The Power and Myth of the Northwest Passage

The Roots of Jefferson’s Indian Policies
The Struggle for French Identity on the Frontier
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On the cover
This 1718 map by Guillaume de L’Isle titled "Louisiane, Cours du Mississippi" shows Indian villages, the exploratory routes of de Soto, Moscoso, Cavelier, Tony and Denis and more. It covers the area from Lake Champlain to New Mexico and south to Florida and Texas. This map is considered the main source of all later maps of the Mississippi.
President’s Message

Foundation’s progress is steady and full of promise

I hope the snow and ice of 2010 is a fading memory and William Clark’s journal entries of 1804-1805 at Fort Mandan sustained you through the most immoderate winter we have experienced; it could have been like 1805. Clarkies are resilient and so it has been with your board of directors. We have made excellent progress in navigating the difficulties of the financial world and the many management changes that have been necessary. Individuals and chapters have recognized the Foundation’s need for additional funding and have been very generous. Our annual appeal was one of the most successful on record, thanks to you. I want to publicly commend the Badger Chapter for its continued support of the Third Century Fund. To date, the Badgers, a chapter of 70 members, have contributed $1,600. That does not include Badger Chapter members who have stepped up with healthy individual contributions. The Badger Chapter’s challenge to other chapters remains in place, “EQUAL or BEAT their total contribution.” Thank you, Badgers. Do not forget that our other restricted funds can be added to and they pay for great Foundation programs and help fund WPO. I look forward to recognizing other chapters in future messages.

I mentioned the need for better chapter reporting in my last letter. In an effort to streamline the reporting system, we have reviewed the Annual Chapter Report, Annual Treasurer’s Report and Volunteer Hours Report looking for ways to simplify them. Much of the information required in the Treasurer’s Report is necessary for the IRS 990 Form we are required to submit. I’m sure we all have equal distaste for reports but we have little choice in some cases. To help each chapter complete their reports and answer other communications, your board members will be serving as chapter liaisons. Each board member has three or four chapters they will visit in person or by phone to promote better communication.

Our staff and board of directors are actively engaged in a total review of operational procedures and financial management. The August issue of WPO will include a one-page insert titled “LCTHF Annual Report.” It will include information on our finances, membership and other facts. Some numbers are cause for concern and others are very positive, but our members have every right to know our strengths and weaknesses.

In late February, my wife Paula and I spent five days in Washington, D.C., attending meetings with the Partnership for the National Trails System, discussing Foundation business with our federal agency partners and visiting with Congressional staff members. The short report is that we had a very productive week. Relationships with other trails and our partners in the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service are strong and thriving.

Jim Mallory at “Fort Lexington,” his home in Kentucky, with his frequently flown 15-star flag.
Completion of the Eastern Legacy section of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the Meriwether Lewis Educational Center on the Natchez Trace Parkway were warmly embraced in Congress despite the cold, wet weather. I have learned that the infrastructure work on the educational center will begin in June 2010; however, completion will require additional Congressional appropriations, which we will work to secure.

As we make progress in realigning our Foundation to function with a small but efficient staff, please remember that progress cannot be made without you and your support. Individual members, chapters and Foundation committees will need to function at a high energy level. Our devotion to telling the stories of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and promoting trail stewardship should include sub-themes of environmental stewardship, healthy lifestyles, families on the trail and cultural connections, along with other topics that will secure good media coverage and promote the Foundation. One of those great opportunities is the living history encampment at the Boy Scout National Jamboree in July. This is an event where we will showcase our Foundation and our partnerships with the Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service through our traveling stewardship education exhibit in front of 50,000 youth and adult Scouts.

Please send stories and pictures of the good work you do along the trail to your local media and our Foundation office. We truly have great opportunities in our future. Opportunities to have fun are our dividends for the good work we do.

You can always reach me at 859-278-7723 or pjmllmarry@insightbb.com with your questions and comments. I look forward to seeing each of you at the 2010 annual meeting in Lewiston. Have you made your reservations?

—Jim Mallory
President, LCTHF

Preserving a sense of place requires open minds

Stephen Ambrose wrote in his foreword to Bernard De Voto’s 1997 edition of the Lewis and Clark journals, “... it is one of the glories of the Lewis and Clark story that we can visit their campgrounds and still see what they saw. Their adventure is accessible in a way that Columbus’s voyage or Admiral Byrd’s flights over the Poles ... are not.” This wonderfully articulates why preserving the trail matters, instead of just maintaining museums or celebrating a Lewis and Clark holiday.

The idea that we can experience the trail much as Lewis and Clark did is possible only because we have tangible resources available to us. Visitors experience a sense of wonder when they encounter stretches of trail that are largely unchanged since the time of the expedition.

The ability to sit around a campfire, read the journals and relive the experiences of the expedition in the very places the explorers traveled is unlike any other. Landscapes such as these are irreplaceable. Unfortunately, such places are disappearing.

Recently, across the river from trail headquarters in Omaha, a six-acre swath of Missouri River flood plain forest was eliminated. I now look out on downed trees, where a mile of continuous riverbank forest cover previously stood. This is a relatively small loss in a highly developed urban area, but when added to other losses along the trail, the cumulative impact is significant.

This is not to suggest that development along the trail should be stopped, but we must all encourage it to be carried out in a manner sensitive to a wide variety of resources.

The 1968 National Trails Act states: “National Historic Trails shall have as their purpose the identification and protection of the historic route ... for public use and enjoyment.” The opportunity for the public to use and enjoy this trail is diminished each time the historic setting and sense of place are degraded. The staff of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail frequently receives information on development that likely will degrade the experiences future generations will have along the trail. In particular, as our country tries to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, we see an increase in the development of renewable energy projects such as wind and solar farms along the expedition route.

Clean, renewable energy is critical to our nation’s future and we support the development of environmentally sound alternative energy technologies. However, we must evaluate development and its placement in a manner that includes ways to limit its impacts on the trail. While the trail staff can make comments and recommendations regarding ways to mitigate the negative impacts of projects, we do not have the ability to determine what happens.

Those who have regulatory authority over such projects often view negative impacts to scenery, landmarks and other historic resources as acceptable trade-offs. It is possible to have development that is designed so that both the needs of the development and the values of the trail can be met. This requires bringing fresh ideas and an open mind to discussions with input and encouragement from all interested parties.

The route of the Corps of Discovery is the genuine artifact. We are in danger of losing it if we fail to work together to protect the places, sights and experiences available along the Lewis and Clark Trail. Without your help, each of us will lose the chance to walk in the footsteps of those who went before us and to experience the magic and the glories of this magnificent journey.

—Mark Weekley
Superintendent, LCNHT

May 2010 We Proceeded On — 3
Letters

Keepers and stewards code calls for historical facts

I've read with interest the disagreement over a recent article in WPO about historical accuracy regarding Lewis and Clark. This should remind each of us as Keepers of the Story and Stewards of the Trail to honor the following trust: “Extraordinary historical claims require extraordinary historical evidence.”

KEITH E. JONES
Racine, Wisc.

My article, “The Death of Meriwether Lewis,” (WPO, November 2009, p.16) included my medical opinions about the various possibilities that may have been responsible for Lewis's death. Mr. John Fisher is correct in his letter to the editor (WPO, February 2010), in that I did not reference any period literature concerning my medical conclusions.

Given the possibilities of the disease processes I presented, I chose instead to cite modern medical textbooks that document the science behind these diseases rather than period literature that reflect complete ignorance of the realities of these disease processes. If I had more clearly emphasized Dr. Benjamin Rush's written arguments about the nature of disease, or Dr. John Brown's opinions about the great benefits of opium and his belief that malaria results from the "over/under stimulation of the nervous system," in no way would I have produced a more logical and scientifically accurate article.

Our entire modern medical system is based on people learning a great deal about science and medicine in the classroom over the course of years, and then obtaining immense clinical experience while dealing with actual patients. We award doctors degrees, licenses and board certifications and then pay them a good deal of money to render their opinions about our diseases.

Dr. Ron Loge (“Meriwether Lewis and Malaria”, WPO, May 2002, p.16), also criticized by Mr. Fisher for his lack of reference to period literature, has a distinguished background, is board certified in internal medicine and has years of clinical experience. If I were ill, I would highly value Dr. Loge's opinions about the nature of my disease and how I might overcome it. Given his medical education and clinical experience, I also value his opinions about Lewis and malaria.

The critical issue at hand is: How reliable is the information on which we are forming our opinions? As many have said: Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion but not to his/her version of the facts. I lacked clinical expertise in malaria when I was writing Or Perish in the Attempt-Wilderness Medicine in the Lewis and Clark Expedition, so I consulted with the late Dr. Lee Rickman who was then the chief of infectious diseases at the University of California at San Diego. Dr. Rickman, a leading world expert in infectious diseases, offered his opinion that it was not possible for Lewis to have survived for two hours after he was shot. It was my desire to buttress my opinions with "facts," so I consulted experts in related fields and found they agreed with and supported my conclusions.

Dr. David J. Peck
San Diego, Calif.

I read with interest Ann Rogers's article, "Hypocondriac Affections," in the February 2010 WPO (pp. 33 and 36) regarding the true meaning of Thomas Jefferson's references to Meriwether Lewis's "hypocondriac affections." In letters to Gilbert Russell in 1810 and Paul Allen in 1813, Jefferson wrote that Lewis was suffering from hypocondriasis and hypocondriac affections. Ms. Rogers wrote that John C. Jackson and I in our biography of Lewis linked "Jefferson’s phrase to an etymologically-related medical term without giving attention to the way” he originally meant it.

Ms. Rogers quotes from several of Jefferson's letters spanning a thirty-year period to support her opinion that his usage of the terms alluded to a psychological model like "an outlook, a disposition, a state of mind," and that "he was not diagnosing any
physical illness.” I believe Ms. Rogers is mirroring the view held by others who have misinterpreted those terms. Like many historians who assumed that Jefferson was talking about the modern-day hypochondria, Ms. Rogers does not distance herself far enough from the grasp of presentism. For instance, she uses a 1968 Webster’s Dictionary to define the word “affection,” and does not define “hypochondriac” at all.

If one looks at the standard English dictionary of the period in which Jefferson penned his letters, that of Samuel Johnson, one finds that a direct link is made between the term hypochondriac and the medical term hypochondres. Hypochondres is defined as “the two regions lying on each side of the cartilage ensisormus, and those of the ribs, and the tip of the breast, which have in one the liver, and in the other the spleen.” The blood moving too slowly through the celiac and esophageal arteries, produces various complaints in the lower bowels and hypochondres; from whence such persons are called hypochondriac.

Although Johnson also alludes in his definition of hypochondriac to a more modern meaning of the term, as he defines it in his first edition, “melancholy; disordered in the imagination,” and second, “producing melancholy; having the nature of melancholy,” the eighteenth-century word simply had not yet taken on the modern meaning of a person who latches on to real or imagined medical symptoms as a sort of mania. It was used to describe what today might be called clinical depression. It is in Jefferson’s phrase “hypochondriac affections” that he gives away his intended use of the word “hypochondriac.” For, again consulting Johnson’s 1785 dictionary, among his nine definitions for various meanings of “affection,” he states in number 7: “State of the body, as acted upon by any cause,” and provides the following extracted quote from Wiseman’s Surgery: “It seemed to me a venereal gonorrhea, and others thought it arose from some scrobutial affection.”

This is the only usage of the word “affection” in Johnson that parallels Jefferson’s usage, and, if the word “hypochondriac” is substituted for “scrobutial” in the quote from Wiseman, an exact parallel usage will be seen.

The word hypochondriasis was defined by the medical community in a physical context as these examples will show. In 1749, a physician describing the hypochondriasis said that symptoms of this disorder came from the left hypochondrium. William Cullen in 1784 wrote that hypochondriasis was always accompanied with dyspepsia while melancholia did not have any accompanied disturbances. When describing the effects of ingesting jalap, the American Dispensatory in 1821 stated, “In hypochondriatic disorders, and hot bilious temperaments, it grips violently.” In 1834, a physician describing the effects of aloe stated, “It is employed to obviate habitual costiveness; and from operating simply as an evacuant. Hence its use in hypochondriasis.” In 1841, Robert Hooper’s medical dictionary held to this definition: “The seat of the hypochondriac affections is in the stomach and the bowels.” On dissection of the hypochondriacal persons, some of the abdominal viscera (particularly the liver and spleen) are usually found considerably enlarged. When discussing a bilious condition, a physician in 1849 wrote, “Upon a tactual examination of the epigastric and right hypochondriac regions a fullness can be observed.” Finally, the pre-eminent physician, Daniel Drake in 1854, observed that the signs of splenitis are tenderness and pain on pressure over the epigastric and left hypochondriac regions; especially when the fingers are pushed upward behind the cartilages of the ribs.

Although hypochondriasis and its companion adjectives were part of the medical lexicon for decades, no one could ever state how this disease was caused. It is my belief that the ague and hypochondriasis were intimately linked—both diseases enlarged the liver and spleen. When Sappington’s quinine pills became available as a remedy for malaria in the 1840s, the physical aspect of hypochondriasis slowly disappeared and its meaning changed to the modern usage, which indicates a phantom condition. It is ironic that a word that was once understood to represent a physical disease, hypochondriasis, had its meaning shifting over the course of a century so that it now describes a reaction to an imaginary medical condition or set of conditions.

Now that we know that Lewis suffered from incurable and untreatable malaria, it is not much of a leap of thought for modern-day historians to suggest that he also might have been depressed. However, if we examine the eighteenth and early nineteenth century words written by Jefferson and others about Lewis in the context of their own time, we will find that they point to a physical rather than mental disease as the overriding cause of his sometimes troubled life and eventual demise. While most modern-day historians claim that he committed suicide, I am claiming that Lewis did not mean to kill himself during his malarial attack - rather he meant only to treat his absolute pain.

Thomas Danisi
St. Louis, Mo.

Notes
1 Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language... to which are prefixed, a history of the language, and an English grammar (London: J.F. and C. Rivington, 1785), pp. 113 and 987. Jefferson’s personal library held two copies of Noah Webster’s 1806 dictionary, the 1785 edition of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary and scores of other dictionaries of all descriptions, most in languages other than English. Webster’s first real dictionary, published in 1828, is searchable online and the words hypochondria and affection refer first to a physical condition. In looking over this information, we can readily see that it was copied almost wholesale from Johnson. In other words, even in 1828, two years after Jefferson’s death, the foremost chronicler of “American” English, Noah Webster, was still employing Johnson’s original definitions for these words. James Gilreath and Douglas L. Wilson, eds., Thomas Jefferson’s Library: A Catalog with the Entries in His Own Order (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989); Webster’s Dictionary of 1828 online: http://1828.mshafer.com/. I thank Dr. Robert Moore for recommending the Samuel Johnson documentation.

WPO introduces new scholarship from aspiring young historians

Over the past forty years, several eminent scholars have represented the "Four Gospels" of Lewis and Clark scholarship: Donald Jackson’s Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition; Gary Moulton’s The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition; John Logan Allen’s Passage Through the Garden and James Ronda’s Lewis and Clark among the Indians. As the definitive edition of the journals became available, more Lewis and Clark scholarship became possible. During the bicentennial, a host of authors produced a wealth of material about the expedition. Now, as the bicentennial has passed, our organization looks toward the future, anticipating continued enthusiasm and scholarship from past and current friends and colleagues as well as encouraging new authors to make their mark.

As a board member of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, chairman of the Education Committee and an editorial advisor for We Proceeded On, I am always looking for opportunities to share a Lewis and Clark story, solicit an article or form a friendship. One day while visiting with Editor Wendy Raney, I approached her about the possibility of having some of my former and current students from Brigham Young University submit their research for possible publication in WPO. After some discussion, we decided that if we received enough solid entries, we should co-edit a special issue featuring the students’ excellent research. This publication is the first fruits of our endeavor.

Nicholas Gentile wrote a version of his article, “Philosophical Sympathy and ‘Seeds of Extinction’” (p. 18), in my Native American history class at Brigham Young University. Nicholas graduated Summa Cum Laude from BYU as the History Department’s valedictorian and as an Edwin S. Hinckley scholar. He earned a master’s degree from Brandeis University, where Dr. David Hackett Fischer advised his thesis work on social pressure and moral suasion in the creation of anti-colonial identity in Revolutionary America. Nicholas taught at Fenn School in Concord, Massachusetts, and currently teaches at American Heritage School in American Fork, Utah.

His article lays a foundation for understanding the shaping of Jefferson’s presidential Indian policies through the lens of his correspondence as minister to France (1785-1789). Jefferson’s letters from France chronicle his interest in and passion for understanding Indian origins, languages, land use and his acknowledgment of Indians’ natural rights. The article paints Jefferson as a more human bundle of contradictions, rather than simply the sower of “seeds of extinction” in Native America.

Brenden Rensink originally wrote a version of his article, “If a Passage Could be Found” (p. 8), for my Historical Research and Writing Seminar. Brenden graduated from BYU and then received his master’s degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, my alma mater. Brenden is a Ph.D. candidate studying the North American West with emphases on comparative borderlands studies and the Native American experience. His current dissertation project focuses on transnational comparisons between the experience of indigenous immigrants and refugees along the Mexican-American and Canadian-American borderlands.

His article here explores the motives behind scores of expeditions sent forth to search for the mythical Northwest Passage through North America. Brenden unravels the motives of these enterprises as participants searched for economic gain, political patronage and new knowledge. To obtain it, they willingly believed, distorted and perpetuated the idea of a mythical passage to the Orient.

Clifford Streby received his bachelor’s degree in history from Brigham Young University in 2009. He was one of my research assistants and his areas of emphasis included the North American fur trade, Native American and Franco-American studies. While at BYU, he capitalized on an opportunity to travel to Aix en Provence, France, where he gained valuable experience conducting primary research in French archives. His future intentions are to attend graduate school and focus on French America and the important role Francophones played in shaping the history of the American West.

“The Struggle for French Identity on the Frontier” (p. 28) examines the interaction between members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, French fur traders and Indians on the Big Bend of the Missouri. These interactions help illustrate that Francophones, after finding themselves without a country after France sold Louisiana, turned to the fur trade to create a new cultural identity. Clifford examines how the Lewis and Clark journals, François-Antoine Larocque’s journal, and traditions of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians illustrate the state of the Francophone people of North America during a critical time in their cultural history.

We hope you enjoy this special issue. It has been inspiring and enjoyable working with these young historians who may well be the future of this publication and our organization. If you have your own idea for a special issue or know of someone researching a story or subject related to WPO’s mission, we encourage you to contact Editor Raney.

—Jay H. Buckley, Guest Editor, and Wendy Raney
"Letters" from page 5


4 On March 30, 1807, Jefferson described absolute (constant) pain in reference to one of his own malarial attacks. "(A)bout 9. oclock every morning I have a very quickened pulse ... a disturbed head and tender eyes, not amounting to absolute pain." Edwin Morris Betts and James Adam Bear Jr., eds., The Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), p. 305.

5 I thank Dr. John J. Danisi, philosophy professor at Wagner College in New York, for succinctly summarizing my position on Lewis’s death.

"An excellent study of a misunderstood hero." — David Lee Porumb, The Past in Review online

Meriwether Lewis
by Thomas C. Danisi & John C. Jackson

Independent scholars Danisi and Jackson have written this definitive biography based on twelve years of meticulous research, re-examining the original Lewis and Clark documents and searching through obscure and overlooked sources to reveal a wealth of fascinating new information on the enigmatic character and life of Meriwether Lewis.

"Danisi and Jackson present a well-written, superbly documented narrative... and cite eighteen manuscript collections, twelve microfilm collections, the Early American Imprints microfiche series, twenty-four newspapers, ten Web site collections, and 342 primary and secondary printed works."

Sheldon Avenius
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"IF A PASSAGE COULD BE FOUND"

The power of myth (and money) in North American exploration

BY BRENDEN RENSINK

The popular lore of North American exploration and westward expansion has oft been woven with themes of heroic bravery, divine providence and Manifest Destiny. These tales indeed relate portions of actual history, but also offer insight into the self-perception and culture of the societies perpetuating them. As larger-than-life figures braved the “unknown” in the name of nation or creed, the motives behind their ventures often were not so singular. The ever-driving force of economic gain stood as a foundation for most expeditions. Simultaneously justifying the current expedition and providing support for future endeavors, explorers interested in self-preservation placed a premium on results—on discovery. The naïve or overly eager optimism of many investors and patrons regularly led to the hasty acceptance of misinformation. In some cases, the intensity of these motives and forces was so strong that different expeditions promising new knowledge or wealth received funding through the centuries in spite of constant disappointment and financial loss. Particularly alluring were the interrelated myths of the Strait of Anian and the Northwest Passage. The promise they offered was more than enough to fuel both imaginative thought and risky endeavors that forever affected North American exploration and its subsequent history.

In and of themselves, the origins and dissemination of these myths provide a strong historical narrative concerning the subsequent impact of “discovery” upon world history. This grand myth of a Northwest Passage generated and sustained numerous explorations as explorers and governments placed surprising trust and faith in unsubstantiated geographical concepts. Clearly driving many of the expeditions that slowly mapped the New World’s coastlines and interior waterways, the long-term impact of cartographic myth cannot be overstated. Likewise, the lure of money, or promise thereof, lent fuel to the imaginative exploits that the myths of the Northwest Passage and Strait of Anian proffered. Dissemination of expedition exploits through popular writing, the willingness of explorers to adapt myths to align with new geographical discovery and the potential for wealth consistently underwrote these myths’ influence in a geopolitical contest that lasted for generations.\(^1\)

Around 1500, European powers vied for political and economic advantages over rival nations. The far off lands of China (Cathay or Cataia), India and the Spice Islands, yet inaccessible to Europe since the Ottoman Empire blocked overland routes, were tempting theatres for economic competition via maritime routes. European powers yearned for access to the riches that lay just beyond their grasp. These dreams and aspirations proved to be fertile ground in which the myth of an easy passage to the Far East could take root and flourish. Unable to ignore potential profit and power, a pattern of accepting promising geographic speculation as fact emerged. Idyllic hopes, desires and conjecture soon became definite realities in reports, discourses, maps, and royal funding and approbation of expeditions. The writings of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Luke Foxe, Anthony Linton, Juan de Fuca, Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado and countless others illustrate the metamorphosis from optimistic hopes to purported fact, and the willingness of European rulers to invest in such ideas. This article explores a small contingent of those who were involved in the creation, perpetuation and adaptation of the Northwest Passage myth.\(^2\)
Creation and Evolution of Theories

The theory of the Strait of Anian exemplifies this metamorphic process. Described by Marco Polo in the late thirteenth century as a body of water southwest of Tibet, it eventually was transformed into the western extremity of the Northwest Passage around the North American continent. Misconceptions of world geography as a whole allowed such a concept to take root. Ideas set forth by the Greek philosopher Ptolemy still held great influence in the minds of European navigators, but they were proven to be incorrect. By miscalculating the length of the earth's latitudinal degrees, the circumference of Ptolemy's globe measured only 270 degrees across from the Prime Meridian. This mistaken idea extended Asia too far east and sheds light on Columbus's much-mocked mistake of believing that he had landed in Asia. The Ptolemy-based globe placed America right where Asia should have been and as late as his fourth voyage in 1503, Columbus still believed himself to be on the Asiatic coasts. (See Figure 1.) Since his sketches connected the northern coast of South America with the southern coast of Southeast Asia, it is arguable that Columbus never realized that he had not reached Asia. Expeditions by Columbus (1492), John Cabot (1497), Jacques Cartier (1534) and others turned European eyes to the Northwest for a passage and Marco Polo's earlier cartographical reports soon became documents of great interest. Soon, the southwest Asian Strait of Anian in Polo's account moved northeast and merged with the Northwest Passage myth, lending the historical (though apocryphal) name, Anian, to a myth without foundation. As long as there remained a tract of uncharted wilderness, the possibility of a passageway persisted.

In 1524, Italian explorer Giovanni Da Verrazano made a landmark voyage that detailed the coasts of future New England in unprecedented detail, which convinced him that Columbus was mistaken. According to Verrazano's new cartography, America and Asia were separate continents. Sir Humphrey Gilbert's 1576 A Discourse of a Discoverie for a New Passage to Cataia concurred, citing clearly divergent fauna, wildlife and cultures of Asia and America as evidence. He proclaimed, "Al [sic] which learned men and painful travellers have affirmed, with one consent and voice, that America was an Iland [Island]." Despite the inconvenient imposition of an entire continent between Europe and the Far East, men such as Gilbert were undeterred. Given the new obstacle, focus shifted toward the myth of a Northwest Passage. The supposed existence of an oceanic passageway or a large interior river through the Americas made the continental obstacle surmountable. Discovering and controlling the invaluable passage and accessing the Asian markets beyond remained paramount.

The mythical waterway made an early cartographic appearance when Italian mapmaker Bolognino Zaltieri drew America and Asia as two separate continents in 1566 and labeled the dividing waterway as the Strait of Anian. Zaltieri's separation of the continents was correct, but his labeling of the Strait of Anian was pure speculation. Though New World geographic discovery slowly lifted the shroud of previous ignorance, cartographic speculation persisted. Dependent upon the patronage of governments and wealthy investors, explorers and cartographers carefully highlighted...
the need for further exploration, emphasized the certainty of imminent discoveries and downplayed the grave risks inherent in Terra Incognita’s great unknown. These men perpetuated the myth to secure future funding and European nations fostered it to further their imperial ambitions. The conditions allowed the myth to engulf the imaginations and pocketbooks of the European powers.

**METHODS FOR SECURING FUNDS**

Those who proclaimed the existence of the Northwest Passage did so in various forms. Sir Humphrey Gilbert’s *A Discourse of a Discoverie for a New Passage to Cataia*, funded by Frobisher’s Company of Cathay, is a prime example.\(^\text{10}\) Searching to prove the existence of his Northwest Passage by “authority[sic] ... by reason ... by experience of sundrie[sic] men’s travels ... [and] by circumstance,” Gilbert made a strikingly convincing argument. (See Figures 2 and 3.)\(^\text{11}\) He first sought to establish the passage’s existence through rhetoric in order to secure funding for an expedition whereby he could actually prove its physical existence. His pleas to Queen Elizabeth for extraordinary privileges and favors in connection with the supposed passage revealed clear monetary motives.\(^\text{12}\) Many others mimicked Gilbert’s pattern of presenting promising evidence to acquire a patron. Whether the adventure of discovery truly captured them, or baser monetary motives drove them, the dissemination of the myth proved effective.

Even though no expedition found the elusive Northwest Passage, the explorers and their sponsors remained resolute in their continuation of the quest. After his failed 1631 expedition, Luke Foxe gave an unflappably optimistic report in 1635. To contextualize his failure, he shared stories of similar failed ventures of King Arthur, Ochter, Frobisher, Davis, Weymouth, Hall, Knight and Hudson. As if their shared belief could will the passage into existence, Foxe emphasized that their common faith in the passage outweighed their failure to find or locate it. Using Gilbert’s *Discourse* and other documents as support, Foxe explained that he would not relate the discovery of the passage, but rather, “the way to find one.”\(^\text{13}\) By recounting and relating other’s failed endeavors, he carefully deemphasized the failure of his own expedition by contextualizing himself in the common plight of other explorers. True to pragmatic form, Foxe concluded, “to show the probability of a Passage,” and make certain solicitations thereby.\(^\text{14}\) Foxe’s maneuvering was indeed deft: shrugging blame for failure, emphasizing the knowledge gained amidst failure, and proving through additional evidence that he would produce dividends on future investment.\(^\text{15}\) Foxe, like Gilbert, perpetuated the myth in hopes of later proving it as fact.

**PURPORTED DISCOVERY OF MARITIME ROUTES TO THE FAR EAST**

After securing funding, the task of mapping courses through the passage stood as the obvious goal. Despite its nonexistence, the passage was charted by many. Accounts arose of men who claimed to have discovered the Northwest Passage or Strait of Anian. In 1596, London-based Michael Lok circulated the account of one Apostolos Valerianos (also known as Juan de Fuca), who purportedly had sailed north from the Pacific Coast of Mexico in 1592 and claimed to have discovered the strait in its entirety.\(^\text{16}\) De Fuca reported that he entered a strait to the east between the latitudes of 47 degrees and 48 degrees. He followed this strait for 20 days until exiting into the Atlantic Ocean.\(^\text{17}\) Lok heard this story from de Fuca while in Venice and carried it to England. It cannot be ascertained whether de Fuca lied completely, or simply embellished having discovered the entrance to a large strait.\(^\text{18}\) Lok apparently found de Fuca’s tale convincing, for he made plans to lead an expedition in search of the passage with de Fuca as his guide.\(^\text{19}\) De Fuca’s claim that the lands on the sides of the strait were “very fruitfull[sic], and rich of gold, Silver, Pearle[sic] and other things, like Nova Spania,” certainly made his services as a guide more enticing.\(^\text{20}\) De Fuca and Lok spread the apocryphal tale since it suited their needs. Though Lok’s publicity may have influenced two voyages in 1602 and 1607, de Fuca’s account did not find widespread popularity until reprinted by Samuel Purchas in 1625.\(^\text{21}\) Belatedly, de
According to Maldonado's account, he left from Lisbon and, sailing north-west, reached the Island of Friesland off the Labrador Coast and other familiar landmarks of the northeastern coasts of North America. After passing through the Strait of Labrador, an easily navigable passage extended for 790 leagues until it ended at the Strait of Anian. Maldonado stated that if they had continued farther, they surely would have run into Quivira, Japan, China and India. His account provided detailed directions for the discovery of the Northwest Passage (Frobisher Straits) and Strait of Anian are labeled on the map.

For analytical purposes, Maldonado's account is highly useful. Viewed in context, his report can be read as a detailed shortlist of the King of Spain's most desired discoveries: a harbor large enough to anchor 500 ships; adjacent rivers deep enough for the largest ocean-going vessels; ideal town sites in the surrounding environs; lush arboreal tracts to supply ample lumber; mountains conveniently leveled off and ready for agriculture and abundant animal life. (See Figure 4.) If this overly idyllic description did not sufficiently exacerbate Maldonado's credibility, his insistence that an immediate return voyage was necessary after having kept his discovery a secret for 20 years did. Stressing that he did not want to lose the passage to a rival nation, his list of provisions needed for his subsequent voyage was both lengthy and costly.26 His request was dismissed and his career never recovered.

Lastly, Anthony Linton asserted a near discovery in 1609. His discussion of perfecting navigation techniques in *Newes of the Complement of the Art of Navigation* emphasized the potential commerce with Cathay and he claimed to have located (though not sailed through) a passage to the Near East. Linton wrote, "I might with the safety of my credit, have affirmed that I had fully discovered that passage."22 Acknowledging the uncharted remainder of the passage, he continued with optimism, "The residue of that passage yet undiscovered, is lesse [sic] by much then it hath been thought to be."27 Drawing on Gilbert's example, he then concluded by making mention of the great riches that trade with Cathay promised. The fictitious accounts of de Fuca, Maldonado and Linton reveal an anxious mindset among European nations, private investors and explorers. One has to question what
The common logic was that if deity had placed a continent west to the Pacific was Louis Armand de Lorn way around or through it. Even though maritime routes failed expeditions, the myth of the Northwest Passage led through the heart of North America. Unfortunately, they failed to comprehend the immensity of the continent had failed to produce the desired easy passage, nations and these men would have done if they had received funding and then failed to rediscover the passage they already claimed to have found. They must have planned to face an angry monarch, disappear or succeed in finding the passage, thus obviating the crisis of previous dishonesty.

**River Routes to the Far East**

As the fruitless maritime race to find a Northwest or Northeast Passage to the Far East extended across nearly two full centuries, public interest waned. After countless failed expeditions, the myth of the Northwest Passage would have to undergo adaptation to warrant further use. The common logic was that if deity had placed a continent between Europe and Asia, nature surely would provide a way around or through it. Even though maritime routes had failed to produce the desired easy passage, nations and their explorers were not willing to relinquish their hopes for an eventual breakthrough. Hence, the ever-adaptable myth evolved. Giving up the idea of a way around the continent, explorers began favoring the idea of finding a river system that led through the heart of North America. Unfortunately, they failed to comprehend the immensity of the continent or, more importantly, the height and breadth of an even greater obstacle in their quest to reach Pacific shores—the Rocky Mountains.

One of the first to propose the idea of a river running west to the Pacific was Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron de Lahontan. During his explorations of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River in 1688, Native Americans hinted of a "Long River," which extended from the Mississippi to the Pacific and raised immediate interest. (See Figure 5.) While not published until 1703, the news of Lahontan’s findings must have spread quickly for, in that same year, cartographer Guillaume de L’Isle included Lahontan's Long River on his map of Canada. (See Figure 6.) As the seventeenth century drew to a close, the hoped-for Northwest Passage, once thought to have lain beyond the northern coasts of the continent, was shifted southward to a river system running through the continent. Often, explorers and mapmakers visualized this river running northeast to southwest, thereby connecting the Hudson Bay with the Sea of the West or Lac de Fonte.

The Sea of the West, or *Mer de l'Ouest*, concept led many to believe that the Pacific could be reached easily by extending the Pacific eastward almost halfway across the continent. As early as 1695, Guillaume de L’Isle proffered the concept of this large inland sea. In 1582, Michael Lok had illustrated this same concept as the Sea of Verazana. (See Figure 7.) Similarly, Pierre Mortier’s 1700 map engulfed all of present-day Washington, British Columbia and Montana as an expansive inland sea. (See Figure 8.) Adopting nomenclature from earlier incarnations of Northwest Passage mythology, Mortier labeled a "Destroit de Anian" running northeast out of the Mer de l’Ouest straight and wide until eventually connecting with the Hudson Bay system.

De L’Isle and Mortier’s notions served as a transitional point as the passage myth moved from an Arctic maritime route around the continent to a river passage through the

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*Figure 5. From Lahontan's *New Voyages to North America* showing the "Long River" extending west to the Rockies from the Mississippi River.*
Figure 6. This is an excerpt from a 1703 map by Guillaume de L'Isle that shows Lahontan's "Long River Extending to the Rockies." It shows the Sea of the West as well as the River of the West extending east out of the sea. On later maps, de L'Isle did not include the Long River. See H.R. Wagner, "Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, New Series, XLI (1931).

continent. The passage myth and Anian name were adapted to fit new discoveries, realities and hopes.

A severe underestimation of North America's size compounded the cartographic imaginings of an Atlantic-Pacific river passage. In 1622, Henry Briggs, the eminent mathematician and Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford, wrote the following:

The Indian Ocean, ... lyeth on the West and North west side of Virginia, on the other side of the Mountains beyond our Fals, and openeth a free and faire passage, not onely to China, Japan, and the Moluccaes ... [and] may easily from Virginia be discovered over Land ...32

As support for his contention that the Pacific easily could be reached overland, he cited Native American testimonies to that effect. Briggs's and his contemporaries' utter lack of understanding of the American interior is painfully evident. They wrote in matter-of-fact tones, suggesting a widespread willingness to accept or believe these ideas.

Many, such as Alexander Mackenzie, set out to find this river passage. As reports circulated of a great river flowing northwest out of Slave Lake in central Canada, Mackenzie set out on June 3, 1789, in hopes of following this river to its outlet to the Western Sea. Much to his dismay, the Mackenzie River emptied into the Arctic, not the Pacific Ocean.33 Undaunted, Mackenzie continued his quest for a river passage to the Pacific and set out again on October 10, 1792, planning to follow the Peace River southwest out of Lake Chipewyan. At the forks of the Peace River on May 31, 1793, Mackenzie followed Indians' advice and took the northerly branch, which, after a portage, brought him to the Pacific shore on July 22, 1793.34 Though the portage proved wholly impractical for large-scale commercial traffic, Mackenzie remained optimistic that profitable exploitation of his route "require[d] only the countenance and support of the British Government."35 His call for additional funding was by now an all too familiar refrain.

The publication of Mackenzie's account in 1801, with its explanation of commercial opportunities in the Pacific Northwest, quickly caught the attention of President Thomas Jefferson. Having previously helped organize John Ledyard's trip to the Pacific Northwest via Siberia in 1786, Jefferson already was preoccupied with the region. On June 20, 1803, Jefferson wrote to his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, detailing instructions for a new overland expedition to the Pacific. Among other instructions, Jefferson wrote: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregan, Colorado or any

Figure 7. Michael Lok's involvement with Juan de Fuca came some 15 years after Lok drew this map in 1582, but it is evident that he had long been interested in the Northwest Passage.
other river may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.” The concept of the Northwest Passage had once again seized the imagination and pocketbook of a nation, only this time one in the western hemisphere.

Jefferson’s view of the West drew upon the Enlightenment mentality that there was balance in nature, and assumed that the West would be somewhat symmetrical to the East. If the Rockies were a low-lying range similar to the Appalachians of the East, they would not be an insurmountable obstacle for an overland route. Jefferson imagined a water route that connected the two coasts of an enormous empire, which would make possible the transportation of trade goods and furs in both directions. (See Figure 9.) Although Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and the Corps of Discovery reached the Pacific Ocean, the Rocky Mountains frustrated Jefferson’s hopes for a navigable Northwest Passage through the continent. The great River of the West, the Columbia, simply did not extend as deeply eastward as had been hoped. Jefferson’s Corps of Discovery succeeded in many of its objectives and collected invaluable information about the American interior, but the Northwest Passage remained an elusive myth.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief survey of explorers, cartographers, writers and magistrates finds the Northwest Passage myth rooted in economic interests. Lucrative trade and possible world dominance stood as the reward for whomever could discover, fortify and control this passage. Some explorers may have knowingly deceived financiers to fund expensive ventures into the unknown, fully knowing that there was virtually no proof of a passage. Evidence also exists that the myth of the passage was created less out of malicious intent than out of naïve optimism and high hopes. While many people were involved in the creation of the Northwest Passage myth, it seems that its genesis lies in a synthesis of these two approaches. Some were consciously deceiving others in hopes of getting rich, while others were simply so optimistic that they claimed more than their geographical knowledge could rightfully support.

After the myth was firmly entrenched in the minds of European power wielders, similar processes took place in its propagation and evolution. Men such as Maldonado, de Fuca, Lok, Linton and others deliberately exaggerated or fabricated stories to earn their wages. If they could receive funding and were able to find the passage, the potential gain outweighed the danger of their initial deception. Though also driven by economic motives, men such as Gilbert and Foxe did not engage in such outright deceit. They were as eager as their potential financiers to prove that the Northwest Passage existed. With such a hopeful attitude, they eagerly accepted and disseminated any promising evidence that they heard. As for those who financed the trips, one explorer’s or cartographer’s guess was as good as another; nobody had a clear understanding of New World geography. Hence, they tended to support reports that confirmed the existence of what they hoped was true—an easily navigable passage to the Far East.

The myth of the Northwest Passage and those who perpetuated its existence shared a marked tenacity and flexibility. Every bay, inlet or river that proved not to be the passage caused supporters of the myth to change their focus to remaining possibilities not yet ruled out. Likewise, every unexplored bay, inlet or river held the possibility of the greatest cartographic discovery of the age. The geographic possibilities of an empty Terra Incognita map were endless. Then, the discovered coastlines and river systems slowly filled in empty spaces on maps and reality decisively erased those possibilities. On August 12, 1805, Meriwether Lewis reached Lemhi Pass, hoping to look down upon the headwaters of the mighty Columbia just a short distance away. Of his westward view he wrote, “...we proceeded on to the top of the dividing ridge from which I discovered immense ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow.”

The Rocky Mountains were a greater obstacle than anyone had imagined, and whether Lewis realized it or not, the
The sheer number of expeditions it inspired, however, suggests a broad and deep impact. (See the sidebar on p. 16). Its effect upon the course of North American history is less in doubt. Certainly, the exploration of the continent's interior would have been severely impeded without the myth's driving force. Likewise, the subsequent intrusion of Euro-American settlers into Native American domains may have taken a slower or different course. Without venturing into counterfactual speculation, it suffices to observe that rising temperatures may open the passage permanently to a full range of commercial traffic. Though centuries delayed, the promise of an easy passage to the Far East may at last become a reality.

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NOTES


2 For a more complete listing of individuals, see the sidebar on p. 16. This is a listing of explorers, cartographers, and writers whose influence, by expedition, map, and publication, perpetuated the myth of an easy passage to the Far East. While the list is not comprehensive, the small sampling illustrates the enormous pull of this myth. Also, the list shows how enduring the myth was as it succeeded in generating expeditions for more than 300 years.


A Brief Chronology of the Search for a Passage to the Far East:

Explorers, cartographers and writers who made expeditions in search of a passage produced maps that had lasting influence or otherwise perpetuated the myths of the Northwest or Northeast Passages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explorer</th>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ptolemy</td>
<td>1450, 1482</td>
<td>John Davis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco Polo</td>
<td>1271-1292</td>
<td>Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado</td>
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<td>Bartolomeo Dias</td>
<td>1487</td>
<td>Juan de Fuca</td>
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<td>Christopher Columbus</td>
<td>1492-1502</td>
<td>Willem Barents</td>
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<td>Martin Behaim</td>
<td>1492*</td>
<td>Cornelius Nay</td>
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<td>John Cabot</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>Brent Teguises</td>
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<td>Juan de la Cosa</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Jan H. Van Linschoten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspar Corte Real</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Jacob van Heemskerck</td>
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<td>Americus Vespucius</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>Jan C. R.</td>
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<td>Miguel Corte Real</td>
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<td>Binot Paulmier de Gonneville</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>George Weymouth</td>
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<td>Martin Waldseemuller</td>
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<td>Henricus Glaenanus</td>
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<td>Ferdinand Magellan</td>
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<td>1520*</td>
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<td>John Rut</td>
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<td>Diego Bezza de Mendoza</td>
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<td>Jacques Cartier</td>
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<td>Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo</td>
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<td>1548</td>
<td>Thomas Peche</td>
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<td>Hugh Willoughby</td>
<td>1553</td>
<td>Lahontan</td>
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<td>Richard Chancellor</td>
<td>1553, 1556</td>
<td>Francisco de Seyxas y Lovera</td>
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<td>Stephen Burroughs</td>
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<td>Vincenzo Coronelli</td>
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<td>Abraham Ortelius</td>
<td>1564*</td>
<td>Guillaume De L’Isle</td>
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<td>Olivier Brunel</td>
<td>1564, 1584</td>
<td>Pierre Mortier</td>
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<td>Bolognini Zaltieri</td>
<td>1566*</td>
<td>Jean Baptiste Nolin</td>
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<td>Gerhard Mercator</td>
<td>1569*</td>
<td>James Knight</td>
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<td>Sir Francis Drake</td>
<td>1572, 1577</td>
<td>Vitus Bering</td>
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<td>Juan Fernandez Ladrillero</td>
<td>1574*</td>
<td>Arthur Dobbs</td>
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<td>Martin Frobisher</td>
<td>1576-1578</td>
<td>Joseph la France</td>
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<td>Arthur Pet and William Jackman</td>
<td>1580</td>
<td>Christopher Middleton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Lok</td>
<td>1576, 1582*</td>
<td>François and Louis Joseph</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Humphrey Gilbert</td>
<td>1583</td>
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*Indicates cartographers and writers, rather than exploring expeditions.

Among those who, at one time, also believed that America was simply a peninsula off the greater Asian continent were Magellan, Las Casas, Behaim, Martellus and Balboa. During Coronado’s 1540 expedition in search of Cibola, the group’s chronicler Casteñeda expressed similar views. He stated, “And this land of New Spain is part of the mainland with Peru, and with Greater India or China as well.” In talking of natives, Casteñeda referred to them quite literally as Indians because he believed they “must [have] come from that part of Greater India.” See Pedro Casteñeda, The Journey of Coronado (New York: Readex Microprint, 1966), pp. 83, 108 and 134.

The voyages of John Cabot in 1497 and Jacques Cartier in 1534 were particularly influential in raising hopes that a passage to the Far East existed in the northwest of the American continent. Of Cartier’s voyage, Sir Humphrey Gilbert cited a mariner having heard of a great sea to which there was no end. They presumed this to be a passage to Cathay. See Richard, “The Strait of Anian,” pp. 164-165. By Rasmusso’s popular 1559 edition of Polo’s voyages, European cartographers had inexplicably moved the Anian waters northeast of India. The misinterpretation included the confounding of the Quian and Oman rivers and other geographical features that remained
somewhat ambiguous in Polo’s account. Relying solely upon Marco Polo’s account, Giacomo Gastaldi fully merged Anian with the Northwest Passage myth. See Nunn, Origin of the Strait of Anian, pp. 22-25.


10 Martin Frobisher conducted numerous expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage between 1576 and 1578. See Vilhjalmur Stefansson ed., The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher: In Search of a Passage to Cathay and India by the Northwest, A.D. 1576-8. From the Original 1578 text of George Best (New York: De Capo Press, 1971).


12 Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 105-106 and 160. Some of the favers requested we be received 1/5th of all customs paid on goods brought through the passage for the next 99 years, to pay no customs himself, to receive 1/10th of all lands discovered by means of his passage and to be named governor of said lands.


14 Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 6.

15 Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 443. Some apparently thought that the voyages’ results were not worth the time and money spent on them.


18 Later explorers named the Strait of Juan de Fuca, which leads from the Pacific Ocean into the Puget Sound, between the Olympic Peninsula of present-day Washington and Vancouver Island, after Juan de Fuca. Perhaps de Fuca had passed or briefly entered this large strait, thought it was a likely candidate for the fabled Strait of Anian, and fabricated the account of having followed it through to the Atlantic Ocean.

19 Wagner, “Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America,” p. 185.

20 Taken from “A Note made by me Michael Lok . . .” as cited in Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others, 20 volumes, (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1905), Vol. 3, p. 849.

21 Wagner, “Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America,” p. 190. The full text by Maldonado can be found as an appendix in Sir John Barrows, A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions: Undertaken Chiefly for the Purpose of Discovering a North-East, North-West or Polar Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific (London: John Murray, 1818), pp. 24-48.


23 Sir John Barrows, A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Region, pp. 24, 27 and 30.

24 Sent to verify the veracity of Maldonado’s account, Malaspina sailed north in 1789. Although he did not find the Strait of Anian, he asserted that the Northwest Passage must exist elsewhere. See Alessandro Malaspina, The Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794: Journal of the Voyage by Alejandro Malaspina (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2001).

25 Wagner, “Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America,” p. 183.


27 Ibid., p. 22.


29 Wagner, “Apocryphal Voyages to the Northwest Coast of America,” p. 208.


34 Ibid., p. 186.

35 Ibid., p. 408.


38 If the Salmon or Snake rivers were navigable, a water route might have been possible with only one short portage.


40 The idea that these two great river systems would have their headwaters near one other was a popular belief. If the Missouri could be navigated, only a short portage to the Columbia would be required to then finish the journey to the Pacific. See John L. Allen, “Geographical Images of the American Northwest, 1673-1826” (Doctoral Dissertation, Clark University, 1969), p. 401.


PHILOSOPHICAL SYMPATHY AND “SEEDS OF EXTINCTION”

Jefferson’s French correspondence and the roots of his presidential Indian policy, 1785-1789

BY NICHOLAS W. GENTILE

In his controversial Histoire naturelle (1749-1789), the Comte de Buffon hypothesized that the New World represented a biological backwater, a harbor for degenerate genes from the Old World. American Indians were but one example. Buffon found them to be one step above animals and incapable of mastering their environment. In a letter to the Marquis de Chastellux, Jefferson, America’s minister to France, strongly refuted Buffon’s claims with the following words:

I am safe in affirming that the proofs of genius given by the Indians of North America place them on a level with Whites in the same uncultivated state. ... I have seen thousands of them myself ... I have had much information from men who have lived among them. ... They have all agreed in bearing witness in favor of the genius of this people. ... I believe the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the whiteman.”

This quote may seem surprising coming from a future president who, in the words of historian Anthony F. C. Wallace, made Indian removal a policy “central to the federal system” and who, “by mourning the passing of the Indians into oblivion or civilized invisibility, gave moral justification to the seizure of lands he said they no longer needed.” Wallace argued that Jefferson’s vision of America had “no place for Indians as Indians.” Historian John Lauritz Larson also has criticized Jefferson’s dealings with Indians during his presidency, emphasizing the negative effects of Jefferson’s 1803 purchase of Louisiana from France. Larson argued that this decision reeked of an ethnocentric greed that discounted the lives of Indians living in the expanse of Louisiana and “belonged to a comprehensive system of government action that undermined Indian autonomy, broke down Indian resistance, and prepared the way for American settlers who would inevitably possess Indian lands and bring them into the empire of liberty.”

From Jefferson’s vantage point as the president of a rapidly increasing population of Americans eagerly expanding westward, a logical decision lay before the American Indian. As Jefferson expressed to William Henry Harrison, the territorial governor of Ohio in 1803, Indians could “either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States or remove beyond the Mississippi.” If Indians resisted
American encroachment or federal policies, Jefferson arrogantly opined that “we have only to shut our hand to crush them.” Thus, Jefferson’s presidency sowed “seeds of extinction” in the physical and cultural lives of Native Americans.

Prior to Jefferson’s tenure as president (1801-1809), however, his writings to close friends and associates portrayed a man who held deep sympathy, admiration and fascination for American Indians. During his time in Paris as America’s minister to France, this affinity for America’s aborigines effused from his pen. Nineteen letters, in particular, from Jefferson to men such as Chastellux, William Carmichael, Benjamin Hawkins, Edward Carrington and Edward Rutledge illustrate his intellectual infatuation with Indians. Though remembered for his destructive presidential policies of assimilation and removal, these letters from France reveal Jefferson’s philosophical sympathy for Indians because they expose his interest in understanding their origin and evolution, his views on the ethical purchase of their lands and his feelings regarding the acknowledgment of their natural rights.

JEFFERSON’S INTEREST IN INDIAN ORIGINS, LANGUAGE AND SOCIETAL EVOLUTION

Aboriginal Americans had fascinated Jefferson since his boyhood at Shadwell, his father’s plantation near Charlottesville, Virginia. As Jefferson biographer E. M. Halliday wrote, Indians seemed to the young Jefferson “to be nature’s noblemen, endowed with intelligence, courage, honesty, ingenuity, strength, grace, dignity, love of freedom, and whatever other virtues humanity was capable of.” Parties of Indians passing his father’s farm on their way to Virginia’s colonial capital, Williamsburg, sparked the young Jefferson’s admiration for them. The spark of curiosity burned brightly through the years, as the intellectually insatiable Virginian studied “what was available on Indian history, tribal organizations, customs, geographical distribution, and languages.”

Even while fulfilling his diplomatic responsibilities at the court of Versailles, Jefferson kept his boyhood fascination with the origin of American Indians simmering on his brain’s backburner. For example, in 1786, Jefferson took time out of his busy schedule to write to the theologian and educator Ezra Stiles, then president of Yale, about his views regarding the derivation of America’s Indians. On September 1, he wrote, “I suppose the settlement of our continent is of the most remote antiquity. The similitude between its inhabitants and those of the Eastern parts of Asia renders it probable that ours descend from them, or they from ours.” Jefferson thought that Asians were a derivative of America’s Indians because, as he told Stiles, “Among the red inhabitants of Asia there are but a few languages radically different. But among our Indians the number of languages is infinite which are so radically different as to exhibit at present no appearance of having been derived from a common source.”

Jefferson’s interest in tracing the ancestral origins of America’s Indians had not waned in the year following his letter to Stiles. Three days after the delegates in Philadelphia’s
Pennsylvania State House finished drafting the Constitution, Jefferson addressed a letter to Charles Thomson, secretary of the U.S. Congress. Jefferson had been researching the religious mounds of the prehistoric Adena, Hopewell and Mississippian cultures. To Thomson, he wrote, “I wish our philosophical society would collect exact descriptions of the several monuments as yet known. Patience and observation may enable us in time to solve the problem whether those who formed the scattering monuments in our Western country, were colonies sent off from Mexico, or the founders of Mexico itself.”

Jefferson’s desire to uncover the roots of North America’s Indian population, whether they extended to Asia or Central America, reflected his intellectual love affair with Indians. Even while an ocean separated him from the native inhabitants of his homeland, Jefferson continued to unravel the mystery of aboriginal origins.

Jefferson relied heavily upon studying Indian languages to find clues about their ancestry. Sheehan wrote that “[Jefferson] not only knew the extensive literature on the subject but also owned most of the important writings. Whatever conclusion might be drawn ... he believed that the truth would come from the study of Indian languages.”

To prove his theory regarding the multiplicity of Indian tongues as being proof that they were not derived from a common source, such as Asians, Jefferson amassed copious notes regarding Indian vocabularies. He brought together “a list of approximately 250 words in as many as fifty Indian languages ... in order to compare the various Indian words of one particular object to illustrate the wide diversity in the Indian tongues.” Six months prior to the storming of the Bastille in Paris, Jefferson wrote to James Madison about his ambitious aspirations for his vocabulary collections. He thanked Madison for sending him a “pamphlet on the Mohiccon language” and then stated, “I endeavor to collect all the vocabularies I can of the American Indians, as of those of Asia, persuaded that if they ever had a common parentage it will appear in their language.”

One linguistic evaluation Jefferson made from Indian vocabularies while in France stemmed from a July 18, 1788, letter to South Carolina statesman Edward Rutledge. Rutledge had written Jefferson on October 23, 1787, regarding the conjectures of a Dr. Trumbull, who hypothesized that the Creek Indians descended from the Carthaginians after members of Hanno’s fleet were lost. Rutledge, knowing of Jefferson’s affinity for Indian languages, offered to send him a copy of Trumbull’s findings. Jefferson replied with exuberance, “I shall be very glad to receive them. If he [Dr. Trumbull] wishes any enquiries to be made on this side of the Atlantic, I offer him my services cheerfully, my wish being, like his, to ascertain the history of the American aborigines.”

Almost a year later, on September 18, 1789, while the French Revolution raged around him, Jefferson received Trumbull’s research and considered the similarities between the “red men of the Eastern and Western sides of the Atlantic.” The comparison intrigued him and, in a letter of response to Rutledge, he explained that “the conjecture that inhabitants may have been carried from the coast of Africa to that of America by the trade winds is possible enough; and its probability would be greatly strengthened by ascertaining a similarity of language, which I consider as the strongest of all proofs of consanguinity among nations.” In theorizing about which race of men came first, Jefferson again cited the “great number of radical languages” of the American Indians as “proof of superior antiquity which I can conceive no arguments strong enough to over-rule.”

Along with studying the origin and languages of Indians, Jefferson also researched their physical and societal evolution. In his 1785 letter to Chastellux, he had located the Indians of North America above blacks and on an equal plane evolutionarily with whites in “the same uncultivated

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**A Chronology of Jefferson’s Significant Letters from France Regarding Indians, 1785-1789**

June 7, 1785: Jefferson to the Marquis de Chastellux
August 18, 1785: Jefferson to William Carmichael
September 5, 1785: Jefferson to David Hartley
September 11, 1785: Jefferson to the Marquis de Poncins
June 22, 1786: Jefferson’s observations on a manuscript from Jean Nicolas Demeunier
August 13, 1786: Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins
August 22, 1786: Jefferson to William Carmichael
August 25, 1786: Jefferson to G. K. van Hogendorp
August 31, 1786: Jefferson to Thomas Barclay
September 1, 1786: Jefferson to Ezra Stiles
December 20, 1786: Jefferson to William Stephens Smith
December 26, 1786: Jefferson to William Carmichael
January 16, 1787: Jefferson to Edward Carrington
January 30, 1787: Jefferson to James Madison
September 20, 1787: Jefferson to Charles Thomson
December 15, 1787: Jefferson to William Carmichael
July 18, 1788: Jefferson to Edward Rutledge
January 12, 1789: Jefferson to James Madison
September 18, 1789: Jefferson to Edward Rutledge
Jefferson's basic political creed, which included societies stated that this form of government fulfilled the tenets of reason, natural law, and the rights of man; his commitment to majority rule; and his faith in the wisdom of the majority, if it erred, for it would always return to the right reason. Natural law, and the rights of man; his commitment to majority rule; and his faith in the wisdom of the majority, because they are more exercised. In Jefferson's observation, strong Indian males who traditionally did the hunting and fighting comprised three out of every 13 Indians. He cited this demographical interpretation in a June 22, 1786, observation on a manuscript from Jean Nicolas Demeunier, who had asked for Jefferson's aid in writing an article about the United States for the Dictionnaire d'Economie politique et diplomatique, l'Encyclopedie methodique. Jefferson wrote, "I am of the opinion that the proportion of persons to warriors among the Indians may be generally estimated at about 10 to 3. Consequently we must not reckon that nations of Indians containing 25,000 warriors have more than about 80,000 persons."

In Jefferson's view, these warriors lived with other members of the tribal community in a society that functioned satisfactorily without the restraints of government. In a letter written from Paris to James Madison on January 30, 1787, Jefferson explained that societies exist under three distinguishable forms: "1. Without government, as among our Indians. 2. Under governments wherein the will of every one has a just influence, as is the case in England in a slight degree, and in our states in a great one. 3. Under governments of force: as is the case in all other monarchies and in most of the other republics." Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., explained Jefferson's philosophical commitment to a democratic government where "the will of every one has a just influence." He stated that this form of government fulfilled the tenets of Jefferson's basic political creed, which included "his belief in reason, natural law, and the rights of man; his commitment to majority rule; and his faith in the wisdom of the majority, even when it erred, for it would always return to the right way."

In Jefferson's mind, Indian societies "without government" functioned in accordance with many of these tenets. He admired the way public opinion facilitated the happiness enjoyed by most aboriginal societies in America. On January 16, 1787, he told fellow Virginian and member of the Continental Congress Edward Carrington that Indian societies "enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under European governments. Among the former, public opinion is in the place of law, and restrains morals as powerfully as laws ever did any where." Jefferson's esteem for the societal organization of North American Indians was indicative of the philosophical sympathy that he expressed for his country's first peoples during his time in Paris.

**Jefferson's Views on the Ethical Purchase of Indian Lands**

Along with portraying his interest in Native American origins, languages and societal evolution, Jefferson's letters from France reveal his philosophical sympathy for Indians because they expose his views on the ethical purchase of their lands.

Between 1785 and 1789, while the duties of diplomacy demanded most of Jefferson's time in France, the westward movement of the burgeoning population in America's nascent republic fueled the fire of Indian land purchases made by the United States. Settlers and land speculators wanted to expand into the Ohio River country and since the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation lacked the ability to tax, selling former Indian land purchased by the government satisfied the public's demands and created much-needed revenue.

As Jefferson explained to the young Dutch economist and aristocrat Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp in an August 25, 1786, letter, "The sale of lands will commence, and I have a firm faith they will in a short time absorb the whole of the certificates of the domestic debt." Once the revenue from land sales offset the domestic debt, Jefferson hoped that American citizens' desire for western lands would create further sales that could "go on for money, at a cheaper rate no doubt, for the payment of our foreign debt." Jefferson's desire for his country to become solvent did not supersede his belief that the purchases that could release America from its burden of debt should be done ethically. This view paralleled the late eighteenth-century policies of the U.S. government.

On September 22, 1783, Congress had forbidden the settlement or purchase of Indian lands by U.S. citizens without the direction and approval of the federal government. This stance laid the framework for the Indian land cession treaties that marked the early efforts of the government's interactions with Indians. However, most Americans ignored this decree. They defiantly settled on tribal lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River that had been ceded by Great Britain under the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Thus, in 1787, when Congress issued the Northwest Ordinance, it reemphasized the
federal government's commitment to ethical land purchases. The ordinance outlined the policies of American territorial expansion in the "Old Northwest" region that abutted the Great Lakes and reasserted the government's position that "the utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians, their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress."22

While in France, Jefferson applauded the government's commitment to ethical financial intercourse with Indians through letters written from his study on the upper floor of the Hotel de Langeac.23 In June of 1786, he summarized his feelings regarding the just purchase of tribal territories with these words given as a reaction to Demeunier's manuscript, "It may be taken for a certainty that not a foot of land will ever be taken from the Indians without their own consent. The sacredness of their right is felt by all thinking persons in America as much as in Europe."24 A year earlier, the Continental Congress had sought the Indians' "own consent" in purchasing what Jefferson described to William Carmichael, then America's principal diplomat in Spain, as "the Indian right of soil to about fifty million acres of land, between the Ohio and lakes."25 Jefferson fully supported this transfer of land because, not only did the U.S. government uphold Indian rights by paying them for their lands, Congress provided a legislative means by which to control the rush of settlement into the new territory: the Land Ordinance of 1785.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 established a system for surveying land that facilitated orderly westward expansion, which Jefferson had praised in correspondence to friends that year. The ordinance directed surveyors to divide future townships on land purchased from Indians into six-mile-square tracts, which would then be subdivided into 36 one-mile-square sections.26 On August 18, Jefferson wrote of the new ordinance to Carmichael in Madrid by saying that Congress had "in consequence, passed an ordinance for disposing of their lands, and I think a very judicious one."27 This "judicious" ordinance forced settlers looking to expand into the Ohio River country to purchase sections of government land, rather than illegally squatting on Indian domain. In the newly surveyed townships, they would live among other Euro-Americans, separated from lands retained by tribes, thus lessening the risk of territorial disputes with Indians.

In his September 5 letter to British House of Commons member David Hartley, Jefferson admitted this ordinance's superiority to the Ordinance of 1784 that he had written: "They have passed an ordinance establishing a land office, considerably improved I think on the plan of which I had the honour of giving you a copy."28 Jefferson's 1784 ordinance had established the principle that new states admitted to the Union would be considered equal to existing states and divided the territory to the west of the original 13 colonies gained from Great Britain into potential states.29

As Jefferson wrote on September 11 to the French agriculturalist Jean Hector de Montagne, the Marquis de Poncins, the 1785 ordinance was more practical than his 1784 plan because it "laid down rules for disposing of [the purchased lands]," rather than simply setting up guidelines for becoming a state, which brought more order to the interactions of Indians and U.S. citizens in the new territories.30

Even though he supported the land purchases and legislation that brought order to the Old Northwest, Jefferson realized that not all Indians wanted to sell their lands. For example, he wrote to Carmichael in 1787 about the "petite guerre always waged by the Indians" who opposed ceding tribal territory to the United States.31 In 1786, Jefferson had written his counterpart in Spain about the "straggling Indians who molest our settlements" following the purchase of their lands by the government.32 Among these Indian molesters, Jefferson specifically cited the Creeks, who had "commenced war in a more serious form" over disputed treaties with Georgia in 1786.33

Despite acknowledging that some Indians did not comply with treaties, Jefferson's letters during 1786 reveal that he believed most Indians were not inclined toward violence. In an August 22, 1786, letter to Carmichael, he cited a minority of Indians who had "molest our settlements" but explained that "it is neither in the general disposition, nor in the power of those tribes to do us any serious ill."34 Jefferson did not believe that violent savagery marked the lifestyle of most American natives, and his words from August 31, 1786, to the Consul General of the United States in Morocco, Thomas Barclay, further enunciated this view. He wrote, "The purchases of Indian lands are completed, and treaties made with them. Some lawless individuals among them have committed hostilities at Kentucky; but they are disavowed by their nations."35 Though he could have focused on the oppositional minority, Jefferson chose to point out the rejection of violent factions by the mainstream members of Indian nations. He regarded Indians as having a generally peaceful disposition, which reflected an admiration for the native peoples of America that correlated with his desire for their rights to be protected through ethical treaties and just treatment.
The painting that Trumbull completed for the Capitol Rotunda shows the presentation of the Declaration of Independence in what is now called Independence Hall, Philadelphia. The painting features the committee that drafted the document—John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert R. Livingston, Thomas Jefferson (presenting the document), and Benjamin Franklin—standing before John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress. The painting includes portraits of 42 of the 56 signers and 5 other patriots. The artist sketched the individuals and the room from life.

JEFFERSON'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF INDIAN RIGHTS

Jefferson’s letters from France bear witness to his philosophical sympathy for Indians and reveal his feelings regarding the acknowledgment of their rights. As he affirmed to Chastellux in 1785, “The proofs of genius given by the Indians of North America place them on a level with Whites in the same uncultivated state ... in body and mind equal.” Jefferson’s belief in the inherent evolutionary equality of Indians and Euro-Americans formed the foundation of his views regarding the treatment of America’s first people. For Jefferson, America’s aboriginal inhabitants deserved just treatment because, as Jefferson biographer Joseph Ellis explained, “in terms of their mental and physical aptitude and their capacity for assimilation into white American society,” “red” Indians joined “white” Americans in being superior to America’s third color class of “black” African slaves and their progeny. Historian Winthrop Jordan wrote about Jefferson’s comparison of these three races in the following words, “Confronted by three races in America he determinedly turned three into two by transforming the Indian into a degraded yet basically noble brand of white man. ... In appropriately altered circumstances Indians would become white men, ... which Jefferson thought the negro could never accomplish.”

Since Jefferson advocated that Indians, as evolutionary equals with Euro-Americans, could acculturate and assimilate into the white American world, he supported upholding the “sacredness of their right” to property. In contrast to black Americans, who were considered property in the 1780s, most Indian tribes conducted contractual relationships on an equal plane with Euro-Americans. Indians exchanged land for money with the United States like the foreign powers of Great Britain, France and Spain did, and the U.S. government passed legislation such as the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 to promote fair commercial practices between white Americans and Indians. In 1789, Secretary of War Henry Knox summarized the federal government’s position relative to the Indians’ right of occupancy. “The Indians being the prior occupants, possess
Benjamin Hawkins (August 15, 1754 – June 6, 1816) was a farmer, statesman and Indian agent from North Carolina. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress and a U.S. Senator, as well as a long-term diplomat and agent to the Creek Indians.

the right of the soil. It cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by the right of conquest in a case of a just war. To dispossess them on any other principle would be a gross violation of the fundamental laws of nature.”46

Always an ardent advocate for the “laws of nature,” Jefferson wrote a stirring letter to Benjamin Hawkins in 1786 that elucidated his philosophy that justice must be meted out to Indians. Ten years earlier, in the middle of a humid Philadelphia summer, Jefferson fulfilled the role of primary draftsman for the Declaration of Independence and wrote “all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights.”47 Though he did not feel comfortable including African slaves in his definition of men whose innate equality demanded the protection of their rights, Jefferson’s August 13, 1786, letter to Hawkins, then a congressional appointee to be a commissioner in treaties with southern tribes, expressed his sentiments that Indians’ rights should be upheld. He explained, “The attention which you pay to [Indian] rights ... does you great honor.”48 Hawkins had orchestrated treaties with the Cherokees, Chickasaws and Choctaws in 1785 and 1786 and had written to Jefferson in a June 14, 1786, letter about his desire to protect their rights during the treaty negotiations. He had stated, “You will see by the Treaties which I enclose how attentive I have been to the rights of these people, and I can assure you there is nothing I have more at heart than the preservation of them.”49

Jefferson commended Hawkins’s attention to Indian rights because, not only did he believe that they should be defended, he felt that “the want of that is a principle source of dishonour to the American character.”50 During 1785 and 1786, Georgia and North Carolina had ignored Congress’s injunctions to purchase Indian lands through legal means. Jefferson deplored this stain on the morality of his nation. Hawkins had told Jefferson that “the interposition of Congress without the co-operation of the southern States is ineffectual, and Georgia and North Carolina have refused by protesting against their authority.” He explained that Georgia “will not allow that the Indians can be viewed in any other light than as members thereof,” thus negating their status as equals in exchanges of land for money. North Carolina, he decried, “claim all the Land westward according to their bill of rights and that the Indians are only tenants at will.”51 This denigration of Indian rights angered Jefferson.
Not only did they “dishonour ... the American character,” but in Jefferson’s view expressed in his August 13 letter to Hawkins, “After the injuries we have done them, they cannot love us, which leaves no alternative but that of fear to keep them from attacking us.”

Rather than promoting the Machiavellian tactic of making Indians fear the United States, Jefferson advocated that justice be the paramount objective of Indian-white relations. In the same letter in which he regretted the blemish on American character due to the inequitable treatment of southeastern tribes by Georgia and North Carolina, Jefferson counseled Hawkins that, despite these flaws of judgment, “Justice is what we should never loose [sic] sight of.”

Dumas Malone explained why the lanky minister to France felt that Indians deserved fair treatment, “It was not merely in the name of scientific accuracy and simple justice that he spoke. He also defended the honor of human nature and challenged the doctrine of human inequality. ... He believed that the Indians were equal to white men in native powers of mind and body.” This belief in Indian equality with Euro-Americans formed the philosophical underpinnings for Jefferson’s commitment to fairness in America’s dealings with natives. From his vantage point across the Atlantic in 1786, a policy of justice in interactions with Indians provided America with its only chance to “recover their esteem.”

Jefferson’s letters from France written between 1785 and 1789 show his philosophical sympathy for the American Indian. The 19 letters discussed in this work illustrate his intellectual infatuation with his country’s aboriginal inhabitants. They reveal Jefferson’s zeal for studying Indian origins, languages and societal evolution; his desire for ethical economic interaction with natives in the purchase of their lands; and his belief in their equality with whites, the sacredness of their rights and the importance of justice in Indian-white relations. Though condemned by historians such as Wallace, Larson and Sheehan for his presidential policies of assimilation and removal that led to the Trail of Tears and the reservation system, a disgraceful genocidal period in American history, Jefferson’s letters from France reveal another side of the paradoxical president that was, perhaps, lost in the pressures of America’s most weighty office. While the negative effects of his Indian policies should not be excused, Jefferson’s words from France, such as his letter to Chastellux that championed Indians who were “in mind and body equal to the whiteman,” also merit inclusion in historians’ dialogues about the complex puzzle of the past.

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NOTES
1 Bernard W. Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, 1973), pp. 66-69. On pages 68-69, especially, Sheehan explains that Buffon’s 36-volume work, which had its first volume published in 1749, compared animal sizes in the New World with quadrupeds from the Old World, specifically Africa, to prove the deficiency of the American species. Buffon said that some “combination of elements and other physical causes” in the New World presented a flaw that made American animals smaller than the elephants, hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses of the Old World. He saw the Indian as an extension of America’s inferior animal species because his observations showed them to have smaller “organs of generation,” a feeble sex-drive, dull physical senses and a lack of love within their families.


3 Anthony F.C. Wallace, Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1999), p. 337. Jefferson’s Second Inaugural Address, on March 5, 1805, set forth the tenets of his policy of Indian assimilation into white society, which, after it failed, led to remediation. He stated, “The aboriginal inhabitants of these countries I have regarded with the commiseration their history inspires. ... The stream of overflowing population from other regions directed itself on these shores. ... They have been overwhelmed by the current. ... Humanity enjoins us to teach them agriculture and the domestic arts; to encourage them to that industry which alone can enable them to maintain their place in existence, and to prepare them in time for that state of society, which to bodily comforts adds the improvement of mind and morals.” This quote is contained in Paul L. Ford, ed., The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes, Federal Edition (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1905), Vol. 10, pp. 131-132.

4 Ibid., p. 11.
We Proceeded

Jefferson wrote to Thomson from France on September 26.

Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, p. 12. Sheehan, Wallace and Larson's works represent the majority of the historiography of the early republic that blames Jefferson for willfully writing Indians out of America's pluralistic society. For example, on page 276 of Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), Cunningham writes of Jefferson's belief that Indian culture must be destroyed to save Indians from extinction. In Ellis's American Sphinx on page 201, he states that Jefferson's presidency fomented the "basic decisions ... that required the deportation of massive segments of the Indian population to land west of the Mississippi." Steven Conn claims that Jefferson's purchase of Louisiana led to the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and that his "desultory policy of civilization and assimilation culminated ... in Andrew Jackson's Trail of Tears" on page 4 of Steven Conn, History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). This essay does not seek to overturn the existing historiographical arguments regarding the ramifications of Jefferson's Indian policy. It does, however, seek to illuminate another dimension in the complicated Virginian's life that will contribute one more piece to the paradoxical puzzle of Jefferson's life, thus making the picture clearer and allowing a fuller telling of a complex historical tale.

For a chronological list of all 19 letters discussed in this paper, see the sidebar on page 20.


The Constitution was completed on September 17, 1787, and Jefferson wrote to Thomson from France on September 20 of that year.


Sheehan, Seeds of Extinction, p. 46.

Ibid., p. 55.

A mob of angry Parisians stormed the Bastille in protest of King Louis XVI's oppressive policies on July 14, 1789. Jefferson wrote his letter to Madison on January 12, 1789.


Ibid., Vol. 8, pp. 185-186.

Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 59.

Ibid., Vol. 11, pp. 92-93.


Boyd, et al., Vol. 11, p. 49.


Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 426. This quote is from Jefferson's letter to William Carmichael on December 15, 1787.

Ibid., Vol. 8, pp. 401-402.


Boyd, et al., Vol. 8, pp. 401-402.

Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 482.


Boyd, et al., Vol. 8, p. 514.

Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 426.

Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 287.

Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 314. This quote is from Jefferson's letter to Thomas Barclay about the Creeks on August 31, 1786. During 1786 and 1787, the Creeks, led by Alexander McGillivray, waged war to drive out Georgians who had settled on land that had been ceded to them in treaties that the majority of Creeks did not endorse. For more information on this period, see John Walton Caughey, McGillivray of the Creeks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), pp. 29-33.


Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 314.

Ibid., Vol. 8, pp. 185-186.

Ellis, American Sphinx, p. 201.


Boyd, et al., Vol. 10, p. 44. This phrase is from Jefferson's letter of June 22, 1786, observation on Demeunier's manuscript.

The ordinance stated, "The utmost good faith shall always...
be observed towards the Indians, their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.” For more information on the Northwest Ordinance, see Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, p. 34.

46 Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, p. 36.
47 Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 236. This quotation is from Jefferson’s original draft of the Declaration of Independence, prior to Congress’s changes (i.e. striking out “inherent and” and inserting “certain” before “inalienable”).
49 Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 641.
50 Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 240.
51 Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 641.

53 In letters to William Stephens Smith, secretary of legation for John Adams in England, and Carmichael (quoted in Boyd, et al., Vol. 10, pp. 620 and 633-634, respectively), Jefferson emphasized his disgust for making Indians fear the United States through acts of violence. He told Smith, “I hope … that troops will not be necessary, and that the good sense of the people will be found the best army.” Carmichael read similar advice from his counterpart in France. “I am satisfied the good sense of the people is the strongest army our governments can ever have, and that it will not fail them.”
57 Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 186.
Great Britain’s victory over France in the Seven Years’ War, the colonial defeat of Britain in the American Revolution and the United States’ purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France diminished the historical role of the French after their political exclusion from North America. People of French ancestry, however, played a vital role in the events of North American history. As their mother country lost all her North American possessions, American Francophones became citizens without a nation. A careful analysis of the accounts left by the Northwest Company and Lewis and Clark reveals that French people living in the United States and British Canada used the fur trade to establish a unique identity for themselves, which enabled them to move easily between the two nations.

François-Antoine Larocque left Fort Assiniboine on November 11, 1804, with his clerk, Charles McKenzie, and five other men to trade among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians on the northern Missouri River. Their employer, Charles Chabot, was a partner in the Northwest Company, a fur trade enterprise run under British rule in Canada. That year, Chabot had a surplus of men and goods on the Assiniboine River and sent them to the upper Missouri under the leadership of Larocque to try to turn a profit. On November 24th the group arrived at the Hidatsa villages where they encamped. Here they found four rival traders from the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and perhaps representatives from various smaller companies also were present. Among the HBC traders was a man named Budge, whose extensive knowledge of Indian languages posed a formidable challenge to Larocque’s winter trade plans. To overcome this, Larocque sought out Toussaint Charbonneau, an interpreter who previously had been employed by the Northwest Company. Upon inquiring about Charbonneau’s whereabouts, Larocque learned that he had been engaged by an American party and was at the Mandan villages nearby. The American group was the Corps of Discovery, led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. This was the moment that Larocque first learned of an American party at the villages and it is not known if he immediately understood the significance of their presence.
The Mandan lived in well-organized villages of earth lodges clustered along the banks of the Missouri River. Each lodge housed up to three dozen people, usually groups of adult sisters with their families. Women owned the contents of the lodges, just as they controlled the produce of their gardens. Men held sway over public spaces and dominated political leadership and were responsible for hunting and for protecting the village from intruders. Although this view of a Mandan village was executed in 1833, a generation after Lewis and Clark visited the upper Missouri River, it captures a scene that closely matches the explorers’ descriptions.

ence. Since he needed the services of an interpreter, he set out to find the Americans and obtain permission to use Charbonneau in his trade with the Indians.³

Larocque and McKenzie left very detailed records of their interactions with Native Americans including account books, notes and observations related to Indian cultures on the upper Missouri. Similarly, Lewis and Clark and several of their men, namely Joseph Whitehouse, John Ordway and Patrick Gass, recorded observations of their interactions with the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Sioux and Assiniboine Indians.

The important role Frenchmen played in U.S. borderlands and the fur trade largely has been ignored in historical studies.⁴ According to LeRoy R. Hafen, “A fur trade conducted almost exclusively by Anglo-Americans is assumed in the works of ... Frederick Merk, History of the Westward Movement; William H. Goetzmann, Exploration and Empire; and Bernard De Voto, Across the Wide Missouri.”⁵ Several of the great writers of the American West have omitted French contributions. One of the few exceptions was Hafen, who wrote, “Despite the numerical preponderance of the French in the West, myths and romantic stereotypes of trappers have persuaded well-known historians that mountain men were American frontiersmen.”⁶

The process whereby people of French ancestry came to live under the flags of other nations warrants mention. As the Seven Years’ War drew to a close, France ceded Louisiana to Spain through a secret treaty in 1762 because officials were beginning to see that defeat was imminent and they wanted to protect French interests in North America. The following year, Britain gained control of Canada in the Treaty of Paris. It was not until 1800, in the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso that Spain returned Louisiana to France. Having lost his footing in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and in need of money to fight the British, Napoleon sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States for $15 million in 1803.⁷

The British also expelled the Acadians from Canada. Hafen wrote, “Following the French and Indian War there came to ... [St. Louis] ... from Canada and the Illinois region, other such Frenchmen as the Robidoux,
Papins, Sarpy, Cerrés, and Gratiot.” They fled from Canada to the Mississippi River valley, a territory controlled by Spain, a French ally. They may have fled there with the belief that these lands would one day return to French possession or to congregate with other Frenchmen who were already there.

After Jefferson purchased Louisiana, ceremonies, including those in New Orleans and St. Louis, facilitated the transfer of the territory from Spanish, to French, to American possession. France designated Captain Amos Stoddard of the United States Army to act as its proxy in the proceedings. Shirley Christian wrote, “Although the French of St. Louis had received the Americans with great cordiality, they quietly regretted the missed opportunity to reclaim their own nationality.” Word that France had reclaimed the territory came just before news that the United States had purchased it, allowing a glimmer of hope to be kindled and immediately put out. The transfer ceremony was an emotional one for French-born residents who knew they would be seeing their flag wave over their land for the last time. Stoddard received the territory from the Spanish Lieutenant Governor and then “deferring to French sentiment ... allowed the Tricolor to fly over St. Louis for twenty-four hours before raising the flag of the United States.”

After the transfer of power, French Americans retained much of their culture. Many people collected paintings or other memorabilia of Napoleon to display in their homes. When Lafayette toured America in 1824-1825, he was mobbed in St. Louis by cheering citizens. Yet, common misconceptions of the French in America often contributed to their struggle for identity. In 1800 in North America, French people often were disliked due to stereotyping that characterized them as lazy, indolent and cowardly. That these views held little truth did not matter; they shaped the American perception of French citizens for years to come. Sergeant Patrick Gass’s journal included several disparaging remarks about people of French ancestry. “It may be observed generally that chastity is not very highly esteemed by these people, and that the severe and loathsome effects of certain French principles are not uncommon among them.”

Gabriel Franchère also wrote of the prejudice with which the American public viewed Frenchmen. He corrected misconceptions by arguing that “St. Louis even contained its noble, industrious, and ... princely merchants ... [such as] its Chouteaus, Soulards, Céré, Chéniers, Valles, and La Croix ... the leading business men ...” Such ideas reinforced the claim that the French were without a country. In many instances they remained nameless and were referred to in records only as “Frenchmen.” Sergeant Charles Floyd employed the derogatory term “half breed” to refer to those of mixed French and Indian ancestry.

However, not all French stereotypes were negative and the French used those that cast them in a more positive light to their advantage. In a letter to Clark dated September 28, 1803, Lewis wrote that “4 or five french water-men” would “be essentiel [sic].” Frenchmen were admired and hired for their abilities as river men. Lewis and Clark hired seven Frenchmen to assist them in reaching the Mandan villages. Much of the fur trade...
occurred along river systems and skilled boatmen were highly valued within the fur trade.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition consisted of enlisted men, French boatmen, civilians, interpreters, hunters, York, and Captains Lewis and Clark. The expedition officially left Camp River Dubois on May 14, 1804, and arrived at the Mandan villages on October 27, 1804.

Lewis and Clark obtained a passport from Great Britain indicating that the expedition's purpose was a scientific inquiry and that British subjects they met should not hinder them in any way and should render all services they needed to further the voyage. This statement was clearly calculated to suppress fears the British may have held of American interference in the upper Missouri fur trade. Interestingly, this passport also was translated into French because, according to historian Donald Jackson, "the British subjects he was most likely to meet would have been French-speaking traders from Canada." 15

Of greater interest is the French passport Jefferson sought from Louis André Pichon. Pichon agreed to issue one and used the British passport as a template. The areas that the expedition would pass through were filled with people of French ancestry. That they had a French passport reveals the influence of French traders and their importance to the upper Missouri fur trade. Perhaps more important was Jefferson's desire to respect the ongoing negotiations for the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France.

The British and French passports emphasized that the purpose of the expedition was primarily scientific, but that was a ruse. The U.S. government never intended this expedition to be solely scientific. President Thomas Jefferson's instructions to Lewis informed him that he was to gather information concerning "commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue..." Scientific observations about flora and fauna are referred to later in the letter and are designated as "Other objects worthy of notice." He further instructed Lewis to show the Indians the "commercial dispositions of the U.S." 18 Lewis and Clark's main purpose was to gather information for future trading opportunities. Jefferson's designation of those Lewis may need to show the passports informed him that the French passport would protect him with subjects of France and that the British one would assist in his acquiring aid from "any traders of that allegiance." 19 Jeffrey referred to these men as traders under British rule. Jefferson recognized that these traders did not consider themselves British or American subjects; they considered themselves Frenchmen.

The relations between Lewis and Clark, Larocque and McKenzie during the winter of 1804-1805 provide a basis for analyzing the manner in which the French overcame their loss of national identity. They created a new identity for themselves as businessmen, interpreters and boatmen in the fur trade.

Larocque's first meeting with Lewis and Clark occurred when he was en route to the Mandan villages (probably to secure the services of Charbonneau). During this meeting the Americans questioned Larocque about the actions of Jean Baptiste Lafrance, a Northwest Company trader. Prior to this meeting, the Americans had been forced to quell rumors spread among the Hidatsas by the Mandans that the Americans intended to join forces with the Sioux and cut off trade with the Hidatsa for the winter. Immediately afterward the Americans learned that Lafrance was circulating similar rumors. Lewis and Clark took pains to inform Larocque and McKenzie of Lafrance's actions and the consequences if he continued. It may have worked since no other incident was ever mentioned.

Lafrance used a tactic often utilized by Indians caught between the United States and Great Britain. Indians played European powers against one another in order to survive. During the winter of 1804-1805, the Hidatsas kept the Americans out of their villages while the Mandans secured a monopoly on American trade. Larocque's journal recounts his fear that the Assiniboines tried to prevent him from leaving the Assiniboine River. A November 20, 1804, journal entry describes the tribe's "fixd determination, to prevent as much as they can, any Communication, between their traders & the Missouri Indians; as they wish to engross that trade themselves." 21 On another occasion in 1805, when Larocque was traveling to the Yellowstone area, some Indians tried to discourage him from proceeding on to the Yellowstone by saying that the Arikara and the Cheyenne were on the warpath and also made disparaging remarks about the Indians of the Rocky Mountains, which Larocque found to be false. 22

Larocque did not preserve a record of his first meeting with Meriwether Lewis but noted that he spoke with Lewis for fifteen minutes and was invited to the American fort. He must have located Toussaint Charbonneau because on November 27, 1804, Larocque approached Charbonneau about assisting him. Charbonneau declined, saying that the Americans had already engaged his services and he could not go without leave from his employers. He then asked Larocque to speak with Lewis on the matter. Lewis agreed on certain conditions and gave Charbonneau.
Larocque was a pragmatist; he was ever ready to adapt his approach to the situation at hand.

On November 28-29, an exchange occurred between the captains and Larocque that revealed the latter's opportunistic nature. Mandan Chief Black Cat informed Lewis and Clark that Larocque was distributing British flags and medals to the Indians. One of the purposes of Lewis and Clark's expedition was to communicate the United States' sovereignty over the Indian tribes in the newly acquired land. The American captains distributed tokens of sovereignty such as flags, military uniforms and medals bearing the image of Thomas Jefferson to Indians. Lewis and Clark could not allow a representative of a rival nation to engage in this same practice on American soil. Lewis and Clark told the Indian leaders that “those Simbells were not to be recev'd by any from them [the NWC traders]” and that doing so would bring the “displeasure of their Great American Father.”

The Americans confronted Larocque the following day. “[W]e informed him that we had herd of his intentions of makeing Chiefs &c. and forbid him to give medalls or flags to the Indians ...” They also informed him of their reasoning, according to Larocque, telling him that the United States government “look'd upon those things, as Sacred Emblem of the attachment of the Indians to their Country.” Larocque responded that he “had neither Flags, nor medals” and further assured them that he had no intentions of distributing such. It is unclear whether Larocque was distributing medals among the Indians.

Lewis and Clark still considered Larocque a threat. After warning Larocque about giving flags and medals to the Indians, the Americans gave Charbonneau leave to go with him, but first ordered Charbonneau “not to utter a word, which might ... be to the prejudice of the United States or of its Citizens to the Indians ...” even if Larocque ordered him to do so. Their concern was predictable. Their purpose was to establish peaceful relations with the Indians on behalf of the United States and to that point, Larocque and his men had given the Americans reason to believe they intended to disrupt their efforts. Throughout the course of the winter, however, amiable relations prevailed. Both sides treated each other with respect and performed several acts of service toward one another. Upon hearing that Larocque feared his horses would be stolen, Lewis and Clark offered to care for them with their own horses. On January 26th, Charbonneau, who had been with Larocque, brought three NWC-owned horses to the American fort. On another occasion, Larocque went to the American camp with a compass that would not point north. Meriwether Lewis spent an entire day repairing and cleaning the device.

During their first meeting together, Larocque learned the details of the Americans’ plans and, his interest in the West grew. Larocque’s initial interest specifically was to gain the services of a much-needed interpreter. After this meeting, however, it appears Larocque took an interest in the American enterprise because he requested to accompany them to the Pacific. In December he received his answer. They refused to allow a British subject to gain first-hand experience in the newly acquired territory. It is unlikely that Larocque wished to go in order to help secure Britain’s footing and more probable that he wanted to seek trade opportunities. Larocque was undeterred and left on his own expedition to the Yellowstone country in the summer of 1805, having been ordered to do so by Charles Chaboillez.

Larocque’s account of the Americans’ plans betrays his interest in the West, its potential for trade and reveals information regarding his self-conceived identity. Larocque wrote that the main purpose of the American expedition was to explore “the N. W. Countries ... so as to settle the Boundary Line between the British & American territories.” His reference to them as British and American territories made him sound more like an outsider than a loyal British subject. He further indicated that the expedition was to inform the Indians of the new American government. Interestingly, he never mentions scientific exploration as a motive. This is odd since they showed Larocque the passports they had been issued that listed scientific observation as a main purpose of the expedition. Either Larocque saw through this ruse and understood the actual purpose or the Americans were very candid when they spoke to him. Whatever the case, he saw the expedition for what it was—a commercial venture. They also assured Larocque that it was not the United States’ intention “to Restrain Commerce & fetter it, as was the Case when Louisiana belonged to the Spanish.” Foreigners would be allowed to trade on American soil and would not have to pay for this right. This may have strengthened his aspirations to take his career west. Lewis and Clark also informed Larocque of American intentions to establish trading houses or factories in the areas they explored. Larocque was skeptical, writing that “a very Grand Plan was schemed, but its taking place is more than I can tell.”

Larocque may have been skeptical, but he was also an opportunist. Certainly this talk of trade in the interior must have appealed to his senses as a fur trader.
Charbonneau moved easily and independently throughout the fur trade and between the British and American worlds, carving out an identity for himself and ensuring employment at every turn.

The information he obtained in this meeting may well have inspired Chaboillez to send Larocque on his own expedition to the Yellowstone River in 1805. After this meeting, Larocque and his clerk, Charles McKenzie, made regular trips to the American fort. Patrick Gass indicated that the “object of the visits we received from the N. W. Company, was to ascertain our motives for visiting that country, and to gain information with respect to the change in government.”

Another event occurred in mid-December that illustrates French adaptation in the fur trade. Lewis had written Chaboillez a letter in late October making known the American presence on the upper Missouri and assuring Chaboillez that the Corps of Discovery did not intend to interfere with trade in the area. Lewis related his expectation that the British subjects in the area would treat the Americans with hospitality and promised that Lewis's men would offer the same in return. Most importantly, he informed Chaboillez of U.S. policy to allow foreign companies to trade on American soil.

Hugh Heney's arrival from the NWC establishment on the Assiniboine brought a change in plans. He brought a response to Lewis along with instructions from Chaboillez to François Larocque. Larocque's original plan was to remain in the area trading with the Indians and returning to Fort Assiniboine. Heney brought new orders from Chaboillez that Larocque should remain for the duration of the winter.
Heney’s visit to Fort Mandan was significant. He delivered the letter from Chaboillez in which the NWC leader expressed his desire to assist Lewis and Clark in any way. Heney was able to provide the Americans with helpful information regarding the headwaters of the Mississippi. So impressed were the Americans that during their return from the Pacific they sent a letter to Heney offering him work. Due to Heney’s good relations with the Sioux, they requested that he bring any Sioux chiefs willing to travel to Washington City to the Missouri River so that the corps could pick them up on their return.

Clark told Heney of potential sites for American trading houses and offered Heney a position in one. Heney had been employed by the NWC, and Clark’s offer shows the relative ease with which one could move from one employer to another. Although the letter never reached Heney, it revealed that Heney and others could move easily between the British and American worlds and the fur trade made it possible.

Charbonneau’s mobility within the fur trade is illustrated by his simultaneous employment by two competing entities. Lewis stated that he had little use for him during the winter and was willing to offer Charbonneau’s services to the Frenchman. Laroque’s narrative detailed his exploits in trying to compete with Budge, the Hudson’s Bay Company trader. Charbonneau was key to these efforts and used his position to his advantage. He was able to play several roles, interpreting for Lewis and Clark throughout the winter while interpreting for Laroque and trading his own furs to the NWC.

Like many French interpreters, boatmen and traders, Charbonneau acted independently. He previously had been employed by the NWC and now was a civilian employee of the U.S. Army. On March 12th, shortly before Lewis and Clark’s departure, Charbonneau decided not to accompany the Americans to the Pacific. The American captains suspected that the NWC traders with whom he had been associating that winter had convinced him not to go. The previous day Clark had written, “We have every reason to believe that our Menetarre interpreter ... has been Corrupted by the [NWC] Companys &c. Some explanation has taken place which Clearly proves to us this fact.” It remains unclear whether or not Laroque influenced Charbonneau in this matter. Records indicate that it was the terms of his contract with the Americans that discouraged him from continuing. Clark wrote that Charbonneau did not want to work or stand guard “if miffed with any man he wishes to return when he pleases, also have the disposial of as much provisions as he Chuses to Carrye.” These terms were unacceptable to the Americans and Charbonneau withdrew. Charbonneau intended to visit the Gros Ventres camp, which was also the location of the NWC men across the river and farther upstream. Charbonneau did cross the river indicating that he may have intended to seek employment with Laroque and his men. Whatever the case, no harm was done to the expedition; through negotiation he was retained according to the agreement.

Although Charbonneau eventually honored his engagement with the Americans, his decision to leave reveals his ability to move from American to British employment and back again at his discretion. Since he held no loyalty to the United States or Great Britain, he felt free to move from the employ of one to the other. Charbonneau’s loyalty, like that of many in similar positions, was to whichever company provided the most agreeable terms.

The Americans and NWC men departed in April of 1805. The Lewis and Clark Expedition proceeded toward the Rockies and Laroque and McKenzie left for Fort Assiniboine to report to Chaboillez. The last significant interaction between the two came on April 3rd when Laroque and McKenzie came to the Americans to receive compensation for one of McKenzie’s horses that had been stolen by the Teton Sioux while in the Americans’ possession.

Records detailing the Mandan winter describe activities of French traders and interpreters in the fur trade. When this information is considered with other records of the fur trade, the importance of the French to the trade is revealed.

St. Louis was home to several merchants who gained favor in the United States by exploiting the fur trade. Most famous among these was the Chouteau family. The Chouteau family reacted pragmatically to Americans in order to further their economic stature in the country. So influential was this family that when the government changed from Spanish to American, the previous Spanish authorities recommended the family to U.S. representatives as the town’s leaders. The influence that the Chouteaus had gained through the fur trade allowed them to maintain that influence even when national sovereigns changed. They exerted significant control over the fur trade into the 1840s. In a letter from Lewis to William Preston, Lewis described Peter Chouteau as “a Gentleman deservedly Considered, among the most respectable and influential Citizens of Upper Louisiana.”
Gabriel Franchère, the son of a Montreal merchant, became the agent at Sault Sainte Marie for John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company. Franchère is an excellent example of those who were able to play both sides for their personal benefit. He had a certain loyalty to the United States, “his adopted country” and even disparaged the NWC (which had tried to obtain his services) for sending British war ships to the Pacific Northwest during the War of 1812. There is evidence to suggest that Franchère became a senior leader in the American Fur Company. His loyalty to his company and the United States remained limited. He still held attachments to his former subjects who used the fur trade to carve successful traders and leaders among the emigrés in the United States. Franchère’s participation in the fur trade allowed him to become a prominent U.S. citizen. He created an identity for himself as a successful trader and leader among the French in North America. Men like Larocque, Charbonneau, Chouteau and Franchère represent a small sample of French-speaking Americans and British subjects who used the fur trade to carve out an identity for themselves.

Competition for the Indian trade drew these men to the Missouri River in the first place. International competition allowed Frenchmen such as Charbonneau and Larocque to move easily from one side to another. Lewis and Clark’s participation in the Indian trade was limited and in most instances the exchange was not for furs, but for food. The American blacksmiths were well liked by the Indians on the upper Missouri and they exchanged their services for corn and other necessities. In addition, Lewis and Clark presented Indian leaders with tokens such as medals to represent U.S. sovereignty, but they had a greater interest in the potential for trade than in extensively participating in it at that time.

Lewis and Clark were perceived by the Canadians traders as a threat to their interests. The Indians were enthusiastic about trade prospects with the Americans. On one occasion while stopping to trade with Indians along the Missouri, Joseph Whitehouse commented that when the articles for trade were opened, the Indians “Said as long as the French had traded with [them] they [never] Gave them as much as a Knife for Nothing.” At the Mandan camps, the Americans appealed to the Indians’ fear of attack by aggressive neighboring tribes. The Mandans endured harassment from the Assiniboine and Sioux because retaliation would have caused those tribes to prevent traders from “bringing you Guns Powder & Ball.” Trade with Americans, however, would allow them to fight back and “not Suffer any nation to insult you.” Talk such as this appealed to the Indians and was not lost on the French traders who became increasingly involved in the American fur trade.

Despite the American policy of allowing foreign traders, competition would be difficult to overcome. “On the heels of American possession of the river, the trickle of traders up the Missouri became a flood, so that by 1818 the trade from Canada was overwhelmed by establishing the international boundary and the influx of American traders.” As the fur trade shifted to the Rocky Mountains during the 1820s, the French were ready and willing to adapt. LeRoy Hafen wrote of the French participation during this period, “The ratio of ‘Frenchmen’ to Americans in the fur trade of the United States was not one to four but four to one.” Participation during the Rocky Mountain era furthered French fortunes such as that of the Chouteaus in St. Louis and brought several French trappers to settle areas in New Mexico and the “French Prairie in the Willamette Valley.”

The Mandan winter narrative presents a small portion of the story of French participation in North American history after the early 1800s. Countless sources exist that reveal their place in discussions of U.S. and British history. Further analysis of the encounters between Lewis and Clark and the NWC shows that while the French may have been subjected to either U.S. or British authority, they did not allow this to become their defining characteristic. After the loss of their parent country, the French in North America used the fur trade to create a new identity, not as Americans or British, but as traders and businessmen who dominated the fur trade of North America.

Clifford Strieby received his bachelor’s degree in history from Brigham Young University in 2009. His future plans are to attend graduate school and to focus on French America and the important role people of French ancestry played in shaping the history of the American West.
Notes
2 They also are referred to as Gros Ventres, Big Bellies and Minitaris.
4 The term “French” here refers to those of French-Canadian, Métis or Creole ancestry.
6 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 16.
16 Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 20, note.
17 Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 61-65, Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis.
18 Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 61.
19 Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 61.
23 Ibid., p. 137.
27 The significance of this event is explained in Larocque’s “Yellowstone Journal” from the summer of 1805. During his expedition to the Yellowstone country, he met with several Indians in the area. While giving a speech to one of the tribes, he referred to the NWC Governor Charles Chaboillez as the owner of the peace pipe presented to their nation. In effect, he formed an alliance between the Indians and the NWC. He related further that he “clothed the Chief of the Ererokas … [with officer’s clothing] … and gave him a flag and a wampooon belt …” Finally he told them that the chief of the whites wanted to make them all his children. Larocque, “Yellowstone Journal,” pp. 171-172. Larocque’s intentions were to facilitate trade between the Indians and the NWC and to present himself as their liaison. In this same speech, Larocque informed the Indians that they likely would see whites other than his group and from a different area, and they were not to harm them. His effort to protect Lewis and Clark discards any notion that he was acting as a nationalist in support of British claims, but his reference to Chaboillez as chief of the whites and his gift of a flag does reveal that he was willing to break his word to Lewis and Clark to further his commercial interests.
29 Ibid., p. 151
30 Ibid., pp. 138-140.
31 Ibid. Under Spanish rule foreigners were forbidden to trade on the upper Missouri. Several Spanish expeditions were sent out to enforce this policy and tried to intercept Lewis and Clark.
32 Ibid.
37 Moulton, Journals, Vol. 3, p. 312, Clark’s entry for March 11, 1805.
38 Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 313, Clark’s entry for March 12, 1805.
39 Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 316, Clark’s entry for March 17, 1805.
40 Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 329, Clark’s entry for April 3, 1805.
42 Franchère, Voyage, p. xx.
43 Ibid., p. 144.
44 Ibid., p. xx.
45 Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806, microform, printed from the original manuscripts together with manuscript material of Lewis and Clark from other sources, including notebooks, letters, maps and the journals of Charles Floyd and Joseph Whitehouse, Harold B. Lee Library (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1905-1905), text-fiche, pp. 47-48.
48 Hafen, French Fur Traders, p. 11.
49 Ibid., p. 16.
50 Ibid., p. 10.
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A Lewis and Clark dispatch from Fort Mandan made its way to Boston in 1805

The following newspaper article was transcribed and submitted by Foundation member Michael Carrick of Turner, Oregon.

BOSTON COURIER
July 18, 1805

From Lexington, KY, June 18, 1805
The party of discovery, under the command of Captain Lewis and Clark, left the mouth of the Missouri, on the 19th [sic] day of May 1804. An express with dispatches from their winter quarters, which left them the 14th April, has returned to St. Louis. By the express, letters were received from Captain Clark to his correspondents in Kentucky. A gentleman from Jefferson county, has obligingly favored the Editor of the Kentucky Gazette with the following account, which he obtained from one of the men who returned with the express, and from letters from some of the party. — They fortified themselves in November last, on the bank of the Missouri, 1609 miles from the mouth, by actual measurement, in latitude 47, 21, North; called then Fort Mandan, after a nation of Indians who reside in the neighborhood, and who have been very friendly to them. — On their passage up, they were delighted with the beautiful appearance of the country for about 200 leagues, or to the mouth of the river La Plate, which comes in from the South; after which, to their winter quarters, it is described not to be so fertile. The person who brought the dispatches, speaks of the opening made by the river, being about one mile wide with high cliffs on each side. The bed of the river occupies about a fourth part of it, the remainder of the bottom entirely composed of coarse sand, covered with cotton wood. This bottom is continually giving way either on one side or the other, and gaining on the opposite side. The cliffs in some places are covered with red cedar, which, with the cotton and a few small black ash trees, is the only timber described to be in that country. — From the height, there is not a tree or twig to be seen, as far as the height can extend, or as they have explored. Out from the river the land goes off perfectly level, with but few exceptions — and their plains covered with grass. They passed the mouths of a number of streams, the most of which had names given by the French — One they have named Floyd's river, to perpetuate the name of a young man, of their party, named Charles Floyd, who died much regretted on the 20th August. They represent the Indians to have been friendly, with but a few exceptions. The Soux are the most numerous, are organized in bands bearing different names, move about from place to place, from the banks of the river out to the plains, in pursuit of game and plunder having no fixed place of residence, and in a continual state of warfare. — These were the most troublesome Indians to the party of discovery, as they expressed a jealousy, lest they would supply their enemies higher up with arms, &c. — — The higher up they went, the more friendly they found the savages, and the better armed. — — They have a more regular trade with the North West Company, and the Hudson bay company; which supplies come to them by the way of Lake Winnepack. The Mandanes cultivate corn, which is of a small kind, from whom the party was supplied during the winter, and their hunters kept them in abundance of meat.

Buffaloes are said to be in great numbers, and of large size — Two description of deer are described; those resembling the common kind of this country being larger, and the tails 18 inches long, and the hair much longer on the bodies; the other kind having a black tail. Elks and goats are numerous. The grouse, or prairie hen are in plenty; and before the closing of the river in the fall, water fowls in abundance. Fish scarce, and those principally of the cat kind. Some of the white bear-skins, had been brought to the fort by visiting Indians from higher up; but the party had seen none of those animals. The Indians keep horses, which are used entirely for the chase, and in war.

From such information as they have received of the country above there, it is about 600 miles to the great falls, which are made by a ledge of mountains, called Rocky Mountain, in which it is presumed the Missouri terminates. At their winter quarters...
the river is nearly a quarter of a mile wide; is equally as muddy as at its mouth, and has continued its rapidity with very little alteration, as high as they have gone, though it has become considerably more shallow, so that they will not be able to take their large barge any higher. From what information they have obtained of the course of the upper part of the river, the most same at the Northwardly part. — From where they wintered to the falls, is nearly a South course. The description given by M’Kenzie, of the head waters of the river, is accurate.

They have sent off to the President of the United States, an accurate journal, with a map of the country through which they passed.

Six of the party were sent back — the party now consists of 28 men, exclusive of the two officers. They have enjoyed perfect health — not one having been sick, except the unfortunate young man before mentioned, and he was taken off in a few hours with a cramp in his stomach. The greatest friendship has existed with the party; and the men who have returned, speak in the highest terms of the humanity, and uncommon pains and attention of both the Captains, Lewis, and Clark, towards the whole of them; and that they left them in good spirits, fully convinced that they would winter on the Pacific Ocean.

They were told of six nations of Indians they would have to pass, before they would arrive at the falls, from only one of which, they apprehend any difficulty — they are called the Snake tribe, and reside higher up.

Curiosities of different kinds: live beasts, birds, several boxes of minerals, a pair of uncommon ram’s horns, from the rocky mountain, scions of a new discovered berry, called the buffaloe berry, &c, have been brought on by the returned party, and deposited with the commanding officer at St. Louis, to be sent by him to the President.

We expect in a few days, further particulars relative to this interesting voyage.
Historical fiction offers insight on Jean Baptiste, but includes errors

Across the Endless River
Thad Carhart
Doubleday
320 pages / $26.95

Across the Endless River is Thad Carhart’s second book. His first, The Piano Shop on the Left Bank, received much critical, international acclaim as a thoughtful look at French culture, friendship and the music of the piano.

Across the Endless River is a far different book. In this work of historical fiction, Carhart spins a creative and compelling story of Jean Baptiste Charbonneau and five years “Baptiste” spent in Europe (1824-1829) as the guest of Paul, Duke of Württemberg.

For “Baptiste,” as Carhart calls young Charbonneau, the five years in Europe were a journey of exploration, as much as his parents’ journey of exploration with the Corps of Discovery was. Through Carhart’s words, we watch as Baptiste matures into an educated, thoughtful and adventurous young man. It is in Europe that Baptiste finds his path, the path readers of We Proceeded On know took him from St. Louis to Württemberg and back to St. Louis, then west to Bent’s Fort, the Mission at San Luis Rey and, eventually, to Danner, Oregon. The French call it entre deux, “the in-between path,” and it was a path Jean Baptiste Charbonneau walked well.

Carhart offers us a look at what it might have been like for a young man, a Metis, to travel from his homes in the Mandan villages and St. Louis, “across the endless river” to Le Havre, France, and to the teeming, bustling, crowded cities of France and Germany. As Paul’s traveling companion and protégé, Charbonneau lived in Paris and in Württemberg, and explored Sweden, Stuttgart, St. Petersburg, Venice and Vienna. Baptiste used his time well, observing the people—nobles, servants and merchants—learning the languages, and sampling the culture and customs of many different countries.

Always, there are sharp contrasts, contrasts that eventually help Baptiste choose his entre deux. Baptiste arranged for the Duke to participate in a Pawnee buffalo hunt, a hunt that would provide the tribe with food, clothing and tools. In turn, the Duke arranged for Baptiste to participate in a carefully orchestrated deer hunt in the manicured woods of France. On their journey down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, Baptiste saw numerous African-American slaves, and their plight troubled him deeply. In France and Germany, friends of the Duke made it clear their servants are not the slaves of the New World ... but at the same time, he is told adamantly, one did not say “please” to the servants in noble households.

Perhaps the most poignant moment in this five-year journey is a disagreement that comes when Paul finds Baptiste has laid out the Duke’s leather boots and saber, a silk purse and a comb, dolls and various kitchen utensils. Baptiste challenges Paul to examine his own belongings and household goods in the same scientific light he examines, labels and displays the American Indian artifacts in his collection. Helping the Duke catalog and display his collection, Baptiste has learned to proudly walk that entre deux between scientific examination and cultural understanding and he asks Paul to do the same.

Baptiste’s letters to his friend and mentor “Captain Clark” are filled with the warmth one would expect between the two men and it is a pleasure to read them. One wonders if such letters really do exist! Baptiste learned well from Clark—to think, to observe and to explore—just as members of the Corps of Discovery did. When the time came in February of 1829 to leave Europe, it is to Clark he wrote first, “I am coming home.”

Across the Endless River is historical fiction. There are many small errors that readers of this publication quickly will notice. Carhart has chosen to brush aside the scholarship of many fine historians to tell this story and, sadly, he insists on using the word “squaw” when he refers to American Indian women. Still, Carhart’s book should give us pause to think about what young Charbonneau’s life might have been like during those five years, his adventures, his understanding and his loves, and most importantly, his ability to choose his own entre deux, in Europe and in the West.

—Barb Kubik
Historian
42nd Annual Meeting  Clearwater River Casino's Event Center Lewiston, ID

Highlights include:
August 1: Vendors; Social and Overview of area and meeting.
August 2: Opening ceremonies; awards dinner; field trip to Patit Creek (May 2, 1806) near Dayton, WA.
August 3: Field trip to "Canoe Camp" (Orofino, ID); "Long Camp" (Kamiah, ID); Weippe, ID and hike a portion of the Lolo Trail.
August 4: Nez Perce tribal activities and mini pow wow; closing banquet.
Meeting feature local historians, authors and tribal interpreters.

For information, contact Chuck Raddon at (208) 476-3123 or by email at 2010meeting@gmail.com or visit the LCTHF website at www.lewisandclark.org