

Oregon Names Provide Fascinating Study of Experiences of Settlers

By Mrs. C. B. Chamberlin
(continued from last week)

In an earlier edition, Mrs. Chamberlin discussed the influence of legends and folk tales upon Oregon's geographic names. One of the early day stories often heard in Curry county concerned the tribe of wild men said to inhabit the upper reaches of the Sixes river country.

Several white men claim to have actually seen some of these grotesque creatures and believe they were responsible for the murder of several early prospectors who located a rich out-cropping of gold-bearing quartz on Benson creek, a branch of the Sixes river. According to old-timers in that vicinity there was once a legend among the Indians that told of strange savages covered with yellow hair or fur and almost giants in stature, who prowled the mountains and canyons of that wild, almost impenetrable back country.

The affectionate way in which the early settlers regarded the communities where they ended their long and wearisome overland journeys are expressed in such names as Pleasant Home, Sublimity, Paradise, Sweet Home, Glad Tidings and many others, and thoughts of the homes they left so far behind are echoed in the names of Dallas, Peoria, Dayton, Detroit, Springfield and Salem.

That many of the early settlers were humble, God-fearing folk is reflected in the Biblical names found throughout Oregon. Lebanon, Goshen, Damascus, Jordan Valley and the unusual Two O'clock Church near Portland. God's Valley is another odd name that arouses one's curiosity. It is said that it was named by John Hunt and E. K. Stovell who were hunting elk on the North Fork of the Nehalem river many years ago and followed a trail up over a ridge and down into an unknown valley where they found and shot several elk. As they climbed back up the ridge and were leaving the little valley behind one man turned to the other and asked, "What shall we call this valley?" The other pondered a moment and then replied, "Well, we needed meat and God sent us to this valley, so let's call it God's Valley."

It is evident that early Oregonians liked their "vittles" by the multitude of names concerning food they bestowed on Oregon landmarks like Johnny Cake Mountain, Butter creek, and Bun creek, Hash Peak, Coffee creek and Sugar creek, Salt creek, Milk creek, Prune Hill, Soup creek, Tomato Camp and Puddin Hill. To cook all this food they provided the community of Bakoven, Coffeepot creek and Fryingpan creek. There is

also Table Mountain to serve it on and Spoon creek, Knife creek, Tincup creek, Sugarbowl and Pitcher creeks with which to set the table and Refrigerator creek to preserve the left-overs!

Tools were a very necessary part of pioneer life and so we have Hammercreek, Hatchet creek, Nails creek, Toolbox Meadow, and Grindstone creek. And money must have been a very scarce article by such names as Two-bit Spring, Tencent Lake and Eight Dollar Mountain.

It must have been washday when Soap creek, Tub Run, Washout creek, and Washboard Ridge were named.

Wild animals naturally furnished the names for many Oregon landmarks like Wildcat and Wolf creeks, and there are more than fifty Oregon streams named Panther or Cougar. In the realm of domestic animals are such odd names as Horse Heaven, Cow Swamp, Dog Lake, Porky Lake, Kitten and Poodle creeks. Lamb Butte, Rooster Rock, Chicken Hill, Goose Nest Peak and Goose Egg Peak.

In the humorous vein are the communities of Ragic (cigar spelled backward) and Robins Nest whose name was derived from the early home of the Episcopal bishop, Philander Chase, who said he called his home Robin's Nest because "it was built of mud and sticks and was full of young ones." Then there is Hell-off, a community that once existed near the mouth of the Nehalem river, so named by the early loggers whose difficulties in logging the area led them to describe a flat near the mouth of the river where they made camp as being "just off hell."

Detail maps such as those given out by the Forestry Service are peppered with many unique or incongruous names like Plush, Velvet creek, Hole-in-the-ground, Nasty Rock and many others.

No collection of Oregon place names would be complete without the "family" of mountains; Husband, Wife, Three Sisters, Little Brother, Bachelor, and Maiden. Oregon visitors are always thrilled by the awesome majesty of the Cascades while Oregonians who live practically in their shadows seem no longer to be inspired by hero worship of these high and mighty peaks but treat them casually like one of the family. With heads still unbowed these mighty mountains seem to have come down to earth and, like friendly household gods, make themselves at home with the humans who live at their feet. As familiar with the mountain's traits as they are with those of each member of their families you'll often hear these mountain folk speak of them in an intimate, genial sort of way, like an oldtimer who remarked, in speaking of Mount Jefferson, "Old Jeff's bin grumblin' and growlin' up there all day, we're shore to be gettin' rain or snow 'fore long now."

What's in a name? A lot when we consider when, how and by whom

that name was given. Let us hope that later generations will never frown upon these robust expressions of early Americana. May they remain forever on our maps as a constant reminder of those hardy souls who dared to battle the wilderness of a new frontier.

(Mrs. Chamberlin's intimate story of Oregon names will no doubt strike a responsive chord in many a mind and perhaps recall childhood memories as it has with us. Reading about "Old Jeff" made us think of one time when a little brother, noticing the clouds that framed Mt. Helen, called excitedly to us to "Come see Sister Helen—she dot a sunbonnet on." Mt. Helen was always Sister Helen to us.—Editor)

Times to Start Record Book of Birth Announcements

Beginning as of January 1, 1948, the Times will keep a permanent scrapbook of birth announcements. We solicit the co-operation of parents-to-be to help us make this a complete record and one that will be a valuable asset to the community in future years.

Sometime ago, we begged expectant parents to put us on the list to receive birth announcements and the response has pleased us very much. These little booklets are going into our scrapbook and we hope to have lots more of them as the years go by. We want the names of every baby born in Willamina or Grand Ronde or the surrounding area during this year. If your baby was born in 1948, it isn't too late to send us an announcement for the scrapbook, even tho the news item was published earlier in the year.

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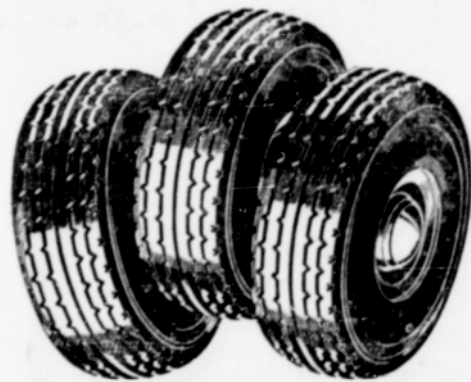
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