

The Meaning of United

States' State Names

By Mark R. Putnam

Introduction

This work contains poetry—each poem describes the meaning a state’s name.

It is not a didactic lecture.

Each meaning paints a striking picture.

Each state has a very amazing and interesting name.

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Alabama

The state name Alabama means the grass, plant, or herb gatherer
The root is the Choctaw word "alba" that means herb or aromatic plant.

The suffix to Alabama "amo" means the collector.

Alabama is a name with a rhythmic flow or chant.

The name Alabama denotes a plant reaper.

It also means in part the farmer.

Alaska

The Aleutian word "alakshak" means the great land.

The name Alaska is a Russian version of that Aleutian name.

Alaska is composed of a great peninsula and large mainland.

To the name, there is a more yawning claim.

The deeper root of Alaska seems to be where the sea breaks.

Alaska, our nation's largest state, a grand hunting and fishing land it makes.

Arizona

The State of Arizona may have a name whose meaning is somewhat simple.

Two meanings have been known to be where there is a little spring or good oaks.

However maybe its name was chosen because it implied an English meaning that is more direct and humble.

To the quick mind, it seems to mean the arid zone that is dry.

Arizona lays under a typically hot and arid sky.

The Latin word "areo" means to be with thirst or drought.

The Latin word "zona" means a belt or terrestrial zone without doubt.

It may be that the local Indian language was kept in mind.

In the end the name Arizona may have been chosen because it implied an English meaning that was well understood or defined.

Arkansas

The State of Arkansas has a name that is linked to the State of Kansas.

Both names come from "Kka-ze" that may mean the people of the south wind or just of the people of the wind.

The Native Indians of the local Kansas River were called the Kaw or Kansas.

The word Kansas may be related to the area's propensity for a tornado, twister, or very strong wind.

In the Sioux language "o-ka-ga" means south.

The Eastern United States tribe name Shawnee means people of the south.

However perhaps Kansas is related the Sioux word for to wind, to twist, or to spin like a top.

The Sioux word “ka-wa-ei” means to cause something to dance by striking it making it spin like a child’s top.¹

Perhaps Kansas is a reference to tornados or twisters.

Kansas is widely known for its many whirlwinds or twisters.

Here the wind will dance, spin, or gyro.

Kansas is the land of the winding turbo or tornado.

California

The State of California was likely named for the queen of a mythical Spanish island.

She herself was called Califia.

Southern California in spring, summer, and fall is a warm and even hot land.

Perhaps there is a deeper meaning to the name California.

The Latin word for hot "caleo" seems to be in fact the essential root to the word California.

The state name then means to be bright, glowing, and hot.

The Spanish word “caliente” comes to mind and also means to be warm or hot.

Colorado

The State of Colorado name comes from Spanish and then Latin words that mean to be colored red.

¹ A Dakota-English Dictionary, Volume 7, By Stephen Return Riggs

Colorado originally applied to the ruby stained Colorado River.

In Spanish "colorado" means to be colored red.

Colorado is a name that is easy to decipher

The Colorado River flows with a tint that ruddy.

The State of Colorado is great state in which to enjoy a vibrant colorful landscape unquestionably.

Connecticut

The eastern State of Connecticut has a name that means long tidal river.

This word comes from one's throat and tongue like a song.

The State of Connecticut was named for the "Quinnehtukqut" or now the Connecticut River.

In Eastern Algonquin "guinn" means long.

"Ehtuk" means tidal.

The ending "qut" means a location or place to dwell.

Delaware

The State of Delaware was named for Lord de la War.

His name likely comes from the French phrase "de la guerre" meaning of the war.

Florida

Florida means the land of the blooming flowers.

Florida was discovered in the Easter season when flowering plants were plentiful.

Easter is the fest of flowers.

A warm sub-tropical state, Florida is a place where blossoming flora is very ample.

Florida means the place that is florid.

The warmth and beauty of the State of Florida makes one feel youthful and fledgling like a kid.

Georgia

Georgia was named for King George II of England.

George means earth worker, husbandman, or farmer.

The Latin word "georgicus" means of the countryside or farmland.

The Plains of Georgia are deeply steeped in cultivation and agriculture.

In Greek words "geo" and "ge" mean geography or the land, earth, or ground.

The meaning to George is easily discovered or found.

Hawaii

The State of Hawaii is composed of many large and small islands.

Hawaii means the place of one's Gods, spirits, or ancestors.

"Owhyhee" was the name of the state's original people's Polynesian homelands.

Hawaiian's were Polynesian oceanic sailors.

Hawaii means the place of the upper and underworld spirits.

Hawaii means where the breath and soul of the spirit or ancestor breaths and sits.

Idaho

Idaho was said to be a politician's joke—the name Idaho was said to be made up and really had no meaning or connotation.

At first the politician said the name Idaho was a Shoshone word that meant gem of the mountains.

He refuted that statement, but however, in the end the statement seems true as indeed the name Idaho likely has that implication.

The Shoshone word "doya" means mountains.

The Shosone word "puihwi" with root "ihwi" is used to makes words for semi-precious and precious stones and metals and for money.²

Idaho seems to be a real Shoshone phrase with "ihwi-doya" then meaning precious stone mountain undoubtedly.

Illinois

The State of Illinois has a name that was said to come from the Miami-Illinois word "irenwe-wa" that means he speaks in an ordinary way.

The root word to Illinois may be connected with the Chippewa word "inwe" meaning I speak.³

Illinois means he who talks or speaks in the regular or common way.

For the meaning of Illinois, this is the conventional critique.

² Eastern Shoshone Working Dictionary, compiled by David Leedom Shaul.

³ A Dictionary of the Ojibway Language, Frederick Baraga.

Indiana

The State of Indiana has a name that means the land of native people--the indigenous.

Originally, the word Indian meant people who were Hindu or from India.

For the American word Indian, that was the early origin or impetus.

The State of Indiana was indirectly name for the Middle-east river called the Indus.

The words Indian and Indiana were used here as American was once thought to be a part of India.

Iowa

The State of Iowa has a name that appears to mean the dormant, drowsy, or sleepy ones.

The Dakota Indian word for Iowa is "A-yu-ba",⁴

Named for the Iowa people, Iowa was first written in French as "Aioues".

The Chippewa word for sleepy is "wa-niba".

Kansas

Like Arkansas, people of the south wind or just people of the wind may be the meaning of Kansas.

⁴ A Dakota-English Dictionary, Volume 7, By Stephen Return Riggs

Having principally the same meaning, their names come from the Kansas River and the Indian group called the Kka-Ze or Kaw.

From the Sioux language comes the word Kansas.

In Sioux the word for south is “o-ka-ga”.

Perhaps however the word Kansas is related the Sioux word for to wind, to twist, or to spin like a top.

The Sioux word “ka-wa-ei” means to cause something to dance or to spin by striking it and making it to dance or spin like a top.⁵

Perhaps this is a reference to the winding wind of tornados or twisters.

Kansas is widely known for turbulent wind, weather, and twisters.

“Ka” means to strike while “wa-ei” means to wind or dance.

“Ka-wa-ei” essentially means to strike and cause to spin or dance.

Kentucky

The State of Kentucky has name that is formed from an Iroquoian word that means field or prairie.

The Mohawk word “kenhtà:ke ” means in French La Prairie⁶ or in English the field or meadow.

Another suggested meaning for Kentucky has been the land of tomorrow.

The word Kentucky means grassland undoubtedly.

The State of Kentucky is called the blue grass state.

⁵ A Dakota-English Dictionary, Volume 7, By Stephen Return Riggs

⁶ The Mohawk Language Standardization Project, Conference Report, August 9-10, 1993

Found here are many a piece of grazing land and through-bred horse pasture estate.

Louisiana

Named for King Louis XIV of France, Louisiana in essence means warrior.

The name Louis comes from Clovis and Ludwig that mean victor.

Maine

The State of Maine may have been named for the French Province of Mayne.

It likely means a continuous body of land, not an island, but a mainland.

Maryland

Maryland was named for Queen Henrietta Maria wife of King Charles I of England.

Another reason that the name Maryland was selected may have been that the state is closely associated with water.

Maryland is today the mariner's land.

The Latin word "mare" means sea-water.

Maryland houses a naval base, hospital, and academy.

In the back of one's mind, Maryland means the people of the sea.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts means grand hill.

The name comes from the Narragansett word “massachusêuck”.

In English one might say Massachusetts means the massive hill.

It means the place with the grand hillock.

Michigan

The Great State of Michigan . . . has a name that means mighty lagoon definitely.

Michigan is the state nearly surrounded by Great Lakes.

Michigan comes from the Chippewa phrase “mitchi-gami”.

In the State of Michigan life is at its best near the sand and gravel shore of a pleasant freshwater lake where the water wave gently rolls and breaks.

Minnesota

Water that is clear sky tinted is the meaning of Minnesota.

In other words, Minnesota is the land of the sky blue water.

Originally the Dakota word for the local Minnesota River was “mnsota”.

In the Dakota language, “mini” means water.

The Dakota word “sota” means to be colored like the sky.⁷

Minnesota is the land with ten thousand lakes with many a beautify view.

Minnesota means the land of water that is colored like a clear sky.

Minnesota is the land of water that is clear and blue.

⁷ A Dakota-English Dictionary, Volume 7, By Stephen Return Riggs

Mississippi

The State of Mississippi has a name that we easily see in the Chippewa word "mitchi-zibii"

Mississippi means the great and mighty river.

The word "mitchi" means grand while "zibii" means river.

The State of Mississippi was named for the Mississippi River the largest and grandest river in the United States that is understood very clearly.

Missouri

The State of Missouri has a name that is said to mean those who have wooden dugout canoes.

The Miami-Illinois word for boat or canoe is "mihsooli".⁸

In Chippewa "mitigo tchiman" means wooden or log canoes.

Missouri is very likely a Miami-Illinois word that in essence means Indian boat or canoe solitary!

In the Miami-Illinois language the Missouri River tribe was called the "ouemessourita" and "wimihsoorita".

The Algonquin people in their languages did not use r's but did use l's when speaking.

The prefixes and suffixes to the above two names may a link to other references or data.

The Missouri Native People were definitely involved with boating or canoeing.

⁸ The Miami-Illinois Language, By David J. Costa

Montana

The State of Montana has a name that is very straightforward and clear.

The word comes from the Latin and then Spanish word for mountain.

The state is full with many a great or grand mountain.

The landscape and sky are flawless whether partly cloudy or clear.

Nebraska

The State of Nebraska was named for an Oto Indian word that meant the place of flat water.

In Chippewa the word "nibi" means water while "nabaga" means level or flat.

The word Nebraska referred originally to the Platte River.

Platt River means the uniform and plain or level river.

The Dakota words "mini" means water while "mda-ska" means flat.

Nebraska is a land that is level.

Nebraska is a place of the Platt River that often greatly and widely overflows as everything is even or horizontal.

Nevada

What may one say about the State of Nevada that has many mountains that are snowcapped?

As to the meaning of Nevada, "nieve" in Spanish and "neige" in French mean snow.

The Spanish word "nevado" means snowy or snowcapped.

For the meaning of Nevada, now you know!

New Hampshire

A beautiful state and state name is . . . New Hampshire.

In England a district or county is called a shire.

The English word "ham" means a house or home that is located on hemmed in land.

New Hampshire means the home with the field and fenced farmland.

New Jersey

New Jersey was named for England's Jersey Island.

Jersey Island is the largest of the islands located in the English Channel.

The old Norse word "ey" means isle or island.

That the name Jersey may be Norse seems very likely or thinkable.

In Norse a spear is called a "geirr".

A sword is "horr" while an army is "herr".⁹

The word Jersey seems to mean "Geirr's Isle" or the Spear's Isle.

New York

⁹ English—Old Norse Dictionary, Compiled by Ross G. Arthur.

The State of New York, the Empire State, has a name that essentially means the land of the yew trees.

New York was named for the Duke of York who lived in England in the 1660's.

New Mexico

New Mexico was named after the country to the south Mexico.

Mexico itself was named for the Aztec god or leader Mexitli.

The Aztec word for the moon is "mtxtli".

Moon Lake is well connected with the City of Mexico.

The Moon Lake encircles the city.

Moon Lake may have received its name from its circular and lunar reflective personality.

North Carolina

The State of Carolina was named for England's King Charles.

The given name Charles means freeman.

An alternate view is that Karl is the root of the name Charles.

Karl means in a similar manner the warrior, earl, or militiaman.

North Dakota

The mid-western State of Dakota has a Sioux name that means the supporter, ally, or friend.

The name is connected with the Chippewa or Ottawa word "widokodas" that means I help or keep company with another.

The Dakota Indian words "Da-ko-da" and ko-da" both mean friend.

The Dakota's are the lands and people of the alliance, covenant, or pledge in the end.

Ohio

The State of Ohio has a name that is from the Seneca language and likely means beautiful and good river.

The Seneca word for the Ohio was "Ohiiyo".

The name was translated by the French as the Belle Riviere or the beautiful river.

The name "Ohiiyo" was originally applied to both rivers the Allegany and the Ohio.

The Seneca word "wi-yo-h" means beautiful or good.¹⁰

Ohio is the river with the beautiful shoreline and wood.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma roughly means Indian Territory.

In Choctaw "okla" means people, tribe, or nation.

"Homa" means red or ruddy.

The land of the Redman is the simple translation.

¹⁰ Handbook of the Seneca Language, By Wallace Chafe

Oregon

The French noun "orage" and adjective "orageux" seem to be roots to the name of the State of Oregon.

They are French words that mean storm and stormy.

The Columbia River the thundery river was once called the Oregon.

The State of Oregon is known for its weather that is squally and rainy.

Pennsylvania

The name of the keystone state—Pennsylvania—means Penn's woods.

In Latin "sylvanus" means forest or woodland.

Pennsylvania was named for its founder William Penn who purchased much of the state's early land.

Pennsylvania means William Penn's timbers or woods.

Rhode Island

The smallest state the State of Rhode Island has a name that means ruddy island.

The word Rhode comes from the Dutch word "roodt" meaning red.

The name Rhode Island referred to the state's Aquidneck Island.

The island was at an early date somewhat ruddy or red.

South Carolina

Please see North Carolina.

Tennessee

The Spanish explorer, Captain Juan Pardo, was the first to record the name “Tanasi” for an early Native town in today’s State of Tennessee.

In the summer of 1567, Pardo found this Cherokee town that later also called “Tanaqui” when he was exploring.

Tennessee is a word that was originally Cherokee.

The Cherokee word “da-na” means the place of the meeting.

The Cherokee word for trader “da-na-ti-s-gi” is a word that is parallel.

“A-da-na-nv” means the trading place a store that is likewise comparable.

Texas

The State of Texas was named for the Tejas Indians whose Caddo Indian name meant friend or ally.

During Spanish colonial rule, Texas was known as the Nuevo Reino de Filipinas.

It was likewise also called in Spanish La Provincia de Texas.

Filipinas is related to the given name Philip that means friend, brother, or ally.

Utah

The name of the State of Utah comes from the local Ute Indian people.

The Ute called themselves the “Nuutsiu”.

Nuutsui means the people.

Utah is the state with the mountains and desert and a beautiful view.

Vermont

This name of the State of Vermont is easy to understand.

The English word verdant means to be green and mount means a mountain.

The state is composed of a grand luxuriant woodland.

Vermont means the green mountain.

Virginia

Latin Virginius has roots in another Latin word “virgo”.

“Virgo” means virgin, maiden, or young married woman.

Virginia was the name of the first child born in the State of Virginia who was born on Roanoke Island in 1587.

From the region later called the State of Virginia, the United States would grow.

The State of Virginia was named for the virgin queen Elizabeth I of England.

In the United States, Virginia was the virgin or first settled land.

Washington

The State of Washington was named for George Washington.

He was the Revolutionary General and first President of the United States, unquestionably.

The name Washington comes from “wassingatun” a name for an English settlement or town.

The name comes from “wassa-seige” meaning hunting conquest, triumph, or victory.

The State of Washington was named for its vast wilderness, its chasing lands, and the founder of our country.

West Virginia

Please see Virginia.

Wisconsin

The State of Wisconsin has a name that comes from a Miami Indian word originally spelled "Meskonsing".

It was miswritten by the early French as “Ouisconsin”.

The State of Wisconsin was in point of fact named for the local river and likely means the place of the red stone.

In Chippewa “miskwa-assin” means red stone.

Wisconsin may reference the Wisconsin bluffs that are made of red or cinnamon stone.

Wyoming

The State of Wyoming has a name that comes from the Delaware Indian language.

The root of the Wyoming seems to mean upon the great plain or perhaps better the place of alternating valleys and mountains.

“M’cheuwomink” later corrupted to Wayomik and other forms was the original name of a Pennsylvania Lenape Indian village.

In the Delaware language, “megucke” means plain and “Wachtschu” means hills or mountains.

The Delaware ending “mik” tends to mean a ground or location.

“Megucke-wachtschu-mik” then would seem to mean the plain and mountain location.

The condense word “Wachtschu-mik” or perhaps Wayomik means simply the site of mountains.

The State of Wyoming has many stunning and highly elevated mountains!