two sets of names, the scientific name and the popular name. Thus the linden is called by the scientists *Tilia*, and the oak *Quercus*; the lily-of-the-valley is the *Convallaria* of the botanist, and the golden poppy is called *Eschscholtzia*. In many cases, the popular names and the scientific names are alike, or have at least the same root. Botanists often took the popular name of the plant already in existence and gave it a Latinized form—the lupine became *Lupina*, the rose *Rosa*, the pine *Pinus*. Most of the plants introduced into Europe from other continents received a Latinized name in the first place and this usually became the popular name: the *Poinsettia*, the *Magnolia*, the *Eucalyptus*. Sometimes, to be sure, the people have rejected the scientific name and substituted a description which is more meaningful to them. The *Ananas* is commonly called pineapple because the taste of the fruit resembles the taste of a sweet apple and the scaly surface resembles that of a pine cone. The *Solanum* became popularly known as eggplant, and the *Arachis* is none other than one of our great American institutions—the peanut.

Horticultural nomenclature began to multiply when the development of the science of genetics opened up an apparently unlimited field for creating new varieties of flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Since Linné, all trees and plants have a double scientific name, the first giving the genus, the second the species. This corresponds to the more loose manner of distinguishing in popular nomenclature different kinds of plants by a modifying adjective. Thus, the *Abies concolor* of the scientist is the white fir in common speech; the *Helianthus angustifolius* is in the vernacular the swamp sunflower. But with the modern way of creating dozens of new roses, fuchsias, apples and berries every year, the new varieties have to receive individual names: the "Peace" rose, the "Humboldt" crabapple, the "General Pershing" peony.

Next I wish to take up the nomenclature of another science generally taught in our schools—chemistry. Of the ninety-eight basic chemical elements thus far isolated eleven were discovered before 300 B.C., although at that time they were not recognized as fundamental substances of the universe. We can be fairly sure

that all were descriptive but most of them defy interpretation, especially since none can really be traced back to the time they were discovered. Most of them have different names in different language families. But we can be fairly sure that the name of our most precious metal, whether it is "gold" as in English or "oro" as in Spanish, meant originally "yellow" or "shining" or "light". It is most likely that the name copper contains the old name of Cyprus because one of the first coppermines known was on that island; carbon probably meant "burnt wood" and sulphur "burning stone". The only one of the old elements which bears a name derived from a personal name is mercury. The Greek called it "silver water" and the Romans "living silver", but in the Middle Ages the alchemists gave it the present name in allusion to the fleet-footed messenger of the gods, Mercurius.

The name of the eleventh of the elements discovered in antiquity, arsenic, may be singled out as a classical example of the strange way names develop. The Greek Theophrastus mentions *arsenikon*, which means "the masculine one". We may wonder what connection there may have been between arsenic and the male sex? A folk etymologist might say that the name was probably given because the mixing of arsenic into food is a common method used by women who want to get rid of their husbands. But the simple and unromantic reason for the naming is that Greek painters used the sulphide of arsenic for coloring the faces of men brownish tan while the faces of women were painted white.

From about 300 B.C. until the later Middle Ages, no new elements were discovered and no new names appear. With the humanistic revolution, the interest in chemistry as well as in other sciences was renewed. To be sure, the alchemists did not try to interpret the immutable laws of chemistry but held the naive belief that they could force their petty laws upon nature. Nevertheless, a number of new minerals were found and alchemistic experiments resulted in the discovery of several elements.

It is interesting to note that the names given by the alchemists to the newly discovered minerals no longer follow the pattern of descriptive names. A touch of romanticism and superstition becomes noticeable which is best illustrated by the names of the two elements, cobalt and nickel. Both were named after underground spirits who tease, fool and torment the miners. One of them is *Kobolt*, the root of which is preserved in goblin. The Kobolt's chief misdeed was to fool the miners by letting them find a heavy mineral that looked like silver ore but produced no silver and was useless. This ore the miners termed "kobolt", firmly believing that it was a mischievous spirit who tricked them. When in 1733 a new element was isolated from this very mineral, the old superstitious name stuck to it.

A similar devilish gentleman was Mr. *Nickel*. His name became attached to a mineral which looked like copper ore but released arsenic fumes when roasted. Reason enough for the superstitious miners to call this infernal stuff *Kupfer-nickel*, "copper-devil". Again, when in 1751 a most valuable new metal was isolated from this mineral, the old name nickel, meaning devil, was kept. It is not only preserved in the name of the element but also in the phrase "full of the old nick", and, of course, in our American coin, the nickel.

Modern scientific chemistry was inaugurated by three Englishmen, Cavendish, Rutherford and Priestley, who isolated the three important gases. They again used descriptive terms in a Latin dress to name the new elements. Hydro-

gen means "water producing", nitrogen "niter producing", and oxygen "acid producing". This custom of applying Latin names in chemistry as well as in other sciences has prevailed to the present day and has fortunately created a nomenclature which can be understood all over the world. The root of the names of chemical elements, to be sure, was not always a descriptive Greek or Latin word. For instance, after the great astronomer Herschel had discovered in 1781 a new planet, Uranus, the next isolated element was promptly called uranium. This is an early example of the now common habit of using a name which had suddenly sprung into fame for baptizing stars and flowers, children and restaurants, sub-divisions and breakfast foods.

Another variety of naming was introduced when Governor John Winthrop of Connecticut found near his house a new mineral which he called columbite in honor of America. When in 1801 a new element was recognized in this mineral, the name was preserved in the form of columbium. Since then, a number of patriotic chemists have honored their native land in naming newly discovered elements: gallium for France, ruthenium for Russia, polonium for Poland, thulium for Norway, and so on. All in all, there is a wealth of historical information in the names of chemical elements and many students would perhaps enjoy the subject more if these interesting facts were pointed out to them.

I have tried to give a sort of bird's eye view of the most important groups of our names, personal names, geographical names, names in horticulture and chemistry. There are numerous other classes of nomenclature: the street names of our cities, the names of birds and fish and mammals, the brand names of our commercial and industrial products, the names of our heavenly bodies, of our months, of our weekdays and so forth. Recently, one of the active members of the American Name Society, Mamie Meredith, published an article on the names of pioneer fences. In the first issue of the *Journal of the American Name Society*, one of the articles will deal with the names of passenger trains in North America. Those who are conscious of the importance of the fence and of the railroad in the development of our nation, will realize that even such apparently unromantic nomenclature may have a great fascination.

In Europe the study of names is a recognized branch of philology. Several periodicals are devoted to the science of onomastics or *Namenforschung*. In America this study has not yet come into its own. Interest in names, to be sure, has always been present, and in recent years the standard works of Stewart and Smith—as well as several state surveys of geographical names and a number of monographs in special fields—have been published. The United States and the Canadian boards on geographical names do excellent work in supervising the application and spelling of place names, and committees on botanical and zoological nomenclature are working toward the standardization of the nomenclature in their fields. But a central agency devoted to the study of names has been lacking. The American Name Society, formed in Detroit in December, 1951, intends to fill this gap.

The purpose of my lecture has not been to give you a mass of factual information. The field of onomastics is too broad and complex to attempt to teach anything concrete within a short hour. All I can hope, is to have done my modest share in stimulating interest in a subject which has heretofore been neglected in America. I should feel richly rewarded if I have succeeded in doing this.

AMERICAN NAME SOCIETY, INC.

At a conference in Detroit, Michigan, December 29, 1951, a group of scholars interested in onomastics founded an American Name Society. It has been incorporated under the laws of the state of Illinois, and its first national meeting will take place in Boston, Massachusetts, in December 1952.

The new organization is sponsored by the following group: Harold W. Bentley, American Dialect Society; Margaret M. Bryant, Brooklyn College; Meredith F. Burrill, Director, Division of Geography, U. S. Department of the Interior; Frederic Cassidy, University of Wisconsin; L. O. Colbert, Arctic Institute of North America; Edward C. Ehrensperger, Editor, South Dakota Place Names; Duncan Emrich, Library of Congress; E. E. Ericson, Gustavus Adolphus College; Edward A. H. Fuchs, G. & C. Merriam Company; Joseph G. Fucilla, Author, *Our Italian Surnames*; Demetrius J. Georgacas, University of Utah; William Cabell Greet, Speech Consultant, Columbia Broadcasting System; Erwin G. Gudde, Author, *California Place Names*; John P. Harrington, Smithsonian Institution; Atcheson L. Hench, University of Virginia; Helge Kökeritz, Yale University; Kemp Malone, Co-Founder, American Speech; Albert H. Marckwardt, University of Michigan; H. L. Mencken, Author, *The American Language*; Mamie Meredith, University of Nebraska; P. E. Palmer, Canadian Board on Geographical Names; Thomas M. Pearce, Editor, *New Mexico Place Names*; Louise Pound, University of Nebraska; Robert L. Ramsey, Author, *Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names*; J. B. Rudnykyj, Editor, *Onomastica*; Elsdon C. Smith, Author, *The Story of Our Names*; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Author and Explorer; George R. Stewart, Author, *Names on the Land*; Francis L. Utley, American Folklore Society.

The purposes of the American Name Society are:

The study of the etymology, origin, meaning, and application of all categories of names—geographical, personal, scientific, commercial, popular—and the dissemination of the result of such study;

to make the American people conscious of the interest and importance of names in all fields of human endeavor and in all subjects taught in our schools and colleges;

to act as a clearing house for American nomenclature and as an advisory agency for government offices, organizations, and individuals concerned with the application, changing, spelling, and pronunciation of names.

The media to attain these purposes will be:

The publication of a quarterly devoted to the study of names, the first issue of the first volume to be published in March 1953;

the publication of books and monographs in the field of onomastics, and the support and encouragement of such publications;

the eventual publication of standard reference dictionaries in the various categories of names.

The annual dues for active and library members are \$5.00; for sustaining members \$25.00. An individual or an organization may become a patron of the Society by a single payment of \$1,000.00. Membership includes a subscription to the journal of the Society and the privilege of purchasing at cost books and pamphlets published by the Society.

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