

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

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LESSON 04 SESSION 05

4.12 Lewis and Clark

In May of 1804, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark proceeded to St. Louis, Mo., in obedience to the following order issued by President Jefferson by authority of Congress:

Go up the Missouri to its sources; find out, if possible, the fountains of the Mississippi and the true position of the Lake of the Woods: cross the stony mountains, and having found the nearest river flowing into the Pacific, go down it to the sea.

4.12.1 The expedition.

Outfitting in St. Louis, Captain Lewis and Captain Clark, with four sergeants and twenty-three privates of the Regular Army, and an Indian interpreter, began the long, tedious journey up the swift current of the Missouri, reaching its headwaters approximately one year later. Crossing the Rocky Mountains, through the Bitter Root Range, they found the Clearwater River. Proceeding down its course through exceedingly rough country to the Snake River, in what is now Idaho, they continued on to the Northwest to the junction of the Snake with the lordly Columbia.

Launching their canoes upon the broad reaches of this most beautiful stream in October, 1805, they drifted down to the Pacific Ocean, reaching their destination November 7, one month later. Returning from there to St. Louis, with their surveys and maps of the regions explored, they completed the required journey in a little over two years' time.

4.12.2 Claim of United States to territory established.

How little was known of the great domain secured to the United States in the purchase of the Louisiana Territory is revealed in part by the wording of the President's order. How much was learned and its importance to the Nation was contained in part in the report those two intrepid Army officers gave upon their return.

The most important result obtained was the firm establishment of the claim of the United States by overland exploration, its first claim being made through the earlier discovery of this north Pacific country by Capt. Robert Gray, of Boston, who sailed his ship from the Pacific Ocean up a great river in 1792, naming it the Columbia, in honor of the three hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus.

4.12.3 The new country.

The Lewis and Clark expedition gave the people their first idea of the vast area, enormous natural resources, and grandeur of the Pacific Northwest. They were the forerunners of what soon became a mighty host of emigrants into the land of the setting sun.

4.13 **Rev, Marcus Whitman**

Thirty years after the Lewis and Clark expedition, Rev. Marcus Whitman packed all his earthly possessions in a wagon and, with his bride, trekked across the plains and mountains, over what became known as the Oregon Trail, to the Walla Walla country as a missionary to the Indians. Impressed with the beauty and richness of the country, he seemed to have lost sight of his special mission, as seven years later he took the trail back to civilization, there to urge his countrymen to follow him in the possession of this new land.

4.13.1 Western emigration.

Acting as guide for this band of emigrants, recruited largely in New England, he led them ever westward in the all but impossible journey of nearly 4,000 miles. The story of the hardships and perils, the labor, sickness, and starvation, the fight with Indians and nature, serves again to prove the sturdiness, self-reliance, and courage of the pioneers of America.

4.13.2 Sterling qualities of racial stock.

Every advancing step in the progress of our Nation emphasizes the sterling qualities of the racial stock that, handed down to succeeding generations, has given the urge and the will to do the fruits of which are today enjoyed by a prosperous and happy posterity.

4.13.3 Boundary Adjustment

These men and women, who so bravely followed Whitman over the Oregon Trail, saved that great country to the United States. The cry in 1846 was "The British must go — The whole of Oregon or none — 54-40 or fight." In the spirit of fair play and justice, the differences with Great Britain were adjusted, the boundaries were fixed, and another great step in the expansion and settlement of our Nation was accomplished.

4.14 Gen. John C. Frémont

As a junior officer of the United States Army, at the age of 29 years, Frémont was designated by the Secretary of War to explore a route from western Missouri to the "South Pass."

4.14.1 Exploration of the Southwest.

In accomplishing his mission he followed the Arkansas River to its source in the Rocky Mountains. On a later expedition he made his way through Utah to the Great Salt Lake and then through the deserts of Nevada and across the Sierra Nevada, where he found his journey leading through the mammoth trees and along the roaring torrents of the California country, reaching the Mexican city of Monterey, some 130 miles south of San Francisco on the Pacific Ocean.

4.14.2 Mexican War.

Through exercise of diplomacy he was able to remain in this vicinity until after the outbreak of the Mexican War, when he headed a revolt against that Government and freed the territory of California from Mexican authority, becoming the governor of the territory which was ceded to the United States by treaty following the conclusion of the war with Mexico.

4.14.3 A contemporary.

Contemporary with Frémont, another brilliant young Army officer, Colonel Kearney (afterwards brigadier general), fought his way across the plains of Texas to Santa Fe, N. Mex., and after its capture continued across the deserts of New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California to a union of his small army with Frémont in California.

4.14.4 Territorial acquisition.

As a result of the splendid work of these men coupled with the success of Generals Scott and Taylor in old Mexico, there was added to the domain of the United States the last of the great southwestern area, a territory of nearly 1,000,000 square miles, a section of our country which within one year thereafter became the goal of the adventurous spirits of the world due to the discovery of fabulous gold deposits along many of the water courses flowing to the Pacific Ocean from the western slopes of the mountains bordering eastern California.