

## DU TISNE'S EXPEDITION INTO OKLAHOMA, 1719.

One of the main purposes of France in settling Louisiana was the development of an overland route for trade and commerce with the Spaniards in Texas and New Mexico. Spain had been trading with the Indians in the West and Southwest for over a century before the French came in to challenge her. The period of France's most far-reaching activities in North America was during the first half of the eighteenth century. It was during this period that the international conflict in the Southwest was being fought out between the two nations, each trying to get control of the territory through the control of the Indian and his trade. Oklahoma came in for her share in the struggle, especially because of her two great highways, the Arkansas and Red Rivers. Between 1718 and 1724 France was expending much effort in opening these highways, especially the Arkansas River.

At the same time that Bernard de la Harpe was crossing eastern Oklahoma, coming in from the south and assembling the nine nations at the Touacara village on the Arkansas; another Frenchman, Charles Du Tisne, was approaching Oklahoma, coming from the north, and visiting the Pawnees, who were located in northeastern Oklahoma. The Pawnees, or Pani, belonged to the Caddoan family. When history dawns in Oklahoma, the Caddoan family are occupying the northern half of Oklahoma. In the movement of the Caddoan tribes northward the Pawnees are said to have brought up the rear,<sup>1</sup> though eventually part of them went much farther north than other Caddoan tribes. The term Pani, or Pawnee, as applied to Indian slaves, came into use in the sixteenth century, by the French and Spanish explorers and traders. The Pawnee villages lay between the French and Spanish colonial frontiers and, in order to get into New Mexico by the Arkansas River, the French had to make an alliance with them. It was other tribes of this family that La Harpe had visited in the summer of 1719, with the aim of making treaties and alliances, in order to open the way to trade with the Spanish settlements on the Rio Grande. Both

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1. Bureau of American Ethnology. Bulletin 30, part 2, page 214.

La Harpe and Du Tisne wished to go farther west and visit the Paducas, a strong, warlike nation living on the western plains. The Spaniards were, also, interested in making alliances with the Paducas. In 1719, the same year La Harpe and Du Tisne entered Oklahoma, a Spanish expedition was sent from Santa Fe to the Missouri to drive the French back. France's renewed interest in the Louisiana country came as a result of Law's financial scheme, and caused the Spaniards much concern. The fate of this Spanish expedition is still a mystery. Possibly the Paducas were the ones responsible for its ill fate.

In the spring of 1719 Claud Charles Du Tisne started on an expedition in the Southwest with the aim in view of visiting the Missouri, Osages, Pawnees and the Paducas. His starting place was Kaskaskia, in the Illinois country. He went up the Missouri to the mouth of the Osage, a distance of forty leagues, according to Du Tisne's reckoning.<sup>2</sup> From the mouth of the Osage, he went eighty leagues to the Osage villages. Eighty leagues from the mouth of the Osage River would place the Osage villages between the ninety-fifth and ninety-sixth meridians. The Osages had been known to the French since Father Marquette's expedition into the Southwest in 1673. Father Marquette located them on the Osage River. The French trappers and traders, no doubt, had made frequent visits to the Osages, but the first official visit to the Osages was that of Du Tisne. At this time Du Tisne says that their villages consisted of about a hundred cabins and two hundred warriors. The Osages, according to Du Tisne, stay in their villages and spend the winters in chasing the buffalo. "Horses which they steal from the Panis can be bought from them."

Du Tisne was well received by the Osages, but when he told them that he had planned to go on to the Pawnees they were opposed to the idea. Du Tisne, like La Harpe, brought goods with him to acquaint these Indians with French merchandise. After much persuasion, and with much determination, Du Tisne said, "I learned that they did not want me to take my goods that I had brought, so I proposed to them to let me take three guns for myself and three for the interpreter. And if they did not consent to this I would be very

2. *Extrait de la Relations de Bernard de la Harpe, Margry, Vol. VI, page 310.*

angry."<sup>3</sup> They consented to this, and Du Tisne went on to the Pawnee country.

The Pawnee villages were reached by Du Tisne after going forty leagues southwest.<sup>4</sup> He said that the country over which he went was both prairie and hilly country, and that he crossed four rivers, the largest of which was the Arkansas. Here Du Tisne must have made a mistake, for had he reached the Arkansas he would have gone farther than forty leagues. This distance to the southwest would have taken him into Oklahoma across the Grand River, and to about where Chelsea, Oklahoma. It is possible that Du Tisne thought the Grand River the Arkansas, this being the first large stream he had crossed since leaving the Osages. This, then, would locate the Pawnee village not far from Chelsea. Had Du Tisne crossed the Arkansas, as he thought, he would not have been far from where La Harpe had gathered the nine nations to sing the Calumet. Du Tisne said they went forty leagues, the distance between the Osages and Pawnees, in four days. This would make an average of ten leagues, or a little over twenty-five miles a day. That was about as far as one could travel over uncharted country.

When Du Tisne first arrived at the Pawnee village he was badly received, because the Pawnees feared that he came to get slaves. This fear was justified because it was not an uncommon thing for the French traders to get slaves from the Indian tribes on the Missouri and the Arkansas. After much persuasion, Du Tisne convinced the Pawnees that he was there on a friendly visit, and made an alliance with them on September 27, 1719.<sup>5</sup> He raised a white flag in the middle of their villages. He traded with the Pawnees for two horses and a mule with a Spanish brand. The Pawnee village, according to Du Tisne, was situated on the bank of a creek, on a hill surrounded by elevated prairies, and there was another village a short distance away. There were in these two villages about three hundred horses, which they valued very much—so much that they were loath to part with them. Also, he said that the Pawnees were a very brutal nation, but that they could easily be subdued if the French would make them presents of guns. There were only six guns among

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3. *Extrait de la Relations de Bernard de la Harpe, Margry, Vol. VI, page 10.*

4. *Ibid., Vol. VI, page 314.*

5. *Ibid., Vol. VI, page 312.*

all of them. Du Tisne says there were many other Pawnee villages west and northwest, of which the French had never heard.

Du Tisne, like La Harpe, wished to go to the Paducas. This nation of the western plains, (the Paducas), was now the only barrier between France and her coveted trade. La Harpe said that at the Touacara villages he was told that the Spaniards got a yellow metal from the ground in the Paduca country. The Pawnees opposed Du Tisne's plan of going to the Paduca country because the Paducas were their mortal enemies. The Pawnees told Du Tisne that they had once been to the village of the Spaniards, which was a month's journey away. Du Tisne says that from the Pawnee villages two days' journey to the west, and a quarter to the Southwest is a salt mine, which is very beautiful and pure. This would give added emphasis to the belief that the Pawnee villages which Du Tisne visited were about where Chelsea, Oklahoma, is today.<sup>6</sup>

Du Tisne believed that the French could make peace between the Pawnees and Paducas, and thereby gain a route to the Spaniards. He believed this could be done by giving back their slaves and making them presents. Du Tisne thought that he could do this, and offered his service to M. de Boisbriant, commander of the Kaskaskia Post.

During the entire period of the French occupation of the Mississippi there was a continuous conflict between the Spaniards and the French. It was a frequent occurrence for inroads to be made into the Indian country, and this one was especially interesting and important to Oklahoma, because it was principally from such explorations that Oklahoma received so many French names of places. These expeditions, both private and official, continued as long as France controlled Louisiana. The French trader of Louisiana and Canada continued to look with covetous eyes toward New Mexico. To the adventurer it was the land of gold and silver, and, probably, a path to the South sea. To the trader and trapper it offered rich reward. The exclusive policy of the Spaniards, with the Apaches on the Red River, and the Comanches on the Arkansas, Kaw and Platte rivers, kept the highways closed for a while longer.

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6. Chappell, Phil. E., "A History of the Missouri River," in *Kansas Historical Collections*, Vol. IX, 1905-1906, page 253.

Editorial Note—The Pawnee people with whom Du Tisne met and those with whom La Harpe met a few weeks earlier as well, should not be confused or confounded with the Pawnee tribe which is still known by that name. The latter were called the Panimaha by the Osage and kindred tribes, this name signifying upper or northern Pawnee, while those living in the Arkansas and Canadian were called the Paniouassa, meaning lower or southern Pawnee. Most of the last mentioned tribes long since disappeared, the surviving remnants doubtless having been absorbed by the Pani Pique (i. e., Tattooed Pawnee), now known as the Wichita. J. B. T.