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SACAJAWEA

An interesting bit of history reviewed by Clifford McLeod, as follows:

"There is nothing so strange as the truth," and the actual tabulated facts in the life of Sacajawea, the Bird Woman, prove the quotation. In the year 1804 President Jefferson sent out an expedition to the west in charge of Lewis and Clark. Late in the autumn they arrived at the Mandan village on the upper Missouri. Winter being upon them, it was imperative that they find winter quarters, and, luckily, the Mandans were friendly and well-deposed toward the white explorers.

The Mandans were good workers, but very poor. They built dome shaped houses of small limbs, about three inches in diameter, and covered them with mud. Many such houses formed a village and such a village presented a curious appearance. These Mandan villages were scattered along the banks of the Missouri around the present city of Bismarck, North Dakota.

This was a good wintering place for the explorers, and they were indeed fortunate to find a young Indian woman, Sacajawea, of another tribe, who was of the utmost service to them.

Many years before the Minnatarees clashed with the Shoshones, or Snake River Indians, and by their spirited and unexpected attack had defeated the Snakes. When the Minnatarees left they took several captives, among them the maiden Sacajawea.

Charboneau, a Frenchman, living at one of the Mandan villages, saw the girl as she was traveling with a roaming tribe in the upper Missouri country. Charboneau wanted to marry her and after he had paid the Minnatarees a sum of money and had given many other things they were united in marriage.

In the spring, Charboneau and his wife accompanied Lewis and Clark on their western journey. Sacajawea was delighted with going with the explorers to the "Land of the Setting Sun" beyond the Rockies. There was the hope that she would see her people. She longed to see again her own blood, her mother, father, sisters and brothers. In the summer of 1805 she found the spot where her people had been defeated by the Minnatarees. This was on the Jefferson

fork of the Missouri River. The expedition did not cross the divide until August. At the time of the battle the Shoshones were hunting buffalo in the country east of the mountains, although their home was to the west of the Rockies.

The weary travelers on August 12, 1805, climbed to a height of land where they could see the waters of a river that flowed westward, and none of the party, not even the guide, knew how to continue the journey. Captain Lewis went ahead and found some Shoshones and persuaded them to return to the main party with him. The meeting of the two parties is told as follows in the Lewis and Clark journal:

"We drew near the camp, and just as we approached it, a woman made her way through the crowd toward Sacajawea. Recognizing each other, they embraced with tender affections. The meeting of the two young women had in it something peculiarly touching, not only from the ardent manner in which their feelings were expressed, but also from the real interest of their situation. They had been companions in childhood. In the war with the Minnatarees they had both been taken prisoners in the same battle; they had shared and softened the rigors of their captivity until one of them had escaped from their enemies with scarce a hope of ever seeing her friend rescued from their hands.

"When the chief of the Shoshones and the white men were talking, Sacajawea recognized the chief of the Shoshones as her brother. Sacajawea instantly jumped up and ran and embraced him, throwing him her blanket and weeping profusely. After some conversation between them, she resumed her seat, and attempted to interpret for us, but her new situation seemed to overpower her, and she was frequently interrupted by tears."

After the council was over, Sacajawea learned that all of her family were dead excepting two brothers, and a small boy of her oldest sister, which she immediately took to rear.

After this meeting, which insured safety to the expedition, they passed the junction of the Solomon and Lemhi rivers and Clark named the river formed by the union of the two, "Lewis River." By the Bitter Root

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