

# The Unknown Travels and Dubious Pursuits of William Clark

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a certain inevitability. For example, in concluding a section on the 1825 treaty of Prairie du Chien, Saler writes that “the conclusion of this treaty in mid-August 1825 suggested the degree to which Wisconsin Indian bands met federal authorities on unequal ground, conforming to Euro-American notions of territoriality and of their (Indian) subject nationhood” (107). Indian nations are, in this interpretation, already on a losing footing. This sits oddly with the fact that a large number of Native nations completely ignored the boundaries set by the treaty after it was signed. Happily, much greater Native agency can be found in Saler’s chapter on mission work in the region, where the author details the missionaries’ generally losing efforts to convert Native people to the Christian faith.

*The Settlers’ Empire* is an engaging text that paints a vibrant picture of the Midwest’s past as many settler-colonist Americans understood it. I recommend it for enthusiasts of federal policy and those with an interest in midwestern history and for purchase by university libraries.

*The Unknown Travels and Dubious Pursuits of William Clark*, by Jo Ann Trogdon. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015. xxii, 469 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$36.95 hardcover.

Reviewer W. Raymond Wood is professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Missouri, Columbia. His most recent book (with Robert M. Lindholm) is *Karl Bodmer’s America Revisited: Landscape Views Across Time* (2013).

William Clark’s role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Meriwether Lewis renders him one of the iconic figures of nineteenth-century America. The bicentennial of that expedition resulted in a number of books detailing his life and his accomplishments in government service. But documents continue to turn up that illuminate his life; one of the most important is the journal that he kept (1798–1801) on a flatboat journey from his home in Louisville, Kentucky, to New Orleans. The journal also contained a map showing many details of features along the Mississippi. The document, housed in the State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia, was virtually overlooked after it arrived there in 1928 until Jo Ann Trogdon discovered it in 1992.

Clark left Louisville on March 9, 1798, his two flatboats containing cargoes of tobacco, furs, and salted pork. Having left the army, and hoping to begin a profitable business, he would sell the cargoes in New Orleans, which was then in Spanish Louisiana. Trogdon poses several interesting questions about Clark’s activities at his destination. Those questions revolve around whether he was somehow involved with what became known as the Spanish Conspiracy. The term refers to efforts by Spanish

officials in New Orleans to detach Kentucky and nearby territory from the United States and to create a buffer state between the United States and Spanish Louisiana. Spanish sources even secretly paid U.S. Army General James Wilkinson (known to the Spanish as Agent 13) to act traitorously on its behalf in the scheme; Wilkinson even secretly shifted his allegiance from the United States to the king of Spain.

No fewer than 22 other individuals were involved in this seditious project, most of them well known to Clark. Prominent among them were Benjamin Sebastian (a family friend), Daniel Clark Jr. (no relation), Andrew Ellicott, John McKee, and Stephen Minor, all of whom knew about the conspiracy, and whom William met in New Orleans. Although the journal contains many details of the trip downriver, once Clark arrived in New Orleans its entries diminish; indeed, Clark records that "nothing extraordinary happened" between his arrival and his departure in August. But details regarding this period of Clark's life are preserved in Spanish documents, records that Trogdon has mined to offer a series of conjectures about what took place there in Clark's contacts with the conspirators. They record, however, only his commercial activities while he was in the city.

Was Clark acting, knowingly or not, as an agent for his friend General Wilkinson? The information that Clark inscribed on his map would have been immensely useful in Wilkinson's schemes. Clark's return home was delayed by his return upriver to Natchez, where he smuggled a secret Spanish payoff of 670 Spanish dollars to an unnamed corrupt American official (surely General Wilkinson) by illegally transporting those Spanish coins across the U.S. border. What did he know of this transaction?

Returning to New Orleans, Clark turned for home by sea, taking passage on the schooner *Star*, arriving in New Castle, Delaware, after sailing around Florida and up the East Coast, suffering from malaria en route. He continued on by land to Virginia and then returned to Louisville by way of the Ohio River, reaching home on Christmas Eve.

Trogdon continues her narrative of Clark's life, including the trip he made to Washington in 1801, recorded in later entries in his Mississippi journal. There he met President Jefferson's secretary, Meriwether Lewis (his old subordinate in the army), and likely told him of his Mississippi River experiences, perhaps thereby paving the way for Lewis to choose him as his second-in-command on the Corps of Discovery.

Trogdon's narrative of William Clark's travels demonstrates how important it is to consult alternate sources in presenting a story. Her account is enriched by her careful and cautious analysis and interpretation of those primary documents. She has successfully woven diverse

sources into a comprehensive account of some of the dangers that faced the newly formed United States at that time, an account that casts new light on the life of one of America's most famous figures between late 1797 and 1803. The voyage down the Mississippi helped shape the river experiences and skills that Clark put to such good use on what he would call his "western travels" – the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

*Brown Water: A Narrative of My Personal Journey in the Wake of Lewis and Clark*, by Butch Bouvier. Onawa, Iowa: Butch Bouvier (keelboat@long-lines.com), 2015. xv, 186 pp. Illustrations, glossary. \$20.00 paperback.

Reviewer Norman Fry is a retired Southeastern Community College American history instructor with a longstanding interest in life in Iowa's small towns and along the Mississippi River.

*Brown Water* is Butch Bouvier's personal narrative of his boat journey along the route taken by Lewis and Clark on the Missouri River. Bouvier describes himself as a "hands on" historian with a passion for living history, and his goal is not only to take the journey but to recreate the boats used by early river explorers. The narrative of *Brown Water* is composed of three parts. The first is Bouvier's own narrative describing the boat building and the journey. The second narrative, written in journals given to the crew by the author, offers the volunteer crew's perspective on the river journey. The third narrative includes "Knowledge Nooks," short explanatory inserts that illustrate the history and techniques of boat building.

Rather than a standard history, *Brown Water* is a modern boatwright's account of the building of traditional riverboats. Bouvier gives abundant details on the selection of wood for boat construction, the construction process, and the navigation by shallow draft keelboats and pirogues. Readers interested in riverboat architecture will find Bouvier's book an informative read. Readers fascinated by a personal adventure story, one that relates that adventure to the history of early Iowa and the perils of navigating the Missouri River, will find *Brown Water* a raconteur's delight.

*Working the Mississippi: Two Centuries of Life on the River*, by Bonnie Stepenoff. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015. xxii, 182 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$36.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is editor of *Open Rivers: Rethinking the Mississippi*, a digital journal published by the University of Minnesota.