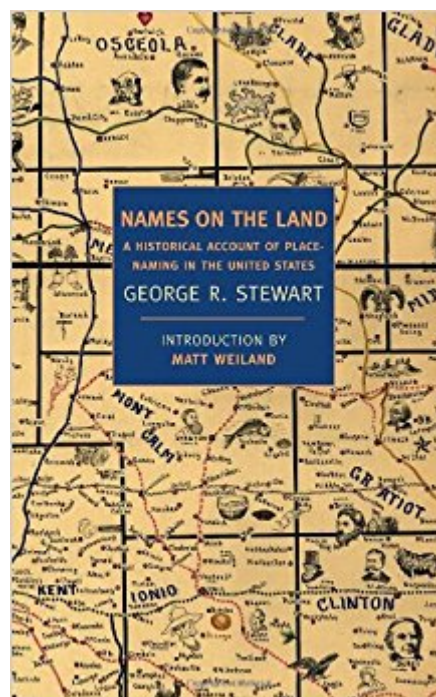




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# Names On The Land: A Historical Account Of Place-Naming In The United States (New York Review Books Classics)



## Synopsis

George R. Stewart's classic study of place-naming in the United States was written during World War II as a tribute to the varied heritage of the nation's peoples. More than half a century later, *Names on the Land* remains the authoritative source on its subject, while Stewart's intimate knowledge of America and love of anecdote make his book a unique and delightful window on American history and social life. *Names on the Land* is a fascinating and fantastically detailed panorama of language in action. Stewart opens with the first European names in what would later be the United States—Ponce de León's flowery Florida, Cortés's semi-mythical isle of California, and the red Rio Colorado—before going on to explore New England, New Amsterdam, and New Sweden, the French and the Russian legacies, and the unlikely contributions of everybody from border ruffians to Boston Brahmins. These lively pages examine where and why Indian names were likely to be retained; nineteenth-century fads that gave rise to dozens of Troys and Athens and to suburban Parkside, Brookmont, and Woodcrest Manors; and deep and enduring mysteries such as why "Arkansas" is Arkansaw, except of course when it isn't. *Names on the Land* will engage anyone who has ever wondered at the curious names scattered across the American map. Stewart's answer is always a story—one of the countless stories that lie behind the rich and strange diversity of the USA.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A surprisingly terrifying short novel about children kidnapped by pirates, elevated from its silliness by surprising moments of violence and introspection, as well as repeated flourishes of literary brilliance. Also, it’s funny.” —Emily Temple, Lit Hub

“It chronicles the nomenclatural adventures of explorers, legislators, and common folk and amounts to a fizzy refresher on America’s past and her character. It proceeds in a spruce voice that’s a model for producing scholarship that doesn’t feel leaden, and it further inspires meditations on tricks of rhetoric and laws of euphony...Perhaps most importantly, it is an aid to fighting tedium: You are about to have several hundred conversations touching on the matter of where your interlocutor is from, and Stewart gives you a map for navigating this chatter with a bit of style.” —Troy Patterson, Slate

George R. Stewart, midcentury novelist and co-founder of the American Name Society, gave onomastics a good name with his classic *Names on the Land* (1945), a learned and rollicking act of patriotic toponymy. Its republication, with a graceful introduction by Matt Weiland, is a welcome reminder that the polyglot medley on our maps is, as Mr. Stewart says, ‘a chief glory of our heritage’...few authors or books are more American—in every good sense of that word -- than George R. Stewart and *Names on the Land*.” —Wall Street Journal

“Stewart’s impressive research demonstrates exactly what is in a name.” —The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

“If the United States is the greatest poem, as Whitman once wrote, then surely the Rand-McNally Road Atlas is our national CliffsNotes. Google Maps are dandy, but there’s nothing like pulling the old coverless atlas off the shelf and pondering a green-dotted scenic route between two unvisited and evocatively named points. It’s too late to plan a summer road trip, but lately I’ve been supplementing my insomniac atlas-reading with George R. Stewart’s *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States*.” —Jennifer Schuessler, The New York Times Papercuts blog

“Names on the Land was first published in 1945 and has remained a classic in the field of onomastics--the study of proper names and their meanings.” —Los Angeles Times

A “masterwork.” —Minneapolis Star-Tribune

“A classic work on American place names by George R. Stewart. I’m a place-name geek but didn’t know about this gem until I read the book recently. First published in 1945 and newly reissued (NYRB Classics) it’s a history of the United States told through its place names. Stewart exhaustively surveys our geographic labels, a chaotic but charming blend of anglicized American Indian words (Wisconsin), transplanted place names (Boston), poetic impulse (Martha’s Vineyard), twisted foreign phrases (Broadway, from the Dutch Breede Wegh) and salesmanship (Frostproof, Fla).” —Columbus Dispatch

“You’ve likely heard me before on the lost-classic glories of New York Review Books,

and this is a reprint of a typically idiosyncratic and cult-beloved World War II-era reference about just what the title says." --OMNIVORACIOUS at .com

“Unusual and excellent...put together in a fascinating manner...The style is also enchanting and leaves an impression that is not quickly forgotten...Here is a book, in short, that may be read frontwards or backwards or from the middle in either direction and be fully enjoyed." -American Speech

"As fascinating as the details are the fine accounts of periods and trends: the Royal names of colonial times, the names of heroes of the Revolution, abstract names and the Civil War...Indian names, French names, Spanish names, name-giving by Congress, name-giving by explorers and pioneers, by land-speculators, by railroaders, by rich men, poor men, beggar men, all acting according to the spirit of their times in this wonderful land of accelerated history." -American Literature

"The result of careful research into an absorbing narrative...Interest of Americans in American geographical names as a subject for research is at least as old as our history as a republic." -Geographical Review

Encyclopedic in scope, "this book with its satisfactory index will be used as a dictionary. And the disappointment of occasionally not finding what one seeks will be assuaged by the illuminating charm of this remarkable key to our history, our language, our society."-American Literature

"A book so interestingly and delightfully written is certain to have wide appeal...Like all really good books, regardless of subject, it has light to cast: something of which there seems to be never enough to go around." -Journal of American Folklore

George R. Stewart (1895–1980) was born in Pennsylvania and educated at Princeton. He received his Ph.D. in English literature from Columbia University in 1922, and joined the English faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1924. He was a toponymist, founding member of the American Name Society, and a prolific and highly successful writer of novels and of popular nonfiction, especially dealing with U.S. history and with the American West.

This is a well-researched, educational, fascinating and engaging book on the stories behind over 2,000 names of states, counties, cities, towns, mountains, rivers, streams, lakes, mining camps, crossroads, and other places in the United States. The book is divided into 46 chapters, presented in chronological order from the earliest European explorations of North America to the admission of Alaska and Hawaii as the 49th and 50th states in 1959. This book is a delightful read for anyone with an interest in word origins, history, geography, travel, and maps.

Behind every name there's a story and Stewart's tome is a staggering monument of scholarship.

One can only imagine the time and resources he put into this book which tells the origin of many of the place names that today are so familiar. And he reveals the naming processes, from adopting Indian appellations to names of explorers, to descriptions of events that took place there, to artificially contrived names, to names that evolved, to names brought from abroad -- in other words, the whole gamut of naming places. Stewart's telling of the story behind so many names adds a new and pleasureable dimension to American history. This is a book you read slowly, savoring the names on the land as they tell their story.

Wallace Stegner was not only a great writer ("Angle of Repose") and teacher (Stanford English Dept. who mentored people like Harriet Doerr), he was also a great lover of writing. His UC Berkeley colleague and friend George Stewart appeared on Stegner's list of "must read" Western American writers for "Names on the Land" as classic non-fiction and for fiction ("Earth Abides" that he recommends as reading in tandem with Miller's classic "A Canticle for Leibowitz"). Dr. Stegner points out that Stewart was not prolific as a writer and, for that reason, is sometimes overlooked as a star in Western American literature. "Names on the Land" underscores the painstaking process of good writing as it was practiced by Stewart and very much appreciated by Stegner. The research is incredibly precise and reliable; the language is as clear and fast running as a mountain stream; and the effect on the reader is overwhelming. In an era of instant gratification and 10 second sound bites, "Names on the Land" doesn't seem "contemporary." But for a thoughtful reader of books, Stewart's masterpiece merits a place of honor in his or her permanent collection and (as Stegner admitted) a lifetime of periodic re-reading and reference.

It is always humbling to discover how limited my education is in key areas, especially geography. Names on a map that I have seen dozens of times, cities and towns I have visited but never given deep thought to, and the evolution of language are all present in this slim volume. I found myself surprised that I had read thirty or forty pages without realizing any passage of time. I lost myself in this book -- like exploring familiar territory for the very first time. An engaging, worthwhile, illuminating book.

Highly readable and appealing, this history is no cutsey look at how places in the US got their names; it's a page-turner of intriguing detail, with appropriate respect for NA Indians. Mr Stewart touches on subjects as varied as the War Between the States, how Oklahoma got its name, the prevalent use of "-burgh" in the eastern sections, and "Noah Webster's spelling book." Find a copy of

NAMES ON THE LAND if you have any interest in finding yet another clue as to how the US got to be the way it is today.

So far I'm only about 1/3 of the way through "Names on the Land," but I'm enthralled. The sub-title, "A Historical Account of Place Naming..." is right on. The book approaches its subject from a historical perspective. The reader travels with the early explorers as they encounter landmarks on their journeys, so one learns about the namers and their times, as well as about the names they left behind them. Based on my reading so far, I can strongly recommend this book.

Came on time and in excellent condition. No problems. Thanks.

A very good informant tie book. This is the best about place names in the United States that you will ever get. Really well written and has a very interesting perspective.

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