

Iron Wills and Men of Leather
The story of the Lewis & Clark Expedition
By DAVID C. HINZE

Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor

Nathaniel Pryor joined the expedition in October 1803 as one of the three sergeants to lead the men. He was first cousin to Sergeant Charles Floyd, who may have recommended him to William Clark.

The sergeant's father died in 1791 and Pryor became a ward of the court. He married into a pioneer family of the region when he wed Peggy Patten in May 1798. Unfortunately his wife died soon afterwards.

Pryor was one of the nine key Kentuckians central to the success of the voyage. Considered, "a man of ability and character" Pryor often assumed the responsibility of army administration.

He was appointed as presiding authority on June 29, 1804 at the court-martial of Privates John Collins and Hugh Hall, both charged with being drunk on duty.

The penalties proved to be severe as Collins was sentenced to, "receive one hundred lashes on his bare back," and Hall, 50 lashes.

Pryor became an integral part of the expedition. He would travel with Lewis and Clark across the Rocky Mountains and return to St. Louis.

The two Captains kept the sergeant very busy. He usually accompanied one of the two Captains on missions away from the keel-boat. Some of these side adventures took him more than 60 miles away from the main body of men.

Upon his return to St. Louis with the expedition he remained in the army, and escorted several Indian chiefs to Washington. D.C. and back up the Missouri River.

In 1808 Pryor was temporarily reunited with William Clark. He escorted the famous explorer down the Ohio and back to St. Louis. Pryor, now a lieutenant, undertook a secret mission for William Clark against the Indian leader Tecumseh and his brother Prophet.

Pryor left the army in 1810 and obtained a trader's license from his former boss. He operated a lead furnace on the Galena River.

In January 1812 the Winnebagoes attacked his small settlement and Pryor barely managed a daring escape across the ice floes in the Missouri. Following his near brush with death he rejoined the army, this time as a captain, and fought in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.

A notation on the cover of a book owned by William Clark noted Pryor was at Ft. Smith, Arkansas from 1825-1828. He returned to Indian trading and cohabitated with an Osage woman with whom he fathered several children.

He was a prominent citizen the remainder of his life and his legacy was secure when the Pryor Mountains, Pryor River and his burial place in Oklahoma were named after this valuable member of the expedition.

Dave Hinze is a professional historian and tour guide. He leads tours and presents at conferences on Lewis & Clark, and other topics pertaining to early American history, for the American History Education Association. For information about this series or one of AHEA's many history tours you can contact Hinze at 1-800-298-1861.

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