Picturesque Nomenclature

An Explanation Of How Some of the Peculiar Names of Arkansas Towns Originated. Several Origins Are Credited to Some Place.

By Fred W. Allsopp.

A spring near the top in Garfield mountain, where the county was named, is0 said to flow from Thumb, although not a small spring. The Thumb family is well represented in the hilly of north Arkansas. They were a Bull mountain and a Bull Shoals, in Maple county; on the White river; on the Hollow and a Bull Bottom in Stone county; a Calf creek and a Cow Creek in Marion county. Then there is a Bull Brink and a Bull Branch in Hard county.

There is a Cow Mountain in Pope county and in Johnson county is little Piney, Red Lake, Cabin creek, Minnow creek, Greencricker and Low Gap mountain.

There is a Cowcreek in Dallas county. Sub Rosa is a village in Franklin county, but they wanted to keep it quiet it is not known.

A schoolhouse in Logan county got the name of Grizzly, and an old school in the Tazoka was another Indian town in what is now Pope county but is not named. A water well, named for an Indian princess called "Wateenka," and the town is sometimes called that now.

Bull Rock, in White county, is not held at all, but is a little hill in the midst of the town from which it derived its name. It is nothing but a part of its mound.

The Devil’s Hole was the name given to a cavern in the county.

Inquiries fail to account for the name of Chubb Creek, in Marion county.

Dundie, in Logan county, and Hog Thief Creek in White county, never had any hog thieves, as they say. And the Hog Thief Trail, famous in Pulaski county politics, was a minor originating from a joke.

Nacogdoches (now Hollywood), near Arkadelphia, was not a place for sponors, but was named for a man too old for that sort of thing.

Elkhorn and Pea Ridge, in Washington county, were Civil war battlegrounds.

During the Civil war a line of march from a stream in Carroll county, and Bug City was the casques ungraciously fastened on by the enemy.

There was a Pull Right in Faulkner county, and Padduck (whatever that means) in Perry county.

Potato Hill, in Franklin county, was so called because of the shape of a nearby series of ridges.

Peleon Springs, in northwest Arkansas, was the scene of a battle in which Stand Waite’s Indian brigade took part in March, 1862.

The mountainous place, unpleasantly called Greasy Cove, in Montgomery county, is supposed to have been the retreat of Gen. Albert Pike, when, after the Civil war, he desired to avoid the ira of civilized society or devote himself to study. Greasy Cove is a similar name for a place on Cache river.

Rip Van Winkle, the favorite resort of the distinguished Reuben H. Stinnett, was named after a few miles southwest of Little Rock, in honor of a man of unknown origin. It is not recorded that Seneca Garfield had a pronounced predilection for this name.

Parakukta was the name of an old Cossack at town, now almost forgotten. It was named by the Kuskokwim, a tribe of the white platter, or cement bluff in the vicinity.

Tip was a trading point and postoffice, five miles west of McCrory. Jeff Davis in his campaign in eastern Arkansas made it a supply point, off post office, but it never amounted to much.

Judge Eugene Cayce of Scary says the village of West Point is on the west side of White county; the town of Scaree is on the west, Morning Sun shines in the corner of the county; instead of at the edge of the hills; and there is not a single bar- row at the settlement called Barrow’s.

There are, or were, both a Cash and a Cash Town, Arkansas. Dr. J. H. McCurry writes that he has the distinction of being the one practicing medicine at both places, and at one time or another at the one or all cash at each of the two places. This Cash town was founded by the Wadsworth Tie Company, which built a railroad from Benton to Alapog.

"Did you know that there was a place called Uitto, just below Cash, in Pope county?" asks Dr. McCurry.

There is a village called Ink in Polk county near Deatsville, in the world where that useful fluid was directly used in naming a town. How it got the name would make a long story.

Smackover is an Arkansas place name, the derivation of which has evaded unusual interest. There are several versions of the name of the oil town in south Arkansas. According to an accredited story, it was originated from a sign on the present site. Another story is that Smackover creek derived its name from a party of immigrants back in the 40’s. After they had been mowed, one of them said to the other: "Well, I went out under and the other said it went across the darn thing." A more romantic explanation is to the effect that the first white couple in the early days a bridal party was honey-moving through the woods of that section. When they came to a spot where they found the honey high for a safe crossing. The bride was filled with fear, but the young husband drove into the water. The bride covered her face with her hands, as she screamed. After a time of splashing and swimming in the water, the waters receded, and the girl said, "Please tell me when we are over." All right, dear, we are out of danger now.

she replied. "Are you sure we are safe?"

"Yes, smack over; and this creek shall be Smackover from this day in memory forever."

The oil boom established a town near this creek, and it was given the same peculiarity.

One of the most interesting old places in south Arkansas has the odd name of Choucagole, an Indian word, meaning "fled worm." It is located on the Ouachita river.

Chapelloe Rock, in Izard county, on White river, got its name from a "lofty, smooth wall of stratified limestone rock, present a horizontal band of different soil," as described by the early settlers. The calico has faded somewhat with the years, and the railroad has dripped down the hill when it cut through that region, but Calico Rock still affords a beautiful sight.

A town, in Logan county, Arkansas river, is Magnes, Greenert, Wild Hay, Round Bottom, Sylamore, Mount Bruce, Mountain Creek, Old Bottom and Old Bottom.

The name of one of the old Cherokee town was Sequatach, situated where Spring creek flows into Buffalo river.

Horse got its old name from one of the general managers of a division of the Missouri Pacific railway when he was being built through that section.

The name of Mena is an abbreviation of Medena, having been named in honor of the queen of the Netherlands.

De Queen is an adaptation of Queen, the surname of a Hollander who assisted in the building of the railroad to the town. The meaning, "market place," in a Polish settlement in Pulaski county.

Until 1803, when Napoleon sold it to the United States, the great expanse known as Louisiana, had known only French inhabitants. They left many local names which survive to the present.

Navigable water was an essential element in the distribution of the French names in the swamps, bayous, rivers, mountains, and towns near the coast, there is no need to mention the Spanish in the Yancey country, where there is no need to mention the English-speaking people—bayou and fourche.

"Bayou" has been corrupted in spelling, but not in pronunciation from the French word "bayoua." (and, by the way, a corrupted "bayoua," a type of stream is defined by du Prat as a "soaked in water, with an observable current.") Nearly every stream of bottom land in the state has its "bayoua" winding through it. In the new Rand McNally atlas (which is one of the most complete maps of the state) a total of 65 creeks listed for Arkansas. Of these, 33 are bayous.

"Fourche" is used mostly only by bayou. Literally it means a "fork." In the northern part of the state it is usually rendered in English, whereas the bayou word is used. There are at least a dozen such streams in the state.

In Arkansas there are at least 44 creeks, bayous and similar streams bearing French names; at least nine rivers have names thus derived; and approximately 40 towns and villages are named after the derivations of their names in the French. These place names are clearly divided into two classes. Some are given in the old form and to some extent in their original pronunciation. An equal number are given in the modern form and pronunciation, until their derivations are many times doubtful. The list of the name is far from complete, and, while there will always be differences of opinion in certain cases. There is difficulty in separating those that belong to the French period from later names given by English or American founders. Beebe Point (near Fort Smith) was not named by the French, but by an American steamer captain, Bolton, Belleville and Calico Rock likewise have no connection with the French period. I have included only those names that are of French origin or influence.


Auraria: This is probably a corruption of "au-ror-eaux," which means gold-colored.

Baraque: Name of a small town on the Arkansas river near Pine Bluff. M. Baraque is remembered frequently by Featherstone, a new writer in the state. The former lived at this point which now is a city.

Bayeau De Rocher: (Rock creek). This stream may be named for de Rocher, near Buffalo river.

Bodow: The original land map, according to J. C. Brauner, has it spelled "Bode." This and the older spelling of "Badeau" are both derived from the French "Badeau," the name of a small town in the department of Ille-et-Vilaine in Normandy. The name of this town is of unknown origin. It is not recorded that Seneca Garfield had a pronounced predilection for this name.

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was called Bayou Deche. This was already corrupted from Bayou de Hache. The Hache was a tribe of Indians in Arkansas and southern Louisiana. Dole or Doty: From the French word *doté* (to be endowed with, to be equipped with, to have a gift, to have an advantage), a common noun in the state, so it may have gained its name from the French.

Evere Faire: *Evere* from *acceor* which means bluff or high bank. The stream runs into the Ouachita river above the bluffs at Camden. It has taken its name from these bluffs, which Camden now stands. M. Fabe, an early settler, figures elsewhere in the history of the state. See: Fouche Le Fave.

Eleven Points: This is an interesting and beautiful stream. It is corrupted or Anglicized from Fouche Le Fave.

Fouche Le Fave: This large stream in Yell and Logan counties was named for a Frenchman. La Fave (sometimes La Fabe) from the French.

Fromway: Another case of analogy. Once it appears French Creek, as well as Francis, Fraise, Francis. It rises in Hot Spring county, flows southwest about 20 miles and enters the Saline river.

Galla or Galley: An old landing on the Arkansas river in Pope county. These names are corrupted from "galet" meaning pebbles.

Grand Glaise: Glaise (pottery clay) is obtained in large quantities here on the White river in Jackson county. This is the name of an old landing on the river near Marked Tree.

Glaspool or Glaspie: From the French "glaise a Paix" (Paul's clay pit). On the early state maps it is called Glassy Pole creek.

Hague: From the French "bygle" (the eagle). This stream is sometimes called Eagle creek. Small stream in Bradley county.

La Grue: The name of this river in the French means "eagle." White cranes inhabit this part of the state in uncountable droves.

La Grange: (the barn or storhouse) is a small town near the Mississippi river on the L'Anguille river.

L'Anguille: (the eel), this river joins the White river just before they enter the Mississippi.

La Peer: This name is probably a corruption of La Pierre (the stone, boulder) a small town near the Louisiana line in Union county.

La Pile: (the pile or pier). Probably personal name. It is spelled La Pelt on one early map of the state. Stream and town in Union county.

La Pin: This is probably derived, like Low Freeton, from "Teau froide" or "Teau frais." Name of a postoffice on the White river.

Low Freton: Here is still another analogous corruption. J. C. Branner says it is derived from "Teau d'froide" (cold water). It is more probable that the derivation is "Teau frais" (the cold water) because of the peculiar environment of this creek. The whole country around it is practically saturated with marsh lands and most of the streams near it are brackish.

Low Freton is almost free from any species of fish but is not inhabitable "because that it is derived from "Teau frais." It is called Bayou Lafreton on the United States stream in Clark county near Arkadelphia.

Magazine: From the French "magazine," a barn or warehouse. The name has a peculiar barn shape which is noticeable even to strangers. It is located in Logan county not far from the Arkansas river.

Marie: Saline Landing: From the French "marais salins" (salt marsh). There are abundant salt licks in the country surrounding this almost extinct landing in Ashley county.

Massard or Mazern: This word appears in several forms on the old maps. It is spelled Massaras and Mazern, but it is supposed to be corrupted from "Mazern." The name of a stream and prairie in Sebastian county.

Maumelle: From the French "ma- mmelle" (breast). It is the name of a conical hill in Pulaski county near Little Rock.

Minter: This bayou was originally named Bayou Miter (Midland creek). This stream is about half way between the White and Arkansas river and is nearly parallel with both. Allason says it was Bayou Metaux (minter creek), but the former is much more probable.

Minot: This is a small village near the Mississippi river. "Minot" is a variant of the French, but whatever its connection is uncertain.

Moro: This word from the French "moreau" means jet black. On early maps it is spelled "moreau." Stream and village in Bradley county.

New Gassy: This settlement a few miles above Pine Bluff on the Arkansas river, was named for the old French province of Gascogne.

Nokha: This name is of Indian origin, but is strictly French in spelling. This river is called "rivière des Quaquibas" on an old German map of 1734. On several old maps it is called Riviere Noire (Black river).

Onza: From the French "aux Onzas" (the burros). Town and stream in Hempsad county. The Praire d'Ames or Praire de Ann is near the town.

Oran: Early travelers write that this is corrupted from "aux Arc," the French abbreviation of "aux Arkansas." (in the Arkansas.)

Palm: This name is quite a puzzle. It may have been corrupted from Place des Larmes (the tears place), since one early settler along the river was named Baptiste Larme, according to Zebolon Pike.

Petit Jean: (Little John). This mountain in Perry county, and the river of the same name in Yell and Perry counties are several of the objectives on several maps of the region, and more of the product of the imagination than fact. One tells of young girl who accompanied her lover, an explorer named Cheves, disguised as a cabin boy. It is said that she fell sick near this point and feared that she would soon die she revealed her identity at last. When she died she was buried on this mountain by her companions who had known her as "Petit Jean."

Point Remove: From the French "point de removal" (an eddy). This is called Eddy creek in Long's account of his travels. Stream which enters the Arkansas about 30 miles above the Cho- ron in Conway county.

Poteau: (A post or sentinel). Mountain and stream in Scott county near Fort Smith.

Quapaw: Other variations of this Indian name are Kappa and Cappa. "Quapaw" in the French would be pronounced as a "k," but its pronunciation with water has now been Anglicized from this spelling.

Racin: French word meaning "root." Name of a village on the Ouachita river near Camden.

Salado: Probably from the French "sal d'eau" (salt water), although this is not good French. On some maps this creek is called Sally Doe. It rises in Choiseur county and flows into the White river six miles southeast of Batesville.

Talbier Mountain in Pulaski county near Little Rock, named for the French settler Chenaunt.

Smackover: Another name which has been considerably corrupted by analogy. Dunbar and Hunter, early explorers, speak of it as "chemin couvert" (a covered roadway or water- way) "which forms a deep ravine in the highlands, here enters the river." "Chemin couvert" probably means that this ravine was overhung by trees. Stream in Union county.

Toehuman: From the French "chemin en haut" (high road) or "chemin a can" (waterway). Its origin is quite uncertain. Stream in Ashley county running to New Orleans.

Toucher Creek: Anglicized from the French name Fourchre au Tigue, as which it appears on early maps. Tigue was evidently a proper name.

Torr Rouge: (red land). A stream in the southern part of the state not far from Turnwalk creek.

Turnwalk: From the French "terre noire" (black land). Analogy has corrupted it to its present form.

Vache Graue: This rather comic name (fat cow) has been given to a small creek near Fort Smith. No reason for the name can be found; some trivial incident probably was the background for it.

Some mention might be made about the word Arkansas itself. It is not a French word because it was the name of a powerful nation of Indians, variously spelled Akasna, Akasnae, Arkansae, Akana, etc., by early scribes. But the silent "a" is a result of French orthography since they always spoke the name in the plural in the region "les Arkansas." The words Arkansas and Kansas are not historically related and their present similarity in spelling is merely a coincidence.