

# Lewis And Clark

A. George Mallis

TROWEL Staff

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Among the many noted explorers of the 17th and 18th centuries on the North American continent, explorers such as Champlain, de Soto, Hudson, Marquette, Vespucci and La Salle, the names of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark must be forever in the first rank. It was through the efforts of Lewis and Clark that the early United States began to stir for greater expansion in North America.

## **Meriwether Lewis (177~1809)**

Meriwether Lewis was born on August 18, 1774 in Albermarle County, Virginia, the eldest son of William and Lucy (Meriwether) Lewis. His father served in the Continental Army and died shortly after the British surrendered at Yorktown. When Lewis was ten years old, his mother, having married John Marks, the family moved to upper Georgia to join a large group of kinfolk who had holdings on the Broad River. Here Lewis developed a liking for the outdoors, hunting and studying the wildlife and vegetation of the area and recording his findings in a scientific manner. Lewis returned to Virginia in 1787 at the age of thirteen, to study Latin, mathematics and rudimentary science under the Reverend Matthew Maury. He continued his studies with various tutors with the intention of attending William and Mary College. However, because his stepfather had died and his mother had returned to the Virginia Plantation, Lewis, now 18 years old, felt obligated to remain in Virginia with his mother and manage the plantation and to take over the education of half brother and sister, John and Mary Marks.

In 1794 when the Whiskey Rebellion broke out, Lewis, then a member of the militia, was called out to help suppress the rebellion. He liked military life so well, that on May 1, 1795 he enlisted in the regular army and was commissioned an Ensign in the 2nd Legion. He served under Anthony Wayne at the treaty signing that ended the northern Indian wars in the Northwest Territory. In 1796, Lewis was promoted to Lieutenant and stationed with the 1st Infantry at

several posts. In 1797, after the Spanish had evacuated the area near Memphis, Lewis commanded a company occupying Fort Pickering at that site. This was Chickasaw Indian Territory and here Lewis showed his great ability by learning the Chicasaw language and their customs, knowledge that would stand him in good stead in later years. From here he went to Detroit and was there when his friend and neighbor, Thomas Jefferson, was elected president of the United States.

Following his inauguration, Jefferson offered the position of private secretary to Lewis who promptly accepted, still retaining his military rank while on leave of absence from active duty. Both Jefferson and Lewis had long harbored a desire to locate a land route to the Pacific. It was on January 18, 1803, that Jefferson requested from Congress an appropriation of \$2,500, for this project. Congress readily concurred.

### **William Clark (1770-1838)**

Clark was born in his family home in Caroline County, Virginia on August 1, 1770, the ninth child of John and Ann (Rogers) Clark. His parents had come to Caroline County from Albemarle County some fifteen years earlier. With little or no formal education, Clark developed a practical approach by listening to others, observing nature about him and learning to draw maps and do practical field surveying. This frontiersman approach was to stand him in good stead in later life. William was only six years old when his oldest brother Johnathan, then a major in the Virginia army was taken prisoner at the Battle of Germantown. At about the same time, his second brother, George Rogers Clark, defeated the British at Vincennes.

After the close of the Revolutionary War, the family moved from Virginia to Kentucky, stopping off near Redstone for the winter. In the spring of 1785, the family and their belongings rafted down the Monongahela River to Louisville where their son, George Roger, now a general, received his parents and family. It was here that the family home, Mulberry Hill was built. In 1799, both of William's parents died and he continued to live there until he joined with Clark for the Lewis and Clark Expedition. While there was peace with Great Britain and the United States was no longer a splinter group of individual states, matters along the western frontier were not all that quiet. The Indian war still went on with loss of life on both sides. In 1785, General Clark negotiated a treaty with the Indians beyond the Ohio but like many previous treaties, it was fragile and more often broken than adhered to. Several expeditions under various commanders, and for some seven years, fought constant battles with the marauding Indians.

It was during this time that William Clark was commissioned a lieutenant of infantry and was attached to the 4th Sub-legion in September, 1792. Clark served under General Anthony Wayne for four years and was in charge of a rifle corps which included several Chickasaw Indians, who at that time were allied with the United States against the Spanish. Later when General Wayne began his march into Indian country, Clark was at Cincinnati and started downriver to join the general. It was at the battle of Fallen Timbers, in August of 1794, that Lieutenant Meriwether

Lewis served under Clark. Clark remained in military service until July 1, 1796, when he resigned his commission and returned to Mulberry Hill. Here, in addition to his duties at home, he traveled extensively from Virginia to Washington DC and even to New Orleans, still under the control of France. It was in 1803, that Clark received an unexpected letter from Captain Lewis. This letter, when he accepted the commission, changed his and Lewis' life forever.

### **Lewis and Clark Expedition**

While Lewis was in fact the commander of the expedition, the success of the project was the result of a combined effort of Lewis and Clark. Initially, Lewis had obtained a passport to cross the French territory of Louisiana, but the sale by France of the Louisiana Purchase to the United States on April 30, 1803, obviated the need for such a passport. The expedition assembled in Illinois, near the mouth of the Missouri River. The winter of 1803-1804, was spent recruiting and training the men who enlisted for the expedition. The route of the expedition was to travel up the Missouri River to its source. One of the problems with this route was that it took the travelers into territory of the Sioux Indians who were not always friendly with the white men. By skillful diplomacy on the part of Lewis and Clark, the expedition passed through the Sioux lands and finally reached the Mandan Indian villages in North Dakota in the fall of 1804.

Following a winter with the Mandan, Lewis and Clark obtained the services of a French-Canadian and his Shoshone wife Sacajawea. The expedition set out in the spring for a trip to the upper river. In July they reached the falls where it was necessary to portage and again resume the water journey to the end of the river. Here horses were obtained and the journey continued across the Great Divide and on to the Columbia River. Again reverting to the water, the expedition fashioned canoes and traveled down the Columbia to the Pacific Ocean. it was an astonishing feat, crossing the continent by using two of its great rivers.

The explorers returned by basically the same route as they had taken out, retrieving their stashed canoes from their outward journey. Lewis did make a short detour up the Maria's River named for his cousin, Maria Wood. It was on this short journey that the first real trouble with the local Indians took place, however there is no record of any expedition members being wounded or killed in the affair.

When the travelers reached the Mandan Indian viilage, they were able to persuade the Indian chief to go with them to St. Louis. They arrived on September 23, 1806 to a great welcome by a nation that had thought them dead.

### **Epilogue**

The success of the expedition brought great rewards to both men. In November of 1807 they returned to Washington, D.C. Here Lewis resigned his military commission and President Jefferson appointed him governor of all of the Louisiana Territory above the northern boundary of present day Louisiana. Lewis returned to St. Louis in the summer of 1807 and remained there until the summer of 1809 when he decided to return to Washington for some unfinished

business in connection with the expedition. At an area near present day Memphis, he left the river and headed east at the crossing of the Tennessee River near Muscle Shoals. On the night of October 11, he stopped at an inn with his two servants. The next morning he was found shot to death and his money and watch were missing. The watch was later recovered in New Orleans. To this day, the matter of his death is still not completely known. Clark also resigned from the army on February 27, 1807, and was at once appointed a brigadier general of the Louisiana militia and appointed superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis. He worked closely with Governor Lewis to establish cooperation between both entities of the government. Upon the death of Lewis, Clark was asked to assume the duty of governor but declined to accept the post. Later, however, in 1813, he became governor of the Missouri Territory. Clark served with great distinction and his attitude towards the native Indians did much to placate any hostility or resentment by the Western Indians. Clark died in St. Louis on September 1, 1838.

Lewis was a member of Door to Virtue Lodge, No. 44, Albemarle Co., Virginia, having petitioned the Lodge on December 31, 1796. He also received the Royal Arch Degree in Staunton Lodge, No. 13 but the exact date is unknown, however, a diploma in the Library of Congress is dated October 31, 1799. Lewis was one of the petitioners to the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania for authorization to form St. Louis Lodge No. 111 and this Lodge was constituted on November 8, 1808, with Meriwether Lewis as its first Master.

Clark was also a member of St. Louis Lodge No 111 and at his death on September 1, 1838, he was buried with full Military and Masonic Honors in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis.

These two great American soldiers, explorers and Masons have received very little recognition since their deaths. Yet these two men were instrumental in allowing the United States to expand westward and help form the great nation that it is.

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