

What happened after the Louisiana Purchase?

What was the Louisiana Purchase? The Europeans had a policy about land ownership in the continents they called the New World. The policy, known as “rights of discovery,” was that the nation first discovering a region became its legal owner. The inhabitants of the land were not important to the European powers. They were considered the *chat-tel*, or moveable property, of the discovering government. The explorer who made the discovery was considered the agent of his government. After a discovery was made and claimed, it became a pawn of peace, a spoil of war, or a tool of bargain, as the government saw fit. So, while European explorers were crisscrossing the New World, their rulers were playing geographical chess with their respective pieces. Two major players were France and Spain.

LaSalle, who had actually seen very little of the territory he claimed, named Louisiana after King Louis of France in 1682. He claimed not only the Mississippi River valley but also the land into which all its tributaries extended. This was approximately one-fourth of all the land which later became the United States.

In the 1700s, Spain agreed to support France against England, and the two allies were defeated in the French and Indian War. (In Europe, this was called the Seven Years’ War.) Spain lost Florida to England and demanded *remuneration* from France. The French ceded Louisiana as *compensation*, and Oklahoma came under Spanish rule in 1763.

In 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte of France and King Charles of Spain signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso. It quietly returned the entire region of Louisiana to France. With Napoleon waging war all over Europe, some Americans feared that the port of New Orleans would be closed to American traffic. So in 1801, Robert Livingston, American minister to France, began trying to buy the Isle of Orleans. The narrow but valuable strip of land was along the lower Mississippi leading to the Gulf.

At first, France denied owning Louisiana, as the treaty was meant to be a secret. In fact, Napoleon had promised Charles of Spain that he would not sell Louisiana. Talleyrand, the Chief Minister of France, finally confirmed the treaty but declared that France would not sell any part of its territory.

However, with several of his campaigns going badly, Napoleon needed money. He decided to sacrifice his dreams of French *imperialism* in the New World in order to fight his wars. He instructed Talleyrand to sell — not only New Orleans but also all of Louisiana. In May 1803, the United States virtually doubled itself in area by purchasing Louisiana from France. The price was \$15 million.

Spain protested the sale vigorously, reminding France of Napoleon's promise. Spain was in no position to go to war, however, and eventually fell silent. The transfer was completed, and Oklahoma became a part of the United States of America.

What was the Lewis and Clark Expedition? Thomas Jefferson was President at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. His immediate concern was the exploration of the new territory. People were moving westward in search of land, but few had ventured farther west than the Mississippi River. Most people guessed that more hostile Indian tribes lived in the west. There were fantastic stories of giants in the north, of salt mountains, and of strange beasts, but little was actually known about the area.

Moreover, no clear boundaries had been set for the territory, and Spain still controlled land to the California coast. Jefferson needed to establish an exact boundary as soon as possible.

The first U.S. *expedition* did not venture into Oklahoma. The President commissioned Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark to explore the Missouri River to its source and to find a passage across the high mountains in the west. This *expedition* covered the northern part of the Louisiana territory. It began in May 1804, one month after the formal transfer of land from France to the United States.

What was the Wilkinson and Pike Expedition? The second *expedition* commissioned by President Jefferson was the first official one into Oklahoma. Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike, twenty-seven years old, and Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson set out in July 1806. They accompanied a group of Osage and Pawnee Indians back to their homes from a trip the Native Americans had made to Washington, D.C. The *expedition* planned to follow the Arkansas River, exploring the territory all the way to its source, and to create friendly relations with any people along the way. Their explora-



**Captain
Meriwether Lewis**



**Lieutenant
William Clark**

tions were to include the mountains surrounding the headwaters of the river, the area later known as Colorado.

Crossing Kansas, however, Lieutenant Wilkinson became ill. It was decided that Pike should take part of the troupe and continue to the source of the Arkansas. Wilkinson took the rest and explored to the mouth of the river. That gave the young lieutenant a chance to recover without facing the rigors of the mountains.



Pike took his men on to discover Pike's Peak in Colorado but then wandered into Spanish territory, where they were captured. The Spanish held them in Mexico and took the papers that the group had used to record their explorations. Later, the Spanish escorted Pike's group back to American territory and released them but kept the papers. Pike and his men had to piece together what they could remember about their trip west from St. Louis.

Lieutenant Wilkinson, however, kept detailed records of all he had seen. These became the first official records of Oklahoma. In his reports he referred to the land along the Arkansas River as a "paradise," and

claimed that he saw "enough deer, buffalo and elk . . . to feed all of the Indians in the United States for 100 years."

Wilkinson and his men spent Christmas Day in an Osage village near the present site of Claremore. He then moved down the ice-clogged river to Webbers Falls, which he estimated to be seven feet high. He reported meeting a few Cherokee and Choctaw Indians, who had apparently come west to hunt. He even found some white men, mostly trappers and traders, in this remote land.

What was the Sparks Expedition? While Wilkinson and Pike were exploring the Arkansas, Captain Richard Sparks followed the Red River to its headwaters. Sparks and his men prepared in New Orleans for the trip and ventured up the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Red River. They floated that stream until they found it blocked by

the “Great Raft,” a mass of logs, debris, and plants. This tangled *phenomenon* choked the river for miles. Finally, Sparks and his party used the land route. Stopping for lunch, they were surprised by a column of Spanish soldiers, who warned them to either turn back or face arrest. While the boundaries of the territory were still unsettled, the Spaniards suspected every American explorer of trying to claim Spanish lands. Considering that they were largely outnumbered, Sparks and his party returned to Louisiana without completing their mission. They had just reached the edge of what is now Oklahoma when they turned back.

How did George Sibley find the Great Salt Plains? The next *expedition* did not take place until 1811. George C. Sibley, Osage Indian Agent from Fort Orange, Missouri, traveled with several Osage chiefs as they returned to their homes after a trip to Washington, D.C. Sibley was curious about the many stories and strange tales he had heard about the salt mountain and about the buffalo. The Osage led him across the prairies of Kansas, Nebraska, and northern Oklahoma. He finally came to the Great Salt Plains, which he said was “glistening like a brilliant field of snow in the summer sun.” The Indians, using turkey wings as brooms, swept the salt into bags to be taken home. Sibley made the first official record of the site, which geologists later reported had once been a great salt sea. The Salt Plains soon became a life-sustaining stop for pioneers moving west across the continent.

What was Major Stephen H. Long’s first expedition? Major Stephen H. Long led two expeditions. The purpose of the first was to establish a fort in the Far West. The site selected was at Belle Point, a ferned and flowered location near the mouth of the Poteau River, where it empties into the Arkansas. Named for Colonel Thomas A. Smith, and founded in 1817, Fort Smith became a center of activity for trappers and traders. The fort itself, designed by Major Long, consisted of a *stockade* of heavy pickets set deep into the ground. It had barracks at the corners of the *stockade* and other buildings inside the enclosure. The Rifle Regiment occupied it first, under the command of Major William A. Bradford. Later, Fort Smith became very important in the development of Oklahoma.

What was Major Stephen Long’s second expedition? In 1819, Major Long and his party set out on their second *expedition* to complete Captain Sparks’s mission, finding the source of the Red River. The War Department also instructed them to explore the Arkansas to its mouth, or where it empties into the Mississippi River. In July 1820, at the headwa-

Do You Know?

Vinita
is the oldest
incorporated town
on Oklahoma
Route 66,
being established
in 1871.

ters in the Rocky Mountains, the party split. Captain John R. Bell and his party followed the Arkansas, and Major Long and his men were to find and follow the Red River.

Four days after separation, Long's men saw a creek and thought it was a *tributary* of the Red River. They followed it to the river and set out down to the main channel. At the 100th Meridian, moving east, they camped for the night and were pleased with the resources there. Short of supplies, especially food, they found wild plums and grapes and plenty of good hunting. Dr. Edwin James, a botanist, recorded that there were excellent grasses in the area and that the soil appeared good for agriculture.

Still, the men endured many hardships on the trip. They lacked sufficient food and supplies and, at one point, suffered a shortage of water. Apparently disillusioned by these hardships, three of the men stole away one night. They took most of the best horses and several saddlebags containing many of the records of the expedition, along with clothing and gifts for the Indians. Although the men left behind launched an intense search, they never found the three who left or the stolen documents.

This incident sharpened the disappointment of the remaining members of the party when they discovered that they had been exploring the Canadian River, not the Red River. Only three days away from Fort Smith, short-supplied and weary, they gave up their attempt to find the Red River. Instead, they reported back to Major Bradford at Fort Smith. (Captain Bell and his men awaited them there with their own tales of hardship.) Long's troops had not completed their mission, yet the records which remained of their journey and the records they wrote from memory were significant. They were important a short time later, when the government decided to build additional forts in the west.

Who led private expeditions into Oklahoma? While the U.S. government funded the exploration of the Louisiana territory, private citizens funded exploration, too. In 1821, Colonel Hugh Glenn, a trader on the Verdigris River, led a private *expedition* into the West. Twenty men left Fort Smith that September. They included Kentucky surveyor Jacob Fowler and his slave, Paul; an interpreter called Baptiste Roy; and Nathaniel Pryor, who had also accompanied Lewis and Clark in 1804. Fowler kept a diary of the trip, which later became invaluable to historians.

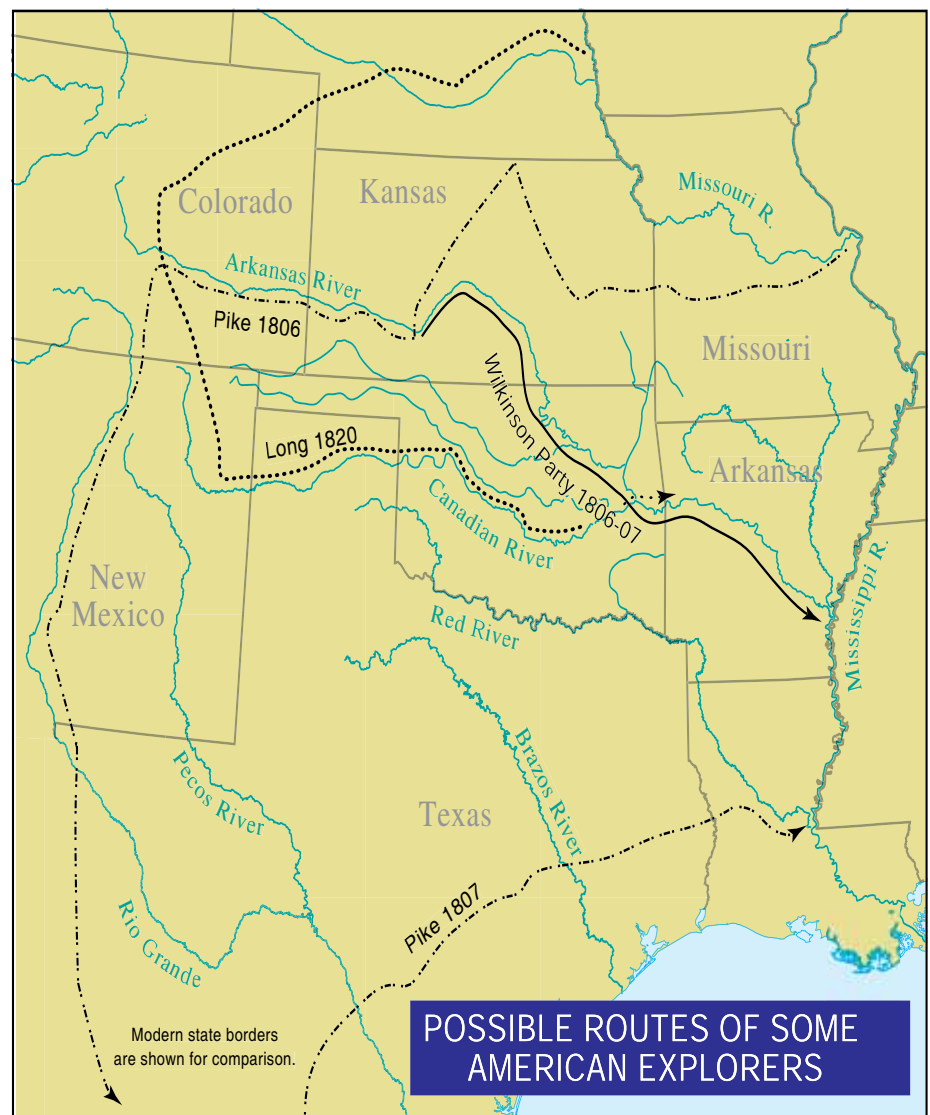
The Glenn *expedition* crossed the Osage Hills and followed the

Arkansas River west to the Purgatory River, where they encountered members of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes. The western tribes were pleased to trade with the explorers, exchanging *pelts* and furs for any items of use or interest offered them. This *expedition* was instrumental in opening trade with the western tribes, especially for the traders already stationed in what is now eastern Oklahoma.

William Becknell led a second trade *expedition* across the Great Plains in 1821. He headed south from the Great Bend of the Arkansas all the way to Santa Fe in the Rio Grande Valley. Becknell's party crossed Oklahoma only in the Panhandle and left little knowledge of geographical value. Nevertheless, the party did open trade in that area, and trade brought a great deal of traffic across Oklahoma.

Explorers, both official and private, served several purposes in the early development of Oklahoma. They were the first to meet the native peoples and have relationships with them. They saw and recorded the varieties of natural resources and their locations. They disproved wild stories of giants, monsters, and natural disasters. They opened trade with western and southwestern tribes and reported the lifestyles of the people they met. Traveling at various times of year, they even recorded the weather and the changes of the seasons.

The courage and spirit of adventure in these explorers made it possible for the rest of the nation to know what to expect in the west. Pioneers began to trickle westward as soon as Lewis and Clark returned. The nation was young, and its boundaries changed frequently.



What changed for the U.S. and Oklahoma when President Jefferson bought Louisiana? On December 20, 1803, William C.C. Claiborne became the governor of Louisiana, the largest single territory ever owned by the United States. In an official ceremony in New Orleans, the French flag was lowered as the American flag was raised. Midway, the operators paused and the banners waved side by side, emphasizing the brotherhood of nations. Seconds later, the Stars and Stripes were flying over New Orleans and, thus, over all Louisiana.

Some 20,000 non-Indian Americans lived in Louisiana Territory. Most of them were in or around New Orleans and St. Louis, with a few scattered settlements in between. In March 1804, Congress passed an act which created two territories in the West. They were the Territory of

New Orleans, south of the Thirty-third Parallel, and the District of Louisiana, or “Upper Louisiana,” north of it.

Temporarily, the District of Louisiana was attached to Indiana Territory, under Governor William Henry Harrison. (He became the ninth President of the United States, serving a brief term in 1841.)

In March 1805, the district separated from

Indiana Territory and became the Territory of Louisiana. General James Wilkinson, the father of Lieutenant James Wilkinson, became governor of the Territory of Louisiana in St. Louis.

In 1812, the U.S. admitted the Territory of New Orleans as the state of Louisiana. The government created the Territory of Missouri and included the area that is now Oklahoma. William Clark, the famous explorer, was appointed governor of Missouri Territory.

In 1819, the U.S. divided Missouri Territory and created the Territory of Arkansas. Governor James Miller founded Arkansas Post as the seat of government for that Territory. Its northeastern and south-



ern boundaries matched those of today's state of Arkansas. Its western boundary *extended* all the way to the Spanish holdings in the west, including Oklahoma.

Also in 1819, the U.S. and Spain finally agreed on the southern and western boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase. John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State, negotiated with the king of Spain through his representative, Don Luis de Onis. Their agreement, the Adams-Onis Treaty, set the absolute boundary between American and Spanish property. They defined the border:

... along the west bank of the Sabine River from its mouth to the 32nd *parallel*; thence, due north to the Red River; thence, westward along its south bank to the 100th *meridian*; thence, north along that *meridian* to the Arkansas River; thence, up the south bank of that stream to its source; thence, due north to the 42nd *parallel*; thence, westward along that *parallel* to the Pacific Ocean ...

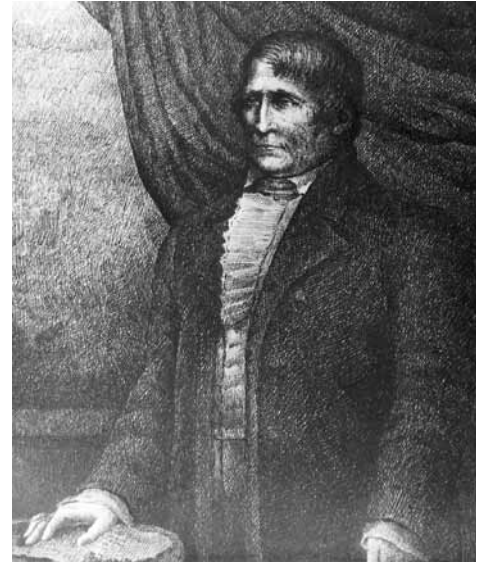
By the Adams-Onis treaty, Spain also gave up all claims to both Florida and Oregon, and the U.S. *relinquished* any claims to Texas as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Further, two future boundaries were decided for the state of Oklahoma — the Red River and the 100th Meridian.

Who were the Chouteaus? As the nation grew in the East, more and more settlers spilled into the West. Traders were the first to come. The Chouteau family was among the first of them.

Auguste Chouteau and his partner, Pierre Laclede Ligest, founded St. Louis, Missouri, in 1764 as a trading port. Auguste's brother, Jean Pierre, started a healthy trade with the Osages, the Omahas, the Otos, the Kaws, the Poncas, and the Quapaws. All of them were enemies of the Pawnees and moved about the Central Plains area.

In fact, much of Chouteau's business with these tribes was in guns and *ammunition* for their wars with the Pawnees. He often took Pawnee captives back to St. Louis to sell as slaves.

Auguste Pierre (A.P.) Chouteau, son of Jean Pierre and nephew of Auguste, joined the family business. He founded a trading post in 1817



**Jean Pierre
Chouteau**
*Oklahoma Historical
Society*



**Chouteau's
trading post**
*was the hub of
commerce in the
early 1800s.*
*Oklahoma Historical
Society*

near the site of present-day Salina, Oklahoma, on the Grand River, in the Three Forks area. Some two thousand hunters and trappers, both Indian and European, traded with A.P. Chouteau, so his post shipped a huge volume of furs and *pelts* to New Orleans and St. Louis. There were hides of bear, beaver, buffalo, deer, otter, raccoon, rabbit, skunk, and many others. The furs sold well in the eager markets of more “civilized” areas of the country.

Chouteau himself lived *luxuriously* in the wilderness. He built a home described by a friend as a “two story log palace,” in which he entertained many travelers. Among those were famous writer Washington Irving and Sam Houston, who later became the President of the Texas Republic. A.P. Chouteau married Sophie Labbadie, and the couple had six children, five daughters and a son. He also had four Indian wives and several children by them.

Who were other significant traders in the south and southwest areas of the country? Colonel Hugh Glenn led an *expedition* in 1821 to the Spanish area we now call New Mexico. When Glenn opened up trade with Santa Fe, it became an important piece of business for both parties. There were no manufacturing centers in “northern Mexico,” so dry goods and hardware were especially valuable items there. Glenn regularly shipped bolts of fabric, barrels of nails, horseshoes, and tools. On return trips, he transported horses, mules, and raw materials for the eastern market. Glenn’s trading post on the Verdigris River thrived. It became a regular stopover for wilderness travelers.

The Verdigris is one of three rivers that meet and are called the Three Forks. Other trading posts in the Three Forks area were owned by partners Brand and Barbour, by Nathaniel Pryor, the veteran of two exploring expeditions, and by Ben Hawkins. All these posts were stopping-off places. Traders became as skilled at sharing tales and *hospitality* as they were at trading goods.

Then the growth of the posts suffered from a natural disaster. Merchandise as well as trading posts themselves were swept away in a flood, the largest ever to hit that region. The Three Forks trading center began to decline after 1833 and the big flood. Chouteau alone suffered \$10,000 in damages. The traders rebuilt and made improvements, only to have them destroyed again a short time later in a fire. The trading center never fully recovered after that.

Not many miles away, however, Bean’s Salt Works had also become a favorite tourist spot. *Established* in the spring of 1820 on the Illinois

Do You Know?

Turner Falls Park in Davis is the oldest park in Oklahoma.

River, the salt-mining business did well. Bean collected saltwater from a saline spring and used large kettles for mining salt by evaporation, in much the same way as the prehistoric people had. He lived in a “comfortable log house,” did *subsistence* farming, and raised some livestock.

What forts and roads were built in Oklahoma and its surroundings in the 1800s? During the early 1800s, the government kept an eye on problems of its southern neighbors. In 1809, Mexico revolted against Spain. The southern boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase were still only vaguely decided (this was before the Adams-Onís Treaty). So the American government planned a series of forts to protect its southern border, to protect white settlers in Indian country, and to deal with the Indians in the Far West.

The first fort, of course, was Fort Smith, dating from 1817. Next was Fort Gibson, *established* after Spanish control ended in North America. It was between the Arkansas and Grand Rivers and named for General George Gibson, who had served in the Revolutionary War.

Also in 1824, the government constructed Fort Towson. It was near the mouth of the Kiamichi River, some 120 miles south of Fort Gibson. This fort was named for Brigadier General Nathan Towson, who had won national recognition in the War of 1812.

These three were the most active forts built in the frontier days of Oklahoma, but others also were important. Fort Coffee was built in 1834 near present-day Spiro. Fort Holmes was constructed the same year near the mouth of Little River. Fort Washita was founded in southern Oklahoma, near the present town of Madill, in 1842.

To connect the forts, the government surveyed the land and constructed the first roads. The very first road was between Fort Smith and



French trade with the Indians
Illustration by artist Charles Banks Wilson

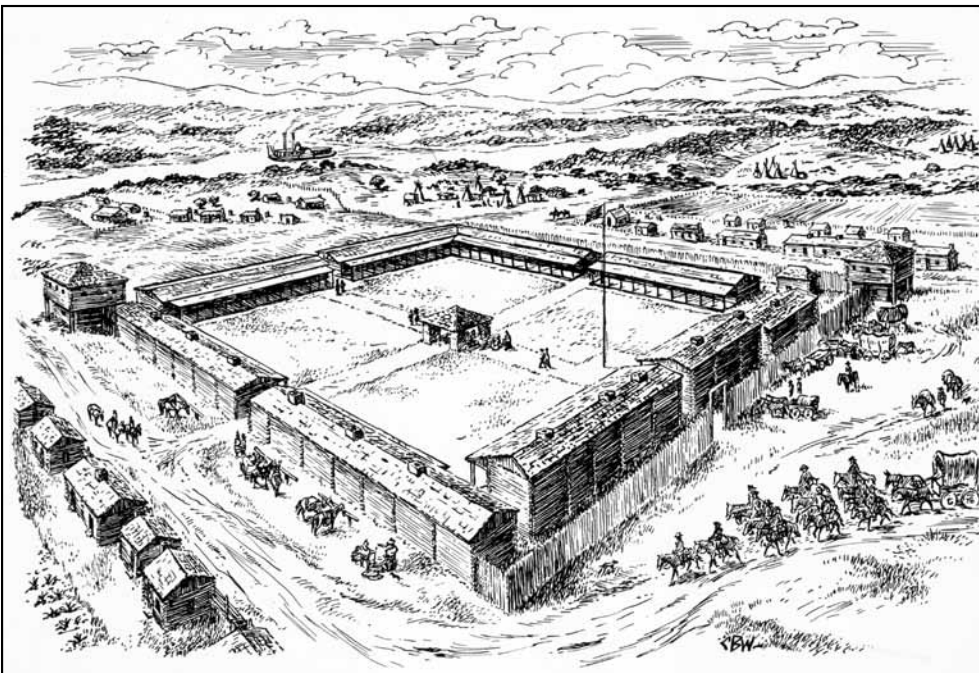
Fort Gibson. It ran about the same course as today's Highway 64. Thus, exploration of most of present-day Oklahoma was gradually achieved through the building of military posts, the surveying of roads, and the movement of troops and military supplies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ft. Gibson was located between the Arkansas and Grand rivers. Indians, fur traders, soldiers and travelers were frequent visitors.

Drawing by Charles Banks Wilson

1. Explain how the U.S. came to own the Louisiana Territory.
2. Give four important facts about the Adams-Onís Treaty.
3. Discuss the establishment of forts in the area (give names) and explain the effects the forts had upon completing the exploration of Oklahoma.
4. Describe the ceremonies that took place when the Louisiana Territory was transferred from France to the United States.
5. Expeditions required people with various skills. Name occupations that were important to the immediate and long-term success of expeditions.
6. Name the son of an early family of traders and tell how he succeeded in establishing a trading post in Oklahoma.
7. Why was Glenn's trade with Santa Fe important?



8. How was Bean's Salt Works important in developing the region?

9. List place names of Spanish, French, and Indian origins across the state.

10. Consider place names in your own area. In regard to local history, of what do they remind you?