

Some Challenges of Names Recognition: The Ontario Geographic Names Board, Canada, 2000-2007¹

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Abstract

Canada was one of the first countries to establish a geographical names authority. However, over the past forty years the approval of geographical names in Canada has been primarily the responsibility of the provinces and, for a shorter time, the territories.

The names authority for the Province of Ontario, the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB), comprises seven members (including representatives from Ontario First Nations, the province's English- and French-speaking communities). Between 2000 and 2007, the OGNB considered some 380 names submissions, recommending approximately 330 for official recognition and general dissemination.

Among questions the Board considered were issues relating to local usage, commemorative naming, urban community naming, and handling existing names considered derogatory. Sometimes bearing on the Board's approaches to these issues were the need for names for emergency reference purposes (911 dialling), a sparse population in northern areas of the province to support local usage, and conflicting submissions to replace derogatory names.

Introduction

Should *Mazinaw Rock* be replaced with *Bon Echo Rock*? Should *Squaw Rapids* continue to be used? Should someone who owns a small island be able to have the island named for himself/herself? Questions of this sort must be answered by a geographical names authority.

In Canada, the government has been involved with issues of naming since the latter part of the nineteenth century and set up a names authority (at first called the Geographic Board of Canada) in 1897. This names board was at first a federal organization, but very soon had input from the provinces. Not, however, until the late 1960s did the decisions on names of places and features fully devolve to all the provinces (and later, in the 1980s, also to the territories). As time has passed, different issues have been central to the

decision-making process in each province. Here you will find some of the issues and challenges faced by the names authority of the province of Ontario, namely the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB), between 2000 and 2007.

During these eight years, I was either a member or the Chair of the OGNB. The Board comprised seven members, including a Chief of an Ontario First Nation, a representative of the province's French-speaking communities, an individual from the less populated northern part of the province, the Surveyor General of Ontario, and the Board Secretary from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR).

The Board is responsible for the naming of natural geographical features, unincorporated populated places, localities and other topographic entities comprising the physical and cultural landscape of Ontario. For the most part the Board is advisory to the Minister of Natural Resources. However, for names of unincorporated places and communities, the Board decisions are entered directly into the provincial records. The Board does not have jurisdiction over names of streets or buildings, or names of features and places governed by statutory or other authority.

A general overview of some types of names brought before the Board

Of some 380 names considered by the Board, 186 were recommended to the Minister for action and 123 entered directly into the official records. In addition, 59 names considered derogatory were rescinded. Most of the submissions were for one or two names. However, a few larger groups of names were considered by the Board:

- urban community names of long standing within the city of Ottawa (95 approvals),
- a group of features associated with Whitestone Lake in "cottage country" near Georgian Bay (36 approvals) - an application from a former Surveyor General of Ontario, following the publication of a map by the local ratepayers' association.
- lake floor features of Lake Ontario submitted by the

¹ This is a modified and abridged version of a paper presented at the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, York University, Toronto, August 17-22, 2008. In its full form it is published on pages 585-596 of the CD-ROM of the Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress Onomastics Sciences, published by York University in 2009.

Canadian Hydrographic Service (12 approvals), several requiring coordination with the US Board on Geographic Names.

The names recommended by the OGNB consisted of the following types of features:

Water	34.3%	(especially lakes, bays and creeks)
Communities	34.3%	(urban and unincorporated)
Land	27.2%	(especially islands)
Underwater	4.2%	

Local usage

Many names submitted to the Board recognize the principle of local usage. Of these many are descriptive of the appearance of the feature, for instance, *Burnt Island*, *Deep Bay*, *Cranberry Bay*, *Drop Anchor Island*, *Sunset Bay*, and so on. Others carry personal names in well established local use (*Bennett Lake*, *Powell Island*, *Suttaby Bay* ...). To receive Board recommendation, it must be determined how much usage there is, how long the names have been used, and whether there are other names in competing local use. The onus is on the applicant to prove local use in their submissions, and wherever possible to acquire a resolution of their local council. Proposals from the sparsely populated northern parts of the province can prove difficult for decision-making, as few people know the features or use names for them, and names submitted may be almost entirely the domain of an extended family. In some cases (22 in 2000 and 2001) the need for toponyms to facilitate emergency (911) dialling enhanced a name submission and its passage to approval (*Whippoorwill Island*, *Hitchcock Island*, *Dewar's Island*). The normal practice of the OGNB Secretariat is to conduct a written and/or telephone survey in the area of the name proposal – but costs and public perception of the Board's work must be considered in pursuing names which do not appear to meet principles or have already been very thoroughly documented. The issue of low returns to surveys is also considered when the Board discusses its recommendations.

The Board's principles of local use also were instrumental in changing names (*White Lake* from *Dummer Lake*, *Farren Lake* from *Farrell Lake*) or in correcting improperly recorded spellings (e.g., *Tate's Bay* rather than *Tait Bay*, *Heney Lake* rather than *Heeney Lake*, and *McDonald's Corners* rather than the form without the apostrophe which in past decades was the form normally accepted for use in geographical names). Local usage can also be a reason for rejecting name changes. Bon Echo Rock was not accepted in preference to the existing *Mazinaw Rock*. Although Bon Echo is the name of the provincial park, Mazinaw has long been in use for the rock – to the local Algonquin people of the area this generally means “writing”, which can be traced

back some 400 years and is in keeping with the pictographs on the imposing rock face. The name in longer usage was retained by the Board.

Commemorative naming²

At the start of this time period, in 2000, the OGNB *Naming Principles* on commemoration referred to naming features for persons and included guidelines that Board consideration be given to honour those who had contributed to the legacy of the area where the feature is located, had contributed to the legacy of the Province of Ontario, or who as an Ontarian had lost his/her life while serving Canada in wartime or overseas peace-keeping operations. To recommend such naming, the Board looked for adequate support from the local or general public and the appropriate municipal, provincial or national interests. The Board opposed and discouraged commemorative naming of a living person.

War casualties

In cases of features submitted to honour casualties of war (primarily World War II), the process was generally fairly straight forward. This form of naming had been widely used in other provinces (particularly Manitoba and Saskatchewan) and such names were usually attached to many of the myriad of lakes (or features within them – bays, islands, etc.) on the Canadian Shield in the northern part of the provinces. Although some features bore unwritten names used by indigenous people when hunting or fishing, or were coined by other small groups using the wilderness, many had not been named. A pattern of naming had been established over the years, and was in practice in Ontario, that the family name only would be used in this commemoration – hence the approval of *Lucas Lake*, *Graham Island*, *Worthington Lake*, *Macfie Island*, *Soulière Lake*. The main questions arising, which the Secretariat ably sorted out with family members, were not to include first names (e.g., not Frederick William Worthington Lake) and, as in several instances, to select other locations for the proposals, if locally used but unofficial names were found to exist for the features originally submitted. Nineteen features were named for war casualties during 2000-07.

Early settlers

Another type of commemorative name remembered early settlers who had contributed to an area. Examples include: *Millin Island* (for first mail carrier Arthur Millin); *Izatt Lake* (for generations of settlers in the 1840s). However, more often the names of early settlers had become a part of local usage and such names were then submitted to the Board as names in local use, for instance: *Hargrave Narrows* (for logger James Hargrave working the area around 1900); *Kajander Lake* (for Einas Kajander, a settler from Finland in 1901).

² In the original article three types of naming were considered: (1) commemorative naming; (2) existing names considered derogatory, and (3) community naming – urban and postal areas.

Contributors to the area

More recently, the Board received and, with supporting information to ascertain their contributions, recommended a feature be named to honour each of several individuals now deceased: dairy farmer Dave Aljoe (*Aljoe Creek*); geologist Paul Coad (*Coad Hill*); forester Bill Roll (*Roll Lake*); and conservationists Joe Bertholet (*Bertholet Bay*) and Walter Ceolin (*Ceolin Falls*). In addition, *Frontier Lake* was named for the 100th anniversary of Frontier College, now a Canada-wide literacy organization, started in 1899 for labourers in work camps on Canada's frontiers.

Accident victims

A variety of submissions were received for victims of tragedies in remote areas, or to honour individuals still alive. In addressing such situations and in fairness to all members of the public the Board had to follow its naming guidelines and if necessary decline the proposals.

One of the cases brought before the Board, was a request to name features for seven young forestry workers with the Ministry of Natural Resources, who lost their lives in a very tragic accident during the Nakina prescribed burn in 1979 (near Esnagami Lake) in the forests of northwestern Ontario northeast of Thunder Bay. When the wind shifted the workers were trapped in smoke and flames from the brush fire they had set to clear slash on timbered land. According to Board principles these students had not contributed to the legacy of the area of the accident. However, this particular incident has subsequently had a significant and far-reaching impact on the way that fires are now fought; Nakina became a case study in North America and contributes to the current teaching on handling fire situations. As such the contribution of these young people to the province was recognized. Although years passed during the ongoing investigations surrounding the tragedy, in 2005, seven lakes were named in their honour. The regional MNR office worked with the families to select features that did not appear to carry any other local or indigenous name. In these cases there was no precedent for the use of family and/or first names, so the choice was that of the family (*Gordon Reid Lake, Danny Lake, Colleen Lake, Jane Spurgeon Lake, Andy Thompson Lake, Ken Harkes Lake, Wanda Lake*). The example of *Gordon Reid Lake* is shown in Figure 1.


Amending OGNB Naming Guidelines

During the time since 2000, the commemorative guidelines have been modified to provide clearer guidelines both for the public and for the Board and to avoid submissions being made immediately following a death. In 2004, in keeping with resolution VIII/2 (2002) of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and policies of other Canadian provinces, the Board introduced a waiting period of two

years after an individual's death before a commemorative name is submitted for consideration. At the same time the clause on naming for living persons was strengthened to "the Board opposes commemorative naming of a living person". Subsequently the Geographical Names Board of Canada adopted its own commemorative guidelines, and in June 2007, the OGNB aligned its commemorative naming policies with the national guidelines, while still keeping some distinctive elements. Ontario retains a two-year waiting period to consider a name proposal (compared to five years nationally);

Ontario will consider naming for victims of accidents and tragedies provided they have contributed to the legacy of the area, province or country. Statements have now been added about commemorating events – in this case Ontario considers a 10-year waiting period, whereas nationally the timeframe is 25 years. For both people and events, Ontario will not consider adopting their names for features that already carry acceptable and well-established names.

Conclusion

In this paper it is not possible to address in detail all the interesting and worthwhile individual submissions that were received (for instance the change of Minesing Swamp to *Minesing Wetlands*, the effort to change *Gorrs Mountain* to *Ohlmanns Mountain*, or the naming of small urban creeks), but only to provide information in a more general way on selected aspects of the work of the Board. In all deliberations the Board took into account that names recommended would become a part of the history of Ontario and as such should form a positive part of the cultural heritage. Over these eight years, in discussing proposals, the Board found it necessary on a number of occasions to revisit Board policy, amending as appropriate, its guidelines to enhance the clarity for both the Board and the public on issues of name proposals and the reasons for their recommendation or refusal. The OGNB Act (1990), the OGNB *Terms of Reference*, and the OGNB and Secretariat *Procedural Guide* approved by the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources on March 26, 2008 now form the backbone for the activities of the Board. 

References

- Government of Ontario. 1990. The Ontario Geographic Names Board Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter O.16. Available on the web at:
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o16_e.htm
- Manuscript materials, maintained by the Ontario Geographic Names Board Secretariat:
- Ontario Geographic Names Board. 2008. *Procedural Guide*.
- Ontario Geographic Names Board. 2007. *Terms of Reference*.
- Ontario Geographic Names Board. 2000-2007. *Minutes of OGNB Meetings, #103 to #127*.



Ontario

The Ontario Geographic Names Board/La Commission de toponymie de l'Ontario

MNR District/ District du MRN

Nipigon

Names of Geographic Features/Noms d'entités géographiques

Provincial Map/ Carte provinciale

20 16 4200 56500

Serial Number/ No de série

F/2005/019

Federal Map/ Carte fédérale

52P01

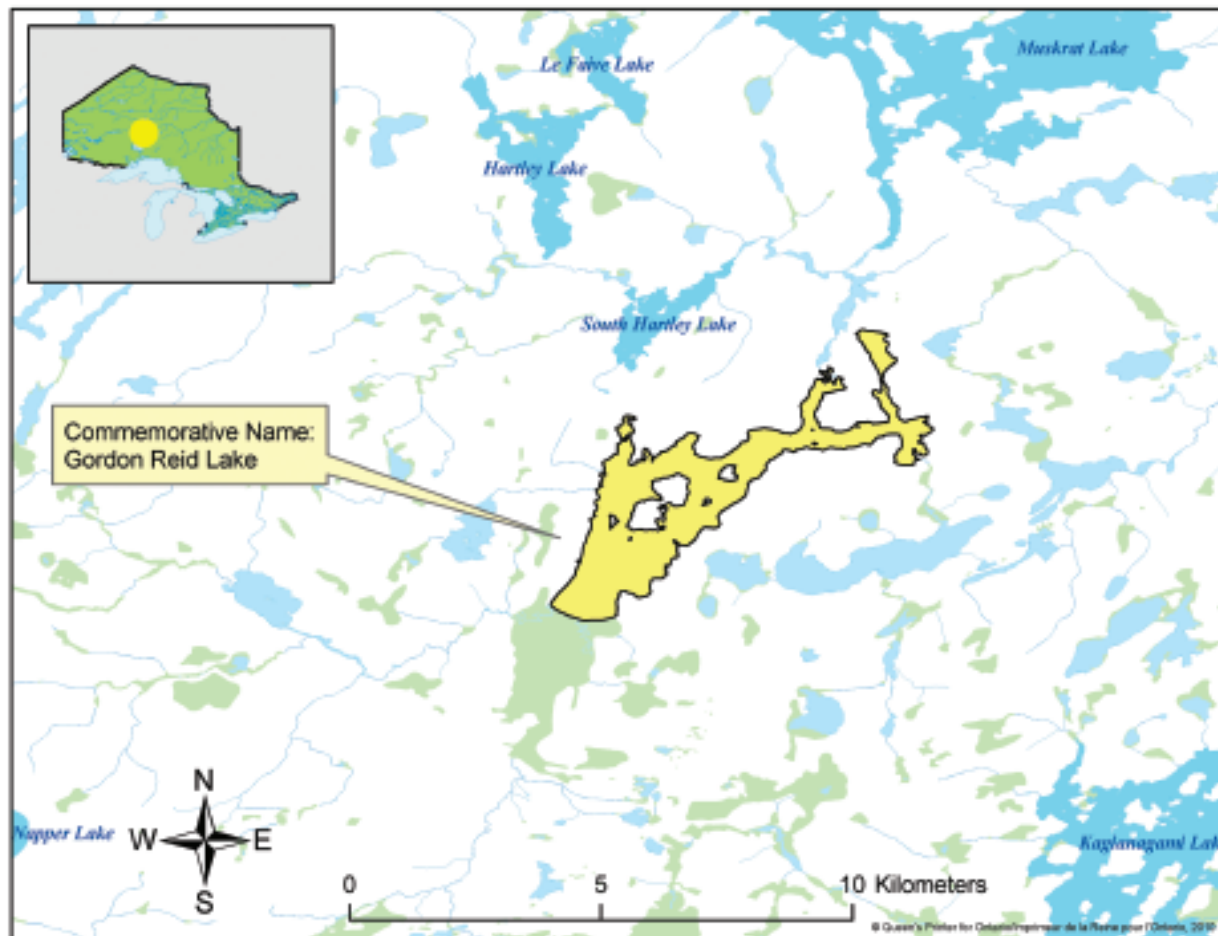
Meeting Date/ Date de la réunion

June 30 2005 (120th)

Decision Date/ Date de décision

July 21 2005

The following names of geographic features have been considered by the Ontario Geographic Names Board and pursuant to Section 3(8) of the Ontario Geographic Names Board Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.16 are Recommended to the Minister for approval under Section 4 of the above Act/Les noms d'entités géographiques qui suivent ont été pris en considération par la Commission de toponymie de l'Ontario et, en vertu du paragraphe 3 (8) de la Loi sur la Commission de toponymie de l'Ontario, L.R.O. 1990, chap. O.16, sont recommandés au ministre pour approbation selon l'article 4 de la loi sus-mentionnée



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Gordon Reid Lake

Lake/Lac (951); Thunder Bay (reg./cty./dist.); NW of Kagianagami Lake; approximate centre at 51.0252203 -88.040016 - UTM = 16 5653143.988 427062.393(NAD83); record status = A1; unique name key = FETJD; waterbody identifier = 16-4271-56531; Not: South Lake (FETJE- B1) nor Nip-nl-1084 (FETJD - B1)

MNR recommended form of name for use French text applications - lac Gordon Reid

Named in memory of Gordon Reid, age 17, of Don Mills who along with six other young forestry workers died in a prescribed fire burn tragedy near Esnagami Lake, on August 22, 1979

Figure 1. OGNB recommendation for Gordon Reid Lake, 2005.