

In the city of Chicago, Illinois, a visitor may come across the Kinzie Building, Kinzie Park, Kinzie Street, or Kinzie Bridge. They are named in honor of John Kinzie, an early nineteenth century trader, regarded as the father of Chicago. A faded and forgotten plaque on the old Kirk Soap Factory Building tells a different story. The plaque reads: "On this spot in 1772 Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, a Negro from Santo Domingo, built the first trading post in Chicago."

Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable was born in San Marc, Haiti, in 1745. His parents owned a successful coffee plantation there. Suzanne, his mother, had been a slave on the island of St. Croix until Jean's father, who had served as mate on a pirate ship, stole her from her master. He took her to Haiti where she would be free, and there they were married.

When Jean turned twenty, his father fitted him with a sloop and a cargo of hardwoods and coffee.

"Go to New France [the North American mainland]," he told Jean. "There lies the future of the new world. It is not here on this crowded island of Haiti."

So in 1765 Jean set out for New Orleans in the sloop. Shortly after departure a storm destroyed the boat and its cargo, but a Dutch ship rescued Jean and took him to New Orleans. Jean was now poor. He stayed off the streets for fear someone might claim him as a runaway slave. He worked quietly at a Roman Catholic mission until an Ottawa Indian took him to the new French trading post at St. Louis. There he began fur trapping in 1766.

Jean ran a successful business in St. Louis. While there, he became friends with the

famous Ottawa chief, Pontiac. The old chieftain had retired to Cahokia, a small camp near St. Louis. One night, in 1769, an Indian sent by the British stole into Pontiac's lodge and stabbed him. The mortally wounded chief called Jean to his deathbed. Pontiac was afraid his son would start a war with the British because of the stabbing. Such a war would only destroy the Indians. He asked Jean to go on a peace mission to the Great Lakes.

Jean agreed to do Pontiac's wishes. He journeyed up the Mississippi, Illinois, and Des Plaines rivers. He reached a vast plain called Eschikagou (the present site of Chicago.) The soil was rich and the streams teemed with furbearing otter and beaver. The plains were filled with game. Jean loved the place. He wanted to build a cabin and trading post on these plains that joined the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes.

Jean's Indian guide told him, however, that Eschikagou had been an Indian battleground for centuries. War parties killed or drove off anyone who tried to settle there. The guide spoke the truth. Such famous French explorers as Marquette, Joliet, and La Salle had failed to build permanent settlements there because of the Indians.

Jean accomplished what those famous explorers could not do. He persuaded the warring tribes to make peace. They agreed to a treaty for the common protection against the British. When peace came to the Great Lakes in 1772, Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable built the first settlement on the Eschikagou plains.

Jean worked hard, and within a few years Eschikagou became a thriving settlement. Hugh Howard was a merchant from Detroit who did

business with Jean. In 1778 he wrote of Eschikagou: "The settlement consists of a log trading post properly stocked, a log home, two barns, a bake house, a poultry, a workshop, a dairy, a milk house, and numerous outhouses occupied by Canadian settlers."

In 1779 France joined the American cause in the Revolutionary War. Jean, though French, wished to remain neutral; but a British colonel arrested him, thinking he would fight with the French and Americans. Jean was taken to Fort Mackinac. Upon word of Jean's arrest, the Ottawas rose up against the British and helped the Americans defeat the British in the west.

After the war Eschikagou became more important as a gateway to the west. Jean felt

lost in the rush of settlers. In 1800 he sold his Chicago interests to Jean LeMai. John Kinzie witnessed the bill of sale, a document still on file in the Wayne County Building in Detroit, Michigan. A few years later, Kinzie obtained the properties from LeMai.

Mrs. Kinzie, the widow of John, wrote in her book *Wau Bun*: "Jean left Chicago and moved to Peoria to live with his old friend, Jacques Clemorgan."

Jean left Peoria in 1814 and retired to a farm near St. Charles, Missouri. There he lived with a daughter until his death on August 29, 1818, at age 73. He is buried in a St. Charles cemetery.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable was born in**
 - A Haiti
 - B Jamaica
 - C St. Croix
- 2. When Jean turned twenty, he**
 - A joined the crew of a pirate ship
 - B took a trip around the world
 - C set out for New Orleans
- 3. Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable became a**
 - A cowboy
 - B fur trapper
 - C soldier
- 4. DuSable became a friend of**
 - A Pontiac
 - B Osceola
 - C Squanto
- 5. When DuSable first went to Eschikagou he**
 - A opened a trading post
 - B built a large settlement
 - C united the Indians
- 6. France joined the Americans in the Revolution in**
 - A 1779
 - B 1776
 - C 1794
- 7. Jean was affected by the Revolution because**
 - A the British destroyed his settlement
 - B a British colonel arrested him
 - C he wanted to fight with the French
- 8. The Americans defeated the British in the west because the**
 - A Americans had more men
 - B British didn't know the country
 - C Ottawa Indians helped them
- 9. Eschikagou became important as a**
 - A gateway to the west
 - B trading post
 - C hunting ground
- 10. DuSable retired to**
 - A St. Louis, Missouri
 - B Peoria, Illinois
 - C Dubuque, Minnesota