

Books Of The Expedition

“The Nautical Ephemeris 1803-1806”

By John W. Fisher

According to research by Donald Jackson and Stephen Dow Beckham, Lewis apparently purchased three from publisher John Garnet, probably 1804, 1805 & 1806. One of them cost \$1.50 and the other two cost \$2.00 each according to the “Summary of Purchases” in Jackson’s “Letters”. Lewis expected to be home by 1806, so it is possible he may have had 1803 instead of 1806.

Because the sun and planets change position in the heavens each day of the year, a “Nautical Ephemeris”, for each year and “Tables Requisite...” by Nevil Maskelyne are necessary to determine latitude and longitude. The exceedingly rare text by Maskelyne is found in the Sherman Library at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center in Great Falls.

Fisher was able to acquire **“Hutchins Improved: ...Almanack and Ephemeris... 1803”** by John Hutchins of New York; **“The Columbian Calendar, and Newengland Almanac; With an Ephemeris for the Christian Aera 1804”** by John Trufant of Massachusetts; **“Hutchins Improved: ... Almanack and Ephemeris... 1805”** by John Hutchins of New York; and **“The Nautical Almanac and Astronomical Ephemeris for the Year 1806.”** by the Commissioners of Longitude, London. These booklets were published each year to show the positions of the sun, moon and planets, and were also helpful in resetting the chronometer, but they were never mentioned in the journals.

Because of the short term use of these pamphlets the quality of paper used was often poor and they were poorly bound. The “1806” above was printed on good paper and has been rebound so it can be handled safely. The contents are briefly described below:

- After the Preface there is a key to symbols of the heavenly bodies and events used on the charts. Among other items are the changing dates of religious holidays, and the dates of solar and lunar eclipses at Greenwich.
- Starting in January each month is listed with the first page devoted to the dates of the Sundays, holidays and terms. The phases of the moon are listed and other phenomena.
- The second and third page has Sun positions and the eclipses of the moons of Jupiter.
- The fourth page has the positions of the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Georgian???
- The fifth, sixth and seventh pages have various data on the Moon’s position.
- The eighth, to the eleventh pages have “Distances of moon’s center from the Sun, and from stars east and west of her”.
- The twelfth page has the “Configuration of the Satellites of Jupiter at VII o’clock in the Morning.”
- The information above is repeated for each month for 143 pages. The last 20 pages are explanations for the use of the ephemeris and a few advertising pages.