

**NEW BRUNSWICK  
TOPONYMY STEERING COMMITTEE**

**2008-2009 ANNUAL REPORT**

**Wellness, Culture and Sport  
March 2009**

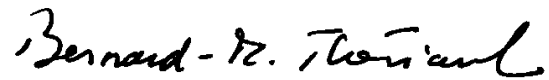
March 31, 2009

Hon. Hédard Albert  
Wellness, Culture and Sport

Dear Mr. Minister:

I am honoured to present you with the first annual report of the Toponymy Steering Committee for the period from February 4, 2008 to March 31, 2009.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bernard-Marie Thériault". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

Bernard-Marie Thériault  
Chairperson

Fredericton, N.B.

## ■ Introduction

This is the first annual report of the Toponymy Steering Committee. It covers the period from February 4, 2008 to March 31, 2009, i.e., from the date of the official announcement of the Committee's composition to the end of the fiscal year.

The first part of the report presents the Steering Committee's membership, organization structure, and mandate. The second part describes the activities carried out during the past year of operation. Next, since this is the Committee's first report, the third part contains a brief historical overview of toponymy. The report ends with a conclusion.

## **Part 1 – Steering Committee and Provincial Organization**

### **■ Members of the Toponymy Steering Committee**

Bernard-Marie Thériault  
Chairperson

Elizabeth Augustine  
Member

Susan Blair  
Member

Matthieu LeBlanc  
Member

Elizabeth McGahan  
Member

Marjorie Polchies  
Member

Fidèle Thériault  
Member

Jean Gaudet  
Special Advisor

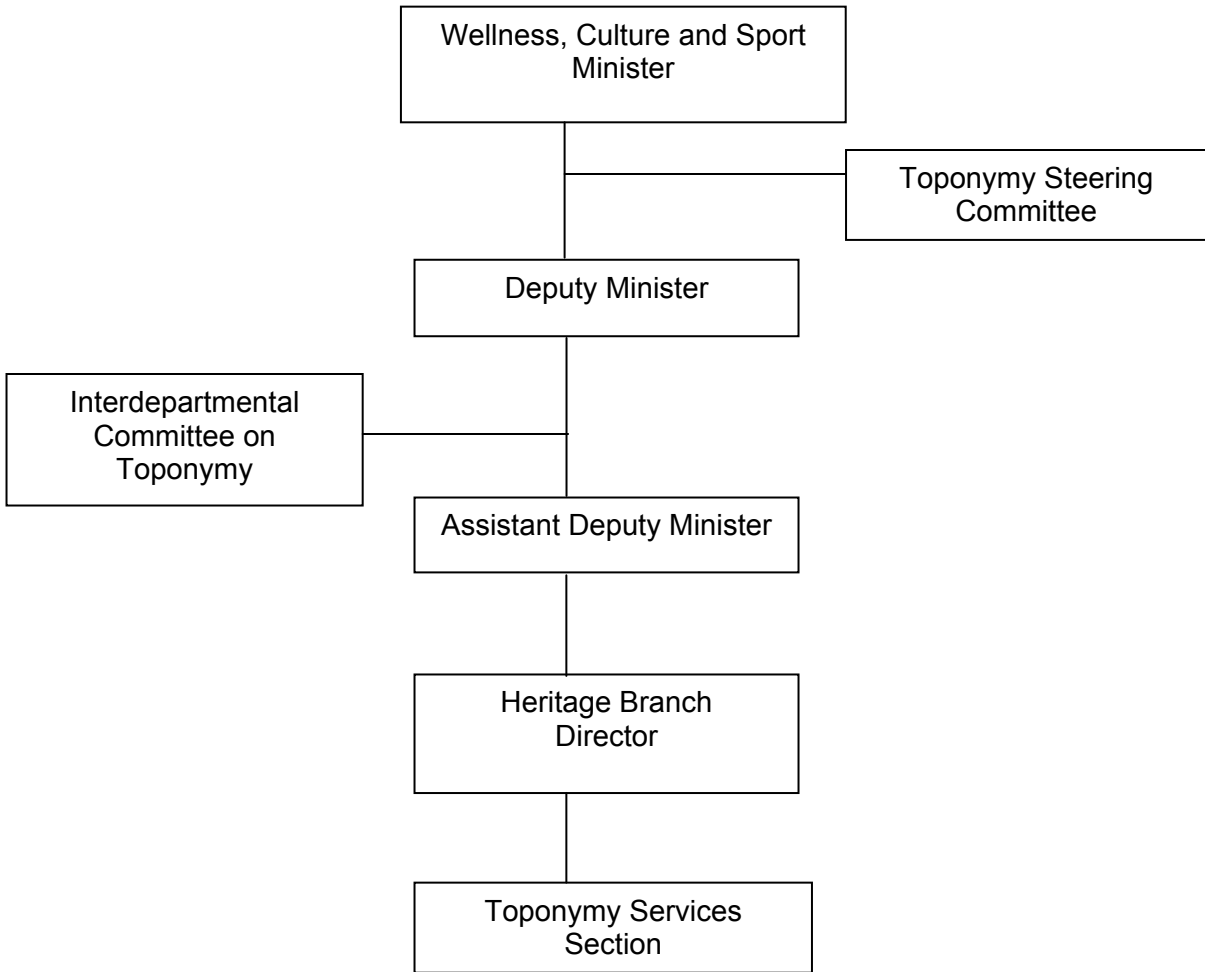
Gilles Bourque<sup>1</sup>  
Manager/Secretary

The Steering Committee is a public mechanism. Its composition is intended to reflect the province's cultural diversity. Accordingly, the Anglophone, Aboriginal (Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq), and Francophone communities are each represented by two members chosen for that purpose and for their knowledge of the province and their expertise in history, linguistics, or other fields related to toponymy.

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<sup>1</sup> Owing to an extended leave of absence, Andrée C. Godin has been appointed acting manager (July 2008).

## ■ Organization Chart



The Steering Committee is a public mechanism made up of members chosen from the community. It reports to the Minister of Wellness, Culture and Sport, who is the provincial authority in toponymic matters. The Toponymy Services manager is the only permanent employee assigned to toponymy. The manager is responsible for administering toponymy-related activities, ensuring coordination and liaison between the various entities, and representing the province on the Geographical Names Board of Canada.

## ■ Mandate

The New Brunswick Toponymy Steering Committee is responsible for examining requests pertaining to the new naming or name changes of existing places and geographic features (such as rivers, lakes, mountains, marshes, islands, etc.) and for making recommendations to the Minister responsible for toponymy.

## Roles and responsibilities

- Evaluate information and participate in research on topics concerning new names or proposed name changes for places and geographic features in the province;
- Comply with the statutes and regulations currently in force in New Brunswick;
- Recommend policies for future orientation relating to toponymic matters in New Brunswick;
- Advise and make recommendations to the Minister concerning the names of places and geographic features, as well as the appropriateness or spelling of toponyms;
- Develop toponymy awareness tools;
- Gather comments from the public on toponymic matters when necessary and disseminate the official toponyms of New Brunswick;
- Advise New Brunswick's official representative on the Geographical Names Board of Canada;
- Give advice to the departments with naming authority (bridges, roads, municipalities, local service districts, protected areas, etc.); and
- Prepare an annual report.

### ■ Provincial organization

In 2008, the provincial government assigned responsibility for toponymy to the Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport, whose Minister became the main authority in toponymic matters.

Previously, in August 2006, the government had set up a **Toponymy Services Section** within that same department and hired a manager. This section was made responsible for administering toponymy-related activities. The manager also serves as the provincial representative on the Geographical Names Board of Canada.

A few months later, in October 2006, an **Interdepartmental Committee on Toponymy** was established, made up of representatives of twelve (12) government departments and agencies,<sup>2</sup> for the purpose of identifying toponymy-related needs, ensuring a standard, consistent approach, and communicating the decisions throughout government. Since the establishment of this Committee, which is chaired by the Director of the Heritage Branch, a coordination and liaison role has been added to the duties of the Toponymy Services Section manager.

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<sup>2</sup> Local Government, Transportation, Tourism and Parks, Natural Resources, Service New Brunswick, Environment, Aboriginal Affairs, Intergovernmental Affairs (Francophonie), Supply and Services, Public Safety, Wellness, Culture and Sport, Official Languages Commissioner (observer).

Lastly, on February 4, 2008, the government added to the provincial organization by establishing a **Toponymy Steering Committee** and announcing its composition and mandate: to study requests for new names and name changes and make recommendations to the Minister responsible.

The Steering Committee is made up of seven members: a bilingual chairperson and two representatives from each of the two official linguistic groups and the First Nations (Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq). A special advisor with practical experience in the field of toponymy is serving as a resource person during the Committee's first mandate. The term of office of half the Committee members and the chairperson is three years while the term of the remaining half is two years. There is the possibility of renewal for a second consecutive term in the same position.

The staff of the Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport supports the Steering Committee by coordinating the work, doing research, and drafting reports. The manager ensures liaison between the two committees.

## Part 2 – Main Activities

### ■ Highlights

- Announcement of the Steering Committee's composition

On February 4, 2008, the government announced the establishment of a Toponymy Steering Committee, its composition, and its mandate. It is a public mechanism “that will allow members of interested communities to participate in the identification and establishment of place names throughout New Brunswick.”<sup>3</sup>

- Meetings

The Steering Committee went to work promptly and held five meetings, at which simultaneous interpretation facilitated discussions between the participants from the various linguistic and cultural communities. These meetings were all held in Fredericton.

- Adoption of principles and procedures

At its first meeting, the Steering Committee adopted the Geographical Names Board of Canada's *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming 2001* as a frame of reference to assist it in its deliberations on proposed toponyms. These principles and procedures will be adapted to the New Brunswick context where appropriate.

- Adoption of tools

Also at its first meeting, the Steering Committee approved a Place or Feature Name Proposal form that interested persons can use to submit naming or name change requests. The form was made available in paper and electronic format and was subsequently amended slightly to make proposers more accountable and avoid excessive bureaucracy. Also, a website was developed and activated.

- Establishment of a work plan

On the basis of the roles and responsibilities assigned to it when it was set up, the Steering Committee outlined a work plan consisting of eight items, which it placed in order of priority.

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<sup>3</sup> News release, *Toponymy Steering Committee members named*, February 4, 2008.

- Requests handled

During its first year of operation, the Steering Committee examined the names of 27 places and geographic features. Some of these cases had been brought to the attention of government many years ago, whereas others were more recent. In addition to consultation with the manager since his appointment in 2006, the Committee also dealt with a few requests for advice. Lastly, a report<sup>4</sup> prepared following an observation day held on the Acadian Peninsula in January 2008 and involving some twenty communities was studied by the Toponymy Services Section and the chairperson.

- Recommendations and decisions

The Steering Committee submitted a first series of nine (9) recommendations<sup>5</sup> to the Minister responsible for toponymy for the province. Four of those recommendations concerned requests for francization of the official toponyms of Acadian Peninsula communities; three of them concerned requests for francization of watercourse names; and the other two concerned requests for English names for a watercourse and a geographic feature.

The Committee also prepared three procedures related to the naming process and responded to two requests for advice that had been submitted to it.

- Identification of concerns

The Committee began discussing a number of concerns: the catching up to be done with respect to toponymy in the province, the concerns of the Acadian community about signage, the linguistic duality requirements, the consideration to be given to Aboriginal names, and the consequences of the implementation of the 911 system in the 1990s. In addition, there is reluctance on the part of the general public, especially Francophones, to accept the establishment of a Steering Committee instead of a real toponymy board like the ones established in other provincial jurisdictions.

- First year as a trial and learning period

For the great majority of the members, the Steering Committee's first year of operation has been the very first period of time they have spent examining and discussing toponymic cases. To help them understand the subject, resource persons were invited to speak on different aspects of toponymy at the meetings.

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<sup>4</sup> Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick – Alliance SAANB-Péninsule acadienne section, *Rapport d'observation – Affichage commerciale et signalisation routière – 2008 – Péninsule acadienne*, submitted to the Steering Committee in September 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Meeting with Hon. Hédard Albert, Minister of Wellness, Culture and Sport, on March 13, 2008.

- Toponymy Services Section manager's extended leave of absence  
The Steering Committee benefited tremendously from the support it received from the Wellness, Culture and Sport administration and staff, for which it is very grateful. However, the Committee's operations were disrupted by the duly approved absence of the Toponymy Services Section manager. Another department staff member was assigned to the position on an acting basis, enabling the Committee to maintain its established schedule and continue to work on cases.

- Priority given to Acadian Peninsula requests  
Since the World Acadian Congress is being held on the Acadian Peninsula in the summer of 2009, the Steering Committee gave special attention to the toponymic concerns and naming requests it received from that region.

## ■ Results

This part of the report sets out the Steering Committee's achievements in relation to the anticipated results. The Committee understands that although some of the results obtained are short-term in nature or measured on an annual basis, the real impact of its work will become apparent in the long term.

### ***Evaluate requests for name changes or establishment of new names***

During its first year of operation, the Steering Committee received 27 requests. Several of them (4) were outstanding when the Toponymy Services Section was set up in 2006, with some dating back as far as 1987, whereas 4 others were submitted not long after that. So most of the requests (70%) were submitted after the Steering Committee was established, many of them as a result of the preparations being made in the Acadian Peninsula for the World Acadian Congress to be held in the summer of 2009.

In addition, two requests for advice were examined: one concerning the name to be given to a ferry and the other on the translation of generic terms.

A report prepared following an observation day in some twenty Acadian Peninsula communities<sup>6</sup> was examined as well, in particular by the acting manager and the Steering Committee chair. The toponymic concerns raised in the report were shared with the Steering Committee members, and the observations relating to highway signage, which made up the greater part of the report, were forwarded to the Department of Transportation for follow-up.

A researcher was hired on contract to assist the acting manager with the historical documentation relating to one series of requests.

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<sup>6</sup> Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick – Alliance SAANB-Péninsule acadienne chapter, op. cit.

### ***Make recommendations concerning the cases examined***

The Steering Committee expressed opinions on 13 requests for new names or name changes. In 9 of those cases, it made recommendations to the minister responsible: 4 of them for francization of the official toponyms of Acadian Peninsula communities, 3 of them for francization of the names of watercourses, one of them for official recognition of the English name of a watercourse unnamed until 1994, and one of them to name a geographic feature.

### ***Collaborate on the establishment of standards and guidelines***

In addition to adopting basic principles and procedures, the Steering Committee drafted three procedures: one on the name request process, one on naming of ferries, and one on translation of generic terms.

### ***Implement a process for holding public meetings or forums***

This objective was discussed a number of times in meetings of the Steering Committee, which tried to identify the different components of the process. Given the complexity of this matter and the steep learning curve faced by the Steering Committee members with respect to the field of toponymy itself, no decision has been made on the process as yet. The tenor of the discussions so far suggests that there will be no set formula applicable in all cases; instead, it will be an open process adapted to the nature of the cases and their importance at the provincial level, while taking into account the communities involved.

### ***Identify problems relating to toponymy***

The Steering Committee has begun to identify a certain number of problems relating to toponymy. Some were apparent from the time the Steering Committee was established, whereas others started to become apparent as the members examined requests for names and became aware of the complexity and ramifications of the field of toponymy itself. Still others had already been identified by researchers such as William F. Ganong<sup>7</sup> and Alan Rayburn,<sup>8</sup> who studied, indexed, or simply wrote about place names in the province and their origins.

One of the problems apparent at the outset was the fact that a Steering Committee had been established and mandated to make recommendations, whereas public opinion was more in favour of establishing a board, as other provincial jurisdictions had done. Also, there was a lot of catching up to do, since the first real mechanisms (the Toponymy Services Section and the Interdepartmental Committee on Toponymy) were not established until 45 years after the responsibility for toponymy had been transferred from Ottawa in 1961.

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<sup>7</sup> William Ganong, *The Historical Development of the Place Nomenclature of New Brunswick*.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Rayburn, *Geographical names of New Brunswick*, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, Ottawa, 1975.

The predominance of the English language in the linguistic landscape, including highway signage, the province's officially bilingual status, and the impact on small rural communities of the implementation of the 911 system, which caused some place names to disappear, are examples of problems that are becoming more apparent as requests are examined.

Ganong pointed out that the deficiencies of the existing nomenclature consist in “its lack of commemoration of many of the founders of the province, its failure to reflect certain of its historical events, and in the large number of very trivial names which have been recently given to settlements.” These deficiencies and other concerns such as the consideration to be given to Aboriginal names are examples of issues the Committee should consider anew in the future.

Another problem in addition to those listed above is the number of jurisdictions involved in toponymy and the varying degrees of responsibility they have with respect to place names. Some examples include the *Municipalities Act* (names of new municipalities), the *Parks Act* (names of provincial parks), and the *Education Act* (names of schools).

#### ***Examine and propose possible toponymic initiatives to be undertaken***

There is some overlap between this objective and the preceding one, and the initiatives it refers to might consist of following up on the problems identified. Moreover, the Steering Committee has started to identify some other possible initiatives, such as a study on English toponyms in predominantly Francophone regions of the province.

#### **■ Participation**

- The Steering Committee chairperson participated as an observer during a focus day on toponymy and street names, organized by the Conseil pour l'aménagement du français au Nouveau-Brunswick Inc. (CAFNB). The theme of this event, which took place in Bathurst on February 28, 2008, was *La gestion des noms de lieux et de rues : un défi* [management of place names and street names: a challenge].
- The Steering Committee chairperson represented New Brunswick at the annual meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC), held in Québec City on October 2 and 3, 2008. This was an opportunity to inform those in attendance about the Committee and its role in toponymy in the province and to exchange ideas and receive offers of collaboration. We are pleased to report that we received excellent support and valuable assistance from the GNBC and the Commission de toponymie du Québec.

- On November 18, 2008, the website *Where is Home? New Brunswick Communities Past and Present – a virtual encyclopaedia of thousands of place names of N.B. communities* was launched at the New Brunswick Provincial Archives. On that occasion, the Steering Committee chairperson gave a speech on toponyms. One member of the audience was Alan Rayburn, researcher and author of the outstanding work *Geographical Names of New Brunswick*,<sup>9</sup> which is often used as a reference by the Steering Committee and by all those interested in toponymy in the province.
- The chairperson and the acting manager participated as observers in the annual general meeting of the Conseil pour l'aménagement du français au Nouveau-Brunswick, held in Moncton on November 21, 2008.

### **Part 3 – Historical Overview**

In 2006, the provincial government recognized the importance of establishing mechanisms to deal with toponymy-related matters. Here is a brief overview<sup>10</sup> of the development of the provincial structures now in place.

The need for a toponymic authority for Canada was recognized in the late 1800s, when resource mapping beyond the frontiers of settlement and extensive immigration made it an urgent matter to manage the country's geographical names and standardize the naming of particular features. To meet that need, the Geographic Board of Canada was set up in 1897 by order-in-council. In 2000, after several name changes, that agency became the Geographical Names Board of Canada.

Prior to 1897 in New Brunswick, geographical names were at first assigned by explorers and cartographers, and then by historians and authors (Fisher, Gesner, and Ganong) or by surveyors and priests. Some names were also taken from travel narratives by well-known people (Plessis, Gubbins, McGregor).

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Rayburn, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Several points are taken from the preface of the Geographic Names Board of Canada's *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming 2001*.

From 1897 to 1961, the provinces and territories were invited to provide advice on the use and spelling of geographical names, although the decisions were ultimately made in Ottawa. However, a few provinces did establish their own boards. During that period in New Brunswick, names were imposed and made official with the development of railroads and the establishment of post offices. English place names are predominant throughout the province, because the public servants and administrators of the day were close to their British roots and to their education.

Starting in 1961, the provinces assumed full responsibility for geographical names. In New Brunswick, efforts were tentative at first. Some corrections were made in the existing nomenclature, and some legislation was passed. This phase lasted until 1972.

From then until 2006, toponymic responsibility was transferred to several different departments, and further legislation and regulations were adopted. It was during this period that A. Rayburn produced his important work *Geographical Names of New Brunswick* (1975), which is still used as a reference.

In the fall of 2006, a Toponymy Services Section was established and a permanent employee was hired to manage it. A little later that same year, an Interdepartmental Committee on Toponymy consisting of representatives of 12 departments and agencies was set up to deal with toponymic matters within government and to facilitate a consistent approach.

In 2008, the Department of Wellness, Culture and Sport was made responsible for toponymy, and in February, Minister Hédard Albert announced the composition of a Toponymy Steering Committee for the province. In his announcement, he pointed out that “the names of places and geographic features reflect our heritage and the realities that our ancestors identified when settling the territory.” He added that “the Steering Committee’s work will allow us to be respectful of our cultural communities and allow interested communities to participate in naming the geographic features located in their region.”<sup>11</sup>

This first Toponymy Steering Committee is responsible for examining requests for naming and name changes and for making recommendations to the Minister. It is a public mechanism that will allow interested individuals and communities to participate actively in the naming process.

At the annual meeting of the Geographical Names Board of Canada in October 2008, New Brunswick offered to host the 2010 annual meeting of the GNBC.

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<sup>11</sup> Hon. Hédard Albert, News release, Toponymy Steering Committee members named, February 4, 2008

## ■ Conclusion

This annual report introduces and describes the Toponymy Steering Committee, the organization now in place to deal with toponymic matters, and lists its main activities during the first year and its achievements in relation to the expected outcomes.

The Toponymy Steering Committee has faced a number of significant challenges. It is the first public mechanism established to evaluate naming or name change requests, and it managed to submit a first series of recommendations to a minister responsible for toponymy a few months later. That challenge was all the greater because this was a new experience for almost all of its members. The second challenge was to begin the catching up that needs to be done in the area of toponymy, even though the one manager hired was absent. The Committee got started right away on the requests that had been left outstanding because of the lack of any real structures. The third challenge was to become accepted by the general public, especially Francophones, who had been lobbying the government authorities for a long time to set up a board that would have an influence on the province's linguistic landscape.

In light of this first year's activities, the circumstances in which it has worked, and the outcomes it has achieved, we consider that the Toponymy Steering Committee has met the expectations set out for it.