Meriwether Lewis at Harpers Ferry

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48th Annual Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Meeting

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Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
July 22–27, 2016
“Yesterday, I shot my guns and examined the several articles which had been manufactured for me at this place; they appear to be well executed.”

– Meriwether Lewis, July 8, 1803
Meriwether Lewis at Harpers Ferry

This 1803 print shows the new government arsenal at the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers. Twenty years earlier, in 1783, Thomas Jefferson declared that this scene was “worth a voyage across the Atlantic.”

Meriwether Lewis relied on the U.S. Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry for guns and hardware that would meet the unique requirements of his transcontinental expedition. On March 16, 1803, Lewis arrived in Harpers Ferry with a letter from Secretary of War Henry Dearborn addressed to Armory Superintendent Joseph Perkins:

Sir:
You will be pleased to make such arms & Iron work, as requested by the Bearer Captain Meriwether Lewis and to have them completed with the least possible delay.

In addition to procuring 15 rifles, 15 powder horns, 30 bullet molds, 30 ball screws, extra rifle and musket locks, gunsmith’s repair tools, several dozen tomahawks, and 24 large knives, Lewis also attended to the construction of a collapsible iron boat frame of his own design. The strange craft was comprised of an iron frame that came apart in sections, over which was stretched a covering of hide. Lewis planned to use the craft following the portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri River. The Armory mechanics assigned to the
Meriwether Lewis at Harpers Ferry

project, however, had considerable difficulty assembling the iron frame, and Lewis was forced to prolong his Harpers Ferry stay from the week he had planned to over a month. On April 20, 1803, Lewis wrote President Jefferson:

“My detention at Harper’s Ferry was unavoidable for one month, a period much greater than could reasonably have been calculated on; my greatest difficulty was the frame of the canoe, which could not be completed without my personal attention to such portions of it as would enable the workmen to understand the design perfectly. –My Rifles, Tomahawks & knives are already in a state of forwardness that leaves me little doubt of their being in readiness in due time.

Lewis and the Armory mechanics finally finished the iron frame, and Lewis conducted a “full experiment” on a section of the unusual canoe. Lewis believed this craft would be lighter and could carry more weight than any other boat of similar size.

On April 18, 1803, Lewis finally departed Harpers Ferry to attend to other pressing matters in Lancaster and Philadelphia, Pa. Eleven weeks later, on July 7, Lewis returned to Harpers Ferry. The following day he wrote President Jefferson:

“Yesterday, I shot my guns and examined the several articles which had been manufactured for me at this place; they appear to be well executed.

Securing a driver, team, and wagon to haul his large supply of weapons and articles to Pittsburgh, Pa., Lewis departed Harpers Ferry for the last time on July 8, 1803. Although there would only be one skirmish in which the rifles were fired against Indians, the arms procured at Harpers Ferry kept Lewis and his men fed for 28 months, and several of the tomahawks served well as “Indian Presents.”

The collapsible canoe, on the other hand, did not work out as planned. When the expedition reached the Great Falls of the Missouri in late June 1805, Lewis was unable to find pine trees for pitch to seal the seams of the leather skins stretched over the framework. From June 18-July 8, 1805, the canoe was assembled and covered with a total of 28 elk skins and 4 buffalo skins. A substitute tar of charcoal, beeswax, and buffalo tallow was applied to the skins to prevent them from leaking. When put into the water on July 9, “the
experiment” floated “like a perfect cork,” but then began to leak. The substitute sealer did not stick. Lewis wrote in his journal:

*She leaked in such manner that she would not answer.*

The failure of the collapsible boat “mortifyed” Lewis, and, lacking the time to attend to further modifications, he “relinquished all further hope of my favorite boat.” On July 10, a cache was dug and the boat was buried. Assuming that pine trees would be available when and where the iron frame was covered with skins had doomed the boat to failure.

From the Potomac River to the Pacific Ocean and back, supplies from Harpers Ferry traveled more than 4,000 miles with the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Of all the weapons, tools, and parts created and prepared at the Harpers Ferry Armory and Arsenal in its sixty year life, none may have traveled so far and affected so many as those which Meriwether Lewis obtained here in 1803.
### Schedule of Events

**Friday & Saturday, July 22-23**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 am - 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Board Meetings</td>
<td>Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, John Brown Museum, 2nd Floor, Allies for Freedom Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sunday, July 24**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 am - 4:30 pm</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Clarion Hotel (CH), Washington Ballroom Foyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 am - 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Book Sales</td>
<td>Harpers Ferry Historical Association, CH, Washington Ballroom Foyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 am - 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Chapter Displays</td>
<td>CH, Washington Ballroom Perimeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 am - 12:00 pm</td>
<td>Chapter Officers' Meeting and Oral History Project Overview</td>
<td>CH, Berkeley Room, Sue Buchel, Oral History Instructor</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 pm - 3:00 pm</td>
<td>50th Anniversary Meeting</td>
<td>CH, Berkeley Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 pm - 5:30 pm</td>
<td>Buffet/Reception</td>
<td>CH, Washington Ballroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
<td>Evening in the Park Program</td>
<td>(Buses depart for Storer College Campus, Camp Hill)</td>
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Schedule of Events

7:00 pm  "A President's Vision, A Captain's Challenge"
  Bill Barker as Thomas Jefferson
  Dick Cheatham as Meriwether Lewis
  Storer College Campus Lawn
  Note: Presentation followed by Q&A’s

8:30 pm  (Buses depart for return to CH)

8:30 pm and after  Chapter Meetings
  CH, Berkeley Room
  A sign-up sheet to schedule meetings will be posted.

Monday, July 25

6:00 am - 7:00 am  Wellness Walk
  Led by Jerry and Janice Wilson

8:00 am - 11:00 am  Late Registration
  CH, Washington Ballroom Foyer

8:30 am  Opening Ceremony
  CH, Washington Ballroom

8:45 am  Welcome
  National Park Service
  CH, Washington Ballroom

9:00 am - 11:00 am  Business Meeting
  CH, Washington Ballroom

11:15 am - 12:45 pm  Lunch Buffet
  CH, Washington Ballroom
**Monday, July 25, continued**

1:00 pm  
**Afternoon Program in the Park**
(Buses depart for Storer College Campus, Camp Hill)

1:45 pm - 3:00 pm  
**Plenary Session**
*Role of Harpers Ferry in the Lewis and Clark Expedition*
Moderator: Todd Bolton, NPS
Panel: Mia Parsons, Dave Gilbert, Bill Barker, David Fox
Storer College Campus Lawn

3:00 pm - 3:20 pm  
**Break**

3:20 pm - 4:00 pm  
**Presentation**
*Route Traveled by Meriwether Lewis from Harpers Ferry, VA to Pittsburgh, PA, July 8 - 15, 1803*
Dave Gilbert
Storer College Campus Lawn

4:00 pm - 4:45 pm  
**Presentation**
*Weaponry of Harpers Ferry: Its History as a Federal Arsenal*
Dr. Frank Tait
Storer College Campus Lawn

5:15 pm  
(Buses depart for return to CH)

6:00 pm  
**Dinner**
CH, Washington Ballroom

7:00 pm  
**Film: Lewis and Clark – The Eastern Legacy: Down the Ohio to the Western Wilderness**
CH, Washington Ballroom
Schedule of Events

8:00 pm and after  Chapter Meetings
    CH, Berkeley Room
    A sign-up sheet to schedule meetings will be posted.

Tuesday, July 26

6:00 am - 7:00 am  Wellness Walk
    Led by Jerry and Janice Wilson

8:00 am  All Day in the Park
    (Buses depart for Storer College Campus)

9:00 am - 9:45 am  Keynote Presentation
    What Lewis and Clark Accomplished on Their Expedition
    Bill Barker
    Storer College Campus Lawn

10:00 am - 10:45 am  Presentation
    Difficulties Made Easy: The Old National Road
    Lorna Hainesworth
    Storer College Campus Lawn

10:45 am - 11:00 am  Break

11:00 am - 11:45 pm  Keynote Presentation
    Passage to the West: Canals and Navigation Schemes at Harpers Ferry
    Dr. Robert Kapsch
    Storer College Campus Lawn

12:00 pm - 12:10 pm  Park Orientation
    Todd Bolton
    Storer College Campus Lawn
Tuesday, July 26, continued

12:10 pm  Harpers Ferry Walking Tour

(Choose one:)

12:10 pm - 1:15 pm  Lower Town Tour
   Led by Jeff Bowers
   (Less strenuous with bus transport to Lower Town for start of
    ranger-guided walking tour)

12:10 pm - 2:00 pm  Harpers Ferry From the Top Down
   Led by David Fox
   (Ranger-guided tour from Storer College area down to and
    including Lower Town)

1:15/2:00 pm - 3:45 pm  Lunch on your own and free time in park

3:45 pm  Eastern Legacy Sign Dedication
   Lewis at Harpers Ferry
   Bill Barker as Thomas Jefferson
   The Green, Lower Town Harpers Ferry

4:00 pm - 5:00 pm  Reception and Concert by Magpie
   The Green, Lower Town Harpers Ferry

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm  Free Time
   (Free time to explore park shops and museums, walk the C&O
    Canal towpath and explore park features)

6:00 pm  (Buses depart for return to CH)

7:00 pm  Dinner on your own
8:00 pm and after   Chapter Meetings
    A sign-up sheet to schedule meetings will be posted.
    CH, Berkeley Room

**Wednesday, July 27**

6:00 am - 7:00 am    Wellness Walk
    Led by Jerry and Janice Wilson

8:00 am - 5:00 pm    Book Sales
    Harpers Ferry Historical Association
    CH, Berkeley Room

8:00 am - 6:00 pm    Silent Auction Bidding
    CH, Washington Ballroom

8:00 am - 6:00 pm    Chapter Displays
    CH, Berkeley Room

8:30 am - 9:15 am    Film: *The Civil War in West Virginia*
    Presented by Jane Bostic
    CH, Washington Ballroom

9:15 am - 9:45 am    Break

9:45 am - 10:30 am    Presentation
    *Preparing for a Traditional Journey: The Lewis to Linnard Letter*
    Lorna Hainesworth
    CH, Washington Ballroom
Schedule of Events

Wednesday, July 27, continued

10:30 am - 11:15 am  Presentation
   Braddock's Road and Old National Road Today
   Brian Reedy
   CH, Washington Ballroom

11:45 am - 12:45 pm  Awards Luncheon
   CH, Washington Ballroom

1:00 pm - 2:15 pm  Presentation
   The Full Story of Acquiring the Louisiana Purchase
   Ron Duquette as Albert Gallatin
   CH, Washington Ballroom

2:15 pm - 2:30 pm  Special Presentation for Friendship Hill
   CH, Washington Ballroom

2:30 pm - 2:45 pm  Break

2:45 pm - 3:00 pm  Presentation
   John Collins, Member of the Expedition: Site Marker and
   His Role in the Expedition
   Todd Bolton
   CH, Washington Ballroom

3:00 pm - 3:30 pm  News from the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
   Neal Bedlan and Dan Wiley
   CH, Washington Ballroom
3:30 pm - 3:50 pm  
**Invitation to 2017 Meeting**  
Rochejhone Chapter  
CH, Washington Ballroom

4:30 pm - 6:30 pm  
**Cash Bar**  
CH, Washington Ballroom Foyer

5:00 pm - 5:50 pm  
**Live Auction**  
Lou Ritten, Auctioneer  
CH, Washington Ballroom  
*(Note: Silent Auction bidding ends at 6:00 pm)*

6:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
**Dinner with Committee and Volunteer Awards**  
CH, Washington Ballroom

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
**Keynote Presentation**  
*Stories Old Upon the Land*  
Fred Shaw, Shawnee Storyteller, United Shawnee Remnant Band  
CH, Washington Ballroom

8:00 pm  
**Silent Auction Winners Announced**
Speakers

Bill Barker – Jefferson scholar and living history presenter, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Neal Bedlan – Chief of Interpretation and Education, Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail (LCNHT)

Todd Bolton – Supervisory Park Ranger, Park Special Events, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (HFNHP)

Jane Bostic – Director of Public Relations, West Virginia Division of Tourism

Jeff Bowers – Park Ranger, HFNHP

Dick Cheatham – Meriwether Lewis living history presenter

Ron Duquette – Albert Gallatin scholar and living history presenter

David Fox – Park Ranger, HFNHP

Dave Gilbert – President, Harpers Ferry Historical Association, Harpers Ferry Armory expert and author

Lorna Hainesworth – Lewis and Clark scholar

Dr. Robert Kapsch – Retired National Park Service Chief of Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record

Mia Parsons – Chief of Resource Management, HFNHP, archaeologist and expert in evolution of Armory

Dr. Frank Tait – Historic weapons expert

Brian Reedy – Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, Ft. Necessity National Battlefield and Friendship Hill National Historic Site

Fred Shaw – Shawnee storyteller, United Shawnee Remnant Band

Dan Wiley – Chief of Resources Stewardship, LCNHT
List of Inventory Acquired by Meriwether Lewis at Harpers Ferry:

15 Rifles
24 Pipe tomahawks
36 Pipe tomahawks for “Indian Presents”
24 Large knives
15 Powderhorns and pouches
15 Pairs of bullet molds
15 Wipers or gun worms
15 Ball screws
15 Gun slings
Extra parts of locks and tools for repairing arms
40 Fish giggs
Collapsible iron boat frame
1 Small grindstone
This program is presented in conjunction with the National Park Service, the Harpers Ferry Historical Association, West Virginia Division of Tourism, and the West Virginia Humanities Council.

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