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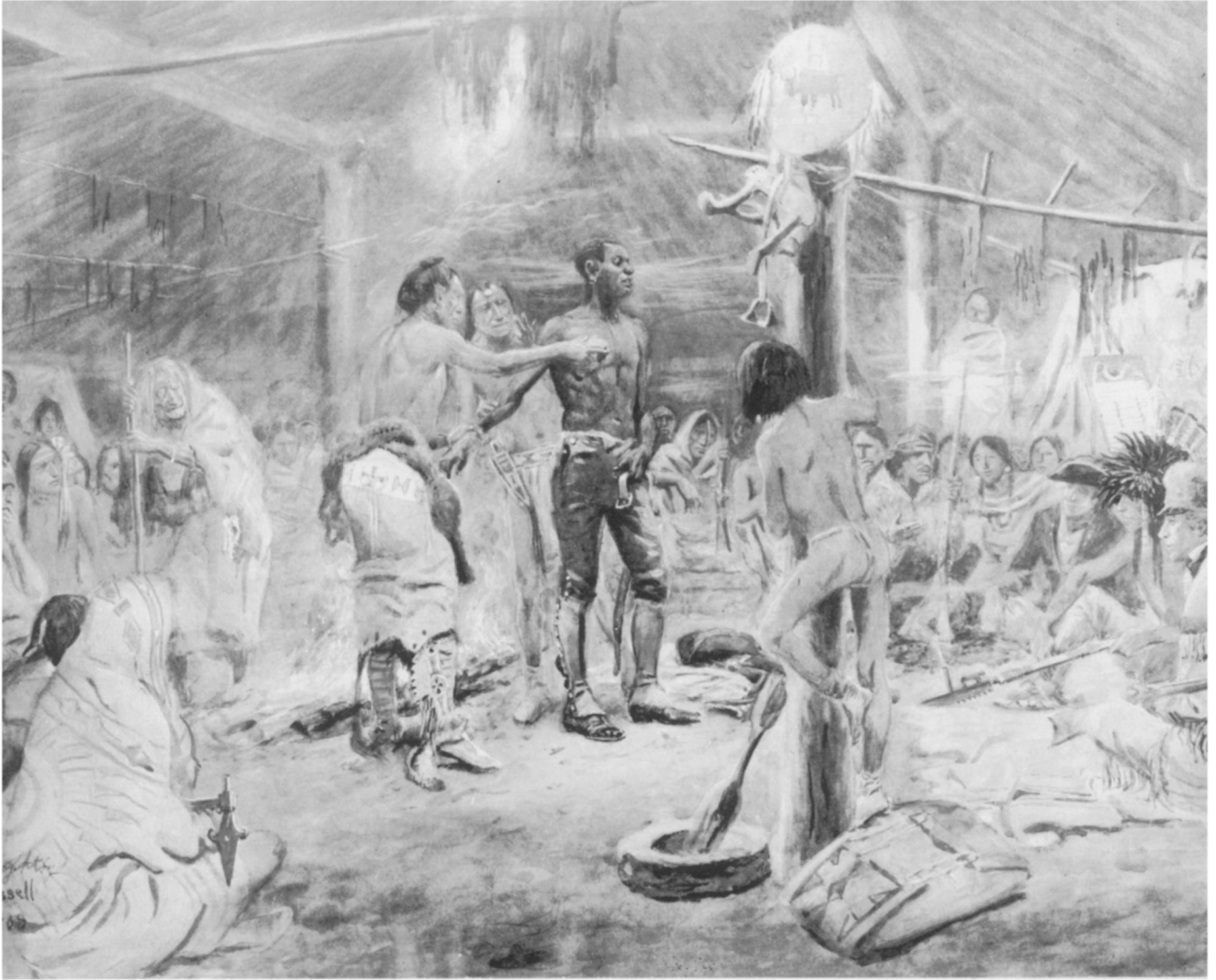
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PLAINS INDIAN REACTIONS TO THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

by JOHN C. EWERS

ON THEIR historic overland journey during the years 1804-1806 the men of the *Corps of Volunteers for North-Western Discovery*, led by Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, explored the valley of the Missouri to its headwaters, crossed the Rocky Mountains, descended the Columbia River to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, and returned safely to St. Louis on the Mississippi. They travelled more than 9,000 miles in roughly 28 months. They logged some 7,000 of those miles and spent 18 of those months *east* of the Rockies in the valley of the Missouri and its most important upper tributary, the Yellowstone. They met Indians from 11 of the 14 tribes who then inhabited the Upper Missouri region from the mouth of the Platte to the Rockies, and they initiated the first official relations between the United States and these Indian tribes. They conferred with the chiefs of the three largest farming tribes on the Missouri—the Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa. And they encountered men of the two strongest military powers on the Northern Plains—the nomadic Teton Dakota (Western Sioux) and the Piegan Blackfoot. The reactions of these Indians to their meeting with Lewis and Clark were important to the future relations of United States citizens with the native peoples of an area larger than that of the original 13 United States.

YORK, Captain Clark's personal servant, is the center of attraction (opposite page) in the 1909 oil painting by C. M. Russell, the original of which is in the Montana Historical Society. The Hidatsa chief, One Eye, puzzled by York's black skin, tries to rub off some of the "color." A tribal name for Negro may have resulted from this encounter.

ALTHOUGH the men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition were the first from the United States to meet the Indians of the Upper Missouri, it would be a mistake to think of those Indians at that time as unsophisticated aborigines whose lives had been untouched by influences from the white man's world. Nor were they ignorant of the interests white men had in them and in the resources of their country.

Radical changes had taken place in the lives of the Indians of the Northern Plains since Henry Kelsey, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, first met some of them in their own country in 1691.¹ Then the Indians hunted buffalo and made war on foot, using weapons of their own manufacture. The farming tribes, living in sedentary villages and combining hunting with the growth of crops, enjoyed greater economic security than did the nomads who depended largely upon buffalo-hunting for their subsistence. But the acquisition of the European horse by tribes of this region during the 18th Century greatly increased the mobility of the nomads and decreased the feast or famine character of the hunters' life. Some tribes of farmers left their villages to become wandering nomads. Those who persisted in their horticultural practices found themselves surrounded by and largely at the mercy of the mounted nomads. Pinned up in their compact villages, they suffered heavy losses from smallpox plagues, so that by the time of Lewis and Clark the numbers of villages as well as the populations of the farming tribes were greatly reduced.²

Horses were wealth among all the Upper Missouri tribes in Lewis and Clark's time. Poor but ambitious young men found that the simplest way to acquire horses was to steal them from alien people—whether Indians or whites. There was no stigma attached to this action. Rather, the theft of a horse was recognized as a minor war honor. Consequently horse raiding was, by 1804, a common action in the warfare of the region.³



CROW INDIAN, originally painted on June 18, 1833 by Karl Bodmer, is typical of the tribe which became notably adept at horse-stealing, a pursuit both common and honorable among tribesmen by the time of Lewis and Clark.

Intertribal trade was almost as typical of Northern Plains Indian life as was intertribal warfare. When Pierre La Verendrye first visited the Mandan villages on the Missouri in present North Dakota in 1738, he found a flourishing native trade center to which nomadic tribesmen brought products of the chase

¹ *The Kelsey Papers*. Ed. by A. G. Doughty and Chester Martin. Public Archives of Canada. Ottawa, 1929.

² John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture*. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 159. Washington, 1955. pp. 332-336.

³ *Ibid.* pp. 176-191.

MANDAN VILLAGE is on the bluff in this 1833 depiction, with women of the tribe poling bull boats on the river. Lewis and Clark and their men had longer and more intimate contact with the Mandan than with any other Plains tribe.



to exchange for the agricultural produce of the villagers. He observed that some articles of European manufacture, introduced by Indian intermediaries who traded directly with whites farther northeast, had already appeared in the trade at the Mandan villages. The Mandan as well as the warlike nomads farther south and west with whom the Mandan traded were eager to obtain firearms, ammunition, metal arrowheads, knives, and axes.⁴ Although the trade in these items increased in volume by the time of Lewis and Clark, the supply still fell far short of the Indians' demands.

Before the end of the 18th Century, direct trade between whites, involving the exchange of European-made goods for furs and peltries, developed on a rather modest scale. British traders built fixed posts on the Assiniboine River and the upper waters of the Saskatchewan and traded with the nomadic tribes of the plains south of the Saskatchewan. Several French Canadians established residences in the villages of the Mandan and of their neighbors, the Hidatsa, learned the Indian languages,

married Indian women, and exerted considerable influence in behalf of either the Hudson's Bay Company or rival North West Company traders who made periodic trading expeditions some 150 miles southwestward from their posts in the valley of the Assiniboine River.⁵

Employing similar methods, operating through white residents in Indian villages, businessmen from St. Louis extended their trade up the Missouri to the Arikara villages, less than 200 miles south of the Mandan. In 1796 John Evans, a Welshman acting in the interest of the St. Louis traders, pushed upriver as far as the Mandan villages where he distributed flags, medals, and other presents to the chiefs, and urged them to recognize "Their Great White Father the Spaniard." He ordered the British traders to return to Canada, but since the Spaniards failed to establish a more permanent contact with the Mandan, British traders continued to

⁴ P. G. V. La Verendrye, *Journals and Letters of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye and his Sons*. Ed. by Laurence J. Burpee. Toronto, 1927. pp. 153-160; 332-338.

⁵ John C. Ewers, *The Indian Trade of the Upper Missouri before Lewis and Clark: An Interpretation*. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Bulletin, July 1954. pp. 429-446.

do business at the Mandan trading center.⁶

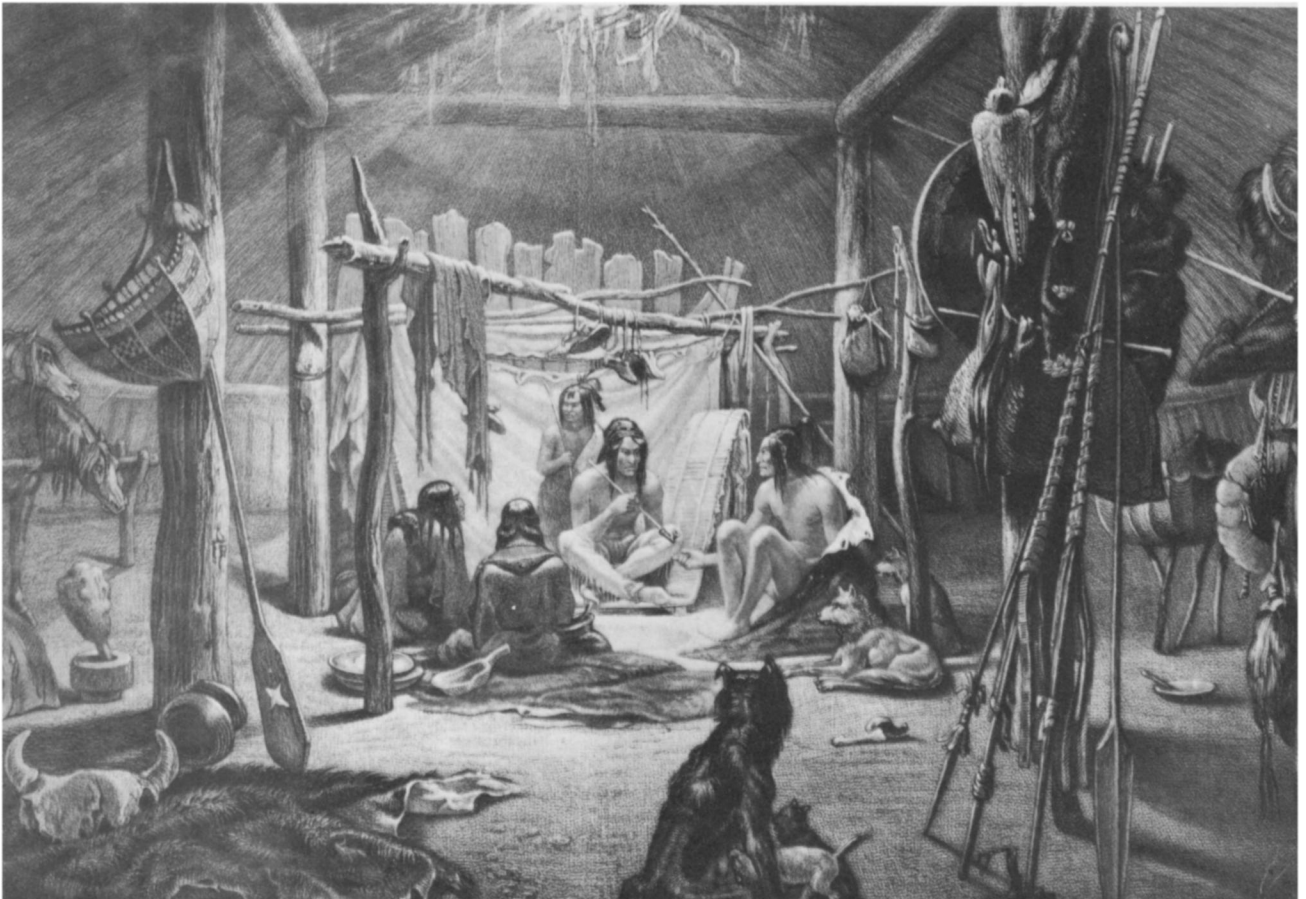
It is significant that before the time of Lewis and Clark not only the Mandan and Arikara but all other tribes of the Upper Missouri had gained some knowledge of white men. Furthermore, most if not all of these tribes knew from experience that white men were in competition for their trade. And they had no reason to believe that there were *any* whites who were not closely associated with the fur trade.

For many years traders visiting the Upper Missouri tribes had been accustomed to making liberal gifts to prominent Indian chiefs in order to win their loyalty and obtain a share of their tribe's trade. Three articles—flags, medals, and ornate, semi-military coats (known to the trade as "chiefs' coats")—had become standard traders' gifts to Indian chiefs. Presented in formal councils,

⁶ A. P. Nasatir, Editor. *Before Lewis and Clark*. 2 vols., St. Louis, 1952. Vol. II. pp. 495-498.

JOHN C. EWERS, who recently became Senior Research Scientist at the newly-created Office of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, needs no introduction to our readers, or indeed to Montanans generally. For many years he has served the U. S. National Museum, adjunct of the Smithsonian, as Associate Curator of Ethnology, and more recently as Director of the new Museum of History and Technology. His duties at the Office of Anthropology, combining the functions of the old Bureau of American Ethnology and the Department of Anthropology, will happily allow more time for Jack Ewers' first love: research and writing on Indians, with emphasis on tribes of the Upper Missouri. Museum planning has long been a Ewers specialty: he was the first curator (1941-44) of the Museum of the Plains Indian at Browning, Mont., and early in the 1950's he served as exhibits planning consultant for the Montana Historical Society museum. Ewers' list of published articles and books is too long to delineate here. His "Blackfeet, Raiders on the Northwestern Plains," appeared in 1958, and in October his large and extensively illustrated study, "Artists of the Old West," reached book stores and dealers. The current article joins a considerable list of contributions to this magazine, including articles on the Blackfeet, Edwin Thompson Denig, and the Iroquois in the Far West.

INTERIOR OF A MANDAN LODGE was graphically delineated by Karl Bodmer in 1834. At the time of the Expedition, the Mandan inhabited palisaded villages made up of these timber-framed, earth-covered lodges on bluffs overlooking the Missouri.





BLACK MOCCASIN was a principal chief of a Hidatsa village when Lewis and Clark knew him during the winter of 1804-1805. George Catlin depicted him in still-vigorous old age in 1832.

the Mandan and Hidatsa to the expedition.

THE TWO villages of the Hidatsa on the Knife River and the two Mandan villages on the Missouri were less than five miles apart. Yet moving up the Missouri the Lewis and Clark party was met and welcomed by Mandan Indians on October 24, 1804, three days before they met any Hidatsa Indians. The Mandan proceeded to take advantage of their initial friendship with the explorers to the disadvantage of their Hidatsa neighbors. At the grand council with the two tribes on October 29th, Lewis and Clark recognized a greater number of Mandan than Hidatsa chiefs.⁸ After the explorers built their winter quarters—Fort Mandan, three miles downstream from the lower Mandan village—the ranking Mandan chiefs, Black Cat and Big White, paid them frequent visits, even in the dead of winter when the thermometer registered 20 degrees or more below zero. The chiefs enjoyed spending the night at the white men's fort. They entertained the whites in their own villages, and invited some of them to take the parts of old men in their buffalo-calling ceremony, during which the wives of younger men gave themselves to the elders.⁹ That Mandan women were more than friendly toward these whites is attested by the leaders' repeated comments in their journals upon the prevalence of "venereal complaints" among the enlisted men that winter.¹⁰

As the winter wore on and meat became scarce at the fort, the Mandan brought corn to exchange for the services of the expedition's smiths in mend-

⁷ Ernest S. Osgood, Ed. *The Field Notes of Captain William Clark, 1803-1805*. New Haven, 1964. pp. 109-110, 121-126, 158, 169-172.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 164-172.

⁹ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806*. Ed. by Reuben Gold Thwaites. Vol. I. pp. 218-247.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 248, 250, 279.

these gifts appealed to a chief's vanity. Furthermore, possession of these articles became concrete evidence to a chief's followers that he was recognized as a tribal leader by important whites, and this in turn strengthened his position in the eyes of his fellow tribesmen.

In a series of formal councils with the leaders of the Oto and Missouri, Yankton Dakota, Arikara, Mandan and Hidatsa on their way up the Missouri, Lewis and Clark presented flags, medals, and chiefs' coats to the principal chiefs. They also gave smaller medals to lesser Indian leaders.⁷ These gifts must have confirmed the Indians' beliefs that all whites were traders.

Sixteen hundred and nine miles up the Missouri, and seven miles below the mouth of Knife River, the explorers spent the winter of 1804-05 near the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. This was the only neighborhood on the Missouri where British traders did business with the Indians. Because this was a critical location for the establishment of American prestige, and because these Indians, over a period of five and a half months, had better opportunities to get to know the explorers than did any other tribes of the Great Plains (who met the Lewis and Clark party only briefly), let us examine in some detail the reactions of

BLOODY HAND, the Arikara head chief who numbered among his war honors the killing of an American trader near the gate of his own trading post, was the subject of this depiction by George Catlin in 1832.

ing tools and utensils and making iron battle axes. More significant as an indication of the friendship that developed between the Americans and the Mandan Indians was the captains' offer to assist these Indians in case of a Sioux attack upon their villages, and the later Mandan aid to Captain Lewis in the pursuit of his horses stolen by the Sioux.¹¹

In marked contrast to the warm friendship of the Mandan was the aloofness and suspicion of Hidatsa relations with the explorers. Nearly a month passed following the initial council with the chiefs before an Hidatsa visited Lewis and Clark. During the entire winter One Eye, the principal Hidatsa chief, made a single visit to Fort Mandan, and Captain Lewis visited the Hidatsa but once.¹²

Undoubtedly the Hidatsa coolness toward the Americans was influenced by the agents of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, who spent considerable time in the Hidatsa villages that winter. These British traders not only wanted to maintain their foothold among the farming tribes of the Mandan region, but they were eager to expand their trade southwestward into the Crow Indian territory of the Yellowstone Valley where "beaver were as rich in their rivers as buffalo and other large animals were in their plains."¹³ They feared that the expansion of trade into that region by men from the United States would deny golden opportunities. When Antoine Larocque of the North West Company visited Fort Mandan in late November,

¹¹ Ibid. pp. 243-272. On March 13, 1805, the explorers noted that so great was the Indian demand for battle axes that "the Smiths have not an hour of idle time to spare."

¹² Ibid. pp. 226-280. Apparently the Mandan, jealous of their inside track with the Americans, also tried to keep the Hidatsa from visiting Fort Mandan by starting a rumor that the white men would kill them if they came to the fort. (p. 249)

¹³ Charles MacKenzie, *The Missouri Indians, 1804-1805*, in L. R. Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-ouest*. 2 vols. Quebec, 1889-1890. Vol. I. p. 341.



the American captains forbade him to give medals or flags to the Indians of the newly acquired United States territory in which he was trading. Word reached Lewis and Clark in January through their Hidatsa interpreter, Tous-saint Charbonneau, that the North West Company's clerk had been speaking unfavorably of the Americans to the Hidatsa.¹⁴

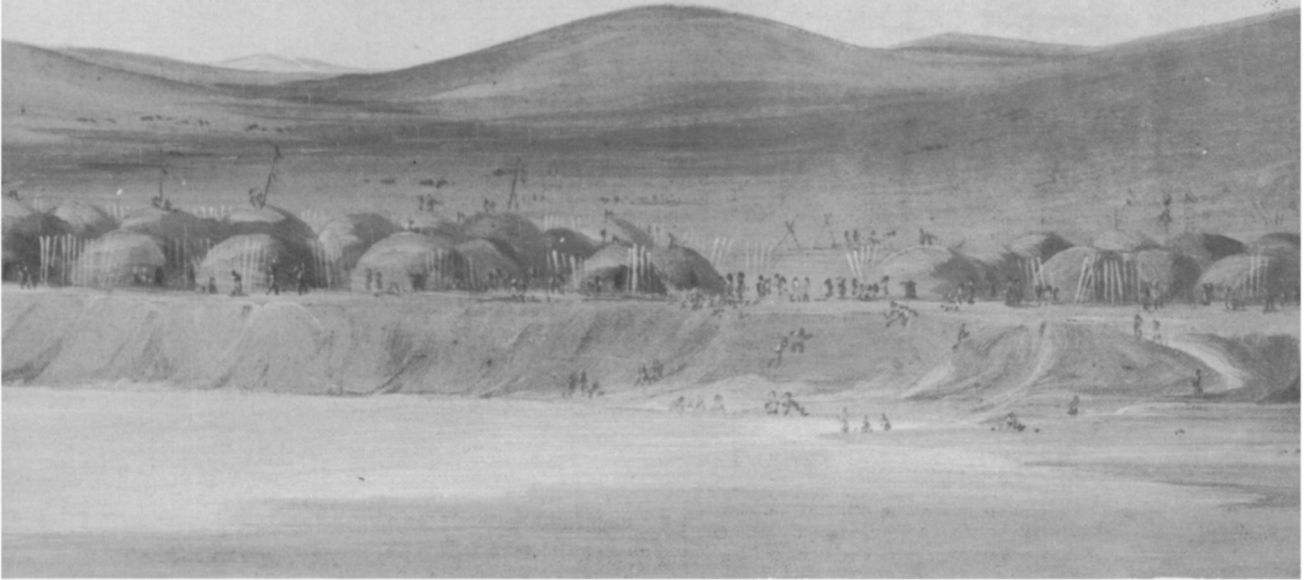
Perhaps this explains why Alexander Henry of the North West Company, on his visit to the Hidatsa in the summer of 1806, reported that those Indians believed the medals and flags Lewis and Clark had given their chiefs "conveyed bad medicine to them and their children" and "supposed they could not better dispose of those articles than by giving them to the natives with whom they frequently warred, in hope the ill-luck would be conveyed to them."¹⁵

Henry also claimed that the Hidatsa "are disgusted at the high-sounding language the American captains bestowed upon themselves and their own nation, wishing to impress the Indians with an idea that they were great warriors, and a powerful people, who if exasperated, could crush all the nations of the earth.

¹⁴ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I. pp. 228, 248-249.

¹⁵ Alexander Henry and David Thompson, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest*. Ed. by Elliott Coues. 3 vols. New York, 1907. Vol. I. p. 350.

ARIKARA VILLAGES, depicted in 1832 by George Catlin, were on this site above the mouth of Grand River in 1804 and 1806 when they were visited by Lewis and Clark. The Indians abandoned the site shortly after Catlin painted it.



This manner of proceeding did not agree with these haughty savages, who had too high an opinion of themselves to entertain the least idea of acknowledging any race to be their superiors."¹⁶

Nevertheless, Alexander Henry acknowledged that "the Mandan are more tractable, and appear well inclined toward the United States."¹⁷

Perhaps one prominent Hidatsa chief, whom Lewis and Clark recognized as the first chief of their smaller village, Black Moccasin, did not share the opinion of the American leaders that Henry claimed prevailed in that tribe. At least we know that a quarter of a century later this aged chief told George Catlin of his fond memories and high regard for "Red Hair" (Clark) and "Long Knife" (Lewis), and insisted that Catlin convey his best wishes to General Clark in St. Louis.¹⁸

Of the other members of the exploring party, York, Captain Clark's Negro

servant, attracted the most attention from both the Hidatsa and Mandan Indians. They had never before seen a Negro and did not know quite what to make of him. York himself, a dark, corpulent man, tried to make the Indians believe he had been wild like a bear and tamed. One Eye, the principal Hidatsa chief, examined York closely, spit on his hand and rubbed the Negro's skin, believing that he might be a painted white man. Possibly this Indian reaction to York survives in the name for Negro in the languages of some of the Upper Missouri tribes, which may be translated as "black white man."¹⁹

The smiths of the Lewis and Clark party were highly regarded by the Indians of both tribes. The Mandan believed their bellows were strong medicine. An Hidatsa chief, appraising the Lewis and Clark expedition to Charles Mackenzie, a North West Company trader, in 1805, said: "Had I these white warriors in the upper plains, my young men would do for them as they would for so many wolves, for there are only

¹⁶ Ibid. Vol. I. p. 350.

¹⁷ Ibid. Vol. I. p. 350.

¹⁸ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*. 2 vols. London, 1841. Vol. I. pp. 186-187.

¹⁹ Osgood, *Op. Cit.* pp. 119. Donald Jackson, Ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*. p. 539.

EAGLE RIBS, Piegan warrior who openly boasted that he had killed eight American trappers, posed in 1832 for George Catlin.

two sensible men amongst them, the worker in iron and the mender of guns."²⁰

The explorers' brief contacts with the most powerful nomadic tribes of the Upper Missouri were hostile ones. The Teton Dakota at that time were the scourge of the Missouri Valley in the present region of North and South Dakota. They were the aggressive enemies of the Mandan and Hidatsa. At that time the Teton secured guns and ammunition in trade with more easterly Dakota tribes at a rendezvous on the James River. And they tried to prevent Missouri River traders from taking arms upriver to strengthen their enemies. Only by a show of force and determination to fight if need be were the explorers able to prevent the Teton from stopping them at the mouth of the Teton River on their way upstream, and they narrowly averted open conflict with these Sioux while descending the river in 1806. Lewis and Clark's initial encouragement of the Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa to make peace with their enemies was of little avail without the cooperation of the most powerful enemies of those tribes—the Teton Dakota. So the bitter intertribal warfare of the Upper Missouri continued unabated, little affected by the peace talks of the well-meaning American captains.²¹

On their journey westward in the spring of 1805, the explorers traveled from the mouth of the Little Missouri to the Rocky Mountains (a distance of nearly 1,000 miles) without sighting an Indian. The country through which they passed was a marginal area between the warring Assiniboine, Gros Ventres, and Blackfoot on the north, and the Crow on the south. The travelers saw numerous timbered lodges that had been built as overnight shelters by Indian war parties among the trees on the



banks of the Missouri. Some of these "war lodges" appeared to have been occupied recently. But the explorers deemed themselves lucky *not* to encounter any Indian warriors.²²

They were much less fortunate on their return journey across the plains of present Montana. The expedition was then divided into two parties. One, under Lewis' command, descended the Missouri. In July, 1806, Lewis and three picked enlisted men explored the upper waters of the Marias River in order to ascertain the northwestern boundary of Louisiana. Lewis knew he was in the country of the aggressive Blackfoot and Gros Ventres. But he had no desire to meet any of these Indians when he was confronted by a party of red men who outnumbered his little force two to one. Mutually suspicious of each other, the groups exchanged untruths through the sign language. Lewis claimed he was happy to meet the Indians and had come in search of them. The Indians signed that they were Gros Ventres and that there were three chiefs among them. Although dubious of their chiefly claims, Lewis gave a

²⁰ Charles MacKenzie, *Op. Cit.* p. 330.

²¹ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.* Vol. I. pp. 162-170; Vol. V. pp. 361-368.

²² Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.* Vol. II. pp. 80-249. Olid D. Wheeler, *The Trail of Lewis and Clark*. 2 vols. New York, 1926. Vol. I. p. 279.



WINTER VILLAGE OF THE HIDATSA, situated among the trees of the Missouri River bottom, pictured by Karl Bodmer some 30 years after the journey of discovery. During the rigorous winter months, the Hidatsa occupied sheltered sites like these.

medal, a flag, and a handkerchief to those three. Forced to spend the night with the Indians, the whites were roused at dawn by the red men's attempt to steal their guns and horses. In the ensuing melee one Indian was stabbed to death and another shot in the belly.²³

This small-scale skirmish with the Piegan (not Gros Ventres) on July 27, 1806, in the valley of the Two Medicine River on the present Blackfeet Reservation, Montana, was the only mortal combat between the explorers and any Indians.²⁴ It was probably the most unfortunate incident in the entire expedition. The whites could not have been

blamed for protecting their lives and property. Nevertheless, this action was the *first* cause of the prolonged Blackfoot Indian hostility towards Americans. In the next year David Thompson, a British trader on the Saskatchewan, noted that "the murder of two Peegan

²³ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.* Vol. V. pp. 218-228. More than a half-century later Piegan Indians identified their tribesman killed in this action as He-that-looks-at-the-Calf. See James H. Bradley, *The Bradley Manuscript*, Montana Historical Society Contributions. Vol. VIII. 1917. p. 135.

²⁴ Mrs. Helen B. West of Cut Bank, Montana has recently published a detailed, illustrated study in which she identifies the site of this historic skirmish, entitled *Meriwether Lewis in Blackfeet Country*, Museum of the Plains Indian, Browning, Montana, 1964.

²⁵ David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*. Toronto, 1916. p. 375.

Indians by Captain Lewis of the U. S. drew the Peeagans to the Missouri.”²⁵ It was a full quarter-century before peaceful trade was established between Americans and the Piegan. In the interval the aggressive Blackfoot killed numerous American trappers and twice forced the Americans to abandon their efforts to take beaver from the streams of the Montana region.²⁶

William Clark, with ten men and some 48 horses, descended the Yellowstone Valley to that river’s junction with the Missouri. On the Upper Yellowstone his party began to see smoke signals on the high points in the distance. They met no Indians, but awoke one morning to find half their horses missing. A diligent search of the vicinity revealed no tracks—only a moccasin and robe left by Indians. This was the first, but by no means the last, theft of American horses by the Crow Indians, who became renowned as the cleverest horse thieves of the American West.²⁷

In his instructions to Meriwether Lewis, penned nearly a year before the explorers started up the Missouri, President Jefferson specifically stated: “If a few of the[ir] influential chiefs, within a practicable distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them.”²⁸ Surely Lewis and Clark placed a very liberal interpretation upon Jefferson’s phrase “practicable distance.” More than 3,000 miles above St. Louis on his return journey, Clark carefully prepared a speech for delivery to the Crow Indians (whom he never met) inviting them to send chiefs to Washington.²⁹ Farther downstream, at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages, 1,600 miles from the mouth of the Missouri, he offered similar invitations to the chiefs of both tribes. They declined, fearing that their enemies, the Sioux, would kill them en route. A young Mandan of poor reputation volunteered to make the hazardous journey, but Clark refused him. Only after the captain agreed to take the interpreter, Rene Jessaume, and his wife along did that canny Frenchman persuade Big White, principal chief of the Lower

Mandan village, to risk the long journey to a strange land to meet his new Great White Father. And before he returned Big White had good reason to regret his decision, for intertribal warfare on the Missouri prevented his reaching home until 1809.³⁰

At the Arikara villages Clark was even less successful in soliciting chiefly delegates to Washington. The chiefs flatly refused to consider making the trip until their chief “who went down” the previous year returned home. Lewis and Clark had arranged for that chief’s journey during their trip up the Missouri. They were very fortunate that at the time of their meeting with the Arikara on their return journey those Indians had not yet learned of the death of their beloved leader in the nation’s capital. When word of this chief’s death reached them shortly thereafter, the Arikara abused the interpreter who brought them this news along with President Jefferson’s personal message of condolence and liberal presents for the family of the deceased. There was a strong suspicion among the Arikara that the Americans had killed their leader.³¹

Prior to that time the Arikara had been friendly to traders from St. Louis. But thereafter these Indians repeatedly demonstrated their hostility toward Americans, preventing the passage of trading parties up river, and killing numerous whites. In 1823 a battle between William Ashley’s traders and the Arikara led to the first campaign of the United States Army against any Plains Indian tribe. A quarter-century after the Lewis and Clark expedition American traders still referred to the Arikara as “the horrid tribe.”³²

²⁵ John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*. Norman, Oklahoma. 1953. pp. 48-71.

²⁷ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. V. pp. 276, 279-281.

²⁸ Jackson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 64.

²⁹ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. V. pp. 299-300.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Vol. V. pp. 338-345. Jackson, *Op. Cit.* pp. 382-383, 411-412, 414, 432-33, 445-450, 456-458, 460-461, 479-484.

³¹ Lewis and Clark, *Op. Cit.* Vol. V. pp. 350-355, 383. Jackson, *Op. Cit.* pp. 306, 437.

³² Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*. Ed. by John C. Ewers. Norman, Oklahoma. 1961. pp. 54-59.



TWO CROWS THE YOUNGER, painted in 1832 by George Catlin, was probably typical of the Crow Indians who stole William Clark's horses in the valley of the Yellowstone during the return trip in the summer of 1806.

MANDAN SECOND CHIEF, Mato-tope, was painted from life by Karl Bodmer at Fort Clark in January, 1834. Adorned with the insignia of his warlike deeds, this Mandan was a veteran of many inter-tribal battles a quarter century after the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



In Retrospect . . .

LOOKING BACK upon the Lewis and Clark expedition after the passage of 160 years, it appears that this pioneer American venture into the wilds of the Upper Missouri was much less successful in the field of Indian diplomacy than in the fields of geographical exploration and scientific discovery. Lewis and Clark were handicapped from the start by the fact that the Indians of the region had never known any white men who were not fur traders. They did score a noteworthy success in winning and holding the friendship of the Mandan. Yet it seems most probable that even those Indians whom they came to know best regarded the explorers as the advance party of a great trading company, "the United States," in whose name and interests Lewis and Clark spoke to them, and which was not much different from the Hudson's Bay Company or the North West Company whose agents were well known to the northern tribes.

The explorers could not have been expected to have made any great progress in weaning the Indian tribes away from their allegiance to the entrenched British traders. It required a quarter-century of courageous and ingenious activity on the part of American traders before they could compete favorably with the experienced Hudson's Bay Company for the fur trade of the nomadic tribes north of the Missouri.

Two persistent impediments to the progress of the American fur trade on the Upper Missouri were in part a heritage from the Lewis and Clark contacts with the Indians. I refer to the prolonged Arikara and Blackfoot hostility toward Americans. In both cases the hostile feelings on the part of the Indians were the results of accident rather than of design. But in the minds of the proud members of those primitive tribes, the causes were very real.

[THE END]