

THE NAMING OF PADUCAH

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The Naming of Paducah

by John P. Dyson.

*I administered a thump
on p. 154 but hope I made
up for it in note 10.*

*Warm regards,
Dyson*

Concerning the origin of the name Paducah . . . , several theories are advanced; but the one which, owing to its romantic character, seems to have commended itself most thoroughly to popular credence, is the doctrine that in the olden time an Indian chief was buried on the banks of the Tennessee . . . , and that his name was given to the beautiful town. The romance which surrounds this hypothesis will not be willingly sacrificed by the average Paducahian.

Perrin, Battle, and Kniffin, *Kentucky: A History of the State* (1888)

I know he existed. I have seen his statue sitting astraddle of a stump in the playgrounds of Paducah.

Gordon, "The History of Jackson's Purchase" (1916)

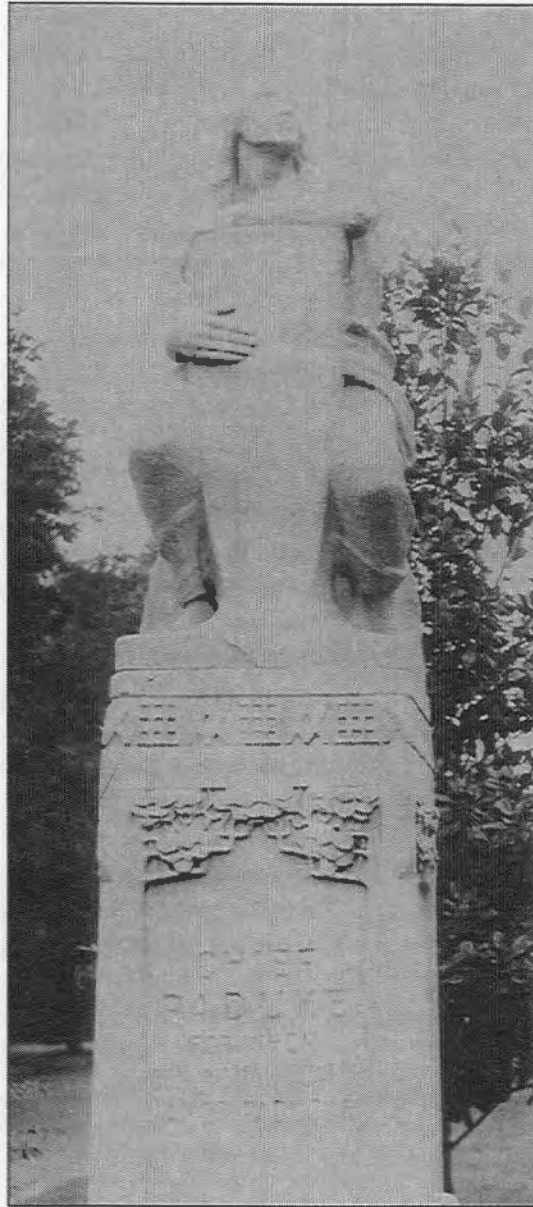
St. Louis April 27th 1827

My Dear Son Lewis

. . . I expect to go to the mouth of [the] Tennessee the 26th of next month and be absent about two weeks. I have laid out a town there and intend to sell some lots [in] it, the name is *Pa-du-cah* once the largest Nation of Indians known in this Country, and now almost forgotten. . . .

Wm. Clark

Dr. Dyson is professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Indiana University. He offers special thanks to Karen Alexander and Barbara Nichols of the Miami Tribal Library; to Glenda Galvin, Geraldine Greenwood, and Gary White Deer of the Chickasaw Nation; to Douglas R. Parks, associate director of the American Indian Studies Research Institute at Indiana University; to Berry Craig of Paducah Community College; and to Charles Manchester, executive director of the William Clark Market House Museum, Inc., in Paducah, for their generous assistance in the preparation of this study.



"Lorado Taft's imposing and romantic statue of Paducah's namesake still stands as a perpetual testimonial to whose lands these once were. Some years after the chief's statue was erected and elaborately dedicated, Taft scandalized Paducah's citizenry by suggesting that the namesake he had so convincingly rendered might never have existed at all."

Chief Paduke was of Herculean size, picturesque and stately, like an old Norse viking; he was tall and massive, with his weight mathematically distributed over his several limbs. His physique was imposing, impressing one that within the casing was an iron soul, a steel heart and a golden brain. His face was broad and clearly cut, and of reddish hue; beneath the copper colored cheeks was a touch of ruddiness. His head was unusually large; the forehead was broad and excessively high for one of his race, making the intellectual portion of the robust chieftain symmetrical and well fashioned. His piercing black eyes were sunk deep under thick Cimmerian brows, while his abundant hair hung in flowing strands over either shoulder. He must have been about fifty years old when The Purchase sale was effected; yet in no particular had age showed its mark in stooping shoulders, dim eyes or penciled hair.⁵

Some years after the chief's statue was erected and elaborately dedicated, an impolitic Lorado Taft scandalized Paducah's citizenry by suggesting that the namesake he had so convincingly rendered might never have existed at all. Taft's outrageous opinion was brought to light by chance in an otherwise unrepachable speech by President Kenneth M. Bradley of Chicago's Bush Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Arts, which he delivered in Louisville on March 3, 1916. Bradley's pointed, though initially unattributed, remarks and an inquisitive reporter's probing follow-up uncovered Taft's perfidy and unleashed a monthlong excoriation of both Bradley and Taft in the Paducah *Evening Sun* and the Paducah *News-Democrat*.⁶

⁵Neuman, *Story of Paducah*, 14. One suspects that Neuman imagined Chief Paduke's physical reality in words just as surely as Lorado Taft had done in stone, combining "features of various Indian tribes in the execution," as the historical marker at the foot of the statue candidly states. Neuman, of course, now had the sculpture before him as a palpable source of inspiration. The statue's creation in 1909 seems to have substantiated the chief's material and historical existence for many others as well. See note 12 below, especially the entries on "Paducah" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for editions published after the sculpture was erected. Neuman was equally lavish in detailing the habits and haunts of "Chief Paduke and His Peaceful Indian Tribe" in Chapter 1 of *Paducahans in History*, 2d ed. (Paducah, 1922), 15-25.

⁶Taft confirmed his opinion in the Paducah *Evening Sun*, March 17, 1916, in a front-page special dispatch from Chicago. The sculptor made it clear that his statue

cal biography of William Clark, Jerome O. Steffen has passed on the story of Clark's memorialized fondness for Chief Paduke without hesitation or comment.¹¹ Many others have elected either to confirm the two men's friendship or to equivocate or, finally, to write off the entire legend as virtually unverifiable regional folklore, in much the same domain as the beguiling foundation tales of Possum Trot or Monkey's Eyebrow.¹²

What is confidently known about William Clark's role in the establishment of Paducah is well documented and can be briefly stated. On September 15, 1795, the state of Virginia awarded General George Rogers Clark nearly seventy-four thousand acres of land in extreme western Kentucky in appreciation of his military victories against the British at Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes in the old Northwest Territory dur-

Comanches actually called themselves was *nérmernuh* ("people"). "Comanche" was what the Ute phrase *kommancimé* ("anyone who wants to fight me all the time") sounded like to the Spanish in New Mexico, who first recorded the word. See Marvin K. Opler, "The Origins of Comanche and Ute," *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943): 156; T.R. Fehrenbach, *Comanches* (New York, 1974), xvi, 91; John Upton Terrell, *The Plains Apache* (New York, 1975), 217n; Stanley Noyes, *Los Comanches* (Albuquerque, 1993), 35, 315n. In fairness, Rennick has since revised the Comanche origin claimed in *Kentucky Place Names*. Robert M. Rennick to author, June 6, 1994.

¹¹Jerome O. Steffen, *William Clark: Jeffersonian Man on the Frontier* (Norman, 1977), 153.

¹²For a sampling of various points of view, see W.H. Perrin, J.H. Battle, and G.C. Kniffin, *Kentucky: A History of the State*, 8th ed. (Louisville and Chicago, 1888), 620-21; J.F. Gordon, "The History of Jackson's Purchase," *Kentucky State Bar Association Proceedings* (1916): 162-63; Purcell, "Our Heritage from the Yester-years," 15; Richard E. Fairhurst, *The Fairhurst Essays* (Gerald, Mo., 1980), 181; John E.L. Robertson, *Paducah, 1830-1980: A Sesquicentennial History* (Paducah, 1980), i-ii; David Perry Sullivan, *Purchase Overview: The Early History of the Jackson Purchase* (Melber, Ky., 1986), 87-89; John E. Kleber, "Myth and Reality in Kentucky History," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 90 (1992): 57; and John E.L. Robertson, "Paducah," in John E. Kleber, ed., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington, 1992), 705. Over time, the entries on Paducah in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* have reflected the same vacillation. Paducah first appeared in the ninth edition (1885), in which no mention of Chief Paduke was made. By the eleventh edition (1910-11), the town was parenthetically "(said to have been named in honour of an Indian chief who lived in the vicinity and of whom there is a statue in the city)." In the thirteenth edition (1926), the parenthesis had disappeared but the chief himself continued to be an unsubstantiated allegation; by the fourteenth edition (1929), the city definitely "was named after an Indian chief." In 1958, "Paducah was named for Paduke, a Chickasaw Indian chieftain living at the site." Finally, in 1968, on the three-hundredth anniversary of the *Britannica*, Jesse Crawford Crow prepared the first signed entry on Paducah in all those years and declared categorically that the city was named "for Paduke, a Chickasaw Indian chief who lived in the vicinity."



The Filson Club

"By 1827, the year of Paducah's founding, General William Clark had had more than forty years of direct dealings with Native Americans. There was surely no white man in the country better and more broadly informed of the red man's reality or more closely attuned to it."

Society Archives, William Clark Papers. This passage of Clark's letter has apparently never been quoted for publication. Clark's explanation of the name he had chosen for the town closely parallels a similar statement he made to American Ethnological

ern Mississippi, Clark rejoined his unit in the Ohio territory.²¹ Shortly thereafter, leaving recently constructed Fort Greenville, he "accompanied his friend, General Wilkinson, and a party of friendly Chickasaws back to Fort Washington for supplies."²² Clark later ferried this same band as far down the Ohio as the Wabash, where the Chickasaws departed for home with twenty days' rations from Clark for the journey.²³ In the following spring of 1794, eighteen Chickasaw warriors were placed under Clark's direct command.²⁴ The identity of individual Indians is not fully recorded, but it is known that Chief Piomingo, Tishomingo, and George and William Colbert all served under General Wayne, were decorated for valor, and were honored afterwards in Philadelphia by the president himself.²⁵ They either already were or would shortly become the most influential leaders in the tribe.

Between 1793 and 1795, Clark made regular reconnoitering sorties deep into Chickasaw frontier territory down the Ohio and Mississippi. His most significant assignment came in the fall of 1795 when he travelled to New Madrid to ascertain the strength and intentions of the Spanish garrison there and at Fort Chickasaw (San Fernando de las Barrancas at present-day Memphis). On the way he stopped to confer with the American commandant at recently restored Fort Massac, and afterwards he investigated the site of long-abandoned Fort Jefferson south of modern Wickliffe, which the Spanish were rumored planning to rebuild for their own use.²⁶ Clark's "experience in the wars, coupled with his intellectual curiosity, broadened his knowledge in regard to the native inhabitants of this country, a characteristic for which he became noted throughout the rest of his life."²⁷

Shortly after the conclusion of Clark's military career, he was recruited by President Thomas Jefferson and by Clark's

²¹Loos, "Biography of William Clark," 26-27.

²²Bakeless, *Lewis & Clark*, 43.

²³Loos, "Biography of William Clark," 29-30.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 34.

²⁵Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934), 102-3; Cecil L. Sumners, *Chief Tishomingo* (Iuka, Miss., 1974), 44-45, 57, 59.

²⁶Bakeless, *Lewis & Clark*, 60-66.

²⁷Steffen, *William Clark*, 25.

true, it is safe to conclude that Clark's extensive contacts with many Chickasaws during almost forty years would have made him aware of their customary personal names and of the usual terms they applied to the sites they occupied.

× Having exhausted the official historical record and failed to find any reference to Chief Paducah, we now turn to what a knowledge of the Indians themselves may reveal. While ethnologist John R. Swanton does verify a small community of Chickasaws on the Ohio, it is improbable that a significant number lived there for any length of time.³⁰ The land north of the Chickasaw Bluffs (Memphis) was strictly hunting territory for the tribe. And although the Purchase's Chickasaw name has not been recorded, if the Chickasaws used the same designation for it as their close kinsmen the Choctaws, *uski anuⁿka* ("in the cane"), it would appear that even they considered it a marshy wilderness. There is no evidence of any substantial Chickasaw population center, whether early or late, significantly north of Memphis. Yet, despite the remoteness of the Purchase, it is also obvious from the Chickasaws' documented ferocity and belligerence, their territorialism, and their commitment to and dependence on trade in peltry that they would have zealously defended that distant ground with a nominal presence against all comers. And there were repeated incursions by Shawnees, Miamis, Potawatomis, Kickapoos, Illinois, Delawares, Cherokees, and many others sufficient to justify frequent retaliatory raids by the Chickasaws in almost every direction.³¹ Verifiably, the Chickasaw tribe hunted in the

³⁰One early source clearly contradicts Major Rogers's assertion regarding the "Chicketaws" in 1765: "Within the personal knowledge of our countrymen since the war of 1755, Kentucky has not been in the occupancy of any tribe. There are indeed through it, as all over the western country, indications of a race of people having existed, much more advanced in the arts, than the tribes known to us; but, whose history is but a tissue of faint and disjointed conjectures. . . . Our hunters from 1767 in their various peregrinations through the territory, since denominated Kentucky, met with no marks of a modern Indian town within the whole extent of the country." Mann Butler, *A History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (Louisville, 1834), 8-9.

³¹One of those retributive raids was directed at the French Fort Massiac, across the river from Paducah, which the Chickasaws destroyed in 1764. The fort was restored thirty years later as a deterrent to possible Spanish incursions on President Washington's and General Wayne's orders and renamed Fort Massac. Loos, "Biography of William Clark," 35; Rennick, *Kentucky Place Names*, 191; Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 8 vols. (Lincoln and London, 1986), 2: 85.

evidence at all that it was represented at councils like every other clan or even committed to tribal memory. The actual meaning of *patoka* may go some way toward explaining the unlikelihood of a Chickasaw connection.

✕ In 1978, some seventy-five miles northeast of Evansville, Indiana, the state Department of Natural Resources opened to the public a camping and recreation area known as Patoka Lake. The reservoir was named for the Patoka River, a modest stream with its headwaters in Orange County. Flowing west for about a hundred miles, this small river empties into the Wabash below Vincennes. There are two common sources given for the name. According to one, the phrase "pah-tah-ko-toh" is a Mesquakie (Fox) phrase roughly meaning "How deep?"³⁴ However, the Patoka River was not located in territory ever controlled or significantly occupied by the Fox in historical times or, as far as is known, even before that. The Shawnees had formerly been in the area, as were the Piankashaws and the Weas, though ultimately it was held by the Miamis, whose hunting ground included all of south-central Indiana after that tribe took up principal residence in Kekionga (Fort Wayne). In later times, the Miamis donated a portion of the area to the relocated Delawares. The Miamis called the river Patokasipiueh, and *pah-toh-kah* (*pa-toh-kah-keh*, plural) was used by them to signify "Comanche," a generic term for "slave" in their trade negotiations with the French.³⁵ That the river was given such a name suggests that it may have been used to transport *patokakeh* to a place where slaves could be bartered for needed supplies. Perhaps such a point of exchange was at nearby Vincennes or on down the Wabash and Ohio at Fort Massiac (later Massac)—almost directly across the river from what would become Paducah.

Patoka was not an original Miami word for "slave." The

³⁴E.Y. Guernsey, del[ineavit], *Indiana: The Influence of the Indian Upon Its History — With Indian and French Names for Its Natural and Cultural Locations* (1932), map. [Indiana] Department of Natural Resources, Publication No. 122 (1933, rev. 1968); Mary C. O'Hair, "Index Glossary of Indiana Indian Names," n.d., 15-16, Miami Tribal Library, Miami, Oklahoma.

³⁵C.F. Voegelin, *Shawnee Stems and the Jacob P. Dunn Miami Dictionary* (Indianapolis, 1938), 68; O'Hair, "Indiana Indian Names," 15-16; Ronald L. Baker and Marvin Carmony, *Indiana Place Names* (Bloomington and London, 1975), 126.

midwestern prairies they were not only plunderers but revengers acting in retaliation for raids conducted against them by the Kansa, Pawnee, Oto, Caddoans, and other peoples.³⁹

By 1920, George Bird Grinnell had already suspected who the mysterious Padoucas were.⁴⁰ In the 1950s, George E. Hyde proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the Padoucas of whom the French were told were none other than the fierce and implacable mounted plains nomads whom the Spanish called Apaches.⁴¹ These people, who referred to themselves as *Indé*, were known to the Spanish by the Zuni term *apachu* (enemies) but to the French by what was perhaps the Caddoan *padu-kesh* (enemy people). The term seems to have gained rapid currency since, according to Hyde:

When he returned to Illinois from the mouth of the Mississippi in 1682, La Salle was given a slave boy who may have been a Padouca from the Nebraska plains; for he had been captured by the Panimahas (Skidi Pawnees), from whom the Osages had stolen him. The Osages gave him to their kinsmen, the Missouri tribe, who traded him to the Illinois Indians.⁴²

The stubborn refusal of the Padoucas to allow the Canadian fur traders or their Indian allies, centuries-old enemies already, to penetrate their territory unchallenged, let alone to hunt on it, and the vast extent of the bountiful area under their control alarmed and angered the avid *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs*. The Padoucas at the time dominated what is now eastern Colorado, southwestern Nebraska, western Kansas, and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas. They effectively foreclosed stable fur commerce from the upper Missouri and Platte Rivers to the lower Arkansas. As a consequence the French determined, as the Spanish had already done,⁴³ to

³⁹Terrell, *The Plains Apache*, 13-14.

⁴⁰George Bird Grinnell, "Who Were the Padouca?," *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 22 (1920): 248-60.

⁴¹George E. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 42, 280-81; see also idem, *Indians of the High Plains* (Norman, 1959).

⁴²Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, 33.

⁴³L. R. Bailey, *Indian Slave Trade in the Southwest* (Los Angeles, 1966), xiv-xvi.

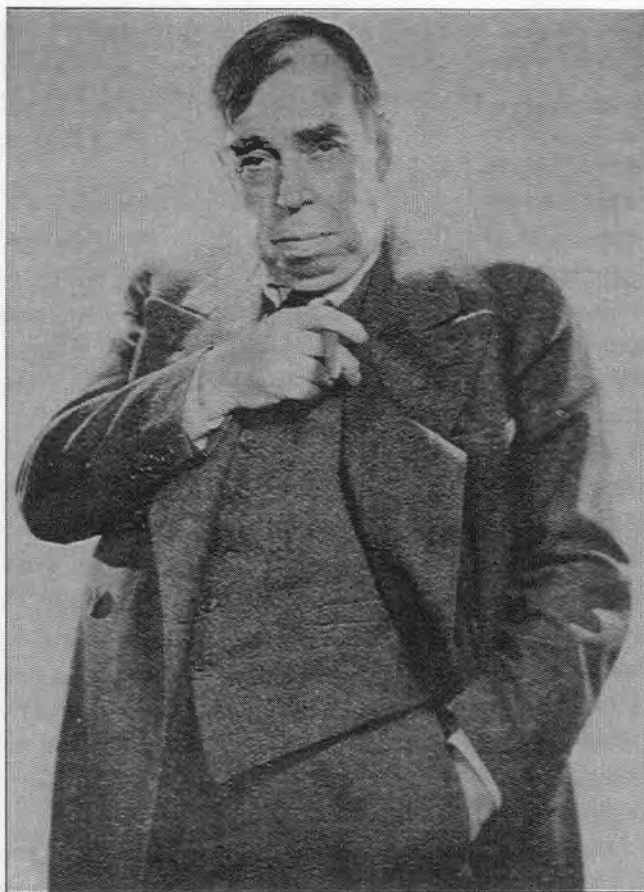
associates.

So pervasive was "Padouca" by the mid-eighteenth century among raiders both east and west of the Mississippi that the term was now customarily applied, as by the Miamis, to the new Comanche captives who had come to supplant the vanishing Padoucas.⁴⁶ Alzate's erroneous map of 1768, misnaming the Comanches as Padoucas and mislocating them as well, when copied by Surville in 1770, "set a fashion in Europe, where . . . later mapmakers adopted the Surville notion and set down the Padoucas as Comanches."⁴⁷ This explains Neuman's muddled account of the Chickasaws in actual possession of the Purchase having once been Comanches. Indians as well as Europeans had long since made "Padouca" part of their working vocabulary of commerce and geography. It also presents a compelling reason why no self-respecting Chickasaws would have freely adopted such a clan appellation.⁴⁸

⁴⁶One of these may have been the "Marthe Pad8ca" [sic] whose son was baptized by Jesuit Father Le Boulanger in 1720 in Kaskaskia. Virgil J. Vogel, *Indian Place Names in Illinois* (Springfield, 1963), 104.

⁴⁷Hyde, *Indians of the High Plains*, 30-31.

⁴⁸Others appeared equally reticent: "In 1820 there was a famous Oto chief named Ietan who got his name from his exploits against that tribe. If Padouca was the Oto and Pawnee name for the Comanche, why was not this man called Padouca instead of Ietan?" (Grinnell, "Who Were the Padouca?," 257). The only recorded instances of persons bearing this "name" are the woman cited in note 46 above and the child she bore, who is assumed to be the "Patoka, chief of the Cahokias" noted in the Kaskaskia court records of 1777 (Vogel, *Indian Place Names in Illinois*, 104). It was customary among Chickasaw warriors to be awarded exploit-names as well, frequently with the suffix (*i ubi* ("killer")) added to the enemy's name or epithet. However, there would have been no honor in being known as Patuk'ubi ("slave-killer"), and one suspects that the Oto chief Ietan in Grinnell's example may have avoided the implications of "Padouca" for exactly the same reason. By one of those bizarre symmetries of history, almost due south of Paducah, at the opposite extreme of the former Chickasaw territory, lies the town of Iuka (*yuka*, "slave"). Its foundation legend, evoked by Sumners in *Chief Tishomingo*, 69-70, was earlier recounted in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi*, 3 vols. (Atlanta, 1907), 1: 948-49: "The county of Tishomingo was named in honor of an Indian (Chickasaw) chief who died about 1836 at Iuka Springs and was buried on the site of Iuka. The town of Iuka was named in memory of Iuka, a chief who died also while camping at the springs and was there buried. The Iuka Springs were looked upon by the Indians as the pools of new life, and to them they were carried when age overtook them to partake of their waters and to receive a renewal of youth. . . ." Considering the resilient immortality of both "Chief Iuka" and "Chief Paduke," the Chickasaws' faith in the springs appears fully justified. A much more reasonable namesake for Iuka is as a contraction of Ishtokiyukatubi, one of the Chickasaw signatories to the Pontotoc treaties of 1830-32, discussed by Vogel in *Indian Place*



Courtesy Rodale Press, Inc.

"Paducah native and writer Irvin S. Cobb derived the word *paducah* from a Chickasaw locative meaning 'a place where the grapes hang down.'"

Clark's journal entry is only partially correct, for the name, at least, was alive and circulating. What is more, in the *St. Louis Missouri Gazette* of June 19, 1818, while Clark was in town,⁵⁰ reference was made to an incident of human sacrifice among the Skidi Pawnees in which it was stated "that some years prior to 1818 a Skidi warrior captured a Padouca woman and dedicated her to Morning Star; but the priests found that

⁵⁰Steffen, *William Clark*, 120.

As the government's principal negotiator of peace treaties and land acquisition agreements, Clark also recorded with great care the names of chiefs and influential warriors empowered either to endorse the accords or liable to disrupt those same negotiations. Moreover, at "some date unknown to us Clark began having portraits painted of Indian chiefs who visited him in St. Louis,"⁵⁴ and in so doing he further certified and actualized their crucial role in the nation's history.

× Like many eighteenth-century men of consequence, Clark was both a diarist and a collector: of curios and artifacts, of acquaintances, of events, attitudes, opinions, and, of course, of names and personalities, as his commissioned portraits of chiefs and warriors attest. In 1827, he had the rare opportunity to name a town of his own, based on a lifetime of experience and knowledge among America's native population. In light of all we know about him and his particular expertise, it is not insignificant that the name General Clark chose was PA-DU-CAH.⁵⁵

Jerome Steffen has convincingly demonstrated that William Clark was a steadfast and quintessential Enlightenment man and an ardent proponent of Jeffersonian democratic ideals and principles. With that in mind, it must be evident that the free-for-all the West had become after the War of 1812, and the government's indulgent tolerance of that freebooting,

⁵⁴John Francis McDermott, "William Clark's Museum Once More," *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin* 16 (1960): 132.

⁵⁵It is revealing that Clark changed the spelling and hyphenated the name PA-DU-CAH in his published notice of the upcoming auction and in his letter to his son Meriwether Lewis rather than use the more common French orthography that had appeared earlier in the *Journals*. Many other varied spellings had also been recorded by then, including Padoo, Padaw, and Padoco (Grinnell, "Who Were the Padouca?"). Such remarkable meticulousness in a notoriously horrific speller like Clark suggests not only his attempt to emphasize the Indian pronunciation, but also to call attention to how the term had actually been used, as by the French and the Miamis, in the East. That it was Clark's own consistent version of the name is further supported by two "Diary" entries for the month of May 1827, made by a clerk/assistant in the General's absence. Berry, "William Clark's Diary," 26:

- 22 Genl Clark starts for Paducah in Steam Boat
Cleopatra
- 29 S. B. *Hercules* arrives[.] Genl Clark arrives
from Paducah

humanity require us to cherish and befriend them. To teach them to live in houses, to raise grain and stock, to plant orchards, to set up landmarks, to divide their possessions, to establish laws for their government, to get the rudiments of common learning, such as reading, writing, and ciphering, are the first steps towards improving their condition. But, to take these steps with effect, it is necessary that previous measures of great magnitude should be accomplished; that is, that the tribes now within the limits of the States and Territories should be removed to a country beyond those limits, where they could rest in peace, and enjoy in reality the perpetuity of the lands on which their buildings and improvements would be made.⁵⁸

That Clark's counsel was being largely ignored both in Washington and on the ground is evident in a letter to his old friend Thomas Jefferson later that same year:

In my present situation of Superintendent of Indian affairs, it would afford me pleasure to be enabled to meliorate the condition of those unfortunate people placed under my charge, knowing as I do their [w]retchedness and their rapid decline. —It is to be lamented that the deplorable situation of the Indians do[es] not receive more of the humain [sic] feelings of the nation.⁵⁹

X In the final analysis, there is no evidence for the claim that William Clark ever had a Chickasaw Indian friend named Paducah or anything else. Clark's only apparent connection with the Purchase was his obvious familiarity with the territory by virtue of his military service, and his eventual though clearly fortuitous ownership of a substantial parcel of land there. Given the wide currency of the term "Padouca" and its variants and of the word's accepted connotations at the time of the town's founding, and given William Clark's own explanation to his son in 1827, one must conclude that Clark called the future city PA-DU-CAH solely in order to memorialize and reprove the willful destruction of a once mighty and

⁵⁸Cited in Gibson, *The Chickasaws*, 144-45.

⁵⁹Quoted in Elliott Coues, ed., *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark*, 3 vols. (New York, 1965; orig. pub. 1893), 1: box, n.

