

## LEWIS AND CLARK'S INDIAN PRESENTS

### The Evolving and Misleading Documentary Record of the Expedition Inventory

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The late Stephen Ambrose, one of the widely recognized authors on the Lewis and Clark expedition, once remarked that planning for the physical needs of the expedition was "as much guesswork as...intelligent forecasting." What would Meriwether Lewis and his band of explorers need to cross the North American continent and return? What, how much, what kind, and how wide a variety were all issues that Lewis had to anticipate, plan for, and suffer the consequences of. In retrospect, how well did Lewis do in his "intelligent forecasting" of the expedition's needs?

There is no easy answer since many original documents relating to this subject appear to be lost. Lewis's task of planning for the expedition presented a number of challenges. How many men would go, how far would they travel, how long would it take, and how many trades would be made and presents given to pave their way across the continent? With limited knowledge of the American West there was no sure answer to these questions. What was the solution? Plan, gather new intelligence, modify, reflect, negotiate, and adapt. How to equip the expedition was not a decision that could be made only once—it was made time and time again.

The written record supplies information that at first glance seems pretty comprehensive. We know Lewis divided his equipment needs into seven discrete categories: arms, ammunition and accouterments; medicines; clothing; mathematical instruments; camp equipment; provisions; and Indian presents. There was one other equipment need that Lewis took into consideration—transportation—but that part of the expedition's logistics was considered separately from the other seven categories. Of Lewis's seven categories, the most costly was Indian presents. At \$669.50, it was just over 30 percent of the total initial expenditure on the expedition's equipment. This attests to the importance both Jefferson and Lewis placed on Indian relations with regard to the expedition's ultimate success.

### **Protocols and Patterns**

For all practical purposes the "Indian presents" did often serve the function of gifts to native people the corps met along the trail. But this merchandise also served the purpose of trade when the Lewis and Clark expedition needed essentials such as food, horses, canoes, as well as many nonessentials that simply caught their fancy. Historian James Ronda explains:

*Colonial experience taught that fruitful diplomacy and peaceful relations with native people required the exchange of gifts at each meeting.... By the time Jefferson created the Corps of Discovery, gifts were a recognized part of the protocol of Indian diplomacy. To venture up the Missouri without a carefully selected store of goods was to challenge foolishly the river gods.*

Knowledge gained during the colonial experience was enhanced by information from individuals who had recently returned from the West. Preferences for certain merchandise and indifference to other items was valuable information exchanged on a regular basis.

Because this was an expedition launched by the federal government, Lewis had access to all government intelligence. He probably gained information from the purveyor of public supplies and the superintendent of military stores, both of whom dealt routinely with Indian goods. Lewis had dealings with both of these offices, which had supplied government trade factories at Tellico (Tennessee) and Colerain (Florida) since 1795, and Detroit, Fort Wayne (Indiana), Fort St. Stephens (Alabama), and Chickasaw Bluffs (today's Memphis, Tennessee) since 1802.

Lewis also was undoubtedly privy to information from Boston merchants who had more than a decade of experience trading with Northwest Coast Indians. Captain Robert Gray had opened that trade to United States businessmen in 1792, and multiple ships from Boston reached the mouth of the Columbia River every year. The taste for trade goods changed periodically from initial contact to the early 20th century. One study of silver trade goods summed up the standard operation of this trade, "First Nations peoples had repeatedly initiated the patterns they desired, and the suppliers merely responded to the consumers."

Hiram Chittenden said that underlying the trade was "a keen contempt for the stupid taste of the other." Lewis and Clark apparently shared this attitude; all too frequently they acquired something they wanted in exchange for what they described as "articles of no great value." Scholars have also asserted that Indians were mystified by an exchange of manufactured goods that must have been difficult to produce, for furs that were so easy for skilled hunters to come by.

Because of the extensive body of writing resulting from the Lewis and Clark expedition, this issue of trade goods can be explored; but is the complete inventory knowable? We are fortunate to have a number of the original lists Lewis made of his "outfit." In fact, there are letters between Jefferson and Lewis, Lewis and Clark, and Lewis to a variety of officials that document his thinking about what would be needed by the expedition. Receipts from merchants verify where Lewis got some of these provisions and even how they were contained or stowed for the trip.

### **Eastern Supplies**

The National Archives holds some of the supply lists that Lewis wrote out. His initial "List of Requirements" was compiled in the spring of 1803 with the belief that he would be leading a company of approximately ten men across the continent. The number of participants obviously would influence the quantity and possibly even the types of most of the equipment and supplies needed. Some types of supplies, however, would be influenced by other factors. For instance, the appropriate amount of Indian presents needed to be based on the number of tribes and the number of individual Indians encountered—essentially the number of occasions for giving gifts or trading throughout the journey. But the extent of the opportunity for Indian encounters was unknown prior to the expedition's departure. A great expanse of their trail would pass through "terra incognita."

Nevertheless, decisions had to be made and the 1803 list included an estimate of "Indian Presents" needed for the expedition. Lewis's handwriting is legible and the casual observer can read many of the items he identified, such as beads, brass thimbles, knives, pipe tomahawks, moccasin awls, and wampum, to name just a few. There are 51 entries in Lewis's initial list of Indian presents.

In some cases a type of Indian present was listed more than once. Beads, for instance, appear four times on the list—wampum, red beads, white beads, and yellow or orange beads. Blue beads do not show up on the initial list, but Lewis became aware of the value of the blue bead in trade before he left the East Coast. Regarding blue beads, Lewis noted: "This is a coarse cheap bead imported from China, & costing in England 13 d. the lbs. in strands. It is far more valued than the white beads of the same manufacture and answers all the purposes of money, being counted by the fathom." Historian Donald Jackson points out that, even with the advanced knowledge that blue beads were important in trade, Lewis "underestimated the preference of the Indians for blue over white, took too few blue ones, and lamented the fact in his journal."

There are some categories that stand out in Lewis's list of required Indian presents. Personal items account for 21 entries. These include adornments, such as armbands, brooches, ear trinkets, beads, finger rings, and wampum. Also included are items of clothing, calico shirts, and gartering. And there are toilet articles such as brass and cast-iron combs and vermilion.

Another important group of presents was tools and equipment. Examples of the tools from this initial list include awls, axes, knives, fish hooks, and fish gigs. Some of the tools were for textile working, including scissors, needles, cloth, thread, and thimbles. But in the case of thimbles, their actual use was adornment rather than sewing. The thimbles were invariably used as tinklers on clothing or bags, as hair ornaments, and other decorative elements.

There were items of furnishings such as blankets and brass curtain rings. As was the case with the thimbles, the curtain rings had a purpose other than hanging draperies, given Lewis's specification that they be "sufficiently large for the finger." Blankets served a dual function as clothing and bedding. Lewis initially believed that raw materials were needed for gifts or trade, so he included iron wire, brass wire, sheet iron, copper, and tin on his list of requirements.

In a matter of a few months, during the spring of 1803, Lewis was able to accumulate a wide variety of goods for use as Indian presents or trade. The inventory of goods was supplied by the government's Indian and military departments and a number of Philadelphia merchants, including: George Lawton, Nicholas Lloyd, Thomas Leiper, and Benjamin Harbeson & Son, to name just a few.

As fortune would have it, a list of what Lewis actually purchased back east, as opposed to what he planned to purchase, has also survived. And as might be expected, Lewis's purchases did not exactly match what he initially thought would be required for this expedition. Of the 51 entries on his initial "List of Requirements," about 10 percent did not appear on the eastern "Summary of Purchases." The items that were dropped were brass combs, silver nose trinkets, gunpowder, copper, tin, and vials of phosphorus. Did Lewis decide that these specific items were not necessary or was there some other reason they were dropped?

Although the number of entries in the two lists went virtually unchanged, there were 14 types of items on the "Summary of Purchases" that were not on the initial list. These items included bells, brads, corn mills, knitting pins, locketts, needle cases, hatband tinsel, and a variety of other items. Between compiling the first list and making his purchases, Lewis had changed his mind on a number of points. Brass combs had been dropped and ivory combs added. Copper and tin were not purchased but strips of brass were. Knitting pins, corn mills, and needle cases somehow became important merchandise to carry across the continent.

Thus, the cargo intended for Indian presents had evolved from the earliest list to the items actually purchased from eastern merchants. It would evolve again before the Lewis and Clark expedition departed from St. Louis in the spring of 1804.

### **St. Louis Supplies**

It was fortuitous that the Corps of Discovery was forced to winter-over near St. Louis, the heart of the Missouri River fur trade. Opinions regarding what was necessary beyond the frontier were in good supply. Lewis had direct access to Manuel Lisa, August Chouteau, Pierre Menard, and other leaders of the fur trade. He obviously took their advice—his letters verify that he was frequently in St. Louis in search of additional supplies and equipment. In one letter Lewis complained to Clark that his dealings with Manuel Lisa had convinced him that the man was a scoundrel. In contrast, Lewis's letters often praise the hospitality of August and Pierre Chouteau. These letters also show that Lewis was once again tapping the local resources of the army. All encounters were opportunities to discuss the logistics of the corps' voyage and, therefore, the expedition's cargo continued to evolve.

The next glimpse of what Lewis had amassed in his pile of presents and trade goods comes in the form of "Baling Invoices," which must have been written during the winter of 1803-04 at the Wood River camp in southwestern Illinois. Clark was bagging presents and assigning individual bags of goods to specific Indian peoples he expected to encounter. Bag 13 was intended for the Ponkas. Bag 30 was set aside for the Ottos or Pawnees. And Bag 33 was prepared for the Maha people. In all, Clark created 15 individual parcels of what he called "Sundries for Indian Presents." Many bags went unnamed, but Clark expected to distribute them later in the journey, identifying them as "Bales intended for foreign Nations: that is those beyond the mandanes."

An analysis of the "Baling Invoices" for the Indian presents reveals a much different picture than Lewis's "Summary of Purchases" back east. The Wood River inventory of purchased Indian presents had reached 137 individual types of items. There were dozens of new things added to the inventory that had not appeared in the previous lists. Lewis gathered in a number of new clothing items, including three kinds of breechcloths, artillery coats, chief coats, hats, and leggings.

Analysis of the "Baling Invoices" reveals 15 different types or colors of beads compared to four in the first list. The quantity of beads increased from 30 pounds to 364 maces, 31 bunches, 20 small bunches, and two cards. In addition to the clothing and a vast array of beads, the Indian presents included soldiers' plumes, Jew's harps, razors, files, flags, and feather circles. Additions of silver moons, silver drops, and silver Jefferson peace medals reflected a refined taste that was characteristic of the period.

Selected items appear to have increased in importance as Lewis continued to adapt his notion of what would be needed. Back east 500 brooches seemed sufficient. In St. Louis that quantity was doubled. The number of handkerchiefs brought along as presents or trade items increased and now included cotton, silk, and East India muslin handkerchiefs. There were fancy handkerchiefs, pocket handkerchiefs, and bandanas.

The detail to be found in this record is exceptional, but some puzzling questions arise. Why does the list of Indian presents bought back east include six-and-a-half pounds of sheet iron while this item is absent in the Wood River "Baling Invoices?" Brads, brass kettles, corn mills, and fancy floss are listed as eastern purchases but do not appear in the "Baling Invoices." A total of 2,800 fish hooks were acquired in Philadelphia, but only 488 are inventoried in Wood River. Lewis submitted a receipt from a Philadelphia merchant for fish gigs, but these gigs also do not appear on the Wood River "Baling Invoices," and there are a number of earlier purchases that are absent from this list as well. What happened to these cargo items?

Clark compiled a fourth list of Indian presents, which he refers to as the "Recapitulation of the...Indian Presents" and this new itemization of the goods brings with it more confusion. Clark calls this document a "Recapitulation," suggesting that the two lists should balance out, but there are half the number of awls in the Wood River "Recapitulation" than are counted in the "Baling Invoices." The Wood River "Baling Invoices" have 80 maces of mock garnet beads while the "Recapitulation" has none. Green seed beads are mentioned in the "Recapitulation" but not in the "Baling Invoices." The brooches that had been counted at 500 in the list of eastern purchases and 1,000 in the Wood River "Baling Invoices" reached 1,500 in the Wood River "Recapitulation." The inconsistencies between the Wood River "Baling Invoices" and "Recapitulation" go on and on, confounding attempts to know with any certainty exactly what Lewis and Clark carried on their journey.

### **Examining the Journals**

Is Lewis and Clark's cargo, the totality of what they carried, knowable? Or has the historic record left us with a broad-brush picture that blurs upon closer examination. The two eastern inventories, the "Requirements" and the "Purchases," demonstrate that Lewis's mind was changing, his thought was evolving. The two Wood River documents confirm that the documentary records, although detailed, have internal inconsistencies. Are there other options for knowing the extent, variety, and quality of the expedition cargo?

There were at least six journals kept on the expedition—those of Lewis, Clark, Floyd, Ordway, Gass, and Whitehouse. A thorough line-by-line examination of these journals yields a considerable amount of data. The journals document the giving or trading of individual items on the lists. In Iowa, on July 23, 1804, tobacco was sent as a present to the Otto and the Pawnee as part of an invitation to come and meet with Lewis and Clark. In Montana during August 1805, a "uniform coat, a pair of leggings, a few handkerchiefs, three knives and some other small articles" were traded to the Shoshone for three good horses. And in February 1806, at Fort Clatsop, Oregon, a sea otter skin was acquired in exchange for six fathoms of blue beads, the same quantity of small white beads, and a knife. All of these particular goods are on the Wood River "Baling Invoices" or "Recapitulation."

But there are numerous items that were given as gifts or in trade that did not appear on the eastern or Wood River lists. In January 1806 Clark attempted to buy a small sea otter skin from some Clatsop Indians who visited Fort Clatsop. Clark offered his watch, a knife, a handful of beads, and "a Dollar of the Coin of U State." The watch and coin were not on any list of trade items. At about the same time Lewis gave Coboway, a Clatsop, a present of "a pare of sattin breeches with which he appeared much pleased." On February 28th Pierre Cruzatte exchanged his capote for a dog that the party would eat. In March 1806, Lewis traded his "uniform laced coat" and some tobacco for a canoe. Many of these items—the laced coat, satin breeches, watch, and coin, for instance, were personal possessions and so not part of the Wood River inventory of Indian presents. But they nevertheless became presents and trade goods during the course of the expedition.

While they were on the coast, Lewis and Clark had hoped to encounter a trading vessel at the mouth of the Columbia River. When the inventory of trade goods reached its lowest level, the expedition was able to supplement its stores on at least a small scale by using the Indians themselves as a source of trade goods. On April 24 Clark wrote in his journal that "we Sold our Canoes for a fiew Strands of beeds." Those beads may have been used the next day to purchase "five dogs and some wood" from the Pish-quit-pahs. Lewis and Clark acquired a gun and more beads on other occasions, and these were added to their store of trade goods. Other exchanges that resupplied the inventory of trade goods undoubtedly went unrecorded in the journals. These phantom transactions compound the problem of determining precisely what the complete inventory of the expedition's Indian presents consisted of.

Incomplete references to trade or gifts are also not helpful. All too often, however, entry after entry reports simply "the natives demanded high prices," "bought five dogs," "purchased some wappetoe," "obtained one Sea Otter skin," "precured 5 dogs and a fiew Wappato." Nowhere in the journals are the specific goods exchanged by the expedition in those particular transactions identified.

A thorough reading of the journals, however, can reveal details that at first might seem to have been left out. For instance, in March 1806 Lewis records in his journal that he was visited by Coboway, who "presented us with some Anchovies which had been well cured in their manner." But this entry does not indicate what Lewis gave in exchange for the anchovies. In a second and separate entry for the same day Lewis records that this particular exchange cost the expedition "twisted wire to ware about his [son's] neck" and "a par of old glovs which he was much pleased with." It is frequently the case that a second entry in Lewis's or Clark's journal will supply detail that the first entry did not. Sometimes the daily journal entry of Ordway, Gass, or Whitehouse embellished on the brief record of the trades made by the expedition, adding an item or two that Lewis or Clark had omitted.

In the final analysis, then, the complete inventory of Indian presents and trade goods carried and used by the expedition is not entirely knowable. However, it is possible to get closer to a complete cargo list than has previously been compiled. A database is being constructed based on a line-by-line examination of all of the journals. Soon that list might be as complete as the historical record will allow. Also, by the spring of 2004, that list of words will be juxtaposed against their material culture equivalent. An exhibit will open at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center that recreates the cargo itself. Not only the Indian presents, which would be interesting enough in itself, but the whole cargo will be recreated based on Lewis's seven discrete

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categories: arms, ammunition and accouterments; medicines; clothing; mathematical instruments; camp equipment; provisions; and Indian presents.

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