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Origin of the Names of Tributaries of the Kansas River

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THERE has been some speculation from time to time on the origin and meaning of the names of the rivers of the Great Plains.[1] It is natural to try to explain such familiar, but often odd, things as the "names on the land."[2] However, this speculation, as regards the rivers, has often been somewhat unscientific, relying more on hearsay and guesswork than on good evidence. After the names of the native tribes, the names of the rivers are likely to be the oldest in the land because of the role the rivers played in the earliest exploration. Barring later changes, the origin of the name quite often coincides with the discovery of the river and is a record of the discovery. For lesser rivers there is often no other document, and the name is the only record. It is interesting, therefore, to trace the name of a river as far back as possible in an effort to approach the first moment in its history, if not to find the origin and meaning of the name itself.

The names of the tributaries of the Kansas river appeared in print for the first time in Pike's *Expeditions,* published in Philadelphia in 1810.[3] After visiting the Osage village (north of Nevada, Mo.) in August, 1806, Pike proceeded west and north to the Pawnee Republic (located along the present Kansas-Nebraska border) and then returned to the Arkansas (at present Great Bend) in order to explore its sources on the borders of New Mexico. His route

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1. George A. Root, in a series of articles on "Ferries in Kansas," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly,* v. 2 (1933)-v. 6 (1937), has touched on the origin and meaning of the names of several rivers in Kansas.

2. See George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land* (New York, 1945); and *Names: Journal of the American Name Society,* Berkeley, Cal., March, 1953, to date.

3. Maj. Z. M. Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi and Through the Western Parts of Louisiana . . .* (Philadelphia, 1810).

thus crossed the western branches of the Kansas twice,[4] and he names five of them, after a fashion, in his journals. The Republican fork and Solomon's fork are so named several times by both Pike and James Wilkinson, his subordinate.[5] However, Pike was uncertain at first in his identification of these streams, as he first calls the Solomon the Republican fork and then "a large fork of the Kans river, which I suppose to be the one generally called Solomon's (September 22, 23). This shows that he did not make up these names himself. He distinguishes the Saline river from Salt creek correctly, but Wilkinson places the Grand Saline north of the Small Saline. The Smoky Hill is mentioned without name except once, by Pike, where the text is corrupt, "the east fork of the Kanses, or la Fourche de la Côte Bucanieus" (October 12).[6]

Pike's *Expeditions* is accompanied by several maps, two of which form a "Chart of the Internal Part of Louisiana." This chart names nine tributaries of the Kansas river: Warreruza R., Head R., Full River, Blue Earth River, Republican Fork, Solomon's Fork, Little Saline, Grand Saline, and Smokyhill Fork. There are also several small unnamed affluents downstream. The Solomon and the Saline are shown as emptying into the Republican instead of the Smoky Hill. Since Pike's route lay well above the junctions, the lower part of the river and its tributaries must be from an alien source, and in fact the cartouches on the maps say so in plain words. They inform us that the maps were "laid down from the notes of Lieut. Z. M. Pike by Anthony Nau,"[7] and corrected and supplemented by Nicholas King from other sources, in particular, "The Missouri from the mouth of the Osage to the entrance of La Platte by Captain M. Lewis."

In these words Nicholas King is referring to a previous work of his own, that is, the well-known Lewis-Clark-King map of 1806, which was drawn by Wm. Clark at Fort Mandan (in North Dakota) in the winter of 1804-1805 and sent to Washington with other reports by Meriwether Lewis, where fair copies of it were made for various branches of the government by Nicholas King. Copies were presented to both houses of congress by Jefferson with his

4. Theo. H. Scheffer, "Following Pike's Expedition From the Smoky Hill to the Solomon," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 15 (August, 1947), pp. 240-247.

5. Pike, *op. cit.*, appendix II, pp. 20-32.

6. "Côte Boucaniere" in the London edition of 1811. The readings of this edition are independent of the Philadelphia edition of 1810; *see* Elliott Coues, *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike* (New York, 1895), v. 1, pp. xxxv-xl.

7. The manuscript copy of the Pike-Nau map of the Mississippi river, preserved in the National Archives, is published in photograph by Sara Jones Tucker, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country, Atlas* (Springfield, 1942), plate XXXII. The cartouche states that Anthony Nau was "Sworn Interpreter of the French language, Territory of Louisiana," and Pike stated (appendix III, p. 61) that Nau had helped him with the reports of his first expedition in St. Louis in 1806.

message of February 19, 1806. The War Department copy is now in the National Archives, and a photograph of the State Department copy is in the map division of the Library of Congress.[8] These two copies are the only ones known today; the map was not printed at the time because of its provisional character. If we compare the printed Pike-Nau-King map of 1810 with the two manuscript copies of the Lewis-Clark-King map of 1806, we see that the lower part of the Kansas river with its tributaries is very similar on both maps and that the earlier must be the source of the later.

Lewis and Clark evidently made quite an effort to collect information about the Missouri Valley from the French and Indians in St. Louis and on their route. Clark's map gives a wealth of material that is not known from previous documents and is also beyond the range of his own observation. Another presentation of the same material is found in an essay by Lewis entitled "Lewis's Summary View of Rivers and Creeks, Etc.," also written, apparently, at Fort Mandan in the winter of 1804-1805. Lewis gave a list of tributaries of the Kansas river with their distance, breadth, and direction, as follows:

The three rivers, near each other and about the same size	10 [lgs]	20 [yds]	N.
The St[r]anger's wife river	15	35	N.
Bealette's Creek	18	22	N.
Wor-rah-ru-za river	19	40	S.
Grasshopper Creek	21	25	N.
Heart river	31	30	N.
Full river	45	50	S.
Black-paint river	72	38	N.
Blue water river	80	60	N.
Me-war-ton-nen-gar Creek	85	18	N.
War-ho-ba Creek	88	15	S.
Republican river	103	200	N.
Solomon's Creek	115	30	N.
Little salt Creek	125	30	N.[9]

The Smoky Hill is omitted because it was counted as a continuation of the main stream, not a tributary. Little Salt creek emptying into the Kansas river seems to be a confusion of Saline river and and Salt creek, Pike's Grand Saline and Little Saline. Lewis adds special mention of another Salt creek 60 leagues up the Republican on the west side, which looks like still another error for the actual

8. Tucker, *op. cit.*, plate XXXI. The State Department copy (unknown to Tucker) is sometimes better; it has the name of the Full river, omitted on the War Department copy.

9. R. G. Thwaites, *The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (New York, 1905), v. 6, p. 36.

Salt creek on the Solomon. He does not share the error of the Pike-Nau-King map in making the Solomon and Saline empty into the Republican. Lewis' list is a fuller and earlier statement of the tributaries of the Kansas river than either of the maps we have considered. If we compare it with the maps, moreover, we find that the unnamed affluents of the lower part of the river shown on both of the maps correspond closely to tributaries named by Lewis, so that it is clear that Clark's map is based on the information contained in Lewis' essay. Since Lewis and Clark merely passed by the mouth of the Kansas river on their way up the Missouri, their information must be secondhand.

No source has been preserved, or found, earlier than Lewis and Clark and Pike that names the tributaries of the Kansas river as fully as they do, but several of the names are mentioned incidentally in a few earlier documents. Among the papers that were taken from Pike during his detention by the Spanish authorities in Santa Fe and Chihuahua and, after lying in Mexican archives for over a century, were returned to Washington in 1910,[10] there is a rough sketch of the route followed by a certain trader from the Grand Panis on the Platte to Santa Fe in 1797. The sketch and the accompanying brief text in the first person are said to be in Pike's handwriting; they may represent an interview of Pike with the trader.[11] The sketch names four tributaries of the Kansas crossed by the route, all stated to be navigable by canoe: L'eau bleu, Republic Fork, Solomons Fork, Fork of the Hill Buckaneuse. In 1793 Pedro Vial followed a similar route on his return from St. Louis to Santa Fe, but in his account all the tributaries of the Kansas are anonymous.[12] The map of the Missouri river drawn by Antoine Soulard in St. Louis in 1795 shows four tributaries of the Kansas corresponding to the Blue, the Republican, the Solomon, and the Smoky Hill, but only one of them is named, R. eau bleue.[13]

These are the earliest documents, so far as I know, that mention the tributaries of the Kansas river by name. They suggest that the nomenclature of these streams dates from the last decade of

10. Pike, *op. cit.*, appendix III, pp. 80-82; Herbert E. Bolton, "Papers of Zebulon M. Pike, 1806-1807," *The American Historical Review*, New York, v. 13 (July, 1908), pp. 798-827; W. E. Hollon, "Zebulon Montgomery Pike's Lost Papers," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Lincoln, Neb., v. 34 (September, 1947), pp. 265-273.

11. Bolton, *loc. cit.*, p. 827, gives the text. I have photographs of the text and map, now preserved in the National Archives.

12. Alfred B. Thomas, "The First Santa Fe Expedition, 1792-1793," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Oklahoma City, v. 9 (June, 1931), pp. 195-208.

13. A. P. Nasatir, *Before Lewis and Clark* (St. Louis, 1952), v. 1, *between* pp. 46,47; Aubrey Diller, "Maps of the Missouri River Before Lewis and Clark," *Studies in Honor of George Sarton* (1946), pp. 505-519.

the Spanish regime. The origins of the individual names are beyond our ken, lost in the prehistory of the Louisiana Purchase. But the early sources do throw some light on the original forms of the names and bring us so much nearer to the actual origins. Let us see what we gain in this direction from our canvass of the documents.

Stranger river is called the Stranger's wife river by Lewis.

Wakarusa river is called Wor-rah-ru za river by Lewis, War-re-ru-za river by Clark and King.

Delaware river is called Grasshopper creek by Lewis. The upper part of it is still so called.

Soldier creek is called Heart river by Lewis and Clark, but on the Pike-Nau-King map it is called Head river, probably by mistake.

Mill creek is called Full river by Lewis and Clark.

Vermillion creek is called Black-paint river by Lewis. There is also a Black Vermillion creek, but it is a tributary of the Blue river.

Blue river is called L'eau bleue or Blue Water by Soulard in 1795, Pike's informant in 1797, and Lewis in 1804. On the existing copies of the Lewis-Clark-King map of 1806 it is not named, but on the Pike-Nau-King map of 1810 it is called Blue Earth river, and this name was copied by Lewis and Clark in 1814, Arrowsmith in 1815, Long in 1823, and others. In spite of this wide currency, due merely to priority in print, I think the early sources prove that Blue Earth is a mistake on the part of Nicholas King and that the true name was Blue Water.

Republican fork, as the early sources call it, was named after the Pawnee Republic situate upon its banks, which is mentioned in documents of the Spanish regime in St. Louis as early as 1777 [14] and was much frequented by traders from St. Louis and even Santa Fe. I do not know why this Indian tribe deserved the fair name of Republic.

Solomon river is called Solomon's fork or creek by Lewis, Pike, and Wilkinson. The possessive form shows that Solomon was a man's name, perhaps Solomon Petit, a trader on the Missouri who appears in J. B. Truteau's "Journal" of 1794.[15]

The Salines and Salt creeks mentioned by Lewis, Pike, and Wilkinson are stated by them to be impregnated with salt or to have deposits of salt on their banks. At the time of the Louisiana

14. Waldo R. Wedel, *An Introduction to Pawnee Archeology* (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 112 [1936], Washington), pp. 14 *ff*, 32.

15. Nasatir, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-294.

Purchase there was talk of a whole mountain of salt somewhere in the unknown interior of the vast territory.[16]

Smoky Hill river is called Smokeyhill fork on the Pike-Nau-King map. The name is doubtless a translation of the French name given in the journals as La Fourche de la Côte Bucanieus (or Boucaniere) and on the sketch of 1797 as Fork of the Hill Buckaneuse. This strange word is probably an adjective from the noun boucan (buccan or barbecue), and côte buccaneuse would be hill of the buccans or barbecues. The word apparently stumped Pike, who had taught himself French, and he hesitated to translate it. He at last produced Smokey Hill, a poor translation, which has mislead modern speculation of the origin of the name. Smoking Hill would have been better. The French name gives quite a different meaning from those heretofore proposed on the basis of Pike's translation.[17]

16. President Jefferson's message to congress, November 14, 1803.
17. *See The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 4 (February, 1935), pp. 3 *ff.*