

## **Books of the Expedition**

### ***MacKenzie's "Voyages from Montreal"***

By John W. Fisher

This is the seventh in a series of articles about the books carried by Lewis on the expedition. The full title of my copy is, "*Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans: in the years 1789 and 1793. With a preliminary account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the fur trade of that Country,*" *Alexander MacKenzie ESQ. New York, 1802.*

First published in London in 1801, Dr. Gary Moulton believes that when Jefferson read this book it was the 'catalyst' for taking action on a project he had long considered; sending an expedition across the continent. The western portion of the continent had not yet been definitively claimed between Canada to the north and the Spanish southwest. If an expedition was to be successful it would help cement claims by the United States; one of the reasons Lewis branded trees along the way and gave out U.S. flags to Indian tribes. The journals never specifically mention Alexander MacKenzie, but McKeen, Sgt. Gass' editor, references MacKenzie over a dozen times in his footnotes.

"*The Literature of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*" (2003) by Stephen Dow Beckham, Erickson et al, referencing Donald Jackson, list three different editions that were available at the time. Jefferson ordered a two-volume London edition for Lewis because it had a more complete set of maps than the American edition which I have. Facing the title page of my text is a 12x18 inch fold out map showing much of North America north of 40 degrees latitude. The volume is divided into three parts.

Part I: "A general history of the fur trade from Canada to the north-west". The first sixty four pages deal with the business aspects of the fur trade; and transportation routes along the rivers, lakes and portages for the exchange of manufactured goods for furs. The next thirty pages contain two sections with a fascinating anthropological discussion of two tribes: "Some account of the Knisteneaux Indians" and "Some account of the Chepewyan Indians" along with a vocabulary for each.

Part II: "A journal of a voyage &c" is a seven chapter account of the 102 day expedition from Fort Chipewyan to the Arctic Ocean and back in 1789. His expedition left on 3 June with four Canadians, two with wives, a German, a guide called English Chief with his two wives and about a half dozen other Indians as hunters and interpreters. The daily accounts include difficult portages, damaged canoes, occasional lack of game, mineral observations and encounters with new settlements of Indians. They carry a large supply of gear and gifts for the natives who helped them along the way.

Part III: "Journal of a second voyage &c" is a thirteen chapter account of the expedition from Fort Chipewyan that departed 10 October 1792 to the Pacific Ocean and returned to the fort on 23 August 1793. They departed with eight white men, two Indian guides and 3,000 lbs. Of provisions in a twenty-five foot birch bark canoe. Two men had been sent ahead to cut timbers for lodging and stockade at a fork in the Peace River where they spent the winter. With the help of Indians along the way and despite frequent repairs they managed to portage their canoe over the continental divide and part way down the river. They had to backtrack and at the advice of a guide, crossed another pass and ultimately descended to the ocean in borrowed cedar canoes. They were frequently in danger from hostile Indians when at the last moment luck or friendly Indians saved them.

During his expedition MacKenzie was able to calculate latitudes using his sextant and an artificial horizon. By using a 40 lb astronomical telescope he observed the movement of the moons of Jupiter and by using his sextant and watch he could determine solar noon and thus determine longitude. Calculating longitude during the expedition was a feat that escaped Lewis due to a faulty chronometer.

*“The Literature...”* describes several entries in the journals that indicate Lewis used this text as a reference and considering the important geographical and ethnographic information that it contained it must have been carried to the Pacific. This author highly recommends reading the 2001 reprint! ISBN 1-58976-036-0.