

Madame Chouteau's Grandchildren

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IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, Missouri, there is a little town called *Cadet*. In eastern Kansas a small stream bears the singular designation *Ogeese*. Both are named for the children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Madame Chouteau of St. Louis. The explanation is simple. *Ogeese* has nothing to do with fowls, wild or barnyard; it is merely a phonetic spelling of a not quite successful American attempt to pronounce the French given name Auguste. The little river was named either for Auguste Pierre Chouteau, a grandson, or for Auguste L. Chouteau, his nephew. *Cadet* at first seems a bit farther out of the way but the connection is obvious enough when you know the answer. It was called after either Madame Chouteau's second son Pierre or *his* second son Pierre junior, for *cadet* is French for "younger son" and this was the nickname in turn of each of these men, both in St. Louis and in the West of their day. They even shared the name: in more than one letter written during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century are references to "old Cady" and to "young Cady."

This paper is a somewhat desultory examination of the manner in which the spread of a family's activities may be seen in place names derived from the family. To go back to the beginning. Marie Thérèse Bourgeois, born in New Orleans in 1733, married René Chouteau there in 1748. She had five children by him. Her elder son, Auguste, as a boy was clerk to Pierre Laclède, a merchant of New Orleans, and assisted him in the founding of St. Louis in February, 1764. Madame Chouteau (separated from her husband) followed Auguste to the new town in September, 1764, with her second son Pierre and her three daughters, Marie Pelagie, Marie Louise, and Victoire. There she had the satisfaction of seeing her children all grow to maturity, living active and useful lives, and presently they gave her forty-six grandchildren, most of whom lived in their turn to maturity. She must have known at least a

dozen of her more than one hundred and fifty greatgrandchildren. Her sons and sons-in-law, her grandsons and grandsons-in-law she could watch operating as merchants and fur traders over a vast expanse of country and she would no doubt be interested to see how far their names were scattered in their day and since.

Since the Chouteau family played a considerable part in the early history of St. Louis it is not surprising to find their names widespread over the city. Chouteau Avenue is the most obvious. The area from 8th Street to about 20th, where Union Station and the railroad yards are today, was until the 1850's the site of Chouteau's Pond, a lake which had been formed by the damming of the Petite Rivière, as the French called it, or Mill Creek, as it was known in the 19th century. Chouteau's Island in the Mississippi north of the city has disappeared into Illinois — it is recognized only in Chouteau Slough (the remains of the old eastern channel) which one crosses on U.S. Highway 66 after leaving the Chain of Rocks Bridge. A postal station, a school, and a large apartment house also bear the name Chouteau.

The three daughters of Madame Chouteau married Charles Gratiot, Silvestre Labbadie, and Joseph Marie Papin. Streets are named after all three. Cabanne Avenue, Cabanne Place, and Cabanne Court are all named for Jean Pierre Cabanné who married a Gratiot daughter. Until quite recently a telephone exchange in St. Louis bore this designation — except that it was anglicized to *Cabany!* A Cabanné girl married James Kingsbury — for them were named Kingsbury Avenue, Kingsbury Place, and Kingsbury Court. Two of their daughters married men named Waterman and De Giverville and thereby provided two more street names in West End St. Louis. Still another Gratiot granddaughter married Jules De Mun in whose memory an avenue is named. Berthold Avenue keeps in mind Bartholomew Berthold, who married the first Pierre Chouteau's only daughter and had many heirs. Watson Road, Sarpy Avenue, Ewing and Morrison Avenues all commemorate descendants of Madame Chouteau. And no doubt there are many other local names, for her descendants today run to the ninth generation.

Chouteau enterprises reached far up the Missouri and down into the southwest. In Montana a county and a township in Teton County in that state bear the family name as do a county and a

creek in South Dakota. Pierre, the capital of South Dakota, derives its name from Pierre Chouteau junior; it began as Fort Pierre, an American Fur Company post. In Oklahoma a town named Chouteau and a Chouteau Creek are both named for Auguste Pierre Chouteau, who was for two decades a principal trader in what is now north-eastern Oklahoma. It was for him that Chouteau's Island in the Arkansas River was named, for there he beat off a strong attack by Pawnees upon a party of trappers and hunters he was bringing back from the headquarters of the Arkansas in 1816.

It was the Osage tribe with which the Chouteaus had the closest associations. As early as 1775 Auguste Chouteau was trading with them in partnership with his brother-in-law Labbadie and Pierre Laclede. In 1794 the Spanish governor of Louisiana gave the Chouteau brothers an eight-year monopoly of the trade with that powerful and difficult nation and to control it they built a fort in the heart of the Osage country, then in western Missouri. For several years after the transfer of Louisiana Pierre Chouteau was United States Indian agent for all the tribes west of the Mississippi and when that position was bestowed on William Clark in 1807 as recognition of his famous exploration, Chouteau was continued as agent for the Osage. Long before this — two years before he built Fort Carondelet — the Osage gave Pierre 30,000 arpents of land on the south bank of the Missouri west of present day Boonville. "As thou hast, since a long time, fed our wives and our children," declared the chiefs, "we do give it unto thee, and no one can take it from thee, either today or ever . . . and if some nation disturbs thee we are ready to defend thee." Chouteau Springs, on this grant, was a popular health resort in the decade before the Civil War.

Pierre Chouteau's name has been given permanency in another way, too, for the State of Oklahoma has made his birthday, October 10, an official holiday on the grounds that he founded the first white settlement of Oklahoma at Salina in 1796. That there is no truth in this matters not at all. Pierre Chouteau had no need of a trading post there in 1796, for he controlled the Osage trade at his own Fort Carondelet three hundred miles to the northeast. The first Chouteau of record to trade in the Salina area was his son Auguste Pierre more than twenty years later. By legislative fiat, however, the Chouteau name is set in the Oklahoma official calendar.

All these connections between the Chouteaus and this powerful and strenuous tribe make it easy to understand why the Osage name for St. Louis was Chouteau-town.

Of the sons of Charles Gratiot and Victoire Chouteau, Henry and John Bunyon moved to the lead country on the Upper Mississippi and it was for Henry that Gratiot, Wisconsin, was named. Fort Gratiot on Lake Huron, Gratiot Beach, and Gratiot County, Michigan, all derive from another son, General Charles Gratiot, once chief of engineers of the United States Army and builder, among other military structures, of Fortress Monroe at Hampton Roads, Virginia. Since I have never come upon another family of this name, I feel certain that Gratiot, Ohio, must be named for one of the Chouteau-Gratiot descendants. Point Labadie on the Missouri and the town of Labadie in Franklin County, Missouri, carry on the name of Silvestre Labadie. Papinsville in Bates County, Missouri, near the Kansas border, was named for its founder, Pierre Melicourt Papin, one of the many sons of Joseph Papin and Marie Louise Chouteau and for many years of his life a trader with the Osage.

And there are other instances once current which are now gone from sight. Here perhaps may be included Charles Pierre Chouteau, an active member of the Missouri Academy of Sciences at St. Louis, for whom a limestone was named. A century ago steamboats on the Mississippi and the Ohio carried names of the family: the *Henry Chouteau*, the *Julia Chouteau*, and the *General Pratte* are three of them. Cabanné's Post, once a well known spot in the Missouri River trade, has been swallowed up in Omaha. Fort Berthold, above Fort Pierre, is now is the name of a spot which has been or is about to be flooded over by one of the new dams on the Upper Missouri. And let us not forget Chouteau's Landing at the mouth of the Kaw, for (as Frederick Billon noted in his *Annals of St. Louis*) François Chouteau, a son of the first Pierre, was "the founder and for many years the sole resident of Kansas City."

Note. That this family name was pronounced Chôteau in the late 18th and early 19th centuries is evident from the sound-spellings found in French, Spanish, and American manuscripts: Chotau, Chauteau, Choto, Shoto were some of the variants. See my "French Surnames in the Mississippi Valley," *American Speech*, IX, 28-30 (February, 1934).