

Ren Vasiliev, Department of Geography
Sabbatical Leave Proposal for Fall 2007
Project: A book on Adirondack place and geographic
feature names.

Introduction

I am requesting a sabbatical leave to write a second book on some placenames in New York State. My first sabbatical leave resulted in *From Abbots to Zurich: New York State Placenames*, published by Syracuse University Press. It consisted of origins of the names of about 2500 villages, cities, and other populated places in New York (out of a total of over 6000 places). This second book focuses on the names of populated places and geographic features in the Adirondack region. There are few populated places in the north compared to the number of geographic features (rivers, streams, mountains, ponds, lakes, and the like). There is a need for a book that covers the name origins of these features. I am constantly being asked, now that my first book has been out for a couple of years, why this and that lake or mountain or other geographic thing out there is named what it is.

Syracuse University Press has again expressed an interest in my project (see attached email). At this writing, I am waiting to hear for a decision. If Syracuse University Press declines this book, the Center for American Places has expressed interest in my work. I am confident that there is enough interest in this topic that someone will publish the book.

Methodology

The names of places and geographic features in New York State are contained in the United States Geological Survey's Geographic Names Information System (USGS GNIS). I have downloaded all the names of populated places, rivers, lakes, summits, and other geographic features that are contained in the GNIS for the counties in northern New York State. The files contains thousands of names that are found on the New York State topographic maps produced by the USGS. I am currently editing this massive list of names to reflect the actual number about which I would write. After this editing is done, I will focus on collecting information on the origins of these names. Some of this research has already been done during the compilation for *From Abbots to Zurich: New York State Placenames*.

Origins of placenames in New York are found in 19th century county histories and gazetteers, and in other papers, both published and not, many of which can be found in the New York State Library and the New York State Archives and Records in Albany, as well as in other libraries around the state.

I am currently collecting information for each of the relevant counties through interlibrary loan, antique book dealers, and through travel to libraries and historical societies in the area whose collections do not circulate, although this last is limited because of my teaching responsibilities.

I have attached a copy of my proposal to Syracuse University Press. This document will provide more detail about the book and its proposed content.

Timetable

The necessity for an extended leave for a project such as this is primarily to have the time for undivided attention to the research and the writing of this material. Collecting the material and writing up the origins for each placename are time-consuming tasks. Some of this work can be done while I teach, e.g., the editing of placenames to be included in the book and collecting published materials through interlibrary loan. However, some collection needs to be done on site, and all of the final writing needs to be done with no interruption.

My tentative schedule is as follows, for a sabbatical leave in Fall 2007:

- Summer 2007: Travel through the Adirondack region, collecting information from historical societies and libraries;
- September through December 2007: Writing the book.

Contribution of Completed Project

A book that serves as a reference work to others is a valuable thing. There is no one comprehensive source for the name origins of places and features in the Adirondack Region.

Writing this book and having it published by Syracuse University Press would continue to enhance my reputation as a researcher in toponymy (study of placenames). It would bring attention to Geneseo as the home of this research.

Furthermore, any geographic research enhances my teaching of the subject; this work, in particular, would help in the Geography of United States course, as well as for a future Geography of New York State course that I am interested in teaching..

Prior Activity

My sabbatical leave in the Spring of 2001 resulted in the publication of *From Abbots to Zurich: New York State Placenames*. Since then, I have spoken a number of times about the subject at public libraries and historical societies.

I currently sit on the Committee of Geographic Names of New York State in which we make recommendations to the Federal Board on Geographic Names about new names or name changes in New York State. This appointment has given me a look into the current placename debates in New York State and, specifically, in the Adirondack region.