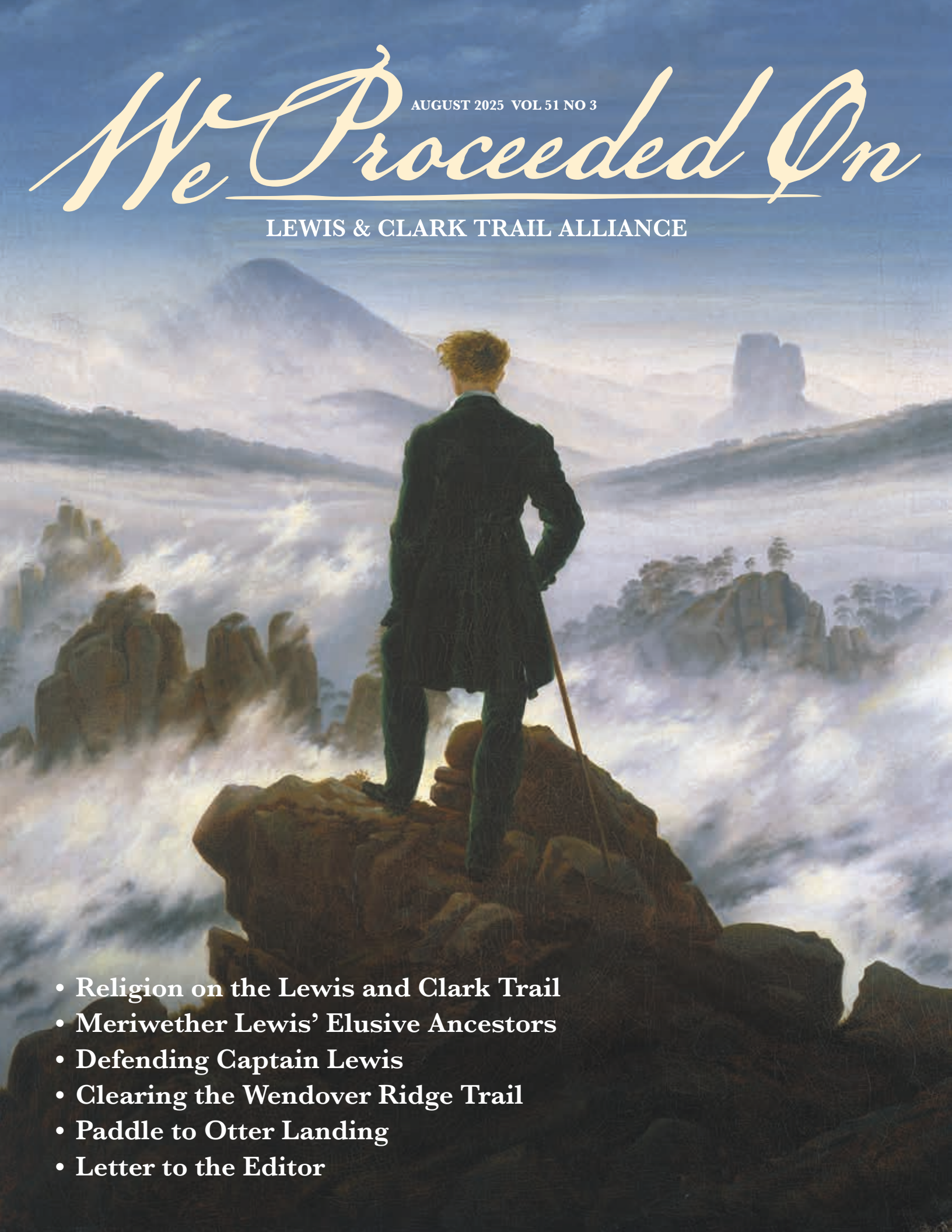


We Proceeded On

AUGUST 2025 VOL 51 NO 3

LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL ALLIANCE

- 
- Religion on the Lewis and Clark Trail
 - Meriwether Lewis' Elusive Ancestors
 - Defending Captain Lewis
 - Clearing the Wendover Ridge Trail
 - Paddle to Otter Landing
 - Letter to the Editor

The Greatness of the Discover Lewis & Clark Website

Where do we turn when we want reliable information about the Lewis and Clark Expedition? We can consult the journals, of course, using the University of Nebraska's outstanding search engine. But for ready information there are more convenient resources.

There is the 2004 *Encyclopedia of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, edited by Elin Woodger and Brandon Toropov. I carry it with me on the Lewis and Clark Trail. There is also the more selective volume by Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs, *The Lewis and Clark Companion: An Encyclopedic Guide to the Voyage of Discovery*. I am never very far from a copy of her father Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage*, which is an indispensable first step in virtually any Lewis and Clark enquiry.

It would require ten stout volumes to print all of the entries of by far the best Lewis and Clark encyclopedia, the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's Discover Lewis & Clark on-line site (lewis-clark.org). As someone who still prefers a book book to an ebook, I'd eat ramen noodles for six months to purchase a complete set if it were ever published. I have found in the last couple of years that when I have a serious question about Lewis and Clark, I invariably now start at lewis-clark.org. I do this for two reasons. First, I know that what is on the site is going to be reliable, succinct, and accurate. This is decidedly not true on many other online sites. Second, thanks to the outstanding editorial supervision and technological sophistication of Kris Townsend, I feel nothing but delight in exploring the site. Aesthetics matter. The information contained at lewis-clark.org is much the same as it was under the founding editorial direction of Joe Mussulman, but in the twenty-first century negotiating Joe's platform sometimes felt like driving a Model T on the autobahn – until Kris transformed it into splendor.

To illustrate the excellence of Discover Lewis & Clark, I'm going to pick three topics more or less at random for quick review.

Old Toby. We all know that he was the Shoshone elder who accompanied Lewis and Clark from the Shoshone village on the upper Salmon to the Lochsa River near today's Lochsa Lodge 20 miles west of Lolo Hot Springs. Here are a few of the many things I don't know or cannot remember about Old Toby: 1) Do we have any other name(s) for him? 2) When did he leave the Expedition to return to his home? 3) Did he, as the journals suggest, take the Expedition to the wrong portal for the Lolo Trail? Let's just see.

It's an article of 2,300 words, originally written by Charles R. Knowles and John Puckett. In addition to what I did know about Toby, here's what I learned.

-Toby spent 50 consecutive days with the Corps of Discovery, "more than any other Indian except Sacagawea." The dates were August 20 to October 8, 1805. I had never thought about that.

- This Shoshone elder is mentioned by his name only once, on the return journey, "more than seven months after they had parted company with him." I didn't know that.

- Obviously his Native name was not Toby and certainly not Old Toby. There are several possibilities. A: it could have been a pet name like "Janey" for Sacagawea. B: it might have been a contraction of *Tosa-tive-koo-bee*, which means something like *gave brains to the white man*. C: his real name might have been *Pi-keek-queen-ab* or Swooping Eagle. If it were either of these complex Shoshone locutions, it is not terribly surprising that the captains created a pronounceable nickname for their guide.

- Lewis later called Toby "a very intelligent old man" who "much pleased" Clark.

- "Although they apparently had little to do, Toby and his son remained with the explorers for the duration of their two-week interlude with the Nez Perce." Father and son did not finally leave the Expedition until October 9, 1805, when they slipped away in the night without saying goodbye or receiving payment for their essential services. Patrick Gass wrote: "I suspect he was afraid of being cast away passing the rapids" of the Clearwater River. The captains asked one of their Nez Perce "conductors" to ride horseback to intercept Toby, but they were advised to let it be. Their guides said any reward the Expedition gave Toby would probably be appropriated by their Nez Perce relatives along the return route. I wonder if this is true.

- Turns out that Toby and son appropriated two of the Expedition's horses along the way home as the reward for their services. The authors of this article say that the horses "were almost certainly more valuable than the trinkets Clark would have given them."

- Finally, in a letter to an unknown correspondent after their return to St. Louis, Lewis wrote, "we attempted with success those unknown formidable snow clad Mountains on the bare word of a Savage, while 99/100th of his Countrymen assured us that a passage was impracticable." This is Lewis in his least admirable mode. The "bare word" of a distinguished Shoshone elder enabled the Expedition to find a vent through the seemingly impenetrable Bitterroot Mountains.

- The authors also question the Expedition's view that Toby was lost. It's a fairly intricate argument, so I urge you to inspect it at your leisure. And besides, who really was lost during this important period of the journey!?

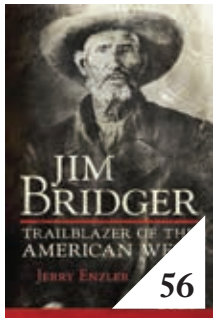
I knew none of these things, except that Toby left without being paid; and I vaguely remembered that he traveled with



IN HIS ELEMENT Joe Mussulman amid the mountains of Montana that he loved so well. He camped among them every summer with his wife and daughters. Courtesy Ellie Nuno.

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Front: *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818) by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), Hamburger Kunsthalle.
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Back: Wendover Ridge in better days before the July 2024 windstorm. Taken on an unusually hot September 13, 2010, close to the Expedition's date for this part of the Trail, at about 5,000 feet in elevation, roughly two-thirds of the way up. Courtesy of Kris Townsend.

We Proceeded On welcomes submissions of articles, proposals, inquiries, and letters. Writers' guidelines are available by request and can be found on our website, lewisandclark.org. Submissions should be sent to Clay S. Jenkinson (701-202-6751) at editor@lewisandclark.org.



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As Keepers of the Story~Stewards of the Trail, the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance provides national leadership in maintaining the integrity of the Trail and its story through stewardship, scholarship, education, partnership, and cultural awareness.

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A Message from the President



LCTA President Bill Bronson

My mother, although born and raised in North Dakota, was a fluent French speaker for most of her life as French was really her “first language.” This anomaly is accounted for by her being raised for many years by her grandparents, *Quebecois* immigrants to this country. Mother used to say that the French language was so embedded in her that she actually “thought” in French much of the time, before translating those thoughts into English. (Her grandmother referred to English as a “guttural tongue!”) My dad and I never quite mastered the lingo and would ignorantly translate various French phrases into a cloddish *patois*, e.g., “coup de grace” became “Coop-duh-grass.” “Parlez-vous Francais” became “parley-voo Francis.” My favorite, however, was how “”potpourri” became “pot-porry!”

I tell you this story only because this president’s message is not confined to one theme, but rather is a “pot porry” of several themes and stories, all of which I hope you find informative about the affairs of your Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance.

In accordance with your bylaws, as well as custom and practice, your Board of Directors holds its spring meeting face-to-face, preferably in a location along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. This year was no exception. We made the wise decision to hold our Board meeting in Omaha at the headquarters of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. In addition to our regular business meeting, we were treated to a wonderful program by Superintendent Mark Weekley and his staff. If anything, this gathering strengthened our existing relationship with our National Park Service partners and planted seeds for future growth and development.

Our trip to Omaha was capped off by a wonderful Sunday morning tour of Lewis and Clark sites in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa, coordinated by our Board secretary and longtime LCTA member Keith Bystrom. This included a trip to the site where the Lewis and Clark Expedition held their crucial counsel with the Otoes and Missourias in the summer of 1804. LCTA Past President Lou Ritten, late Board member Rob Heacock, and I traveled down the bluff adjacent to the now restored Fort Atkinson to the exact site of the meeting. We are grateful to Keith and the members of the Mouth of the Platte Chapter and the Northern Plains Region for arranging this tour and enhancing our understanding of this portion of the Trail. LCTA is blessed with folks who care about this history and the landscapes.

On a related note, we say goodbye to Mark Weekley as Trail Superintendent. He retired from the National Park Service at the end of May. Mark has played a critical role in the LCTA/NPS partnership over the past several years. During one of our lunches in Omaha, Mark and I shared a conversation on a topic near and dear to both of us. Mark as a federal employee and I as an attorney and elected official have both taken oaths at the commencement of our service to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. One expects as much from an attorney or elected official, but we forget that many government employees make a similar pledge. Mark took his oath seriously. During his tenure in government service, he was a dedicated public servant. When you have an opportunity, please commend him for his devotion not only to the Lewis and Clark community but to our nation as well. In the wake of Mark’s departure, we say hello to Neal Bedlan, who will serve as Acting Superintendent of the Trail. Many of you will remember that Neal served with distinction as Chief of Interpretation for the Trail for more than six years. He has been engaging with us frequently since his appointment in June. We look forward to this new relationship with an old friend.

There is probably no one topic of conversation within our community more important than membership. We have frequent conversations about the status of membership and how to redress the decline that has occurred over the past few years. Your Board of

A Message from the President

Directors has taken up the challenge with the appointment of a special membership task force. This group, composed of Board members and also some longtime Alliance members and supporters, has been meeting periodically over the past several weeks to develop a comprehensive plan for sustaining and augmenting our membership in the coming years. We are mindful that membership in the organization going forward may not necessarily mean the same thing or look the same as it has during the first 50-plus years of our existence. Our diverse group has a number of ideas, and none of us would claim to have ownership of all the potential ways we can increase our membership

numbers. If you have any ideas along these lines, please feel free to share them either with me or our Chief Executive Officer, Richard Hunt. We coordinate these periodic meetings and are happy to add your ideas to our agenda. Membership numbers are moving back up again, by the way, slowly but surely.

Another item of concern monitored by your Board and leadership is the proposed change not only in the operation of many federal agencies, but also the budgets under which they operate. The process of figuring out mission, staffing, and finances is ongoing and will probably not even be fully resolved by the time this message is published in August. During our Board meeting in

Omaha, directors reached a consensus that we as an organization should be in the forefront reminding all of our elected officials of the importance of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the contributions LCTA and our federal partners make to understanding this aspect of the history of our nation. Our story is one we think everyone can appreciate regardless of political beliefs. We hope people can also appreciate the need for public resources to be devoted to the telling of that story. By the time you read this, I will have been in contact with every member of the congressional delegation in those states along the Trail, reinforcing our belief in the Trail as an



LCTA President Bill Bronson, Past President Lou Ritten, and late Board member Rob Heacock traveled down the bluff adjacent to the restored Fort Atkinson in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, to the exact site where the Lewis and Clark Expedition held their first counsel with the Otoes and Missouri on August 30, 1804, as indicated by the compass marker. Courtesy of Lou Ritten.

institution in itself and the importance of the Lewis and Clark Story for which we are a “keeper.”

Hopefully, all of you are now subscribers to our Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Newsletter which comes out every other week, usually on Saturday. If you have not had an opportunity to review this excellent production, which is overseen by Richard Hunt, please do so. It's a mix of important news, commentaries, videos, and other content that would not normally be seen either in *We Proceeded On* or *The Orderly Report*. It's also one of our many attempts at outreach to individuals not otherwise engaged with the Alliance. For more information or to subscribe, go to our website, www.lewisandclark.org, and sign up or contact director@lewisandclark.org. Be sure to let Richard know your thoughts about the newsletter.

If you have an interest in Lewis and Clark education, please check out the updated and revised Lewis and Clark curriculum we issued last year and made available on a free basis to school districts and educators across the United States. We are grateful to a longtime Alliance member for helping fund this project. This curriculum guide, which is updated not only in content but also in new platforms for communicating knowledge, is yet another contribution to our stated mission. For more information, go to our website, and scroll down to the entry, “*Our 2024 Curriculum Guide*.”

We hope to see many of you at LCTA's 57th Annual Gathering in Kansas City, Missouri, from September 14-17, 2025. The local planning committee has put several years of effort into creating a memorable experience.

Your presence there will make it an enjoyable one for all of us. Meeting and hotel registration are available at our website lewisandclark.org.

I hope you have enjoyed this “pot-porrry” of news and information about your Alliance. Your Board of Directors takes their responsibilities as your elected representatives very seriously. We hope we are living up to the reasonable expectation to not only promote responsible Trail stewardship, but to share one of the most critical events in American history. ■

Bill Bronson

*President, Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance
Great Falls, Montana*

We Proceeded On *The Journal of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance*

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Clearing the Wendover Ridge Trail

By Nick Davis

The crew takes a (rare) break (left to right): Wayne Fairchild, Kienan Slate, Josh Spaulding, Nic Jones, Cale Alber, Mark Alber, Mike Kenovich. Photographs courtesy of Nick Davis.

The cold Pabst Blue Ribbon in my hand seemed like a miracle, given our location and the events of the day. Eight of us were sprawled out on a small, mostly level bench high in the remote Bitterroot Mountains of Idaho, having hiked and worked our way 2,000 vertical feet above the runoff-heavy Lochsa River where we had begun the day. And let me tell you, the first few sips – ok, gulps – of that beer tasted like an elixir delivered straight from heaven.

I wondered if something similar to the immense satisfaction of that moment were shared some 220 years earlier by William Clark, who had waited at this very spot for the rest of the Corps of Discovery to arrive. Clark's beverage, perhaps not of choice but certainly of convenience and need, was the crisp, teeth-numbing water that gushed from a nearby spring. The full group rested their horses here and ate some soup before

continuing up to the crest of the ridge where they joined what is now known as the Lolo Trail atop the spine of the Bitterroots.

The role of Old Toby – the Lewis and Clark Expedition's Shoshone guide from the Bitterroot Valley in Montana to the Clearwater River upstream of present-day Lewiston, Idaho – in our group was approximated by Josh Spaulding, a horse packer in the employ of Boulder Creek Outfitters (bouldercreekoutfitters.com) of Peck, Idaho. Spaulding's team of a lead horse and four mules had packed our gear up to the bench, and it was he – along with the brilliant foresight exercised by Wayne Fairchild, owner of the Missoula-based Lewis & Clark Trail Adventures (trailadventures.com) and the instigator of our journey – we had to thank for the presence of the beers, the ribeye steaks we would later enjoy with gusto, and the camping gear that would get us through the night.



The Trail Stewardship grant Wayne had received from the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance funded our work in part.

The most famous expedition in American history had a clear mission, of course: to find a navigable waterway between the Continental Divide and the Pacific Ocean. Our expedition, while far less ambitious, had a “clear” mission in a most literal sense: to clear the Wendover Ridge trail so that other people could more feasibly hike in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark. The trail had been rendered all but impassable by some 200 trees felled by the ferocious wind storm of July 2024.



THE PROBLEM It's hard to fathom the power of those winds unless you see the destruction in their wake. The derecho is a force of nature.



We set out early. the morning Cloudy and proceeded on Down the right Side of River over Steep points rocky & buschey as usual for 4 miles to an old Indian fishing place, here the road leaves the river to the left and assends a mountain winding in every direction to get up the Steep assents & to pass the emence quantity of falling timber which had falling from dift. causes i e. fire & wind and has deprived the Greater part of the Southerly Sides of this mountain of its gren timber, 4 miles up the mountain I found a Spring and halted for the rear to come up and to let our horses rest & feed, about 2 hours the rear of the party came up much fatigued & horses more So, Several horses Sliped and roled down Steep hills which hurt them verry much The one which Carried my desk & Small trunk Turned over & roled down a mountain for 40 yards & lodged against a tree, broke the Desk the horse escaped and appeared but little hurt Some others verry much hurt, from this point I observed a range of high mountains Covered with Snow from S E. to S W with Their top bald or void of timber. after two hours delay we proceeded on up the mountain Steep & ruged as usual, more timber near the top, when we arrived at the top As we Conceved we could find no water and Concluded to Camp and make use of the Snow we found on the top to cook the remnt. of our Colt & make our Supe, evening verry Cold and Cloudy. Two of our horses gave out, pore and too much hurt to proceed on and left in the rear— nothing killed to day except 2 Phests.

From this mountain I could observe high ruged mountains in every direction as far as I could See. with the greatest exertion we Could only make 12 miles up the mountain and encamped on the top of the mountain near a Bank of old Snow about 3 feet deep lying on the Northern Side of the (hills) mountain and in Small banks on the top & leavel parts of the mountain, we melted the Snow to drink, and Cook our horse flesh to eat.”

William Clark
September 15, 1805



The trail marker just off the Lochsa River. Recent work by a Forest Service crew is seen in the background.

Wayne, a gregarious former Marine with a deep passion for American history, founded his adventure company in 1989 for that very reason: to enable modern history aficionados to walk (or paddle) the paths taken by that monumental Lewis and Clark Expedition more than two centuries ago. In fact, Lewis & Clark Trail Adventures is the only licensed outfitter that is permitted for both canoe trips in the White Cliffs region of the Missouri River and hiking trips on the Lolo Trail.

Crossing the Bitterroots was arguably the most perilous section of Lewis and Clark’s journey. In the 11 days it took the Corps of Discovery to travel the 160 miles from Travelers’ Rest to Weippe Prairie (September 1805), they endured a grueling march through steep mountains while suffering hypothermia, malnutrition, and a severe challenge to morale along the way. It’s a testament to the enduring might of the Bitterroots that Wayne believes Wendover Ridge to be the most remote and challenging contemporary section of the original Expedition’s trail, given the 3,100-foot elevation gain along the eight miles from bottom to top and the lack of accessible road support.



This isn't Dutch's first rodeo. Experienced mountain horses are worth their weight in gold. Horse packer Josh Spaulding on Dutch leads the mule train carrying supplies and, most crucial to the team, the cold beer.

Wayne notes that the difficulty of hiking Wendover Ridge takes some people by surprise, even though they've been warned. But invariably, he says, it proves to be one of the highlights of his trips. "Once they recover from the immediate effects of the hike, you can practically see the sense of accomplishment take hold. They've just walked in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, through one of the most difficult sections of the most famous journey in American history."

The trail-clearing project has been on Wayne's mind for several years, as the Wendover Ridge trail had become increasingly tougher to navigate owing to deadfall. The last significant trail-clearing work had been more than 20 years ago, in the leadup to the Expedition's 200th anniversary. Then a rare weather phenomenon accelerated that timeline in a big way.

On July 24, 2024, I sat with my wife and son in our living room in Missoula, all of us enjoying that magic hour when the sun paints its way to the horizon, and lengthening shadows begin the regular diurnal swing from hot, dry afternoons

into gloriously cool, crisp mountain nights. And that's when things began to get weird.

The gradual darkening of the sky suddenly transitioned into a near blackout, and the moderate breeze of the day quickly became more muscular. We watched through the living room's bay window as the wind became steadily more violent, sending various neighborhood artifacts (bits of litter, yard toys, an empty garbage can) cartwheeling down our sidewalk like props from *The Wizard of Oz*.

The fate of our extensive garden in question, I ran out front to minimize the damage, my son close behind. Just as we succeeded in clearing the yard and garden, an ominous crack rang out from the vicinity of the 60-foot subalpine fir in our yard. It was the kind of sound that makes a person disregard small concerns and snap into genetic survival mode. We dashed back into the house moments before the wind sheared our beloved tree at the stump, sending it crashing on top of my neighbor's truck and into the street. Thinking about it later, I realized that I barely heard the crash of the tree's impact through the teeth of that vicious wind.

The weather service reported gusts of over 80 mph on the valley floor and just shy of 110 mph atop the mountain guarding Missoula's southeastern flank. Thousands of trees were uprooted, snapped at the base, beheaded, delimbed, or otherwise damaged all over town, and some homes were without power for over a week. There are a lot of new roofs in Missoula these days, and my neighbor got a new truck.

It turns out that the kind of storm that hit Missoula is called a "derecho," which Wikipedia defines as "a widespread, long-lived, straight-line windstorm that ... cause[s] hurricane-force winds." This spring, when Wayne told me that the long, straight line that passed through Missoula had tracked directly over Wendover Ridge and Lolo Trail before continuing eastward, that he had received a Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Trail Stewardship grant to clear part of the Trail, and asked if I wanted to document the project, I jumped at the chance. Given the mind-boggling damage the derecho had caused in Missoula – a city with a lot of trees, to be sure, but nothing close to the timber density of the northern Bitterroots – I was beyond curious to witness the aftermath. The fact that it involved the historical path of Lewis and Clark made it a no-brainer.

Wayne assembled a crack trail-clearing crew via a mutual acquaintance. Mark Alber lives in the Bitterroot Valley not far south of Travelers' Rest State Park in Lolo, Montana, and he founded Miller Creek Reforestation some 36 years ago. He and his crews have since made a living in the woods of Montana and Idaho, doing non-commercial forest work for private and public entities. The jobs they perform typically include fuels reduction, thinning, prescribed burns, and pile burns. They also used to contract for trail-clearing projects in the Bitterroots, though he says those projects have dried up in recent years. In any case, these are experienced woodsmen who regularly pack heavy saws, fuel cans, and safety gear through terrain that would make most people question their own sanity.

The bottom mile or so of the Wendover Ridge trail is particularly steep, a steady sequence of tight switchbacks. Thankfully, the local U.S. Forest Service office had put a clearing crew on that section just days before our arrival. They had also opened a tight, winding fire road that bisects the trail at around that one-mile mark. That's where Wayne and I met Spaulding and his pack train: Dutch, the horse he'd ride, and mules Viola, Sue, and Maggie. Mark and his crew of four had arrived earlier, and they were an hour into their work when Wayne and I started up the trail.

Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Trail Stewardship Grants

In 2025, the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's **Lewis & Clark Trail Stewardship Endowment: A National Council of the Lewis & Clark Expedition Bicentennial Legacy Project** awarded a total of \$79,554 in grant funding to 15 organizations dedicated to strengthening the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail's visibility and accessibility and expanding public understanding of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Lewis & Clark Trail Adventures in Missoula, Montana, received \$7,500 to clear fallen trees from the Wendover Ridge Trail and help to reopen this wild stretch, preserving a portion of the Lewis and Clark Trail that remains largely untouched by modern development.

- Gary Kimsey

As far as first impressions go, this one most definitely got my attention. A couple hundred yards up the trail I turned to look back at the fire road, and through the distance the little patch of it I could make out appeared almost directly below my feet. That was the first time – but far from the last – that I tried to imagine what it must have been like for the Corps of Discovery as they and their Salish horses carried an entire expedition's worth of gear and supplies up that untamed mountain – in the snow! On September 16, 1805, Clark wrote, "I have been wet and as cold in every part as I ever was in my life, indeed I was at one time fearfull my feet would freeze in the thin mockersons which I wore." We had the luxury of sturdy work boots, and no snow.

We came upon sawed logs almost immediately, and throughout the roughly four miles of trail we covered that day we rarely traveled more than 50 yards without encountering more downed trees across the trail. Some areas had massive clusters of trees downed at various angles, making it look like a handful of toothpicks dropped on the trail, if the toothpicks had diameters ranging from 12 to 48 inches.



The trail through dense woods emerges after cleaning up cuts and clearing brush. It is, however, a work in progress. Of the seven miles of the Wendover Ridge Trail designated for clearing, five have been opened with two more to go on a return trip.

The crew sawed the downed trees in varying segment lengths, depending on the diameter and relative density of the tree in question, with the ultimate goal of making as few cuts as needed while leaving the cut segments manageable for the follow-up task of pushing them off the trail. So a large-diameter snag (a tree that died and dried while standing, before succumbing to gravity or wind) would be cut in longer segments than a live tree, of similar diameter, that had either been uprooted or had its trunk snapped by the derecho. The number of trees uprooted was about equal to those snapped off by the intense winds.

The tree segments that the saw crew had pushed off the trail were only those required to allow them access up-trail, which left a lot of segments for Wayne and me to clear to make the trail wide enough for the pack train and for future adventurers. That's no slight on the crew who were mandated by Wayne to get as far as they could and thus wisely prioritized the cutting work only they were qualified to perform. As for my status as the mission's archivist, well, it became clear that the amount of work in front of us required

an all-hands-on-deck approach.

The work quickly settled into a rhythm for Wayne and me, with one of us clearing downed logs and the other trimming branches that crowded the trail from the sides and from above. For the latter job, Wayne had brought a recently purchased set of loppers with unusually short, light handles and a simple gear mechanism that enabled the tool to punch far above its perceived weight class. We dubbed it "Cyndi Lopper," after the 80s pop star who's powerful four-octave vocal range belied her tiny stature.

It was an unseasonably hot day, and we took regular water breaks along the way. Sometime around midday we caught up to Mark who, as the senior member of the saw crew, took the task of cleaning up cuts and clearing brush that was too dense for hand lopping, while the young bucks forged ahead to saw large trees further up the trail. He was standing near a massive upright snag that had been freshly sawed at a height of about five feet. As we drew closer, we could see that the ground around the base of the snag was pocked by several large, deep holes.

The snag's standing posture (all the other trees had been sawed on the ground) and the holes beneath it confounded us. Mark explained that the snag – the remnant of a magnificent Englemann spruce situated right at the edge of the trail – had been uprooted, likely almost a year prior and, while falling across the trail, had been caught by a thick grove of standing trees on the other side. When the crew made the first cut near the trail's edge, the snag, now freed from the weight of the vast majority of its trunk, stood upright on its own like a resurrected ghost! The holes in the ground were owing to the earth that had been excavated by the uprooting, and because they were so close to the trail, we stuck sawed logs into the larger holes as a warning for the pack train.

Before we resumed our upward journey, I tried a rough count of the stump's rings, a task made quite difficult by the saw marks on the long-dead wood. However, I'm confident that this tree had seen well over 250 growing seasons before it fossilized, meaning that the entire Corps of Discovery had passed within inches of its much younger living self. As a writer I'm fascinated by the stories that make human history, though I'm rarely wowed by simple geographical proximity to events that transpired in the distant past. But I must say that I had a moment there, in the wake of that realization, that gave me goosebumps despite the sweltering conditions on the trail.

When Wayne and I finally arrived, late in the afternoon, at the bench where we would camp for the night, I was as hot, thirsty, and wiped out as I've been in quite some time. We were greeted by Spaulding and the pack train, which had passed us earlier, and the rest of the saw crew, which had stayed ahead of us the whole time. Wayne opened a cooler and asked if anyone wanted a beer, and a dozen arms immediately shot in the air (some of us raised both).

For a while we sat in relative silence, immersed in the singular pleasure of an ice-cold beer after a day of strenuous work, as well as the stunning views of the Bitterroots afforded by our elevated vantage point. Once again, I found myself wondering if Lewis, Clark, and the rest of their group had felt the same as they rested in the very spot where we now sat. Unlike the Expedition members, we knew what awaited us the next day: the saw crew would continue up the trail until time dictated their return down the mountain and back to their homes, while Wayne and I would pack up camp and head back in the morning, cleaning up rough spots on the trail along the way.

I imagined that the hardy souls of the Corps of Discovery were inoculated against chronophobia by this point of their journey. That they drank in the view as they refreshed themselves with the fresh water of the nearby spring. That they then turned to the task at hand – continuing the steep climb

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up to what would come to be known as Snowbank Camp, at the top of the ridge – and resumed their most heroic of journeys in the manner of all such journeys, before and since: one step at a time. ■

Nick Davis is a compulsive generalist who generally makes a living telling stories on paper and on video. He's been writing about Missoula since 1995, when a letter to the editor of the Missoula Independent turned into a job. An unrepentant riverholic and an oversharing baseball fan, he improbably finds himself living with both a Corgi and a cat.



Wayne Fairchild takes in the view on the way back down. He says this part of the Wendover Ridge Trail is in the best condition he's seen it in 30 years.

You may have heard about the windstorm of July 2024 that wreaked havoc in the city of Missoula, Montana, and the surrounding areas. It also toppled hundreds of trees in the Clearwater National Forest and more specifically, the historic Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, also known as the Lolo Trail.

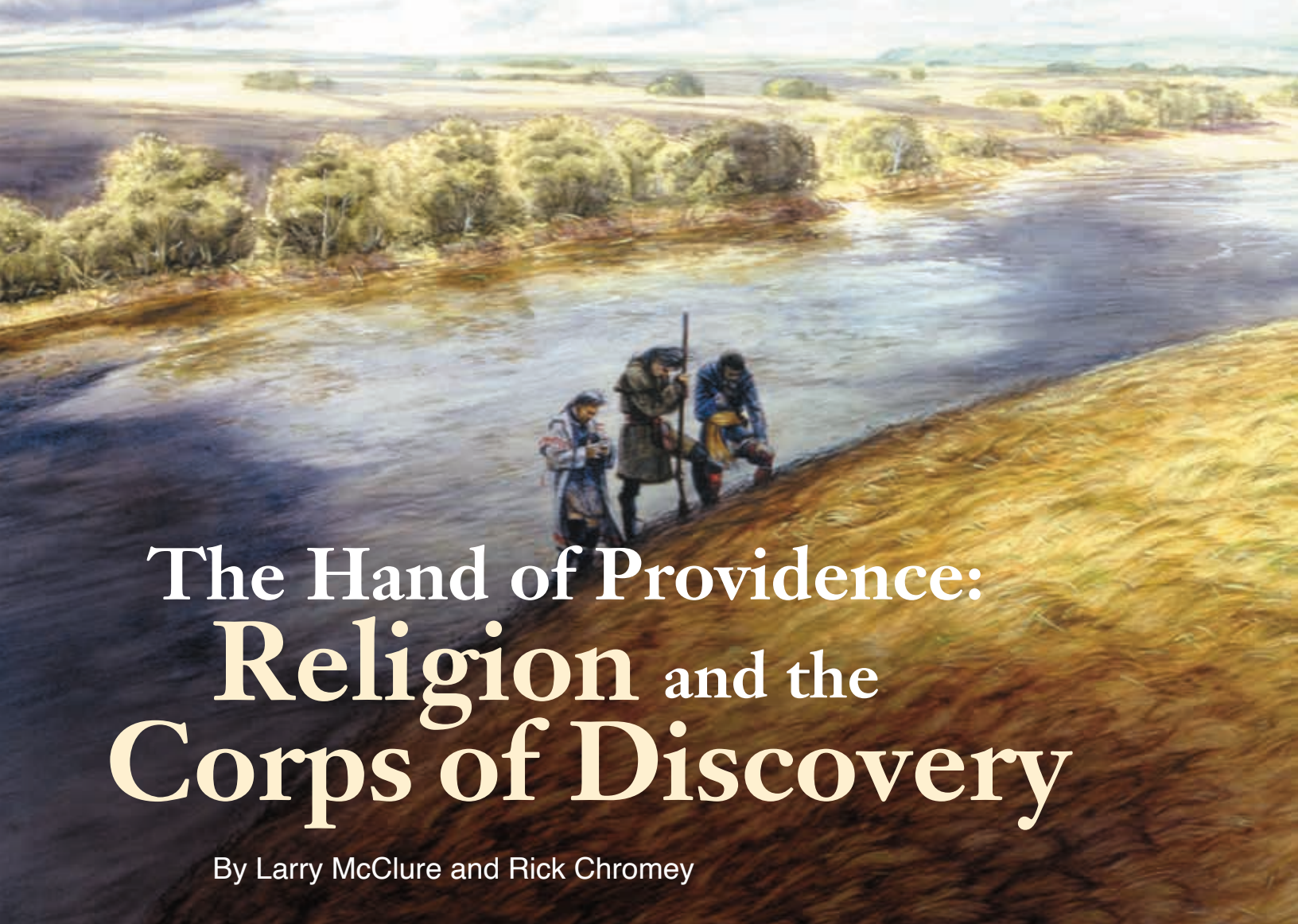
I first started to explore the Lolo Trail in the mid 1980s while attending the University of Montana and studying recreation management. After graduating, I started an outfitting business called Lewis & Clark Trail Adventures. We specialize in leading folks hiking and canoeing on the original Trail of the famous 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Pacific and back. The section of Trail known as the Wendover Ridge Trail follows the Expedition's path of September 1804 from the Lochsa River and ascending to the high ridgelines of the Lolo Trail. This is a unique section of the Trail that follows ridgelines in a landscape that has remained much the same as when the Expedition came through. This section was severely damaged in the July 2024 windstorm.

Last fall I applied for a Trail Stewardship grant from the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance to help pay for a crew to clear the trail and reopen this unique section of the Lolo Trail. I am happy to report in June of this year that a team of six and a horse packer spent two long days cutting and clearing the Wendover Ridge Trail. The crew cut through approximately 300 downed trees and cleared the trail for hiking and horse packing again. We were able to clear approximately five out of the seven miles. Our crew is not done yet; we have a couple more miles of the Wendover section and would also like to reopen the Sinque Hole to Smoking Place Trail and the Sherman Peak Trail (aka Spirit Revival Ridge Trail).

I would like to thank the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's Lewis & Clark Trail Stewardship Endowment: A National Council of the Lewis & Clark Expedition Bicentennial Legacy Project for the funds that enabled us to preserve this unique section of the historic Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail for years to come. Stay tuned for future tree cutting and trail-maintenance progress.

Enjoy the Trail!

Wayne Fairchild
CEO, Lewis & Clark Trail Adventures
Missoula, Montana



The Hand of Providence: Religion and the Corps of Discovery

By Larry McClure and Rick Chromey

Sergeant Charles Floyd is buried, as noted by William Clark on August 20, 1804, “with all the honors of War...to the top of a high round hill overlooking the river & Countrey for a great distance” near present-day Sioux City, Iowa. Courtesy Michael Haynes Art.

As the Lewis and Clark Expedition approached St. Louis in September 1806, relief mingled with joy. This diverse group of explorers, soldiers, interpreters, and *engagés* had accomplished the impossible – a mission comparable to putting a man on the moon.

For two and a half years, the party experienced near starvation¹, frostbite, heatstroke, rheumatism, dysentery, boils, and assorted wounds. The Corps endured blizzards, flash floods, wildfires, high winds, and hailstorms. They encountered numerous rattlesnakes, monstrous grizzlies, and ram-paging bison. A few party members survived falls off cliffs, near drownings, or getting shot. Confrontations with certain Native tribes created anxious moments. The fact that only Charles Floyd died – likely of a ruptured appendix – was remarkable, if not *miraculous*.

According to historian Robert R. Hunt, the Expedition faced 56 “incidents” (events, disasters, or mishaps) on their round-trip journey to the Pacific.² On several occasions, the Corps of Discovery was nearly a *corpse* to be *discovered*. Lewis could have died a dozen times, and Clark no less than nine. Sacagawea, Drouillard, Joseph Field, Charbonneau, and Shannon all faced “multiple exposures” to death.³

The post-Expedition question remains to this day: How did they overcome all that?

William Clark humbly offered his opinion to the citizens in Fincastle, Indiana, in early 1807: “Gentlemen, we ought to assign the general safety of the party to a singular interposition of providence, and not to the wisdom of those who commanded the expedition.”⁴ Meriwether Lewis



agreed. On May 11, 1805, he recorded “many hair breadth escapes” from crumbling river banks, adding, “providence seems so to have ordered it.”⁵ A year later, Lewis acknowledged that “the hand of providence” was “wonderfully in [their] favor,” allowing them to escape becoming a “sacrifice” to Montana’s grizzlies.⁶

Eldon G. Chuinard seemed to affirm Lewis and Clark’s traditional religious view, calling the Expedition a “miraculous feat...[and] accomplishment.”⁷ On the other hand, many scholars and students prefer more secular interpretations, standing with early twentieth-century historian Olin D. Wheeler’s perspective that Lewis and Clark enjoyed “rare good luck” to survive these perils.⁸

But could modern secular sensibilities prejudice interpretations of this story?

“Providence” is an unverifiable explanation, and yet the captains’ response reflected the post-Revolutionary America of their day.

All the American members of the Corps of Discovery were likely religious to some degree. Spiritual activities documented in the journals and early nineteenth-century religious culture support this assertion.

The Religious World of Lewis and Clark

This Expedition was a military mission; therefore, little is known about the members’ religious backgrounds or practices. Religious values and piety were not prerequisites for the Corps’ mission and were rarely documented. However, this silence does not imply that individuals lacked spiritual beliefs or that they ceased or avoided practicing faith.



Clark noted on May 23, 1804, "...passed the Tavern Cave, Capt Lewis' ascended the hill which has peninsulis projecting in ragged points to the river, and was near falling from a Peninsula hard water all Day Saved himself by the assistance of his Knife..." Courtesy Michael Haynes Art.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark believed in God. Both were born in Virginia, where the Church of England was the official religion until 1786. They received religious education from devout mothers and their local churches. Lewis also augmented his early training by studying literature, Latin, Greek, philosophy, history, and religion with Anglican clergymen.

Determining Lewis' spirituality at his death is challenging. He was involved with Freemasonry, a fraternal organization that requires a belief in God for membership. The organization incorporates religious vocabulary, meets in "temples," and uses the Bible for oaths while promoting morality, charity, and good works. Additionally, it's difficult

to know the influence of Lewis' mother, Lucy Meriwether Lewis Marks, who converted to Methodism in the 1780s.

Clark maintained his Anglican faith throughout his life, even with fewer Anglican churches in the western reaches. According to one biographer, Clark was steadfastly "religious but not narrowly sectarian."⁹ Not inclined to jeopardize his reputation, career, mission, or life, Clark's approach to everything, including religion, was moderation.

The Christian Roots of America

Early America was populated by dissidents and separatists, Puritans and Pilgrims. Most were coming to America either to escape persecution or to evangelize the Native tribes. This is clear from their original charters as, for example, those of Virginia¹⁰ and Carolina.¹¹

Eventually, the colonies were constituted as states, still beneath the banner of Christianity. These states continued to include religious tests for elected leaders and taxes to support religious activities; nearly all were tied to creedal Christianity.

- **Pennsylvania's State Constitution (1776)** required all members to declare: "I do believe in one God, the creator and governor of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked. And I do acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine inspiration."¹²
- **Massachusetts's Constitution (1780)**, in Article III, states the "happiness of a people," and "good order" and "civil government" are dependent upon "piety, religion and morality." It then gave its legislature the power to levy "suitable provision" occasionally to "the public worship of God" and to pay for "public Protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality."¹³
- **Maryland's Constitution (1776)** prohibited any "test or qualification" to hold state office except a "declaration of a belief in the Christian religion."¹⁴

Virginia was under the control of the Church of England. Rhode Island was predominantly Baptist; Maryland was initially Catholic, while Pennsylvania was mainly Quaker; Massachusetts was principally Congregational.

Consequently, the Expedition members likely reflected their families' and states' religious persuasions. Could John Ordway, Hugh Hall, and Silas Goodrich, all from New



Meriwether Lewis' mother, Lucy Meriwether Lewis Marks (1837), by John Toole. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Hampshire and Massachusetts, have favored Congregationalism? Were Virginians Nathaniel Pryor, John Shields, and Robert Frazer professed Anglicans? George Shannon was Presbyterian. Both John Shields and John Colter were reputed Baptists.¹⁵

The Young Men of the Second Great Awakening

Between 1720 and 1775, an estimated 250,000 Scotch-Irish refugees, primarily Presbyterian Calvinists, fled religious persecution in Ireland and immigrated to Pennsylvania, Virginia, eastern Ohio, and Kentucky. Known for their resilience and fervent religious beliefs, they established numerous churches, often without preachers. But it didn't matter. These Scotch-Irish Presbyterians were "well indoctrinated in principles of the Christian religion."¹⁶ One of these Protestant-Irish families was named Shannon. In 1785, this family welcomed a baby boy named George, later recruited as the youngest corpsman in the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The First Great Awakening (1734-1745) sparked a major revival in nearly every American church, leading to the

establishment of hundreds of new congregations within each denomination across all regions. Between 1700 and 1780, every American church sect experienced growth. And these weren't half-empty churches.

Between 1700 and 1750, one historian noted that between 70 and 80 percent of Americans regularly attended church. By the century's end, those numbers hadn't changed. In 1778, Benjamin Franklin informed the French that Americans had a "Bible and a newspaper" in every home and a quality school in every district, boasting they were the "principal support of [America's] virtue, morality, and civil liberty."¹⁷

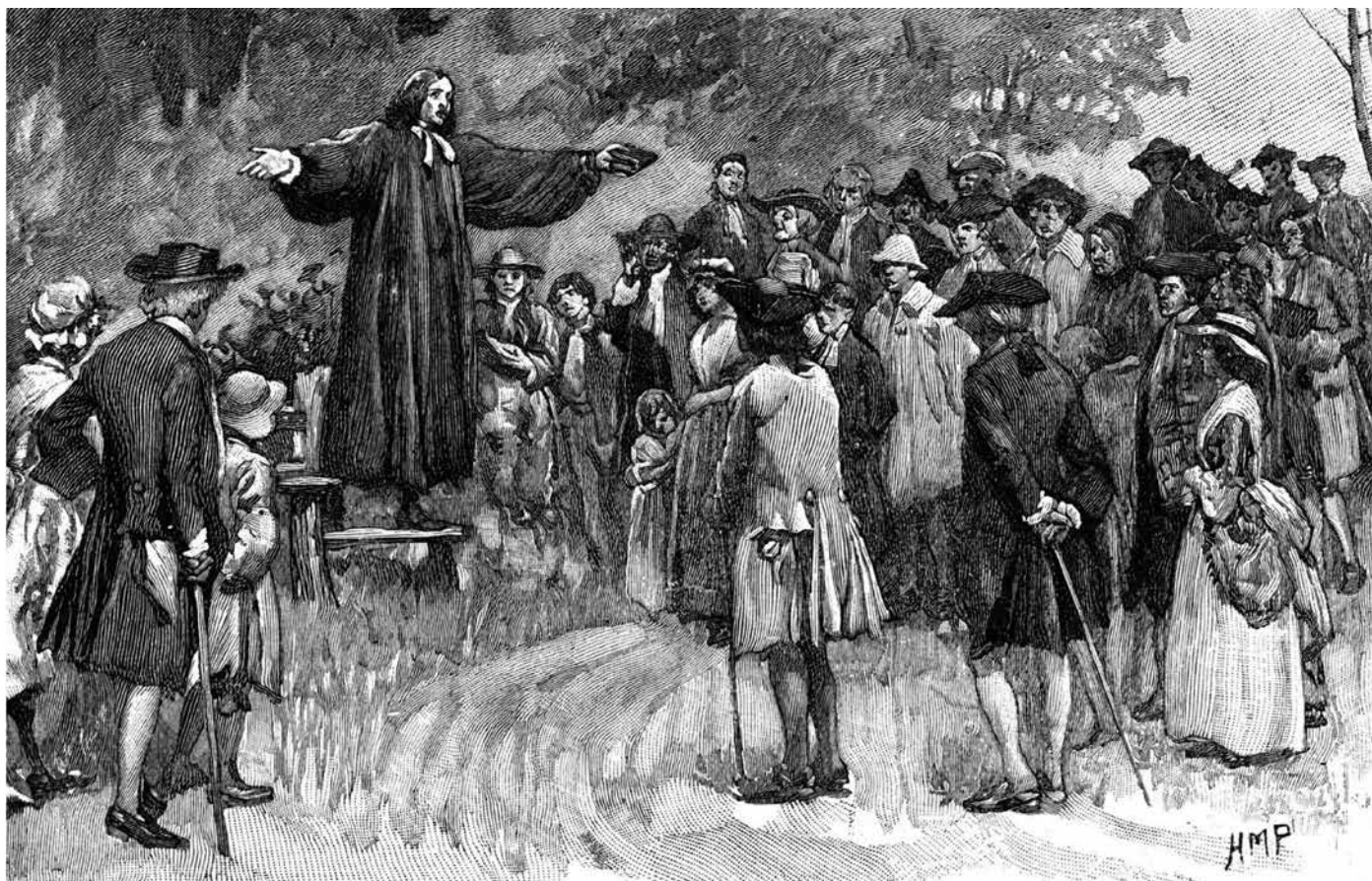
The First Great Awakening transformed America. In 1794, Benjamin Franklin also published a pamphlet entitled *Information for Those Who Would Remove to America* to help people understand America before they emigrated. Franklin noted the socio-religious culture of America:

Industry and constant employment are great preservatives of the morals and virtue of a nation. Hence bad examples to you are more rare in America; which must be a comfortable consideration to parents. To this may be truly added, that serious religion, under its various denominations, is not only tolerated, but respected and practiced. Atheism is unknown here, infidelity is rare and secret; so that persons may live to a great age in that country without... meeting with either an atheist or an infidel. And the Divine Being seems to have manifested his ... mutual forbearance and kindness with which ... he has been pleased to favour the whole country.

Lewis, Clark, and their recruits grew up in this unique, highly charged Protestant Christian culture. Then, as young adults, they experienced a "second" revival that introduced a new type of *American* church: non-denominational, autonomous, and democratic. Ultimately, the Second Great Awakening (1790-1835) had a profound impact on every American institution.

The First and Second Great Awakenings were rooted in Protestantism. The First emphasized *spiritual renewal*, while the Second prioritized *evangelism and conversion*. John Wesley's Methodism, introduced to America in 1784, promoted an emotional religious experience grounded in home Bible studies and public revivals.¹⁸

In 1800, Kentucky camp meetings launched a new American church. The Cane Ridge Revival drew upwards of 30,000 Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists (ten percent



George Whitefield preaches to a crowd, a concomitant of the "Great Awakening." Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Awakening>.

of Kentucky's population) in early August 1801. For a solid week, people heard messages by various preachers, sang hymns, fellowshiped, danced, exhorted, and experienced mystical phenomena.¹⁹ Personal salvation and free will were preached, and religion became more democratic and accessible, shifting power from elite clergy to charismatic preachers and common believers.

As a result, churches in the Ohio River valley galvanized America's emerging "Bible Belt." Baptist and Methodist churches experienced the most growth, while Presbyterians posted modest increases.²⁰ The buckle of this "belt" proved a fast-growing, non-denominational, unity movement of Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists. Since many Corps recruits originated from the Ohio River valley, it's likely they had contact with, maybe attended, these "Christian Churches" or "Churches of Christ."

Another component of the Second Great Awakening was its social reforms and personal transformation. Many movements, including abolitionism, temperance, suffrage, prison reform, and asylum, were rooted in evangelical Christianity.

Women, especially, were given a new public voice. It was these reforms that caught the attention of French diplomat and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville who visited America in the early 1830s and then penned his classic *Democracy in America*. He observed:

Upon my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things, to which I was unaccustomed. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country..²¹

Although it's not explicitly stated in the journals and is still too early to tell, could it be that many of the "social" harmonies in the Corps of Discovery reflected the socio-religious-political "Great Awakening" culture of Lewis and Clark's era? An environment where multiple nationalities,



Alexis de Tocqueville (1850) by Théodore Chassériau, Palace of Versailles. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

religions, and languages worked together as one; where York was not segregated, carried a gun, and was free; where a young Shoshone mother provided vital assistance; and where two vastly different personalities like Lewis and Clark could lead in harmony.

These were all components of their broader *Christian* culture.

The journals were not diaries; instead, they were military records that documented experiences, daily and unique events, personnel issues, observations, experiments, mileage, weather, and other vital data. However, neither were they penned in a vacuum. Occasionally, the private and personal lives seeped, leaked, and spilled on the pages of their journey, giving us glimpses of their prejudices, beliefs, and values.

We believe that the larger cultural landscape shaping their lives from 1803 to 1806 must not be ignored. Their world was governed by a Christian ethic and morality, which influenced their thoughts, attitudes, and actions. As a result, it's likely the Lewis and Clark party was *more religious and Christian* than our modern, secular sensibilities might accept

or believe. And it's through that Christian lens that we also speculate, upon the firm ground of this religious culture, as much as the journals allow.

Religious Practices Among the Corps of Discovery

On Sunday, May 20, 1804, Pentecost Sunday, the Corps rested in St. Charles awaiting the arrival of Captain Meriwether Lewis. Nevertheless, a dedicated group of 20 (nearly half the Corps, including John Ordway) attended a Catholic mass. Clark recorded that he “gave the party leave” to attend church services and hear “a romon Carthlick Priest” speak.²² As an Anglican, Clark recognized the special significance of Pentecost Sunday, which celebrated the church's birth in 30 CE.

The Roman Catholic church in St. Charles offered the Mass in Latin (by either a French or Spanish priest). Pentecost



Wooden Church on Coyote Creek Road in the Oregon ghost town of Golden, a state heritage site, looks much as the church in St. Charles, Missouri, would have looked when the Lewis and Clark Expedition departed from there on September 14, 1803. Courtesy Gary Halvorson, Oregon State Archives, Wikimedia Commons.

Sunday services highlighted distinctive rituals in silence, congregational prayer, scripture readings, and Gregorian chants. The St. Charles church was likely adorned with flowers and banners, and the altar and attendees wore red to symbolize the Holy Spirit's fire. Not surprisingly, Whitehouse confessed the Mass was a "novelty" to the men.²³ Clark, who had declined a ball invitation on Saturday night, possibly would have joined his men if Lewis weren't still in St. Louis. But the captain knew his responsibility was to be at camp.

Church attendance provides evidence for some of the Corps' religious behavior and devotion. And this was the Corps' last institutional church service until their return. Had they known what was in store for them, they might have requested a comforting homily on Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."²⁴

Holy Days on the Trail

The Corps of Discovery celebrated three Christmases and Independence Days together from 1803 to 1806 – two holidays that early American generations collectively honored. John Quincy Adams explained their special symbiosis in an 1837 speech:

Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior?... That the Declaration of Independence ... laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity...?²⁵

His father, John Adams, wrote his wife, Abigail: "I am apt to believe that [Independence Day] will be celebrated, by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated as the Day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty."²⁶ Adams believed Independence Day should be "solemnized with pomp and parade" in perpetuity, featuring "shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other."²⁷

Perhaps that's why Lewis and Clark religiously celebrated New Year's Day, Christmas, and July 4th, although not with equal zeal. Christmas was clearly the Corps' favored holiday as it merged Independence Day and New Year's into one grand celebration. On Christmas morning in 1804 at Fort Mandan, Sergeant John Ordway recorded:

Tuesday 25th Decr. 1804. cloudy. we fired the Swivels at day break & each man fired one round. our officers Gave the party a drink of Taffee. we had the Best



John Quincy Adams, 1815, by Pieter Van Huffel (1769-1844), National Portrait Gallery. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

to eat that could be had, & continued firing dancing & frolicking durement the whole day. the Savages did not Trouble us as we had requested them not to come as it was a Great medician day with us. we enjoyed a merry cristmas durement the day & evening untill nine oClock—all in peace & quietness.²⁸

The phrase "Great medician day" signaled to their Mandan neighbors that Christmas was a time for worship and sacred reflection, as American Indian tribes celebrated their own "great medicine" days.

"Great medicine" was terminology journal writers ascribed to mean something mysterious and hard to explain, like the air rifle's powderless repeating fire.²⁹ On May 2, 1805, Lewis defined "big medicine" as "the operation of the [presence] and power of the great spirit." Ordway, on the same day, used the same definition but capitalizes "Big Medicine," suggesting Divinity or "Supreme being."³⁰ Essentially, "Big" or "Great Medicine" is *an incomprehensible operation of the Presence and Power of the Great Spirit*.

It's why the Mandans left the party alone on December 25. Christmas was a sacred time for the Corps to reflect



Abigail Smith Adams, c. 1810-1815, by Gilbert Stuart, National Portrait Gallery. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.



John Adams, c. 1800-1815 by Gilbert Stuart, National Gallery of Art. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

upon God's visitation through Jesus' birth. The old English holiday emphasized feasting, drinking, dancing, and other revelry. Patrick Gass noted their Mandan Christmas featured brandy toasts, dinner, and dancing until evening.³¹

On Christmas Day 1805, at Fort Clatsop, Clark described a rainy morning that began with "a shout and a song," followed by breakfast and a gift exchange. While similar celebrations may have occurred at Fort Mandan, this Christmas the Corps showed greater reverence and gratitude. According to historian Joe Mussulman, the men probably sang the same classic Christmas carols sung in Protestant churches and living rooms back home (e.g., "Joy to the World" [1719], "O Come All Ye Faithful" [1751], and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" [c. 1760]).³² The captains distributed gifts of tobacco and handkerchiefs. Clark described the gifts he received which included fleece hosiery, socks (from Lewis), moccasins (from Whitehouse), an Indian basket (from Goodrich), and two dozen white weasel tails (from Sacagawea). Clark summarized their day, noting the "nativity" as the reason for the celebration:

...we would have Spent this day the nativity of Christ in feasting, had we any thing either to raise our Spirits or even gratify our appetites...³³

Books of Faith and Religious Services

The Corps' traveling library did not include religious books in its inventory, but that doesn't mean the men didn't bring them. Western history artist Michael Haynes believed the captains "anticipated the need" to officiate at funerals.³⁴ Both Lewis and Clark were Anglicans and familiar with *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549), a pastoral resource of traditions for worship, prayer, and sacramental rites. Lewis and Clark likely packed this ministerial resource, a new edition of which was published in 1800, for several reasons:

1. It was a popular prayer and sacrament book in their era, used not only by the Anglican Church but also by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Lutherans.
2. Lewis and Clark were Anglicans (Church of England/Episcopal) and familiar with this ecclesiastical resource.
3. The Virginian Lewis had many opportunities to secure such a resource from a local Anglican clergy member.
4. Jefferson and Lewis planned out every detail and anticipated every situation. Indeed, a funeral service would have been a likely occurrence during such a



Noah Webster, 1833, by James Herring, National Portrait Gallery. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

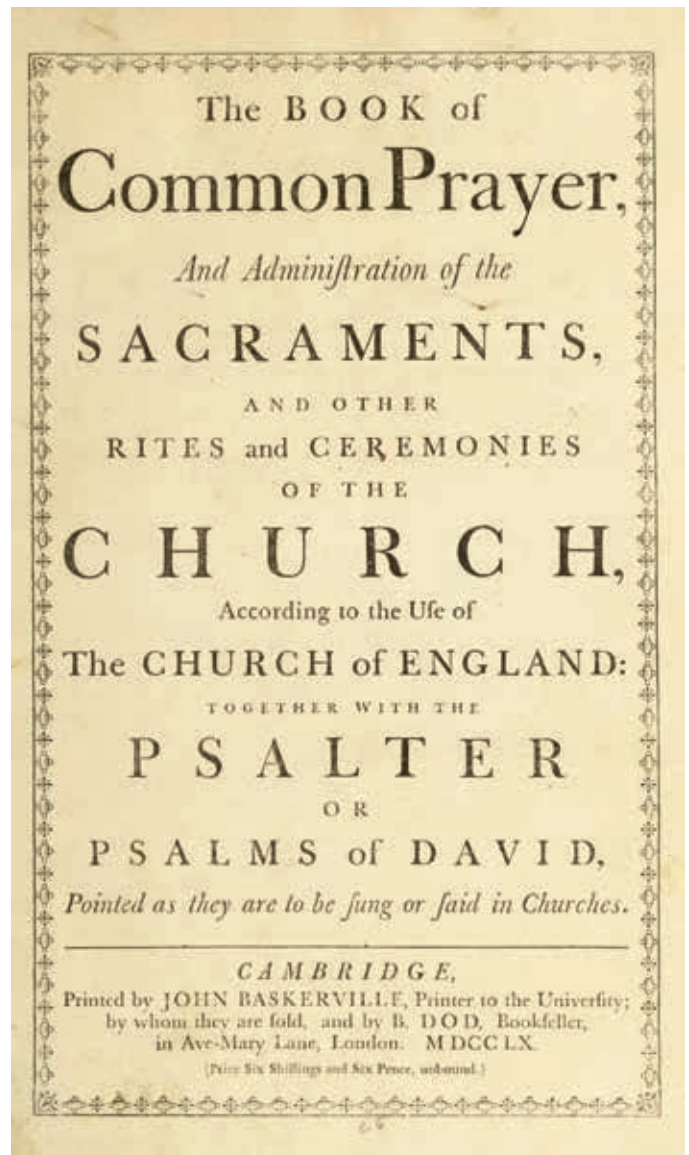
perilous expedition. *The Book of Common Prayer* included a complete funeral service.

5. Clark wrote, “Capt Lewis read the funeral Service over him.” Ordway wrote that Floyd was interred in an honorable, customary ceremony.³⁵ From these descriptions, it seems Lewis “performed” Floyd’s funeral, likely using a printed, premeditated ceremony from a source work.
6. It’s reasonable that they packed other useful yet unofficially listed literature for camp life, history, poetry, food recipes, and commentaries.
7. In 1800, *The Book of Common Prayer* was the official liturgical service book for the Church of England, central to Anglican worship and practices.

Could the American party members have packed their Bibles? It’s possible. The Bible, after all, was the central text for the young nation’s identity, sovereignty, and liberty. Unlike today, the Bible was a central part of American life, from the home and schoolhouse to the courthouse and White House. “Public utility pleads most forcibly for the general distribution of the Holy Scriptures,” argued Founder James McHenry, “Without the Bible, in vain do we increase

penal laws and draw entrenchments around our institutions.”³⁶ Daniel Webster added, “The Bible is a book ... which teaches man his own individual responsibility, his own dignity, and his equality with his fellow man.”³⁷ “The moral principles and precepts found in the Scriptures,” Noah Webster stated, “ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws.”³⁸

The Bible also shaped how Americans understood their world for over a century, thanks to churches, with their bells and steeples, which served as community gathering places. The Bible was the primary text not just in the churches, but in America’s schoolrooms and families’ living rooms. This



Title page of *The Book of Common Prayer*, published in Cambridge, England, in 1760, containing the administration of the sacraments and other rites and ceremonies according to the Church of England. An edition was also published in 1800 which may have been from where, according to William Clark’s August 20, 1804, account of the burial of Sergeant Floyd, “Capt Lewis read the funeral Service over him.”

was critical to perpetuating the American ideal. Dr. Benjamin Rush concluded, “The only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government is the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible.”³⁹

In Lewis and Clark’s day, many American families owned the popular *Aitken Bible* (the “Bible of the Revolution”).⁴⁰ However, the corpsmen likely carried a miniature King James Version “pocket Bible” – perhaps similar to their fathers’ war edition – which was reputed to save and transform soldiers’ lives.⁴¹ Sergeant Francis Merrifield barely survived the Battle of Bunker Hill. Still, he testified to God, writing inside his pocket Bible on June 17, 1775: “I desire to bless God for his Kind [appearance] in delivering me and sparing my life ... on Bunker’s Hill. I desire to devote this spared life to his Glory and honour.”⁴²

In America’s more secularized culture, these statements seem antiquated, irrelevant, and strange. However, to understand the Lewis and Clark story fully, we must begin with the proper context. Otherwise, our interpretations, conjectures, and speculations will be askew. Yes, the journals are silent on whether the Americans carried Bibles, but that silence should be interpreted within the cultural (Christian) context of 1800, not the more secular environment of 2025.

Therefore, we believe it is safe to consider that several, perhaps the majority, of the Americans had a Bible in their possession.

Petitions and Prayers

Prayer was common in early America. State governors and U.S. presidents routinely designated “thanksgiving, humiliation, prayer, and fasting” days.⁴³ Therefore, we should expect prayer during the Expedition experience. Fortunately, several instances were recorded. Joseph Whitehouse wrote of a Christmas blessing at Fort Clatsop in 1805:

We had no ardent spirit of any kind among us; but are mostly in good health, A blessing, which we esteem more, than all the luxuries this life can afford, and the party are all thankful to the Supreme Being, for his goodness towards us.— hoping he will preserve us in the same, & enable us to return to the United States again in safety.⁴⁴

Another example is Hugh McNeal’s joyful exclamation on the Continental Divide, when Lewis marked the Missouri River fountainhead (August 12, 1805). The captain noted how McNeal exultantly straddled an alpine brook



Near Miss by Michael Haynes. On April 13, 1805, Lewis recounted a “sudden squall” that turned the pirogue so much on its side as “near oversetting” it. The Corps encountered the threat of capsizing not infrequently which often required all hands on deck. Courtesy Michael Haynes Art.

and “thanked his god” he lived long enough to “bestride the mighty ... [and] ... endless Missouri.”⁴⁵

A year later, Patrick Gass documented his gratitude to God for reuniting the entire Corps (which had separated on July 3 to explore the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers): “and now, (thanks to God) we are all together again in good health.”⁴⁶ Lewis was likely just as grateful, given he had escaped two near-death-dealing musket balls in two weeks.⁴⁷

And then there’s Toussaint Charbonneau’s prayerful “cry” for God’s assistance. On May 14, 1805, Charbonneau was piloting the white pirogue when a wind gust flipped the vessel, spilling precious cargo (journals, medical equipment and medicines, personal gifts, and several people) into the Missouri River. With six men battling a grizzly downstream and Lewis and Clark detained on the opposite shore, Charbonneau, who couldn’t swim, panicked to paralysis. Lewis observed his interpreter hopelessly “crying to his god for mercy.”⁴⁸



Misfire! by Steve Ludeman. When Captain Lewis and his crew landed on Brunot's Island on August 31, 1803, the residents asked him to demonstrate his new experimental air gun. He fired at a target seven times, with good accuracy. Then Blaze Cenas asked to see Lewis' rifle. While holding the gun, Mr. Cenas accidentally discharged it. Courtesy Steve Ludeman Fine Art.



Close Call by Steve Ludeman. Forty yards away, the rifle ball inadvertently activated by Mr. Cenas grazed a woman's temple, knocking her hat off. She fell immediately, unconscious. The wound proved to be only superficial, and she revived quickly. Courtesy Steve Ludeman Fine Art.

Crying for mercy? To his God? Back then, as now, the reasons someone seeks God's mercy are few and select – but, first and foremost, salvation and deliverance from illness, danger, oppression, sin, or death. We cry for mercy to seek absolution, release, and liberty. We hunger for mercy when we're suffering, desperate, needing solace, or comfort.

Charbonneau is drowning (he believes), deadly afraid of water. Lewis called him "timid," meaning nervous, fearful, or anxious. He's unable to handle the pirogue during the "violent" gale. Even Lewis noted that had the pirogue sunk, Charbonneau and the other two men would've drowned. Charbonneau's "cry for mercy" is one of the clearest prayers in the journals.

But it's not the only time death came knocking for the Lewis and Clark party.

A series of events in late May and June 1805 – while they were portaging the Great Falls – may have been the deadliest part of all. The death march started around midnight on May 28, when a wild bison bull ran through camp, almost trampling several sleeping men. Lewis and Windsor almost died falling off a cliff on the Marias River (June 7). Meanwhile, Sacagawea was sick and near death from a mysterious illness. Then she, her baby, Charbonneau, and Clark almost drowned in a flash flood (June 29). That same day, the men portaging their supplies were caught naked in a violent hailstorm that "bruised and bloodied" them. Lewis somehow escaped a pursuing grizzly. Add the prickly pear cacti,

rattlesnakes, and grizzlies that roamed their Upper Portage camp, and it was a scary month.

In Lewis and Clark's day, Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity, was common, accepted, and promoted. And it's that socio-religious lens that makes it *easier to believe* they had Bibles in the backpacks, prayers on their lips, and a desire to gather whenever possible for a Sunday hymn or message.

Three Miracles on the Trail?

Many historians consider it miraculous that the Corps of Discovery completed their mission to the Pacific and back with only one Corps casualty. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a "miracle" as "an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs."⁴⁹ A miracle exists beyond natural law and has no reasonable explanation. Miracles are supernatural and unexplainable. Surprisingly, the word "miracle" is used once in the journals. As the Corps entered the Bitterroots, the hunters returned with a few grouse and squirrels, insufficient for their large group. The party was living off their portable soup and slowly eating their three colts. On September 14, 1805, Sergeant Gass wrote that "without a miracle," it would be "impossible" for everyone to be sufficiently fed.⁵⁰ Unlike today, Gass probably used the word "miracle" deliberately. He knew that, without divine intervention to provide food, their prospects were slim and grim. God was their last hope.



Sulfur Spring. In June 1805, Sacagawea became “extremely ill.” Lewis sent a canoe across the river from their Lower Portage Camp “to procure the water of the Sulphur spring, the virtues of which I now resolved to try on the Indian woman. I caused her to drink the mineral water altogether.” Her condition improved the next day. Today, you can still visit this Sulphur Spring via a 3.6-mile (round trip) trail with viewpoints and interpretive signs. The trail, located 17 miles from Great Falls, Montana, is for hikers only; no bicycles allowed. Trail Map: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3795289.pdf. Courtesy of Clay Jenkinson and lewisandclark.travel.

Air Gun Resurrection?

A rather strange (some might say “miraculous”) incident occurred outside Pittsburgh on August 31, 1803, just as Lewis was beginning his descent of the Ohio River. Lewis stopped at Brunot’s Island to meet his old friend Felix Brunot. News spread that he had a high-tech air gun, likely a .46 caliber Girandoni.⁵¹ Several curious onlookers urged Lewis to exhibit it, and the captain didn’t disappoint, nailing his target at 55 yards seven times.

Then a man named Blaze Cenas asked to shoot the powderless, multi-ball wonder weapon. That’s when things took a dangerous turn. Cenas mishandled the weapon, “accidentally” striking a woman 40 yards away in the head. She “fell instantly ... blood gushing from her temple.” Everyone, including Lewis, who had trained in field medicine, “supposed she was dead.” No one rendered aid. The woman was presumed deceased. Until she wasn’t. According to Lewis, the woman “revived” after “a minute,” to everyone’s surprise. Lewis and Cenas felt an “inexpressible satisfaction” at this

unexpected recovery. After careful inspection, Lewis concluded her “wound” wasn’t “dangerous.”⁵² And that’s it.

Three facts leave a tall tale begging for explanation. The woman was shot at 40 yards with a .46 caliber ball (the size of a medium marble), well within lethal range. The lead ball “cut” into her temple deep enough for blood to “gush” (which is considered a serious medical emergency). The ball struck with enough force to knock her unconscious for over a minute. She showed *no evidence of life*. Presumed dead. Then she wakes and walks away.

How does a lifeless, supposedly dead person suddenly come back to life without any medical treatment? How does a gushing (and pooling) head wound heal so quickly? Why does Lewis provide aid only after she “recovers?” It’s irrational and unexplainable. And it borders on the miraculous.

Sacagawea’s Healing Water

In mid-June 1805, Sacagawea hovered near death from an unknown illness. While Lewis scouted on foot for the

falls, Clark led the canoe group up the Missouri. Sacagawea became sick on June 10, but after days of treatment, her condition deteriorated to the point of “dangerous” on June 15.⁵³ The next day, Sacagawea refused food and medicine. Her husband, Charbonneau, petitioned for a return to Fort Mandan. Clark was out of ideas. His bleedings and barks, even the opium, failed to help Sacagawea.

On June 16, Lewis produced his solution: sulfur water. While returning downriver, he discovered a natural spring “strongly impregnated with sulfur.”⁵⁴ The captain found Sacagawea barely alive, with a faint pulse, fever, and twitching. He medicated her with mineral water, which she drank. After more rest and sulfur water, Sacagawea revived and was pain-free by evening, the fever and twitching gone. This sulfur water seemingly proved key to Sacagawea’s recovery.

Although the specifics of her illness remain uncertain, some doctors believe Sacagawea suffered from a severe urinary tract infection.⁵⁵ Their argument is that Clark’s “bleedings” further weakened and dehydrated Sacagawea. At the same time, Lewis’ mineral water hydrated her and may have served as a liquid sulfa drug, combating bacteria in her body. Sacagawea improved significantly within hours.⁵⁶ The next day, she ate “heartily,” convincing Lewis “that there is every rational hope of her recovery.”⁵⁷

So where’s the possible miracle? Was it the water’s sulfuric composition? That remains debatable. However, what’s miraculous (or very lucky) is that Clark’s party camped directly across from the only sulfur springs (of two) in Montana, and “Sacagawea’s Springs” is the only spring near the Missouri. It may also be coincidental that the first application of the sulfur water happened on a Sunday. Is it possible that Sacagawea’s devout French Catholic husband, Charbonneau, was praying for her? Might we speculate that the men, some, most, or all, held a prayer vigil for her?

Prayer was a popular and prominent part of the Second Great Awakening.

A “Mysterious” Moment

A final incident was Lewis’ brush with death a few days earlier (June 14). In the late afternoon, Lewis shot a bull bison on the plain near the Sun River and waited for death to come. But he wasn’t alone. A large grizzly sneaked within 20 yards of the captain. Lewis had forgotten to reload his gun. And his options were limited. Run. Climb. Fight. Lewis chose to outrun “this monster” to the river. When Lewis flinched, the grizzly charged, and the chase began.

Despite a head start, the bear should’ve easily caught Lewis within 20 yards. Grizzlies can run 35 miles per hour. A fast human might do 22 mph. And yet, Lewis outran that grizzly for 80 yards – fully geared! When he reached the Sun River, Lewis leaped into its waist-deep water, turned to defend and fight. But what happened next confounded the captain. He wrote later it “still remains with me misterious and unaccountable.”⁵⁸ The grizzly ferociously charged into the river, stopped suddenly, turned, and sprinted up the bank, out of sight. When Lewis spied him again, he was still running several miles away!

What could possibly have turned a grizzly 20 yards from attack, forcing it to flee away at full speed for several miles? It was a mystery. Lewis noted it was highly unusual.⁵⁹ Had it seen a ghost? Maybe Lewis had guardian angels on both shoulders.⁶⁰ Certainly, something spooked that grizzly, sending it scampering back across the plains. Lewis was stumped. Rather than doomed to be a grizzly’s lunch, he walked away.

Mysterious. Unaccountable. A miracle run?

A year later, Lewis was back at the great falls. This time Hugh McNeal had somehow escaped a grizzly attack, but the captain chose to give “higher” credit:

...these bears are a most tremendous animal; it seems that the hand of providence has been most wonderfully in our favor with respect to them, or some of us would long since have fallen a sacrifice to their ferocity. there seems to be a certain fatality attached to the neighborhood of these falls, for there is always a chapter of accidents prepared for us during our residence at them.⁶¹

Maybe Lewis has seen the light. You can only be “lucky” or “fortunate” for so long. Sometimes, you need God’s favor, protection, and provision, especially at the great falls. And sometimes a miracle or two help, as well.

A Matter of Faith

After the Expedition, many others ventured into the American West. But these mountain men, fur trappers, and emigrant wagon trains found a more difficult path. John Jacob Astor’s 1810 trek to establish a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River produced a loss of over 60 men.⁶² From the 1840s to the 1880s, approximately 250,000 emigrants traveled along the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails.⁶³ One in ten (20,000 to 30,000) pioneers did not survive the journey west, facing many of the same challenges as the Corps of Discovery.



Lewis described his encounter with the grizzly on June 14, 1805: "I ran about 80 yards and found he gained on me fast...the idea struk me to get into the water to such debth...that I could in that situation defend myself with my espontoon; accordingly I ran haistily into the water about waist deep, and faced about and presented the point of my espontoon, at this instant he arrived at the edge of the water within about 20 feet of me; the moment I put myself in this attitude of defence he sudonly wheeled about as if frightened...and retreated with quite as great precipitation as he had just before pursued me." Courtesy Michael Haynes Art.

We are confident the Corps' success can also be traced to Jefferson's decision to leave as little as possible to chance. He directed Lewis to be mentored by the best brains in their fields, placed the project with the military, defined a clear mission, condoned its shared leadership, participated in the advanced planning, allowed the captains to seek out a diversity of personnel and skills, gave time for initial shake-out training, authorized budgets for the best equipment and supplies, including health care, available at the time, and stressed teamwork.

The captains subsequently weeded out the unfit and built their team around respect for each individual's talents as well as accountability for mistakes. Safety and security followed Army guidelines. The captains set a tone of open-mindedness and, when appropriate, elicited the Corps members' opinions to maintain cohesiveness and morale.

William Clark's words at Fincastle signal who deserved

credit for the Corps of Discovery's success. While modern skepticism may question the red-headed captain from Kentucky, perhaps we should not dismiss his attribution so casually. Clark claimed the Corps of Discovery succeeded by the "singular interposition of Providence" – an interesting phrase found in the works and speeches of many Founders, including John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, and George Washington. Literally, it means God intervened to protect and provide for us alone.

God provided varieties of food, so no one in the Corps of Discovery starved. He protected them from rattlesnake bites, grizzly bear attacks, and bison charges. God rescued them from flash floods, hailstorms, violent winds, prairie fires, and bitter cold. He led them to healing mineral water, relaxing hot springs, and the Pacific Ocean. God provided helpful Native guides like Sacagawea, Toby, and Twisted Hair. He brought them affordable blubber, dogs, and salmon to eat.

In Lewis' case, God turned bullets, spooked grizzlies, and solidified crumbling cliffs to give him another lease on life.

Lewis and Clark believed God's hand was upon their venture. To them, and many others, it remains the only rational explanation for how they did it. It's a matter of faith.

Believe it – or not. ■

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Notes

1. Lewis wrote on September 18, 1805: “we dined & suped on a **skant proportion of portable soupe**, a few canesters of which, a little **bears oil** and about **20 lbs. of candles** form our stock of provision...” Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, et al., May 11, 1805 entry in Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press / University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries-Electronic Text Center, 2005, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-09-18#lc.jrn.1805-09-18.01>). Two days later, John Ordway used the word “starving” to describe their condition: “a cold frosty morning we found a handful or 2 of Indian peas and a little bears oil which we brought with us we finished the last morcil of it and proceeded on half Starved and very weak.” Ordway, September 20, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-09-20#lc.jrn.1805-09-20.04>.
2. Robert R. Hunt, “Luck or Providence: Narrow Escapes of the Lewis and Clark Expedition,” *We Proceeded On* 25:3 (August 1999): 6.
3. Hunt noted six privates escaped accidental injury during the Expedition: Goodrich, Howard, Labiche, LaPage, Shields and Werner. Hunt, “Luck or Providence,” 6.
4. Clark to the Citizens of Fincastle, January 8, 1807, Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1806*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 359-60.
5. Lewis, May 11, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-11#lc.jrn.1805-05-11.01>.
6. Lewis, July 15, 1806, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-07-15#lc.jrn.1806-07-15.02>.
7. E.G. Chuinard, M.D., *Only One Man Died: The Medical Aspects of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1998), 25. Chuinard cautioned Lewis and Clark historians not to “discredit Clark’s great and humble declaration” that the captain felt God had provided for and protected them.
8. Olin D. Wheeler, *The Trail of Lewis and Clark, 1804-1904*, 2 vols. (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1926), 1:46. As quoted in Hunt, “Luck or Providence,” WPO, 6.
9. William E. Foley, *Wilderness Journey: The Life of William Clark* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 256.

10. The First Charter of Virginia (April 10, 1606) stated Indian evangelism as a primary purpose for the colony: “propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government...” The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/va01.asp.

11. The Charter of Carolina (1663) notes the spread of the Church of England as a purpose: “which as Christian religion shall increase within the country, isles, islets and limits aforesaid, shall happen hereafter to be erected, together with license and power to build and found churches, chappels and oratories, in convenient and fit places...” The Avalon Project: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/nc01.asp.

12. “Constitution of Pennsylvania – September 28, 1776,” The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pa08.asp.

13. 194th Court of Massachusetts: Massachusetts Constitution, Article III: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/Constitution>.

14. “Constitution of Maryland – November 11, 1776,” The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/ma02.asp.

15. Until the 1900s, churches often buried members in their own cemeteries, linking the deceased to their religious affiliations. John Shields died December 1809 and was buried in “Little Flock Baptist Burying Grounds” near Corydon, Indiana. John Colter died around November 22, 1813, near Dundee, Missouri. Colter’s tombstone, which no longer exists, was originally at the Fee Fee Baptist Church. Charles Clarke, *The Men of the Lewis & Clark Expedition* (1970; reprint Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2002), 46-48, 53-54.

16. James H. Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1998): 24.

17. George Bancroft, *History of the United States, From the Discovery of the American Continent*, 19th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1866), 492.

18. Meriwether Lewis’ mother, Lucy, was an early convert to Methodism which emphasized a radical “new birth” and holiness. This required rejecting harmful influences like alcohol, dancing, and Freemasonry. Lucy’s conversion conflicted with her son’s lifestyle, likely leading her to reject his suicide as a sin with eternal consequences.

19. Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, Anthony L. Dunnivant, D. Newell Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 165-66.

20. Ironically, during the Second Great Awakening, revival did not come to America’s Episcopalian (Anglican) churches. James Madison wrote how Episcopalian churches “have in many instances gone to ruin, or are in a very dilapidated state, owing chiefly to desertion of the flocks to other worships.” Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*, 24.

21. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (New York: George Adlard Publishing, 1839), 307.

22. Clark, May 20, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-05-20#lc.jrn.1804-05-20.02>.

23. Whitehouse, May 20, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-05-20#lc.jrn.1804-05-20.06>.

24. Psalm 46:1, *The Artsroll Thilim* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1988).

25. John Quincy Adams, *An Oration Delivered Before the Inhabitants of the Town of Newburyport at Their Request on the Sixty-First Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1837* (Newburyport, MA: Charles Whipple, 1837), 5-6.

26. Charles Francis Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams During the Revolution* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876), 193-94. Adams signed the Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776, along with most of the other delegates to the Continental Congress.

27. Adams, *Familiar Letters of John Adams*, 193-94.

28. Ordway, December 25, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-12-25#lc.jrn.1804-12-25.02>.

29. In reference to the Clatsop Indians, Clark penned on January 24, 1806: “our air gun also astonishes them very much, they Cannot Comprehend its Shooting So often and without powder; and think that it is great medison which Comprehends every thing that is to them incomprehensible.” On October 28, 1804, Clark mentioned how their barge and York, his black servant, were considered “big medicine.” Now he adds the air gun, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-01-24#lc.jrn.1806-01-24.02>.

30. Lewis, May 2, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-02#lc.jrn.1805-05-02.01>. Note Lewis italicizes “big medicine” and “great sperit” to distinguish them.

31. Gass, December 25, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/jrn.1804-12-25#lc.jrn.1804-12-25.03>.

32. Joe Lewis Mussulman, "Holidays on the Trail," www.lewis-clark.org/other/holidays-on-the-trail/ or visit "The Hymns and Carols of Christmas," https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/HTML/index_of_carols_c.htm.

33. Clark, December 25, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/jrn.1804-12-25#lc.jrn.1804-12-25.01>.

34. From a footnote to "Sgt. Floyd's Burial: An Artist's Interpretation" by Michael Haynes. Discover Lewis & Clark, Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance, <https://lewis-clark.org/arts/visual-art/sgt-floyds-burial/>.

35. Clark, August 20, 1804, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-08-20>.

36. Bernard C. Steiner, *One Hundred and Ten Years of Bible Society Work in Maryland, 1810-1920* (Baltimore?: Maryland Bible Society, 1921), 14.

37. Daniel Webster, *Address Delivered at Bunker Hill, June 17, 1843, on the Completion of the Monument* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1843), 31.

38. Noah Webster, "Advice to the Young," *History of the United States* (New Haven: Durrie and Peck, 1832), 339.

39. Benjamin Rush, "A Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," *Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas & Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 112.

40. The *Aitken Bible* was the first full-sized, complete (Old and New Testament) English Bible published in America by Robert Aitken (1782). Authorized by the U.S. Congress to solve a Bible shortage owing to a British embargo on books, less than 40 copies remain, making it among the world's rarest books. Even with its larger size and weight, there's evidence some Revolutionary War soldiers carried the *Aitken Bible*.

41. Oliver Cromwell first issued a 16-page, 150-verse abridgment of the Geneva Bible to his soldiers in 1643, known as *The Souldiers Pocket Bible*. According to Puritan Richard Baxter, one of Cromwell's men was saved when a bullet lodged in the pamphlet. Cromwell claimed his army never lost a battle after his men carried it. By the Revolutionary War, pocket-sized New Testaments and Psalms were common. James Waylen, *The House of Cromwell and the Story of Dunkirk* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880), 300.

42. Merrifield's pocket Bible was published in Edinburgh by Adrian Watkins (1755) and imported to America. "Treasures of the Caren Archive II," Bonham's Auctions: https://www.bonhams.com/auction/23256/lot/60/the-bunker-hill-bible-of-francis-merrifield-the-holy-bible-edinburgh-printed-by-adrian-watkins-1755?utm_source=chatgpt.com. From press release (June 2, 2016): "*Rare Inscribed Bible Carried at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775*" by the Museum of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/press-releases/rare-inscribed-bible-carried-at-the-battle-of-bunker-hill-in-1775-acquired-by-museum-of-the-american-revolution>.

43. From the beginning, early America featured regular days where the entire community, colony, state, or nation was invited to become humble, pray, fast, seek forgiveness, and express gratitude to God. In 1668, the Virginia House of Burgesses appointed August 27 as a "Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer, to implore God's mercy: if any person be found upon that day gaming, drinking, or working, works of necessity excepted,...shall be fined." Thomas Jefferson, as Virginia governor, proclaimed November 11, 1770, as "a day of public and solemn Thanksgiving to Almighty God...[to] spread the light of Christian knowledge through the remotest corners of the earth." "Proclamation Appointing a Day of Thanksgiving and Prayer, 11 November 1779," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-03-02-0187>.

44. Whitehouse, December 25, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-12-25#lc.jrn.1805-12-25.05>.

45. Lewis, August 12, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.mult.1805-08-12kloefkorn>.

46. Gass: August 12, 1806, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-08-12#lc.jrn.1806-08-12.04>.

47. On July 27, 1806, Meriwether Lewis, George Drouillard, and Joseph and Reubin Field got into a fight with eight Blackfeet warriors, and Lewis was nearly shot in the head ("...he overshot me, being bearheaded I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly"). Lewis: July 27, 1806: <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-07-27>. And then, on August 11, Lewis was shot in the buttocks by Pierre Cruzatte who mistakenly thought he was an elk. It was a painful wound that put Lewis out of commission for a month. <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-08-11>.

48. Lewis, May 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-14#lc.jrn.1805-05-14.01>.

49. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: "Miracle," accessed July 30, 2024: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/miracle>.

50. Gass, September 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-09-14#lc.jrn.1805-09-14.04>.

51. The Girandoni air rifle was likely a .46 caliber. However, a .51 caliber gun was also produced. Airgun Depot, "History of Girandoni Air Rifle," June 4, 2021, <https://www.airgundepot.com/vault/articles/girandoni-air-rifle/>.

52. Lewis, August 30, 1803, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1803-08-30#ln01083006>.

53. Clark, June 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-06-14#lc.jrn.1805-06-14.02>.

54. Lewis, June 16, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-06-16#lc.jrn.1805-06-16.01>.

55. Western historian Elizabeth Alexander and her husband, James Alexander, MD, FACS, reject the pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) diagnosis (caused by venereal disease) for three reasons: PID responds slowly to therapy (Sacagawea healed rapidly), doesn't respond to oral hydration therapy alone (Sacagawea only responded to oral hydration), and is recurring and chronic (no further evidence of PID by Sacagawea). Her pelvic and genital pain also rules out any viral illness. Dr. Alexander claims the best explanation is a severe urinary tract infection (UTI), common in young, healthy women who have recently given birth. Dr. James E. Alexander, Jr. and Dr. Elizabeth Alexander, "*The Indian woman Verry bad*": *Sacagawea's Illness at the Great Falls of the Missouri*" (unpublished manuscript in possession of author, Conference on Medicine and Health in the Era of Lewis and Clark, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 10-12, 2004): 10-13.

56. Dr. James Alexander wrote "*oral hydration...as well as the potential bacteriostatic agent in the sulfur water; can clear the infection very rapidly. The cleansing effect of simply washing out the bladder by drinking a lot of fluids might have been enough to clear the bacteria. But combined with sulfur chemicals, the water would stop the growth of the bacteria or even kill the bacteria that were causing the infection. And the effect of this treatment could be very rapid, especially in the case of a young, otherwise healthy person.*" Private email exchange between Elizabeth Alexander and Rick Chromey, March 13, 2025.

57. Lewis, June 17, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-06-17>.

58. Lewis, June 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-06-14#lc.jrn.1805-06-14.01>.

59. A comparative example is the grizzly that six "good hunters" – including George Drouillard – shot full of lead on May 14, 1805. Despite being shot through the lung with a broken shoulder, this grizzly chased all six hunters in various directions, including two unlucky corpsmen into the river. He nearly caught one of the men before someone on shore shot him in the head. In contrast, Lewis' grizzly wasn't injured, but on the prowl for food. Waist-deep water and an espontoon were no match. Lewis, May 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-14>.

60. The tale of Lewis and the grizzly mirrors the Old Testament story of Baalam (Numbers 22:21-35) who beat his donkey to move. Then God revealed an angel was blocking their path (a Divine intervention). Similarly, Lewis found it inexplicable that the grizzly chased him, then suddenly halted, and ran away for miles "as if he expected pursuit." Lewis, May 14, 1805, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-14>.

61. Lewis, July 15, 1806, <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-07-15#lc.jrn.1806-07-15.02>.

62. Larry Morris, "The Astor Expedition (1810-1813)," *Oregon Encyclopedia* (The Oregon Historical Society). Accessed February 28, 2025, [https://www.oregonency](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/astor_expedition_1810_1812/)

Meriwether Lewis. 1805.

Who was
**Meriwether
Lewis?**

Not Manic, Not an Alcoholic

By Robert Bartsch

420.

There is an amazing array of opinions about the life and especially the death of Meriwether Lewis. Authors are split concerning whether his death was by murder, suicide, or some combination of suicide and accidental death for the relief of pain. Suggesting murder, I have in my notes the following authors: Guice,¹ Dillon,² Stroud,³ Chuinard,⁴ Fisher,⁵ Gale,⁶ Coues,⁷ Chandler,⁸ and Turnbow.⁹ My notes show the authors leaning toward suicide are Ambrose,¹⁰ Danisi/Jackson,¹¹ Jenkinson,¹² Peck and Peck,¹³ and Potter.¹⁴ Anyone who's ever read about Lewis' death probably has his own opinion, which is just as valid as the ones above. There are so many unanswered questions that determining the definitive truth becomes elusive.

We have a dizzying body of literature on practically every imaginable aspect of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Shelves of books and many years of articles in *We Proceeded On*, other journals, and university theses are readily available. Interest in all things Lewis and Clark is almost a national avocation. I believe it's wonderful that so many people are captivated by the histories of these two men.

I am not a historian, but rather a retired veterinary pathologist with long-standing experience in outdoor adventures and the Lewis and Clark story. The books I grew up reading about Lewis and Clark often portrayed them as sort of ultimate Boy Scouts – true American heroes. These books centered on the Expedition phase of their lives and largely ignored their post-Expedition existence. Perhaps the speculations made in 1996 by Stephen Ambrose in *Undaunted Courage* became a tipping point, opening the floodgates on questions about who Lewis was. There seemed to be a need for authors to find little hints or degrading tidbits, innuendoes that may have suggested some quirk or defect in the captains. Lewis, particularly, often became something other than that Boy Scout. I feel they often over-interpret letters or journal entries, not as they were written, but by reading between the lines, as it were. Now Lewis became a hothead, mercurial¹⁵ or erratic, volatile, impulsive, self-absorbed, and reckless,¹⁶ a split personality, manic depressive and/or alcoholic.¹⁷ I've read other suggestions that Lewis may have had chronic mercury poisoning from calomel ingestion, although the inorganic form of mercury found in calomel is generally nephrotoxic, not neural. Dr. Reimert Ravenholt considered him as suffering from neurological signs of chronic syphilis.¹⁸ Others suggested he was a laudanum or tincture of opium

addict, and one even intimated that Lewis might have been homosexual.¹⁹ Thomas Slaughter²⁰ felt Lewis was a failure, knew it, and could not cope. Clay Jenkinson believed Lewis suffered a slow-moving mental breakdown during the latter part of the Expedition.²¹ David Nicandri argued that Lewis was a grandstander and actually failed Clark by not somehow obtaining Clark's promotion to captain.²² This, aside from the fact that during this period, President Jefferson was trying to shrink the size of the army by half, and Secretary of War Henry Dearborn wrote to Lewis explaining that a "peculiar situation and organization of the Corps of Engineers" prevented raising Clark to captain.²³ Next, we hear that Lewis was overwhelmed by his duties as Governor of Upper Louisiana, neglected his finances, and frittered away time in the eight months between leaving Philadelphia (late July 1807) and arriving in St. Louis (March 8, 1808).²⁴

Possibly the greatest of Jefferson's second term achievements was keeping the United States from war with England after they captured the *USS Chesapeake* (June 22, 1807) and killed or impressed some of our sailors. There was then a



Major-General Henry Dearborn (1812) by Gilbert Stewart, Art Institute of Chicago. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

At left, Meriwether Lewis, 1805 by Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin, engraving on paper, National Portrait Gallery. Wikimedia Commons.

national outcry for action against Britain. The president bought time while he built up our defenses. Certainly, the Louisiana Purchase and the Expedition to the Pacific must also rank very high in Jefferson's accomplishments. Thomas Jefferson and Lewis had been neighbors and knew each other well. Locust Hill was a few miles from Monticello, and later, as a teenager, Meriwether stayed with his uncle Nicholas Lewis, who was a next-door neighbor to Jefferson.²⁵

Not only did Jefferson know Lewis well, growing up nearby, but he also brought young Captain Lewis to live with him for two years as presidential secretary and groomed him to lead the Corps of Discovery. Could Meriwether Lewis possibly have had problematic traits mentioned above and have been chosen to carry out such an important mission by one of our most intelligent, thoughtful presidents? One must wonder: If Lewis had the personality traits accused by some, why would Jefferson have chosen him? Could such an impaired Lewis have succeeded in planning, supplying, and leading the Corps to and from the Pacific?

A while back, I planned, organized, and led three one-week float trips for our family of 14 members on the Yellowstone River. We floated downstream, not up, amounting to some 300 miles. The work I did to make these little floating and camping trips happen pales to nothing in comparison to what Lewis did. My planning and the responsibility felt during their execution were anything but easy. Lewis' were monumental. One must be in awe of the difficulties Lewis conquered for the successful two-way Pacific Expedition, all the while collecting hundreds of plant, animal, and mineral specimens.

Also, one must acknowledge William Clark's role as co-captain of the Expedition. I suspect they would have had a less successful tour had Clark not been there to help with his know-how, make informed decisions, provide guidance, and maybe even a shoulder to cry on at times. Lewis gave Clark a great deal of credit for their success as exemplified by his speech in Charlottesville on December 15, 1806,²⁶ and in his discussions with Secretary of War Dearborn during which he insisted that Clark be given the same compensation as he would receive.

Both co-captains were fast-acting, decisive leaders, seasoned army officers. But, forget not, Lewis was the president's chosen man. As such, I'm sure he must have felt it his responsibility to take the reins at various inflection points. The story of when they finally made contact with the Shoshones on August 12, 1805, may have been one of those times.



Mahlon Dickerson, 1802, by Charles Balthazar Julien Févret de Saint-Mémin, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

As documented in Gary E. Moulton's *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, they struggled up a fast-flowing part of the Missouri, Lewis with the canoes and Clark walking ahead with John Potts, Joseph Field, and York searching for and following Indian trails, hoping to find the Shoshones. Clark continued to walk daily from July 18 until they reached the Three Forks on July 27. Clark's feet, as well as those of the other three men, took a terrible beating from the ubiquitous prickly pear cactus along the trail. On one night alone, Clark dug out 17 thorns from his feet by firelight. On July 26, Clark developed an illness, which they successfully treated with Peruvian bark extract. They rested for a few days, and Lewis determined on August 1 to continue up the Jefferson River with George Drouillard, Toussaint Charbonneau, and Sergeant Patrick Gass until he found the Shoshones. Lewis may have made that decision to go ahead on foot since Clark had been beaten up so badly and became ill (ague?). Lewis rightly was highly concerned about finding Sacagawea's tribe to obtain horses in time to traverse the Bitterroots before being snowed in. This was a major tipping point, could have led to the Expedition's doom. Again, Nicandri, in his *We Proceeded On* article, makes Lewis out to steal the honors from Clark. It seems more likely his actions were those of an effective leader. I wonder what odds Las Vegas would have given

them to float, walk, and ride those 3,000-odd miles of wilderness filled with daunting obstacles successfully.

Was Lewis an Alcoholic?

I'd like to discuss one other issue: the question of whether Lewis was an alcoholic. When Lewis and Clark first returned from the West, they were feted with many dinners and tributes where alcohol was surely flowing freely. They were national heroes, honored from St. Louis to Washington City and stopping points between. Those dinners and toasts afforded plenty of opportunity for excessive drinking. As guests of honor, wouldn't it have been incumbent upon them to at least maintain a modicum of sobriety? They might even have been expected to say a few words after dinner to their hosts. How can we really know? I haven't seen any of the newspaper accounts of those dinners that stated either of the captains was intoxicated.

Mahlon Dickerson (1770-1853) was a Lewis friend and important companion in Philadelphia. During the summer of 1807, when Lewis was in Philadelphia visiting naturalists and other scientific men, distributing his botanical specimens, and organizing the publication of the journals, they spent some (we don't know how many) evenings together talking and walking around the then one square mile that was the city of Philadelphia. Ambrose calls Dickerson a "Philadelphia playboy" and states, "he [Lewis] was doing a

lot of heavy drinking"²⁷ during this time. However, when you check Lewis' account book, he recorded buying "a dozen of Ale" on April 20 and on May 5 "1 dozens of ale." Then again, on May 21, another purchase: "sent sum for a doz of ale, went pd for 2 doz, \$3."²⁸ If these were the total of his alcohol purchases, and we can't be sure, it does not seem to be excessive, considering that he spent roughly four months in Philadelphia that year.

There's another alcohol notation on February 17, 1808, when Lewis was en route to St. Louis: "Louisville—pd. John Clark \$20.67—a case of wine for Wm Clark."²⁹ It sounds to me like that case of wine may have been for celebrating after the Clarks reached St. Louis later that June.

However, this is not all the purchased alcohol Meriwether Lewis recorded in his account book. On August 19, 1808, his account book records: "Then received of Nicholas Boilvin for Isac Miller for 2 barrals of whiskey of 33 gals each at 75 cts pr. gln. the above discharged by Genl Clark by way of order on John Clark his nephew, \$49.50."³⁰

On August 25, 1808, General Clark, with 80 mounted dragoons, left St. Louis for Fire Prairie, some 300 miles up the Missouri, to build Fort Osage and treat with the Osages. Barges carrying supplies to support these troops left by river.³¹

Another entry: "1808: Oct 28th ... then obtained from Genl. Clark his order for the amount on John Clark of Louisville Ky. which is to be paid to Issac Miller from Nicholas Boilvin for



O how horrible the spines. Prickly pear cacti Sp. Opuntia grow low to the ground at the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park, arrayed much as what Clark must have encountered on his walks. The cacti are hard to differentiate from the surrounding greenery, but the corpsmen knew when they had stepped on them. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Inail Whelan Esq
for Cap Lewis — Do. of David Jackson
30 Gallons Strong Sp. Wine @ 233 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ \$ 70.
6 Iron Bound Kegs — 1.20. 4.20
\$ 74.20

Duplicate, Received the above articles.
Meriwether Lewis
Capt 1st US Regt Infy.

For the good of the Corps. Lewis signed for the receipt of "Strong Sp. Wine" and 6 (?) kegs in Philadelphia on June 1, 1803, before starting down the Ohio from Pittsburgh in August 1803.

two barrels of whisky of 33 Gls each belonging to said Miller, \$49.50.³² John Clark was William Clark's nephew who ran a Louisville merchandising store, with whom William Clark was planning to partner and open a franchise in St. Louis. Nicholas Boilvin was a trusted sub-agent to the Sacs and Foxes who later became the agent after John Campbell was killed in a duel.

Was this whiskey purchase just a coincidence or timed to match a large group of Osage Indians that was coming to St. Louis late that October to negotiate and sign a treaty, finalized on November 10, 1808?³³ Clark wrote the Osage Treaty and had it signed while they were building Fort Osage earlier in the fall. However, several bands of Osages felt they were left out of the negotiations and refuted their legality. Lewis with Clark, back in St. Louis, rewrote the document, renegotiated with the Osages, and then did the final signing. Alcohol played a big role in Indian dealings in those days.³⁴ Could that explain the purchase of these two barrels?

In Lewis' receipt book: "June 15, 1809. Isaac Miller's account with me for 14 Barrels of whiskey which he sent to St. Louis for sale

Paid him through John Clark for 2 barrels of 33Gls. each—\$49.50

Paid by Genl. Clark to him for 4 Brls. by Boilvin—\$102
I owe hem for 5 bls —\$123.75

I have settled 3 bls with No. 14 Mr. Webster, \$79.12
1/2.³⁵

There is no conjecture as to what this alcohol was purchased for. In a long letter to his brother Jonathan dated November 22, 24, 1808, General Clark wrote: ". . . I think 4 Compy. will move this way before long if they do I Should wish a few goods Sent to their Camp, which draws in ready Cash, from a Store of not more than 10 or 1100 Dollars worth of Such articles as are Calculated for Solders, mostly Licquors, groceres & fancy articles. Those troops will most probably assend the missouri next Summer. . . ."³⁶ On February 24, 1809, Governor Lewis signed a contract with the St. Louis-based Missouri Fur Company to get Sheheke back to his Mandan village home. The contract called for 125 experienced riflemen

to accompany them, along with a small group of soldiers.³⁷ The first group left St. Charles on May 17. The second large group of barges departed St. Louis on June 17 for the Mandan villages.³⁸ Lewis even increased the size of the militia volunteers to 140.³⁹ There is little doubt that these 14 barrels of whiskey went up the Missouri in their fleet of 13 barges.

Finally, in Lewis's receipt book: "August 19, 1809. To Isaac Miller for which a note is left with Genl. Clark, \$202.87 1/2."⁴⁰ An IOU was found in the special collections of the University of Virginia Library, that reads:

"St. Louis August 22nd, 1809

I so acknowledge myself justly indebted to Isaac Miller the sum of two hundred and two dollars and eighty seven 1/2 cents for eight barrels of whiskey—\$202.87 1/2."

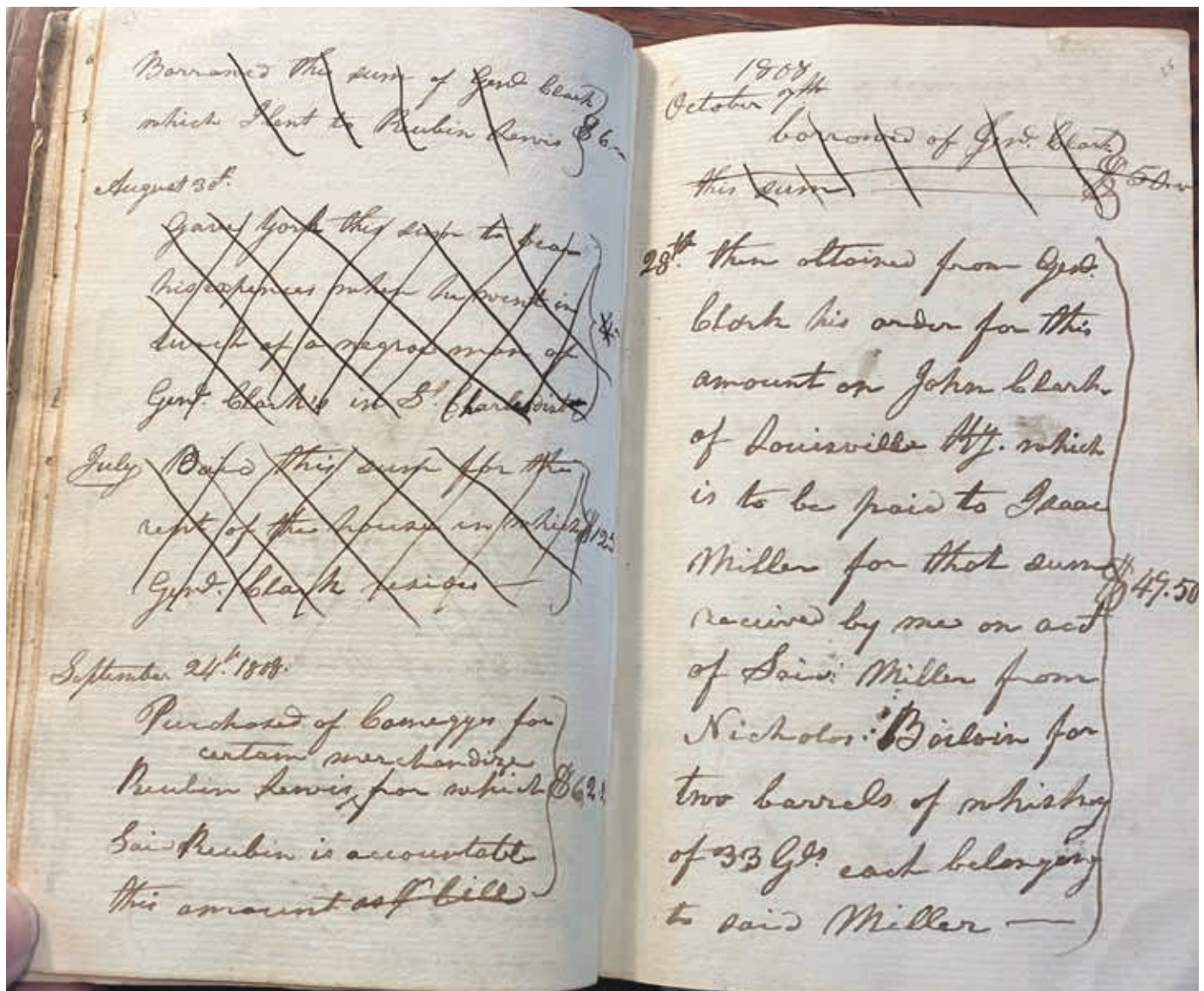
On Aug. 22, 1809, Nicholas Boilvin left St. Louis with 28 troops from Fort Belle Fontaine and traveled to the mouth of the Des Moines River on the Mississippi. Lewis' orders were for Boilvin to establish a cantonment at this location and quell a potential uprising both east and west of the river. Lewis believed that two of Frederick Bates' Indian agent hires were spies for the British and were responsible for both Sac and Fox

troubles north of St. Louis and to the west with the Ioways. William Clark was convinced that The Prophet, a Shawnee and brother of Tecumseh, was responsible for problems that developed east of the river.⁴¹

The combined purchases of whiskey amount to 26 barrels or 858 gallons. Surely this amount of alcohol was not purchased for Lewis' personal use. Negotiating with Native Americans in those days involved plying offering drink during and celebrating with drink after the treaty was signed.⁴² Soldiers back then were allotted 32 gills of whiskey per month. A gill is equal to 1/4 of a pint. A pint is 16 ounces; thus, a gill is four ounces of whiskey. The allotment for one day would cause a blood level of 0.10%, the legal limit for driving in most states today.⁴³ According to historian Robert Hunt, "Despite its risks, the obligation was an absolute necessity. No military commander of the eighteenth century would have thought of leading his troops without planning for this need."⁴⁴ Some conclude that this whiskey was bought for personal use as the accounting was in Lewis' receipt book.⁴⁵ However, there are also drafts in the book for "sundry expenditures in the indian department" (June 24, 1808) and "for supplies made to the Iaways and Saucs" (June 21, 1808), for example.⁴⁶ These are obvious expenses related to his duties as governor.

Both Lewis and Clark were responsible for providing liquor in their respective positions as Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs and General of the Militia. I believe these prodigious amounts of alcohol were purchased as part of their routine business of supplying liquor for troop movements and Indian dealings. That does not rule out that Lewis, and Clark for that matter, could have been heavy drinkers. With the soldiers' allotment back in their day, consuming even one gill of whiskey per day would likely earn a person the moniker of "heavy drinker" in today's world. A question that bothers me is this: Lewis had many enemies in St. Louis, and he also knew many important people in Washington and St. Louis. Yet, none of these ever intimated that Lewis was a drunk that I've read. Only in Jefferson's letter to Captain Gilbert Russell, April 18, 1810, lamenting Lewis' death, is there a comment that could be construed as indicating he had an alcohol problem: "... the habit into which he had fallen...." Why couldn't Jefferson have just come out with it if he meant to say Lewis was addicted to drink? Lewis had another "habit:" he habitually overthought things. Jefferson's reference to "habit" was to the hypochondria

Governor Lewis' Account Book for August 19, 1808, shows the purchase of 66 gallons of whiskey. Six days later General William Clark departed with 80 troops to build Fort Osage at Fire Prairie. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.



Governor Lewis' Account Book entry for October 28, 1808, documents purchase of two barrels of whiskey of 33 gallons each. In late October, a large contingent of Osages came to St. Louis to negotiate, sign, and celebrate William Clark's first treaty with Native Americans, signed November 10, 1808. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

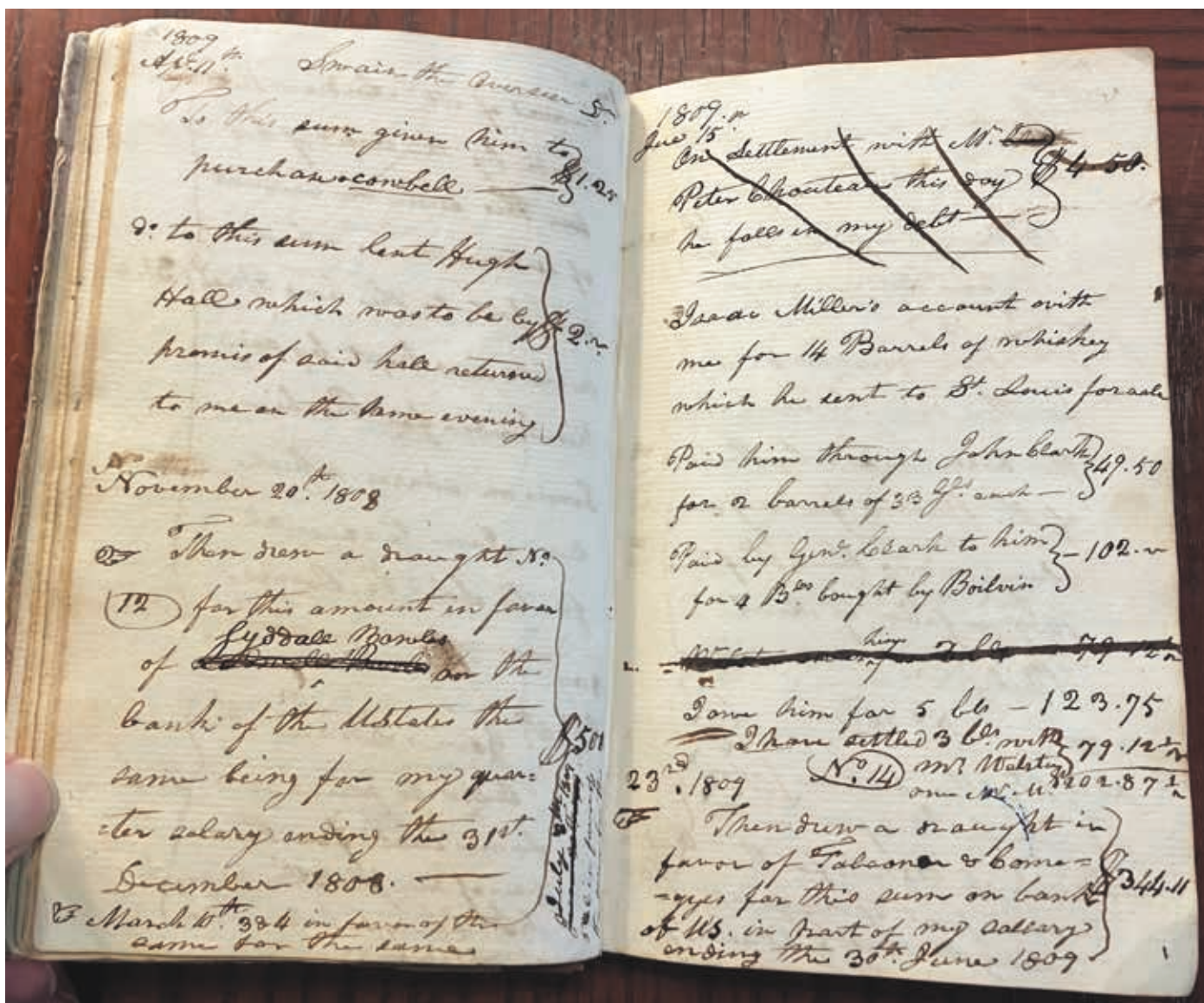
seen in the Lewis family and how the affliction may have led to painful reflections in a mind like his.⁴⁷ Might his introspection have been the “habit?”

So, who was Meriwether Lewis? Any of the above? After all is said and done, I choose none of the above. Was he flawed in some ways, like every human who ever drew breath? Sure! But, I choose to accept the journals and history of the two men, pre- and post-Expedition, at face value – not cherry-pick innuendos, or spend energy filling the spaces between lines. Also, acknowledgment of the 200-year-plus chasm lying between us is a necessity. That distance often renders interpretation, owing to their spelling or word usage, difficult at times.

I agree wholly with Trent Strickland: “Lewis did not suffer any mental instability, was a highly capable leader, a successful problem solver, made tough decisions, and in the end generously shared the glory of success with his men and co-captain.⁴⁸”

I wonder what odds Las Vegas would have given them to float, walk, and ride those 3,000-odd miles of wilderness filled with daunting obstacles successfully? ■

Robert Bartsch is a retired veterinary pathologist. He and his wife Marjorie split the year; winters in Scottsdale, Arizona, and summers on the Yellowstone Plateau in southeastern Idaho.



Governor Lewis' Account Book entry for June 15, 1809, records the purchase of 14 barrels of whiskey. Two days later a large contingent of 140 militia volunteers left St. Louis in keelboats and barges for the Mandan villages to return Chief Sheheke to his home. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

Notes

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13. David J. Peck and Marti E. Peck, "So Hard to Die" (The Marti and David Peck Family Trust of 1992, 2021), 369.
14. Tracy Potter, *Shebeke: Mandan Indian Diplomat* (Helena, MT, and Washburn, ND: Farcountry Press and Fort Mandan Press, 2003), 156.
15. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 477.
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17. Jenkinson, *The Character of Meriwether Lewis*, 312, 477.
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Along the Trail With WPO Editor Clay Jenkinson on the Marias

On July 8, 2025, I had the great pleasure of touring the Two Medicine Creek "fight site" with two extraordinary experts in the Lewis and Clark world. Larry Epstein has been an important figure in the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance for decades. At the age of 12, as a Boy Scout, Larry helped to locate the actual site of the skirmish between Lewis (and three of his best men) and eight young Blackfeet men, not far from Cut Bank, Montana. He has led many hundreds of people to the site. Jack Gladstone is a Blackfeet singer-songwriter, guide, and cultural commentator who has long argued that looking at the famous incident through Blackfeet eyes provides an insightful and comprehensive understanding of just what happened on July 26, 1806, in the shadow of what would become Glacier National Park.

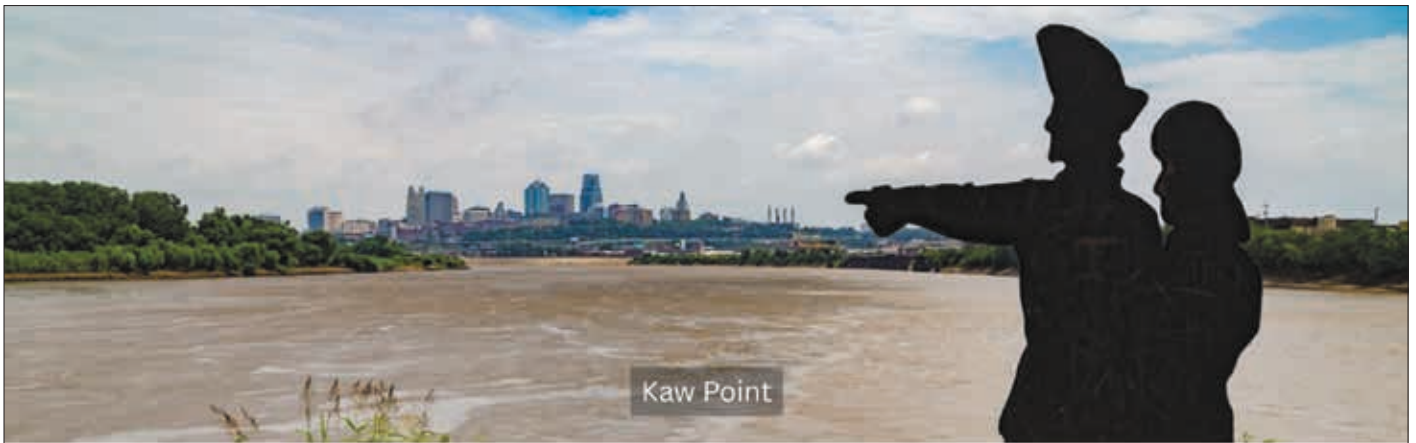
It was pure joy – on a perfect July day, hot, brilliantly lit, with

a slight breeze – to listen to these extraordinary men discuss and debate the skirmish, the only bloodshed of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. We sat in the shade of the lone remaining cottonwood tree for more than an hour, reading from the journals, gesturing across the landscape, laughing, and exchanging points of view. Larry can match every descriptive phrase in Lewis' journal to the lay of the land – the high place from which Lewis discovered the Blackfeet men as they observed George Drouillard down by the Marias River; the site of the uneasy bivouac between the two groups; and the niche in the broken hillside where several of the Blackfeet attempted to run off with the Expedition's horses.

It doesn't get any better than this: exploring a key incident in the Lewis and Clark story with individuals who have given years to mastering the story and the landscape on which it unfolded. ■



"Fight site" on the Marias River where Lewis, the Field brothers, and Drouillard encountered the young Blackfeet men near the present-day town of Cut Bank in northwestern Montana. Courtesy of Clay Jenkinson.



Final Call to Attend

2025 Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Annual Gathering
September 14–17, 2025
Kansas City, Missouri

Chautauqua at Kaw Point
Field trip to Fort Osage (established by William Clark in 1808)
The Discovery Expedition of St. Charles Keelboat
Dr. Stephen Aron, 2025 Moulton Lecture
Virtual Reality from Shenandoah University
Robert Eppes, grandson of Thomas Jefferson, hosted by Clay Jenkinson

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Paddle to Otter Landing

By the Members of the Jefferson River Chapter Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance

Otter Landing is a 4.3-acre public campsite on Montana's Jefferson River which has public access only by water. The campsite, located two miles upstream from Sappington Bridge (11 miles west of Three Forks on US Highway 10; then 1 mile south on US Highway 287 to bridge), was purchased by the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's Jefferson River Chapter. All photographs courtesy of Tom Elpel.

Twenty-seven paddlers floated down Montana's Jefferson River in nine canoes and seven kayaks on May 3, 2025, to visit the newest public campsite. Members of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's Jefferson River Chapter had conducted a two-month fundraising campaign over the winter and purchased the 4.43-acre parcel sight unseen in January. This was the first opportunity for members to visit the new campsite.

"Saving open lands is a sacred mission," said chapter member Michael Enk of Great Falls. "Once it's gone, it's gone forever." The property was acquired by the chapter to improve public camping and recreation opportunities along the Jefferson River Canoe Trail portion of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. The water trail now includes four campsites on Bureau of Land Management land, two campsites on state lands, and three campsites on properties purchased for the public by the Jefferson River Chapter.

The group named the new campsite Otter Landing, noting

that Meriwether Lewis reported seeing vast numbers of beaver and otter as they ascended the Jefferson River from Willow Creek to Antelope Creek on July 31, 1805. Otter Landing is located two miles upstream from Sappington Bridge (11 miles west of Three Forks, Montana, on US Hwy 10; then one mile south on US Hwy 287). Public access is available only from the river. Magris Talc Plant is nearby, but out-of-sight from the property. "Otter Landing is going to make a great campsite; it's beautiful," said Jefferson River Chapter Secretary Jack Batsel of Butte, Montana. "Good views all around. I don't see a single building!"

The parcel is part of the abandoned right-of-way of the old Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad, which went bankrupt and dissolved in the 1980s. The Jefferson originally hooked south of the parcel, making a sharp bend against the hill. This would have necessitated spanning the river twice. The railroad company eliminated the need for the bridges by cutting a new river channel north of the



Jefferson River Chapter President Tom Elpel organized the river expedition from Limespur Fishing Access Site to Sappington Bridge Fishing Access Site, about 12 miles west of Three Forks, Montana.



Twenty-seven paddlers floated down Montana's Jefferson River in nine canoes and seven kayaks to visit Otter Landing, the newest public campsite on the river purchased by the Jefferson River Chapter for the enjoyment of current and future paddlers.



Warren Swager and Rick Tilstra of Sheridan, Montana, at the interpretive sign they installed about the Lewis and Clark Expedition at Otter Landing, featuring otter-themed artwork by Sheridan artist Susan Jarman.

property, using the excavated earth to form the roadbed across the old channel, explained Jefferson River Chapter President Tom Elpel of Pony, Montana.

"The old river bed adds nearly eight acres of *de facto* public land around Otter Landing, giving us twelve acres for the price of four," Elpel said. "There is also potential access to 160 acres of state land across the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) spur line to Harrison," he added, "totaling 172 acres to hike and explore while camping at Otter Landing." Elpel emphasized that property boundaries are not marked, however, and it is important to use accurate maps to stay on public land and respect adjacent private ranch lands. There are also no facilities at Otter Landing, and the public is encouraged to practice *Leave No Trace* principles to keep the site beautiful for all visitors.

The group paddled from Limespur Fishing Access Site to Sappington Bridge, stopping along the way to tour two

campsites on Bureau of Land Management lands within the Jefferson River Canyon. "Being on a trip down the river makes me appreciate public lands so much," said Susan Hillstrom of Great Falls.

"It was a nice, gentle float with bald eagles overhead and beautiful scenery," said Paulette Hardy of Sheridan, Montana. "Otter Landing is in a verdant bowl," agreed Sally Schendel of Silver Star, Montana. "It's a gentle landscape that is welcoming to all."

The event was not without incident, however. One of the paddlers slipped on a grassy bank and broke her ankle, necessitating emergency evacuation. As an X-ray technician by profession, the individual knew exactly which bones were broken. With the aid of nurses and emergency personnel in the group, the ankle was efficiently splinted and the patient paddled out to a nearby road to meet the ambulance. "We are immensely grateful for the emergency services personnel who came out from Willow Creek to facilitate the evacuation," Elpel said.

After the float, Elpel returned the following day with long-time supporter and former Board member Dr. Warren Swager and friend Rick Tilstra of Sheridan, Montana, to install an interpretive sign at the new campsite. Sheridan artist Susan Jarman produced the otter-themed painting for the sign.

Of the nine campsites on the Jefferson River Canoe Trail, seven are located downstream from Cardwell, Montana, and two are located near Waterloo, Montana. Members of the Jefferson River Chapter hope to acquire additional properties for public campsites along the upper river between Twin Bridges and Silver Star as well as between Whitehall and Cardwell. "Each parcel we acquire enhances public camping and recreation opportunities for future generations while permanently protecting the riverfront from housing developments," Elpel said. For membership, maps, brochures, donation opportunities, and other information about the Jefferson River Canoe Trail and LCTA's Jefferson River Chapter, please visit JeffersonRiver.org. ■



George and Anne Holmes: Meriwether Lewis' Most Elusive Ancestors

By Arend Flick

Dragon Run (or Swamp), 40 miles east of Richmond, Virginia, flows through heavily forested land into the Piankatank River. Thomas Holmes and his family lived near the headwaters of the Run, as did (a generation later) William Clark's grandparents. Courtesy Coastal Virginia Ecotourism Alliance.

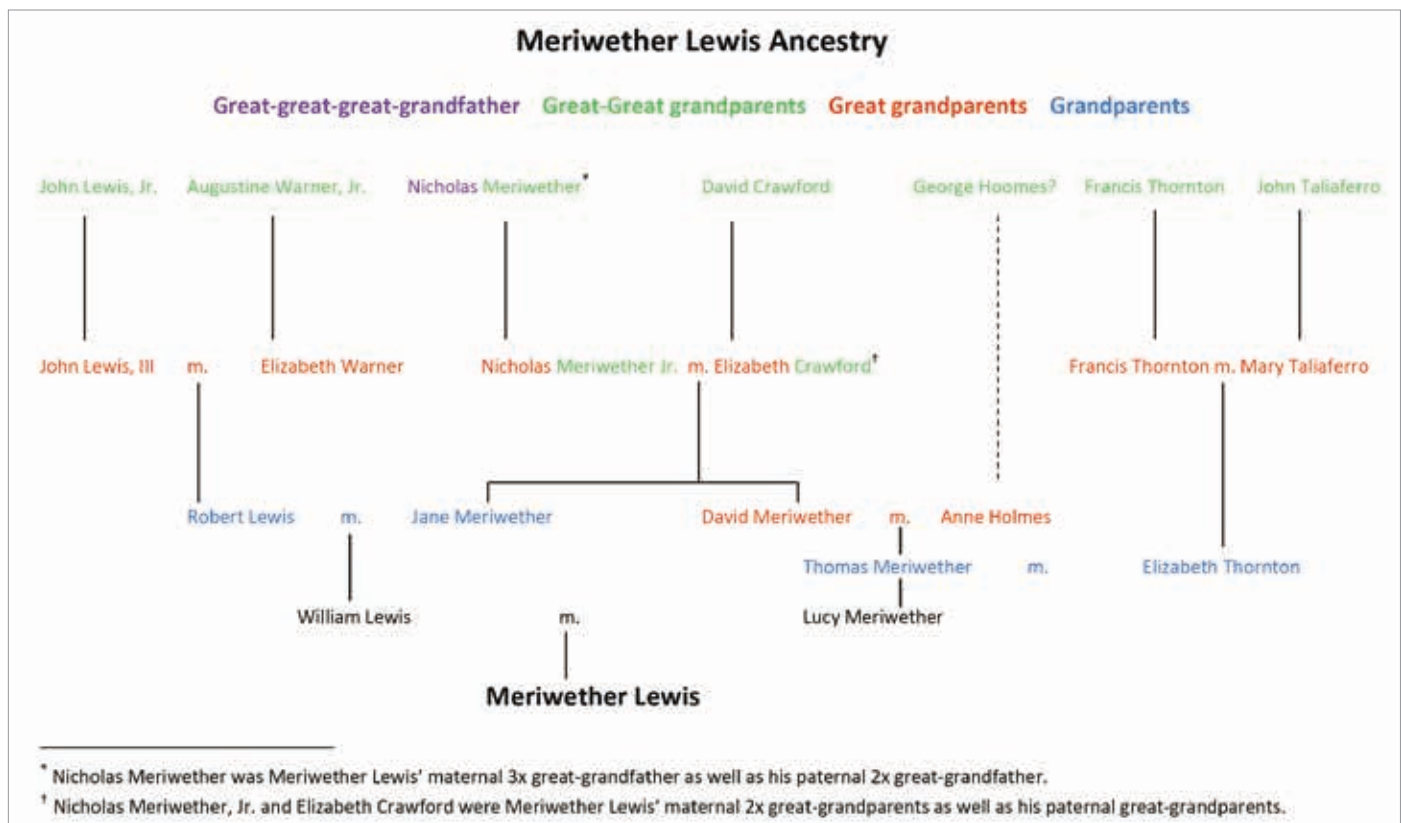
On January 10, 1733, the last will and testament of a wealthy Caroline County, Virginia, landowner named George Hoomes was presented to the court by two of his sons, George, Jr., and Christopher, acting as executors. As was the custom at the time among people of Hoomes' class, the court ordered an appraisal of his estate and granted a certificate for obtaining probate.¹

Unfortunately, neither the appraisal nor the will itself has come down to us. Caroline is one of the so-called "burned" counties of Virginia, those that lost a significant portion of their records during the Civil War or before. While the Caroline court Order Books are largely intact from 1732 on, thus providing us a record of when wills were presented and proved, early records of other sorts, including the wills themselves, were mostly destroyed in May 1864 when a Union army passed through Bowling Green, the county seat, on its way to defeat at the Battle of Cold Harbor. General Winfield Hancock's troops briefly occupied the courthouse, mutilating or burning most of the documents stored there.² Among those documents were probably Hoomes' will and

estate appraisal, though some evidence suggests that Caroline had not done a particularly good job of maintaining its records in the years leading up to the war.

The loss of Hoomes' will is particularly regrettable for Lewis and Clark studies. It would almost certainly have clarified for us who his other children were, especially whether he had a daughter named Anne. If he did, that would almost certainly make George Hoomes one of Meriwether Lewis' eight great-great-grandfathers, the only one whose identity remains mysterious today. One of Meriwether's four great-grandmothers was named Anne Holmes, and her father is thought to have been named George. "Hoomes," "Homes," and "Holmes" appear to have been alternate spellings of this surname at the time.³

Meriwether's four paternal great-great grandfathers – **John Lewis, Jr., Augustine Warner, Jr., Nicholas Meriwether,** and **David Crawford** – left clear documentary evidence of their existence. The line of descent from these men to Meriwether is also clear, as is their immediate ancestry. John Lewis, Jr., came to Virginia with his father and brother,

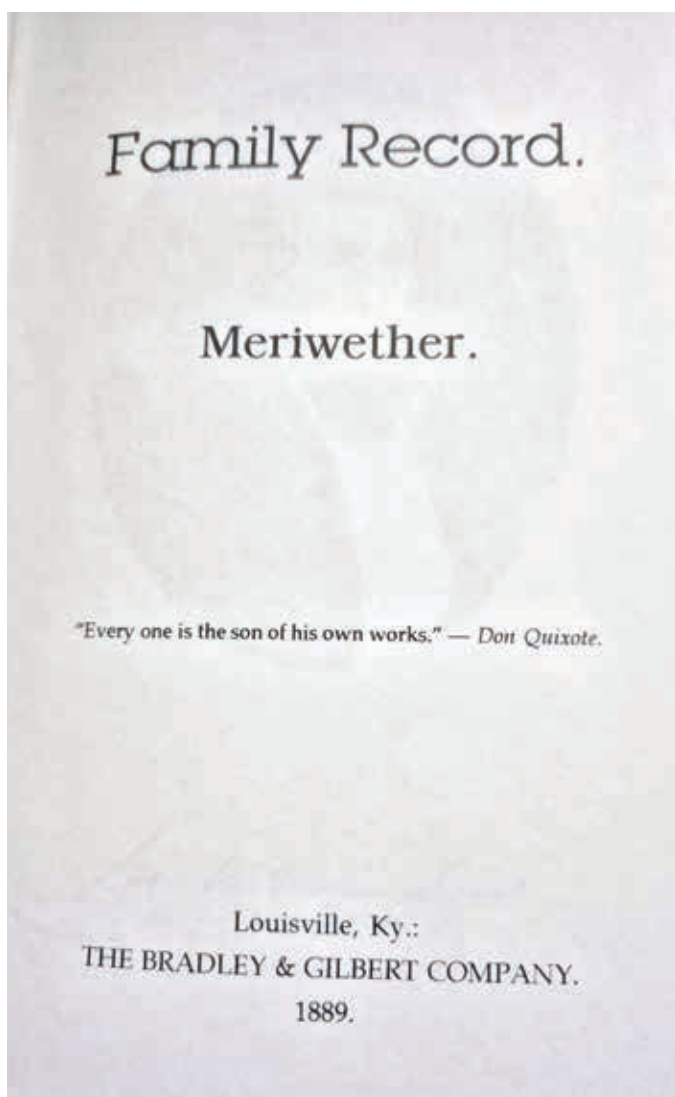


and perhaps his mother, from Monmouthshire, Wales in 1653, when John, Jr., was 18. After the death of John, Sr., in 1657, he went on to patent great tracts of land in Gloucester and New Kent counties before his own death in 1689. David Crawford (the name originally spelled “Craford”) also came to America with his family as a teenager, probably arriving with his father from Scotland around 1643. He too became a wealthy New Kent County landowner, as well as a militia colonel, before dying around 1710. Nicholas Meriwether, born in Norfolk, England in 1631 to a clergyman father, arrived in Jamestown alone around 1652 and became first a government official and later a land speculator, dying in Williamsburg in 1678. Augustine Warner, Jr., was the only one of Meriwether Lewis’ paternal great-great grandfathers to be born in America. He was also George Washington’s great grandfather, as well as Queen Elizabeth II’s 8x great-grandfather, thus making Meriwether Lewis a very distant cousin to the nation’s first president and to England’s most recent queen and king.⁴

Three of Meriwether Lewis’ four maternal great-great-grandfathers also leave little doubt about their identities and major life accomplishments. One of them was **Nicholas Meriwether, Jr.**, who in addition to being the son of one of Lewis’ paternal ancestors also married one of David Craw-

ford’s daughters. **Francis Thornton** and **John Taliaferro** were both native Virginians from old and respected families whose fathers emigrated from England in the 1640s and became patriarchs in Virginia planter society. Thornton descendants besides Meriwether Lewis include James Madison, the fourth president of the United States. John’s father Robert Taliaferro (the surname eventually pronounced and sometimes even spelled “Tolliver”) patented thousands of acres in Essex County, where he also served as sheriff and burgess. The Taliaferros were, as the name suggests, originally Italian, probably having immigrated from Venice to England in the sixteenth century. Meriwether Lewis shares his Taliaferro ancestry with a diverse lot of famous Americans, including General Robert E. Lee.⁵

But Meriwether Lewis’ fourth great-grandfather, said to have been named George Holmes (sometimes listed with “Esq.” as a suffix) of King and Queen County, is an enigmatic figure, as is his putative daughter Anne, who married Nicholas Meriwether, Jr.’s son David in or around 1712. We cannot even be certain of the spelling of his name (Hoomes vs. Holmes), much less his family origins. Based on records that include extant wills and less reliable Bible records, there is little doubt that a woman named Anne Holmes married David Meriwether and had a son named Thomas, who had a daughter named Lucy,



8	MERIWETHER.
	"Betty's daughter, £28; Old Thom, £15; Sam Carpenter, £10; Betty, Hannah's daughter, £6, &c., &c."
	"Two cows, £1, 5; two yearlings and two calves, £0, 7, 6; three calves and one bull, £100, &c., &c."
	This was in the year 1745; Virginia currency equal to \$3½ to the £.
	2d. Thomas Meriwether had a son by name Nicholas.
	3d. Nicholas had a daughter named Mildred.
	4th. William Meriwether; his children were Nicholas, John, Thomas, Richard, Jane, Sarah, and Mary.
	6th. Elizabeth Meriwether married Mr. Bray, and died 1st January, 1725, leaving an only daughter named Elizabeth, who in the year 1743 married Mr. Phil. Johnson.
	7th. Anne Meriwether married Mr. Johnson, and had a son William, one of whose descendants, Chapman Johnson, was one of the most eminent lawyers of Virginia.
	8th. Sarah Meriwether married Wm. Littlepage, and died Friday, 2d of July, 1733, at six o'clock P. M., leaving an only daughter named Judith.
	9th. Mary Meriwether married Mr. John Aylett. She died without issue, 1745, and the farm of 1,140 acres, with certain slaves deeded to her by her father Nicholas, was, in the event of her death without issue, to be equally divided between her brother, David, my great grandfather, and her brother William, which was effected the following year.
	5th. David Meriwether, son of said Nicholas, known in after life as Col. David, married Anne, daughter of George Holmes, of King and Queen County, Virginia. He died the 25th day of December, 1744, and was buried on the east bank of the Rivanna River, near Charlottesville, Virginia, the place where his father was buried. His will is recorded in Louisa County, Virginia, 22d January, 1745. His wife, Anne, died 11th March, 1735-6. They had six sons and two daughters, viz.:
	1. Thomas Meriwether, born about 1714 or 15; died in the winter of 1746 or 7.
	2. Francis Meriwether, born about 1717.

Family Record. Meriwether. by George Wood Meriwether (1789-1864) is the first published history of the Meriwether family. G.W. Meriwether was the grandson of William Meriwether and Ann Holmes. Note listing for "5th. David Meriwether, son of said Nicholas, known in after life as Col. David, married Anne, daughter of George Holmes, of King and Queen County, Virginia."

who was the mother of Meriwether Lewis. But whether Anne Holmes' father was the George Hoomes who died in Caroline County in late 1732 or early 1733 is open to some question. Hoomes' plantation near the town of Bowling Green was in that portion of Caroline County that had been a part of King and Queen County before Caroline's creation in 1728.

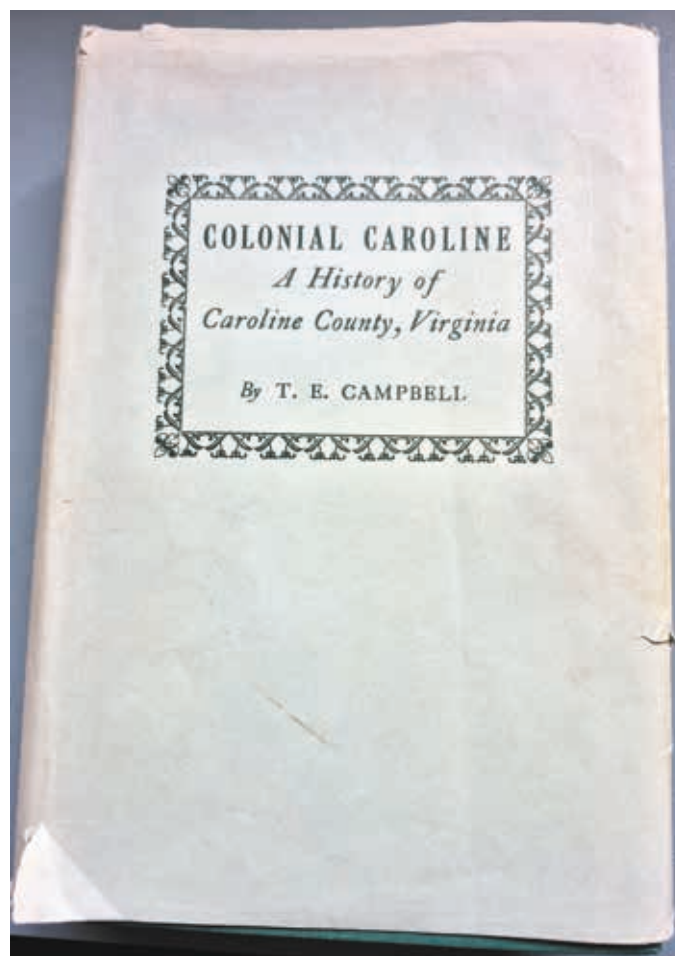
The first published record of a David Meriwether-Anne Holmes marriage appeared in a document compiled by another great-grandson, George Wood Meriwether, and dated 1855, called *Family Record Meriwether*. First published by his daughter Emerine Price Meriwether Snead much later in 1889, *Family Record Meriwether* was prepared, according to the author, "from an old mutilated register found among the old papers of [his] grandfather."⁶ In areas where the details of the record can be

independently verified, it seems generally reliable. Referring to his great-grandparents, George Meriwether states that "David Meriwether, son of said Nicholas, known in after life as Col. David, married Anne, daughter of George Holmes, of King and Queen County, Virginia . . . Anne died 11th March, 1735-6."⁷ William Ridgely Griffith's 1899 book *The Record of Nicholas Meriwether of Wales and Descendants in Virginia and Maryland* gives the date of David Meriwether's death based on a Bible entry and lists the birth years (and in some cases birth dates) of their children. Other Meriwether family histories by Louisa H. A. Minor (1892), Minor Meriwether (1896), and Sarah Travers Lewis (Scott) Anderson (1938) provide no additional details about Anne Holmes.⁸ Nelson Heath Meriwether's 1964 revision of Minor's book suggests the marriage between

David and Anne took place in "1712/1713," probably because their first child was born in 1714.⁹ In recent years, references to Anne in online genealogies often add a birthdate (19 December 1695), the basis for which appears to be an unsourced family history posted online in 2003 of the descendants of King Edward III of England. In this account, Anne Holmes is said to have been the granddaughter of King Edward's putative descendant George Reade, who did exist and was acting governor of Virginia in 1638-1639 as well as a great-great grandfather of George Washington. While an Anne Holmes may have been born in Virginia (or England) on this date, there is no evidence that her mother's father was George Reade or indeed that she was the Anne Holmes who married David Meriwether. Nor of course is there reliable evidence Anne, Lucy, and Meriwether are descended from a fourteenth-century English monarch.¹⁰

Published family histories, which became especially fashionable for people with Virginia roots in the second half of the nineteenth century, are usually riddled with error. Inaccuracies in one account inevitably multiply and infect later ones. But they are never entirely false. If we proceed, however, from the assumption that David Meriwether did in fact marry an Anne Holmes of King and Queen County and that she had a father named George, an immediate problem arises. Anyone marrying a Meriwether at that time would have come from a family of comparable wealth and status. They would almost certainly have left some evidence of their existence. But there is no one named George "Holmes" of this period who would seem to fit this description, much less evidence of an Anne Holmes born in the 1690s, as she would have to have been. A George Holmes, whose wife's name was Rebecca, began patenting land in James City County in the mid-1630s, for a total of around 700 acres. But this man never lived closer than 50 miles to King and Queen County and would likely have been in his 80s (if he were alive at all) when Anne Holmes was born. Nor is there evidence that this man had a son named George who might have moved to King and Queen County.¹¹

George *Hoomes*, however, would seem to be an entirely plausible candidate for having been Anne's father and the father-in-law of David Meriwether. He is known to have had children a few years younger than Anne Holmes; he lived in King and Queen County from the time of its formation in 1691 until a few years before his death, when his land became part of Caroline; and (perhaps most importantly) he was of an appropriate social status. Caroline County historian T.E. Campbell describes him as having been a physician, and we



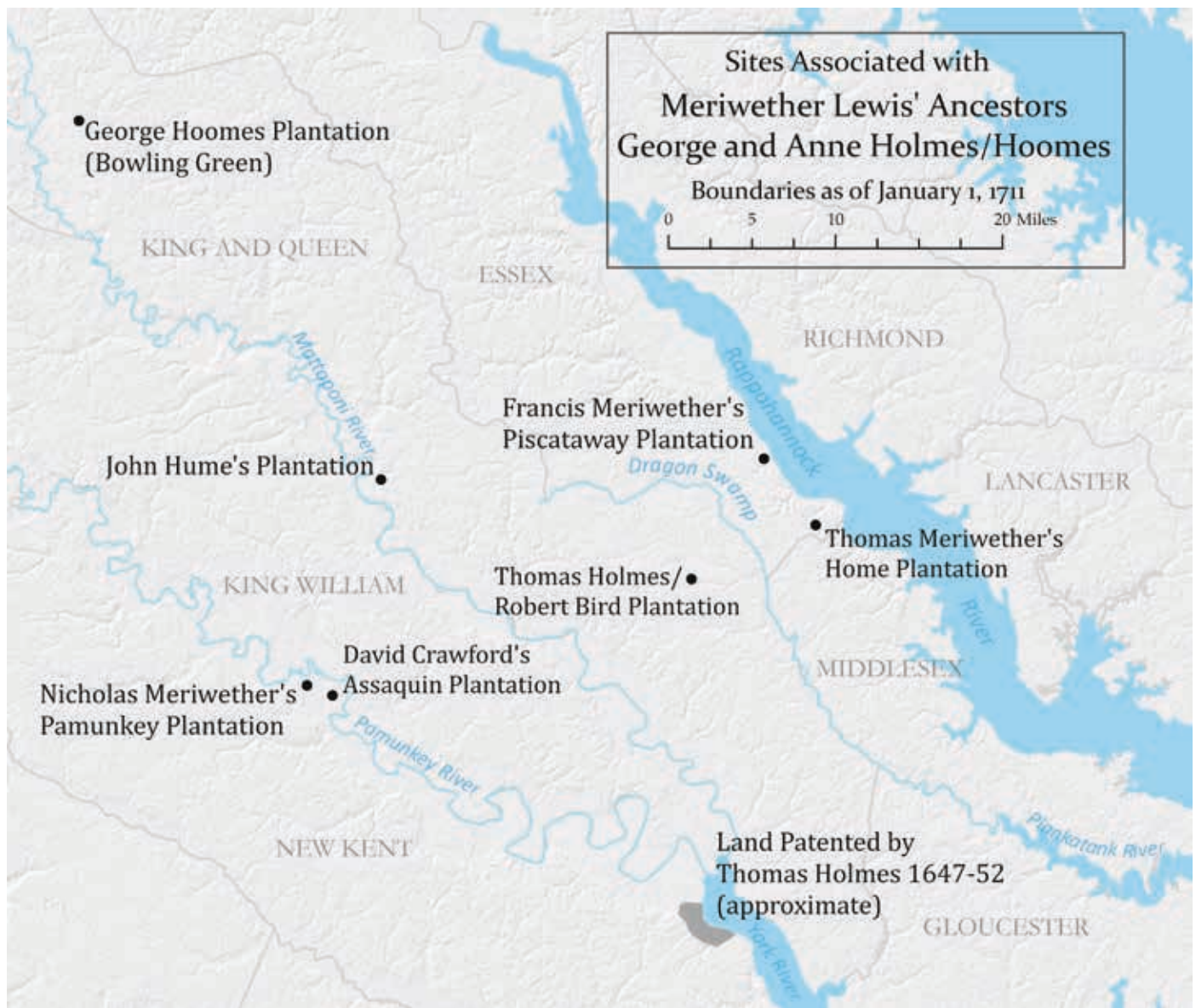
Colonial Caroline, published in 1954, provides a detailed history of the county where William Clark was born and where many of his and Meriwether Lewis' ancestors lived and established their plantations.

know from documentary evidence mostly related to his children's lives that he was wealthy and possessed of significant land holdings (though he does not seem to have patented any land himself until late in life).¹² Were the Hoomeses originally Holmeses? Various pieces of circumstantial evidence suggest they might have been. Holmes is, of course, a common surname, originating in the north of England and Scotland and still frequently seen in both places today, and indeed throughout the English-speaking world. Hoomes, by contrast, is a surname confined to America. There are many Holmeses today in the telephone directories of London and Edinburgh, but no Hoomeses. This suggests the probability that one branch of immigrant Holmeses may have become Hoomeses, though of course it doesn't explain how Anne apparently became known as a Holmes while her father was called a Hoomes. Nor does it explain the antecedents of George Hoomes – how he came to be in possession of his land and wealth in the first place.

Campbell's 1954 book, *Colonial Caroline*, is useful for anyone interested in the county where so many of Lewis' ancestors lived, and where William Clark himself was born and grew up. Campbell was a native of the county, "born and reared" there, according to the dust jacket. Trained as a lawyer, he served as a state legislator and a judge advocate in the U.S. Army Air Corps during the Second World War

In an opening discussion of “the first settlers along the Mattapony [River],” Campbell asserts that three large land-owners had come to this area beginning as early as 1655. He names them as Major William Lewis, Colonel Augustine Warner, and (a mysterious) John Hoomes. Lewis (who was the brother of Meriwether’s great-great grandfather) is said to have patented 2,000 acres “on the northeast side of the Mattapony River lying near the head of the said river.”¹⁴ Although the language of the patent itself differs slightly from Campbell’s quotation, the patent records indicate that Lewis did in fact secure possession of this land, just north of present-day Bowling Green, in 1655. Campbell also says that in 1672, Augustine Warner (Meriwether’s great-great-grandfather) patented 1,400 acres “on the north side of the main swamp of the Mattapony” near the lands of Robert Taliaferro, probably the brother of Meriwether’s great-great-grandfather. Here we have a problem. The patent records list a patent by Augustine Warner of 10,100 acres in this year, but they say nothing of a 1,400-acre patent. Though Campbell does list the 10,000-acre patent later in the book, his reference to a 1,400-acre tract either confuses Warner with another man or, more likely, draws on a source that does not appear in the patent books.¹⁵

John Home/Hume patent of 523 acres, NE side of Matapanie [sic] Riv., New Kent Co., April 7, 1674. Virginia Land Office Patent Book No. 6, 508.



Sites Associated with Meriwether Lewis' Ancestors George and Anne Holmes/Hoomes: Boundaries as of January 1, 1711. Map denotes plantations, rivers, and counties of the area. Courtesy of Charles Wells.

Lewis, Warner, and Taliaferro were probably all absentee owners, but it is striking that various ancestors of Meriwether Lewis, themselves unrelated to each other, were acquiring land contiguous to each other (and perhaps coming to know each other as a result) a hundred years before he was born. Was “John Hoomes” also a Meriwether Lewis ancestor and the father of a man we know to have existed, George Hoomes? There is simply no record of a man with this name having patented “3000 acres of a swamp leading to the northeast bank of the Mattaponi” near William Lewis’ land, as Campbell asserts. Campbell says that this land “was to become known first as the Bowling Green,” which would

certainly explain how George Hoomes (as the putative son of John) came to possess it.¹⁶ But a seventeenth century “John Hoomes” (George Hoomes did have a son of that name in the eighteenth century) seems only to have existed within the pages of *Colonial Caroline*.

An explanation for Campbell’s confusion emerges when we scrutinize Campbell’s references to a “Thomas Hoomes” later in the book, who he says patented 523 acres “Immediately south of first Hoomes grant” in 1674.¹⁷ The man who actually patented this acreage is noted with near-illegibility in the patent book itself, but the first name looks more like “John” (or “Jn.,” a common abbreviation for John at

the time) than Thomas and the last more like “Hume” than Hoomes. This is in fact the way it was transcribed in the second volume of *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, which abstracts and indexes Virginia patents and grants from 1666 to 1695.¹⁸ John Hume (or Humes, as he is sometimes called) first acquired 300 acres northeast of the Mattaponi in 1672, and then added to it in the 1674 grant referenced by Campbell as having gone to “Thomas Hoomes.” This land is said to have been on or near the Masticock and Pesticock swamps, which places it not at Bowling Green but much further south, nearer to present-day Walkerton and to Fort Mattapony, built in the 1650s to protect White settlers from Indian depredations. John Hume is not connected with the Holmeses or Hoomeses (or Meriwethers) in any discernible way.

The “John Hoomes” who is a strong candidate for having been George Hoomes’ father and whom Campbell erroneously suggests patented 3,000 acres near the northeast bank of the Mattaponi (as it is now spelled) is much more likely to have been a man named Thomas Holmes. This Thomas Holmes did patent 575 acres “near Exalls swamp” and his already existing land in 1667, the existing land consisting of nearly 2,200 acres he had patented in 1661 and 1664.¹⁹ Campbell in fact says that the “old land books show two large grants for the Hoomes family in 1661” and admits that they were not the Bowling Green tract but 40 miles southeast, extending “to the headwaters of the Dragoon [sic].”²⁰ He has confused Holmeses with Hoomeses and apparently created a fictitious John Hoomes out of an actual Thomas Holmes. But perhaps that confusion is partly a function of the families’ having been related in the first place.

Thomas Holmes lived for many years in that part of New Kent County that became King and Queen County in 1691. Between 1660 and 1661, Thomas Holmes patented over 2,000 acres of land in what was then New Kent County, “on the N. side of [the] Mattapony River,” according to the patent entry, and on the “S. side of Pyanketanke [sic] Sw.”²¹ The swamp that enters into what we now call the Piankatank River is called the Dragon Swamp (or Run) today, and this as well as other clues in the patent books allow us to fix Holmes’ plantation as having been north of present-day Dragon Run State Forest, just west of where King and Queen, Middlesex, and Essex counties now meet, a few miles southwest of present-day Ino, Virginia. Even today, a “Holmes Swamp” may be found nearby. Curiously, this is also land associated with William Clark’s ancestors. His grandparents Jonathan and Elizabeth Wilson Clark lived on a small plantation perhaps

two miles west of Holmes’ estate, though this would have been some years after Thomas died.

The name Thomas Holmes is also linked to earlier land patents further south, just southwest of where the Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers enter into the York. A Thomas Holmes patented a total of around 700 acres here in the 1640s and 1650s, and perhaps another 700 further west, only a few miles east of Richmond. Some of this land was sold in 1670.²² Whether this is the same man who later established a much more substantial estate on or near the Dragon, or an entirely different Thomas Holmes, is unclear.

Several surviving documents permit us to reconstruct aspects of the later life of the Thomas Holmes who lived on a large plantation near the Dragon Swamp. He likely had two marriages. In 1655, one Rowland Burnham made a will that suggests Thomas Holmes “of York River” was his brother-in-law and that Thomas’s wife (and Rowland’s sister) was named Margery.²³ It is possible though unlikely that this was a different Thomas Holmes, but the sequence of land patents suggests that a single man, born in England around 1620 (patent records indicate that a Thomas Holmes was transported to America in 1639), established a small farm southwest of the York-Mattaponi confluence in the 1640s and 1650s, then moved some 15 to 20 miles north in the 1660s to develop a much larger plantation. Whether Thomas and Margery had children is uncertain, though they are likely to have had them. At some point, Margery died, Thomas married a second time to a woman named Catherine, and they had at least two children, Catherine (born c. 1670), and Sarah (born c. 1672).²⁴

Thomas Holmes died when his daughters were very young, probably without leaving a will or having made one that is now lost. In the minutes of the general court of Colonial Virginia, we read that on October 11, 1675, a dispute between one Robert Holmes and Robert Bird (whom we know to have been Thomas Holmes’ neighbor on Dragon Swamp) was settled that had involved Bird’s desire to marry Thomas Holmes’ widow, to which Robert Holmes apparently objected.²⁵ So Thomas Holmes was clearly no longer living by that date and had probably recently died. A lower court had sided with Robert Holmes in his objection to the marriage (or more likely, Bird’s controlling interest in the estate), but the higher court reversed the decision. Given the circumstances, Robert is likely to have been Thomas’ son by his first wife, though it is possible he was his much younger brother. Patent books indicate that a Robert Holmes was a



Caroline County Courthouse in Bowling Green, Virginia. Built in 1830 in the Jeffersonian Roman Revival style and part of the Bowling Green Historic District, it was listed on the National Register of historic places in 1973. The Caroline County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on August 25, 2020, to remove the Caroline County Confederate Monument that had stood in front of the courthouse. Courtesy Wikipedia.

small landowner in the early part of the eighteenth century. He lived near present-day Ruther Glen, some 40 miles northwest of the Thomas Holmes' plantation. This is probably the same man who sued Robert Bird in 1675, though his absence from the extant historical records in the 1680s and 1690s casts some doubt on that supposition.

Robert Bird did in fact marry Catherine Holmes and move into Holmes' plantation, which was much more extensive than his own. Robert and Catherine had at least four children: Anna (born c. 1676), William (1679), Robert (1681), and Mary (1683). His 1694 will, which survives, makes it clear that Thomas Holmes was his "predecessor," that his stepchildren (whom he seems to have adopted) were Catherine (by then wife of James Boisseau) and Sarah, that his children were as indicated (Anna and William as the eldest were named executors), and that his plantation lay on

the Dragon Swamp.²⁶ Bird had patented additional small quantities of land near the old Holmes estate between 1682 and 1693.²⁷ Another Clark connection: Robert and Catherine Bird's daughter Mary became William Clark's great grandmother. If Catherine Holmes Bird's first husband was Meriwether Lewis' great-great grandfather and her second William Clark's great-great grandfather, it would be an extraordinary coincidence.

Online genealogies for George Hoomes of Bowling Green often list the name of his father as "John Thomas Hoomes," following from Campbell's alternating use of John and Thomas when describing the owner of these patents.²⁸ But there is simply no evidence such a man ever existed. It does seem certain that a Hoomes (or Holmes) of some sort patented or purchased the land near Bowling Green that enabled George and his descendants to live there and



George Hoomes' plantation was on the east side of the Mattaponi River and near its headwaters, 40 miles north of Richmond, Virginia, and just south of present-day Bowling Green, Virginia. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

develop the property.²⁹ The most likely explanation is that it was Thomas Holmes of the Dragon Swamp who enabled George – probably a child of his first marriage, possibly a nephew – to acquire this acreage. In his listing of grants in excess of 1,000 acres made by Sir William Berkeley “to his favorites,” Campbell includes a 1667 grant to Thomas Hoomes, “On a swamp leading into north bank of the Mattapony,” below the Lewis grant. This would certainly have been Bowling Green, and Thomas Hoomes is likely to have been Thomas Holmes. Although this grant does not appear in the patent books, the specificity of Campbell’s description suggests that he found a reference to this patent in a later document, perhaps a land dispute.

The 1704 Quit Rent rolls for Virginia have come down to us, and they indicate that George Hoomes was taxed for possessing 725 acres in what was in that year still King and

Queen County. This made him one of the more substantial landowners in the county.³⁰ He had several other children besides George, Jr., and Christopher, including Joseph, Benjamin, and perhaps Priscilla, all of them probably born in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Before his death he was able to expand his land holdings by purchasing (with George, Jr.) a 5,000-acre tract in Spotsylvania County and an additional 3,100 acres in Hanover County, again with his son George.³¹ Probably born in the 1660s, he clearly possessed the kind of wealth and status that would make intermarriage between his family and the Meriwethers plausible. And he is the right age to have been Anne Holmes’ father.

Despite Campbell’s reference to him as having been a physician, there is no evidence George practiced this profession. The name George “Holmes,” however, appears several times in the patent records of the 1680s and early 1690s as

having been transported by patentees from England to Virginia, and a "Geo. Hoomes" appears once, in 1694.³² Under the headright system, people could acquire patents to Virginia land by paying the expenses of immigrants to travel there, at the rate of 50 acres per person transported. But a person did not have to be an immigrant – he or she might have been returning home to Virginia after having travelled to England for business or pleasure. Perhaps George had been in England for his medical training. And perhaps he even fathered a daughter named Anne there.

Some Hoomes family histories list the wife of George Hoomes as Anne (or Sarah Anne) Reade and make her the daughter of the George Reade, who (as we have seen) is frequently said to have been Anne Holmes's grandfather.³³ The Reades were among Virginia's most eminent families, and one from whom Meriwether Lewis clearly descended on his father's side, since Augustine Warner, Jr., married into the Reade family. But George Reade's descendants have been fully researched and they do not include a daughter named either Sarah or Anne. Several of George Reade's brothers also came to America from England and it is possible that George Hoomes married one of their daughters (or granddaughters). As it stands, though, we have no indisputable evidence of the identity of George Hoomes' wife.

George Hoomes, Jr., became one of the most powerful men in Caroline, serving at various times as sheriff, constable, and coroner. In the early 1740s, he built a fine mansion on his late father's Bowling Green estate that still stands. His son John augmented the family's wealth with the acquisition of thousands of acres of land in Kentucky. As a boy, John and his brother Joseph studied at Donald Robertson's school near Aylett, the same school at which William Clark's older brothers had studied. (Robertson was the Clarks' uncle by marriage.) John was briefly county treasurer, served as a vestryman, and was an ardent supporter of Thomas Jefferson with whom he regularly corresponded. John and his descendants were responsible for introducing horse breeding for racing purposes to the county. More to the present point, his father was evidently a friend of the Meriwether family, having (as we have seen) patented adjoining land in what was then Louisa County on the same day in 1733 that Nicholas Meriwether did.³⁴

Christopher Hoomes moved from the Bowling Green area to Culpeper County and had several illegitimate children with a woman named Catherine Freeman, all of whom he warmly acknowledged in his 1785 will.³⁵ Some of them attempted to disguise their illegitimacy by linking their family

tree falsely to other members of the Virginia planter elite. This so outraged George Harrison Sanford King, the dean of twentieth century Virginia genealogy, that he expended a great deal of energy writing articles and letters challenging this spurious lineage. In the process, he never directly took up the question of who Anne Holmes was, but he flirted with the notion that the Hoomeses were Holmeses.

Priscilla Hoomes, born around 1702, seems almost certainly to have been George Hoomes, Sr.,'s daughter, though there is at least some question as to the precise nature of the relationship. She is usually referred to as Priscilla Holmes, but various documents list her as "of Bowling Green" and sometimes spell her name "Hoomes." So it seems safe to assume she belongs to this family, though perhaps not as George's daughter. She married a man named Joseph Pollard, and one of their daughters, Frances, became the second wife George Rogers, William Clark's uncle, in 1754. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was the second wife of James Meriwether, David and Anne Holmes Meriwether's son. She and George, Jr., are further evidence of King's assertion in one of his letters that the Holmes/Hoomes and Meriwether families were of the same "set" and "hung together."³⁶

The vestry books for the parishes in which George Hoomes and Thomas Holmes lived are lost.³⁷ Since the Anglican vestries were charged with many of the functions we usually associate with civil authority, their records might have detailed other Meriwether-Holmes/Hoomes interactions and perhaps even provided clearer evidence of Hoomes as a variant spelling of Holmes. But despite these losses, we have ample evidence that the Meriwethers knew and intermarried with the Hoomes and Holmes families. An Anne Holmes (or Hoomes) born in or around 1695 (making her c. 1712 marriage to David Meriwether plausible) would logically have had a father born in the 1660s or perhaps early 70s, as George Hoomes, Sr., seems to have been. There would appear, though, to have been a gap between Anne's birth and those of the children we know to have been born to George and his wife early in the eighteenth century. Ann's mother was almost certainly not the mother of George, Jr., Christopher, Priscilla, et al. Without additional evidence, we can only speculate that she was the product of a first marriage (or perhaps extramarital liaison) George Hoomes, Sr., had, perhaps even in England. As to the possibility that hers was an illegitimate birth, these kinds of relationships were far from uncommon in colonial Virginia (or England), and King thought the Hoomes family particularly inclined to them,



The Old Mansion, on land originally patented by Thomas Holmes, was probably built in the 1730s by George Hoomes, Jr. The early colonial style house, seen here in a photo from the 1930s, has been added onto over the years. It stands a mile or so south of Bowling Green, Virginia, the county seat of Caroline County. Courtesy Wikipedia.

as witness the example of Christopher’s “natural” offspring. Certainly, this would help to account for the fact that Anne’s birth and family connections are murky. A third possibility must also be considered, that George was not her father but her guardian. She may have been a niece (perhaps the daughter of Robert Holmes) or even the orphaned daughter of a friend. It seems unlikely that evidence will ever emerge that will permit us to determine the relationship with certainty, but the recoverable facts reassure us that we are on the right general track in determining who Anne Holmes was. The most parsimonious explanation, the one that best fits the available facts in the simplest way, is that she was connected in some fashion to George Hoomes, probably as a daughter of a first marriage.

One further detail is intriguing. In December 1711, a woman named Anne Holmes was among five persons

transported from England to America under the auspices of an Essex County landowner named Lawrence Taliaferro.³⁸ Lawrence was Meriwether Lewis’ great uncle, the brother of Mary Taliaferro Thornton. Lawrence’s land was along Peumansend Creek, not far from Bowling Green. Perhaps she was coming to America to be married.

We can only speculate about the circumstances leading to and bringing about the betrothal and marriage of David Meriwether to Anne Holmes. Born around 1690, David grew up on his father’s Pamunkey Plantation in southwestern New Kent County, about 20 miles northeast of Richmond. David Crawford, the grandfather after whom he was named, lived nearby at Assasquin Plantation and deeded 200 acres of land to his grandson in 1697. David would have come of age at the time of his marriage around 1711, but he is entirely absent from the extant historical record until

1719, as he would not have been if he had stayed at or near Pamunkey. St. Paul's Parish served the Pamunkey and Assasquin areas, and the vestry book, which is extant and begins in 1706, contains many references to Nicholas Meriwether and David Crawford but none to David Meriwether until 1719, when his name appears regularly in many capacities for the next ten years.³⁹ David was therefore almost certainly not living in the parish between the ages of 21 and 29, when he returned to it with a wife and several young children.

Where was he living in the years leading up to his marriage and for the seven or so years after? His grandfather had died in 1710, reputedly murdered by Pamunkey Indians. Perhaps he was striking out on his own by developing the 200-acre parcel his grandfather had deeded him, though it is likely to have been in New Kent County. The Pamunkey and Assasquin plantations were some 25 miles from the Holmes-Bird plantation and 40 miles from Bowling Green. Presumably a marriage would have to have been negotiated with George Hoomes at one of these locations. A possible link between David and the Holmes/Hoomes family would have been one or both of his uncles. Thomas and Francis Meriwether had moved to neighboring Essex County, which bordered King and Queen County, as young men in the 1690s, where they both became prominent citizens and landowners.⁴⁰ Francis served as county clerk, justice of the peace, and eventually burgess; Thomas became high sheriff and trustee of the town of Tappahannock. Francis' Piscataway Plantation, a couple of miles southeast of present-day Tappahannock, was perhaps eight miles from the Holmes/Bird plantation. Thomas had inherited and probably lived at the plantation of his father-in-law at Nimrock Point, near the Essex-Middlesex border, just a few miles east of Holmes/Bird. Neither lived long lives, Thomas dying around 1709 and Francis around 1713. But they clearly knew second-generation members of the Holmes and Bird families, as Thomas had connected himself by marriage to them in 1702. In 1707, Thomas bought 400 acres of land from Robert Bird, Jr.'s sister-in-law.⁴¹ One could easily imagine David Meriwether's visiting his uncles and cousins in Essex County or perhaps even living there during part of the period we cannot otherwise account for him. George Hoomes could have been visiting his own relations at the nearby Holmes-Bird plantation on Dragon Swamp. A marriage between David and Anne might well have been arranged without their having known each other very well, if at all. What would have mattered is that their families were well acquainted and of

equal status. It may be telling that David and Anne named their first child Thomas.

What, finally, of the relationship between Thomas Holmes of the Dragon (but also apparently patentee of the land just south of the Lewis tract) and George Hoomes of Bowling Green? We cannot declare with certainty that there *was* a relationship, but George's emergence as a substantial King and Queen County landowner around 1700 with no obvious antecedents or wealth of his own must be accounted for somehow. The simplest explanation is that Thomas, whether father or uncle, accounts for it. It would be not at all surprising if the Robert Holmes who contested Robert Bird's right to marry Thomas Holmes' widow had an older brother or nephew named George who for whatever reason began to spell his name Hoomes.

Unless some hitherto undiscovered evidence emerges to confirm or invalidate these hypotheses, we must conclude that George Hoomes of Bowling Green was *probably* the son of Thomas Holmes of Dragon Run and the father of Anne Holmes, wife of David Meriwether and one of Meriwether Lewis' four great-grandmothers.⁴² ■

Arend Flick is emeritus professor of English and the Humanities at Norco College in Southern California. He has completed a book on the fathers of Lewis and Clark and is nearing completion on a monograph about Lewis' 1795 court-martial. A long-time member of LCTA, he co-edits The Orderly Report with Philippa Newfield and contributes regularly to We Proceeded On.

Notes

1. *Caroline County Order Book 1732-1740*, 111, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

2. "Lost Record Note," Caroline County Records, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

3. See for example the patent dated 13 May 1679 for "Mr Richd Johnson" in New Kent County that indicates his 270 acres were "by Mr. Homes (Holmes) path." *Virginia Land Patent Book No. 6*, 685.

4. The lives of Nicholas Meriwether (father and son) and David Crawford are treated in some detail by Maurice Wesley Kendall and Guy Meriwether Benson in the Meriwether Society's comprehensive and carefully researched history of the first three Meriwether generations, *The Meriwether Family in America: The Colonists* (Baltimore: Otter Bay Books, 2015). For Lewis and Warner, see Merrow Egerton Sorley, *Lewis of Warner Hall: The History of a Family* (1935; reprint Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1979).

5. W. G. Stanard, "The Thornton Family," *William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine* 4:3 (January 1896): 157-64; William Buckner McGroarty, "The Taliaferro Family," *William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine* 4:3 (July 1924): 191-99.

6. George W. Meriwether, *Family Record. Meriwether*. (Louisville: The Bradley & Gilbert Company, 1889), 3.

7. Meriwether, *Family Record*., 8.

8. William Ridgely Griffith, *The Record of Nicholas Meriwether of Wales and Descendants in Virginia and Maryland* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones, 1899), 89-93; Louisa H.A. Minor, *The Meriwethers and Their Connections: A Family Record* (Albany: Joel Munsell's Sons, 1892); Minor Meriwether, *Lineage of the Meriwethers and the Minors from Colonial Times* (St. Louis: Nixon-Jones, 1895); Sarah Travers Lewis (Scott) Anderson, *Lewises, Meriwethers and Their Kin* (1938; reprint Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1984). Griffith's book establishes conclusively the line of descent from David Meriwether-Anne Holmes to Meriwether Lewis by including relevant wills and other related documents.

9. Nelson Heath Meriwether, *The Meriwethers and Their Connections* (Columbia, MO: Artcraft Press, 1964), 70. The marriage years are given in both Julian and Gregorian calendar style.

10. "Descendants of Edward III," <https://www.angelfire.com/realn3/ruvignyplus/index.html>.

11. Nell Marion Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants*, 6 vols. (1934; reprint Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1992), I:30, 46, 68.

12. T.E. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline: A History of Caroline County, Virginia* (Richmond: The Dietz Press, 1954), 450. In 1704, Hoomes was taxed on ownership of 725 acres of land in what was then King and Queen County, making him one of the largest landholders in the county. Robert Bird held 1,324 acres. See "Virginia Quit Rent Rolls, 1704 (Continued)," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 32:2 (April 1924): 149.

13. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, III:327.

14. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline*, 12. Campbell inexplicably places the passage I have quoted in quotation marks himself, without indicating the source of the quotation. It is not a verbatim quotation from the patent record.

15. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline*, 13.

16. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline*, 13.

17. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline*, 296.

18. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, II:145-46. The patent itself is in *Virginia Land Office Patent Book No. 6, 1666-1679*, 508, Archives at the Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

19. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, I:401, 515, 520; II:73.

20. Campbell, *Colonial Caroline*, 13.

21. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, I:394.

22. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, I:169, 241-43, 270, 276, 349; II:77.

23. "Will of Rowland Burnham," dated 12 February 1655, *Lancaster County, Virginia Will Book: 1654-1792*, 46-49, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

24. The names and likely ages of Thomas Holmes' daughters can be inferred from the will made by their stepfather, Robert Bird, in 1694, where they are referred to as his daughters in law and given mourning rings. For the will itself, see note 26.

25. "In the Difference Between Robert Bird as marrying the Relict of Mr Tho Holmes, Pit & Rob Holmes Deft vpon an Appeale from New Kent County Court being fully heard, It is Order'd that the Order of New Kent Court be made void, and that the Said Holmes pay Vluall Cofts, Mr Bird in Court freely Gives the Cofts to the faid Holmes." H.R. McIlwaine, *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1924), 426.

26. Robert Bird's will is transcribed by genealogist Malcolm H. Harris, "Five Wills of the Early Birds of King and Queen County," *The Virginia Genealogist* 17:3 (1973): 163-71.

27. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, II:227, 262, 369, 383.

28. See for example the Wikitree entry "John Thomas Holmes (abt. 1621 – abt. 1684)," <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Hoomes-7>. The Hoomes Family Tree at the rootsweb site repeats this spurious lineage while providing generally accurate information about George Hoomes and his descendants: <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~blondell/genealogy/SusannahBlondelHoomes/HoomesFamilyHistory.html>.

29. Campbell refers to a "Thomas Hoomes" who he says patented 3,000 acres in 1667 "On a swamp leading into north bank of the Mattaponi, below the Lewis grant" (294), which would situate it exactly at Bowling Green. This would neatly account for the tract as Holmes/Hoomes land IF we could locate the patent itself in the existing patent records or in *Cavaliers and Pioneers*. But it simply isn't there. The specificity of Campbell's language suggests the possibility that, researching and writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, he had access to a record that for whatever reason has gone missing. The evidence

remains circumstantial that George Hoomes inherited the tract from Thomas Holmes (presuming Thomas Holmes and Thomas Hoomes are one).

30. "Virginia Quit Rent Rolls, 1704 (Continued)," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 32:2 (April 1924): 149.

31. H.R. McIlwaine, *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, vol. 4 (1930; reprint Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1978), 2, 106. Neither of these grants appears in the land patent books or *Cavaliers and Pioneers*.

32. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, II: 235, 257, 359, 362, 395. Each of these patents was claimed by men from New Kent County with land on the north side of the Mattaponi or by men with land in King and Queen County.

33. Online genealogies that give a wife named Reade to George Hoomes probably originate with the angelfire site: <https://www.angelfire.com/realn3/ruvignyplus/index.html>.

34. There are scattered references to George Hoomes, Jr., in *Colonial Caroline*. See also Michael L. Marshall, "A Tidewater, Virginia, Quilt with Shenandoah Valley Connections," <https://ehcnc.org/decorative-arts/historic-trades/virginia-quilt/>.

35. "Will of Christopher Hoomes," dated 20 May 1780, *Culpeper County Will Book C: 1783-1791*, 102-105, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

36. Priscilla Holmes' relationship to George Hoomes may be inferred from the will left by her husband, Joseph Pollard, in 1791. See Mary Pollard Clarke, "The Will of Joseph Pollard of King and Queen County, Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine* 2:3 (July 1922): 162-66. For King's comments on the Meriwether-Hoomes connections, see George H.S. King to Mrs. Nettie L. Major, 28 March 1961, *George Harrison Sanford King Papers*, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. King's voluminous notes, charts, and letters have been digitized by the FamilySearch website.

37. Between 1655 and 1679, Holmes' plantation as well as the land that would become Hoomes' lay in Stratton Major Parish. St. Stephen's Parish was created from a portion of Stratton Major in 1679, and it encompassed both the Bowling Green and the Dragon Run area. Bowling Green would have become a part of the newly created Drysdale Parish in 1723, while Dragon Run remained in St. Stephen's. Regrettably, the vestry books of these three parishes are lost.

38. Nugent, *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, III:124.

39. David Meriwether served on the St. Paul's vestry throughout the 1720s and early 1730s. A 1726 report on "the present state of Virginia" by Governor Hugh Drysdale indicates that in that year, David Meriwether served as sheriff, corner, and justice of the peace for what was then Hanover County. See "Virginia in 1726," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 48:2 (April 1940): 144.

40. The lives of Francis and Thomas Meriwether are treated at length in Kendall and Benson, *The Meriwether Family in America*, 235-301.

41. *Essex County Deed and Will Book* 12, 434.

42. I would like to thank Meriwether Society members Guy Meriwether Benson (who has long suspected George Hoomes to have been Meriwether Lewis' great-great grandfather) and Joe M. Oglesby for email exchanges that helped clarify my thinking on the issues explored in this essay. I am also grateful to Virginia genealogist Victor Dunn who helped me locate relevant documents I might otherwise have missed. The distinguished Virginia-based genealogist Barbara Vines Little kindly responded to some of my questions as well. My colleague in the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance, Barb Kubik, read the article and made useful suggestions for improvement. I am especially grateful to my friend Charles Wells, a retired ESRI mapmaker (and professional genealogist), for making the map entitled *Sites Associated with Meriwether Lewis' Ancestors George and Anne Holmes/Hoomes: Boundaries as of January 1, 1711*.

Correction: Thanks to Ted Kaye, LCTA Oregon Chapter, Portland, Oregon, and Norm Mundhenk for pointing out that John Baker's article on the Whitehouse journal in *We Proceeded On* (51:1 [February 2025]) mistakenly delays Oregon's statehood in referring to Portland, Oregon Territory, in 1878 and beyond. Oregon became a state in 1859. Also, the article by Peggy Cornett on the plants of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the same issue should have stated that the Corps of Discovery traveled along the Missouri River and encountered the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa tribes in the fall of 1804.

Review

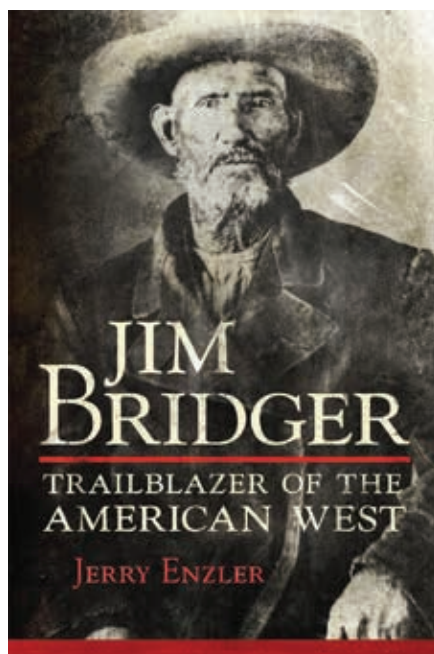
Jim Bridger: Trailblazer of the American West

by Jerry Enzler

Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021, 384 pp, \$28.00

Reviewed by Jay H. Buckley

Although this book came out a few years ago, it is worthy of review in 2025 for several reasons. First, James Bridger is one of the greatest frontiersmen in American history. Second, July 1, 2025, marked the 200th anniversary of the first Rocky Mountain Rendezvous held near Henry's Fork of the Green River, Wyoming. Interestingly, Jim Bridger eventually built his famous fort on Black's Fork of the Green River about 40 miles northwest of the first rendezvous site, nearly two decades later after the rendezvous era ended in the early 1840s. Third, there is renewed interest in Jim Bridger because of the recent book and movie, *The Revenant* (2015), which features the story of Hugh Glass' savage attack by a grizzly. The boy Bridger and a mountaineer named Fitzgerald stayed behind to bury Glass when he died – except Glass would not die. Fitzgerald convinced Bridger their lives were in danger from Indian attack and so they hastily buried Glass alive and left his body. Glass recovered and eventually tracked down and confronted both of those men, forgiving Bridger because of his youth. Finally, at the 2024 National Fur Trade Symposium sponsored by the Museum of the Mountain Man in Pinedale, Wyoming, historians proposed five nominees to be inducted into the inaugural Mountain Man Hall of Fame: Jedediah Smith, Joe Meek, Hugh Glass, Joseph



Walker, and Jim Bridger. Through a vote, symposium attendees selected Jim Bridger as valedictorian of his class – not too shabby for a boy orphaned in his youth near St. Louis who could neither read nor write.

Historians have waited 200 years for a definitive biography of Jim Bridger. Bridger's illiteracy and lack of personal correspondence were among the myriad of obstacles for anyone undertaking the endeavor. Historian J. Cecil Alter wrote the first important biography of Bridger 100 years ago in 1925, but his imprecise footnoting of the sources he used and the unavailability of sources now available made his work incomplete. Stanley Vestal wrote a biography of Bridger in 1946, but it did not provide much new information and is now regarded as unreliable.

Jerry Enzler, a Washington, DC, native, received a Master of Arts degree in Museum Studies from Cooperstown Graduate Program, State University of New York, an honorary Doctorate of Humanities degree from

Clarke College, and an honorary Doctorate of Laws from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. He served as founder and director of the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa, helped form the America's River project along the Mississippi, served as the first President of the America's River Corporation, and founded the Great River Road network of 62 museums and interpretive centers along the Mississippi River. Enzler has written and curated national exhibitions and films, received a Smithsonian fellowship, appeared on the History Channel, and published historical articles on river history and three articles on Jim Bridger in the *Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal*. In *Jim Bridger* Enzler offers readers a valuable reinterpretation of Bridger's remarkable life. His book represents the most reliable, well-researched, and comprehensive biography of this western trailblazer, mountain man, army guide, and fort operator.

Born to James and Chloe Bridger, James Felix Bridger began his earthly journey on the morning of March 17, 1804, in Richmond, Virginia. That same day, the enlisted men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition enjoyed spring-like weather at Wood River, Illinois, while the captains finalized preparations for the western odyssey. During the War of 1812, the Bridger family moved to the American Bottom, across the Mississippi from Saint Louis just east of the Cahokia Mounds. William Clark, then Indian Agent and Brigadier General of the Militia, sent dispatches that Jim's father James may have carried between Fort Osage, Arrow Rock, and Saint Louis.

Orphaned at age 13, Jim worked as a hired hand at farms and ferries along

the Mississippi before finding steady employment as an apprentice to famous gunsmith Philip Creamer in Cahokia. Missouri became a state in 1821, and the next year William Clark became the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Saint Louis. Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton helped end the government factory system, resulting in the entry of private entrepreneurs into the fur trade. Bridger was one of the youngest recruits to respond to an advertisement from Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley for hunters and mountaineers to ascend the Missouri River. The “first one hundred,” as they were called, departed St. Louis on April 3, 1822, retracing the Lewis and Clark route to the Mandan Villages and up to the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers, where they stopped and constructed Fort Henry.

A disagreement with the Arikaras the following year led to the Arikara War, a conflict that caused Henry and Ashley to send men overland to the Rocky Mountains. Jedediah Smith wintered with the Crows and then crossed South Pass in the spring of 1824. That fall, Bridger explored the Bear River and became the first documented American to see the Great Salt Lake. Bridger had a knack for leading and gaining the respect of his peers and climbed the ranks quickly. He became good friends with the Flatheads, Utes, Shoshones, and Crows and aided them in fighting their enemies of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

In 1830, Jim Bridger joined colleagues Thomas Fitzpatrick, Milton Sublette, Henry Fraeb, and Jean Baptiste Gervais in forming the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, a successor to Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, who had replaced Henry/Ashley in 1826.

Bridger married a Flathead woman named Cora. After Cora’s death, he married a Ute woman Chipeta, followed by a Shoshone woman named Mary. Bridger enjoyed horse racing on his fastest steed, Otholoho. He was present at every rendezvous and even had Dr. Marcus Whitman remove an arrowhead from his back in the 1830s. A nobleman named William Drummond Steward gifted Bridger a suit of English armor he donned at another rendezvous.

After the RMFC sold out to the American Fur Company in 1834, the beaver trade began to decline. Bridger and partner Louis Vasquez planned and constructed Fort Bridger on Black’s Fork of the Green River (modern-day Fort Bridger Historic Site, Uinta County, Wyoming). His post supplied migrants, gold rushers, and Latter-day Saints on the Oregon-California and Mormon historic trails. In 1853, the Latter-day Saints built a competing post, Fort Supply, nearby and also competing ferries along the Green River. Bridger and Vasquez sold their fort to the Latter-day Saints for \$8,000 in gold coin and another \$1,338 for the supplies. Bridger purchased a ranch on Indian Creek in the Westport/Kansas City area with the proceeds and Vasquez opened a store in Salt Lake City.

During the 1850s and 1860s, guiding became Bridger’s new money-maker. He guided emigrants, miners, engineers, scientists, and soldiers to his Rocky Mountain home. He scouted for expeditions led by Howard Stansbury, St. George Gore, and Gouverneur K. Warren from western Missouri to the Rocky Mountains. He guided Edmund Alexander and General Albert Sidney Johnston’s Army west in 1856 under

President Buchanan’s orders to punish the Latter-day Saints and install a new governor in Utah Territory. The army occupied what remained of his former fort until 1890, compensating his family many years later. Bridger guided several expeditions into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and modern Yellowstone National Park including William F. Reynolds, Edward L. Berthold, Caspar Collins, and others and located Bridger Pass in Wyoming, a shorter overland route used by the transcontinental railroad. He helped guide along the Bozeman Trail during the Civil War and he tried to avert Red Cloud’s War of 1866 by blazing the safer Bridger trail through friendly Crow land.

The life of one of the most distinguished and well-known mountain men, frontiersman, and scouts of the West ended on July 17, 1881. Bridger was a walking atlas of the west – and lived the life legends are made of. Enzler’s new biography is the most reliable, best-researched, and most comprehensive biography of this western trailblazer, mountain man, army guide, and fort operator, and offers readers a valuable reinterpretation of Bridger’s remarkable life. ■

Jay H. Buckley, associate professor of history at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, is a past president of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance and a frequent contributor to WPO. He is the author or co-author of 12 books, including William Clark: Indian Diplomat; By His Own Hand: The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis; Zebulon Pike, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West; and, most recently, Great Plains Forts.

Letter to the Editor and Response

To the Editor,

Thank you for the recent article on the Joseph Whitehouse journal in *We Proceeded On* (51:1). It is a most amazing account, but to my mind the most mysterious part of it all is how Joseph Whitehouse could simply disappear for such a long time, with apparently no trace. I would have expected that he would show up in the national censuses, but I have been told that, up until the 1850 census, only the head of household was ordinarily listed. If he were living somewhere where he was not considered the head of household, then his name would not appear. There is more detail in the 1860 census, but apparently none of the various

Joseph Whitehouses who appear in that census is our missing man. One would think that a person with some claim to fame and some interest in telling the story could not simply vanish from all record. A minor mystery concerns how Gertrude Haley moved away from Gertrude in 1879 but was nevertheless appointed postmistress of Gertrude in late 1881 and managed to serve in that position for six months.

Norm Mundhenk

Dear Mr. Mundhenk:

Thank you for your comments on my article on Joseph Whitehouse in the

February 2025 issue of WPO. I have been researching Joseph Whitehouse for 20 years, and it is good to hear from another person interested in him. Please also see “The Almost Published Journals” in the February 2023 (49:1) issue of *We Proceeded On*, available at lewisandclark.org, for more information about Joseph Whitehouse.

Joseph Whitehouse, with a pocket full of money, tried civilian life after the Lewis and Clark Expedition, purchasing a house in St. Louis. Apparently not very successful, he ended up in debt to Manual Lisa and in trouble with the Sheriff. After 14 months as a civilian, on December 21, 1807, Whitehouse rejoined the First



The original Journal of Private Joseph Whitehouse donated to the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, by Edward Everett Ayre who also donated the fair copy of Whitehouse's journal discovered in Sessler's Book Shop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1966. Photo by Clay Jenkinson.



WPO Editor Clay Jenkinson admires the aesthetics of the field-tested leather binding of the Whitehouse journal at Newberry Library, June 2024. Photo by Dennis McKenna.

Infantry at Cantonment Missouri/Fort Belle Fontaine in the company of Captain E.B. Clemson. He spent some years at Fort Osage and then participated in several major battles during the Niagara Campaign in the War of 1812. Still a private in 1817, he deserted from his Artillery Company at Fort Pike, Sackets Harbor, New York, on February 1, 1817.

What he did for the next 30-plus years is still unknown. I have reviewed hundreds of census and newspaper records from multiple states in trying to find him but without success. The most likely states he may have lived in are Wisconsin and Minnesota, the locations for the priest Canon de Vivaldi who had his original journal. It is possible he changed or modified his name if he were hiding as an army deserter. We know that sometime between 1851 and 1858 Whitehouse met Canon de Vivaldi and, from Gertrude Haley's information, he gave the journal to de Vivaldi. I have been unable to determine when and where this happened. The search continues.

I have also researched all available records for the *Augusta Her-*

ald that advertised the publication of the Whitehouse Journal in 1808. After 20-plus years of searching, I found the *Augusta Herald* subscription for the Whitehouse Journal from a regular on-line search for references to Joseph Whitehouse. The *Augusta Herald* did have the edited version of the Whitehouse Journal which ended up with Ebenezer Mustin of Philadelphia whose uncle Eli Mustin lived in Augusta, Georgia.

Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Bissell, commander of the First Infantry Regiment in 1809 and also Whitehouse's captain when he first joined the army in 1798, was from Middletown, Connecticut, the home of *Augusta Herald* publisher William Hobby. One scenario is that Bissell became Whitehouse's agent to help publish his journal and get him out of debt. As Bissell's publishing contact could have been *Augusta Herald* publisher Hobby, my theory as to why the journal was never published is that it never received enough subscriptions to make it profitable for the *Augusta Herald*. Their newspaper subscription notices were primarily in the southern states of South Carolina and Georgia.

Two research questions still remain. One: what happened to the second part of the "Original Journal" written by Whitehouse? We know from the "Fair Copy" that there was more of the original journal than we now have at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Two: what happened to the second volume of the "Fair Copy" that would have been published by the *Augusta Herald*? We have volume 1, but at the end there is a reference to volume 2. The *August Herald* subscription indicated it included a map which we also do not have.

I have the government certificate appointing Gertrude Haley postmistress in 1881. The Haleys had moved to a new home in Crane Valley, California, later called Bear Lake, in 1879, not far from the town of Gertrude. I think the Haleys were doing well with the gold mine in 1881, and she didn't need the extra income.

If you find any new information on Joseph Whitehouse, please let me know.

*Yours truly,
John Baker*

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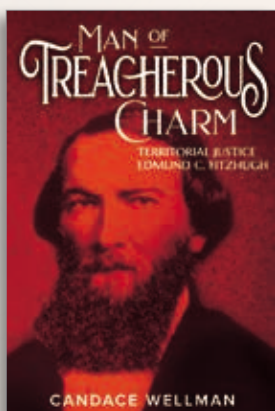
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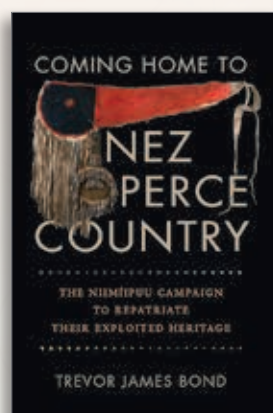


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his son. Just how old he would have been in 1805 is unclear, but if his son were accompanying him that son was probably more than just an adolescent.

Ok, let's take an easy one. **Wapato.** This brief entry was written by Barbara Fifer, the author of a number of books about the Lewis and Clark Trail.

We learn that Clark likened it to "a small Irish potato." We learn (who knew?) that the wapato root grows in every one of the lower 48 states. Fifer writes, a little wryly, that the men of the Expedition would therefore have been familiar with it (*Sagittaria latifolia*), "although maybe not as food." The Expedition first tasted wapato on November 4, 1805, near Ridgefield, Washington. Lewis characteristically gave it a culinary review. Wapato became a staple of the Expedition's Fort Clatsop diet, in part as relief from lean or spoiled elk meat. On March 26, 1806, as the Expedition began its return journey, Clark described how Native women harvested the swamp potato by digging with their bare feet to release it from the mud while holding themselves upright by gripping the lip of a canoe. We learn that "it was first officially named and described by Carl Ludwig Willdenow (1765-1812), a physician, botanist, and taxonomist who was head of the Botanical Garden in Berlin." Fifer also reminds us that when the captains conducted the fabled plebiscite to help them decide where to construct their winter compound, Sacagawea said she'd prefer a location with "plenty of Potas."

Finally, I've randomly chosen an article that was written by the late, great Joe Mussulman, who undertook the "vast enterprise" of building a comprehensive internet encyclopedia of Lewis and Clark back when the available technology was by today's standards no better than an eight-track tape player. Joe was one of my very favorite friends in the Lewis and Clark world.

The subject is:

Moose. Unlike most Lewis and Clark scholars, Joe was an old-school antiquarian in the tradition of England's John Aubrey (1626-1697). Joe's brain was a vast repository of fascinating, often unusual information, and he delivered up his historical and literary nuggets with irresistible whimsy and even some delightful self-congratulation.

Not content merely to inform the reader that the Expedition had only one certain moose encounter (July 7, 1806), Mussulman explains that western civilization's first recorded moose sighting was by Julius Caesar (of all people!) in the first century BCE. The first encounter with a moose by a White person in American history came in 1614 in Maine. The unnamed individual heard an Algonquian Native call it something that sounded like *mus*.

As Joe moves from one fascinating digression to the next, he almost appears to have forgotten Lewis and Clark. We know – but he doesn't say – that the sighting occurred near Lewis and Clark Pass east of Missoula, and that Reubin Field shot and wounded (but did not kill) the moose "near our camp." Tough day for Lewis' Newfoundland dog Seaman. Not only was Seaman bitten by a beaver on July 7, but when the moose appeared Lewis noticed "my dog much worried." This, by the way, is what the antiquarian Joe would call the *penultimate* mention of Seaman in the journals. Eight days later, Lewis writes, "The musquetoos continue to infest us in such manner that we can scarcely exist, . . . my dog even howls with the torture he experiences from them." After that, Seaman disappears from the journals for the final 70 days of the Expedition. Nobody knows what became of the dog.

I knew there was a moose in Lewis and Clark, but I have often wondered why they called it a "moose deer." Joe provides the answer. English travelers at first thought it was some sort

of elk, but then decided to call it a "moose deer" instead, in the same way that at first the Piegan Blackfeet called the horse an "elk dog." So when Lewis called it a moose deer he was merely using common nomenclature.

There may have been a much earlier moose sighting, on May 10, 1805, in far eastern Montana. Private Joseph Whitehouse reported that Expedition hunters said they saw "some Moose deer, which they said was considerably larger than the common deer." Some scholars have suggested that what the hunters saw were actually mule deer. It is worth noting that there are moose in eastern Montana and northern North Dakota even now.

Joe spends considerable ink in trying to convey how weird, ungainly, and dangerous moose are. He writes, "A male, called a bull, is as tall as a big horse, and weighs 1800 pounds and up, although it is utterly devoid of equine grace in stance and motion." It's clear in this article that Joe is having a good time. He writes:

Then there's the in-your-face attitude. The crouched stance, the hunched-up shoulders; the nose as formidable as a Humvee's hood; the underslung jaw; the upper lip bulging like a cowboy's crammed with chaw; the brow-beating glare from eyes absurdly small for such a big head. But the ears are proportionally large. Those cloven five-by-six-inch hooves can be deadly defensive weapons. The voice matches it all: the bull's, a bellow, a croak, and a bark; the cow's, a quavering moan cut off with a cough, or a grunt to call her calves. The effect of a slight shake of its head is amplified by its dewlap, the flap of loose skin that dangles from its throat. All in all, you'd rather not meet one, even in a nightmare.

All this is just a wee sampling of the almost unbelievable depth, range, and excellence of Discover Lewis & Clark. It's the work of scores of scholars. I consult it on every Lewis and Clark subject I'm studying. Even when I start with a plain Google search, as often as not our site is algorithmically first in line. That tells us how many hundreds of thousands of people worldwide depend on lewis-clark.org.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to internet pioneer Joe Mussulman (1928-2017), but we now owe equal gratitude to Kris Townsend. The fact is that Joe's site was stuck in a kind of techno-limbo at the end of his life. He knew the software he had employed from the beginning (1998) was woefully outdated and there was some question as to whether all that information and wisdom could be converted to a more flexible and graphically pleasing platform without pulling every article and starting from scratch. Joe found the answer to his concerns in Kris Townsend, a gifted photographer and web developer.

Consulting Discover Lewis & Clark now is a perfect delight. The layout and aesthetics are superb – pleasing to the eye and a breeze to use. The site is enlivened with reproductions of historic paintings and illustrations, plus photographs, many by Kris Townsend, who tries to take photographs at the same season, location, and weather as when Lewis and Clark passed through.

The Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance has many important cultural assets. Under the leadership of Joe Mussulman and Kris Townsend, Discover Lewis & Clark is one of the best. ■

Clay Jenkinson



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