



Reference Series #1098

Oregon Short Line Names for Southern Idaho Stations Between American Falls and Glenn's Ferry

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When Union Pacific Railway officials were arranging for survey and construction of an extension across southern Idaho, they wanted to use Indian names for their new stations in that barren country. So a noted authority on Indian languages was consulted. E. P. Vining of Brookline, Massachusetts provided that service. He reviewed appropriate sites with a surveyor who had established that route, and based upon descriptive information, chose several names that got onto railroad maps. Since he preferred to use Stephen R. Riggs' 1852 Dakota dictionary for that purpose, all of his selections were Dakota words. That language had no local application in Idaho, but such details did not concern nineteenth century authorities dealing with western geographic names. One of Vining's selections, Minidoka, came into widespread local use for more than a railroad junction. Its Dakota meaning is a large water spring. (Other derivations for Minidoka have been suggested, but they are unrelated to Vining's actual choice.) Vining's other contributions have remained obscure.

Vining's other Oregon Short Line stations with Dakota names included:

Kimama, referring to a butterfly which surveyors were impressed with at that site.

Owinza, meaning some kind of bed upon which they could lie or sit on.

Ticeska, coming from a formation that reminded them of a tent top or a house top.

Wapi, a place where they were fortunate or lucky.