CANOMA

CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY

1905-1909

III.   SASKATCHEWAN

Alan Rayburn*

In Volume 5, Number 1 of CANOMA it was noted that James White had received 384 circulars from Saskatchewan postmasters in his 1905-1909 place name survey. The postmasters of some prominent places like Regina, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Kindersley, Rosetown and Biggar apparently ignored White's questionnaire on the origin and meaning of the names of their communities, but the postmasters who did reply provided a fascinating insight into the variety of ways that were followed to select names for populated places in Saskatchewan.

Names like Nipawin, Nokomis, Saskatoon and Assiniboia may be traced to their roots in Indian languages. Of similar origin is WAKAW, a town whose post office was established in 1904 at the western end of Wakaw Lake. In his letter George Arthur has explained the Cree meaning of the name and has noted further that, although the name is not especially euphonious, efforts by European settlers to call it "Crooked Lake" had been rejected.

A large number of names in Saskatchewan derived from Indian languages have survived in translation, examples being Swift Current, Touchwood Hills and Qu'Appelle River. In 1905 the *Qu'Appelle* postmaster, N.M. Thomson, provided the succinct explanation that the name related to the tale of a dying maiden calling for her loved one. The post office name was changed to *Fort Qu'Appelle* in 1912 to avoid conflict with Qu'Appelle, another village on the Canadian National Railways, 26 km (16 miles) south of Fort Qu'Appelle. Katepwa, the Cree for "who calls", is retained in the name of Katepwa Lake, east of Fort Qu'Appelle and the English translation is reflected in Echo Lake, west of the town.

The personal names of noted Indians also provided a source of names for places.   The postmaster at *Moosomin* informed Mr. White that the name was chosen to commemorate a prominent chief who had lived near North Battleford and had distinguished himself in the Rebellion of 1885. In his book on Saskatchewan names, E.T. Russell mentions that *Kamsack* was named for a well known Indian.[1] The postmaster's letter of 1905 elaborated in considerably more detail that Kamsack was named for an Indian who was a crippled dwarf humourously called by the Indians themselves, Kamsack, or "big man", who had helped the first settlers in 1882. The name was selected in 1904 to replace *Burnsville,* the post office established in 1888.

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1   Russell, E.T. (1980): *What's in a name*.   Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, 3rd Edition, p. 153.
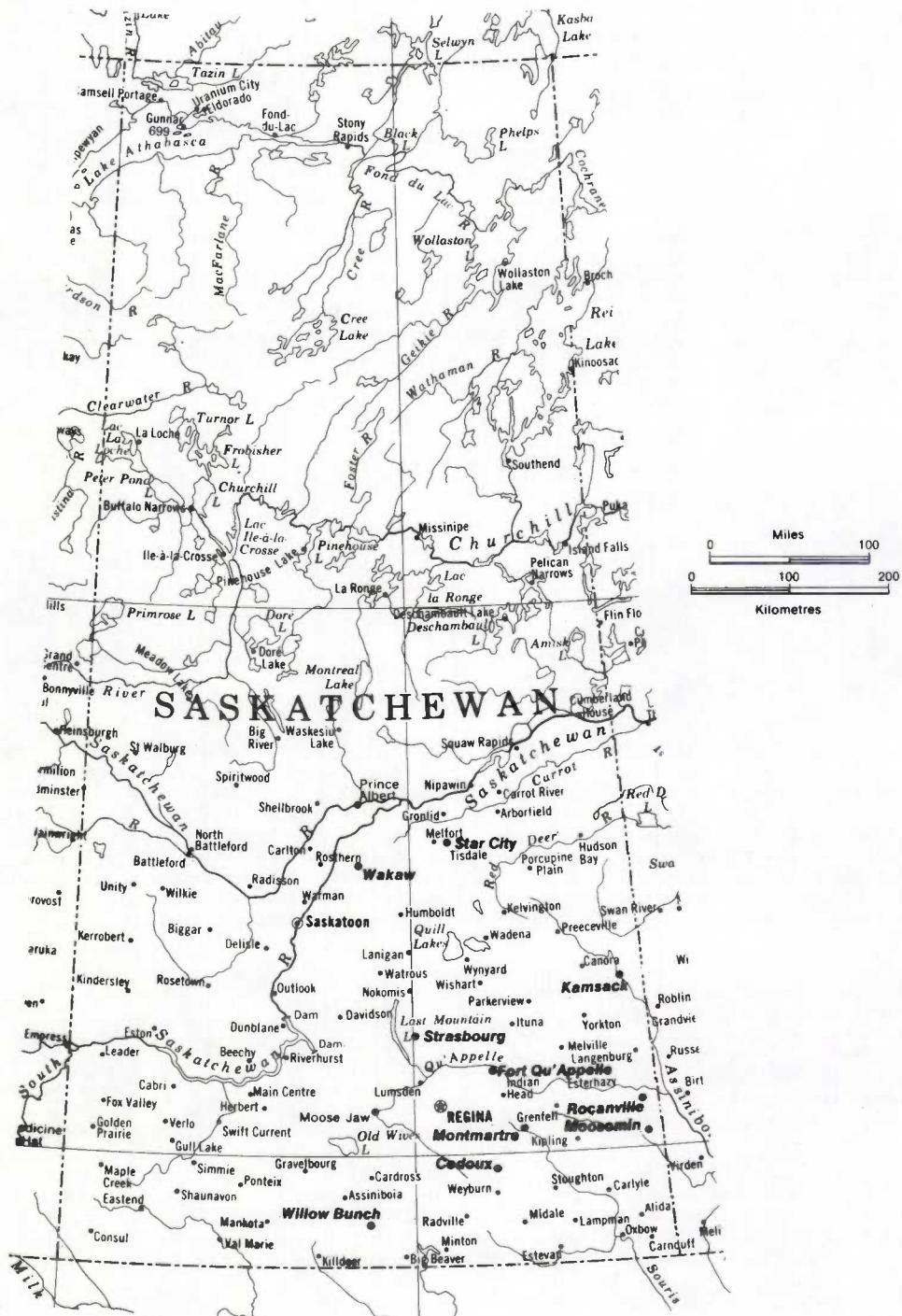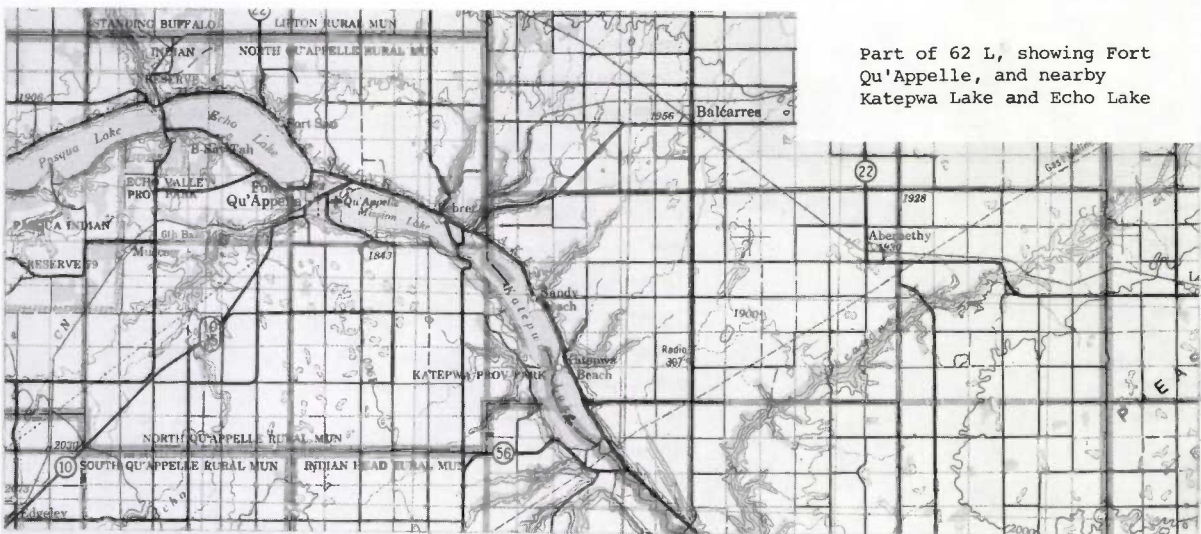
Saskatchewan: showing communities for which replies to James White's circulars are discussed

Wakaw is part of the Cree word
Wakawkomah — bent or crooked or curved water
Père Lacomb translates wakaw crocle and also courbé
The lake is a ~~semi lunar bot~~ crescent shaped body 12 miles long
lying with its convex shore facing S.E. and is the
source of the Carrot River
The banks are in places fully 200 feet high and one may
easily imagine an Indian standing on an emmence and
naming it true to shape "Curved water"

By many the place is known as Crooked Lake and the
Galicians shorten it to "Kruk lak" and many letters
so addressed find their way here
An attempt is being made to retain the rather uneuphonious
Indian name

Yours truly

George Arthur

Reply to circular: from Wakaw

Part of 62 L, showing Fort
Qu'Appelle, and nearby
Katepwa Lake and Echo Lake

Star City
Sask
Sept 18/05

Sir

I have the honor to reply to the enclosed

Star City was named by myself
The first settlers here asked me to accept
the position of postmaster, when we first
applied for the post office, I did so on condition
that I should name the place, my name
being Walter Starkey. I took the first syllable
of my name Star & added City to it calling
it Star City. My occupation at the time was
farmer, born at Brighton, Sussex, England
in the year 1872, at the age of 18 I emigrated
to the United States of America, where I resided
8 years, coming to Canada still a British subject
in the year 1900, & homesteaded on the SE ¼ Sec
16. township 45. Range 17 W 2 am now moved to
the townsite of Star City & still postmaster

Very Truly Yours
Walter Starkey

Reply to circular: from Star City

The early settlers themselves provided their own personal names for a large number of places. Such a name is STAR CITY, a village of 500 people southeast of Prince Albert, which was named for Walter Starkey, who settled there in 1900. Mr. Starkey's letter provided clear details on how the name was chosen, where he came from and where he had settled.

The origin of ROCANVILLE is especially fascinating. In his letter A.H.R. Bastien explained that his real name was Honoré Rocan, but through the second marriage of his mother and during various jobs in Montréal and in western Canada he had become known as Auguste Henry Rocan Bastien. The post office was opened there in 1884.

Names derived from places in other countries are quite numerous in Saskatchewan. Many were taken from places in the United States, either by people who had migrated from those places or by people who found names such as *Alameda* to be especially attractive. A rather strange story is that of CEDOUX, named in April 1905 for a place called Ledoux, a post office from 1875 to 1904, in Minnesota.

The name *Strassburg*, a town 75 km (47 miles) north of Regina, was given for the city in Alsace, which was part of Germany prior to World War I. The postmaster's letter of 1905 clearly states it was named by two Germans from Strassburg, Germany. In 1919, following the transfer of Alsace to France, the Geographic Board of Canada recommended the change of Strassburg to *Strasbourg* to conform with the restored French form in Alsace. The town council accepted the proposal, as did the Saskatchewan Municipal Affairs Department, the Post Office Department and the Canadian Pacific Railway.
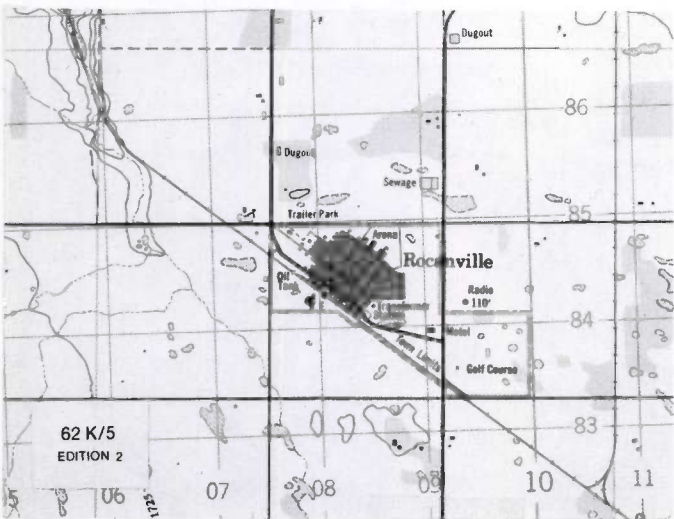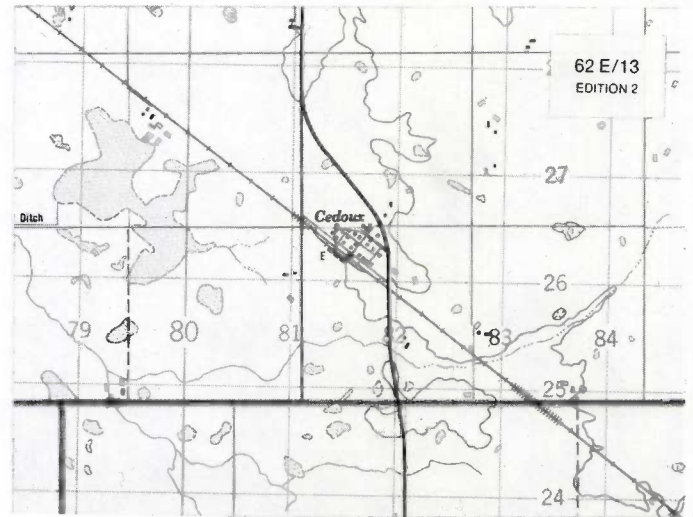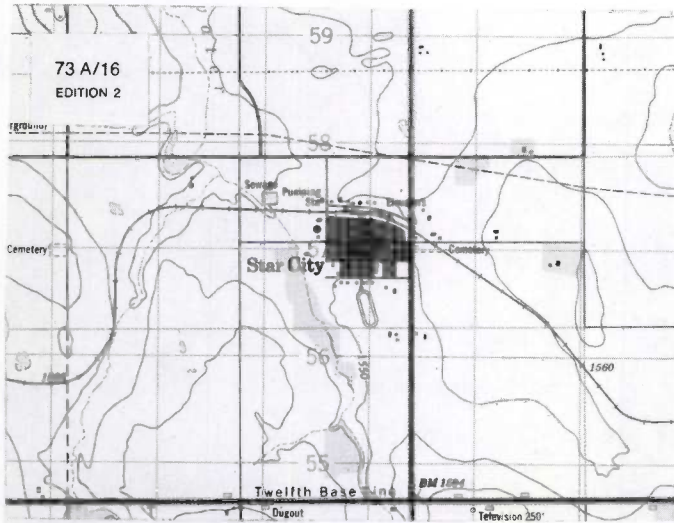
Honoré Rocan born at St. Vincent de Paul 4 May 1842,
at school at above place; St. Eustache & St. Laurent,
at 14 yp. entered a Wholesale Wine &c. firm Montreal
Firm found Honoré too long and named me Auguste
being the name of father had no objections.
In 1862 or 3 entered the Hudson's Bay Co. Service
& came in this Nor-West Territories remained with
above Company 21 years English changed my name into
Henry.
When leaving the H.B.Co. I took land on Sec. 6 ~7 —
named after one
31. W. 1st M. the P.O. was opened on my place &
myself as P.M. remaining there until this
branch of Ry. was built. The Company put-
up a station 3 miles S.E. of my place and
named it as the old P.O. "Rocanville" the
old office was closed and transfered along with
myself to the station, now on S. 21. 16. 31. W. 1st M.
The surname or alias Bastien. I presume comes
from generations long passed originating in step
father, as a widow with children marrying
a second time and her children going under the
name of last husband until the children were old
enough to assume their proper names. and now
although my name in the register in St. Vincent-
de Paul Church is simply "Honoré Rocan "
I sign
        A H R Bastien
it stands for Auguste Henry Rocan Bastien

Reply to circular: from Rocanville

Dear Sir,

In reply to your enquiry regarding the way in which our Village Post Office received the ~~name~~ of "Cedoux", I may state that before coming to Canada to reside I lived at a place named *in the State of Minnesota* "Ledoux", and the people in our neighbourhood thought this was an easy name to pronounce and remember, hence the reason why we called our place "Cedoux". I may point out further that it should have been "Ledoux", but the authorities at Ottawa called it "Cedoux" so we just kept that name. Trusting this information may be satisfactory to you.

I am

yours truly,

Joseph Chowaniec
P.M. at Cedoux

Reply to circular: from Cedoux

Another name derived from Europe was MONTMARTRE, the majority of settlers having come from Paris to this village 85 km (53 miles) east of Regina. The postmaster in 1905, V.R. Ogier, provided extensive details in his letter on the settlement and the local geography. The following extract from his letter indicates why the name was chosen.

"*Quiconque a visité Paris a plus forte raison celui qui l'a habité, ou qui en est natif se souviendre toute sa vie des buttes Montmartre, point le plus culminant & qui domine toute la ville et les environs.... C'est d'ailleurs un lieu de réjouissance un but de promenade etc. etc. le quartier le plus populeuse de Paris.*

C'est par Patriotisme & en souvenir de ce lieu de plaisance que les premiers colons et les fondateurs de la Colonie Française de Montmartre dont la majorité sont Parisiens de naissance ou bien ont habité Paris un certain nombre d'année lui ont donné ce nom - L'Endroit a du reste quelques analogie et rappelle les souvenirs Parisiens."

V.R. Ogier
Maître de poste

Translation:

Visitors to Paris, and, above all, people who have lived or were born there, will always remember the hills of Montmartre, the high point of which overlooks the entire city and its suburbs.... Montmartre is also a place of leisure, a destination for people to walk to, etc., etc., and is the most populous district in Paris.

It was out of patriotism and in memory of this pleasant spot that the first colonists and the founders of the French colony of Montmartre, most of whom were Parisians by birth or who lived in Paris for a number of years, gave it this name. Moreover, the place bears a resemblance to its namesake and evokes memories of Paris.

The influences of local geography and natural vegetation have determined a large number of names in Saskatchewan. An excellent example described in one of the circulars returned to Mr. White is WILLOW BUNCH. The accompanying extract from Jean Louis Légaré's letter describes how the Metis settlers encountered "harres rouges" in the Big Muddy Valley and, when non French-speaking people arrived, the translation, Willow Bunch, was established as the name.

"Il y a àpeuprès 40 ans les premiers Métis Canadien qui s'avansait de plus en plus à l'Ouest pour y faire la Chasse de Buffalo. Trouverent une coulée ou il y avait un peut de bois. Avec qui il y avait des harres Rouges - et de cette Écorce - qui melait avec du Tabac pour fumer tous s'en procurait quant on n'en trouvait tous eut occasion de Connaitre. Cette Talle de Harre Rouge et de la est venu le nom. Car les gens pouvait se dire l'un à l'autre j'ai passer par la Talle de Harre Rouge, ou j'ai camper près de la Talle de Harre Rouge - ou hiverner à telle distance de la Talle de Harre Rouge. Et quant la Police Monté sont venu ici en 1877 - ceux qui ne parlait pas Français - été forcé de dire Red Willow Bunch - sa fini par être Willow Bunch ni plus ni moins. Il y a 35 ans que je suis par ici je suis celui qui a rendu Sitting Bull et ces Braves qui avait pris part au Masacre du General Custer en 1876 au sud du Montana. J'était ici 13 ans avant que les chars viennent au Pays en 1882."

Jean Louis Légaré
P. Master

Translation:

About 40 years ago the first Canadian Métis, advancing farther and farther westward to hunt buffalo, discovered a coulee with a small wooded area consisting partly of red willows, the bark of which used to be blended with tobacco and smoked. They would all acquire some of it when it was available. This bunch of red willows became familiar to everyone, and this is where the name came from. People might say to one another, I passed by the bunch of red willows, or camped near them, or wintered a certain distance from them. And when the Mounted Police came here in 1877, those who spoke no French had to say Red Willow Bunch, which was eventually shortened to Willow Bunch. I have been around here for 35 years. I was the one who handed over Sitting Bull and his braves who had taken part in the massacre of General Custer in 1876 in southern Montana. I was here for 13 years before the trains arrived in 1882.

This selection of letters received by James White in the 1905-1909 period illustrates the considerable diversity of sources for names of populated places in Saskatchewan. Many of the remaining letters provide a fascinating insight into the naming practices in Western Canada 80 to 100 years ago, as well as focusing on various social and cultural aspects of that period of Canadian history.

Over 1000 White circulars for the four western provinces are on file in the CPCGN records. These are now available on microfiche and arrangements can be made through the CPCGN Secretariat to purchase copies of the fiches.

The Chief Geographer's place name survey will be continued in Volume 7 of CANOMA. A selection of the 338 circulars received from Manitoba postmasters will then be reviewed.