

**From Bayou Funny Louis to Shoebootee Creek:
Native Place-Names in the Lower South Having Opaque Etymologies**
Joel Nevis¹

In the transmission of place-names from one language to another, names will remain more or less intact as one group adopts the naming conventions from another through imitation and borrowing. In the majority of instances, the words are close enough to their sources to be parsed and are traceable to the original languages. That is, there has been a continuous transmission with little modification of pronunciation over the years. Sometimes there is a good amount of change in the sounds due to the mismatch of the sound systems of the language involved, but on the whole the changes are minimal compared to what is presented below.

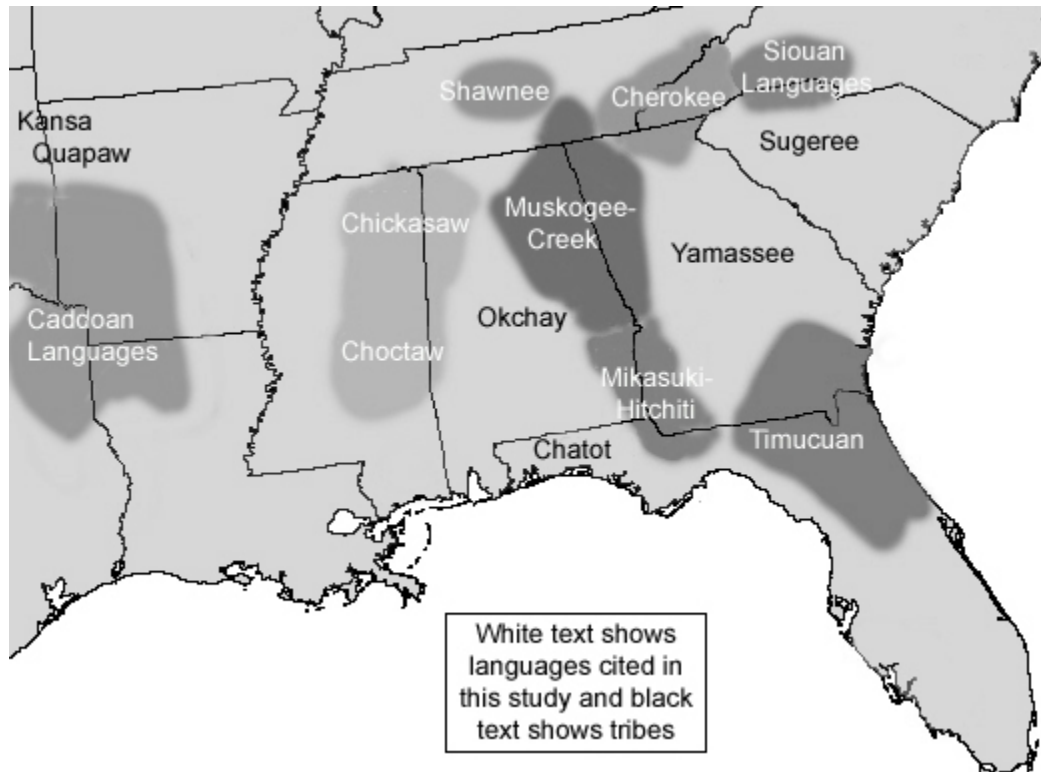
Even in instances where there is unexpected disruption the derivation can still be transparent. For instance, *Bulgosa* (AL) is derived from *Bogueloosa* by Read (1927:10), and this is easily identified as Choctaw *bok* ‘river’ and *lusa* ‘black’. This re-sequencing, or metathesis, of the consonants (-*gl-* to -*lg-*) is not unprecedented in English dialects and in the history of English: a common pronunciation of *asterisk* is *asterix* (changing the -*sk* to -*ks*); *ax* is dialectal English for *ask*; and a non-standard pronunciation of *modern* is *modren*, reversing the vowel and the [r]. Similarly Old English *brid* has been transformed into *bird* and *thrida* into *third*.

In a database of nearly one thousand native place-names of the Lower South (i.e. Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina), over 80% of the entries show such transmission with little modification. These place-names can reveal a strong correlation between the modern names and traditional locations of Native Americans prior to Removal in the 1840’s (Nevis 2004). My corpus proffers data from the Muskogean languages, notably Muskogee-Creek and Choctaw, as well as neighboring languages (e.g. Caddo, Cherokee, and Timucua, among others), and reveals morphological aspects of the transmission of these place-names as they

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Most Muskogee-Creek and Choctaw spellings adhere to conventions established for those languages. In particular, Muskogee-Creek *v* is a vowel pronounced like English *uh*, and Choctaw *q* represents the same sound; Muskogee-Creek uses *c* in place of English *ch*; Muskogee-Creek *ē* is a long vowel and Choctaw *ã*, *ĩ*, *ũ* are nasalized vowels; Muskogee-Creek *r* represents a sound for which English offers no equivalent: a voiceless lateral fricative, that is, rather like English *thl-* or *hl-*.

survived from their Native American sources into the mouths of the European colonists and the later English-speaking Americans.



Map 1: Languages and Tribes (extracted from Sturtevant 2004)

Ignoring the translated place-names (around 10% of the corpus), this study addresses the remainder of the corpus (more than 8%), showing a continuity in the pronunciation but with a radical alteration that cannot be explained as a mere mismatch between the sound systems of two languages. This suggests something else has occurred during the history of these names, namely **blends**, where parts of two names are put together to form a new name, **clippings** and **contractions**, whereby sounds are omitted, and **folk etymology**, whereby an unfamiliar sequence of sounds from the source language is “reinterpreted” as something more meaningful in the target language.

Blends

The first set of data comprises blends, nearly all of recent coinage.² A few clear instances of the merging of two existing names are cited by Stewart (1970) and Bright (2004):

² One candidate for a blend is *Tennga* (GA), which according to Krakow (1999:224) was shortened from *Tennessee-Georgia* and formerly pronounced *Tenngée*, although the older name is *Whip*, itself shortened

Clayhatchee (AL) is a name recently blended from two streams: *Claybank Creek* and *Choctawhatchee River* (Stewart 1970:101).

Tamiami (FL) is a blend of *Tampa* and *Miami* (Stewart 1970:472), both names are originally native Floridian names not of Muskogean origin.

Muckafoonee Creek (GA) a recent blending of two streams, the *Muckalee* and the *Kinchafoonee* (Stewart 1970:310, Krakow 1999:153).

Okeelanta (FL) is a blend of Mikasuki-Hitchiti *oki* ‘water, lake’ plus *lanta*, somehow short for *Atlantic* (Stewart 1970:340), though *Atlanta* is a better phonological fit.

Manasota Key (FL) is a blend of Manatee Creek and Sarasota County, the names of adjacent counties (Bright 2004:263)

Two others are not so straightforward and perhaps do not qualify as blends:

Chocolotta Bay (AL) is claimed to be a recent development based on the older name *Chacaloochee* (from Choctaw *shākol-ushi* ‘little cypress’) with influence from *Chocolocco* (from Muskogee-Creek *cahkē rakko* ‘big shoal’) (Stewart 1970:96), but note that *-tt-* unexpectedly replaces *-cc-* (or rather, [k]); perhaps this is merely *Chocolocco* with contamination from English (or Spanish) *chocolate*.

Oceda (SC) possibly blends a native word for ‘water’ — Mikasuki-Hitchiti *oki* or Muskogee-Creek *ue* (pronounced /oy/) — and English *cedar* since it is near the Cedar Creek (Stewart 1970:337), but the location is not particularly close to traditional Creek or Hitichiti areas; more likely it is from an unknown South Carolina language.

Less than half of one percent of my corpus constitutes blends, and most appear to be doubtful or modern coinages; blends are thus rare to nonexistent in place-names derived from native languages of the Lower South.

Clippings and Contractions

Sometimes in the transmission of place-names, the pronunciation may be shortened either by clipping a portion from the beginning or end of the word, or by “contracting” — that is, removing a string of sounds from the middle of the word. This is the second set of data to consider under radical change.

from the name of the Cherokee native *Whip-poor-will*. Technically this result is more than a mere blend as the second syllable derives from the spelled abbreviation of *Georgia* and is not straightforwardly shortened from the pronounced word. In any event, this is not an instance of a native place-name surviving in English but of a fairly modern naming due to the town’s positioning near the Georgia-Tennessee border. *Tennessee* is of obscure origin but derives from town name *tanasi*.

One frequent shortening involves omitting an unstressed vowel, especially at the start of the word (as with the loss of the initial vowel from *opossum*). *Catahoula* (LA) may represent this last form of clipping. One of Harder's (1976:87) proposed derivations is from Choctaw *okkattahoola* 'beautiful white water', and Stewart (1970:70) proposes the source as Choctaw *okhata* 'lake' with *ihollo* 'dear, beloved'. GNIS offers confirmation with a variant *Acatahoula Lake*.

Another example of the disappearance of an initial sound, or aphaeresis, is *Steinhatchee*, which reveals its lost vowel in an 1839 spelling *Esteen-hatchee*; the Muskogee-Creek source for this is *este enhvce* 'person's stream' (Martin 2002).

Authentic instances of clipping entail more than just the loss of an unstressed vowel; clipping usually drops an entire syllable or even several syllables, as in the following examples, separated by initial clipping or final clipping:

Initial:

Bigbee (AL) is clipped from *Tombigbee River* (Read 1927:7); originally from Choctaw *itombi ikbi* 'coffin-makers', a class of tribesmen who cleaned the bones of the dead and placed them in boxes (Stewart 1970:488, Harder 1976:552).

Chartee (AL) may be clipped from *Conchardee* (Muskogee-Creek *Kvn-Chate*), a tribal town (Martin 2002:172).

Chucky River (TN) is a clipping of *Nolichucky River*, originally perhaps the name of a Cherokee town *Na-na-tsu-gun* meaning 'spruce tree place' (Bright 2004:332).

Haw River (NC) is a tribal name clipped from the Sissipahaw tribe, a Siouan tribe (Harder 1976:228); GNIS lists variants *Hau River* and *Saxapahaw*.

Lacoochee (FL) is a shortened form of the river's name, *Withlacoochee*, which runs past the town (Fernald and Purdum 1992, <http://dhr.dos.state.fl.us/flafacts/city>, Stewart 1970:247). *Withlacoochee* is from Muskogee-Creek *ue-rakk-uce* /oy-hlakk-ocí, wi:-hlakk-ocí/ 'small river' (Martin 2002, Krakow 1999:256, Morris 1995:257, Harder 1976:613). See *Withla* below for another clipping from the same source.

Lobutch Creek (MS) is probably clipped from Choctaw *yalubba* 'tadpole' with *ãsha* 'there, place', i.e. 'tadpole place' (Stewart 1970:261), or with *-ushi* 'little', i.e. 'little tadpole'; GNIS variants include other shortenings *Yalabutch* and *Butcha*, along with *Albatcher Creek*, *Lobutchy*, *Yellow*, *Yellow Butcha*, and *Lobutcher*.

Lula (GA) is clipped from *Talulah*, perhaps from Choctaw *talula* ‘bell’ (Bright 2004:257). This is probably not the same origin as Tallulah Falls (GA), which has a Cherokee derivation (Krakow 1999:220).

Tibbee Creek (AL) is short for *Oktibbeha* ‘icy water’ (<http://www.segenealogy.com/mississippi/mscnty11.htm>); also *Okatibbee Creek* (MS), itself shortened from *Oaktibbehaw River*, which derives from Choctaw *okti* ‘ice’ *abeha* ‘to be in’ (plural form) or else possibly from Choctaw *oka* ‘water’ plus *itibi* ‘fighting, battle’ due to its location on a border with the Chickasaw (Foscue 1989:137, Read 1927:67). The most straightforward derivation for *Tibbee Creek* is directly from Choctaw *itibi* ‘fighting’.

Wannee or *Wanee* (FL) may be a shortening of *Suwannee* (Stewart 1970:520, Morris 1995:249) or a local pronunciation of Spanish *Juan*, since one derivation of *Suwannee* is from *San Juan*.

Final:

Chokee Creek (GA) is shortened from *Chokeefichickee* with uncertain origin probably Muskogee-Creek (Stewart 1970:96); the name is shortened from Muskogee-Creek *Chokeefichickee* with obscure derivation, it may mean ‘rotunda raised on a mound’ (Krakow 1999:43).

Des Arc (LA) is both a folk etymology and a clipping; it is from French *des arcs* ‘of the bows’, but this is probably a shortening of *des Arkansa/Kansas*, the Indian tribe; the name was first applied to a stream; *Ozark* is similarly from *aux arcs* (Stewart 1970:134). GNIS offers *Des Arc* place-names in AR, LA and MO.

Okaloo (FL) is a town name clipped from *Okaloosa* (Morris 1995:179); although Morris says it is Muskogee-Creek, the source is more likely to be Choctaw *oka* ‘water’ and *lusa* ‘black’.

Shocco Springs (FL), with GNIS variant *Chocco Springs*, may be clipped from *Chocolocco*, which is Muskogee-Creek *Cahkê-Rakko*, a tribal town (Martin 2002, Foscue 1989:33, Read 1927:18, Stewart 1970:96). The change from *ch-* to *sh-* is probably due to spelling pronunciation.

Wacca Station (FL) is abbreviated from *Waccasassa River* (Bright 2004:538), which is from Muskogee-Creek *wakv* ‘cow’ (from Spanish *vaca*) plus *sasv* ‘some’ (Martin 2002, Stewart 1970:516).

Watula Creek (AL) derives from Muskogee-Creek *watula* ‘crane’ (Stewart 1970:525) or a longer name *Watulahoka*, a Lower Creek village, itself from *wvtolv-hake* /watola-há:k-i/ ‘crying sandhill crane’ (Martin 2002, Foscue 1989:146, Read 1927:75). I am suspicious that the clipped form coincides with a word, *wvtolv*, in Muskogee-Creek meaning just ‘crane’, which is a more obvious and less circuitous derivation than clipping from *wvtolv-hake*.

Withla (FL) is short for *Withlacoochee* (Stewart 1970:539, Morris 1995:257); see *Lacoochee* above for another clipping from the same source and for the etymology of *Withlacoochee*.

Generally a clipping is the loss of a sequence of segments at the beginning or end of a word, but sometimes what has been lost is from the middle of the word; in this case it may be a kind of contraction — often due to repetition of vowels or consonants. For instance, GNIS *Chappela Creek* is cited as a variant of *Chappepeela Creek* (LA); here the source [p] plus a vowel followed by another [p] plus a vowel is shortened by losing one of the syllables containing [p]. The source *Chappepeela* derives from Choctaw *apeli* ‘hurricane’ preceded by *chopa* ‘to roar (as falling water)’ or *oka chopo* ‘cascade’, i.e. a stream associated with the occurrence of a hurricane (Stewart 1970:87).

Medial:

Alkahatchee Creek (AL) may be a folk etymology as discussed below; it derives from a stream name, possibly *ahalak* ‘potato’ plus *hvcci* ‘stream’ or else it is clipped from Muskogee-Creek *ahalagvlg hvce* ‘potato clan creek’ (Read 1927:29). Here *alka-* shows contraction of *ahalak* to *alk-*, and possibly loss of *-vlg* as well.

Cahoula (LA) may be a shortening of *Catahoula* (Stewart 1970:70), itself a clipped form of Choctaw *okhata* ‘lake’ with the remainder probably ‘beloved’ (Stewart 1970:81). Harder (1976:87) offers three origins, one of which is Choctaw *okkattahoola* ‘beautiful white water’. *Catahoula* was a tribal name derived from Choctaw *okhata* ‘lake, bay’ plus *ihollo* ‘beloved, dear’. In addition to exhibiting medial contraction, *Cahoula* shows loss of the initial vowel (*cata* < *okhata*).

Hialeah (FL) is usually cited as ‘beautiful-prairie’ (Stewart 204, Morris 1995:117), but is probably *hvyakpo* ‘prairie’ plus *here* /-hil-í/ ‘good’ (Martin 2002) with the first two syllables *hvy-* and the last syllable *-li* (with perhaps some spelling pronunciation as well) but with much of the medial parts omitted.

Ichawaynochaway Creek (GA) is from Muskogee-Creek ‘deer-sleep’ (Stewart 1970:217, Harder 1976:247); the original spelling was *Echohonauwa Nochawa* which suggests a derivation from Muskogee-Creek *eco* ‘deer’ and *honvnwv* ‘male’ and *nuce* ‘sleep’ (Krakow 1999:115). This is certainly a clipping if Krakow is correct, although by not specifying ‘male’ here we would obviate the need for clipping *honvnwv* out to begin with, otherwise *-honauwa-* has been reduced to *-way-*. GNIS variants include further shortenings: *Natchaway*, *Nochaway*, *Notchaway*, and *Notcheway Creek*.

Tallatchee Creek (AL) may be derived from Choctaw *tala* ‘palmetto(s)’ or *tali* ‘rock(s)’ *ãsha* ‘are there, place’ (Read 1927:63), as in ‘palmetto place’ or ‘rock place’, or possibly *hacha* ‘stream’ in place of *ãsha*. Because it lies in traditional Choctaw

territory, a less likely possibility is that it is a contraction of *Tallahatchee*, which is Muskogee-Creek *etvlwv* ‘town’ + *hvcce* ‘river’, or ‘river town’ (Harder 1976:538).

Implied Words

The clippings examined thus far reveal clippings from a single word. But clipping might be extended to more than just individual words. In a few instances in my corpus what is missing is an “implied” word such as Choctaw *oka* ‘water’ or *bok* ‘river’ or the like. This then may be a subtype of clipping.

For example, *Lubbub Creek* (AL) comes from Choctaw *lahba* ‘warm’, which likely derives from Choctaw *oka lahba* ‘warm water’ or *bok lahba* ‘warm creek’ (Stewart 1970:267). And although *Tibbee Creek* (AL) may be a mere clipping of *Okatibbee* ‘icy water’, as cited above, a second proposal is that it derives from Choctaw *oka* ‘water’ plus *itibi* ‘fighting’ due to its location on a border with the Chickasaw (Foscue 1989:137, Read 1927:67). Here the implied reference to a stream is as in English, where it is common not to include *river* or *creek* in the name of a stream: we say “The Mississippi” rather than “The Mississippi River”; likewise “The Suwannee”, “The Hudson”, et cetera.

Lubbub Creek (AL) means ‘warm’ (Stewart 1970:267); it derives from Choctaw *lahba* ‘warm’ (clipped from Choctaw *oka lahba* ‘warm water’ or *bok lahba* ‘warm creek’) (Foscue 1989:87, Read 1927:42). It is not clear how this word acquires a final *-b*.

Tibbee Creek (AL) may be clipped from *Okatibbee Creek* (MS) as described above, or it derives from Choctaw *oka* ‘water’ + *itibi* ‘fighting’ due to its location on a border with the Chickasaw (Foscue 1989:137, Read 1927:67). The most straightforward derivation is clipping from Choctaw *itibi* ‘fighting’ with an implied *oka* ‘water’ or *bok* ‘river’ (or else *āsha* ‘place, sitting’).

Capshaw (AL) is from Chickasaw-Choctaw *bok kapassa* ‘cold creek’ or *oka kapassa* ‘cold water’ (Foscue 1989:28, Read 1927:12). See also below under Folk Etymology.

Another implied word may be ‘tree’, as in the following example. One explanation for *Shomo* (AL) is clipping from *Shomo Takali*, but the other explanation derives *Shomo* (or rather *shumo*) from *iti shumo*.

Shomo Creek (AL) is from a Choctaw personal name, *shumo* ‘thistle, thistle down’ or clipped from *iti shumo* ‘Spanish moss’ (with *iti* ‘tree’) (Read 1927:58, Stewart 1970:441). Instead, the Alabama name may derive from *Chon’ontakali* (MS), a Choctaw town — in Choctaw *Shomo Takali* ‘Hanging Moss’, so named on account of

the abundance of Spanish moss hanging on the trees in the vicinity (<http://www.natchezbelle.org/ahgp-ms/roman/roman1.htm>).

While clippings are not as rare as blends, they are nevertheless uncommon; only 3% of my database counts as clipped forms.

Folk Etymology

One of the important principles of toponymy is that a renamed feature is opaque to earlier derivations of the place-name. When *Cape Canaveral* was renamed to *Cape Kennedy* (and more recently back to *Cape Canaveral*), for instance, there was no etymological connection between the two names. While folk etymology is not a complete break in the naming conventions as this kind of renaming is, it is distinct enough to erase all or part of the etymological connection. This section addresses instances of folk etymology in the corpus, that is, the third type of radical transformation.

Folk etymology as used by linguists refers to a change in the pronunciation of a word away from an unfamiliar form in the direction of existing familiar words. For example, *bridegroom* derived from Old English *brydguma* ‘bride-man’. *Guma* became obsolete in English as the word for ‘man, male’ and as a result *brydguma* made little sense to speakers so *guma* was replaced by the similar word *groom* ‘servant’. In changing the form, speakers appear to give a false history of the word.

In many instances these unfamiliar words are borrowings from other languages; for example, Spanish *cucaracha* was borrowed into English as *cockroach*, even though it has nothing to do with any meanings of *cock* nor the fish known as *roach* (the modern use of *roach* is a clipping from *cockroach*). Similarly *crayfish* and *crawfish* derive from Middle French *crevice* (Modern French *écrevisse*) and having little to do with the word *fish*. Thus in folk etymology speakers merely associate words or parts of words with existing forms, whether they make good sense or not — and often they make rather “bad” sense.

Over 7% of my data are derived via folk etymology.³ *Bayou Santa Barb* (LA), for example, first caught my attention in Stewart’s tome (1970:425), where it is derived from Choctaw *sinti bok* ‘snake-stream’. GNIS further

³ This estimate includes the six candidates discussed in the appendix. There is overlap between clippings and folk etymologies.

offers variants of this name, *Centerburg Bayou* and *Sandy Burg Bayou*, both of which are folk etymologies from the same source *sinti bok*.

In the following I highlight the folk-etymologized portion of the place-names with bold-face text.

Adios Bayou (LA) is a folk etymology from Indian tribal name (*Adayes, Adois, Adai* — including an English possessive *s*) (Stewart 1970:3); instead of an English possessive the final *-s* may derive from a French plural.

Amite River (LA) was a French corruption of Choctaw *himmita* ‘young, youthful’ (Read 1927:); Byington’s dictionary offers *himmita* as both an adjective ‘young’ and noun ‘young, youth’.

Bucksnobby Branch (MS) possibly ends in Choctaw *ãbi* ‘killer’ with the rest uncertain, GNIS variants include *Puchshinnubie Creek*.

Centralhatchee Creek (GA) is from Muskogee-Creek *sandalakwa-hachi* ‘perch-stream’ earlier *Sundalhatchee* (Stewart 1970:84, Krakow:1999:216); from *svntalakwv* ‘perch (fish)’ plus *hvcce* ‘stream’ (Martin 2002).

Chickasanoxie Creek (AL) probably means ‘cane-ridge’ but with the first part shifted by analogy to the tribal name Chickasaw (Stewart 1970:92); Muskogee-Creek *koha* ‘cane’ *chanvksi* ‘ridge’, with the first element confused with the Chickasaw tribe (Foscue 1989:33, Read 1927:16); from *kohv* ‘cane’ plus *cvnakse* ‘ridged’ (Martin 2002), GNIS variants include *Cohoanocsa Creek, Cohoasanocsa Creek, Cohousanousa Creek, Conuck-see, and Konuckse Creek*.

Chickasawhatchee Creek (GA) derives from Mikasuki-Hitchiti ‘house-is-there-stream’ referring to a council house and with folk etymology to the tribal name *Chickasaw* (Stewart 1970:92); Muskogee-Creek *cikasa-hvcce* is a possible source as well.

Chickasawhay River (MS) was reshaped by folk etymology; a French source (1732) records the name as *Tchikahaé* (Stewart 1970:92); Harder gives the source as Choctaw ‘town’ plus *hay* or *ahe* ‘potato’ (Harder 1976:100), but the only Choctaw word I find that is similar in form and meaning is *chukka* ‘house’, so possibly ‘potato house’ is the original.

Choctahatchee Creek (GA) and **Choctawhatchee River** (AL, FL) were probably first named from the Chatot (or Chacato) tribe with a later substitution from the name of better known Choctaw tribe, with Muskogee-Creek *hvcce* ‘river, stream’ or Choctaw *hacha* ‘stream’ (Krakow 1999:43, Stewart 1970:96, Foscue 1989:34, Read 1927:19, Morris 1995:49)

Des Arc (AR, LA, MO) comes from French *des arcs* ‘of the bows’, but this is probably a shortening of *Arkansa* (or *Kansa*), the Quapaw tribe; the name was first applied to a stream, cf. Ozark (Stewart 1970:134); GNIS variants include *d’Arc, Des Argues, Desarc, Desarcs, Deark Creek*.

Lake Opal (FL) is a railroad (i.e. modern) naming from Seminole-Creek *opv* ‘owl’ (Morris 1995:182).

Noonday Creek (GA) is from Cherokee *nunda*, which the Cherokee called both the sun and the moon (Krakow 1999:160).

Oaklimetal (MS) may be from a Choctaw word for ‘young people’, containing *oklah* ‘people’ plus *himmita* ‘young’ (Bright 2004:340); nearby is *Oaklimeter Creek*, revealing a possible second folk-etymologized form.

Pennymottley Creek (AL) is from Muskogee-Creek *pen-emarv* /pin-imá:hla/ from *penwv* /pínwa/ ‘turkey’ plus *emarv* /imá:hla/, a title (Martin 2002, Stewart 1970:366, Read 1927:52).

Santa Bogue (AL) is from Choctaw *sinti bok* ‘snake-stream’ (Stewart 1970:425); from Choctaw *sinti* ‘snake’ *bok* ‘creek’, variants include *Senator Bogue* (Foscue 1989:123, 128, Read 1927:56, McMillan in Read 1927:96). See also *Bayou Santa Barb* above.

Sea Warrior Creek (AL) is from Choctaw *isi-waiya* ‘deer-crouching’ (Stewart 1970:432, Read 1927:57). Choctaw *isi* ‘deer’ plus *waiya* ‘bent, slanting’.

Sugar Creek, *Sugaw Creek* (SC) takes its name from the Sugeree or Sugaree Indians; the name was pronounced *Sugaw* or *Soogaw*, and the word from which *Sugar* is derived means ‘group of huts’ (<http://www.cmstory.org/history/hornets/creek.htm>), variants include *Suger*, *Shugar*, *Sugercreek*, and *Suga* (<http://www.cmstory.org/history/hornets/creek.htm>)

Tallow (MS) was one of the former Choctaw settlements of the Sixtown Indians, from Choctaw *tala* ‘palmetto’ (Read 1927:5, GNIS).

In addition to the instances of folk etymology to a common noun, some of the examples show folk etymology in the direction of a European name:

Abbie Creek (AL) is an obscure Indian name, possibly Mikasuki-Hitchiti *yatipi* ‘panther’ or Muskogee-Creek *atvphvlgí* ‘dogwood grove’ (from *atvphv* ‘dogwood’ plus the *vlgí* collective suffix), variants Yattayabba Creek, Pattayabao Creek; nearby is Abbeville, named for the creek (Foscue 1989:5, Read 1927:3); the simplest account would be to derive it directly from Muskogee-Creek *api* ‘tree’ with folk etymology toward English name *Abbie*, though counter to this is the fact that it lies in traditional Hitchiti territory.

Alcovy River (GA) means ‘pawpaw-among’ (Stewart 1970:7); from Muskogean *ulcofau-hatichie* [sic] ‘river in the pawpaw trees’ (Harder 1976:8); *orko* ‘pawpaw’ plus *-ofv* ‘location’ plus *hvcce* ‘stream’ (Martin 2002).

Bayou Funny Louis (LA) is a folk etymology of Choctaw *fáni-lusa* ‘squirrel-black’ (Stewart 1970:174).

Bayou Louis (LA) may be a folk etymology of Choctaw *lusa* ‘black’ (Stewart 1970:265) or Choctaw *lowa* ‘burnt’ (Bright 2004:256); GNIS includes variants *Bayou Louie* and *Lewis Creek* as well as *Bayou Louah*, supporting perhaps Bright’s interpretation.

Capshaw (AL) may be from Chickasaw *bok kapassa* ‘cold creek’ or *oka kapassa* ‘cold water’ (Foscue 1989:28, Read 1927:12); see implied words above in the [Clippings](#) section.

Carlos (FL) may be a Spanish corruption of *Caloosa*; Morris associates this name with Charlotte Harbor, but allows for that name to derive from Queen Charlotte Sophia, wife of King George III of England (Morris 1995:44, 46) though the timing seems too late; GNIS offers *Big Carlos Pass* and *Carlos Point*.

Charley Apopka Creek/Charlie Apopka Creek (FL) is from Seminole-Creek *chalo-apapka* ‘trout-eating (place)’ (Stewart 1970:87, Morris 1995:47); from Muskogee-Creek *calo* ‘trout’ with *papkv* ‘eating’.

Cheneyhatchee Creek (AL) is Muskogee-Creek for ‘cedar-stream’ with perhaps some folk etymology of first part to make it an English personal name (Stewart 1970:90); Muskogee-Creek *vchinv* ‘cedar’ *hvcci* ‘creek’, Read notes pronunciation of *Channahatchee* with *Cheney* or *Chinney* (Foscue 1989:31, Read 1927:13); GNIS variants include *Cedar Creek*.

Cubahatchee Creek (AL) is Muskogee-Creek for ‘lye drip stream’ or ‘mulberry tree creek’, though Stewart says “uncertain meaning for *Cuba-* (1970:119); Muskogee-Creek *kvpi* ‘lye drip’ *hvcce* ‘stream’ (i.e. “creek where lye was made”) or Muskogee-Creek *ki-vpi* ‘mulberry tree’ *hvcce* ‘stream’, i.e. “mulberry creek” (Foscue 1989:43, Read 1927:27); possibly Muskogee-Creek *kvpe* /kapí/ ‘lye’ plus *hvcce* /hácci/ ‘stream’ (Martin 2002); variants include *Cupiahatchee Creek*, *Cubihatcha*, *Kebihatche* (Foscue 1989:43, Read 1927:27).

Dorcheat/Bayou Dorcheat (LA) is probably Caddoan in origin and may be the remnant of a tribe (itself meaning ‘people’) with partial folk etymology into an English name (Stewart 1970:140); ultimately from Indian, probably a tribal name in the Caddo family, folk etymologized into the present form (Harder 1976:150).

Fenholloway River (FL) is a former Creek town meaning ‘high footlog (bridge)’ (Stewart 1970:164); Seminole-Creek ‘high-footlog’ i.e. ‘high bridge’ (Harder 1976:176); from Muskogee-Creek *fenv* ‘foot log’ plus *hvlwe* ‘high’ (Martin 2002); GNIS offers variants *Fenahallowi River*, *Fenhalloway River*, and *Finholloway River*.

Quilby Creek (AL, MS) comes from Choctaw *koi-ai-albi* ‘panther-there-killed’ (Stewart 1970:395); Choctaw town and creek, from Choctaw *koi* ‘panther’ *ai* ‘there’ *albi* ‘killed’ i.e. creek where the panther was killed (Read 1927:55, 94); variants include *Koilbah*, *Quibby*, *Quillibee*, *Koi Albi*, and *Quibbi* (Read 1927:55, 94; GNIS).

Washley (LA) Choctaw, folk etymology of Choctaw *wushulli* ‘foam’ first applied to a creek (Stewart 1970:523); Choctaw *wushulli* means ‘to ferment, fermentation’.

Some entries in my corpus may not be folk etymologies altering the pronunciation of the word, but spellings that coincide with an English word:⁴

Chunky River (MS) comes from a Southeastern indigenous word for a game in which a stone is rolled and lances are thrown at it (Stewart 1970:98); Choctaw village (Swanton 1953).

Eastahatchee (GA) is of Muskogee origin, from *este* ‘person, someone’ plus *hvcce* ‘stream’, perhaps because of an early Indian settlement along its banks (Krakow 1999:68), with folk etymologized variant **Easterhatchee** (Krakow 1999:68, GNIS).

Funny Creek (MS) derives from Choctaw *fani* ‘squirrel’.

⁴ *Stocking Creek* (GA) might be considered a folk etymology based on an earlier recorded 1766 *Stalking Head* (Stewart 1970:461), or it might just be a spelling variant.

Funny Yockana Creek (MS) Choctaw *fani* ‘squirrel’ + *yakni* ‘country, land’ ... about a mile south of Bull Frog Town on the banks of Funny Yockony Creek (Fani Yakni Bok, Squirrel Country Creek) is a Choctaw burial mound, which is the last existing memorial of this aboriginal town, variants *Funny Yockony Creek* and *Fani Yakni Bok* (<http://www.natchezbelle.org/ahgp-ms/roman/roman1.htm>).

Nickajack (TN) derives perhaps from a Cherokee word meaning ‘old Creek place’ (Bright 2004:326); compare GNIS variants *Nicojack*, *Nikutsegi* and *Nikwatsegi*.

Ochwalkee Creek (GA), Muskogee-Creek for ‘water-dirty’ (Stewart 1970:337), may just contain *-walk-* as a spelling variant for *-wak-* preceded by some form of Muskogee-Creek *ue/ok-* ‘water’ + *vholwvkē* ‘dirty’.

Olustee (FL) sometimes appears in spelling as Celtic-looking *O’Lustee*, from Seminole-Creek *oklasti* ‘blackfish’ (Morris 1995:182); from Muskogee-Creek *ue-lvste* ‘black water’ (Martin 2002).

Peachahala Creek (MS) includes variants *Peachallow*, *Peachuhaley*, and *Pitchahala* (GNIS), is from Choctaw *pichi* ‘sorrel’ *a* ‘there’ *hieli* ‘standing’ i.e. ‘where the sorrels are standing’ (Read 1927:26).

Puss Cuss Creek (AL, MS) is from Choctaw *puskus* ‘infant, baby’, perhaps shortened from an original ‘crying child’, probably an incident name (Stewart 1970:392); *Pusscuss Creek* ... the name restored to its correct Choctaw orthography is *Puskus Paya* ‘Calling Child’ (<http://www.natchezbelle.org/ahgp-ms/roman/roman1.htm>); Choctaw *puskus* ‘child’ *pāya* ‘crying’ (Foscue 1989:115, Read 1927:55).

Steinhatchee River (FL), an 1839 spelling of the river as *Esteen-hatchee* and an 1848 translation as ‘Man River’ suggests an origin as *este enhvce* ‘person’s stream’ (Martin 2002), GNIS variant *Esteen-hatchee River*.

Tuckasee King Landing (GA) is perhaps a folk etymology from either Muskogee-Creek *tukashina* ‘peppergrass’ or more likely Cherokee *Tuckasegee* (NC) and *Tuckasegee* (TN), the names of two ancient Cherokee towns (Stewart 496, Krakow 232), though Bright insists it is from an unidentified Indian language (2004:516).

Walk-Ikey Creek (GA) probably means ‘cow creek’ from *waca* ‘cow’ (Krakow 1999:245); many SE languages have some form of Spanish *vaca* ‘cow’, so the remainder of the word would be key to the derivation — perhaps Muskogee-Creek *wakv* ‘cow’ with *ekv* ‘head’ (*wak-ekv* refers to a cow head placed at the top of ball poles as targets, Martin and Maudlin 2000) or with *uekiwv* ‘spring’, i.e. ‘cow spring’. Or it could derive from Mikasuki-Hitchiti since it lies in traditional Hitchiti territory.

Variation and Folk Etymology

When a folk etymology has occurred, there is a break in the continuity of the name, and the earlier derivation from the older form now becomes opaque. From the point of view of the history of the word, a folk etymology means that the derivation has re-started with a clean slate. While I agree with previous scholars that not every place-name has to have an etymology — sometimes a name is just a name (for instance, P. Munroe says that *Chahta* probably means nothing more than ‘Choctaw’, as reported in Bright 2003: 676) — it is possible in some instances to peek behind the word to find an

etymology, but it is crucial to find evidence for any proposed derivation, especially when there has been a folk etymology, and this evidence usually comes from the historical record. But it sometimes comes from another source — variation that occurs in current usage, what linguists call synchronic variation. In the following examples, the folk etymology lives on side by side with the source form. Here the fact that there are variants of the place-name allows one to see the relevant connection.

Allejoy, Alljay, Alljoy, Elija, and Elljoy (GNIS) are variants of *Ellijay* (GA); from the Cherokee word *Elatse-yi* or the abbreviated *Elatse* ‘green earth’ (<http://www.visitnortheastgeorgia.com/indiannames.htm>); some suggest that this was the name of a Cherokee Indian chief and others say it means ‘place of green things’ or ‘many waters’ or ‘new ground’ (Krakow 1999:72).

Ammonia Lake and *Jamony Town* (GNIS) are variants of *Iamonia Lake* (FL), an ancient Seminole town, meaning uncertain (Stewart 1970:217); Seminole-Creek town *Hiamonee* near the Georgia border perhaps derived from the tribal name *Yamassee* meaning ‘mild, peaceable’ (Morris 1995:).

Chimney Town (GNIS) is a variant of *Chinneby* (AL), named for Chief Chinnibee (from Muskogee-Creek *vcenv* ‘cedar’ plus *vpi* ‘tree’), earlier *Fort Chinneby* (Foscue 1989:33, Read 1927:17).

Corn Acre Creek and *Cork* (GNIS) are variants of *Coronaca Creek* (SC), of Indian origin, said to mean ‘place of big oaks’ (Stewart 1970:114).

Cuttingbone Creek (GA) is possibly from the Cherokee word for ‘scratcher’, referring to a ceremonial scratching device made of bone, or from an Indian rite in which warriors cut the calves of their legs with a sharp bone, or more likely from a corruption of the possible early names used of *Crittingtons* or *Crittentons Creek* (Krakow 1999:56) — Stewart states that *Crittington* was the name of a Cherokee-English family (1970:124)

East Boga, Eastaboga Station, and Eastobogo (GNIS) are variants of *Estaboga* (AL), the name of a Creek village, meaning ‘people-dwelling-place’ (Stewart 1970:157); Upper Creek village *Istapoka* from Muskogee-Creek *isti* ‘people’ *apoga* ‘dwelling place’ i.e. people’s dwelling place’ (Foscue 1989:50, Read 1927:31); from Muskogee-Creek *este* ‘person’ plus *ak-* ‘in water or a low place’ plus *pokv* ‘being gone, dying’, said to be named for a group of people swallowed by swirling water (Martin 2002).

Elk Hatchee Creek, Elkahacha Creek, and Elkahatchie Creek (GNIS) are variants of *Elkahatchee Creek* (AL), earlier *Alkehatchee*, from Muskogee-Creek words for ‘potato’ plus ‘stream’ (Stewart 1970:151); Upper Creek town, possibly from *ahalak* ‘potato’ plus *hvcce* ‘stream’ or clipped from Muskogee-Creek *ahalagvlgv hvcce* ‘potato clan creek’ (Read 1927:29); GNIS description “Upper Creek village on the Tallapoosa River four miles above Oakfuskee”; Muskogee-Creek *vhv* ‘potato’ and *vhvkvkvlki* ‘Sweet Potato Clan’ (Martin 2002:327). *Elke-* derives through folk etymology to *elk*.

Funnyhatchie Creek and *Funacha Creek* (GNIS) are variants of *Fenache Creek* (AL), from Choctaw *fani* ‘squirrels’ plus *asha* ‘there, place’, with variants *Phenatchie* and *Funacha* (Read 1927:52), alternatively from Choctaw *fani hacha* ‘squirrel-creek’ (Stewart 1970:370).

Hightower River (GNIS) is a variant of *Etowah River* (with *Etowah* names in AL, FL, GA, TN, NC, OK) from Cherokee *itawa*, perhaps ultimately from Muskogee-Creek *etvlwv* ‘town, tribe’ (Foscue 1989:54, Read 1927:31); named after the Etowah Indian tribe, the derivation is from Cherokee *itawa*, the name of several Cherokee settlements, but the origin is obscure, possibly from Cherokee *etawaha* ‘deadwood’ or borrowed from Muskogee-Creek *etvlwv* ‘town’ (Krakow 1999:74, 109).

Itcheecono Creek and *Itchy Creek* (GNIS) are variants of *Echeconnee Creek* (GA), from Muskogee-Creek ‘place where deer are trapped’ (Harder 1976:158); called *Itchy Creek* by local youths, the name is a Muskogee-Creek word meaning ‘deer trap creek’, from *echo* ‘deer’ and *conna* ‘trap’, so named because deer that came to drink from the stream were attacked by Indians before they could escape up its steep banks (Krakow 1999:69); Muskogee-Creek *eco* ‘deer’ plus *kvnhv* ‘trap’ (Martin 2002).

GNIS variants of *Kentuctaw Creek* (MS) include *Cane Creek*; probably Choctaw *kinta* ‘beaver’ with the rest uncertain (Stewart 1970:237); a close fit is Choctaw *kinta aioktabli* ‘beaver dam’.

Oak Chunk Creek (GNIS) is a variant of *Auchumpkee Creek* (GA), from Muskogee-Creek ‘hickory-all-about’ (Stewart 1970:27); Muskogee-Creek *ocē* ‘hickory nut’ plus *hvmken* ‘one, next’ or *hvmkvn* ‘all over’ (Martin & Maudlin).

GNIS variants of *Oakachoy* (AL) include *Oakchoy Creek* and *Oakjoy Creek*; *Okcaye* was the name of a Creek tribal town (Martin and Maudlin 2000:169).

GNIS variants of *Otasse* (AL) include *Ottersea*, an ancient Muscogulge/Creek town (Bartram 1928 :318).

Santuck (SC) locally said to be *Sand Tuck* (where *tuck* means ‘a cove or nook’) but Stewart finds it doubtful (Stewart 1970:425); GNIS variants for both *Santuck* AL and *Santuc* SC.

GNIS variants of *Shubuta Creek* (MS) include *Shoebootee Creek*, from Choctaw ‘smoky’ (Stewart 1970:442); a closer fit is Choctaw *shobota* ‘steam’ rather than *shoboli* ‘smoky’.

Variants of *Sinta Bogue Creek* (AL) include *Santabogue Creek* and *Senator Bogue Creek* (Foscue 1989:123, 128, Read 1927:56, McMillan in Read 1927:96); the name derives from Choctaw *sinti* ‘snake’ with *bok* ‘creek’ (Foscue 1989:123, 128, Read 1927:56, McMillan in Read 1927:96).

Variants of *Tensawatee* (GA) include *Tensau Water* and *Tennessee Water* (Krakow 1999:147, 224); it was an old Cherokee village and means ‘Tennessee Old Town’, but may have been transferred from another *Tensa* place (Krakow 1999:224).

Tight Eye Creek is a variant of *Ty Ty Creek* (AL), which may be Timucuan (McMillan in Read 1927:97); the *Titi* is a shrub found in swamps; the name is derived from the White *Titi* (ironwood trees) or Black *Titi* (buckwheat trees), of the genus *Cyrilla*, which grow in thickets in bayous. There are *Titi* and *Ty Ty* place-names in AL, FL, and GA (Krakow 1999:235, GNIS).

Variants of *Unawattie Creek* (GA) include *Yone Water Creek* (Krakow 1999:236), and means ‘old bear creek’, possibly for a Cherokee by this name who lived on its banks.

Whiskey Bay is listed as a variant of *Osca Bay* (LA), from Choctaw *uski* ‘cane, cane-brake’ (GNIS, Stewart 1970:348).

Weolustee Creek (AL) includes variants *Weil Lustre Creek* (GNIS) and *Will Lester Creek* (Read 1927:78); it derives from Muskogee-Creek ‘water-black’ (Stewart 1970:530); Muskogee-Creek *ue* ‘water’ plus *lvste* ‘black’; possibly the same origin as *Olustee*, from *ue-lvste* /oy-lást-i/ ‘black water’ (Martin 2002).

For *Yalobusha River* (MS) GNIS offers variant *Yellowbushy River*, along with *Yalobusha County* (variant *Yellowbusha County*). It originates in a Choctaw word for ‘little tadpole’ (Stewart 1970:544, Harder 1976:619), namely Choctaw *yalubba* ‘tadpole’ with *ãsha* ‘place’ or *-ushi* ‘little’.

Summary

An adage in the field of linguistics is that each word in a language has its own history, but certain patterns nevertheless emerge in a study such as this. Most words continue from one language to another with minimal alteration in pronunciation; a minority is continued in a translated form. A smaller set shows continuity but with a severe interruption in pronunciation due to folk etymology, clipping or blending.

When there is a disruption in the continuity of place-name transmission through folk etymology, the story of the word begins fresh with a blank derivational slate, a story which may in some cases be recoverable from the historical record or from current variation. But without such documentation, the investigator is reduced to mere speculation — an undeniable risk and temptation in this business of etymology. And although infrequent, clipping is more readily traceable, while genuine blending is indeed rare.

Appendix: Other Candidates For Folk Etymology

Six less clear candidates for folk etymology to consider are:

- (a) *Bogue Homa Creek* (AL) Choctaw, Choctaw ‘stream-red’ (Stewart 1970:52); Choctaw *bok* ‘Creek’ *humma* ‘red’ (Read 1927:8). GNIS variants include *Bogue Homo Creek*, *Bogue Homer*, *Big Bogue Homo Creek*, and *Bogue Home Creek*. Starting from Choctaw *homo* ‘to cover, to house, to roof’ or ‘roofer, shingler’ would require no folk etymology, except in the opposite direction, from *Bogue Homo* ‘shingler river’ to *Bogue Homa* ‘red river’, perhaps as an English taboo avoidance.
- (b) *Coosa River/Coosa Creek* (AL, GA), Choctaw *kūsha* ‘cane’ as in canebrake (Harder 1976:120); *Coosha* derives its name from *Kūshak*, or *Kūsha*, which means ‘reed, reed-brake’, ... On the reduced copy of Romans’ map in Dr. Riley’s School History of Mississippi, Coosa Creek has been grievously transformed into ‘Goose Creek’. (<http://www.natchezbelle.org/ahgp-ms/roman/roman1.htm>); Choctaw *kūshak* ‘reed’ or *Kūsha* ‘the Kunshaws (part of the Choctaw) (Byington 241); *Goose Creek* then is most likely a typo for *Coose Creek*.
- (c) *Pink Creek* (GA): Originally known as *Punk Creek*, its derivation is probably from the old Indian village of *Punk Knot* or *Tukpafka*, or possibly translated directly from *tukpafkahachi* ‘punk creek’ (Krakow 1999:177), earlier recorded as *Punk Creek* (GA) with *punk* as a term for partially rotten wood used by Indians and settlers as firewood — the name may be a translation from an Indian language (Stewart 1970:373–391)
- (d) *Senatobia* (MS) is claimed to be a folk etymology in the direction of a Latin-looking word, from Choctaw *sini* ‘sycamore’ with the rest uncertain (Stewart 1970:434); Senatobia soon after the county’s formation. The city took its name, with a slight derivation in spelling, from nearby *Senatahoba* (*senatahoba* or *sin-ih-toh-bih-a*) Creek, which means ‘White Sycamore’ or ‘Black Snake’ (<http://www.segenealogy.com/mississippi/mscnty14.htm>); the termination here may be Choctaw *abeha* ‘are there’; GNIS *Senatobia* (variant *Sennatoba*) and *Senatobia Creek*.
- (e) *Sylacauga* (AL) can be traced to Muskogee-Creek *sule* ‘buzzard’ plus *kagi* ‘roost’, compare *kakita* ‘to sit (of two)’ (Harder 1976:535; Stewart 1970:469), but it may also be the earlier Shawnee town *Chalagakay* (Harder 1976:535). However, if the Shawnee *Chalagakay* was morphed into the Muskogee-Creek *Sylacauga*, then we may be able to access the Muskogee-Creek interpretation of the place-name, but we cannot readily parse the Shawnee version. At this point the researcher can merely speculate about a possible folk etymology on the part of the Creeks: encountering the unfamiliar word *Chalagakay*, they might have reinterpreted it as the more familiar *sule-kagi* ‘buzzards’ roost’, thereby giving a Creek interpretation and wiping clean the Shawnee history of the word.
- (f) *Sopchoppy* (FL) is recorded earlier as *Lockchoppy*, from Muskogee-Creek *lokchvpi* (with *lokcv* ‘acorn’ and *vpi* ‘stem’ — apparently this combination signifies the red oak) (Fernald and Purdum 1992; Harder 1976:517; Stewart 1970:454; Morris 1995:224; Martin and Maudlin 2000). That the initial /l/ has become /s/ is unexplained; attempts to derive the word from a different source have been unsuccessful. If this has undergone a folk etymological reinterpretation, it might have seen influence from *kvsppē* ‘cold’ or *svpeyv* ‘smelly’ with *cvpkē* ‘long’.

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