

## A NEW REFERENCE

RAMONA J. QUINCUNX

In 1949, the G. & C. Merriam Company, then publishing the Second Edition of Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, issued a new publication, Webster's Geographical Dictionary. It was, on the surface, both a companion volume to Webster's Biographical Dictionary, first published in 1943, and an expansion of the Gazetteer in the unabridged dictionary, a section that then embraced only 30,000 names, compared with about 40,000 in the new and independent reference work.

Subsequent events disclosed a more sinister purpose behind WGD (as the geographical dictionary will hereinafter be referred to, for the sake of brevity). It was, apparently, intended to replace the Gazetteer section in the unabridged dictionary, because that section was reduced to 20,000 names in 1953, and eliminated entirely from Webster's Third New International Dictionary, published in 1961.

Considered by itself rather than in its relation to other Merriam-Webster publications, it was an excellent reference work, even though one could not help wondering why it was limited to 1293 pages when its teammate, Webster's Biographical Dictionary (WBD), took up 1697 pages. By adding 400 pages to WGD, a lot more of the world's interesting and important places could have been included.

World events were most unkind to WGD. The 1950s and 1960s saw changes take place in the world on a scale and with a speed virtually unprecedented in all previous history. These decades were the years of the emerging new nations in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. Every few years, the editors of WGD brought out a revision of this work, trying to incorporate the most important new names and facts. Of necessity, these revisions were limited in scope, and could not possibly reflect the changing world. WGD, fulfilling a unique function as a modern gazetteer modest both in physical size and in price, was hopelessly crippled.

In the latter part of 1972, the G. & C. Merriam Company replaced the obsolete work with Webster's New Geographical Dictionary (WNGD). Handsomely bound in green with gold lettering, it represented a complete overhaul of the original work. The number of pages was increased from 1293 to 1370, the number of entries was increased from about 40,000 to more than 47,000, the number of black-and-white maps was increased from 159 to 217, and the quality of the maps was upgraded: instead of preparing the maps themselves, the Merriam editors turned the job over to professionals, the C. S. Hammond and Company people.

Unfortunately, the price of the thumb-indexed edition -- \$14.95 plus sales tax, where applicable -- was not calculated to inspire mass purchases by the lay public.

WNGD remains what its predecessor was: a reference work unique in its realm. It has no competitor in its field, and is a must for all reference libraries, including those of logologists. Run, do not walk, to your nearest bookstore for a copy!

Alas, the world continues changing, and WNGD is already obsolete. The name WATERGATE does not appear in WNGD. The article on the BAHAMA ISLANDS gives no hint of their change to independent status in July, 1973, and the articles about EGYPT and LIBYA do not mention the merger of those nations scheduled to occur in September, 1973. The table of manned United States space flights ends with Apollo 16 in April, 1972; no mention of Apollo 17 or of Skylab. Day by day, the list of omissions is destined to become longer.

Aside from the inevitable obsolescence of any work dealing with geography, WNGD must surely be condemned as the poorest reference work ever edited and published by Merriam. Casual browsing through the book conveys the impression that it is a compendium of errors, omissions, and whimsies, with the book itself in deplorable physical condition.

Let's consider outright errors. NEW YORK CITY is described as the second largest one in the world, with a population of 7.9 million. Yet, WNGD assigns populations of 8.2 million to London, of 8.8 million to Tokyo, and of 11.0 million to Shanghai. Conclusion: someone over there can't count to four! Or, look at the article on the PHILIPPINES. The native name of the country is included, labeled as PILIPINO, an obvious misprint for FILIPINO. Or, look for IRELAND. You will find the country listed under the native name of EIRE, although all other nations are listed under their English names: for example, there is an article about SWEDEN, not SVERIGE, and another one about SPAIN, not ESPANA. Or, check the article TANZANIA. It mentions the former Belgian trust territory of RUANDA-URUNDI, but misspells the name RUANDA-URANDI. Or, look up NIGERIA. The twelve states comprising that nation are listed, with the instruction to see their individual entries for correct pronunciation. Look up state names such as EAST-CENTRAL or NORTH-WESTERN, and you find no pronunciation, only an instruction to see the table at NIGERIA. That seems like a ridiculous waste of time and motion.

Errors of omission are just as plentiful as errors of commission. One of the most interesting places in the world, both in name and in fact, is the MOHOROVICIC DISCONTINUITY, the region of contact between the earth's crust and the underlying mantle. Neither that name nor MOHOLE PROJECT, intended to reach that region at an ocean site near Hawaii, are included in WNGD.

In connection with Watergate, there has been renewed interest in

TEAPOT DOME, the name that brought scandal to the Harding administration. Although that name was defined in WGD, it is mysteriously absent from WNGD.

Everyone knows that Minneapolis and St. Paul are called the Twin Cities. On the other hand, how many of us can instantly identify the Twin Cities of Maine (Auburn and Lewiston)? or the Tri-Cities of Alabama (Florence, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia)? or the Tri-Cities of Washington (Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland)? or, better yet, the five main cities comprising the Quad-Cities in Illinois and Iowa (Davenport, Rock Island, Moline, East Moline, and Bettendorf)? It seems indisputable that such collective names ought to be in WNGD. They are not. Parenthetically, do readers of Word Ways know of other such group names for American cities?

There is a special category of fact omissions in WNGD that is best put under the heading of whimsies. A few examples follow. DAMASCUS is described as the oldest city in the world having continuous existence -- but its age is not indicated. The article on JACKSONVILLE, Florida carefully omits its claim to fame -- being the largest city in developed land area in the Western Hemisphere, with an area of 827 square miles. The article on GUAM gives an alternate name for the island, GUAHAN, that almost no one has ever heard of, perhaps not even our good friend there, Professor Merlin X. Houdini, IV. However, the article fails to answer an extremely obvious question about GUAM. Hawaii is described as being 2090 miles WSW of San Francisco. How far west or southwest of Hawaii, or of Wake, or of Midway, is GUAM? A very logical way of placing the island!

Even my own home base, LITTLE AMERICA, is slighted. True, some of the various expeditions that have used it are listed, but the fact that the successive bases are known as Little America I, Little America II, Little America III, Little America IV, and Little America V is carefully concealed; the last of these, my present home, isn't even mentioned indirectly!

There is a more basic criticism to be made of WNGD, affecting all its content. Entries in WGD averaged fewer than 31 per page; those in WNGD average more than 34. Since the number of words per page appears to be about the same in the two works, the inevitable conclusion is that the average length of each entry has been decreased. Specimen word counts confirm that conclusion. For instance, the definition of FINGOLAND has been reduced from 20 words to 16; that of NERCHINSK from 94 words to 73; that of SURESNEs from 25 words to 23. Both works contain a great deal of historical information. The addition of 23 highly eventful years to the history of every place in the world should have had the effect of increasing entry lengths, not of decreasing them. We have sadly been short-changed.

Even with the length of the book increased to 1370 pages, it is still 327 pages shorter than the latest (1972) Edition of WBD. Surely, those 327 pages could have been used to bring entry lengths in WNGD up to

smuff, and perhaps to increase the total number of entries to a nice, round figure such as 50,000. Why was this not done?

The physical condition merits a number of comments. First, the print style has been changed, whether for the better or the worse it is difficult to say. Psychologically, the new print doesn't look as "friendly" as did the old print, but this may be a subjective impression. The boldface entries themselves are definitely in smaller print. A actual measurement, for instance, shows that the name TEHACHAPI MOUNTAINS was 36 millimeters long in WGD, but extends only 26 millimeters in WNGD. This size reduction makes the entry names more difficult to read.

WGD closed with a set of 24 color plates, half of them historical maps. Such plates are always an attractive addition to any work. Naturally, they have been eliminated in WNGD.

A number of special tables in WNGD, such as those of the manned space flights both of the USA and the USSR, National Monuments of the United States, and the boroughs of Greater London, are in a kind of type quite different from the rest of the pages. This creates the impression that the tables were inserted as an afterthought, in a slipshod sort of manner. They almost look as if they were typed instead of being set in regular print, then reduced by a photographic process and placed in the book. Inferior craftsmanship!

Pages 991 and 992 are beyond belief. Instead of being printed back to back on one sheet of paper, they were printed on two separate sheets of paper, each with a blank back, and then pasted together. The pasting job was a poor one. At least in my copy of the book, the lower outside corner has come apart. Furthermore, the paste-up job has left pale orange streaks running through both pages! This is a phenomenon entirely outside all my previous experience with published books.

Last but not least, we consider WNGD from the viewpoint of pure logology. The first feature to strike us is the announcement on the dust jacket that the world's places from AA to ZYWIEC are included. This might impress the average person, but not a logologist. Why not go from A to ZYYI? The former is the name of a town in Norway, the latter the name of a town on Cyprus, both listed in The Times Index-Gazetteer of the World (1965).

WNGD has the usual curiosities: palindromes such as ELEELE, GLENELG, and NEUQUEN; an all-consonant name such as LLWCHWR; and all-vowel names such as AIEA and EIAO. It also attempts to include what it appears to consider the longest place name in the world: the original Indian name of Lake Webster in Massachusetts. The trouble with that is that the correct name as shown in an atlas such as the Rand McNally New Cosmopolitan World Atlas (1965) is spelled with 45 letters. WGD chiseled a little, deleting the 21st letter, to reduce the overall length to only 44 letters. WNGD chisels a little more, also deleting the last letter, to reduce the name to one of only 43 letters.

Anyway, that isn't the longest name at all; there is that well-known one in Wales, included in WNGD with its first 20 letters and the comment that the full name, variously spelled, has anywhere from 54 to 58 letters. Tantalizingly, the full name is not shown. Besides that, we have never seen a spelling of the full name that used fewer than 58 letters; some versions are longer, up to 69 letters. Not mentioned at all by WNGD are the 85-letter name of a hill in New Zealand, and the full original name of Bangkok, Thailand, an available shortened version of which is spelled with 158 letters.

The South American aquatic opossum has a name spelled three ways (OYAPOCK, YAPOCK, YAPOK) that represent two successive letter deletions with no change in meaning. WNGD adds a geographic analogue by listing the old name for TOKYO with three spellings: YEDDO, YEDO, EDO.

WNGD includes state nicknames, but very inadequately. One example: New Jersey is nicknamed the Garden State. Not mentioned are these other sobriquets: the Blue State, the Camden and Amboy State, the Commuter State, the Crossroads of the East, the Dominion, the Foreigner State, the Mosquito State, the Red Mud State, the State of Spain, and the Switzerland of America. How many other nicknames for New Jersey might there be?

These are random impressions about WNGD. Get your own copy and make a multitude of other discoveries!