AN ONOMASTIC STUDY (PART 2)

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The first article in this series concerned itself with the shortest and the longest American place names. This article examines the same names in the search for such standard logological phenomena as tautonyms, palindromes, and reversals, using the same format and guidelines as did the first article. County or other specific location and number of reference work used (see bibliography at end of this article) are generally given in parentheses.

In some parts of the world, tautonymic place names are commonplace—so common that one may actually get tired of seeing them. In the United States, it is quite different, and considerable ingenuity has been invested in assembling the names about to be displayed. Be, therefore, duly appreciative of the reduplicative feast about to be spread before you!

Four-letter names, tautonymic though they may be, are too short to excite admiration in a professional logologist or onomatologist, and our search commences at the six-letter level. Extended investigation brings only four names to light: PAW PAW, Michigan (Van Buren-1), YUM YUM, Tennessee (Fayette-1), ELEELLE, Hawaii (Kauai-1), and ILLILI, American Samoa (Tutuila-2). The last two of these names, in addition to being tautonyms, are also palindromes, insuring them a permanent place in the Logological Hall of Fame.

Moving on to the eight-letter level, we find KUMUKUMU, Hawaii (Kauai-1), PAGO PAGO, the capital of American Samoa (Tutuila-2), SING SING, New York (Westchester-3), and TOPA TOPA, California (Ventura-1). In a typical display of anti-logological sentiment, the town of Sing Sing was renamed OSSINING in 1901.

Next is the ten-letter level, on which we are confronted by BADEN BADEN, Illinois (Bond-3), BICOL-BICOL, The Philippines (Luzon-4), and PANGOPANGO, an older form of the name PAGO PAGO (5). Shortening of PANGOPANGO to PAGO PAGO is yet another instance of the anti-logological currents swirling about us. For the benefit of skeptics, we hasten to point out that BICOL-BICOL is taken from an atlas published five years after The Philippines became a possession of the United States. Finally, something reasonably familiar greets us on the ten-level: WALLA WALLA, Washington (Walla Walla-1). The new breed of Post Office abbreviations for our state names permits WALLA WALLA, WA. to join SENSUOUSNESS and LEVITATIVELY as the only English twelve-letter anchored palindromes.

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Can we be satisfied with ten-letter tautonyms? Of course not! Longer ones must and will be found. Our first attempt to break through to a higher level revolves around imperfect longer specimens. Thus, we discover HETCH HETCHY, California (Tuolumne-3), from which we would like to remove the final letter, as we also would like to do in the case of KINNICIKINICK, Ohio (Ross-1). As for the compound designation EIGHTY EIGHT, KY. (Barren-1), deletion of the "K" would create a twelve-letter tautonym. Alas, these reduplications simply were not meant to be!

The largest city in the Western Hemisphere shows us the way to success. Who can deny that NEW YORK, NEW YORK is a fourteen-letter tautonym? Using the same method, we quickly come across ILLINOIS, ILLINOIS (Alexander-1) and WEST VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA (Kanawha-6). The same technique can be extended to produce the tautonymist's ultimate dream. Instead of combining city and state, let us combine city, county, and state. That gives us OKLAHOMA, OKLAHOMA, OKLAHOMA (Oklahoma-6), a 24-letter, three-part tautonym! The atlas used was published in 1911. In 1923, the name of the city was officially changed to OKLAHOMA CITY, yet another instance of rampant anti-logology. How sad . . .

Palindromes, two examples of which have already been noted briefly in connection with our review of tautonyms, are even more difficult to find than are tautonyms. From a population standpoint, the nation's largest palindromic community appears to be ADA, Oklahoma (Pontotoc-1), but the name uses only three letters, and a population of barely 15,000 is nothing to brag about, anyway.

More interesting to the onomatologist are names of seven or more letters. These include GLENELG, Maryland (Howard-1), NEW OWEN, Kentucky (Owen-7), and OKONOKO, West Virginia (Hampshire-1). The name NEW OWEN is rather suspect because other atlases list it as NEW, OWEN (1) -- that is, as a town named NEW in the county named OWEN.

Naturally, only three worthwhile palindromes do not suffice, and a combination of techniques produces these further examples: OXOBOXO Lake, Connecticut (New London-1), a name we should like to shorten to OXOBOXO; OMAHA, MO. (Putnam-1); APOLLO, PA. (Armstrong-1); KANAKANAK, Alaska (Bristol Bay-8); and ADAVEN, NEVADA (Nye-8). This twelve-letter palindromic champion is the victim of the usual anti-logological activity: even though it appears on the map in Source 9, it is not indexed in that source, and has been suppressed entirely in Sources 1 and 7!

If the community of Sion, Texas (Walker-6) could be transplanted to Illinois, the result would be another twelve-letter palindrome: SION, ILLINOIS. What we actually have, unfortunately, is ZION, ILLINOIS (Lake-1). With infinite regret, we note that the name of a height in Jerusalem, a city currently completely under Israeli sovereignty, may be written either as ZION or as SION. Not so ZION, Illinois.
Next on the agenda are reversals. In thinking about reversals as related to place names, a variety of questions comes to the fore. Let's examine these questions one at a time.

What are the longest place names that can be spelled backwards to produce other American place names? The three best examples seem to be CALVERT, Kansas (Norton-1), which turns into TREVLAC, Indiana (Brown-1); COLBERT, Washington (Spokane-1), which becomes TREBLOC, Mississippi (Chickasaw-1); and ROBERTSON, Wyoming (Uinta-1), a reversal of NOSTREBOR, Virginia (Nottoway-6).

What are the longest names that can be reversed to spell other names in the same county of the same state? The three finest specimens are: NIKEP and PEKIN, Maryland (Allegany-1); COLVER and REVLOC, Pennsylvania (Cambria-1); and DOTSER0 and ORESTOD, Colorado (Eagle-1). COLVER and REVLOC are different localities, as are DOTSER0 and ORESTOD, but NIKEP and PEKIN are two names for the same community, NIKEP being the municipal name and PEKIN the railroad name.

What are the longest names that can be spelled in reverse to produce ordinary English words or non-geographic names? Two eight-letter examples are ROTAVELE, California (Glenn-1), a reversal of ELLEVATOR, and NICOLAUS, California (Sutter-1), a reversal of SUALCIN, a bright star in the constellation Delphinus.

What are the largest cities the names of which turn into sentences when spelled backward? FRESNO, California (Fresno-1) becomes ON, SERF!, a command. YAKIMA, Washington (Yakima-1) turns into AM I KAY?, a question. The combination TULSA + MIAMI is a reversal of the sentence, I MAIM A SLUT.

There is another sort of reversal possible. Large numbers of American place names end with suffixes such as -VILLE, -TON, -TOWN, and -CITY. We shall now demonstrate that such names can be reversed, putting the suffix at the front. Specifically, GREENVILLE, South Carolina (Greenville-1) turns into VILLEGREEn, Colorado (Las Animas-1); QUINTON, New Jersey (Salem-1) becomes TONQUIN, Oregon (Washington-1); CENTERTOWN, Kentucky (Ohio-1) is merely a reversal of TOWN CENTER, New Jersey (Essex-1); and PARK CITY, Kansas (Sedgwick-1) is actually a backward spelling of CITY PARK, Illinois (Christian-1).

Continuing our survey of standard logological fields, what is the longest American place name using no letter of the alphabet more than once? There is one name preeminent above all others, a sixteen-letter gem: SOUTH CAMBRIDGE, N. Y. (Washington-1).

What is the longest American place name using each letter that appears in it exactly two times, to qualify as a pair isogram? Naturally, we must exclude trivial cases such as palindromes and tautonyms. Two ten-letter examples are SUCCASUNNA, New Jersey (Morris-1) and RIVERVILLE, Virginia (Amherst-1). Devoted readers of Word Ways will note, unfortunately, that we are considering only letters to the oh where, is known.

What is the obvious answer to this question? It looks is the famous word. Dependable WAI, Washington, after all-vowel WAI, that "U" is any.

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Ways will note that SUCCASUNNA is in Editor Eckler’s home county. Unfortunately, ten-letter pair isograms are not too impressive so that we are compelled to coin a plausible-sounding town name of fourteen letters to fill the natural void: NORTH HELLERTON. Where, oh where, is NORTH HELLERTON?

What is the longest name spelled entirely with vowels? The obvious answer is AIEA, Hawaii (Honolulu-I). What that answer overlooks is the fact that the letter "W" functions as a vowel in some words. Depending on how we choose to pronounce the name, WAWAILI, Washington (Whitman-1) may, possibly, qualify as a seven-letter all-vowel place name. Remember that "W" is really "U" and that "U" is an unimpeachable vowel.

What is the longest name spelled with one vowel only? It seems to be McKNIGHT, Oklahoma (Harmon-I), a name with the added virtue of using no letter of the alphabet more than once.

Is there any name in which one letter of the alphabet appears three successive times, in the style of the four-letter name in HEADMISTRESSSHIP, as that word is spelled in Webster’s Second Edition? Yes, there are at least two such names: KAAAWA, Hawaii (Honolulu-I), and NUUULI, American Samoa (Tutuila-2).

What are the largest communities in the United States with apostrophized names? LEE’S SUMMIT, Missouri (Jackson-I) and COEUR D’ALENE, Idaho (Kootenai-I). It is fascinating to observe that the 1970 census populations of these two communities were 16,230 and 16,228, respectively -- two miserable souls apart! What is the shortest apostrophized name? D’LO, Mississippi (Simpson-I).

The next article in this series will start with the massive subject of name transposals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


QUERY

All pangrammatic word lists, such as SQUADGY FEZ BLANK JIMP CRWTH VOX, are six (or more) words long. It appears to be impossible to find a five-word pangrammatic list using only words from Webster's Second or Third. How many extra letters must be added before it is possible to contain the alphabet in five words? Leslie Card of Urbana, Illinois has discovered the 29-letter example QUICKTHORNS JAPYX FLOWED GAMB VIZ. Is it possible to find a 28-letter (or even a 27-letter) example?