

Indian Names in Missouri

J. A. C. LELAND

THIS LIST OF NAMES is taken from *Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names* by Robert L. Ramsay (cf. *Names*, March 1953, p. 61). I have attempted to give the etymology of the Indian names, thus supplementing Ramsay's excellent study of the history and geography of the state. A careful perusal would no doubt reveal additional reasons for the use of the names. It is probable, however, that the majority are transfer names which were given without regard to the physical features of the locality or to the meaning of the words.

In some instances the names were not taken directly from their source, as Savannah, named for Savannah Woods, a girl. In other cases there may be no connection with Indians, as Saco, "named for two men, now forgotten" (Ramsay), but included as it is Indian in its present form.

Bonawali (Ripley County). An Indian village that once existed at the site of Current View, meaning not ascertained (Ramsay).

Calumet Creek (Pike County). It is often thought to be an Indian word, but it is from French *Chalumeau*, "a reed," so called because the long pipe stems of the Indians were reeds or resembled them.

Capaha Village (New Madrid County). The Quapaw "down stream" tribe, so recorded by early Spanish explorers.

Catalpa (Mississippi County). Creek, *kut-uhl'Epa* "winged head" from the shape of the flowers.

Catawba (Caldwell County). Choctaw *ka-ta'-pa* "divided or separated" (from other Siuoan people) (Gatchet). Lawson in 1701 calls them *Ka'da'pa'*.

Catawissa (Franklin County). Algonkian—*Piscatawese*, one of the names of the Conoy tribe. Said to mean "place of white pines."

Chesapeake (Lawrence County). *K'che'* "big" *sepi* "river" *Oc*

“people.” A small tribe in Norfolk County, Virginia in 1607; also their village from which the bay took its name.

Chicopee (Carter County). Massachusetts—*chekee* “violent” *sipe* “river.” The river in Massachusetts is very swift.

Chilhowee (Johnson County). Cherokee *Tsu-la’wi*, possibly connected with *tsu’-lu* “kingfisher” (Hodge). *Tsu’lu* was a Cherokee town on Tellico River, Monroe County, Tennessee.

Chillicothe (Livingston County). Shawnee *Chi-la-ka’-tha*, one of the five tribal divisions of the Shawnee. In conversation with Thomas Wildcat Alford of Tecumseh, Oklahoma, great-grandson of Chief Tecumseh, he pronounced it *Gil-ack’-a-the*, meaning unknown.

Chillicaux (Cape Girardeau County). This name has puzzled Missouri researchers. Here is a suggestion. Wherever the Chillicothe band of Shawnee settled, they called their village Chillicothe. There were four in Ohio. In 1793 a large band crossed the Mississippi and settled on a grant from the Spanish Government twenty-five miles square at Cape Girardeau. It is reasonable to suppose they would name a village Chillicothe. This would be pronounced by the French Chilicauti. Transpose the third and fourth syllables and get Chilliticaui. Add *x* for the plural. We have in California something like this—Mt. Tamalpais, always pronounced Tamalpias.

Chinquapin (McDonald County). Algonkian *chinque* “great” *min* “fruit or seed.” In early times the ending was *men* or *min*, suggesting that the *m* has been changed to *p* (Hodge).

Chula (Livingston County). Mexican, “pretty, graceful, attractive” (Gudde).

Cisco (Livingston County). Algonkian, probably from *siskowit*, several species of fish of the Great Lakes. Chippewa *Pemiskawet* “that which has oily flesh” (Hodge).

Coloma (Carroll County). Maidu *Culloma*, a southern Maidu village near which the gold discovery was made in California, meaning not given (Gudde).

Des Moines River (Clark County). When Marquette visited the Illinois villages near the present Keokuk, Iowa, he found the *Moingwena* living near the *Peoria*. The French shortened the name to *Moing* and finally by folk etymology to Des Moines, “of the Monks.”

Hahatonka (Camden County). Professor Ramsay says this is

one of the "made up Indian names." It has, however, a meaning in the Santee Sioux dialect: *ha-ha* "falls" *tonka* "big." In Minnesota we have Lake Minnetonka, "big water," named by whites but never so called by Indians.

Hayti (Pemiscot County). Carib-*haiti* "highland."

Hickory (Grundy County). Algonkian of Virginia, *po-hickory*, a food made of hickory nuts or walnuts pounded in water. The name has been transferred from the food to the tree.

Hiwassie (Oregon County). Cherokee *Ayuhwa'si* "Savanna, meadow," villages in Tennessee and North Carolina (Hodge).

Hoozaw River (Warren and St. Charles Counties). One of the forms of Osage. So called by Penicaut 1719.

Huzzaw Creek (Crawford County). Same as above (Ramsay).

Iatan (Platte County). One of the names of the Ute "high up."

Illinois Road (St. Louis to Pemiscot counties). Illinois. The French on first meeting this tribe, asked "Who are you?" They replied, *inini* "men." The French got it *ilini* and added their ending *ois*. Later another *l* was added.

Kahoka (Clark County). One of the forms of Cahokia, a tribe of the Illinois confederacy (Ramsay).

Kansas City (Jackson County). Siouan *kanze* or *kansa* "south wind."

Kaw River (Jackson County). A contraction of *kansa*. In Siouan *n* at the end of a syllable is only slightly nasalized. *Kansa* is pronounced *Kaw'sa*. Last syllable dropped by whites.

Kawsmouth (Jackson County). Same as for Kaw.

Keota (Mason County). "Gone to visit"—white, no explanation.

Kewanee—Algonkian, "prairie chicken."

Koshkonong (Oregon County). Said to mean "ugly place" "frightful place." The last syllable may be Algonkian *ing* "place."

Lakota (Cooper County). Teton Sioux. Same as Dakota "friends, allies." The Tetons have no *d* sound in their speech, using *l* instead.

Mendota (Putnam County). Sante Sioux—*md o'te* "the junction of two rivers." From the Indian village and trading post at the mouth of Minnesota River.

Meramec River (Franklin and St. Louis counties). Chippewa *Manumaig* "catfish." First mentioned by Father Gravier 1700 as *miaramigoua*. See *Indians of North America*, vol. II, page 329 and in Note 1 as *maramee*. Quoted from the *Huron Relation*. *Manumaig* is one of the gens of the Chippewa.

Miami (Saline County). Chippewa names for the tribe *Omaumeg*, "people who live on the peninsula" (Hodge).

Mingo Bottoms (Bollinger County). Delaware *mengwe* "treacherous, stealthy." The Delaware referred to all Iroquoian people thus. The Iriquois who moved to the Ohio country were called *Mingo* by the whites.

Moccasin Bend. Probably a point on Osage River covered by waters of the dam. Massachuset *mokkussin* "shoe."

Moniteau County. Algonkian *manito* "spirit."

Mississippi River. Many Algonkian dialects: *missi*, *massa*, *michi* "great," *sebi*, *sepi*, *sipi*, "river."

Missouri River. Algonkian *missi* "big," *oui*, "muddy." Named by Marquette *Pe-kit-an-oui* "big muddy water river." The Sioux say *minisose*, pronounced Minishosha, "muddy water," and according to Professor Ramsay, the Osage say *Nishodse* "muddy water."

Moark (Dunklin County). A combination of Missouri and Arkansas, from the tribe called by Marruette in 1673 *Arkanse*. The tribe was called *Capaha* by the Spanish, from which we have their present name, Quapaw.

Montauk (Dent County). Natick-*menatauket-munnoh* "island," *auke* "land" *et* "at," at the Island land. In 1901 the writer met the last full blood of the Montauk tribe.

Nashua (Clay County). Natick *Nashawog* "people between" *nashue* "between" *og* "people." Probably so called because they lived between the Massachuset and Pennacook.

Neosho River (Newton County). Siouan *ne* "water." Ramsay says "main river." White says, "clear cold water."

Neska River (New Madrid and Pemiscot Counties). Siouan *ne* "water" *ska* "white."

Neongwah (Camden County). Siouan *ne* "water."

Niangua. Same as above.

Nishnabotna River (Atchison County). Siouan *ni* "water" "canoe making river." White—no explanation.

Nodaway River. Algonkian *nadowa*, *nadowe*, "snake, adder, enemy." River of the enemy.

Ohaha River (Falls and Pike counties). This could be a half-breed name. French *eau*, "water" Sioux, *haha* "falling"—Falling water.

Ojibway (Wayne County). Algonkian, *ojib* "to pucker up," *ub-*

way "to roast." Referring to the puckered seam in the front of their moccasins (Hodge). There are 180 different forms and spellings of their name. Generally called Chippewa.

Onondaga (not located). Iroquoian, *ononta-ge*, "top of the mountain" "mountaineers" "people of the hill," a central tribe of the Six Nations. In their town Onondaga the councils of the confederacy were held.

Omaha (Putnam County). Osage, *Umaha*, "up stream people."

Oronogo (Jasper County). Might be from oronoco, oronoko, a variety of tobacco brought to Virginia from the Orinoco River, South America. Carib *Ibirinoco*.

Osage (County and River). Osage, *Washashe*, "war people," the principal division of the Osage. *W* was written ou by the French. Hennepin shortened it to Ozages and Osage.

Osceola (St. Clair County). Creek, *asi*, "black drink" *yehola*, "a whoop or halloa." This Seminole Chief was called by his office instead of his name. In the purification rite, when the attendant gave each warrior a gourdful of the drink made from the leaves of the cassia shrub, he uttered a loud whoop to notify their deity that the rite had been performed.

Owasco (Sullivan County). Lake in New York said to mean "the bridge" or "lake of the floating bridge."

Passaic (Bates County). Delaware—*Passajeck*, "valley."

Pawpaw (New Madrid County). Goajiro—*papaya*, "the papaya."

Pembina (Christian County). Chippewa—*anepeminan*, "watered berry" so called because it grows near water. The high bush cranberry.

Peoria (Washington County). Peoria, *Piwarea*, "packers."

Persimmon Creek (Taney County). Delaware, *pasiminan*, "dried fruit," the fruit was dried in cakes for later use. Name applied to the tree by whites.

Pemiscot (County and bayou). Fox *hem* "by or along side of," *eskaw*, "go or run." A side channel (Ramsay).

Pocahontas (Cape Girardeau County). Powhatan—*Pokahantesu*, "she is playful." Her real name was *Matoaka*, having about the same meaning. John Smith says, "She was called Pocahontas because that the savages did think that did we know her real name, we would have the power of casting an evil eye upon her" (Hodge).

Ponca (St. Genevieve County). Sioux, *Panka* "medicine" (White).

Portage de Sioux (St. Charles County). First part French. Sioux is from the name they were called by the Chippewa, *nodowesuwig* "little enemies." Shortened by the French to *su* and plural Sioux.

Possumtrot (Taney County). Powhatan *apasm*, "white animal." Chippewa, *wabassim*.

Roanoke (Randolph County). Algonkian, *roan* "northern" *ok*, "people." The name, roanoke was also used for shell money, probably from *rarenawok* "smooth shells" (Hodge).

Saco (Madison County). Algonkian *sauk*, "outlet."

Saginaw (Newton County). Algonkian, *Saginawe*, "place of the Sauk" who were known as Outlet People.

Savannah (Andrews County). Creek, *sawanna*, the Creek way of saying Shawnee.

Seneca (Newton County). Mohican, *assini*, "stone" *ka* "people." By folk etymology changed to the name of the Roman philosopher. The Mohican called the Iroquois collectively, People of the Stone.

Shawnee (Jackson County). Algonkian *shawan* "southern" *ok* "people." So called by other Algonkian tribes on account of their being the most southern branch of the family, having their outposts in the Creek Country and at Augusta, Georgia on Savannah River, named for them.

Spokane (Christian County). Salish, *Spokanee* "sun." Also used as a greeting, *hust spokanee*, "good sun." Probably mistaken by early white visitors for the name of their tribe. In 1930 Charles F. Brown, a halfbreed Spokane said, "*Spukaneh* means sun, or cycle of the year."

Taos (Cole County). Tigua, *tainama*, "willow people." Sometimes said to mean "red willow."

Tarkio (Atchison County). "Difficult to ford." White, no explanation.

Taumsauk (Mt. Iron County). Devil's Toll Gate, a narrow defile, is at the foot of the mountain. Perhaps "Sauk" refers here not to the Sauk tribe but to the word from which their name is derived, meaning "outlet, mouth." This word is seen in many place names, Saco, Saugus, Sac, Sauk Center, Osakis, Sag Harbor, Saginaw.

Tecumseh (Ozark County). Shawnee *tecumtha*, "flying panther or shooting star." In this connection the two definitions mean the same as the Shawnee believed that a meteor was a fiery panther flying across the sky. About 1940 Thomas Wildcat Alford of Te-

cumseh, Oklahoma, great grandson of the Chief, said to the writer, "On the night of Tecumseh's birth, women of the tribe who were assisting, were sitting at the door of the wigwam when a meteor fell. They exclaimed "Tecumtha" and the mother said, 'that is his name.'"

Terrapin-Neck (Boone County). Algonkian, *tarapins*, "small turtle."

Texas (County), Hasinai, *teyas*, "friends or allies." They so greeted the first Spanish visitor, who thought it was the name of the tribe.

Tippecanoe (Schuyler County). Miami, *kitapkwan*, "buffalo fish" *unk* "place" (J. P. Dunn, quoted by Hodge).

Toronto (Camden County). Said to mean "meeting place." A French trading post was established at the site of Toronto, Canada in 1749.

Tuscumbia (Miller County). Choctaw *tashka*, "warrior," *ambi* "killer" or *tashka*, "warrior," *umba ikbi*, "rain maker" (Read).

Tywappity Bottoms (Scott County). The last part of the name may contain Shawnee *wapiti*, "elk," literally, "white rump."

Waco (Jasper County). The Waco were one of the bands of the Towakoni "river bend in a sandy place" (Gatchet). Caddoan tribe at Waco, Texas.

Wakenda (Carroll County). Siouan *wakonda* from *wakon* "spirit." The spiritual power which animates all objects.

Wappapello (Wayne County). May be the same as the Fox chief Wapello, *wap* "white" *ello* "painted." Mckenney and Hall say, "the Prince," White says, "the chief."

Whosau Trace (Warren and St. Charles counties). A form of Osage (Ramsay).

Winnetonka (Clay County). A made up halfbreed name, Chipewa *winat*, "dirty" *nipyä*, "water." Siouan, *tonka*, "big." Big dirty water.

Wonona (Shannon County). Santee sioux, *winyan*, "woman" *na* "little." The first born child, if a girl, was so called.

Wyaconda (Scotland County). Same as Wakenda.

Wyreka (Putnam County). For Yreka, California. Shastan *Wyeka* name for Mt. Shasta. *wai* "north." May mean North Mountain (Gudde).

Yucatan (Callaway County). Probably Mayan.

Yukon (Texas County). Athapascan "the river" (White).

Yuma (Putnam County). Yuman, *yahmayo* "son of the captain." The title of the son of the Chief applied to the tribe through a misunderstanding by the early Spanish missionaries (Hodge).

Zewapeta (Scott County). Same as Tywappity (Ramsay).

LITERATURE

- Robert L. Ramsay, *Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names*, 1952.
Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 1920.
William A. Read, *Indian Place Names in Alabama*, 1937.
Erwin G. Gudde, *California Place Names*, 1949.
Maurice G. White, *Indian Names and Meanings*, 1937.
Wm. Harvey Miner, *The Iowa*, 1911.
George Catlin, *The North American Indians*.
McKenney and Hall, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*, 1843.
Samuel G. Drake, *The Book of the Indians of North America*, 1834.
John Lawson Gent., *Lawson's History of North Carolina*, 1714.
Timberlake, *Memoirs of Lieutenant Henry Timberlake*, 1765.
William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 1791.
Edna Kenton, *Indians of North America*, 1896.
Franz Boas, *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, B.A.E. Bulletin 40, 1911.
Frederick Webb Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, B.A.E. Bulletin 30, 1912.
James Hammond Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*, B.A.E. Bulletin 25, 1903.
John P. Williamson, *An English-Dakota Dictionary*, 1902.
Stephen Return Riggs, *A Dakota-English Dictionary*, 1890.



Our heritage of Indian names is rich and treasured—twenty-six states, eighteen of the greatest cities, most of the larger lakes and longer rivers, a few of the highest mountains, and thousands of smaller towns and natural features. Other names are translations of the Indian words. But merely to tell what such names mean literally or may possibly have meant to some long-vanished tribe is to miss most of the flavor. The meaning of a name is more than the meaning of the words composing it.

—George R. Stewart