

Tents for Lewis and Clark

From 1895 to 1904 several prominent citizens of Sioux City were intensely interested in the Lewis and Clark expedition. The earlier year was memorable for the rediscovery of Sergeant Floyd's grave and the organization of the Floyd Memorial Association; the year 1901 saw the dedication of the beautiful Floyd monument; while the last named year was the centennial anniversary of the passage of Lewis and Clark up the Missouri and, therefore, of the death and burial of Sergeant Floyd within the corporation limits of the present city.

One of the prominent citizens of Sioux City during this period, and one whose interest in the great expedition was most active, was H. C. Powers, a retired professor who for many years had been a member of the faculty of the Agricultural College of Florida. Professor Powers was a trained scientist as well as a widely read student of history.

One day in 1900, Professor Powers came to my home in Sioux City (I was then professor of history in Morningside College) and with great enthusiasm declared that, in one of his many walks

around the adjacent country, he had discovered the remains of a Lewis and Clark camp near the Floyd Bluff. In fact he had found a series of five embankments about one-eighth of a mile from the explorer's grave. At the earnest request of Professor Powers, I accompanied him to the site of the earthworks and together we examined, measured, and platted them.

Immediately we began to speculate upon the origin of the embankments, Professor Powers taking the position that they must be the remains of the camp of Lewis and Clark made on August 20, 1804. His argument ran like this: "Floyd was seriously ill and the party landed in order better to care for him. Not knowing how long he might be ill, a better camp than usual was made. At the time of making the camp no one knew that Floyd was fated to die almost immediately, making such a camp needless." It must be remembered that at this time R. G. Thwaites's edition of the complete journals of Lewis and Clark had not been published. Nor did we have access to the journals of Whitehouse, Gass, or Ordway. Reprints of the Biddle-Allen edition of 1814 were of no help in solving the problem.

I was convinced that the embankments were not the remains of a Lewis and Clark camp, because the party went on after the burial of Floyd's body

and camped at the mouth of the stream now called Floyd River. The distance to this place was only one-half mile and it did not seem reasonable that the party would leave a superior camp to go such a short distance so late in the evening. In addition to this I was able to point to the lack of positive proof in support of Professor Powers's theory. And so, in the most friendly spirit, it was agreed to disagree, and, while I attempted to prove the embankments not a Lewis and Clark camp, Mr. Powers undertook to prove his contention. While Professor Powers was not able to prove that the earthworks were the remains of a Lewis and Clark camp, his investigations led to something vastly more important, namely, the discovery of the place where the equipment for the expedition was obtained, together with a complete list of the items in that equipment.

Professor Powers's theory was that the embankments had served as the foundations for tents and that their size measured the size of the tents of the party camping there. Having been in the Union Army during the Civil War, he was acquainted with the custom of throwing up such embankments so that the water from a tent would run off into the ditch outside of the embankment and thus keep the interior of the tent dry. Therefore, if he could discover the size of the tents used

by Lewis and Clark and if they corresponded to the embankments he would establish a presumption in support of his explanation.

After following several clues to no purpose, Mr. Powers wrote to Dr. R. G. Thwaites, who was known to be editing the original journals of Lewis and Clark, and asked him for the size of the tents used by those explorers. In his reply Dr. Thwaites asserted that he had searched far and wide and had not been able to find out where the expedition had been outfitted or any list of the items in the equipment. Thereupon, Professor Powers secured from Congressman Hubbard a letter of introduction to various authorities for his nephew, E. E. Stacey, principal of a ward school in Washington, D. C. Armed with this letter, Professor Stacey called several times at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington without obtaining the information he sought. Then, in response to a letter to the Secretary of War, he received the following reply:

“Washington, March 2, 1904.

“Nothing has been found of record to show the character of the camping equipment taken by the Lewis and Clark expedition up the Missouri River, or relative to the aid, if any, rendered the expedition by the Sec. of War, except that instructions were issued by the War Dept. July 2,

1803, to the end that the contractor's agent should put on Capt. Lewis' boat proper provisions to carry him and his men to Massac, and that he be furnished with eighteen light axes.

"No record has been found showing the items of the account rendered to the Sec. of War, referred to by Capt. Lewis in his letter to President Jefferson, dated at Fort Mandan, April 7, 1805.

"By authority of the Sec. of War,

F. C. Ainsworth.

Chief Record and Pension Office."

But Professor Stacey was persistent. In an old encyclopedia in the Library of Congress he found a hint that expeditions of a century before had been outfitted at Philadelphia and that the records of the Purveyor of Supplies at that time might contain the information sought. "A letter to the Depot Quartermaster at Philadelphia was referred to the Commanding Officer of the Schuylkill Arsenal, and from him came the desired information in copies from the old records of his office." These records contained a complete list of all the items of equipment requisitioned by Captain Lewis and also the bills for all the articles actually furnished. Not all of the articles requisitioned could be supplied. According to the records of the Arsenal, the items of equipment were arranged

under the following headings: "Mathematical Instruments, Arms and Accoutrements, Ammunition, Clothing, Camp Equipage, Provisions and Means of Subsistence, Indian Presents, Means of Transportation, Medicine, and Materials for making up the Various articles into portable Packs." The total amount paid for the supplies, according to the bills, was \$2373.81.

Immediately upon the receipt of this information from Mr. Stacey, Professor Powers sent a copy of the various articles of equipment of the Lewis and Clark expedition to Dr. Thwaites, who received it just in time for insertion in the appendix of volume seven of his edition of the original journals of the explorers. In doing this he gave full credit to Professors Powers and Stacey, and also mentioned the Sioux City Academy of Science and Letters of which Mr. Powers was the secretary. A brief account of the find, together with a list of the articles requisitioned by Captain Lewis, was published in volume one of the Proceedings of the Sioux City Academy of Science and Letters.

Incidentally the data received from the Schuylkill Arsenal showed that nine tents had been supplied to Captain Lewis, eight of which had been made to order and one of which had been purchased. It was impossible, however, to determine

the size of any of these tents. So far as explaining the origin of the embankments near Floyd Bluff was concerned, the description of the equipment proved nothing. But the research stimulated by the mysterious embankments as possible evidence of the shape and size of the tents used on the Lewis and Clark expedition led to the discovery of something much more important, namely, the facts about the outfitting and equipment of the expedition.

F. H. GARVER