Énergie, Mines et Ressources Canada
Energy, Mines and Resources Canada

CANOMA

Vol. 9 – No. 1 July/juillet 1983

Nouvelles et commentaires concernant la toponymie du Canada recueillis par le Secrétariat du Comité permanent canadien des noms géographiques

Publié par la Direction des Levés et de la Cartographie, Énergie, Mines et Ressources, Canada

News and views concerning Canadian toponymy compiled by the Secretariat of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

Published by the Surveys and Mapping Branch, Energy, Mines and Resources, Canada

Canada

COVER/COUVERTURE:

Photo of the First rural mail delivery Hamilton to Ancaster, Ontario, October, 1908, superimposed on a map of Ancaster Township from the Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Wentworth, Ont., published by Page and Smith, Toronto, in 1875.

Photo de la première livraison du courrier rural entre Hamilton et Ancaster, Ontario, octobre 1908, surimprimée sur une carte du canton d'Ancaster tiré de Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of Wentworth, Ont., publié par Page et Smith, Toronto, en 1875.

(Public Archives Canada/Archives publiques du Canada, C22406, C27791)

CANOMA

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CHIEF GEOGRAPHER'S PLACE NAME SURVEY

1905-1909

VI. SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Alan Rayburn*

In five previous papers in CANOMA, selections were made of the circulars returned by postmasters to the Chief Geographer, James White, in the 1905-1909 period. The last paper (Vol. 8, No. 1) noted the origins of the names of several offices established in Northern Ontario. This paper examines the replies received by Mr. White from the postmasters in that part of Ontario west of Toronto and Lake Simcoe.

In the year 1905, Southwestern Ontario had 1 740 named post offices and way stations. However, only 562 returned circulars are in the CPCGN files, representing only one-third of the total offices. By comparison, approximately two-thirds of the postmasters in the Prairie Provinces responded to the request for information. This considerable difference in response may be explainable, because the Western postmasters were more likely the first appointees in office and knew the origin of their post office names, whereas many of the Ontario postmasters may have been very young or not even born when their post office was named.

The most notable contrast between Western Canada and Southwestern Ontario offices is the marked deficiency of Ontario place names derived from native languages. There are some examples, such as Toronto, Niagara Falls, Waubaushene, Washago, Nanticoke and Waubuno, but such names are few and far between. In Southwestern Ontario there would appear to have been an unstated antipathy for native names by the British authorities in the period from the late 1700s to the mid 1800s, the period when Toronto itself was known as York and Niagara-on-the-Lake was officially called Newark. Southwestern Ontario even lacks Western Canada's distinctive and stirring translated names like Moose Jaw and Medicine Hat.

In keeping with the British character of Southwestern Ontario there is a very large number of names recalling places in the British Isles or relating to British royalty and exploits abroad. Names such as Lucknow and Vittoria evoke British victories far from the homeland. The tale of the naming of AGINCOURT reveals some of the late 19th century political intrigue in obtaining a post office, and draws attention to the French-English tensions that have continued throughout the 20th century.

The United States provided a source for several post office names, among them Long Branch, New Lowell, Alton, Troy, Baltimore, Hartford, Palmyra, Lynn Valley and Bloomsburg. BOWLING GREEN, a once thiving village in Dufferin County, received its name in 1870 as a result of a preference put forward by one of its leading merchants. Mr. Edgar's letter reveals the competition that often ensued among residents for the honour of naming their community. W.B. Jelly, who would have been better pleased with "Jellyville", was appointed the first postmaster.

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* Alan Rayburn, Executive Secretary, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

Southwestern Ontario: showing communities for which details of replies to James White's circulars are discussed

The Re-naming of Agincourt Post Office

Mr. John Hill who was keeping store at this place about the year 1858 had petitioned the Post-master General several times for a post Office but without success.

About this time Mr. Hill met Mr. Thibideau of Port-Neuff in Toronto.

They had been friends when Mr. Hill lived in Port-Neuff. In course of their conversation Mr. Hill told him of his desire to get a Post-Office in connection with his store but had not been able

Oh he said I can get you a Post-Office you know I am not a strong Party man and John, A, will give anything to to keep me on his side, but if I get it for you you must give it a French name.

All right if ~~I get it~~ you let me choose the name, very well what shall it be.

Mr. Hill said Agincourt is a very pretty name, Oh he says that ~~[illegible]~~ is where you beat the French, but it is a pretty name so let it go. Your obedient Servant

M. A. Kennedy P.M.

Above: Reply to circular: from Agincourt

Left: Location of Agincourt: northeast of Toronto

Dear Sir: In giving this place a name some suggested to call it Jellyville after the man of that name who owned a North East corner farm of the 8 lin. road (Lot 11 con 7 west ½ Tp. Amaranth) Some wished to call it Connorville after the man across the road west from Mr. W.B. Jelly Some wanted some name some suggested an other until the story keeper Mr. Mole who had been in the United States suggested the name Bowling Green after a very pretty place he had been in over there I do not know whether Kentucky or Ohio. This suggestion was agreeable and this has been its name ever since

A Mr. Thos. Hinton Bowling Green. } could tell from
Mr James Bates } personal experience all about this affair

Also I think Mr. John Keefer British Columbia

This man was some in law to Mr Mole and likely to know most about it he is deaf but smart his sons are prominent out there and they would be easily found.

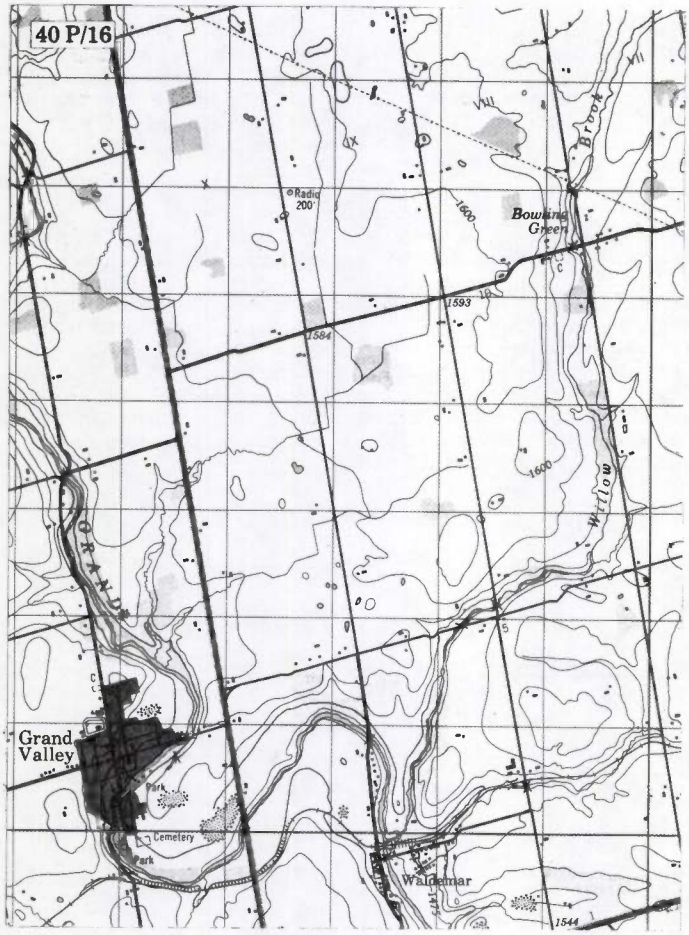
One neighbor says Mr. Mole thought the side of the hill was like a Bowling alley, common in England. This open commons was used at first by a few volunteers for drill.

Mr. Mole promised a jug of whiskey to the men if they would let him name it which they did and Mr. Thomas Hinton baptized it in these characteristic lines while quaffing of a glass of the liquor supplied by Mr. Mole.

Long live the Queen and We'll call this place Bowling Green.

I am, Sir;
Yours respectfully.
Robert Henry Edgar.
Bowling Green,
Ont, Ca. N.A.

Reply to circular: from Bowling Green, January 17, 1906



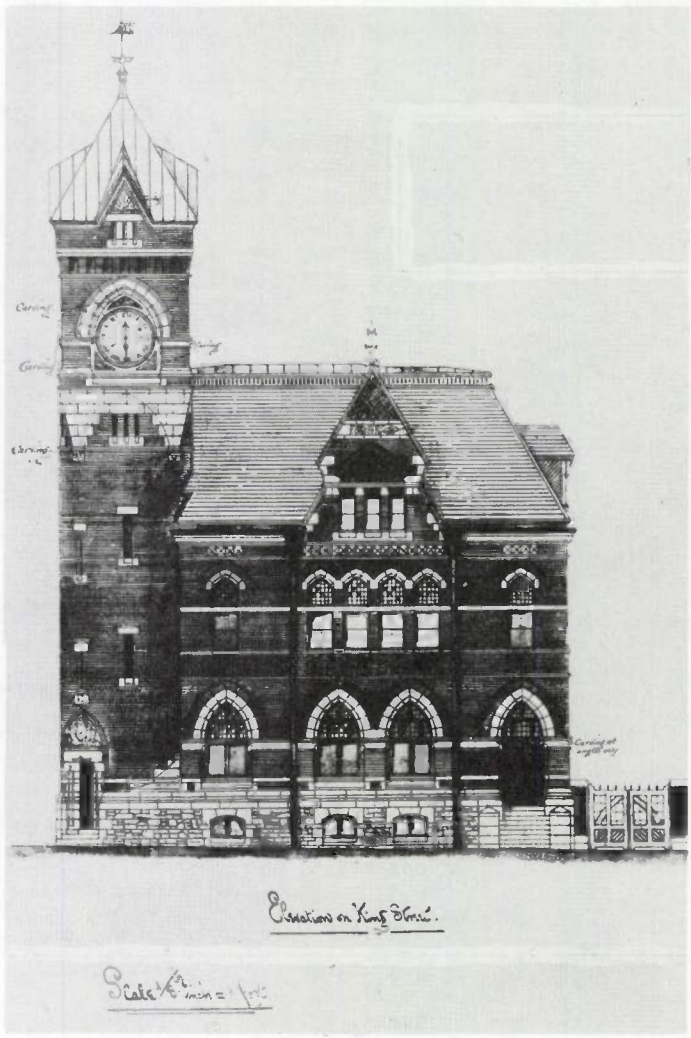
Bowling Green, near Orangeville

The naming of **Berlin** (the former designation of Kitchener) appeared to be done rather casually, as the letter from the postmaster states:

> "Early in the Thirties the residents felt that it deserved a name. A groop (sic) of villagers were one evening seated in the village inn, discussing the matter of a name, when two strangers walked in and called for refreshments. Their arrival created considerable curiosity and interest and the village spokesman questioned them. 'Where are you from?' was asked. 'Berlin, Germany, and we are looking for homes.' 'Then', said the questioner, 'Settle here and Berlin shall be the name of the village.' And so it received its name."

Sometimes certain names may appear to have been selected by the residents to retain the memory of a fondly recalled place in the home country or for a reason of local significance. As often as not, however, many names were imposed without consultation by the Post Office Department itself. Examples of such names are Formosa (the people wanted St. Marys), Holstein (Rosemont was submitted), Ethel (the residents had submitted something else) and Mosside (first called Sutherlands Corners, but that office was moved 5 km southeast to the present location of Cairo).

Southwestern Ontario has several names derived from religious and classical sources. Among them are Sparta, Corinth, Olivet, Damascus, Sharon and Wesley. J.W. Donaldson wrote from Shakespeare on October 19, 1905, and explained how Jonnie Linton, a local teacher, suggested that name as the community was located on the Avon River; but Donaldson remarked that "9/10ths of the settlers from the wilds of Glenquoish and Connemara knew no more of the poet than did Tom Gibbs black sow". The reply from Salem, a small village adjacent to Elora, provided succinct details on the naming of that place. Henry Wissler, the postmaster, submitted the following from the family Bible:



Post Office, Customs and Inland Revenue Offices, Berlin. (Plan drawn late last century)

(Source: Public Archives Canada, C-108067)

> "Sem Wissler was born the 21st March A.D. 1819 in Elizabeth Township, Lancaster County, State of Pennsylvania and came to this Province on the 24th August A.D. 1839 and on the 9th June 1845 I came to Nichol and commenced to improve the forest and I called my place Salem."

Many places in Southwestern Ontario were named for prominent settlers and founders of the communities. The extensive details given about some of them in the files of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names provide invaluable comments on cultural geography and local history. A good example is the closely knit two pages of notes on Fergus, named for Adam Fergusson, one of the town's founders. Other examples of such excellent notes are the five pages for Brotherston (for Montezuma Brothers) in Perth County and the two pages on Gibson (for William Gibson) in Simcoe County. Many of the names derived from persons often had a secondary source to reinforce the name. Examples are Orangeville (for Orange Lawrence and the Orange Lodge), Ailsa Craig (for David Craig and the Scottish island, Ailsa Craig, off the Ayrshire coast), Stoney Creek (for a storekeeper called Mr. Stoney and the stony bed of the creek), Paris (for the French capital and plaster of paris), and Kirkton (after five Kirk brothers and one of various places called Kirkton in Scotland).

Occasionally the first names rather than family names have been the source of toponyms. Among them in Southwestern Ontario are Udora (for Udora Brethour Webster), Smithville (for Smith Griffin), Garnet (for Sir Garnet Wolseley) and Angus (for Angus Morrison). An interesting response came from Hume Cronyn on the naming of VERSCHOYLE, a rural community in Oxford County. The selection of the name brought together several characteristics of post office names: it honoured a prominent family of the region, it had roots in a noted British family with associations in the Church of England, and it was unusual enough not to be confused with any other name.

Cronyn & Betts,
Barristers, Solicitors, etc.
Huron & Erie Buildings,
London, Canada, 22 May 1906

James White, Esq.,
Geographer,
Department of the Interior,
Ottawa, O n t.

Dear Sir:

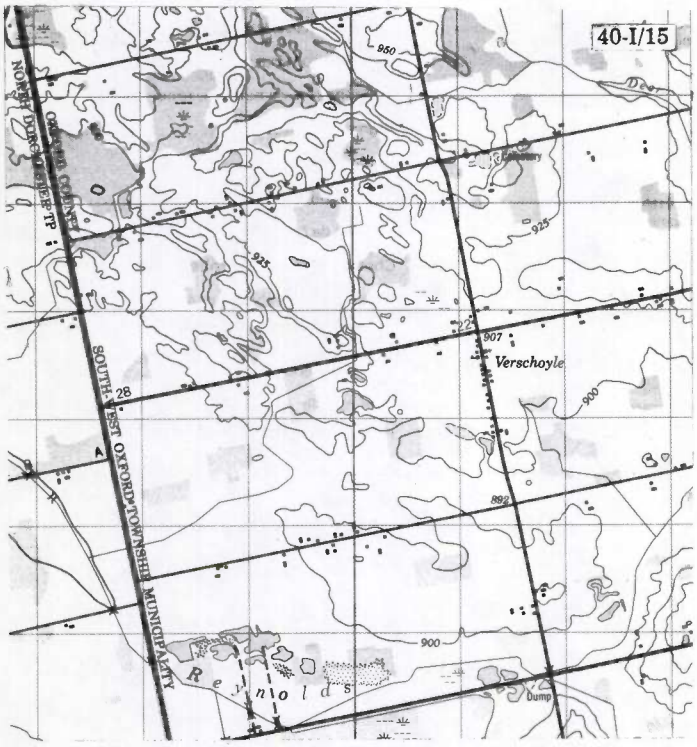
Your enquiry of the 31st of March relating to Verschoyle Post Office, Oxford County, Ontario, has been just forwarded to me for a reply.

This name was suggested by the late Gilbert Griffin when Post Office Inspector, it being the first name of my Father, Verschoyle Cronyn, K.C. of this City. Mr Griffin was always anxious to find names which commenced with letters little used and for that reason more perhaps than any other induced the selection.

My Father was named after the Right Reverend Hamilton Verschoyle, Lord Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh, Ireland who was a life long friend of my Grand-father the late Bishop of Huron.

Yours truly,
Hume Cronyn

Reply to circular: from Verschoyle



Verschoyle, near Tillsonburg

Not too many place names in Southwestern Ontario reflect commercial or industrial activities. There are a few with the word "mills". A good example is Boston Mills in the present town of Caledon. The postmaster, H.A. Bracken, wrote in 1905 that it was:

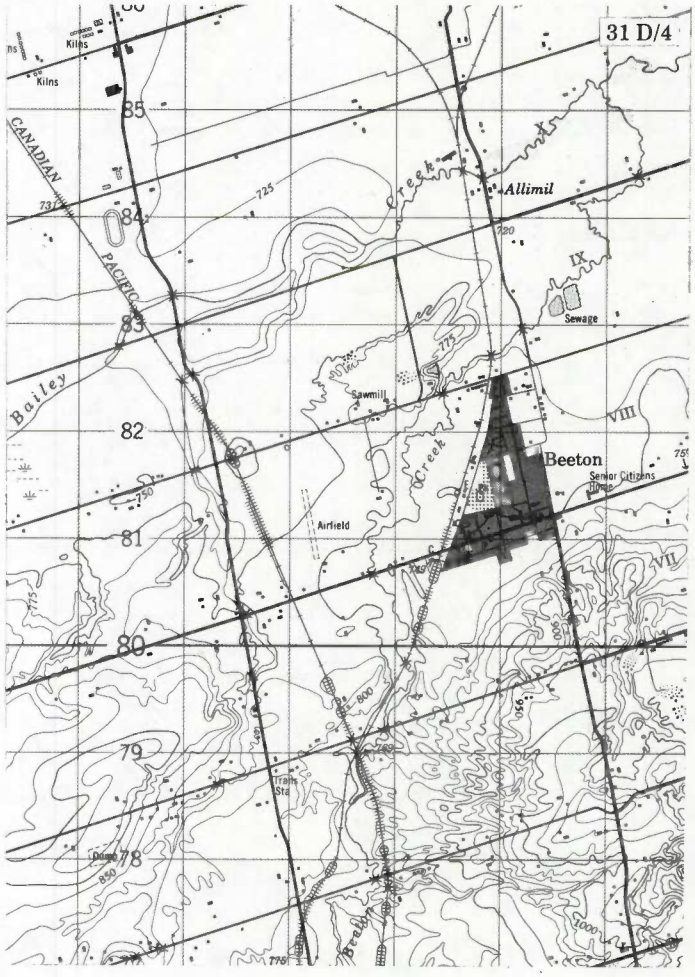
> "... called Boston in 1848. The young men of the district were wont to seek amusements in Cheltenham to the south. The dance was usually closed with a number entitled 'The Road to Boston', so that the name became synonomous with home and gradually the name 'Boston' was applied to home. In 1860 'Boston Mills' was printed on the Mill but the name Boston Mills was not applied until 1870 when it was given by railway men."

Commercial activity suggested the name BEETON as a replacement for Clarksville, but as the finely penned letter from F. Somers explains, the name was also suggested by Beeton Castle in Scotland, the birthplace of the mother of Mrs. D.A. Jones. Mr. Jones, as well as being a noted apiarist, was also postmaster of Beeton when Mr. White made his inquiry in 1905.

More than once James White returned the circulars to his respondents, requesting additional information or, questioning the veracity of the detail provided. The postmaster of Courval near Leamington explained in his first letter that he had named nearby Albuna when he had been appointed its first postmaster in 1884. In response to Mr. White's inquiry as to the name's significance, John Thompson replied:

> "I took the name out of a Latin dictionary - Albuna or Albunea a fountain near ancient Rome, and means clear. I thought the reference would not be inappropriate, owing to the clear water which is obtained from the gravelley soil at the place where this P.O. has been established. My aim was to found a name that would not conflict in similarity with other names of post offices throughout the country, and thus prevent mail matter going astray."

When the postmaster of "Amigari" (then in the village of Bridgeburg, now the area of downtown Fort Erie) remarked that the office was named for the Irish birthplace of William Bunting, the M.P. for Welland County, James White wrote back to state that no such place existed in Ireland, and observed that the name appeared to be of Indian origin. The postmaster was unable to shed any more light on the name. Neither he nor Mr. White were aware that among the 60 000 odd townland names of Ireland there was a place such as "Aghmakeri", or similar townland name, for which Amigari was likely named.



Beeton, southwest of Lake Simcoe

James White Esq.
Geographer,
~~Toronto~~ Ottawa

Beeton. April 16th 1906.

Dear Sir,

Your Circular letter of April 11th was handed to me today for reply, by Wm Jones, Postmaster of this town

The village of Beeton was originally called "Clarkeville" being named after Robert Clark the first post master in the section, who died a number of years ago. His son Wm George M. Clark was License Inspector for the district of Vandorell during the past twenty years and removed from town to Alberta three months ago. The name of the village was changed from Clarkeville to Beeton owing to the similarity of the original name with that of others throughout the province, and the difficulty experienced by our citizens in receiving mail matter, which frequently went to the other post offices.

"Beeton" was chosen by the towns most foremost business man Wm D.A. Jones, who at the time manufactured Apiary Supplies and was also President of the Canadian Bee Keepers Association.

The name was selected no doubt on account of Beeton castle in Scotland being the birth place of Mrs Mackherson, mother of Wm Jones.

I trust the above information may be of service to you.

Yours truly Jones

per Jones.

Reply to circular: from Beeton

Among the Southwestern Ontario responses submitted to James White, one generates a considerable mystery. The postmaster at Nober, a rural community between Waterford and Hagersville, stated that his office was named by a gentleman called Finney from "St. Johns (sic), N.B. -- he named it after a town or village near the above place." This writer has studied every name past and present of populated places in New Brunswick, and has never come across a place anything like Nober. Maybe what was meant was St. John's, Nfld., with Nober being comprised of letters from Carbonear; or perhaps St. Johns (now Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu), Quebec, with Nober being a badly corrupted derivative of Napierville. Maybe it is best to leave it a mystery!

The replies to James White's circulars from Central and Eastern Ontario will be examined in Volume 10, Number 1 of CANOMA.

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