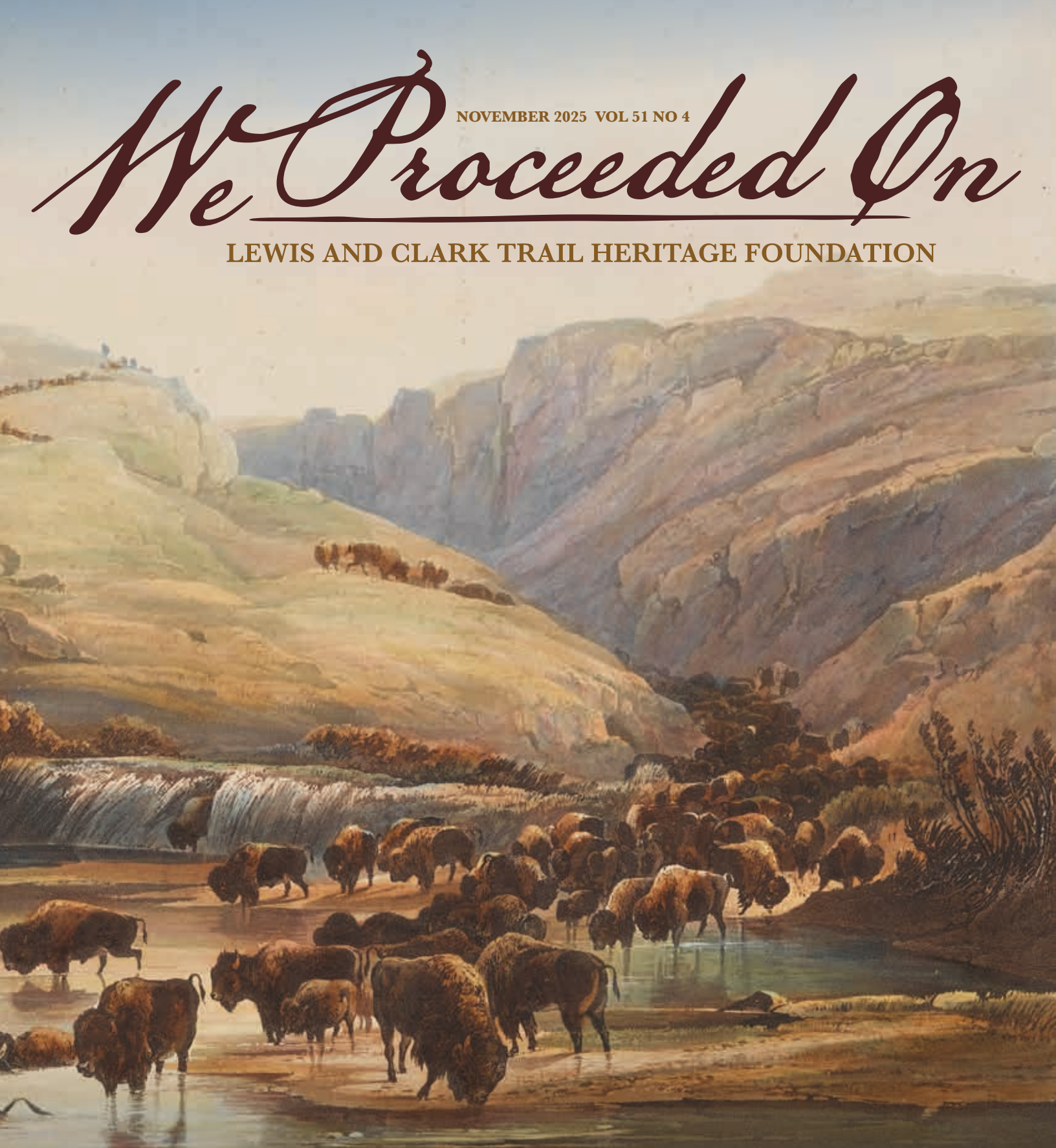
NOVEMBER 2025 VOL 51 NO 4

We Proceeded On

LEWIS AND CLARK TRAIL HERITAGE FOUNDATION



- Preview: Two New Books
- Lewis Recrosses the Divide
- Art Illuminates the Trail
- How the Judith Came to Be the Judith

Some Thoughts on Jefferson's Brainchild

We take it for granted that the Lewis and Clark Expedition was Thomas Jefferson's brainchild. We all know the basic outline: previous attempts to get the West explored; the "Sputnik moment" (1801) when Alexander Mackenzie's book *Voyages from Montreal* spurred the President to get the journey authorized by Congress; Lewis' presence for a couple of years at the feet of the master in the White House; the famous June 20, 1803, instructions; Jefferson's "unspeakable joy" when the Expedition returned to St. Louis safely.

The Louisiana Purchase occurred in 1803 while Jefferson was serving his first term as president. In urging his representatives in Paris to secure American access to the Mississippi River all the way to its mouth, Jefferson was not intending to buy the Louisiana Territory. In fact, he was at that time more interested in the Floridas (our Florida, plus the Gulf coast all the way to Texas). But he had the good sense - with a little help from his friend and Secretary of State James Madison - to accept Napoleon's offer to sell us the entire Missouri River watershed for three cents per acre. Jefferson instructed Lewis to ascend the Missouri to its source *before* the U.S. bought the Louisiana Territory. The mission changed somewhat when the U.S. took possession of those 575,000,000 acres, 828,000 square miles, all or part of 14 future states.



Map of the Louisiana Purchase, *acquired by President Thomas Jefferson in 1803. His initial intent was to secure the mouth of the Mississippi River, but he got more than he had bargained for. Original by Frank Bond, Government Printing Office (1912), Map no. 4. Wikimedia Commons.*

Counterfactual history is always dicey, but I doubt that the other presidents of Jefferson's time would have made the Louisiana Purchase. Not even George Washington, who had extensive dealings (and holdings) in the West. Certainly not John Adams, the New England Federalist. Not James Madison who went along with Jefferson's visions of America, but did not always agree with his impulses. Probably not even James Monroe, who had bonafide western credibility, but who was probably too timid to do something so bold himself. Monroe sought Jefferson's counsel, for example, before promulgating the Monroe Doctrine in 1823.

Meriwether Lewis lived with President Jefferson in the White House (probably in the East Room) for over two years before he undertook the great journey. He served as the President's private secretary (i.e., aide de camp). He couriered messages to the Capitol including Jefferson's State of the Union Messages. He escorted Jefferson's daughters into the District of Columbia when they came to visit in November 1802. He handled some of the delicate interactions with James Callender as the Scottish-born journalist and scandalmonger attempted to blackmail Jefferson into giving him the postmastership of Richmond. He was frequently a guest at Jefferson's famous afternoon dinner parties at the White House, where Lewis would have played the role of usher and greeter.

How much Jefferson and Lewis talked about the American West is unknown. Because Lewis' first assignment was to determine which military officers should be retired for their unreconstructed opposition to what Jefferson called "the second American revolution," they must have spent a good deal of time discussing the payrolls. It is said that on the White House grounds Jefferson tried to teach Lewis his own idiosyncratic method of obtaining longitude. In those White House years Lewis must have learned a good deal about Jefferson's agrarian vision of a nation of small-r republican farmers, his imperial designs on the continent, and his makeshift "Indian Policy."

Jefferson was a preternaturally busy man in and out of office. He took his duties as President very seriously. He insisted, for example, in seeing every piece of government communication from each of his five cabinet members: Secretary of War, Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of the Navy, and Attorney General. President Jefferson probably didn't have a great deal of time to spend with Lewis in those months. Jefferson was busy in his campaign to chasten the U.S. Judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, as presided over by his second cousin, once removed John Marshall. He was also preoccupied by the ongoing crisis in the Mediterranean as Islamic pirates preyed upon American shipping interests.

We'd give anything for a transcript of Jefferson and Lewis' conversations about Louisiana, the Missouri River, Native Americans, and the Corps of Volunteers for Northwestern Discovery.

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Herds of Bisons and Elks on the Upper Missouri, 1832-1834, by Karl Bodmer (1809-1893). Courtesy DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

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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E. G. Chuinard, M.D.,
Founder, *We Proceeded On*

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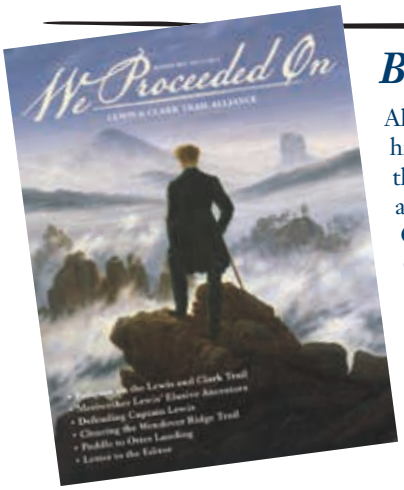
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As Keepers of the Story~Stewards of the Trail, the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance provides national leadership in maintaining the integrity of the Trail and its story through stewardship, scholarship, education, partnership, and cultural awareness.

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A Message from the President



LCTA President Bill Bronson

I write this issue's message while attending the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance's Annual Gathering in Kansas City, taking in the informative talks, enjoying the company of our members, and mindful that the submission of this letter is a tad bit overdue to the editor! So, on to business!

This year's annual meeting gave the Alliance Board of Directors the opportunity to engage with elements of our strategic plan, adopted in late 2023. This engagement is critical to the long-term success of this organization. Most of you know the reasons why, but let me elaborate here nevertheless.

The Board, in interactions with several committees and task forces as well as individual members these past several months, has had conversations about subjects of great importance to the Alliance:

Membership:

Although our overall numbers have remained relatively stable for about a year, we are mindful this circumstance will not stay the same without implementing new and innovative membership plans. The number of people who interact with us on the Internet and over social media is amazing. How do we translate these brief excursions into our territory into more active participation?

Annual Gatherings:

All of us love our annual get-togethers along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. They increase our knowledge and appreciation for the Lewis and Clark story as well as related subjects, and they rekindle old friendships and associations. But these pleasures are being increasingly matched by some pain. Meetings are becoming expensive propositions for many of our members. Travel over long distances is no longer comfortable for many. (Today's airlines to me are like the cattle cars I used to watch fill up next to the stockyards, before the trains took the cattle off to slaughter; at least with our travels to annual meetings, we have something pleasurable to look forward to!) We have meetings planned through 2027, but we need to consider carefully whether we can continue with this format in the future, and if so, how we can do it while accommodating the concerns described above.

Partnership Relationships:

We have barely scratched the surface yet on developing better and stronger associations with the various "friends" groups and others along the Trail that share our mission. Likewise, many of our members belong to other national trail organizations, all of which are dealing with the same issues confronting the Alliance. There is a need for more interaction here, so that we can learn from one another, reinforce each other, and collaborate in ways that preserve all of us.

Alternative Programming and Education:

COVID taught us that we did not necessarily have to disengage from conversation with each other while travel and personal meetings were not possible or advisable. Unfortunately, even with the crisis now behind us, we have yet to take full advantage of what we learned then about the use of virtual technologies to promote regional and national engagement and learning sessions. We need to go back to what we learned then and build on it so that we can enhance future learning opportunities.

Fundraising:

Our members are generous, but in order to sustain this organization in the coming years, we must seek more funding from sources outside the traditional membership structure. Numerous grant opportunities await us and must be examined carefully and integrated into our customary practice. We need to enhance our marvelous endowment to make sure it provides more operating capital for our annual budget. We also need to renew our outreach to members and others about remembering the Alliance in their estate planning, as opposed to just paying dues or even making donations. We are already the beneficiary of one generous bequest this year, and another one awaits us in the coming year.

Library and Archives:

The William P. Sherman Library and Archives located in our Great Falls, Montana, headquarters, is an incredible asset. We have missed the presence of a librarian now for two years. Our Library and Archives Committee has become reenergized in the

past year and is working on a series of new objectives for the institution, but we also need to address fundraising specifically designed to ensure that the library is able to fulfill its role in our organizational structure.

Committees:

The Alliance has a history of strong engagement by special committees appointed to address important topics, such as education and trail stewardship. We need to ensure our existing committees remain relevant moving forward and not be afraid to create the new committees – permanent or *ad hoc* – necessary to accomplish our basic mission.

The challenges posed by these projects seem daunting, but the Corps of Discovery faced challenges far more daunting. I recall the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy's telling an audience one time, "Some people look at things as they are and say 'why.' I dream the things that never were and say, 'why not?" Your Board of Directors agrees. It is time to stop focusing on the "*why*," and start working on the "*why not*?"

During our most recent meeting in Kansas City, we decided to tackle the aforementioned concerns, and more, in a reasoned and comprehensive manner. The Board unanimously concurred with the recommendation to establish a "Future Initiatives Task Force." I am pleased to report that LCTA Vice-President Pat Traffas has agreed at my request to chair this special group. Pat is well-suited to this role, based in part on her participation in sister organizations like the Oregon-California Trails Association, but no less on her broad experience in the preservation and promotion of American history. Pat will also assume the presidency of our organization in the fall of 2026, when the recommendation of the task force will be clear and their implementation hopefully well under way.

During Board deliberations on this subject, LCTA Past President Lou Ritten made perhaps the best statement about how this task force should be perceived by all of us. He noted that the task force's mission promises both "renewal and evolution" – *renewal*, because we are reaffirming the essential mission statement of the organization: we are and will remain the "Keepers of the Story," and we are and always shall be the "Stewards of the Trail." How we accomplish that mission is part of the *evolution*. Even if within the next year we adopt a new and/or modified membership structure, enter into new arrangements consistent with the concept of an "Alliance," or change or modify the way we conduct some of our business, any changes will nevertheless exhibit the evolutionary cycle by which the best and strongest organizations survive and grow. Many sister organizations already look to us as a leader in these matters. We can and will live up to this reputation.

If you, as members, have ideas that would aid the task force in its work, please don't hesitate to contact Pat through our office in Great Falls. Likewise, if you believe you have something to contribute to one or more of our various committees, please don't hesitate to reach out to me personally. Part of my responsibility as your president is to ensure that our committees are well populated not just with LCTA officers and Board members but with members who have something to contribute for the good of the order. You can find out more about our committee structure by visiting our website, lewisandclark.org.

The experiences of our Kansas City meeting left all of those who attended well-pleased and energized to "proceed on" with contributing more to the future of the Alliance. Attendees will hopefully echo the sense of optimism I express here. For those of you who were unable to attend, I hope this letter will fill you with the same sense of optimism. Look for further updates as we continue to enjoy our experiences along the Trail. ∎

Best wishes,
Bill Bronson
President, Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance
Great Falls, Montana

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Additional info: call (888)701-3434, e-mail us at grants@lewisandclark.org, or ask any LCTA Board member.



Lewis, Clark, York, Sacagawea, and dog Seaman, *statue by Robert Scriver, in the Lewis and Clark National Historic Interpretative Center, Great Falls, Montana. Wikimedia Commons, Robert Scriver.*

We Proceeded On

The Journal of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance

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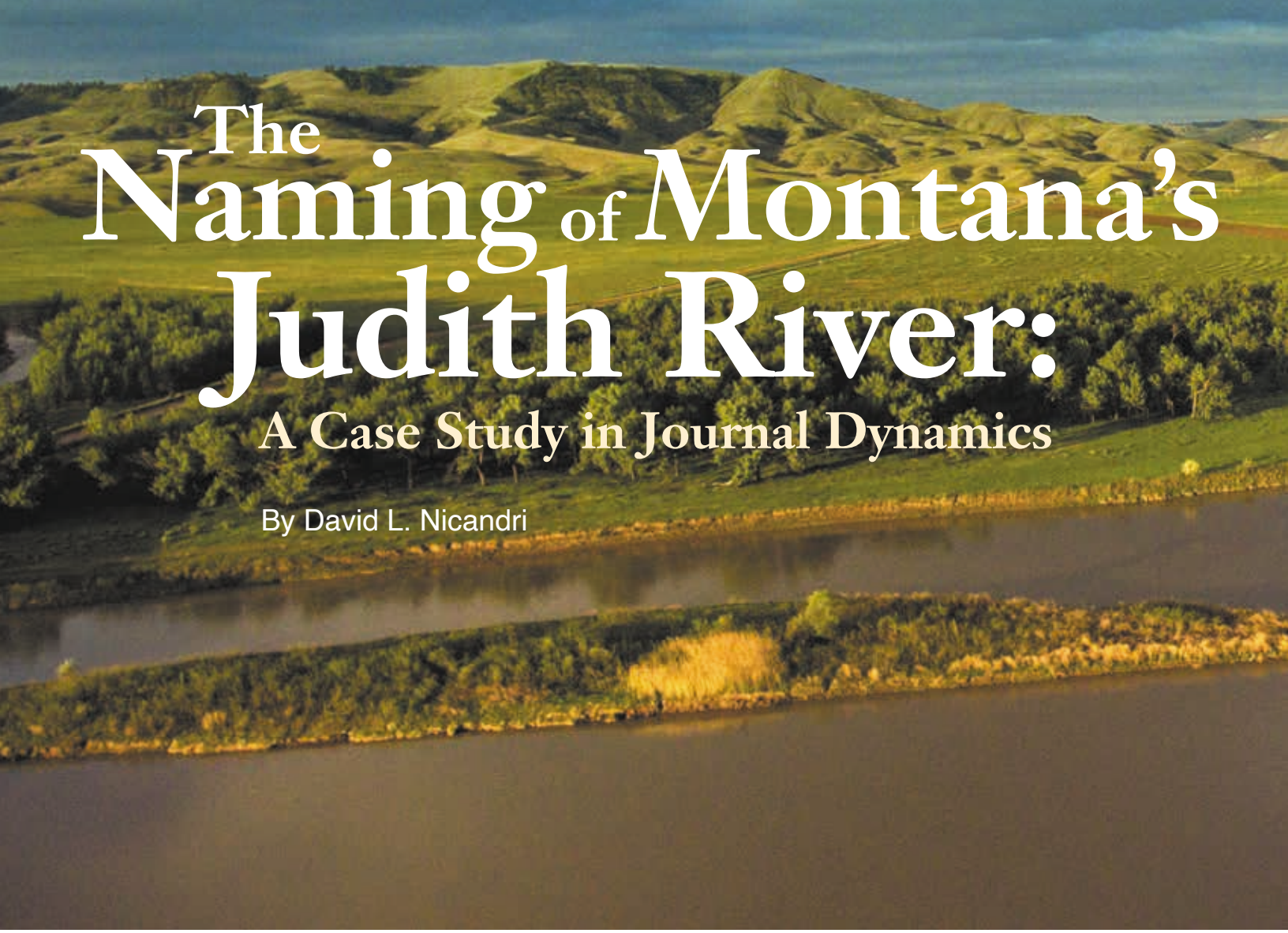
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The Naming of Montana's Judith River:

A Case Study in Journal Dynamics

By David L. Nicandri

Judith Landing, part of Judith Landing Historic District between Winifred and Big Sandy, Montana, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. Lewis and Clark camped here on May 29, 1805. Courtesy Kris Townsend.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark placed hundreds of place names on the landscape of the North American west. For students of exploration history, toponyms are well worth paying attention to because they often provide subtle clues into aspects of an expedition not explicitly visible. For example, I've argued elsewhere that Lewis and Clark's naming of tributary streams between the Great Falls of the Missouri and that river's three forks is suggestive of the identity of the so-called missing journal-keepers.[1] (I concluded they were Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor and privates Robert Frazer, Thomas Howard, and John Potts.) Toponymic anomalies are especially worthy of notice. Consider Captain James Cook's odd reliance, for an Enlightenment man, on the liturgical calendar during the North American phase of his final expedition.[2]

One of the more curious, and oft-referenced, aspects of Lewis and Clark's naming pattern is the occurrence of the Judith and Marias rivers. These stand out because of the overt personal connection between the explorers and the named subjects. Captain Cook would not have dared to name an island in the Pacific or a cape on the Northwest Coast after a former girlfriend, his wife, one of his children, or some other relative. That the American captains did so smacks of a lack of seriousness or amateurism.

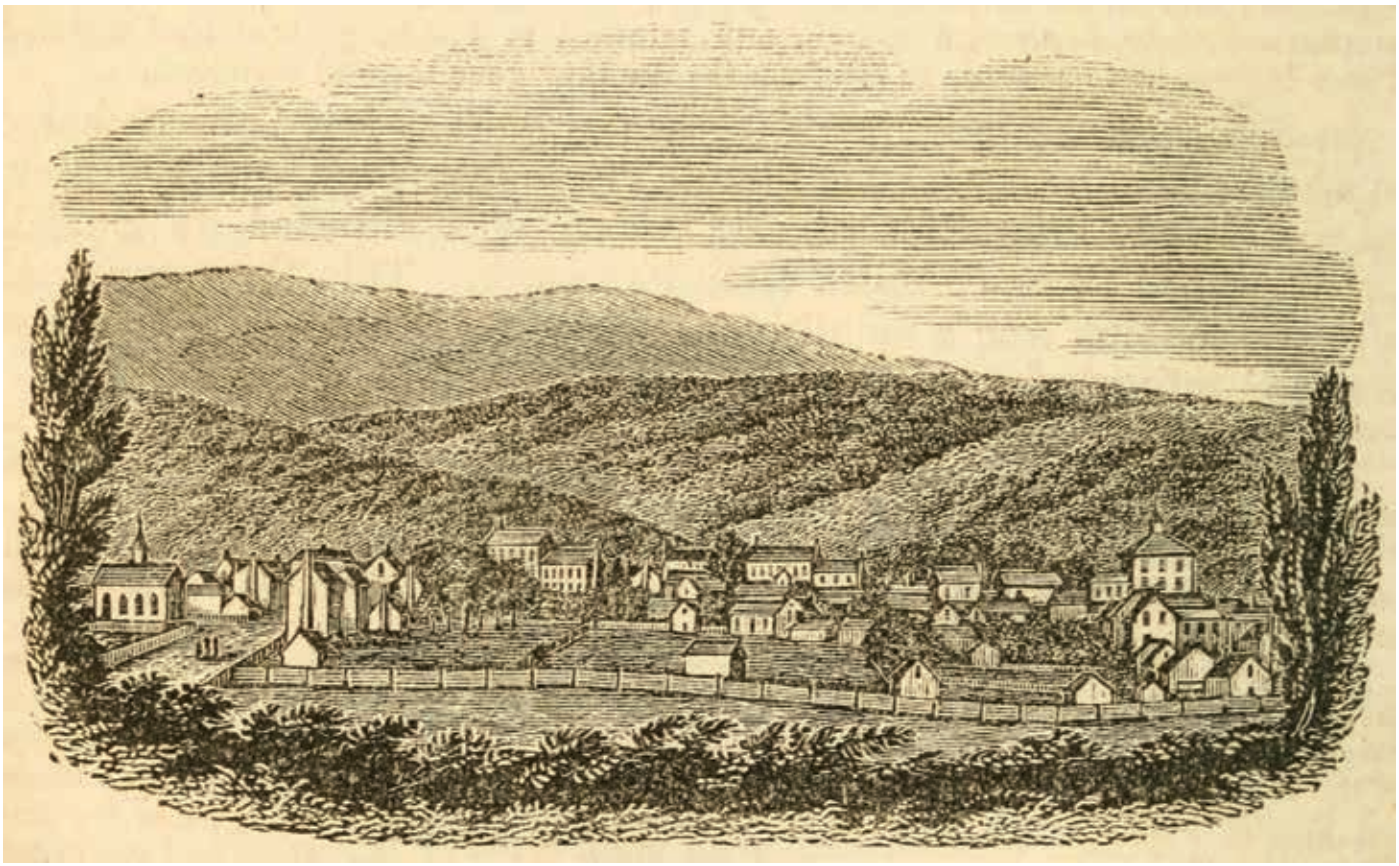
Lewis and Clark's naming of these two rivers was of no particular research interest to me until I was asked to review a fictional account dealing with the Expedition for WPO.[3] The work in question suggested that Clark had an unwholesome interest in a pre-teen girl whom he would eventually marry after the Expedition. Wishing to fully engage in that



author's work prompted me to investigate the Judith River place name more fully; really, for the first time. Space allotted to the review did not then allow an elaboration, now provided here, on how failing to appreciate the dynamics of exploration journal construction can lead authors astray.

As is so often the case with the Lewis and Clark story, a simplistic reading of the journals by even the most practiced of historians has led to a host of mistaken impressions and conclusions.[4] Here is the principal fact of current relevance: With a few exceptions (like Clark's elkskin-bound field notes made westbound on the Columbia), most of what has passed down to posterity is a second-generation version of occurrences written in a studied manner, commonly with a retrospective casting of events. Which is to say, the journals are *not* like diaries written on the actual date to which they are appended. Much of what we see in finished form in the Moulton edition of the journals was written weeks, months, and in some cases years after the actual event described. This last time frame is the case with the naming of the Judith River.

If generally true, some really good historians have fallen into the particular trap of a naïve or too-literal reading of the journals in the case of the naming of the Judith River. The prevailing interpretation (if only defined by its popularity), Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage*, is representative. Recounting the Expedition's westbound progress in central Montana, he describes the appearance of a stream that "came in on the south side. Clark walked up it and named it Judith's River, after his cousin Julia Hancock."[5] Née Judith



Fincastle, Virginia, location of Julia Hancock's home in Botetourt County. Wikimedia Commons.

Hancock, she seems to have preferred the familiar "Julia," though her father persisted in using Judith.[6]

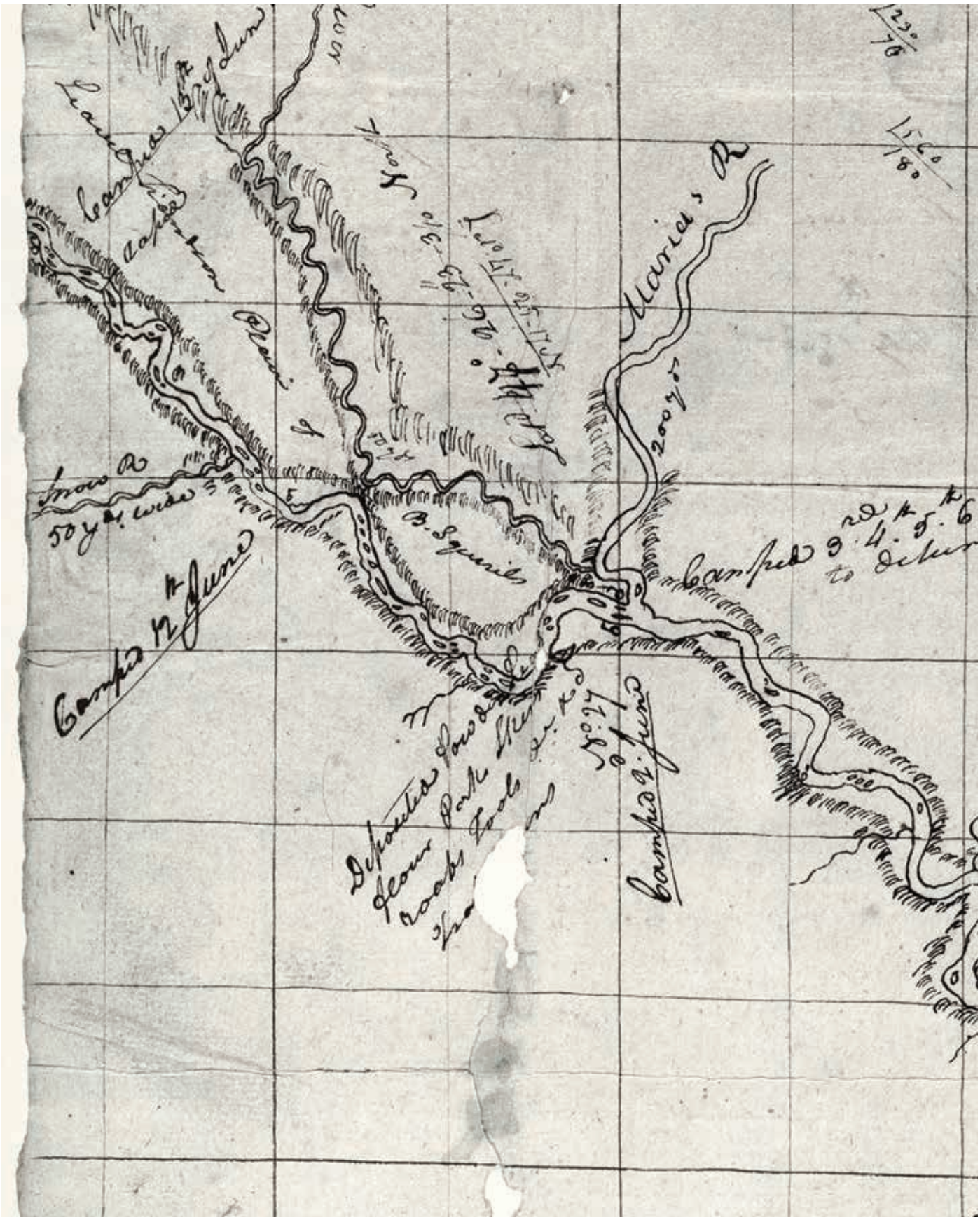
Ambrose's spare phrasing is doubly misleading. Not only does it assert that Clark named the stream in May 1805 (which he did not), it confuses Clark's supposed acquaintance with Julia Hancock with Lewis' relationship to his cousin, once removed, Maria Wood, the daughter of Lewis' cousin Mildred Lewis Wood. Lewis would name the Marias River after her a month later. Ambrose elaborates on the Clark-Hancock connection when describing Lewis and Clark's separation on their post-expeditionary return to Virginia in December 1806. While Lewis visited his family before reporting to President Thomas Jefferson, "Clark went to Fincastle, Virginia, to see friends – especially Julia Hancock, who had been a child of twelve when he last saw her and after whom he had named the Judith River."[7] Whether Clark went to Fincastle in this instance specifically to see Julia Hancock is debatable, as will be explicated below.

Not to single out Ambrose, nor to create a catalogue of erroneous interpretation, but merely to draw an explanatory line by putting a second point on the graph, Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, in the companion book to their famed documentary film, write: "Clark considered it an especially pretty stream and named it the Judith River, in honor of a young girl back in Virginia he hoped would one day be his wife."[8] Again, the premise is that Clark named the stream after Julia Hancock in 1805 and that by that point in time he had determined to marry her. The first is demonstrably wrong and therefore the second must be as well.

To be fair, some historians have correctly gauged the evidentiary pattern. Jay Buckley writes: "It appears that after the expedition, [Clark] went back to revise his map and named Judith's River in Montana."[9] As for Clark's supposed fascination with the young Hancock girl, Thomas Danisi and John Jackson assert, "It is difficult to imagine that William Clark had been dwelling on the possibility of Julia Hancock as a wife" during the course of the Expedition.[10]

*****

So, what's the real story behind the naming of the Judith River? Let's start with the question of when William Clark first met Julia Hancock. According to one popular theory,



The Marias River, named for a Lewis relative, was, unlike the Judith River, named during the course of the Expedition in 1805. Gary E. Moulton, The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 13 vols. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001), 1:Atlas, Map 53.*



Santillane, Julia Hancock's childhood home in Fincastle, Virginia. Courtesy David Edwards/DHR, 2022.

in May 1801 Clark left Kentucky, traveling through Virginia to Washington and eventually Philadelphia, to clean up the financial scandal surrounding his oldest brother George Rogers. On this route he is posited as having stayed with William Preston, an old army buddy, who lived near Fincastle, Virginia, the seat of Botetourt County. As the story goes, Clark is then supposed to have made the acquaintance of the neighboring Hancock family.[11]

Judith "Julia" Hancock had been born on November 21, 1791; thus she would have been *nine* at this time. According to family legend, in an incident that Landon Jones asserts "is almost certainly apocryphal," while in rural Botetourt County William Clark rescued two young girls riding a wayward pony "along a country road."[12] The girls would eventually prove to be not only his first wife, Julia, but the person who would become his *second* wife, her cousin Harriet Kennerly. (Clark married the widow Harriet K. Radford after Julia died.) For this trip from Louisville, Kentucky, to Fincastle in southwest Virginia to make sense, Clark would have had to take what was often referred to as the Wilderness Road across the famed Cumberland Gap, thence down the Shenandoah Valley before cutting over to Washington via Harpers Ferry.

There are a couple problems with this first supposed Julia Hancock-acquaintance-scenario. There isn't any actual documentation that Clark stayed with Preston on this trip nor that the pony ride encounter actually occurred. Preston had estates in both Botetourt County and Montgomery County on the far side of Roanoke to the southwest in the direction he may have come, and a third in Wythe County even closer to Cumberland Gap. Preston could have been at any one of them. Indeed, in the future, both Lewis and Clark would have to guess at his whereabouts in addressing correspondence to him.[13]

Furthermore, on his overland trips between Kentucky and Virginia and Washington, Clark alternated between the Cumberland Gap, what he called the "Southern rout,"[14] and more northerly routes through what's now central West

Virginia, Maryland, and western Pennsylvania. Parts of this last trail followed the old Braddock Road, named after the route taken by Edward Braddock for his attack on Fort Duquesne on the Ohio River during the French and Indian War (during which George Washington served as an adjutant). There is no concrete evidence that in 1801 Clark took the southern path on his way to the capital and other seaboard points. We do know that after concluding his brotherly mission he was back in Louisville by mid-August 1801, having taken the northern or Ohio River route on his return.[15]

Clark made another trip east to Virginia in December-January of 1801-1802, a journey engineered to move the preponderance of his brother Jonathan's enslaved African Americans from Spotsylvania County to Kentucky. This plantation was far across Virginia, 140 miles (as the crow flies) to the northeast of Fincastle. Again, we are not sure if Clark took the southern route through the Appalachians on his way to Jonathan's. It's been established that he took a northern route back to Kentucky.[16]

If Clark stayed with Preston on the eastbound leg of the 1801-1802 trip, this was a far more likely occasion for his first making the acquaintance of Julia because Preston was now engaged to her older sister Caroline. They would marry on March 24, 1802. James Holmberg intimates the pony ride incident might have happened at this juncture, not the spring of 1801, further indication as to the elusiveness of what he calls the "family tradition."[17] In any event, under this second scenario, Judith Hancock would have been, therefore, only ten when Clark is supposed to have seen her. The larger point: It is widely assumed that on the basis of one of these two ephemeral introductions, Clark determined on courting the Hancock girl, seemingly proved by his naming a river after her, ostensibly in May 1805, three or four years (depending on the scenario) after he last saw her.

Clark did not actually meet Julia for certain until after the Expedition. By early November 1806, Lewis and Clark were at Louisville on the Ohio River on their way to Virginia and the nation's capital. But there they split company, and from here forward in this recounting of events it will be important to track when the two captains are separated or together. Lewis proceeded east from the Falls of the Ohio first, taking the southern/Cumberland route so as to better approach his family near Charlottesville, eventually reuniting with Thomas Jefferson at the White House on December 28, 1806.

Clark left Louisville a month later, also took the southern pass through the Appalachian Mountains, aiming to spend Christmas with Mr. and Mrs. Preston. He arrived in Fincastle in time to attend the December 23, 1806, double wedding of yet another Hancock sister, Mary, and Harriet Kennerly, the cousin from the legendary pony ride. Julia was now fifteen. Marriage was thus definitely in the air, and Clark clearly courted Julia then and through the occasion of the great Fincastle fete for him (and Lewis, *in absentia*) on January 8, 1807. Correspondingly, as Clay Jenkinson writes, "Clark was so interested in securing her hand in marriage that he missed the official Washington, DC, ball (January 14, 1807) celebrating the success of the expedition."[18] This testimonial event had been postponed several times while its sponsors waited for Clark to arrive.

Clark finally reached "Washington City" on January 18, 1807. In a letter to his brother Jonathan (now living in Kentucky) sent on January 22 from the capital, William told him that he was returning to Fincastle to visit the Hancocks and Prestons (in that order) on his way back to Missouri. In a footnote he states, using explorer-like language, that he had a collateral "object in view" for this itinerary, that is, to secure a marriage commitment from Julia. Accordingly, in this missive William asks Jonathan to tell his wife, Sarah Hite Clark, that he is about to draw on his sister-in-law's longstanding promise to "prepare Sugar and plumbs for the pies" suitable for a forthcoming wedding feast.[19]

On March 10, 1807, Clark and Lewis visited the White House to wrap up issues surrounding land warrants and back pay for members of the Expedition and to discuss the return of Big White to his Mandan village home in today's North Dakota. Clark left town for points south and west the next day, secure in the knowledge that he was to become the principal Indian agent for tribes west of the Missouri River (except for the Osages). While they were both in the capital city for those 52 days, at one or more junctures Clark spoke to Lewis about his courtship. We know this because Lewis referenced Clark's, and his own, romantic prospects in a letter dispatched from Washington on March 13, 1807.[20] This missive caught up with Clark at Fincastle a few days later. It was one of a flurry of letters (some duplicates) Lewis dispatched to him at several locations in Virginia along Clark's projected route, not knowing at which locale the communications would reach him.

As to the romantic interest that concerns us here, Clark's, in a letter of reply written later in March, he tells Lewis discretely (as was the fashion; that is, without using any first or last names, since Lewis was in the know): "I have made

an[d] attacked most vigorously, we have come to terms, and a delivery is to be made first of January."[21] The half-cryptic "we have come to terms" is a reference to his engagement to culminate in a marriage with Miss Hancock set for January 1808. Clark's life and future career were now set in motion. This was true not in the least respect because, when Clark parted company with Lewis (they would not see each other in person for more than a year), it also then seemed that the published account of their Expedition and his role as principal mapmaker was off to a good start as well.

March 1807 was a promising month for Lewis too, in all respects except his love life. After the conclusive set of meetings with Jefferson and Clark, Lewis wrote a letter to the *National Intelligencer* on March 14 (published on March 18) outlining the forthcoming publication. It also warned off readers of unauthorized accounts, other than Robert Frazer's, ironically, which never saw the light of day. Historians have yet to fully explain why Lewis would have endorsed this publishing project but determined to throw scorn on the Patrick Gass account. (My theory: Lewis sensed that Gass was very conscious of Lewis' reliance on Alexander Mackenzie's path-breaking voyage and published journal and feared that Gass might expose this.) Late in the same month Lewis headed north to Philadelphia to commence actual arrangements for publication with John Conrad, including a full prospectus which was ready to print in early April. Regrettably, this was the apex of Lewis' career as a writer because matters began heading south, proverbially. April fool's day was the start of what would become, in Clay Jenkinson's apt summarization, Lewis' "lost year."[22]

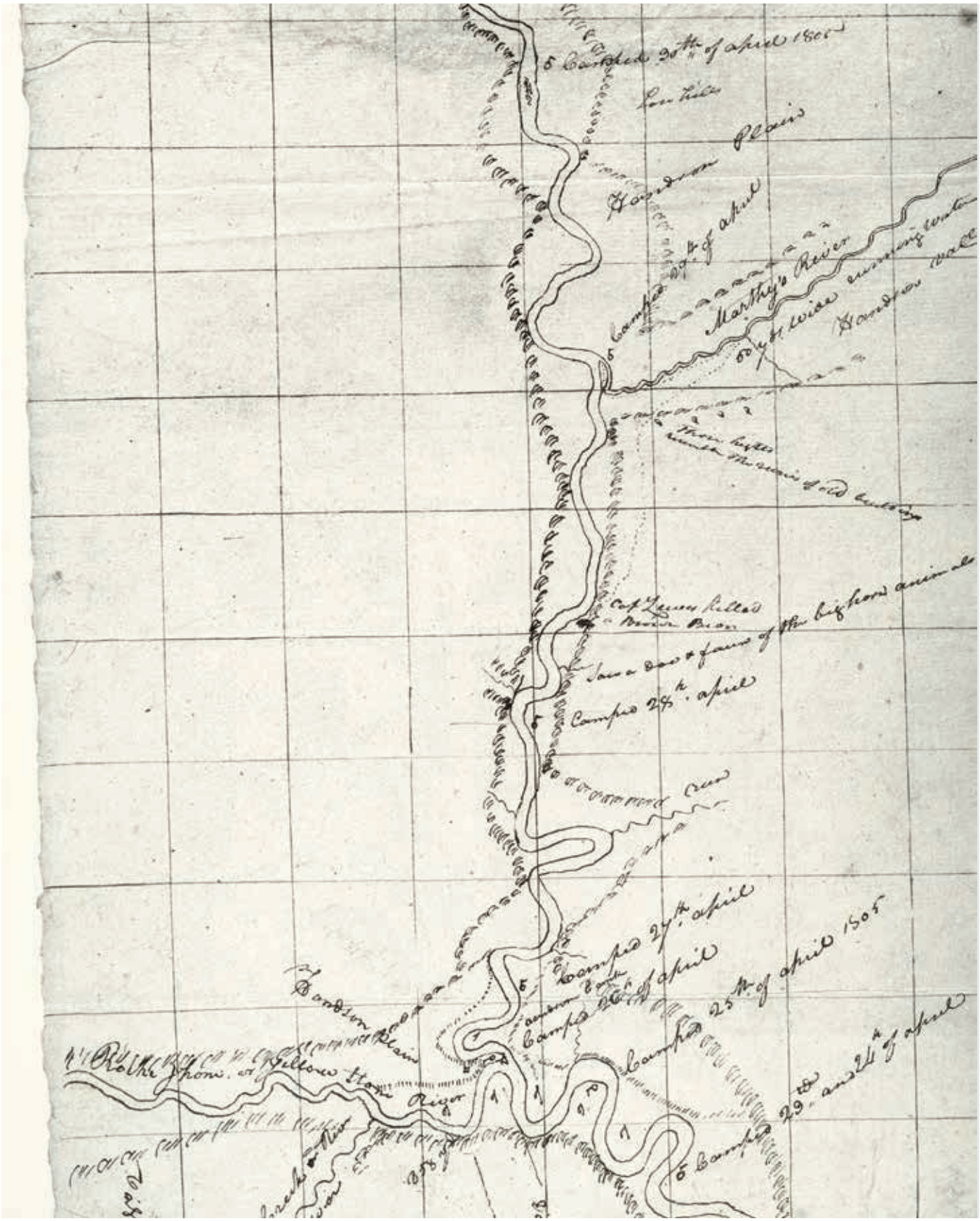
To recapitulate the ensuing chronology before analyzing the relevant portions of their journals and maps and the dynamics behind their composition: Clark was in St. Louis from April to late July 1807. He was frequently in the field conducting tribal diplomacy though in June he was doodling his betrothed's name on draft money orders. In August he was on his way east again but was delayed by having to conduct a fossil dig at Big Bone Lick, Kentucky. This was a favor to Thomas Jefferson. (The President had the bad habit of asking both Clark and Lewis to engage in clear digressions from their stated duties and obligations.) The dig and preparation of a lengthy report on that endeavor (dated November 10, 1807) took two months. After a sojourn in Louisville, Clark proceeded to Fincastle for the winter holidays and his wedding, which took place on January 5, 1808. Julia was sixteen. After the nuptials, Clark proceeded back to his duties in St. Louis. Making steady progress on the northern route, including passage down the Ohio, Clark left Louisville for St. Louis on June 2, 1808, with his new wife, York and other enslaved African-Americans, and some associates. They reached St. Louis by July 2, where they found Lewis finally ensconced in his gubernatorial position.[23]

Meanwhile, all this time Lewis (with his packet of journals including the Missouri River segment from 1805) had been, first, in Philadelphia, carousing with his pal Mahlon Dickerson and otherwise squandering his time.[24] On June 27, 1807, he wrote Jefferson with news that he planned to be in Washington by July 15. Once at the capital, he discussed Expedition finances with government officials, which business was completed in August. Lewis proceeded to Monticello, where, as was his insistent custom, the president was spending a more pleasant summer than in humid Washington. Much as he distracted Clark from more pressing obligations, late that month Jefferson cajoled Lewis into traveling to Richmond to monitor the Aaron Burr treason trial. His duties as an observer there expired in mid-September. After briefly returning to Monticello (what would prove to be his last meeting with Jefferson) to render a report on the Burr proceedings, Lewis went back to Richmond on October 8th to secure his paycheck.[25]

In late December/early January 1808 Lewis, with his brother Reuben, was finally on the road to St. Louis to warrant the salary he had been drawing as governor. Clark was at this time on his way to Fincastle for the wedding. They missed each other going in opposite directions. After stops in Lexington and Louisville, Lewis finally arrived in St. Louis on March 8, 1808. When Clark reached the same city in July it was his first encounter with Lewis since March 1807 in Washington. The separation had lasted almost 15 months. More to the point, it was the first time they had seen each other since Judith Hancock agreed to marry Clark.[26]

*****

To the journals, at last. Westbound, the Lewis and Clark Expedition left Fort Mandan on April 7, 1805. On the 29th, having crossed into modern Montana, Lewis recounted Clark's side trip up "a little river, which falls in on the Stard. Side." It's now called the Big Muddy Creek at the eastern boundary of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Clark proceeded three miles up this stream which drained, per Lewis, "an extensive, fertile, and beautifull vally." Lewis' journal continues: "This stream my friend Capt. C. named



Marthas River ("Marthy's River," upper right), named by Clark, perhaps in honor of a former girlfriend, was also named in 1805 when Clark was in the field. Moulton, ed., Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 48.*

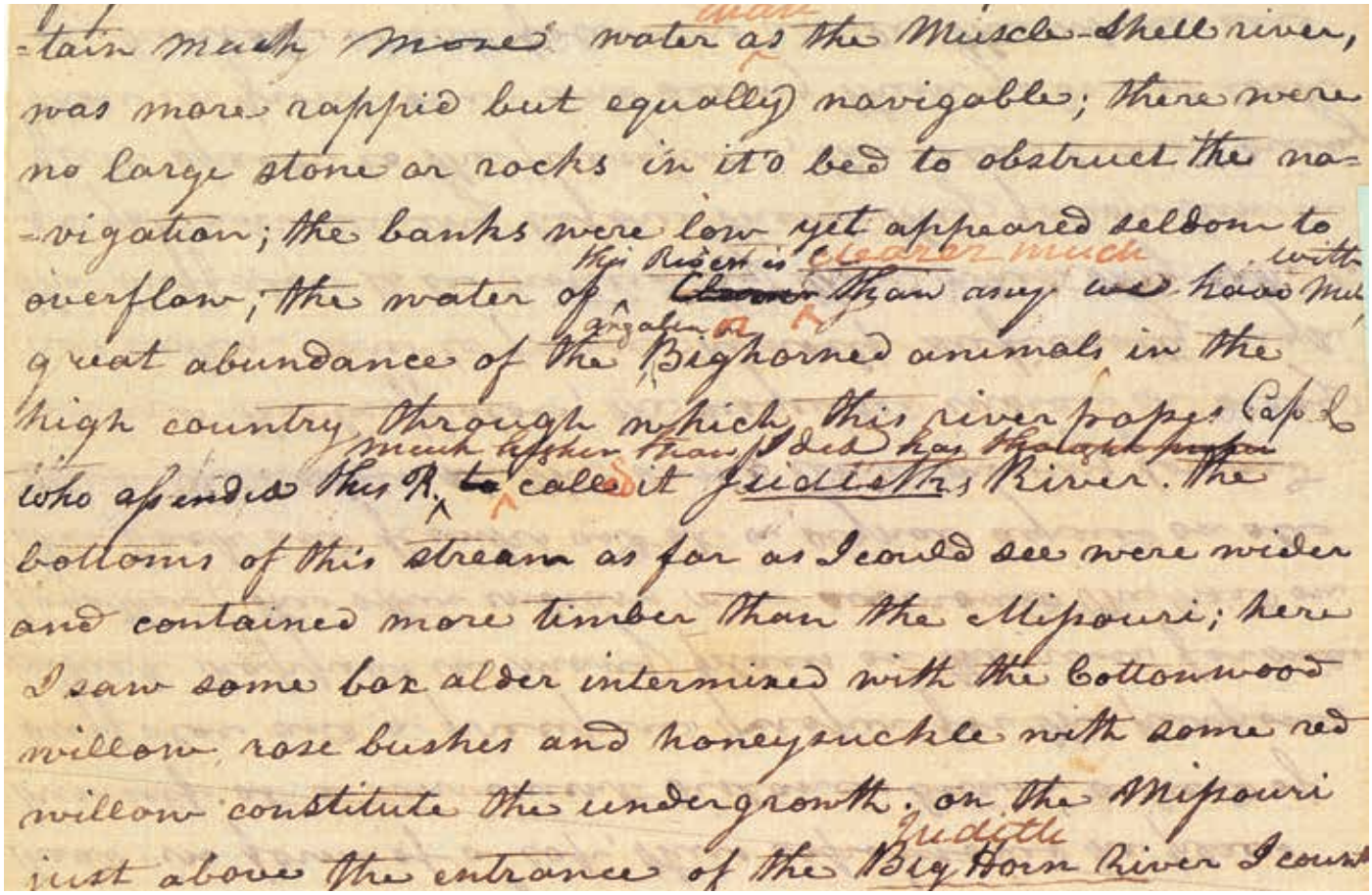
Marthas river." But Lewis at some point struck out the ensuing text: "*in honor of* [emphasis added] Miss M F." Clark, in what's been called his "verbatim" mode of journal-keeping (recapitulating Lewis' record of a day's events) writes: "*we* [emphasis added] call this river Martheys river in honor to the Selebrated M. F."[27]

From these textual gymnastics it seems safe to conclude that both Lewis and Clark, for separate reasons and at different times, wanted to distance themselves from the "honoring" of "Miss M. F." Lewis knew he bore the responsibility for writing the published account. Being a student of captains Cook and George Vancouver and their use of toponyms, he was thus more conversant with place naming sensibilities. Accordingly, naming a stream after an otherwise unknown woman but "celebrated" in Clark's mind if not his own as well, might have made him a bit queasy. As we will see in the naming of the Judith River, Lewis seems to have appreciated how unorthodox this naming strategy was (even though he would resort to it himself in due course).

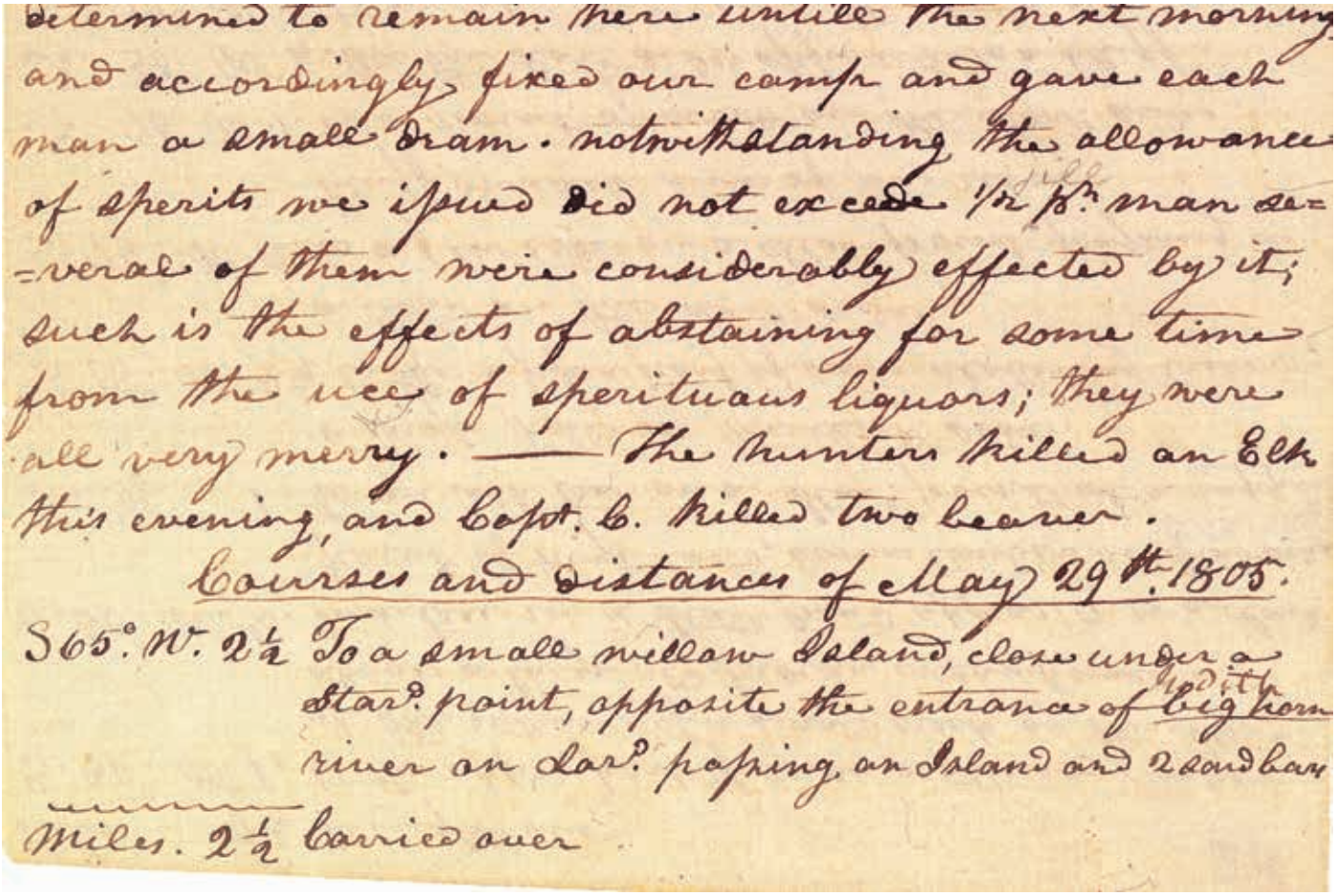
Clark's subsequent motivation for toning down the language is also easily gauged. Moulton said the identity of Clark's "Selebrated" acquaintance "remains obscure."[28] But two decades later Landon Jones ventured that "M. F." was Martha Fontaine, one of the nine daughters of Aaron Fontaine, a Louisville ferry operator. These young women were "widely known for their beauty," Jones asserts, and Clark had been fond of one of her older sisters, who spurned him in the 1790s.[29]

Exactly one month later, the Expedition encountered "a handsome river" discharging into the Missouri from the south. The stream had clearer water than any tributary so far that season, and its flanks were populated by a plentitude of big-horned sheep. As printed in Moulton, we see Lewis stipulating that because Clark "assended this R. much higher than I did" he acquired the right to name it. Lewis states: "Cap. C. . .thought proper to call it *Judieth's* River."[30]

However, an inspection of the American Philosophical Society's Bicentennial-era replica edition of this codex


-tain much more water as the Miscle-Shell river,
was more rappid but equally navigable; there were
no large stone or rocks in it's bed to obstruct the na-
-vigation; the banks were low yet appeared selbom to
overflow, the water of Yellow Stone River is clearer much with
Clearer than any we have Met
great abundance of the Bighorned animals in the
high country through which this river passes Cap. C.
who assended this R. much higher than I did has thought proper to
call it Judieths River. the
bottoms of this stream as far as I could see were wider
and contained more timber than the Mipouri; here
I saw some box alder intermixed with the Cottonwood
willow, rose bushes and honeysuckle with some red
willow constitute the undergrowth. on the Mipouri
just above the entrance of the Judiths Big Horn River I coun

Lewis' journal entry for May 29, 1805, reflecting post-expeditionary changes by Lewis made at Clark's request regarding the Big Horn/Judith River. The notations in red ink were made by Nicholas Biddle when he visited with Clark in 1810. American Philosophical Society, Lewis and Clark Codices, Codex E: Lewis Journal, May 24, 1805-July 16, 1805.


determined to remain here untill the next morning
and accordingly fixed our camp and gave each
man a small dram. notwithstanding the allowance
of Spirits we issued did not exceed 1/2 pt. man se-
=verals of them were considerably effected by it;
such is the effects of abstaining for some time
from the use of Spirituous liquors; they were
all very merry. —— The hunters killed an Elk
this evening, and Capt. C. killed two beaver.
Courses and distances of May 29th. 1805.
S 65° W. 2 1/2 To a small willow Island, close under a
Star. point, opposite the entrance of big horn
river on Lar. paping, an Island and 2 sandbars
Miles. 2 1/2 Carried over

In Lewis' course and distance log for May 29, 1805, "big horn" (lower right) is edited to reflect Clark's request that the river be named after his fiancee/wife Judith. American Philosophical Society, Lewis and Clark Codices, Codex E: Lewis Journal May 24, 1805-July 16, 1805.

(in my possession) shows that the further ascension proviso was an editorial rationale added after the fact as superscript. Which is to say, it was a cover story. Furthermore, the phrase "thought proper" was later crossed out, additional evidence that Lewis was skeptical about the propriety of this kind of nomenclature. Most importantly, as Moulton himself notes, "*Judieths*" was substituted over the erasure of the words "Big Horn" in Lewis' journal. Indeed, in the balance of that day's entry Lewis again refers to the "*Big Horn*." This is confirmation that Big Horn was his preferred and the original name of the stream. Nicholas Biddle caught the usage inconsistency and made the change to "*Judith*" in his mark-up of Lewis' manuscript.[31]

This theory is complemented by the fact that Lewis' course and distance log calls out the appearance of the "*big horn*" river, as does Clark's. Curiously, Clark's "verbatim" text leaves a blank space for the name and his course and distance log replicates Lewis' "*Big Horn*."[32] All these circumstances combine to suggest that the naming of the Judith River came much later in time, indeed, probably well after the Expedition was over at which time Clark was at least engaged to Julia Hancock if not married to her. In any event, the dynamics of this journal construction suggests a kind of pleading that Clark eventually tendered to a reluctant Lewis.

Gary Moulton told Lanny Jones, in a 2003 private communication, that Lewis changed the Big Horn to "Judieths" during the Expedition because this more formal usage betokened an acquaintance of her dating to childhood rather than the more familiar name "Julia" that she preferred as an adult.[33] But I would argue that Moulton's own detective work explaining the evolution of the Expedition's cartographic record, composed mostly by Clark, is the most direct manner to settle this matter conclusively in favor of a post-expeditionary name change.



Clark's first-generation field sketch showing the route during late May 1805, with the future Judith River (lower left) left unnamed. Moulton, ed., Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 41.*



Clark's second-generation map, prepared sometime after the Expedition's return to St. Louis, bears the name "Big Horn River" (left center), located on the transit of May 29, 1805. Moulton, ed., Journals, *1:Atlas, map 52.*

Clark's sketch map of the relevant portion of the Missouri River, prepared in the moment of exploration, on which Clark wrote his course and distances, shows the stream but it is unnamed.[34] (This lack of specification is consistent with his journal.) Clark later used these rough drafts to compose more polished versions of each Missouri River segment after the Expedition was over. We know the post-expeditionary vintage of this second-generation Missouri River cartography because the original field sketches were cached at the Great Falls in July 1805. Lewis reclaimed these maps during the return voyage in the summer of 1806, and re-presented them to Clark sometime on the float back to St. Louis after the captains joined forces below the Yellowstone. These second-generation segment replicas do not record downstream campsites.

Given this fact pattern, combined with their "physical condition and the clarity of penmanship on the maps," Moulton writes, "it seems most likely that Clark made these copies after completing the expedition,"[35] or in September 1806 at the earliest and perhaps much later. Whenever it was inscribed, this second-generation chart still carries the name "Big Horn."[36] Similarly, Clark's draft track map, completed at Fort Clatsop in February 1806, the one Lewis presented to Thomas Jefferson in Washington the winter of 1806-1807 (about the time Clark was proposing marriage), still carries the name "Big Horn."[37]

It's not until Clark's master map of 1810, prepared for use as an engraving in the published journals, that we finally see the Judith River nomenclature incorporated within



Clark's master map, begun at Fort Clatsop and revised and/or completed upon the Expedition's return to St. Louis, still carries the "Big Horn R" nomenclature (red oval). Moulton, ed., Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 123.*



Clark's draft map of 1810, prepared for the engraver's use, finally shows the Judith River nomenclature, with the Big Horn River moved to a spot further up the Missouri River (red ovals). Moulton, ed., Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 125.*

an Expedition map. Curiously, however, on this chart the Big Horn name survived, having been re-applied to a non-descript stream just up the Missouri from the Judith confluence. When in the field, this minor tributary went unnamed by both captains in their journals for May 29, 1805, and in their respective course and distance logs.[38] Clark has here engaged in what might be called a cartographic sleight of hand.

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So, when did Clark name the Judith River? Clearly it had to have happened sometime between September of 1806 when the Expedition returned to St. Louis and October of 1809, when Lewis died by suicide. However, that question begs two others. When did Clark have the motivation to cajole Lewis into striking Big Horn in his journal and substitute it with Judith? And, when was Clark in physical contact with Lewis to make a pleading along those lines? (For this proposition would never have been reduced to writing.)

One could argue that the change to Lewis' journal text was made sometime during January through March of 1807 when the captains were together in Washington and Clark was wooing Miss Hancock. (Naming a river for her could be seen as a courtship gesture.) But recall, she did not agree to become Mrs. Clark until *after* Clark left Lewis' company for 15 months' duration. Would Clark have asked Lewis to make the change before she had agreed to his proposal? Perhaps, because recall again that when Clark headed to Fincastle to propose, he knew Lewis would be on his way to Philadelphia to put his journal onto the path of publication, a narrative that might make mention of certain rivers on the upper Missouri. Plus, naming the Judith could have been all the more important to Clark because, relative to the naming of Marthas River, it would have been awkward for him to have named a stream after a woman he knew in Louisville but not his future wife.

Far more likely, the change was made after Clark married Julia. All three of them (Lewis, Mr. and Mrs. Clark) would have been together for the first time in early July of 1808. And, contrary to expectations when the captains parted company in Washington the year before, Lewis had not made much if any progress on the publication of his journal. But then, Jefferson dispatched a letter to Lewis, dated July 17, 1808, chiding him about that very fact.[39] Jefferson's letter would have reached the governor sometime in August.

Accordingly, if Lewis were ever going to be provoked into getting his manuscript in order, it would have been the summer of 1808. Clark did not leave St. Louis on a treaty mission into Indian Country until August 25, returning on September 22. But, before departing on this mission, according to Danisi and Jackson's sources, "on August 20 the two former explorers considered that it might be necessary for Lewis to return east. . .to get the expedition book back on track."[40] This was almost certainly a consequence of the arrival of the President's scolding letter.

Both Lewis and Clark were in St. Louis together the balance of 1808, allowing them plenty of time for them to consult on any number of matters, including the forthcoming publication. We know the account was on Lewis' mind the last half of 1808 because in mid-December he was laying the groundwork for a trip to "Washington and Philadelphia."[41] The latter destination could *only* have entailed aspects related to the expected expeditionary account. This leads me to conclude that any changes Clark wanted made in the forthcoming publication would have been timely if made from August through December of 1808. In the event, however, Lewis did not leave St. Louis until September 4, 1809, by which time territorial affairs and related financial issues had totally distracted him and his well-being.[42] He was dead a little more than a month later, but by that time the Big Horn had become the Judith River.

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This long explication has hoped to prove that though William Clark was possibly acquainted with Julia Hancock before the Expedition, his naming of a river after her does not represent a lurid fascination with a girl nine to twelve years old (as various accounts hold), but was rather a discrete tribute to his betrothed or spouse. After all, Clark named it the Judith, not the Julia, as she was commonly known, suggesting the name was a semi-secret to avoid Clark's embarrassing himself or his wife. It was something he could point out to her on the map once it was published.

Nevertheless, we must ask, was Julia Hancock very young at the time of marriage, especially when considering her husband was two decades her senior? Yes, but not as dramatically as modern sensibilities would suggest because it was not unusual for women in the early national period to get married in their teens. Carolyn Gilman writes, Virginian women "married young, around age fifteen to seventeen." Nor, she adds, was the 22-year difference in age between her and Clark "unusual" in her culture.[43]

Nor many cultures. In what amounts to a long ethnographic essay precipitated by his direction from Jefferson to study the manners of the Indigenous people he was to encounter, Lewis explored the marriage customs of the Lemhi Shoshone. (This investigation could only have been conducted in the complicated detail he provides through the office of another young woman, Sacagawea.) In Shoshone society, we learn, fathers contracted their daughters to other older men directly, or arranged marriages for the sons of these men. In either case, the dowry came in the form of horses. But this did not happen until these girls "have obtained the age of puberty which with them is considered to be about the age of 13 or 14 years." This, according to Lewis, is what had happened to Sacagawea herself; that is, she had once been "claimed" as the wife of a Shoshone man but not until "she had arrived to the years of puberty." This unnamed man "was yet living and with this band. [H]e was more than double her age and had two other wives."[44]

The late, great Lanny Jones perhaps summed it up best when he wrote, Clark did not name this river "in 1805 for Judith Hancock of Fincastle, whom he had last seen when she was nine, but some time afterward when she had become his wife, Judith ('Julia') Hancock Clark of St. Louis."[45] ∎

David L. Nicandri, a frequent contributor to We Proceeded On, *is the author of* River of Promise: Lewis and Clark on the Columbia *(2009)*, Captain Cook Rediscovered: Voyaging to the Icy Latitudes *(2020)*, *and more recently*, Discovering Nothing: In Pursuit of an Elusive Northwest Passage *(2024)*.

Notes

1. David L. Nicandri, *Lewis & Clark Reframed: Examining Ties to Cook, Vancouver, and Mackenzie* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2020), 61-74.

2. David L. Nicandri, "On Cook, Providence and the Liturgical Calendar," *Cook's Log* 44:3 (July-September 2021), 15-17.

3. David L. Nicandri, "*Review:* The Lost Journals of Sacajawea: A Novel," *We Proceeded On* 50:4 (November 2024), 57-61.

4. See David L. Nicandri, *River of Promise: Lewis and Clark on the Columbia* (Bismarck: Dakota Institute Press, 2009), 22-23, 37-41, 44, 52, 98-106, 208, 215, 251.

5. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 227.

6. James J. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 133 n5.

7. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 407.

8. Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, *Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 97.

9. Jay H. Buckley, *William Clark: Indian Diplomat* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 68.

10. Thomas C. Danisi and John C. Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2009), 169.

11. Landon Y. Jones, *William Clark and the Shaping of the West* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 107.

12. Jones, *William Clark*, 107-08.

13. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 83 n3.

14. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 119.

15. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 30.

16. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 41 n1, 43 n5.

17. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 125 n., 133 n5.

18. Clay S. Jenkinson, *The Character of Meriwether Lewis: Explorer in the Wilderness* (Washburn: Dakota Institute Press, 2001), 315.

19. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 119, 122, 126 n11.

20. Danisi and Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis*, 169, 176 n6.

21. Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 388.

22. Jenkinson, *The Character of Meriwether Lewis*, 237.

23. Jones, *William Clark*, 156-62; Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 126-27, 127 n1, 129-31, 133 n 4, 139.

24. See Nicandri, *Lewis & Clark Reframed*, 113-21.

25. Danisi and Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis*, 171, 178-85.

26. Danisi and Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis*, 189-90; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 437; Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 6, 139.

27. Gary E. Moulton, *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 13 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001), 4:85-87.

28. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:88 n4.

29. Jones, *William Clark*, 141.

30. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:215-16.

31. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:216, 220 n1.

32. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:217-19.

33. Jones, *William Clark*, 348 n91.

34. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 41.

35. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 1:Atlas, 9.

36. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 52.

37. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 123.

38. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 1:Atlas, Map 125, 4:215-20.

39. Jackson, *Letters*, 444-45.

40. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother*, 152 n1; Danisi and Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis*, 200, 210 n48.

41. Danisi and Jackson, *Meriwether Lewis*, 206.

42. Jones, *William Clark*, 176.

43. Carolyn Gilman, *Across the Divide* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 132. Jane Austen, the paragon of early nineteenth century sense and sensibility, is another authority. Her middle-aged Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*, assessing his marital prospects, states "any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking." Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1817; reprint London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 58.

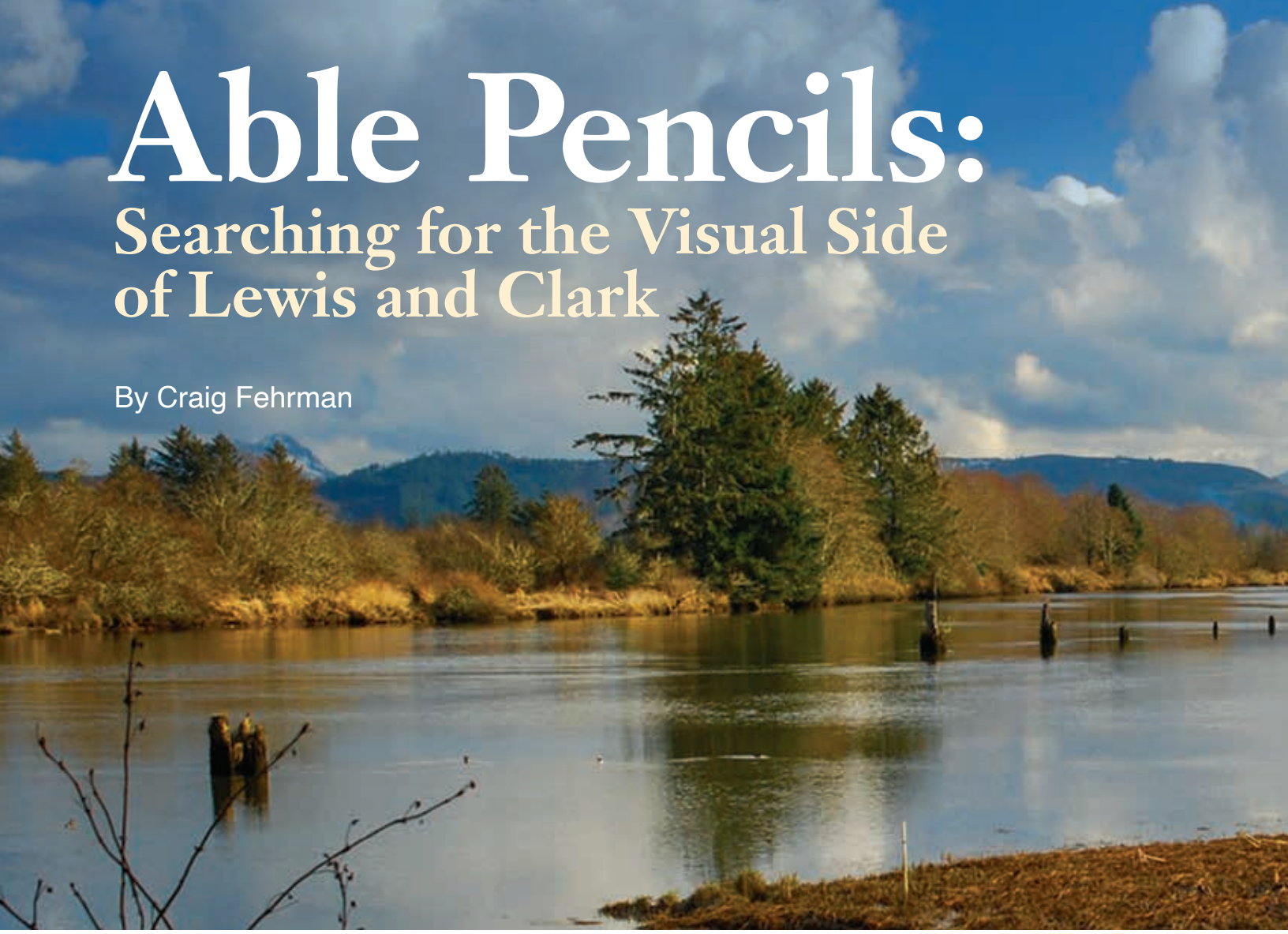
44. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 5:120.

45. Jones, *William Clark*, 142.

Able Pencils:

Searching for the Visual Side of Lewis and Clark

By Craig Fehrman



The view of the canoe landing area along the Lewis and Clark River at the Fort Clatsop National Memorial of the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park southwest of Astoria, Clatsop County, Oregon. Gary Halvorson, Oregon State Archives, Wikimedia Commons.

Lewis and Clark left behind a lot of words – more than a million, by Robert Betts' estimate.[1] But they did not leave behind many images. There are Clark's maps, of course, along with some wonderful sketches in the journals. (I'm partial to the captains' taxonomy of Clatsop canoes.) You can also visualize by visiting the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail itself, at least the parts untouched by modern dams and development. Yet there's a surprising way to see what the Corps saw. It comes from Clark's maps – and from comparing them to the paintings of George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and a few lesser-known figures.

Before we turn to these comparisons, a word about Mathew Carey's images. These six woodcuts, which Carey added to his bestselling reprints of the Gass journal, have delighted some scholars and irritated others. While I was researching *This Vast Enterprise*, my forthcoming book on Lewis and Clark, I reviewed Carey's papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania to see if Gass had any input on the infamous woodcuts or the journal itself.

Sometimes, the archives reward you, even on a subject as well-studied as the Lewis and Clark Expedition. With the images, though, I didn't find much. The only relevant correspondence was between Carey and David McKeehan, the bookish businessman who first published Gass' journal. McKeehan sent Carey a lot of letters, mostly because he owed Carey a lot of money. "I merely write to you," he pleaded in one, "that you may understand you are not forgotten, but that I have very flattering prospects to enable me to meet every demand that you or any other person may have against me."[2]



Carey was an incredible editor and publisher – someone who supercharged the careers of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, someone who, when he heard Thomas Jefferson was slicing up New Testaments and assembling *The Jefferson Bible*, had two questions: "Do you intend it for publication? If so, would you be willing to let me have the [manuscript], and on what terms?"[3] Jefferson, the most private of men, declined.

Like most Americans, Carey tracked the Corps' progress obsessively.[4] It's worth wondering how things might have gone differently if Lewis had sold his book to someone as supportive and involved as Carey – or even if Jefferson had connected Clark and Carey to assemble the book after Lewis' death. All we can say for sure is that Carey and McKeehan never mentioned Gass' intentions or involvement. McKeehan probably gave Carey the right to reprint the journal as a partial payment for his debts, and Carey probably added the woodcuts on his own, one of many savvy decisions in his long editorial career.[5] The Carey images can tell us something about Lewis and Clark's era – about its literary culture and also its material culture, the clothes people wore and the tools people used. If we want visuals directly connected to the Corps, though, we need to look harder.

I'd like to share six images of my own selection. I'll discuss the images and their locations in the order the Corps would have encountered them. I want to add a general caveat: it's impossible to be exact here. The Missouri River changed between 1804 and 1834, to say nothing of 1834 and today, and we can't always identify the campsites. Still, these images come close to the Corps' experiences. If they're off, it's by only a few miles.[6]



Ruins of Fort Atkinson *by Karl Bodmer. Courtesy Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska.*

The first image is a watercolor by Bodmer. It depicts a wide stretch of the Missouri, with a pale but striking bluff rising in the center. This bluff is the one the captains called Council Bluff, where they held their first Native council with Otoe and Missouria leaders. On July 30, 1804, Clark wrote that "Capt. Lewis and my Self walked in the Prarie on the top of the Bluff and observed the most butifull prospects imagionable." Bodmer's painting reproduces part of that view. The Corps camped and rested for several days in the bottom below the bluff. Lewis wrote that "the base of the Bluff is washed by the river about a mile; it is about 60 feet high & nearly perpendicular."[7]

On August 3, Clark declared Council Bluff "well Calculated for a fort to Command the Countrey and river." As usual when it came to logistics, Clark was right. The army installed Fort Atkinson on this spot in 1819, abandoning it in 1827. Bodmer and his companion, Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied, came through six years later. On May 5, 1833, Maximilian noted "the ruins of the fort." All that was left were "the stone chimneys and, in the middle, a roofed supply house of stone." But the bluff was still standing – the same one the captains climbed in 1804.

The second image is an oil painting by Catlin. It also features the Missouri River, but the most striking element is a flat and grassy plain, dotted with hundreds of Lakota tipis. This plain was probably the main spot where the captains met Black Buffalo and his people in the fall of 1804. Catlin was painting Fort Pierre, which sits in the middle of his landscape. The fort was named after Pierre Chouteau and opened in 1832, the same year Catlin passed by. When Maximilian and Bodmer ascended the Missouri, they carried copies of Clark's original route maps. The copy that covers the Lakota council, Map 23 in Moulton's *Atlas*, makes clear that the Corps' campsites from September 25 through September 28 sat right across the river from the future Fort Pierre.



Fort Pierre, Mouth of the Teton River, 1200 Miles above Saint Louis *by George Catlin. Courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.*

It seems likely that the Lakota put their tipis in the same plain in 1804 that they did in 1832. In fact, Catlin met one of Black Buffalo's sons on that very plain, a Lakota leader named One Horn. One Horn, Catlin wrote, showed him "a simple small shell that was hanging on his neck, which descended to him from his father, and which, he said, he valued more than anything he possessed."[8]

If you can imagine Catlin's painting with no Fort Pierre, then the view is very similar to the one the captains and their men had during their councils and feasts. The one big difference was noted by Clark on September 26: in 1804, the Lakota formed "their Camp in a circle."[9]

The third image is an aquatint based on Bodmer's work. It captures Fort Clark, built in 1830, but next to it is a Mandan town, Mih-tutta-hang-kusch. This town sat three miles south of Mitutanka – Sheheke's old town, the one closest to Fort Mandan. In 1822, Mitutanka's residents moved to the new town depicted by Bodmer. Still, the aquatint reveals a lot about the Corps' time with the Mandan and Hidatsa – the mounded earthlodges, the spiky stakes of the defensive palisade, and most of all the sheer number of people. According to the captains' estimates, in 1804 these five Native towns combined for a population of around 4,000 people, bigger than Washington, DC, and roughly four times the size of St. Louis.

What I like most about this aquatint, though, is its frosty chill. There's the frozen Missouri, the heavy gray skies, the weak winter sun, and the bushes shellacked with ice. When selecting a site for Fort Mandan, the captains wanted, as Clark wrote on November 2, 1804, "a place well Supld. with wood." You can see just such a place on the aquatint's opposite shore – the same shore where the fort was built,



Fort Clark on the Missouri *(February 1834) based on Karl Bodmer. Lewis and Clark wintered in the forested area similar to the one on the right across the river from the Native village. Courtesy New York Public Library, New York, New York.*

a couple miles to the north. The Corps turned that cottonwood grove into firewood and a fort, both of which kept them warm, though never warm enough. Even John Ordway, the hardy New Englander, remarked on the plains winter. On December 8 – a day when the captains measured the temperature at 12 below zero – he noted that it was "colder this morning than I ever new it to be in the States."

The fourth image is another aquatint based on Bodmer's work. On September 9, 1833, Bodmer left Fort McKenzie, a trading post near the confluence of the Missouri and the Marias, to make a sketch. His subject, according to Maximilian, was "the first chain of the Rocky Mountains." Bodmer and Maximilian were probably looking at the Highwood Mountains – the same mountains that Clark probably spotted on May 25, 1805. In his journal for that day, the captain wrote, "I also think I saw a range of high mounts. at a great distance to the S S W. but am not certain as the horozon was not clear enough to view it with Certainty."

The Corps kept moving, and those mountains became unmistakable. They loomed in view of the party for weeks. "High Mountains," Lewis wrote on June 1, "at a considerable distance covered with snow." This aquatint shows how those mountains must have looked and, even more, how they must have felt – an attraction but also a threat, a series of dark peaks, scalloping the sky.

The fifth image is an engraving of a sketch by John James Barralet. While this image is not as striking as Bodmer's or Catlin's, it offers something else – a direct link to Lewis and his own sketch of its subject, the Great Falls of the Missouri. On June 13, 1805, Lewis sat in front of the falls – "I took my position on the top of some rocks about 20 feet high," he wrote, "opposite the center of the falls."

Lewis wrote more than a thousand words of description. He ended up hating all of them. His writing, he felt, failed "to give to the enlightened world some just idea of this truly magnifficent and sublimely grand object." So Lewis made a sketch. He tried "to trace some of the stronger features of this seen." The captain planned to use his sketch and his memories to inspire "some able pencil" to make something better.



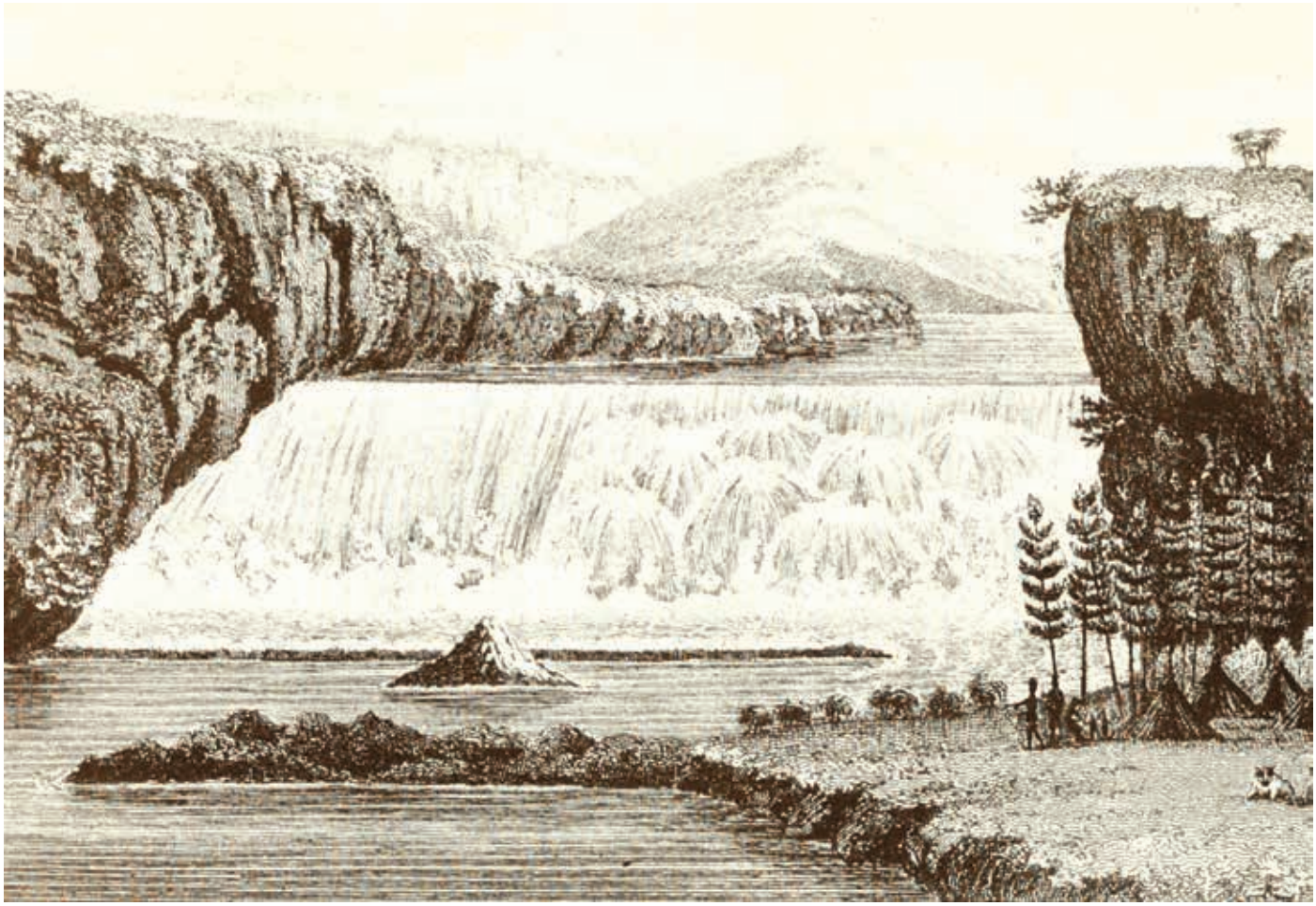
View of the Rocky Mountains *based on Karl Bodmer. Courtesy New York Public Library, New York, New York.*

Barralet was that pencil. In 1807, Lewis paid him $40 to turn his first sketch, plus a second one he made on the return trip, into something sublime. Apparently the result did not impress Clark – in a letter, he described "imperfect drawings . . . of the falls" – and the engraving of Barralet's sketch ran only in an Irish edition of the captains' book.[10] Still, the image hints at the overwhelming scale of the falls. It also hints at Lewis' personal touch. Since his own sketches have never been found, this is the closest thing we have to what he drew on that June day. And the rocky outcropping in the center of the image must have been the one Lewis sat on while he sketched and wrote.

The sixth image is a lithograph based on a painting by Henry Warre. It features another mountain, Mount Hood, towering over the Columbia River, just past the Dalles. The Corps spotted this mountain on October 18, 1805. Clark wrote that they "saw a mountain bearing S. W. conocal form Covered with Snow." He mentioned the mountain repeatedly as the party approached the Pacific, often calling it the "Timm" or "Falls Mountain," the name used by local Natives.

The Columbia is one of the Expedition's richest stretches in terms of visual documentation; the Army Corps of Engineers took many black and white photographs before the Dalles Dam was finished in 1957, and there are other early photographs by Edward Curtis and E. Jane Gay. But colorful images like Catlin's or Bodmer's are rare. Warre's lithograph captures the majesty of Mount Hood. The lithograph makes it easy to appreciate how exciting it and the other Cascade peaks must have felt to the Corps. They had maps that told them exactly where Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens were. Those peaks promised that they had almost reached the Pacific, their goal.

The captains knew how powerful images could be. That's one reason Lewis worried so much about getting his Great Falls visuals just right.



Principal Cascade of the Missouri *by John James Barralet,* History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clarke*, 2 vols. (Dublin: J. Christie, 1817). Courtesy www.archive.org.*

But there are some things that only words can convey – things like a person and his interior emotions. Lewis' first visit to the Great Falls can also serve as an example here. On his first night at the falls, Lewis found himself feeling grateful. "My fare is really sumptuous this evening," he wrote on June 13, "buffaloe's humps, tongues and marrowbones, fine trout parched meal pepper and salt, and a good appetite." Perhaps Lewis was thinking about his recent sickness. Still, his words suggest he was thinking about something more. A good appetite, he wrote, "is not considered the least of the luxuries."

There had been times in Lewis' life when his appetite had left him. Jefferson had seen it. Clark had seen it. Lewis had seen it – had felt it – most of all. Those struggles had taught him that a good appetite was worth celebrating, and so, in his journal, Lewis did exactly that. He left us a different kind of picture – a picture of a human being understanding his demons and, in this moment, standing up to them.∎

Craig Fehrman began studying the visuals of Lewis and Clark during the five years he spent researching his book, This Vast Enterprise: A New History of Lewis and Clark, *which will be published on April 21, 2026, by Simon & Schuster. In it he includes archival discoveries about Jefferson, the captains, regular soldiers like John Ordway, and the many Native nations the Corps of Discovery encountered. He's also taken an innovative approach to the story, with each chapter presenting a new point of view. Chapter 1 focuses on Lewis' perspective, Chapter 2 on York's, Chapter 3 on Jefferson's, and so on.* The Wall Street Journal *called Fehrman's first book,* Author in Chief, *"one of the best books on the American presidency to appear in recent years." Craig will preview* This Vast Enterprise *– and his chapters on Ordway – during a Zoom with Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance members sponsored by the Southwest Region, which will be available after November 2, 2025, on LCTA's YouTube channel.*



Mount Hood from Les Dalles *based on Henry Warre. Courtesy Rees-Jones Library of the American West, Southern Methodist University, University Park, Texas.*

Notes

1. Robert B. Betts, "'The writingest explorers of their time': New Estimates of the Number of Words in the Published Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," *We Proceeded On* 7:3 (August, 1981): 4-9. Betts estimates that the captains and their men combined to produce 1,123,445 words.

2. McKeehan to Carey, October 3, 1810, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Lea and Febiger Papers, 1810 Correspondence series, Box 71. Thanks to Lee Arnold and Anthony DiGiovanni for their help with the Carey papers. Thanks to James N. Green for sharing insights into Carey's career.

3. Carey to Jefferson, October 22, 1816, Founders Online, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-10-02-0357.

4. See Doug Erickson, Jeremy Skinner, and Paul Merchant, "Mathew Carey: First Chronicler of Lewis and Clark," *We Proceeded On* 29:3 (August, 2003): 28-33.

5. The lack of Gass touches on another classic Lewis and Clark question: how much of the text in Gass' journal is Gass'? The scholarship of Carol Lynn MacGregor, especially her editing of *The Journals of Patrick Gass* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 1997), makes clear that Gass was a smart and literary person, and I agree with her that most of the prose came from the sergeant. But I would add that there are moments where McKeehan clearly takes over – and they are often the moments historians find most tempting to quote. Consider Gass' famous riff on May 14, 1804: "The best authenticated accounts informed us that we were to pass through a country possessed by numerous, powerful, and warlike nations of savages, of gigantic stature." No other journal echoes this passage. (No other journal ever uses the word "gigantic" – not once in a million words.) It seems obvious that, in this spot, McKeehan decided to juice the narrative. He probably drew on one of the viral news stories produced by the Corps: the reports on the Osage delegations' visit to Jefferson, with the newspapers often describing the Osage as being "of a gigantic stature" (*Kentucky Gazette*, June 12, 1804).

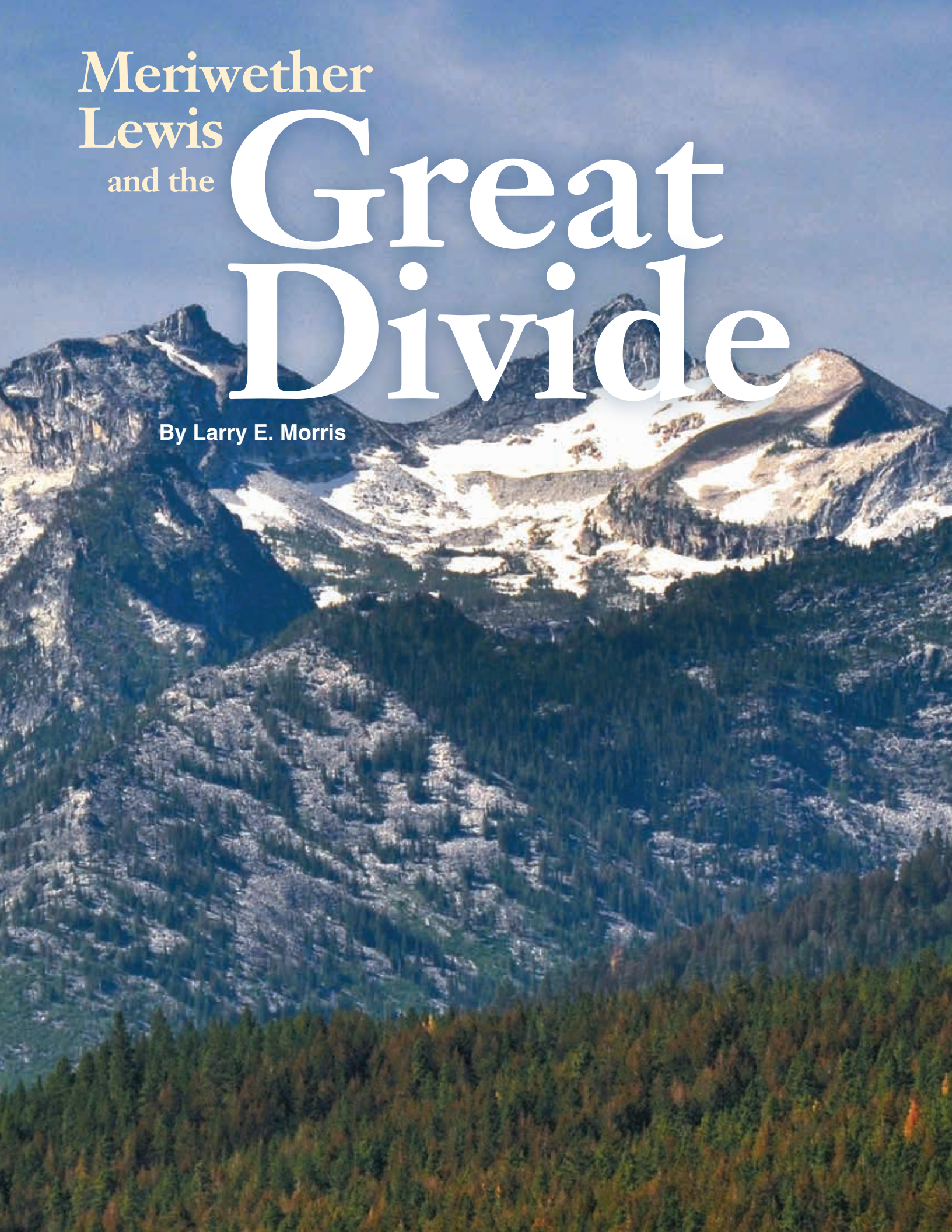
6. I can connect these images to the Corps' journey only because of excellent scholarship. I relied on Gary Moulton's editing and footnotes, and my journal citations, identified by date, are to his online edition: https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu. I also relied on Stephen S. Witte and Marsha V. Gallagher's editing of the Maximilian journals, which I cite in the same manner. Lewis and Clark fans might spend a few hours on their wonderful site, which includes Maximilian's journals and many rare Bodmer images: https://maximilian-bodmer.org/journal/. Also invaluable was Moulton's *Atlas of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) and Roy E. Appleman's *Lewis and Clark: Historic Places Associated with Their Transcontinental Exploration* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1975).

7. If Lewis were keeping a journal or field notes at this time, they have not been found. This quote comes from his report on the Missouri's affluents: https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-1805.winter.part1.

8. Catlin, *Letters and Notes* (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1857), 1:327. Some historians suggest this man's name was Lone Horn – another, younger son of Black Buffalo – but I have interviewed Black Buffalo's Lakota descendants, and they, like Catlin, maintain that the right name was One Horn. Catlin painted a striking portrait of him and his father's shell, which you can see online:https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/ha-won-je-tah-one-horn-head-chief-minicon-jou-tribe-4299.

9. Bodmer painted Fort Pierre from a different angle, which you can see online: https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbc0001.2003gen0002/?sp=43. For more on the significance of the circle, see Kingsley Bray, "Making the Sichangu Hoop: Brule Tribal Organization, 1750-1804," Arni Brownstone and Hugh Dempsey, eds., *Generous Men* (Wyk, Germany: Tatanka Press, 2008), 147–62.

10. For Clark's letter, and much more on this topic, see Joseph A. Mussulman's excellent "Illustrating the Great Fall," Discover Lewis & Clark, https://lewis-clark.org/arts/visual-art/illustrating-the-great-fall/



Meriwether Lewis and the Great Divide

By Larry E. Morris

On August 12, 1805, Meriwether Lewis and a few companions became the first United States citizens to cross the Continental Divide, fulfilling one of their fondest hopes but also bringing them face to face with a hostile new landscape. "West of the Continental Divide," historian Vern Huser wrote, "Lewis and Clark found a confusing jumble of mountains and a complex network of streams, a discouraging perspective, given their primary goal. They had anticipated a single river flowing directly west to the Pacific. They found rivers, but they didn't seem to go where the explorers wanted to go. . .The rivers the Corps of Discovery knew. . .in the eastern United States were tame compared to these western rivers."[1] Nothing illustrated the confusion of this landscape more than Lewis' experience along the Montana/Idaho border, when he, George Drouillard, Hugh McNeal, and John Shields reached the "most distant fountain of the waters of the mighty Missouri." The four men celebrated by drinking the "pure and ice cold water" of the Missouri, then crossing a "dividing ridge" – Lemhi Pass – and first tasting "the water of the great Columbia river."[2] The quartet believed they had followed Jefferson's instructions to explore "the portage between the heads of the Missouri & of the water offering. . .the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent."[3]

But there was a problem. They ascended the "dividing ridge" expecting an easy passage to the coast; instead, they found "immence ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow."[4] Not only that, but Shoshone chief Cameahwait told them the "bold running Creek" they had found was part of a river – the Lemhi – that "discharged itself into another doubly as large . . .confined between inacessable mountains. . .impossible for us to pass either by land or water down this river to the great lake where the white men lived."[5] With the help of a



Lemhi Pass. *Although Lewis and Clark knew they had crossed the Continental Divide at Lemhi Pass, they had no idea how difficult it would be to reach the Pacific Ocean. Courtesy Tony Huhn and Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance (www.lewisandclark.org).*

At left: Como Peaks, Bitterroot Mountains.
Courtesy Roger Peterson, Wikimedia Commons.

Shoshone guide called Old Toby, Clark confirmed that the turbulent waterway, Idaho's Salmon River – known as the river of no return for good reason – was indeed impassable.

The trouble was, Jefferson "had studied the geographical lore of the Northwest thoroughly and had extracted from it a proposal to establish a Passage to India," which theorized that at the head of the Missouri the explorers would locate "a portage over a height-of-land. From here they would pass over a divide into the navigable waters of westward-flowing streams and then down to the Pacific."[6] Yes, Lewis and the others walked from a rivulet of the Atlantic to one of the Pacific, and if the Columbia were as navigable as the Missouri, they could have reached the coast in a month, but Jefferson and all the "experts" were mistaken. There was no "height-of-land," no easy portage across the Rockies.

Old Toby, however, knew the northern country better than anyone else in the tribe and offered a ray of hope when he told Clark of a different branch of the Columbia to the north. So, on September 1, with the weather turning cold, the 33 members of the Corps of Discovery, their veteran guide and his son (whose name is not known), with 29 horses bought from the Shoshones, headed due north, toward Lost Trail Pass.

"They were entering mountains far more difficult to pass than any Americans had ever attempted," writes Stephen Ambrose. This was "rough, seldom traveled mountainous country, with no Indian trail. . .[and a] confusion of creeks and ravines cutting through the mountainsides."[7] The Corps scaled "high rugged hills" in a September hail storm and "descended a Mountain nearly as steep as the Roof of a house." Every day, morning rain turned to afternoon snow, with no game in sight and "little to eate," the band traversing "emence hils and Some of the worst roade that ever horses passed."[8]

After life-saving help from Salish Indians, they followed the Bitterroot River downstream and on September 9, 1805, near present-day Missoula, Montana, they found a "fine. . . clear running stream. . .about 20 yards wide." Lewis "determined to halt the next day rest our horses and take some [celestial] Observations," calling the spot "*Travellers rest,*" at present-day Lolo Creek. They were 160 miles from the Shoshone village but still dependent on Old Toby, who advised them to "leave the [Bitterroot] river at this place," even though he was unsure where the Bitterroot "discharged itself into the columbia river." Old Toby then surprised the captains by announcing that the Clark Fork River took its



Thomas Jefferson, *c. 1791-1792, by Charles Willson Peale. In June 1803, Jefferson instructed Lewis to explore the Missouri River and its "communication with the waters of the Pacific" to find "the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce." Courtesy National Gallery of Art,Washington, DC.*

rise from the mountains near the Missouri River to the east and that if a party ascended that river through a valley, they could reach the river's source and then cross the Continental Divide "about 30 miles above the *gates of the rocky mountain*" and thus "pass to the missouri from hence by that rout in four days [on horseback]."[9]

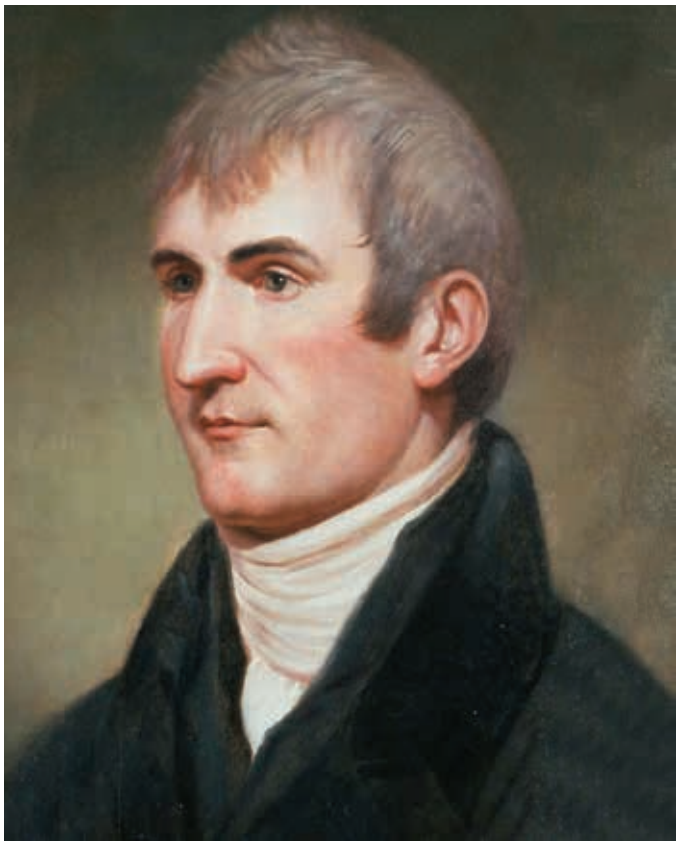
"*Four days*!" bellows Ambrose. "It had taken the expedition fifty-three days to travel from the Gates of the Rocky Mountains [about twenty miles north of the site of Helena, Montana] to its present location [near the site of Missoula]. Whatever emotions Lewis felt when he learned that the party might have saved seven weeks he kept it to himself."[10]

Despite this discouraging news, Old Toby's recommendation that the Corps leave the Bitterroot River proved accurate when John Colter befriended a Nez Perce Indian who "agreed to continue with us as a guide, and to introduce us to his relations whom. . .resided. . .on the columbia river."[11] The corps thus continued west with new hope, soon welcomed by the Nez Perce nation, who helped them prepare

to descend the Clearwater, Snake, and Columbia rivers to the coast. For the present, however, they still had a range to cross. Sergeant Gass, initially calling the peaks to the west "very steep," soon said they "made the travelling fatiguing and uncomfortable," finally calling them "the most terrible mountains I ever beheld."[12] Men and horses grew "much fatigued" and desperate for food, but the hunters found no game, and Indian horses had eaten all the grass. "We were compelled to kill a Colt. . .to eat. . .and named the South fork Colt killed Creek." On September 16 the snow continued all day. Clark went ahead on foot but "found great difficulty in keeping" the trail because of the deep snow, "passing emince Dificulet Knobs Stones much falling timber and emencely Steep."[13] Still, Clark retained his endless optimism.



[Meriwether] Lewis in Indian Dress [Shoshone] *by William Strickland after Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint Memin (1807) published in Analectic Magazine and Naval Chronicle, 1816. Courtesy Missouri History Museum, St. Louis, Missouri.*



Meriwether Lewis, c. 1807, *by Charles Willson Peale. "Capt. Lewis is brave, prudent, habituated to the woods, & familiar with Indian manners & character," wrote Jefferson. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.*

Not so with Lewis. David Nicandri argues "that the first cracks in Lewis's psyche" – which eventually led to his suicide at an obscure Tennessee inn in 1809 – "occurred in the Pacific Northwest. From his first few days west of the Continental Divide. . .until he re-crossed the Bitterroot Mountains in June 1806, Meriwether Lewis was confounded by the country drained by the Great River of the West."[14] In a letter written after reaching St. Louis, Lewis revealed just how deeply the nerve-wracking crossing affected him: "I have not leisure at this moment to state all those difficulties which we encountered in our Passage over these Mountains—suffice it to say we suffered everything Cold, Hunger & Fatigue could impart, or the Keenest Anxiety excited for the fate of Expedition in which our whole Souls were embarked."[15] Nor did recrossing the Bitterroots – and then the divide itself – ease Lewis' anxiety or halt his downward spiral, for in the last three months of the Expedition he made a series of mistakes that twice almost cost him his life and ended his historic voyage on an inglorious note.

"A Canoe Which Belonged to the Clatsop Indians"

On Monday, October 7, 1805, the Corps finally set out on a water course for the Pacific, with no one in the party doubting that this had been the most trying period of the journey. The delay in transitioning from Atlantic to Pacific waters cast an irreversible pall over Lewis, but ironically, the Corps of Discovery, with invaluable help from the Shoshone, Salish, and Nez Perce nations, had fulfilled Jefferson's instructions the best they could by finding the one and only reasonable passage between the Missouri and the Columbia. Jefferson's assumption that the latter had several tributaries near the head of the former was correct, but he could not foresee the effect the unforgiving western landscape had on the course of rivers. The Snake River was the key tributary of the Columbia, but, as the Astorians discovered, the upper Snake did not offer navigable access to the Columbia because of the deep gorge called Hell's Canyon. As noted, Clark confirmed that the Salmon was impassable. Then there was the fork of the Columbia that bypassed the Snake – the Clark Fork/Pend Oreille River – but even the expert navigator David Thompson waved the white flag when trying to get past Metaline Falls. That left one option – the Clearwater, which flowed into the Snake below both Hell's Canyon and the Salmon. But even passing from the Dearborn River to Travelers' Rest and then to the Clearwater would have required advanced planning and packhorses to carry supplies over a long haul. The upshot? Whether called the Passage to India, the Northwest Passage, or something else, Jefferson's "direct and practicable water route" was nowhere to be found.

Making good time in their canoes, the Corps reached the mouth of the Snake on October 16, Celilo Falls on October 23, and the Cascades of the Columbia on October 30. The most memorable day of the voyage came on November 7. "Great joy in camp we are in View of the Ocian," Clark wrote.[16] In December the men built Fort Clatsop, where they spent the next few months, but we don't know how Lewis felt about these happenings because he had not, with two minor exceptions, updated his journal since September 22. What we do know is that the time on the coast was full of



Snake River in Idaho. Courtesy Bob Wick, Wikimedia Commons.

boredom, sickness, and constant rain that often spoiled the elk, fish, and roots the group hardly liked in the first place. "The captains found many of the natives' customs and attitudes repugnant," writes Moulton. "Although the Indians never manifested real hostility, the commanders took strict security measures to insure the safety of the party."[17]

Lewis resumed writing in his journal on January 1, 1806, returning to his detailed entries, not mentioning his failure to write for three months but making his fragile mental state clear by noting, "Our repast of this day . . . consisted principally in the anticipation of the 1st day of January 1807, when in the bosom of our friends we hope to participate in the mirth and hilarity of the day, and when with the zest given by the recollection of the present, we shall completely, both *mentally* and corporally, enjoy the repast which the hand of civilization has prepared for us."[18] His subsequent entries frequently provided detailed descriptions – and impressive sketches – of everything from Indian fishhooks, arrows, swords, canoes, and head-flattening methods, to pine cones, fern leaves, condors, and white gulls. Still, Lewis was more like an inmate biding his time than a man who had found his mental and emotional bearings. He reflected on his time on the coast as "having been so long imprisoned in mountains and those almost impenetrably thick forests."[19] Indeed, the Corps' four-month sojourn ended on a sour note, a fitting portent of Lewis' final months as Jefferson's trailblazer.

"[Drouillard] was taken. . .with a violent pain in his side," Lewis wrote on March 18, 1806. Several others were also ill. "It is truly unfortunate that they should be sick at the moment of our departure." A few days later, things looked just as glum. "It continues to rain. . .[and] there is no possibility of getting our canoes completed. . .The hunters all returned except Colter, unsuccessfull. We determined to set out tomorrow."[20] Set out they did, paddling upstream on the powerful Columbia. Sergeant Ordway described the woeful conclusion to the Oregon interlude: "4 men went over. . .to take a canoe which belonged to the Clotsop Indians, as we are in want of it. . .the others took the canoe. . .and concealed it, as the chief of the Clotsops is now here."[21] This was Ordway's careful way of saying *stole the canoe*.



After almost four months of constant rain, frequent sickness, and an unwelcome diet, mostly fish, Lewis and Clark and their party were glad to leave Fort Clatsop in March 1806. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Thomas Jefferson had urged Lewis and his party to always be "faithful friends and protectors" of the Indians,[22] but now, as Ronda laments, "The captains were abandoning a two-year tradition of never stealing from the Indians. The essential honesty that distinguished Lewis and Clark from explorers like Hernando DeSoto and Francisco Pizzaro had been tarnished. It had been one thing to trick Cameahwait into thinking that Clark's party was close at hand when the fate of the Expedition hung in the balance. It was another thing to cheat Coboway [the Clatsop chief] – a man Lewis described as 'friendly and decent,'. . .and not even feel a pang of conscience. . .[in a] singular betrayal of friendship."[23]

Unfortunately, the theft of the canoe set the tone for Lewis' treatment of Indians over the next month, a period Nicandri puts in sharp focus: "Surely Lewis's behavior on the Columbia in April 1806 represents a man stressed to his limit and seemingly just short of a nervous breakdown. It is here that we find the onset of a troubled trajectory that terminated at Grinder's Stand just over three years later."[24] During the portage of the Cascades on April 11, for instance, two "illy disposed" Natives tried to take a dog John Shields had purchased "and pushed him out of the road." When Shields drew a knife, his assailants "instantly fled." Next came something Lewis considered a cardinal sin: "Three of this same tribe. . .stole my dog this evening, and took him towards their village."[25] Lewis "sent three men in pursuit of the thieves with orders if they made the least resistance. . .in surrendering the dog to fire on them. . .the indians discovering the party in pursuit of them left the dog and fled." Canine lovers empathize entirely with Lewis' rage. For that very reason, however, it is a mystery how Lewis could be so upset at Seaman's temporary loss but shrug his shoulders at stealing an Indian ally's canoe when he knew the coastal people looked on their finely crafted, indispensable canoes with affection, but he gave no sign of contemplating such complexities. "We ordered the centinel to keep [the Indians] out of camp and informed them by signs that if they made any further attempts to steal our property. . .we should put them to instant death."[26] That hardly sounded like the Lewis who dealt successfully with one Indigenous nation after another for two years. One hopes that such a threat would turn out to be hyperbole, but Lewis' erratic behavior continued. Going upstream on the Columbia got harder and more dangerous. At The Dalles Lewis managed a portage while Clark went upstream to negotiate for horses. When Willard allowed his horse to wander off, Lewis reprimanded him "more severely. . .than had been usual."[27]

Lewis' nerves were just as frayed the next day. He characterized the Indians as "proud, haughty, inhospitable. . .nothing but our numbers. . .prevents their attempting to murder us. . .I ordered the indians from our camp. . .and informed them that if I caught them attempting to perloin any article from us I would beat them severely."[28] Lewis soon backed up his threats. On April 21, when a Corps tomahawk came up missing, Lewis "surched many of [the Indians] but could not find it." Hitting his limit, he "ordered all the spare poles, paddles and the balance of our canoe put on the fire. . .that *not a particle should be left for. . .the indians.*"[29] As Nicandri writes, "the scene worsened. Seeing this wasteful destruction taking place, one Indian attempted to retrieve an oarlock from the bonfire, an act the obstreperous Lewis characterized as 'stealing.'"[30] Lewis gave the man "several severe blows and. . .informed the indians that I would shoot the first of them that attempted to steal an article from us. . .that I had it in my power. . .to kill them all and set fire to their houses, but it was not my wish to treat them with severity provided that they would let my property alone."[31]

"Winter with All Its Rigors"

On April 24, 1806, the Corps started overland, with several horses loaded with baggage. Within a week the entire group was on horseback, rapidly increasing their progress. On May 4 they met two Nez Perce friends from their stay the previous autumn. Three days later, they caught a glimpse of the Bitterroots, "perfectly covered with snow." The Nez Perce said Lewis and Clark would not be able to pass those mountains "until the next full moon or about the first of June."[32] The group camped on the north bank of the Clearwater River, near present-day Kamiah, Idaho, which offered access to hunting grounds, a pasture for the horses, and fish and water.

The month with the Nez Perce, which included a warm camaraderie between explorers and Natives as they ate side by side, danced together to Cruzatte's fiddling, and competed in horse races (won by the Indians) and shooting contests (won by soldiers), gave Lewis a chance to get back to his pre-divide self, but that did not happen. As the time approached to cross the Bitterroots, he revealed his dread, writing that the Corps was preparing "to meet that wretched portion of our journy, the Rocky Mountain, where hungar and cold in their most rigorous forms assail the waried



A PATCH OF GREEN. It was these grassy areas that the Corps of Discovery needed to find in crossing the Bitterroot Mountains in June 1806 and exactly the places to which their Nez Perce guides led them. Photo by Kris Townsend of Myrtle Creek*, an original painting in the collection of the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance.*

traveller."[33] Despite that feeling – or maybe because of it – Lewis was overly anxious to get going. He had asked the Nez Perce for guides, and a chief assured him two young men who knew the way across the mountains would soon overtake the Expedition. "Our party seem much elated with the idea of moving on towards their friends and country," he wrote on June 9. The next day, "we set out with the party each man being well mounted and a light load on a second horse," along with several extra horses.[34]

Three days passed with no sign of the guides, but Lewis was determined to go ahead. "From hence to traveller's rest we shall make a forsed march." At the same time, he was "apprehensive that the snow and the want of food for our horses will prove a serious embarrassment to us as at least four days journey of our rout in these mountains lies over hights and along a ledge of mountains never intirely destitute of snow."[35] The Corps made 22 miles the next day and came upon "handsom meadows of fine grass." While the horses grazed in "a handsome little glade," Lewis, a botanist at heart, relished the spring weather and commented on the dogtooth violet, honeysuckle, and white maple. Then the spring day vanished: "The snow has increased in quantity so much that the greater part of our rout this evening was over the snow which has become sufficiently firm to bear our horshes, otherwise it would have been impossible for us to proceed as it lay in. . .some places 8 or ten feet deep."[36]

The next morning, June 17, the party set out early. "We ascended about 3 miles when we found ourselves invelloped in snow from 12 to 15 feet deep even on the south sides of the hills. . .here was winter with all it's rigors; the air was

cold, my hands and feet were benumbed." Lewis' quarrel and bafflement with the northwestern landscape thus continued throughout his time west of the divide. In his haste to return to the Missouri country, he had led the party into another Bitterroot trap. He had no illusions otherwise: "If we proceeded and should get bewildered in these mountains the certainty was that we should loose all our horses and consequently our baggage instruments perhaps our papers and thus eminently wrisk the loss of the discoveries which we had already made if we should be so fortunate as to escape with life." He and Clark talked things over, conceiving "it madnes in this stage of the expedition to proceed without a guide who could certainly conduct us. . .we therefore. . .[resolved] to return with our horses while they were yet strong and in good order. . .untill we could procure an indian to conduct us over the snowey mountains." For the first time, the Corps was "compelled to retreat."[37]

"We therefore hung up our loading on poles, tied to and extended between trees," wrote Sergeant Gass, "covered it all with deer skins, and turned back melancholy and disappointed."[38] The group's "loading" included "instruments" – the scientific implements Lewis used for celestial observations – and "papers" – the invaluable journals of Lewis, Clark, Ordway, Gass, and Whitehouse. Lewis' belief that they were "safer here than to wrisk them on horseback" reveals how short-sighted his impulse to depart without pilots had been.[39]

The next morning, the captains sent Drouillard and Shannon back to the Nez Perce "to procure a [guide] at all events," adding "we sent by them a rifle which we offered as a reward to any of them who would. . .conduct us to traveller's rest."[40] Just as Lewis' striking a Native and ordering a retreat were both "firsts" on the journey, offering a rifle for Indian help was also unparalleled – and never mentioned as an option in obtaining a canoe. The main group retreated for the next few days, increasingly nervous when they saw no Nez Perce guides. "We have determined to wrisk a passage," Lewis wrote. "Capt. C. or myself shall take four of our most expert woodsmen. . .and proceed two days in advance taking a plentiful supply of provision." These men would attempt to find the trail by looking for "the marks which the baggage of the indians. . .made" by rubbing against the trunks and also by the Indians' blazing the trail with tomahawks. "After proceeding two days. . .two of those men would be sent back to the main party" to let them know whether to go ahead or wait for further word. If the scouting party could not find the trail, they would "then return to the main party. . .and attempt a passage over these mountains through the country of the Shoshones further to the South."[41]

The captains thus contemplated a variety of high-risk ventures, all abounding with crucial – and unanswered – questions. Luckily, the next day they met "two indians who were on their way over the mountain; they had brought with them the three horses. . .that had left us. . . .As well as we could understand the indians they informed us that they had seen Drewyer and Shannon and that they would not return . . .[for] two days." With new hope, the captains shelved their tentative plans and returned to the site of their encampment a week earlier, where they "anxiously await[ed] the return of Drewyer and Shannon." The next day brought more good news: "All hands who could hunt were sent out. . .we killed eight deer and three bear."[42]

On June 23, wrote Lewis, "Apprehensive from Drewyer's delay that he had met with some difficultly in procuring a guide. . .we thought it most advisable to dispatch Frazier [Robert Frazer] and Wiser [Peter Weiser] to them this morning. . .to detain them a day or two longer." The two privates had not returned by afternoon, but Lewis was not worried because he instructed them to accompany the two Indians to Travelers' Rest if necessary. Around 4:00 p.m. all worries vanished when Drouillard and Shannon rode into camp with "three indians who had consented to accompany us to the falls of the Missouri for the compensation of two guns. . .these are all young men of good character."[43]

Lewis was about to get clear of the Columbia country once and for all. The party set out early the next day, soon meeting Frazer and Weiser and the two Natives. At nightfall, Lewis wrote, the guides set "fir trees on fire" by igniting "a great number of dry lims. . .[that created] a very suddon and immence blaze from bottom to top of those tall trees. they are a beautifull object in this situation at night." Two days later the group reached the spot where they had stored their invaluable journals and other materials. "Here we necessarily halted about 2 hours to arrange our baggage and prepare our loads. . .[and] made a haisty meal of boiled venison."[44]

Near sunset on June 30, the Corps arrived at their old encampment at Travelers' Rest. Deer were plentiful, so there would be no lack of food while they and their horses finally rested. On July 3, Lewis and Clark split the Corps of Discovery into two groups. "The proposed rendezvous at the Missouri-Yellowstone junction was a full five hundred miles east of Travelers' Rest, as the crow flies. Clark's proposed

route would cover nearly a thousand miles, Lewis' nearly eight hundred."[45] Clark wrote that his group of 22 included "interpreter Shabono [Toussaint Charbonneau] & wife [Sacagawea] & child [Jean Baptiste Charbonneau]. . .with 50 horses."[46] Clark was on his way to explore the Yellowstone River. He and Lewis had concluded that the mouth of the Yellowstone was an ideal site for a U.S. trading post. Given the strategic importance of the Yellowstone River, exploring it was mandatory to meet Jefferson's directives. At the same time, Lewis believed it just as important to explore the Marias River, which the Corps had first seen in June 1805. "It is a noble river," Lewis wrote, "one destined to become in my opinion an object of contention between the two great powers of America and Great Britin with rispect to the adjustment of the North westwardly boundary of the former; and that *it will become one of the most interesting brances of the Missouri in a commercial point of view*."[47]

"I Hope This Seperation Was Momentary"

"I took leave of my worthy friend and companion Capt. Clark," Lewis wrote. "I could not avoid feeling much concern. . .although I hoped this seperation was only momentary."[48] Lewis was accompanied by Sergeant Gass, Drouillard, the Field brothers, Frazer, Goodrich, McNeal, Thompson, Werner, and five Nez Perce Indians whose names were not recorded. Mounted on horseback, Lewis and his men went north along the Bitterroot River to the mouth of the Clark Fork River. They then ascended the Clark Fork to the east, staying to the left and thus following the Blackfoot River along a route similar to present-day Montana Highway 200. Seventeen miles northeast of present-day Lincoln, they followed an Indian trail over the Continental Divide, making an easy crossing at Lewis and Clark Pass (elevation 6,424 feet). Ten miles farther on they found the Dearborn River, with the trip from Travelers' Rest to the Dearborn taking five days, once again confirming Old Toby's incredible knowledge of the area.

Lewis and his men were finally back in the Atlantic watershed, where they had spent all their lives except the previous 11 wearisome months. "R. Fields killed a fine buck," Lewis wrote on July 8, 1806. "We halted and dined. . .We saw a great number of deer goats and wolves. . .much rejoiced at finding ourselves in the plains of the Missouri." They feasted on "very fat buffaloe," the first they had killed in a year. On July 11, they came in sight of the White Bear Islands, where they cached quite a variety of items in June of 1805 after completing their portage of the great falls. "I sincerely belief that there were not less than 10 thousand buffaloe within a circle of 2 miles arround that place," Lewis wrote. Not that all was perfect – mosquitoes were "extreemly troublesome;" the bearskins and plants Lewis had left in the cache were all destroyed by rising water; ten horses turned up missing, and Lewis sent Drouillard to search for them.[49]

Luckily, the cached "carriage wheels" were in good condition. The men not accompanying Lewis could now use them for another portage, when several of Clark's men arrived from Three Forks. When two days passed with no sign of Drouillard, Lewis tried to accept the possibility "that a whitebear [grizzly] had killed him." If any accident had separated Douillard from his horse, "the chances in favour of his being killed [by a grizzly] would be as 9 to 10. . .these bear are a most tremenduous animal; it seems that the hand of providence has been most wonderfully in our favor. . .or some of us would long since have fallen a sacrifice to their farosity." On the afternoon of July 15, however, Drouillard made it back to camp, reporting that "after a diligent surch of 2 days he had discovered where the horses had passed Dearborn's river at which place there were 15 [Indian] lodges that had been abandoned." Drouillard's safe return relieved Lewis "from great anxiety." He "felt so perfectly satisfyed that he had returned in safety" that he "thought but little of the horses." Still, the loss of the horses meant that instead of taking six men to the Marias, Lewis could only take three.[50] "Capt. Lewis. . .gave orders that we should wait at the mouth of Maria's river to the 1st of Sept.," wrote Sergeant Gass on July 16, "at which time, should he not arrive, we were to proceed on and join Capt. Clarke at the mouth of the Yellow-stone river, and. . .return home: but informed us, that should his life. . .be preserved, he would meet us at the mouth of Maria's river on the 5th of August."[51]

"Captain Lewis Took Us All by the Hand"

As Clay Jenkinson notes, "Lewis made his excursion to the upper waters of the Marias River (July 16-28) to determine if its sources were located somewhere in today's Alberta, because the Louisiana Purchase Treaty entitled the United States to all the lands watered by the Missouri River and its tributaries. A tributary with a source deep in the Canadian north would drive back the border and change the course of American history."[52] Lewis' plans were specific – to "ascend Maria's river with a view to explore the country and ascertain whether any branch of that river lies as far north

as Latd. 50 and again return and join the party who are to decend the Missouri, at the entrance of Maria's river."[53]

Such details raise the obvious question: What northern boundary did the French Republic and the United States agree to when they signed the treaty? The answer: "Louisiana's boundaries were vague, even in the treaty." Indeed, the treaty made no mention of any borders – nor did it reference rivers or oceans. What was Jefferson's understanding? The answer: he was not certain, but his estimate that the purchase contained "500 millions of acres" proved to be amazingly close to the 529,402,880 officially determined in 1819.[54] Jefferson asked several citizens of New Orleans "best qualified" to answer "questions on boundaries," and William C. C. Clairborne, governor of the Mississippi Territory, answered that he had "not been able to obtain any satisfactory information," and other correspondents reported that "almost nothing is known."[55]

Lewis had high hopes of claiming new territory for the U.S. as he and his companions made their way through wide plains with "the appearance of an ocean, not a tree nor a shrub to be seen. . .numerous herds of buffaloe were seen feeding." They killed a buffalo and "took the hump and tongue which furnish ample rations for four men one day." Still, Lewis was nervous. They saw a bleeding buffalo and concluded Indians were running the herd. "The blackfoot indians. . . are a vicious lawless and reather an abandoned set of wretches I wish to avoid an interview with them if possible."[56]

The quartet reached the Marias River on July 18. "We killed a couple of buffaloe in the bottom of this river and encamped on it's west side in a grove of cottonwood. . .I keep a strict lookout every night."[57] The next few days they ascended the Marias to the northwest, the buffalo growing scarcer each day. On July 21, they "struck a northern branch of Marias river about 30 yds. wide" – Cut Bank Creek. "Convinced that this stream came from the montains I determined to pursue it as it will lead me to the most northern point to which the waters of Maria's river extend which *I now fear will not be as far north as I wished and expected*." They followed Cut Bank Creek about 13 miles, until darkness fell, when they made a fire of buffalo dung. They wounded a buffalo, but it escaped. They camped a mile southwest of present-day Cut Bank, Montana.[58]

The next day they made 28 miles, stopping "in a beautifull and extensive bottom of the river about 10 miles below the foot of the rocky mountains." As Lewis gazed out at the Continental Divide along the eastern edge of present Glacier National Park, he concluded, "it unnecessary to proceed further. . .I now have lost all hope of the waters of this river ever extending to N Latitude 50°." Lewis nevertheless decided to stay at this camp for two reasons –"to rest ourselves and horses," and "take the necessary observations."[59]

On July 23, Drouillard found "an indian camp. . .which appeared to have been abandoned about 10 days." Lewis believed the Indians to be somewhere on the main branch of Marias River and decided not to "strike that river on my return untill about the mouth of the North branch."[60] The next day clouds and rain prevented Lewis from completing his observations. "I determined to remain another day in the hope of it's being fair." Food was running low; Drouillard and the Fields were convinced "it was useless to hunt within 6 or 8 miles of this place." Not only that, but the cold and rain rendered their situation "extreemly unpleasant." Lewis wrote on July 25, "I did not see the sun through the whole course of the day. . .I shall. . .leave this place. . .with much reluctance without having obtained the necessary data to establish it's longitude – as if the fates were against me my chronometer from some unknown cause stoped today." Still, they were "extreemly fortunate" in not finding several Indian wintering camps inhabited.[61]

Rain fell on the morning of July 26, but Lewis waited, hoping the sky would clear. "Finding the contrary result. . . we set out biding a lasting adieu to this place which I now call camp disappointment." They took their route through the open plains, striking Two Medicine River seven miles later. When they stopped to eat and graze the horses, they found "some indian lodges which appeared to have been inhabited last winter." They rode on, with Lewis and the Fields ascending a high plain while Drouillard continued along the river. "I discovered to my left at the distance of a mile an assembleage of about 30 horses, I halted and used my spye glass by the help of which I discovered several indians. . .who appeared to be looking down towards the river I presumed at Drewyer. . .This was a very unpleasant sight, however I resolved to make the best of our situation and to approach them in a friendly manner."[62]

After a series of nerve-wracking attempts to keep the peace – during which one Indian charged toward Lewis on his horse, as if to count coup but halted when the latter calmly held out his hand – Lewis gave a medal, a flag, and a handkerchief to three of the Indians. Although Lewis thought these eight men were "Minnetares," they were actually Piegan Blackfeet. "I told them that I was glad to see them,"



Weathered sign at the site tells the tale of Lewis' encounter with a band of Piegan Blackfeet Indians in northwestern Montana. Courtesy Fran Brunn and the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance (www.lewisandclark,org).

he wrote. With Drouillard interpreting via sign language, Lewis "had much conversation with these people. . .I found them extreemly fond of smoking and plyed them with the pipe untill late at night." Then, the man who was so apprehensive about encountering the "vicious" Blackfeet and kept a "strict watch" each night, somehow became nonchalant at the worst possible time. He accepted the Indians' invitation to camp with them and failed to have at least two of his party awake and alert throughout the night, which could have prevented the violence that followed. "I took the first watch tonight and set up untill half after eleven; the indians by this time were all asleep, I roused up R. Fields and laid down myself; I directed Fields to watch the movements of the indians and if any of them left the camp to awake us all as I apprehended they would attampt to seal [steal] our horses." Not a word about the rifles he and the others carried, weapons much more accurate than the Indians' trade muskets and therefore coveted more than horses. "This being done I fell into a profound sleep and did not wake untill the noise of the men and indians awoke me a little after light."[63]

The "noise" was a scuffle between Drouillard and a Native who was grabbing his gun. Then Lewis realized his own gun and one of the Fields' were missing. The outcome was predictable – two Blackfeet suffered fatal wounds in the melee that followed, the six survivors scattering. Lewis, Drouillard, and the Fields escaped unscathed, even though Lewis, "felt the wind" of one bullet fired at him. Lewis then left "the medal about the neck" of one of the dead Indians, "that they might be informed who we were." Next, "having no doubt" that a "large party" of Indians would pursue them, the four explorers fled, pushing their horses "as hard as they could bear," riding hard till dark, and making 88 miles before stopping to rest. Each man switched mounts when needed because they had 15 of the Indians' horses with them. Two hours later they "again set out by moon light," covering another 20 miles and leaving at daylight, even though all four complained of being "so soar" that they "could scarcely stand." They debated which route to take to the Missouri, but Lewis insisted they head for the mouth of Marias River, where he had promised to meet the canoe party. Lewis told Drouillard and the Fields that they had to risk their lives and warn the boatmen before the Blackfeet took them by surprise. They rode another 20 miles and then, wrote Lewis, "we heared the report of several rifles very distinctly on the river to our right, we quickly repared to this joyfull sound and on arriving at the bank of the river had the unspeakable satisfaction to see our canoes coming down."[64]

Sergeant Ordway described meeting Lewis and the others in what he must have considered a miraculous coincidence: "About 9 A. M. we discovred on a high bank a head Capt. Lewis & the three men who went with him on horse back coming towards us on N. Side we came too Shore and fired the Swivell to Salute him & party. . .and were rejoiced to See them &c. Capt. Lewis took us all by the hand."[65] As for the fatal conflict with the young Piegans, "It was Lewis's fault." Ambrose writes. "He was the one who had dreamed up this exploration, the one who had decided to make it with a party of four only, the one who had delayed two full days even though he knew that every additional hour in Blackfoot country raised the risks of an unwelcome encounter."[66]

The remarkable and sad postscript is that three of the four escapees from Blackfeet country would perish from gunshot wounds in less than four years – Joseph Field and George Drouillard, both at the hands of Indians, both on Lewis and Clark's trail, and Lewis, by his own hand in Tennessee, on a wilderness path called the Natchez Trace.

"All in Good Health, Except Captain Lewis"

The men got back to normal the next day, with most of them descending the Missouri in the white pirogue and five small canoes. "I placed the two Fieldses and Colter and Collins in the two smallest canoes. . .with orderes to hunt, and kill meat for the party." To a man, the group was "anxious to get on" and "plyed their oars faithfully," making good time on the river.[67] "We are all extreemly anxious to reach the entrance of the Yellowstone river where we expect to join Capt. Clark and party," Lewis wrote on August 2.[68]

On August 3, Collins and Colter left camp early to hunt. Lewis and his band passed their canoe and "hailed [Colter and Collins] but received no answer [and] proceeded," assuming the two would catch up later. Navigating a swift portion of the Missouri, they made about 73 miles, seeing "a great number of Elk, deer, wolves, some bear, beaver, geese." Lewis noted that there was no sign of Collins and Colter.[69] Nor did he see them the next day. He delayed on August 5, waiting for the two to arrive. When that did not happen, he concluded they must have passed him during the night, so he stayed on the river much later than normal to catch them. Still no luck. August 7 dawned "cold and extreemly unpleasant," but the men nevertheless "set out early resolving. . .to reach the Yellowstone river" that day, even though Lewis estimated it was 83 miles away.[70]

There was no way of knowing what kind of scrapes Clark may have encountered – or even if he and his group were still alive. The high-strung Lewis was thus in a fragile state, worrying about Collins and Colter and trying to muster hope that he would find Clark at the confluence. Another concern weighed on his mind. Because Marias River had not offered the northernmost point he sought, he was determined to take careful latitude readings beyond the mouth of the Yellowstone. Since he and Clark would unite by that point, he would have the time he needed to make astronomical observations and accurately measure latitude. Luckily, "we went at a good rate. . .at 4 P. M. [on August 7] we arrived at the entrance of the Yellowstone river." What he found was not what he expected: "Capt. Clark had been encamped at this place and <was gone> from appearances had left it about 7 or 8 days." What? Clark had arrived but had not waited for Lewis? "I found a paper on a pole at the point which mearly contained my name in the hand wrighting of Capt. C. we also found the remnant of a note . . .[and] from this fragment I learned that game was scarce at the point and musquetoes troublesome which were the reasons given for his going on." Lewis then wrote a note to Collins and Colter, "ordering them to come on without loss of time. . .this being done I instantly reimbarked and decended the river in hope of reaching Capt. C's camp before night." Already exhausted, the men staggered back to their canoes, going about seven miles before they saw a recently abandoned campsite. "From these circumstances we included that Capt. C's camp could not be distant and pursued our rout untill dark with the hope of reaching his camp in this however we were disappointed."[71]

Why would Clark leave the confluence in the first place, and why would he then double down by breaking his pledge to wait "a few miles below?" Nor did Clark's "reasons" of scarce game or troublesome mosquitoes sound convincing. In 1805, the Corps found "the whol face of the country was covered with herds of Buffaloe, Elk & Antelopes."[72] Worse yet was the mention of mosquitoes. The pests were a fact of life except in freezing weather. Lewis responded cynically to that defense when he wrote, "We found the Musquetoes extreemly troublesome but in this rispect there is but little choise of camps from hence down to St. Louis."[73] What an incredible contrast to what Lewis experienced 16 months earlier, when he wrote, "I ascended the hills from whence I had a most pleaseing view of the country, perticularly of the wide and fertile vallies formed by the missouri and the yellowstone rivers."[74]



The confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. On July 3, 1806, Lewis and Clark split into two groups, planning to reunite at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers after Clark descended the former and Lewis the latter. Courtesy Mark Jordan.

Now, however, as Jenkinson observes, "William Clark set off a chain of events that would alter the nature of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and cast a shadow over Lewis's return from the wilderness."[75] Already worried about Colter and Collins and fretting over his celestial observations and descending the Missouri before the ice set in, Lewis was now disquieted by Clark's mysterious behavior. On August 8 his mood swung from one extreme to the other. Convinced that "Capt. Clark could be at no great distance below," he set out early, traveling at a good rate until 10:00 a.m., when hope faded. "Not finding Capt. Clark I knew not what calculation to make with rispect to his halting and therefore determined to proceed as tho' he was not before me and leave the rest to the chapter of accedents." *As tho' he was not before me*? What could that possibly mean? Lewis was certain Clark was ahead of him, and the sooner they reunited the better. Nor was Lewis one to leave his fate to *accidents*. He was understandably frustrated with Clark, but the only solution was to chase his friend down the river. Instead, Lewis "determined to halt at this place untill the perogue and canoe could be repared and the men dress skins."[76] This was not the rational Lewis but the troubled soul suffering the "psychological toll exacted by the harsh geographic extremes of the Columbia country."[77]

Since January 1803, if not earlier, Lewis had been the solitary head of the effort to "explore the whole line" of Missouri River commerce, "have conferences with the natives," and "return with the information acquired."[78] True, Clark gladly accepted his old friend's invitation to participate in the Expedition's "fatiegues. . .dangers and. . .honors,"[79] but by then Lewis had made all kinds of arrangements and purchases and was tutored by experts in everything from anatomy to astronomy and zoology. He was ready to proceed, whether Clark signed on or not. Lewis would report to Jefferson. When the Corps departed Fort Mandan in April 1805, Lewis was the one concluding that "the picture which now presented itself to me was a most pleasing one. entertaing <now> as I do, the most confident hope of succeading in a voyage which had formed a da[r]ling project of mine for the last ten years <of my life>."[80]

Few admirals have shared their command with an ensign the way Lewis shared his with Clark – in their case captain and second lieutenant – but it was the Lewis Expedition for all intents and purposes and no shock that Lewis was the first to see the confluence of the Missouri and the Yellowstone, first to gaze upon the spectacular great falls, first to drink from the source of the Missouri, first to drink from the waters of the Columbia,



William Clark, *1810, by Charles Willson Peale. As valuable as Clark was during most of the journey, his failure to wait for Lewis at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers accelerated Lewis' downward cycle in the final months of the Expedition. Courtesy Missouri Historical Society Collections, St. Louis, Missouri.*

and first to walk the Pacific shore. Now he had made one bad decision after another – stealing the canoe, striking the Indian reaching for the oar, threatening to kill Natives who offended him, trying to cross the Bitterroots without a guide, venturing into Blackfeet territory with just three companions, failing to keep a careful watch while camped with the Piegans. Now, not only had he not been first to reach the rendezvous site, but his junior officer had also failed to wait for him or even stopped where he promised – because of *mosquitoes*. As Jenkinson says, Lewis' "behavior and his mindset were erratic, irrational, contradictory, manic, and confused. . . nonplussed. . .he was off his center of gravity. . .making decisions based on pride and ego." The upshot? Lewis made another flawed decision – staying put to dress skins rather than finding Clark as fast as possible. "Three days later, this kind of erratic logic would nearly cost him his life."[81]

On August 10, there was still no sign of Colter and Collins, or of Clark. Although the men had the pirogue and canoe repaired by 2:00 p.m., they did not get underway for another three hours, making six or seven miles before stopping for the day. On August 11, after three leisurely days, the impulsive Lewis was suddenly in a hurry, making sure the party set out early, "it being my wish to arrive at the birnt hills by noon in order to take the latitude of that place as it is the most northern point of the Missouri." He was "anxious to get forward" and "requested that they would exert themselves to reach the place in time." What? Why was he mentioning this for the first time? Had he not waited to dress elk skins and repair the boats, he easily could have reached the Birnt Hills the previous night, with ample time to ready his scientific tools and select the best site for observations, which he needed to take just before, precisely at, and just after meridian – noon – when the sun was directly overhead. From studying Clark's latest maps at Fort Clatsop, Lewis had correctly concluded that Birnt Hills was the northernmost point of the Missouri, crucial information for the nation as it looked to claim as much fur-trading territory as possible.[82] Given his failure to get good readings at Camp Disappointment, Lewis wanted to compensate by getting accurate information on the main fork. That all made sense. What made no sense was his announcing it so late in the day on August 10. Still, the men rowed hard and "proceeded rapidly." Why then would Lewis take time for anything other than making the noon deadline? But he did, shooting a buffalo swimming in the river around 9:00 a.m., "leaving the small canoes to dress it." Not long after that they saw a large grizzly bear and tried to kill it, but it took wind of them and fled. Then the small canoes overtook Lewis and told him the meat of the buffalo was unfit for use. Next, they saw a large herd of elk on the north shore, and Lewis directed the men in the small canoes to hunt. All of this took time, a few minutes here, a few there, in fair weather, the sun rising in the sky. "When I arrived [at Birnt Hills] it was about 20 minutes after noon and of course the observation for the [sun's] meridian Altitude was lost."[83]

The lost observation was as predictable as the young Piegans' grabbing rifles at the first opportunity. "Off his center of gravity," Lewis made another grave misjudgment: he went hunting with Cruzatte, just the two of them, "on a thick willow bar," something that would not have happened with Clark on the scene. Lewis was "dressed in brown leather" and could have been mistaken for an elk by Cruzatte, who had poor eyesight, and the two took different routes through the thick willows – "an accident waiting to happen," as one commentator says.[84]

"I was in the act of firing on the Elk. . .when a ball stuck my left thye about an inch below my hip joint, missing the



Meriwether Lewis, *c. 1805 by Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint-Memin. Lewis was 35 years old when he died of gunshot wounds on the Natchez Trace near Hohenwald, Tennessee. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC.*

bone," Lewis wrote. "The stroke was very severe." He called out to Cruzatte but heard no reply and concluded Indians had ambushed them. Despite a serious wound – and a fragile state of mind – Lewis kept his cool. "I thought best to make good my retreat. . .calling out as I ran for the first hundred paces as loud as I could to Cruzatte to make his retreat. . .I called the men to their arms to which they flew in an instant, I told them I was wounded but I hoped not mortally. . .and directed them to follow me. . .I returned about a hundred paces when my wounds become so painfull and my thye so stiff that. . .I was compelled to halt. . .I now got back to the perogue as well as I could and prepared my self with a pistol my rifle and air-gun being determined. . .to sell my life as deerly as possible."[85] Like Lord Jim, we are fated never to see Meriwether Lewis clearly, but in this instant of decline and crisis, Jefferson's descriptor "of courage undaunted" fits him well.

Lewis waited "in this state of anxiety" for 20 minutes, "when the party returned. . .and reported that there were no indians." Lewis had no doubt that Cruzatte had accidentally shot him, writing "the ball had lodged in my breeches which I knew to be the ball of the short rifles such that he had," but Lewis was lucky. He had been shot at close range by a powerful weapon without suffering artery or bone damage – otherwise he was almost certainly doomed. With Sergeant Patrick Gass' assistance, Lewis gave himself first-aid, "introducing tents of patent lint into the ball holes" and then going downriver before sleeping in the pirogue.[86]

To no one's surprise, Lewis did not pause for convalescence the next day. "Captain Lewis is in good spirits, but his wound stiff and sore," wrote Gass.[87] "We. . .proceeded with all possible expedition," added Lewis, "being anxious to overtake Capt. Clark." Taking another observation was out of the question because of Lewis' injury and because each bend of the river was taking them south, not north. Around 8:00 a.m., a man called out that there was a camp on shore: "the camp of two hunters from the Illinois by name Joseph Dickson and Forest Hancock. . .[who] informed me that Capt. C. had passed them about noon the day before." These were the first Europeans the group had seen in a year and a half. Dickson and Hancock told Lewis "they had been robed by the indians and [Dickson] wounded by the Tetons of the birnt woods [Brulé Sioux Indians]. . .but were determined to proceed." Lewis gave the trappers "a couple of pounds of powder with some lead" and described "the places [on the Missouri River] where the beaver most abounded."[88]

In the midst of this dialogue, someone announced that Collins and Colter, missing for nine days, were paddling their way down the Missouri. Unfortunately, neither Colter nor Collins ever said which news they learned first – the presence of two Illinois trappers or the shock of a seriously wounded Captain Lewis. Regardless, no one was happier to see them than Lewis. "They were well no accedent having happened," he wrote.[89] The long-awaited reunion came an hour or two later. "At meridian Capt Lewis hove in Sight," Clark wrote, with rich but unintended irony, "with the party which went by way of the Missouri."[90] The immediate concern was whether everyone had survived. Sergeant Gass answered that question: "We. . . overtook Captain Clarke and his party. . .and now, (thanks to God) we are all together again in good health, except Captain Lewis, and his wound is not serious."[91]

Lewis, of course, insisted his injury was minor, but it wasn't. Positive reports on his recovery were frequently followed by the opposite. "Capt. Lewis fainted as Capt. Clark was dressing his wound," Ordway said on August 14.[92] Five days later Clark wrote that Lewis' wounds were healing but told a different story on August 28: "Capt Lewis had a bad nights rest and is not very well this morning." Two weeks after that, Lewis had "entirely recovered," able to "walk and even run," but "the parts are yet tender."[93]

So it was that Lewis completed his "darling project" not as a triumphant Columbus or Captain Cook but as an invalid. Virtually all mentions of him in the journals after he was shot deal with his recovery. There were detailed descriptions of friendly encounters with the Mandans and Arikaras, a rebuke of the Teton Sioux, sending men out to hunt, the false alarm of an attack, farewells to Colter and Charbonneau, Sacagawea, and Pomp, and frequent meetings with westbound trappers, but the commander handling all of this business was William Clark, who was his usual pragmatic, reliable self. Nothing is known from Lewis' perspective because after August 12, 1806, the day the captains finally reunited, he never wrote in his journal again.

Editor's Note: this article was adapted from *Guns, Furs, and God: An American West History of Indigenous Peoples and Explorers* by permission of the University of Nebraska Press and imprint Bison Books. © 2025 by Larry E. Morris. Available wherever books are sold or from the University of Nebraska Press 800.848.6224 and at nebraskapress.unl.edu. ∎

Notes

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9. Lewis' journal entry, September 9, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 5:192, italics in original, brackets added.

10. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 286, italics and brackets added.

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12. Gass' journal entries, September 12, 16, and 17, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 10:141, 143.

13. Clark's journal entry, September 14, 16, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 5:205, 207.

14. David L. Nicandri, "The Columbia Country and the Dissolution of Meriwether Lewis: Speculation and Interpretation," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106:1 (Spring 2005): 8.

Larry Morris was born on the east bank of the Snake River near the falls after which Idaho Falls is named, a site well known to Wilson Price Hunt and his Overland Astorians. Larry's parents were born near Rexburg, Idaho, within walking distance of the fork of the Snake named after Andrew Henry and roamed by the likes of Thomas Fitzpatrick and Jim Bridger.

Larry was graduated from Brigham Young University with a B.A. in philosophy and an M.A. in American literature. After receiving a diploma from the Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents, he worked as an editor for 37 years and retired from the Joseph Smith Papers project in 2015. Morris published several short stories and a novel, The Edge of the Reservoir *(Signature Books), before turning to antebellum U.S. history. Around 1996, he was in a used bookstore and picked up a book about Lewis and Clark. It included a list of the members of the Expedition, and he realized he knew very little about them or their journey. His first research involved reading back issues of* We Proceeded On *and traveling to St. Louis. About that same time, he became interested in the history of Mormonism and published his first articles on both subjects in 2000. He has published pieces on Lewis and Clark and the early fur trade in* We Proceeded On, *the* Missouri Historical Review, American History, St. Louis *magazine, and* The Rocky Mountain Fur Trade Journal *and on the founding of Mormonism in the* Journal of Mormon History, Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, BYU Studies, The Ensign, *and* The FARMS Review.

His books include The Fate of the Corps: What Became of the Lewis and Clark Explorers After the Expedition *(Yale University Press);* In the Wake of Lewis and Clark: The Expedition and the Making of Antebellum America, The Mystery of John Colter: The Man Who Discovered Yellowstone *(coauthored with Ron Anglin), and* The Perilous West: Seven Amazing Explorers and the Founding of the Oregon Trail *(all three from Roman & Littlefield);* The 1959 Yellowstone Earthquake *(from the History Press);* A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon *(Oxford University Press); and* Elder and Scribe: Oliver Cowdery, the Book of Mormon, and the Rise of Mormonism *(forthcoming from the University of North Carolina Press).*

Larry and his wife Deborah, a retired second-grade teacher and published author, have visited such historic sites as Monticello, Lemhi Pass, Fort Clatsop, and the grave of Alexander Hamilton Willard in the Franklin, California, cemetery, but their favorites will always be the convergence of the Madison and Jefferson rivers near Three Forks, Montana, and the incredible views of the Columbia River – all the way from Boardman, Oregon, to Cape Disappointment, Washington. Deborah and Larry have two daughters, two daughters-in-law, two sons, one son-in-law, and eight grandchildren, scattered from Sandy and West Jordan, Utah, to Sussex, Wisconsin, to Bedford, New York.

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15. Letter, Lewis to an Unknown Correspondent, October 14, 1806, Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:339.

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17. Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 6:2.

18. Lewis' journal entry, January 1, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 6:151-52, italics added.

19. Lewis' journal entry, April 17, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:131.

20. Lewis' journal entries, March 18 and March 22, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 6:429 and 444, respectively, brackets added.

21. Ordway's journal entry, March 18, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 9:278.

22. Letter, Jefferson to Lewis, January 22, 1804, Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:166.

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27. Lewis' journal entry, April 19, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:143.

28. Lewis' journal entry, April 20, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:146.

29. Lewis' journal entry, April 21, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:152-52, italics and brackets added.

30. Nicandri, "The Dissolution of Lewis," 16.

31. Lewis' journal entry, April 21, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:152.

32. Lewis' journal entry, May 7, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:221-22.

33. Lewis' journal entry, June 2, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:325.

34. Lewis' journal entries, June 9 and 10, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 7:349 and 8:7, respectively.

35. Lewis' journal entry, June 14, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:24.

36. Lewis' journal entry, June 16, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:27-28.

37. Lewis' journal entry, June 17, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:31-32.

38. Gass' journal entry, June 17, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 10:241.

39. Lewis' journal entry, June 17, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:32; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 362.

40. Lewis' journal entry, June 18, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:34-35.

41. Lewis' journal entry, June 20, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:39-40.

42. Lewis' journal entries, June 21 and 22, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:43-44 and 45, respectively, brackets added.

43. Lewis' journal entry, June 23, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:46-47, brackets added.

44. Lewis' journal entries, June 24- 26, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:48-52, brackets added.

45. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 369.

46. Clark's journal entry, July 3, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:161. Clark was also accompanied by Sergeant Ordway, Sergeant Pryor, Bratton, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Gibson, Hall, Howard, Labiche, Lepage, Potts, Shannon, Shields, Weiser, Whitehouse, Willard, Windsor, and York.

47. Lewis' journal entry, June 8, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:266, italics added.

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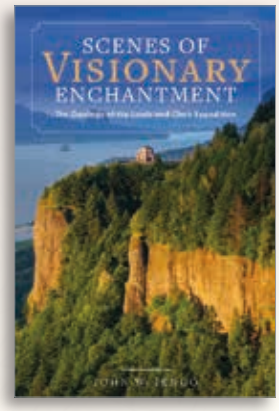
57. Lewis' journal entry, July 18, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:115-16.

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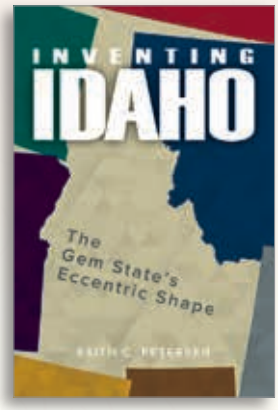
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63. Lewis' journal entry, July 26, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:129-32, Moulton's brackets.

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65. Ordway's journal entry, July 28, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 9:341.

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67. Lewis' journal entries, July 29 and 30, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:140-41.

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69. Lewis' journal entry, August 3, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:146, brackets added.

70. Lewis' journal entry, August 7, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:149.

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72. Lewis' journal entry, April 25, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:67.

73. Lewis' journal entry, August 8, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:152.

74. Lewis' journal entry, April 25, 1805, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 4:67.

75. Jenkinson, *Explorer in the Wilderness*, 176. Thanks to Clay Jenkinson for his profound insights into the character of Meriwether Lewis, drawn upon here in no small degree.

76. Lewis' journal entry, August 8, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:152.

77. Nicandri, "The Dissolution of Meriwether Lewis," 8.

78. Jefferson's Message to Congress, January 18, 1803, Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:12, 13.

79. Letter, Lewis to Clark, June 19, 1803, Jackson, ed., *Letters*, 1:60.

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82. Jenkinson, *Explorer in the Wilderness*, 188.

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84. Bruce B. Paton, *Lewis and Clark: Doctors in the Wilderness* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2001), 189.

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88. Lewis' journal entry, August 12, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:157.

89. Lewis' journal entry, August 12, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:157-58.

90. Clark's journal entry, August 12, 1806, Moulton, *Journals*, 8:290.

91. Gass' journal entry, August 12, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 10:266.

92. Ordway's journal entry, August 14, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 9:350.

93. Clark's journal entries, August 19 and 28 and September 9, 1806, Moulton, ed., *Journals*, 8:309, 326, and 354, respectively.

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor,

"The Hand of Providence: Religion and the Corps of Discovery" by Larry McClure and Rick Chromey (WPO 51:3 [August 2025]: 14-29) quotes both Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as attributing their "many hair breadth escapes" to the "hand of providence." Lest we forget, though, Lewis planned meticulously in preparation for a journey for which he did not know where he was going, what he would need, whom he would meet, what he would find, and how long he would be gone. The Expedition's success in the face of such challenge is a miracle in itself.

Lewis and Clark and the entire Corps of Discovery were living the observation French scientist Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) made many years later that "chance favors the prepared mind." For those who prefer not to leave good fortune/luck to chance, the saying "God helps those who help themselves" can be considered the other side of Pasteur's coin. Or as Rabbi Nechemia Schusterman of Chabad of Peabody, Massachusetts, put it, "All I know is that I have to do my job, and HaShem [Hebrew: "The Name," as the ineffable name of God is not spoken] will do his."

—*Philippa Newfield*

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Photograph of Trapper Peak, Bitterroot Mountains, Montana, Courtesy of Steve Lee.

continued from inside front cover

Filling Up the Canvas

The Lewis and Clark Expedition is one of America's favorite stories. It tends to suck the oxygen out of the larger picture of American exploration, in part because it was so tremendously successful. In one of his expansive visionary moments, Jefferson had written, "We shall delineate with correctness the great arteries [i.e., rivers] of this great country: those who come after us will fill up the canvas we begin." Accordingly, the Jefferson administration dispatched a series of exploration missions into the West: Hunter and Dunbar on the Ouachita River in 1804-1805, Freeman and Custis on the Red River in 1806, Zebulon Pike to the source of the Mississippi and then to the sources of the Arkansas and the Rio Grande in 1805-1807.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition was Jefferson's baby until it wasn't. Lewis proved to be a troubled governor of Upper Louisiana. He stopped communicating with the War Department, with his publisher in Philadelphia, and - worst of all - with his mentor and patron Jefferson. Meanwhile, true to his republican principles, Jefferson left office after two terms (March 4, 1809), washed his hands of power, and retired to his gardens, his mathematics, his classical texts, and his grandchildren at Monticello. Jefferson's hand-picked successor James Madison had far less interest in the American West. The evidence is slender, but it appears that Madison did not share Jefferson's supportive view of Meriwether Lewis. Lewis was Jefferson's protégé, Jefferson's Albemarle neighbor, Jefferson's secretary, and Jefferson's hand-picked explorer. Lewis' troubles with the War Department in 1808-1809 (which contributed to his death) occurred in part because of the change of presidential administrations. If Jefferson had still been President in those years, I doubt that he would have let the bureaucrats of the War Department treat Lewis so aggressively. That Madison did not share Jefferson's paternalistic (even parental) regard for Lewis is seen in the letter William Eustis sent to Governor Lewis on July 19, contesting several of his expenditures in the Return Sheheke debacle. "The President has been consulted," Eustis wrote, "and the observations herein contained have his approval." Ouch. President Madison decided to cut Lewis loose. Jefferson would almost certainly have found a way to protect his protégé, and he would have attempted to "gentle" Lewis into more responsible behavior.

Denouement

Jefferson's intense personal involvement with the Lewis and Clark Expedition has a downside and some mysteries. Jefferson was so fascinated with Indian languages that he took possession of the vocabularies Lewis had painstakingly compiled during the journey. They were never copied by government clerks. When Jefferson retired in March 1809, he sent trunks of his personal possessions home by way of the Chesapeake. Vandals opened his baggage on the James River and apparently tossed the precious vocabularies - having no commercial value - into the river. Lewis wrote a peevish letter to his mentor about this horrific loss of painstakingly gathered data.

Jefferson was a strict constructionist - which means he did not believe the U.S. government could do anything not explicitly authorized by the Constitution. He could not contemplate any unnecessary government spending until the $87 million national debt was paid off, and he did not want to expand the scope of the national government without enabling constitutional amendments. Therefore, he did not urge Congress to create a national museum to house artifacts of the Lewis Expedition or any other. The Enlightenment President dispersed what Cutright calls the Lewis and Clark "booty" to his gardener friends, to members of the American Philosophical Society, and to his friend Charles Willson Peale of Philadelphia, America's first museum director. Most of what Lewis and Clark sent back (from Fort Mandan, 1805) and brought back (1806) was subsequently lost or destroyed by fire, neglect, and dispersal. At Monticello merely a set of elk antlers remains of all that Lewis collected. A number of artifacts found their way to Yale or Harvard, the Filson Historical Society, and the American Philosophical Society. But the overall loss is incalculable.

Lewis failed to write his book(s). Lewis failed as frontier governor. Lewis was in danger of being recalled at the time of his death. Lewis died by suicide. Clark was in no position to write the book himself.

Imagine if Lewis had lived a full life? Imagine if Jefferson had been able to protect his troubled protégé. Imagine if Jefferson had provided Lewis with a sinecure and a ghost writer after the Expedition's return. Imagine if Lewis had found it possible to lean on his mentor when his life was falling apart. Imagine if Jefferson had encouraged Congress to create what became the Smithsonian Institution just four decades after the Expedition returned.

Even in its truncated state the Lewis and Clark Expedition is the great epic journey of American history. If Lewis had written his book(s) and the President had found a secure warehouse in which to house the scores of artifacts, just imagine what intellectual riches we'd be in possession of today. ▮

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Lewis & Clark
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