The Race to Publish Lewis and Clark

When Meriwether Lewis went to Philadelphia in the spring of 1807 to arrange for the publication of his journals, he went with a sense of urgency. Two enlisted members of his exploring party already had announced plans to publish their own narratives of the recent expedition to the Pacific.

Other journals might be in preparation, Lewis feared, including "some spurious publications," and he had just voiced in print his disapproval of such accounts. His attempt to dissuade the public from patronizing the writings of his fellows was coupled with a promise to bring his own story of the expedition off the press soon. It was a promise that he proved unable to keep.

Lewis and his partner William Clark had brought the expedition safely back to St. Louis on September 23, 1806, and had immediately begun the task of giving to the world some accounting of the more than two years they had spent beyond the Mississippi. On the day after their arrival, Lewis turned ghost writer by penning a long letter for Clark to sign and send to one of his brothers, probably George Rogers Clark, near Louisville. Knowing that this letter would inevitably reach the newspapers, and that it would be the first published news of the expedition's success, both Lewis and Clark must have realized that it could best be phrased by the more literate member of the team. The letter was published first in the Frankfort (Kentucky) Palladium of October 9, and was copied by many other newspapers as soon as the editors could obtain it. The Pittsburgh Gazette ran the letter on October 28, and it reached the Philadelphia papers about a week later.

Even before this letter was made public, a prospectus was circulating in St. Louis for the publication of Robert Frazer's journal. Lewis

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1 The draft in Lewis' hand, dated Sept. 24, 1806, is at the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. The fair copy sent by Clark, dated Sept. 23, is at the Filson Club, Louisville, Ky. Despite the earlier date of the fair copy, the internal evidence that it was copied by Clark from the Lewis draft is conclusive. The letter begins "Dear Brother" and bears no address. In printing it, the Palladium reported that it had been sent to "gen. Clark, near Louisville."
had read the prospectus and had warned Frazer to avoid discussing the scientific aspects of the expedition. Frazer was promising his subscribers "an accurate description of the Missouri and its several branches; of the mountains seperating the Eastern from the Western waters; of the Columbia river and the Bay it forms on the Pacific Ocean; of the face of the Country in general; of the several Tribes of Indians on the Missouri and Columbia rivers; of the vegetable, animal and [mineral] productions discovered in those Extensive regions."

There is no evidence that Frazer ever published such a book, nor has any manuscript journal of his been located. A manuscript map has survived, with a legend reading: "A Map of the discoveries of Capt. Lewis & Clark from the Rockey mountain and the River Lewis to the Cap of Disappointment Or the Coloumbia River at the North Pacific Ocean By observation Of Robert Frazer."

With Frazer's intentions known, there still remained a question about the future of the journals—at least four of them—kept by other men on the expedition. Lewis and Clark bought Sergeant John Ordway's journal outright for $150, splitting the cost between them, and it became a useful reference in the later preparation of their own manuscript. The journal of the late Sergeant Charles Floyd, who had died en route, was too fragmentary to be significant. Private Joseph Whitehouse had kept a journal, aided in the early stages by two other men, and Sergeant Patrick Gass had kept still another. It was perhaps a report that Gass had sold his journal to a publisher that caused Lewis to issue his warning to the public. The following notice, dated March 14, 1807, ran in the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.) of March 18:

Having been informed that there were several unauthorised and probably some spurious publications now preparing for the press, on the subject of

2 A holograph copy is at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. Printed versions appeared in some newspapers, also, including the Philadelphia *Aurora* of Dec. 13, 1806.

3 The manuscript map is in the Library of Congress and appears in facsimile in Carl Wheat, *Mapping the Transmississippi West* (San Francisco, Calif., 1957—), II, following p. 50.

4 A settling of their account with one another, Aug. 21, [1809], shows the cost of Ordway's journal as $150; it further shows that the two explorers were dividing all such preliminary publication costs. See account in the Missouri Historical Society. Although Jefferson and his associates considered the project mainly Lewis', Lewis himself thought of it as a joint undertaking which he called "Lewis & Clark's Travels."
my late tour to the Pacific Ocean by individuals entirely unknown to me, I have considered it a duty which I owe the public, as well as myself to put them on their guard with respect to such publications, lest from the practice of such impositions they may be taught to depreciate the worth of the work which I am myself preparing for publication before it can possibly appear, as much time, labor, and expense are absolutely necessary in order to do justice to the several subjects which it will embrace: With a view therefore to prevent the practice of those deceptions the public are informed that the lists for subscriptions which have been promulgated by myself are headed with the subjoined Prospectus, and that those who wish to possess the genuine work, may obtain it by entering their names on those lists. The Prospectus will serve to shew the distribution and contents of the work.

The map will most probably be published by the latter end of October next, and the first volume of the work about the 1st of January 1808; the two remaining volumes will follow in succession as early as they can possibly be prepared for publication.

As early as a just estimate of the price of the several parts of this work can be formed, public notice will be given of the same through the medium of the Press.

To Robert Frazier only has permission been given either by Gen. William Clark or myself, to publish any thing in relation to our late voyage. When the proposals were first drawn in October last for the publication of the journal of that man, they were submitted to me for correction; I then expunged the promise which had been made, that the work should contain certain information in relation to the natural history of the country through which we had passed and cautioned the persons concerned in the publication not to promise the world any thing with which they had not the means of complying; but as the hope of gain seems to have outstripped their good faith to the public in this respect; I think it my duty to declare that Robert Frazier, who was only a private on this expedition, is entirely unacquainted with celestial observations, mineralogy, botany, or zoology, and therefore cannot possibly give any accurate information on those subjects, nor on that of geography, and that the whole which can be expected from his Journal is merely a limited detail of our daily transactions. With respect to all unauthorised publications relative to this voyage, I presume that they cannot have stronger pretensions to accuracy of information than that of Robert Frazier.

MERIWETHER LEWIS.

The man who had bought the Gass journal was David McKeehan, a Pittsburgh bookseller who kept a “Book and Stationary Store, in front of the Court House,” and whose name also appeared under notices of the Pittsburgh land office which ran in the Pittsburgh
Gazette of the period. Perhaps he is the David McKeehan who was graduated from Dickinson College in 1787 and was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar in 1792. It is unlikely that he had seen Lewis’ public statement when, in the Gazette of March 24, he announced plans to publish “a Journal of the Voyages & Travels of a Corps of Discovery, under the command of Captain Lewis and Captain Clarke of the Army of the United States . . . with geographical & explanatory notes, by the Publisher.”

He proposed to issue a work of about three hundred pages, “handsomely bound in boards,” priced at one dollar. To assure the subscriber of the authenticity of the work, he declared that “at different resting places during the expedition, the several journals were brought together, compared, corrected, and the blanks, which had been unavoidably left, filled up; and that, since he [McKeehan] became the proprietor, in order to render it more useful and acceptable, he has undertaken and completed the laborious task of arranging and transcribing the whole of it.”

The caveat by Lewis must have struck hard at McKeehan’s hopes, for Lewis and Clark were now the objects of national acclaim. Lewis had arrived in Washington in late December accompanied by a picturesque Mandan chief, had been lionized at public functions, had heard a public reading of a eulogistic poem written by Joel Barlow, and then had been appointed governor of the Territory of Louisiana. His criticism of unauthorized journals could have been ruinous for McKeehan.

With his investment at stake, McKeehan wrote an excoriating letter—obviously intended more for the public eye than for Lewis’—and handed it to the editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette. It occupied the whole of page 2 in the issue of April 14, 1807, and seems to have been

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5 When Lewis arrived in Washington on Dec. 28, 1806, his party included Sheheke or Big White, a chief of the Mandans, with his family and an interpreter. It would be nearly three years before Sheheke could return home. A detachment of soldiers under Ens. Nathaniel Pryor, who had been a sergeant on the expedition, failed in its mission to return the Indians in the summer of 1807 when the Arikaras attacked the party. The expedition that finally pushed through in 1809 contained more than one hundred men. See Lewis’ contract with the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company for the return of the Mandan, Feb. 24, 1809, Missouri Historical Society.

6 Barlow’s poem and an account of a dinner in Lewis’ honor are in the National Intelligencer (Washington, D. C.), Jan. 14, 1807.
overlooked by the biographers of Lewis and Clark and the subsequent editors of their journals. The complete text follows:

To his Excellency Meriwether Lewis, Esquire, Governor of Upper Louisiana.

Sir,

Your publication in the National Intelligencer, dated the 14th of last month, has forced into notice an obscure individual, who, of course, has had the misfortune of being "entirely unknown to you," to defend his character and his rights. However unpleasant it may be to his feelings to appear before the public in his own defence; and however he may regret the necessity of drawing their attention to the remarks he may offer, it is some consolation that the conduct of his antagonist claims of him no scrupulous adherence to the rules of formality, or of punctilious delicacy; and that to meet Your Excellency on the subject of your publication requires to you no apology. Your rapid advancement to power and wealth seems to have changed the polite, humble and respectful language of a Sir Clement into that of him who commands and dispenses favours; even your subscription lists, when you offer your learned works for publication must be "promulgated."

As your notice may not be favored with a general insertion in the newspapers, it may be an act of candour towards Your Excellency, before I proceed in my principal remarks relative to it, to give, as far as necessary, a statement of its contents.

Your Excellency is pleased to observe,—"Having been informed that there were several unauthorized and probably some spurious publications now preparing for the press, on the subject of my late tour to the Pacific Ocean, by individuals entirely unknown to me, I have considered it a duty which I owe to the public, as well as myself to put them on their guard against such impositions, lest from the practice of such impositions they may be taught to depreciate the worth of the work which I am myself preparing for publication before it can possibly appear, as much time, labour and expense are absolutely necessary in order to do justice to the several subjects which it will embrace."—The public are then referred to the lists for subscriptions which have been promulgated by yourself, and the prospectus with which they are headed; and obligingly informed, "that those who wish to possess the genuine work, may obtain it by entering their names on those lists." But, as an inducement perhaps to make the entries, we are told that the price of this "genuine work" is to be fixed at a future day; that the map will most probably be published the latter end of October next; the first volume of the work about the first of January, 1808; and that the two remaining volumes will follow in succession as early as they possibly can be prepared for publication; or (as it stated in the proposals) at as early periods as the avocations of the author will permit. Next you tell
the public that to Robert Frazer only permission has been given to publish any thing relative to your late voyage. But even the proposals of Frazer must feel the effect of your expunging fingers: what amputations and mutilations his journal itself has suffered, you do not think proper to communicate; but it is reasonable to suppose that all those parts were expunged which might depreciate the worth of the work, which you are preparing for publication. Do you yet stop here? No, but in order to defeat the ostensible object of your own permission, and to deprive poor Frazer, or those who may have purchased from him, of all benefit arising from his publication, you attack his capacity, and “declare that Robert Frazer, who was only a private on this expedition, is entirely unacquainted with celestial observations, mineralogy, botany, or zoology, and therefore cannot possibly give any accurate information on those subjects, nor on that of geography, and that the whole which can be expected from his journal is merely a limited detail of our daily transactions.” Limited perhaps in proportion to your expunging operations! Having thus attempted to expose Frazer and his work, you conclude your notice with the following sweeping clause intended to affect all other persons interested in any of the journals; “With respect to all unauthorised publications relative to this voyage, I presume that they cannot have stronger pretensions to accuracy or information than that of Robert Frazer.”

Having given this exposition of your note, it may perhaps be agreeable to Your Excellency to know the reasons of my interfering in this affair of the journals of what you very modestly call your late tour. You will therefore please to understand, that, without soliciting either your permission or authority, I have purchased the journal of one of the persons engaged in the late expedition from the mouth of the Missouri to the Pacific ocean “performed by order of the government;” that I have arranged and transcribed it for the press, supplying such geographical notes and other observations, as I supposed would render it more useful and satisfactory to the reader; that a large edition of it is now printing in this place, and will be published and ready for delivery (unless some unforeseen circumstances occur to prevent it) the latter end of next month; according to the proposals inserted in this paper.

After having furnished Your Excellency with this information, I must be permitted to make some short observations, which I think necessary, on a few points in order to render the subject in discussion between us fairly understood.

With respect to the hazardous nature of the enterprize and the courage necessary for undertaking it, candour compels me to say, that public opinion has placed them on too high ground. Mr. M’Kenzie with a party con-

7 Alexander Mackenzie, Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Lawrence, through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Ocean; in the Years 1789 and 1793 . . . (London, 1801). Lewis and Clark were acquainted with this work and probably had a copy with them in the West.
sisting of about one fourth part of the number under your command, with
means which will not bear a comparison with those furnished you, and with-
out the authority, the flags, or medals of his government, crossed the Rocky
mountains several degrees north of your rout, and for the first time pene-
trated to the Pacific Ocean. You had the advantage of the information
contained in his journal, and could in some degree estimate and guard
against the dangers and difficulties you were to meet; and I have no doubt
that, had government given an invitation, hundreds as daring, enterprising
and capable as your Excellency, would have offered to engage in the expedi-
tion, and for compensations much smaller than were received by yourself
and the other persons composing the corps actually engaged in it.

Having mentioned compensations; with your Excellency’s leave, I will
next notice that received by you. What compensations did your Excellency
receive? By an act of congress passed the 3d of last month, double pay was
allowed you as captain of infantry, during the expedition, and also a grant
of 1600 acres of land; to these may be added the value of your rations and
your pay as private secretary or master of ceremonies to the president,
the latter of which it is alleged and believed you pocketed though you
could perform no part of the duties or ceremonies attached to the office.\(^8\)
Have we got through the items of the account? No. To these perquisites the
executive adds the honorable and lucrative office of Governor of Upper
Louisiana! Why, sir, these grants and rewards savour more of the splendid
munificence of a Prince than the economy of a republican government. It
ought not to escape notice that the land is to be located within your own
government, where your influence and means of information may render
the value of the grant incalculable. There is besides a good deal of tinsel
thrown into the scale with these solid considerations; such as the praises of
the president (for a hobby horse as well as another will sometimes run away
with his rider); the honor of leading such an expedition; of knighting or
making chiefs (an act perhaps not strictly constitutional) of the poor
savages of the west; of immortalizing your name and those of your friends
by giving them to the mighty streams which flow from the Rocky moun-
tains; and what I had almost forgot, the warblings of the Muses, who have
been celebrating the “Young Hero’s name.” Who could have thought that
after so much liberality shewn by the country, your Excellency would have
been found contending with the poor fellows, who for their small pittance
were equally exposed with yourself to the toils and dangers attending the
expedition, about the publication of their journals, which cost them so
much trouble and anxiety to keep and preserve! I am afraid Captain Clarke,
who appears to have acted during the whole of the tour with the greatest
prudence, firmness and courage, will be forced to blush for the man he has
called his friend.

\(^8\) Lewis was secretary to Jefferson from the spring of 1801 until he left Washington in July,
1803. He was replaced by another Virginian, Lewis Harvie, and did not draw a salary from
Jefferson after his departure.
Solomon says, "There are three things which are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough." Had your Excellency lived in the days of Solomon, and been as near his court, as you have lately been to that of the United States, the wise and discerning monarch would easily have found a fifth thing which would say not, It is enough.

By way of interlude in this exhibition of curious things, let me put a question to Your Excellency. Where was your journal during the session of Congress? Snug, eh! No notice is given in the government paper of an intention to publish it;—No warnings against impositions;—only a few proposals circulated among booksellers at a distance! Some of the members begin to wince, complain that they are called upon to legislate in the dark, that no journal of the expedition was laid before them; others boldly assert that the grants they are asked for are extravagant—that double pay is a sufficient compensation; and that to get rid of importunate applicants, and to be allowed to attend to the important business of the session, they are obliged to consent to grants which they know to be unreasonable and unjust. This was the time to keep the journal out of view; and to be silent about the fortune to be made out of the three volumes and a map. "I'll squeeze, (says His Excellency in embrio) 'I'll squeeze the nation first, and then raise a heavy contribution on the citizens individually: I'll cry down these one-volume journals, and frighten the publishers; and no man, woman, or child shall read a word about my tour, unless they enter their names on my lists, and pay what price I shall afterwards fix on my three volumes and map." Without thinking it worth while to ask by what right you call this tour, which you acknowledge was "performed by order of the government," your tour, let me enquire by what high grant or privilege you claim the right of authorizing, licensing or suppressing journals or other publications concerning it? Every man of sense must agree that these journals are either private property of the individuals who took them, or public property; for none but an idiot could for a moment suppose, that any officer upon the expedition could have a property in any but his own. If therefore they are the private property of the individuals severally who kept them, there is an end to the question. Are they public property and has the government done any act either to manifest or relinquish its claim? In my opinion there may be cases where the journals, maps, surveys, and all other documents taken during a military expedition, especially where policy and the interest of the country requires secrecy, ought to be considered the property of the public and delivered up to the government; but where no such policy, interest or secrecy exist; and where it is for the public advantage that the information collected shall be diffused as widely as possible; where the government never calls for any documents for their inspection but those taken by the commanding officers; where other persons belonging to the expedition, who had taken journals or other documents, were discharged from public service with these journals and documents in their hands, and no claim made of them as public property when other public property in their possession was delivered up; where the commanding officers have been
allowed by the government to publish their journals, maps and other documents for their private emolument; will it be said that in a country governed by equal laws, and where equal rights and privileges are secured to all the citizens, these persons who have been so discharged from public service and become private citizens, have not also a right to publish the documents they have taken and preserved? Why, sir, scorn itself would hardly deign to point its finger at the administration, which would attempt to suppress them and prevent their publication; and despotism would blush at the deed, even to advance its favorites and sycophants. The fact is, sir, that these journals were considered as unnecessary (those of the commanding officers being preserved) for the information of the government, and all claim relinquished to them by the act of discharge, without a demand, when the persons who had taken them were retiring from public service, to private life. These journals, when first ordered to be taken were intended to be made use of only conditionally, and therefore more of the nature of private property than the others. The object of multiplying journals of the tour was that, in case of defeat or other misfortune affecting the safety of those taken by the commanding officers, the chances of preserving information with respect to the country through which the expedition was to pass might also be multiplied. Connected with this part of the investigation, is another point (and a material one) on which I must ask a question or two, and say a few words: this respects the credit due to these journals and their claim to correctness. Was it not a part of your duty to see that these journals were regularly kept, and, if necessary, to supply from your journal, any defects or omissions? Were not all the journals belonging to the corps brought together at certain resting places, examined, compared and corrected? If Mr. Gass (from whom I purchased) “is unacquainted with celestial observations” (which I will grant) was it not your duty, and did you not supply him with the result of those made by yourself? How else did Mr. Gass find out the latitude of certain places where your observations were taken to the exactness of minutes, seconds and tenths of seconds? Without information from Captain Clarke or yourself, how did he ascertain the distances of places, the breadth of rivers and bays, height of falls and length of portages? But it is unnecessary to multiply questions: you know that these journals will furnish the necessary information relative to the tour; and that the publication of them will “depreciate the worth of the work you are preparing for publication.” This is what alarms your insatiable avarice. If there were not some consequence connected with these journals, why all this uneasiness about them? Why purchase them at high prices in order to have them suppressed? Did you not lately purchase the journal of sergeant Prior or Sergeant Ordway, for that purpose? I will next grant that Mr. Gass is not acquainted with mineralogy, botany or zoology, that his geographical knowledge is neither extensive nor correct, “and (to use your own words) that the whole which can be expected from his journal is merely a limited detail of your daily transactions,” and yet strange as it may appear to such a phenomenon in literature as Your Excellency, I am of opin-
tion it will be more interesting and useful to readers generally than the volume of your work, which is to be “confined exclusively to scientific research.” He may in some respects be considered as having the advantage; for while your Excellency was star-gazing, and taking celestial observations, he was taking observations in the world below. If Mr. Gass and the publisher of his journal can lead their readers along the route of the expedition and make them acquainted with those things which were the objects of the external senses, and as they appeared to those senses, the greater number will willingly dispense with “scientific research.” Of what consequence is it to the generality of readers to know how a plant has been classified, to what order, genus or species it has been confined by Botanists? And as to zoology and mineralogy similar questions might be asked with equal propriety. Who is not pleased with M'Kenzie's journal? And what does he say of himself? Does he pretend to be either a mineralogist, a botanist or zoologist? “I do not possess,” says he, “the science of the naturalist; and even if the qualifications of that character had been attained by me, its curios spirit had not been gratified. I could not stop to dig into the earth, over whose surface I was compelled to pass with rapid steps; nor could I turn aside to collect the plants which nature might have scattered on the way, when my thoughts were anxiously employed in making provision for the day that was passing over me.” Yet he “flatters himself” that his “work will be found to excite an interest, and conciliate a regard, in the minds of those who peruse it.” What! without “scientific research!” Unacquainted with “mineralogy, botany and zoology!” What a presumptuous fellow!

To shew the public that Mr. Gass has some talents and merit, I will introduce the following extract from a paper delivered to him under your own signature.

“As a tribute justly due the merits of the said Patrick Gass, I with cheerfulness declare that the ample support, which he gave me under every difficulty; the manly firmness, which he evinced on every necessary occasion; and the fortitude with which he bore (boar, in the original) the fatigues and painful sufferings incident to that long voyage, entitles him to my highest confidence and sincere thanks, while it eminently recommends him to the consideration and respect of his fellow citizens.”

This certificate does you honor, and it is to be regretted that the wealth and honours heaped upon you so soon rendered your heart callous towards the companions of your “fatigues and painful sufferings.” Perhaps I ought to beg pardon for using the word companions, as it has been thought proper at the seat of government to degrade them to mere “Followers.”

The publication of the journal of Mr. Gass I expect will have the following good effects; first, It may save many the trouble of purchasing your

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9 Here McKeehan merely quotes from Gass's discharge. The same words are found in Private William Bratton's discharge, in Lewis' hand, in the Iowa State Department of History and Archives.
three volumes and map, by affording them at a cheap rate, a plain and satisfactory account of the tour; in the second place, it will so depreciate the worth of your work that there may be a chance of getting it at a reasonable price; and in the third place, as it will contain plain matter of fact, it may deter you from swelling your work with such tales of wonder as have sometimes issued from the Ten-mile-square.

But, by the bye, did your Excellency never attend to the advice given to those who have glass houses? Were you not afraid that some persons affected by your publication, might inform the public that you were not a man of science, that you were not a man of letters, and that you were not qualified for scientific research. The length of the observations already made prevent me from giving even a limited detail of my information upon this point.

I, however, assure you that I shall wait with some impatience for your voluminous work; and shall willingly subscribe for it, when a reasonable price is fixed; but hope you will be cautious in magnifying trifles; and in giving too long and learned dissertations with respect to the "Origin of Prairies," and "the cause of the muddiness of the Missouri." With respect to the latter, which you make one of your great points of investigation, Mr. Gass, who does not speak scientifically, only says, "At two, we proceeded again on our voyage, and passed a long chain of Bluffs on the north side, of a dark colour. From these and others of the same kind the Missouri gets its muddy colour. The earth of which they are composed dissolves like sugar; every rain washes down great quantities of it, and the rapidity of the stream keeps it mixing and afloat in the water until it reaches the mouth of the Mississippi." Now who can relish this homespun account without a spice of "scientific research!"

I must pass over the unhappy affair with the Indians on the plains of Maria's river, also that very affecting one of your own posteriors, and conclude with congratulating you that Mr. Gass's Journal did not fall into the hands of some wag, who might have insinuated that your wound was not accidental, but that it was the consequence of design,—that the young hero might not return without more scars (if not honorable, near the place of honour) to excite the curiosity and compassion of some favorite widow Wadman, who might have been languishing during his absence. In what a ludicrous situation he might have placed the young hero with his point of honour just past the point of a rock, with Crusatte taking aim!—perhaps there will be a representation in the plates embellishing your second volume!

Pittsburgh, 7th April, 1807.

The Editor of Gass's Journal

10 The very few unfortunate incidents on the expedition included the two singled out by McKeehan: an encounter with a small band of larcenous Piegan Indians, two of whom were killed, and the accidental shooting of Lewis by Private Pierre Cruzatte. Cruzatte was blind in one eye, and claimed to have mistaken Lewis, in his elkskin suit, for an animal in the dense underbrush.
At the end, McKeehan added a request that newspaper editors insert the letter in their own papers. Apparently few, if any, complied, for McKeehan complained in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of June 16 about "the conduct of those Editors of newspapers, who declined to publish his observations on captain Lewis's Notice,—especially of such as had given place to that Notice." So he offered an inducement: every editor who now ran the piece would receive two copies of the Gass journal.

"It is not yet clearly ascertained," McKeehan wrote, "how far the illiberal and indelicate notice of Captain Lewis has been injurious. In a few instances it has had a good effect; while in some parts of the country, there is no doubt, it has occasioned a temporary deception, which will vanish on correct information, and when the price of his work is made known." When McKeehan later learned that Lewis intended to ask thirty-one dollars for two volumes and a map, he ran another half-column advertisement in the *Gazette* to compare his own publication with Lewis' and to repeat that his price was only one dollar.

By July 7 McKeehan could announce that his book was ready for distribution. In many ways it was a miserable piece of work, for upon Patrick Gass's sketchy notes the editor had placed the burden of an elegant prose style. But it was a journal, the first to reach the public, and it sold well. The first edition, printed in Pittsburgh by Zadok Cramer, was reportedly followed in 1808 by another Pittsburgh printing. A London edition appeared in 1808, and in 1810 the copyright apparently was purchased by Philadelphia publisher Mathew Carey, who published identical editions in 1810, 1811, and 1812, having added six plates to the original material. The French came forward with a Paris edition in 1810, containing the first map known to mention Lewis and Clark and to locate portions of their route.

Alexander Henry was carrying a copy of the work with him on a fur trading expedition in 1810. "Put tongues to thaw, and perused Gass' Journal Across the Rocky Mountains," he wrote in his own journal.11

When the first edition appeared in Philadelphia bookstalls in the summer of 1807, Meriwether Lewis was still in that city making

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plans for his own publication. He was so much in demand socially, and had, through Jefferson, so many associations with the leading scholars and professional men of the city, that he accomplished little. By May 5, painter and museum curator Charles Willson Peale already had done his portrait and was writing to John Hawkins in London, “The drawings for Governor Lewis’s Journal I mean to draw myself to be engraved for the work. It is a work that seems to excite much attention, & will I hope have a great sale & give considerable profit to this bold adventurer.”

The publishing house operated by John Conrad had contracted to produce the work, but, of course, they needed a manuscript. Later in the summer, when Lewis left to assume his governorship in St. Louis, there still was no manuscript and no prospect of one. There were thousands of pages of journal entries, kept by both Lewis and Clark, and the two explorers seem to have believed that these could somehow be transmuted into a printed book without further effort on their part. No one can say with certainty that the manuscript journals, as they exist today in the vaults of the American Philosophical Society, were produced during the expedition or, in a revised version, during the 1808–1809 period when the men were together in St. Louis. Jefferson later declared that the journals were produced in the field, and indirectly attributed their fine state of preservation to the fact that they were sealed in metal containers.

In any event, we have John Conrad’s testimony that at the time of Lewis’ death in 1809, not a line of manuscript had been received from St. Louis.

In the meantime, another “unauthorized” journal had appeared, and it was completely spurious. Published in Philadelphia by Hubbard Lester in 1809, it was entitled The travels of Capts. Lewis & Clarke, by order of the Government of the United States, performed in the years 1804, 1805, & 1806. Although it was designed to appear as an official report of the expedition, it was actually a compilation of odds and ends from Lewis and Clark letters and from the reports of Alexander Mackenzie, Jonathan Carver, and other travelers. It had

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the effect, however, of further satiating the public appetite for Lewis and Clark material and making more urgent the early issuance of Lewis' own account.

Lewis had other problems now, for he was not cut out to be a governor. As a public expression of gratitude, his appointment had been flattering, but he chafed under fiscal restrictions and showed little ability to cope with the wrangling that typified frontier politics. He soon made an enemy of Frederick Bates, the territorial secretary, who had a quick temper and a sharp tongue and who taunted Lewis publicly and privately.\(^5\) He made some unwise decisions in Indian matters that irked Henry Dearborn, the Secretary of War, although the calmer head of William Clark generally served him well here (Clark was territorial superintendent of Indian affairs). During the bothersome business of getting the Mandan chief back to his village against the opposition of the Arikaras, Lewis executed some drafts that were not honored by the Secretary of War, and his personal finances suffered.

Finally, there was the matter of the unfinished manuscript. Conrad wrote him repeatedly about it and got no reply. European savants such as Humboldt and Volney were eagerly awaiting the edition. Jefferson, in his anxiety about the matter, seemed to feel that his choice of Lewis to lead the expedition would not be justified, in the eyes of his Federalist opponents, until the journals were published. He pressed Lewis for information and received none; Lewis wrote almost nothing to his old friend after leaving Washington, and the few extant letters are strictly about territorial affairs.

At last Lewis began an excessive use of alcohol—or so it was reported to Jefferson, and so Jefferson believed.\(^6\) The mystery of his

\(^5\) Considering Bates's relationship with Lewis, his solicitude could not have been sincere when he wrote to Louisville publisher Joseph Charless, Mar. 12, 1808: "I should esteem a particular favor your procuring for me, one, two or three of those western Papers, from different Presses, which contain the Prospectus of Frazier's Journal. The interest which I take in the compromise of those misunderstandings which have arisen from that Prospectus, urge me to trouble you with this request. If the Publication of Gov. Lewis on the subject of Gass' & Frazier's Journal can be procured, you would confer an additional favor by transmitting it."


\(^6\) Capt. Gilbert C. Russell to Jefferson, Jan. 31, 1810, discusses the possible contribution of Lewis' intemperance to his death. Jefferson acknowledged this letter on Apr. 18, saying of Lewis, "He was much afflicted & habitually so with hypocondria. This was probably increased by the habit into which he had fallen. . . ."
violent death in October, 1809, at a wayside tavern in Tennessee can never be solved now; it might have been murder, but the testimony leads most observers to conclude that Lewis took his own life.  

It would be 1814 before Clark, Jefferson, and Philadelphia littérature Nicholas Biddle could bring about the publication of the work. By this time, John Conrad would be bankrupt, the country would be at war with England, and public interest in the expedition would understandably have ebbed somewhat. The so-called Biddle narrative was considered by Jefferson to be only a stopgap publication. He wanted the scientific observations of Lewis and Clark on natural history to be edited and published by Benjamin Smith Barton, a botanist and zoologist at the University of Pennsylvania, and he continued to hope that the journals themselves could still be put into print. Barton died before he could accomplish his assignment. Eventually, the journals were published, but not until 1904, exactly a century after the exploring party pushed westward from St. Louis toward the Pacific.

If Lewis was a suicide, his death can be attributed to no single cause. Perhaps the early and singular achievement of this melancholy man led him to expect more of himself, and of his postexpedition career, than he was able to accomplish. Undoubtedly, the realization that he had disappointed Jefferson and the world by his failure to prepare his journals for publication added one more problem to the list of those he could not solve.

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18 Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804–1806 (8 vols., New York, 1904–1905). The 1814 edition, published in Philadelphia by Bradford and Inskeep in two volumes, was entitled History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the . . . Pacific Ocean. It was written by Biddle, with some final touches by Paul Allen, and was based partly upon the journals, partly upon personal interviews with Clark, Ordway, and Private George Shannon.