

This Day in History... August 18, 1774

Birth of Meriwether Lewis

Explorer, soldier, and politician Meriwether Lewis was born on August 18, 1774, in Ivy, Albemarle County, Virginia.

The son of a soldier that died of pneumonia in 1779, Lewis relocated to Georgia after his mother remarried the following year. Lewis didn't receive a formal education until he was 13, but until then he learned to become a skilled hunter and outdoorsman. He had a keen interest in natural history and learned from his mother how to gather wild herbs for medicinal uses.

When he was 13, Lewis was sent to Virginia to be educated by private tutors. He then attended Liberty Hall (present-day Washington and Lee University). After graduating, he joined the Virginia militia in 1794. In that role he helped put down the Whiskey Rebellion (a protest against the first domestic product tax of the new American government).

Lewis went on to join the US Army in 1795. He would ultimately reach the rank of captain, after which he left the military in 1801. During his service he first met William Clark who was then one of his commanding officers.

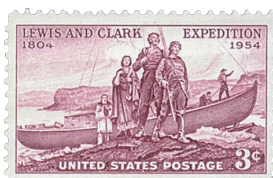
In April 1801, President Thomas Jefferson appointed Lewis as an aide. Living in the presidential mansion, he got to meet many leading political figures. After Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory, he appointed Lewis to lead the Corps of Discovery Expedition west. Lewis then selected his former officer Clark to share in the command.

The Corps began their journey in May 1804. Over the next two years they braved their way across the country in dangerous conditions. Along the way, Lewis kept a detailed journal and collected plant and animal samples. He was also shot by one of his men while hunting, but survived the wound.

Upon his return from the expedition, Lewis received 1,600 acres of land, and was later made governor of the Louisiana Territory. In that role, he published the first laws in the Upper-Louisiana Territory, created roads, and promoted the fur trade. He also negotiated peace among warring Native American tribes.

Assessments of Lewis's work as governor are mixed, in part because it appears his secretary hoped to remove him from the post and take his place. Among other things, the secretary sent letters to Washington, DC, claiming that Lewis had profited from a mission in which he returned a Native American chief to his tribe. Lewis had paid for the expensive trip with his own money, but was then denied reimbursement due to secretary's claim.

Issued for the 150th anniversary of the expedition.



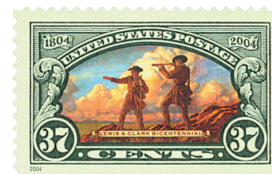
On September 3, 1809, Lewis left for Washington, DC, to clear up the situation. A month later, while spending the night at an inn in Tennessee, Lewis suffered multiple gunshot wounds and died shortly after. While his death was ruled a suicide, some, including his family, believed he was murdered.



Lewis stamp issued to mark the 200th anniversary of the expedition.



Clark stamp from the expedition Bicentennial set



Lewis & Clark Bicentennial stamp

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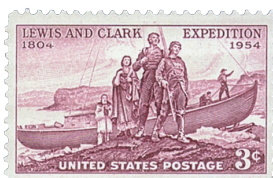
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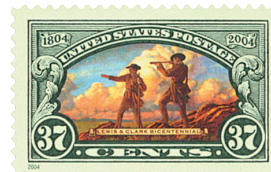
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