

THE WORD "IOWA"—WHAT IT MEANS.

BY L. F. ANDREWS.

Labored and exhaustive efforts have been made to ascertain the origin of the word "Iowa" and determine its signification. It is generally given, as I believe erroneously, as meaning "The Beautiful Land." Legends and traditions relating to it have been traced centuries back. Words have been twisted, distorted and corrupted until they bear little or no orthographic relation to that which the tradition-searchers have reached in their quest.

It is claimed by some that the word is of Dakota origin, and by the French was written "Aiouez," and applied to a branch of the Otoe tribe inhabiting territory west of the Missouri River. Gradually the word became Anglicised to "Iowa," which in the Dakota language means "something to write or paint with."

Hildreth, in his history of the American aborigines, gives the derivation from "Py-ho-ja," a name applied by the Omahas to a tribe in this territory, and which means "Grey Snow," or "Drowsy Ones"—tradition having it that when the Iowa tribes left the parent tribe in the north, a snow-storm prevailed.

Schoolcraft says the Iowa tribes called themselves "Pa-ho-ches," which means "dusty nose" or "dirty face," from the fact that they first settled near the mouth of a river where there were sand-bars, and the wind blew sand and dust in their faces. At an early date their location is fixed at the junction of Rock River with the Mississippi; thence they moved to the junction of the Des Moines River with the Mississippi, occupying what now comprises Lee, Van Buren and Davis Counties; thence they moved up the Missouri River into Dakota; thence back to the

head waters of the Little Platte, now Southern Iowa and Northern Missouri; thence to the head waters of Chariton and Grand Rivers in Iowa. During all these migrations they called themselves "Pa-ho-ches."

The history of the North American Indian shows very strongly that the original home of the Dakota stock of the very early Ganowanian family was on the far western side of the continent, while that of the Algonkin was on the eastern; that the Sauk and Fox tribes were of Algonkin origin, and descendants of the Chippewas and Pottawattamies, once strong and powerful. This is also indicated by their dialects; for in the language of Western tribes labial and vowel sounds prevail, while in those of Eastern they are guttural. In the oldest tradition extant of the Algonkins, Nicollet gives the word "A-ho-la-king" as signifying "Beautiful Land."

The original families have been divided and succeeded by hundreds of branches, and their language also divided into hundreds of dialects, so that little remains of the old.

There is very little or no estheticism or sentiment with the Indian. He was, and is, a creature of circumstances. He adapts himself always to present conditions. The future concerns him very little; the past is consigned largely to oblivion. His language is one of signs, circumstances and conditions. A single word often has several significations, the real application being determined by a gesture, an incident or an event. The best authority for the language of a tribe is the tribe who used it.

It is conceded generally that the State of Iowa derived its name from a river; that the river was named from a tribe of Indians. According to Schoolcraft, the Indians occupying the territory along the river were called "Pa-ho-ches," hence the river did not derive its name from their nomenclature. The most extravagant linguist could not so distort it.

The word "Iowa" is unquestionably a corruption of the word "Kiowa," which was of common use by the Sauk

and Fox tribes more than two centuries ago, and is to-day by the remnants of those tribes still in existence—one being in Tama County, Iowa, and another in Oklahoma.

When Black Hawk, who was a Sauk (or Sac, as it is now written) Indian, and his hordes overspread and occupied the territory which is now Iowa, the use of the word became more general. It signified "This is the place." It was also used to signify "Crossing, or going over."

Antoine Le Claire, long a resident of Davenport, of French and Indian descent, born and bred among the Indians, familiar with their habits, customs and language, speaking the latter as his native tongue, says the word means "This is the place."

According to the records, when Black Hawk made his raid west of the Mississippi, he crossed the river at or near where Davenport now is, and subsequently designated the spot as "Kiowa,"—the place where the river was crossed. He was not then seeking the "beautiful," nor a "beautiful land." He was prospecting for a very different purpose. As he moved forward he drove the inhabiting tribes across a river and that river was called "Kiowa," meaning the river over which the tribes were driven, and the Indians driven over were called "Kiowas." The word was in frequent use by the Indians when the first settlers came into the State. Taylor Pierce, who was connected with the trading-post at Fort Des Moines, and who spoke the Sauk and Fox languages fluently, says that when the Indians were moving southward from their excursions in the north, if asked where they were going, the answer would be: "Posse (pony) pukachee (traveling or moving) Kiowa (place) sepo (river)." That is, they and their ponies were going down across the Kiowa River, which was their favorite lodgment. Sometimes the answer would be "Puckachee, Kiowa, Kesauk Sepo," which signified they were going up or along the Kesauk River, that being the name which the Sauk and Fox Indians gave to what is

now called the Des Moines River. The word Kesauk means dark, turbid, from the fact that in the Spring, when they made their hunting trips northward, the water was blackened by the washing from the prairies, which had been burned over the previous Autumn. It is from Kesauk the town of Keosauqua takes its name. The Des Moines River has always been called Kesauk by the Indians.

That the word "Iowa" was primarily "Kiowa," and originated with some of the many dialects of Algonkin origin, there is good reason to assert. The Sauks were especially partial to the use of the letter "K." It occurs three times in "Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kiakiah," the Indian name of Black Hawk. So also of other chiefs, as Mahaska, Keokuk, Poweshiek, Winneshiek, Waupekuk, Kishkekosh, etc. In a list of over two hundred names of chiefs appearing on the books at the trading post of Fort Des Moines, all but twenty contain this guttural letter once or more. It is also a marked characteristic of the languages of the Chippewas and Pottawattamies.

As further evidence of the correctness of this interpretation of the word, an old chief of the Musquakie or Tama County Indians, was very recently asked the meaning of the word "Iowa" or "Kiowa." His answer was, "This is the place." For instance, if a party of Indians were traveling, when camping-time came and the chief found a suitable spot, he would exclaim, "Kiowa," and the party understood it was a good place to camp. It is also used to signify passing over, or across. The Musquakies are the remnants of the Sauks and Foxes who refused to leave the territory. They were gathered together and located near Tama. "Musquakie" signifies "confederation."

Mention has been made of the words "De Moins," which are French, signifying "the less," or "the smaller." They were applied by the early French explorers, who were much among the Indians, to a small band of Indians

who were on one side of a river, while those on the other side were called the greater. The Indians soon acquired the use of them, and gradually the early settlers, though by the latter the application seems to have been erroneously, to the river itself. It was in this wise Col. S. F. Spofford christened his long-time hostelry on the river bank at Walnut street in the city of Des Moines, "The Demoin House," and nothing could induce him to change it.

Latterly the name has been changed to "Des Moines," which some historians say means "The monks." This is incorrect, as the French word for "monk" is "moin," and the use of either orthography, as applied to the river or the city, is without warrant of circumstance, condition or fitness of things.

THE CAPITOL GROUNDS will soon be replete with a fine lot of shrubbery which will much improve them. Forty years ago, before any very serious thoughts were abroad that we should ever have a capitol, or capitol grounds, the spot where the building now stands was densely wooded, and rabbits, squirrels and quails were not an uncommon sight. A little beyond was a duck-pond where ducks were to be found in their season. There were few houses in that part of the village, and no one dreamed of the glory that was to come to the city in after years. From this hill, at that early date, one could look well over the dirty, smoky, little village of 2,000 inhabitants and make future pictures. To the north was a dense forest. To the south on the bottoms, was a huge corn-field. To the east was a strip of thick woods bordering the open prairie, basking in the sun. It was a pity human foresight could not have seen the necessity of saving some of the oaks which grew upon these grounds. It is possible, however, that if they had been saved, the grading would have caused their death. There are scarcely any traceable land-marks of the very old days left in this immediate vicinity. Time, the leveler of men and hills, is still industriously at work changing the face of nature by putting in art instead.—*Des Moines Mail and Times, May 9, 1896.*

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.