

THE INDIAN NAMES OF OUR WAR VESSELS.

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The present war, waged in its inception wholly by sea, has naturally brought into special prominence the naval branch of the service, and there are perhaps now few readers, especially among those who have possessed themselves of a copy of the *NAVY SUPPLEMENT* of the *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN*, who are not well acquainted with the composition of our navy, or familiar with the names borne by its various vessels, from battleships down to armed tugs and dispatch boats. Concerning the origin and application of many such names, however, there is doubtless not so much known; and this is especially the case with regard to those of Indian derivation, some of which have never been interpreted, while the meaning ascribed to others, in books, has in many instances been drawn from the imagination of those who have preferred to indulge in guesswork rather than endeavor to ascertain facts.

One of the results of the war has been to bring to the front for the purpose of harbor defense some of the old monitors, of which the construction was authorized in 1862. Among these relics of the past, there is one called "Canonicus," which perpetuates the memory of the "Great Sachem" of the Narragansetts, whose name otherwise, and more correctly, spelled Quonacut, means "He is of tall aspect." This famous sachem's nephew, Mekumeh, "Put me in mind," who in youth was his marshal, afterward his associate, and finally the principal sachem of the Narragansett country, was always the warm friend and protector of the settlers of Rhode Island. He is described by his contemporaries as having been a man of great stature (a family characteristic, as would appear from his uncle's name), haughty, stern and commanding, and one who caused all his subjects to tremble at his speech and promptly to respond to his summons. It was doubtless for this reason that in mature years he received the name by which he is best known in history—that of Miantonomoe (My-an-ton-6m-ai-oo), meaning "He gathers together by word of mouth." His name has been variously spelled in historical works, and, in the form of Miantonomoh, is now borne by one of our modern monitors. The name of the Mohegan sachem who defeated Miantonomoe in battle, delivered him to the English, and afterward superintended his execution, is borne by the dispatch boat "Uncas." Uncas is a corruption of Wankus, an Algonkin name for the fox; the word means "the circler," and refers to the animal's habit of doubling or circling when pursued.

Another of the old monitors is the "Manhattan," named after our own island, which in turn was so called by the Dutch after its aboriginal owners, the Manahattanak, or "Island Highlanders," whose favorite place of resort and residence was, as their name implies, the upper half of the island, where deer, beaver, otter, etc., were found in great abundance, and where the rich bottom lands subsequently known as the "Harlem Flats" were available for tilling and planting.

The monitor "Montauk" bears the name of a point familiar to everyone as the locality off which the waters of the ocean meet those of Long Island Sound. Montauk is a nasalized form (dating from about the middle of the seventeenth century) of a word that was originally spelled Matowack or Metowack—properly, Metawak—the participial form of Matawan, meaning "where one body of water enters another," i. e., place of confluence.

In the name of the monitor "Passaic," so called either from a city or a river of New Jersey, we have the Lenape word for "valley."

The "Mahopac" was named after a well-known watering place in Putnam County, N. Y. The older spelling of the word—Macookpack—stands for the Lenape Mehekpeg, meaning "large lake."

The "Nahant" was so called after a watering place situated on a small rocky peninsula in Massachusetts Bay and the Indian name of which means "at the promontory." In "Nantucket" (the name of another of the monitors) we have a word from the same root as the last mentioned, meaning "at the promontory in a tidal river."

The name of the monitor "Lehigh" is a corruption of Lechau, a word abbreviated by the Moravian missionaries in Pennsylvania from the Lenape Lechauhanne, meaning the "fork of a stream." The familiar river name Lackawanna represents the unabbreviated word.

The "Wyandotte" bears the name of an Iroquoian people whom the French nicknamed the Hurons. Their name apparently meant, in its original form, "the Islanders."

Finally, in the name "Comanche," meaning "separated," or "estranged," we have the appellation of an aboriginal people of Numa stock, who formerly wandered through northern Texas and on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Of the new monitors, the only one besides the "Miantonomoh" that bears an Indian title is the "Monadnock," which was so called after an isolated mountain in Cheshire County, N. H. The aboriginal name of this eminence was Manadene, the "bad mountain," which, with the locative suffix, becomes Manadnak, "at the bad mountain." The name was probably

given from the fact that a storm is preceded for several hours by a roaring of the mountain (of evil portent to the natives), which, according to Jeremy Belknap, may be heard to a distance of ten or twelve miles.

It is probably to a tradition that the Indians regarded this eminence as "manito," that is, as possessing something of the supernatural or mysterious, that is due the unwarranted interpretation, "the spirit's place," found in some books. As the letter n is convertible in Algonkin with l and r, the derogatory prefix in this word becomes in certain dialects mal or mar; whence the name Maramak, a "bad fishing place," applied to some locality upon a New England river, to which the appellation, in the corrupt form of Merrimack or Merrimack, was early transferred by the European settlers.

As well known, the name of this river was formerly borne by a United States frigate, which, under the name of "Virginia" (by which she had been rechristened by the Confederates), had a memorable conflict with Ericsson's "Monitor" in Hampton Roads, March 9, 1861. Her successor in name now blocks the entrance to the harbor of Santiago.

Two other of our war vessels bear the name of mountains. One of these, the armored ram "Katahdin," was so called after the highest elevation in Maine, the Indian name of which, Ketadene, means the "principal mountain." The other is the battleship "Kearsage" (now constructing), which is to perpetuate the memory of the famous corvette that sank the Confederate cruiser "Alabama" in 1864, and ended her career on Roncador Reef in 1894. This vessel was so called after a conspicuous eminence in Carroll County, N. H., the modern name of which is a very bad corruption of Kowasádehu, meaning "pine mountain."

The law that provides that cruisers shall be called after cities has given an Indian name thus far to but one vessel of this class—the "Chicago," the name borne by the cruiser "Topeka" being merely an Indian corruption of the English word potato.

The meaning of the word Chicago (spelled by early French writers Chicagou) is obscure. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the following idle guesses from being made as to its signification: "Place of Skunks;" "Place of Wild Onions;" the "Deity;" "Thunder;" the "Voice of the Great Manito;" "King;" and the name of a chieftain signifying "Strong." There are two things which can be stated with positiveness in regard to the word Chicago: (1) That it was the name of a village of the Miamis; and (2) that in the dialect of these Indians it had none of the meanings that has thus far been ascribed to it.

The name of the auxiliary cruiser "Yosemite" is (to use the words of Mr. Stephen Powers) a "beautiful and sonorous corruption" of uzúmaiti (oo-zoo-my-tee), the Miwok Indian name for the grizzly bear. The word as a name for the beautiful valley so called, came into use about 1851, and the credit of its application is accorded to a Dr. L. H. Bunnell. Among the Indians themselves, the name of the valley is Awáni.

The name borne by the "Monocacy" is derived from that of a small tributary of the Potomac, near which, in the vicinity of Frederick, Md., on July 9, 1864, the Confederates under General Early defeated the Federals under General Wallace. The name of the river near which this engagement took place represents the Lenape word Menágassi, meaning a "stream having several large bends."

In the nomenclature of gunboats, and of such yachts and tugs as have been converted into vessels of this class, the Navy Department has selected a few names of Indian origin: Thus, the name of the gunboat "Machias" (so called after a town on the coast of Maine) represents the word Matsiész, or "lazy bird," the Passamaquoddy name for the partridge or ruffed grouse. The armed tug "Wompatuck" bears the name by which the Canada goose was known to the Massachusetts and Narragansett Indians. The tug Osceola is so called after a famous Seminole warrior, whose name, correctly spelled, was Assiyahóla, or "Black Drink Shouter."*

The name of the torpedo boat destroyer "Yankton" is shortened from a Dakotah word meaning "villages of the border," and designating one of the divisions of the Dakotah people.

In the designation of the dispatch boat "Oneida," we have a slight alteration of the Iroquoian word Oneiyeta, meaning "standing stone."

We now come to the most important part of the navy, that constituted by the battleships, which, as well known, are by law christened after the States of the Union. Of this class of vessels thus far called after States having names of Indian origin are the "Texas," "Massachusetts" and "Iowa," now in commission, and the "Kentucky," "Wisconsin" and "Alabama," under construction.

The name of the State borne by the first named of these vessels had, like that of many other States, a

* This name is said to be expressive of the effect produced by a copious imbibition of "assi" (called by the white settlers black drink), an exhilarating beverage prepared from the leaves of Ilex cassine, and used by all the Indian tribes that formerly inhabited what are now the Southern States.

local origin. It began with Tachies, the name of a Caddoan tribe which formerly lived upon an affluent of the Sabine River. This tribal name, changed to Tachus and Tekas, and finally to Texas, was first applied, in the latter form, to a prairie called Bradshaw Place, on the east bank of the Neches River, and was afterward extended to the entire territory now embraced in the State so called.

It was the Blue Hills of Milton and Quincy that gave the State of Massachusetts its name. These were known to the Indians as Massadchúash, or "great hills," a word which, with the locative suffix, becomes Massadchúashet, meaning "at the great hills." The terminals in the present form of the word is the sign of the English plural, and is superfluous.

Much research has been wasted in the attempt to ascertain the meaning of the State name borne by the battleship "Iowa." Washington Irving, with the license allowable to an imaginative writer, states that the word means "beautiful," and explains its application by saying that a certain tribe which, in its wanderings, arrived at the highest point in the Iowa prairies, looking over the vast expanse of country, uninterrupted by hills or swamps, involuntarily uttered the word Iowa, meaning "beautiful." A certain number of authors have taken Irving seriously, and adopted his fanciful etymology. The State derives its name from a Siouan tribe which lived on the Des Moines River, and called itself Pajoha, or "Gray Snow," but to which some of its neighbors gave a name that has been variously spelled Aiaoue, Ayaway, Ahyahwah, Ahwahhaway, Iaway, etc., and, until the organization of the territory in 1838, Iowa. The Indian language to which this word belonged (and consequently its meaning) has not been determined.

The battleship "Wisconsin" will do duty under a name which has been interpreted "strong stream" and "wild rushing river." The State so called derives its name, it is true, from the largest river which intersects it—the Ouisconsin, as the word was formerly and properly spelled. Ouisconsin, however, was not the Indian name of a river, but of a locality. In the Otchipwe dialect, to which the word belongs, ouiskons is the name for the small lodge of a beaver or musquash, and this, with the locative suffix, becomes Wiskonsing, "at the small lodge of a beaver or musquash." The stream itself was called by the same Indians Ouiskonsisibi, or "beaver (or musquash) lodge river." Such transferences of aboriginal names are very common in our geographical nomenclature.

Although the phrase "dark and bloody ground" might, on certain occasions, prove quite apposite as a designation for the deck, at least, of a war vessel, if not for the vessel itself, such is not, as has been generally supposed (ever since some extremely careless reader of Filson * put the statement upon record), the meaning of the name "Kentucky" that has been given to one of the battleships now under construction. Nor does this word signify, in the language of the Shawnees, the "head of the river," as has been stated. Most of the land embraced in the territory called Kentucky was claimed and sold by the Six Nations, and the true origin of the name, as suggested by Fathers Marcoux and Cuoq, is, doubtless, to be found in the Iroquoian word Kentake, meaning "at the prairie land."

The battleship "Illinois" will sail under what maybe called a hybrid name, consisting of an Indian word with a French plural suffix. The State so called assumed, upon its organization, the name of a territory that had long been mapped as the "Illinois country," and which was called by the French "Le Pays des Illinois," from several tribes of Indians of which representatives had been met by Fathers Allouez and Marquette while they were laboring respectively among the Otchipwés and Ottawas, and who spoke a dialect slightly different from that of the latter. Thus, while in Otchipwé and Ottawa the term for "man" (or, more accurately speaking, individual of the "native" or "common" type) was Inini, the same word in the more southerly dialect was Ilini, from which the Jesuits, with the addition of the French plural suffix, made the distinctive name Illinois, which, at that period of the French language in which it was first used, was pronounced Il-ee-náy.

The battleship recently launched and christened "Alabama" bears a name which was that of a Muskogean people (Alibámu; plural, Alibámalgi), and the meaning of which is not known, even to the remnants of the tribe now living. Nevertheless, some one long ago interpreted the word as "here we rest," and the State of Alabama adopted the phrase as its motto.

In order to capture fish, Pool states that the natives of Surinam whip the water with the wood of Lonchocarpus violaceus, Bth., a papilionaceous tree which contains a substance having a narcotic action on the fish. The wood, which has a disagreeable odor, is called "Nekoe" by the natives, and stinkwood by European settlers.—Pharm. Centralh., xxxix., 282, through Nederl. J. Jdschr. o. Ph., 1798.

* The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky. By John Filson. Delaware, 1784.