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AMERICAN TRANPOSITIONS

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One particular class of linguistic oddity which has frequently appeared in the pages of Word Ways is the transposition. Hardly an issue of the magazine goes by without a clutch of transpositions being offered to the readership. The very first issue (February, 1968) contained transpositions of the names of some of the chemical elements; subsequent issues have contained transpositions of the names of some of the chemical elements; subsequent issues have contained transpositions of country names, anatomical terms, animal names, color names, mathematical terms and the names of the fifty states. In this article, we would like to present and discuss some transpositions deriving from the name AMERICA.

Starting with AMERICA itself, there are five transpositions that are known to us:

ACRIMEA a highly technical term taken from the field of zoological nomenclature
CERAMIA the plural of ceramium, an ancient liquid measure of Greece and Egypt
CERIAMA a large, long-legged bird of South America
MACAIRE Robert Macaire was a brigand character in French drama
MACERIA a genus of plants belonging to the family Verbenaceae

After AMERICA, we come to the plural form, AMERICAS. In case you are suspicious of this pluralized form, let us hasten to point out that the Americas is a term widely used to refer to North America, South America and the West Indies. In addition to those transpositions formed by pluralizing the individual transpositions of AMERICA (thus, ACRIMEAS, CERIAMAS, MACAIREs and MACERIAS), there are three nonplural items of interest:

CRAMASIE an old spelling of cramoisy, itself an archaic term for crimson cloth
MARISCAE the plural of marisca, a hemorrhoid
MESARAIE an adjective meaning 'pertaining to the mesentery', a membrane that serves part of the alimentary canal

One of the simplest derivatives of AMERICA is AMERICAN. This can be used either as an adjective or a noun. As a noun it is quite simply an inhabitant of North or South America. As an adjective it is used to refer to America. There is a handful of AMERICAN transpositions:
AMACRINE  a type of cell found in the retina
CAMARINE  a fetid marsh or swamp
CAMERINA  a genus of single-celled marine organisms
CINERAMA  a motion picture process designed to produce a
           three-dimensional image
IN CAMERA  a two-word legal term meaning 'in the judge's
           chamber'

The transposition enthusiast advances from AMERICAN to its plural form, AMERICANS. Plural transpositions abound, from the pluralization of the transpositions of AMERICAN: thus, AMACRINES, CAMARINES, CAMERINAS and CINERAMAS are immediately apparent. An interesting additional transposition that can be included in this grouping is:

MARCASINE  an obsolete rare term for iron pyrites

Next up from AMERICANS is AMERICANOS, cocktails made from sweet vermouth, bitters and soda water. Transposing this is not too difficult. In fact, there is a pair of transpositions:

CRESOMANIA  hallucinations consisting of the imagining of
great wealth
SEROMANIA  an adjective meaning 'pertaining to serum and
mania' (at least, we think that's what the word
means -- the only dictionary that lists the word
does not bother to define it, an all-too-often fall­
ing of dictionaries)

Upwards and onwards! After AMERICANOS, how about AMERICANITE, a meteoritic mineral of South America? To the best of our knowledge, this has only one transposition:

ACTERAIMINE  the name of a star of the third magnitude, found
in the shoulder of Cepheus

A person who is in favor with the policies of the USA goes by the
same name as a person interested in the anthropology of the Ameri­
cas -- namely, an AMERICANIST. Transpose that and you end up with:

MARCIANITES  a variant spelling of Marcionites, followers of
Marcion, an anti-Judaic Gnostic of the second
century AD

And finally, the last step. Pluralize AMERICANIST and get
AMERICANISTS. Now transpose that. What results? Two twelve­
letter transpositions:

CARTESIANISM  the philosophy of Rene Descartes, the ideal
of which was mathematical certainty in meta­
physical demonstrations
SECTARIANISM  exclusive or narrow attachment to a belief