EPISODE 105: GETTING ALONG ON THE LEWIS AND CLARK TRAIL

In this hour, we’ll spend a day with the expedition members, and with some of the tribes they met along their route.

Patrick Gass: Some readers will perhaps expect that, after our long friendly intercourse with these Indians...we ought to be prepared now, when we are about to renew our voyage, to give some account of the fair sex of the Missouri and entertain them with narratives of feats of love as well as of arms....

Peter Coyote: Join me as we become acquainted with the Corps of Discovery and a number of the tribes they met, after the day’s news.

Optional cutaway for News

Allison Frost: Welcome to this edition of the Latest Tidings, a special feature produced in cooperation with the National Intelligencer. In 1804, celebrating four years as America’s Newspaper. I’m Allison Frost.
This time we’re looking at the latest news from the Corps of Discovery. Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out earlier this year to chart the vast Louisiana Purchase and to try to find the famed Northwest Passage. We’ve heard the party is making good progress but the Expedition has suffered several setbacks. Sergeant Charles Floyd, who was a relative of William Clark, died earlier from a condition Clark himself diagnosed as bilious colic. Sergeant Floyd was buried on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River. But, the Latest Tidings has learned, discipline problems now seem to be plaguing the party. There have been at least six serious incidents resulting in court martial proceedings since the Corps of Discovery was assembled, the most recent of which involved the expulsion of Private John Newman. We caught up with Captain Meriwether Lewis just after the conclusion of that proceeding and persuaded him to speak with us about how he’s handled some of the discipline problems the company has experienced.
Thank you, Captain Lewis.

Meriwether Lewis: Not at all.

Allison Frost: Could you tell us why have there been so many discipline problems so far on this expedition?
Meriwether Lewis: First of all, I do not consider some half a dozen incidents in a journey so long as this one to be “many.” We are on a military expedition and, as such, it is imperative that a strict order be enforced, not merely an “adequate” one. It is only in this manner that we may hope to fulfill the mission that our great president Thomas Jefferson has set before us.

Allison Frost: I see. So this was the sixth court martial of the expedition. What was Private John Newman’s crime?

Meriwether Lewis: In my estimation, and the nine members of the court convened for the trial, Private Newman is guilty of having uttered repeated expressions of a highly criminal and mutinous nature.

AF: That sounds serious indeed. Can you elaborate?

Meriwether Lewis: I’m not sure you as member of the...uh, press, would want to hear the details, but be assured those same repeated remarks by Private Newman have not only been aimed at destroying every principle of military discipline, but also at alienating the affections of the individuals composing this detachment to their officers, and furthermore to disaffect them to the service for which they have been so sacredly and solemnly engaged!

Allison Frost: And what was the sentence?

Meriwether Lewis: In keeping with the Rules and Articles of War, he will have 75 lashes and will be discarded from the permanent party engaged for North Western discovery. Excuse me, I must attend to my dog Seaman.

Allison Frost: Just one last follow up if you would, Captain Lewis. Lashing is a standard sentence, but discharge—this is an unprecedented punishment which has not been meted out on the expedition so far. Are you intending to send a message to the rest of the party? Is this punishment one that fits the crime or perhaps one that fits your need to reign in an undisciplined party?

Meriwether Lewis: Come, Seaman. Miss Frost, I bid you good day.

Allison Frost: That was Captain Meriwether Lewis, speaking with us after the court martial and sentencing of Private John Newman. He was the 6th court martial but the first to be expelled from the Expedition.

In news from around the world, in France, Napoléon Bonaparte has imposed a new code of law. It reportedly incorporates some gains from that country’s revolution, such as individual liberty and equality under the law. And German philosopher Immanuel Kant has died at the age of 80 in Königsberg, the East Prussian capital, Our correspondent, April Baer, reports.

April Baer: The eccentric philosopher was well-known for his so-called “Critical Philosophy” including his essay What is Enlightenment. He also authored Critique of Pure Reason, Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Judgment. He considered that the answers to the questions of god, the soul and the nature of free will could not be had without investigating the limits of human understanding and reasoning. And importantly, he believed that reason is the means by which mankind translates experience into understanding. Some considered these views heretical. Kant taught logic and metaphysics at the University of Königsberg. Though his ideas influenced philosophic inquiry the world over, he himself never ventured more than 40 miles from his hometown. I’m April Baer.

Allison Frost: And one final note: in the United Kingdom, an engineer named Richard Trevithick has built a locomotive powered by steam. It made a two-hour run between two towns in South Wales carrying ten tons of iron, 70
men and five extra wagons over nine miles of iron rail.
And that closes the book on this edition of the Latest Tidings, I’m Allison Frost. Our program is produced in cooperation with the National Intelligencer. Celebrating four years as America’s Newspaper, since 1800.

[Program theme music]

Peter Coyote: Here are some simple questions: What was daily life like on the Lewis and Clark Expedition? What happened morning, noon and night? And what was daily life like for the American Indians they encountered?

Clay Jenkinson: Well, it’s not as simple as you might think.

Peter Coyote: The Lewis and Clark Expedition left St. Charles, Missouri on May 14, 1804 and traveled 7,689 miles to the Pacific Ocean and back again. The trip took more than 28 months. The expedition was President Jefferson’s brainchild, commanded by his friend and protégé Meriwether Lewis and his old Army friend, William Clark. It is considered the most successful exploration in American history. Joining me for a look at the social dynamics of this trip is Clay Jenkinson, humanities scholar-in-residence at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. Clay, let’s start with a picture of how many people were on this expedition.

Clay Jenkinson: The “permanent party”, as it’s called, consisted of 33 people, and that includes Sacagawea and her infant son Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau. But in the first year of travel, from St. Charles to today’s North Dakota, the roster included almost fifty men.

[Military drum roll]

Meriwether Lewis: Captain Clark, will you please muster the men?


Clay Jenkinson: About a dozen of the original contingent were professional French watermen, known as voyageurs or engagés. They were hired solely to get the boats to today’s North Dakota and it was understood that they would be sent back after the first year of travel. Of the rest, we know a good deal about approximately ten of the men, a little about fifteen or so more, and almost nothing about eight or ten of the participants. Lewis and Clark could not know that we would be so intensely interested in the lives of the men they regarded as little more than functionaries. The journals were never intended to be a complete narrative. They only notice things that were dramatic, or urgent, or highly unusual, and most of the things we really want to know about the day-to-day dynamics of the expedition are either lost altogether, or have to be reconstructed by minute excavation of the details combed from the journals. I had the chance to discuss this issue with Dayton Duncan, one of the producers of the Ken Burns’ documentary on Lewis and Clark.

Dayton Duncan: If you take any particular day, you can triangulate and make the day a little more three-dimensional by looking at all the journals....I remember one day that I studied, one of the men mentions that we stopped for lunch, and another one mentions that there were chokecherries there, and a third one mentioned that they took the chokecherries and they put them in their whiskey barrel. So you knew that that night as they had their gill of whiskey, it had a little cherry aftertaste. It’s not necessarily critical information, but it’s the parallax view that
starts to allow you to see things with greater dimension.

Peter Coyote: Clay, how well did all of the expedition members get along with each other?

Clay Jenkinson: After a somewhat rocky start, there emerged a remarkable unity in the group. Inevitably, as would be the case in any long adventure of this sort, there were some social tensions, especially early on, even a couple of situations where the men had to be punished. We must never forget that this was a military expedition. But the men appear to have functioned well together and within a few months they became what Lewis, who was a rather detached man, called “the best of families”

After I had completed my observations in the evening I walked down and joined the party at their encampment on the point of land formed by the junction of the rivers; found them all in good health, and much pleased at having arrived at this long wished for spot, and in order to add in some measure to the general pleasure which seemed to pervade our little community, we ordered a dram to be issued to each person; this soon produced the fiddle, and they spent the evening with much hilarity, singing & dancing, and seemed as perfectly to forget their past toils, as they appeared regardless of those to come.

Meriwether Lewis, April 26, 1805, at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers

Dayton Duncan: Just one night at one campsite, I think, could fill in an awful lot. It’s not essential to know, I suppose, for understanding Lewis and Clark, or for at least placing them in history. But boy, it would tell us so much about the group dynamic that could teach us that much more about what kind of leaders they were and just how does a group like this function on the trail for so long?

Peter Coyote: Only one expedition member died in the course of the great journey, Charles Floyd of Kentucky. Dayton Duncan believes that event, on August 20, 1804, actually increased the solidarity of the group rather than eroding the men’s confidence in the mission.

Dayton Duncan: It’s there around the grave of a fallen comrade that they started to understand the stakes that were involved and that they were all in it together, and also understood in the most profound terms the uncertainty of their enterprise.

(Singing: “Come ye sinners, poor and needy...”)

Peter Coyote: A song that might well have been sung by expedition members at Floyd’s funeral. Joseph Musselman, the folklorist who sang that is a Lewis and Clark expert from Montana. He studied the songs, jokes, and soundscapes of the period.

Joseph Musselman: That was a medicine song. That song might have contained the power needed at that critical moment. That might have been the “Amazing Grace” that we use now.

Peter Coyote: Clay, you said earlier that reconstructing the daily life of the expedition members isn’t a simple thing to do. Why is that, given the 1,500,000 words that half a dozen men of the expedition wrote in their daily journals? Haven’t Lewis and Clark been called “the writingest explorers of all time”?

Clay Jenkinson: Because for all of the detail we have from the journals, there are still plenty of silences. We know the big events—the great encounters, the accidents and the setbacks, the moments of triumph and official achieve-
ment of the expedition—but the simple daily habits of the men who made it happen are mostly lost to us. We like to think of the expedition as a grand American adventure, America’s epic, but for most of the men who participated, it was two and a half years of backbreaking labor.

_I detrumined to make Canoes out of the two first trees we had fallen, to Contract thir length so as to clear the hollow & sinshakes, & ad to the width as much as the tree would allow._

*William Clark, July 10, 1805*

_A pleasant day and all hands employed in cutting wood to make charcoal. We have a blacksmith with us, and a small set of blacksmith tools...._

*(Patrick Gass, January 26, 1805)*

Peter Coyote: Historian James Ronda says work is the dominant theme of daily life for every explorer, including those in the Corps of Discovery.

James Ronda: So I see their day as organized around tasks: the tasks of preparing food, of cleaning weapons, of the pulling and hauling of boats, of hiking and walking, of food preparation, of hunting, of writing, of talking. Those are the soundscapes: the rip-rip of a saw, the slam of the bite of an ax and the thump-thump of the forge and the blacksmith’s work. There are the sounds of the whine of a fiddle and of a sounding horn and of tambourines, of music and of singing and of dancing. Those are the sounds. But mostly, mostly, I hear the sounds of work, and we should remember that much of what they did was day after day of grinding, boring work.

_A pleasant morning. All hands employed getting more timber to raise the barge. Doubled the rope and raised up the barge. Got the windless going...._

*John Ordway, February 26, 1805*

Peter Coyote: It’s exhausting just to hear about the labor these men undertook. So at the end of the day, what happened? Can we learn anything about these explorers from their sleeping arrangements, for example?

Clay Jenkinson: Let’s start with the captains. At the beginning of the second year of travel, as they were essentially entering today’s Montana, what might be called the “leadership group” slept in a large tipi hired from Toussaint Charbonneau. Here’s Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs.

Stephenie Ambrose Tubbs: Lewis and Clark were in it and Charbonneau and Jean-Baptiste and Sacagawea, and probably York was in there. It belonged to Charbonneau and it was probably something that he obtained from the Mandan villages. I think that the tipi was The Ritz compared to what the men were sleeping under. For one thing, they could have a nice little fire in there, keep it a little warmer. They could probably keep more bugs out. They could keep certain critters from coming in. And I just think it was more comfortable to be inside of that lodge than to be out under the stars.

Clay Jenkinson: Indeed, the rest of the men slept outside in some sort of orderly way. By this time, it was a loosely regulated military mission. We get a glimpse of the sleeping arrangements when a buffalo bull visits the camp on May 29, 1805, in eastern Montana.

_He then alarmed ran up the bank in full speed directly towards the fires, and was within 18 inches of the heads of some of the men who lay sleeping before the centinel could alarm him or make him change his_
course, still more alarmed, he now took his direction immediately towards our lodge, passing between 4 fires and within a few inches of the heads of one range of the men as they yet lay sleeping.
Meriwether Lewis, May 29, 1805

Ken Karsmizki: What they’re talking about is the buffalo charging for the fire and what that suggests is that these guys are sitting close, I mean laying close, basically circling that fire.

Clay Jenkinson: That was Ken Karsmizki who is one of the nation’s leading experts on physical aspects of the expedition. In fact, he’s made a close study of how the expedition moved from camp to camp.

Ken Karsmizki: One of the things regulations say is that you have to dig an outhouse. You have to dig a privy hole—what they could call a sink—every day because this is cleanliness. This is a military unit and by regulation you are supposed to do that. Did they do that at the Lower Portage Camp? No, they didn't do that. I mean, you've got 31 guys, one woman and a baby. They’re going to go to the edge of the pool of light that is from the campfire and that’s the bathroom.

Peter Coyote: Troops on the move require careful logistical preparations to assure sufficient supplies of food and other staples. The Corps of Discovery was no different.

Now, let’s test your knowledge of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Despite their excellent provisioning, can you name the precious commodity the Corps ran out of on July 4, 1805? Stay with us for the answer when we re-visit the military side of the expedition later in the program.

We’ll take a short break, and when we come back, we’ll hear about daily life among the Indians that Lewis and Clark met in their transcontinental journey. I’m Peter Coyote. You’re listening to “Unfinished Journey.”

[Program Break: Aaron Meyer/Bill Lamb-Unfinished Journey: The Lewis and Clark Expedition Soundtrack (La Bastringue)]

[Women’s voices on very old recording]

Peter Coyote: Frances Densmore was an ethnomusicologist who died in 1957 at the age of 90. In the early years of the 20th century, she recorded Mrs. Holding Eagle speaking the Mandan words we just heard using extremely primitive equipment. The recording we heard is held by the State Historical Society of North Dakota-Densmore Collection. These are basic words for things that were important in daily life of the Mandan and Hidatsa people. Her recordings helped to preserve Great Plains languages as they were spoken generations ago. Clay, these are probably similar to sounds the expedition heard as they met tribes along their path. What do we know about the daily lives of those native people?

Clay Jenkinson: Since they encountered more than fifty different tribes across thousands of miles of the American West, and each tribe had its own unique culture, we asked several Indian historians to describe daily life for their tribes. We’ll hear from Roberta Conner, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla and Director of Tamástlik Cultural Institute near Pendleton, Oregon; Gerard Baker, a Mandan-Hidatsa and Superintendent of Mount Rushmore National Memorial; and Jack Gladstone, an enrolled member of the Blackfeet nation.

Roberta Conner: We greet the day with song and reverence, and those prayer songs that greet the sun talk about the promises the creator has made to us, talk about the promises on the other side when we pass from this world. But as my grandmother used to say, they are songs of thanksgiving.
Gerard Baker: They would wash in the river, they would start their day, start the day meaning getting ready for a ceremony, getting ready for a hunt, getting ready to defend their villages (warfare), getting ready to plant their gardens, getting ready for, in some cases, birth, maybe getting ready for someone that had passed away, funerals and so forth. So it was a very, very busy day and any given day, I think, would have been that way.

Jack Gladstone: In the morning we would rise and we would bathe, we would wash. We were extremely clean people.

Roberta Conner: It would not be unusual for people to start the day with something small and light food-wise—boiled fish, dried fish, dried meat, dried roots—and immediately get to labor to use the daylight to complete all the productive tasks that needed to be done....At that time of year, people would have broken into different kinds of workgroups so the men who had the most hazardous work would be on the water in the river where it was slick and dangerous. They would be tending to the fish in the harvest. Women would be processing the fish.

Gerard Baker: The sounds would have been of singing, of people laughing. We're human beings—maybe of people arguing. There would have been sounds of children running through the villages and screaming and having a good time and crying and calling for their mothers or calling for their grandmothers or calling for their grandfathers. There would have been sounds of dogs barking and dogs fighting and the buzzing of activity, the buzzing of life. To me, that is the ultimate sound, the sound of civilization, if you will. And I think that you not only would have heard that, you would have smelled it. You would have smelled the hides being tanned, you would have smelled the cooking, you would have smelled the buffalo meat, you would have smelled the roast.

Roberta Conner: People would work and work and work until it was time to eat and then work until it was time to rest and it would not be a clock-oriented schedule. It would be based on what needed to be done.

Jack Gladstone: The women would gather and would preserve the food. Pemmican—the processing of what we call pemmican, which is a blend of meat and fat and berries—was important. Even in my father’s day, he recalls pemmican being prepared. Of course, you'd have fiber with your seeds from your berries. You would have sugar from the berries. You would have protein from the meat and you would also have fat for that rapid energy.

Gerard Baker: In the evenings, there was always food on. When you got hungry, you ate. I don't think there was really any time—you didn't have lunch at 12 or supper at 6 or whatever. They ate when they were hungry. And since it was more or less a communal atmosphere, you could also, I understand, you could go into any lodge basically and help yourself to whatever they have.

Roberta Conner: People would retire into the tule mat lodges. The tule mat lodges were covered with tules, which are bulrush, but they would also sleep on tule mats. In a pitted tule mat lodge, it’d be very warm, very cozy. There would be a fire inside at this time of year because it was cool and there would be a multitude of people in each lodge, so there’d be multigenerational cohabitation—young children, elders, and adults altogether according to our kinship systems. And the day would end with people retiring at sunset.

Peter Coyote: We’ve gotten a glimpse of the daily rhythms of some of the Indians Lewis and Clark met along the trail. And we have some sense of what life would have been like for a military expedition crossing the continent at the beginning of the 19th century. But what happened when the two met? What sorts of activities did the whites and Indians engage in together?
Clay Jenkinson: That’s actually one of the most interesting themes in the Lewis and Clark story, maybe the most interesting theme. What I suggest is that we allow the journal keepers to share their own experiences:

*About 9 [o’clock] 15 of the party went up to the 1st veillage of Mandans to dance as it had been their request. Carried with us a fiddle & a Tambereen & a sounden horn. As we arrived at the entrance of the [village] we fired one round then the music played. Loaded again. Then marched to the center of the [village], fired again. Then commenced dancing.*
*John Ordway, January 1, 1805*

*After we had our camp fixed and the fires made, a chief came from their camp which was about 1⁄4 mile up the Columbia river at the head of about 200 men singing and beatting on their drums stick and keeping time to the musik; they formed a half circle around us and sung for some time, we gave thyem all smoke, and spoke to their chiefs as we could by signs informing them of our friendly disposition to all nations, and our joy in seeing those of our children around us”*
*William Clark, October 16, 1805*

*Several foot races were run this evening between the indians and our men. The indians are very active; one of them proved as fleet as drewer and r. Fields, our swiftest runners. When the racing was over the men divided themselves into two parties and played prison base, by way of exercise...After dark we had the violin played and danced for the amusement of ourselves and the indians.*
*Meriwether Lewis, June 8, 1806*

Peter Coyote: This sounds almost too good to be true: everyone getting along and having a great time. But let’s not overlook another subject that explorers, both real and fictional, seem to encounter on the frontier.

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, from Captain Cook to Captain Kirk, sex seems to be a constant element in the history of exploration.

Peter Coyote: In spite of Captain Kirk’s best intentions, his flirtations with women often ended up violating the prime directive not to interfere with another culture. Were the Lewis and Clark expedition members under any similar orders as they traveled to new lands?

Clay Jenkinson: Well, yes and no. The captains do both express concern at times about the implications of sexual activity with Indian women, but they were also realists and they knew there was nothing they could do to prevent it. Any time you put a group of people together for that long, you’re going to observe a wide range of social expression: jokes, games, drinking, and yes, sexual activity. We have to recreate the sexual history of the expedition from the hints and fragments left in the journals. And needless to say, the captains were not going out of their way to advertise the sexual activities of their men.

*To prevent this mutual exchange of good offices altogether I know it impossible to effect, particularly on the part of our young men whom some months abstinence have made very polite to those tawney damsels. No evil has yet resulted and I hope will not from these connections.*
*Meriwether Lewis, August 19, 1805*

*Some readers will perhaps expect that, after our long friendly intercourse with these Indians...we ought to*
be prepared now, when we are about to renew our voyage, to give some account of the fair sex of the Mis-
souri and entertain them with narratives of feats of love as well as of arms....
Patrick Gass, April 5, 1805

Clay Jenkinson: Patrick Gass goes on to say that it wouldn’t be “prudent” to fill up his journal with entertaining stories about love and sex. But he does make reference to Indian women in somewhat less than flattering terms.

It may be observed generally that chastity is not very highly esteemed by these people, and that the severe and loathsome effects of certain French principles are not uncommon among them. The fact is that women are considered an article of traffic and indulgencies are sold at a very moderate price.
(Patrick Gass, April 5, 1805)

Peter Coyote: That’s a disdainful view of native women and their attitude toward sex. What was going on here, Clay?

Clay Jenkinson: It was in part a clash of cultures along the issue of sexual mores. And let’s not forget here, that the men of the expedition were as eager to initiate sexual contact for their own purposes as Indian women were to gain access to the trade goods that the expedition was carrying. Here’s how Roberta Conner sees it:

Roberta Conner: It’s not as if the Indians were solely responsible for this behavior. It took two to tango and the men of the expedition were healthy, sturdy, vigorous people.

Marilyn Hudson: It’s as old as Biblical times, the fact that there are relationships between men and women. I think if you go through any type of history, you’re going to find that when men and women got together there was going to be sexual intercourse.

Roberta Conner: Sex is a normally unladen, straightforward behavior in nature. We do not consider bears having sex to be promiscuous. We do not consider birds of any kind to be doing something against the laws of nature. But with Indian people we were like everything around us; it was a natural occurrence. And once these were determined to be men, not monsters, there was no reason not to and I guess that’s the way I look at it is there was no prohibition, inhibition, or social custom that said it was wrong.

Marilyn Hudson: When you look at a custom that exists, always look behind to see who benefits. So, in a case of, say, a man is offering his daughter to the expedition, did he benefit in terms of food? Did they give him food? Did they pay him? What was the exchange? In some cases, was there rape involved? I would think so. And was there any penalty? Maybe not. There’s no indication that there was a penalty.

Peter Coyote: We heard from Marilyn Hudson, a member of the Hidatsa tribe, along with Roberta Conner.

Clay Jenkinson: Finally, a cautionary note about sex from the great Lewis and Clark scholar James Ronda. Ronda says it would be a mistake to try to analyze sexual encounters of the expedition from the vantage point of the 21st century.

James Ronda: I think that we need to be sensitive and we need to be restrained in our conversations, not to be prudish, because after all Meriwether Lewis knew full well that sex was going to be a part of the life of the expedition. When he was in Philadelphia, he would buy penis syringes and mercury, a clear statement that he knew that
something was going to go on. But we ought not to suggest that these are the defining moments. So, sensitivity and restraint.

_We gave the men a drink of spirits, it being the last of our stock, and some of them appeared a little sensible of effects. The fiddle was played and they danced very merrily until 9 in the evening when a heavy shower of rain put an end to that part of the amusement tho’ they continued their mirth with songs and festive jokes and were extremely merry until late at night._

_Meriwether Lewis, July 4, 1805_

Peter Coyote: The last of the whiskey...so early in the course of the expedition, with more than a year of travel ahead and no hope of re-supply. And that’s the answer to our quiz question. Once the revelry subsided on Independence Day, that must have been a sobering realization.

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, indeed. Liquor and tobacco were staples of American life in that era, and particularly of military life. In fact, enlisted men were entitled by law to one gill of liquor per day, about a quarter of a pint. The expedition ran out of its whiskey supply about halfway to the Pacific Ocean, and then ran out of its tobacco sometime during the early winter of 1806. From a logistics point of view, it was simply impossible to carry enough of those recreational essentials from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back again.

_Among our other difficulties we now experience the want of tobacco and out of 33 persons composing our party, there are but 7 who do not make use of it; we use crab-tree bark as a substitute._

_Patrick Gass, March 7, 1806_

Peter Coyote: I can see why music was so important on the journey, if liquor and tobacco were in such short supply.

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, we know there were two fiddle players on the expedition, the better known of which was Pierre Cruzatte, the half French, half Omaha man who was also the master boatman and an interpreter. Cruzatte’s tunes must have helped ease the aches and pains of many long days of hard labor. And then there was humor. Folklorist Joseph Mussulman has studied the joke books of the day, called ‘jesters’, to find out how the men may have amused themselves around the campfire. Here’s a sample:

Joseph Mussulman: Walking to Philadelphia, there was two men, two Irish men. Exhausted, they asked a farmer they passed, “How much farther is it to Philadelphia?”

“Oh, about ten miles,” says the farmer.

“By my shoals,” says one of the two Irishmen. “That’s only five miles apiece. Let’s walk on then.” [Rim shot]

A one-liner that Private Hugh McNeal might have pulled on one of his buddies: “Did you know your shirt’s on wrong side out?”

Private Tom Howard might have said, “Sure, there’s a hole on the other side.” [Rim shot]

But in one of the “jesters” this two-liner: “Hey, I hear your sister had a baby. Did she have a son or daughter?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know whether I’m an uncle or an aunt.” [Rim shot]

Peter Coyote: The members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition had to find ways to amuse themselves at the end of long days of physical labor at a time when there was virtually no recreational infrastructure west of St. Louis. Cultural historian Hal Rothman of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas is an expert on the American West as a landscape of the imagination. For Rothman, Lewis and Clark were American tourists as much as they were Enlighten-
ment explorers. He sees Las Vegas as the quintessential location where outsiders have projected their fantasy life on the expanse of the American West. We asked him how the expedition might have fared if their destination had been somewhat south of the rainy Oregon Territory.

Hal Rothman: The prospect of the laconic and depressed Meriwether Lewis sitting by the pool slathered in sunscreen, umbrella drink in hand and ogling cheesecake is a little too much for this time traveler to fathom. But the Corps of Discovery would have found their needs well attended to when they saw the bright lights of Las Vegas before them.

Las Vegas is both script and mirror: a story about you, the visitor, a reflection—and anticipation—of your desires, the place where these long-suffering travelers could have rested their bones, filled their canteens with good strong liquor—for free, if they played the slots—letting them forget the New Year’s Day when all they had to drink was pure water. They could have feasted on a buffet—‘Step up to our wapato bar!’—to curb the starvation that gnawed at them in the Bitterroots, or much, much better, gotten a lot more than the bath and shave of legend as they found a place where their buckskins were no more eccentric than anyone else’s costume.

The artesian springs that have bubbled here to the surface since time immemorial created a lush oasis in the desert—the “vega” or meadow of the name. Las Vegas’s bright lights offer another kind of oasis, liquor to quench your thirst, dull your pain, and addle your judgment; full plates piled high with delicacies instead of the geese on which the Corps subsisted; shows with Frank, Sammy, and Dean; and dance floors to boogie the night away.

The Corps of Discovery would have sauntered down the Strip, watching the exotic siren show at TI. With their experience in canoes, the men might wonder about the gondoliers at the Venetian—“What kind of boatmen be these, and where did they get such clothing?,” they might query—and enjoy the dancing fountains at the Bellagio before they lined up to get into RumJungle, Rain or another nightclub.

But they surely would have reached their journey’s end, for why go on from here? What could be better—especially after 18 months in the wild—than a city of fantasy created for your desires? All they’d have to do is pay their way. Jefferson’s universal letter of credit would have sufficed, and that’s always the test. Can you or your 19th century forebears handle such a place, where the only barriers are the ones you set for yourself?

As a canvas for American neuroses, Las Vegas has always been the end of the road. You couldn’t blame Lewis and Clark if they never left, if Meriwether liked the view by the pool and Clark found himself a rock ‘n roll promoter. Maybe we’re lucky Lewis and Clark stayed so far to the north. The American republic might never have been the same.

Peter Coyote: University of Nevada-Las Vegas historian Hal Rothman.

Coming up next: a re-enactment of the journey the Corps of Discovery made offers an opportunity for a little modern-day observation.

Terry Gildea: It’s morning in Camp Culbertson. Bitter cold. I woke up to snow outside the tent this morning.

Peter Coyote: Stay with us as we head out to the trail. I’m Peter Coyote. You’re listening to “Unfinished Journey: The Lewis and Clark Expedition” on PRI.

[Program Break: Aaron Meyer/Bill Lamb-Unfinished Journey: The Lewis and Clark Expedition Soundtrack (Up-beat)]

Peter Coyote: It’s important to remember that the expedition was a military operation, and that military hierarchy and discipline were very much a part of the social dynamics of this group. Clay, were there any instances where
members of the Corps got out of line?

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, especially early on, and military discipline was strictly enforced. There were actually seven court-martials on the expedition, all of them in the first year. March 29, 1804—Colter, Frazer and Shields, for general misconduct, unspecified; May 17, 1804—Collins, Hall and Werner, for being absent without leave and for misconduct at a dance held in St. Charles, Missouri; June 29, 1804—Collins, again, and Hall, for unauthorized incursions into the expedition’s limited supply of liquor; July 12, 1804—Alexander Willard, for falling asleep on guard duty. Now that one was very serious, indeed, a capital crime. Willard got one hundred lashes on his bare back spread over four days of agony. August 4th, 1804—Moses Reed, for desertion. He was forced to run the gauntlet, which means that he had to run between two lines of the men, all beating him as hard as they wished with whatever they chose to use for the clubbing. October 13 and 14, 1804—John Newman for uttering “mutinous expressions.”

The Court martial convened this day for the trial of John Newman...are unanimously of the opinion that the prisoner John Newman is guilty of every part of the charge exhibited against him, and do sentence him agreeably to the rules and articles of war, to receive seventy five lashes on his bear back, and to be henceforth discarded from the permanent party engaged for North Western Discovery.

Meriwether Lewis, October 13, 1804

Clay Jenkinson: And finally February 9, 1805—Thomas Howard, for climbing over the wall of Fort Mandan at night after the gate had been locked. Captain Lewis pardoned Howard before the lash could be applied to his back. And that was it. After that, from early February, 1805 to September, 1806, the journals do not document a single further court-martial, remarkable harmony.

Peter Coyote: Perhaps we can’t know exactly what life was like on the expedition, but Lewis and Clark re-enactors are marking the bicentennial by following the forward progress of the expedition day by day, on the great rivers of the American West, trying in a visceral way to get closer to the experience of the explorers. But how close can they really get, given that they come at the experience from, and often with, the conveniences of the modern world? We sent correspondent Terry Gildea to North Dakota to find out:

Terry Gildea: The sun rises over the Missouri River as I salute the American flag in formation with soldiers of the United States Army’s 1st Regiment. It’s my first day in camp with the Discovery Expedition of St. Charles—a group of men re-enacting the famed expedition of Lewis and Clark. The men have agreed to let me fall into their ranks and travel with them for a few days, but convincing these guys that I’m not a journalist—that I have what it takes re-enact this great adventure—isn’t going to be easy.

[Campfire sound]
Terry Gildea: Morning, guys. Hey, can I get a cup of coffee?

Bud Clark: No. [chuckles] You want a cup of coffee in that? I’m not sure this is ready...I don’t know about this one. This one’s gonna be thick.

Terry Gildea: All of the men are dressed in flawless period military uniforms. After several phone conversations with the group’s media contact, I showed up a makeshift muslin costume I’d pieced together from a rental shop and my personal wardrobe. I look more like a medieval serf than a soldier. It’s easy to see why no one was taking me seriously. Before I could hit the trail with these guys, I needed a crash course in re-enacting and within the group I
found the perfect mentor.

**Ed Scholl:** Mike Caldwell, playing Gass; Gary Ulrich, playing Sergeant Ordway and Norm Bowers as Sergeant Pryor. And these are the soldiers in the squad. I’m in here as Hugh Hall.

**Terry Gildea:** Ed Scholl first became interested in Lewis and Clark when he traveled the route by bus several years ago with an organization called Elderhostel. He’s a tall 74-year-old, a retired full-colonel from the army. Scholl has an endless enthusiasm for the Discovery Expedition. He chose to portray Hall partly because they both come from Pennsylvania, but he also enjoys Hall’s free spirit. On May 17, 1804, Hall and Private Collins were court-martialed for being drunk and AWOL from guard duty. Hall was found guilty and sentenced to fifty lashes.

**Ed Scholl:** I admitted drinking the whiskey and they gave me 50 lashes. It was supposed given in the afternoon at three o’clock. But it came three o’clock, I disappeared...This is re-enacting, not the real thing.

**Terry Gildea:** Ed went over the roster and found no one portraying Private Joseph Field. By taking on his identity, I wouldn’t have to re-enact any court-martials, major illnesses or encounters with large beasts. So, on the morning of April 26, 2005, I boarded one of the replica riverboats called pirogues. Lewis and Clark’s pirogues were flat bottom boats used to travel the waters of the upper Missouri River. Powered by sails and steered by rudders, the boats often ran aground on sandbars and hit other obstructions along the route. The re-enactors copied those pirogues, but included a few modern conveniences.

**[Pirogue motors fire up]**

**Terry Gildea:** What you’re hearing is the forty-horse power outboard motor of the pirogue I’m traveling on. A depth finder, VHF Radio, fire extinguishers and a global positioning system are also standard issue on the pirogues. Most of the equipment is required by the U.S. Coast Guard for travel on commercial waterways. The facades of the pirogues and period uniforms are the public face of re-enacting. Later, out of the public eye, the guys let their guard down They tell off-color jokes and eat left over fried chicken for lunch donated to the group from the night before.

**David Bright:** While we’re on the boats it’s nice. It’s just our group, among friends.

**Terry Gildea:** David Bright, a 33-year-old chemist from Missouri, loves re-enacting the journey, but feels a little suffocated by the celebrity of it all.

**David Bright:** While you’re in camp in a public location, the public can come in anytime on any day. So we never really get a day off. And we’re always in our uniforms. Sometimes it’s a problem to use the bathroom, get a shower or clean your clothes.

**Terry Gildea:** The diverse group of men on this leg of the journey range in age from 27 to 76. Like Ed Scholl, many are retired and have the time and money to join the group for extended periods of time. Others take vacation or unpaid leave from their jobs and other commitments to join the group for weeks or even months. No one in the group is currently portraying York or Sacagawea, but several people plan to do so as this expedition makes its way west.

**[Sound from onboard boat]**
Even with all the modern tools of marine travel we still ran aground and were blown off course. And after eleven long hours, we made it to the next encampment in Culbertson, Montana, 36 miles upriver.

With our camp already set up by the ground crew, I sat down to a hot meal and rekindled my spirit. I was beginning to feel like a member of the expedition. Finally I retired to one of the canvas army tents, curled up in my sleeping bag and braved the cold Montana night.

It’s morning in Camp Culbertson. Bitter cold. I woke up to snow outside the tent this morning. I was able to sort of keep warm last night. My upper body was warm, but my feet got cold. The official camp thermometer reads 25 degrees Fahrenheit.

During breakfast, Bud Clark read aloud from the journals of the original expedition, a ritual he performs on a regular basis to remind the group where they are on the historical calendar.

Bud Clark: I walked down and joined the party at their encampment, on the point of land formed by the junction of the rivers, found them all in good health and much pleased at having arrived at this long-wished for spot...[fades]

Terry Gildea: A semi-retired consultant for Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, Clark has left his modern-day life behind and become the unofficial head of the St. Charles expedition. For him, the sole purpose of re-enacting the footsteps of his ancestor lies in educating people, especially kids.

[Group of re-enactors at Culbertson Elementary, clapping]

Terry Gildea: The expedition tries to visit every elementary school along the route. Today the stop is Culbertson Elementary with educational talks covering the medicine, uniforms, boats and firearms of the original corps.

Bud Clark: Are you all familiar with how you can start a fire...[fades]

Terry Gildea: After traveling up the river and camping out with the guys, I felt less like a reporter and more as if I wanted to keep going. Bud Clark invited me to his teepee that evening. Clark is steadfast what he believes the Discovery Expedition of St. Charles is attempting to accomplish.

Bud Clark: We’d just like our legacy to be that we can look back at what we did and say, you know, because of these stops we made and meeting a lot of wonderful people and promoting open and honest dialogue that we came closer together as an American family, and we’re a better American family—a closer-knit nation because of it in just some small way.

Terry Gildea: That legacy has been questioned by some. In South Dakota, the group was confronted by Lakota protestors, who said that the original trip led to Indian genocide and damaged their culture. The protestors asked the modern re-enactors to turn back.

Inside the group, there has been conflict as well. The Discovery Expedition of St. Charles faced a leadership dispute that tested the social fabric of the modern-day group. Scott Mandrell, who originally portrayed Lewis, and Bud Clark ultimately disagreed on the mission of the expedition. Both sides refuse to go into detail, but Mandrell and several members split off to fulfill what they believe is the most important objective of the bicentennial.

Scott Mandrell: Jefferson’s dictate was very clear to Meriwether Lewis: ‘The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River and the principle streams there of and find a practical water communication to the ocean.’ We felt the purpose of our project was to show people a snapshot of the trail 200 years later.
Getting along on the Lewis and Clark Trail

Terry Gildea: For Mandrell, re-enacting had less to do with period uniforms and educational programs at elementary schools. Retracing the steps of the Corp of Discovery to the calendar day became his ultimate priority. He’s also paddling up the Missouri in canoes instead of motor-powered pirogues. He is creating an archive of his journey and the physical route as it exists today.

Scott Mandrell: We have the luxury of being in the very same location, or as near as possible to the very same location to where the party was, circumstances permitting, to where the original party was on that day two hundred years prior.

Terry Gildea: Both expeditions will fulfill their goals, but I believe they really have more in common than they think. While neither re-enactment can completely escape the 21st century, the wanderlust and appetite for adventure embodied in the Discovery Expedition of St. Charles is contagious. As I left to catch a plane back to Oregon Territory, some members tried to convince me to stay and travel with the group.

Bud Clark: We’re going to make another small boat and re-enact Shackleton’s trip to the polar cap... Nah, just kidding.

Terry Gildea: I’m Terry Gildea on the Lewis and Clark Trail.

[Singing: Hail Columbia, ye happy land...]

James Ronda: We are desperate to see these men and this woman and this child as fully developed, fully engaged human beings.

Peter Coyote: Lewis and Clark scholar James Ronda offers an explanation for why today’s students of the expedition invest so much effort in learning about each member of a military mission that ended two centuries ago.

James Ronda: And what happens out of that desperation is that we often create for them identities, so that George Shannon is forever the lost and that Patrick Gass is forever the carpenter and George Drouillard is forever the hunter. We provided easy labels for them, to give them not just names but faces and identities because we want to know them, because in some way or another we think that we are them and they are us.

Peter Coyote: The challenge of re-creating the social dynamics of this exploration party is intriguing, but in many ways frustrating. Our guide, Clay Jenkinson, offers a few final thoughts on this subject.

Clay Jenkinson: What was it actually like out there on the Lewis and Clark trail? Who grumbled? Who joked? Who hummed while he worked? Who prayed before he ate dried salmon and wapato root, and according to what liturgy?

Who was annoying? Who was Miss Congeniality? Who had bad breath? Who shirked his duties whenever he could? Who, besides Charbonneau, caved in a crisis, and who was as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar?

Who were the loners? Who was the life of every party? How many of the men wished they had never volunteered in the first place? And how many wished they never had to return to civilization? What was the social—as opposed to military—pecking order? Which members of the expedition were inseparable, and which ones couldn’t stand to be together in the same vast wilderness?

Who, besides Charbonneau, got on everybody’s nerves? Were there factions? Were there cliques? To what extent
did the social order fall out along geographic or linguistic or religious lines?

What kinds of jokes and stories did they tell around the campfires—“Hey, did you hear about the blond who discovered the Great Falls”? Or, “two Canadian explorers walk into a bar...” Who talked of home most? Who shyly confessed that he had a sweetheart he intended to marry when, if, he ever got back to Kentucky? How did they react to the black man, especially those like John Ordway who grew up in slave-free New England? Who was the handsomest man of the expedition? Who was the dimmest-witted? What would Pierre Cruzatte say was the most often-requested song?

We don’t know the answers to these questions, and probably we can never know unless remarkable new documents turn up. If they’d only realized we’d be so fascinated, they might have thrown us a bone or two.

“Let me describe Sacagawea,” Clark might have written, “the day she first ventured into our construction site at Fort Mandan.”

“Permit me to make a list of those who could not swim,” Lewis might have written.

Now, two hundred years after the expedition, with the oral traditions clouded in both the Indian and white traditions, we have only the journals and a few related letters and receipts to rely on. And so, we sift relentlessly through these semi-public documents searching for clues. Inevitably, we make more of every scrap and fragment, every shred of evidence than probably it deserves. There is something slightly pathetic about this and we know better, but we cannot help ourselves. Humans have a firm, even a desperate, need to construct satisfying master narratives of their activities. And in most cases, we’d rather they be tidy than true. We’d rather they be certain than correct.

Lewis and Clark may have been, as Donald Jackson put it, the ‘writingest explorers in American history.’ But what they wrote is surprisingly stingy of detail. It is sometimes said that if an archeologist could spend one hour at Troy or Macchu Picchu, she would learn more from direct observation than all of the midden diggers who ever lived. If we could only send a modern master of detail to spend one day with the Corps of Discovery, this time instructed not to find the shortest water route to the Pacific, but rather to notice what the explorers took for granted, to defamiliarize what was to William Werner or Silas Goodrich the utterly familiar, to describe everything from campsites to canteens, and to bring back Polaroids of Cameahwait and York and Po-sa-cop-sa-hay and, of course, principally, of Sacagawea, it would probably blow the doors right off the master narrative we have strung together over the last two hundred years.

In the meantime, we sift and we speculate and we bring an almost Talmudic scrutiny to bear on the slightest hiccup of William Clark or Meriwether Lewis’s pen. Probably not one in ten thousand of us could have stood up to the rigors of that great journey, but which of us would not wish to stand at the periphery of a Montana campsite with a crisp and empty elkskin-bound journal and a brand new pen that would have made Thomas Jefferson salivate? For the Unfinished Journey, I’m Clay Jenkinson.

Peter Coyote: I’m Peter Coyote. This program was produced by Lewis & Clark College and Oregon Public Broadcasting. The producer is Eve Epstein, audio engineer Steven Kray, associate producer Sherry Manning. Original music composed and conducted by Aaron Meyer and Bill Lamb. The executive producers are Clay Jenkinson and Morgan Holm. Major funding provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional funding was provided by the National Park Service and the Jonsson Family Foundation. Support for this program also comes from this station and Public Radio International stations and is made possible in part by the PRI program fund whose contributors include the Ford Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. To learn more about this series visit opb.org and click on the “Guide to Lewis and Clark.”