

::: Origin of Some Common Indian Words :::

BY J. NELSON BABBY.

How many words of Indian origin have also developed a significance of their own? The Indian word *woodchuck* is a good example. It is now used to mean a woodchuck, but it was originally applied to the fisher, *Urophycis*, the largest of the weasel family, but is now popularly applied to the *moosack* or *ground hog*, which latter term has often furnished the forerunner with an alternate for *sausage*.

Other animals, however, have retained their original names, the *moose*, or *wood-eater*, from its habit of gnawing the bark of trees, *wapiti*, the white rump, *caribou*, that poses the snow, *skunk*, *coyote*, *quickhatch* or *wolverine*, meaning hard to hit by the Indian archer, and *cougar*, which on account of its wide distribution is also designated in various localities as

ferently from a man or a bear. *alpaca*, *llama*, *tapir*, *lucrat*, *chinchilla* and *pecary*. The scratches on a "coon tree" originated the Indian name *urakun* or *racoon*, while in the far west *casaca*, the tribal name for the Indians around Walla Walla, Wash., is now applied to the Indian pony, elsewhere known by the Spanish word *mustang*. Over half of our states have Indian



an example of the many Indian words which have become incorporated into our language, and it is of interest to note how many things peculiar to America have retained their Indian

names. *Mississippi*, the great river; *Missouri*, the muddy river; *Wisconsin*, the rapid river; *Connecticut* (*Quinnituck*), the long tidal river; *Minnesota*, the whitish river; *Kansas*, the smoky river. While the same word designating an Indian tribe has become *Arkansas* by the addition of the French word for bow, the pronunciation being obscured by the French spelling as in the case of *Spokane* and *Willamette*. *Nebraska* means shallow water, and *Ohio* the beautiful river. The same word in Japan signifies good morning, and the story is told of a traveler in the land of the Mikado, supposing that the salutation was an inquiry as to his residence, replied, "No, I come from Kentucky," which also is an Indian word of uncertain meaning, although popularly supposed to signify the dark and bloody ground. The meanings of *Tennessee* and of *Oregon* are unknown.

Alaska, the mainland, has the same meaning as *Maine*; while *Massachusetts* was named from the blue hills of *Milhoon*. The derivation of *Idaho* from its snow-clad peaks is disputed. *Wyoming* is an Indian word for prairie. *Michigan*, which an Englishman once pronounced "my chicken," means fish weir, similar to *Wallers* in *Oregon*. *New Mexico* retains an Aztec word which referred to a deity, and from those same people we have *Arizona*, the small springs, where silver was found in early days, and also *Texas*, which has the same significance, friends or allies as *Dakota*. The captain of a *Mississippi* steamer is said to have given the names of states to the sleeping apartments on his boat from which the term *stateroom* originated, and being loyal to his native state, named his own room by the pilot house *Texas*, which originated the expression "Texas deck" and so became applicable to the sharp-edged surface of the cañone on which so many of the early pioneers migrated to the Oregon country.

Alabama is an unusually pleasant Indian word and means thicket clearing in allusion to the agricultural efforts of the aborigines. The name of Indian tribes have been preserved in *Utah*; *Oklahoma*, red people; *Iowa*, sleepy ones, and *Illinois*, men, the two latter having French spelling. And lastly while *Indiana* is not of Indian origin, it refers to that race.

Other Indian place names have given rise to a class of words in our language which have entirely changed their original meaning. *Hobo* applied by early New Yorkers to the poorer whites who settled across the Hudson at *Hoboken*, the pipe country, where the Indians had obtained clay for their pipes, and in a similar way *Tuckahoe*, a vegetable substance eaten by Indians became an epithet for the poor whites of southern Virginia. *Wabash*, gleaming white, was applied to the river which flowed over limestone beds and became a synonym for cheat on account of alleged delinquencies of some of the first white settlers.

When the mineral springs known to the Indians as *Saratoga* became a fashionable resort, that name was applied to the potato chips which were first popular there, and also to the huge trunks in which the belles of that day transported their hoop skirts. In a similar way a fashionable coat was named from *Tuxedo*, wolf, in

New Jersey, while *Rockaway*, sandy loam, in the same state became the name for a carriage. *Conestoga*, in Pennsylvania, named from an Indian tribe, gave its name to the huge wagons used before the advent of railroads and also to the draft horses which drew the *conestoga* wagons, while a shortened form, *stogie*, is the name of a cigar. *Potunk*, a neck or corner of land, has become familiar through its use by *verisimile* writers. It is natural that the white men should have retained the Indian names of things peculiar to this country, such as *terrapin*, made famous by *Uncle Remus*; *mahogany*, *chinkapin*, a small chestnut greatly prized by children in the south; *pecan*, a nut of wider popularity, *catalpa* and *pot-hickory*, or *hickory*, which became the nickname for one of our presidents. *Perstimon* is another tree bright red fruit of which has a most pleasantly astringent effect upon the mouths of the unsophisticated who have been induced to try to eat one. *Sequoia* or *redwood*, and *tamarack* or

hackmatack, are well known in the west, as well as the mesquit of the plains. Everyone is familiar with *potato*, *tomato*, *cocoa*, *chocolate*, *taglock*, *saava* and *ocrea*. The delicious *grapes*, *catawba* and *scuppernon* preserve Indian names which were never so associated by the red men. *Tolu* gum is popular with many, and *camas* is well known in the west. When a little boy asks the riddle: If you toss up a pumpkin what comes down? He probably has no idea that *squash* is an Indian word. *Indian corn* is now seldom called *maize*, but *hominy* is in common usage and *pone*, a cake of corn bread, is also used in the south, while *succotash* is everywhere used for stewed corn and lima beans. *Samp* *su-pawn*, or *Indian pudding*, and *sagamite* or *saginity* are becoming obsolete. *Jehale cake* is a corruption of *journey cake*, formerly made by travelers in the woods who spread corn meal dough on a piece of wood and cooked it before the campfire, a cus-

tom probably learned from the Indians. Indian words are often unpronounceable and the early settlers evidently decided that Indian sugar with any other name would taste as sweet so they called it *maple sugar*, unscrupulous manufacturers also called various substances "maple sugar" prior to the passage of the pure food law. The sounds emitted by the red men are not always capable of reproduction by white men, consequently some Indian usages were adopted without the names. It may be well enough to call a spade a spade, but the rules does not apply when an Indian has named a thing, this was probably the case when the snow shoe, the white men adopted the idea but they preferred an English appellation; the same appears to have been the case with *clambake*, and the Indian game *la crosse* with its French name. *Blazing a trail* and *girdling trees* to clear land also originated with the Indians.

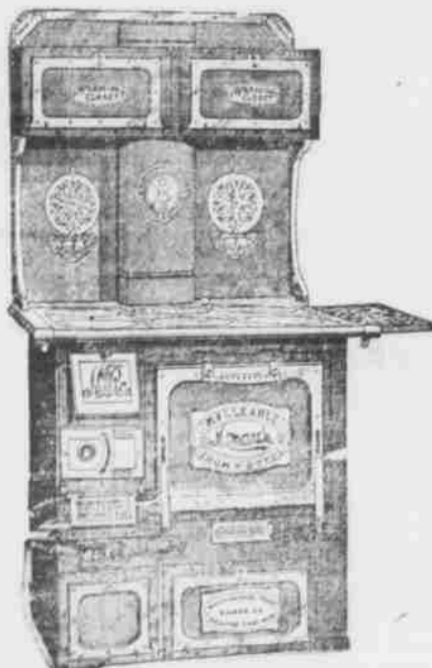
Continued on page 23

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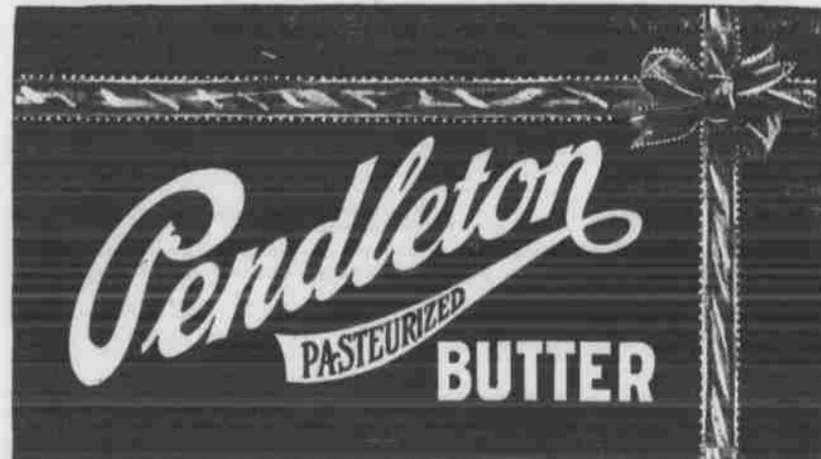
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