Resuming our survey of onomatological logology, we take up the transposition of city, town, and village names in the United States and its possessions. As in previous articles of this series, the county location and reference source are shown in parentheses, for the benefit of those readers who wish to check our discoveries.

What are the longest names that can be transposed into non-geographic names or into ordinary words and terms? At this stage in logological exploration two eleven-letter specimens are known: NEW CARLISLE, Indiana (St. Joseph-1), which turns into WINE CELLARS, and GIANT FOREST, California (Tulare-1), a transposal of FORESTATING.

What are the longest names that can be transposed into other American place names? That depends on the degree of well-shuffledness that you want to observe in the transposal. The longest thoroughly shuffled such transposal has only nine letters: MASTERSON, Texas (Moore-1) and SEARSMONT, Maine (Waldo-1). On the eleven-letter level, we find a partially well-shuffled transposition: ENGLISHTOWN, New Jersey (Monmouth-1) and SHINGLETOWN, California (Shasta-1). If we are willing to settle for the poorest sort of letter shuffling, we can rise to the thirteen-letter level with MOUNT PLEASANT, Utah (Sanpete-1) and PLEASANT MOUNT, Pennsylvania (Wayne-1); or with POINT PLEASANT, Missouri (New Madrid-1) and PLEASANT POINT, Indiana (Jefferson-1).

The potential for longer well-shuffled transposals exists, but has yet to be realized. Consider the curious case of a twelve-letter name, WESTMORELAND, Kansas (Pottawatomie-1). It can be transposed into perfectly reasonable town names such as EMERALDSTOWN, NEW STORMDALE, LOWDENSTREAM, and MALDEN TOWERS, as well as into names such as ELDERMONT, WA. and ALDERSTOWN, ME. Sad to relate, it does not seem possible to substantiate any of the transposed creations in reference works.

Stepping up our attack on the transposal problem, we ask what the longest three-way all-name specimen might be. Here, a threefold answer awaits us:

CAROLINE, Wisconsin (Shawano-1)
COLERAIN, North Carolina (Bertie-1)
CORNELIA, Georgia (Habersham-1)
The second of these three examples verges on a four-way transposal, since the same eight letters also spell ORELANDS, the plural of ORELAND, Pennsylvania (Montgomery-1). In a sense, this is also true of the third example, which may be rearranged to spell MONTEROS, Argentina (Tucuman Province-2). Argentina, yes, America, no!

What is the greatest multiplicity that can be achieved in transposing names? Two seven-way examples are known:

ADEL, Oregon (Lake-1)
DALE, South Carolina (Beaufort-1)
DEAL, New Jersey (Monmouth-1)
DELA, Oklahoma (Pushmataha-1)
ELDA, West Virginia (Mingo-1)
LEAD, South Dakota (Lawrence-1)
LEDA, Virginia (Halifax-1)

The percipient reader will note that, in all of the transposal examples cited thus far, the various members of a transposal set have always been taken from the maximum number of different states possible. Never has a state been used more than once within a given transposal set. This is not the result of chance; we have deliberately arranged it so, to give each set as much diversity in appearance as is possible. You have our assurance of continued unflagging devotion to this principle!

What are the largest American cities with transposable names? Only four of the twenty largest cities possess transposable names, but included among those four are those ranking first and fifth: NEW YORK, New York (Y-WROKEN, an old form of WREAKED used as a participle); DETROIT, Michigan (DOTTIER); WASHINGTON, D.C. (NOWA-NIGHTS, the correlative of NOWADAYS); and SAN DIEGO, California (AGONISED, the British form of AGONIZED, and DIAGNOSE). These cities are so well-known that we have omitted the usual identification by county and reference source.

To ascend to the ultimate heights of onomastic transposalry, we
must first backtrack slightly. In the previous article of this series, SOUTH CAMBRIDGE, N. Y. was singled out as by far the longest place name using no letter of the alphabet more than once. Even so, it consumes only 16 of the 26 letters available, and the climb toward logical perfection demands more than that. In the ceaseless striving for the impossible that characterizes all true logologists, we have hit on the expedient of combining three names to utilize a larger number of alphabetic letters, each one once. The two most remarkable examples found use 22 letters a piece:

CAMP FLOWERS, Florida (Bay-3) + DUXBY, Minnesota (Roseau-1) + KNIGHT, Louisiana (Vernon-3)  
GRAVEL SWITCH, Kentucky (Marion-1) + DUXBY, Minnesota (Roseau-1) + KNOPF, Virginia (Caroline-4)

As in many another instance, 22 letters do not exhaust the potential of English, and we are actively seeking the 24-letter combination McKNIGHTSBY + PULVEX + JAWFORD. Who will be the first to devise a plausible-sounding 26-letter combination?

Interestingly, if we retreat slightly from the 22-letter plateau, we can find transposable combinations. On the 21-letter level, there is a two-way transposal:

TWINSBURG, Ohio (Summit-1) + PECKHAM, Colorado (Weld-1) + FLOYD, New Mexico (Roosevelt-1) =
NORTH SEDGWICK, Maine (Hancock-1) + PLUMB, Washington (Thurston-3) + FAY, Illinois (Carroll-1)

On the 20-letter level, there is a three-way transposal:

BOLD SPRING, Tennessee (Humphreys-1) + FAY, Oklahoma (Dewey-1) + KETCHUM, Idaho (Blaine-1) =
LYNCHBURG, Mississippi (De Soto-1) + POTSDAM, New York (St. Lawrence-1) + KIEF, North Dakota (McHenry-1) =
BUCKSPORT, Maine (Hancock-1) + FLYING H, New Mexico (Chaves-1) + MEAD, Washington (Spokane-1)

Note that, even with nine different towns in one transposal set, we have clung to the principle of using nine different states! Now, who will be the first one to find a four-way transposal of this kind? Remember, no letter of the alphabet may be used more than once in this exercise.

We conclude this article in the current series with an interesting miscellany.

What are the most misplaced towns in America? One is HOUSTON, TEXAS, found in Missouri. (The town of Houston is in the county named Texas in the state named Missouri: see Source 1.) Another is HONOLULU. Instead of being in Hawaii, it is discovered in the Matanuska-Susitna Census Division of Alaska (again, see Source 1).
What are the strangest town names in America? No two individuals are likely to agree on this subject. Our own three candidates are TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, New Mexico (Sierra-1), renamed from HOT SPRINGS in 1950, after a then-popular radio program (see Sources 2 and 5); its original Spanish name had been the 28-letter delight LOS OJOS CALIENTES DE LOS PALOMAS, "Hot Springs of the Doves" -- see Source 6); EWIGE QUAL, Illinois (Cook-7), now a part of Glencoe but originally an independent community, the German name of which means "Eternal Torture"; and WHO'D A THOUGHT IT, Alabama (Jefferson-1), now a part of Birmingham. Readers are invited to contribute equally strange names to our collection.

What name is written with the largest number of periods or full stops? So far as we can determine, it is A.B.C., Tennessee (Sumner-4), known to the railroads as TURNERS. Significantly, perhaps, the community receives its mail through the post office in WESTMORELAND, Tennessee (Sumner-1)!

What name appears in the largest number of different states? No intensive study of that problem has ever been undertaken; a preliminary search through Source 1 has uncovered towns named WASHINGTON and SPRINGFIELD in 32 different states each (not counting WASHINGTON, D.C., which is not in any state); towns named JACKSON in 33 different states; and towns named WARREN in 34 different states. These figures could obviously be increased by adding towns found only in older atlases and gazetteers, but there is the delicate aesthetic question as to whether that would be a proper thing to do. Are there other names that occur more extensively in any one major geographic reference work?

We close this article with several additions to curiosa in the first two articles: the solid 16-letter name BATCHELDERSVILLE, Illinois (Calhoun-7); the hyphenated 18-letter name ENGLEWOOD-ON-THE-HILL, Illinois (Cook-7), the first such long name outside the state of New York; HUEHUE, Hawaii (Hawaii-1), another 6-letter tautonym; and E, Maine (Aroostook-1), another 1-letter name, somewhat questionable as it is PLANTATION OF E in full.

The next article in this series will start with an alphabetical survey of American place names.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CAN A DICTIONARY BE DEFAMATORY?

Yes, argued Marcus Shloimovitz, a textile merchant from Lancashire, England, who this summer brought an action against the Oxford English Dictionary to force them to delete the following definition of Jew from all future printings: "A name of opprobrium or reprobation; spec. applied to a grasping or extortionate money-lender or usurer, or a trader who drives hard bargains or deals craftily."

No, countered the Oxford English Dictionary; a dictionary must be devoted to the accurate recording of language, not with what people think it should be. The OED's chief concession in the past to critics such as Shloimovitz has been an historical note in the Supplement explaining how Jews became known as money-lenders during the Middle Ages; this concession will be continued in a reset edition of the Shorter Oxford expected off the press at the end of October. The High Court heard the opposing arguments on July 6 and, in a victory for philology, ordered Shloimovitz's writ and statement of claim to be struck out, on the ground that there was no cause for action.

THE LETTER SUBTRACTION CHAMPIONSHIP

Down through the ages, men have searched feverishly for long words that can be reduced, one letter at a time, always producing a new word, until the ultimate is reached: a one-letter word.

A new champion has just been crowned in this murky logological area: the 12-letter word STRANGELINGS (uncared-for children). The succession: STRANGELING, STRANGLING, STRANGING (altering), STANGING (spearing eels), STAGING, SAGING (a tree found in the mangrove swamps of the Philippines), AGING, GING (family), GIN, IN and I.

We absolutely guarantee that you will locate each of these words in Webster's Second Edition!