

Spanish Influence on Language of the West

In Names and in Some Phases of Architecture Traces Remain of Days When Spaniards Ruled Southwest.

BY J. NELSON BARRY, Spokane.
Should you ask me, whence these strange words?

Such as mustang and mosquito,
Such as alkali and stampede,
Such as tule, trail and sorghum,
Words like prairie and banana,
Like coulee, ranch and two-bits,
Alligator and tamale,
Words which sound peculiar
To some region or condition,
Yet familiar in our language?
I should answer, I should tell you
From the Frenchmen and the Spaniards.

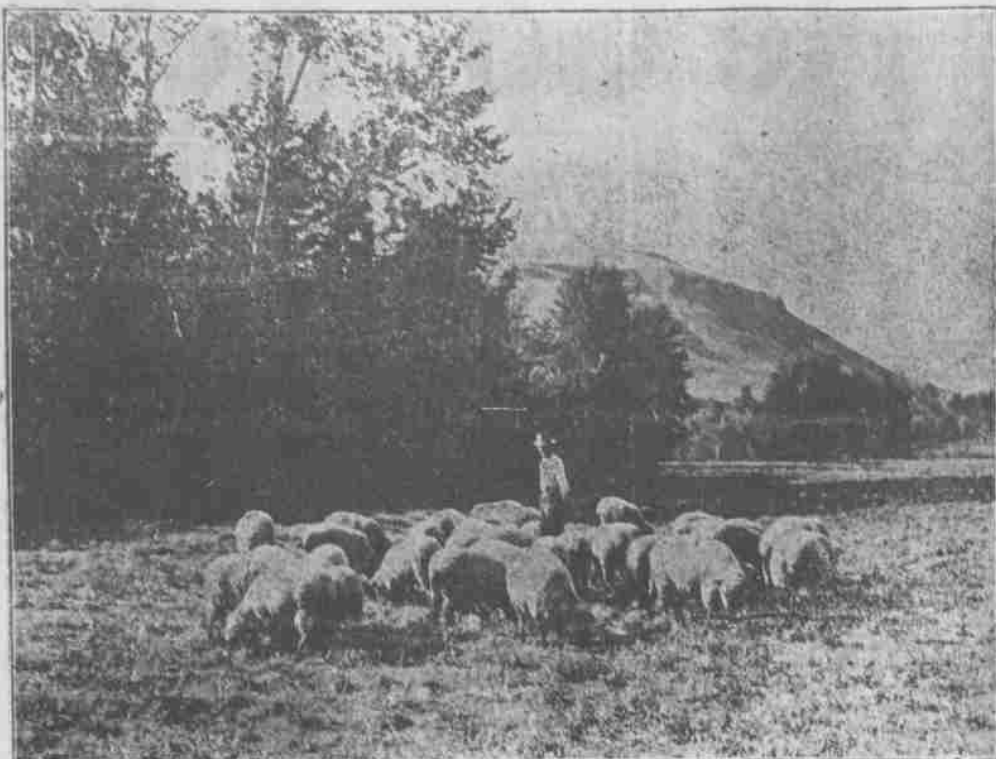
From the first whites in this country,
From those races which have been
here.

And have left these words as relics
Of their former occupation.

Odd Reminders of Spanish Settlement.

The methods of the ancient Greeks and Romans in building their houses around an open court was adopted by the Spaniards and by them introduced into America, and today this custom is still found in Oregon where sometimes the livery stable, or corral consists of a large central enclosure surrounded by sheds opening into it, which is one of the surviving memorials of the time when the southern boundary of Oregon was the northern boundary of Spanish territory.

Both the southeastern and the southwestern portions of the United States were once occupied by the Spaniards, and the flag of Spain once waved over St. Louis, Mo., and although the tide of Anglo-Saxon civilization has flowed over their ancient dominions it is but natural that there should be found here and there much that reminds one of those earliest white settlers, and it is interesting to notice how certain Spanish words have become incorporated into our language, and also how characteristic they are to those parts of the country where the Spaniard lived.



Eastern Oregon Pasturage Scene

language, but also that they should be characteristic of that section.

The Spanish rancho has become our word ranch, and their word pueblo used for the aboriginal towns is still associated with adobe, the dried mud which was the most available building material in that treeless region of scanty rainfall, while cactus and chaparral have a distinct flavor of the

son's burro, and the clerk in the railroad office in Indianapolis not being familiar with the Spanish word telegraphed that the freight car had arrived "short one bureau, long one donkey," to which General Wallace telegraphed in reply "change places with the donkey."

The Sawtooth Mountains of the west are known by the Spanish equivalent

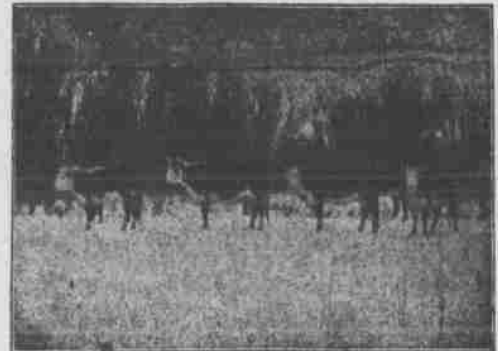
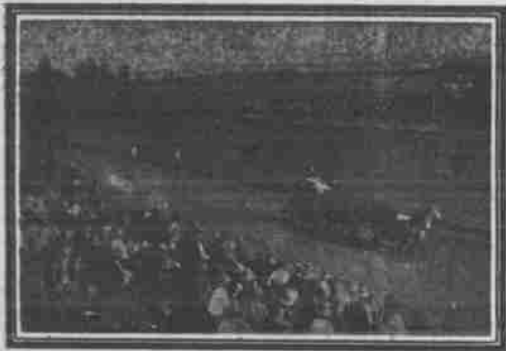
small change with the little Spanish words of "bits," they were using the system which had been customary before the United States government adopted the eight real piece as its standard for a decimal system of coinage.

The floatsmen and the jetsam on a sea beach mark not only the extent of a receding tide but also the character of what had been carried on the waters. In a similar way the era of the North American continent to which French influence has formerly extended is indicated by French names of places so widely scattered as from Montreal to St. Louis and New Orleans, and from Lake Champlain to The Dalles and Des Chutes in Oregon. Many French words which have become incorporated into our distinctively American speech suggests peculiarities of the country occupied by the French as well as of the character of their occupation.

The French were first attracted to America by the cod fishing on that part of the Atlantic coast where there are many islands, and the spelling of Maine for the mainland is said to have been the result of French influence.

Louisiana, which formerly extended over practically the entire Mississippi Valley, preserves the name of a French king and reminds us of the early French settlements on our largest river, while such French words as plantation, barge and levee recall characteristics of that region, while the French word pickayune for the ancient Spanish coin, the value of half a Spanish real, indicates the

(Continued on page eighteen.)



From the southeastern portion of the United States we have words with characteristics associated with that section—alligator, mosquito, sorghum, sassafras, savanna, negro, mulatto, quadroon and octoroon, as well as creole and picanniny.

Florida was given its name by Ponce de Leon, while Cortes gave the name California, which is a perpetual reminder of him. The dark red waters of the Colorado river gave it its Spanish name which has since been extended to the state, and in a similar way the Spanish word for

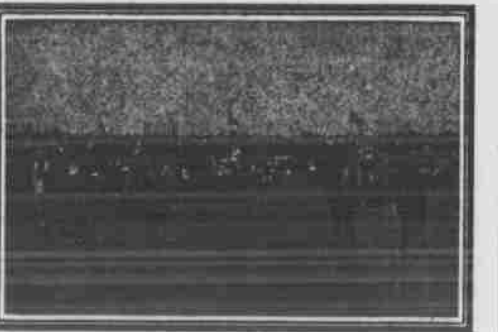
old ranges where now so much alfalfa is being cultivated.

The riding leggings of the cattlemen are called chaps, which is a shortened form of chaparrigo, while in the early days the scarcity of iron on the plains necessitated some substitute for buckles, so that the cinch was used for the girth, with the latigo, a strap to fasten it. The hackamore was a bridle without a bit, with its nasal or nose piece. The cattle were roped with a lariat, and the raw-hide ring for the noose was called a honda, while the cowboy used

valent Sierras, while canyon and llano are now familiar words to us all. The storms of the southwest have given us our words cyclone and in the southeast tornado, while other dangers are recalled by desperado and stampede.

The rushes in the western lakes are still called tules, and the miners of the early days learned from the Spaniards the terms Eldorado and bonanza. In more modern times the tamale is winning an ever-increasing popularity.

When the early miners flocked to



snow-cind mountains became the name Nevada.

The wide prairies of the southwest which were at one time part of the Spanish dominion became in time the range for the cattle of the American cowboys, and it is but natural that only that some Spanish word should have become incorporated into our

a quilt to urge his steed, whether mustang or broncho, which if of variegated color was called a pinto. A more humble animal was termed a burro, although now sometimes called the Rock Mountain canary.

It is said that when General Lew Wallace returned from Mexico he placed in his car of freight his little

California they carried with them comparatively few coins, but they found that the Spanish real which they called a "bit" was the equivalent of twelve and a half cents, so the terms so characteristic of the west, "two-bits," "six-bits," originated.

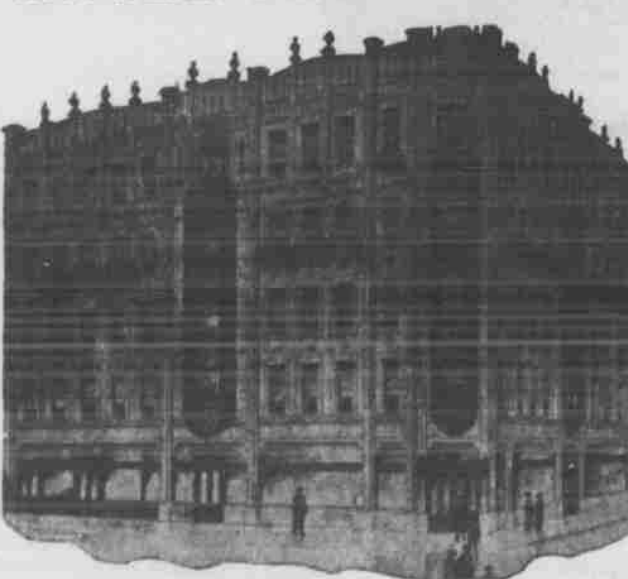
It seems strange that these terms should have any connection with our dollar mark \$, and yet the American dollar adopted for our decimal system was originally the Spanish eight real piece, although few school boys who have read in Robinson Crusoe of the old "pieces of eight" have recognized our coveted coin under that designation.

In ancient times the Dutch traders who visited the Spanish settlements in America used a silver coin known as the Thaller, which was exactly equivalent to eight Spanish reals. The name was shortened from "Joachimsthaler," the silver having been mined in the valley of Joachim in Bohemia, but the Dutch tongue pronounced the word Thaller as "Dollor."

The old method of designating the eight real piece, or dollar, seems to have been to make the figure eight and then to draw a cancellation line through it, as in many other well known abbreviations, for example cent, barrel, etc.

While examining some ancient parchments the writer of this sketch was struck with the peculiar manner in which the figure eight was written, similar to the dollar mark but with only one short downward stroke. The idea occurred that the use of the quill pen might account for this style of forming the figure, which was verified by an experiment which anyone can easily make with a quill pen. The origin of the dollar mark can be thus explained as to the old style of the figure eight with a cancellation mark to designate thallers or pieces of eight. When the California miners made

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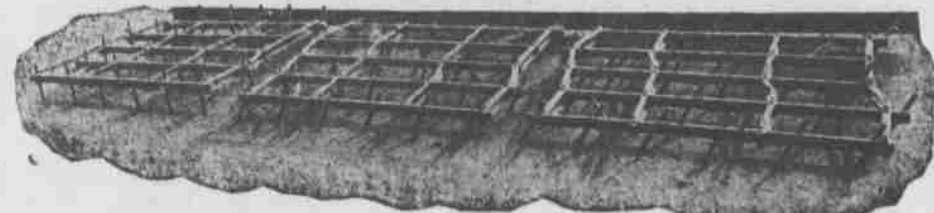
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