

Ouaricon Revisited

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RECENTLY MY FRIEND DAVID KRECH of the Psychology Department of the University of California made an investigation of the "longevity" of scientific articles in his field, and for a comparison he ran a similar test with scholarly articles in literature and language, using a list of journals which I provided. He later reported to me that an article in psychology was rarely cited after, as I remember, about three years. I asked him about those in my own field, and he replied with a laugh, "Oh, that's easy! Nobody ever cites them at all."

Since Professor Krech is a man noted for provocative statements, we need not take him literally that the life of our articles is zero years. Yet my own experience, unfortunately, goes a long way toward showing him approximately right. I have published what might be called a creditable number of such articles, in approved journals of three countries, and the great majority of them, as far as I can tell, have just dropped into the void. I have rarely found them cited, or received letters from people who have read them, or had people speak to me about them, except in so far as some people thanked me politely for having sent them offprints.

This is, indeed, the chief reason why I have quit writing such articles, since the appearance of my last contribution in *Names* of March, 1962.

Now, at the request of Editor Kenny, I draw the ancient sword again. He made the suggestion to me, under the patriotic dateline of July 4, 1966, that I should again consider the material that I presented in "The Source of the name 'Oregon'" (*American Speech*, April, 1944). Did I still hold to the same opinions? Had more recent significant work on the subject appeared? To what degree had scholars accepted my idea? Since I could not thus have written without an elaborate synopsis of the original article, I made the suggestion that *Names* should reprint it, along with a reproduction of a map.

So much interest displayed in a twenty-two-year-old article might seem *prima facie* refutation of Krech's cynicism about such items. But let us momentarily reserve judgment.

As a statement of position, I may declare that I have not changed my own opinions as regards Oregon. I still believe the evidence to be very strong toward the conclusions that I have ventured, and I know of no better idea having been promulgated. Naturally, I used my own material in *Names on the Land* (1945), and in the enlarged edition of that work (1958) I added a long footnote.

My article, somewhat exceptionally, had a follow-up. Also in *American Speech* (October, 1946) Professor Frederick Bracher published "'Ouaricon' and Oregon." His special object was to trace the origin of the map-error, upon which my article was based, and he found it to occur only in the French editions, beginning with the "Ornament" issue of 1703. His concluding sentence ran, "In short, the origin and reproduction of the form 'Ouaricon' in the Lahontan editions increase the probability that Professor Stewart's suggested etymology is correct."

From this point on, however, the history of the article seems to bear out Krech's conclusions. It is, of course, listed in the Sealock and Seely bibliography, so that failure to notice it cannot be justified, as it so often can be, upon inadequate bibliographical compilations. Nevertheless, the waters of Lethe seem to have prevailed.

McArthur's *Oregon Geographic Names* is the standard work, and one of the notable monuments of American onomastics. When my article appeared, I sent an offprint to McArthur, and received an acknowledgment in which he expressed interest. Yet his Third Edition (1952) uses essentially the same words in the Oregon entry as appear in the earlier editions. With McArthur's careful scholarship he would certainly not have omitted some reference to the article, even if only to refute it. The lack of any comment at all is probably to be attributed to the fact that the Third Edition was posthumous, and that whoever completed the work did not maintain the original standards of scholarship.

Similarly George Simpson in his *Book about American History* (1950) and John C. Huden in *Indian Place Names of New England* (1962), both of whom discuss Oregon, seem to have no knowledge of my work.

Two recent articles upon the name are Vernon F. Snow's "From Ouragan to Oregon" (*Oregon Historical Quarterly*, December, 1959),

and a communication in refutation of it by Malcolm H. Clark, Jr. (*ibid.*, June, 1960). As Clark points out, Snow's idea is the re-hash of an old one, and no more convincing than it has been in the past. Neither of these writers seems to be familiar with my article, though it is cited in a footnote.

As might be expected, mention of the article has not always meant agreement with it. Francis Lee Utley (*Names*, September, 1963, p. 161, n), without committing himself, declares that my "Oregon etymology still shocks many hearers." Why such a word as "shock" should be necessary to describe the sensations of scholars in such a connection is difficult for me to understand. The implication, I am afraid, is that many scholars, learned in the European linguistic background, fail to know much about place name process and in particular do not conceive the bizarre manner by which many American place names, demonstrably, have arisen.

What may be considered a violent reaction occurs in Virgil J. Vogel's *Indian Place Names in Illinois* (1963). The entry on Oregon occurs only among the *addenda* (p. 176), so that it was apparently a last-moment discovery and may have been hurriedly added with limitations of space. It notes my article, and concludes that my view "is without foundation." This Olympian arrogance, I must confess, leaves me somewhat breathless. Such godlike confidence in the crushing of another worker in the field may occasionally be permitted to some scholar grown gray in his labors, and no longer able always to suffer fools gladly. But, as for Mr. Vogel, I find nothing either in his bibliographical record or his biographical record that makes me ready to grant him any such right or privilege of punditry. Even his words are carelessly all-embracing. Will not "without foundation" suggest to those otherwise ignorant that I fabricated the whole business? Even if he meant only that the etymology is without logical foundation, that seems beyond his prerogative to promulgate as an *ipse dixit*, without even the grace of an "in my opinion." I also think it will be to the ultimate advantage of scholarship if I state that I find his words scarcely to maintain a tradition of scholarly courtesy.

Earlier in this present note I used the figure of speech of drawing the sword. Probably I have now laid about sufficiently with the old snickersnee. Let me, then, return to the comfortable slippers and the fireside nook, and to the quiet oblivion that Krech's researches seem to predict for old writers of scholarly articles.

The Source of the Name 'Oregon'

[This is Professor Stewart's original article on Oregon, reprinted from *American Speech*, April 1944, by permission of the Columbia University Press, New York. Without the original article, Mr. Stewart's present commentary would be incomplete. The two together give an interesting view of the reception and vicissitudes of a place name theory. *Ed.*]

THE MEANING and ultimate origin of the name Oregon have always been mysteries, and Oregon has thus remained perhaps the chief *crux* among American place-names. Many fanciful etymologists have attempted derivations from languages as far scattered as Mohegan, Mohawk, Shoshone, Santee, French, and Spanish. For many years the name could not be traced farther back than Jonathan Carver's *Travels through the Interior Parts of North-America* (1778). At last T. C. Elliott discovered that the name appeared in the manuscripts of Major Robert Rogers, and could be found as 'Ouragon' as early as 1765 ('The Origin of the Name Oregon,' *Quart. of the Oreg. Hist. Soc.*, June, 1921, and 'Jonathan Carver's Source for the Name Oregon,' *ibid.*, March, 1922). Lewis A. McArthur, in his *Oregon Geographic Names* (1922), declared that Elliott had thus made the 'one important contribution . . . in the last hundred years.' In the same work (pp. 263-266) McArthur also gives an excellent summary of the whole question to date, and presents, without approving, many of the fanciful suggestions.

The name is ultimately derived, I believe, from a confusion arising from the 'Carte générale de Canada' of Lahontan's *Nouveaux voyages . . . dans l'Amérique Septentrionale*. This work exists in many varying editions, and I am thus unable to say just when the map first appeared, but it was certainly as early as 1709, and perhaps in 1703. This map is reproduced in Justin Winsor's *Cartier to Frontenac* (p. 352); his *Narrative and Critical History of America* contains a similar but much less accurate reproduction. In the English editions of Lahontan, however, the situation giving rise to the name was changed when the map was redrawn with English captions.



THE "OUARICON" MAP — Reproduced from Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, iv, 258. It appeared first in the "Ornament" issue of Lahontan's *Nouveaux Voyages*. See Bracher, *op. cit.*, in text.

Anyone looking at this map of Lahontan's somewhat casually will see, near the left-hand edge, what appears to be 'R. de Ouaricon.' ('R.' here stands for 'Rivière.') A close inspection will show that following 'Ouaricon' are two small dots indicating a hyphen, and that below are written the letters 'sint.' (The last letter is somewhat doubtful, but its identification is not of importance to the present argument.) My own impression, however, was that here on the map was a river called Ouaricon; except for being particularly interested in place-names, I would probably not have corrected this impression. Anyone making only a casual examination of the map would quite readily carry away the memory of a river called Ouaricon. This would be the easier because the map is full of obscure descriptive annotations, with which the four letters following the hyphen and written below might easily be confused.

From Ouaricon the modern name is readily derived through the intermediary forms actually preserved. We may list:

La Hontan	(1709)	Ouaricon
Rogers	(1765)	Ouragon
Rogers	(1766, 1772)	Ourigan
Carver	(1778)	Oregon

(In 1766 Rogers also once uses *Ourgan*, but this can probably be dismissed as a mere error.) The two forms used by Rogers are obviously about half-way between Ouaricon and Oregon. The chief difference between Ouaricon and all later forms is the shift of *c* to *g*. This may indicate some oral transmission, since the two consonants (differing only by voicing or the lack of it) are very easily confused in sound. In any case the difference between Roger's two (or three) spellings is enough to show that he himself was a bad speller and might easily have shifted *c* to *g*.

On the whole, however, I think it unlikely that Rogers himself is responsible for the confusion. More likely he had merely heard that on 'some old map' there was a river of that name flowing toward the west, and in some way this name had become connected in his mind with the often-told legend of 'The River of the West.'

Rogers once wrote: 'the River called by the Indians Ouragon.' Elliott has already cast doubt upon whether the river was actually so called by 'the Indians.' Moreover, the very vagueness of the wording arouses suspicion. Rogers knew a good deal about Indians,

and must have known that the different tribes did not all speak the same language. If he had really been writing from personal knowledge, he would almost certainly have stated a particular tribe. 'Called by the Indians' is scarcely less vague than 'they say.'

The actual form Ouaricon is really sufficient evidence on which to rest the case. On the whole it would seem that the burden of proof should rest upon anyone trying to show that Ouaricon—Ouragon—Oregon is *not* the proper solution. On the other hand, it may also be pointed out that the river as presented on the map fulfills most of the conditions associated with the mysterious 'River of the West,' *viz.*, it is located well toward the west, flows toward the west, and is a route to salt water. The salt water thus reached would of course be the Gulf of Mexico, not the Pacific.

The origin of the name is fortunately explicable. Written without the hyphen, it becomes Ouriconsint, although the last letter is doubtful. The position of the river on the map makes certain that it is the Wisconsin, which was actually one of the chief French routes for passing from the Lakes to the Mississippi. (Carver himself followed that route, and Rogers mentions it in one of his petitions.) On most early French maps Wisconsin is written 'Ouisconsing.' From some such form as this the map-engraver produced a bad misspelling, either because he was working from an illegible or incorrect manuscript or because he himself was careless. The latter is perhaps more likely, because there are other misspellings which would have been unlikely on a manuscript, e.g., 'Missipipi,' and 'bbis' for 'bois.'

The origin of new names because of mistakes of map-reading is by no means unknown. Hood Canal, an arm of Puget Sound, was first written as Hood Channel, and altered by a map-maker. The most extreme case which I have noted is the derivation of the English name Young (in Dumas's *Un Gil Blas en California*) from the badly engraved French word 'Fourche,' with the aid of some lines indicating the windings of a river.

With this derivation from Ouaricon we arrive at the interesting conclusion that Oregon, like its sister-state Wisconsin, takes its name from the river by which Marquette and Joliet first reached the Mississippi, and which was thus in itself a 'River of the West.'