

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation / [www.lewisandclark.org](http://www.lewisandclark.org)

May 2012 Volume 38, No. 2

# THE MAN WHO ABANDONED MERIWETHER LEWIS



David Douglas and the Corps of Discovery

“Easy and Expeditious Transport”:  
Horses of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

# Contents

**President's Message:** From the Great Falls of the Missouri to the Falls of the Ohio

2

**Letters:** The Location of Burning Bluffs

4

**L&C Roundup:** New LCTHF Executive Director; U.S. Supreme Court and Navigable Waters; L&C Art Kites; new Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn, North Dakota.

5

**Trail Notes:** Summary of 2011 Membership Survey

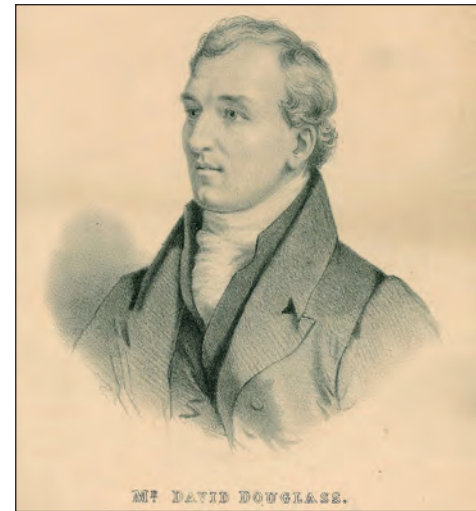
6

## **Clarkia, Douglas-Fir and Salal: David Douglas and the Corps of Discovery**

8

How a young Scottish naturalist journeyed to America on the heels of Lewis and Clark expedition and deepened knowledge about the Pacific Northwest horticulture.

By Jack Nisbet



David Douglas, p. 9

## **Horses of the Lewis and Clark Expedition**

Initially seen as unnecessary, horses soon became an essential part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

By A. G. Wesselius

13

## **The Man Who Abandoned Meriwether Lewis**

Major James Neelly, who reported Lewis's death to President Thomas Jefferson on October 18, 1809, "I am sorry to say by suicide" has controlled the story of his death. But can the historical record rest on his account?

By Tony L. Turnbow

20

## **Review**

*Uncovering the Truth about Meriwether Lewis* by Thomas Danisi.

By Clay S. Jenkinson

32

## **Endnotes**

Invitations to an Expedition, Nine Young Men from Kentucky, October 23, 1803: A few reasons why the Falls of the Ohio, the site of the 2012 annual meeting, was central to the Lewis and Clark story.

By James H. Holmberg

36

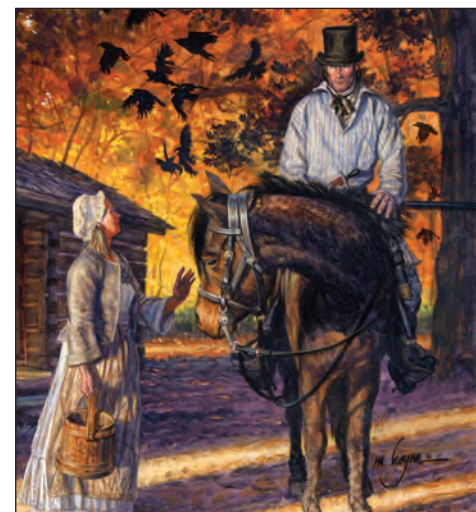


On the cover

*Capt. Meriwether Lewis*  
by Michael Haynes



*We Proceeded On*, p. 15



*Grinder's Stand*, p. 22





May 2012 • Volume 38, Number 2

*WE PROCEEDED ON* is the official publication of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. Its name derives from a phrase that appears repeatedly in the collective journals of the expedition. © 2012

E. G. Chuinard, M.D., *Founder*  
ISSN 02275-6706

*Editor and Designer*  
Caroline Patterson, carolinepatter@yahoo.com  
Eileen Chontos, Chontos Design, Inc.

*Volunteer Proofreaders*  
H. Carl Camp • Jerry Garrett • J. I. Merritt

Printed by Advanced Litho  
Great Falls, Mont.

#### EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Jay H. Buckley  
*Provo, Utah*

Barb Kubik  
*Vancouver, Wash.*

H. Carl Camp  
*Omaha, Neb.*

Glen Lindeman  
*Pullman, Wash.*

Robert C. Carriker  
*Spokane, Wash.*

J. I. Merritt  
*Pennington, N.J.*

Elizabeth Chew  
*Charlottesville, Virg.*

Robert Moore, Jr.  
*St. Louis, Mo.*

Carolyn Gilman  
*St. Louis, Mo.*

Gary E. Moulton  
*Lincoln, Neb.*

James Holmberg  
*Louisville, Ken.*

Phillippa Newfield  
*San Francisco, Calif.*

Wendy Raney  
*Cascade, Mont.*

### Membership Information

Membership in the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. is open to the public. Information and applications are available by writing Membership Coordinator, Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, P.O. Box 3434, Great Falls, MT 59403.

*WE PROCEEDED ON*, the quarterly magazine of the Foundation, is mailed to current members in February, May, August, and November. Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS and AMERICA: HISTORY AND LIFE.

#### Annual Membership Categories:

Student: \$30  
Individual: \$49  
Individual 3-Year: \$133  
Family/International: \$65/\$70  
Trail Partner: \$200  
Heritage Club: \$100  
Explorer Club: \$150  
Jefferson Club: \$250  
Discovery Club: \$500  
Lifetime: \$995, \$2,500 and \$5,000

The Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. is a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation. Individual membership dues are not tax deductible. The portion of premium dues over \$40 is tax deductible.

## President's Message

# From the Great Falls of the Missouri to the Falls of the Ohio

On June 2, 1805, in present-day, north-central Montana, the Lewis and Clark Expedition faced a defining moment when it arrived at a fork in the Missouri River. The stream flowing from the northwest was wide and muddy, similar to the river they had ascended for two thousand miles. A swifter, clearer western branch flowed out of the mountains. The captains had not known of this fork. They assumed the western river was the true source; the rest of the party disagreed.

The captains deliberated over their decision. To make a wrong choice was unthinkable. It would use precious resources, delay progress, demoralize the party, and thwart the expedition. Captain Meriwether Lewis commented that "our cogitating faculties [have] been busily employed all day." They sent search parties up both forks and had them return and report. The inconclusive results prompted the captains to examine it themselves. Captain William Clark took a contingent of men 50 miles up the Missouri and noted its direction from the southwest. Lewis led a larger reconnaissance group that ascended the northern branch—which he named Maria's River—about seventy miles before he returned. Despite field observations and reconnaissance, the proper course was still unclear. Nevertheless, the party indicated they would cheerfully "follow us any wher we thought proper to direct."

Just as choosing which branch of the river created a difference of opinion among the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, so divergent thoughts about our Foundation's

future created an opportunity for exploration. We are fortunate to have members willing to provide input on the course we should take and then cheerfully proceed on (see summary of the 2011 member questionnaire in this issue). This March, the Foundation held its spring board meeting in Great Falls, Montana. We renewed our relationships with some of our friends and partners, including the National Park Service (especially the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail led by Superintendent Mark Weekley from Omaha, Nebraska), the USDA Forest Service (especially Elizabeth



Jay H. Buckley at the Sherman breakfast in Great Falls, Mont.

Casselli, director of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls), the Great Falls Honor Guard (living history), and the Lewis and Clark Foundation that supports the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. We also spent a delightful weekend with the Portage Route Chapter, culminating in a breakfast honoring its former member William P. Sherman. Thank you, friends.

Like Lewis, who traveled ahead on foot to the Great Falls of the Missouri, and sent back the welcome information to the oncoming party to “settle in their minds all further doubts as to the Missouri,” we send back word of the strength and resiliency of our organization and of the steadiness of the course we are traveling together. The board spent two hours reading and discussing your responses and recommendations from the recent member survey. From your input, we decided to: 1) focus efforts on direct benefits to members, chapters, partners, and the trail; 2) simplify policies, procedures, and programs so they are clear and can be sustained through changes in leadership; 3) simplify by focusing on the basics: *We Proceeded On*, annual and regional meetings, trail stewardship and grants to chapters, chapter and member relations, empowered committees, living within our means, and fundraising.

We are pleased to announce the hiring of our new executive director, Lindy Hatcher, who will oversee the trail stewardship grants to our chapters, manage the office, and assist us in completing the above. We are grateful to Don Peterson, Cathie Erickson and others who have continued to help the office run smoothly during the transition. We also are elated to announce our new president-elect, Dan Sturdevant of Kansas City, who replaces Bob Gatten, who reluctantly resigned due to unavoidable family concerns.

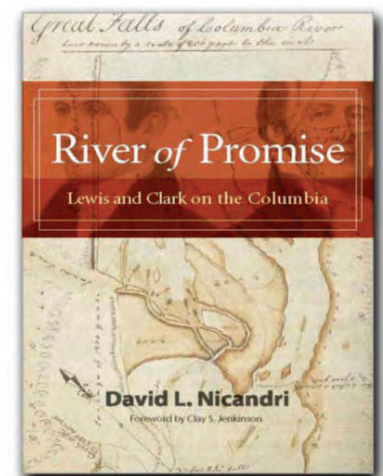
Now, our focus turns to the Falls of the Ohio. We eagerly anticipate rendezvousing with you at the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation’s 44th annual meeting in Clarksville, Indiana, where Lewis and Clark renewed their friendship. We trust the same will occur this year as we meet together to learn history, experience the trail, share laughs, create memories, and have fun! We are grateful to Jim Keith, Linda Robertson, Phyllis Yeager, and the organizing committee, as well as members of the Ohio River

Chapter for all of their preparations in hosting the event. Please join us as we rediscover the stories and trail anew. Be sure to register before mid-June to receive the best rates at: <http://lewisandclarkfallsoftheohio.com>.

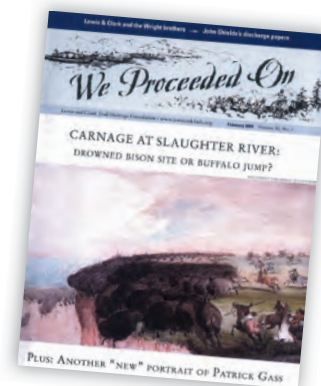
Highlights of the 44th annual meeting include: 1) field trips to Lewis and Clark sites and various Clark homes in Indiana and Kentucky; 2) presentations by Joshua Bennett, Lee Alan Dugatkin, John Fisher, Carolyn Gilman, Jim Holmberg, Robert Owens, Albert Roberts, Bill Smith, Margaret Wozniak, and myself; 3) living history encampment with the Discovery Expedition of Saint Charles; 4) camporee for scouts and area youth and the Future Explorers youth program; 5) excessive amounts of food, friends and fun! We will also hear reports on the initial \$50,000 in grants given to 16 chapters in 12 states funded by the Lewis & Clark Trail Stewardship Endowment: A National Council of the Lewis & Clark Expedition Bicentennial Legacy Project that enables the Foundation to annually fund trail stewardship projects. The Bicentennial Trail Stewardship Advisory Committee will announce another round of grants to chapters and partners for trail stewardship projects and will oversee trail stewardship training at the annual meeting.

Consider inviting a friend or family member to come along. Hand out some of our new LCTHF brochures to your acquaintances and local businesses (call or email Lindy or Don if you would like some to distribute). Invite friends to experience Lewis and Clark with you at a chapter, regional, or annual meeting. Most of all, please know of our deep appreciation to you, the membership who are continually stepping up to make the Foundation a success. You are the best ambassadors for spreading the Lewis and Clark story and fulfilling our charge to be wise stewards of the trail. We look forward to traveling that trail together.

— Jay H. Buckley  
President, LCTHF



**Available at Booksellers**  
Or Directly from the Publisher at  
[www.FortMandan.com](http://www.FortMandan.com)  
Or Call 877-462-8535  
**The Dakota Institute Press**



## WE PROCEEDED ON

(Back issues, 1974 - current)

All back issues of our quarterly historical journal are available. Some of the older issues are copier reproductions. Orders for a collection of all back issues receive a 30 percent discount. Order your missing issues to complete your set.

Call 1-888-701-3434 or order at [york@lewisandclark.org](mailto:york@lewisandclark.org).

\$10 originals or cds  
\$4 shipping & handling

## The Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc.

P.O. 3434, Great Falls, MT 59403  
406-454-1234 / 1-888-701-3434  
Fax: 406-771-9237  
www.lewisandclark.org

The mission of the LCTHF is:  
As Keepers of the Story ~  
Stewards of the Trail, the Lewis  
and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation,  
Inc. provides national leadership  
in maintaining the integrity of  
the Trail and its story through  
stewardship, scholarship, education,  
partnership and cultural inclusiveness.

### OFFICERS

*President*  
Jay H. Buckley  
Provo, Utah

*Immediate Past-President*  
Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs

*President-Elect*  
Dan Sturdevant  
Kansas City, Mo.

*Vice-President*  
Margaret Gorski  
Stevensville, Mont.

*Secretary*  
Larry McClure  
Tualatin, Ore.

*Treasurer*  
Jerry Garrett  
Saint Louis, Mo.

### DIRECTORS AT LARGE

Ken Jutzi, Camarillo, Calif.  
Barbara Kubik, Vancouver, Wash.  
Ron Laycock, Benson, Minn.  
Gary Moulton, Lincoln, Neb.  
Philippa Newfield, San Francisco, Calif.  
Jim Rosenberger, Verona, Wisc.  
Clay Smith, Great Falls, Mont.  
Bill Stevens, Pierre, S. D.  
Richard Williams, Omaha, Neb.

Incorporated in 1969 under  
Missouri General Not-For-Profit  
Corporation Act. IRS Exemption  
Certificate No. 501(c)3, Identification  
No. 510187715.

## Letters

### Burning Bluffs Location Misidentified

I am writing concerning John Jengo's article in the February 2011 *We Proceeded On* entitled "'Blue Earth,' 'Clift of White,' and 'Burning Bluffs': Lewis and Clark's Extraordinary Encounters in Northeastern Nebraska."

I was impressed with the knowledge of this area evinced by the WPO article. Jengo was thorough, but apparently relied on erroneous maps because his conclusion that the Burning Bluffs are located near Wynot, Nebraska, is mistaken. The so-called Burning Bluffs are located in the traditional area northeast of Newcastle, Neb. and southeast of Vermillion, S. Dak. (The site is visible from a small "mini-park" on Vermillion's West Main Street.)

I am a native of this area and a life-long "river rat." I grew up at Ponca, Neb., and frequently visited the "Volcano Hill," as it is locally known. There is a small cemetery just across the road from the site.

I bought a copy of Martin Plamondon's "overlay maps" at one of the Foundation's annual meetings. Two or three friends also have the Plamondon maps and we found some rather significant errors in them. I did contact Mr. Plamondon about the problems and he said he would get back to me after he checked his material. He died before he could respond. I also have a copy of Clark's map reproduced in volume one of Gary Moulton's edition of *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. The Plamondon maps differ

significantly from Clark's maps in the area where the Burning Bluffs are located. I spoke with Dr. Moulton about this WPO article at the Foundation's annual meeting in Omaha in summer 2011.

As you likely know there has been a long-time question as to what caused the burning which attracted Lewis and Clark to the site. Numerous theories have been advanced for the cause of the burning.

I think there is a simple answer and that this is the perfect place for the utilization of "Occam's Razor." I believe that the burning resulted from the ignition of a vein of lignite. Such a layer is found in this area and there is at least one outcropping a few miles downstream, northeast of Ponca. During the depression in the 1930s, area people would "mine" the vein of lignite for fuel. (It does not burn well; it smolders, and is not of much use as fuel.) To this day, burning lignite is occasionally encountered along the Missouri River, downstream of Chamberlain, S. Dak.

If you wish further information about this matter, please feel free to contact me. I have no objection if you wish to share this letter with others.

JIM PETERSON  
Vermillion, S. Dak.

WPO welcomes letters. We may edit them for length, accuracy, clarity, and civility. Send them to us c/o Editor, WPO, P.O. Box 3434, Great Falls, MT 59403.

### The Supreme Court and Navigable Waters

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, the waterfalls of the Missouri near Great Falls are not navigable—just as Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark proved more than 200 years ago with their grueling portage around the falls—and the state of Montana cannot claim to own the riverbeds or charge rent to the power company PPL Montana.

This 26-page ruling, which came down February 22, 2012, by the U.S. Supreme Court, reversed a previous decision by the Montana Supreme Court. Riverbed property ownership,

as well as millions of dollars in rental revenue, were at stake in the case.

In the suit, the Montana Supreme Court had sided with the state, which attempted to claim ownership over riverbeds and to collect rent from PPL, the power company that owns dams on the Missouri, Madison, and Clark Fork rivers. By law, states hold title to riverbeds, if the rivers are navigable.

The case goes back to the state. Montana Attorney General Steve Bullock said he is not giving up on the state collecting rent from PPL.



## New Executive Director

Welcome to our new executive director, Lindy Hatcher! Hatcher, who comes to LCTHF from Vermont, received her masters of science in administration from Saint Michael's College in 2007. She has worked as communications director, manager of operations, marketing and public relations director, and has served



**Lindy Hatcher, New Executive Director**

on numerous boards and committees. She writes grants, business plans, and strategic plans and has been on the steering committees of three start-ups. Hatcher loves women's history and was an advisor on the Vermont Commission on Women for eight years, is past President of Vermont Business and Professional Women, and serves as the Secretary of the Champlain Valley Real Estate Investors Association.

Hatcher has a fiancé in Vermont, a son in the Navy in Texas, and a daughter and grandson in Vermont. She said, "I enjoy the contagious passion for sharing the Lewis and Clark story, and the teamwork and comradery of the staff and Board at LCTHF." Being from Whidbey Island, Washington, Hatcher is familiar with Washington travels and the initiation of the Lewis and Clark journey. She said, "I enjoy discovering every facet of Lewis and Clark's expedition, not just traveling via waterways, but identifying plants and animals West of the Louisiana Purchase,"

Hatcher said. "Sometimes, one has to personally experience the site, like the awe-inspiring Great Falls of the Missouri, before fully understanding what took place on that part of the journey."



## Corps of Discovery Kites

This image of the 30-foot kite, *Rosetree* built by Steve Ferrell of Wescosville, Penn., is part of a new exhibition, *Visions of Lewis and Clark*, an exhibition of 26 art kites at the Great Falls International Airport and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, May 30 to September 20, 2012. Commissioned by Terry Lee, the founder of SkyWindWorld, the exhibition has been currently touring the West. For more information, contact: <http://skywindworld.org/lewis-and-clark.htm>

Each kite is accompanied by a quote from Captain Lewis. *Rosetree* depicts the night of April 28, 1806, when the Corps was gathered for the last time with more than 550 members of the Nez Perce Tribe. Pierre Cruzatte played his fiddle. Lewis wrote: "A little before sunset the fiddle was played and the men amused themselves with dancing about an hour. we then requested the Indians to dance which they very cheerfully complied with; they continued their dance untill 10 at night."

## From Buffalo to Expedition Books

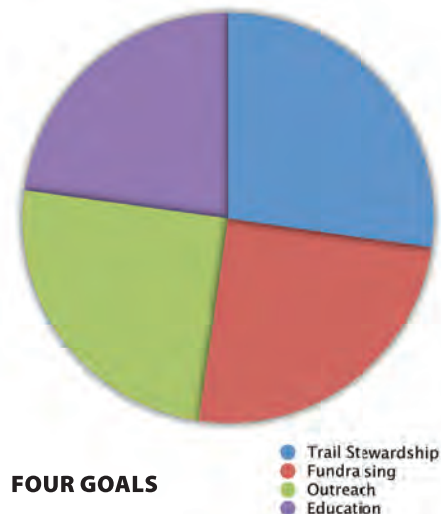
Step into phase one of the new Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn, N. Dak. and you'll be immersed in the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, as well as the story of the Enlightenment that gave birth to that journey and rare artifacts from the John Fisher collection. See a massive bighorn sheep skull, books and rifles similar to those carried on the expedition, the life-cast figure of an early canoe-builder at Fort Mandan, and life-size figures of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark illustrated by Michael Haynes. The facility, along with Fort Mandan, is open daily. For more information go to [www.FortMandan.com](http://www.FortMandan.com) or call 877-462-8535.



**Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn, N. Dak.**

## Results of the 2011 LCTHF Member Survey

The economic downturn of the past five years, coupled with the bicentennial post-partum and shriveling budgets of our federal partners, have provided an opportunity for a healthy reevaluation of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. We are grateful for your responses to the fall 2011 member survey regarding the Foundation's essential functions and actions. We received a high response rate from approximately one quarter of our members. Ellie and Larry McClure of Tualatin, Oregon compiled and edited the written comments from the survey; Jay Buckley distilled their complete report (which numbered more than 20 single-spaced pages) to present the results in the following summary.



In late summer 2011, members of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation were surveyed to assess their views on various issues related to the Foundation's future. The purpose was to guide the board of directors in its planning. A section of the form labeled "Priorities" asked members to rate the importance to each of four goal areas: education, outreach, trail stewardship, and fundraising. From a total of 100 points, respondents were asked to allocate points as a way to determine how much emphasis the

board should give each area. In an advisory poll on two other bylaws items—office location and board membership—yes or no responses were sought.

Space was allowed for members to provide rationale and any additional comments on all six questions. Forms were mailed in late September of 2011 and were still being received as late as January 15, 2012. Surveys were returned by 252 members—more than one-quarter of the Foundation's membership. Across the four goal areas, the points were nearly equal, although a few members allocated all of theirs to one item. This is the distribution: Trail Stewardship: 26.77 points; Fundraising: 24.52; Outreach: 24.45; Education: 22.38

## Planning and Budgeting Priorities

**Overall Sentiment:** The Foundation needs to 1) reestablish stability; 2) live within its means; 3) simplify.

**Education.** 125 responses. The majority felt education was necessary in order to involve youth, have a presence in the school curriculum, keep the Lewis and Clark story at the forefront of the nation's consciousness, and generate interest. We need to engage living historians; connect with trail sites and interpretive centers; develop future leaders; initiate new research; involve members, chapters, and partners; and grow membership and contributions. The consensus on the existing curriculum guide was to simplify and update it, and to provide it electronically.

**Outreach.** 113 responses. The majority of the comments focused on ways of sharing the Lewis and Clark stories, traveling the trail, holding regional meetings, reinstituting some form of *The Orderly Report* (perhaps electronically), and developing an information management system to keep track of people, programs, finances, and correspondence.

Critical to the outreach mission is WPO. Members supported efforts to hire an editor and increase sales, distribution, and public awareness. Most favored keeping it a print journal although a few encouraged an electronic distribution. Another key is improving the visibility and usability of the website [www.lewisandclark.org](http://www.lewisandclark.org). Regular communication with membership and prospective donors is important, as is linking *The Orderly Report* information sent by chapters to the website. Social media outreach and appropriate use of technology should be explored. There was consensus approving the hiring of an executive director and incorporating part-time staff and volunteers efficiently and effectively.

**Trail Stewardship.** 110 responses. Half of the respondents felt this was the most important area. Trail stewardship grants distributed from the Foundation to its chapters help chapters recruit and retain members, raise public awareness, increase cooperation with new and existing partners, and facilitate volunteers' interest in supporting the trail. The grants link members and chapters to the national organization and can also be used to generate funds through estate planning, grants, gifts, and particular projects as well as promoting successful education and outreach programs. Trail stewardship grants can be used to maintain signs, make trail improvements and protect endangered sites.

**Fundraising.** 120 responses. Twenty percent said fundraising was necessary to survive. Members emphasized that the Foundation should live within its means and engage in fundraising to augment education, stewardship, and outreach. They recommended pursuing grants as a way to raise money, while others emphasized identifying individuals and corporations who would support worthwhile endeavors. Some suggested establishing a National Advisory Committee appointed by the board to solicit funds and raise



awareness among non-members and large corporations. Members also thought an emphasis on “history travel” would draw people with time and money to get involved. Others thought that chapters might get involved in matching contributions or annual contributions, as the Badger State Chapter currently does.



The Missouri River, just outside the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls, Mont.

## Governance and Headquarters Location

**Board Make-Up.** 148 responses. The majority favored keeping the board as one that was elected by the membership. Many thought that the Governance Committee has done a good job balancing the geographical representation on the board. Diversity is one factor to consider, but board members need to be interested and committed to our organization and should not fill a position just to be politically correct. Outside directors offer fresh perspective, expertise, and contacts, but they may not have enthusiasm for the story or the trail. Members felt that it was better to seek diversity (ethnicity, gender, age) in the membership and then let members run on their own merit. Others favor adding heavy hitters (government connections, philanthropists, well-connected and deep pockets, star power) to a National Advisory Council that was focused on fundraising and political influence.

**Headquarters Location.** 165 responses. Discussion about moving the headquarters, honoring the ten-year agreement signed with the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in 2007, and considering possible relocation

sites in the future generated the most passionate responses. The majority favored staying in Great Falls, at least through the end of our current agreement at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center. Reasons for remaining in Great Falls included the following: Lewis and Clark traveled to the West and spent a great deal of time at the Great Falls portage; Montana boasts the most trail miles; Great Falls is a beautiful Missouri River destination; and the community has a large number of volunteers, facilities, and support mechanisms already in place. They argued Great Falls was the center of the historic trail, an excellent location, and that the travel question was a non-sequitur because the membership does not usually travel to the headquarters. Respondents argued moving the trail headquarters does not advance the cause in any meaningful way and would be an additional expense and potential disaster. Instead, they advocated fostering, developing, and negotiating with current partners and entities.

As the Foundation’s agreement comes up for renegotiation or renewal, many suggested openly, objectively, and dispassionately evaluating all of the possibilities, including staying in Great Falls. Most agreed that the William P. Sherman Library and Archives should remain in Great Falls indefinitely. Other cities that received the most votes for future consideration included St. Louis/St. Charles and Omaha. Other cities mentioned were Kansas City/Independence, Clarksville/Louisville, and Portland. A few mentioned Washington, D.C., as a possibility, but potentially relocating to that city received the most negative comments.

We are grateful to all of you for taking the time to complete and send in your responses.

*Compiled by Ellie McClure, Tualatin, Oregon, 2011; Edited by Larry McClure; January 2012; Summarized by Jay H. Buckley, April 2012.*

## Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Reported Death of Sacagawea

Join Us In South Dakota Respectfully Honoring her Life and Memory At the Regional LCTHF Meeting Hosted by the Encounters On the Prairie Chapter ~  
Headquartered at the AmericInn, Fort Pierre, SD  
September 28, 29 & 30, 2012

### Invited Speakers:

- Ron Laycock, Minnesota
- Dr. Gary Moulton, Keynote, Nebraska
- Bev Hinds, Iowa
- Dr. Brad Tennant, South Dakota
- Lonis Wendt, South Dakota
- Barb Kubick, Washington
- Gerard Baker, South & North Dakota

### Tentative Schedule:

- Friday dinner at “the Cattleman’s Club”  
East of Pierre along the Missouri River
- Symposium/Speakers Saturday morning and afternoon  
Fort Pierre AmericInn on the west shore of the Missouri River
- Saturday Catered lunch in Fischer’s Lilly Park @ the confluence of the Wakpa Sica and Missouri Rivers,  
\*This is the historic 1804 Encounter site of the L&C Corps of Discovery and the Brule’ Sioux!
- Saturday night Catered Dinner at the AmericInn
- Sunday Road Trip to Mobridge, Fort Manuel Lisa
  - Lunch at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s Grand River Casino
  - Guided trip to the nearby Fort Manuel Lisa, where Sacagawea is reported to have died of a “putrid fever” on December 20, 1812 and buried outside of the stockade walls over looking the Missouri River
  - Optional trip to the 3 stone Idols on the East Side of the Missouri River in Pollock, SD
  - Dinner at Bob’s Steak House overlooking the Missouri River, west of Gettysburg, SD
  - Return to Fort Pierre AmericInn

### Contact Information:

Bill Stevens, EOTP Chapter President and  
Regional Meeting Host Chairman  
Home Phone: (605) 224-0223  
Email Address: bill.stevens@eotp.net  
Mailing Address: 612 N Poplar Ave.  
Pierre, SD 57501



\*Registration begins June 1.



# “CAPT. LEWIS OBSERVES...”

## CLARKIA, DOUGLAS-FIR AND SALAL: DAVID DOUGLAS AND THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY

BY JACK NISBET

In 1823, a young Scottish naturalist named David Douglas, working as a collector for the London Horticultural Society, sailed from Liverpool on an expedition to New York and the mid-Atlantic states. Assigned to assess oak timber, new cultivars of fruit, and promising garden plants, Douglas traveled from Detroit to the Chesapeake Bay and sent back chests full of living plants, rootstock, and viable seed. He carried letters of introduction that connected him to many of the leading naturalists of the day, including Thomas Nuttall and the Bartram family in Philadelphia. At Peale's Museum, Douglas had another encounter: with the wildlife collected by the Corps of Discovery on their 1804–1806 expedition. He was quite taken with the broad



OVIS MONTANA.

Published by John Bannock, January 1828.

**Bighorn Sheep *Ovis canadensis*. Douglas described eating a venison stew with a spoon fashioned from the horn of a mountain sheep**

curved horns of a mounted bighorn sheep that Captains William Clark and Meriwether Lewis had shot on the Missouri River in 1806, and wrote, “I had the opportunity of seeing the whole animals collected during their expedition (now in Philadelphia Museum).”<sup>1</sup>

Douglas's first outing as a collector was deemed a great success. He introduced several new varieties of apples and pears to Great Britain, and presented living saprophytes (plants that feed on dead or decaying matter) and pitcher plants (plants that trap insects) to board members who specialized in those breeds. He showed a knack for keeping interesting plants alive and getting them to grow in the British climate, including an Oregon grape that originated from one of Lewis and Clark's Pacific Northwest collections. In

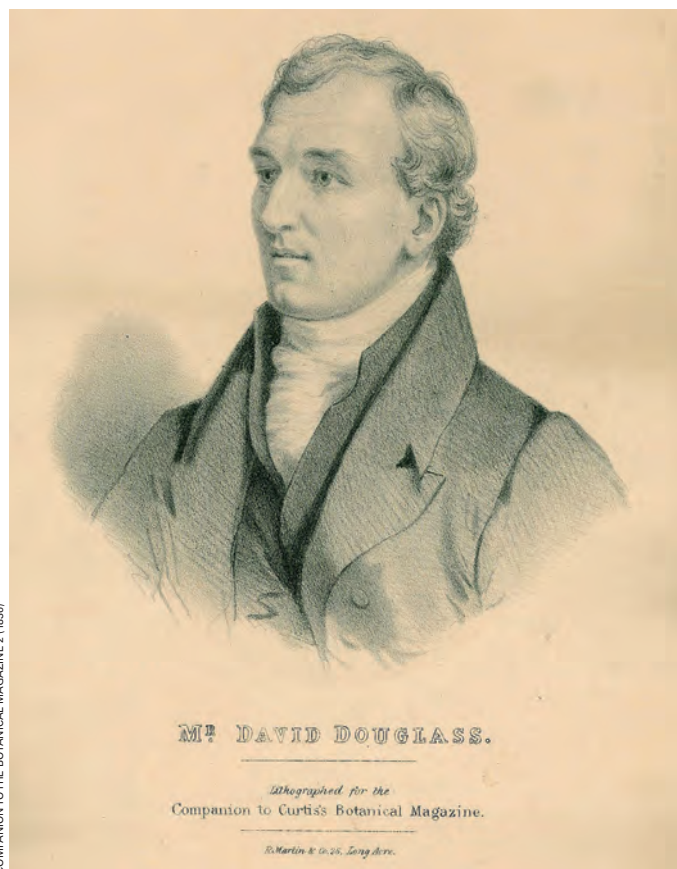
addition, he penned a monograph on American oaks that not only demonstrated a thorough knowledge of earlier work compiled by André Michaux and Frederick Pursh, but also reflected his own investigations into the possibilities of the various oak species for carpentry and shipbuilding.

Born in the village of Scone, Perthshire, in 1799, Douglas was the son of a stonemason. His behavior at the local school gave little indication that he might be destined for anything greater than fishing, caring for abandoned birds, and rambling in the nearby hills. A childhood friend later recalled that, in those early years, Douglas held “contempt for his master’s thong, and [was] careless about those difficulties and hardships which would have weighed hard with other boys.” David’s older brother John later recognized that these qualities—stubbornness and independence of mind—served the lad well in his chosen field.

By the time he was 11, young Douglas was working summers under the head gardener at the local manor, and although he sometimes quarreled with the other boys employed there, he began an apprenticeship that cycled him through all the phases of gardening and horticultural practices. At age 19, he advanced to a position at a larger estate, and two years later landed at the Botanic Gardens of Glasgow University, just as a new lecturer, William Jackson Hooker, came on board. Hooker, who later became the first director of Kew Gardens, had the connections to put Douglas’s energy and talent to use. He remained Douglas’s mentor and close friend for the rest of the collector’s life.

Only a few months after his return to England, the Horticulture Society booked Douglas passage aboard a Hudson’s Bay Company vessel bound for the Columbia River. Before he departed in late July 1824, Douglas extensively researched his new collecting territory. He read George Vancouver’s account of Great Britain’s 1792–96 Pacific Coast surveying expedition, and interviewed Archibald Menzies, who had served as surgeon and naturalist on that trip. He studied Alexander Mackenzie’s 1793 journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Fraser River and Bella Coola for the North West Company. With a particular eye for natural history, Douglas pored over Nicolas Biddle’s 1814 account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. For his journey around Cape Horn to the Columbia, Douglas took along a copy of Frederick Pursh’s *Flora Americae Septentrionalis*, which included the taxonomic details of the corps’ plant collections.

With these scholarly underpinnings, Douglas was able to name the landmarks from Vancouver’s and William Clark’s maps from the moment he sighted Cape



**During his stay in London in 1829, David Douglas had two portraits made, from which several later images of him were adapted.**

Disappointment from outside the Columbia River’s fearsome bar. Soon after he stepped ashore, he met the Chinook headman Comcomly, who had interacted with Lewis and Clark at the river’s mouth two decades previously. For the next two years, Comcomly’s network of kin guided Douglas from Astoria to Grays Harbor, providing him with food, introductions, companionship, deep ethnographic knowledge, and numerous collections of flora, fauna, and cultural artifacts.

Douglas emulated the Corps of Discovery and other successful visitors by quickly learning Chinook jargon, a trade language that allowed him to communicate with tribal and mix-blood families throughout that region. Douglas also collected flora and fauna along the lower Columbia during all seasons of the year, through several annual cycles, which allowed him to expand on the solid base of natural history data begun by Lewis and Clark during their winter months on the river.

## SALAL, & QUIP QUIP

In his daybook, where Douglas kept a running list of his collections, he revealed his awareness of who had come before him. One of the first plants Douglas saw at Cape Disappointment was the familiar evergreen shrub salal (*Gaultheria shallon*). He wrote that it was “called by the



natives ‘Salal,’ not ‘Shallon’ as stated by Pursh, figure and description good; abundant (as is very correctly observed by Mr. Menzies) in all the pine forests.”<sup>2</sup> Here Douglas used his knowledge of Chinook jargon to edit Pursh’s account of a Corps of Discovery collection, which explains the variation between the plant’s common and Latin names. He also recalled the oral accounts of Archibald Menzies. (He even packed up cakes of pounded salal berries, made by local Chinook families, to send to Hooker as a gift—again emulating Lewis and Clark by noting a particular plant’s local uses as food.) The fact that it was Douglas who successfully brought salal seed back to England, where it was propagated, sold as a ground cover, then spread across the northern British Isles to become a noxious weed, only adds to the collecting lore.

Similarly, Douglas paid close attention to the digging and cooking of the beautiful blue camas lily (*Camassia quamash*). He procured seed and packed dried bulbs in sand so that the lilies could be sold as garden plants by the Horticultural Society back in London. His field notes included one family’s recipe for cooking camas in an earth oven, and Douglas ended his account, as he often did, with a modest joke that included an historical reference. “Captain Lewis observes that when eaten in a large quantity they occasion bowel complaints. This I am not aware of, but assuredly they produce flatulence: when in the Indian hut I was almost blown out by strength of the wind.”<sup>3</sup>

In reading through Douglas’s daybook and plant lists for 1825 and 1826, he seemed to be following Pursh’s *Flora Americae Septentrionalis* as a treasure map in his search for specimens. Each new find was a prize that provided further insight into complex layers of human and natural history. On July 19, 1825, for example, Douglas departed from his Fort Vancouver headquarters in search of a mysterious sedge, for which he had only a partial clue.

After he obtained seeds for beargrass (*Xerophyllum tenax*), another Lewis and Clark favorite, Douglas again commented on Pursh: “The natives at the [Grand]



**Indian tobacco, *Nicotiana quadrivalvis*.  
This tobacco was the only plant that  
Douglas saw cultivated by Northwest tribes.**

EDWARD'S BOTANICAL REGISTER, 1827

Rapids call it ‘Quip Quip.’ Pursh is correct as to their making watertight baskets of its leaves.”<sup>4</sup> The collector marveled at the same style of conical hats that Meriwether Lewis admired, and ordered three of them made more “in the English fashion” from a young girl he encountered on Willapa Bay. When Hooker published his manual of North American flora, it included many of Douglas’s comments on Pacific Northwest plants, including a broad range of uses for beargrass. “It is one of the greatest ornaments of the western mountains, and the natives make baskets, hats, pouches, bags, bottles, mats for sleeping on, &c, of its strong foliage.”<sup>5</sup>

## TRIBAL TOBACCO

Tobacco was the single plant most often mentioned in the journals of the Corps of Discovery, featured in episodes in the Mandan villages,

among the Shoshone, and at the mouth of the Columbia that involved the tribal-grown smoking material “of their own manufacture.” Douglas was curious about the origin of the plant, and began looking for it as soon as he arrived on the river. He collected information from fur traders about its spread and gradually focussed in on native gardeners. “Whether its original habitats are here in the Rocky Mountains, or on the Missouri, I am unable to say, but am inclined to think it must be in the mountains,” he wrote in fall 1825. “I am informed by the hunters it is more abundant towards them and particularly so among the Snake Indians, who frequently visit the Indians inhabiting the head-waters of the Missouri by whom it might be carried in both directions.”<sup>6</sup>

European manufactured tobacco was a staple of the British fur trade, just as it was for the Corps of Discovery as they travelled West, but for months the perplexed Douglas only saw a single locally grown tobacco plant. The plant was held by a man at the great trading bazaar in The Dalles, and despite the collector’s frantic offers, the man would not part with it for any price. Douglas slowly realized that he was not seeing the tobacco plants because “They do not cultivate it near camps or lodges, lest it should be taken for use before maturity. An open place

in the wood is chosen where there is dead wood, which they burn, and sow the seed in the ashes.”

In time, he came across a patch of this garden tobacco near the Willamette River. Unaware that he was being watched, he removed some of the plants. “On my way home I met the owner, who, seeing it under my arm, appeared to be much displeased,” Douglas wrote, “but by presenting him with two finger-lengths of tobacco from Europe his wrath was appeased and we became good friends.”<sup>7</sup>

Douglas sent his stolen tobacco plants back to Hooker, and when compared with a sprig of tobacco that Lewis and Clark collected at the Mandan villages, it proved to be a cultivar of the same species, now known as *Nicotiana quadrivalvis*. The combined work of Douglas and the corps proves that this species, which is native to California, was the result of tribal gardening and an extensive trade network that was in existence long before white contact.<sup>8</sup> Native-grown tobacco was, as Douglas put it in his comments to Hooker, “abundant within the recesses of the Rocky Mountains, and westward to the Pacific Ocean, in all dry light soils; it is greatly esteemed by the different tribes for smoking, and is the only vegetable which the native of the Columbia cultivate.”<sup>9</sup>

As Douglas moved inland, he mentioned Lewis and Clark as he continued along their routes. Like the captains, he shot at harbor seals at the Cascades of the Columbia. For the long portage that Hudson’s Bay Company fur traders called The Dalles, he preferred “The Grand Rapids, as they are called by Lewis and Clark.”<sup>10</sup> When he saw the beautiful wildflower called clarkia or elkhorn (*Clarkia pulchella*) that Pursh named for William Clark, he made sure to ship seed on the returning ship of fall 1825—the flower, in full bloom, became the hit of a fund-raising plant sale at the London Horticultural Society in the summer 1828.<sup>11</sup>

Douglas spent much of 1826 circling the Hudson’s Bay Company’s interior posts. For drainages upstream on the Columbia from the mouth of the Snake (which he called “Lewis and Clarke’s River”), Douglas switched to a new source for geographical information: oral



**Elkhorn, *Clarkia pulchella*. The pink blooms of *Clarkia* quickly became a popular garden plant in Great Britain.**

accounts and unpublished maps of several of the fur men who worked for North West Company agent and surveyor explorer David Thompson. By July 1826, Douglas was back on the Lewis and Clark trail, accompanying fur traders to a Nez Perce encampment at the mouth of the Clearwater River. As he searched the area for new plants, he inevitably arrived at “the spot pointed out to me by the Indians where Lewis and Clarke built their canoes, on the way to the ocean, twenty-one years ago.” Apparently local people kept close track of the corps, as Douglas did.<sup>12</sup>

### “LITTLE KNOWN GENUS OF PLANTS”

David Douglas returned to London for two years before undertaking a second expedition to the Pacific Northwest. While in England, he wrote or contributed to more

than a dozen scientific papers, several of which built on Lewis and Clark’s botanical collections. Typical of these is a line from a paper on the sumptuous mariposa lilies (genus *Calochortus*) that thrive in the Columbia’s interior. As Douglas wrote, “We derived our knowledge of this hitherto little known Genus of Plants from Pursh ... from a solitary specimen found by Lewis and Clarke in their expedition across the continent, during the years 1804, 5, and 6, in the recesses of the rocky mountains, and west of them, towards the waters of the Pacific Ocean. ...” After acknowledging his debt to his predecessors, he then surpasses them in the very next sentence. “In the course of my late journey through the districts adjoining the River Columbia, I was fortunate enough to find the species already described by Pursh, and two others, not before observed, I am enabled to give some additional information respecting this interesting and highly ornamental Genus.”<sup>13</sup>

For bitterroot (*Lewisia rediviva*), a genus that carries Meriwether Lewis’s own name, Douglas described the species from personal experience.

The roots of this are gathered in great quantities by the Indians on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, and highly valued on account of their nutritive quality.



They are boiled and eaten as Salep, or arrow-root, and are admirably calculated for carrying on long journeys: two or three ounces a day being sufficient for a man, even while undergoing great fatigue.<sup>14</sup>

As part of Douglas's job description, he sent back the seed for numerous conifers that forever altered commercial forests in Great Britain and all her temperate colonies. Foremost among those is the tree that bears his name: the Douglas-fir. In his treatment of this new conifer, he gently challenged Lewis and Clark's estimate of three hundred feet for the height of one tree. "After a two year's residence, during which time I measured any tree that appeared from its magnitude as interesting, I was unable to find any from actual measurements exceeding the height [of 227 feet]."<sup>15</sup>

Throughout his journeys, the collector's curiosity extended beyond the elements of botany to include the region's rocks, insects, mammals, and birds. In a paper on sage grouse, Douglas referred to the specific page number of Lewis's "Cock of the Plains" passage from the original Biddle ("page 473").<sup>16</sup> When he wrote extensively about condors, he correctly expanded their Pacific Northwest range from the lower Columbia south into the Umpqua drainage and east up the Snake.

Just as Meriwether Lewis never saw a live *sewelel* or mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa*), Douglas made four trips to Willapa Bay to search in vain for the secretive rodent; just as Lewis brought home a stunning *sewelel* robe to present to Thomas Jefferson, Douglas, through tribal sources, was able to bring back a robe sewn from 27 *sewelel* skins to show to John Richardson so that Richardson could include the animal in his *Fauna Boreali-Americana*. And, of course, there was the mountain sheep from Peale's Museum. As soon as Douglas arrived in the Spokane country, "I made inquiry about a sort of sheep found in this neighbourhood, about the same size as that described by Lewis and Clarke." Although he never succeeded in shooting one on his own, Douglas did purchase a sheep skull and horns from a tribal man which is still in the British Museum.

During his second trip to the Pacific Northwest from 1830 to 1834, Douglas ascended the Columbia twice, interspersed with trips to California and Hawaii. He died on the Big Island when he slipped into a cattle pit trap that was

already occupied by an angry bull. Like Meriwether Lewis, the naturalist's energetic life and mysterious death have helped elevate him to a kind of mythic status, far beyond that of a typical botanist. For David Douglas, with his awareness of his predecessor's work and his vision about the future

of subjects ranging from horticulture and silvaculture to biogeography and practical ecology, at least some of that aura seems well deserved. ❧

*Jack Nisbet of Spokane, Washington, has written books including Sources of the River and The Mapmaker's Eye about David Thompson as well as The Collector, which follows the life of Scottish naturalist David Douglas. His upcoming David Douglas: A Naturalist at Work, is the companion book for a museum exhibit that will open at Spokane's Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture in fall 2012.*



**Fur trade posts in the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia and New Caledonia Districts visited by David Douglas 1825 to 1833.**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>David Douglas. *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823–27*. (London: William Wesley & Son, 1914), p. 172fn. *Cottage Gardener* 6 (July 31, 1851) p. 263.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup>William Jackson Hooker. *Flora Boreali-Americana*. (London: Henry G. Bohn. vol 2, 1832), p. 178.

<sup>6</sup>Douglas, *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823–27*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup>All tobacco quotes, Douglas, *Journal* (1914) p. 141.

<sup>8</sup>Jack Nisbet, *Visible Bones*, (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2003), pp. 132–152.

<sup>9</sup>Hooker, *Flora Boreali-Americana*, vol. 2, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas, *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823–27*, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup>Jack Nisbet, *The Collector*, (Seattle: Sasquatch Book, 2009) p. 184.

<sup>12</sup>Douglas, *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823–27*, pp. 200–201.

<sup>13</sup>Douglas, "An Account of the Species of *Calochortus*; a Genus of American Plants." *Transactions of the Horticultural Society* 7 (1830) p. 275.

<sup>14</sup>Hooker, *Flora Boreali-Americana*, vol. 1, p. 223.

<sup>15</sup>Douglas, *Journal kept by David Douglas, 1823–27*, Some American Pines, pp. 340–41.

<sup>16</sup>Douglas, "Observations of Some Species of the Genera *Tetrao* and *Ortyx*." *Transactions of the Linnean Society* 16 (1833) p. 133.



# HORSES OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

BY A. G. WESSELIUS

When U.S. President Thomas Jefferson wrote out his instructions to Captain Meriwether Lewis for an epic expedition, he did not include horses in his planning.<sup>1</sup> At that time, people assumed that the Continental Divide was comparable in height to the Allegheny Mountains and was a relatively narrow rise separating watersheds that could be easily portaged with minimal need for horses.<sup>2</sup> When Lewis compiled a list of expedition requirements for the U.S. military, he did not request equipment for expedition horses.<sup>3</sup> He did, however, make arrangements for purchasing “Horsemen’s Cloths” and for shipping his saddle and bridle.<sup>4</sup> There are no records about when or if these items were ever used.

Horses, however, became an important part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, particularly in the inland West. Although waterways were the most important means of transportation from Camp Wood in the Illinois Territory to Fort Clatsop near the Pacific Ocean, members of the corps found themselves trading with Indian tribes for horses when they reached the Rocky Mountains.

The captains’ journal records, plus those of other corpsmen, help to illuminate some of the daily discrepancies that arose with the constant changes in the number of horses. The number of horses owned by the corps at any different time varied widely. Robert Hunt and Loren Gibbons have tabulated accountings of the stock employed.<sup>5</sup> More than 50 horses were required for the Continental Divide crossing; more than 70 were pressed into service for the homeward bound journey.

The Lewis and Clark journals also mention a number of horse-related topics, but few passages cover the specifics on the horses used by expedition. Horses were such an ordinary part of nineteenth-century life that expedition diarists often omitted details that would clarify many of today’s technical questions on topics including the care, feeding, and doctoring of horses.

## “EASY AND EXPEDITIOUS” TRANSPORT

Records from the five-month-long Camp Wood encampment, where the expedition recruits were selected are sketchy and do not clearly document the acquisition of horses from the U.S. government—the horses used for transportation, transporting supplies, and hunting forays.<sup>6</sup> When the expedition’s flotilla left Camp Wood, the military horses were returned to the government.

Only two horses owned by George Drouillard, a civilian scout, were kept for reconnaissance and hunting.

During their winter post in Fort Mandan from 1804 to 1805, the captains took counsel from their Mandan and Hidatsa Indian hosts and began to realize they needed horses to complete their mission. Lewis reported to Jefferson “by means of horse, the transportation of our baggage will be rendered easy and expeditious over land.”<sup>7</sup> The captains hired Charbonneau as an interpreter and his wife, Sacagawea, whose translation skills helped the captains to procure horses from Shoshone Indians.<sup>8</sup>

The waterborne expedition left Fort Mandan to search for the source of the Missouri River and seek a portage route to the Columbia River. On August 12,

---

“by means of horse, the transportation  
of our baggage will be rendered  
easy and expeditious over land.”

---



1805, however, when Lewis reached the summit of the Continental Divide and saw, “immense ranges of high mountains still to the West their tops partially covered with snow,” he fully grasped the desperate need for horses.<sup>9</sup> Lewis rode a borrowed Shoshone Indian horse to return and rendezvous with Captain Clark and the main party. After riding bareback for an hour, he elected to walk instead of riding without stirrups like his Indian companions. This absence of horse tack during this short trip resulted, later on, in innovative solutions to replace saddles and stirrups

### TRADING FOR HORSES

As the winter and the Bitterroot Mountains lay before them, the captains realized they needed horses to reach the coast. With Sacagawea’s help translating, the captains finally negotiated with the Shoshones for the acquisition of horses. Lewis stated on August 18, 1805, “I soon obtained three very good horses for which I gave an uniform coat, a pair of leggings, a few handkerchiefs, three knives and some other small articles the whole of which did not cost more than 20\$ in the U’ States. the Indians seemed quite as well pleased with their bargain as I was.”<sup>10</sup> In 1805, monetary values, the price paid for Indian horses was a bargain compared to the \$50 to \$200 price for a horse on the lower Missouri frontier.<sup>11</sup> A long bartering session settled the different cultural values between corpsmen and Indians.

The Shoshone Indians, however, soon realized the buyers’ desperate need for horses, and the corps paid increasingly larger amounts of merchandise for each horse purchased, though the corps did acquire one mule, for which they had to trade an iron battle-axe. The Indians grew hesitant to give up their horses. Eventually they insisted that weapons and ammunition had to be part of the trade. “Offering guns for horses was a sure indication of both the expedition’s need and the Shoshonis’ trading skill,” Historian James Ronda observed. “The Shoshonis had proven to be better Yankee traders than the Americans.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to bartering for horses, the corpsmen were making pack stock equipment that they needed for the Continental Divide portage. Horse packing details are rare in the journals but an 1801 military document sheds some light on packing during that era: “The Quarter Master Genl. will be so good as to furnish three Pack Horses, two pack-saddles complete with girths and croopers, four temporary boxes (2 feet long, 1 foot 2 inches wide, and 1 foot eight inches deep) and [blank space] lbs. of rope.”<sup>13</sup>

### SAWBUCK PACK SADDLES

Few journal entries mention pack stock and riding equipment. Pack saddles were probably patterned after the sawbuck pack saddle, with wooden cross-pieces front and back attached to wooden side bars. Lewis described how the corps constructed a pack saddle, not an easy endeavor in the wilderness. He noted on August 20, 1805, that “in this operation we find ourselves at a loss for nails and boards; for the first we substitute thongs of raw hide which answer very well, and for the last to cut off the blades of our oars and use the plank of some boxes which have heretofore held other articles and put those articles into sacks of raw hide which I have had made for the purpose.” By that means, he continued, “I have obtained as many board as will make 20 saddles, which I suppose will be sufficient for our present exigencies.”<sup>14</sup>

Sawbuck pack saddles are usually double-rigged with two “girths” and a “harness.” A harness has either a crooper or a britchen strap and a breast collar to stabilize the load.<sup>15</sup> A crooper or a britchen strap keeps the load from slipping forward when going downhill.<sup>16</sup> When going uphill, the breast collar prevents the load from slipping back on the horse. Whether croopers or britchen straps were used by the corps is left to speculation; the journals give no indication of which apparatus was employed for the constructed twenty pack saddles.



**Modern sawbuck packsaddle. The Corps built packsaddles with boards, paddles, and rawhide.**

A saddle pad under a pack saddle prevented the wooden side bars from creating friction injury on the pack animal’s back and withers. The corps’ saddle pads are mentioned, in passing, in the journals. Clark recounted the escape of Charbonneau’s horse, when it sped “down the hill to the village where he disengaged himself of his Saddle & the robe which was under it. ...”<sup>17</sup> On separate occasions, Sergeant Patrick Gass and Private Silas Goodrich were sent to obtain mountain goat hair for stuffing saddle pads.<sup>18</sup>



***We Proceeded On* by Charles Fritz reiterates the phrase used so many times in the Lewis and Clark journals that communicated the rugged determination of the Corps of Discovery.**

Buffalo robes and stuffed leather pads were probably used for pack saddle pads and for riding saddles.

Lewis also mentioned the difficulty of evenly distributing the load among the pack animals. It is vital, when packing cargo on stock animals, to attach balanced loads on each side of the pack saddle to prevent the load from slipping. Lewis was trying to solve this problem on August 18, 1805, when he “began the operation of forming the packages in proper parcels for the purpose of transporting them on horseback.”<sup>19</sup> Known today as panniers, the “parcels” were either sacks or boxes with straps for hanging them on a packsaddle, (similar to the dimensions of the wooden 1801 version described above.<sup>20</sup> Typically, after the packs were loaded, they are covered with a heavy cloth mantle or horse blanket, to protect the cargo from rain and snow.<sup>21</sup> The corps improvised and used dressed skins to cover their loads.<sup>22</sup>

Lewis was concerned about the mountainous terrain and the heavy load the pack stock was expected to carry, estimating that “it will require at least 25 horses to convey our baggage along such roads as I expect we shall be obliged to pass in the mountains.”<sup>23</sup> He was also concerned about the smaller size of the Indian horse.<sup>24</sup> Different in conformation from contemporary riding horses, Native American horses were shorter in stature; 14 to 14 ½ hands tall.<sup>25</sup> Stout and sure-footed, they were spirited horses with exceptional stamina.

A shortcoming of the literature on the expedition has been the lack of analysis given to the corps’ improvised riding equipment, such as specifics about riding saddles

or bridles. For example, when Clark reported, “...Made Saddles & Set out on our rout down the river by land. ...”<sup>26</sup> It is unclear whether he was referring to pack saddles or riding saddles. Makeshift bridles, without metal bits, and halters were probably constructed with rope and leather. The corps’ riding saddles, however, must have been a variation of the Shoshone Indian saddle that Captain Lewis described as a stuffed pad without stirrups.<sup>27</sup>

Horses were not only used for transportation. The discrepancy between horses purchased and pack saddles assembled accounted for at least three horses that were eaten. As Captain William Clark noted, the corps was “to purchase as many as we can to take our small proportion of baggage of the Parties. (& Eat if necessary) ...”<sup>28</sup> Three foals were included in the corps’ remuda for provisions in the event wild game could not be procured.

#### **“SORE BACKS AND SEVERAL PORE, AND YOUNG”**

The captains also had to contend with inferior pack stock. Native Americans sold their mediocre horses; culls and worn-out horses were kept for trading. On August 30, 1805, for example, Clark described the 29 horses the corps received from the Shoshone as “nearly all Sore Backs and Several pore, & young Those horses are indifferent, many Sore backs and others not accustomed to packs ...”<sup>29</sup> The Shoshone Indian trading practices were a harbinger of future horse purchases for the remainder of the journey. Occasionally, Native Americans gave away a quality horse as a gift to garner favor or to demonstrate prestigious status; but, in these instances, there was a subtle expectation of a return gift.



The journals provide very little information about the military measures employed for the cavalcade. Each captain kept his own journal inventory for horses under his division of responsibility; the two accountings are inconsistent. Consistent with nineteenth-century military protocol, the captains were expected to ride and the corporals would be assigned to manage the pack string. Lewis also arranged for the purchase of a horse for Sacagawea and her baby. Traditionally, the cavalcade would begin the overland journey in orderly military practice; the mounted captains guiding the horse handlers who led the pack stock. In practice, however, the travelling arrangement was vague and varied from circumstance to circumstance. This was particularly true as the corps crossed the formidable Bitterroot Mountains. For the remainder of the entire expedition travel routine was complicated as horses were killed, abandoned, consumed, lost, found, rented, traded, and purchased.

Horses—so casually regarded in the pre-expedition planning—were now essential to the corps’ survival. Fortunately the cavalcade met Salish Indians that possessed at least five hundred horses. On September 6, 1805, Clark wrote about the precautions the corps had to protect their new horses, noting that they “Secured [them] well for fear of their leaving us, and watched them all night for fear of their leaving us or the Indians prosuing & Stealing them.”<sup>30</sup>

## HERD-BOUND HORSES

Throughout the journey, the captives were constantly vexed by herd-bound horses attempting to escape and return to their former herd. Runaways, along with piracy, kept the size of the corps’ horse herd constantly in flux. Pickets, hobbles, and side-lines did not always work with the Indian horses as they were not trained for that type of restraint.<sup>31</sup> The horses, instead, Lewis noted on April 19, 1806, “frequently threw themselves by the ropes by which they were confined.”<sup>32</sup> On more than 30 different dates, horses escaped from their handlers; some of which were not found. Horses also wandered with hobbles. Hobbled horses can travel long distances with a hopping gait they develop by rearing their bound front legs then walking forward with their hind legs.

Feeding horses was one of the biggest stock management problems faced by the corps. Horses working every day need a lot of feed—at least 20 to 25 pounds of grass, which takes about six hours of good grazing to meet. When the forage is scarce, more feeding time is required. Hobbled horses wander and picketed horses need to be



*Troublesome Horse, George Catlin.*

constantly moved. Lewis described the evening horse feeding, “they were extremely restless and it required the attention of the whole guard through the night to retain them notwithstanding they were hubbled and picqueted.”<sup>33</sup> Horse guard duty was an additional burden for men that were fatigued, hungry, and exposed to the elements; negligence occurred.

When the corps reached a Nez Perce Indian village on today’s Clearwater River, they transitioned from an overland cavalcade to a waterborne expedition. Each horse in the herd was branded with a “stirrup iron” and the brand was placed on the “near fore Shoulder” according to Sergeant John Ordway and Private Joseph Whitehouse.<sup>34</sup> The horses were left with the Nez Perce Indians until the corps returned on their homeward bound journey. The iron actually used to brand the horses is the subject of controversy. Captain Lewis’s branding iron probably was not used because his branding iron was too intricate in design.<sup>35</sup> Constructed with a metal backing and measuring 4 inches wide and 4½ inches high with the inscription “U S Capt. M Lewis” in the upper half, this branding iron would have caused concentrated dermal burning and created a blotched configuration. Proper branding with an appropriately designed hot iron destroys the skin’s hair follicles resulting in a denuded scar bearing a specific design. The visible brand, no matter what device was used, as well as a cropped forelock would have identified the corps’ horses and facilitated their recovery.

## HORSE TRADING HOME

At Fort Clatsop, the captains made contingency plans for the homeward journey, which included bartering for horses for the journey home. It was not until April 14, 1806, near today’s White Salmon River that Sergeant Patrick Gass reported, “we saw some horses, the first we have seen since October last. These horses appear in good case.”<sup>36</sup> Quartered at Rock Fort Camp, the captains had to barter for horses and construct pack saddles and harnesses. Two days later on April 16, 1806, Lewis decided “twelve horses will be sufficient to transport our baggage. . .” and

advised that four horses would be necessary to portage the rapids.<sup>37</sup> The next day he informed Clark, “double the price we have heretofore offered for hoses and if possible obtain as many as five ... “to portage the rapids.”<sup>38</sup>

Again, the captains bartered for horses with several of the tribes along the Columbia River. This time, however, corps had few remaining trade items, so they were forced to do some creative bartering. Cooking kettles that could be spared were traded. Toussaint Charbonneau bartered for horses for his family’s needs in exchange for his belt, shirt, and two of his wife’s dresses. James Ronda clarifies, “Despite the fact that the frontiersmen knew good horse flesh when they saw it, they were usually at the mercy of native sellers who could set price and supply at will.”<sup>39</sup> As they moved up the Columbia River, the corps led the pack horses while the captains purchased as many horses as they could afford, built more pack saddles, and sold the expedition’s last two dugouts for beads.

Now completely dependent on horses, the expedition began the longest overland segment of the journey from above the rapids now known as Celilo Falls. The next order of business was buying two “nags” for the captains to ride on a bypass around the basalt cliffs of Wallula Gap. As they bartered with the Indians, even Clark’s limited medical skills were included in the negotiations to obtain provisions and horses. Lewis justified this by bemoaning the corps’ pitiful lack of trading goods May 5, 1806, “In our present situation I think it pardonable to continue this despection for they will not give us any provisions without compensation in merchandize and our stock is now reduced to a mere handful.”<sup>40</sup>

The newly acquired herd-bound males continued to escape and run away; compounded by the onset of spring breeding season. Clark reported, “we find the horses very troublesom particularly the Stud which compose 10/13 of our number of horses.”<sup>41</sup> Arriving at the Nez Perce Indian village the branded horses were collected and attempts were made to correct the problem. Captain Lewis’s attempt to exchange stallions for mares or geldings was unsuccessful; even two-for-one offers were turned down. Sergeant Ordway’s records a a solution for the unruly males: “we eat

Several of our Stud horses as they have been troublesome to us.”<sup>42</sup> Sergeant Gass reported another solution, “had an operation on seven of our horses.”<sup>43</sup>

This is one of the few places in the journal that refers to the process of castrating horses. No mention is made of how the corps restrained the horses to do so—but it is known that some Native Americans tribes lassoed a horse, choked it down, tied both sets of feet, blindfolded it, and left it in this condition until it was exhausted and sometimes nearly asphyxiated.<sup>44</sup> This method was harsh,

but probably the only way, without fencing, that the corpsmen could restrain horses for branding and castration. Lewis reported on May 14, 1806 that a Nez Perce Indian helped with the actual castration operation, cutting “them without tying the string of the stone as is usual, and assures us that they will do much better in that way, he takes care to scrape the string very clean and to separate it from all adhering veigns before he cuts it.”<sup>45</sup>

Adopted from a Spanish method of horse castration, the Nez Perce serrated testicular vessels before removing the testicle. This achieved homeostasis and involved less handling of retained tissues.<sup>46</sup> Drouillard castrated three more stallions, using the English method, which involved

cutting the testicular vessels then fashioning a knot with the testicular vessels to reduce bleeding. The captains admitted the Native American method was preferable.

Wounds from rope restraints also complicated frontier gelding operations. Captain Lewis recorded on May 21, 1806, “my horse which was castrated the day before yesterday wounded his thigh on the inner side with the rope by which he was confined that evening and is now so much swollen with the wound the castrating and the collection of vermen that he cannot walk, in short he is the most wretched specticle...”<sup>47</sup> Clark’s diagnosis was that the horse, “had his hip out of place ...”<sup>48</sup> Regardless of the cause, the horse was euthanized.

## A CAVALRY UNIT

When they returned to the Nez Perce Indians, the expedition was forced to stay more than one month as they were delayed by snow in the Bitterroot Mountains.



Captain Lewis’ brand on a cedar plank.

**“we find the horses very troublesom particularly the Stud which compose 10/13 of our number of horses.”**



Daily grazing was mandatory and the herds had to be brought in at noon each day to familiarize them with each other. Many horses had become so wild that they could not be caught without the help of Nez Perce Indian ropers. The expert ropers were not always available and the corpsmen were not competent with a lariat, so a corral was built to catch the runaway horses.

The corps took forays to outlying villages for provisions and to hunt. Hunting excursions also employed horses. The sorties ventured further and further from camp due to scarcity of wild game. Different horses were daily assigned to the hunters to prevent back injuries and to insure they would be used equally.

Before leaving the Nez Perce Indian homelands, the captains added horses to their remuda. Lewis reported, “we have sixty five horses at this time, most of them in excellent order and fine strong active horses.”<sup>49</sup> After the cached pack saddles were retrieved and repaired, the corpsmen began packing their stores for their eastward trek. Four sore back and “indifferent” horses were considered unsuitable for the mountain crossing and the corps exchanged them for sound Nez Perce Indian mounts.

For the first time, the corps was a cavalry unit—every corpsman was mounted. In addition to pack horses, the remuda had reserve horses to replace worn-out animals and for emergency provisions. After a two-week delay, the expedition crossed the Bitterroot Mountains without serious incident—only one horse was injured. In contrast to the 11 days it took to traverse the mountains heading west, the eastbound journey took six days. At Travelers Rest, Lewis reported, “our horses have stood the journey surprisingly well, most of them are yet in fine order, and only want a few days to restore them perfectly.”<sup>50</sup> The horses were rested and grazed for two days while the captains planned their explorations of the Marias and Yellowstone rivers.

## HORSES ON THE MARIAS

Lewis’s detachment to the Marias River consisted of nine mounted corpsmen and seven pack horses. They crossed the Continental Divide and rode to the Great Falls of the Missouri River without incident. While they were camped at the Missouri, ten of the best horses disappeared. Three strays were subsequently recovered, but the shortage of horses meant changing plans—a change that had dramatic repercussions. Instead of taking six corpsmen with him to explore on the Marias River, Lewis had horses for only three corpsmen. Six horses were needed for the Marias

River reconnaissance and four were required to portage the dugouts and cargo around the Great Falls of the Missouri.

The Two Medicine River skirmish might have been avoided with a larger detachment. Before they fled the confrontation with the Blackfoot Indians, the corpsmen rescued their horses, took possession of four Blackfoot horses, and hastily retreated to the Missouri River. After riding all day and most of the night, one hundred miles in the saddle, they stopped for a short rest. Lewis complained the morning of July 28, 1806, “I could scarcely stand, and the men complained of being in a similar situation ...”<sup>51</sup> After riding another 20 miles, they reached the Missouri River and, by a happy coincidence, joined the portage crew. Thirteen horses were left on the riverbank to become part of the wild horse herds roaming the prairies.

## FROM A PACK STRING TO A HERD OF WILD HORSES

Clark travelled with 19 corpsmen and the Charbonneau family mounted on horses, accompanied by 28 pack horses along the Yellowstone River. Their trip was complicated by runaways and lost horses that could not, Clark remarked, “be Separated from each other when driving with their loads on in the course of the day.”<sup>52</sup>

Clark’s records provide a clue to the pack string arrangement. Instead of being tied head to tail and led by a corpsman, Clark’s pack string was driven along the trail. With 8 corpsmen, the Charbonneaus and 50 horses, Clark left the Three Forks of the Missouri River to ride overland to the Yellowstone River. A horse-related injury to Private Gibson delayed the detachment’s progress down the Yellowstone River. Twenty-four horses disappeared while dugout canoes were being built to transport the injured soldier (see Yellowstone Canoe Camp article, WPO November 2011). Pryor and three corpsmen were ordered to take the remaining horses overland to the Mandan Indian villages. The second night out, the last of the corps’ horses were taken from the horse herders. Fifty horses became part of the Native American horse herds that roamed the prairies. Before leaving the Mandan Indian villages, Charbonneau was discharged and paid for his horse lost during government service which he had purchased with his own goods.

After the expedition had returned home, Lewis and Clark reported to Jefferson that horses would be important for crossing the vast expanse of the West, concluding that “... horses are to be obtained from the Indians of the Rocky Mountains and west of them [to] reduce the expenses of transportation over this portage. ...”<sup>53</sup> Horses would continue to play an important role in the fledgling country’s expansion into the West. ❖

Dr. A. G. “Doc” Wesseliuss is a retired veterinarian who has spent his life working with horses and currently volunteers his pack string for back country trail maintenance. An active LCTHF member, he serves on the board of directors of the Washington State Chapter.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783 – 1854*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 61–66.

<sup>2</sup>John Logan Allen, *Lewis and Clark And The Image Of The American Northwest*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), pp. 109–126.

<sup>3</sup>Jackson, pp. 69–75.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 92 and p. 107.

<sup>5</sup>For information on numerical accounting of expedition horses, see: Robert R. Hunt, *Hoofbeats & Nightmares: A Horse Chronicle of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, (*We Proceeded On*, Vol.20, No. 4, November 1994 and Vol. 21, No. 1, February 1995), pp. 4–9 and pp. 4–8. Also, Loren G. Gibbons, *All Them Horses and One Poor Mule: A numerical accounting of the Corps of Discovery’s Livestock*. (*We Proceeded On*, Vol. 28, No. 3, August 2002), pp. 26–32.

<sup>6</sup>Alan H. Hartley, *Lewis & Clark Lexicon of Discovery*, (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2004), p. 139.

<sup>7</sup>Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783 – 1854*, p. 231–234.

<sup>8</sup>Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, 13 volumes, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983–2001), Vol. 3, p. 312.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup>James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among The Indians*, (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) p. 154.

<sup>13</sup>Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783–1854*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Moulton, Vol. 5, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup>Girths, plural form of today’s cinch, are leather straps positioned around the animal’s chest to stabilize riding or pack saddles.

<sup>16</sup>A crooper is a circular rolled leather strap that fits under the tail and around the tail head, then attached to the packsaddle with a leather strap; used for light loads. A britchen strap is a flat leather strap that fits around the hips and rump, then attached to the packsaddle with two or more leather straps on each side of the pack animal; used for heavy loads.

<sup>17</sup>Moulton, Vol. 7, p. 157.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 297, 308.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 117.

<sup>20</sup>Pannier is a derivation of the French word for bread basket.

<sup>21</sup>Manty is a derivation of the Spanish word for horse blanket.

<sup>22</sup>Moulton, Vol. 5, p.187.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 158.

<sup>24</sup>For more information on Pacific Northwest Indian horses see: Gene & Mollie Eastman, *Bitterroot Crossing—Lewis and Clark Across the Lolo Trail*, (University of Idaho: Northwest Historical Manuscript Series, 2002), p. 58 and pp. 65–66. Francis Haines, *Where Did the Plains Indians Get their Horses?* (*The American Anthropologist*, Volume XL, Number 1, January–March, 1938), pp. 112–117. Ibid., *The Spread of Horses among the Plains Indians*, (*The American Anthropologist*, Volume XL, Number 3, July–September, 1938), pp.429–437. Eugene S. Hunn, *Nch’i-Wana “The Big River” Mid-Columbia Indians and their Land*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1990), pp. 23–27.

<sup>25</sup>Hand, equivalent to 4 inches; unit of measurement for size of a horse at the withers. 14 to 14 ½ hands is 56 to 58 inches in height.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 179

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, pp.178–9.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 189.

<sup>31</sup>A picket is a rope tied to a peg fixed in the ground and tied to an ankle to tether a horse. A hobble is a leather strap or a rope tied to the front feet of a horse to limit locomotion. A side-line is a rope or ropes fastened to hobbles and tied to one or both hind feet to severely limit locomotion.

<sup>32</sup>Moulton, Vol. 7, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 143.

<sup>34</sup>Moulton, Vol. 11, p. 338.

<sup>35</sup>For information on Captain Lewis’ branding iron see Hunt, *Hoofbeats & Nightmares: A Horse Chronicle of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Ibid., p. 8n.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 210.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 126 and p.131.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 126

<sup>39</sup>Ronda, p. 217.

<sup>40</sup>Moulton, Vol. 7, pp. 209–210.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 158.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 310.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., Vol. 11, p. 227

<sup>44</sup>Robert H. Ruby & John A. Brown, *The Cayuse Indians: Imperial Tribesmen of Old Oregon*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), p.18.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 257.

<sup>46</sup>For more information on horse castration see: Douglas Osborne, “Nez Perce Horse Castration – A Problem In Diffusion”, (*Davidson Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 1), pp.113–122.

<sup>47</sup>Moulton, Vol. 7, p. 277.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 279.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 313.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 66.

<sup>51</sup>Moulton, Vol. 8, p 137.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 169.

<sup>53</sup>Jackson, pp. 326, 338.



# THE MAN WHO ABANDONED MERIWETHER LEWIS

BY TONY L. TURNBOW

The first person to interpret a historic moment wields enduring influence over the public's perception of the event.<sup>1</sup> Major James Neelly first reported Governor Meriwether Lewis's death in Tennessee—allegedly by suicide—as Neelly stated in a letter to former President Thomas Jefferson. His version of events gained immediate and widespread publication in newspapers and shaped the public's perception of Lewis at the end of his life. Newly discovered evidence surrounding Lewis's death, however, will challenge these perceptions.

Major James Neelly was appointed federal agent to the Chickasaw Nation in July 1809. He assumed his position in August 1809 and arrived at Fort Pickering in mid-September, where Governor Meriwether Lewis had been detained on a trip from St. Louis to Washington. Neelly offered to ride with Lewis through the Chickasaw territory to Nashville, Tennessee. The great explorer died on that journey. A mystery that has troubled historians for decades is why Neelly, who was given the task of protecting Governor Lewis, disappeared shortly before Lewis's death.

---

**A mystery that has troubled historians for decades is why Neelly, who given the task of protecting Governor Lewis, disappeared shortly before Lewis's death.**

---

On October 18, 1809, a letter written to former President Thomas Jefferson informed him that Governor Meriwether Lewis had died on the trip up the Natchez Trace in the early morning hours of October 11, adding, “and I am sorry to say by suicide.”<sup>2</sup> It was signed “Major James Neelly.” The Neelly account implied that the day before Lewis's death two horses strayed and Neelly had stayed behind to search for them with the Chickasaw Indian who had accompanied their party. Lewis rode ahead, the letter said, to the house belonging

to Robert Grinder where the two men had arranged to meet. It claimed that Neelly arrived at Grinder's house “some time later” to find that the distraught governor had died from self-inflicted wounds to the head and chest. The

letter then credited Neelly for making arrangements for the governor's burial.

Court records recently discovered in Williamson County, Tennessee, reveal that on Wednesday, October 11, 1809, the date the Neelly letter claimed that Lewis died, Major James Neelly appeared before a jury of twelve men and a panel of three judges in Franklin, Tennessee to defend

himself in a lawsuit brought by businessman Thomas Masterson.<sup>3</sup> Unlike modern-day civil actions, the court issued an order requiring Neelly's personal appearance. The order stated in part, "To the Sheriff of Williamson County, Greeting, You are hereby commanded to take the body of James Neelly if to be found within your county, and him safely keep, so that you have him before the Justices of our court of Pleas and Quarter-Sessions, to be held for the county of Williamson the second Monday of October next. ..."<sup>4</sup>

In order to go free before the trial, Neelly executed a personal appearance bond, agreeing to personally appear on the day of trial.<sup>5</sup> His relative, George Neelly, co-signed the bond. James Neelly's signature on the note in the court file matches the signature on a December 30, 1809 letter that Neelly signed as Chickasaw Agent.<sup>6</sup> If Neelly had not appeared, the court would have noted his absence in the court minutes and declared a forfeiture of the bond.<sup>7</sup> The absence of such a notation proves that Neelly was present.

The town of Franklin was more than a day's ride north of Grinder's Tavern, where Lewis died and almost a two-day ride north of the point where Neelly said they parted company. Either the circumstances of Lewis's death were different than the letter reported—or October 11, 1809, was not the date of Lewis's death.

### WHO WAS MAJOR JAMES NEELLY?

Historians have admitted knowing little about Major James Neelly, the man whose credibility has determined the date as well as the circumstances of Lewis's death.<sup>8</sup> Described by his son as a man who enjoyed fiddle, dancing, and strong drink, James Neelly became overseer of the road which became known as "'Major Neelly's Road' after the former overseer was assaulted by a James Neelly."<sup>9</sup> He did endear himself with the Chickasaw Indians along the Natchez Road. Half-Chickasaw John McLish, who operated an inn for travelers about five miles south of Grinder's Inn, named his first son, James Neely McLish, in his honor.

After the land speculation boom in 1806, Neelly became a "cash poor" land owner, like so many others in Tennessee.<sup>10</sup> A judgment had been rendered against Neelly on a debt in the case *Brown v. Neelly* in 1806. By summer 1809, Neelly's debts had mounted. President Jefferson's embargo on foreign trade brought the national economy to a standstill, and the Tennessee economy was in severe distress. Neelly served as administrator of the estate of Isaac Leonard, his cousin Sophia's first husband.<sup>11</sup> Although he had a fiduciary duty to safeguard Leonard's



MICHAEL HAYNES WWW.MHAYNESART.COM

**Capt. Meriwether Lewis**

assets, Neelly spent the estate funds. Two Baltimore residents, Hugh Young and William Young, filed suit against James Neelly in Nashville June 16, 1809, alleging essentially that Neelly had taken \$700 from the estate that was due to them. On July 18, 1809, a Williamson County jury rendered a verdict against him for \$276 in the case *Wright v. Neelly*. Virginia resident Francis Preston filed suit against Neelly in August, 1809 for unjustly taking \$1,075.55 from the Leonard estate. Joseph Thornberg was granted a judgment against Neelly for a pre-existing debt in July 1811. Facing apparent insolvency in an area where little cash was available in 1809, Neelly needed a reliable source of income. He later admitted that the appointment as Chickasaw agent saved him from financial ruin.

Major Neelly crossed paths with Lewis at Fort Pickering as the governor was traveling to Washington to document his request for reimbursement of expenses and to defend his reputation. Lewis's boat had been pulled ashore, and Lewis, who was ill, was placed under





MICHAEL HAYNES WWW.MHAYNESART.COM

**Grinder's Stand.** Governor Lewis travels into Grinder's Stand greeted by Mrs. Grinder.



guard, ostensibly for his own protection. Neelly arrived at the fort on September 18, 1809, three days after Lewis was confined.<sup>12</sup>

It was not uncommon for the Chickasaw agent to travel to the Chickasaw Bluffs, as it was one of the primary areas where business with the Chickasaw tribe was conducted.<sup>13</sup> However, almost a year earlier, Neelly had posted a bond to make a personal appearance in Franklin, just south of Nashville, at the beginning of the October session of the County Court on October 9, 1809. Neelly volunteered to ride with Lewis toward Nashville since he was already making the journey. President Jefferson later wrote that Neelly “kindly determined to accompany & watch over” Lewis.<sup>14</sup> They were joined by Lewis’s servant John Pearney,<sup>15</sup> Neelly’s servant, a Chickasaw interpreter, and some Chickasaw chiefs according to one account, along with the trunk that had been packed for the Chickasaw Nation.<sup>16</sup>

As a matter of protocol, the Chickasaw agent’s offer to escort the governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory through the Chickasaw Territory would seem appropriate, though it is not clear how the two men viewed each other. Both men were thirty-five years old and Virginians by birth.<sup>17</sup> Jefferson had rewarded Lewis with General Wilkinson’s position as Governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory. Neelly, however, would have been loyal to Wilkinson, who most likely approved his appointment as Chickasaw agent.

## LEWIS’S FINAL JOURNEY

The route the Lewis and Neelly party followed from Fort Pickering to the Natchez Trace has been the subject of speculation. Fort Pickering, on the Chickasaw Bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, was the location of a major Chickasaw trading village. The nearest large settlement was located near Houston, Mississippi, the site of the Chickasaw Agency house.<sup>18</sup> The Hatchie River formed a natural barrier between Fort Pickering and Nashville.<sup>19</sup> Major trails ran southeast from Fort Pickering across northern Mississippi to the Chickasaw Agency, and there were several villages along those paths where the travelers could find shelter and supplies.<sup>20</sup> In a November 1811 document attributed to Fort Pickering Commander

Gilbert Russell, he states that the party traveled the “usual route thro’ the Indian country,” which would have been the main path from the Chickasaw Bluffs to the Chickasaw Old Town.<sup>21</sup> The Neelly letter dated October 18, 1809, said that the party rested at the Agency House, located in the Mississippi Territory.

During the group’s brief stay at the agency, Neelly arranged for a prisoner, George Leanheart, to be transported for trial in federal court in Nashville. Although it was his duty to escort the prisoner, Neelly, who was short on funds, paid army officer Jeremiah Love ninety dollars to take the prisoner in his place, which allowed Neelly to escort the governor to Nashville without the additional responsibility.<sup>22</sup> After leaving the Agency House, the party

would have followed the quickest route north, the Natchez Road, and boarded a ferry across the one mile-wide Tennessee River in present-day Alabama. Natchez Road resident, Levi Colbert, who operated an inn in what is now Alabama, later confirmed that Lewis had stayed at his

---

**Neelly would have known that Lewis faced the risk that highwaymen would rob or kill him, particularly if Lewis was as ill as the Neelly letter claimed, yet by the letter’s admission, Neelly’s disappearance forced Lewis to ride ahead with only two servants to protect him.**

---

inn during the final journey.<sup>23</sup>

Contrary to the image of the 1809 Natchez Trace as a wilderness inhabited only by a few independent frontier families, the area’s northern half was governed by a small network of leaders related by business or intermarriage.<sup>24</sup> Many residents in the vicinity of Grinder’s Tavern on the literal border of the Chickasaw Nation were also interrelated.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, all the people Lewis is known to have met beyond Fort Pickering knew Major Neelly, and many were acquainted with or related to each other. After being ferried across the Tennessee River, the party made its way north to Tennessee, according to the Neelly letter, and camped about a day’s ride from the river, just north of present-day Collinwood, Tennessee near or at a Chickasaw inn known as “Young Factor’s Stand.” At that point, Neelly was about 80 miles south of Franklin, where he would appear on October 11, 1809.

The Natchez Road, long known as a haven for bandits, remained a dangerous road for travelers in Tennessee in 1809.<sup>26</sup> Neelly would have known that Lewis faced the risk that highwaymen would rob or kill him, particularly if Lewis was as ill as the Neelly letter claimed, yet by the letter’s admission, Neelly’s disappearance forced Lewis to ride ahead with only two servants to protect him. Natchez

Trace historian Dawson Phelps's opinion that the Natchez Trace was safe for travel by 1809 is cited by those who theorize that Lewis committed suicide. However, as late as 1811, Tennessee Governor Willie Blount asked the Tennessee legislature to fund law enforcement for the road because of numerous reports of robberies of travelers.<sup>27</sup>

The assertion in the Neelly letter that he left the governor's company the day Lewis was shot is suspect. He simply could not have made the ride to Franklin and back in a day. The latest Neelly could have parted company with Lewis was October 9, 1809, rather than October 10, 1809, in order for Neelly to appear in Franklin at the convening of court at 8 a.m. October 11, 1809.<sup>28</sup> Neelly's bond, in fact, required him to appear in Franklin two days earlier—on October 9, 1809, at the beginning of the court's session. The discrepancies are critical. If Lewis died October 11, 1809, then the implication that Neelly was only a day's ride away from Grinder's Tavern is false. Post riders and military men regularly traveled up to 50 miles a day on the Natchez Road. Conversely, if Neelly and Lewis parted company 24 hours before Lewis's death, then the date of Meriwether Lewis's death is inaccurate: he did not die on October 11, 1809.

The Neelly version said that he interrupted his mission to protect Governor Lewis because two horses strayed and he stayed behind to find them. Although stray horses were common on the Natchez Road at that time, Neelly had to travel light to arrive in Franklin in time for his trial.<sup>29</sup> It is more likely, however, that Neelly's Chickasaw friends would have rounded up any stray horses, if in fact any strayed.

The November 1809 document also attributed to Russell added the interesting observation that on the night preceding Lewis's arrival at Grinder's house "one of His (Lewis's) horses *and one of the Chickasaw agents with whom he was traveling strayed off from the camp* [emphasis added] and in the Morning could not be found."<sup>30</sup>

The Russell document repeats Neelly's statement about horses straying before Lewis's death but adds a new fact: that the party searched for the missing agent, implying that Neelly left the camp without explanation during the prior evening. The document relates no conversation between Neelly and Lewis about meeting at the Grinder

house. The other Chickasaw agent, presumably the interpreter, stayed behind with the Chickasaws to find the horse or horses. The second of three documents attributed to Russell on the subject of Lewis's death implies that Neelly abandoned Lewis.

The morning of October 11, 1809, as Governor Meriwether Lewis supposedly lay dying at Grinder's Tavern from two or three gunshot wounds, and, the accounts added, a cut throat, Major James Neelly appeared before a jury in Franklin in an action brought by Thomas Masterson for a debt of \$153.44. Under the appearance bond, Neelly's failure to appear would have subjected his relative to liability and the major would have been apprehended.<sup>31</sup> The jury rendered a verdict against Neelly.

---

**The morning of October 11, 1809, as Governor Meriwether Lewis supposedly lay dying at Grinder's Tavern from two or three gunshot wounds, and, the accounts added, a cut throat, Major James Neelly appeared before a jury in Franklin in an action brought by Thomas Masterson for a debt of \$153.44.**

---

The Neelly letter of October 18, 1809 states that he rode to Grinder's house and arranged for Lewis's burial. That statement is also suspect. Neelly's case was the fifth trial to be heard by the court on October 11, 1809, near the end of the docket. If Neelly immediately left the Court House on the Franklin Public Square after

the verdict and rode directly to Grinder's Tavern, he would not have arrived until October 13, 1809. Though his late arrival supports the statement that he arrived "some time after"—it is unlikely he arranged for Lewis's burial on October 11, 1809. It is more likely that the Grinders' neighbors buried Lewis than to assume, as Neelly's letter implies, that Lewis's body was left unburied more than a day in the "excessively hot" October weather in Tennessee.<sup>32</sup>

None of the three accounts attributed to the innkeeper Priscilla Grinder mentions leaving the body unburied for two days until Neelly's arrival. In Mrs. Grinder's third account, she claimed that Major Neelly and Lewis's servant John Pearney buried Lewis, not realizing that Neelly supposedly only took credit for making the burial arrangements in his letter to Jefferson. Later accounts credited Grinders' neighbors with building a coffin and burying Lewis.<sup>33</sup> According to local lore, Grinder neighbor Samuel Whiteside, of Maury, Tennessee, was the man responsible for making Lewis's coffin.

Another misconception about the events surrounding Lewis's death was that Grinder's Tavern in 1809 was remote. In fact, the tavern was located within a few feet of the





NPS PHOTO

**This section of Old Trace, located near the Grinders Stand site.**

Natchez Road, which was traveled each year by thousands of northbound boatmen, southbound settlers, as well as numerous Chickasaw Indians. The tavern was situated five miles from the McLish Stand to the south and five miles from Dobbins' Stand to the north, where the Columbia Turnpike intersected with the Natchez Road.<sup>34</sup> Neighboring farms were located between Grinder's and Dobbins'.<sup>35</sup>

### FROM HEARSAY TO HISTORY

If Lewis died on the three-hundred-acre tract leased to the Grinders, his death would have fallen under the jurisdiction of the local Maury County justice of the peace or coroner rather than the Chickasaw federal agent.<sup>36</sup> Most likely, some neighbors later served as jurors at the coroner's inquest, as documented in the 1905 Maury County Court minutes.<sup>37</sup> Because Lewis had probably already been buried when Neelly arrived at Grinder's house, the major would not have seen Lewis's wounds. Anything Neelly would have reported would have been hearsay. That hearsay forms the common understanding of the circumstances of Lewis's death, including the date of his death. Conveniently for Neelly, the date the letter said Lewis died was the same

date on which he had an alibi witnessed by three judges and twelve jurors should he ever be accused of killing Lewis.

Though the Neelly letter claims that Lewis died on October 11, 1809, Major Neelly did not appear in Nashville until October 18, 1809, to report that he had failed his mission to protect Governor Lewis—at least that is when the Neelly letter was written to President Jefferson. What Neelly did in the interim or why he delayed writing such an important report is only a matter of speculation. Neelly supposedly made his official report to U.S. Army Captain John Brahan in Nashville. On furlough as commander of Hiwassee Garrison, Brahan served as the federal receiver of funds for Mississippi Territory land sales. Captain Brahan wrote a letter to President Jefferson, the same date as the Neelly letter, essentially repeating the facts stated in the Neelly letter.<sup>38</sup> The *Nashville Democratic Clarion* published a news story based upon the same account (adding its own detail that Lewis also suffered knife or razor wounds to the throat and “hams” or misspelling for “hands”). That story was picked up by other papers across the nation. It is likely that witnesses who had seen Lewis's body reported the additional wounds, but the *Clarion* account otherwise matches the Neelly letter, suggesting a common source. The same issue contains an advertisement from Neelly, implying or confirming his contact with the paper. The Neelly version of events—put forward through the newspaper account, the report to Captain Brahan, and the letter to President Jefferson—was quickly established as the official and accepted version of Governor Meriwether Lewis's death.

If the Neelly letter was written to spread the suicide theory, it is significant how quickly the Neelly and Brahan letters describing Lewis's suicide got into the right hands. Lewis's servant, John Pearney, previously worked as Thomas Jefferson's servant in the White House, and Jefferson trusted him enough to send him to St. Louis with Jefferson's protégé, Lewis.<sup>39</sup> Neelly, who had no funds, gave fifteen dollars to the equally cash-strapped John Pearney to help him reach and deliver the Neelly letter to Jefferson.<sup>40</sup> Jefferson forwarded it on to President James Madison, giving the Neelly version of Lewis's death the weight of his own credibility.<sup>41</sup> The argument can be made that John Pearney was paid to deliver the letters because it was critical the suicide account was handed to Jefferson by someone Jefferson could trust. Pearney took his own life several months after delivering Neelly's letter to Jefferson.<sup>42</sup>

Though few modern authors question Neelly's actions, motives, or veracity, Fort Pickering Commander Russell, who knew Neelly, was not so trusting. Russell wrote





**Meriwether Lewis's grave on the Natchez Trace Parkway. Located at mile 385.9 on the 444-mile parkway, this monument was built over Lewis's grave in 1938. The broken column represents a life cut short.**

January 31, 1810, that if someone other than Neelly had accompanied Lewis, Lewis would still be alive.<sup>43</sup> Russell also said, "This Neely (sic) also says he lent the Gov. money which cannot be so for he has none himself & the Gov. has more than one hundred \$ in notes & specie bearing a check I \_\_\_\_ of 99/50 none of which \_\_\_\_ can be found."<sup>44</sup> In addition to accusing Neelly of lying, Russell's statement suggests that Neelly took Lewis's money.

Neelly was relieved of his duties in 1812 for questions about his own loyalty or for failing to encourage the Chickasaws to properly support the American government at a time of impending war.<sup>45</sup> After losing the support of the Chickasaws, Neelly was charged with attacking a man in the Chickasaw Nation, frequently becoming intoxicated and indecently exposing himself to the Chickasaws,

becoming intimate with a woman other than his wife at the Agency, and self-dealing on land transactions with the Chickasaws.<sup>46</sup> Neelly was also known to have stolen Lewis's tomahawk, pistols, and dirk rather than surrender them to the U.S. Army or give them to John Pearney to take to Lewis's family.<sup>47</sup> He was reported to have carried Lewis's dirk and pistols continually with him.<sup>48</sup> Rather than hiding the fact that he had bungled the most important mission of his career by failing to protect the Governor of the Louisiana Territory, Neelly's displaying of Lewis's distinctive pistols and dirk demonstrated to inhabitants of the southwest territory that Neelly was associated with Lewis's death. He carried around the distinctive pistols and knife as if he were bragging about his role in Lewis's death.

Neelly subsequently failed to appear in Nashville for a court date in another lawsuit on October 25, 1809, and a judgment was rendered against him in the matter of *Preston v. Neelly*. Neelly's absence from such an important appearance in Nashville only a week after he purportedly penned the October 18, 1809 letter to Jefferson makes his behavior more suspicious. The plaintiff, Francis Preston, was the father of William Clark's brother-in-law and Lewis's friend William Preston, and perhaps Neelly or his protectors did not want him questioned about Lewis's death by people who were closely acquainted with Lewis.<sup>49</sup>

The October 18, 1809 misrepresentations of Neelly's whereabouts at the time of Lewis's death do not prove that he played any role other than abandoning the man he "kindly" agreed to protect. The fact that Neelly was desperate for money does not prove his complicity in a plot to take Lewis's life for financial gain. Without additional

---

**Though the Neelly letter claims that Lewis died on October 11, 1809, Major Neelly did not appear in Nashville until October 18, 1809, to report that he had failed his mission to protect Governor Lewis—at least that is when the Neelly letter was written to President Jefferson.**

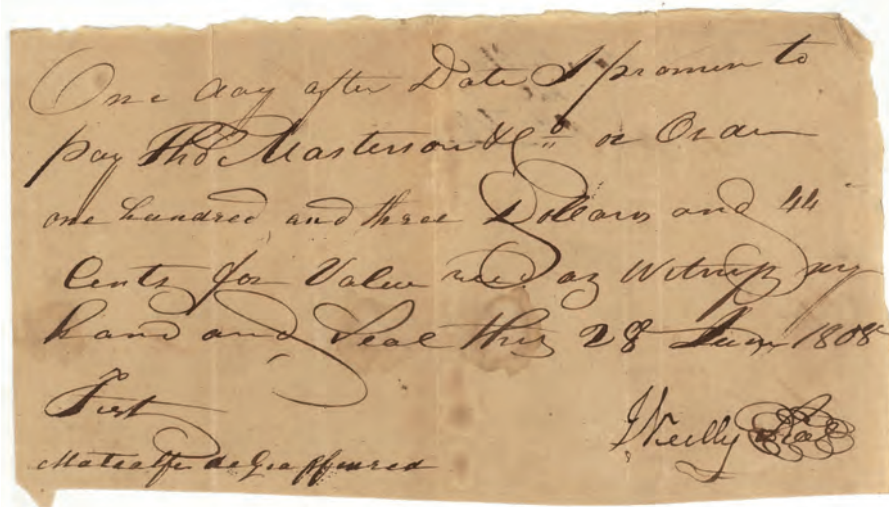
---

facts, the most defensible explanation from the evidence of a slit throat and missing funds on the Natchez Trace is that Meriwether Lewis was killed during a robbery, and that the suicide account was contrived to shield Major Neelly from disciplinary action for abandoning Lewis on

a road where robberies and murders were frequent.<sup>50</sup>

The more troubling possibility, however, was that Neelly did not write the October 18 letter to Jefferson. The Neelly signature on the Jefferson letter—though containing his unique "N" and "Y"—is the only letter out of almost twenty Neelly letters of record in which

the “James” is spelled out. In all other Neelly letters, the first name is signed with a simple “J.” More significantly, Major James Neelly’s purported signature appeared on two letters written on October 18, 1809, from two places miles apart. On October 18, 1809, the same date as the Neelly letter to Jefferson was written from Nashville, Major Neelly wrote a letter from the Chickasaw Agency to the Secretary of War requesting reimbursement for the funds he advanced to officer Love for transporting the prisoner to Nashville.<sup>51</sup> The signature on the Chickasaw Agency letter more closely resembles the signature on the other Neelly letters. The implications of the second October 18, 1809 letter are beyond the scope of this article, but the existence of the second letter also undermines the reliability of the Neelly letter to Jefferson.<sup>52</sup>



**A copy of the bond summoning Captain James Neelly to appear in court in Williamson County.**

For two centuries, the prevailing theory that Meriwether Lewis committed suicide has been based primarily upon Major James Neelly’s account of the events in the October 18, 1809 letter to Jefferson.<sup>53</sup> Neelly’s position as a federal agent gave him credibility. As a result, Lewis’s reputation has suffered the vilest of attacks. The accepted date of Lewis’s death as October 11, 1809, was also based solely upon accounts attributed to Neelly. The historical record would be better served if harsher scrutiny were turned on the character of James Neelly, as Captain Russell was willing to do, instead of on the reasons why Lewis may have taken his own life.

Any discussion of Lewis’s death should begin with the admission that no conclusive contemporaneous evidence exists about how he died or about the exact date of his death. Beginning with that concession, those who believe he committed suicide and those who believe he

was murdered must admit that all of these theories are, admittedly, historical speculation and can be evaluated on their own merits. At a minimum, the man who abandoned Meriwether Lewis has no credibility as the author of the conclusion of Lewis’s biography. ❖

*Tony L. Turnbow lives in Hohenwald, Tenn. and practices law in Franklin. He is a member of LCTHF’s Meriwether Lewis Chapter.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I credit Maury County, Tennessee archivist Bob Duncan for pointing out the “power of first interpretation.”

<sup>2</sup>Major James Neelly to Thomas Jefferson, 18 October 1809, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 467-468.

<sup>3</sup>There were three adult men and one minor named James “Neelly” or “Neely” living in Williamson County in October 1809. Two independent forensic handwriting experts have confirmed that the signature on the note that was the subject of the October 11, 1809 trial matches the signature on Neelly’s December 30, 1809 letter as Chickasaw Agent to Secretary of War William Eustis. *Masterson & Co. v. Neelly*, 11 October 1809, Williamson County Court Records, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>James Neelly to William Eustis, 30 December 1809, microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Danisi, in his book *Uncovering the Truth About Meriwether Lewis*, (Prometheus Books, 2012) published after this article was submitted, demonstrates from an 1805 case in which Neelly failed to appear as a witness that Neelly’s absence would have been noted on the court records. In the *Masterson* case, Neelly was a defendant under the penalty of a *habeas corpus* and an appearance bond. The court was even more certain to record Neelly’s absence in the 1809 case. Danisi misinterprets the legal term from the court minutes that the parties “appeared by and thro’ their attor(neys).” The word “appeared” refers to the legal presentation of evidence rather than the physical presence of the parties. A review of the Williamson County Court minutes from 1805 to 1812 shows that records of all trials, including criminal trials, began with that phrase. Applying Danisi’s legal interpretation of that phrase equally to all the cases leads to the unsupportable conclusion that neither plaintiffs nor defendants, including criminal defendants, ever appeared at trial. It is not common practice in jury trials even today to waive the parties’ appearance.

<sup>8</sup>Dawson A. Phelps, “The Tragic Death of Meriwether Lewis,” *William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History* 13, no. 3 (1956) pp. 305-18.



<sup>9</sup>Book 1, p. 53, Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN (refers to Major Neelly's Road). Book 1, p. 464, Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN (names Neelly as Overseer). William Neelly may also have been known as "Major Neelly."

*Who Was Who Among the Southern Indians, a genealogical notebook, 1698-1907*, Don Martini, (Falkner, MS, 1998) p. 461.

*Who Was Who Among the Southern Indians, a genealogical notebook, 1698-1907*, Don Martini, (Falkner, MS, 1998) p. 460. *Department of the Interior Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, In the matter of the Enrollment of Sally L. Campbell for enrollment as a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation*, 27 September 1898, Chickasaw Packet 1349, Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup>Conversation of author with former owner about Neelly land, Fall 2009.

*Brown v. Neelly*, July, 1806, Williamson County Court Minutes, book 1, p. 224, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN. J.W.M. Breazeale, *Life as it is; or, Matters and things in general: containing, amongst other things, historical sketches of the exploration and first settlement of the State of Tennessee ... descriptions of natural curiosities; a collection of anecdotes, &c.* (Knoxville, TN: J. Williams, 1842; Nashville: C. Elder, 1969), p. 240. Citations are to the Elder edition.

<sup>11</sup>Isaac Leonard and Sophia Neelly, marriage certificate, dated May 2, 1800, attested to by James's father William Neelly. Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Archives, Nashville, TN. The clerk spelled "Neely" with one "l", but William signed "Neelly" with two "l's."

*Hugh Young and William Young v. James Neelly, administrator of Isaac Leonard, deceased*, 16 June 1809, Nashville Court of Common Pleas Minutes, microfilm, M-1313, Roll 1, National Archives at Atlanta. James Coffield Mitchell, *The Tennessee Justice's Manual, and Civil Officer's Guide* (Nashville: J.C. Mitchell and C.C. Norvell, 1833), pp. 71-76. Neelly could have pled either that the estate had no funds or that there were inadequate funds to pay the debt. He never pled either defense; therefore, he must have found sufficient property in the estate and failed to pay the creditors.

*John Wright v. James Neelly*, 18 July 1809, book 1, p. 421, Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN.

*Francis Preston v. James Neelly*, 16 June 1810, Minutes of U.S. Circuit Court at Nashville, microfilm, M-1313, National Archives at Atlanta.

*Joseph Thornberg v. James Neelly, adm. of Isaac Leonard, deceased*, 16 October 1811, Book 1, p. 434, Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN.

<sup>12</sup>Statement of Gilbert C. Russell, 26 November 1811, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 573-574. Russell said that Lewis arrived at the fort on September 15. The Neelly letter said he arrived at the fort on October 18, 1809, and Lewis had arrived two days earlier. Major James Neelly to Thomas Jefferson, 18 October 1809, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 467-468.

<sup>13</sup>Neelly was ordered to take possession of goods delivered to

the Chickasaw Bluffs for distribution to the tribe. Letter from the War Department to James Neelly, 21 July 1809, microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta. Based upon a comparison of an account of distributions to the Choctaw at the Agency House in 1813, those distributions were likely made at the Agency House. *Journal of Andrew Jackson Edmonson*, Mississippi State Archives. The Russell statement stated that a trunk had been packed for the Nation and that Lewis and Neelly left Fort Pickering accompanied by Chickasaw Chiefs and interpreters. The chiefs were probably the Colberts.

*Masterson v. Neelly*, 11 October 1809, Williamson County Court Records, Williamson County Archives, Archives Storage Facility, Franklin, TN. The original court file contains the original note, complaint, attachment, and appearance bond.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Paul Allen, 18 August 1813, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 592.

<sup>15</sup>John Pearney to Thomas Jefferson, 10 February 1810, Library of Congress Online Collection, with credit to Kira Gale for the information. Most authors have spelled the servant's name "Pernier" but the servant signed his name "John Pearney."

<sup>16</sup>Statement of Gilbert C. Russell, 26 November 1811, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962) pp. 573-574.

<sup>17</sup>Neelly was born December 24, 1773.

<sup>18</sup>Rush Nutt, "Diary of a Tour through the Western and Southern Parts of the United States in America," *Journal of Mississippi History*, v. 48, 1986, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup>I thank Bob Duncan for this observation. Glover's Trace, an unimproved trail and later as a fork of the Natchez Trace ran north from the Chickasaw Old Town east of the Hatchie River to the mouth of the Duck River in West Tennessee. It did not lead to Grinder's Tavern. Major Neelly, in fact, opened that second route as a military road after Lewis's death.

<sup>20</sup>Nutt, "Diary of a Tour," p. 48.

<sup>21</sup>Statement of Gilbert C. Russell, 26 November 1811, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962) p. 573-574. On September 20th, Leanheart stole saddlebags containing a large sum of silver that had been entrusted to James Colbert at McIntoshville, near present-day Tupelo, Mississippi and the Agency House, while Neelly was at Fort Pickering. *United States v. George Leanheart*, 30 November 1809, Minutes of the Court of Pleas at Nashville, M-1315, Roll 1 National Archives Southeastern Region at Atlanta.

<sup>22</sup>Letter from War Department to Major James Neelly, 26 November 1809, Microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta. Neelly's reimbursement for the payment was to be deducted from his salary.

<sup>23</sup>W.C. Yates, *Tales of a Tennessee Yeoman* (Franklin, TN: W.C. Yates, 1991), pp. 26-29.

<sup>24</sup>The necessity of conducting business in Nashville and Franklin as the main centers of business on the northern end of the Natchez Road encouraged interaction among the settlers down the road. In addition, many of the leaders had first settled in the Nashville or Franklin and established business relationships or

family ties before emigrating south along the road.

<sup>25</sup>In addition to Major Neelly's uncle Robert Neelly, who lived near Grinder's Tavern, the owner of Dobbins' Stand, just north of Grinder's house, was the brother of two of Neelly's Benton Town neighbors, and he had previously lived near Major Neelly's farm near present-day Leiper's Fork, Tennessee.

<sup>26</sup>The *Tennessee Gazette* reported on 18 May 1803 that three separate attacks on travelers took place in a few weeks about five miles from the spot where Grinder's Tavern would be built. At least one robbery resulted in the victim's death, *Tennessee Gazette*, 18 May 1803 Microfilm, Nashville Public Library Nashville Room. Because of murders of travelers on the Natchez Trace near where Grinder's Stand would be built, President Jefferson suggested a program for building inns for the safety of travelers. Grinder's Tavern was one of those inns leased for five years. Robert Grinder obtained a deed to land in Hickman County in 1814 and there was an unclaimed letter for him that year. He likely moved to the site from Williamson County in 1809, after Neelly was appointed Chickasaw Agent. In Mr. Danisi's new book, he confuses Grinder's farm near Benton Town with the Grinder's Tavern property. *By His Own Hand? The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis*. Coedited by Hames Holmberg and Jay Buckley (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), p. 68.

<sup>27</sup>Phelps, "The Tragic Death of Meriwether Lewis," p. 305-18. Phelps later said that his opinion was based solely upon the review of newspapers in Natchez and Nashville and travel diaries. Phelps to Superintendent of the Natchez Trace Parkway, memorandum, 12 August 1954, Natchez Trace Parkway Document Collection, Parkway Headquarters, Tupelo, Mississippi. Willie Blount, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1796-1821*, ed. R.H. White vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952), p. 349. *The Impartial Review* issue of 9 June 1808 claimed that incidents of serious nature by the Native Americans were a daily occurrence; however, bandits on the road often disguised themselves as Native Americans. *The Impartial Review*, 9 June 1808, Microfilm, Nashville Public Library Reading Room. Neelly took custody of a man who had attempted

to murder his fellow traveler in 1811. Letter from War Department to James Neelly, 18 November 1811, microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta. In 1813, even Chickasaw Chief Tuscumbia was robbed on the Natchez Road just south of Franklin. *State of Tennessee v. John Campbell*, 18 October 1813, Circuit Court of Maury County, loose files, Maury County Archives, Columbia, TN.

<sup>28</sup>Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson Archives, Franklin, TN. Book 1, p. 434.

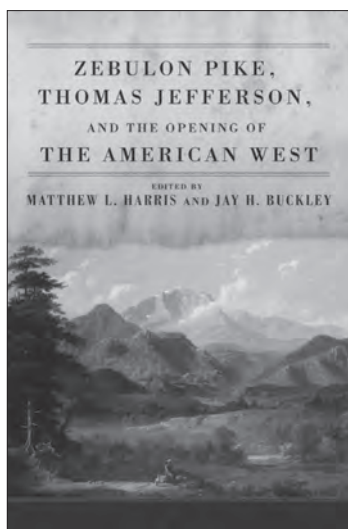
*Natchez Trace Parkway Survey*. Ibid., p. 89. This figure assumes a single rider, on a single horse, stopping at night. Franklin is approximately eighty miles northwest of Collinwood. The 1801 schedule for post riders on the Natchez Road showed that men who traveled the Trace frequently could cover a distance of 40 to 50 miles per day. The 1802 schedule required the rider cover 50 miles per day. Mail carried by multiple riders, traveling on pre-positioned fresh horses, could travel up to 120 miles per day. , *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey. Letter of the Secretary of the Interior Transmitting in response to Senate Resolution No. 222 . . . with a View to Constructing a National Road on*

*this Route to be Known as the Natchez Trace Parkway*, 76th Cong., 3d sess., 1940, S. Doc. 148 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1941), 90.

<sup>29</sup>Newspaper announcements of finding stray horses along in the Natchez Road area were common., *Democratic Clarion*, 9 June 1809, 7 July 1809, 21 July 1809, 30 Oct. 1809, Microfilm, Nashville Public Library Nashville Room. Neelly would have traveled the Natchez Road for speed; however, by 1809, a postal road to Franklin intersected the Trace about five miles south of Grinder's Tavern, the Columbia Turnpike intersected just north of the Tavern and another road intersected about fifteen miles north that would have been a more direct route to Neelly's farm. If Neelly had not wanted to be seen, he could have traveled one of several Chickasaw paths, including the path that the Natchez Road replaced.

<sup>30</sup>*Masterson v. James Neelly*, Book 1, p. 434, Williamson County Court Minutes, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN.

<sup>31</sup>Masterson's son married Tennessee Governor Archibald Roane's niece, graduated from a Nashville law school,



## ZEBULON PIKE, THOMAS JEFFERSON, AND THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Edited by Matthew L. Harris and Jay H. Buckley

\$29.95 HARDCOVER

256 PAGES · 14 B&W ILLUS.

In life and in death, fame and glory eluded Zebulon Montgomery Pike. The ambitious young military officer and explorer, best known for a mountain peak that he neither scaled nor named, was destined to live in the shadows of more famous

contemporaries. This collection of thought-provoking essays rescues Pike from his undeserved obscurity.



UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PRESS

2800 VENTURE DRIVE · NORMAN, OK 73069

TEL 800 627 7377 · OUPRESS.COM



and moved to Texas in 1832. Frank W. Johnson, Eugene C. Barker, and Earnest William Winkler, *A History of Texas and Texans*, vol. 5 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1916), p. 2112.

<sup>32</sup>Local lore held that Neelly abandoned Lewis's body and left it to locals to bury him. *Lewis County, Tennessee WPA Records*, ed. James L. Douthat and Jessie Clinton (Signal Mountain, TN: Mountain Press, 1991), p. 33. John McFall, son-in-law of Dobbins' Stand owner David Dobbins, claimed to have dug Lewis's grave and wrote that there were six people present when Lewis was buried. Letter of John McFall, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1845-1857*, ed. R.H. White, vol. 4 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952), p. 387. A "Mr. Hale" was another said to have helped dig Lewis's Grave. Olaf T. Hagen to Lewis T. Anderson, July 5, 1933, Natchez Trace Parkway Document Collection, Parkway Headquarters, Tupelo, Mississippi.

*Philadelphia Saturday American*, 7 December 1844, 29CC56, Draper MSS.

<sup>33</sup>Everett Newton Dick, *The Dixie Frontier: a social history of Southern frontier from the first transmontane beginnings to the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1946, repr. Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 222. Citations to the Norman edition. Bodies were typically buried within twenty-four hours on the Southern frontier. Neighbors assisted the family. The third account attributed to Priscilla Grinder said that neighbors were called in before Lewis died.

*Natchez Trace, Indian Trail to Parkway*, Phelps, Dawson, pp. 4-5. The Natchez Road served a population of over 350,000 people by 1810. *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey*, page 50. Robert and Priscilla Grinder's establishment was referred to as Grinder's "house" or "tavern" in the accounts of Lewis's death. Their type of establishment was commonly known and regulated as an "ordinary house," "house of entertainment," or "tavern," which provided overnight accommodations, stables, meals and liquor. The first reference to Grinder's house as a "stand" I have found is in an 1880's deed. Deed Book F, p. 306, Register's Office of Lewis County, TN. Many taverns on the Natchez Trace also sold supplies to travelers.

<sup>34</sup>Vol. 1, page 193, Maury County Court Minutes, Maury County Archives, Columbia, TN.

<sup>35</sup>Land grant map, Lewis County, Tennessee Register of Deeds Office, Hohenwald, TN. An elderly Bruce Cooper recalled a childhood memory that the area was sparsely populated when someone came to their blacksmith shop to obtain nails for Lewis's coffin; however, settlers are known to have settled on nearby farms as early as 1807 prior to construction of Grinder's house. B. Gordon to Lyman C. Draper, December, 1872, Draper Collection on microfilm, Tennessee State Archives, Nashville.

<sup>36</sup>James Coffield Mitchell, *The Tennessee Justice's Manual, and Civil Officer's Guide* (Nashville: J.C. Mitchell and C.C. Norvell, 1833), 480-481.

<sup>37</sup>Maury County, Tennessee County Court Minutes, Minute Book Q, p. 538, Maury County Archives, Columbia, Tennessee.

<sup>38</sup>John Brahan to Thomas Jefferson, 18 October 1809, Thomas Jefferson Papers, online collection, pp. 312-314. The Neelly letter was worded carefully to avoid suggesting that he had any acquaintance with the Grinders. Robert Grinder had lived near Neelly's farm in the Benton Town area from 1801-1805

and again in 1808, before opening the tavern on the Natchez Road. *Tax Book I, Williamson County, Tennessee, 1800-1813*, compiled and Published by Louise Gillespie Lynch, 1971, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN, p. 42 and Williamson County Court Minutes. (Danisi confuses that location with the Grinder's Stand location). Indian agents appointed operators of taverns under the government program for accommodations. Major Neelly would have appointed Robert Grinder to operate the tavern for a period of five years, contingent upon good behavior.

*The Democratic Clarion*, 20 October 1809, microfilm, Nashville Public Library Reference Room, Nashville Public Library, Nashville. The inventory of Lewis's possessions included an old razor box but the razor was apparently missing. Memorandum of Lewis's Personal Effects, Thomas Freeman, 23 November, 1809, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 470-472. There were no eyewitness accounts of Lewis's death. Some highwaymen on the old Natchez Road were as likely to use a knife as a firearm and slit their victim's throat. According to Neelly's letters to the War Department, some assailants used both. The 6 February 1810 *Virginia Argus* appears to have printed a clarification of the "supposed cause of the rash deed" as a fever that went to Lewis's brain. How that cause could have been determined sometime after Lewis's burial is a curiosity. I credit Brian Allison with the discovery of the *Argus* article.

<sup>39</sup>Donald Jackson, "On the Death of Meriwether Lewis's Servant," *William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History* 21, no. 3 (1964), pp. 445-448.

<sup>40</sup>Major James Neelly to Thomas Jefferson, 18 October 1809, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 573-574.

<sup>41</sup>Thomas Jefferson to President James Madison, 26 November 1809, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 475-476.

<sup>42</sup>Donald Jackson, "On the Death of Meriwether Lewis's Servant," *William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History* 21, no. 3 (1964), 445-448.

<sup>43</sup>Gilbert C. Russell to Thomas Jefferson, 31 January 1810, Thomas Jefferson Papers, online collection, pp. 568-570.

<sup>44</sup>Gilbert C. Russell to Thomas Jefferson, 31 January 1810, Thomas Jefferson Papers, online collection, pp. 568-570. Russell was familiar with the dangers of the Natchez Road. According to one account, Russell had helped provide security at the hanging of the notorious Natchez Trace bandit Little Harpe in Greenville, Mississippi in 1804. Jo C. Guild, *Old Times in Tennessee: with historical, personal, and political scraps and sketches*. (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1878, repr. Gallatin, TN: Rose Mont Restoration Foundation, 1995), p. 98. Citations to the Rose Mont edition.

<sup>45</sup>Order from United States War Department to James Neelly, 4 June 1812, microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta.

<sup>46</sup>Letter from James Brown to William Eustis, 11 June 1812, National Archives, microfilm, M221, Roll 42. Neelly had already been dismissed by the time the written charges reached the War Department.



<sup>47</sup>John Hastings Marks to Reuben Lewis, 22 July 1812, Meriwether Lewis Letters from Meriwether Lewis to his mother, and from John Hastings Marks to his half-brother, Reuben Lewis, regarding Meriwether Lewis, 1808 and 1812, Accession #2520, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

<sup>48</sup>John Hastings Marks to Reuben Lewis, 22 July 1812.

*Preston v. Neelly*, Minutes of U.S. Circuit Court at Nashville, microfilm, M-1214, National Archives at Atlanta.

<sup>49</sup>James J. Holmberg identified a Virginia resident Francis Preston as the brother of William Clark's brother-in-law William Preston, James J. Holmberg, *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark*, (Yale University, 2002) p. 240 n.10. Lewis's close relationship with William Preston is evidenced in a letter from Lewis to Major William Preston, 25 July 1808, Accession # 9041, University of Virginia Archives.

<sup>50</sup>By defensible, I refer to the explanation that relies upon probabilities based upon evidence of the dangers of the Natchez Road, exclusive of the contradictory statements of the near witnesses. A more thorough study of all the people connected to Meriwether Lewis's final days may yet provide an answer to the two-hundred-year-old mystery of how he died.

<sup>51</sup>Letter from James Neelly to William Eustis, 18 October 1809, microfilm, MR6, National Archives at Atlanta.

<sup>52</sup>Since this article was written, Thomas Danisi has published that the Neelly letter to Jefferson was penned by Captain Brahan. I concur that he was the scribe though not the author. Kira Gale pointed out the similarities in early 2011. Mr. Danisi apparently does not find the practice of Brahan writing such an important letter out of the ordinary.

<sup>53</sup>Proponents of the theory that Lewis committed suicide will point to the two additional accounts attributed to Priscilla Grinder. Even she did not claim to have seen Lewis at the moment he was shot. There is not space in this article to address the Grinder accounts. The Grinders have never been accurately portrayed, and neither has the area where they lived. Writers have often restated other historians' assumptions as facts.

# The Character of MERIWETHER LEWIS

*Explorer in the Wilderness*



Clay S. Jenkinson

Foreword by David Nicandri



The DAKOTA  
INSTITUTE

*"Clay Jenkinson's provocative character study of Meriwether Lewis opens a new chapter in Lewis and Clark scholarship. Let the debates begin."*

William E. Foley, Author,

*"Wilderness Journey, The Life of William Clark"*

**Now Available through Booksellers  
Everywhere Or Directly from the Publisher**

[www.FortMandan.com](http://www.FortMandan.com)

or 877-462-8535

### Uncovering the Truth about Meriwether Lewis

By Thomas C. Danisi

Foreword by Robert Moore

Prometheus Books  
466 pp. \$26. 2012

The historian H.W. Brands has said that the purpose of any new book of history is to either offer new information or a new interpretation. Independent scholar Thomas Danisi's new study of Meriwether Lewis offers both. This book is a valuable addition to Lewis and Clark studies that should be consulted by every serious student of the expedition. A resourceful and tenacious researcher, Danisi has done Meriwether Lewis students and scholars a service by ferreting out new documents relating to the expedition and the explorer's short, troubled life. His publication of those documents will generate lively debate. Although not everyone will agree with his analysis, his discoveries will enlarge and clarify our understanding of one of the most remarkable men in American history.

Danisi's Lewis is a thoroughly competent and productive man who has been unfairly characterized by other historians as a self-destructive and mentally disturbed explorer and territorial administrator. Lewis's only serious problem, according to Danisi, was a severe and recurring case of malaria. To be sure, he had difficulties in St. Louis, and enemies, but their attacks on his character were completely unjustified, and he was not responsible for the effective collapse of his governorship. Danisi's Lewis did in fact kill himself at Grinder's Inn, but his reputation should not be stigmatized by the incident, which

had nothing to do with suicide—and, Danisi maintains, should not be referred to as suicide. It's time, he argues, to liberate Lewis from the bipolar cloud that Stephen Ambrose (and others) have cast over him.

Danisi explains his method in the chapter where he attempts to prove that Major James Neelly, who attended Lewis in his last days, was not a scoundrel as many murder theorists allege, but "an ordinary man" who served Lewis with genuine respect. "As in many other instances involving historical mysteries," Danisi writes, "dogged research can uncover unknown sources."

Danisi's major discovery is a complete account of the proceedings of Lewis's court martial in November 1795—a document he unearthed in the Anthony Wayne Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania that supersedes a summary account of the court martial that resides in the National Archives. Danisi explains that "the court-martial transcript is about forty handwritten pages and contains a tremendous amount of new material regarding the young Lewis." Using the new historical material embedded in the transcript, Danisi attempts to show that, before the incident, Lewis did not meet Clark in the aftermath of a professional crisis, as most biographers have alleged. He was not drunk at the time, but acquitted himself masterfully during the court-martial. He did not leave the Second Sub-Legion of the U.S. Army in a cloud, as previously understood, but had already transferred to the Chosen Rifle Company (the Fourth Sub-Legion) commanded by William Clark. Danisi suggests that it is unfair to suggest that Clark's first

impression of Lewis was that he was a mercurial man with a troubled soul.

Danisi may be said to be a Lewis apologist. Lewis, Danisi explains, did not fritter away the crucial months between his return to the east in December 1806 and his arrival in St. Louis on March 8, 1808, but was simply too busy when he returned to St. Louis to write the book, the first installment of which was to be put the hands of the learned world by January 1808. He should not be blamed, the author argues, for not accomplishing a task that was, under the circumstances, impossible. Although Jefferson had observed that Lewis had "from early life been subject to hypochondriac affections .... a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family," Danisi maintains that Lewis did not suffer from depression, but instead his moods must be seen merely as "a description of a physical disorder"

He attempts to show that Lewis, whose journal is blank for more than 440 days of the expedition, was not as silent, as some historians and biographers have alleged, but that some of Lewis's official correspondence during his residency in St. Louis from March 8, 1808 to September 4, 1809, was intentionally delayed by an unidentified detractor. Lewis's apparent silence during this period so frustrated War Department officials in Washington, D.C., that they eventually lost confidence in his administrative competence. Without sufficient information, they challenged some of his official administrative and financial dealings. If someone were deliberately attempting to damage or destroy Lewis's governorship by interrupting his official communications, his

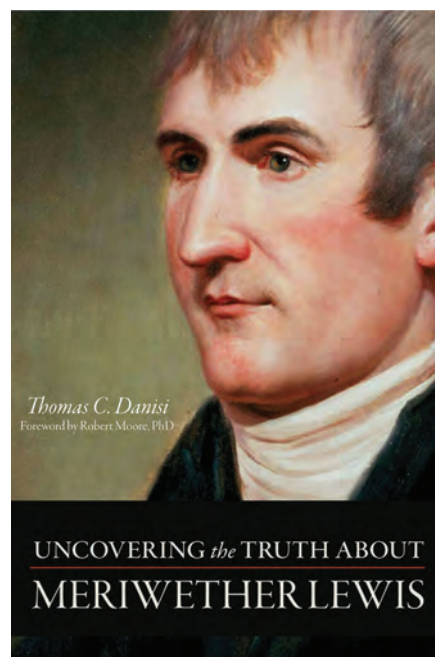
apparent dilatoriness could be explained in a more favorable light. Other scholars may not agree with Danisi's analysis, but the statistical materials he has brought together in this chapter will be of great value to anyone trying to make sense of this period of Lewis's career.

In the "The Missing Journal Entries" chapter, Danisi also argues that Lewis was not as silent as he seems. The conventional wisdom, dating back to the 1904 edition of the journals edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, was that Lewis's 441 days of journal silence constitute a serious failure of responsibility. More recently, Stephen Ambrose and others have suggested that Lewis suffered from bipolar disorder and there were times he could not bring himself to write in his field journal. Danisi flatly rejects this interpretation. He argues that "Lewis was not psychologically handicapped, but of sound mind, and that historians have imposed unrealistic expectations and unnecessary demands upon him."

During many of the journal gaps, Lewis was making scientific notes, particularly about plants; keeping twice-daily weather logs; conducting celestial observations; collecting and cataloguing mineral samples, Indian artifacts, as well as animal and plant specimens; and conducting diplomatic meetings with Indian tribes. In other words, Danisi points out, Lewis may not have been keeping a narrative journal, but he was certainly not idle. If, as Danisi postulates, Lewis's disparate scientific notations can be regarded as his "journal," the number of days he was silent are actually quite small. Given Lewis's plethora of responsibilities,

Danisi wonders, "Why, on those days when he did so, did he keep a diary at all?" He rather boldly claims, at the end of the chapter, to have "solved" the problem of Lewis's silences and that "the need to inquire further into Lewis's supposed recording gaps has come to an end."

Danisi has a remarkable gift for administrative history—as he exhibited in his earlier work



on Lewis. The most important chapter in this book—"Governor Meriwether Lewis's Fiscal House of Cards: A Closer Look"—is the least dramatic. This chapter is truly brilliant, and it should permanently change the way we think about Lewis's fiscal difficulties in Louisiana Territory and is "must" reading for anyone interested in Lewis's post-expeditionary difficulties as the governor of Louisiana Territory.

To understand the tangled state of Lewis's "fiscal house of cards" between 1807 and August 1809, it is essential to understand two things. First, when Congress created the

Office of the Accountant of the War Department in May 1792, it placed the staff in the Department of the Treasury (not War), and gave it almost complete autonomy. This meant that territorial expenditure vouchers that belonged to the War Department were handled and settled by clerks in an entirely different department, one that was able to thwart or frustrate clear War Department directives. Second, in April 1795, William Simmons was appointed as the principal accountant of the War Department (but within Treasury), which created terrible difficulties for a large number of competent and well-meaning military and territorial officers, including—tragically—Meriwether Lewis. During what Danisi calls his 19-year "autocratic regime," Simmons routinely exceeded his regulatory authority, took pains (and apparently pleasure) in denying legitimate territorial vouchers for arbitrary reasons, writing hostile letters to good and honest men (including the famous July 15, 1809, letter to Governor Lewis), and refused to permit the appeals process that would have permitted territorial functionaries to seek justice. Simmons damaged a number of innocent officials until the summer of 1814, when President Madison finally fired him. If the office of the accountant of the War Department had been presided over by a man of understanding and human decency, Lewis's tenure as Governor would have been dramatically more successful and he might not have undertaken his fatal errand along the Natchez Trace in autumn 1809.

Above all, Danisi attempts to prove that Lewis did not commit



# FULL-COLOR PRINTS

- Significant events on the Lewis & Clark Trail.

- Uniforms of the Corps of Discovery.



MICHAEL HAYNES  
www.mhaynesart.com

## Reviews

suicide—or at the very least that he was not “suicidal” at the time of his self-inflicted death in Tennessee. “Meriwether Lewis was not stricken with a psychological illness, namely depression, but rather with a physiological disease, ‘the ague,’ which is known today as malaria.” He states, more emphatically in this book than in *Meriwether Lewis*, the biography he co-authored with John C. Jackson in 2009, that Lewis shot himself not because he was suffering from psychological pain, but from malarial pain. “The unsystematic courses of action employed by malarial sufferers,” Danisi explains, “were extreme efforts to allay pain, even if it meant to wound themselves in the head.”

There is a fascinating paradox here. Although Danisi is certain that Lewis did not commit suicide, his solid research will make it harder to prove that Lewis was murdered on the Natchez Trace. Unlike most murder and conspiracy theorists, he does not question the credibility of Lewis’s escort Major James Neelly, who wrote a letter October 18, 1809, to inform former President Jefferson that Lewis had taken his own life. Nor does he discredit the legal affidavit of Gilbert Russell, recorded on November 26, 1811, at Fredericktown, Maryland. Thus, Danisi convincingly affirms the very documents that murder theorists are most eager to discredit. He accepts Russell’s report that Lewis had tried to kill himself twice on the journey from St. Louis to Fort Pickering, but insists that Lewis was merely trying to extinguish severe malarial pain he experienced in an admittedly clumsy and desperate way. In this book and in the biography he co-authored

## Advertise your L&C products and services in WPO!

### RESERVATION DEADLINES

Issue	Reservation Date	Ad Due
February	January 15	February 1
May	March 15	April 1
August	June 15	July 1
November	September 15	October 1

### AD RATES

Full page (7¼" x 9½"): \$400 b&w/\$500 color  
 2/3 page vertical (4¼" x 9½"): \$300 b&w/\$400 color  
 1/2 horizontal (7¼" x 4"): \$250 b&w/\$300 color  
 1/3 vertical (2¼" x 9½"): \$150 b&w/\$300 color  
 1/3 square (4¾" x 4⅝"): \$150 color/\$300 color  
 1/6 vertical (2¼" x 4⅝"): \$75 b&w/\$100 color

### COLOR:

Full page, back cover (8½" x 11" trim, 8⅝" x 11¼" bleed, 8" x 10½" safe area): \$600  
 Inside back cover (7½" x 9½"): \$500  
 Inside front cover (7¼" x 9½"): \$500  
 Double spread, inside: \$800

To reserve your ad space, contact  
 Don Peterson: york@lewisandclark.org or  
 Caroline Patterson at carolinepatter@yahoo.com

Email your color 300-dpi jpeg or pdf with embedded images and fonts by the due date for that issue to WPO editor **Caroline Patterson** carolinepatter@yahoo.com.

### ADDITIONAL DISCOUNTS

Foundation members receive a 15% discount  
 Repeat advertisers receive a 10% discount

*If you pay in advance, we can offer additional discounts as long as the following conditions are met:*

Advertiser must place a minimum of at least 2 ads within 12 months in the same calendar year or at least 2 consecutive ads if the ads fall in different calendar years. Payment must be received 30 days in advance of the ad deadline for the first scheduled ad. Multiple ads must be paid for 30 days in advance of the ad deadline for first advertisement. Payment must be in cash, check or money order.  
**NO CREDIT CARDS accepted.**

### Discounts

2 ads earn an additional 2% discount  
 3 ads earn an additional 3% discount  
 4 ads earn an additional 4% discount  
 5 ads earn an additional 5% discount  
 Maximum additional discounts: 5%

For example, a Foundation member who runs ads in the May, August, and November issues of WPO would receive an 18% discount on his total bill if he paid by cash, check or money order.

with Jackson, Danisi accepts all the documentary evidence that seems to point to suicide (Priscilla Grinder's testimony, Neelly's letter to Jefferson, Gilbert Russell's three accounts of the last days of Lewis's life, Alexander Wilson's account of his visit to Grinder's Inn), but attempts to recast the narrative as non-suicidal, self-inflicted death. Lewis was not committing suicide on October 11, 1809, Danisi argues, but engaging in radical, fatal, self-surgery in a desperate attempt to ease the pain of malaria.

Over time, Danisi's argument, will fade away and we will be left—after this psychologically “comforting” intermediate plateau—with the explanation of suicide, plain and simple. With his careful scholarly

detective work, he has ironically strengthened the case that Lewis took his own life. He is too rigorous a scholar to attempt to discredit the evidence for Lewis's self-inflicted gunshot death, but in my view his malaria theory is unlikely to attract many serious advocates.

Even readers who disagree with Danisi's analysis will benefit from reading this book, which represents the most substantial contribution of new material to the Lewis corpus since the publication of Richard H. Dillon's biography in 1965. The appendices alone are worth the price of the book. Not only does Danisi print (for the first time) the entire court martial proceedings, but excerpts from the correspondence of Jeffersonian and U.S. Senator

Samuel Latham Mitchell, and key extracts from documents pertaining to Lewis's financial affairs in the last years of his life. Danisi also prints the key documents relating to Lewis's violent death in 1809 in authoritative transcriptions. This alone will be a great boon to Lewis biographers.

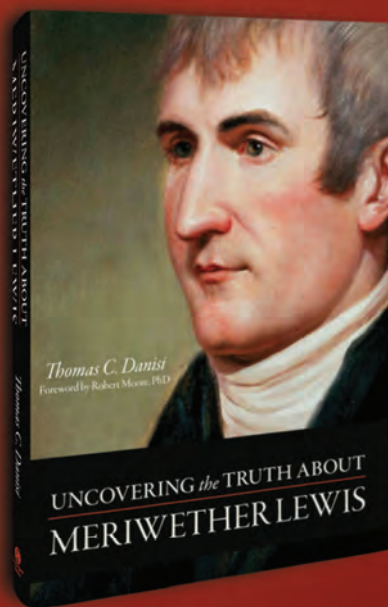
The documents Danisi has uncovered may not seem particularly significant and, with the possible exception of the court martial proceedings, they do not significantly alter our understanding of Lewis. But they do materially add to the sum of information we possess about Lewis. The information they reveal will be incorporated into all subsequent biographies of Lewis. That's a very remarkable achievement.

—Clay S. Jenkinson

*“[A] must-read for anyone interested in the Corps of Discovery and its pivotal role in the exploration of the American West.”*

—Herman J. Viola

Curator Emeritus, Smithsonian Institution



*“[Danisi] has discovered more new sources about the life and times of Meriwether Lewis than any researcher alive. . . . Even readers who think they know Lewis will find surprises in this book.”*

—Carolyn Gilman

Author of *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide*

*“History buffs will find this book invaluable for its impeccable research, attention to detail, and readability.”*

—★ Publishers Weekly starred review

*“Passionately argued and painstakingly researched. . . . brings new insights into the life of one of America's most misunderstood heroes.”*

—Landon Jones

Author of *William Clark and the Shaping of the West*

*“[A] gem! . . . The scholarship is backed with additional new evidence and supported with never-before published documentation. A must-read. . . .”*

—R. Mark Buller, PhD

Professor of virology, Saint Louis University

*“Danisi has emerged as the Meriwether Lewis expert of this generation.”*

—Jay H. Buckley

Author of *William Clark: Indian Diplomat*



www.prometheusbooks.com • 800-421-0351 • facebook.com/PrometheusBooks • twitter.com/prometheusbks



## Lewis and Clark at the Falls of the Ohio

BY JAMES J. HOLMBERG

The 2012 LCTHF annual meeting will bring attendees to the Falls of the Ohio. The Falls are the foundation for the Corps of Discovery. It was where William Clark received his invitation from Meriwether Lewis to join him on the journey west to the Pacific Ocean. It was where the partners in discovery actually joined forces October 14, 1803. It was where the first recruits—the famous Nine Young Men from Kentucky—were enlisted, as well as York, who joined as Clark’s servant, but was so much more. It was where, on October 26, 1803, the nucleus of the Corps pushed off down the Ohio and into history. And it was where the captains returned, November 5, 1806, on their way to Washington to report on their American odyssey.

The Falls of the Ohio are a series of rapids and small waterfalls that drop approximately 26 feet over 2 miles. Islands along this stretch divide the river into three channels. Located at about mile 600 along the Ohio River’s 1,000-mile stretch, the Falls were the only serious obstruction to navigation on this historic waterway. Two of the towns that played a major role in the Lewis and Clark story are Louisville (1778) and Clarksville (1783). William Clark’s brother, George Rogers Clark, founded Louisville at the head of the Falls on the Kentucky side of the river while he was on his famous Illinois Campaign against the British during the American Revolution. Clarksville, located at the foot of the Falls on the Indiana side, was named in his honor. Both captains and a number of their fellow explorers lived in the area or visited it before they set off in 1803.

Clark and York came to the Falls in March 1785 as teenagers when the Clark family moved from Virginia to Kentucky. The two Field brothers—Joseph and Reuben—came to the Falls about 1785 as boys. They grew up on the frontier and were among the finest athletes, shots, scouts, and hunters in the corps. Charles Floyd was born about 1782 at the Falls, most likely at or near his uncle John Floyd’s station along Beargrass Creek. When his family moved across the river to Clarksville in the late 1790s, young Charles quickly shouldered responsible tasks. By 1802 he was a constable for Clarksville township and

carried the mail between the Falls and Vincennes, Indiana, over a trace fraught with danger. Floyd’s first cousin Nathaniel Pryor, came as a boy. Patrick Gass visited the Falls in 1793 on his way to New Orleans and again in 1800 as a soldier on his way to a western posting. He returned in October 1806 with William Clark’s letter for publication to spread the news that the Corps of Discovery had successfully accomplished their mission. Lewis was no stranger to the Falls. He visited before the fall of 1803. During his army and family land business travels in the 1790s and very early 1800s, Lewis was in Kentucky, including Louisville, and undoubtedly saw and almost

certainly passed through the Falls.

As Lewis and Clark corresponded the summer of 1803, they arranged to rendezvous in Louisville, at the Falls of the Ohio. The delay in the completion of the keelboat and slow passage down the river because of low water resulted in delaying their August meeting to October 14. The keelboat was piloted through the Falls on October 15 and apparently moored at the mouth of Mill Creek, at Clarksville. A base camp was most likely established at the Clark farm at Point of Rocks (today Clark’s Point), where William and his brother George settled that spring. Preparations, visiting, and goodbyes on both sides of the river were completed by the afternoon of October 26, 1803, and the little flotilla of the keelboat and red pirogue set off down the river. The captains, York, and some others returned in 1806. In subsequent years, some would live in or visit the area.

These are just some of the Falls’ Lewis and Clark connections. Don’t miss this chance to walk where they walked, and visit sites they visited. A great annual meeting is planned with the usual combination of fun, fellowship, learning, and adventure. See you there!

*Jim Holmberg, curator of special collections at the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, Kentucky, is a Lewis and Clark historian and editor of Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark. A long-time LCTHF member, he currently serves on the editorial board.*



**Map of the Falls of the Ohio, ca. 1795, Victor Collot, *A Journey in North America*. Published in 1826, Collot created the map as part of an intelligence mission into Spanish Louisiana and Florida in preparation for a French attack on the Spanish colonies.**

# Regional Meeting in Great Falls, Montana — March 16, 2012

**New Executive Director Lindy Hatcher and Jay H. Buckley**



**Caroline Patterson, WPO Editor; Jay Buckley; and Lindy Hatcher, Executive Director.**



**From left: Walt Walker, President, Portage Route Chapter; Jay Buckley, Elizabeth Casselli, director of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls; Jay Russell, Executive Director, Lewis and Clark Foundation.**



**Jay Buckley and Don Evans, volunteer extraordinaire.**



**Jay Buckley; and Mark Weekley, Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.**



**Bill Scriver, Portage Route Chapter; Margaret Gorski, LCTHF Vice President; Portage Route Chapter member.**

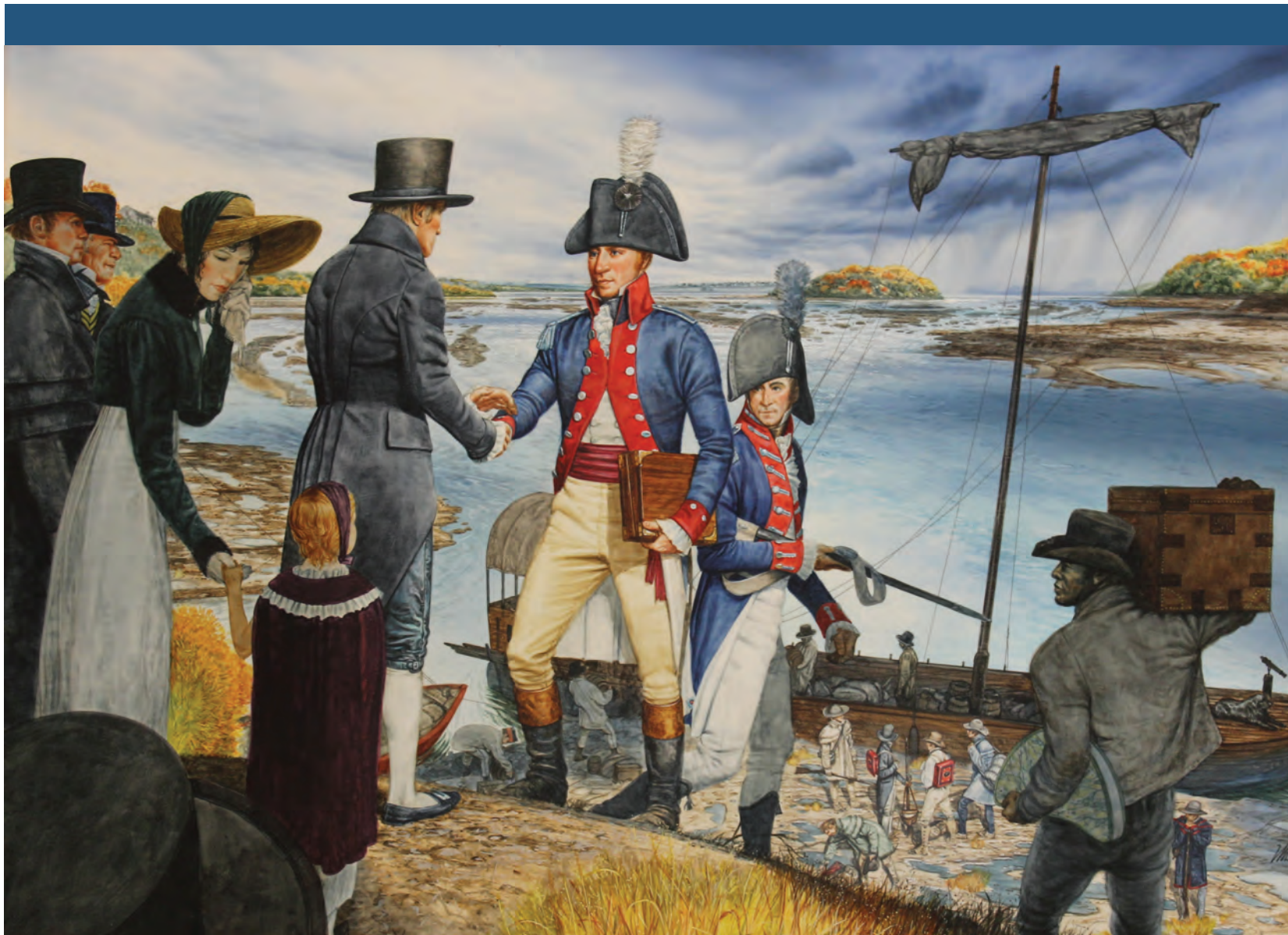


Lewis and Clark Trail  
Heritage Foundation, Inc.

PO Box 3434  
Great Falls, MT 59403



Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Great Falls, MT  
Permit No. (74)



**The nucleus of the Corps of Discovery, some of the famous Nine Young Men from Kentucky, leaving the Falls of the Ohio on October 26, 1803.**  
*Courtesy of the Falls of the Ohio Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Committee.  
Michael Haynes, [www.mhaynesart.com](http://www.mhaynesart.com)*