

THREE CITIES OF WASHINGTON

Origin of Their Names

By
EDMOND S. MEANY

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THREE CITIES OF WASHINGTON

ORIGIN OF THEIR NAMES

The following items are here reprinted from the *Washington Historical Quarterly* for the benefit of those who may wish to save the information in this separate form. Another purpose of the reprint is to make announcement of the forthcoming volume on the "Origin of Washington Geographic Names." In that volume there will be published the three items here reprinted, together with all the others which have appeared in the series of articles in the *Washington Historical Quarterly* since the October number, 1917. The completed volume will contain between 350 and 400 pages. Only 250 copies of the book will be printed. Anyone who may desire to purchase a copy when completed should communicate with the University of Washington Press, Seattle.

SEATTLE, on Elliott Bay, now Seattle Harbor, a part of Puget Sound. It is the metropolis of the State and county seat of King County. The colony of twelve adults and twelve children, from which the city has grown, landed at what is known as Alki Point on November 13, 1851. The winter was stormy at that point and on February 15, 1852, A. A. Denny, W. N. Bell and C. D. Boren located and marked three claims on the east shore of the bay. On March 31, 1852, Dr. D. S. Maynard arrived and accepted the offer of the others to move their lines so as to give him an adjoining claim on the south. In October, 1852, Henry L. Yesler arrived, looking for a mill-site. Maynard and Boren adjusted their lines to accomodate him. The road leading from his mill became Mill Street, later changed to Yesler Way. Before this, Denny, Boren and Maynard agreed upon a plat and a name for the town. On May 23, 1853, Denny and Boren filed the first plat for the town of Seattle and later the same day Doctor Maynard filed his part of the plat. Chief Seattle, who was thus honored, had been friendly to the white settlers and remained so during the Indian war which followed in 1855-1856. (Arthur A. Denny: *Pioneer Days on Puget Sound*, pages 17-21.) Chief Seattle did not know his age. He died in 1866 when the pioneers estimated

his age as eighty years. If this be true, he was a boy of six when Vancouver dropped anchor at Restoration Point on May 19, 1792, and the Suquamish Indians saw white men for the first time. Vancouver gives a graphic account of the Indians and their camp. (*Voyage Round the World*, second edition, Volume II., pages 118-127.) While still a boy Seattle succeeded his father Schweabe as Chief of the Suquamish tribe and on attaining manhood he evidently was a thorough savage. The Hudson's Bay Company's daily record, known as the Nisqually Journal, contains frequent references to the Chief. The entry for September 30, 1835, says: "This forenoon a quarrel took place between Ovrie and an Indian of the So qua mish tribe by name See alt or by us called La Gros. It is said he threatened Ovrie with his gun. This is the second time. I of course brought him to an account and told him that if ever he did so again I should not pass over the business so quietly. At best this fellow is a scamp and like Challacum [Steilacoom] a black heart ready to pick a quarrel." The writer was Chief Trader at Fort Nisqually. (The original manuscript journals of Fort Nisqually are in the possession of Thomas Huggins of Tacoma.) The entry for October 18, 1835, says a Skagit Indian gave ten large beaver skins to "See yalt as a present to his daughter." In six entries for 1836 the name is spelled "See yat". The entry for December 6, 1837, says: "The Chief See yat has murdered an Indian doctor, much talk about the affair amongst the Soquamish tribe. I wish they would determine on shooting the villian." On January 9, 1838, the record says: "Challicum with a party of his Indians cast up, put a few skins in the store and then left us for a visit to the Saw aye waw mish to buy some articles for the death of a So qua mish shot by the villian See yat, the latter having got a gun from the Saw aye waw mish and with it committed murder." Seattle's people were good hunters. The Fort Nisqually record contains a summary for 1837, showing that of 555 large beaver, Seattle brought 68, 16 out of 141 small beaver, 37 out of 261 otter skins. In this, his tribe was excelled only by the Skagits. The condemnatory entries cease after 1838. For this there are two good reasons: The Puget Sound Agricultural Company, a subsidiary of the Hudson's Bay Company, changed the nature of Fort Nisqually making it an agricultural and stock raising center; and Chief Seattle was baptized under the name of "Noah Sealth" by a Catholic missionary, probably Father Modeste Demers, who began work on Puget Sound in 1838. The futile at-

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tack on Fort Nisqually by Chief Patkanim of the Snoqualmie tribe in 1849 changed that warrior into a friend of the white people and must have had an influence for good on Chief Seattle as well. United States troops were brought to Puget Sound and Fort Steilacoom established that same year. (Edmond S. Meany: *History of the State of Washington*, pages 149-150.) Whatever the cause or causes, Seattle became the friend of the pioneers who settled in his neighborhood in 1851 and remained steadfast during the remaining fifteen eventful years of his life. The Chief was a large man, an impressive leader of his people. Among his other native talents, was that of oratory. Miss Emily Inez Denny, daughter of David T. Denny, has gleaned from the memory of her father and other pioneers anecdotes about Seattle's oratory. Dr. H. A. Smith, for whom Smith's Cove was named, told about the first arrival of Governor Isaac I. Stevens at Seattle in 1854. "The bay swarmed with canoes and the shore was lined with a living mass of swaying, writhing, dusky humanity, until Old Chief Seattle's trumpet-toned voice rolled over the immense multitude like the reveille of a bass drum, when silence became as instantaneous and perfect as that which follows a clap of thunder from a clear sky." (*Blazing the Way* pages 362-363.) The grave of the old Chief remained unmarked until June 28, 1890, when Arthur A. Denny, Hillory Butler, Samuel L. Crawford and other pioneers placed over it a large marble cross seven feet high. (Frank Carlson: *Chief Seattle*, page 3..) The religious letters "I. H. S." are entwined with ivy. Two sides of the monument bear inscriptions: "Seattle, Chief of the Suquamish and Allied Tribes, Died June 7, 1866. The Firm Friend of the Whites, and for Him the City of Seattle was Named by Its Founders." "Baptismal name, Noah Sealth. Age probably 80 years." The grave is at Suquamish, Port Madison Bay, Kitsap County, near the famous long-house home of the Chief. The spelling of the name has been much discussed. The different forms arose from the difficulty in catching the guttural pronunciation by the Indians. In addition to the above instances, it may be cited that in 1853, Theodore Winthrop wrote it "Se-at-tlh." (*The Canoe and the Saddle*, J. H. Williams edition, page 32.) In 1858, the United States Coast Survey wrote it "Se-at-tl." (*Annual Report for 1858*, page 446.) The more euphonious spelling on that first pioneer plat has persisted. The Indians' own name for the place was "Tzee-tzee-lal-itch," meaning "little portage," and referring to the trail to the large lake

—Washington—so much shorter than the circuitous river route. (Charles M. Buchanan, of Tulalip, in *Names MSS.* Letter 155.) Frederic James Grant has recorded the origin of the city's "pet" name as follows: "The summer of 1883 was distinguished by the arrival of many people of note, from both far and near. General Sprague and John Muir, of the Northern Pacific, addressed Seattle as the Queen City of the Sound." (*History of Seattle*, page 167.) The city's rapid growth in recent years has resulted in its merging with a number of suburbs, such as Fremont on the north shore of Lake Union. See Alki, Ballard, Columbia, Fauntleroy Cove, Georgetown, Latona, and Ravenna Park.

SPOKANE, an Indian word which has attained great geographical use in the State of Washington. A wealthy county wears the name and its capitol, with the same name, is the beautiful and proud "Metropolis of the Inland Empire." It was first applied to the Indians, then to the river and the region it drained. Lewis and Clark, in 1805, wrote of the Indians and the falls, but used the name "Skeetsomish." (Elliott Coues, *History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Volume III., pages 990-992.) On June 8 and August 11, 1811, David Thompson, of the Northwest Company of Montreal, referred to the Spokane River and Spokane House, while on his map the river is charted as "Skeetshoo." (*Narrative*, Champlain Society edition, pages 461, 530, and map,) The Spokane House mentioned by Mr. Thompson had been established under his authority in 1810 by Jacob Finlay and Finan McDonald at the junction of the Spokane and the Little Spokane Rivers. A short distance away the Pacific Fur Company (Astorians) built a rival Fort Spokane in 1812. (T. C. Elliott, "Columbia Fur Trade Prior to 1811," in the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Volume VI., page 9.) Although the river was then known by another name and although the two trading posts were abandoned, they helped materially to fix the name on the country. The Astorians' post was taken over by the Northwest Company of Montreal during the War of 1812. The Northwest Company was absorbed by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821 and in 1827 that company established Fort Colville and abandoned Spokane House. In the meantime Hudson's Bay Company men were making use of the name, Spokane River. David Douglas, the botanist, used it in his entry following the date of March 24, 1826. (*Journal, 1823-1827*, page 62.) John Work

used the name on August 2, 1826. ("Journal," in the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, Volume VI., page 36.) For a time, the upper part of the river, from the junction of what is now Little Spokane River to Lake Coeur d' Alene, was known and charted as Coeur d' Alene River. (*Pacific Railroad Reports*, 1853, Volume XI., chart 3; Volume XII., Part I., map.) Later the name Spokane River was extended to the lake and the tributary became known as Little Spokane River. The first law to organize Spokane County was approved by the Legislature of Washington Territory on January 29, 1858. The city was incorporated in 1881. (N. W. Durham, *Spokane and the Inland Empire*, page 362.) For years the official name of the city was Spokane Falls. The meaning of the native Indian word has been much discussed. Rev. Myron Eells, who gave a life-time to missionary work among Indians and whose father was one of the first missionaries to work with the Spokane Indians, says: "Spokane has some reference to the sun. Ross Cox says that in 1812 he met there the head chief of the Spokane tribe, whose name was *Il-lim-spokanee*, which he says means 'son of the sun.' *Il-li-mi-hum*, however, in that language means 'chief,' while *skok-salt* means 'son.' *Illim* is evidently a contraction of *illimihum*, and I think that the name, as given by Ross Cox, means 'chief of the sun people,' not probably the name of the chief, but his title." (In *American Anthropologist* for January, 1892.) N. W. Durham says that M. M. Cowley settled on the Kootenai River, near Bonner's Ferry, Idaho, in 1867 and moved to Spokane Valley in 1872. Mr. Cowley says: "I always thought that the fur traders must have named these Kootenai Siwashes "The Spokanes." The Indians called themselves *Sinkomahnahs*. If the Indians had wanted to call themselves 'children of the sun,' they would have made it *Spo-kan-ee*; that means 'sun,' and the ordinary Indian greeting instead of 'good morning' is '*Hust-Spokanee*,' which merely means 'good sun.' (*Spokane and the Inland Empire*, page 643.) Edward S. Curtis says: "Etymologically the word seems to be related to *spukani*, 'sun,' but the force of the reference is not apparent. It may conceivably have originated among a tribe which thus described a related people living 'towards the sun.'" Mr. Curtis is also authority for the statement that the name for Spokane Falls in the Indian language is *Stluputqu*, meaning 'swift water.' (*The North American Indian*, Volume VII., pages 56 and 60.) Out of such discussion, it is probable that a locally used definition, 'child of the sun,' will become fixed in speech and literature.

TACOMA, principal city of Pierce County, on Commencement Bay, now known as Tacoma Harbor. The name is said to be of Indian origin, but its source and meaning have been the subjects of much debate and disputation. Of all those who have written on the subject, the best authority is undoubtedly Thomas W. Prosch. A pioneer newspaper man with a bent toward history, he had the advantage accompanying such training. Furthermore, on September 12, 1877, he was married to Miss Virginia McCarver, whose father, General Morton Matthew McCarver, reputed founder of the City of Tacoma, had been dead only two years at the time of his daughter's wedding. Mr. Prosch had thus entered upon access to family traditions and records. In 1906 and 1909, Mr. Prosch wrote and published two books—*McCarver and Tacoma*, and *The Conkling-Prosch Family*—in which he tells with clearness and frankness how General McCarver founded and named Tacoma and how a contention over the naming arose at the very beginning. He shows the first settler of Tacoma to have been Nicholas Delin, who arrived in 1852 and began a small water-power sawmill. Peter Judson and family, members of the famous party of immigrants who crossed the Naches Pass in 1853, were the next to settle on the bay. There were others who found employment in and around the mill. When the Indian war broke out in 1855, the white people left the bay and Mr. Delin sold his mill to J. L. Perkins, he to Milas Galliher, the last owner being Frank Spinning. For several years prior to 1864, the south side of the bay was deserted. On Christmas day of 1864, Job Carr settled there. His family are often counted the first settlers of Tacoma. In 1868, General McCarver arrived looking for a townsite that would serve as the terminus of the proposed Northern Pacific Railroad. He bought most of Job Carr's claim and acquired other lands. He had financial associates in Portland. The first plat of the proposed town bore the name "Commencement City," a name derived from that of the bay. This plat was not filed of record. On Friday, September 11, 1868, Philip Ritz arrived at the McCarver home. He was gathering information for the Northern Pacific Railroad Company and had heard of General McCarver's proposal to build a town. He wanted to suggest a name. He was enthusiastic about the book *The Canoe and the Saddle*, by Theodore Winthrop, in which it was said the Indians knew Mount Rainier by the name of Tacoma. He was eloquent in advocating that name for the town. Mr. Prosch says sleep was banished from the McCarver home that night and Saturday morning found the family still talking over the

new name. (*McCarver and Tacoma*, page 164.) The associates in Portland accepted General McCarver's suggestion that the new name be put upon the plat instead of "Commencement City" and the naming was accomplished. Mr. Prosch says: "The Indian name for the land taken by the Carrs was Chebaulip. None of the citizens heeded that, and as the Indians themselves had little regard for their own names, and were always willing to adopt those of the whites instead, Chebaulip was passed and forgotten." (*McCarver and Tacoma*, pages 162-163.) A later and more extended publication is *Tacoma, Its History and Its Builders, A Half Century of Activity*, by Herbert Hunt, published in Chicago in 1916. Mr. Hunt devotes pages 134 to 141 to a discussion of the name. It does not differ materially in results from the record of Thomas W. Prosch. However, he says (page 135): "That it was favorably received may be assumed from the fact that Anthony Carr, M. M. McCarver, John W. Ackerson and C. P. Ferry each has claimed the honor of applying it to 'Chebaulip'." The author examines each of the claims carefully and also calls attention to the facts that a hotel in Olympia and a lodge of Good Templars had each been known by the name Tacoma some months before it was applied to the new town. These two names probably emanated from the same book by Theodore Winthrop. In 1908, Benjamin C. Harvey, of Tacoma, collected much material on the name which was published in Tacoma in 1914. (*Washington State Historical Society Publications, 1907-1914*, Volume II., pages 440-464.) His work was in the interest of changing the name of Mount Rainier to "Mount Tacoma." Of course many references are there made to the origin and meaning of the word. One of the published letters is from Dr. Charles M. Buchanan, for many years in charge of the Tulalip Indian Reservation. He was the greatest authority yet developed on the Indian languages and dialects of Puget Sound. In one of his letters to Mr. Harvey, he says Tacoma is not at all a local word but an Algonkin word meaning "near to heaven," and he calls attention to many uses of the word in various forms east of the Rocky Mountains. There are many meanings given for the word, such as "nourishing breast," "mother of waters," "frozen waters." Several writers, in the correspondence referred to, suggest that Mr. Winthrop probably heard the Indians use the Chinook Jargon word *T'kope* meaning "white." (Shaw's *The Chinook Jargon*, page 27.) Mr. Buchanan thinks it quite likely as the explosive pronunciation of *T'kopt* by the Indian would somewhat resemble the white man's pronunciation of Tacoma.

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