

After Lewis and Clark: Expedition Personalities and South Dakota History

**by
Brad Tennant**

The 2004-2006 bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition commemorated one of the most significant milestones in American history. At the time of the expedition, Lewis and Clark's exploration of the west captured the attention of the French, British, and Spanish, along with Americans in the eastern United States. Over the past decade, scholars and other history enthusiasts discussed old and new interpretations of the Lewis and Clark expedition and its significance to the history of the United States. In addition, people from across the country visited sites along the trail and learned about the expedition's legacy from a variety of perspectives. Recent scholarship also reminded us that the American Indian nations whom Lewis and Clark encountered were often as much of the story as the expedition members themselves. Furthermore, the perspectives of York as an African-American slave, Sacagawea as an American Indian woman, and, yes, even Lewis' trustworthy companion, Seaman, have been considered despite the lack of substantial historical evidence as to what their actual thoughts may have been.

In reality, the Lewis and Clark expedition was never a story by itself. Rather, it remains a collection of stories featuring a huge cast of participants stretching from coast to coast. Although the Lewis and Clark expedition ended in September 1806, the role of several expedition members, and other individuals whom Lewis and Clark met, continued to be significant to the history of South Dakota in the years after the expedition. The fact that Lewis served as Governor of Louisiana Territory and Clark became Brigadier General of the Louisiana Territorial Militia

Brad Tennant is an assistant professor of history at Presentation College in Aberdeen, South Dakota. In addition to his studies on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, he also researches and writes about a variety of topics related to South Dakota and regional history.

and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the territory is significant in itself.¹ In their post-expedition political positions, both Lewis and Clark continued to play important roles that were often connected to what is now South Dakota.

From 1825 to 1828, William Clark compiled a list of the members of the expedition and where they were at that time. Because it was based on his personal knowledge of the expedition members, there were many members with whom he had lost contact over the years and could not accurately list their status. It is interesting to note how many of the members died during the approximately twenty years after the expedition. Among those listed by Clark as dead by 1825-1828 were Meriwether Lewis, John Ordway, John Collins, John Colter, Pierre Cruzatte, Joseph Field, Silas Goodrich, George Gibson, George Drouillard, Sacagawea, Hugh McNeal, John Shields, John Potts, Jean Baptiste Lepage, John Thompson, and Peter Weiser.² In fact, many of these well-known expedition members were dead within ten years of the expedition's return in 1806. Many of these individuals returned to the upper Missouri and, in doing so, passed through South Dakota. While the connection to South Dakota's history may be minor in many respects, others developed notable connections to the state and region.

As the expedition was returning through present day North Dakota, it met two fur traders, Joseph Dickson and Forrest Hancock, who were heading west. On 17 August 1806, John Colter asked Captain Lewis and Lieutenant Clark if he could join Dickson and Hancock. Permission was granted, and Colter immediately returned to the wilderness from which he came.³ The following spring, Colter decided to return to St. Louis. However, as he was heading down the Missouri River, he met and joined Manuel Lisa's trapping party.⁴ Consequently, he once again traveled the Missouri River highway through South Dakota.

While the role of Manuel Lisa's fur trading business in South Dakota and the upper Missouri valley is well known, it is interesting to note how many members of the Lewis and Clark expedition were employed by Lisa. In addition to Colter, Peter Weiser, John Potts, George Drouillard, and Touissant Charbonneau all served as employees of Lisa at one time. Weiser and Potts joined Lisa's fur trading ventures

in 1807 and were traveling up the Missouri River when their party met John Colter in the area of the Platte River. The three former expedition members were then reunited as they once again headed up the Missouri through South Dakota and toward the Yellowstone.⁵ While Weiser and Potts operated for several years from Lisa's trading post Fort Raymond, near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Bighorn rivers, Colter returned to St. Louis in 1809 where he joined the Andrew Henry fur trapping expedition. In 1810, Colter and Potts met again in the area of the Three Forks of the Missouri in Montana. Shortly thereafter, the two were captured by Blackfoot Indians. Potts was killed, while Colter was stripped and given a head start in a game of cat and mouse. Fortunately, Colter, who was known during the Lewis and Clark expedition for his running ability, outran the Blackfoot and survived. Unfortunately, Lisa and his partners later sued Potts' estate for \$1,000 in payment for debts for trapping supplies.⁶

George Drouillard, the acclaimed hunter and interpreter of the Lewis and Clark expedition, spent several years in Missouri after the expedition, but eventually, he also returned to the upper Missouri passing through South Dakota. As previously mentioned, Drouillard, like Colter, Potts, and Weiser, was employed by Lisa, and like John Potts, he was also killed by the Blackfoot Indians in 1810.⁷

After departing the Lewis and Clark expedition in mid-August 1806, Toussaint Charbonneau, Sacagawea, and Jean-Baptiste settled among the Mandan and Hidatsa villages of North Dakota. As with Colter, Potts, Weiser, and Drouillard, Charbonneau became an employee of Manuel Lisa. In late 1809, Charbonneau and his family traveled through South Dakota on their way to St. Louis to visit William Clark. At this time, Jean-Baptiste began his formal education and remained in St. Louis for the next six years.⁸

While the connections of Colter, Potts, Weiser, Drouillard, and Charbonneau to Manuel Lisa and South Dakota history are limited to traveling up and down the Missouri River, Sacagawea's connection is more significant. Given the fact that actual references to Sacagawea in the Lewis and Clark journals are limited and brief in detail, she, nonetheless, has become one of the most notable figures associated with

the expedition. In addition to different interpretations regarding the spelling and meaning of her name, along with her role and contributions to the expedition, Sacagawea's place and date of death are also matters of controversy. Most historians, however, believe that Sacagawea died at Fort Manuel Lisa in north central South Dakota on 20 December 1812.⁹ Among the evidence supporting Sacagawea's death at Ft. Manuel is a journal entry by John C. Luttig, who was a clerk for the Missouri Fur Company at Ft. Manuel Lisa. According to Luttig's journal, the Snake (Shoshoni) wife of Charbonneau died of putrid fever on that date. He, furthermore, stated that she was approximately twenty-five years of age and had a child, which would have been her daughter Lizette. Even William Clark listed Sacagawea as dead when he compiled his 1825-1828 roster of expedition members.¹⁰ Several historical markers devoted to Sacagawea can be found along the upper Missouri River, including one near Mobridge, South Dakota that refers to her as "the most illustrious feminine representative of the Indian race."

While some of the former members of the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to the upper Missouri because of the fur trade, other members returned to South Dakota as part of a special assignment. When Lewis and Clark stopped at the Mandan villages on their return trip in 1806, they convinced the Mandan chief Sheheke (White Coyote) to return with them and to visit Washington, DC, which he did accompanied by his family.¹¹ A year later, in 1807, White Coyote was ready to return to the Mandan people. Consequently, the responsibility of returning Sheheke to his village was assigned to Ensign Nathaniel Pryor, who was one of the sergeants during the Lewis and Clark expedition.¹² In addition to Pryor and Sheheke, other noteworthy individuals recruited for this mission included Private George Shannon and interpreters Pierre Dorion and Rene Jessaume. Envisioning an opportunity to establish trade relations with several upper Missouri tribes, St. Louis fur trader and entrepreneur Auguste Pierre Chouteau received permission to also accompany Pryor's party.

George Shannon was the young private in the Corps of Discovery who was lost sixteen days on the Nebraska side of the Missouri as the expedition made its way into South Dakota. Thinking that the expedition

was ahead of him, he pushed himself trying to catch the main party when, in reality, the expedition was pursuing him.¹³ Pierre Dorion was the Frenchman who lived with the Yankton for approximately twenty years prior to being hired by Lewis and Clark as an interpreter for the Yankton council of 30-31 August 1804. The Dorion Gardens at the Lewis and Clark Visitor's Center near Yankton, South Dakota are named for him, and a historical marker located in Yankton is dedicated to him. The other interpreter, Rene Jessaume, was hired to translate during the expedition's 1804-1805 winter with the Mandan.¹⁴ Auguste Pierre Chouteau was the eldest son of Pierre Chouteau, the patriarch of the famous St. Louis fur trading family from whom Fort Pierre and Pierre, South Dakota derive their name. In addition, the Chouteau family worked closely with both Lewis and Clark in their post-expedition political positions in St. Louis.¹⁵

The 1807 party under Pryor's leadership numbered a little over one hundred people when it left St. Louis. This number included Pryor's troops, traders employed by Chouteau, and a large group of Indians who were being returned to their respective tribes along the way. Although many of these people traveled only as far as the Sioux nation, Pryor and Chouteau still had nearly fifty men as they continued toward the Mandan villages. With this number, Pryor felt that they would be safe even if they encountered a hostile group along the way. What Pryor did not expect, however, was the collective resistance of the Arikara nation.¹⁶

Although several factors contributed to the Arikara turning against any Americans coming through their part of north central South Dakota, the most important factor was the death of the Arikara chief Eagle Feather. In the spring of 1805, as part of the Lewis and Clark expedition returned to St. Louis with the keelboat, a number of chiefs were invited to go to Washington, DC. Among those accepting the invitation was Eagle Feather. Unfortunately, after visiting Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, Eagle Feather became ill and died on 7 April 1806. Word of the great chief's death angered the Arikara, thus creating a sense of hostility toward Americans. At the same time, the rivalry between the Mandan and Arikara nations rekindled. In the midst of this atmosphere of distrust, dislike, and hostility, Ensign Pryor had to pass through the Arikara nation in order to take Sheheke back to the Mandan villages.¹⁷

Upon arriving at the Arikara villages, Pryor quickly realized the seriousness of the situation. Pryor later reported that he believed Manuel Lisa also contributed to the hostile environment. Lisa, who was traveling with a trapping party ahead of Pryor and Chouteau, supposedly informed the Arikara that a Mandan chief and many trade goods would soon be arriving. Thus, Lisa convinced the Arikara to let his party pass.¹⁸ When Pryor arrived at the Arikara villages, he attempted to deliver a speech of friendship, however, the interpreters Dorion and Jessaume, who spoke Sioux and Mandan respectively, were of little use. Consequently, Pryor had to rely upon a Spaniard, who was residing with the Arikara at the time, to interpret. Given the resentment by the Spanish over the American acquisition of Louisiana Territory, Pryor considered the Spaniard to be very suspect in his interpretation. Afterwards, Pryor gave the Arikara chief Grey Eyes a peace medal, while Chouteau reluctantly offered a great portion of his trade goods as gifts. Although Lewis and Clark did not meet Grey Eyes during their outbound trip in October 1804, Clark held a council with Grey Eyes on 21 August 1806 on their return trip. Since then, Grey Eyes had become increasingly anti-American. As tensions between the Arikara and Pryor's party increased, Grey Eyes reportedly tore the medal from his neck and violence erupted. With an estimated 650 Arikara warriors beginning to shoot, Pryor and Chouteau eventually retreated downriver, although shots continued to be fired for almost an hour until safety was finally reached.¹⁹

Despite the odds, Pryor and Chouteau lost only three men although a number of men suffered from various wounds. Among the wounded were George Shannon and Rene Jessaume. Although Jessaume's wounds were not life-threatening, Shannon suffered a severely broken leg, which eventually had to be amputated. Despite his injury, Shannon provided a great deal of assistance several years later to William Clark when Nicholas Biddle edited the Lewis and Clark journals. Meanwhile, Pryor returned Sheheke to St. Louis and wrote a lengthy letter to Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Clark explaining the situation. Pryor's first sentence stated, "The Escort under my command for the reconveyance of the Mandane Chief to his nation has been compelled to return to St. Louis without accomplishing that object."²⁰

The post-Lewis and Clark expedition connection to the fur-trade and the Arikara lasted well into the 1820s. In 1808, the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company was organized with some of the partners including William Clark, Manuel Lisa, Pierre and Auguste Pierre Chouteau, and Reuben Lewis, Meriwether's brother whom Clark appointed as a subagent to Indians on the Missouri River. In an interesting political twist, Governor Lewis extended a contract on behalf of the federal government to the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company to return Sheheke to the Mandan nation. The amount of the contract was \$7,000 for Sheheke's safe return.²¹

From a practical perspective the arrangements made sense. The government lacked the manpower to take Sheheke through the treacherous Sioux and Arikara country. Meanwhile, the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company needed funding to establish trading outposts along the Yellowstone River, well beyond the Arikara nation. Once Sheheke was returned home, the company could continue westward.²²

As Chouteau and Lisa prepared to return Sheheke, Lewis presented them with an additional order. In a letter dated 8 June 1809, Lewis wrote, "That the aricare nation should be severely Punished for their unprovoked attack on the party under the Command of Ensign Pryor in September 1807." Lewis continued by stating that "the particular individuals who killed our citizens on that occasion" or "an equivalent number with those murdered" should be surrendered and shot in front of their nation.²³ It was at this time, according to the late Lewis and Clark historian Stephen Ambrose, that Lewis' behavior became noticeably unsettled. His order of vengeance against the Arikara may reflect the strain under which Lewis was suffering. He was ill; his authority was being challenged by other government officials; and his relationship to the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, and to the Chouteau family in particular, was being questioned. Not only did he borrow money on a regular basis from the Chouteaus, which drew attention to his personal financial situation, but he also received a letter from President Madison's secretary of war, William Eustis. Eustis informed Lewis that expenditures beyond the initial \$7,000 provided to the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company would not be honored by the United States government. Lewis began making plans to defend his requests by going to Washington, DC.²⁴ Of course, Lewis never finished his trip, and he

is believed to have committed suicide while on the way to defend his expenditures.

On Sheheke's return trip, despite Lewis' demand for retaliation, Chouteau held a peaceful council with the Arikara, and the party continued out of South Dakota with Sheheke arriving at his village on 22 September 1809.²⁵ A little over three years after Sheheke left his people with Lewis and Clark, he was finally home once again. Meanwhile, relations between American traders and the Arikara improved until the early 1820s, when renewed tensions developed. John Collins, who was a private with the Lewis and Clark expedition and who is often remembered for his court-martial for stealing whisky, was a member of the 1823 Ashley fur trading party heading to the Yellowstone Valley and the Rocky Mountains. On 2 June 1823, the Arikara attacked the Ashley Party near the Grand River in north central South Dakota. In the ensuing battle, Collins was killed marking yet another post-expedition connection to South Dakota history.²⁶

After the Arikara's attack on the Ashley party, Colonel Henry Leavenworth led a retaliatory force of 220 soldiers from Fort Atkinson (Nebraska). As Leavenworth's Missouri Legion advanced up the river, approximately forty fur traders and several hundred Lakota joined the campaign against the Arikara.²⁷ On 9 August 1823, the Sioux warriors accompanying Leavenworth attacked the Arikara villages ahead of the troops. The next day, 10 August, Leavenworth's men arrived and began an artillery attack on the villages. Grey Eyes, the longtime Arikara leader who sat in council with William Clark in August 1806, died as the result of this shelling. Eventually, Leavenworth asked the remaining Arikara leaders to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the battle. Interestingly, the interpreter for the negotiations was Toussaint Charbonneau.²⁸

Tribal leaders of the Yankton Sioux and Teton Sioux are also among the personalities who played important roles during the Lewis and Clark expedition as well as years afterward. Readers of the Lewis and Clark journals often note the difference between the peaceful council that Lewis and Clark held with the Yankton Sioux (Nakota) as opposed to the four tense-filled days spent later with the Teton Sioux (Lakota). Not only did Lewis and Clark enjoy the advantage of Pierre Dorion as an interpreter with the Yankton, but the general disposition of the Yankton

was also friendlier. The Yankton Sioux desperately wanted and needed trade goods, and in the end, the Yankton chiefs The Shake Hand, White Crane, and Half Man, along with other tribal leaders, acknowledged that they wanted both trade and peace. With these objectives agreeable to both the Yankton and American delegations, Lewis and Clark felt that the council was a success.²⁹ Today, the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks manages the Chief White Crane Recreational Area near Yankton, which is named for the chief whom Lewis and Clark identified as the Second Chief during the council of August 1804.³⁰

Despite the tension that prevailed during Lewis and Clark's stay with the Lakota from 25-28 September 1804, the Lakota leaders eventually sought peace with the United States, especially once the War of 1812 concluded. In 1815, William Clark, serving as Missouri Territorial Governor, hosted a large multi-tribal peace council at Portage des Sioux (Missouri). Thirty-seven Indian nations were invited to send delegations to the council, which was the first of its kind west of the Mississippi River. Among the first of the Indian leaders to arrive at the council were the Lakota leaders Black Buffalo and the Partisan.³¹

When Lewis and Clark first met Black Buffalo and the Partisan in 1804 near present-day Fort Pierre, South Dakota, the political rivalry between the two Lakota leaders is believed to have contributed greatly to the tensions between the Lewis and Clark expedition and the Lakota. Yet, in the summer of 1815, both leaders stood together to represent the Lakota nation in an attempt to forge peaceful relations with the United States. Unfortunately, Black Buffalo, who is credited with allowing Lewis and Clark to continue their expedition in 1804, died suddenly at the Portage des Sioux proceedings. Hoping to avoid any negative reactions, Clark ensured that Black Buffalo received a funeral fit for a great tribal leader. While American troops marched and gave rifle salutes to the fallen Lakota chieftain, the most notable event of the funeral came when the Omaha chief Big Elk eulogized Black Buffalo. The Omaha and Lakota were long time rivals; consequently, Big Elk's eulogy was important in establishing a peaceful atmosphere for the treaty talks. According to the *Missouri Gazette*, Big Elk said, "What is past

and cannot be prevented should not be grieved for. Be not discouraged or displeased then that in visiting your father here, you have lost your chief . . . Chief of the Warriors – Your labors have not been vain – Your attention shall not be forgotten.”³²

The Lakota leaders, along with William Clark as the main representative of the United States, signed the Treaty of Portage des Sioux on 19 July 1815, while the United States Senate ratified it on 26 December 1815. In short, the treaty stated that “there shall be perpetual peace and friendship” between the United States and the Teton tribe.³³ The treaty, of course, would be only one of many to be signed between the Sioux nation and the United States during the nineteenth century.

In retrospect, the significance of the many events and personalities of the 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark expedition did not end with the expedition itself. In many ways, the expedition marked the beginning of a drastically changing period of time in American history, which included trading, conflict, treaties, and westward expansion. The role of many expedition members and others with whom Lewis and Clark met continued to be significant to the history of South Dakota and the upper Missouri Valley for years, and in some cases, decades after the expedition returned in September 1806. Therefore, it is important to remember those who were a part of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the ever-changing course of history.

NOTES

1. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage – Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 415-16.
2. Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 2 volumes (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 638-39.
3. Ambrose, 387, 389.
4. Charles G. Clarke, *The Men of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1970, reprinted 2002), 46-47.
5. *Ibid.*, 46-47, 51, 59.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 42.
8. *An American Legacy: The Lewis and Clark Expedition*, (Great Falls, MT: Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, 2001), B.25-26, B.28.
9. Stephanie Ambrose Tubbs and Clay Straus Jenkinson, *The Lewis and Clark Companion – An Encyclopedic guide to the Voyage of Discovery*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 268-69.
10. James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 258-59.
11. Sheheke was often translated into Big White, however, recent scholarship uses the translation White Coyote.
12. Tracy Potter, *Sheheke: Mandan Indian Diplomat – The Story of White Coyote, Thomas Jefferson, and Lewis and Clark*, (Washburn, ND: Fort Mandan Press, 2003), 138; Landon Y. Jones, *William Clark and the Shaping of the West*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 158.
13. Ambrose, 166.
14. Tubbs and Jenkinson, 95, 169-70.
15. Potter, 138.
16. *Ibid.*, 139-40.
17. Mark Chalkley, “Eagle Feather Goes to Washington,” *We Proceeded On*, May 2003, 7-8.
18. Jones, 161.
19. Potter, 143-46; Ronda, 248-49.
20. Clarke, 52; and Jackson, 432.
21. Jones, 172.
22. Ambrose, 444.
23. Jackson, 451-54.
24. Ambrose, 450-51, 456, 458.

25. Potter, 163.
26. Clarke, 45.
27. Herbert S. Schell, *The History of South Dakota, (4th Edition, Revised)*, (Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), 58.
28. Jones, 270.
29. Ronda, 25-26.
30. "Chief White Crane Recreational Area," South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks website at: <http://www.sdgfp.info/Parks/Regions/LewisClark/ChiefWhiteCrane.htm>. Retrieved 13 April 2006.
31. Jones, 226-28.
32. *Ibid.*, 229-30.
33. Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Teton, 1815," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Volume II*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 112-13.