

Expanding the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail (Trail):

By Frank Muhly, Founder, Philadelphia Chapter, LCTHF

Not too long ago, in listing which states should be rightfully included in legislation expanding the **Trail**, one of the participants referred to an epiphany experienced that justified adding Tennessee to the list – “Meriwether was surely and certainly ‘on **Trail** business in 1809’ when he met his demise at Grinder’s Stand.” Others in attendance surprised themselves by quickly seeing the point and agreeing with it completely, thereby satisfying the objections of some not in favor of including specific sites “off the **Trail**” east of the Mississippi River.

Using the same now-acceptable reasoning, the tale of the **Trail** after 1806 should expand to and include 1807 when Meriwether came to Philadelphia on **Trail** business to express his appreciation to his mentors and all others who had helped him in 1803, to sit for his now famous portrait, to leave souvenirs such as his Shoshone tippet for Charles Wilson Peale’s Museum, to commission paintings of birds and the Falls of the Missouri, to discuss his plans for treatment of his plant specimens, and to obtain a prospectus for publication of his and Clark’s journals.

Similarly, William Clark’s business in 1810 that brought him to Philadelphia for three months in search of an editor to replace Lewis, to have his portrait painted by Peale as Lewis had done and to meet with prominent citizens of the city justifies the expansion.

And Nicholas Biddle’s editing the journals with Clark’s and George Shannon’s help in 1810-1811, and getting them published by 1814 would also clearly be **Trail** related and worth the story being expanded to its final obvious conclusion.

The result is that these concepts and possibilities can be given broad publicity now so that the “getting ready” and “putting away” periods so essential to a complete account of any and all endeavors, be it building a house or landing on the moon, can be included. Fortunately much of this new **Trail** is illustrated by a brochure titled *The Eastern Legacy of Lewis and Clark*, from Lewis leaving the White House in March 1803 to the published journals in Philadelphia in 1814.

Eldon “Frenchy” Chuinard would be extremely proud of us. He, the second president of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, wrote his fellow officers and board of directors in February 1971 that they all should strive to fashion a truly coast-to-coast **Trail** because that was what it was most certainly. And in May 1982 he stressed that conclusion more broadly with an article in the foundation’s quarterly publication, *We Proceeded On*, which suggested that Philadelphia could be considered the beginning and end of the **Trail**.

I think we can agree that some things may have been done hastily in the 1960s or inadvertently omitted because there was plenty to do at the time west of St. Louis but now is the last chance to be all inclusive. Adding Washington DC, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee to the **Trail** is a must, as is the expansion of the story to include 1807, 1809, 1810-1814. Acceptance of the above revisions in our thinking is crucial.

Fortunately the National Park Service already has a program established to obtain Certified Sites to add in the east and has done that already in Philadelphia. Let’s put aside provincialism and concentrate rather on the noble and soul-stirring goals that can inspire and uplift thousands of new Lewis and Clark devotees. Let us come together to re-define and re-assess our vow to be Keepers of the Story (every paragraph of it!) and Stewards of the **Trail** (every foot of it!).

Having the bully pulpit of the Internet is sobering; using it in a righteous cause is exhilarating. And keep this in mind as Samuel Adams stated: “It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brushfires in people’s minds.”