



How Missouri Was Named

Father Jacques Marquette, accompanying explorer Louis Joliet, traveled down the Mississippi River in 1673. During the trip he wrote, “We descend following the course of the river, toward another called Pekitanoui, which empties into the Mississippi, coming from the northwest.”

Although he called the river “Pekitanoui” – a name apparently given to him by the Sauk Indians – he noted on his map that a large tribe of native people called the OuMissouri lived upstream. The name had been given to them by their enemies, the Fox tribe of Algonquins, and in the Fox language means “people with big canoes.”

The Missouris, a branch of the Sioux, called the river Nishodse, which means “muddy water.” This may explain the wide-spread (but incorrect) assumption that Missouri means muddy water. Whatever its earlier names, the mighty river which flowed into the Mississippi eventually was identified with the tribe that lived along its banks. It became the Missouri River.

Later, when settlers came, the vast area it drained (extending westward to the Rocky Mountains) became known as the Missouri Territory. In 1821, when the new state was formed in this territory, it adopted the name Missouri.