

Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF GEOGRAPHER

Ottawa, AUG 22 1905

DEAR SIR,

I wish to obtain information respecting the derivation of the place-names of Canada—of the names of the villages, towns, cities and of the natural features, such as rivers, lakes, capes, bays, mountains, etc.—and shall be much obliged if you will give me any information that you may possess or can procure, respecting the below-mentioned name and also respecting the names of any other features in the vicinity of your residence concerning which you have knowledge.

In many localities, the older generation is passing, or has passed away, and unless steps are taken to collect this information, it will, in many instances, be too late. In most communities there are persons who take an interest in things of this nature or that have been connected with the early settlement of the locality. If there are any such in your neighbourhood, will you kindly submit this to them.

Below I have indicated the lines along which I desire information and also the commoner derivatives of place-names in Canada :—

(1.) Whether named after a village, town, or city, or natural feature in any other province or country ; if so, the name of province or country in which the original locality is situated.

(2.) Whether named after a person ; if so, the person's name, occupation, spelling of name as rendered by the person and any details of interest respecting him (or her) such as (a) Whether alive or, if dead, approximate year of death ; (b) Whether at any time a resident of the locality and, if so, whether still living there.

(3.) Whether named after a natural feature ; if so, any details respecting the origin of the name as applied to the feature and the geographical position of the latter.

(4.) Whether the town, village or city ever had any other name or names ; if so, at what dates, approximately, and the origin of these obsolete names.

Any information bearing on the above will be deemed a courtesy.

Yours truly,

JAMES WHITE,
Geographer.

Kindly write your reply on the attached sheet.

To ensure free transmission of your reply I enclose herewith an addressed envelope which will come free of postage.

"Medicine Hat" asked

~~Sask~~ Alta

Medicine Hat, Assa
Aug. 26 - 1908

Jacques White Esq.
Geographer, Dep. of Interior
Ottawa.

Dear Sir,
I have much pleasure in
replying to your circular.

The exact origin of the name
of this town is a matter of argument among
the native Indians.

Medicine Hat is situated in the
valley of the "Belly" or "South Saskatchewan
River" & this locality was the neutral zone
between the Black feet, and the Cree nations.

Here also naturally these two strong
peoples used to meet in deadly fights,
following the immense herds of buffaloes
as the latter were driven from the east
and the west, to their favourite watering
places on the river banks.

"Mus-ke-ke-was-to-ten" is Cree for
"the place of the medicine man's hat", hence
for shortness "Medicine Hat".

The principal man in an Indian tribe,
more powerful perhaps than the head-chief
is the medicine man, and the principal
adornment of the medicine man is
his hat, an edifice decorated with charms,
votive offerings, feathers, claws and the

Valued birch-branches of the tree.

One legend told by the Blackfeet - who call the place "Sah-hah-mis" (same meaning as the tree) is - that on the bank of the river they found a medicine man's hat - such an extraordinary find, considering the value placed on the fetish.

The Cree say that here at one time they gained such a victory over the hated Blackfeet that the medicine man as a special act of thanksgiving, & offering of self-dedication flung his much valued hat into the waters of the Saskatchewan as a sacrifice to Manitou, the great Spirit -

Here we cross another legend, which shortly is as follows.

Indians generally believe that although Manitou exists everywhere, yet he has special dwelling places - One of these is in this river, & they confidently point out to you, a certain spot where the water never freezes, no matter how severe the winter may be. This is the place left untouched by ice, where Manitou may come to breathe.

There are other traditions dealing with the derivation of the name, but I believe the above to be the most reasonable. My informant, an intelligent native who died some years ago, believed so.

I remain dear Sir

Yours obediently
Francis R. East