

Towards harmonization in naming along Canada's southern border

Helen KERFOOT*

In the 1950s, a major power project was constructed on the St. Lawrence River between Canada and the USA, and in 1959 the St. Lawrence Seaway was created. In order to undertake these large engineering projects that would benefit both countries, the water levels would be raised by over 73 metres. This would involve flooding of farmland, creating a new landscape, particularly on the Canadian side where it necessitated moving families from six communities and three smaller hamlets into two newly created communities above flood level. Naming the new features appeared straight forward, but turned out to be problematic, showing that a names board needs good supporting material with local input before making decisions and that Government ministers can influence decision-making; it also provides an example of preservation of cultural heritage through geographical naming. A lake was formed and required a name that could be used on both sides of the Canada/US border; agreement was reached, although not without questions.

Some 25 years later, representatives of the names boards of Canada and the USA met to develop an agreement on the naming of transboundary features. This was signed in 1989 and has been in effect since. Following this agreement, an inventory was created of named features that crossed the Canada/US boundary. For various reasons there were differences in the names of a number of shared features in the inventory; few attempts have been made to change these names for consistency, and local usage and language may justify their retention as reflections of differing cultural heritages. The only major addition to the inventory was with the approval of Salish Sea, for a cross-border feature on the west coast, with the consultations and approval process following the terms of the established agreement.

BACKGROUND TO THE ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY PROJECT

In the 1950s, a major power project was being constructed on the St. Lawrence River between Canada and the USA that required a large dam to be built near Cornwall, Ontario. In addition this project made way for the creation of the St. Lawrence Seaway, allowing the passage of salties and lakers from the Atlantic through the Great Lakes to

* Former Chair, United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Canada.

the upper end of Lake Superior. In order to undertake these large engineering projects that would benefit both countries, the water levels along a portion of the Ontario/New York shorelines would be raised by more than 73 metres.

On the Canadian side six communities and three smaller hamlets would be under water when the project reached completion, so much consideration was given to relocating affected families from what are now referred to as the “Lost Villages” into two newly created communities above flood level. In addition, several communities further upstream would lose their waterfront sections and need re-orientation of their central business districts. In Upper New York State in the USA, settlement was sparse and the impact of the construction was far less.

The increase in water level would involve flooding of productive farmland as a new landscape was created. Existing islands would be under water, hill tops would become islands, new channels would be created (see Figure 1), existing wetlands and marshes would be drowned and new ones created, rapids would cease to exist, a small older canal and its locks would be below water, and mouths of small creeks draining to the St. Lawrence would be inundated when all was ready to let the water build up behind the dam on July 1, 1959 (“Inundation Day”). This new landscape would see the loss of some toponyms, but would require new ones to provide reference to the islands that emerged.

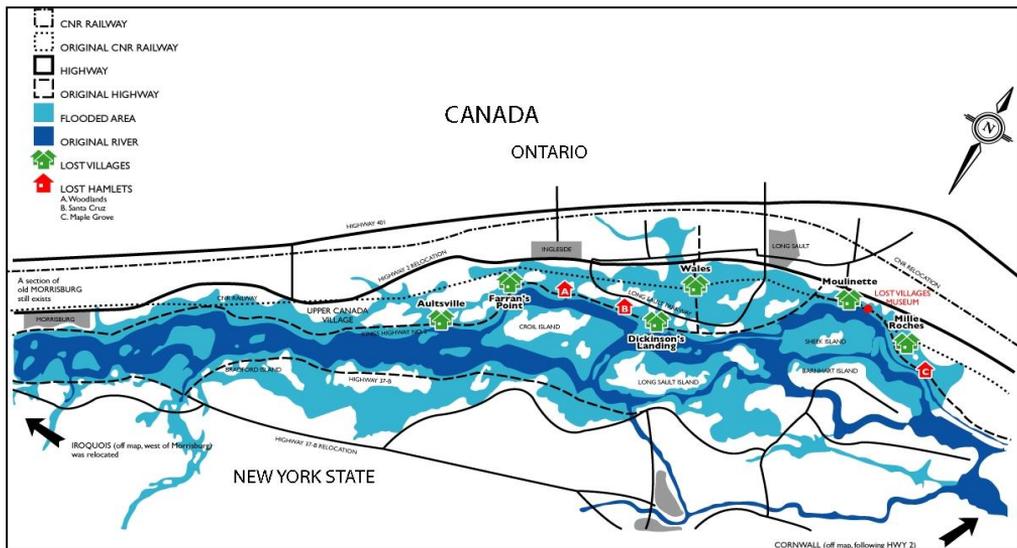


Figure 1. Stretch of the St. Lawrence River, east of Cornwall, Ontario, showing flooded area (pale blue) (Source: The Lost Villages Historical Society, Long Sault, Ontario, Canada)

THE CANADIAN NAMES AUTHORITY, ITS WORK TO NAME THE NEW FEATURES, AND CHALLENGES FACED

At the time of this construction project, the Canadian Board on Geographical Names (CBGN) was the body responsible for names in Canada. Essentially it was still a board composed of representatives from federal government departments, with the addition of advisors from various provinces, including Ontario, relevant to this particular piece of toponymic history.

Chair of the CBGN was then Col. C.H. Smith, Director of the Military Survey (Army Survey Establishment - ASE). He was an experienced surveyor and first Commanding Officer of the ASE. (Later he worked with the United Nations to implement national mapping programmes in seven countries, including Pakistan, Liberia, Bolivia and Iran.)

The files of Canada's national names authority contain several volumes of pertinent correspondence resulting from the complex endeavours to sort out the names associated with the changing landscape. And it is clear that the process – although at first sounding straight forward – had its problems!

Several organizations were involved, including:

- the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority (its President being the Hon. Lionel Chevrier, who was a local resident, lawyer and former Member of Parliament in Canada);
- the Ontario-St. Lawrence Development Corporation (Commissioner James Smart, a federal civil servant);
- the Postal Services, the Military Charting Establishment, Ontario Hydro;
- historians and the general public.

Initially the Hon. Chevrier contacted the federal Minister (Mines and Technical Surveys) responsible for the names board and suggested names for the islands to be formed. The Army Survey Establishment was at the time responsible for mapping Canada and instructions were given as a priority task to a Lieutenant Williamson to make a field survey and propose names for the new islands. This was done with alacrity after consultation with the organizations involved. Williamson reported that “As far as can be ascertained, no local naming of the new islands has occurred, and there is no obvious local feeling towards such names”. He provided a list of 20 island names, including names of the settlements being relocated, officers of a local battle (Cryslers Farm) of the War of 1812, early settlers, the First Protestant Church in Upper Canada and the rapids to be lost.

All seemed well and when the CBGN met in July 1956 (well ahead of “Inundation Day”), the names were approved for the features that would appear when the flooding took place. But then everything fell apart! At the next Board meeting in August all the names were rescinded (i.e. withdrawn). So what had happened?

Lt. Williamson, although he had consulted the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, had not actually consulted the President, Mr. Chevrier, who felt personally involved with this naming project. Mr Chevrier wrote to the Minister responsible for the names board and quoted from an earlier Federal Government report; it “states that consideration should be given to the preservation of ... the historic associations of the area that will disappear forever.” Mr. Chevrier thought that some name choices were good but that the Board had omitted to consider aspects of local history (for instance names given by French settlers and names associated with the old canals that would be replaced). He submitted new suggestions that he thought were more representative. The Board Secretary had to recommence discussions on the names and additionally consult with the Ontario Board member and historians. Over the next few months there were further new suggestions, disagreements, particularly concerning which individuals should receive naming recognition. Eventually there was agreement of all parties concerned and the Board approved 24 names in December 1956.

Final decisions on physical feature names

To move from the original 20 name approvals to the new 24, 8 were retained as listed, 8 discarded, 4 re-positioned, and 12 were added since the earlier list. From Mr. Chevrier's perspective the most significant part was the names of the thirteen new islands that the public would see when using the new Long Sault Parkway (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Aerial view of the Long Sault Parkway looking west over the islands created by flooding
(Source: St. Lawrence Parks Commission)

In summary, the historical significance of the names¹ as finally decided by the Board is:

- For lost villages: Ault, Farran, Woodlands, Dickinson, Wales, Mille Roches, Moulinette + nearby Iroquois
- Explorer: Fraser (ended life in nearby St. Andrews)
- 1812/13, Battle of Crysler's Farm: Nairn, Morrison, Heriot

¹ Some further details on the names as approved for features created from the construction of the power dam on the St. Lawrence River are provided below.

Fraser Island: Simon Fraser (1776-1862), Nor'Wester, in charge of company's operations beyond the Rockies. Returned to live in St. Andrews, Ontario.

Nairn Island: Captain Thomas Nairn, killed at Battle of Crysler's Farm, 11 November 1813.

Morrison Island: Lt. Col. Joseph Morrison, senior British officer at Battle of Crysler's Farm.

Heriot Island: Captain Frederick Heriot commanded Voltigeurs at Battle of Crysler's Farm.

Hoople Island: After Hoople Creek, for original settler of the area.

Sheek Island: David Sheek, granted land in 1806.

Vankoughnet Island: Philip Vankoughnet, instrumental in construction of Cornwall Canal. Born in 1790, son of United Empire Loyalist.

Macdonald Island: John Sandfield Macdonald, first Premier of Ontario, 1867-1871.

Whitney Island: Sir James Pliny Whitney, Premier of Ontario, 1905-1914.

Macdonell Island: Bishop Alexander Macdonell (1760-1840), first Roman Catholic Bishop of Upper Canada

Strachan Island: Bishop John Strachan, Rector of Cornwall 1803-1812, educator, legislator.

Snetsinger Island: John Gray Goodall Snetsinger, local businessman, elected to Ontario Legislature in 1875.

Broder Island: Andrew Broder, pioneer, and Member of Parliament (Canada) 1896-1911.

Bergin Island: Dr. Darby Bergin, pioneer physician in Cornwall, Ontario; first Physician-General of Canada.

Harkness Island: John G. Harkness, pioneer lawyer who became Crown Attorney in Cornwall, Ontario.

- Early settlers: Hoople, Sheek
- Earlier canal constructors: Vankoughnet, Phillipotts
- Ontario Premiers: Macdonald, Whitney
- Church leaders: Macdonell, Strachan
- Politicians from the local area: Snetsinger, Broder
- Local physician / Local lawyer: Bergin, Harkness

Even after the formal approvals, this was not quite the end of this particular naming process:

- The Ontario-St. Lawrence Development Corporation (OSLDC) requested a change to include Moss, local landowners ... refused by the Board
- The OSLDC considered that the name of Premier Whitney should be applied to a more major feature and supported the bid of Mr. Bredin, the local landowner, to have the island named as Bredin Island instead of Whitney Island ... approved by the Board
- The water levels did not rise high enough to create Farran Island ... name withdrawn
- Documents confirmed that Captain Thomas Nairn actually spelled his name as Nairne ... corrected
- With the new water levels Woodlands Island turned out to be three islands, so there was a need for West Woodlands Island, Centre Woodlands Island, East Woodlands Island ... approved



Figure 3. A laker passing through the Iroquois lock on the St. Lawrence Seaway, cut between Harkness Island (top left) and Iroquois Island (lower right)
(Source: H. Kerfoot)

Naming the new communities

By contrast the naming of the two new communities was straight forward!

1. The inhabitants of Aultsville, Farrans Point, Dickinsons Landing and Wales were moved to Town #1. Various names were put forward for the town, for example: Avondale, Osnabruck, Primerville, Sunnyvale, Wales, but the final decision was Ingleside (CBGN December 1956)
2. The inhabitants of Moulinette and Mille Roches were moved to Town #2. Long Sault was suggested early after the name of the former rapids, and this name was requested by the Post Office. Approved by CBGN September 1956.

Some lessons learned

There are certainly some lessons to be learned from the experiences of Canada's names board in handling this project in the 1950s.

- Although planning and surveying was undertaken well before the inundation took place and the new features were created, the viewpoints of local people and historians were not clearly considered. (Today the name decisions would be the responsibility of the Ontario Geographic Names Board and discussion with First Nations of the region would be essential to decision making.)
- Board members should have very good supporting material reflecting all levels of input before being asked to take name decisions.
- The need for the Board to reverse many of its decisions indicated that Government ministers or influential politicians can have an impact on decision-making.
- This does provide an example of the preservation of cultural heritage through acts of geographical naming
- There is much valuable manuscript information for research on policies and case studies in the records of the GNBC Secretariat.

The no-name lake behind the power dam

The Power Dam created across the St. Lawrence River and straddling the USA-Canada border supplies water to generating stations on either side of the border, at Massena, NY and Cornwall, ON. The dam was named the Moses-Saunders Power Dam. Chairman of the New York Power Authority, Robert Moses, oversaw the U.S. portion and Robert H. [Hood] Saunders, chairman of Ontario Hydro, oversaw the Canadian side of the project.

With the completion of the dam, an international body of water came into existence. First there were questions as to whether this "pool" was really a "lake", or just a section of the river, and what its limits would be. Next was the question of a Canada-US agreement on a suitable name.

Many names were being submitted by the public or aired via the newspapers². For

² These name proposals for the lake behind the power dam are included in the files of today's Geographical Names Board of Canada.
Lake Americana, Americana Lake or Lake Canarican

example, names played with the words “Canada” and “USA”; expressed ideas such as harmony and neighbourliness; recalled royalty, politicians, and other well known individuals; or promoted cities or other locations.

However, quite quickly both the Canadian and US names boards decided that Lake St. Lawrence was the appropriate name to be used. There was some discussion in the Canadian Parliament, House of Commons, as it appeared that the US Board had made the decision independently. Nevertheless it was then claimed that the Canadian Board had suggested this name to the Americans! Lionel Chevrier MP who was influential on earlier naming was still of the opinion that Long Sault Lake was a preferable and more locally significant name. However, the name Lake St. Lawrence stuck and was approved and confirmed by both boards. The US Board on Geographic Names approved Lake Saint Lawrence on January 1, 1958 (although “Saint” and “St.” can be used interchangeably), while the Canadian Board on Geographical Names approved Lake St. Lawrence on September 4, 1958.

TOWARDS A CANADA-USA TRANSBOUNDARY FEATURE NAMES AGREEMENT

Some 25 years later, representatives of the names boards of Canada and the USA met to consider and develop an agreement on the naming of features that cross the Canada-USA border (“transboundary features”).

The two countries form the United States / Canada Division of UNGEGN and over the 20th century had some level of cooperation on a variety of naming issues. At the Third UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Athens in 1977, resolution III/20 noted the “need for international standardization of names of

Canusa Lake, Lake Canusa
Lake Usca
Confederation Lake
Lake Harmony
Lake Unity
Lake of Good Neighbors or Neighbours' Lake
Lake Sublime
Lake Indedom(from Independence and Dominion)
Kilowatt Lake
Lake Elizamerica (Elizabeth and America)
Queen Elizabeth Lake
Steinhardt Lake (daughter of the late US Ambassador to Canada)
Lake Adam Dollard
Lake Vincent Massey
Princess Margaret Lake
Lake Mac-Wash-E.D. Macdonald, Washington, Eisenhower, Diefenbaker
Lake Lavallée
Lake Bergen existing lake before flooding
Long Sault Lake ... From Hon. L. Chevrier in the House of Commons
Lake Iroquois
Lake New York
Lake Toronto

geographical features that are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided among two or more countries”. The resolution recommended that “countries sharing a given geographical feature under different names should endeavour, as far as feasible, to reach agreement on fixing a single name for the feature concerned”. Where this is not possible, the resolution recommended that in international cartography the names used by both countries should be accepted.



Figure 4. Canada, showing its boundary with the USA

Document of understanding

With this UN background, Canada and the United States held a joint meeting to establish a policy of understanding concerning the names of geographical features shared by the two countries. The drafted document addressed:

1. Coordination in the naming of transboundary features
2. Name changing
3. Generic and feature class terminology
4. Implementation
5. The International Boundary Commission mapping programme
6. Procedures for handling transboundary feature names (Appendix A)

After the initial discussions, the main point that arose was a strengthening of opinions that variances in naming may well reflect differences in cultural heritages and historical perspectives of the two countries, and that although there were mutual benefits to using the same name for a feature crossing the international boundary, this would not always be possible.

At the time of the Fifth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Montréal in 1987, the work undertaken by the USA and Canada on the transboundary accord led to another resolution about features beyond a single sovereignty, namely V/25. The resolution noted that “it would be useful to know and compare the practical experience acquired by neighbouring countries in the standardization of names of geographical features extending across their common borders”. It recommended that national geographical names authorities establish joint or interrelated programmes with neighbouring authorities for the collection and treatment of names of features extending across their common borders, and that future UN Conferences be informed of achievements in this field.

Following final discussion and layout, the document of understanding was signed by the Chair of the United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN), Rupert B. Southard, and by the Chair of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN), J. Hugh O’Donnell, in August 1989. In keeping with the spirit of United Nations resolutions III/20 and V/25, this document was submitted as E/CONF.85/L.54 at the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in New York in 1992.

In summary, the primary recommendations in the Document of Understanding included:

1. Coordination
 - a. Different names and different spellings of the same names be respected where such variances reflect different cultural heritage and historical perspectives
 - b. Similar and effective policies and procedures for handling names of transboundary features be established in both countries
 - c. A name proposed for an entity without an official name on both sides of the boundary be considered for approval if supported by local usage
 - d. Where a name is approved on one side of the boundary only, the other country consider approval if the name is supported by local usage
 - e. For names in unofficial use, they be investigated for possible approval in each country
 - f. Where there is no agreement on a common name, each country may make its own decision
2. Name changing
 - a. Although it is highly desirable to retain established official names, with appropriate reasons a name change may be considered in both countries
3. Generic and feature class terminology
 - a. Names authorities exchange information concerning terminology and generic terms used
 - b. For the purposes of data exchange between digital databases, information be included on generic terms and feature classes
4. Implementation
 - a. Actions be undertaken in Canada and the United States for names authorities to implement these recommendations

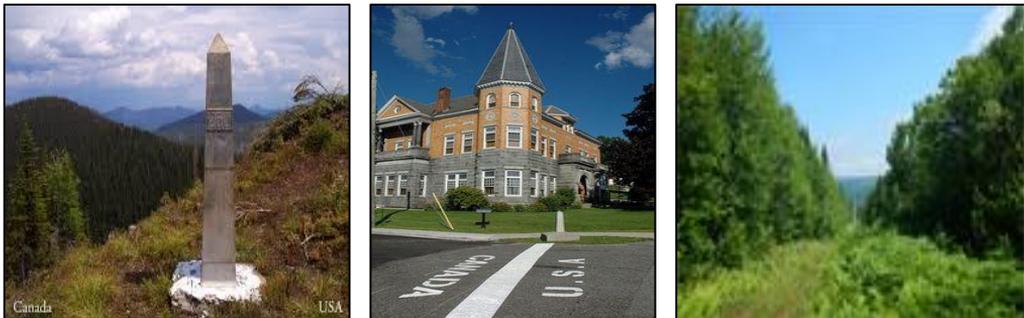
5. International Boundary Commission (IBC)
 - a. Both the USBGN and the CPCGN should provide encouragement to the IBC to produce a new series of boundary maps
 - Appendix A Procedures for handling transboundary names
 This provided for the treatment of established names, of new name proposals and the exchange of generic and feature type information

Follow-up actions

The border is the longest international border in the world (land and water is 8,891km) and affects 8 provinces and territories of Canada and 13 states of the USA. At this point it should be clarified that there are some differences in operation between the names authorities in the United States and in Canada. Differences that had to be considered in developing processes for dealing with toponyms, and differences that would be relevant to questions of cultural variations across the border.

In the United States, although most individual states may have a names authority, it is the BGN, composed of federal members, that makes decisions on names for use on federal documents. By contrast, in Canada the authority for names is decentralized with each province and territory having responsibility for toponyms within their jurisdiction; these decisions are accepted by the national body – at that time the CPCGN – and entered into the nationally maintained geographical names database.

With regard to the language of names, Canada is a bilingual country (English and French), and particularly on the Quebec/USA border, names on the Canadian side will be made official in French. In these cases, there is little chance that there will be an exact match of names of features crossing the international border.



Figures 5, 6 and 7. Views of the boundary between Canada and the USA
(Source: International Boundary Commission)

Actions:

1. A template was drawn up to facilitate the processing of transboundary names in both countries.
2. A study was undertaken by Canada, with the cooperation of the USA, to determine from national topographic maps of both countries and from IBC maps, which features actually crossed the boundary and how they were named on each side. (There are no populated places or administrative areas that are considered as “transboundary” in nature.)

Some details of the study undertaken of transboundary features and the status of their names

Shortly after the document of understanding had been prepared, a contract was awarded in Canada to determine the status quo of transboundary features and their names.

This involved the study of the topographic maps produced for the border areas by both countries. The map scale was 1:50,000 or larger, but clearly the dates of publication varied along the boundary in both countries. At the same time the maps produced by the IBC between 1900 and 1930 were also checked. The southern boundary of Canada runs from the Atlantic Ocean where New Brunswick and Maine meet to the Pacific Ocean at the British Columbia / Washington border. In addition, there is a northwestern border between Canada and the United States, where Alaska meets British Columbia and Yukon, running from the Pacific Ocean to the Arctic Ocean (see Figure 4). Although this paper deals with Canada's southern border, I have included the Alaska data for the sake of completeness.

It was found that some 900 transboundary features were named and of these over 60% had matching names on both sides. Another 30% were named only on one side of the border (about twice as many had names in Canada as in the USA). Of the remaining 10% that did not match, the reasons included differing generic terms – either in the same language, or in English/French; different names; variations in spelling; variation in details (e.g. West Branch X River compared to X River); or the feature type appeared to change at the border (e.g. glacier to creek).

Other statistics of general interest were that some 60% of the names appeared on the old IBC maps, and so had been approved prior to 1930. About 70% of the names are for water features (primarily rivers and streams), and of the Canadian jurisdictions abutting the US border, the mountainous province of British Columbia had the greatest number of features – about one-third of the total.

Where marked differences in names occur, documentary study would be necessary to determine the historical associations of the particular names before consideration would be given to modification of any names (e.g. Mokowan Butte, Alberta vs. Lee Ridge, Montana; or Ross Lake, Manitoba vs. Eramosh Lake, North Dakota; or Ruisseau l'Eau Clair vs. West Branch Little Black River, Maine).

Among the most entrenched variations of names in the two countries are some in the west that involve spelling and form variations. Kootenay River (Canada) vs. Kootenai River (US); Okanagan River (Canada) vs. Okanogan River (US); Juan de Fuca Strait (Canada) vs. Strait of Juan de Fuca (US). These names are in long-standing use in each country, and in all probability will remain as currently shown.

The follow-up from this study has not been intensive and is not documented in detail. However, it can be noted that the province of Quebec in Canada worked through their list of transboundary names and established some features that likely did not cross the boundary; some coordinates, map sheets or spellings that needed correction in the national database and some 15 names in Quebec to be added to the inventory.

While no specific list has been compiled of new names or name changes along the

USA/Canada boundary, a few may be noted:

Pembina Valley ... Manitoba /North Dakota

Goodeve Creek ... British Columbia / Washington

Nine lake bed and water features in Lake Ontario on the Canada / USA boundary

Salish Sea ... British Columbia / Washington (in Canada also approved in French as Mer des Salish).

This name was used since 1988 to encourage awareness of the ecosystem of what is virtually an inland sea, and was approved in 2010 after extensive consultations between indigenous people, the federal governments of the two countries, the State of Washington and the Province of British Columbia (for further detail see Webber, 2011).

It should also be noted that the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB) includes a field to indicate Canadian features that cross into the United States. The data from the study was entered into the CGNDB and so today a list could be computer-generated of all the transboundary features.

This Document of Understanding between the two countries is now some 28 years old, but has formed the basis for a spirit of international cooperation for exchanging information and methodology, both at the national and state/provincial levels. Time moved along as far as the IBC mapping is concerned, and digital positioning of the USA/ Canada boundary made further printing of the IBC international boundary maps no longer a reality. The maps from the early 1900s are, however, available on the IBC website.

At the recent 2017 annual meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada a proposal was made for the review and update of the Document of Understanding between Canada and the USA; perhaps at that time the list of mismatching names will also be subject to review.

CLOSING COMMENTS

These two examples of work in standardizing names along the borders of Canada illustrate some of the challenges faced by names authorities and the desirability of establishing communication between neighbouring countries with respect to naming features that cross the international border. Recognizing local input is significant in the work of the geographical names authorities in Canada. In the naming of the new features created with the flooding along the St. Lawrence River in the 1950s, the Board experienced the intervention of politicians (not, of course, the only example of this) when moving too speedily through the naming process, without casting a wide enough net to gather research material relevant to the history of the region. The Document of Understanding established with the United States in 1989 provided an agreement to exchange information and to seek harmony in cases of transboundary naming, while clearly stating that the linguistic and cultural heritage of each country was more important than identical names for transboundary features.

REFERENCES

- Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat, Ottawa. File records (NTS) addressing the decisions of the Canadian Board on Geographical Names in the 1950s.
- Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat, Ottawa. File records (SM) addressing the Document of Understanding with the United States of America and the subsequent inventory of named transboundary features.
- UNGEGN (1992). Document of Understanding concerning the Treatment of Names of Geographical Features shared by Canada and the United States, 1989. Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, U.S.A., July 17, 1992. Available on the UNGEGN website:
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/6th-uncsgn-docs/e_conf_85_L54.pdf (Accessed November 20, 2017).
- Webber, Bert (2011). Naming the Salish Sea, Burnaby, Canada, 17th International Seminar on Sea Names. Available on the The Society for *East Sea* website:
<http://eastsea1994.org/data/bbsData/14630303871.pdf> (Accessed November 20, 2017).

WEBSITES VISITED

- <http://www.internationalboundarycommission.org/en/> (Accessed November 20, 2017)
- <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/confGeneral.html> (Accessed November 20, 2017)