

BOOK REVIEWS

Espenshade, A. Howry. Pennsylvania Place Names. State College, Pa., Pennsylvania State University, 1925. Reprinted by Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1969. 375 pages. \$14.50.

The study of place names, long in the pale of those enamoured of popular antiquarianism, has for some time received relatively serious attention from cultural geographers, and more recently, from folklorists. Espenshade's study, completed in the first decade of this century, remains a standard, excellent work on the major place names of the counties, county seats, principal towns (at that time those with a population of 5,000 or more) and other important villages and townships of Pennsylvania. His readable comments on the selected sites often include valuable though short histories of the area and biographies of noteworthy persons.

The folklorist may regret that in his introduction Espenshade scoffs at "fabulous explanations" and "ridiculous 'name stories' which are current about the origin of place names" (p.12). He gives several "specimens of folk etymology" as illustrations:

The following explanation of the village named Tamanend is given by a local historian: 'There is a tradition among the old residents that about the time of the Wyoming Massacre a noted Indian chief, Taman by name, an ally of the British, was foremost in the war upon the defenseless frontier. Afterward, when the avengers of these butcheries made war upon the savages, Taman was brought to bay at Hawk's Curve, near the site of the village. Here he was captured and immediately hanged; hence the name Taman's End or Tamanend.' Alas for the name and fate of St. Tammany.

Here is an explanation of the name Bellefonte which points to a German rather than a French origin. An old Pennsylvania German farmer put a bell on one of his cows and turned the drove loose to pasture on the wooded hills surrounding the village. The cows came home, but the bell was lost. Not until the autumn, when the farmer was hunting among the hills, was the bell found. 'Ya wohl! there, among the bushes wass that bell fount!' And, of course, the town was Christened Bellefonte to commemorate the event!

'How did Tyrone get its name?' I once asked a good and lady who had lived there all her days. 'Have you never heard,' she said. 'I thought everyone knew.' It was this way: the first pioneer who came into this region with his wife camped near where the town now stands. He had two horses, a gray and a roan, which he turned out to pasture in the evening. The roan seemed so restive that the careful wife urged her husband to 'tie roan.' They settled here and accordingly named the place Tyrone. And the good trustful soul who expected me to believe this story bore an Irish name! (pp.13-14).

That place name legends are still alive and well in Pennsylvania as well as throughout the country there is no doubt: raised in the vicinity of the Swatara Creek, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, I often heard from my grandfather that the creek got its name from an Indian brave who,

upon shooting an arrow into the air, and it landing he knew not where on the opposite shore of the creek, cried out, "Goodbye, swift (or sweet) arrow!"

Espenshade, however, prefers to intensify his work with substantial historical fact gleaned from numerous local histories of individual towns and counties. The result is by no means dull or uninteresting; it is extremely well integrated and beautifully written in a style we might call Victorian. His approach is that of a serious, dedicated scholar, intent upon recording and carefully classifying the material before him, rather than that of a dilettante or Saturday savant.

He observes four broad source areas for most place names, although he distinguishes numerous others in the specific breakdown of classifications:

(1) aboriginal place names, retained because "they have become familiar, or are thought to be appropriate or euphonious" (p.15); such examples as Allegheny, Lycoming, Susquehanna, Wyoming and Kittanning (familiar to all who frequent the Pennsylvania Turnpike) are cited.

(2) place names borrowed from the Old World, some of which are merely transferred from the old country to the new:

This same phenomenon is often apparent within the restricted limits of a single county. Lancaster County, which was originally settled by English Quakers, Welsh Episcopalians, Irish Presbyterians, and German Mennonites and Moravians, furnishes a good illustration. The names of the townships and villages often show whence the first settlers came. The townships of Lancaster, Warwick, Salisbury, and Little Britain mark the English settlements. In like manner the Welsh have given their names to East and West Lampeter, Caernarvon and Brecknock townships. The Scotch-Irish gave their settlements such names as Leacock, Dremore, Colerain, Rapho and Donegal. The settlers of German extraction bestowed their own names on Manheim, Lititz, New Holland and Strasbourg. (pp.17-18)

(3) Names of persons, whether they be illustrious figures from history, as evidenced by the appearance of such names as Washington, Franklin, Pike and Wayne, or local celebrities such as John Harris (Harrisburg), James Gettys (Gettysburg) or Elizabeth Hughes Reeby (Elizabethtown).

(4) Invented names owing "their origin to some plant, animal, or industry, to some prominent geographical feature, to an historic event or circumstance, or to mere caprice." (p.15). Examples are, of course, abundant. The names Bird-in Hand, Red Lion and King of Prussia (named for early tavern signs) come immediately to mind, but others exist with great frequency. Steelton (named for its large steel mills), Middletown (named for its central location between the early cities of Lancaster and Carlisle), Snow Shoe, Slippery Rock, Lock Haven, Oil City and Valley Forge are but a few.

The bibliography, although somewhat limited by the time factor, is nevertheless an excellent catalogue of local histories. There are several appendices of useful charts but it is to be regretted, there is no map to guide the oftentimes confused reader through the geographical intricacies of the state, apparently assumed by the author to be a priori knowledge (Philadelphia is on Lake Erie, isn't it?).

One problem remains: the book is interesting and informative, delightful to read and replete with factual history, but how can it possibly be of use to folklorists? The answer comes, not unexpectedly, from a cultural geographer, E. Joan Wilson Miller:

However extraordinary some of them may seem, toponyms have meaning and value to the cultural geographer. Many of them represent selective oral material disseminated regionally by ingrained, persistent speech habits. Such names belong to the folk because they are a part of a shared experience and are a reaction to a real, immediate, and practical situation. Some of their origins are elusive and variants concerning these origins exist. The study of place names indicates that they are a geographic expression of cultural processes that are still dynamic. So they, too, are a part of the continuum of man's changing occupation of the land.*

Yvonne J. Milspaw
Indiana University

* E. Joan Wilson Miller, "The Naming of the Land in the Arkansas Ozarks: A Study in Culture Processes," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, LIX (1969), 251.

Umeasiegbu, Rems Nna. The Way We Lived, illus. Heinemann Educational Books, Malta, 1969. 139 pages.

The Way We Lived is one of those unusual but increasingly common books mushrooming in Africa. This book is particularly strange because of the details of its creation, described in a letter by the author to his father (page viii). The author belongs to the Ibo, a famous tribe in the Eastern region of Nigeria. His father, G.U. Umeasiegbu, was (or is, I can't tell), a leading elder in the county of Aba, and he customarily entertained such dignitaries as the councillors of the Aba Urban Council. One day when the councillors gathered in his homestead, he asked his son, Rems Nna Umeasiegbu, to bring in palmwine for the guests. The son served the palmwine without taking a sip first, a violation of Ibo custom. The father threatened to remove him from school, which, the father felt, was corrupting his knowledge of the Ibo traditions. The serious sermon following the reprimand left such an imprint on Umeasiegbu's mind that he later decided to reconstruct the Ibo customs as he recollected them while studying at Oxfordshire in Britain. Thus his only informant in retrospect was his father, and his only methodology, recollection of his father's sermons and tale-telling sessions. This book treats the traditional, fashionable path of desiring to reconstruct the African cultural past which is believed to have died out. While a number of authorities in African folklore (or studies) would have us believe that oral traditions in Africa are a living reality, Mr. Umeasiegbu emphasizes: "Practically all the customs detailed in this book are now obsolete and are nowhere to be found amongst the Ibo today. They have been put down here for record purposes."

This book is divided into two parts: 1. Customs and 2. Folklore. The customs include birth of children, birth of twins, teething of children, circumcision, marriage, hunting, naming babies, divorce, funerals, worshipping idols, oaths, greetings, festivals, games, breaking kola nut and hospitality. The author gives synopses of the various