

OREGAN—RIVER OF THE SLAVES OR RIVER OF THE WEST

Oregon derives its present name from a typographical error in Jonathan Carver's *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America in 1766-1768*. This error appears to have been first perpetuated by Hall Jackson Kelley, and then given to the country west of the Rockies and not the River. This error has, almost always, been continued by writers, since Kelley's time, in quoting Carver's *Travels* and the other earlier writers.

Carver's *Travels* contain all data to elucidate the origin of the name OREGAN and its meaning. Though Alexander Henry, Sen's *Travels and Adventures*, made between the years 1760 and 1776, gives more detailed accounts of the slaves held by the Indians among whom Carver was with; especially the Assinaboia and Chipeway Tribes.

Henry's sojourn among these Indians was during 1775 and 1776, nine years after Carver's among the same Indian Tribes.

The vocabularies in Carver's *Travels* show, that, in the Sioux dialect, "Owah Menah," as Falling or Running Waters or River; and the Chipeway dialect, "Wa-kan," as Slaves or slave. Hence "Owah-menah Wakan" is River-Slaves, or as abbreviated by the Indians in their dialects, would be "O'Wakan."

The sound of "R" is not used by these Indians, and that may explain an attempt of Carver's to express the missing syllable meaning, "of the." On page 239; he states that he renders the vocabularies as near as he could, using English characters with their sounds.

The word "OREGAN" as shown would, almost certainly, be of the Assinaboia dialect; as they were an off-shoot of the Sioux Tribe and long allied with the Chipeways, and as noted by Henry the holders of Slaves from the "River of the West," and from whom almost all of their knowledge of those rivers would come. No two of these slaves would have the same name for the river they had come from; hence it would naturally be spoken of as the "River of

*The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society has recently given much space to a discussion of the origin of the name Oregon. Volume XXI., No. 4, (December, 1920,) was given over wholly to that subject. The three articles were "Oregon—Its Meaning, Origin and Application," by John E. Rees; "The Early Explorations and the Origin of the Name of the Oregon Country," by William H. Galvani; "The Strange Case of Jonathan Carver and the Name Oregon," by T. C. Elliott. Since then Mr. Elliott has continued his studies resulting in two more articles—"The Origin of the Name Oregon" in Volume XXII., No. 2, and "Jonathan Carver's Source for the Name Oregon" in Volume XXIII., No. 1, (March, 1922.) Mr. Meyers has a different theory than those mentioned in the above articles and he thinks it would be helpful while the subject is being discussed in a neighboring publication. It should also be mentioned that in *Contributions to North American Ethnology*, Vol. VII., page 507, *Wakan* is shown to mean "spiritual," "sacred," or "wonderful" in the Dakota or Sioux language.—EDDOR.

the Slaves," or "River of the West." Both Carver and Henry mention Slaves as a most valuable object of barter and trade.

Henry says in his *Travels*; published in New York by J. Riley, 1809, page 273: "The Indians, who inhabit them immediately to the southward [of Fort dest Prairie Plains], are called Osinipoilles or Assiniboins. At the fort I met with a woman who was a slave among the Osinipoilles; taken far to the westward of the mountains, in a country which the latter incessantly ravaged. She informed me that the men of the country never suffer themselves to be taken, but always die in the field rather than fall into captivity. The women and children are made slaves, but are not put to death, nor tormented. Her nation lived on a great river, running to the southwest; and cultivated beans, squashes, maize and tobacco. The lands were generally mountainous, and covered with pine and fir. She had heard of men who wear their beards. She had been taken in one of the incursions of the Osinipoills. Of the men who were in the village the greater part were killed; but few escaped, by swimming across the river."

As a digression: This would seem a first reference, to an agricultural attempt in the Columbia River Region; and the tobacco being the only self-propagating plant mentioned, and the situation, would indicate Tobacco Plains, near Gateway, Montana, as the situation of it.

Henry, on pages 306-7, after relating the cruel treatment of a female slave that had been captured west of the mountains, states: "It is known that some slaves have the good fortune to be adopted into Indian families, and are afterward allowed to marry in them; but, among the Osinipoilles this seldom happens; and, even among the Chipeways where a female slave is so adopted and married, I never knew her to lose the degrading appellation of 'wa-kan,' a slave."

On page 325, he mentions the buying of two slaves from the Indians from Lake Athabaska, who were natives of the country west of the Rockies, one a woman of twenty-five years of age and the other a boy of twelve, giving for each a gun. These would have been from the Fraser River country: but a "River of the West."

J. A. MEYERS.