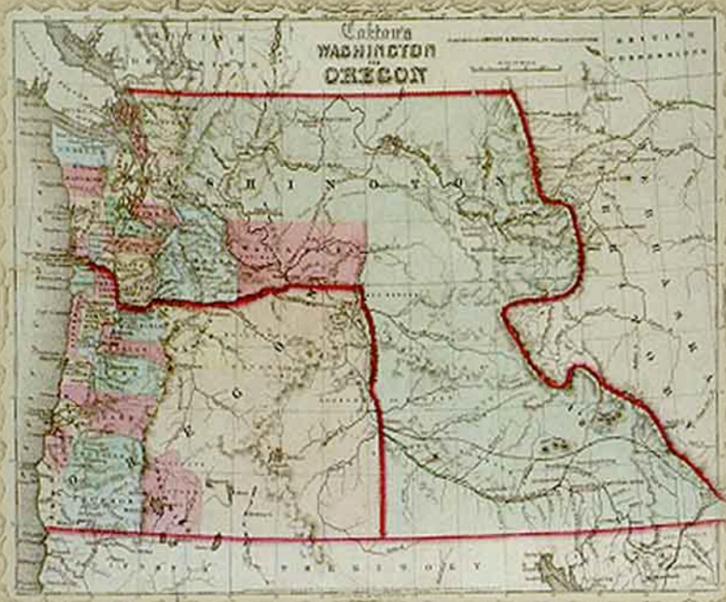


The Naming of Idaho



Washington Territory, 1860

Idaho's naming is cloaked in legends of Indian words and the wishes of early white settlers to extol the territory's beauty as the 'gem of the mountains.' Efforts to draw out the facts over the years have shed some light on what occurred, but the exact source of the name 'Idaho' is still unknown.

History has linked Idaho's state and territorial name to the formation and naming of another western territory, Colorado, in 1861. The mining community of "Idahoe," better known as Idaho Springs, Colorado, where gold was discovered in 1859, was an early use of 'Idaho' as a place name. In a partisan debate at territorial conventions in the Pike's Peak mining camps, the Democrat-favored name 'Jefferson' territory triumphed over the Republican-favored name 'Idaho.' However, when Republicans came to power nationally in 1860, the 'Jefferson Territory' delegate to Congress, Beverly D. Williams decided to go with the name 'Idaho,' which he had been told was an Indian word meaning 'gem of the mountains.'

To his dismay, Williams later learned that 'Idaho' was a word made up by someone involved in the territorial process, probably the first Pike's Peak delegate to Congress, George M. Willing. At that point, Williams requested that Congress drop 'Idaho' and use a previously proposed name, 'Colorado.'

Although 'Idaho' was not used for Colorado Territory, it was still discussed as a naming option in Washington Territory and in Washington D.C. where decisions were being made about the West. Most participants in the territorial process seem to have quickly forgotten that 'Idaho' was not an Indian name, and an 'Idaho' bill was introduced in Congress for the new territory northwest of Colorado. Somehow that 1862 bill was renamed 'Montana' before it passed in the House. However, during the last night of the session, the name 'Idaho' was restored to the proposed new territory.

A 1917 article in the Oregon Historical Society's quarterly magazine perpetuated some of the legends about the naming of Idaho territory, including the Indian name story. The article also told of two steamboats named 'Idaho,' both launched in 1860. The Yale Steamboat Company built the first boat, launched in Victoria, British Columbia. It was said to be named 'Idaho' after Idaho Springs, Colorado, home of one of the company owners. The steamboat name later changed to 'Fort Yale' before it was destroyed in a boiler explosion. Oregon Steam Navigation Company built another steamboat 'Idaho,' also launched in 1860. This steamer transported thousands of miners up the Columbia River toward the newly discovered gold mines at Orofino, probably popularizing the name 'Idaho.'



William H. Wallace

Luzanne Wallace, the wife of William H. Wallace the first governor of Idaho Territory, also claimed to have played a role in the naming of Idaho during the 1862-1863 session of Congress. William Wallace was then a delegate to Congress from Washington Territory. According to the Oregon Historical Society, he offered Luzanne the opportunity to suggest a name for the new territory. She said she named 'Idaho' after her niece who was born in Colorado.

Sources:

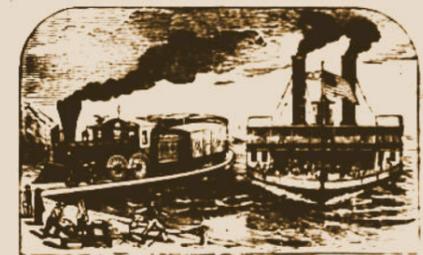
- Rees, John E. "Idaho—Its Meaning, Origin and Application." *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, Volume XVIII (March 1917-December 1917): 83-92.
- Wells, Merle W. "Origins of the Name 'Idaho' and How Idaho Became a Territory in 1863." In *The Idaho Heritage: A Collection of Historical Essays*, Richard W. Etulain and Bert W. Marley, eds. Pocatello: Idaho State University Press, 1983.

Links:

- Idaho Digital Atlas: <http://imnh.isu.edu/digitalatlas/geog/explore/essay.pdf>
- Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series #258: <http://history.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/reference-series/0258.pdf>
- Portland's Lost Waterfront, Early Days on the Lower Willamette: <http://portlandwaterfront.org/early.html>
- Washington Secretary of State Legacy Project: <http://www.sos.wa.gov/legacyproject/HistoryMakersDetail.aspx?Wallace/William/694>

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Will leave PORTLAND at 6 A. M. daily, arriving at ASTORIA the same day at 6 P. M.