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V.—THE STORY OF LEWIS AND CLARK'S JOURNALS.

By REUBEN GOLD THWAITES, LL. D.,

*Secretary and Superintendent of Wisconsin Historical Society.*

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# THE STORY OF LEWIS AND CLARK'S JOURNALS.

BY

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SECRETARY AND SUPERINTENDENT OF WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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## THE STORY OF LEWIS AND CLARK'S JOURNALS.

By REUBEN GOLD THWAITES, LL. D.

The story of the records of the transcontinental exploration of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark (1803–1806) is almost as romantic as that of the great discovery itself.

In his detailed instructions to Lewis, dated June 20, 1803<sup>a</sup>, President Jefferson displayed particular concern for the journals of the proposed expedition to the Pacific, which, with all possible scientific data, were to be prepared “with great pains & accuracy, to be entered distinctly & intelligibly for others as well as yourself.” The notes of the two captains were to be guarded against loss by making copies of them—“one of these copies [to] be written on the paper of the birch, as less liable to injury from damp than common paper.”<sup>b</sup> Not only were Lewis and Clark to keep such journals, but their men were encouraged to do likewise.

The two leaders faithfully performed their duty in this regard, and the four sergeants—Charles Floyd, Patrick Gass, John Ordway, and Nathaniel Pryor—also wrote journals. Tradition has it that at least three of the twenty-three privates were, as well, diarists upon the expedition, but the only private's notebook now known to us is that of Joseph Whitehouse.<sup>c</sup>

It was the daily custom of the captains to make rough notes, with rude outline maps, plans, and miscellaneous sketches, in field books which they doubtless carried in their pockets. When encamped for a protracted period, these were

<sup>a</sup>State Department (Washington, D. C.), Bureau of Rolls, Jefferson Papers, series 1, vol. 9, doc 269.

<sup>b</sup>This suggestion was not adopted in practice.

<sup>c</sup>In the camp orders issued by Lewis and Clark, May 26, 1804, occurs this sentence: “The serg<sup>ts</sup>. in addition to those [other] duties are directed to keep a seperate journal from day to day of all passing occurrences, and such other observations on the country &c., as shall appear to them worthy of notice.”

developed into more formal records. In this development each often borrowed freely from the other's notes—Lewis, the better scholar of the two, generally rewriting in his own manner the material obtained from Clark; but the latter not infrequently copied Lewis practically verbatim, but with his own phonetic spelling.

Upon reaching St. Louis, on the return (September 23, 1806), these individual journals were for the most part transcribed by their authors into neat blank books—bound in red morocco, and gilt-edged—with the thought of preparing them for early publication. After this process, the original field books must have been cast aside and in large measure destroyed; for but one of these<sup>a</sup> is now known to exist—a bulky duodecimo, containing about 20,000 words, wrapped in an irregular piece of soft elkskin, rudely stitched to the back. There have come down to us, however, several notebooks which apparently were written up in the camps.

Altogether, these journals of the captains cover each and every day the expedition was out; largely a double record, although occasionally there are periods when we have the journal of but one of them.<sup>b</sup> The manuscripts well exemplify the habits and characteristics of the two men—Clark, the more experienced frontiersman of the two, expressing himself sententiously with Doric simplicity and vigor of phrase, and often amusingly eccentric orthography; Lewis, in more correct diction, inclined to expatiate on details, especially with regard to Indians and natural history, and frequently revealing a poetic temperament and a considerable fund of humor.

In February, 1806, when the expedition was upon the Pacific coast, President Jefferson sent to Congress a message,

<sup>a</sup> By Clark, dated September 13–December 31, 1805, and described *post*.

<sup>b</sup> We have much more of Clark in these journals, than of Lewis. The lacunæ in the Lewis manuscripts, as compared with the dates covered by Clark, are as follows:

1804—May 14, 16–19, 21–September 15; September 18–December 31=228 days.

1805—January 1–February 2; February 14–April 6; August 27–September 8; September 11–17, 23–November 28; December 1–31=168 days.

1806—August 13–September 26=45 days. But during much of this period Lewis was disabled from a wound, and therefore unable to write.

The only gap in the Clark journals is the brief period from February 3 to 12 (inclusive), 1805=10 days.

Whether the missing Lewis entries (441 days, as compared with Clark; but we may eliminate 41 for the period when he was disabled, thus leaving 400) are still in existence or not, is unknown to the present writer. There appears to be no doubt that he regularly kept his diary. It is possible that the missing notes, in whole or in part, were with him when he met his death in Tennessee, and were either accidentally or purposely destroyed by others.



inclosing, among other matters, a letter from Lewis dated at Fort Mandan (near the present Bismarek, N. Dak.) in the previous April, just as the explorers were leaving for the upper country. At that point the party had passed their first winter. The communication, describing the experiences of the expedition as far as Fort Mandan, was accompanied by brief reports of explorations on the Red and Washita rivers by Doctor Sibley, Doctor Hunter, and William C. Dunbar, together with statistics of the Western tribes and other data of the kind; the ill-assorted whole being promptly published as a public document.<sup>a</sup> Based upon this fragmentary publication, there soon sprung up, both in England and America, a long list of popular compilations, telling the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition during its first year, expanded with miscellaneous information about the Western Indians, picked up here and there—some of it singularly inaccurate.

A year later (early in 1807), only a few months after the return of the party, there was published at Philadelphia the first detailed report of the entire tour—being the journal of Sergt. Patrick Gass, an observant man, whose rough but generally accurate notes had been carefully written up by an Irish schoolmaster, named David McKeehan, of Wellsburg, W. Va. This little volume of about 83,000 words,<sup>b</sup> with its curiously crude illustrations, was reprinted in London in 1808, while new American editions appeared at Philadelphia in 1810, 1811, and 1812, and a French translation at Paris in 1810. It is now, in any form, a rare book.

It had been the intention of Lewis and Clark to publish their own journals; they had presented no official detailed report to the Government, it being left with them by Jefferson, as we shall see, to make such literary use of their material as they saw fit. Unfortunately for this purpose, both men

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<sup>a</sup> Message from the President of the United States, communicating discoveries made in exploring the Missouri, Red River, and Washita, by Captains Lewis and Clark, Doctor Sibley, and Mr. Dunbar; with a statistical account of the countries adjacent (Washington, 1806).

<sup>b</sup> A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery, under the Command of Captain Lewis and Captain Clarke, of the Army of the United States; from the Mouth of the River Missouri, through the Interior Parts of North America, to the Pacific Ocean; during the Years 1804, 1805, & 1806. Containing An Authentic Relation of the most interesting Transactions during the Expedition: A Description of the Country: And an Account of its Inhabitants, Soil, Climate, Curiosities, and Vegetable and Animal Productions. By Patrick Gass. One of the Persons employed in the Expedition. With Geographical and Explanatory Notes by the Publisher. Pittsburgh: David McKeehan. 1807



had soon after their return received, together with commissions as generals, important government appointments: Lewis being made governor of Louisiana Territory, and Clark its Indian agent and brigadier-general of militia.<sup>a</sup> The onerous duties appertaining to these offices, in the new and vast territory through which they had explored, were necessarily absorbing; and neither being a literary man, the task of publication was under such circumstances easily deferred.

Urged by Jefferson, however—who had from the first been keenly desirous to have the records of the exploration made, as soon as possible, the common property of the world—it was in 1809 agreed that General Lewis should at once undertake the editorship of the journals. Arrangements were made with C. & A. Conrad & Co., of Philadelphia, for the publication of the work, and a prospectus was circulated with a view of obtaining advance subscriptions. Lewis was traveling on horseback through Tennessee, on his way to Washington, intending thereafter to go to Philadelphia to enter upon this editorial task, when he lost his life during the night of October 11. A guest, at the time, of a wayside settler some 60 miles southwest of Nashville, it was reported that he had committed suicide, a theory which Jefferson, probably his closest friend, accepted without question; but it was, and still is, believed by many that he was murdered for the small sum of money upon his person at the time.

Clark, now the sole surviving head of the expedition, promptly sought the assistance of an editor in bringing out the proposed publication. It appears that, probably early in 1810, overtures were made to him from some literary person in Richmond, Va.;<sup>b</sup> but these he rejected, and earnestly solicited the aid of Nicholas Biddle, of Philadelphia. Biddle, who had descended from one of the oldest Philadelphia families, had graduated from Princeton in his sixteenth year (1801). He had been secretary to John Armstrong, our minister to France (1804), and while in Paris had superintended the pay-

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<sup>a</sup> Upon the expedition, Lewis held a captaincy in the First regiment of infantry; Clark had been commissioned as second lieutenant of artillery. On their return they both resigned from the army—Clark on February 27, 1807, and Lewis on March 2 following. March 3, Jefferson signed Lewis's commission as governor of Louisiana Territory; nine days later he signed Clark's commission as brigadier-general of its militia, an office combined with that of Indian agent.

<sup>b</sup> See Biddle-Clark correspondence in Coues, *Lewis and Clark*, I, pp. lxxxii et seq.



ment of American claims growing out of the Louisiana purchase, in this capacity greatly surprising the French officials both by his brilliancy and his youth. After traveling extensively in Europe, he became secretary to Mr. Monroe while the latter was minister to Great Britain, but in 1807 returned to practice law in Philadelphia. At the time of Clark's invitation Biddle was only 24 years of age. He had, nevertheless, already attained considerable reputation as a financier, lawyer, and man of letters—in the last-named field, being editor of the *Port-folio*—and socially was considered by many both the handsomest and the most charming man in Philadelphia, as he certainly was one of the most cultivated. It is small wonder that Clark chose him as the writer of the narrative.

In his second letter to Biddle, dated February 20, 1810, from the home of his father-in-law, Col. George Hancock, near Fincastle, Va., then being visited by the General, he invites his young friend to come to him at that place, "where I have my books and memorandums and stay with me a week or two; read over & make yourself thereby acquainted with everything which may not be explained in the Journals. \* \* \* Such parts as may not be full, I can explain, and add such additional matter as I may recollect. I brought the Books with me to Copy such parts as are intended for the Botanical work which I shall send to Doct<sup>r</sup>. Barton, and will deliver the Books to you if you will engage to write the naritive &c."

On March 3 Biddle replied to Clark, regretting "that it will be out of my power to undertake what you had the politeness to offer," explaining that "My occupations necessarily confine me to Phil<sup>a</sup>. and I have neither health nor leisure to do sufficient justice to the fruits of your enterprize and ingenuity. You cannot be long however without making a more fortunate selection."

Two weeks later, however (March 17), he again addressed Clark—who was still at Fincastle—and reports having seen some of the latter's friends in Philadelphia, the result of the conference being that he "will therefore very readily agree to do all that is in my power for the advancement of the work; and I think I can promise with some confidence that it shall be ready as soon as the publisher is prepared to print it. Having made up my mind today, I am desirous that no delay shall occur on my part." He therefore will soon visit the



General at Fincastle. The latter replied (March 25) with "most sincere acknowledgments for the friendly sentiments," and urged an immediate visit, "as my business calls me to Louisiana; and nothing detains me but the business I wish with you."

Biddle made the trip to Fincastle, noted Clark's oral statements, and carried back with him to Philadelphia the journals and maps of the expedition, from which he at once began to write his narrative. In May Clark sent to the editor a young man named George Shannon,<sup>a</sup> who as a mere boy of 16 years, had creditably served as one of the privates in the expedition. Then 23 years old, and studying for the law, Shannon appears to have remained in Philadelphia throughout most of the time spent in drafting the narrative, and materially assisted Biddle, both in interpreting the notebooks and giving personal recollections of the tour. Not only did Clark tender the services of Shannon, but he himself was in frequent correspondence with the editor, and purchased and forwarded to him the journal of Sergeant Ordway.<sup>b</sup> We have seen that the journal of Sergeant Gass had already been published in 1807.

The talented young editor at once surrendered himself almost completely to the difficult task before him. He had promised Clark that the narrative should be ready for the press within twelve months. By the 7th of July he appears to have finished the story of the exploration up to July 7, 1805, above the Falls of the Missouri; for in a note to his distinguished correspondent, chiefly concerning the maps for the publication,<sup>c</sup> he playfully says: "To-day I have sent you and ten men up into a bottom to look for wood to make canoes after the unhappy failure of your iron boat." A year later (July 8, 1811) he wrote to Clark, informing him that he had "completed the work, agreeable to our engagement," and was "ready to put it to the press whenever Mr. Conrad chose."

<sup>a</sup> Shannon was born in Pennsylvania, of a good family, in 1787. After the return of the expedition he lost a leg as a result of a wound at the hands of Indians, the amputation having taken place at St. Charles, Mo. Soon after serving Biddle, he was admitted to the bar at Louisville, Ky.; becoming a circuit judge in Kentucky, a State senator in Missouri, and United States district attorney for Missouri. He died suddenly in court in 1836, aged 49 years.

<sup>b</sup> Coues assumes, in his Lewis and Clark, that Biddle had also the use of the journal of Sergeant Pryor, but I can find no evidence to this effect.

<sup>c</sup> Which were being prepared by F. R. Hassler, Schenectady, N. Y.



In our day a work of this character would eagerly be sought by publishers. Stanley, Nordenskjold, Nansen, and Hedin have had but to choose among applicants from the book trade. Ninety years ago the situation was far different. John Conrad, a prominent publisher of his day, was finally prevailed upon to undertake the work, the financial outcome of which seemed to some others doubtful. He appears to have entered into the project with much interest; but by the time Biddle was ready he had fallen into financial straits and in due course was plunged into bankruptcy, for this was the period of the second war with England and business was unsettled. Biddle accordingly writes to Clark July 4, 1811, stating the facts in the case and incidentally mentioning that "last winter I was prevented from going to the legislature chiefly by a desire to stay & superintend the printing." He has, however, made an arrangement with Thomas Bradford, "one of the best booksellers here," and hopes that "we can proceed vigorously & soon get the volumes out."

Despite Biddle's optimism affairs dragged slowly, for Bradford's terms were unacceptable. Over a year later (September 5, 1812), we find Clark offering Biddle "the half of every profit arising from it, if you will attend to it, have it Completed as far as it is possible and necessary, prented published &c. including the advances which have and may be necessary &c." Biddle does not appear to have accepted this financial proposition. More familiar with the book market, he probably anticipated the failure of the project.

Throughout the entire course of the work Conrad continued his friendly concern, and assisted Biddle in his strenuous search for a publisher. November 12 he tells Biddle by letter that he has tried Johnson & Warner without success, that firm "seem to have so incorrect an idea of the value of the work and probable profits arising from the publication of it." He advises Biddle to "agree to Mr. Bradfords offer. It is I am confident the best bargain you can make for Genl. Clarke. The copyright I presume will be in him (Genl C.) & I suppose he will derive the entire benefit of the sale of the M. S. in England."

This advice Biddle in due time felt impelled to accept, and February 23, 1813, tells Clark that having found Bradford's



terms "not such as I thought advantageous I made proposals to all the booksellers in town. The stagnation in that branch of business was so great that no one was willing to embark in it, and after a great deal of fruitless negociation I was obliged to return and on the advice of Mr. Conrad accept Mr. Bradford's proposals \* \* \* I now wait only for the engravers who will soon I hope finish their work and then we can strike off the printing immediately & in a little time the work will be published." A year was, however, exhausted in the mechanical execution of the two small volumes. During this time the publishing firm of Bradford & Inskeep, which undertook the work, in their turn became insolvent, and at the actual time of publication (February 20, 1814)<sup>a</sup> were in the bankruptcy court.

Just before going to press Biddle was elected to the legislature, in which he soon won an enviable reputation for statesmanlike qualities. Being thus prevented from paying that attention to the book which he thought it deserved, he engaged Paul Allen, a Philadelphia newspaper writer, to supervise the issue. In a letter to Clark (March 23), reviewing some of the circumstances of the publication, Biddle says: "The gentleman who received and prepared it for the press, Mr. Allen, is a very capable person, and as I did not put the finishing hand to the volumes I did not think it right to take from him the credit of his own exertion and care by announcing personally the part which I had in the compilation. I am content that my trouble in the business should be recognized only by the pleasure which attended it and also by the satisfaction of making your acquaintance, which I shall always value. I could have wished that your time had permitted you to revise the whole of the work, as no doubt some errors and inadvertences have from the nature of the volumes and the circumstances attending the publication crept into them. I hope, however, that you will not find them very numerous or impor-

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<sup>a</sup>The date of the first sale of volumes. See Coues's *Lewis and Clark*, I, pp. xci, xcii, for detailed statement of the financial outcome of the enterprise.

The full title of the work was: *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the Sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky Mountains and down the River Columbia to the Pacific Ocean. Performed during the Years 1804-5-6. By order of the Government of the United States. Prepared for the Press by Paul Allen, Esquire. Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1814. 2 vols.*



tant. \* \* \* Henceforth you may sleep upon your fame, which must last as long as books can endure. Mr. Bradford has, I presume, sent you a copy of the work." Not long after this (July 1, 1813), General Clark, who since the expedition had been a resident of St. Louis, had been appointed governor of Missouri Territory.

Despite Biddle's determination to claim no credit for the great narrative which has long been regarded a classic in American history, it is quite apparent that Allen's connection with the enterprise was but that of reviser for the press. He himself modestly states in the preface that he does not wish "to arrogate anything from the exertions of others;" that "he found but little to change, and that his labor has been principally confined to revising the manuscript, comparing it with the original papers, and inserting such additional matter as appears to have been intentionally deferred by the writer [Mr. Biddle] till the period of a more mature revisal." Allen secured from President Jefferson an admirable memoir of Lewis; possibly he also blocked out the chapters; and the mechanical form may in a measure be due to him. His labors were doubtless important from the typographical and clerical side; but of course the credit for the enterprise should chiefly rest with Biddle. That the latter had finished the work, ready for the final touches of a practical reviser for the press, is evident from his own letters to Clark, as well as the confirmatory statement which has come down to us from Conrad.

In his admirable edition of the Travels (New York, 1893, 4 vols.) Dr. Elliott Coues spends much space and energy in persistently heaping vituperation on Allen for fathering a work mainly performed by another. Biddle had the undoubted right to withdraw his name from public connection with the narrative. We may consider his reasons Quixotic, but he was entitled to be guided by them, and they certainly bespeak a nature more generous than we are accustomed to meet. As for Allen, it is quite evident that he did his part with becoming modesty; and no doubt he well earned the fee of \$500—partly taken out in trade—with which he was rewarded by the publishers. Press revision and proof reading are no light tasks; although we might wish that, while he was at it, he had also given us an index.

The size of the edition was apparently 2,000 copies.<sup>a</sup> Of these it would seem that 583 were either lost in some manner—"supposed to be destroyed in binder's or printer's hands"—or were defective from lacking plates. This would leave for sale only 1,417 perfect copies, which explains why the book is now rare. The net profits on the enterprise were computed at \$154.10, of which neither Clark nor Biddle appears to have received a penny. The copper plates of the engraved maps became the property of the latter, and are now owned by his son, Hon. Craig Biddle, of Philadelphia. To Clark was left the copyright. As for the heirs of Lewis, we find them<sup>b</sup> as late as 1816-17 making application to Clark for their share of the earnings, "persuaded that profit arising from that work has been received," and being informed by the kind-hearted governor of the dismal result of the enterprise.

Over two and a half years after the publication a letter from Clark to Jefferson (October 10, 1816)<sup>c</sup> reveals the fact that the explorer had himself "not been so fortunate as to procure a single volume as yet"—thus showing that Bradford, in the midst of his financial troubles, had not carried out his agreement with Biddle, mentioned above, to transmit a copy of the work to the man chiefly concerned in its appearance.

The service of Biddle in editing the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition was a far more difficult literary undertaking than is commonly supposed. The entire mass of notes which he had before him may be thus roughly computed:

|  | Words.    |
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| Lewis and Clark journals (Amer. Philosophical Society codices) . . . . . | 900,000   |
| Gass journal (as printed) . . . . .                                      | 83,000    |
| Ordway journal—unknown, but possibly . . . . .                           | 100,000   |
|  | 1,083,000 |

To this we should add about 150,000 words in the Clark-Voorhis collection, later to be described, and undoubtedly at one time in Biddle's hands, and whatever additional notes he may have made during conversations with Clark and Shannon,

<sup>a</sup>In this I follow Coues.

<sup>b</sup>Coues. I, pp. xciii, xciv.

<sup>c</sup>Original MS. in possession of American Philosophical Society.



or as the result of correspondence with the former—and they must have been copious. A large proportion of the scientific matter of the Lewis and Clark notebooks, however—which may have aggregated possibly a fourth of the journals as a whole—had been eliminated by Clark and Biddle. This material, carefully copied out, was sent to Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton, an eminent naturalist in Philadelphia.<sup>a</sup> Doctor Barton agreed to prepare a special volume, “which was to have been (by contract) prepared in six months from the time” of the appearance of the narrative of the journey. Owing to Barton’s illness and consequent death this “scientific part”<sup>b</sup> was not written. Thus, while the Biddle narrative gives a popular account of some of the principal discoveries, the scientific data so laboriously kept by Lewis and Clark—chiefly the former—has thus far not been given to the world.

It was Biddle’s task to weave this great mass of heterogeneous data into a readable narrative which should have unity and a simple and forceful literary style. Adopting so far as possible the language of the original journals, where essential he amplifies and explains them from his additional data, it being plain to see, on comparison with the originals, wherein Clark and Shannon and the Ordway and Gass journals had assisted him to a more complete understanding. The nearly 1,200,000 words of the originals he condensed into 370,000 words. The first person plural is used, save where the captains are individually mentioned, and then we have the third person singular. So skillfully is the work done that probably few readers have realized that they had not before them the veritable journals of the explorers themselves, written upon the spot. The result will always remain one of the best digested and most interesting books of American travel, comparable in many respects with *Astoria* and *Bonneville’s Adventures*—of course lacking Irving’s charm of style, but possessing what Irving’s two Western classics do not, the ring of truth, which never fails to appeal to those who love a tale of noble adventure in the cause of civilization.

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<sup>a</sup> A professor of medicine in the University of Pennsylvania and a vice-president of the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>b</sup> Clark’s letter to Jefferson, dated St. Louis, October 10, 1816, in archives of American Philosophical Society.



We have seen that Jefferson, who set on foot the expedition,<sup>a</sup> had from the first expressed much concern in its records, both in the making and the publication. He had urged their early printing, and on Lewis's death spurred Clark to action, with what result has been related. The dilatoriness of that performance—for which Clark, however, was only partly responsible—fretted the great man. December 6, 1813, he wrote to Baron von Humboldt, "You will find it inconceivable that Lewis's journey to the Pacific should not yet have appeared; nor is it in my power to tell you the reason. The measures taken by his surviving companion, Clark, for the publication, have not answered our wishes in point of dispatch. I think, however, from what I have heard, that the mere journal will be out within a few weeks in two volumes, 8vo. These I will take care to send you with the tobacco seed you desired, if it be possible for them to escape the thousand ships of our enemies spread over the ocean. The botanical and zoological discoveries of Lewis will probably experience greater delay, and become known to the world through other channels before that volume will be ready. The Atlas, I believe, waits on the leisure of the engraver."<sup>b</sup> Nearly a hundred years have elapsed, and we still await its publication.

Three years later (1816) we find Jefferson instituting a search for the manuscript journals of the explorers, with a view of placing them in the archives of the American Philosophical Society. He writes (April 26)<sup>c</sup> to Prof. Joseph F. Correa da Serra, a botanist then holding membership in the society, asking him, in the cause of science, to interest him-

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<sup>a</sup>In 1783 he suggested to Gen. George Rogers Clark, oldest brother of William, an expedition "for exploring the country from the Missisipi to California," but nothing came of it. The original MS. of this letter is in the Draper MSS., Wisconsin Historical Society, press mark 52 J 93. In 1786, while American minister at Paris, he proposed to John Ledyard, of Connecticut, a plan for penetrating through Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, "and procuring a passage thence in some of the Russian vessels to Nootka Sound, whence he might make his way across the continent to America [the United States]." But Ledyard was turned back by order of Empress Catherine II, when within a few days of Kamchatka, and this project failed. (See Jefferson's "Autobiography" in Ford's edition of his writings, I, pp. 94-96.) In 1793 he arranged with the French botanist André Michaux to make a transcontinental tour up the Missouri and down the Columbia; but Michaux became involved in the Genet intrigue and got no farther west than Kentucky. Ten years later his fourth attempt succeeded under the direction of Lewis and Clark.

<sup>b</sup>Ford, IX, p. 433.

<sup>c</sup>The original MS. of this letter is in the possession of the society.



self in the matter, and describing in some detail the character of the documents—with which he was himself familiar, for he had handled them at Monticello. These papers, he informs Da Serra, “are the property of the government, the fruits of the expedition undertaken at such expence of money and risk of valuable lives. They contain exactly the whole of the information which it was our object to obtain for the benefit of our own country and of the world, but we were willing to give to Lewis and Clarke whatever pecuniary benefits might be derived from the publication, and therefore left the papers in their hands, taking for granted that their interests would produce a speedy publication, which would be better if done under their direction. but the death of Cap<sup>t</sup> Lewis, the distance and occupations of General Clarke, and the bankruptcy of their bookseller, have retarded the publication, and rendered necessary that the government should attend to the reclamation & security of the papers. their recovery is now become an imperious duty. their safest deposit as fast as they can be collected, will be the Philosophical society, who no doubt will be so kind as to recieve and preserve them, subject to the order of government. \* \* \*

As to any claims of individuals to these papers, it is to be observed that, as being the property of the public, we are certain neither Lewis nor Clarke would undertake to convey away the right to them, and that they could not convey them, had they been capable of intending it. \* \* \* my interference will, I trust, be excused, not only from the portion which every citizen has in whatever is public, but from the peculiar part I have had in the design and execution of this expedition.”

It appears that Biddle, who still held the majority of the notebooks, was disinclined to surrender them to Jefferson save on order of Clark. September 8 Jefferson wrote to the General soliciting such an order, to “be given in favor either of the War office or myself. \* \* \* I should receive them only in trust for the War office, to which they belong, and take their orders relating to them.” He wishes to deposit with the Philosophical Society “for safe-keeping the travelling pocket journals as originals to be recurred to on all interesting questions arising out of the published journal,” his desire



being to secure "to the world all the beneficial results we were entitled to expect from it [the expedition] and which would so fully justify the expences of the expedition incurred by the United States in that expectation."

October 10, Clark responds to Jefferson<sup>a</sup> by inclosing "an Order on my friend M<sup>r</sup>. Biddle for the papers in his possession;" Biddle being at the same time instructed as his agent, "to collect all the Books, papers, specimens, &c.," in the hands of Doctor Barton's heirs or others. Clark expresses interest in Jefferson's desire to collect the papers, and adds: "From the mortification of not haveing succeeded in giving to the world all the results of that expedition, I feel Relief & greatitude for the interest which you are willing to take, in effecting what has not been in my power to accomplish." Curiously enough, as we shall soon see, Clark appears to have had at the time in his possession at St. Louis five of his own original journals, nearly all the maps of the expedition, and many miscellaneous documents concerning it; these he did not surrender.

June 28, 1817, Jefferson writes to Dr. John Vaughan, of the society, saying that although Mr. Da Serra had obtained several notebooks from Mr. Biddle and Mrs. Barton, there was still experienced considerable difficulty in collecting all of the documents. Evidently much annoyed, he proposes to bring pressure to bear through the Secretary of War, "that office having some rights to these papers." The further suggestion is made that the society publish "in their Transactions or otherwise," a digest of the "zoological, vegetable & mineralogical papers & subjects."

On the 8th of April, 1818, we learn from the manuscript minutes of the society that "Mr. Nicholas Biddle deposited the original journals of Lewis and Clark, with an account of them and of those journals and documents which he was not possessed of." The following receipt therefor was ordered to be given by the secretary:

Rec<sup>d</sup> April 8. 1818 of Nicholas Biddle 14 Volumes of the Pocket Journal of Meis Lewis & Clarke: a Volume of astronomical observations & other Matter by Capt Lewis: a fmall Copy Book containing some Notes by Capt. Lewis— A Rough draft of his letter to the President from St. Louis

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<sup>a</sup>Original MS. in possession of American Philosophical Society.



announcing his return — Two Statistical Tables of the Indian Tribes West of the Mississippi river made by Governor Clarke: All which are Deposited with the Hist Com<sup>ee</sup> in compliance with the request of Gov<sup>r</sup> Clark in his Letter to Nicholas Biddle dated 10 Oct 1816 & forwarded to the Hist. Com<sup>ee</sup> by Mr. Jefferson.

It is understood & agreed on the part of the Histo. Com<sup>ee</sup> in receiving these books & papers, that Gov. W<sup>m</sup> Clark his heirs or assigns shall at all times have the full use of them for any future edition of his Travels. By order of the Hist. Com<sup>ee</sup>. Jn Vaughan recording Sec. of the Hist. & Lit Class of the Am. Ph. Soc.

The deposit was accompanied by this letter from Mr. Biddle, giving interesting particulars, which in the present connection are worthy of preservation:<sup>a</sup>

PHILAD<sup>a</sup> April 6, 1818

DEAR SIR: I have the pleasure of depositing with the Historical Committee the papers & books which accompany this letter, in compliance with the request of Governor Clark in his letter to me of the 10th of October 1816 transmitted by M<sup>r</sup> Jefferson.

It may perhaps be useful to add such notices of other objects connected with them, as may enable the Committee to extend its researches.

It was in the Spring of 1810 that I received from Governor Clark in Virginia, & brought to Philadelphia the papers & documents deemed necessary for the publication of the Travels. They consisted of,

1. A large map of the country between the Mississippi & the Pacific illustrating the course of the journey.
2. A map for M<sup>r</sup> Hafsler who was in the state of New York and engaged in some astronomical calculations for the work.
3. Some documents for D<sup>r</sup> Barton.
4. The manuscript journal of Serjeant Ordway, one of the party
5. The pocket-Journals of the expedition, of these

(1) The map after the draft was made from it for the engraver was delivered by the draftsman, M<sup>r</sup> Lewis, to Governor Clark when last in Phil<sup>a</sup> about the year 1813.

(2) The other map was forwarded by M<sup>r</sup> Vaughan to M<sup>r</sup> Hafsler, who in his letter dated Aug. 12. 1810 at Schenectady mentioned the receipt of it.

(3) The documents for D<sup>r</sup> Barton, were delivered to him immediately after my arrival in Phil<sup>a</sup>. Not having received any list of them from Gov<sup>r</sup> Clark I of course took none from D<sup>r</sup> Barton, and as I was merely the bearer of them, my recollection is not as accurate as it would have been had they fallen more immediately under my examination. My impression however is that the packet for D<sup>r</sup> Barton consisted of small manuscript books & some papers. The books were chiefly extracts relative to objects of natural history taken from the original Journal now deposited with the Committee. The papers were Indian vocabularies, collected during the journey. They formed, I think, a bundle of loose sheets each sheet containing a printed vocabulary in English with the corresponding Indian

<sup>a</sup> Original MS. in possession of the society.



name in manuscript. There was also another collection of Indian vocabularies, which, if I am not mistaken, was in the handwriting of Mr Jefferson.<sup>a</sup>

I have turned to my letter to Governor Clark dated July 7. 1810, the first to him after my arrival at Phil<sup>a</sup>, in hopes of finding some further particulars, but the letter merely states in general terms "I need not say that I arrived safe at this place—that the map was immediately forwarded to Mr Hafslar, and that Dr Barton received all his papers." In the preface to the printed travels which, being published in Phil<sup>a</sup> whilst Dr Barton was there, must be presumed to have been correct—it is stated that "those parts of the work which relate to the various objects of natural history observed or collected during the journey, as well as the alphabets of the Indian languages are in the hands of Profef<sup>s</sup>or Barton, and will it is understood, shortly appear." This was in 1814.

I have mentioned these particulars so minutely because the description may perhaps enable some of the Committee to recognize the vocabularies, which I incline to think were the only things delivered by me to Dr Barton not included in the volumes now deposited.

(4) The journal of Serjeant Ordway was I believe a private purchase from that person. Governor Clark in his letter to me of the 24 Jany. 1818 desires me to send it to him.

(5) The Journals of Mefs<sup>rs</sup> Lewis & Clark from the beginning to the end of the journey are contained in the 14 volumes, all of which are now deposited. There is besides one volume of astronomical observations & other matter by Captain Lewis, a small copy book containing some notes by Captain Lewis—the rough draft of his letter to the President from St Louis announcing his return—and two statistical tables of the various tribes of Indians west of the Milsisipi made by Governor Clark.

These are all the observations which occur to me as promising to be useful to the Committee.

Very respectfully yrs

NICHOLAS BIDDLE

Honble WILLIAM TILGHMAN,

*Chairman of the Historical Committee of the Philos<sup>l</sup> Society.*

Here the records of Jefferson's search suddenly stop. Neither the Federal Government nor the American Philosophical Society having decided to publish them, these priceless manuscripts slumbered untouched for nearly seventy-five years in the library vault of the society, practically unknown to historical scholars. The two-volume Biddle narrative—an abbreviated paraphrase, but commonly accepted by the world as the actual journals of Lewis and Clark—had, after the first period of neglect, been reprinted over and over again in

<sup>a</sup>Several copies of the Indian vocabulary blank prepared by Jefferson are in the possession of the American Philosophical Society, having been presented by him in October, 1820. It consists of a sheet 7½ by 19½ inches, printed on both sides—although there are some which were printed on but one side of a sheet twice this width, the two pages standing side by side. Those filled out represent, among others, the Miami, Micmac, Shawnee, Chippewa, and Lenâpe languages, while several are still blank. In the collection are none which appear to have emanated from the Lewis and Clark expedition.



England and America (about twenty distinct editions) and been translated into the German and Dutch languages.

In 1892 Dr. Elliott Coues, eminent as a scientist and traveler, as well as an editor of American historical sources, was engaged in editing with elaborate notes a new edition of Biddle. He already had most, if not all, of his matter before him in galley proofs when (December) he learned for the first time of the existence of the original manuscripts in Philadelphia. Armed with a letter from the explorer's son, Jefferson Kearny Clark, of St. Louis, Coues requested the loan of the journals from their custodians. This was granted by the society (vote of December 16), and the manuscripts were accordingly sent to him at Washington. He considered it too late to block out the work afresh and to discard Biddle's text, but compromised by enriching his notes with many citations from the originals—unfortunately freely modernized, as was his custom with all of the Western manuscripts which he edited—and from them also compiled a new chapter in the Biddle style, which he inserted into the body of the book as though a part of the Biddle text. His modified excerpts but served to whet the appetites of Western historians, and thus led to the project for their eventual publication in extenso and with literal accuracy.

In returning the journals to the society Coues transmitted therewith a detailed report upon their scope and condition.<sup>a</sup> While in his possession he attached to each journal (or codex) a memorandum summarizing its contents, and to each codex gave an identifying letter, running from A to T.<sup>b</sup> This was

<sup>a</sup> Published in American Philosophical Proceedings, XXXI (No. 140), pp. 17-33.

<sup>b</sup> There are in this collection eighteen notebooks in all, and twelve parcels of loose sheets. Of these, thirteen are small books, bound in red morocco covers,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches in dimension, each containing 152 pages—seven of these books are by Lewis and six by Clark; they are collectively called "the red books," and are Codices D-P of Coues's arrangement. There is one volume by Clark of similar size, bound in brown leather and containing 274 pages, which is lettered as Codex C. Then come four bound in boards, marble paper sides, containing about 184 pages each, two being by Clark and two by both explorers, known as Codices A, B, Q, and R. The loose sheets, consisting of leaves torn from the other books, are labeled Codices Aa, Ba, Fa, Fb, Fc, Fd, Fe, Ia, La, Lb, S, and T. It is difficult to say which of these, if any, were actually carried in the field. In his letter to Da Serra of April 26, 1816, already cited, Jefferson assumes that the red morocco books were carried in the field by Lewis, "in which, in his own handwriting, he had journalized all occurrences, day by day, as he travelled;" indeed, we have already seen that Jefferson called them "travelling pocket journals." Coues thinks, however, that probably none of the codices, except possibly Codex C, was a field book, but was written up afterwards. It is not necessary here to cite the evidence in detail, but I am also inclined to this view, save that as Codex C differs radically in appearance from the known Clark field book in the possession of the Voorhis family (to be described later), I am disposed to consider C as a copy, possibly made at Fort Mandan or Fort Clatsop.



commendable, but certain other liberties which he took with these precious manuscripts merit our condemnation, for in many codices he freely interlined the text with his own verbal changes and comments, and in general appeared to treat the material as though mere copy for the printer, which might be revised by him with impunity. Apparently the codices were unopened by the custodians after their return, for it was not until the summer of 1903 that the society authorities were made aware, by one who was examining them in detail, of the astonishing treatment to which they had been subjected by Coues.

The next chapter in the story opened in the spring of 1901, when the society's historical committee determined—in view of the forthcoming Louisiana Purchase Centennial—at last to carry out Mr. Jefferson's suggestion, and secure the publication of the Lewis and Clark journals direct from the original manuscripts in their custody. They succeeded in interesting in this project the firm of Dodd, Mead & Co., of New York, who in turn engaged the present writer as editor of the work.

In the course of the consequent investigation into the sources there came to view in the society's library a few other Lewis and Clark items, besides the codices handled and labeled by Coues. These were chiefly statistical tables regarding the Western Indians, a meteorological record, and a list of the explorers' specimens sent from Fort Mandan to the society<sup>a</sup>—matters of considerable, although not commanding, importance.

In Coues's report on the codices, as published in the Society's Proceedings,<sup>b</sup> occurs this note: "One of Clark's journals is now in the possession of his son, Mr. Jefferson K. Clark, of St. Louis. I am not informed of the date covered by this volume, nor of the nature of its contents." Upon assuming charge of the proposed publication, the writer at once approached the widow of Mr. Clark—the latter had died in New York soon after the appearance of the Coues edition—and requested an opportunity of examining this notebook, under the supposition that it was the Ordway journal, which had been returned to General Clark as being his private property, purchased by him. For a long time this request

<sup>a</sup> Many of these are still preserved by the Academy of Sciences of Philadelphia.

<sup>b</sup> Page 22 of publication previously cited.



and many successive appeals through friends of the family were unanswered. Later it appeared that the present owners of the papers of William Clark were his granddaughter, Mrs. Julia Clark Voorhis, and her daughter, Miss Eleanor Glasgow Voorhis, both of New York City. The father of Mrs. Voorhis was the late George Rogers Hancock Clark, younger son of William, and the executor of the latter's estate. In this manner the family manuscripts relating to the expedition had descended to these two ladies.

In October, 1903, the writer was invited to visit the Voorhis home and examine material which had been uncovered during the search instituted by the ladies for the Ordway journal. The store of manuscripts which was shown to him upon his arrival was of surprising richness, consisting of the following items:

*Clark journals.*

Red morocco notebook No. 1.—Diary, April 7–July 3, 1805; 38,000 words, with three maps of the Falls of the Missouri.

Field book, bound in a rude piece of elkskin, secured by a thong and button, and undoubtedly carried in Clark's pocket upon the expedition—Diary, September 13–December 31, 1805; 20,000 words, with over a dozen full-page sketch maps of the trail over the mountains, interwoven with the badly-blurred text.

Red morocco notebook No. 2.—Diary, January 30–April 3, 1806; 41,000 words, with numerous pen sketches of canoes, birds, dwellings, tools, etc., by the same hand (Clark's) as those contained in Lewis's codices of similar dates in the American Philosophical Society's collection.

Red morocco notebook No. 3.—Diary, April 4–June 6, 1806; 35,000 words, with some sketch maps.

Fragment of journal.—Detached leaves, giving evidently first draft of entries, April 16–21, 1806; 2,300 words.

Red morocco notebook No. 4.—No diary, but containing sundry notes and tables of weather, distances, astronomical and ethnological data — all covered, however, in more finished manuscripts in the American Philosophical Society's collection. There are also in this book four excellent colored maps.

*Miscellaneous material.*

An orderly book running from April 1–October 13, 1804, and a detached entry for January 1, 1806; detached orders promulgated at River Dubois camp February 20 and March 4, 1804; also several other detached orders issued during the expedition.

Ten letters (some of them drafts).—Lewis offering (June 19, 1803) Clark an equal partnership in command of the expedition; Clark's acceptance thereof (July 17); Clark's letter to President Jefferson (July 24),



informing him of acceptance; Lewis to Clark (August 3), expressing his gratification at the latter's acceptance; six others, chiefly by Clark, relating to various phases of the expedition.

Numerous other letters and memoranda—among them an original of Jefferson's letter of credit; Clark's various military commissions before, during, and after the expedition; fragmentary records of courses and distances, Indian tribes, weather data, and the like; and data concerning the Assiniboin country, obtained from British traders at Fort Mandan.

#### *Maps.*

Most important of all the documents are about sixty detailed maps, for the most part made by Clark, while on the trip. Collectively, these illustrate the greater part of the journey both going and returning, indicate camping places, and contain many interesting comments on the country and the Indians. These charts vary in size from 8 inches square to several feet long.

In addition to the above materials bearing directly on the expedition, there are in this collection a considerable store of manuscripts concerning the career of William Clark during the period prior and anterior to the expedition, some of them being of much importance in connection with the early history of the territories of Louisiana and Missouri; there are also numerous manuscripts bearing upon the life of George Rogers Clark, William's elder brother. These, and several oil paintings of the Clarks—chiefly George Rogers and William—together with numerous valuable relics of these men, make of the home of Mrs. Voorhis a museum of great interest to students of Western history.

Two interesting queries arise in this connection: (1) How did General Clark obtain possession of this wealth of manuscripts, when all the records of the expedition were supposed to be in the hands of Biddle and Barton, as editors, and by the latter were delivered on Clark's order, and at Jefferson's request, to the Philosophical Society? (2) Why did not the General surrender them either to the Philosophical Society or to Jefferson, when the latter was eagerly searching for all the documents in the case, claiming them as the undoubted property of the Government, and all the while Clark was ostensibly assisting him to that end?

To the first query the probable answer is that Biddle found these particular notebooks of no service to him, for all of the facts contained in them are either in Lewis's journals of similar dates or in other drafts by Clark—as a rule, fuller and in



better form. He therefore probably returned the books to Clark in the early stages of the work, keeping only those which later were placed in the society's archives and which sufficiently present the entire story of the expedition. It is probable, also, that the engraver having completed the necessary maps for the publication, all of the charts made upon the expedition were returned to Clark. As for the elkskin-bound field book, already transcribed into another volume, this probably did not go to Biddle at all. The orderly book, the various fragments, the Lewis-Clark correspondence, and the letter of credit were doubtless also kept at St. Louis as being deemed for Biddle's purpose of a popular narrative unusable material. As for the Ordway journal, it is on record that this was returned to Clark, although thus far it has not been discovered among his papers.

That these documents were not surrendered by Clark to Jefferson during the latter's search was possibly occasioned by the fact that Clark—an exceptionally busy man, yet in this affair apparently quite lacking in business habits—had either forgotten their existence or, like Biddle, considered them as of slight historical value. His seemingly careless treatment of them would appear to bear out the last conclusion. Clark (who died in 1838) lived at a fine country homestead, "Minoma," in the outskirts of St. Louis, and kept all his private papers pigeonholed in an old secretary. This piece of furniture came into the possession of his third son, George Rogers Hancock Clark, who in later years roughly arranged his father's papers into bundles and labelled them. His daughter, Mrs. Voorhis, some half dozen years ago, first examined these in a general way, and at once recognized their value as literary material; she was indeed, she states, engaged in preparing some of the documents for publication when the present writer came upon the scene. His search for the Ordway journal stimulated Mrs. and Miss Voorhis into a closer scrutiny of their family treasures, and in due course negotiations were entered into with them, resulting in the inclusion of all their Lewis and Clark material in the projected publication of the original journals of the expedition.

It has often been asserted that Sergeant Pryor wrote a journal of the expedition, and some have assumed that Biddle used it in preparing the narrative of 1814; but evidence to



this effect seems to be wanting—in any event, no one now seems to know the whereabouts of this manuscript. The journal (12,500 words, covering the dates March 13–August 18, 1804) of Sergeant Floyd, the only man of the party to meet death during the trip,<sup>a</sup> was, in the spring of 1805, sent from Fort Mandan to his parents in Kentucky, and eventually became the property of the Wisconsin Historical Society. It was published in 1894 in the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, with an introduction by James Davie Butler. Soon after the return of the expedition, Robert Fraser, one of the privates, solicited subscriptions in Vermont for a publication of his journal, to be “contained in about 400 pages octavo;” but it did not appear, and the present writer has no knowledge of the manuscript. The existence of a journal (67,000 words, covering the dates May 14, 1804–November 6, 1805) by Private Joseph Whitehouse was unknown until recently. It was purchased in San Francisco by Dodd, Mead & Co., to be published in connection with the original journals of Lewis and Clark. After having been edited for the press the manuscript was acquired from the publishers by Edward E. Ayer, the well-known Chicago collector.

Thus, seventy-five years after Jefferson’s quest, and within a few weeks of a hundred years after the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition at their preliminary camp on River Dubois, there have at last been located presumably all of the literary records now extant of that notable enterprise in the cause of civilization.

When published, as they bid fair to be within a twelve-month, their original journals will create a new interest in the deeds of Lewis and Clark. Not only are they much more extensive than the Biddle narrative, and the voluminous scientific data—in botany, zoology, meteorology, geology, astronomy, and ethnology—an almost entirely new contribution; but we obtain from the men’s notebooks, as written from day to day, a far more vivid picture of the explorers and their life than can be seen through the alembic of Biddle’s impersonal condensation.

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<sup>a</sup>Floyd, aged about 20 years (possibly 23), died near the site of the present Sioux City, Iowa, May 14, 1804, and was buried on the top of a neighboring bluff. The site is now marked by a stately stone monument dedicated (May 30, 1901) to his memory by the Floyd Memorial Association. See reports of the association—First, 1897; second, 1901.



The pages of the journals are aglow with human interest. The quiet, even temper of the camp; the loving consideration that each of the two leaders felt for the other; the magnanimity of Lewis, officially the leader, in equally dividing every honor with his friend, and making no move without the latter's consent; the poetic temperament of Lewis, who loved flowers and animals, and in his notes discoursed like a philosopher who enjoyed the exercise of writing; the rugged character of Clark, who wrote in brief, pointed phrase, and, less educated of the two, spelled phonetically, capitalized chaotically, and occasionally slipped in his grammar—all these, and more, are evident on every page, causing the reader deeply to admire the men and to follow them in their often thrilling adventures with the keenest sympathy and anticipation. We shall hereafter know Lewis and Clark as we never knew them before. The Biddle narrative will no doubt continue to live as the brief popular account of an exploration fraught with great consequence to American expansion; but at least the student of history will feel that the original records, as the men wrote them on the spot, are by far the more satisfying of the two.









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