

Indian Place Names in Western Canada

Written for The Western Home Monthly, by Max McD.

THE Red Man's contribution to place names in Canada, and particularly in Western Canada, makes a considerable body in the aggregate.

Indian names now permanently attached to our rivers and lakes, towns and cities have a peculiar interest to us all. In them the Indian has perpetuated himself by a monument more eloquent and more imperishable than could be erected by mere human hands. It is a sound policy, and but a measure of justice to the original inhabitants, that seeks among Indian tribes, some now almost extinct, for the titles of provinces and cities, lakes and rivers, mountains and forests. Moreover, on the score of beauty alone, the debt is on the white man's side.

The descendants of the Indians have kept with great fidelity the names of their ancient localities, and have bestowed them upon our villages and cities as they have

Old Traders Responsible for Many Names in Far West

But in the names which Indians have themselves given to places in Western Canada is the curiosity of the Easterner aroused. When such localities as Whiskey Gap, Leavings, Pincher Creek, Porcupine Hills, Robber's Roost, Stand Off, Slide Out, Slide In, Medicine Hat, Jumping Pound, Freeze Out, Bull Horn, Jumbo Valley, Old Man, etc., are spoken, the stranger in the West begins to enquire how the selection was made.

It was in the early seventies that the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company ceased and the Dominion Government took over judicial rights in all that vast territory which lies between the International Boundary and the North Pole. The ending of this monopoly was a signal for an influx of adventurers. Gamblers,

the early days of smuggling and Indian trading in Western Canada. Whoop-her-up was the name given the place by the Indians, but this, for respectability's sake, has been changed to Whoop-up, with an innocent suggestiveness of some poetic Indian title.

These pounds were ingenious constructions of trees laid one upon another, interwoven with twigs or wattled with branches and were used by the Indians for killing buffalo in winter time. In summer they chased these animals on horseback and killed them with bows and arrows.

A little farther up the stream from the Pound on Jumping Pound Creek, is an old Indian camping ground marked by the familiar ring of stones that held down the covers of the teepees.

Readers of R. M. Ballantyne, Palliser, the two Henrys, and others, know why the buffalo jumped. A high ridge runs beside the creek for some distance, its crest flanked on either side with piles of stones in lines converging toward where the ridge ends in one of the small coulees that run down from the heights to the bottoms in

constructed some animals—"little brothers" he called them—and made of clay a woman and her son.

At the north end of the Porcupine Hills, "Old Man" stopped to make another tribe of men. The animals were following closely behind him, for they served him willingly, but the new people ate them. In order still better to appease their hunger, "Old Man" made buffalo enough to occupy the northern plains. This was roughly the country east of the Rockies for a hundred miles, and between the Yellowstone and the North Saskatchewan.

Still moving northward "Old Man" paused at the meeting of the Bow and Elbow Rivers to create another family and teach and provide for it. At Red Deer, he stretched himself on the earth for another sleep, and there to-day may be seen the imprint of his form. On waking, he moved still farther north and climbed to the summit of a tall hill. It was steep and he amused himself by sliding to its foot, the place being known to this day as "Old Man's Sliding Ground."

The Blackfeet to-day believe that "Old Man" has moved to the mountains in the West, beyond the vexing sight of civilization, and when he is sorely needed by his people he may come back. His home is at the source of the Old Man River. The source of this river is in the face of a rocky wall in the side of Sentinel Mountain and is believed to be the outflow of a subterranean stream. From it gush forth great waters so suddenly and in such volume as to fill one with wonder and amazement. To see a river spring into being, full grown, from the face of a blank wall, is quite calculated to lend an air of mystery and miracle to the surroundings.

The Bloods, then, chose no commonplace region for the dwelling-place of their weird and witty Old Man Creator.

A Head-Piece Responsible for "Medicine Hat"

"Medicine Hat" is a name with a character of its own. It throws some light on the ways and thoughts of primitive people.

Medicine means more to an Indian than to a white man. We think of it as something diabolical that is good for us; but the Indian distinguishes as "good medicine" and "bad medicine," anything that will change his fortunes for better or for worse. Imagine that Lo is hunting antelope and meeting no success. Presently he finds the top of a tomato can, and shortly after he gets a crack at his game. Can he doubt that the piece of tin gave the luck? Not he. He wears that fragment of tomato tin around his neck with his other jewelry and it is "good medicine."

Well, several years ago, there was a Blackfoot Chief who lived at Seven Person's Creek, hunting sometimes, and making war on the Crees between times. He had much joy and profit in a head dress of feathers which he called his "medicine hat" for when he wore it he had good luck, if he had fortune.

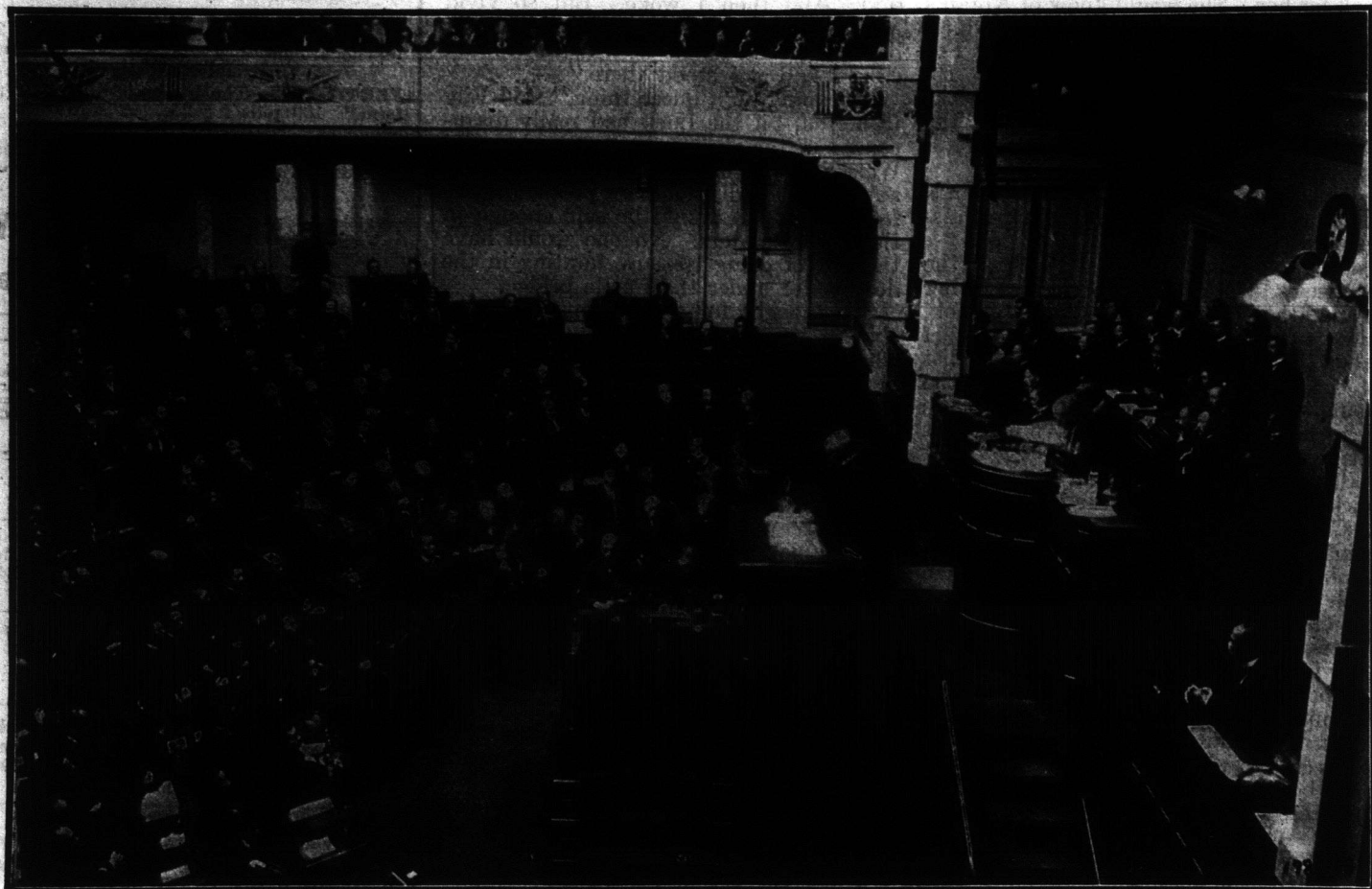
One day he met the Crees near the present site of Medicine Hat. He fell upon them with great industry, smiting, slaying, scalping, fairly beaming with satisfaction. But just as he had the enemy in flight, a gust of wind whirled out of the West, and catching the magic hat, tossed it into the Saskatchewan. Instant was the effect. The poor Chief lost all confidence in himself and his cause, and with victory within his reach he forebore to grasp it, "skedaddling" over the plains in a panic, followed by his tribe. And thus befell the evil that leaves its record in Medicine Hat.

Other Place Names of less Importance

There are many other place names of less interest [that might be included in a list of those with which Indians are connected in the Great West of Canada. Just a few more, however, must suffice for the completion of this article.]

In the Milk River Ridge south of old Whoop-up, is a defile through which the whiskey smugglers passed on their trips to and from Fort Benton. Once a posse of Red-coats, following a gang that had slipped out of Slide Out, came upon them in this defile and the smugglers had to surrender their whiskey. Since that day till this, the depression has been called "Whiskey Gap."

Few of the places named in the seventies have changed those names. Pity the day that some vandal brings about their abolition and they become Smithburgs and Jonesvilles and Browntowns like a hundred thousand other inanities between the Gulf of Mexico and Hudson's Bay.



This is not a scene in the British House of Commons. It is the opening of the recent session of the Japanese Parliament by Count Okuma. It proved to be the stormiest session that has yet been witnessed. The pro and anti-war parties were almost equally divided and when the question of the war arose the anti-militaristic element refused to vote the war credits and greatly embarrassed the government.—Photo Underwood.

successfully appeared. It is but a fit tribute to our Indian predecessors to record the baptismal names of our rivers, lakes and streams, and also of their ancient sites.

The capital of Ontario was formerly known as York. By the adoption of the cognomen of an Indian tribe, Toronto has gained a name of sonorous beauty scarcely to be matched among all the cities of the world. By a similar process, Ottawa has gained vastly by the change from its original name of Bytown.

Strong and virile, if not always euphonious names, are Assinaboine, Ontario, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Wisawasa, Niagara, Muskoka, Masquash, Mississauga, Temiscoutat, Washimeska, Asiwanan, Restigouche, Nipissing, Algonquin, Awoju, Shequindah, and Temiscaming.

Pleasing names to be found in the Canadian Gazetteer are Hiawatha, Minnehaha, and Nokomis; but these, perhaps, owe allegiance to Longfellow rather than to the Red Man from whose language they were taken.

In the list of lakes of the United States published in 1885 for the Fisheries Commission, two hundred and eighty-five Indian names. A larger proportion is shown in the rivers and streams. In a list of the principal rivers flowing into the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, seven hundred and twenty-four have Indian names. If to these should be added the Indian names of the St. Lawrence valley, those attached to the waters of the Great Lakes in both Canada and the United States, the Saskatchewan, and the numerous other great northern and north-western watersheds, and the lakes and streams of the Pacific Coast, the list might easily be doubled.

smugglers, criminals of every stripe, struck across the boundary line from Montana and other northern states into the Canadian territory at the foothills of the Rockies. With out a white population, these raffish adventurers could not ply their usual wide-open traffic.

The only way to wealth was by the fur trade; and the easiest way to obtain the furs was by smuggling whiskey into the country in small quantities, diluting this and trading it to the natives for pelts. Chances of interference were nil. The Canadian government officials were thousands of miles distant, without either telegraph or railway connection.

But the game was not without its dangers. The country at the foothills was inhabited by a confederacy of the Blackfeet Indians—Bloods, Peigans, and Blackfeet—"tigers of the prairie" when sober, and worse than tigers when drunk. The Montana whiskey smugglers found they must either organize for defence, or pay for their fun by being exterminated. How many whites were killed in these drinking frays will never be known; but all about the Belly and Old Man rivers and Fort Macleod, are gruesome landmarks known as the places where this and that party was exterminated in the seventies.

The upshot was that the Montana smugglers emulated the old fur traders, and built themselves permanent forts: Whoop-her-up, Kipp, Stand Off, Slide Out, Robber's Roost, and several others of less importance.

Whoop-up Was First Smuggler's Fort

The most interesting stories connected with place names in Western Canada, centre around Whoop-up, a smuggler's fort on the Belly River near the City of Lethbridge. A gang from Montana built it in

all this land. When the Indians wanted meat they drove a herd of buffalo into the stone-pile funnel. Probably the stones alone served to keep the stampeding herd within the bounds of the enclosure. More probably, unmounted men, women and boys hid behind the piles until the charging van drew near, and then leapt up to fill the way of escape with menace of a new danger. Still there was the coulee, so like a thousand others down which bovine hooves have hammered tracks that lead to water; and down the coulee the herd tumultuously poured. But the coulee ended in the fateful cliff. Scarcely would the danger be seen before the pressure of the herd would drive the leader over, and after him the frenzied herd to the last straggling calf.

Twelve feet deep their bones lie there to show how the Indian got his meat, and the Jumping Pound its name.

Blackfeet "Old Man" at Source of That River

Among a people unspoiled in imagination by civilization and its conventionalities, it is natural to find a wealth of tradition and legend, of folk-lore and myth, of strange tales and wonderful happenings.

Apistotoke, sometimes called the "Old Man," is a Blackfeet deity, the Creator, or Former, or Maker of things and men. He gave the Indians their knowledge of games. From him, too, they learned to paint themselves in curious and fantastic fashions. "Old Man" built the mountains, caused trees to grow, made the Teton river, resting on a hill above it and leaving there his form in outline; then he walked northward, building the Sweet Grass Hills with earth and rocks that he carried. Now he covered the earth with grass and fruits,