

Book Reviews and Notices

By His Own Hand? The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis, edited by John D. W. Guice. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006. xxi, 178 pp. Illustrations, map, facsimile documents, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Reviewer David Walker is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He regularly teaches courses on the American West and Indians in American history.

The Lewis and Clark bicentennial celebration produced valuable scholarly works, including this set of essays delving into Meriwether Lewis's death by murder or suicide. When the Corps of Discovery returned to St. Louis in September 1806, Lewis assumed responsibility for arranging publication of the field notes while serving as governor of Louisiana Territory. Overwhelmed by political, economic, health, and social problems, he headed to Washington, D.C., via the well-traveled but often dangerous Natchez Trace, reaching Grinder's Stand, Tennessee, on October 10, 1809. Lewis died the following morning as a result of bullet wounds to the head and chest; his body had also been cut extensively with a razor. Because there were no direct witnesses to the tragic event, a controversy was born.

In *By His Own Hand?* four respected historians present well-written and thoroughly documented essays; an appendix provides a chronological overview of suicide and murder advocates from 1809 to 2005. Clay Jenkinson and James Holmberg agree with most current historians who accept that Lewis's death was the result of suicide, based in large measure on the fact that the two men who knew Lewis better than anyone else, Thomas Jefferson and William Clark, accepted that verdict without question. John Guice advocates murder as a possibility rather than a proven fact by countering basic arguments without presenting confirming evidence. Finally, Jay Buckley analyzes both contemporary and historical accounts representing each possibility.

Scholars and general readers will find this an effective summary of the issues surrounding the controversial historical question. Yet an indisputable verdict on Meriwether Lewis's death by murder or suicide may never be reached.