

Excerpt from a speech given by Foundation Past-President Larry Epstein
To the LCTHF Board of Directors in Great Falls, MT in May 2004

The roots of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation are with President Thomas Jefferson at his home at Monticello. Jefferson's request to Congress for the funding for an Expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase, penned more than 200 years ago, represents the first steps along a Trail we all follow to the formation of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc.

Move ahead with me then to the 1960's, as many of the western Trail states became involved in historic recognition of territorial and statehood centennial celebrations. At about this same time, the Congress, at the urging of many folks with an interest in western history, created a commission made up of state appointees from along the Trail of the Lewis and Clark Expedition from St. Louis Missouri, up the Missouri river to the Continental Divide, into and including Idaho and then down the Columbia to include the states of Washington and Oregon. From this commission came the first designated historic Trail in America, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

The members of that commission, after meeting and working together for several years and working with congress for Trail designation, felt that it was very important to continue to work to promote knowledge about the Expedition and to protect and promote the Trail.

Their determination to "proceed on" resulted in the incorporation, in the state of Missouri, of a new group with the unwieldy name of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., in 1969.

Originally a small cadre of 6 men and one woman as the founders, the Foundation began meeting once each year somewhere along the Trail on the occasion of the captains' birthdays during the first week of August. Those who participated in these early gatherings recall a tremendous feeling of kinship and family, as young historians and authors like Donald Jackson, Jim Ronda, Steve Ambrose, John Logan Allen, Dayton Duncan and many others gathered to rub shoulders and explore the Trail with amateur writers, historians and interested folks like myself.

They all shared the enthusiasm, camaraderie and love of this epic American story. At the 1978 annual meeting here on the Great Falls of the Missouri, my senior law partner and mentor, Wilbur Werner, closed out his presidential term by celebrating a real benchmark, 300 active, enrolled members all along the Trail and at least a dozen chapters all along the Trail. In the ensuing years chapters were formed; projects were supported; a young historian named Gary Moulton was hired away from his position at the University of Oklahoma to begin a project at Nebraska that, 20 years later, became "the Moulton journals." A small, mimeograph document called *We Proceeded On* became one of the best history periodicals published anywhere by anyone. Numerous other publications were underwritten and marketed. We even took on the sale of two very fine bronze sculptures by western artist, Bob Scriver as a way of funding Foundation activities.

Throughout the 1970's & 80's and into the middle of the last decade, all of this wonderful work, with the exception of the editing and publication of WPO, was done entirely by volunteer

members of the Foundation. The president and secretary did the correspondence; committees of member volunteers worked to carry out the Foundation's mission.

It has been said, by one of our stalwart members, that most of us involved in this are "a mile deep and an inch wide." We are, to say the least, focused. We, each of the members of this Foundation, are dedicated to promotion of an accurate and interesting telling of the story of the Expedition and the times and context in which it occurred; we are dedicated to protection and stewardship of the Trail. From a Western American context, I would ascribe to Wallace Stegner's idea that all of this is about "place," about who and what happened all along a Trail that we believe extends from Monticello to Fort Clatsop and all the way back again.

In the early 1990's, with the long awaited bicentennial looming very near on the horizon, the board of this Foundation had the foresight to create a separate entity with its own board, setting its own direction, the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. With what we lawyers would call "an interlocking board of directors" the Council was created in 1992 to oversee the direction of this national milestone commemoration. The Council's history and evolution are the subject of an entire separate dissertation. Suffice to say that under the able direction of Dr. Robert Archibald and the staff of the Missouri Historical Society, the Council has moved ahead with the plans and support for a wonderful and appropriate commemoration of the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

In large part, I believe, because of the bicentennial and also due to the media attention such an event naturally garners, we have, as a Foundation, experienced an almost magical growth and development during the past 10 years. We have grown to more than 40 chapters both on and off the Trail. We have had over 10-fold growth in membership from all over the world. We have a professional and dedicated staff.

We have continued a productive relationship with our grown-up offspring, the Bicentennial Council, and have forged very important, strong partnerships with state and federal governments and agencies and with Indian nations along the Trail. We have worked very hard to ensure that the Trail designated by Congress be enlarged to include the "Eastern Legacy" portion from Monticello and Philadelphia, by way of Harper's Ferry and on down the Ohio to its current designated inception on the Missouri. We have worked very hard to prepare for visitors during this period of recognition of the 200th anniversary of this journey.

Where are we today? We are still small enough to hold "family reunion" sort of gatherings every year along the Trail; we have a tremendous staff who work very hard to promote and support our work; we are partners with the Bicentennial Council, native tribes, state governments, federal and state agencies, fellow Trail groups and a host of scholars and writers, not to mention the folks planning and preparing the signature events for the next two years all along the Trail. We have direct involvement in the construction and furnishing of the interpretive centers along the Trail. We have seen to it that we are on everybody's radar screen as THE Lewis and Clark group.

We are still history and place oriented folks. We will still be around long after the national focus on the Bicentennial ebbs as everyone else's attention is focused elsewhere. Here's my final

thought, which I must, in all fairness, attribute to a history professor from New Orleans, Steve Ambrose. There are persons alive today, taking part in this commemoration, that will also be around when we join the rest of the world as a nation to commemorate the tri-centennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011