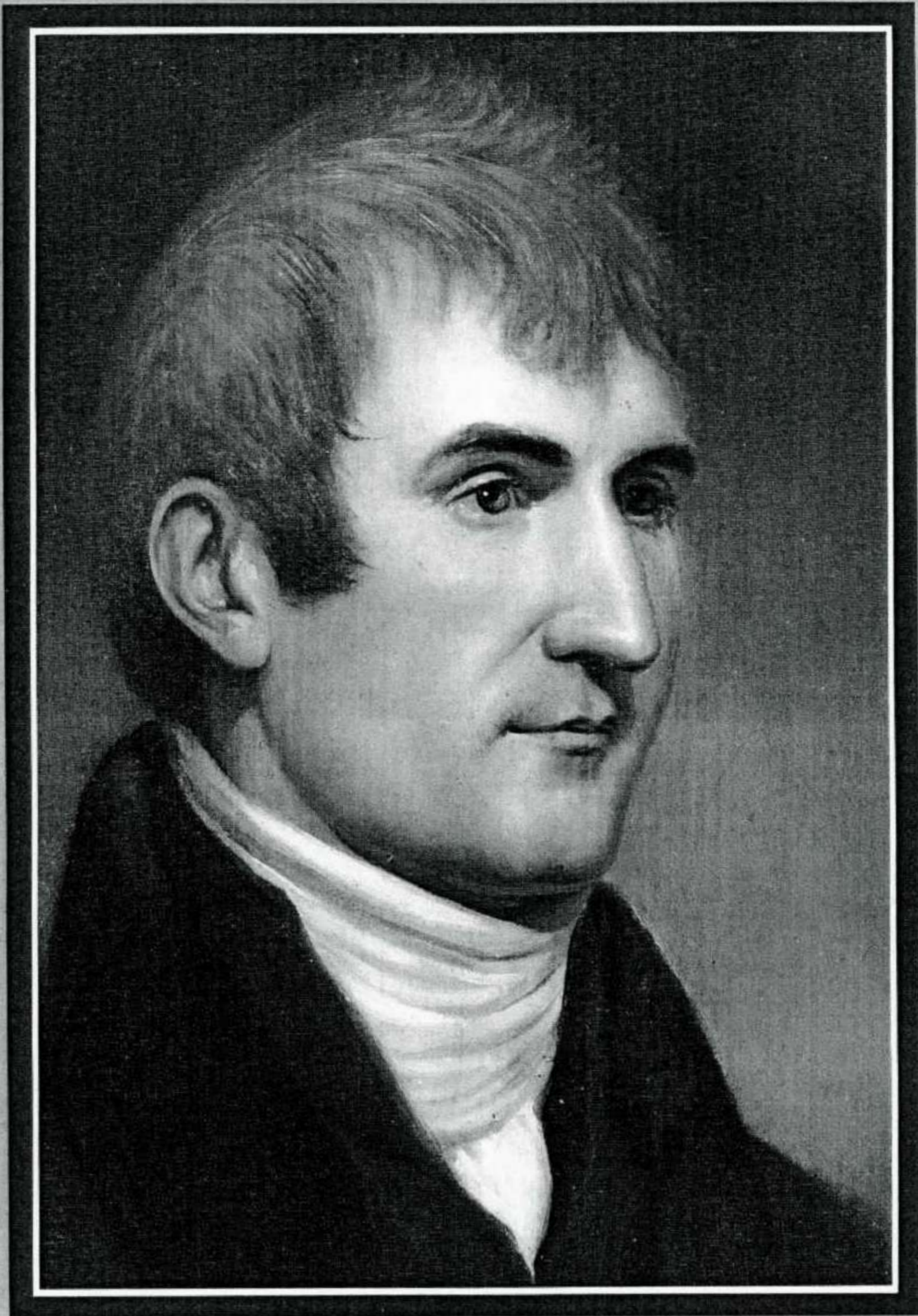
Meriwether Lewis



Caption for previous photograph.

Meriwether Lewis
Photo Courtesy Independence National Historical Park Collection, National Park Service

Meriweather Lewis (1774–1809) was chosen by President Thomas Jefferson to lead the "Corps of Volunteers for Northwest Discovery" on its mission to explore Western North America. Lewis shared the leadership of the expedition with William Clark and together they commanded one of the greatest explorations in American history. At Fort Clatsop Lewis filled his journals with valuable information that sparked an enduring interest in the West. After the expedition he was appointed Governor of the Louisiana Territory.

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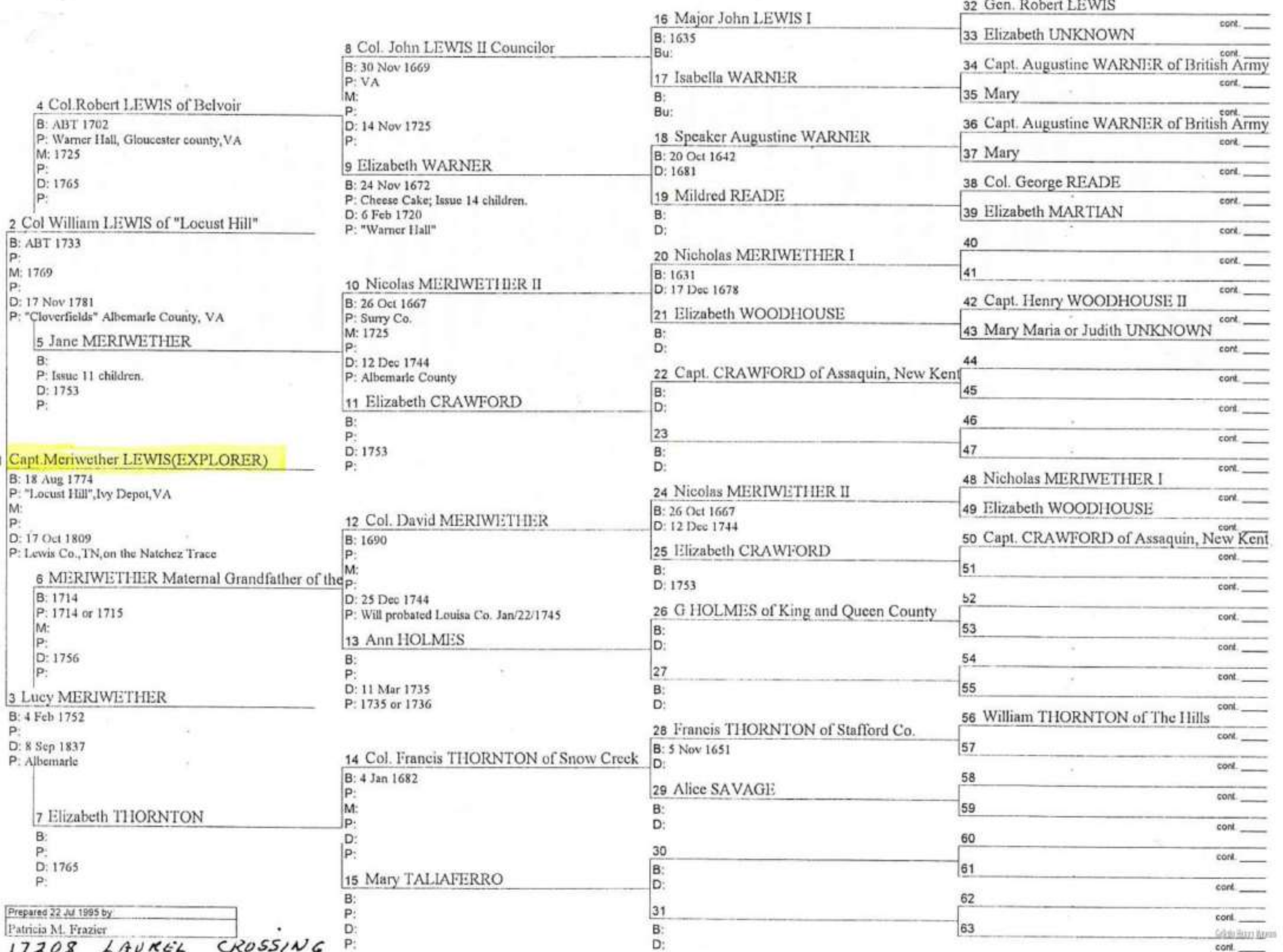

Pedigree Chart

No. 1 on this chart is the same as no. 1 on chart no. 1

Chart no. 1

1 Capt.Meriwether LEWIS(EXPLORER)
B: 18 Aug 1774
P: "Locust Hill",Ivy Depot,VA
M:
P:
D: 17 Oct 1809
P: Lewis Co.,TN,on the Natchez Trace

2 Col William LEWIS of "Locust Hill"
B: ABT 1733
P:
M: 1769
P:
D: 17 Nov 1781
P: "Cloverfields" Albemarle County, VA

3 Lucy MERIWETHER
B: 4 Feb 1752
P:
D: 8 Sep 1837
P: Albemarle

4 Col.Robert LEWIS of Belvoir
B: ABT 1702
P: Warner Hall, Gloucester county,VA
M: 1725
P:
D: 1765
P:

5 Jane MERIWETHER
B:
P: Issue 11 children.
D: 1753
P:

6 MERIWETHER Maternal Grandfather of the
B: 1714
P: 1714 or 1715
M:
P:
D: 1756
P:

7 Elizabeth THORNTON
B:
P:
D: 1765
P:

8 Col. John LEWIS II Councilor
B: 30 Nov 1669
P: VA
M:
P:
D: 14 Nov 1725
P:

9 Elizabeth WARNER
B: 24 Nov 1672
P: Cheese Cake; Issue 14 children.
D: 6 Feb 1720
P: "Warner Hall"

10 Nicolas MERIWETHER II
B: 26 Oct 1667
P: Surry Co.
M: 1725
P:
D: 12 Dec 1744
P: Albemarle County

11 Elizabeth CRAWFORD
B:
P:
D: 1753
P:

12 Col. David MERIWETHER
B: 1690
P:
M:
P:
D: 25 Dec 1744
P: Will probated Louisa Co. Jan/22/1745

13 Ann HOLMES
B:
P:
D: 11 Mar 1735
P: 1735 or 1736

14 Col. Francis THORNTON of Snow Creek
B: 4 Jan 1682
P:
M:
P:
D:
P:

15 Mary TALIAFERRO
B:
P:
D:
P:

16 Major John LEWIS I
B: 1635
Bu:

17 Isabella WARNER
B:
Bu:

18 Speaker Augustine WARNER
B: 20 Oct 1642
D: 1681

19 Mildred READE
B:
D:

20 Nicholas MERIWETHER I
B: 1631
D: 17 Dec 1678

21 Elizabeth WOODHOUSE
B:
D:

22 Capt. CRAWFORD of Assaquin, New Kent
B:
D:

23
B:
D:

24 Nicolas MERIWETHER II
B: 26 Oct 1667
D: 12 Dec 1744

25 Elizabeth CRAWFORD
B:
D: 1753

26 G HOLMES of King and Queen County
B:
D:

27
B:
D:

28 Francis THORNTON of Stafford Co.
B: 5 Nov 1651
D:

29 Alice SAVAGE
B:
D:

30
B:
D:

31
B:
D:

32 Gen. Robert LEWIS cont. ____
33 Elizabeth UNKNOWN cont. ____
34 Capt. Augustine WARNER of British Army cont. ____
35 Mary cont. ____
36 Capt. Augustine WARNER of British Army cont. ____
37 Mary cont. ____
38 Col. George READE cont. ____
39 Elizabeth MARTIAN cont. ____
40 cont. ____
41 cont. ____
42 Capt. Henry WOODHOUSE II cont. ____
43 Mary Maria or Judith UNKNOWN cont. ____
44 cont. ____
45 cont. ____
46 cont. ____
47 cont. ____
48 Nicholas MERIWETHER I cont. ____
49 Elizabeth WOODHOUSE cont. ____
50 Capt. CRAWFORD of Assaquin, New Kent cont. ____
51 cont. ____
52 cont. ____
53 cont. ____
54 cont. ____
55 cont. ____
56 William THORNTON of The Hills cont. ____
57 cont. ____
58 cont. ____
59 cont. ____
60 cont. ____
61 cont. ____
62 cont. ____
63 cont. ____

Prepared 22 Jul 1995 by:
Patricia M. Frazier
17208 LAUREL CROSSING
HELOTES TX 78023

sp: Mrs. Mary CHARLTON of Suffolk (-)
Sarah Meriwether LEWIS (1800-1841)
sp: Ira HARRIS (-)
Matilda Brown LEWIS (1802-1819)
James Howell LEWIS (1804-)
sp: Sarah STANFORD (-)
Col William LEWIS of "Locust Hill" (1733-1781)
sp: Lucy MERIWETHER (1752-1837)
Jane Meriwether LEWIS (1770-1845)
sp: Edmund ANDERSON (1763-1810)
Elizabeth Thornton ANDERSON (1786-)
Jane Lewis ANDERSON (1789-)
sp: Ben WOOD (-)
William Lewis ANDERSON (1792-1875)
sp: Mary A. WEBB (-1858)
Lucy Meriwether ANDERSON (1795-1854)
sp: Ballard BUCKNER (-1828)
Ana Liza or Anne E. ANDERSON (1800-1845)
sp: Thomas Fielding LEWIS (1798-1862)
David ANDERSON (1803-1832)
sp: Mary BUCKNER of Natches, Mississippi (-)
Dr. ANDERSON of "Locust Hill" (1805-1862)
sp: Lucy Sydnor HARPER (1811-1885)
Sarah Thornton ANDERSON (1807-1857)
sp: Gabriel Smither HARPER (1804-1872)
Mary Herndon ANDERSON (1809-1820)
Capt.Meriwether LEWIS(EXPLORER) (1774-1809)
Reuben LEWIS (1777-1844)
sp: Mildred DABNEY (1790-)
Mary LEWIS (1735-1813)
sp: Samuel COBBS (-)
Judith COBBS (-CHILD)
Jane COBBS (-)
sp: John J. WADDY (-1775)
Samuel Cobbs WADDY (-)
sp: Mary THOMSON (-)
sp: Sally DUPUY (-)
sp: Elizabeth HOBBS (-)
Robert COBBS of "Plain Dealings" (1754-1829)
sp: Ann G. POINDEXTER (-1842)
sp: Waddy THOMSON (-1801)
Ann THOMSON (-)
sp: John SLAUGHTER (-1797)
Waddy Thomson SLAUGHTER (-)
Warner SLAUGHTER (-)
Mary Lewis SLAUGHTER (1790-1849)
sp: William L. SLAUGHTER (1783-1854)
sp: Philip GRAFTON (-)
William GRAFTON (-)
Ann GRAFTON (-)

Strange Death of Meriwether Lewis One of the Unsolved Mysteries of Early American History

By WALTER ED TAYLOR

The story of the strange death of Meriwether Lewis, he who was co-leader of the great Lewis and Clark expedition of exploration to the northwest and whose name is so intimately connected with Montana's earlier history, is one of the dark spots and unsolved mysteries of American history. It is a puzzling, not always pleasant tale which has all the elements necessary to a modern popular mystery novel, except that in the case of Meriwether Lewis there was no Sherlock Holmes, no Philo Vance to step in and unravel the tangled threads of the mystery. Was it a murder or a suicide? Did the great man really die by his own hand, or was he the victim of a murderous servant or the owner of the house where he stopped to spend the night that fateful evening of Oct. 10, 1809?

The setting of this real-life murder mystery yarn was a house—a sort of tavern—in the frontier wilderness of the region now included in the state of Tennessee. The characters in the drama were frontier folk, a strange group indeed. For that touch of romance so necessary to any story, we have Lewis' long drawn-out romance with the beautiful Mrs. Theodosia Burr Alston, daughter of the much-maligned Aaron Burr and one of the reigning beauties of Washington society of the era. The two had parted forever in 1807, just two years before Lewis' death, and a short time later Mrs. Alston disappeared mysteriously from a ship while on a cruise along the Atlantic coast. Her death, like that of her lover, remains an unsolved mystery to this day. For a further touch of the bizarre we have the Lewis family jewels which are said to have disappeared at the time of Lewis' death. The entire story is full of contradictions; historians contradict each other in telling it, and while it is now much too late to decide definitely just how Meriwether Lewis did die, we can, at least, marshal the evidence and draw our own conclusions.

Almost immediately after the close of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Meriwether Lewis was appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory, a vast region including all the territory west of the Mississippi river and drained by its tributaries. He arrived in St. Louis, his capital, amidst much celebration. It was a personal triumph for him, for he had once lived in St. Louis as an obscure army officer; now he was governor of the greatest piece of territory ever annexed by a nation in modern times. Upon arrival in St. Louis, Lewis took up residence in a sprawling mansion of M. Auguste Chouteau, member of a family of fur traders famous in the history of the northwestern fur trade. Lewis had been invited to live in the home of his old friend William Clark, but as Clark had but recently been married Lewis probably refused the invitation because he did not want to intrude upon the happiness of the newlyweds.

from there to Philadelphia by ship and thence to Washington. When just a short way down the river Lewis heard rumors of trouble between the United States and England, the trouble which culminated in the War of 1812. He heard rumors of pirated ships on the Atlantic and he decided it would be best to go to Washington overland. Leaving the river boat at Memphis he borrowed army horses and pack mules and started the grueling journey through the wilderness toward Washington, the Washington that he was never to see again. Lewis was sick at the time and Major John Neely, Indian agent of the Cherokee nation, traveled with him to see that he reached his destination safely. One afternoon after the party had been traveling overland for a week a terrific thunderstorm struck. In the storm the pack mules escaped. Governor Lewis ordered Neely and the two servants to round them up while he pushed ahead to the nearest house. There he would await them.

Meriwether Lewis rode for several hours through the Tennessee hills. Finally he saw a house before him in the gathering dusk. It was the home of a family named Grinder or Grinner, a house many miles from any habitation, where travelers along the famous old Natchez Trace road sometimes stopped to spend the night. Lewis procured lodging from Mrs. Grinder. The facts as to what happened after he entered the door of that house deep in the forest are jumbled. For him it was the door of eternity. The following morning he was found dead on his bed with several bullet wounds in his body.

Many accounts of what happened that stormy night have been given, and in nearly every account the important facts differ. Some writers have pictured the Grinders as kindly country folk who gave up their house that the ailing governor might have a good night's rest; others have pictured the Grinders as characters of ill repute who had been suspected of robbing travelers who passed their way.

A number of historians have drawn conclusion that Meriwether Lewis was a suicide from the fact that Thomas Jefferson said he was. Yet Thomas Jefferson's word in this case can really carry very little weight, for Jefferson was retired to Monticello, his Virginia country estate, at the time. The only word he had of Meriwether Lewis' death was hearsay. The evidence gathered at the scene of the tragedy points quite definitely toward a murder theory. Several more recent writers on the case have concluded that Lewis was a murder victim.

Thomas Jefferson's memoir of Meriwether Lewis is given in Olin D. Wheeler's account of Lewis' death in the monumental Trail of Lewis and Clark." Jefferson wrote: "Governor Lewis had, from early life, been subject to hypochondriac affections. It was a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family of his name, and was more immediately inherited by him from his father. While he lived in Washington, I observed at

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Thomas Jefferson was convinced that his old friend and former secretary had committed suicide; but Jefferson might have been wrong. His evidence came from great distance; he had only the story as related by the Grinders. Evidence uncovered since Jefferson's time changes the aspect of the case. Why should Meriwether Lewis have committed suicide? If he was really subject to hypochondriac affections he certainly had not showed evidences of such while on his journey to the northwest with William Clark. Throughout the Journals of the expedition Lewis is shown as a man of unusual good humor. He was only 35 years old at the time of his death; he was a great success in the eyes of the world; he was looking forward to the early publica-

committee in charge made the following statement: "The impression has long prevailed that under the influence of disease of body and mind—of hopes based upon long and valuable service—not merely deferred but wholly disappointed—Governor Lewis perished by his own hand. It seems to be more probable that he died at the hands of an assassin."

In 1891 a newspaper in Nashville, Tenn., printed an article on the death of Meriwether Lewis which attracted wide attention. Parts of the article are reprinted in Wheeler's "The Trail of Lewis and Clark" and in "Meriwether Lewis," a biography by Charles Morrow Wilson, and so it may be taken that these two writers considered the information given as fairly reliable. The newspaper piece said, in part: "It has always been the firm belief of people of this region that Governor Lewis was murdered and robbed. The oldest citizens now living remember the rumors current at the time as to the murder, and it seems that no thought of suicide ever obtained footing here. The writer recently had an interview with Mrs. Christina B. Anthony, who lives some two miles from the Lewis grave, and has lived all her 77 years in the neighborhood. She says that old man Grinder kept a "stand" for travelers on the Natchez Trace. Polly Spencer, whom she knew well before her death 40 years ago, was a hired girl at Grinder's, when Governor Lewis was killed. Polly had often told the circumstances of the murder as far as she personally knew them.

"She was washing dishes in the kitchen after supper with some of the females of the family when they heard a shot in the room where Captain Lewis was sleeping. All rushed to the room and found him dead in his bed. Captain Lewis, being fatigued from his journey, had retired immediately after supper. His only companion, she said, was a negro boy, who was attending to the horses in the barn at the time. Old Grinder, who was of Indian blood, was at once suspected of the murder, ran away, was captured at Cane creek, brought back and tried, but proof not being positive, he was released. Only 25 cents was found on the person of Captain Lewis after he was shot.

"Old Grinder soon afterwards moved to the western part of the state, and it was reported in his old neighborhood had bought a number of slaves and a farm and seemed to have plenty of money. Before this he had always been quite poor.

"Mrs. Anthony says the people always believed old Grinder killed Lewis and got his money. She had never heard the theory of suicide until the writer mentioned it to her. Mrs. Anthony was a young married woman, boarding with the father of Polly Spencer when Polly told her these circumstances. Mrs. Anthony thus heard an ear-witness, so to speak, relate the story of the murder, which is pretty direct evidence. She is a bright, active, and intelligent old lady, and has for many years kept the hotel at the hamlet of Newburg, the county seat of Lewis county, which is just two miles east of the monument.

"Others living in Lewis and adjoining counties have been conversed with, who remember the general belief at the time, that Grinder killed his guest for the purpose of robbery. He must have observed that Captain Lewis was a person of distinction and wealth; that he was almost alone, and that he probably had money with him. It seems impossible that a young man of 35, the governor of the vast territory of Louisiana, then on his way from his capital to that of the nation, where he knew he would be received with all the distinction and consideration due his office and reputation, should take his own life. His whole character is a denial of this theory. He was too brave and conscientious in the discharge of every public duty; too conspicuous a person in the eyes of the country, and crowned with too many laurels to cowardly sneak out of the world by the back way, a self-murderer. The idea was doubtless invented to cover up the double crime of robbery and murder and seems to have been the only version of his death that reached Mr. Jefferson and other friends in Virginia."

The facts given in this newspaper story do not coincide with some of the other known facts of the Lewis case, but it does present the idea that the suicide theory was not accepted by all people at the time of the tragedy. Through the years a great mass of evidence, pro and con, has been brought to public attention by the many writers who have given time to the case. Was it murder or suicide? Each of us must weigh the evidence and decide for ourselves what was the fate of Meriwether Lewis.

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Governing Louisiana was no bed of roses and Lewis soon found it out. His domain was a trackless forest with only a few scattered settlements. St. Louis itself was only a small frontier settlement where saloons outnumbered other places of business three to one and where most of the representatives of the federal government spent their time gambling and general carousing. Lewis did his best as governor, but by the fall of 1809 his accounts were so badly scrambled that he decided he must go to Washington and straighten them out. Although he was a Virginia gentleman, Lewis had had little education; he knew nothing about keeping accounts. Government authorities in Washington knew as little about conditions on the frontier. They had questioned Lewis' accounts of his handling of certain Indian affairs. He had provided money for the purchase of medicine for disease-ridden tribes and when he presented his bill to the treasury officials in Washington they refused to pay. So Lewis decided to go to Washington and clear his name. He had also another reason for making the journey, for Thomas Jefferson had been writing letters for two years urging him to prepare for publication his journals of the expedition to the Pacific coast.

One day in September, 1809, Lewis set out from St. Louis on the long journey to Washington with two servants, leaving William Clark in charge of affairs in Louisiana. In his trunk he carried his proof that his accounts of the handling of Indian money and other affairs were correct. He also carried his journals of the northwestern expedition. It was his plan to go down the Mississippi river to New Orleans. There he would await them.

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Meriwether Lewis was buried near the house where he met his death. For years his resting place was unmarked except by a rude pile of stones. In 1848 the Tennessee legislature appropriated $500 for the erection of a suitable monument over the great explorer's grave. The grave is in Lewis county, Tennessee. Upon completion of the monument, the committee in charge made the following statement: "The impression has long prevailed that under the influence of disease of body and mind—of hopes based upon long and valuable service—not merely deferred but wholly disappointed—Governor Lewis perished by his own hand. It seems to be more probable that he died at the hands of an assassin."

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The President's Secretary

When the contentious election of 1800 had been decided and Thomas Jefferson prepared to assume the office of president, he knew whom he wanted as his private secretary. Within days of the final balloting in February 1801, Jefferson posted a letter to Gen. James Wilkinson, commander of the U.S. Army, and under the same cover one to "Lieut. Meriwether Lewis, not knowing where he may be." Jefferson gave specific reasons for seeking the young Lewis: his knowledge of the frontier and the military, and "A personal acquaintance with him, owing from his being of my neighborhood."

Indeed, Meriwether Lewis and the extensive Lewis and Meriwether families were from Jefferson's "neighborhood" in the central Piedmont region of Virginia. Meriwether Lewis was born on his father's farm, Locust Hill, located approximately 10 miles west of Monticello, on Aug. 18, 1774. His father, William Lewis, and mother, Lucy Meriwether, were second cousins, and by naming their eldest son for his mother's family, they signaled his association with two very prominent families of Central Virginia. Both families were well known to Jefferson. Two of Jefferson's siblings had married into a line of the Lewis family, and Nicholas Lewis, Meriwether's uncle and guardian, was a close friend who adeptly managed Jefferson's affairs during his years in Paris.

Familiarity and trust were apparent on both sides. Meriwether Lewis accepted the president's offer immediately and "with pleasure," even though Jefferson's letter contained no job outline, only assurances that it would be an "easier office" than military life and that he could retain his rank and right for promotion in the army. Jefferson offered also that the position "would make you know & be known to characters of influence in the affairs of our country, and give you the advantage of their wisdom."

In addition to trusted familial connections, Meriwether Lewis had other qualifications that interested Jefferson: "a knowledge of the Western country, of the army & it's situation." Today, Meriwether Lewis' name is irrevocably linked to that of William Clark and the exploratory expedition that traveled to the Pacific Ocean and back. It is easy to assume that exploration was Jefferson's prime motive in hiring someone with knowledge of the West, but in his letter Jefferson also emphasized Lewis' familiarity with the state of the U.S. Army – an important consideration at the time.

In 1801 the country had survived a shift of political power from the Federalists to the Republican Party through the electoral process, but the campaign had been extremely bitter. The new Republican administration was committed to reducing the standing army, and Jefferson needed to know which officers were superior, which inferior, and in light of the recent election, which would be likely to support or oppose the current administration. The roster of all commissioned officers, dated July 24, 1801, that was supplied to Jefferson featured curious symbols beside each officer's name. Historians have identified an accompanying key that gives a meaning to each symbol as being written in the hand of Meriwether Lewis. From this it has been concluded that one of Lewis' first duties was to assist Jefferson in determining the worthiness or unworthiness of officers, and in some instances their political leanings as well.

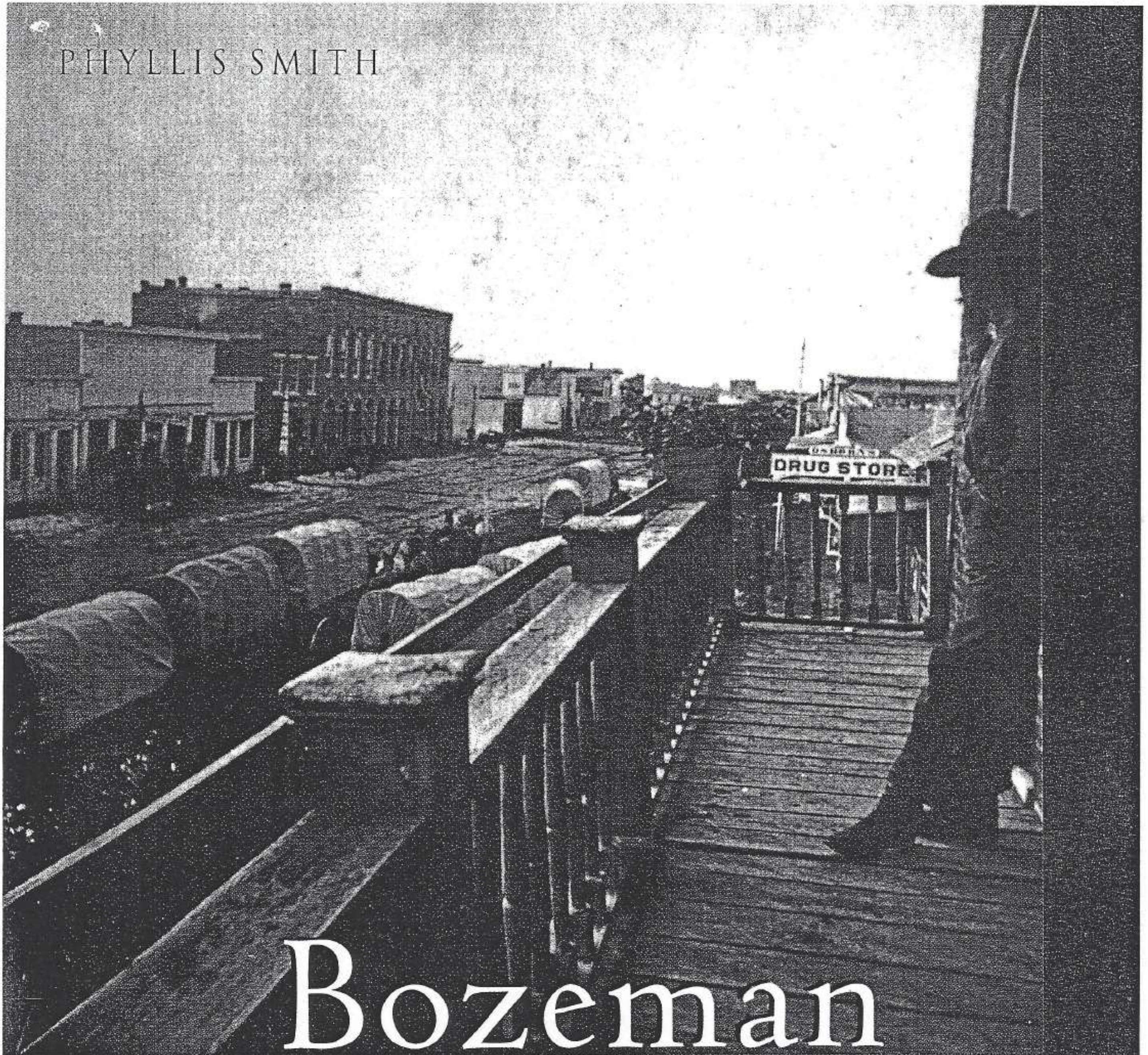
So whether Jefferson sought out Lewis to meet the immediate need of evaluating the officer corps or for more ambitious exploratory undertakings in the future – or both – Lewis retained Jefferson's confidence during his two years as secretary. In selecting a leader for what he called an "exploring party" and that history would record as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Jefferson wrote of his former secretary, "I could have no hesitation in confiding the enterprise to him."

Gaye Wilson

Gaye Wilson
Research Assistant

— Ditto . . Ditto second class, respectable as officers, but not altogether entitled to the 1st grade --
— Ditto . . Ditto, Republican.
— Ditto Officers whose political opinions are not positively ascertained
— Ditto Politicial apathy.
— Ditto opposed to the Administration, otherwise respectable officers
...d to the Administration more decisively. —
most violently to d°. and still active in its vilification
...sionally the soldier without any political creed —
...thy of the commissions they bear —
...own to us. —

Key to symbols found on 1801 list of U.S. Army officers, written by Meriwether Lewis (left).

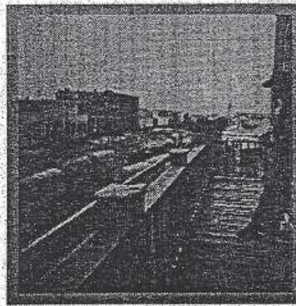


PHYLLIS SMITH

Bozeman *and the* Gallatin Valley

a history

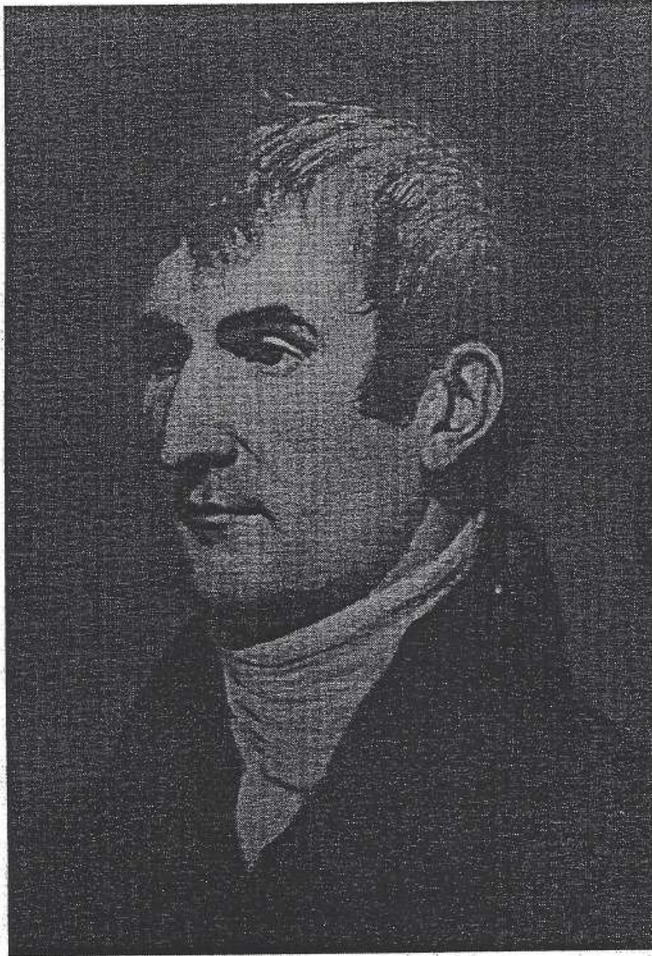
chapter FOUR



Although some Indian groups continued to favor the Gallatin Valley as prime ground for hunting and fighting, others claimed the area, along with most lands west of the Mississippi River. Few of these early landlords came to visit the property, however.

In 1682, France assumed ownership of the region up to the Continental Divide (though the French were not certain just where the divide was) and called the land Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV. Sometime before 1742, a French fur trader with the imposing name of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, Sieur de la Verendryé, who operated a post north of Lake Winnipeg, explored the northern Louisiana area, getting as far as what are now the Dakotas. Age and ill health forced him to return home before he had learned much. He sent his sons François and Louis-Joseph back south from Canada in 1742;

Louisiana Purchase, 1803.



Meriwether Lewis, 1774-1809.
Oil portrait (1807) by Charles Willson Peale, courtesy Independence National Historical Park.

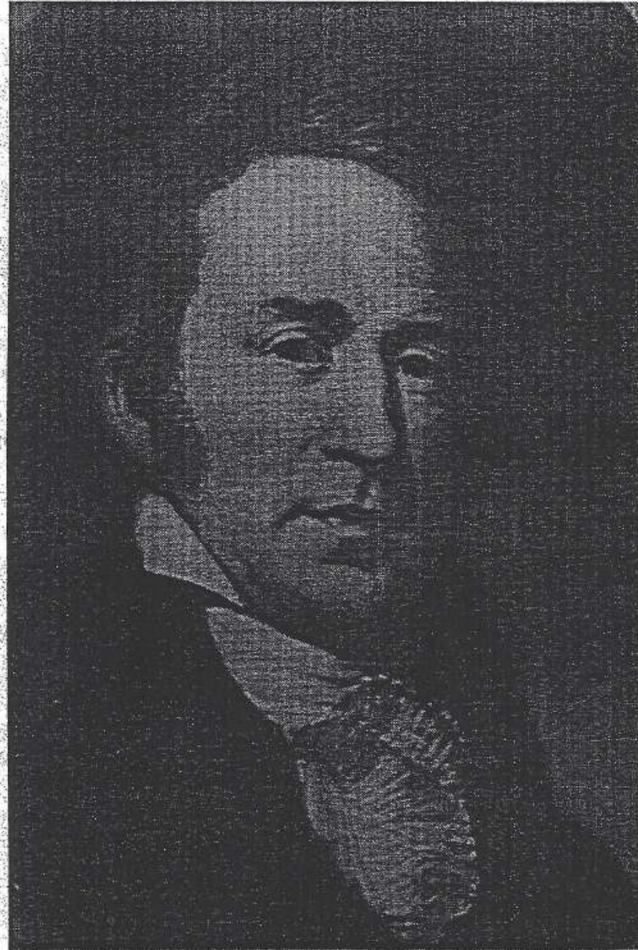
they may have wandered through the Black Hills or possibly got a look at what is now eastern Montana. The romantic notion that the Verendryé brothers ascended the Missouri River to its source persists, but there is no evidence they visited the Gallatin Valley.

Twenty years later, in 1763, France ceded Louisiana to Spain, which claimed the land for thirty-seven years as a buffer between British activity in Canada and Spanish settlements in the Southwest. Then, in October 1800, agents for Napoleon took back Louisiana under the terms of the Treaty of San Ildefonso.

Adventurers may have traveled about the territory during these years. No known diary or record gives evidence of any Frenchman or Spaniard moving about the Gallatin Valley before 1800. Perhaps a few fur traders from the northeast ventured to the area, but seldom did any of these early wanderers commit their observations to paper or map—perhaps because, as historian Robert Athearn said, they were "an uncommunicative lot and had no precise information about what they had seen."[1]

Despite French ownership of vast Louisiana, Thomas Jefferson, even before he became president in 1801, quietly began to plan for an American expedition to the Far West. As president, he secured $2,500 from Congress to finance an overland trip of exploration to the Pacific Ocean, although he did not advertise the appropriation widely. At the same time, Jefferson sent diplomatic feelers to Paris for a possible $2 million land purchase of the Florida region and the land surrounding New Orleans.

Gallatin History Museum



William Clark, 1770-1838.
OIL PORTRAIT (1810) BY CHARLES WILLSON PEALE, COURTESY INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK.

Neither Jefferson nor his associates dreamed that Napoleon would be open to American purchase of Louisiana itself for $15 million. The French leader had suffered sufficient military losses in the New World to determine that he could not explore or exploit Louisiana for French benefit. The real estate deal was struck on April 30, 1803, but it was not until July that President Jefferson learned that "his representatives had bought not only a city, but a whole wilderness empire. . . . In retrospect, it was a transaction of daring proportions and of considerable significance. At the stroke of a pen, about one third of modern America was attached to the young nation . . ."[2] Thus, the United States bought "the world's largest pasture, considerable mineral rights, one major and several minor rivers—all in good working order—and the best-known desert in the Western Hemisphere."[3]

Jefferson appointed his personal secretary, Virginian Meriwether Lewis, to lead what the president called a Corps of Discovery to explore the newly acquired territory and seek the elusive Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean. At Lewis's suggestion, the president then named as co-leader William Clark, another Virginian, whose older brother George Rogers Clark had been a hero in the Revolutionary War. The twenty-nine-year-old Lewis received a captain's rank; thirty-three-year-old Clark became a second lieutenant with a promise that he too would become a captain. A cantankerous U.S. Congress and an equally cantankerous War Department balked at making Clark's higher rank official. Nevertheless, the two men regarded one another as military equals, as did the party of twenty-

six regular army men. Clark's black slave York, two French voyageurs, interpreter George Drouillard (sometimes written Drewyer), and Lewis's dog, a Newfoundland named Seaman, completed the group.[4] Members of the Corps, who had been carefully selected by Lewis, were "good hunters, stout, healthy unmarried men, accustomed to the woods and capable of bearing bodily fatigue in a pretty considerable degree."[5]

The two leaders complemented one another, both in their different personalities and the skills they brought to the enterprise. Lewis was lean; Clark was heavyset. Both were tall men, over six feet, and in good physical condition, although Clark was plagued by occasional digestive complaints. Lewis was better educated; Clark learned from the school of experience. Lewis needed long periods of solitude and was inclined to be introspective. He was somewhat formal, even a bit pompous with the men, although he could be charming enough at the Washington soirées Jefferson asked him to attend. Red-haired Clark was a hearty open fellow, genial with the men.

Lewis was meticulous and precise; Clark was expansive and imaginative (witness his prowess as a master misspeller). Lewis planned the route; Clark drew the maps to show where they had been. Lewis collected plants and animals, made extensive notes on their appearance, and packed them away so that the president could study them later in Washington. Clark collected medicines and doctored the men when needed, although most remained healthy. (The expedition lost only one man, Charles Floyd, who probably died of a ruptured appendix as the group neared the present site of Sioux City, Iowa.) It was appropriate that Clark was in charge of such potions as Dr. Benjamin Rush's Thunderbolt pills because he often doctored himself for one ailment or another. Lewis was temperamental; Clark was sanguine and more comfortable in negotiations with Indian groups. Lewis usually went ahead, investigating the choice of route. Clark often stayed with the boats and saw to their maintenance.

Toward the last of May 1804, after a winter of drill, the assembling of equipment, and the packing of a fifty-foot-long keelboat and two pirogues, the group left Saint Louis to ascend the Missouri, as William Clark reported in his creative spelling, "under a jentle brease."[6] After hauling the keelboat and pirogues upstream for a grueling distance of sixteen hundred miles, the group arrived in late October at the Mandan villages twenty miles north of present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. There they stopped for the winter.

During their cold weather stay, Lewis and Clark found out what they could about the journey ahead. They learned of a great falls upstream and of the three forks, sources of the Missouri. They also learned of a large tributary that their informants told them was called "the river which scolds all others," and wondered whether this waterway might give passage to the Pacific Ocean.

They discovered that Clark's servant York greatly interested the Indian groups they encountered, since none had seen a man with black skin before. Indian women rubbed his arms and cheeks, tried to peer down his trousers, and pressed him for sexual services to such an extent that he often complained of fatigue.

The captains hired a French interpreter, Toussaint Charbonneau, who brought along his wife Sacagawea, a young woman who had been forcibly taken from her Shoshone band by the Hidatsa (Minataree) some years before. Sacagawea's baby boy, Jean Baptiste, was two months old. Charbonneau turned out to possess less skills than the leaders had hoped, but Sacagawea recognized landmarks and provided information about possible routes when the party reached the Three Forks area. Before they set off again on April 7, 1805, from the Mandan villages, the captains sent the keelboat back to Saint Louis, along with two men expelled for disciplinary reasons.

Now the party traveled in the two pirogues, an additional six canoes, or on foot beside the river. They passed the "river which scolds all others," but not before Lewis determined that the swollen stream, now called the Milk River, was not the miracle passageway to the Pacific, despite contrary advice from the men. The meticulous Lewis studied the creekbeds of both the Milk and the Missouri, observing that the Missouri had more stones that might be seen in a waterway that had its source in the mountains.

By the time the expedition arrived at the Great Falls on July 9, its members had seen their first elk,

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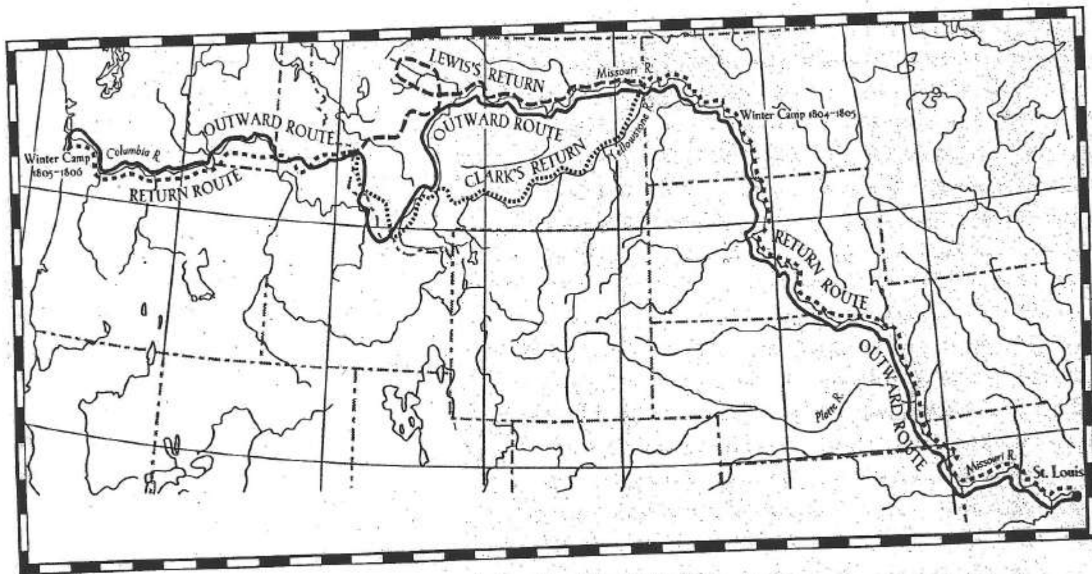

Route of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

bison, and grizzly bear. They had been bitten by their first western "musquetores." (The pesky mosquito was spelled nineteen different ways in William Clark's journals.) Lewis, no champion speller himself, reported the "musquetoes extreemly troublesome to me today nor is a large knat less troublesome, which dose not sting, but attacks the eye in swarms and compells us to brush them off or have our eyes filled with them."[7] They also had learned the backbreaking job of portaging their goods around rapids and through increasingly swift streams with numerous channels. They were surprised at the height and spread of the mountains, some still covered with late-summer snow.

On July 22, Lewis wrote: "The Indian woman recognizes the country and assures us that this is the river on which her relations live, and that the three forks are at no great distance. this peice of information has cheered the sperits of the party who now begin to console themselves with the anticipation of shortly seeing the head of the missouri yet unknown to the civilzed world."[8] Sacagawea recognized the chalky cliffs where her people gathered white powder to paint their faces and their horses. Lewis and Clark hoped they would soon meet her relatives, or any Shoshone band with sufficient horses to trade for the overland trip to the Snake River and along the Columbia drainage to the Pacific Ocean. Lewis ordered "canoes to hoist their small flags in order that should the indians see us they might discover that we are not Indians, nor their enemies . . ."[9]

William Clark reached the Three Forks first. He went ahead with Robert Frazier, brothers Joseph and Reuben Fields, and Charbonneau, arriving at the forks of the Missouri on July 25. The men's feet were in terrible shape from stepping on the thorns of prickly pear cactus. Despite their discomfort, Clark reported in his journal that it had been "a fine morning":

> we proceeded on a fiew miles to the three forks of the Missouri those three forks are nearly of a Size, the North fork [Jefferson] appears to have the most water and must be Considered as the one best calculated for us to assend Middle fork [Madison] is quit as large about 90 yds wide. The South fork [Gallatin] is about 70 yds wide & falls in about 400 yards below the midle fork those forks appear to be very rapid & Contain Some timber in their bottoms which is verry extincive.[10]

He took note of burned areas to the north: "the Indians have latterly Set the Praries on fire, the Cause I can't account for." He spied the track of one lone horse, also the sign of many elk, beaver, and otter.[11]

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After a breakfast of venison, Clark left a note for Lewis and took his party up what he called the north fork of the Missouri. He left two men whose feet were the most painful (one was Charbonneau) and climbed to the top of a mountain, but found no Indian sign. On the way down, hot and thirsty, he drank from a cold spring and, almost immediately, he reported later, became ill. Even so, the tough captain hiked cross-country from the Jefferson to the Madison. At some point, the hapless Charbonneau fell into some water and Clark was obliged to fish him out.

Lewis and the others arrived at the Three Forks two days later, July 27. Always the naturalist, Lewis noted the intense blue color of the broken limestone cliffs and a number of bighorn sheep. As he reached the mouth of what he called the southeast fork, the Gallatin, he wrote in his journal:

> ... the country opens suddonly to extensive and beatifull plains and meadows which appear to be surrounded in every direction with distant and lofty mountains; supposing this to be the three forks of the Missouri I halted the party on the Lard. shore for breakfast. and walked up the S.E. fork about a mile and ascended the point of a high limestone clift from whence I commanded a most perfect view of the neighbouring country. From this point I could see the S.E. fork about 7 miles. it is rapid and about 70 Yards wide. throughout the distance I saw it, it passes through a smoth extensive green meadow of fine grass ...[12]

In order to give the men a rest and to wait for Clark's return to the spot where he had left the note, Lewis halted the party. While the company aired and dried their goods, Lewis made notes of the probable latitude and longitude of the area.

Sure enough, Clark returned, but with a high fever. He took to a brush shelter with chills. Lewis suggested a dosage of Dr. Rush's Thunderbolt pills. Taking advantage of Clark's indisposition, the men made new moccasins, shirts, and leggings from deerskin, and tended to their aching feet.

On Sunday, July 28, Lewis and the ailing Clark made some decisions. Lewis wrote:

> Both Capt. C. and myself corrisponded in opinion with rispect to the impropriety of calling either of these streams the Missouri and accordingly agreed to name them after the President of the United States and the Secretaries of the Treasury and state having previously named one river in honour of the Secretaries of War and Navy. In pursuance of this resolution we called the S.W. fork, that we meant to ascend, Jefferson's River in honor of that illustrious personage Thomas Jefferson, the author of our enterprise, the Middle fork we called Madison's River in honor of James Madison, and the S.E. Fork we called Gallitin's River in honor of Albert Gallitin. the two first are 90 yards wide and the last is 70 yards, all of them run with great valocity and thow out large bodies of water. Gallitin's River is reather more rapid than either of the others, is not quite as deep but from all appearances may be navigated to a considerable distance. Capt. C. who came down Madison's river yesterday and has also seen Jefferson's some distance thinks Madison's reather the most rapid, but it is not as much so by any means as Gallitin's. the beds of all these streams are formed of smooth pebble and gravel, and their waters perfectly transparent; in short, they are three noble streams. there is timber enough here to support an establishment, provided it be erected with brick or stone either of which would be much cheaper than wood as all the materials for such a work are immediately at the spot.[13]

Lewis also noted in his journal that

> Our present Camp is precisely on the spot that the Snake Indians were encamped at the time the Minnetares of the Knife R. first came in sight of them five years since, from hence they retreated about three miles up Jeffersons river and concealed themselves in the woods, the Minnetares pursued, attacked them, killed 4 men 4 women a number of boys, and mad prisoners of all the females and four boys, Sah-cah-gar-we-ah or Indian woman was one of the female prisoners taken at that time; tho' I cannot discover that she shews any immotion of sorrow in recollecting this event, or of joy in being restored to her native country; if she has enough to eat and a few trinkets to wear I believe she would be perfectly content anywhere."[14]

By Monday, July 29, Clark had recovered, and

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he and Lewis agreed that the Jefferson River was surely the way to the mountains where the expedition might meet Sacagawea's people, the Shoshone, and secure horses for the overland trip to the Columbia Basin. They traveled up the Jefferson for a week but, by August 8, Lewis determined that to follow the waterway farther would not be productive. He left Clark to nurse his now-ulcerated feet and, taking Drouillard, Shields, and McNeal, climbed the Beaverhead Mountains to cross the Continental Divide at Lemhi Pass. Here they saw some Indians, but they slipped away from the explorer and disappeared.

Finally, the four men were able to convince a small band of Indians through sign that they should go with the party to the place where Clark and the rest of the expedition were camped. They would receive gifts, they would see with their own eyes a man with black skin, and they would be reunited with a woman from their band. With utmost caution they came, following their chief Cameahwait. Sacagawea, upon seeing members of the band approach, "began to dance and show every mark of the most extravagant joy, turning . . . and pointing to several Indians . . . sucking her fingers at the same time to indicate they were of her native tribe."[15] When she recognized chief Cameahwait as her brother, she "ran and embraced him, throwing over him her blanket and weeping profusely. The chief was himself moved, though not in the same degree."[16] The man to whom Sacagawea was promised in her infancy was part of the chief's band and, although he claimed she was his wife by right, he did not want her since she had had a child by another.

The expedition traded for Shoshone horses and "proceeded on," as both Lewis and Clark said repeatedly in their journals, to travel over Lolo Pass and then downstream to the Pacific Ocean before winter set in, an arduous and sometimes frightening trek. Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery had completed the first half of one of the most amazing expeditions in the New World, lauded and studied two hundred years later.

The party started back toward the States on March 23, 1806. William Clark was the only captain to return to the Gallatin Valley the following summer. Meriwether Lewis took his group through the Missoula Valley and east toward the Great Falls of the Missouri, bound for the mouth of the Yellowstone. Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor was charged with bringing horses through the mountains to the Three Forks. Clark, Sergeant John Ordway, and a few other men took a wild canoe ride down the still-swollen Jefferson River, traveling ninety-seven miles the first day, quite a different experience from the arduous pulling of canoes upstream the year before. On Sunday, July 12, all met at the Three Forks, including Pryor and the horses, and the group was again divided.

Ordway and ten of the men were to follow Lewis down the Missouri, a relatively pleasant canoe ride, except for the "musquetoes." Clark was left with York, Sergeant Pryor and eight privates, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, the now-eighteen-month-old Jean Baptiste, forty-nine horses, and one colt.

The group was bound for what many called the Roche Jaune or Yellowstone River. To spare the sore feet of the horses, the party camped the first night, July 12, a mere four miles from the three forks, at a spot near the present town of Logan. The next day, as the relaxed group ambled east across the Gallatin Valley, they saw elk, deer, beaver, antelope, wolves, and otter on the bottomlands. Overhead, they watched wheeling eagles, hawks, crows, and wild geese. After considering a more northerly route leading east, Clark said in his journal that he deferred to the judgment of another: "The indian woman who has been of great Service to me as a pilot through this country recommends a gap in the mountains more south which I shall cross."[17]

Clark's party had some difficulty crossing the Gallatin River in several places as they moved east, due to swift currents and beaver dams. The leader wrote that he saw old sign of buffalo but none of the animals themselves. "The Indian woman informs me that a fiew years ago Buffalow was very plenty in those plains & vallies quit as high as the head of Jeffersons river, but fiew of them ever come into those vallys of late years." Further, "the Shoshones . . . are fearfull of passing in-to the plains."[18] Perhaps the Blackfeet had something to do with that.

On the evening of July 14, Clark's group camped on high ground at the mouth of Kelly Canyon at the east end of the Gallatin Valley. After

breakfast on Tuesday, July 15, the party broke camp and followed an old buffalo road, then crossed Jackson Creek and went over what is now Bozeman Pass. They arrived at the Yellowstone River near the site of present-day Livingston in the early afternoon.

They then continued down the Yellowstone to its junction with the Missouri, where they joined the rest of the party in mid-August. Indians along the way celebrated the expedition's leaving the country by stealing a good number of its horses, much to Sergeant Pryor's embarrassment. All seemed anxious to return to Saint Louis. As they said good-bye to Charbonneau and Sacagawea, Clark vowed to the couple that he would educate their son Jean Baptiste (Clark called him "Pomp") when he was grown. Years later, he remembered his promise. ▩

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