

**PENNSYLVANIA PLACE NAMES.
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE
COLLEGE STUDIES IN HISTORY
AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, NO. 1.
COLLEGE SERIES NO. 1**

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A. HOWRY ESPENSHADE

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CONCERNING AMERICAN NAMES

LOCAL names—whether they belong to provinces, cities, and villages, or are the designations of rivers or mountains—are never mere arbitrary sounds, devoid of meaning. They may always be regarded as records of the past, inviting and rewarding a careful historical interpretation. . . . The colonization of America has been effected during the modern historic period, the process of name-giving is illustrated by numerous authentic documents, and the names are derived from living languages. By means of the names upon the map, we may trace the whole history of the successive stages by which the white men have spread themselves over the Western world. We may discover the dates at which the several settlements were founded; we may assign to each of the nations of Europe its proper share in the work of colonization; and, lastly, we may recover the names of the adventurous captains who led their little bands of daring followers to conquer the wilderness from nature or from savage tribes.”—ISAAC TAYLOR: *Words and Places*.

“None can care for literature in itself who do not take a special pleasure in the sound of names; and there is no part of the world where nomenclature is so rich, poetical, humorous, and picturesque, as the United States of America. All times, races, and languages have brought their contribution. Peking is in the same State with Euclid, with Bellefontaine, and with Sandusky. The names of the States and Territories themselves form a chorus of sweet and most romantic vocables: Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Dakota, Iowa, Wyoming, Minnesota, and the Carolinas; there are few poems with a nobler music for the ear; a songful, tuneful land; and if the new Homer shall arise from the Western continent, his verse will be enriched, his pages sing spontaneously, with the names of states and cities that would strike the fancy in a business circular.”—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: *Across the Plains*.

PREFACE

PENNSYLVANIA PLACE NAMES is an historical commentary on the names of all the Pennsylvania counties, county seats, and towns with a population of five thousand or more, and on the most noteworthy village and township names. The author has endeavored to make his account of the naming of places more interesting by furnishing important geographical and historical facts about the places named, and brief biographical data about many of the distinguished men whose names are inseparably connected with the counties, cities, and boroughs of Pennsylvania.

The book is a modest effort in a comparatively new field of research. In attempting it the author has been actuated by an intense love for his native State, an absorbing interest in its history, and a fondness for etymological studies, particularly in the field of personal and local nomenclature. So far as he knows, the only other work in any way resembling this is Dr. Charles M. Long's *Virginia County Names*, which presents a somewhat similar but briefer historical commentary on the names of the one hundred counties of Virginia.

Perhaps the writer should add that fourteen years ago, when he first began to collect material bearing upon the origin, historical setting, and meaning of Pennsylvania place names, he had no thought of writing a book, but was simply riding a hobby for his own gratification. An extensive correspondence as Registrar of The Pennsylvania State College gave him some acquaintance with nearly all the places of consequence in Pennsylvania, and aroused his interest in their names, and greatly stimulated his curiosity to learn something about their origin. The large number of letters received from others who seem to be interested in the same subject has led him to believe that the general reader as well as the scholar may possibly find some instruction, entertainment, and profit in learning easily what the writer has found out only after long and patient research.

Pennsylvania place names are now pretty firmly fixed. Some new names will be added from time to time, but very few names of any importance are likely to be changed. The time has therefore come when some inquiry can and should be made into their origin and history. The author has tried to show that an interesting and important part of the history of Pennsylvania has been indelibly written in the names of its counties, cities, towns, and townships; and he ventures to hope that his work may stimulate others to prepare similar historical commentaries on the place names of other states. Here is a promising and useful field for the local historian.

To be convinced of some of the difficulties to be met in such an investigation, the reader need only set himself some such task as that of discovering the origin and the meaning of the current English names of the nations of Europe, or of the forty-eight states of our Union and their capitals. Such an effort will convince any one that the amateur historian and etymologist must exercise patience, restraint, judgment, and common sense in seeking the origin and signification of place names.

The author has resisted the temptation to write a much bigger and more pretentious work,—a great hulking ark of a book with its keel deeply barnacled with lengthy and labored footnotes. He has found it pleasanter—and perhaps wiser—to ride his hobby decorously and to set down mainly what may presumably appeal to the normal interest of the general reader. He has searched through hundreds of books and has written countless letters in his quest. He has made every effort to learn all the essential facts about a particular name, and to secure information from the most reliable and authentic sources. His chief printed authorities are mentioned in Appendix A, containing a list of important books consulted. He has purposely used footnotes sparingly. Without tagging every statement with the authority on which it is based, he has tried in the text to indicate what may reasonably be accepted as fact or approximate truth, and what must be regarded only as probability or guesswork.

On such a subject no one could hope to write a book that

would be free from error. In some cases doubtless the so-called authorities have themselves been misinformed. Fuller knowledge, it is hoped, will in the future correct the errors and fill in some regrettable gaps in the author's work. And yet some facts about the naming of places can never be known, because it is impossible to subpoena the dead.

The author has, for the most part, refrained from any criticism of the names selected by the early settlers of Pennsylvania. On this point the reader will form his own judgment. If he thinks that our forefathers have not generally been very successful and happy in the naming of places, and that the list of names given in the index of this book is only another proof of the poverty of the average human intellect, he should remember that the colonists and pioneers were of necessity much engrossed with more pressing concerns, and that the particular names at which one may be inclined to cavil may have been to them objects of respect and love, or become dear to them by long familiarity and association.

The relative amount of space devoted to the discussion of the names of counties and county seats, and to pertinent historical and biographical comment, has been determined by the fact that in Pennsylvania the county is the most important geographical and political unit, and that the county town is of almost equal consequence as the seat of justice and the centre of the public business of the county. In Pennsylvania the counties and the municipalities—cities and boroughs—are of far more importance than the civil subdivisions known as townships, which are useful mainly in maintaining roads, in providing means of education for rural communities, and in administering justice in minor misdemeanors and disputes.

The average size of the county towns and their total population of nearly three and a half million inhabitants have also had weight in settling the difficult question of proportion. The county seats discussed in Part I and the hundred and thirty-one large towns included in Part II contain sixty per cent. of the population of Pennsylvania. The political importance of the counties and county seats, and the large proportion of the population

centered in the county towns and the other large incorporated places seem to justify the amount of space given to Parts I and II.

The author tenders his heartiest thanks to all who have assisted him in his labors.

State College, Pennsylvania,

March 14, 1925.

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