

The Name “Minidoka”

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When E. P. Vining, of Brookline, Massachusetts, was assigned to provide station names for Oregon Short Line Railway sites west of American Falls in the early 1880's, he set out to find Indian language terms related to the locations' geographical settings. He did not worry about what language was appropriate. He had no dictionary for Shoshoni—the most common Indian language in the region—and preferred to use a Dakota dictionary anyway. Based upon descriptions provided by Union Pacific staff who had surveyed that route, he chose a large number of Idaho place names, most of which have been forgotten. Minidoka, however, became a prominent junction point. Its name derives from a Dakota term that Stephen R. Riggs translated into English as “a fountain or spring of water.” (*Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge* [1852], 4:139.) That water source, upon which Vining based his geographic name selection, occurred out in a broad desert plain. It was important, on that account, for enabling railroad builders to have an important station there. Minidoka Station later gained additional significance as a junction for a branch line to Twin Falls.

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