EPISODE 112: THE WORLD OF LEWIS AND CLARK

In this hour, we meet Lewis and Clark experts and enthusiasts and find out what draws them to this chapter of American history.

David Peck: Reading about Lewis and Clark is one thing, but when you go on the trail and you see the sights and you read, it can become very intoxicating as it did with me.

Peter Coyote: Join me as we explore the modern-day world of Lewis and Clark through the eyes of their biggest fans.

Optional cutaway for News

Allison Frost: Welcome to this edition of the Latest Tidings, produced in cooperation with the National Post. In 1902, celebrating 25 years of publishing America’s “Democratic daily journal.” I’m Allison Frost.
Eva Emery Dye is 47-year-old woman author who is has just published her second book of fiction based on real events. She recently published a book about the settling of the western United States called McGloughlin and the Old Oregon, which tells the story of a man named John McGloughlin who helped the early pioneers. And Dye stuck with the subject of history for her new novel about the Lewis and Clark Expedition. One of the members of that journey was a little known Indian woman, Sacagawea. Eva Emery Dye says Sacagawea has been shrouded in obscurity for too long.

Eva Emery Dye: Out of a few dry bones I found in the tales of the trip, I created Sacagawea and made her a living entity.

Allison Frost: We are please to present a special literary edition of the Latest Tidings, featuring Eva Emery Dye reading from The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis & Clark.
Dye begins by putting the life of the Indian woman in the context of the larger expedition.

Eva Emery Dye: Captured in battle as child five years before, Sacagawea had been brought to the land
of the Dakotas and sold to Charbonneau. Now barely sixteen, in the February at the Mandan fort, she became a mother. Most of the men were away on a great hunting trip; when they came back, a lusty little red faced papoose was screaming beside the kitchen fire.

Allison Frost: Later, Sacagawea helped the explorers interpret among Indian tribes and was a powerful symbol of peace for the Corps of Discovery in what otherwise might have been perceived as a war party. At one meeting with Indians, Dye describes how Sacagawea was reunited with her brother after being separated from him—and her birth tribe—for many years.

Eva Emery Dye: A council was immediately called. The Shoshones spread white robes and hung wampum shells of pearl in the hair of the white men. “Sacagawea. Bring her hither,” called Lewis.

Tripping lightly into the willow lodge, Sacagawea was beginning to interpret. Then lifting her eyes to the chief, she recognized her own brother, Cameahwait. She ran to his side, threw her blanket over his head, and wept upon his bosom. Sacagawea, too, was a Princess, come home now to her Mountain Kingdom.

Allison Frost: When the explorers finally arrived at on the Pacific Ocean, Dye tells the tale of Sacagawea's insistence on being included in an excursion to see a beached whale.

Eva Emery Dye: “Captinne, you remember w’en we reach de rivers and you knew not which to follow? I show de country an’ point de stream. Again w’en my husband could not spik, I spik for you. Now, Captinne, I travel great way to see de Beeg Water. I climb de mountain an’ help de boat on de rapide. An’ now dis monstrous fi sh haf come.” Sacagawea could scarce restrain her tears. Sacagawea was only a woman, and a brave little woman at that.

Allison Frost: But, Emery Dye told her audience, Sacagawea ultimately prevailed in her suit and was allowed by Captain Meriwether Lewis to accompany the men.

Eva Emery Dye: Sacagawea, save Pocahontas the most traveled Indian Princess in our history, spoke not a word, but looked with calm and shining eye upon the fruition of her hopes. Now she could go back to the Mandan towns and speak of things that Madame Jussaume had never seen, and of the Big Water beyond the Shining Mountains.

Allison Frost: That was Eva Emory Dye, reading from her novel The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis & Clark, which has just been published by A C McClurg & Co. of Chicago. Dye is looking ahead to the Centennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in two years. That journey began under President Thomas Jefferson, nearly 100 years ago, in 1804.

In other news, suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton has died. She authored several books including The Woman's Bible and her autobiography, Eighty Years and More. She and Susan B. Anthony wrote a three volume History of Woman Suffrage. Stanton is perhaps most famously remembered for her participation in the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, where she drafted a Declaration of Sentiments, which stated that men and women are created equal. So far, only Colorado, Utah and Idaho have granted women the right to vote.

And that concludes this edition of the Latest Tidings. I'm Allison Frost. Our program is produced in cooperation with the National Post. Celebrating 25 years as America’s “Democratic daily journal,” since 1877.
Peter Coyote: Lewis and Clark research sounds like the province of dry-as-dust historians digging through piles of old documents.

Clay Jenkinson: Far from it! This story attracts amateurs and professional historians alike, and an infinite number of buffs. Even the most dispassionate scholar can become misty-eyed when discussing the adventures of Lewis and Clark.

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 as our guide to this story is Clay Jenkinson, humanities scholar-in-residence at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. So what is it that draws all sorts of people into Lewis and Clark? It’s an interesting story, but why does it touch the American consciousness so deeply?

Clay Jenkinson: Peter, there is such a level of enchantment about Lewis and Clark. It’s amazing how many people have stories to tell about when they first became interested in these explorers. They’re eager to describe their favorite place along the Lewis and Clark trail and many remember when the story first resonated with them in childhood.

Stephen Ambrose: I’m right now into chapter 16 of a biography of Meriwether Lewis, which has been a dream of mine since 1976.

Clay Jenkinson: That’s the late Stephen Ambrose, author of *Undaunted Courage*, in an interview with Brian Lamb on C-SPAN in 1994, two years before his bestselling book appeared. It became such an instant classic in Lewis and Clark literature that it’s hard to believe it was published so late in the 20th century. And because of it, Stephen Ambrose became sort of the patron saint of the Lewis and Clark bicentennial. Unfortunately, he died of cancer in 2002, so he didn’t live to see how deeply he influenced our understanding of Lewis and Clark. But listen to his enthusiasm, his passion for this story:

Stephen Ambrose: This Meriwether Lewis book, wait until you see it. We—Moira and I and our kids—wanted to do something special for the 200th birthday of the United States, something other than watching fireworks and getting drunk. We decided we were going to go to Lemhi Pass, which is on the Idaho-Montana border. It’s the place where Meriwether Lewis became the first American to cross the Continental Divide. We camped up there that night, and we had the most gorgeous night, with the stars—you could reach up and touch them. We brought some booze along, and we had some students with us, and we got royally drunk and sang “God Bless America” and other patriotic songs, lying on our back, looking at these stars.

Peter Coyote: What a great image! Stephen Ambrose, looking up at the stars on Lemhi Pass during the nation’s bicentennial, dreaming of a book he would finish twenty years later. Since then, there has been a surge of interest in history generally. All you have to do is change channels on TV. But in this particular...
case, Clay, how do you explain the fascination with Lewis and Clark?

Clay Jenkinson: Nobody can really explain it, and it’s shocking in a certain kind of way. One of the joys of this public radio documentary has been getting to know so many people who have a deep personal connection to Lewis and Clark, and hearing in a surprisingly unguarded way their speculations about the meaning of the expedition, their personal affection for certain characters from the story and their protectiveness for the integrity of the story as they understand it. In the last decade, scores of books have been written about Lewis and Clark, interpretive centers have sprung up all over the country and the Lewis and Clark trail has been invaded by hundreds of buck-skinned re-enactors.

Man: Welcome to Fort DuBois. Allow me to introduce myself: I’m Private Richard Windsor, 1st United States Infantry Regiment. You can tell that by the word on my button.

Clay Jenkinson: Boats—some of them without motors—have been plying the Missouri River and there have even been confrontations between American Indians and re-enactors in pirogues and keelboats. Peter, this story has some strange kind of magic.

Peter Coyote: When did this phenomenon really strike the American people?

Clay Jenkinson: The 200th anniversary of the expedition was bound to get a lot of attention. That’s how Americans do public history. The publication of Stephen Ambrose’s Undaunted Courage in 1996 had a big impact. But it was Ken Burns’ superb documentary that carried the story into millions of American homes the following year.

Stephen Ambrose (from Ken Burns’ Lewis and Clark): He had been talking to himself like a lawyer, according to Mrs. Grinder, and was clearly distraught. And then he sat down in the park and had this moment of quiet and remarked, “Oh, what a sweet evening this is,” and went into an introspection. I think as he sat in that park and looked West, he was waiting for Clark to come down the trail and rescue him. But of course, Clark who knew nothing about this situation was hundreds of miles away.

Peter Coyote: Clay, let’s go behind the scenes to meet some of the key players in the Lewis and Clark world and listen to their favorite stories about the journals. We’ll learn what questions continue to perplex them and hear firsthand their sense of passion and their moments of discovery.

Dayton Duncan: When I first encountered Lewis and Clark 25 years ago, I read the one edition volume of the journals edited brilliantly by Bernard DeVoto.

Peter Coyote: That’s Lewis and Clark expert Dayton Duncan, co-producer of Ken Burns’ documentary on Lewis and Clark.

Dayton Duncan: And I was immediately captivated by the first person accounts, and by the road trip story, but also I was attracted to sort of what I would call the “highlight reel.” They almost come to blows with the Teton Sioux; boy, that crossing of the Bitterroots when they’re eating their horses to survive; the deadly fight with the Blackfeet Indians, moments like that, catapulting down the great Columbia River. Those things attracted me, and then in following them to write a book it reacquainted me with my love of the American landscape. It reinvigorated my interest in American history.

Peter Coyote: Clay, many people might assume that all the important documents and original source
materials about Lewis and Clark have been discovered and thoroughly analyzed. But that’s not actually true, is it?

Clay Jenkinson: No. As a matter of fact, there is still a great deal of new and original scholarship underway in the Lewis and Clark world.

Peter Coyote: One of the people you interviewed for this documentary played a critical role in verifying and publishing newly-recovered documents relating to Lewis and Clark. Tell us the story.

Clay Jenkinson: James Holmberg of the Filson Club in Louisville, Kentucky found himself face to face with a group of 55 previously unpublished letters by William Clark, letters that had literally been sitting in an attic all these years. Mr. Holmberg knew right away that he was about to experience something that all historians dream of.

James Holmberg: In 1988, when I got wind of a find in an attic here in Louisville of a trunk full of Clark family papers, including a bundle of William Clark letters, I thought, ‘Oh my gosh.’

Clay Jenkinson: Holmberg got right on the trail and what he discovered was that the letters belonged to descendants of Jonathan Clark--that’s William’s brother. He describes what happened next:

James Holmberg: It was on a Friday afternoon, as I recall, in February and he said, ‘I hear that you’re interested in the Clark letters.’ And I said, ‘Oh yes.’ I said, ‘I am. Can you tell me about them?’ He says, ‘I think they’re pretty good. They look pretty interesting. They’re written from Mulberry Hill, Louisville, Washington, St. Louis.’ He says there’s a lot from St. Louis. And then he says, ‘Uh, the mouth of the Missouri, Fort Mandan.’ And, of course, by this time I’m hyperventilating, and falling out of my chair almost. I mean, I’m truly stunned because I know right away any letters from William Clark are going to be special, but I was probably almost shaking and I said, ‘Well, can I see them? Can we get together?’ And he said, ‘Oh sure, that’s fine.’ So, we made an appointment for the following week, on a day which happened to be my birthday. And I said, for a historian and Lewis and Clark--at that time more buff than historian--what a treat!

Peter Coyote: And then what happened?

Clay Jenkinson: Holmberg met with the descendant and opened the bank box that contained the stack of letters.

James Holmberg: I start immediately going through them, and I’m looking at five expedition letters. I go to October, 1809--here it is, the death of Lewis. You know, this was just answering all these questions and unknowns and disputatious points.

Dear Brother,
when at Shelbyville to day I Saw in a Frankfort paper called the Arguss a report published which givs me much Concern, it Says that Govr. Lewis killed himself...on his way between the Chickaw Saw Bluffs and nashville. I fear this report has too much truth....
William Clark, October 28, 1809

Peter Coyote: What a find!
Clay Jenkinson: Yes, and when Clark says later on in this previously unknown letter “I fear, o! I fear the weight of his mind has overcome him, what will be the consequence?,” we come as close as we’re ever going to get to hearing William Clark’s reaction to the death of his friend, Meriwether Lewis. But the letter also makes clear that although he was saddened and shocked, Clark was not altogether surprised that Lewis had taken his own life. The phrase “weight of his mind” tells us a great deal about the last days of Lewis’s life and this passage is merely one example of how these letters have added to our knowledge about the journey and the post-expedition life of William Clark. Holmberg went on to edit these letters and published them in 2002 under the title *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark*. This is just one way in which the bicentennial has made a permanent contribution to Lewis and Clark studies.

Peter Coyote: As I understand it, in this letter Clark actually mentions a letter he received from Lewis not long before his tragic death.

> I wish much to get the letter I receved of Govr. Lewis from N. madrid, which you Saw it will be of great service to me. prey Send it to Fincastle as Soon as possible.
> William Clark, October 30, 1809

Peter Coyote: Has the letter Lewis wrote to Clark before his death ever surfaced?

Clay Jenkinson: No. It has disappeared and it may have been destroyed by the Clark family to protect the reputation of Captain Lewis.

Peter Coyote: I guess we may never know what happened to it. Who knows? Maybe that missing letter by Lewis is lurking somewhere in a trunk or an attic, just waiting for some lucky person to find it. Clay, what kind of people give their lives to this sort of work, ferreting out hidden information, gathering the documentary threads of American history?

Clay Jenkinson: Peter, let me introduce to you a very remarkable man, Roger Wendlick of Portland, Oregon, who is not a scholar. He’d be the first to tell you he doesn’t have a college degree. And for a long time, he claims, he didn’t even read books. Whatever your preconception is of the historical antiquary, forget it! Roger Wendlick is one of the single most enthusiastic people associated with the Lewis and Clark bicentennial. Here’s a fraction of what he told me when we sat down together.

Roger Wendlick: I think what excites me most about the Lewis and Clark Expedition is how it pertains to my own life, and the challenges. How could they possibly have gone this distance with the loss of only one of the Corps from their membership, and how did they find food and lodging and shelter and each day face different challenges and succeed? As Clark said in January when they were passing the Great Falls, and he kind of asked the members of the Corps, ‘You know, we’ve really got a challenge ahead of us; we may not make it, men,’ and the men all told Captain Clark that ‘we will join you and we will succeed or perish in the attempt.’ Wow, what a strong message that sends young people today! I don’t know, it’s an exciting adventure of men against nature and it was a success, it was a success.

Peter Coyote: Now let’s test your knowledge of the Lewis and Clark Expedition: When William Clark joined Meriwether Lewis as co-leader of the expedition, the War Department denied Clark the rank of captain. A 20th century president finally rectified that in a White House ceremony, which also saw York
and Sacagawea became official members of the Corps of Discovery. Can you name that president?
Coming up next: historians who looked at existing documents in totally new ways.

James Ronda: As I so often tell audiences now, get off the boat, get on the bank. See this story through
other eyes.

Peter Coyote: 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 (Upbeat)]

Peter Coyote: Clay, not very many people get the chance to discover unpublished documents in an attic
somewhere. And most historians probably aren’t that eager to dress up in buffalo skins for the sake of
scholarship.

Clay Jenkinson: You’re right, Peter, but what is available to scholars of every generation is the
opportunity to look freshly at things we thought we knew and take for granted. Probably the most
important scholar in modern Lewis and Clark studies is James Ronda, Barnard professor of history at
the University of Tulsa. Ronda wrote a book in 1984 that revolutionized the way we think about Lewis
and Clark and even the way we think about the larger patterns of Western history. Ronda called his book
Lewis and Clark Among the Indians. But what Professor Ronda actually did was reverse the lens and
look at the Lewis and Clark story from a Native American point of view.

James Ronda: I was trained as an ethnohistorian. I was trained for the close reading of documents
written by Euro-Americans and then to tease out of those documents other perspectives, other voices.
Historians trained in the 1930’s, or 1940’s, or 1950’s didn’t have that kind of graduate school experience,
but also didn’t have the kind of cultural experiences of the 1960’s and 1970’s. I’m absolutely persuaded
that Lewis and Clark Among the Indians is a book that reflects a unique time in the writing of American
history.

Clay Jenkinson: Professor Ronda is being characteristically modest about his scholarly contribution. His
knowledge and the depth of his insights about Lewis, Clark, Jefferson, Sacagawea, and particularly the
tribal peoples they encountered was inspiring. I asked him if he remembered when the idea came to him
to write a book that put native people at the center of the story.

James Ronda: Sometime in the 1970’s I was given the opportunity to review John Logan Allen’s brilliant
book Passage through the Garden. I had been writing about more Eastern frontiers and relationships
between Indians and missionaries in New France and southern New England in the 17th century. Again, I
knew nothing about the West, I knew nothing about Lewis and Clark. I read that book and was transfixed
by it. A year or so later, I was increasingly persuaded that I was running out of ideas, that I had said the
same thing over and over again about Indians and missionaries and that I was doing what no scholar
should do, I was repeating myself. I began to think about that book, about John Allen’s brilliant book,
and towards the end of the 1970’s, I said—it must have been ’78—I said, ‘Wouldn’t it be interesting
to do a book about Lewis and Clark and Indians?’ And I thought there must be a dozen books about
that—such an obvious topic. And I remember going to the Youngstown State University library—I was
then teaching at Youngstown State—went to the library expecting to find on the shelf a dozen books
about Lewis and Clark and Indians and ethnography and Native American diplomacy and found none, and decided at that moment in this foolish arrogance that I would do a book about Lewis and Clark and Indians. I knew nothing about the West, I knew nothing about Western Native American history or ethnography and decided at that moment that I was going to try to tell that story by the use of Native voices and through Native eyes, that I would change the angle of vision. As I so often tell audiences now, get off the boat, get on the bank. See this story through other eyes.

Peter Coyote: Clay, Ronda’s modesty is notable—his insistence that he was “foolish” and “arrogant” to take this on.

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, we’ve all had that experience—“if I knew then what I know now…” What I particularly admire is Ronda’s willingness to challenge his own past. He talks freely about how his ideas about the Lewis and Clark story have evolved over time. And he’s gained the respect of both Native Americans and the general scholarly community for his work. That respect was confirmed when Ronda was asked to give the keynote address at the bicentennial kick-off at Monticello in 2003 where tribal leaders gave him a star quilt for his great work.

James Ronda: It was a powerful and emotional experience, made even more compelling for me by the presentation of the star quilt. It was an extraordinary moment for me, one that I will never ever forget. I felt as though I had redeemed what my grandmother had done wrong so many years before. My grandmother was an Indian missionary who worked among the Navajos and Zunis, and she was very much a part of that effort to erase Native cultures and to silence Native voices. And it was as if now I had redeemed something of my family legacy as well.

Peter Coyote: It sounds like James Ronda was right when he said in his speech at Monticello that “books change lives.”

Clay Jenkinson: Peter, I’ve heard James Ronda quote on a number of occasions from Thoreau’s *Walden* the line ‘how many a man dates a new era in his life from the reading of a book.’

Joyce Badgley Hunsaker: The first time Sacagawea came into my consciousness, I was five years old and I was keen on getting my own library card. In those days you had to prove that you could write your name in cursive by yourself and you had to prove that you could read a book chosen by the children’s librarian. So when I was five, I went down to the local Carnegie library and wrote my name effectively and the children’s librarian reached behind her and pulled out a book at random to give to me to prove that I could read, and wouldn’t you know it, it was a children’s biography of Sacajawea, the Bird Woman. So from that point on, I’ve been hooked.

Donna Barbie (Kessler): When I was a child, I was a Sacagawea fan. I just tapped into the belief of the legend. I thought she was just wonderful. I thought North Dakota was fabulously wonderful for honoring her. When we went to that statue when I was a child, I thought of her as just this tower of strength.

Peter Coyote: We heard from Sacagawea re-enactor Joyce Badgley Hunsaker and Donna Barbie, a scholar who explored Sacagawea’s place in American history. Not everybody who comes under the spell of Lewis and Clark decides to devote their life to studying the expedition. But there are many people who are passionate about this story, and who make contributions in other ways. Tell us about some of those people you’ve met.
Clay Jenkinson: They run the gamut, from re-enactors who dress up in period costume and try to re-create as closely as they can the experiences of Lewis and Clark to amateur historians who focus in on particular aspects of the story and learn more about guns or cooking equipment or the sextant than anyone would think possible. A surprisingly large number of people are experts about some stretch of the Lewis and Clark trail and they follow the expedition in their district almost footprint by footprint, tent stake by tent stake. These folks are not only excellent amateur historians, but maybe more importantly, keepers and preserves of the trail. Larry Epstein is a Montana attorney and past president of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. He’s the keeper of one of the most important sites on the trail, where the only bloodshed of the expedition occurred. I spent a day with him at Two Medicine Creek in north central Montana where he told me that his efforts to preserve, explore and lead tours to the site are, at times, like a full-time job.

Peter Coyote: I want to hear more about that trip in a moment. But first, tell me why Two Medicine Creek is significant in the Lewis and Clark saga?

Clay Jenkinson: Most of Lewis and Clark’s encounters with Indians were peaceful and successful. But on the return journey in 1806, Lewis took three members of the expedition up the Marias River to determine whether its source was in Canada or the United States. In one of the most isolated places in today’s Montana, a little international incident occurred in which Lewis and his men killed two young Blackfeet Indians. It’s known as the “fight site.” Nobody is absolutely sure where that scuffle occurred, but if anybody comes close, it’s Larry Epstein.

We hike to the site on an extremely windy day, and stop to rest by the creek where Epstein believes the four men of the expedition camped for the night with a small party of eight young men of the Blackfeet nation. There’s no question that Lewis was undermanned on this occasion and most historians agree that the eight young Indians were as surprised by Lewis as he was by them. All we know for sure is that at earliest light the Blackfeet tried to capture Lewis’s guns and horses.

On a scale of 1 to 100 what is your sense that we are where the gunfight occurred?

Larry Epstein: In the 60’s, or 70’s, because there’s no telling. A lot of this topography meets some of the descriptions.

Clay Jenkinson: We’re in a stark Great Plains landscape here, lonely but extremely beautiful, about 250 feet below walls of eroded shale and limestone. Larry reads from Lewis’s detailed journal account of a bullet whizzing past his head.

Larry Epstein: “Being bare-headed I felt the wind of his bullet very distinctly.” And even when I talk to second graders, or third or fourth-graders, they love that drama.

Clay Jenkinson: One of the first gunfights in the history of the American West.

Larry Epstein: Certainly in Montana and certainly one of the first white/non-white interactions like that we’ve ever documented.

Clay Jenkinson: The other six Blackfeet fled, but two were killed. And Lewis knew he had to get as far away as possible, as quickly as he could. But before he withdrew, he performed one last, arguably rash, act.
Larry Epstein: “The gun we took with us. I also re-took the flag, but left the medal about the neck of the dead man”—this is another one of my favorites—“that they might be informed who we were.” It is technically called throughout this story a “peace medal” but Lewis, like troops in Vietnam did, left a sign of who was there, and they leave that medal around his neck.

Clay Jenkinson: Was that a smart thing to do or is that a stupid thing to do?

Larry Epstein: I think it’s a swaggery thing to do. Those kinds of things always get me in trouble.

Clay Jenkinson: The “fight site” is in a pretty remote place near Cut Bank, Montana. You really need a guide like Larry Epstein to take you across private property to reach the site. As we lurched along the dirt trail, I asked Larry how he got interested in Lewis and Clark. Turns out it was when he was in the Boy Scouts, and the troop leader brought Larry and other boys out to the area in his airplane.

Larry Epstein: Every scout in that troop, which means all six of us, six or eight of us by then, flew with Bob the entire route. He would take three kids, put them in that Cessna, and we’d start at the Great Falls, fly up, fly around, fly the whole route, and he’s lecturing us on maps and journals. The one thing I derived from all of that was a true love of maps and mapping and navigation to this day. I love maps, always have.

Clay Jenkinson: Larry Epstein is a man in his fifties now and a distinguished member of the Montana Bar Association. But you can’t spend much time with him without realizing that the Boy Scout is still very much in control.

Larry Epstein: You know, it sucks you in, it really does.

Clay Jenkinson: Have you ever felt drowned?

Larry Epstein: I’ve felt short of breath a time or two. You’ve got a Wilderness Society hike, followed by the local historical society wants one. And then somebody is calling from England and saying, ‘we’ll be there in four days, can we go to the “fight site.”’

Clay Jenkinson: It doesn’t take much to get Larry Epstein to visit Two Medicine Creek. In fact, the day after our windswept adventure, he returned to the site with a family that had purchased his personally-guided tour at an auction.

Larry Epstein: Let’s wander over and look at the “fight site.” This is actually the cool thing about this for me and for other Lewis and Clark buffs, is this is the most pristine site on the whole trail.

Unidentified Man: It’s probably so difficult to get into.

Unidentified Woman: We will never come here again. Hardly anyone would…

Larry Epstein: You can’t bring a tour bus, and if you rent a car at the Great Falls airport, it’s got to be a Subaru or a Ford Explorer because you’re not coming here in a Honda.
Unidentified Man: Is this public access to get here, or is it because of you that we’re able to come in here?

Larry Epstein: It’s a mix, this is private. It’s because of me.

Clay Jenkinson: Larry takes his responsibility as a historian and gatekeeper very seriously. He collects the five-dollar access fee that one of the land owners requests. He makes sure that people who come here stay on the path, collect no artifacts, enjoy but not gather the flowers, and show respect for what both Larry and the Blackfeet people regard as a sacred site.

Larry Epstein: It doesn’t sound like much, but on a Saturday afternoon, I’m apt to bring one hundred people out. That’s happened a lot.

Clay Jenkinson: In some ways, Lewis and Clark are just an excuse for Larry to get out here into the heart of the Montana plains. His love of the land and his sense of stewardship are as impressive as his historical knowledge. It’s amazing how thoroughly he embodies this place and how deeply committed he is to getting the story right and treating the land with respect. He’s an indispensable part of the Lewis and Clark world. This is Larry Epstein’s place, but there are literally scores of others scattered across the Lewis and Clark trail who perform similar roles and help us realize that this is a story deeply rooted in the landscape of America.

Larry Epstein: I was out here two weeks ago. This yellow flower was in full bloom and you can see how much of it there is. And the blooms were the size of a quarter. And then it was a purple flower, all over, and it was just awesome, something I’d never seen before.

[Music]

Peter Coyote: You can find Lewis and Clark enthusiasts everywhere, even in the White House. In one of the last acts of his second term, President Clinton signed a bill that posthumously promoted Clark to captain. That’s the answer to our quiz question this hour.

President Bill Clinton: When Lewis recruited Clark to help lead the Corps of Discovery, he promised him the rank of captain. Unfortunately, issues of budget and bureaucracy intervened—some things never change [laughter]—and Clark never received his commission. A natural leader, great frontiersman, Lieutenant Clark risked his life across the continent and back, all for the good of this nation. Today we honor his service by presenting his great-great-great grandsons, Bud and John Clark, with the late William Clark certificate of appointment to the rank of Captain in the United States Army. [Applause]

Peter Coyote: Dayton Duncan was a witness to that historic White House event.

Dayton Duncan: He made Sacagawea and York honorary members, official members of the Corps of Discovery, and he designated the White Cliffs of the Missouri and Pompey’s Pillar as national monuments. These were things that my friend Steve Ambrose and I and many other people had been working on for some time. But to know that the place where Meriwether Lewis wrote that it seemed as if “scenes of visionary enchantment would never have an end” now by virtue of something President Clinton did have a better chance at never having an end, by the protection that came from his naming it as a national monument, I felt that whatever role that I and some of my friends had had was well placed.
President Bill Clinton: As we finally right these wrongs and celebrate the legacy of Lewis and Clark, we recognize the irony inherent in their expedition. Their historic journey of discovery opened up the American West, a mythic frontier that even today endures in the American mind as a symbol of freedom. But York was anything but free, and Sacagawea’s people, like her neighbors, would eventually be swept away by a flood of American settlers determined to claim the Great Plains and the land beyond. These hard truths do not fit comfortably within the narrow rhetorical boundaries of ‘manifest destiny’ or square with modern notions of democracy and diversity. But as our nation has grown physically, so we have grown as a people and I believe that capacity for growth as a people, for deepening the bonds of community and broadening our vision of liberty and equality has been just as important a voyage of discovery as the physical one Lewis and Clark took so long ago.

Peter Coyote: Coming up next: favorite journal passages and places on the trail.

Ken Karzmiski: I would say that my favorite place is probably the lower portage camp and the reason is that today it looks so much like it did.

Peter Coyote: 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 (Amazing)]

Peter Coyote: So far, we’ve heard from a president, from scholars and historians, from a construction worker-turned-book collector, from an attorney who leads tours in his spare time. Where else do we find Lewis and Clark enthusiasts in unlikely places?

Clay Jenkinson: Well, Peter, how about the emergency room?

Peter Coyote: As in a medical doctor?

Clay Jenkinson: Yes. It’s amazing how different facets of this story attract people from a range of backgrounds. The forty-some men and one woman of the Lewis and Clark Expedition pushed 30 tons of baggage from St. Charles, Missouri to the Pacific coast. It’s no surprise that this led to a range of medical complaints—dislocated shoulders, back problems, accidents with tools, digestive troubles, snake bites, the birth of a child, the death of Sergeant Floyd from an undiagnosed illness and, of course, plenty of sore muscles. Physician David Peck says his interest with Lewis and Clark began when he visited his mother’s family in Montana as a child. He found the medical history fascinating:

David Peck: Reading about Lewis and Clark is one thing, but when you go on the trail and you see the sights and you read, it can become very intoxicating, as it did with me. I became very interested in the medicine because I’m a physician and went to a wilderness medicine conference and they talked all week about wonderful topics and all of it had to do with Lewis and Clark. It’s a wonderful story not only adventurewise but from a medical point of view and also viewing medicine at the time of Lewis and Clark within the context of what was happening in the world in science and medicine. It becomes such a deep and rich story. The expedition has so many facets to it. There’s just something there for everybody, for the biologist and the zoologist and the botanist and the physician and the ethnographers. It just has so much to offer everybody.
Peter Coyote: David Peck is the author of *Or Perish in the Attempt: Wilderness Medicine and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

Ken Karzmiski: I would say that my favorite place is probably the Lower Portage camp.

Peter Coyote: That’s Ken Karzmiski, a Lewis and Clark archeologist and historian. He’s the executive director of the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center. Clay, you asked Ken Karzmiski and others about their favorite places on the trail and their favorite passages from the journals.

Clay Jenkinson: Yes, and most, like Ken, came up with an answer immediately.

Ken Karzmiski: Today, it looks so much like it did. I know, I have been on the trail in so many places and so many times and I know Lewis and Clark would go there today and they would not know where they are. At the Lower Portage camp, it would look just like it looked the day they left it.

Clay Jenkinson: What’s now known as the Lower Portage camp was the starting point for a month-long detour around the Great Falls in Montana.

Peter Coyote: Here’s what other scholars and experts we interviewed told us about some of their favorite passages and places on the Lewis and Clark trail. Dayton Duncan:

Dayton Duncan: For me, it turns out it’s the short grass prairie, it’s the rolling prairies of South Dakota, North Dakota, the places where those short grass prairies collide with the front range of the Rocky Mountains in Montana. And when I go there for some reason, I am transported in my own spirit, and because of that I feel I am communing with Lewis and Clark and there with them more than any other places along the trail.

Peter Coyote: Lewis & Clark College history professor Stephen Dow Beckham.

Stephen Dow Beckham: I think one of the most telling passages is Lewis’s reflection on his departure from Fort Mandan, when he affirms his sense of history, the centrality of his voyage of discovery, and his comparison to the deeds of Columbus and Captain Cook. There’s also a remarkable passage that he penned at the Great Falls of the Missouri River where he struggles, he tells us, to find appropriate words to describe this sublime spectacle of nature and he seeks the artistry of Salvatore Rosa, the pen of the Scottish poet Thompson, and then quite adequately conjures up in his own choice of words, a wonderfully vivid description of the Great Falls of the Missouri. That sort of passage speaks to me and is quite special.

Peter Coyote: Roberta Conner, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla and director of the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute near Pendleton, Oregon.

Roberta Conner: The names in the journals are fun to read because sometimes they’re correct and we know what they mean and where they mean when they try to write them in our languages. It’s an understanding from inside the culture when you read the journals. There’s a place they call “Wahopa.” There was a woman who was my great grandmother’s friend. My great grandmother’s name was Wyushish and she left her village at the age of probably 13 or 14 as a teenage bride when Fort Dow soldiers raided the villages and thought that they could chase the Indians off by throwing all their food...
in the river. Her husband got on a horse and was never seen again; her parents were killed. She canoed upriver alone. She had a cache in the riverbank in a cave with the canoe and had been told to go up to where the Umatilla River is—the river that Lewis and Clark didn't see on their way out but saw on their way back—that if she went up the Umatilla to a high point, which is now Echo, there would be people who spoke the same language as her people from the river. Wyushish was a Columbia River Indian and she came to live at the mouth, two winters at the mouth of the Umatilla River before she married again. One of her dearest friends was a woman by the name of Sitwuks and another dear friend of hers was a woman by the name of Wahopa. That’s written about in the journals. There’s speculation as to who those people were, but that was the woman’s name who lived amongst us on the Umatilla reservation until she died.

Peter Coyote: Doctor David Peck.

David Peck: My favorite site on the whole trail [is] the Gates of the Mountains near Helena. My favorite event in the journals—for whatever reason, I think it just sums up the excitement and just the wild nature that this expedition had—occurred on May 14, 1805 and it occurred along the Missouri when two canoes and six men spied a sleeping grizzly bear. The grizzly bear was about 300 yards off the river and these guys snuck up to within 60 yards of him, four of them shot him simultaneously. The bear woke up and was enraged, and started chasing the men. Two of the men that had held their fire shot and one of the shots broke the bear’s shoulder. The bear—as Lewis said, his movements were retarded for only a moment—was up chasing the men again, chased one man into the river, jumped into the river after him. Finally, the men were able to shoot the bear several other times and kill him. And that night around that campfire they named that creek Brown Bear Defeat Creek. I think that that bear story for me sums up so much of the adventure and excitement of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and it’s just something that I can never read without my pulse increasing.

Peter Coyote: And poet Gary Holthaus.

Gary Holthaus: My favorite is still that opening paragraph. This is from Lewis’s journal, April 7, 1805. They’re just beginning the journey. “We were now about to penetrate a country at least two thousand miles in width on which the foot of civilized man had never trod. The good or evil it had in store for us was experiment yet to determine. However the picture which now presented itself to me was a most pleasing one. I could but esteem this moment of my departure as among the most happy of my life.” That whole epic thing about finding ourselves, not just finding the Columbia or the West coast or whatever, that’s the journey we’re all on and it is an epic journey for each of us, at least if we pay attention to it and are the least bit reflective about ourselves and our role in the world and who we are and who we might become. That’s all wrapped up in the journals in that first paragraph—the good or evil yet to be discovered.

Peter Coyote: What a great look at some favorite moments in this story. We began this hour with the enthusiastic voice of the late Stephen Ambrose, anticipating the publication of his book *Undaunted Courage*, a book that helped spur our modern love affair with Lewis and Clark. We asked Ambrose’s daughter, Stephenie Ambrose-Tubbs, to read from her father’s essay about the friendship between Lewis and Clark.

Stephenie Ambrose-Tubbs: It was the most famous friendship in American history, based first of all
on their common birth and later attraction, partly on their personalities, mainly on the dangerous and arduous task they set out to do together, coupled with their certain knowledge that if they disagreed with each other, shouted or yelled, tried to set one of the men of the Corps of Discovery against any one or all of the others, then there was no way they could make it to the Pacific Ocean and back. Their journals, America’s epic poem, cover everything. They contain not one hint that in their 28-month expedition the captains exchanged even one sharp word.

Friendship is different from all other relationships. Unlike acquaintanceship it is based on love. Unlike lovers and married couples it is free of jealousy. Unlike children and parents it knows neither criticism nor resentment. Friendship has no status in law. Business partnerships are based on a contract. So is marriage. Parents are bound by the law, as are children. But friendship is freely entered into, freely given, freely exercised.

Friends never cheat each other, or take advantage, or lie. Friends do not spy on one another, yet they have no secrets. Friends glory in each other’s successes and are downcast by the failures. Friends minister to each other, nurse each other. Friends give to each other, worry about each other, stand always ready to help. Perfect friendship is rarely achieved, but at its height it is an ecstasy. For Lewis and Clark, it was such an ecstasy, and the critical factor in their great success. But even at its highest, friendship is human, not godlike. For all his efforts and intentions, Clark could not save Lewis. But they gave to each other everything that can be drawn from a friendship, including their finest moments. Through their trust of each other they put themselves into the top rank of world explorers. And they gave to their country its epic poem while introducing the American people to the American West.


We have explored the sense of friendship—the passion even—that historians and amateurs alike have for the Lewis and Clark story, a passion that has moved them to explore new terrain on their own journey of discovery. For a final word, we turn to Clay Jenkinson, humanities scholar-in-residence at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon and a historian, scholar, and Lewis and Clark expert himself.

Clay Jenkinson: So what is the massive appeal of the Lewis and Clark story? How did it get under our skins in so remarkable a way? Why have we given it four years of our national attention? There are many theories. Here’s mine:  
The British 17th century political theorist John Locke wrote, “In the beginning, all the world was America.” What he meant was that at some point in the far distant past, the whole planet had been what America was when Columbus bumped into it in 1492—a vast primordial world of forest and grass with a handful of scattered pastoral settlements in the clearing. Life in a state of nature. “In the beginning,” he wrote, “all the world was America.”  
But we live with electric garage door openers and cell phones and coal-fired generation plants and sitcoms. The Lewis and Clark Expedition recalls for us the world we have lost, or nearly lost. Lewis finds himself alone in what he calls “scenes of visionary enchantment” in Montana. Clark on the Yellowstone has to wait a couple of hours while a massive herd of buffalo swim across the river. The game is so thick, Lewis writes, that in a 15-minute hunt he could feed a regiment of 800 for a week. The heart of the appeal of the story can be found in what Lewis wrote on April 7, 1805 as the expedition left Fort Mandan in North Dakota: “We were now about to penetrate a country at least two thousand miles in width upon which the foot of civilized man has never trodden.” Lewis and Clark give us a chance to glimpse an America that once was and is no more. To get back in touch with that world, we go camping or hunting. As we sit around the campfire with coyotes howling the distance, we reconnect with
America. And yet we know as we hear a jet airplane cross over our campsite, that that magical American world is almost gone. We go into nature to get a bit of it before it slips away forever, and naturally we turn to the stories that remind us of that world, none so much as Lewis and Clark.

Sometimes in my fantasy life, I imagine myself as one of the lesser members of the expedition in north central Montana in 1805. I can close my eyes and almost see this country when it was still John Locke’s America, untouched by European civilization. I try to imagine 10,000 buffalo in a single valley of the Great Plains. I think of peeping down from a ridgeline on a Lakota or a Crow Indian encampment with girls carrying water in buffalo bladders from the creek, boys wrestling or shooting blunt-tipped arrows for practice, the women tanning hides, and the men returning in proud parade from a successful hunt. The hills are alive with pronghorn antelope and mule deer, elk and prairie dogs, coyotes, wolves and bighorn sheep. In my mind’s eye, it is a golden world, frozen in time as if on John Keats’ Grecian urn. America before the first load of concrete had ever been poured. America before we did to it what we have done to it. It makes me ache to think about it.

It’s the romance of America, which in different forms has enchanted the world—Huck and Jim on their raft, teased along by the immense currents of the Mississippi; Natty Bumppo tiptoeing silently through the prairies of upstate New York; Hamlin Garland lying out all night in the wheat fields of Dakota, dreaming of literary greatness; John Colter, naked, barefoot, and terrified, outsprinting his Blackfeet tormentors; or John Muir spending the night high up in a sequoia to feel the sway of the Sierra forests. In my mind’s eye, there are no mosquitoes, no blisters, no whippings for insubordination, no sleepless nights among a potentially hostile Indian tribe, no bone-chilling drizzle on the coast, no smoky fires, no tainted elk for supper.

In my imagination, Captain Lewis keeps his distance but I stand in awe of his mind and purposefulness. Captain Clark is more relaxed; sometimes, he even joins us for an evening dram or dance. The men laugh as they work through the day and sing rowing songs from the Old Country.

In my fantasy, Sacagawea is always wearing a perfect white deerskin dress with elaborate beadwork. Her hair is straight. Her child never cries. It is always June 15th, and the grizzly bears growl but do not attack. Somewhere in that cluster of ideas, that fantasy, lies the magic of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. And then I snap out of my reverie and realize, of course, that I would not have been with Lewis and Clark had I been alive in 1804. I wouldn’t have been one of the nine young men from Kentucky. I probably would have been a meek copy clerk or librarian in Philadelphia, taking his meals at the corner tavern. 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.

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