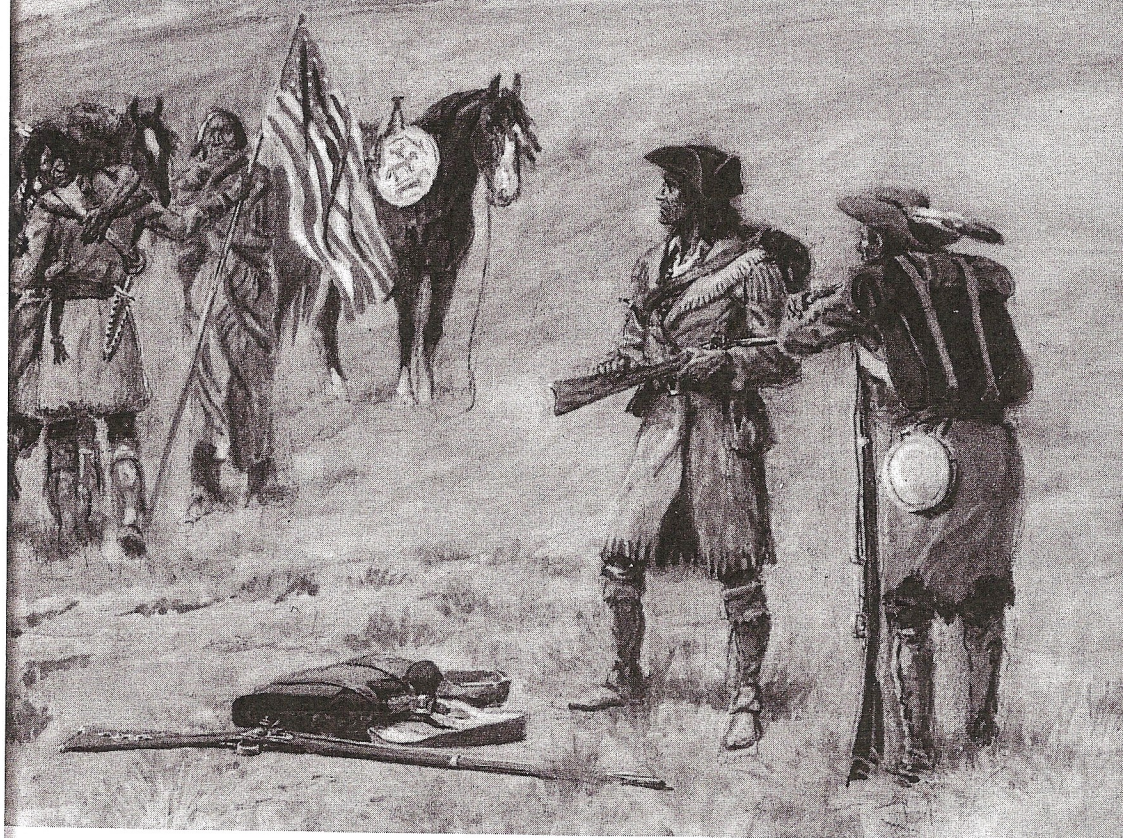




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Undaunted Courage

MERIWETHER LEWIS,
THOMAS JEFFERSON,
AND THE
OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Washington

January–March 1807

On January 2, the House created a committee “to inquire what compensation ought to be made to Messrs. Lewis, and Clarke, and their brave companions.” Willis Alston, Jr., of North Carolina was named chairman.¹ Lewis, who was living at the President’s House, went to work on the politicians, for himself and for Clark and the men.

Official Washington, meanwhile, wanted to honor the captains in a more immediate way, with a grand testimonial dinner and ball that would allow the politicians to be seen with and talk to the young heroes. Clark, however, was still in Virginia, courting Julia Hancock. (Lewis was doing some courting of his own in Washington, although no details about this are known.) The ball was put off on several occasions; finally, it was decided to wait no more, and a date was set for January 14.

Indicative of the excitement in the capital was a recommendation from Joel Barlow, considered by himself and some others to be the leading poet of the nation, to rename the great river of the West, changing it from “Columbia” to “Lewis.”²

Pierre Chouteau and Big White accompanied Lewis to the ball. Jefferson was not listed in the newspaper account of the dinner, so it can be assumed he was not among the “several officers of government” who attended. Dumas Malone explains that “Jefferson abominated such occasions, and he may have believed that his presence would distract attention from the returned hero.”³

Many toasts were drunk—to the Constitution, to Lewis and Clark, and so on. Barlow offered one: “To victory over the wilderness, which is more interesting than that over man.”

Lewis offered his own: “May works be the test of patriotism as they ought, of right, to be of religion.” After the toasts, the party sat down to what the *National Intelligencer* described as a “well spread board.”

Barlow wrote a poem of eight stanzas, full of bombast, bad rhymes, and mixed metaphors, that was read after dinner. An example:

*Then hear the loud voice of the nation proclaim,
And all ages resound the decree:
Let our Occident stream bear the young hero's name
Who taught him his path to the sea.*

This was too much for Senator John Quincy Adams, who wrote a parody ridiculing Jefferson as a "philosopher" and a man absurdly credulous. Adams wrote about what Lewis did not find: mammoth or mammoth bones, Welsh Indians, salt mountain. As far as Adams was concerned, Lewis was extravagant in his storytelling:

*What marvels on the way he found
He'll tell you, if inclin'd, sir—*

But what really set Adams off was Barlow's proposal to rename the Columbia:

*Let old Columbus be once more
Degraded from his glory;
And not a river by his name
Remember him in story—
For what is old Discovery
Compar'd to that which new is?
Strike—strike Columbia river out,
And put in—River Lewis!⁴*

As to Barlow's line about Lewis teaching the Columbia its path to the sea, Adams wrote in a footnote, "Here the young HERO is exhibited in the interesting character of school-master to a river." Malone comments that this bit of doggerel "revealed more wit than most observers would have expected of the sober Senator from Massachusetts and a more partisan spirit than his public actions showed."⁵

Jefferson, wisely, never followed up on Barlow's proposal. So Columbus, already defrauded of the name of a hemisphere, kept his river.

Lewis stayed at the President's House through the winter. The debriefing continued. In mid-February, Jefferson wrote Secretary Dearborn that in conversation with Lewis he had discussed the items that any future explorers of Louisiana ought to take with them. At the top of the list was blue beads, preferred by the Indians to all others. Lewis told Jefferson that, if he were to perform his journey again, one-half to two-thirds of his stores would consist of blue beads, brass buttons, knives, battle axes and tomahawks (but not rifles), awls, glover's needles, iron combs, nests of camp kettles, and arrow points.⁶

Lewis also worked on the accounts from the expedition, and talked with the politicians about compensation, seeking more money and land for his men, and justice for Clark. In conversation with Secretary Dearborn, he insisted that, whatever grant of land Congress might give him, Clark's should be the same. He further insisted "there should be no distinction of rank."

Dearborn, who was the cause of this sorry mess about rank, refused. In

responding to Congressman Alston's request for a formal recommendation from the War Department on compensation, Dearborn proposed that each of the men receive a warrant for 320 acres (the standard Revolutionary War veteran's bonus), that Clark receive a thousand acres, and Lewis fifteen hundred.⁷

Lewis drew up his own formal recommendation, not for himself or Clark but for the enlisted men. He began with a plea for two enlisted men who did not make the journey past Fort Mandan—Corporal Richard Warfington and Private John Newman. Lewis had discharged Newman from the party for mutinous expression at Fort Mandan, but he had conducted himself admirably since and had been invaluable to Warfington on the voyage back to St. Louis.

Then Lewis listed all the men (except York) who had been to the Pacific and back. He asked for additional compensation for Private "Labuiche," on the grounds that Labiche had served as translator from French to English in addition to his regular duties; for Private John Shields, whose "ingenuity . . . in repairing our guns" was indispensable; for the Field brothers ("Two of the most active and enterprising young men who accompanied us"); and for "George Drulyard" (which was perhaps an improvement on his usual spelling of "Drewyer"), whom Lewis described as "a man of much merit." Drouillard's skills with the sign language and as a hunter and woodsman were performed "with an ardor which deserves the highest commendation." He had signed Drouillard on at twenty-five dollars a month, but recommended that he receive thirty per month.

Lewis was negative only toward Charbonneau, "a man of no peculiar merit." He had hired Charbonneau on as interpreter at \$25 a month, but obviously thought it unjust that he receive the same pay as Drouillard.

Lewis ended his recommendation with a plea for all the men, whose conduct had entitled them "to my warmest approbation and thanks; nor will I suppress the expression of a hope, that the recollection of services thus faithfully performed will meet a just reward in an ample remuneration on the part of our Government."⁸

On January 23, Alston presented his bill for compensation. It called for 1,600 acres each to Lewis and Clark, 320 acres to each of the enlisted men, and double pay for all. That included Warfington, Newman, Drouillard, and Charbonneau. There was no provision for anything extra for Labiche, Shields, or the Field brothers, nor did Drouillard get the extra \$5 per month. The appropriation to cover the compensation amounted to \$11,000.

The Alston bill was hotly debated in the House. Some representatives contended that the grants were extravagant and beyond precedent. One member declared, "It was the equivalent to taking more than \$60,000 out of the Treasury, and might be perhaps three or four times that sum, as the grantees might go over all the Western country and locate their warrants on the best land," worth far more than the standard \$2 per acre. It took the House over a month to pass the bill (by a vote of 62 to 23). On the same day they did so, February 28, the bill passed the Senate without amendment and with little

debate, and without a recorded vote (perhaps luckily for Senator Adams, whose doggerel attacking Lewis and Jefferson was later used against him politically).⁹

The pay scale ranged from \$5 per month for privates, \$7 for corporals, and \$8 for sergeants, to \$30 for Lieutenant Clark and \$40 for Captain Lewis (the officers also received reimbursements for rations for themselves and, in Clark's case, for York).

For Lewis, that meant a total of \$3,360 in pay for the period April 1, 1803, to October 1807, plus \$702 in ration money, plus land warrants worth \$3,200 payable at any government land office, or a grand total of \$7,262. That hardly made him rich, but it did give him some working capital for the expenses involved in preparing the journals for publication, with enough left over to let him become a player in the St. Louis-based fur trade. For himself, for Clark (except for his pay scale), for the men, it was all Lewis could have hoped for or expected.

There were more expenses to be paid, including the cost of getting Big White back to the Mandans; obviously, when the final settlement was made, the expedition was going to turn out costing a lot more than had been anticipated. Jefferson never complained. He was no more likely to haggle over the costs of the expedition than over his own building operations at Monticello, because he regarded the expenditure as an investment in the future of the country.¹⁰

In July 1808, the president went on record on the matter. He wrote the French naturalist Bernard Lacépède, "I can assure you that the addition to our knowledge, in every department, resulting from this tour of Messrs. Lewis and Clark has entirely fulfilled my expectations in setting it on foot, and that the world will find that those travellers have well earned its favor."¹¹

There was another compensation for the captains, in the form of their new appointments. On February 28, 1807, Jefferson nominated Lewis to be governor of the Territory of Louisiana.* The Senate approved the nomination, and on March 2, Lewis resigned his commission in the army.¹² At the same time, Jefferson wanted to nominate Clark for promotion to lieutenant colonel, but when the list of nominees came through from the War Department, Clark's name was not on it. The president queried his secretary of war, who explained that Clark had been left off through "a misunderstanding of my directions" by a clerk.¹³

The Senate rejected Clark's nomination, but as Clark explained to his brother in a March 5 letter, it was done "on the Grounds of braking through a Principal"—namely, seniority. Clark said he was "truly gratified" nevertheless, for the senators had all told him they would confirm any other nomination, and

* In 1807, Congress split the original Louisiana Purchase lands at the thirty-third parallel, the modern northern boundary of the state of Louisiana. Everything below that was the Territory of Orleans; everything above, the Territory of Louisiana.

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indeed did so when Jefferson appointed him superintendent of Indian affairs for Louisiana Territory, with the rank of brigadier general of militia.¹⁴

It was midwinter in Washington, wet and cold. At the President's House, Jefferson's son-in-law Thomas Mann Randolph took ill. His fever rose and fell, leaving Jefferson alternately worried and hopeful. The doctor was bleeding the invalid, which certainly did him no good. Jefferson wrote his daughter Martha progress reports, complaining on one occasion that "the quantity of blood taken from him occasions him to recover strength slowly." On March 6, Jefferson informed Martha that Captain Lewis was constantly with Randolph, attending to his needs.

Whatever Randolph had, Lewis caught. Jefferson also had a bad cold. Between them, Jefferson wrote Martha, "we are but a collection of invalids."¹⁵

Clark, meanwhile, had made it to Washington, where he was gathering up the land warrants for the men still in St. Louis, and the money due them, and preparing to head west to his new post. He and Lewis had agreed that Lewis would stay behind in the East, to oversee the publication of their journals in Philadelphia.

Clark's first task in St. Louis would be to see to Big White's safe return. To that end, Dearborn gave him a letter authorizing him to spend up to four hundred dollars for presents to the Mandans and to draw on the War Department for expenditures that were "indispensably necessary in fitting out the party for the Voyage." As an inducement to get an armed party of private traders to join Sergeant Nathaniel Pryor, recently promoted to ensign, who would lead the party returning Big White, Dearborn further authorized Clark to enter into contracts with any St. Louis merchants who were interested in pursuing the Missouri River fur trade, granting them a two-year monopoly on a license to trade with the Indians and furnishing their engagés with rifles and ammunition.¹⁶

Clark received this authorization on March 9. The following day, he visited Lewis in the President's House and was distressed to see his friend so indisposed by his illness. Lewis roused himself sufficiently to go over the details of the land warrants and the back pay—he handed over the warrants plus \$6,896 in coin. They discussed the return of Big White and agreed that Pryor should attempt to enlist any men from the expedition still in St. Louis who were willing to go.

After Clark left, Lewis took some pills—whether Rush's or some others is not known. The next morning, he wrote his friend—already en route to St. Louis—that the pills had provided "considerable relief, and [I] have no doubt of recovering my health perfectly in the course of a few days."¹⁷

He must have, because three days later he sent an open letter to the *National Intelligencer* condemning "several unauthorised and probably some spurious publications now preparing for the press, on the subject of my late tour to the Pacific Ocean by individuals entirely unknown to me" and warning the public

to be "on guard with respect to such publications." He said these spurious works would "depreciate the worth of the work" he was preparing and asked for patience from the public, which was clamoring for the journals, "as much time, labor, and expense are absolutely necessary in order to do Justice to the several subjects."

With the letter he included an announcement of his own work, which would give interested people an opportunity to join the list of subscribers. He promised to have the map published by the end of October, with the first volume (the narrative) following by January 1, 1808, the second (on the geography of the country, the Indians encountered, and the prospects for the fur trade) and the third (on scientific discoveries) coming shortly thereafter.

Lewis said that only Robert Frazier had been given permission to publish his journal, and warned that Frazier, who "was only a private," was "entirely unacquainted" with any scientific matters and could provide "merely a limited detail of our daily transactions." He concluded, "With respect to all unauthorized publications relative to this voyage, I presume that they cannot have stronger pretensions to accuracy of information than that of Robert Frazier."¹⁸

It was a strange document, mean-spirited in tone and content, so unlike Lewis, who had previously been active in promoting the interests of Clark and the men. It was defensive, even greedy. There were no misspellings, which indicates that someone proofread it for him. It used words Lewis did not ordinarily use, such as "depreciate," "subjoined," and "expunged." Further, Lewis was a man whose reputation for telling the truth was unassailable, but he almost certainly lied when he wrote that he had heard reports to the effect that "individuals entirely unknown" to him were preparing books on the expedition.

What he had heard was that Sergeant Gass was about to issue a prospectus for a book based on the daily journal he had kept—as Captain Lewis had ordered him to do. In fact, the Gass prospectus did appear six days later in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*.

All this leads to the conjecture that, when Jefferson and Lewis heard about the Gass journal, they went into something akin to a panic. Jefferson may have urged Lewis to issue his warning against "spurious publications" and helped him write the letter.*

Whoever was responsible for the letter, it was a mistake. It made Lewis look cheap, ungrateful, pleading for special interests—himself. It opened him to ridicule. He could be considered guilty of a double cross, for he had given Frazier permission to publish and then denigrated the product, which he had not seen.† And how dare he assert his right to publish for profit while denying it to Frazier and Gass?

* The eminent authority Paul Russell Cutright, in his *History of the Lewis and Clark Journals*, pp. 20–26, concludes that Jefferson was directly involved.

† Frazier's journal has been lost, but one reader, decades later, said that Frazier's record "was in many respects more interesting than that of his commanders" (Jackson, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 346). Of course the reader would not have seen the Thwaites edition of the captains' journals.

The battle in Washington over who got the insiders memoirs out first was under way—a battle Lewis was sure to lose. It would cheapen his product, which infuriated him. It would cut into his profit, which made him so angry he lost his common sense.

Lewis knew how vulnerable he was on the money question; in his prospectus he wrote that the author “declares to the public, that his late voyage was not undertaken with a view to pecuniary advantages,” and explained that he was asking for subscribers only because he needed to know how many copies to print.¹⁹

If Jefferson was party to this sordid stuff, as seems likely, he too was guilty of gross misjudgment.

The Gass prospectus was as bad—from Lewis’s point of view—as it could have been. It promised a daily narrative, a description of the country and its flora and fauna, soil and minerals, and more. What really hurt was a paragraph explaining that around the campfire “the several journals were brought together, compared, corrected, and the blanks filled up,” meaning that early subscribers would be reading material corrected and approved by the captains. What cut to the bone was the publisher’s promise to have the work ready for delivery in two months for a price of one dollar per copy.

There went Lewis’s market. To add to the injury, Gass’s publisher sent to the newspapers his reply to Lewis’s warning to the public. The publisher seized on the vulnerabilities Lewis had created to ridicule him. He wrote of “what you very modestly call *your* late tour.” He said Mackenzie had faced greater dangers with one-fourth of the men, and done it first. He attacked Lewis’s compensation from the government: “Why, sir, these grants and rewards savor more of the splendid munificence of a Prince than the economy of a republican government.”

He raised the question “Where was your journal during the session of Congress? Snug, eh!” He exposed Lewis’s double standard: “Every man of sense must agree that these journals are either *private* property of the individuals who took them, or *public* property.” In one sentence he managed to show he knew what he was talking about while suggesting that Gass’s journal would be more readable than Lewis’s: “He may in some respects be considered as having the advantage; for while your Excellency was star-gazing, and taking celestial observations, he was taking observations in the world below.”²⁰

Lewis’s work had been insulted and pre-empted. He was a writer; we can assume that his mind never stopped composing his reply. But he had the good sense—finally—to keep quiet. He made no public response.

One of the would-be authors, Robert Frazier, was in Washington. He was planning to join Clark in Fincastle, Virginia, for a return trip to St. Louis, where he had been called to appear in the trial of some of the Burr conspirators.* Despite Lewis’s comments about Frazier in the newspapers, the two men

* What Lewis called Burr’s “treasonable practices” rivaled the return of Lewis and Clark as the sensation of the season.

maintained a friendly relationship. Lewis loaned him fifty dollars, with the understanding that Clark would deduct that amount from Frazier's compensation and return it to Lewis. He sent via Frazier Clark's commission as brigadier general of militia and instructions for Frederick Bates, appointed by Jefferson to be secretary of the territory, a position equivalent to that of lieutenant governor.²¹

Clark was staying at the home of Colonel George Hancock, Julia's father. In a mid-March letter to Lewis, he reported that he had sent Frazier on to St. Louis, along with Lewis's letter to Bates and one of his own.

Clark was in a fine mood. He had his commission, he was headed west, his friend was arranging for the publication of his map and journal, and he had been successful in his courtship. In reporting on the latter, he wrote with uncommon levity.

"I have made an attack most vigorously," he began. "We have come to terms, and a delivery is to be made first of January when I shall be in possession highly pleasing to my self. I shall return [to Virginia] at that time eagerly to be in possession of what I have never yet experienced." He hoped Governor Lewis would not object to his absence from St. Louis: "You can hint a little on that subject if you think proper and let me know."

Like most young men in love, Clark wanted a similar happiness for his friend. He made an oblique reference to "F.," a young woman Lewis was courting, "but should the thing not take to your wish," he went on, "I have discovered a most lovely girl Butiful rich possessing those acomplishments which is calculated to make a man hapy—inferior to you—but to few others." The only trouble was, her father was a Federalist. But that handicap could be overlooked, Clark said, and he knew because he had done it. He confessed he was surprised to discover that Colonel Hancock "is also a Fed. I took him to be a good plain republican. At all events I will hope to introduce some substantial sincere republicanism into some branch of the family about January."²²

The head of the Republican Party was also in a good mood. Jefferson was doing what he liked to do best, distributing new knowledge to his naturalist friends. On March 22, he sent Bernard McMahon some seeds brought back by Lewis, explaining that he would not get to Monticello in time to plant them and thought McMahon might put them in the ground in Philadelphia. Jefferson added that Lewis had some seeds set aside for McMahon and would be handing them over when he arrived in Philadelphia, and advised McMahon to "say nothing of your receiving [the enclosed seeds] lest it might lessen the portion he will be disposed to give you."²³

In his letter of thanks, McMahon said, "I never saw seeds in a better state of preservation," high praise for Lewis's methods. A couple of weeks later, he reported that he already had a fine showing from the Aricka tobacco, the perennial flax, four varieties of currants, and other seeds. He promised regular reports on "the progress of this precious collection."²⁴

Two days later, Jefferson sent seeds to another Philadelphia naturalist,

William Hamilton, with a similar covering note. In it, Jefferson summed up the results of the three months Lewis had spent in the President's House, three months of almost daily debriefings on what Lewis had done and found. It was a splendid tribute to his young protégé.

"On the whole," the president wrote of Lewis, "the result confirms me in my first opinion that he was the fittest person in the world for such an expedition."²⁵

25. Jackson, *Letters*, vol. I, p. 351.
26. *Ibid.*
27. See Eldon G. Chuinard, "Thomas Jefferson and the Corps of Discovery: Could He Have Done More?," *American West*, vol. 12, no. 6 (1975), pp. 12-13.
28. Jackson, *Letters*, vol. I, p. 352.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 356-58; vol. II, p. 694.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 692-94.
31. Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term*, p. 202.
32. Quoted in James Ronda, "A Knowledge of Distant Parts: The Shaping of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Autumn 1991), p. 8. This is a seminal article.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
34. Donald Jackson, "The Public Image of Lewis and Clark," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Jan. 1966, p. 3.
35. Ronda, "Knowledge of Distant Parts," p. 9.
36. Quoted in *ibid.*
37. We know this from Jefferson's remark in a 1816 letter, in Jackson, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 612.

Thirty-two: WASHINGTON

1. Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents: 1783-1854*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), vol. I, p. 361.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 203.
4. Richard Dillon, *Meriwether Lewis: A Biography* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965), p. 276.
5. Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term*, p. 204.
6. Jackson, *Letters*, vol. I, p. 375.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
8. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 364-69.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 377-78; see also Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term*, p. 205.
10. Malone, *Jefferson the President: Second Term*, p. 205.
11. Jackson, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 443.
12. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 376.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Edwin Morris Betts and James Adam Bear, eds., *The Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986 reprint of 1960 University of Missouri Press ed.), pp. 298, 300.
16. Jackson, *Letters*, vol. II, p. 382.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-407.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 387-88.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 389.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 391-92.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

Thirty-three: PHILADELPHIA

1. Paul Russell Cutright, "Contributions of Philadelphia to Lewis and Clark History," *We Proceeded On*, suppl. no. 6 (July 1982), p. 32.