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The Corps of Discovery **LEWIS & CLARK**

Louisiana Purchase

In 1800, Napoleon gained ownership of the Louisiana Territory from Spain, and America lost control of the Mississippi. This was a major issue for the United States because they had been using the river heavily for transporting goods. Not knowing France was willing to sell Louisiana, Americans set off to bargain for the port of New Orleans so they could control the mouth of the Mississippi. France sold all of the Louisiana Territory to the United States, a purchase that would double the size of the United States, for \$11,250,000 US dollars.

The Expedition

Once the Louisiana Purchase was made by the United States, President Jefferson decided the new land needed to be explored. William Clark and Meriwether Lewis were picked as the expedition leaders. Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark were to explore the Missouri River, gather information about the Indian tribes and record as much scientific data as possible.

In May of 1804, the expedition, called the Corps of Discovery, set off from camp Dubois in present day Missouri, up the Mississippi and onto the Missouri River. They used a sixty foot long keelboat and some additional smaller boats for traveling on the river. They brought with them some swivel cannons for protection and rifles for hunting. They also brought along goods to trade with the Indians. In the fall of 1804, the expedition arrived at the five Mandan villages in present day North Dakota. The Corps built Fort Mandan to house them from the cold over the winter.

The expedition crew and the people of the Mandan tribes had a good relationship with one another. The Mandan people helped the Corps with hunting buffalo, gathering food, and mapping out the rest of the trip up the Missouri River. The Corps tried to lend a hand when they could. Meriwether Lewis would often lend his medical expertise to the Mandan people. One night, he got a call to help a woman deliver a baby. This woman would end up guiding the men on the rest of their expedition. Her name was Sakakawea. They would return to Fort Mandan, in 1806 on the journey home.

Sakakawea

During Lewis and Clark's 1804 winter at Fort Mandan, they decided hiring a guide and interpreter would be beneficial to the expedition. They met a Frenchman, Toussaint Charbonneau to help guide them. Toussaint had been living in the Knife River Villages and had married a woman from the tribe. His wife, Sakakawea, would accompany them on the journey along with their new born son Jean-Baptiste. Sakakawea was originally a member of the Shoshone tribe from the Rocky Mountains area. She would also play a significant role as an interpreter and secure horses for the Corps from her original tribe.

Legacy of the Expedition

The Corps of Discovery expedition was very successful. They were able to chart out the Missouri River and find the West Coast. The Corps also successfully made contact and gathered information about a number of Indian Tribes along the trail. The scientific samples collected along the way gave important information as to the different life forms found in various geographic areas. Most importantly, the expedition established the first contact between the United States and the newly acquired French territory.

The content above came from North Dakota State Library items, ND Studies materials and the State Archives
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