
TO LIGHT!



Bringing Masonic Education To Light

A Publication of the Grand Lodge AF & AM of Nebraska

Meriwether Lewis

Our third president, Thomas Jefferson, had an abiding interest in the land area west of the Mississippi River. In his personal library he had one of the largest collections of books available on the subject. Because of this interest, after taking office as President in 1801, he began plans for an exploration party to survey a portion of that uncharted territory. The man he chose to lead this group was his personal secretary, army officer Lieutenant Meriwether Lewis.

Meriwether Lewis was born in Virginia into the Southern planter aristocracy. During his youth he was a keen observer of the natural world, which led to his interest and special talents in the areas of botany and zoology. He had a great sense of adventure, which led to service in the Virginia militia, where he served during the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794. Because of his capacity for leadership he became a junior officer and joined the regular army in 1795. He was a member of the first Infantry Regiment during the Indian wars in the Ohio Valley. It was during this time he met William Clark, who in later years became the co-leader of the now famous Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Lewis' plantation was not too far from Jefferson's home, Monticello. Jefferson was very familiar with the abilities of Lewis. In 1801 he was selected by Jefferson to serve as his personal secretary. In December of 1802 he was assigned the task of making preliminary preparations for an expedition of discovery in the West. This included monetary estimates, acquiring of supplies and consultations with leading scientists. Lewis soon discovered the expedition was going to be larger and more complex than anticipated and he chose William Clark to become his co-leader.

After a year of preparation, the expedition left St Louis May of 1804. The expedition traveled over 8,000 miles from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean and back, returning over two years later in September 1806. The principal goal of the expedition was to find a Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean. Although this easy route through the West was never found, many other great discoveries were made, which included the varied people, geography, plants and animals previously unknown to the Eastern population. Lewis served as the expedition's naturalist, recording hundreds of entries in his journal and collecting many specimens of the varied plant and animal life new to the Eastern scholars.

After their return, Lewis and Clark became national heroes. Jefferson appointed Lewis as governor of the Louisiana Territory. Lewis had great difficulty managing the many political problems of this position. He also struggled with deep bouts of depression. On October 10, 1809, while on route from St Louis to Washington, D.C., near Hohenwald, Tennessee, Lewis apparently took his own life. Many historians believe he was murdered, but the prevailing evidence points to suicide.

Meriwether Lewis was a member of Widow's Son Lodge No. 60 at Charlottesville, Va., and the first Master of St. Louis Lodge No. 111 at St. Louis, Mo., chartered by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, November 1808.

Note: *If you like this "To Light Moment" come and listen to an expanded version detailing the Lewis and Clark Expedition at one of the Grand Lodge Education Committee's Education Symposiums which will be held at various locations across the state in October. Check your "Nebraska Mason" for dates and times.*

By Max Miller