

Voyage of Discovery

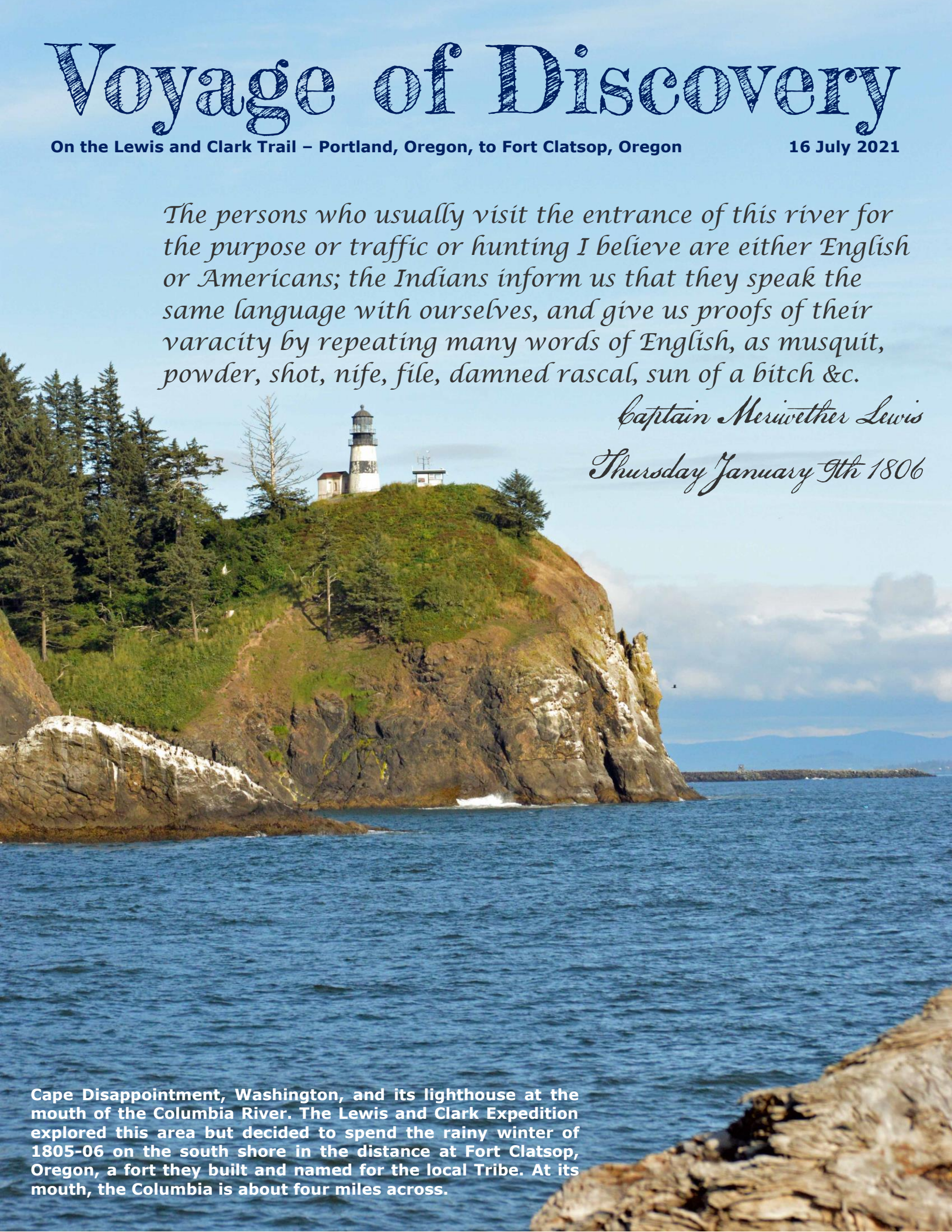
On the Lewis and Clark Trail – Portland, Oregon, to Fort Clatsop, Oregon

16 July 2021

The persons who usually visit the entrance of this river for the purpose of traffic or hunting I believe are either English or Americans; the Indians inform us that they speak the same language with ourselves, and give us proofs of their varacity by repeating many words of English, as musquit, powder, shot, nife, file, damned rascal, sun of a bitch &c.

Captain Meriwether Lewis

Thursday January 9th 1806

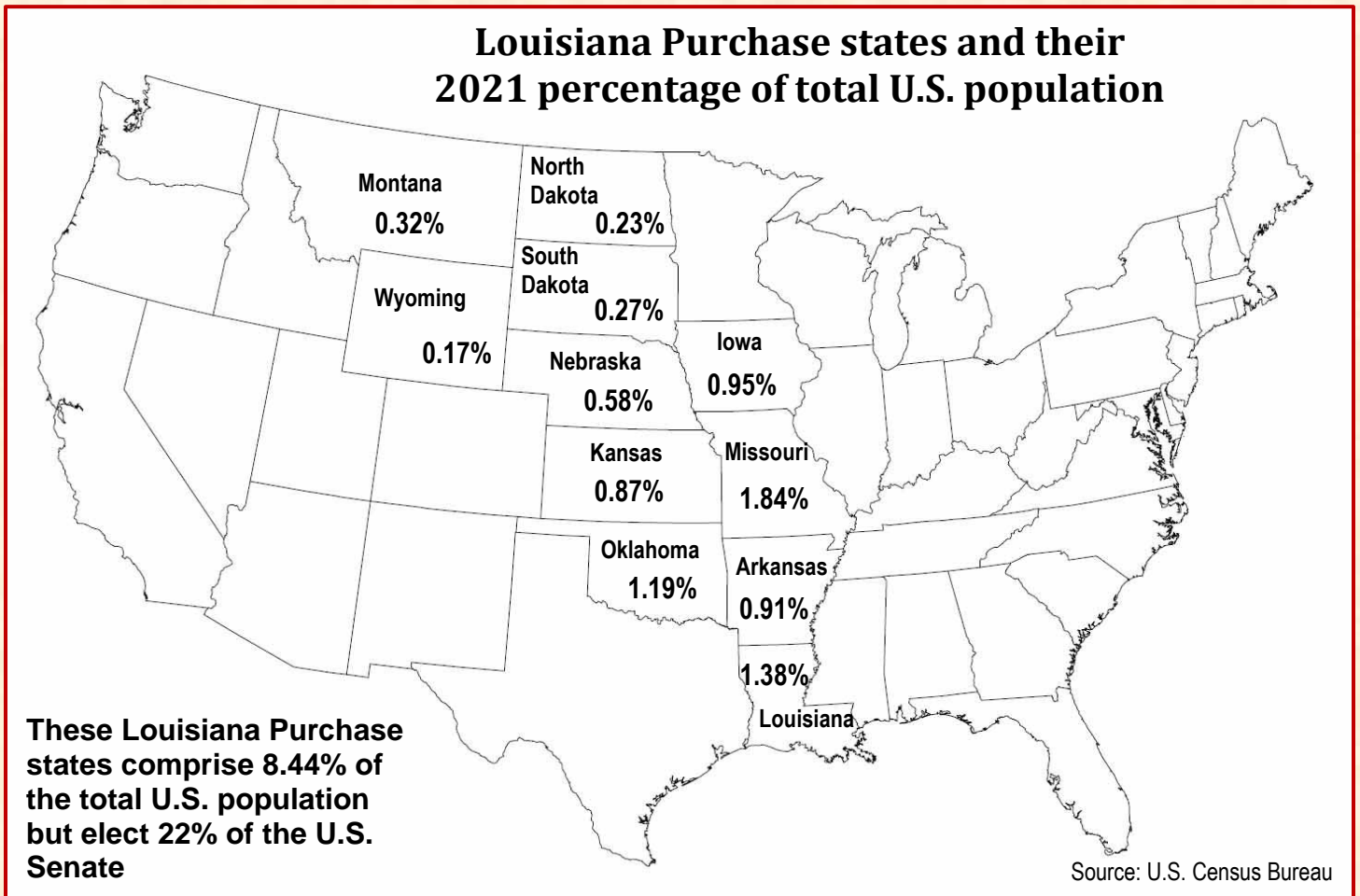
A photograph of Cape Disappointment, Washington, showing a lighthouse on a rocky cliff overlooking the ocean. The lighthouse is white with a black top section and is situated on a grassy hillside. The cliff is dark and rocky, with some green vegetation. The ocean is blue and calm, with a small wave breaking at the base of the cliff. In the background, there are mountains under a blue sky with some clouds.

Cape Disappointment, Washington, and its lighthouse at the mouth of the Columbia River. The Lewis and Clark Expedition explored this area but decided to spend the rainy winter of 1805-06 on the south shore in the distance at Fort Clatsop, Oregon, a fort they built and named for the local Tribe. At its mouth, the Columbia is about four miles across.



A reconstruction of what historians believe Fort Clatsop looked like. Neither the design or exact location are clear from expedition records, but it's known that it was near the present-day city of Astoria, Oregon.

Learning our lesson



As did the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Julie's and my expedition finally reached the Pacific Ocean. We got there Friday, July 16, fortified by the arrival of my wife, Emily, and our friend, Maureen Chandler, who took their weekend off and flew up to Portland, Oregon, to join our celebration.

When he reached the Pacific in November 1805, William Clark wrote in his journal – with spelling deficiencies that seem common to the people of their time – “Ocian in view! O! the joy.”

When we got there, Maureen said: “This is a lot farther from Portland than I thought.”

Indeed, it was. Portland is 60 miles inland but it's 100 river miles on the Columbia from its mouth on the Pacific, a place that had been visited somewhat regularly by British and U.S. ships for about 25 years before the expedition's arrival (see Clark's quote on the cover).

Reaching the Pacific over land, however, was a singular achievement and accomplished President Thomas Jefferson's first objective for the expedition.

“The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it's [sic] course & communication with the water of the Pacific ocean may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce,” Jefferson wrote to Lewis, the man he hand-picked as leader.¹

That the expedition didn't find a navigable water route across North America wasn't for lack of trying. The route ain't there.

But the expedition did bring back enormously important information to the government about the land it had acquired and the Tribes who lived there, the academics acknowledged last month in the University of Virginia-organized webinar I attended. The buffalo and the indigenous people would be the big losers.

The number of Americans who claim Native American ancestry today is just 1.5% of the 331.5 million U.S. population the U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2020.² Those 5 million Native Americans are estimated to be about half as many who lived here "pre-contact" with Europeans.³ Their population fell as a result of disease, poverty and 35 wars over a period of 135 years beginning with independence in 1776.⁴

Judging the territorial acquisition is similarly complicated. In 1803, when the Louisiana Territory was purchased, Jefferson and his contemporaries had no way to predict the enormous technological changes that would transform the agrarian world they lived in or revolutionize transportation and communication.

Agriculture would not become the foundation of American wealth Jefferson predicted, even though U.S. agricultural output ranks behind only China and India in total value and there's more of it in the Plains states than anywhere else in the country. U.S. farm output is less than 1% of the nation's GDP (gross domestic product), although that rises to 5.2% if you add in food manufacturing, restaurants, textiles and other industries related to ag.⁵

But agriculture is the foundation of the Great Plains economy. Eighty percent of its land area is crops, pasture or range.⁶ In 2019, when U.S. agricultural subsidies totaled \$26.9 billion, eight of the 10 states receiving the largest amounts were Louisiana Purchase states.⁷ The ranking of states by agriculture subsidies, led by Texas, is not the same as the ranking of states by value of agricultural output, led by California.⁸ That's because the crops receiving the most subsidies – corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and grain sorghum – are primarily grown on the Plains.⁹

If Meriwether Lewis had been in a hurry in 1803, he could have made it from Washington, D.C. to Saint Louis by horseback and boat in about five weeks. But children born that year would have seen the invention of the steam locomotive in their lifetimes, which made that trip a two-day journey by the time they were grandparents.¹⁰ It was the first significant time savings in land transportation since the Romans built the Appian Way in the 4th century BCE. Children born in 1803 could send a telegram from coast to coast in seconds by their 58th year.¹¹

Thus ended the Missouri River's predicted role as a major transportation/communication link.

Outside Alaska, a substantial portion of which is frozen year-round, the 11 prairie states on the map accompanying this story are the most sparsely settled region in the United States. But they punch above their weight in the U.S. Senate, and thus in national politics. Wyoming, North and South Dakota each have fewer people than the million who live in my city, San Jose. Those states plus Montana and Nebraska each have fewer people than the 2 million in my county of Santa Clara. All 11 combined still fall short of California's 39 million inhabitants.

What Jefferson correctly predicted was that white Americans from the east would come to occupy the continent from coast to coast. The museum at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis made this point crystal clear: every square inch of the nation's territory was taken from its native inhabitants by either contract or conquest. Most of the contractual acquisition of land was far from a square deal.

“... is it a business transaction when a man buys the lots adjoining your own, and builds high walls on three sides, erects powder magazines and glycerine manufactories, corrupts city councils, and, by means of extra privileges and excessive taxation, compels you to sell your valuable property for a mere song, by saying, ‘Take my price for your property, or run the risk of being blown up,’” wrote my new favorite source, Alfred Meacham.¹²

The land would become enormously valuable to the nation but not to its original owners.

In 1789 when the University of North Carolina, where I went to school, was founded, the university’s first gift was 20,000 acres of land from Col. Benjamin Smith, who had been given that land for his service in the Revolutionary War under George Washington. The land was then in North Carolina, which stretched to the Mississippi, but now is in Tennessee.^{13, 14}

This land plus about 180,000 additional acres in what’s now Tennessee, taken from the Cherokee and Chickasaw, were sold between 1818 and 1840 to make up for shortfalls in the university’s operating budget. In 1834 and 1835, sales of former Native American land covered 94% of the school’s budget.¹⁵

That was a model for the Morrill Act, passed by Congress in 1862 and signed by President Abraham. The law took 10.7 million acres from more than 250 tribes to create an endowment for what became the nation’s 52 “land grant colleges,” which were established to teach agriculture, science, military science and engineering. These schools include the 10 largest undergraduate student bodies in the country and are among the most prestigious in the United States including the universities of California, Florida and Georgia, Michigan State, Ohio State and Penn State universities, Virginia Tech and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 2020, funded by the Pulitzer Foundation, the Colorado-based nonprofit magazine *High Country News* documented the transactions of more than 79,000 parcels – 99% of the Morrill Act acreage – for which the United States paid less than \$400,000. It paid nothing for a quarter of those parcels. Adjusted for inflation, those land grants are worth more than \$500 million today.¹⁶

Some land-grant universities have begun acknowledging it in web pages like this one¹⁷ from North Carolina State University, the land-grant university in my home state.

If expanded to refer to our entire nation, it reads like the summary lesson of our trip:

“We would like to honor the land beneath us. North Carolina State University sits on land that was originally stewarded by two Indigenous tribes: the Tuscarora and the Catawba tribes.

“We honor these tribes today by recognizing that this institution of higher education is built on land stolen from those who were here before the colonizers arrived. Additionally, this land has borne witness to over 400 years of the enslavement, torture, and systematic mistreatment of African people and their descendants.

“Indigenous Americans since long before their first contact with European settlers, shared their knowledge of the land and its resources and have continued to play a vital role in the development of our local communities, North Carolina, and the nation.

“We honor these people today and every day by recognizing them in order to break the cycle of colonization and the continued erasure of Indigenous and Black peoples. We must acknowledge the history of the spaces and places we occupy to both understand and unlearn the many ways that we have been socialized.”

Notes

- ¹ **Jefferson's Instructions to Meriwether Lewis**, website of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc., the private nonprofit that owns Thomas Jefferson's Monticello <https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/louisiana-lewis-clark/preparing-for-the-expedition/jefferson-s-instructions-to-lewis/>
- ² **Quick Facts**, U.S. Census Bureau, population base April 1, 2020 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>
- ³ **Native American Population 2021**, World Population Review <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/native-american-population>
- ⁴ **List of American Indian Wars**, Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_American_Indian_Wars
- ⁵ **Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy**, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 2, 2021 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>
- ⁶ **Great Plains**, Agroforestry: Enhancing Resiliency in U.S. Agricultural Landscapes Under Changing Conditions, USDA Forest Service https://www.fs.fed.us/research/publications/gtr/gtr_wo96/GTR-WO-96-AppendixA-Great-Plains.pdf
- ⁷ **Total USDA – Subsidies**, EWG's Farm Subsidy Database, Environmental Working Group, 2019 <https://farm.ewg.org/progdetail.php?fips=00000&progcode=total&yr=2019&page=states®ionname=theUnitedStates>
The top 10 states, in descending order, are: Texas, \$2.4 billion; Iowa, \$2.3 billion; Illinois, \$2.1 billion; Kansas, \$1.8 billion; Minnesota, \$1.6 billion; North Dakota, \$1.6 billion; Nebraska, \$1.4 billion; Missouri \$1.3 billion; South Dakota, \$1.3 billion; and Indiana, \$1 billion.
- ⁸ **FAQs**, USDA, Economic Research Service <https://www.ers.usda.gov/faqs/#Q1>
- ⁹ **Federal farm subsidies: What the data says**, USA Facts 2020 <https://usafacts.org/articles/federal-farm-subsidies-what-data-says/>
- ¹⁰ **Travel time is the forgotten breakthrough of the past 200 years**, by Phil Edwards, Vox, 2015 <https://www.vox.com/2015/3/11/8187033/maps-travel-times>
- ¹¹ **Western Union completes the first transcontinental telegraph line**, This Day in History, October 24 <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/western-union-completes-the-first-transcontinental-telegraph-line>
- ¹² **Wigwam and War-Path**, by Alfred B. Meacham, 1875 <https://archive.org/details/wigwamandwarpat00meacgoog/page/n32/mode/2up>
- ¹³ **The Campaign for Carolina**, Carolina's history <https://campaign.unc.edu/carolina225/history/>
- ¹⁴ **Benjamin Smith**, by Dorothy Freeman Grant, 1994, NCPedia <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/smith-benjamin>
- ¹⁵ **Without profit from stolen Indigenous lands, UNC would have gone broke 100 years ago**, by Lucas P. Kelley and Garrett W. Wright, Sept 15, 2020, Scalawag Magazine, a North Carolina-based nonprofit journal that covers the South from the perspective of minority communities <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/09/indian-land-university-profit/>
- ¹⁶ **Land-grab universities**, by Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone, March 3, 2020, *High Country News* <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.4/indigenous-affairs-education-land-grab-universities>. I originally quoted Dr. Lee in my earlier story in this newsletter series about "manifest destiny" at <https://bit.ly/2Unc1WJ>. He is an American history lecturer at Cambridge University in England; Ahtone, a member of the Kiowa Tribe, was then Indigenous Affairs editor and now is editor-in-chief of the *Texas Observer*. The story won the 2020 Polk Award for Education Reporting and the 2020 Investigative Reporters and Editors Award.
- ¹⁷ **Land Acknowledgement**, N.C. State University College of Education <https://ced.ncsu.edu/student-success-and-strategic-community-engagement/land-pledge/>



A national park ranger in period costume talks about the Lewis and Clark Expedition's rainy winter at Fort Clatsop.

What happened to ... ?

**Meriwether
Lewis**

Upon Lewis' return to Saint Louis, he was granted 1,600 acres / 650 hectares of land as his reward and was to begin work on publishing his journals. In 1807, a year after the expedition, President Jefferson appointed him territorial governor of all of Louisiana, basing him in Saint Louis. But Lewis was ineffective at both tasks. Historians have noted what appears to be periods of mental depression in his life, particularly in descriptions written by Jefferson, and that Lewis seemed to lose enthusiasm for the expedition once it reached the Pacific. In 1809, Jefferson summoned him to Washington because of slow work on his journals and indebtedness. Lewis wrote a will before his departure and, most historians believe, his death near Nashville, Tennessee, from a gunshot wound was a suicide. His grave is near Hohenwald, Tennessee. He never married.

William Clark

Clark was appointed general of the militia of the Louisiana Territory and the agent for Indian Affairs in 1807. For years his primary role living in Saint Louis was as the primary U.S. diplomat dealing with American Indians. He became Louisiana's territorial governor in 1813. Clark was married twice (his first wife died) and had eight children plus Halahtookit, the son he fathered with a Nez Perce woman in an unconfirmed Native American story while on the expedition. I wrote about at <https://bit.ly/3zIE6My>. He is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis, which I wrote about at <https://bit.ly/2UTNich>.

Sacagawea

Most historians believe Sacagawea died in 1812, about the age of 25. Clark reported in his own notes written in 1825 or 1826 that she was dead and other contemporary writings support that. After her first child with Toussaint Charbonneau, Jean Baptiste, she had a daughter Lizette, who is believed to have died in childhood. A grave believed to be Sacagawea's is in Mobridge, South Dakota. However, the oral history of the Comanche Tribe, which now lives on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, is that she traveled the Great Plains and eventually settled with the Comanche, who called her "Porivo," which means "chief woman." There is a grave marker for her at the reservation headquarters at Fort Washakie, Wyoming.

**Jean Baptiste
Charbonneau**

William Clark, who was especially fond of Jean Baptiste and called him "Pomp" and "Pompey," made an offer to Sacagawea and Charbonneau to adopt their son and provide him an education in Saint Louis. The family moved to Saint Louis in 1807 a year after the expedition and, in 1809, left him in Clark's care when they returned to Mandan, North Dakota. Even after they returned to Saint Louis, Jean Baptiste remained with Clark and was educated at St. Louis Academy, a Jesuit school now called St. Louis University High School. He spoke French, English and Shoshone at the time, making him valuable as an interpreter on the frontier. Working in that role as an 18-year-old near what is now Kansas City, Missouri, Charbonneau met Duke Friedrich Paul Wilhelm of Württemberg, Germany, a naturalist who was touring in the United States. He returned to Germany with the duke in 1823 and lived at the palace for six years where he learned German and Spanish. He also fathered a child during his visit. When he returned to the United States, he worked as an explorer, guide, fur trapper and other jobs in the West. In 1848 he went to California as one of the earliest to join the Gold Rush and later was manager of the Orleans Hotel in the town of Auburn. A marker noting his residency was placed under a cedar tree at Auburn's Old Fire House. He is believed to have died in 1866 in Danner, Oregon, now a ghost town, where there is a grave marker placed by the Malheur County Daughters of the American Revolution. Later, markers were placed there by the Oregon Historical Society and the Lemhi Shoshone Tribe.

Encountering Sacagawea in ...



Kansas City



Three Forks, Montana



Portland



Fort Clatsop, Oregon