

Great American Lives

of Nineteenth Century Missouri

Auguste Chouteau

By Paula Brous

Golden City Elementary

From his unstable early life, it seemed unlikely that Auguste Chouteau would have ended up successful, let alone a topic in history. But today Chouteau is recognized as a member of St. Louis' founding family, and we still study his important roles as **businessman**, **fur trader** and **Indian diplomat** during the settlement of the west.

Auguste Chouteau was born in New Orleans in the French territory of Louisiana in September 1749 to René Chouteau and a teen mother, Marie Bourgeois. The **arranged marriage** was not a happy one. Not long after the marriage, René Chouteau deserted young Marie and her infant son, leaving them to fend for themselves in New Orleans.

In 1755, Marie Chouteau's fortunes changed when she met a well-educated Frenchman named Pierre Laclède. Pierre and Marie Chouteau fell in love. Laclède served as a father to young Auguste, and the couple eventually had four children together, including Auguste's brother, Jean Pierre.

A **savvy** businessman, Laclède became interested in the fur trade and soon **embarked** on an adventure that would secure the future of his family.

Fur-trading Fortune

In 1762, the United States didn't yet exist. The English colonies claimed the territory east of the Mississippi River, but France claimed a huge tract of land west of the Mississippi called the **Louisiana Territory** (see map).

Within this Louisiana Territory, the French government awarded Laclède an **exclusive** right to trade with the Indians of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. In 1764, he established a fur trading post called St. Louis at the junction of the

two rivers. He put 14-year-old Auguste in charge of 30 workers who cleared the timber and built the structures. It was a very important **task** for such a young person!

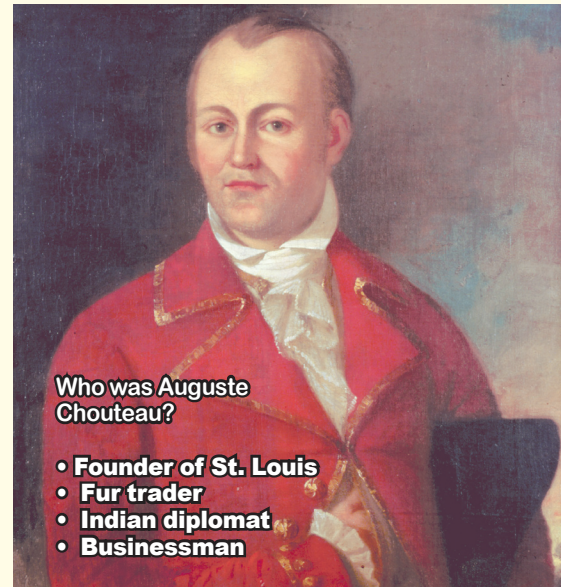
Laclède's fur trade became a very **lucrative** venture. He exchanged goods such as blankets, beads, jewelry, tools and guns to the Indians in return for beaver pelts and other furs. Trading posts such as this naturally attracted people, and the city of St. Louis grew around Laclède's post. When Laclède died in 1778 – two years after the English colonies declared their independence from Great Britain – Chouteau inherited his step-father's business.

Doing Business on American Soil

Under Chouteau, the trade post **flourished** largely because of his reputation as an honest and fair **negotiator** among the Indians. From his base in St. Louis, Chouteau's traders spread out over much of the west.

In 1803, France sold the Louisiana Territory to the young nation, doubling the size of the United States! Now doing business on American soil, the Chouteau family – including his wife Therese and their children – quickly made friends with the American government and their fur trade continued to prosper.

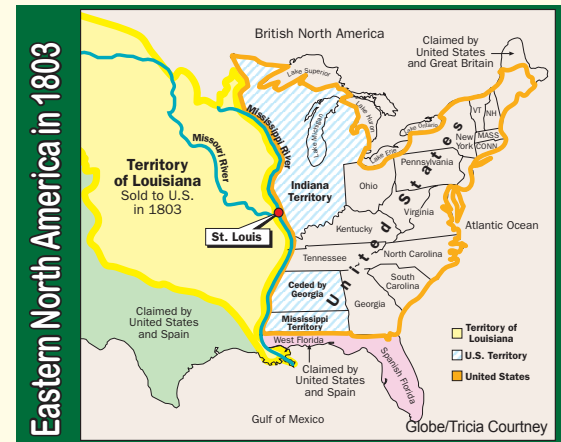
Although the fur trade was Chouteau's main business, he was also involved in retail merchandising, **land development** and banking throughout his life. Because of his good relationship with native Americans, the government asked his **advice** and named him a diplomat during the Indian wars. In 1815, Chouteau successfully negotiated peace treaties with the Sioux, Iowa, Sauk and Fox. Chouteau died in 1829, but his name remains **prominent** in St. Louis today!



Who was Auguste Chouteau?

- **Founder of St. Louis**
- **Fur trader**
- **Indian diplomat**
- **Businessman**

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Vocabulary

Match the vocabulary word with the correct definition, then write a sentence using each word

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ___ Arranged Marriage | A – Someone who traded goods with the Indians in exchange for furs to sell |
| ___ Embark | B – A person representing his government in negotiations with other nations |
| ___ Flourish | C – The state of being intelligent or shrewd |
| ___ Diplomat | D – To begin an enterprise or a business |
| ___ Land Developer | E – The territory west of the Mississippi River claimed at various times by the French and Spanish |
| ___ Prominent | F – Controlled by one person or group |
| ___ Louisiana | G – Work or chore to be done |
| ___ Territory | H – Profitable |
| ___ Exclusive | I – To thrive or do well |
| ___ Savvy | J – To bargain with someone in order to reach an agreement |
| ___ Advice | K – A suggestion or opinion on what course of action to take |
| ___ Task | L – Famous, important or widely recognized |
| ___ Lucrative | M – Someone who buys land to develop and make money from it |
| ___ Fur trader | N – A marriage in which a son or daughter's parents selects the person he or she will marry |
| ___ Negotiator | |