NINE YOUNG MEN
FROM KENTUCKY

By George H. Yater and Carolyn S. Denton

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

GEORGE H. YATER

George H. Yater is a retired journalist who continues to write. He lived in Louisville, Kentucky. He received a B.A. in history from the University of Louisville in 1950. He is a contributing editor to Louisville magazine where he served as associate editor and managing editor. He has been a reporter for The Louisville Times, an associate editor of The Insurance Field, director of the news division of the Kentucky Department of Public Information and humanities grants coordinator and writer/editor for the University of Louisville. Yater is a consultant to the Louisville Museum of History and Science. A frequent lecturer on Louisville history, he also occasionally lectures on history at the University of Louisville. He has won a number of writing awards and his book Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio: A History of Louisville and Jefferson County is in its second edition. He has had three booklets on Louisville area history published and contributed a chapter on Louisville to Cities Reborn published by the Urban Institute.

His interest in Lewis and Clark came through William Clark being a local figure and brother of Louisville’s founder, George Rogers Clark.

CAROLYN S. DENTON

Carolyn S. Denton is Curator of Special Collections and University Archivist at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. Ms. Denton received her B.A. in fine arts from the University of Kentucky in 1968 and her master’s in library science from that institution in 1984. She was the editor of the Catalogue of the Transylvania University Medical Library (1987), and in 1989 became a Certified Archivist. Prior to assuming her present position in 1984 she had been a commercial artist, a first grade teacher, and then studied paper and book conservation, as well as bookbinding, in Lund, Sweden. Presently she is a juried member of the Cincinnati Art Club and enjoys watercolor painting. Having been raised in Owensboro, Kentucky, she is the daughter of Evelyn and Shelby Denton, and the mother of two teenage sons.

Ms. Denton first acquired an interest in George Shannon while reading a novel in 1985 about the Lewis and Clark Expedition that mentioned Shannon had attended Transylvania University. Since that time she has researched his life; collecting information and corresponding with Shannon descendants. Through her efforts, one of the lesser known members of the Expedition has been brought to light and given his due recognition.

These papers were presented at the 23rd Annual Meeting of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. in Louisville, Kentucky, August 3-7, 1991.

On the Cover—The pencil sketch Explorers on the Missouri was done by Judd Adam Shaw. Judd is in the seventh grade at Summer Shade Elementary School, Summer Shade, Kentucky. His sketch of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and Sacajawea won first prize in a contest sponsored by the Kentucky Junior Historical Society—Susan Lyons Hughes, Coordinator.
The title of this discussion really should be ‘‘Ten Young Men from Kentucky’’ because York, William Clark’s African-American servant, was a young man from Kentucky who went all the way to the Pacific and back with the Expedition, and I want to say a bit about York.

First, however, we need to speak some about conditions around the Falls of the Ohio in 1803, the area from which seven of the nine young men, plus York, came. And here I’d like to point out that the name Falls of the Ohio is misleading. The Falls was, in fact, a two to two and one-half mile series of rapids with a fall in that distance of twenty-six feet. The Falls was the only serious bar to navigation in the 981-mile length of the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio enters the Mississippi. The Falls have been tamed today by a dam and bypassed by a canal. Only when the river rises so far as to spill over the dam can some faint idea be gained of what it was like in a state of nature—and in 1803 it was in a state of nature and could be navigated safely only when the water was high and even then required skilled pilots to take vessels through the foaming water. Otherwise, a portage around the Falls was required. That is why Louisville grew at this point.

The area was first settled in 1778 during the American Revolution as the by-product of a Virginia military expedition led by George Rogers Clark, an older brother of William Clark, to seize British posts in the Illinois country. This whole Ohio Valley was claimed by Virginia as part of its old sea-to-sea grant. George Rogers Clark is regarded as the founder of Louisville and is the Clark best known around here. Many Louisvillians think that George Rogers Clark was the Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. William Clark is hardly known among the population at large.

In 1778 Louisville was the farthest west of any American settlement. The next closest as one journeyed upriver toward Fort Pitt—or Pittsburgh—was at Wheeling, West Virginia. There were some settlements in the interior of Kentucky, but none had been established more than three years. This, then, was the American frontier in 1778 and in 1803 it was still in a state of transition—no longer the frontier, but not yet the not-frontier. And the nine young men, plus York, had been born or grew up here when it was the real frontier—with Indian raids and log cabins and clearings here and there in the dense woods—when hunting was still an important way to provide for the kitchen table, and when buffalo still roamed Kentucky.

The men recruited here by Clark for the Pacific tour of discovery were born to the woods, products of the frontier.

So it was in June 1803 when Meriwether Lewis invited William Clark to join the Expedition. He also asked his friend to look about for likely prospects—unmarried young men—for the party. Clark accepted. His letter to Lewis was dated July 17 from Clarksville, across the river. The town that had such high hopes that didn’t materialize was named for George Rogers Clark, who also lived there. William Clark may have lived with his brother. He set to work promptly and only a week later dispatched another letter to Lewis in which he said he had engaged several men ‘‘of a description calculated to work and go thro’ those labors and fatigues which will be necessary.’’ How prophetic.
He added that he had discouraged several "gentlemen's sons" because "they are not accustomed to labor." In an August letter Clark reported that he had promised places to only four young men—"the best hunters and woodsmen" in this part of the country.1

Lewis, meanwhile, was having problems in Pittsburgh. He originally had hoped to reach Louisville on August 10 and then by the end of August. Problems with the builders of his keelboat were the principal cause of the delay. He didn't leave Pittsburgh until August 31 and the Expedition didn't leave Louisville until October 26, very late in the season.2 Note, too, that from this point on Lewis and Clark, as joint commanders, were together. Does that lead to the conclusion that the Lewis and Clark Expedition started here? Locally we think so, but apply your criteria to this disputed point.

By the time the Expedition departed the Falls of the Ohio, William Clark had recruited seven young men and had taken along his black servant, York. Lewis had picked up two men at Maysville, Kentucky, on the way down the river.

Who were these nine young men, and what do we know about York? Not all we would like to, but the recent discovery here in Louisville of a cache of letters from William Clark to his eldest brother, Jonathan, throws new light on them and recent research in local public records also adds a bit more.

I'll take them one at a time. It is interesting that among the local recruits were two brothers and two first cousins. We will begin with the brothers, Joseph and Reubin Field.

Joseph and Reubin Field

At the conclusion of the Expedition, in 1806, Meriwether Lewis described the Field brothers as "Two of the most active and enterprising young men who accompanied us. It was their peculiar fate to have been engaged in all the most dangerous and difficult scenes of the voyage, in which they acquitted themselves with much honor."3

They were the sons of Abraham Field, who came to Kentucky from Culpepper County, Virginia, in 1783, and to Jefferson County in 1784.4 Abraham Field had been wounded at the 1774 Battle of Point Pleasant (the point where the Kanawha River joins the Ohio in what is now West Virginia) in Dunmore's War. The name comes from Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia; the enemy were Indians from what is now the state of Ohio. Virginia later recognized this as a Revolutionary War engagement (rather strangely, in my opinion) and awarded Abraham Field a Revolutionary War pension. His wounded shoulder left him rather helpless in his old age, but in the 1780s he gained a reputation as a hunter and was hired by a large landowner near the present site of Okolona along Preston Highway to provide meat for his table.5

In 1790 he purchased a 200-acre farm on Pond Creek in southwestern Jefferson County, not the best of farmland. It was located in what are called the Knobs—a series of low, knobby hills.6 It was at this farm, no doubt, that Joseph and Reubin Field were recruited by William Clark for the Expedition. Though this site cannot be pinpointed precisely, I have reason to believe that it was near the point where the Gene Snyder Freeway today crosses Pond Creek.7 Incidentally, within one-half mile of the Field farm was the farm of Charles Floyd, sometimes cited as the father of Sergeant Charles Floyd of the Expedition, but who undoubtedly was the sergeant's uncle.8

The two Field brothers were members of a family of three other brothers and two sisters. The eldest was Ezekial Field, born October 6, 1773, ten years before the family moved to Kentucky. He is the only one of the Fields for whom we have a birth date. Ezekial Field is important to this story because of one of his business enterprises.
Bullitt County is immediately south of Jefferson County and in the earliest days of exploration of the Falls of the Ohio region in 1773, salt springs were discovered in the vicinity of the present county line. After settlement, salt-making became a major activity. Salt from Bullitt’s and Mann’s and other licks was in demand all over Kentucky and beyond. The Field farm was close to this area and Ezekial was one of the frontier entrepreneurs engaged in producing salt. He was so engaged in 1807 and apparently had been for some time, leasing one-fifth of Bullitt’s lick. He is likely to have employed some of his brothers in the salt production process. It is suggestive, I submit, that when the Lewis and Clark Expedition set up a salt-making operation on the Pacific Coast to replenish its supply for the return journey that Joseph Field was one of the salt makers, along with William Bratton and George Gibson, all William Clark’s recruits. Salt making may seem to the uninitiated merely a matter of boiling salt water until only the salt is left, but it is more complex than that. I suggest that Joseph Field was in charge of the salt-making operation and that he gained his knowledge at the salt licks south of Louisville, a fact that would have been well-known to William Clark. Meriwether Lewis noted in his journal of January 5, 1806, that he found the ocean-water salt to be “excellent, fine, strong, & white,” indicating the work of an experienced salt maker.

Despite Clark’s laudatory later remarks concerning the Field brothers, there was at least one occasion when Reubin Field was reprimanded. During the winter sojourn at Wood River near St. Louis both Clark and Lewis were at times absent perfecting arrangements for the coming spring resumption of the journey. On March 3, 1804, Lewis was forced to issue a stern warning read at parade. He found himself, he said, “mortified and disappointed at the disorderly conduct of Reubin Field in refusing to mount guard when in the due roteen [rotation] of duty he was regularly warned; nor is he less surprised at the want of discretion in those who urged his opposition to the faithful discharge of his duty, particularly Shields [another of the nine young men], whose sense of propriety he had every reason to believe would have induced him rather to have promoted good order …” Field had refused to obey an order of Sergeant Ordway.

There were other problems at Wood River, too, as Lewis’s order makes clear. “The abuse of some of the party in respect with privilege heretofore granted them of going to the country is not less displeasing; to such therefore as have made hunting or other business a pretext to cover their design of visiting a neighboring Whiskey shop, he cannot extend this privilege and directs that four men cannot leave camp for ten days.” One of the four was John Colter, another Kentuckian.

Despite Reubin Field’s initial lack of understanding of military discipline and the chain of command, he seemed to have learned quickly after his public reprimand and he and Joseph were exemplary Expedition members.

When they returned to Jefferson County, probably in the fall of 1806, the two brothers slipped back into the obscurity that enveloped them before their great adventure. Sometime in early 1807 they, along with five other Expedition members, put their names to a petition to Congress asking that the land bounties they were to receive be laid off in the Territory of Indiana or Louisiana rather than farther away. The wording is significant: “Many of your petitioners are poor … Having abandoned their ordinary pursuits & establishments, at the time they embarked” they would encounter difficulties “in regaining their former situations, or in again betaking themselves [with little to commence with] to those occupations which would afford them the necessaries, if not the comforts of life.”

Joseph’s obscurity even extends to the cause of his death, which was apparently not natural and not long after his return. Even the date is uncertain—only that it occurred sometime between June 27 and October 20, 1807. On the former date Joseph and Reubin’s parents transferred title to the Pond Creek farm for $500. Then, on October 20, the parents executed another deed
to Reubin alone, stating "whereas my son Joseph has departed this life intestate and his property has come to me as his heir-at-law ... I hereby convey unto the said Reubin Field ... all my right ... in the estate of said Joseph." 

Joseph must have met a violent end. William Clark’s cash book and journal for the years 1825-1828, now in Chicago’s Newberry Library, has on the cover a list in Clark’s handwriting of many members of the Expedition and their status and location, presumably in the 1825-1828 period. One name is "P. Cruzate Killed," followed by "J. Fields, do," that is, ditto. So ended the saga of the Pacific coast saltmaker, whose mortal remains lie in an unknown grave somewhere in Jefferson County.

Reubin Field had obviously impressed Clark on the Expedition. In a letter of November 26, 1807, to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, Clark recommended Reubin for a lieutenancy "if the army should be augmented." Nothing came of this, although the number of lieutenants was increased by sixty.

The following year Reubin was married, a step Joseph never took. The bride was Mary Myrtle of a numerous Myrtle family in southwestern Jefferson County. But the marriage was in Indiana and it was about this time that Reubin sold the 200-acre family farm on Pond Creek. It would seem that he moved to Clark County as did so many from the Kentucky side of the river at this time. In any event he does not appear in the Jefferson County records again until 1816, when he purchased 50 acres on Little Bee Lick, again in the southwestern part of the county. This land was near the present community of Valley Station. Here he settled down to farming and is not heard from again until his will was admitted for probate on January 14, 1823. The will, dated April 22, 1822, is curious. He leaves his entire estate to his wife. Then he adds: "Should their marriage in Indiana in 1808 by one they thought was a minister of the Gospel named Smith, but later learned may not have been, be considered illegal, then he bequests to her as Mary Myrtle, her former name."

His burial place is also unknown, but may have been the Myrtle family cemetery, near Little Bee Lick. About 1955 as suburbia reached out to this once-remote area, the cemetery was removed to make way for a housing tract. The disinterred bones were removed to the nearby Lewis family cemetery, but were not permitted to remain for long. A shopping center was built on the site and all remains there were removed to the Bethany Cemetery. That is probably where Reubin’s bones lie in an unmarked grave, in the area where he spent almost his entire life, except for his one great adventure on the Tour of Discovery.

Sergeant Charles Floyd

Now, to the two sergeants who were first cousins. One, Charles Floyd, was among the youngest members of the party—only about 21 years of age. He was the only member of the Expedition to die on the long journey to the Pacific Coast and back.

Charles Floyd was born about 1782 near Louisville, probably at or near Floyd’s Station east of Louisville in what is now St. Matthews. Floyd’s Station was a log-palisaded fort established in the spring of 1780 by his uncle, John Floyd. Charles’ father was Robert Clark Floyd and his mother was Lilyann—or Lillian—maiden name unknown. The Floyds, a numerous clan in early Jefferson County, were from Virginia. Robert Floyd served in the Virginia forces during the Revolution and came to the Falls of the Ohio region in 1779, accompanying his brother John—and presumably brought his family with him, as did John, who had a claim to 2,000 acres in the present St. Matthews area. Young Charles, then, was born and came of age on the frontier, accustomed to the rifle and roaming the forest.

Nothing concrete, however, is known of his early years. On October 14, 1791, his father, Robert Floyd, purchased jointly with Thomas Minor Winn 250 acres on the headwaters of the Licking
Fork of Beargrass Creek—in the eastern part of Jefferson County and not far from Floyd’s Station. A year before this, Charles Floyd’s sister Betsy—Elizabeth—had married Thomas Minor Winn, so Robert Floyd made the purchase jointly with his son-in-law. The Floyds were living on this tract in 1793, as shown by the tax list for that year, which has survived. Robert Floyd owned one horse and six head of cattle—a modest estate.  

By the fall of 1799, however, the Floyd family had moved across the river to present Indiana—then still part of the Northwest Territory. By 1801 he and his son Davis Floyd kept a ferry across the Ohio River. Clark County was formed in 1801 and Charles Floyd was named the first constable of Clarksville Township. Floyd was only about 19 years old—perhaps 20—and the fact that he was named keeper of the peace in a new and raw township says much about his abilities and throws light on his appointment as a sergeant on the Lewis and Clark Expedition at a young age.  

William Clark would have been familiar with Charles Floyd—the Clark and Floyd families were well acquainted—and familiar with conditions across the river, since Clark’s Army career included service at Fort Finney in present Jeffersonville in the 1790s and he had moved to Clarksville as a civilian in 1802.  

Floyd kept a diary, as members of the Expedition were required to do, and on June 4, 1804, along the Missouri River, he noted “A Butifull a peas a land as I ever saw ... level on both sides.” This is the comment of an individual accustomed to evaluating land for its agricultural potential, a necessary requirement for the planter-frontiersman. Then on July 31 his diary entry reads: “I am verry sick and has been for Sometime, but have recovered my Helth again ... This place is called Council Bluff.” By August 20 the Expedition had reached the present site of Sioux City, Iowa, and on that date Clark recorded that Charles Floyd died “with a great deal of composure ....” The young sergeant said poignantly to Clark: “I am going away. I want you to write me a letter.” He was buried on a bluff a half mile below a small stream that the Expedition named the Floyd River. From the symptoms there is little doubt but that Floyd died of a burst appendix.  

More than two years later, as the Expedition was returning, a stop was made at the burial site on September 4, 1806. Clark noted that “the grave had been opened by the natives and left half covered we had this grave completely filled up ...” Today, Floyd’s original gravesite is in the open air because of the meandering inclinations of the Missouri River, but a large obelisk covers what remains were rescued and reburied.  

The letter that Floyd dictated would have been sent back to St. Louis in the fall of 1804 from the winter camp at Fort Mandan, the last report from the Expedition until its return to St. Louis in 1806. What a treasure it would be if it should turn up, as Floyd’s journal did many years later.  

It was no doubt addressed to Floyd’s father, Robert, who by 1806 had moved back to Kentucky from Indiana. On January 15, 1807, Meriwether Lewis wrote in the official muster roll of the Expedition that Charles Floyd’s father “who now resides in Kentucky, is a man much respected, tho’ possessed of but moderate wealth.” Yet he never sold Charles Floyd’s land bounty warrant. It remained in the family, passing on to the sergeant’s brothers and sisters. Not until November 1, 1839, was it sold. It was then in the possession of Mrs. Mary Lee Walton, the youngest of Robert Clark’s children. She was only ten years old when her brother died on the Expedition. She sold the warrant for $640 to John G. Berry and John T. Winn. The latter, I would surmise, was her nephew, the son of her sister Betsy Winn.  

Some researchers have concluded that Sergeant Floyd was the son of Charles Floyd, the near-neighbor of the Field family on Pond Creek. This confusion is understandable, since Charles Floyd also had a son named Charles, the first cousin of Sergeant Floyd. A scrap of a letter may also have contributed to the confusion. This letter, apparently now missing, was once in the possession of the Floyd Memorial Association in Sioux City. It is from Nathaniel Floyd, son of
the elder Charles, to his sister Nancy. He had apparently just read the letter that Sergeant Floyd had dictated to Clark. Nathaniel wrote that: "Our dear Charles died on the voyage of colic. He was well cared for, as Clark was there, my heart is too full to say any more ... I will see you soon, your brother Nat." Nat was speaking of his cousin, but it would be easy to conclude that he was speaking of his brother.\footnote{27}

That Robert Clark Floyd was the sergeant's father is obvious from the heirs who actually came into possession of the land warrant. Also, on November 26, 1807, in the same letter that recommended to the War Department a lieutenancy for Reubin Field, Clark also recommended a captaincy for an R.C. Floyd. Only one Floyd had those initials—Robert Clark Floyd. It was probably Clark's way of compensating in some measure for Robert Clark's loss of a son. Robert Floyd served as an officer in the Kentucky militia and in 1796 had been promoted to major. Finally, Mary Lee (Floyd) Walton, Sergeant Floyd's youngest sister, noted in a letter to Lyman C. Draper, that remarkable collector of manuscripts and recollections of the early West, that her father's name was Robert.\footnote{28}

The three young men we have so far considered were the first that William Clark recruited. All entered the Army on August 1, 1803. The other young men from Kentucky did not enter the service until October. This early recruitment is evidence of Clark's high opinion of these three.

**Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor**

Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor, who officially joined the Expedition on October 20, 1803, was a first cousin of Sergeant Charles Floyd. His mother was the former Nancy Floyd, sister of Robert and Charles. She had married John Pryor in Virginia where Nathaniel Hale Pryor, the future sergeant, was born in 1772. John and Nancy Pryor had come to Jefferson County, Kentucky, by April 2, 1782, when John voted for delegates to the Virginia General Assembly. We even know for whom he voted, because the quaint custom at that time and for many, many years thereafter was to vote \textit{viva voca}, by voice, and in the earliest days the vote was recorded in the Minute Book of the County Court.\footnote{29}

On May 17, 1783, John Pryor was awarded 3 shillings and 3 pence for 18 days service as a spy—spying out hostile Indians and/or British. He is shown on the Jefferson County tax list for 1789, but he died soon after, probably early in 1791, because on July 6, 1791, the County Court minutes record that Robert and Nathaniel Pryor, orphans of the late John Pryor, are to be bound out by the overseers of the poor. The two youngsters were bound out to one Obidiah Newman on August 7. Newman doesn’t appear in the public records again until his will is probated on August 12, 1816. It is a simple document that leaves his entire estate to his wife, Martha.\footnote{30}

Nathaniel was married on May 17, 1798, to Peggy Patten, daughter of James Patten, a real pioneer who came to the Falls of the Ohio with George Rogers Clark in 1778. James Patton became the first pilot licensed to take boats through the Falls, which could be quite lucrative from the fees paid.\footnote{31}

Peggy must have died early—possibly in childbirth as was so common at that time—because there is no evidence that she was living in 1803 when the Expedition departed Louisville. Her father’s will, dated December 28, 1815, does not mention Peggy nor any children of hers. Nor was Peggy buried in the Patten family plot in this city's old Western Cemetery. Her fate remains unknown.\footnote{32}

After the return of the Expedition to St. Louis, Pryor remained in the army and was one of the group detailed in 1807 to return the Mandan Chief Shahaka to his home, an effort that was thwarted by the Arikara Indians. Pryor was a second lieutenant until 1810. One of the recently discovered letters of William Clark to his brother Jonathan, dated June 7, 1808, mentions Pryor. "Since writing you, we have descended [the Ohio River] to the mouth of the Cumberland ... I
have just heard that Mr. Pryor & about 20 men with 2 boats is waiting at the Mouth of the Ohio for me.' Clark was on his way to St. Louis and apparently was to be accompanied up the Mississippi by Lt. Pryor and a military escort.

A special mission that Pryor undertook while in military service and at the request of William Clark, by then Indian agent in the Missouri Territory, was a secret mission having to do with the Shawnee Indian Chief Tecumseh and his brother, The Prophet. The exact nature of the mission is unknown, but at that time Tecumseh was attempting to unite the northern and southern tribes for a concerted strike at the whites. The ultimate aim was to drive them back to the east side of the Allegheny Mountains—an impossible goal, but an uprising that could have cost much bloodshed. Tecumseh was killed during the War of 1812 when the Indians allied themselves with the British along the Canadian border.

After leaving the Army in 1810, Pryor secured an Indian trader's license from William Clark and operated a lead-smelting furnace along the Upper Mississippi at the mouth of the Galena River. On January 1, 1812, Pryor's establishment and that of a fellow trader, George Hunt, was attacked by a party of Winnebagoes who had inadvertently happened to be at Tecumseh's village at Tippecanoe along the Wabash River near present Lafayette, Indiana, on November 7, 1811. That was the very day that the battle of Tippecanoe erupted between General William Henry Harrison's U.S. Army forces and the Shawnees led by The Prophet while Tecumseh was absent. The Winnebagoes, spending the night at Tippecanoe on their way back from Canada to their village in Illinois, were embroiled in the clash and lost twenty-five men. Brooding on this after they returned home, they set out for the Galena mines to seek revenge. Pryor and Hunt were unaware of what had happened and were totally surprised, but both managed to escape. Pryor's escape was aided by a Sac squaw. He crossed the frozen Mississippi on the floating ice to Missouri and eventually found refuge for the winter in a village of French farmers. He returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1812 on a fur trader's boat.

After that harrowing experience as a civilian it's small wonder that he rejoined the Army in 1813, rising to the rank of captain and participating in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. His regiment was disbanded later that year and he again entered the Indian trade, this time on the Arkansas River. Clark's list of former Expedition members in 1825-28 shows Pryor at Fort Smith. He married, or at least cohabitated, with an Osage woman and was the father of several children, all of whom were given Osage names.

He became a well-known citizen of the Arkansas Territory and lived until June 1, 1831. The town of Pryor, Oklahoma, where he is buried, was named for him and a monument has been erected to his honor. The Pryor River in Oklahoma also carries his name and the Pryor Mountains in Montana.

Private John Shields

The four Expedition members we have considered so far made enough of an impress on their times to leave some information in the Jefferson County public records, scanty though it is. With John Shields we come to those who simply do not appear in the records, or in a way that leaves doubt as to their identity.

We are not sure when Shields came to Kentucky. Work by earlier researchers shows that he was born near present-day Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 1769, the sixth son of Robert and Nancy Stockson Shields, and one of ten brothers and a sister. Harrisonburg, by the way, located in the lovely Shenandoah Valley, is Louisville's twin city in the truest sense of the word. Both Harrisonburg and Louisville were given corporate life in a single act of the Virginia legislature in 1780.
By then, young Shields was eleven years old. Shortly after, in 1784, the family emigrated to Pigeon Forge in the Tennessee foothills of the Smoky Mountains. Here he learned blacksmithing at a shop owned by a brother-in-law, Samuel Wilson, and also operated Wilson's grist mill. He was an apt pupil of blacksmithing and his skill proved unusually valuable to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.\textsuperscript{39}

By 1790 he was in Kentucky and about that time married a girl named Nancy, family name unknown. The only reference I have been able to find to a John Shields locally is from a session of the County Court on November 8, 1797, when persons named to appraise the estate of a John Williams, deceased, included John Shields. Was he our man? Perhaps, but there is no way to be certain.\textsuperscript{40}

In any event, he became a private soldier in the Expedition, even though Lewis had earlier called for only unmarried men. He was, at age 34, the oldest man in the party and was the blacksmith, gunsmith, and all-around mechanic. His work as blacksmith brought in badly needed corn during the winter sojourn of 1804-05 at Fort Mandan. On February 5, 1805, Meriwether Lewis noted in his journal that the party was ‘visited by the natives, who brought in a considerable quantity of corn for the work the blacksmith had done for them . . . They are peculiarly attached to a battle ax formed in a very inconvenient manner in my opinion, it is fabricated of iron only.’ There were several such entries. And on April 8, 1806, Clark noted that: ‘John Shields cut out my rifle and brought hir to shoot very well. The party owes much to the ingenuity of this man, by whom their guns are repaired when they get out of order which is very often.’

At the conclusion of the Expedition, Lewis wrote of Shields: ‘‘Has received the pay only of a private. Nothing was more peculiarly useful to us, in various situations, then the skill and ingenuity of this man as an artist, in repairing our guns, accoutrements, &c. and should it be thought proper to allow him something as an artificer, he has well deserved it.’’ There is no record that Lewis’s suggestion was acted upon. Shields’ skill as a hunter comes through the journals, as well. There are at least seventy references to his hunting accomplishments.\textsuperscript{41}

As an acute observer of anything new that he had come across, Shields proved a ‘‘medicine man’’ to another Kentuckian on the Expedition—William Bratton. Bratton, as one of the saltmakers on the Pacific Coast, came down with back pains so acute that he could scarcely walk. On the return journey Bratton traveled by canoe or horseback. When the Expedition halted in present-day Idaho at ‘‘Camp Chopunnish’’ to wait for the snow to melt in the high Bitterroots, Shields suggested a treatment for Bratton. He said he had seen men with similar complaints cured by violent sweats.

Lewis detailed the process in his journal: Shields dug a circular hole four feet deep, lighted a fire to heat the surrounding earth, put in a seat and willow hoops across the top to hold blankets. Bratton was placed in the hole and given water to sprinkle on the hot earth to create steam. The steam and plunges into cold water cured the back pain. Lewis added that during the treatment Bratton was given ‘‘copious draughts’’ of a strong tea of horse mint. This was also Shields’ idea and he told Lewis he had seen ‘‘Sinneca snake root’’ used when mint was not available.\textsuperscript{42}

Following the Expedition’s return, Shields spent a year trapping in Missouri with famed Kentuckian Daniel Boone, who was evidently related to him in some way. Upon his return to the Falls of the Ohio area he spent some time with Daniel’s lesser-known brother, Squire Boone, in Indiana—in what is now Harrison County some thirty miles west of Louisville. Shields died in December 1809 and is probably buried in the rather neglected Little Fork Baptist Church graveyard south of Corydon, Indiana, in Harrison County. I might note that Squire Boone was, among other things, a Baptist preacher and likely presided at Shields’ burial. John and Nancy Shields were the parents of a daughter named Janette who married her cousin John Tipton, a man who became a power in Indiana politics.\textsuperscript{43}
Private John Colter

Now, to John Colter, whose exploits after the conclusion of the Expedition exceeded in danger and personal bravery anything he experienced while on the Tour of Discovery. He was born about 1775, another Virginian, born in Augusta County on the frontier. His father was Joseph Colter and his mother the former Ellen Shields, which makes one wonder whether Colter and John Shields were distant relatives.

About 1779 his family moved to Limestone, a landing point on the Ohio River above Cincinnati and now Maysville, Kentucky. Little is known of his childhood and early adult years, but Maysville, like Louisville, was on the frontier. He would have grown up as a woodsman and hunter. Lewis, in one letter to Clark from Cincinnati, mentions that on his river journey he had taken on two young men who were interested in joining the Expedition. Lewis was giving them a trial.

One of these young men was John Colter, then about 29. He has been described as five feet, ten inches tall, somewhat shy, with blue eyes and a quick mind. The West and the mountains obviously captivated him. As the Expedition, on its return, was nearing the Mandan villages, it met two Americans coming up the Missouri, Forrest Hancock and Joseph Dixon, who were on a fur-trapping expedition. These two perhaps sensed Colter’s fascination for the West and decided that a man who had been all the way to the Pacific was just the third party they needed.

Clark noted in his journal on August 15, 1806: “Colter, one of our men expressed a desire to join some trappers ... who offered to become shares with him & furnish traps &c. The offer was a very advantageous one to him.” He was allowed to go provided no one else would expect to get such permission and all agreed.

So now, only six weeks or less from St. Louis, Colter headed back from whence he had come. They trapped along the Yellowstone until the spring of 1807, but it proved unprofitable, the Indians were unfriendly, and disagreements arose among the partners. In the spring of 1807 Colter headed back to St. Louis and this time at the mouth of the Platte met a trapping party headed by Manuel Lisa headed for the Yellowstone. Lisa’s enthusiasm had been fired by the stories he heard from the Lewis and Clark people on their arrival in St. Louis.

And once again Colter turned back with Lisa’s party. They arrived at the Yellowstone in October 1807 and built a small fort and trading post at the mouth of the Bighorn River. Lisa wanted to encourage the Crows to come there with furs to trade, so he sent Colter on a 500-mile mission to find the Crows in their winter camps. It was on this epic journey that he discovered the thermal wonders of what is now Yellowstone National Park and passed through Jackson Hole—as far as is known, the first white man to see these national treasures; certainly the first to report them.

Late, in the summer of 1808, he joined the Crow and Flathead Indians on an expedition up the Yellowstone to the Three Forks in Montana. Here the group was attacked by the Blackfeet—grumpy as usual—and Colter was forced to fight against them. Colter was wounded in the leg and returned to Lisa’s fort to rest and recover. Then in early fall he and John Potts, another former member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition who had joined Lisa’s venture, went trapping up the Jefferson, or perhaps the Madison, and tried—unsuccessfully—to avoid the Blackfeet. When the two trappers were discovered, Potts was “riddled” after he returned rifle fire. Colter, not so rash, received a different treatment. He was stripped of all his clothing—even his moccasins—and sent running while the Blackfeet pursued him.

That must have been one of the most amazing foot races of all time—Colter running for his life with a horde of Indians in pursuit. The run was perhaps six miles and blood began gushing from Colter’s nose. Finally, when only one pursuer was left, Colter wheeled toward the Indian and startled him so that he stumbled as he attempted to thrust his spear into the trapper. Colter seized the spear, pinned the Indian to the ground with it, snatched the warrior’s blanket and
fled toward the river, plunged into the icy water and hid under some driftwood. The Blackfeet searched for him until dark, but never found him.

With nothing but the Indian blanket in the chill fall weather, Colter set out for Lisa's fort—300 miles away—and made it. Unbelievably, the next spring he returned to the same spot where his ordeal had begun. He wanted to retrieve the traps he had dropped in the water when the Blackfeet appeared. Once again the Blackfeet discovered him; he barely escaped in a hail of bullets. Then, in the early spring of 1810, Colter led a group of 32 trappers up the Yellowstone toward Three Forks where they planned to construct a trading post, which—amazingly—they did in the heart of hostile Indian country. The Blackfeet were constantly harassing the group and by late April Colter finally had enough, and returned to St. Louis—the first time in six years he had been in "civilization." By the way, I was amazed to run across a long account of Colter's adventures in a Louisville newspaper of 1885, copied from a New York newspaper, but with no indication of his Kentucky background.

Of course, he hadn't yet received his pay for the Expedition and Meriwether Lewis, who held the funds, had departed this world in October 1809, probably by his own hand. Colter was forced to obtain the services of an attorney to get his money. Colter remained in Missouri, married a girl named Sally, lived on a farm near the town of Dundee, and became the father of a son named Hiram. A party of fur trappers going up the Missouri in the spring of 1811 stopped at Colter's home to ask questions about the West. One of the group later wrote that Colter seemed to want to go with them, but did not feel he should because of his recent marriage.

It was just as well. John Colter died not long after in November 1813 of jaundice, not yet 40 years old. There is some confusion about his burial place. One version is that he was buried in the cemetery of the Fee Fee Baptist Church at Bridgeton, Missouri, near Colter's farm. The records of the church contain an entry: "John Colter—fur trader with Manuel Lisa." Supposedly there was once a marker there bearing Colter's name, but it is not there now.

The other version is that he was buried in a small cemetery atop a hill near Dundee, which came to be called Tunnel Hill when a railroad bored its way through in the 19th century. In 1926 the railroad, to improve its line, excavated a wide cut through the hill. As the steamshovels ate into the hillside, a workman noticed more than dirt being crunched. There were bones and the remains of rude wooden coffins. If John Colter was buried there, he is now distributed along the right of way of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

Colter's son Hiram was the father of eight children. In 1926 many of John Colter's descendants still lived in the Dundee area and probably do today. They carry the family name of the person whom Bernard DeVoto, that prolific writer on the westward movement, called "the first of the mountain men."

William Bratton

Private William E. Bratton was second-generation Scots-Irish, a native of Augusta County, Virginia, which was also the birthplace of John Colter. Augusta County, a huge county comprising a large part of today's West Virginia, was a frontier area populated largely by Scots-Irish.

Bratton was born July 27, 1778, at the time when the settlers on Corn Island here at the Falls of the Ohio, were growing their first crop of corn. Charles G. Clarke in his Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition notes that research has not settled the question of which of two brothers was William's father: George Bratton or James Bratton.

I would suggest that it was George, based on an abstract of some Virginia marriages published in the multi-volume series Marriages of Some Virginia Residents. James Bratton was married in 1774 to a woman with the remarkable name of Rebecca Hogshead. The marriage was in
Rockbridge County, immediately south of Augusta County. Two of James and Rebecca’s sons were also married in Rockbridge, indicating the family did not leave. George Bratton does not show up in this list. He is the likely father, then, of our adventurer, William.\textsuperscript{27}

The family supposedly migrated to Kentucky about 1790 and presumably to Jefferson County. However, neither George nor William show up in the local public records, although a Charles Bratton does. He may or may not be related.\textsuperscript{28}

Nevertheless, William was here and on October 20, 1803, became a member of the tour to the Pacific. His qualifications obviously pleased both Clark and Lewis. He is described as over six feet tall, square of build, erect, somewhat reserved, and of strictest morals. This latter quality may have been a legacy of his Calvinistic Scots-Irish background.\textsuperscript{29}

While John Shields gets much credit as the Expedition’s blacksmith, Bratton, too, was a blacksmith, as well as a gunsmith and hunter. Apparently he was number two man to Shields. They would have worked together, of course, and it may be this close association that led Shields to take such elaborate measures with the steambath to relieve Bratton of his crippling back pain.

Amazingly, Bratton’s discharge from the Expedition signed by Meriwether Lewis and dated St. Louis, October 10, 1806, was still in existence in 1901 and came to light. During the previous year Olin D. Wheeler, an early researcher into the personnel of the Expedition and editor of the Northern Pacific Railway’s annual promotional publication, \textit{Wonderland}, had devoted the 1990 issue almost exclusively to the Expedition.\textsuperscript{30}

Fortunately, a copy came into the hands of Mrs. Ella Fields of Chillicothe, Missouri. She wrote to Wheeler reporting that she was a daughter of William Bratton and had his discharge in her possession. She was able to provide him with some further details of her father’s life, all of which appeared in \textit{Wonderland}, 1901.\textsuperscript{31}

After his discharge, Bratton returned to Kentucky for a short while, presumably here in Jefferson County, but went back to Missouri and was living in New Madrid, Missouri, at the time of the great earthquake of 1811, often referred to in this part of the nation as the ‘‘New Madrid Shakes’’ and felt as far afield as Louisville, where it caused some damage and great alarm. Wheeler learned that Bratton served in the War of 1812 and was along the Canadian border where he saw the body of Tecumseh after he was killed.

At the age of 41 he married for the first time—on November 25, 1819, to Mary H. Maxwell and they lived for a time at Greenville, Ohio. By 1822 they were in Waynetown, Indiana, and became the parents of eight sons and two daughters. He died on November 11, 1841, aged 63, and is buried in Waynetown’s pioneer cemetery. An imposing monument records that he ‘‘Went with Lewis and Clark in 1804 to the Rocky Mountains.’’\textsuperscript{32}

**Private George Gibson**

Private George Gibson is the least known of the nine young men from Kentucky, almost nothing is known of him. He was a native of Pennsylvania—Mercer County, on the Ohio border north of Pittsburgh—but was probably reared in Kentucky. You may have the idea by now that Kentucky was populated in its early days exclusively by Virginians, but that’s not true. Pennsylvanians came by the thousands—and to understand why, just look at the map. The Ohio River begins at Pittsburgh and flows right to Kentucky—a ready-made easy access.

Gibson was said to be a fine hunter and horseman and played the violin—but I’ll bet he called it a fiddle. Sergeant Ordway, in his journal, indicates that Gibson was something of an Indian interpreter and that there was some rivalry with George Drouillard in this regard. That is difficult
to accept, however. If Gibson were acquainted with some Indian dialects it would have been that of the Ohio Indians—the Algonquin language family and a knowledge useless west of the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{63}

Gibson was married after the Expedition and died in St. Louis in 1809. That is the extent of present knowledge. His story, like that of so many other Expedition members, belongs to the short and simple annals of the poor.\textsuperscript{64}

**York**

Although technically not one of the nine young men from Kentucky and not in military service, York, William Clark's black servant, was from Kentucky, was young, and went all the way to the Pacific and back performing valuable service and frequently mentioned in the journals. He was a *de facto* member of the Expedition and deserves credit as such.

York is important in another way, certainly from the perspective of any historian of the Falls of the Ohio area. He is the first slave who emerges as a living, breathing personality from the anonymous mass of Jefferson County slaves consigned to servile, anonymous lives. What were they like? York gives us a glimpse of one and emerges as an interesting, attractive personality.\textsuperscript{65}

Robert R. Betts's 1985 book *In Search of York* is the first extended treatment ever given to Clark's servant. York was born in Caroline County, Virginia, where the Clarks lived, and apparently was chosen as Clark's body servant and companion as a youngster, a usual procedure. York, then, must have been about the same age as Clark, just two or three years younger. Clark noted that in his younger days in Virginia, when he went hunting, fishing, or riding, he was "always accompanied ... by York."\textsuperscript{66}

When the family made the great migration to Kentucky, where George Rogers Clark was already a towering figure, William Clark was 14. York was perhaps 11. With such a background, York doubtless spoke very good English, and living on the frontier after the age of 11, he would have mastered various frontier skills.\textsuperscript{67}

The first time York appears in any written record is 1799 in the will of John Clark, William's father. John Clark left his son "one negro man named York, also old York and his wife Rose and their Children, Nancy and Juba." It would seem from this that old York and Rose might have been York's parents, but it is not clear, since he is not designated as such. But he would have been about age 26 and probably no longer considered a part of his parents' household. The will assigns other slaves to William, including one named Ben, who pops up later in York's story.\textsuperscript{68}

York first appears in the journals at Wood River on December 26, 1803. Clark recorded that: "Corpl. Whitehouse & York come sawing with the whipsaws.' And on June 5, as they were ascending the Missouri, Clark reported that York swam to a "sand bar to gather greens for our dinner." Clark also noted that York was particularly attentive to Sergeant Floyd in his illness and a few days later that York shot an elk. Other instances are noted of York bringing down game. York could swim and was a good marksman—things he learned on the frontier.\textsuperscript{69}

We also learn from Clark's journal that York was not only a big man—he was fat. In South Dakota Clark wrote: "... we returned to the boat at sunset, my servant nearly exhausted with heat thirst and fatigue, he being fat and unaccustomed to walk as fast as I went."\textsuperscript{70}

The remote Indians, such as the Arikaras, were astonished at York. They had never seen a black man. Clark records that the Arikaras called York "the big Medison." York told them he had been a wild animal and ate children until caught and trained by Clark. Here was a man whose sense of humor was suited to the occasion. Some Indians rubbed York's skin to see if the color would come off. Too much of that understandably irritated York.\textsuperscript{71}
At another time Clark notes that the Indians were astonished that a man as large as York could dance so nimbly. At still another time Clark says that in contact with the Indians, York "made himself more turrible than we wished him to Doe."\(^7\)

This must have been a heady time for the slave who was tasting freedom for the first time in his life, traveling far from home, and apparently accepted by the enlisted men as an equal. The awe with which the Indians regarded him could only have been a boost to his ego.

The recently discovered Clark letters, including two from the Expedition itself, throw more light on York. A letter from Fort Mandan not only indicated that John Shields was sending a buffalo robe to his wife, but also that York is sending two buffalo robes: one to his wife—so York was married before the Expedition and not later—and one to Ben, who is undoubtedly the Ben mentioned in the will of William Clark's father. By this time Ben was a free man—freed by Clark in 1802.\(^7\)

With the arrival of the party in St. Louis in 1806, York's brief taste of freedom and equality ends. He is back to his old life as a slave. Trouble develops between York and his master. There has always been speculation as to the cause of the falling out between these two. The letters recently discovered in Louisville reveal the cause. York's wife, not owned by Clark, was in Louisville where her master lived. York was in St. Louis with Clark and agitating to return to his wife. That was the core of the problem.\(^7\)

York's life was one of misery after the Expedition. Clark did give him his freedom about 1815—York was then about 42 years old. Novelist Washington Irving, who visited Clark in St. Louis in 1832, learned that after being freed, York purchased a wagon and a six-horse team and operated a freight service between Nashville and Richmond, but was unsuccessful. He sold the horses and was cheated. He set off for St. Louis, perhaps to appeal to Clark for aid, but contracted cholera in Tennessee and died—a sad ending for a remarkable individual.\(^7\)

There was one other young Kentuckian on the Expedition—George Shannon. Carolyn Denton will present her meticulous research on him.

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\(^5\)Roy E. Appleman, "Joseph and Reubin Field, Kentucky Frontiersmen of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and Their Father, Abraham," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 49 (January 1975), 8-36.

\(^6\)Jefferson County Deed Book 2:20, August 27, 1790.

\(^7\)Ibid. A. John Speed, living on Pond Creek, sought permission to erect a mill on the creek in 1805 and stated that the site was 1½ miles from Abraham Field's farm. Jefferson County Minute Book 7:13, May 8, 1805. The 1858 G.T. Bergman (county surveyor) map of the county shows only one mill on Pond Creek, which was no doubt the site of Speed's mill. The Field farm can thus be located.

\(^8\)John Speed stated that his proposed mill was one-half mile from Charles Floyd's farm.

\(^9\)R.A. Briggs, ""The Field Family,"" typescript in Field family folder, genealogical files, The Filson Club.

\(^10\)Robert Emmett McDowell, "Bullitt's Lick, the Related Saltworks and Settlements," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 30 (July 1956), 241-269.


\(^12\)Ezekial Field, C.J. Saunders and Evan Moore occupied 3/5 part of Bullitt's Lick for saltmaking in 1807.


\(^14\)Ibid., 19.

\(^15\)Jackson, *Letters*, 373.

\(^16\)Appleman, "Joseph and Reubin Field," 23.

\(^17\)Jackson, *Letters*, 638.

\(^18\)Ibid., 371.


\(^20\)R.A. Briggs, "The Myrtle Family," typescript in the
Myrtle family folder, genealogical files, The Filson Club.

"Anna Margaret Cartlidge, Children and Grandchildren of William and Abidiah (Davis) Floyd, (Baltimore: the author, 1966), unpag.


"Abstracts of Jefferson County Deeds—Deed Book 2, 178, Robert Floyd and Thomas Minor Winn from Philip and Tabby Buckner, October 14, 1791. (Deed Book 2 is now missing. The abstracts were made by The Filson Club before the book was lost.) Jefferson County Marriage Book 1:11, October 25, 1790. "Jefferson County Tax List 1793," The Kentucky Genealogist, 21 (July 1979), 95.

On October 28, 1799, Robert and Lillian Floyd, described as residents of the Northwest Territory, sold 500 acres on Chenoweth Run in eastern Jefferson County to their son, Davis Floyd: Jefferson County Deed Book 5:155. Minute Book 1, Clark County Court of Quarter Sessions, Indiana Territory, April 1701. (Indiana Territory was carved from the Northwest Territory in 1801.) The Minut Book is quoted in Lewis C. Baird, Baird's History of Clark County, Indiana (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen & Co., 1909), 49.

"James Alton James, The Life of George Rogers Clark (University of Chicago, 1928), 460-461, quoting a letter of George Rogers Clark to Thomas Jefferson.


"Jackson, Letters, 371. Cartlidge, Children and Grandchildren, unpaged. Letter of Mary Lee (Floyd) Walton of Vicksburg, Miss., to Lyman C. Draper, October 5, 1872, Draper Manuscripts 13VV120.


"Jefferson County Marriage Book, 1:30. James Patten gave his consent in writing to his daughter's marriage, indicating she was under the age of 21.


"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 42.

"Ibid., 53.

"Ibid., 53.

"Jefferson County Minute Book 5:84, November 8, 1797.

"Jackson, Letters, 367.

"Lewis's Journal, May 24, 1806.

"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 54.

"Ibid., 46.


"Harris, Colter, 132, 140-147. Louisivle Commercial, February 10, 1885, 10.


"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 47.

"St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 27, 1926, reprinted in We Proceeded On, 9 (May-June 1983), 15.

"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 43.

"Ibid., 43.


"Charles Bratton served on a jury in 1785 and purchased three lots in Louisville the following year: Jefferson County Minute Book 1:111, May 3, 1785, and Book 2:4, March 7, 1786. He married Hannah Hynes: Jefferson County Marriage Book 1:5, January 9, 1787.

"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 44.


"Ibid., 8.

"Ibid., 11

"Clarke, Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 44-45.

"Ibid., 7.

"George H. Yater, Two Hundred Years at the Falls of the Ohio, (Louisville: The Filson Club, 1987), 45.


"Ibid


"Betts, York, 10, 11, 13.

"Ibid., 14.

"Ibid., 16.

"Clark's Journal, October 10, 1804.


"Betts, York, 119.
George Shannon of the Lewis & Clark Expedition: His Kentucky Years

Carolyn S. Denton

Of the “nine young men from Kentucky” in the famous Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery, George Shannon became the most educated, the most accomplished, and even the most colorful. He was the only “professional” of the group and was known in his adult life as Judge Peg-Leg Shannon. Yet history has given him little notice. No thorough biography has been done on his life. Aside from numerous articles, only two children’s books which basically recapitulate Shannon’s expeditional exploits have been written. It could be that because he was the youngest member of the Lewis and Clark group and played only a subservient, though necessary, role during the trip that his name is seldom mentioned in connection with the Expedition.

Was Shannon even one of the men from Kentucky? Various sources say he was born in Washington Co., Pennsylvania. In 1800 his family moved to Belmont Co., Ohio. George was back in Pennsylvania in 1803 when Meriwether Lewis began his journey west from Washington, D.C., through Pittsburgh. On August 30, 1803, Lewis wrote the first lines of the official record of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, “Left Pittsburgh this day at 11 o’clock with a party of 11 hands 7 of which are soldiers, a pilot and three young men on trial they having proposed to go with us throughout the voyage.” It is assumed that George was one of the three young men, according to Paul Cutright in his History of the Lewis and Clark Journals. Charles Clarke states in his biographical roster of The Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition that Shannon joined Lewis at Maysville, Kentucky on October 19, 1803 as a Private apparently after successful completion of a 7 week trial period. Having joined the group en route while it was passing through Kentucky may have been the only reason that George was considered one of the men from Kentucky.

George Shannon’s true roots in Kentucky were not firmly established until after the Expedition ended. Shannon residents in Lexington, Kentucky today claim him as a cousin even though the exact genealogical descent has not been established. Though there may have been some family ties in Kentucky, George basically came to Kentucky to get an education at Transylvania University. A recently acquired letter of introduction found at the Filson Club written October 1, 1808 by William Clark states that George Shannon “is going to Lexington to go to school with the view of acquiring some knowledge to fit him for an employment to get his living. He is studious and ambitious and a man of impeachable [sic] character.” Yet even Transylvania University has forgotten that George Shannon was once in attendance. There he has been overlooked and overshadowed by the likes of Henry Clay, Stephen Austin, Jefferson Davis, Cassius Clay, Constantine Rafinesque and others, all of whom were his contemporaries. In another place and time his name would have been honored. Though it has been almost 200 years since George returned from the western territories to become a college student at Transylvania University, his early presence has finally come to light, like the discovery of a rare old penny lost in a crack.

It is fitting that George acquired his formal education at Transylvania University. Just as Thomas Jefferson was the champion of the Expedition, he was also a long time friend and supporter of the trans-Allegheny institution, being the governor of Virginia when that state chartered the school in 1780. In a letter to a friend, Jefferson wrote that “we must send our children for education
to Kentucky ... I would rather it should be to Kentucky than any other state, because she has more flavor of the old cask than any other.” George Rogers Clark, a neighbor and friend of Jefferson, was an early trustee of Transylvania and the brother of William Clark. As a member of Clark's Expedition George Shannon could not escape hearing about Transylvania University and being encouraged to continue his education if he indeed was “studious and ambitious.”

George was delayed in attending to his education immediately after the conclusion of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. William Clark employed him in the spring of 1807 as an “Indian Conductor” to assist a Mandan Chief on his return from Washington, D.C. to his tribe sixteen hundred miles up the Missouri River. On reaching North Dakota, George Shannon’s party was attacked by the Arikara Indians. George received a leg wound in the battle and was unable to obtain medical treatment until the party retraced its course back down the river to St. Charles, Missouri. In October Dr. Barnard G. Farrar, who first practiced medicine in Frankfort, Kentucky, and later received an honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine from Transylvania, found that George’s leg was in a state of gangrene and had to amputate the limb above the knee. Shannon then spent approximately a year recuperating in an army hospital. He used a wooden peg for the rest of his life, which earned him the nickname “Peg-Leg.”

Once George was able, he accompanied Lewis in exploring saltpeter caves in Missouri for a short time; and then made his way to Kentucky, passing through Louisville with a letter of introduction from William Clark for his brother, General Jonathan Clark (mentioned previously). William Clark stated that he would “continue to pay him [Shannon] his salary until ordered to the reverse by the Secretary of War which will enable him to pay his board and schooling.” Only sons of wealthy families attended Transylvania during those early days. George was not from a wealthy family. His father had died in an Ohio snowstorm in 1803, leaving a widow and nine children to fend for themselves. Because of his association with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and apparent natural abilities, George Shannon was afforded an excellent opportunity to acquire an education and the necessary social connections to improve his station in life, and ultimately the lives of several of his brothers as well.

Few records concerning students remain in the Transylvania University Archives from its early founding to 1818, the period that George was in attendance. No matriculation books exist from that time and the first printed Catalogue of Students did not appear until 1821. The 1823 Latin catalog does present the first retrospective list of Transylvania graduates from 1802; George is not listed. He may not have received an official diploma from Transylvania University, few did; but the fact that he was a student is verified by one miscellaneous document in the archives, and the original manuscript of William Leavy, a fellow student, who stated: “1807-10 George Shannon, Attorney and Judge, died in Missouri.” Leavy wrote his Memoirs of Lexington & Vicinity many years after the fact in 1874 and therefore the 1807 date is questionable, particularly since Shannon was wounded in that year. Because of the Filson Club’s recent acquisition of the Clark letter of 1808, it can be concluded that George Shannon attended Transylvania University from the fall of 1808 through the spring of 1810. Two original compositions located at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, which were written by George in 1809 while he attended Transylvania University, seem to confirm that George pursued a classical course of instruction in the academic department of the school, rather than being enrolled in the law department as some sources claim. Ironically, it was in the fall of 1809 when George was a student at Transylvania that William Clark stayed the night of October 28 with George and learned of the death of his partner Meriwether Lewis from a local newspaper.

Many of George Shannon’s classmates at Transylvania went on to become prominent citizens of Lexington; some even affected the history of our country by their distinguished careers. They became U.S. congressmen, state legislators, local officials, doctors, lawyers, merchants and ministers. Yet the most famous fellow student of George was Stephen Austin. Austin also left
Transylvania in 1810 to eventually become a member of the Missouri legislature, a judge in Arkansas, and then the "Father of Texas." In the *Austin Papers* edited by Eugene Barker can be found several affectionate letters written to him by his old college friends, including one letter from George himself.  

Robert Todd (Lincoln's father-in-law) wrote Austin in 1810 saying, "I met George Shannon at Shelbyville and stayed a day or so with him." Then Austin received a letter dated later that year from Isaac Baker who was still at Transylvania—"Shannon started to Philadelphia the 12th ult." Obviously Austin was a friend of Shannon and curious about his activities or these letters would not have referred to him. The interesting point made by the Baker letter is that it established the exact date that George Shannon left Transylvania University—June 12, 1810.

If George intended to study law at Transylvania, he may have abandoned the idea when he was recruited by William Clark in the spring of 1810 to travel to Philadelphia to assist Nicholas Biddle with his paraphrase of the Lewis and Clark journals. Clark sent George off with two letters of introduction. The one to Benjamin Smith Barton, a famous botanist, was received August 14, 1810. This places George in the East by late summer. The second letter was addressed to Nicholas Biddle and states, as does the other letter, that George "possesses a sincere and undisguised heart, he is highly spoken of by all his acquaintances and much respected at the Lexington University where he has been for the last two years." Clark goes on to say:

"Mr. S. Connections are respectable. Since the misfortune of losing his leg, he has been studiously employed in pursuit of an education ... he wishes to study Law and practice in the Western Country. May I request of you to give him such advice or assistance ... to enable him to pursue those studies while in Phila."[sic]

It can be ascertained then that while George was helping Biddle compose his narrative of the Expedition with his intimate knowledge of the "language of signs," "Indians of the upper Missouri!" and "Buffalo Pathes" he may have been reading law. Though Biddle was himself a lawyer as well as a scholar, statesman and financier, there is no indication that George read law in his office. Yet his law studies may have been completed by 1812. In a letter to Biddle, George wrote "I am anxious to obtain the place of judge advocate, in this new Army which is to be raised." He apparently did not receive the appointment and states in another letter to Biddle "I wrote to you precipitately ... not however, from any difference in my abilities to perform the duties of the office, with a proper dignity and correctness, but from a consciousness of my want of the necessary degree of celebrity and standing in society, to justify an expectation of the success of my application."  

George's prospects in Pennsylvania may have been limited and he therefore returned to Lexington, Kentucky in 1812. There he was well connected as he had an association with Henry Clay, who was a member of the Board of Trustees at Transylvania University, and other men of means and status, who had been his classmates. The *Kentucky Gazette* newspaper carried a notice in 1812 that "Mr. Shannon is appointed messenger for the Kentucky electors." In a letter to President James Madison from Hubbard Taylor dated Dec. 6, 1918 it is mentioned that "Mr. George Shannon takes in the votes of the Electors, he is the young man that lost his leg in the Battle with the Indians in taking home the Osage Indian Chife [sic] and was also in the Expedition with Lewis and Clark to the Pacific Ocean, he intends to petition for some compensation, in consequence of his being disabled."  

With steady employment and his education completed, George was able to attend to affairs of the heart. On Sept. 19, 1813 he married Ruth Snowden Price, daughter of Samuel Price. Ruth's brother and cousins had been classmates of George at Transylvania, and her father had been a trustee of the university. George married into an established Lexington family whose members married well and were associated with the Harts, Russells, Richardsons, and Clays. The Rev. James Blythe, who was acting president of Transylvania University, performed the
marriage ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. Shannon eventually had seven children all born in Lexington between 1814 and 1825.

By 1814 George was associating with all the “right” people when he attended a Washington’s Birthday celebration with some of the leading citizens of Lexington—“When the company had been collected, they were addressed by George Shannon in an eloquent and pertinent speech, commemorative of the virtues of Washington.” In June of that year the Kentucky Gazette noted that George declined candidacy for the Kentucky legislature, though no reason was given. It was first announced January 2, 1815 in the same paper, and in succeeding years up to 1818, that “George Shannon, Attorney at Law, keeps his office in the house lately occupied by Mrs. Beck ... where he may always be found by those disposed to employ him in the line of his profession.”

George joined the Tammany Society (or Brethren of the Columbia Order) in 1815. The Lexington chapter was formed in 1811 and continued to exist locally until 1820. Members were called the sons of Saint Tammany, and they often marched through the streets of Lexington dressed as Indians in red paint, feathers, bows, tomahawks, and war clubs. The organization certainly must have suited George as he was well acquainted with American Indians from his Expedition experience. Oddly enough it was considered one of the most Democratic and patriotic organizations in the West and its members included many well-known Lexington citizens. George was an active member in the society. The Kentucky Gazette carried the following notice in 1815: “The Sons of Tammany ... are requested to be punctual in their attendance at their great Wigwam, at the house of Br. George Shannon ...” In May of 1818 he volunteered a toast at a meeting of the Society, “Those who are unfriendly to liberties in other countries, cannot be sincere friends to it in our own.” He delivered a long talk on the anniversary of the discovery of America in October of the same year. George continued to attend the local Washington’s Birthday and 4th of July celebrations throughout the years with such dignitaries as Isaac Shelby, Henry Clay and Leslie Combs. At one event, George made a toast to “Henry Clay, the able and independent advocate of the rights of man.” He was surely present when President Monroe and General Andrew Jackson visited Lexington in 1819 and “attended the Fourth of July festival at Dunlap’s.” And very likely he went to the elaborate reception and ball for General LaFayette in Frankfort which was hosted by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Daniel Wiesiger, in 1825.

Once George Shannon became somewhat established in Lexington, three of his six brothers from Ohio arrived in town. David and Wilson Shannon lived with George while they attended Transylvania University. Both became lawyers and Wilson eventually became a governor of Ohio. James, also an attorney, married a daughter of Isaac Shelby, Kentucky’s first governor, and practiced law in Lexington for many years. Brother Thomas, who never came to Kentucky, became a U.S. congressman, as did Wilson Shannon. One wonders how much George, who was the first to venture from his Ohio home, may have influenced his brothers to obtain educations and go into politics.

George Shannon went into partnership with Thomas T. Barr, once a Transylvania University trustee and a member of the Kentucky legislature. The following notice ran in the Kentucky Gazette throughout the year of 1818: “The undersigned have entered into co-partnership under the names and firm of Barr and Shannon, With a view to practice law in the courts of Fayette. Their office will be kept on Limestone ... where they can at all times be consulted, unless when attending said courts. Those who employ them will in all cases obtain the counsel and efforts of both, and may be assured that all business committed to their care will be discharged promptly and punctually.” Barr had been a board member of the Lexington Public Library and its first secretary for twenty years. In 1819 George was also elected to the library’s Board of Directors. An uncataloged manuscript, obviously a petition to the city to change the location of the library, was recently found at Transylvania. It is the only document thus far discovered in the university
archives that contains the signature of George Shannon. Thomas Barr died in 1824, ending the partnership of Barr & Shannon.

One piece of business that George settled, though it took him many years to do so, was compensation for his services with the Expedition. He sought to have the land warrant, which had been awarded to him by Congress in 1807, renewed as he had apparently lost the original. With the assistance of Henry Clay, he received a new warrant for his 320 acres which was finally approved in 1814. George assigned power of attorney to Clay in 1815 stating that he had sold his land warrant to Clay and that Clay was authorized as his attorney to draw the arrearages of his pension. With the help of Clay and William Clark, George also had his pension increased twice, from $5 a month to $8 in 1814, and then to $12 in 1817.

George furthered his standing in the community by joining the Masonic Fraternity. He was Past Master of the Murray Lodge, which was Lexington's third lodge. An incident occurred in the summer of 1818 that involved the duel of two doctors, Benjamin Dudley and William Richardson. They were both Transylvania University medical professors and Masons. The whole Masonic Fraternity in Lexington opposed the un-Masonic conduct of the doctors. George Shannon was involved in the proceedings that temporarily suspended the dueling men from the privileges of Masonry. The proceedings may have been quite difficult for George as Dr. Richardson was his wife's cousin.

The 1820s were the most interesting and probably the most trying of George Shannon's career. He served three consecutive one year terms in the Kentucky House of Representatives from 1820 to 1823. Once he entered public life, his character was questioned on several occasions in the local papers and in handbills. Lexington was so infested with gamblers that in 1822 its citizens passed a new anti-gaming law and put offenders in jail. George was publicly accused of pleading the statute to avoid payment of a gambling debt that same year while he was running in the state election against Robert Wickliffe. This incident coincided with the infamous Relief War that raged from 1814 to 1829 in Kentucky between the “Old Court” and “New Court.” “Dirty politics” came into play and George Shannon was caught in the middle of each controversy.

The entire state of Kentucky was suffering from a deep depression as a result of the War of 1812. Many state-chartered banks of Kentucky were ruined and forced to call in outstanding loans and mortgages. In response, the legislature passed a series of laws designed to aid the debtor class, and eventually repealed the statutes that created the then existing Court of Appeals and installed a new court. A bitter fight ensued between the “Old Court,” or Anti-Relief party, and the “New Court” called the Relief party. The Anti-Relief party was successful in this political struggle and eventually evolved into the “Whigs.” The New Court party positioned itself with Jackson and became Democrats.

George Shannon strongly allied himself with the Relief party when he first ran for the state legislature in the election of 1820. That year he published a letter in the Kentucky Gazette “To the People of Fayette” stating that in his opinion “a just and equitable property law so constructed as amply to secure to creditors their rights, without entirely sacrificing the property of debtors, is absolutely demanded by the present condition of our country. Such a law, I believe, can be framed; and if you shall deem it expedient to repose so much confidence in me, as to select me, as one of your representatives in the next legislature, it is my intention to advocate the passage of such a law.” George won his house seat that year, the same year that the Relief party gained control of both the executive and legislative departments of the state government. Soon after he assumed his office he publicly stated he would oppose any amendment which would hurt small land owners and proposed a resolution that gave relief to debtors. In the archives of Transylvania University is an 1822 pamphlet entitled The Speech of George Shannon, Esq. On the Resolution for the Removal of Judge Clark from Office on Account of his Decision in the
Bourbon Circuit Court Against the Constitutionality of the Endorsement and Replevin Laws which attacks Judge James Clark's alleged disregard of constitutional liberty.51

Though the 1823 legislature failed to gain the necessary two-thirds votes to remove Clark as Circuit Judge, he nevertheless resigned in 1824 and it was George Shannon, his political foe, who was nominated to take his place. The nomination was announced in The Kentucky Reporter and then heatedly debated on the Senate floor before he was actually appointed by Governor Joseph Desha, a strong supporter of the Relief party.52 The controversy concerning George's appointment was a carry-over from the campaign of 1823 in which he attempted to run for a fourth term in the legislature. Several broadsides by and about George Shannon appeared that year concerning accusations made against him of attempting to obtain a loan from the Commonwealth Bank with the intention of avoiding payment by pleading that the bank's charter was unconstitutional. One such broadside has as its heading: "Who is George Shannon? What are his private and moral virtues, and what is his public and political character?" It gives reasons why the electorate should not support him in the next election,53 which he lost by only 60 votes.54

The most spectacular event of George Shannon's life in Kentucky centered around a murder. Just 25 days prior to the Senate's approval of George's nomination as a judge by Governor Desha, the governor's son killed and robbed a man.55 He was arrested and brought to trial January 18, 1825. As a result of a change of venue, the case was heard in Harrison County where John Trimble was the Circuit Judge. However, as Trimble had just been appointed judge to the Court of Appeals, he in turn selected George Shannon to try the case. George refused to preside at first but eventually was persuaded by Trimble to do so the very morning that the trial was to begin. He rode on horseback from Lexington to Cynthiana that very day, opened court at 8 p.m. and adjourned over until the next day. The entire case was heard in one morning session and the verdict found young Desha guilty, fixing the punishment at death. The counsel for the defense immediately filed a motion for a new trial on the grounds that the jury had been tampered with and that the verdict was not in accordance with the evidence. George himself thought the evidence raised a doubt as to Desha's guilt. He then set aside the guilty verdict and granted a new trial.56

As a result, George was vehemently accused by the press of the state of partiality because of his political association with the governor. According to a Frankfort newspaper, George was burned in effigy in both Harrison and Bourbon counties.57 A year later the Desha case was heard again and brought in the same verdict and punishment rendered in George Shannon's court. George did not preside in the second trial. Amos Kendall, in a letter to Henry Clay, mentioned that the office of Judge was vacant in the Harrison County District after the first trial and stated "Nor can it be presumed, that any other Judge will sit in the case after the treatment received by judge [sic] Shannon."58

George Shannon's circuit judgeship was a life-time appointment dependent on good behavior and he did not run for the legislature thereafter, particularly since his political bent was no longer popular in the state. The election of 1826 resulted in a victory for the Old Court which was supported by the Anti-Relief "lawyer's party." Though George was one of the few lawyers who was of the "people's party" that supported the New Court for debtors' relief, once he became a judge he was non-partisan enough that he sent cases on appeal to both courts. By 1829 the court struggle in Kentucky was decided. Governor Desha was forced to compromise before he left office in 1828. It was one of Judge Shannon's own cases, known as Hildreth's Heirs vs. McIntire's Devisee, that finally ended, officially, recognition of the New Court's judicial efforts when it went to the Appeals Court in 1829. The principal question presented for decision was whether or not the lower court erred in obeying the mandate of the judges of the New Court. It was found that Shannon's circuit court had indeed erred in its judgment and was reversed. Since then, none of the decisions of the New Court has ever been cited as authority in Kentucky.59
George fortunately had left the state before learning that one of his own decisions had been the "kiss of death" for his party.

It is not known why George Shannon gave up his judgeship and moved to Missouri in 1828, though several reasons can be surmised. Most likely he didn't have much of a political future in Kentucky when his party and avowed stance concerning the court issues inevitably fell out of favor with the general public, especially after Governor Desha left office in that year. His character and morals had been criticized for years in the press whenever he ran for public office, and he had not fared well financially. When he began his partnership with Barr in 1818 he owned two slaves and one cow, and had ten whites in his household with assets totaling $700. In 1822 he owned his own home, six slaves, one horse, and three cows with only eight whites living together and $2,480 in assets. That was his best year. By 1827 he was living on the edge of town with nine whites in the household, two blacks under age of eighteen, two horses and one cow with only $460 in assets. The 1828 Fayette County Tax Assessment records show that the Bank of the United States owned the Shannon residence with twenty-one acres. Did he actually default on a loan as he was accused of considering in 1822? In any event, the political climate was more favorable in Missouri, land easy to obtain, and many Kentuckians had already settled there. In fact, George's sister-in-law and husband, Isabella and William Samuel, had already moved to Hannibal, Missouri.⁶⁰

Eventually the Shannons settled in St. Charles, Missouri, the very town where Lewis and Clark rendezvoused with their men, and made final preparations for their Expedition in May of 1804. George was nominated a United States Attorney for the District of Missouri in 1830 by President Jackson. His appointment was confirmed by the Senate after secret hearings concerning a protest presented by his predecessor. George was nominated for a new term in 1834 but for some unexplained reason his nomination was withdrawn.⁶¹ For a short time he occupied a seat in the State Senate, and later became a candidate for U.S. Senator in 1832 running against Thomas Hart Benton. Just prior to his death, he was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives.⁶²

George Shannon died suddenly August 30, 1836 in Palmyra, Missouri at the age of 49. He had travelled to Palmyra to try a murder case. His obituary appeared in several newspapers including a short notice in Lexington's Observer and Reporter. A St. Louis newspaper carried the details of his death and Masonic funeral in Palmyra, which was attended by "a large assemblage of the ladies and gentlemen of the town ... to offer their last testimony of respect to the remains of a good man." The members of the Bar of both Palmyra and St. Charles wore crepe upon their left arms for 30 days and published such resolutions in his honor, as "Resolved, that to the genius, learning and eloquence which rendered him a shining member of the legal possession, he added those social qualities which rendered him a pleasant and agreeable companion."⁶³ In the end, his early travels to the western territories with Lewis and Clark were overlooked by those who out-lived him. He is buried in an unmarked grave in the Massie Mill Cemetery one mile north of Palmyra.⁶⁴

William Clark once stated that George Shannon was "one of the most active and useful men we had."⁶⁵ Clark even named a stream in his honor when descending the Yellowstone in 1806, though today it is known as Sand Creek.⁶⁶ The state of Missouri named a county after him just a year after his death.⁶⁷ In the last several years some of George's direct descendants have contacted Transylvania University in search of clues about him. Family lore suggests that he was an alcoholic (an 1823 handbill accused him of being seen "in his cups"). Could it be that the hilarious stories of George's drinking escapades described by W.V.N. Bay in his Reminiscences of the Bench and Bar of Missouri are true? Bay wrote that someone once proposed to George "that if either would do a particular act, and the other should fail to follow suit, the delinquent should treat the crowd. Thereupon Shannon took off his wooden leg and threw it into the fire; and as the other was not disposed to thus jeopardize a sound limb, he was forced to foot the bill."⁶⁸ Such a story
certainly humanizes the character of George Shannon. All men have their weaknesses. On the Expedition George was not well versed in woodcraft, but he made up for it in Meriwether Lewis’ estimation with his great courage, perseverance and loyalty. Those very attributes served George Shannon well while he lived through difficult times in Kentucky.

-NOTES-


2Shannon, Ed. “The Shannons have gained fame far and wide.” Barnesville Enterprise (Barnesville, Ohio) 5 Nov. 1981, states that George left Ohio around 1802 and traveled up and down the Ohio River as a boat crewman (p. 7). Curl noted George lived with an Uncle Will in Pennsylvania for two years and at the age of 17 went to the office of John A. Tarascon Brothers, Ship Builders, where he met Lewis (p. 2).


5William Clark to General Jonathan Clark, 1 October 1808, ms. John Hite Clark Papers, Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky. In the same papers is also a receipt dated 22 March 1809 to John H. Clarke signed by George Shannon.


7Caldwell, J.A. History of Belmont and Jefferson Counties of Ohio, (Wheeling, West Virginia: Historical Publishing Co., 1877) pp. 187-189 states that “Shannon had his leg properly dressed, and had he taken the care of himself that he should, the limb would have been saved, but he ventured to walk upon it before it was entirely well, and broke off the bone afresh.” Also see Jackson, “Clark to Henry Clay,” 11 September 1816 which describes Shannon’s injury and subsequent government pensions (Vol. 2: pp. 619-621); “Nathaniel Pryor to Clark” 16 October 1807, notes that Shannon was near death after his operation and his medical bills amounted to $300. (Vol. 2: pp. 432-438).

8“Peg-leg Shannon,” Missouri Historical Review (1934-1935) Vol. 29, no. 2: pp. 115-121. See also Chuinard, E., Medical Aspects of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, (Oregon State University, 1965) which ironically mentions that Shannon’s only injury while on the Expedition was that he cut his foot “with the ads [adze]” March 6, 1806 (p. 244).


11Leavy, William A. A Memoir of Lexington and its Vicinity ... 1874 Notebook, ms., Leavy papers, Transylvania University Archives, Lexington, Ky., p. 74. Also, 1864 Notebook, ms., in the same collection that states “George Shannon from near Whaling, [sic] Va. got his leg cut off in Lewis & Clark’s Missouri expedition to Rocky Mountains—became Atty in Lex. member of legislature afterwards. Judge & died in Missouri he married after his college course a daughter of Saml Price senr & sister of Mrs. Genl Wm. Russell.” p. 20.

12“Disinterested Benevolence No. 1” 20 Nov. 1809; mss., Lewis and Clark Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Mo. See also Jackson, Vol. 2, p. 621.

13Jackson, Vol. 2, p. 726. Death reported in the Argus of Western America (Frankfort, Ky.)


19The Indian vocabularies collected by Lewis while on the Expedition were apparently lost when Thomas Jefferson’s effects were plundered on the James River while being shipped to Monticello. Constantine Rafinesque, a T.U. botany professor, interviewed George Shannon in an attempt to recover some words of various Indian languages. He stated in a letter to the American Anti-quarian Society that “Judge Shannon ... had acquired a tolerable knowledge of this [Mandan] language, and he was lately favored me with some words of it ...” It is interesting to note that Shannon remembered the Indian word for “Whisky or Water of God.” See: Rafinesques, C.S. to the American Antiquarian Society 5 July 1824, photostat, Transylvania University Archives, Lexington, Ky. See also: Rafinesques, C.S. ed. Atlantic Journal and Friend of Knowledge. (Philadelphia: Winter 1832) Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 132-133; and Boewe, Charles. “George Shannon and C.S. Rafinesques,” ts, unpublished paper presented to the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation conference August 7, 1991, Louisville, Ky., Transylvania University Archives, Lexington, Ky.

20No record of Shannon’s law studies has been found, nor when or where he passed the Bar. In 1811 while living in Norristown, Penn. he did act as a purchasing agent for Clark’s store in St. Louis (Jackson, Vol. 2, p. 570).
apparently was published before Barr and Shannon went into partnership. Lexington then had only 17 lawyers.

2

Kentucky Gazette (Lexington, Ky.) 8 Dec. 1812: p. 3.


2Robertson, George. An Outline of the life of ... (Lexington, Ky.: Transylvanian Printing Co., 1876) p. 28.

2"Mr. Price had five grown daughters ... Such a social nucleus of promising young females and males ... the elite of the young of both sexes ... we all had joyous times."

2Kentucky Gazette 28 Feb. 1814, p. 3.

2Kentucky Gazette 6 June 1814, p. 3. For obituary of Elizabeth Price, wife of Samuel Price see Kentucky Gazette 28 March 1814, p. 4. George may have declined for personal reasons. His mother-in-law had just died and his wife was expecting their first child.

2Kentucky Gazette 2 Jan. 1815, p. 3.

2Ranck, George W. History of Lexington, Kentucky ... (Cincinnati: Robert Clark and Co., 1872) p. 245. Also see Kendall, Amos. Autobiography of ... (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872) pp. 141-142. On joining, Kendall said "My principal object is to make myself known, and get an opportunity of displaying such talents as I may possess."


2Kentucky Gazette 15 May 1818, p. 3; and 9 Oct. 1818, p. 3.

2Kentucky Gazette 9 July 1819, p. 3; and 16 July 1819, p. 3.


2Whitley, p. 141. Also see James Shannon Papers, University of Kentucky Special Collections, which contains James Shannon's ms. petition to the Ohio Senate to practice as an attorney, dated October 2, 1818.


2Kentucky Gazette 27 March 1818, p. 3. See also Coleman, J. Winston Jr., Lexington's Second City Directory published by William Worsley and Thomas Smith for the Year 1818. (Lexington, Ky.: Winburn Press, 1953) pp. 5, 15 which indicates that the Limestone office belonged to Barr and that George was living and practicing law in Jordan's Row on Upper St. The directory apparently was published before Barr and Shannon went into partnership. Lexington then had only 17 lawyers. By 1820 there were 47.

2Leavy, pp. 23, 111-112.

2Kentucky Gazette 15 January 1819, p. 3.


2Jackson, Vol. 2: p. 381.


2Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky (Frankfort, Ky.) Oct. 16-Dec. 27, 1820 Sess.: pp. 5, 247; Oct. 15-Dec. 21, 1821 Sess.: pp. 3, 178; Oct. 21-Dec. 11, 1822 Sess.: pp. 3, 145. See also miscellaneous entry in the Fayette County Order Book No. 4, p. 177 (November Court 1820) "Ordered that George Shannon be and he is hereby appointed Counsel for the Commonwealth for the ensuing year."

2Harn, F. Gerald, "Central Kentucky Broadsides and Newspapers 1793-1846 in the John M. McCalla Papers, West Virginia University Library, Part II" in Register of the Kentucky Historical Society (Frankfort, Ky.: January 1961) Vol. 59: p. 75. See also Shannon, George, "To the People of Fayette" (Lexington: July 31, 1822), University of Kentucky Special Collections 60M200. Broadside, 1 leaf.

2Ranck, p. 299.


2Kentucky Gazette, 28 April 1820; another long letter "To the Public" 5 May 1820; candidacy was first announced 7 April 1820.


2Shannon, George. Speech of George Shannon on the resolution for the removal of Judge Clark from office on account of his decision in the Bourbon Circuit Court against the constitutionality of the Endorsement and Replevin Laws. (Frankfort, Ky.: 1822) 19 pp. pamphlet.

2Kentucky Reporter (Lexington, Ky.) 29 November, 1824, report nomination confirmed. See Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Kentucky ... (Frankfort, Ky.: Amos Kendall, 1824) pp. 75-77, 123-126, 179 for debate concerning nomination. Also see Governor Joseph Desha Papers, "Executive Journal" (November 1824) ms., pp. 46-47, 49, 56. Kentucky Department of Archives and Records, Frankfort, Ky.

2Register "Broadsides ..." pp. 340-343.
54 Western Citizen, 9 August 1823, p. 3.
57 Western Citizen, 9 April 1825, p. 3, article mentions that the same day Shannon's appointment as a Judge (salary $1200 per annum) by the Governor was confirmed by the Senate, the Senate also passed a bill for change of venue of the Desha case; 5 March 1825, p. 3 letter "Robert Wickliffe to his Constituents, Frankfort, January 12, 1825" states that Shannon "was known to be his [the governor's] bosom and confidential Friend."
60 Hagood, p. 27.
63 Observer and Reporter (Lexington, Ky.) 14 September, 1836 "Died—On the 31st of August, at Palmyra, Mo., Judge George Shannon, formerly of Ky." See also Missouri Argus (St. Louis, Mo.) 9 Sept., 1836; and Jeffersonian Republican (Jefferson City, Mo.) 10 September 1836. For Mrs. Shannon's obituary see The Missouri Republican (St. Louis, Mo.) 20 September, 1833, p. 3.
64 "An interesting coincidence" in The Palmyra Spectator (Palmyra, Mo.) 10 May 1939, p. 1. A marker for the burial site of George Shannon was installed 21 October 1935 [the marker no longer stands]. Also Corbyn Jacobs, Palmyra, Missouri letter to Carolyn Denton, 1 May 1988 that describes cemetery and includes a photograph of the burial site. Transylvania University Special Collections. Also see Shoemaker, Floyd C., Missouri Day by Day (St. Louis: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1943) pp. 263-264.
68 Bay, p. 24.
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The mission of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., is to stimulate public appreciation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's contributions to America's heritage, and support education, research, development and preservation of the Lewis and Clark experience.

We Proceeded On is the official publication of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. The publication's name is derived from the phrase which appears repeatedly in the collective journals of the famous expedition.

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Purpose of the Foundation
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Foundation’s History
Formed in 1969, the Foundation succeeds the work of the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission, which was established by an Act of Congress dated October 6, 1964 (P.L. 88-630). During its five year life (1964-1969), the Commission encouraged study of the history and heritage of the Expedition within the context of local geographical settings and promoted long-range planning for a national historic trail, focusing upon historical sites and scenic and recreational resources along the route traveled by the Expedition. In fulfillment of its charter, the Commission achieved a reawakening of national interest in the historical significance of the Expedition, and attendant realization of its broad educational values. Upon its expiration in 1969, one of the Commission’s recommendations was that a private group continue the movement it had started.

The implementation of the Foundation was by the Governor of Missouri, who suggested to the Governors of the “Trail States” (Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon) that each appoint a Lewis and Clark Trail organization. From these Governor-appointed groups, the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. had its beginning. The Foundation was organized under the “Not for Profit Corporation Act” of the State of Missouri, and at the date of this publication has members in all fifty states, Canada, England and Europe. Members also participate in 26 local Foundation chapters across the country.

Foundation members have researched sites for official certification along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and provide grassroots volunteer efforts to develop interpretative and educational opportunities, and maintain, repair, promote, and conserve the Trail. The Foundation manages a public research library in Great Falls, Montana, publishes the quarterly magazine, We Proceeded On, has published a curriculum guide about the Expedition for grades 5-9, and from time to time produces supplementary publications such as this one about the Corps of Discovery.

Foundation Publications
We Proceeded On is the official publication of the Foundation. The magazine’s name is derived from the phrase which appears repeatedly in the collective journals of the Expedition:

“...this morning we set out early and proceeded on...” (Capt. Lewis, July 19, 1805);
“...wind from the S.W. we proceeded on...until 6 o'clock...” (Capt. Clark, May 14, 1805);
“...the fog rose thick from the hollars we proceeded on...” (Sgt. John Ordway, June 29, 1806).

The magazine features articles by recognized scholars and members of the Foundation, biographical monographs about the exploring party, book reviews, maps, and member and chapter news.