

CHOUTEAU, LOLA JANE INTERVIEW

#7084

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INTERVIEW.

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James R. Carselowey,
Interviewer.

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Interview With Miss Lola Jane
Chouteau, Vinita, Oklahoma,
R. F. D. #3.

My name is Miss Lola Jane Chouteau. I live with my grandmother, Mrs. Sarah Grimm, age seventy-six, Vinita Oklahoma, R.F.D. #3. I am the last to bear the name of our line of Chouteaus.

My father's name was Benjamin Cyprian Chouteau, and he was the son of Benjamin Cyprian Chouteau, Sr., who was the son of Cyprian Chouteau, and Cyprian was the son of Jean Pierre Chouteau.

My mother's name was Lola Jane (Grimm) Chouteau. My grandmother's name on my father's side was Maria (Tucker) Chouteau, and she was the daughter of Charles Tucker, who was a leader among his tribe, (The Shawnee Indians).

My ancestors on my father's side are all Shawnee Indians, and the name of Chouteau is fast becoming extinct. I was the only child in my father's family, and my parents are both dead.

My grandfather, Benjamin Cyprian Chouteau, died in 1911, and he was the father of five children, now all deceased.

My grandfather, Benjamin Cyprian Chouteau, was living on a farm, just south of Kansas City, when the Shawnee Tribe

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sold out in Kansas and came to the Indian Territory to cast their lot with the Cherokees. His farm was very valuable, and he had not yet married, when the farm was sold. When he turned everything into cash and got ready to leave the state, my father said that he figured he had more money than he would ever spend, so he invited a party of friends to go with him to California, and he paid all the expenses. They came back to Kansas City, and he took another bunch of friends to California, and again paid all the expenses.

About 1872, he came to the Territory and settled on Mustang Creek, about fourteen miles southeast of Vinita, where he took up land the same as the other Shawnees.

He built a fine home, and was married to Maria (Tucker) Shaw, a widow, with one child, Miss Cora Shaw. Cora later married John Nolan Woodall, and after his death, she married Charles F. Landrum.

My grandfather was still very rich when he came to the Indian Territory, and he built his house with the back wing for servants. There were no doors to get to the front of the house, without going out on the porch. He had this wing filled with negro servants, and on down

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through the age many who did not know the history of the house have asked why it was built that way.

My grandfather served on the Cherokee Council from 1885 to 1887. He had many visitors from Vinita and Kansas City, and gave many old time country dances, which would last all night. He had a blind cousin, Edmond Chouteau, who was a fine violin and piano player, and he usually had him out to play for the dances. He also had two brothers, Alex and Fred, who were good old time fiddlers, but cousin Edmond as he called him, was an up to date player. He had a bad habit of laying down on the boys, if they didn't keep giving him something to drink, along in the wee hours of the morning. Mrs. Chouteau had a jug of wine in the cellar on one of the occasions I speak of, and Cousin Edmond began to balk and wouldn't play another set without a drink, and Mrs. Chouteau's nephew knew about this jug in the cellar, and began to slip it to the violin player, and before morning the two of them had it all drunk up. The next morning as they went to eat breakfast my grandfather asked this nephew of my grandmother's to run down in the cellar and bring up that jug of wine, to give Cousin Edmond a little

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drink before they ate. Then the two had to confess that they had already emptied that the night before.

My grandfather was a great hunter and when he first came down here there were worlds of prairie chickens, and wild turkeys. He would invite his Kansas City friends down to hunt and five or six of them would come at a time and hunt for two weeks, and would take a whole hack load of prairie chickens back with them. He fed enough relatives during his lifetime to keep many families a lifetime, and died in fairly good circumstances, still in possession of his original homestead.

EARLY DAY TRADING POSTS.

My grandfather, Benjamin Cyprian Chouteau, was a direct descendant, being a grand-son of Jean Pierre Chouteau, who established the first trading post at Salina, Indian Territory, in 1796.

Among the papers left me by my father I find a complete history of the Chouteau family as far back as 1730, which is as follows:

It was about 1730 when Rene Auguste Chouteau departed from France, his native country, and made his way to the French gulf coast settlement of New Orleans to cast his lot

in the New World. In the veins of this Chouteau flowed the blue blood of the French nobility, but in his heart was an uncontrollable love of adventure that tore him away from the luxuries of home, and set him down on the wave-lashed coast of an unknown land, the interior of which was infested with primitive dangers that blanched the face of the hardiest pioneer, at the mere mention. Here he made his home for the remainder of his life, and made many exploration trips to the north, although he was never known to have advanced farther than the boundary line of white settlement.

About ten years after his arrival in New Orleans, Rene Auguste married Therese Bourgeois, a French girl, and to this union were born two sons, Auguste and Jean Pierre. These Chouteau brothers were the actual founders of the family dynasty, and at an early age they began the establishment of a commercial enterprise which was to become the most extensive in the world.

In 1763, when he was only fourteen years of age, Auguste organized an expedition and plunged into the wilderness to locate a site desirable for a fur trading post. Marching up the Missouri River from Fort Chartres, he finally established a settlement on the present site of

St. Louis. The post was named in honor of Louis the ninth, former king of France.

Here Auguste began, with Laclède Ligest, a policy of expansion, which led to the eventual supremacy of the Chouteau Trading Company, and made the name of Chouteau symbolical of leadership, among both red and white men on the frontier. He quickly won the friendship of the numerous Indian tribes of the interior, and became a virtual emperor, to whom the aborigines bowed with respect.

HEAD-QUARTERS AT ST. LOUIS.

Headquarters for the trading company were established at St. Louis, from where after a few years, the Chouteau brothers virtually controlled the fur trade of the entire middle western strip, from Canada to the Gulf coast.

An atmosphere of old world feudalism clung to the pretentious St. Louis estate of Auguste and Jean Pierre where it stood, amid the colorful trappings of baronial life, on the extreme frontier, overlooking the broad expanse of the Missouri River. Few notables ever came to the country in that day, who were not the guests of the Chouteaus. The most noteworthy of these was Lafayette, the French states-

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man, who was entertained by the brothers when he visited this country in 1834.

JEAN PIERRE HAD NINE SONS.

The activities of the Chouteau family were directed for nearly forty years by Auguste and Jean Pierre. After Laclède Ligest died, his St. Louis estate was purchased by Auguste, who retained it until his own death in 1829. On this estate nine sons were born to Jean Pierre, who were to carry on the family tradition.

A great and powerful trading company was established by the elder Chouteaus but it remained for the younger generation to expand it. The subsequent openings of other trading posts, and the operation of the various business enterprises in typical chain store manner is an epic of commercial history.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century, the elder Chouteau brothers held a virtual monopoly on Indian trade, along the Osage and Missouri Rivers, trading with the Crow, Comanche, Shawnee, Sioux, Fox and Osage Indians.

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FIRST TRADING POSTS ESTABLISHED
BY CHOUTEAUS IN 1796 AT SALINA
AND THREE FORKS, MAYES COUNTY.

In 1796 Jean Pierre commanded an expedition into the unexplored wilderness of eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas, and established two trading posts. The first was set up on the present site of Salina, Mayes County, Oklahoma, and is marked by a monument erected by the Oklahoma Historical Society, commemorating the first white settlement in the Indian Territory, nearly forty years before the first Cherokees moved here from Georgia.

The second trading post was set up at Three Forks, where the Verdigris and Grand Rivers empty into the Arkansas.

Jean Pierre then returned to St. Louis, and for six years little was done to expand the Chouteau's business in the Indian Territory. The territory was thinly populated, and there were few customers with whom to trade. For awhile it seemed that Salina and Three Forks were doomed to fall back into the wilderness. In 1802, a thing happened that resulted, through one of the most remarkable commercial ventures in history, in the population of this district, and the permanent establishment of the Indian Territory trading posts.

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In that year the Spanish Government took away the Chouteau monopoly on fur trade with the Osage Indians, and gave it to Manuel Lisa. Angered by this political intervention, Jean Pierre conceived a daring plan that was vivid proof of his unusual business acumen, and his great influence among the Indians. He appeared before leaders of the Osage tribe, and induced them to move to the Indian Territory. By this he accomplished two goals, the removal of the Osages out of Lisa's territory, and took them to the territory contiguous with the posts he had established in the Indian Territory, saving these newest links in his fur business from bankruptcy.

The Osage tribal emigration, one of great magnitude in that early day was made in the fall of 1802, under the leadership of Cashesgra, or "Big Track", an Osage selected by Chouteau himself, to head the emigrants. Today the Osages still live in Oklahoma, and constitute the richest Indian nation on earth. Their capitol is at Pawhuska, fifty miles from Tulsa.

JEAN PIERRE'S SON GROWS UP.

While Jean Pierre was accomplishing this tribal movement a young man was growing to manhood, back in St. Louis,

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who was destined to complete the work of building a prosperous business in Oklahoma. He was the son of Jean Pierre, and was given the name of Auguste Pierre.

When the trading posts at Grand Saline and Three Forks were built, young Auguste was only sixteen years of age. Two years later he entered West Point, and in 1808 was commissioned an officer in the first United States Infantry. He resigned from the army at twenty-one, and entered business, as a member of the St. Louis Fur Company, leaving this to become a captain of militia during the war of 1812.

AUGUSTE DIES AT FORT GIBSON.

After a disastrous period of trading among the Indians of the upper Arkansas, and the upper Platte Rivers, with Jules DeMunn, young Auguste took charge of the Chouteau posts, in the Indian Territory, plunging into active management of the business with youthful vigor.

During his latter years, Auguste spent much of his time in the service of the government, seeking to pacify Indian tribes. It was on one of these diplomatic missions, that he fell sick, and on Christmas day, 1863, he died at Fort Gibson. He was ninety-seven years of age at his death.

ESTABLISHES POST AT KANSAS CITY.

In 1821, Francois Chouteau established a general agency for furnishing supplies to the Indians in the bottoms, opposite Randolph Bluffs, about three miles below what is now Kansas City, and a short time later he headed the trading expedition that settled in Kansas City. This was the first recognition of the natural advantages of this point for a distributive trade, and the actual founding of the interests which has expanded into the wide business activities of modern Kansas City.

In 1825, Cyprian Chouteau joined Francois at Kansas City, and brought Frederick Chouteau, his brother, on a visit to the post which was by this time recognized as the chief distributing point on the frontier. Frederick was dispatched by Francois to the Kaw Missions ten or twelve miles above Topeka, Kansas.

FREDERICK ADOPTED BY SHAWNEES.

In 1842, Frederick moved to Johnson County, Kansas, where he made his home with the Indians. He was adopted as a member of the Shawnee tribe, and was frequently offered a Chieftainship in the Shawnee Nation. He gratefully refused the honor, although during his life with the aborigines,

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he married three Indian women, and was the father of fourteen half-breed children. He died at his Kansas home in his eightieth year, and Francois died in Kansas City in 1840.

It was in the beautiful valley of the Kaw River, three miles below Kansas City, that Cyprian Chouteau settled and died, on one of the finest farms in that section. His three sons, Benjamin, Frederick and Alex were forced to sell the home which they had learned to love in 1867, when the Shawnee Tribe removed to their new home in the Indian Territory. Their Kaw Valley farm was so valuable that the three brothers sold their land for \$300 per acre, and were almost heart-broken because they had to give it up.

Benjamin Cyprian, grandfather of the young lady giving this interview, often told his son, when he saw allotment coming on, that "The Government is after you boys now, and will not let up until they get your land."

During the expansion of their vast fur trading industry, the Chouteaus were known to have established more than twenty-five trading posts.

PROMINENT IN INDIAN AFFAIRS.

For almost one hundred years, members of the Chouteau family were very prominent in Indian affairs, representing French, Spanish and American Governments in dealing with the various tribes, and executing some of the most important treaties on record.

Jean Chouteau, Jr., was for many years agent for the Big and Little Osages at St. Louis. In 1815, Auguste, Jr., was special agent to the same tribes, with Paul Liguist serving as their official interpreter. In 1822, Paul Liguist was appointed agent to the Osages in Missouri, and in 1833, he established a new agency for the Indian Territory Osages on Grand River. From 1869 to 1871 Louis Pharamond Chouteau was the official government interpreter with the Osages.

It was with the aid of the Chouteaus, that the first land of present Oklahoma was secured by the United States from the Indians, Auguste, the younger, having signed the treaty with the Quapaws in 1818, under which they surrendered all of their claims to land in the southern part of the state, between the Canadian and Red Rivers. In the same year, Auguste and Paul Liguist Chouteau signed the treaty

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with the Osages, whereby they relinquished all of the land in Oklahoma, between the Illinois and Verdigris Rivers. They also signed the treaty with the Osages in 1825, when the tribe sold all the remainder of its claims in northern Oklahoma.

In 1834, Auguste accompanied an expedition to the Kiowa country to rescue a party of Osages, who had been kidnapped by the Kiowas, and held for ransom. It was on this trip that he established Camp Holmes, not far from the present site of Norman. In 1835, Camp Holmes was replaced by Fort Chouteau, and was located about five miles northeast of Purcell, Oklahoma. This fort was the base from which trade and diplomatic affairs were carried on with the Comanches, Kiowas, and Apaches, until the death of Auguste, in 1838.