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The John Evans 1796-97 Map Of The Missouri River

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One of the curious twists of Great Plains history is that the first accurate eyewitness map of the Missouri River in what is now North and South Dakota—the historic home of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Indians and of their nomadic neighbors—was produced by a Welshman who had come to the United States to seek evidence for something that never existed: the illusory "Welsh Indians." The inquisitive Welsh explorer, John Thomas Evans (1770–99), did not find what he came to discover, but he produced what was to be one of the most important maps available to Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in planning and executing their famous expedition up the Missouri River in 1804.

Evans's map shows his route up the Missouri River from Fort Charles, located in what is now northeastern Nebraska near modern Sioux City, Iowa, to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages at the mouth of the Knife River in present-day North Dakota. The map illustrates in detail the major features of the Missouri River channel and shows all of its principal tributaries. It is a landmark of Missouri River cartography. Later mappers relied heavily upon it, as no less than ten secondary English, French, and Spanish maps of the period from 1797 to 1811 bear unmistakable evidence of their dependence on Evans's work.1

The Evans map was especially important to the Lewis and Clark expedition. Clark repeatedly referred to it and verified Evans's earlier observations. Indeed, Evans (whose name Clark variously spelled Evins, Evens, and Ivens) named all of the major tributaries of the Missouri River in the area his map covered. In fact, it remained for Lewis and Clark to name only a few minor streams below the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. Until they reached those villages they made only "secondary and supplementary" maps of the Missouri River, so precise and detailed was Evans's work. It was a major "road map" of the expedition for no less than seven hundred miles.2

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FIG. 1. Sheet 2 of the Evans map, showing the Missouri River in southcentral South Dakota. Compare with figure 3.
THE MACKAY-EVANS EXPEDITION
OF 1795-97

Evans, together with James Mackay, led an expedition up the Missouri River between 1795 and 1797.\(^3\) Sponsored by Spain, the party left Saint Louis in August, 1795, accompanied by thirty-three men—a party not much smaller than that of Lewis and Clark nine years later. In November they reached the Omaha Indians and built Fort Charles near their village in what is now Dakota County, located in northeastern Nebraska. Mackay subsequently sent Evans up the Missouri to obtain information on intertribal relations. Evans went as far as the mouth of the White River, which is located in south central South Dakota. Here he was forced to retreat by hostile Dakotas, and he returned to Fort Charles.

In early 1796 Mackay again dispatched Evans upriver, this time with instructions to "discover a passage from the sources of the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean."\(^4\) With these impossible orders in hand, Evans ascended the Missouri River with a party of unknown size and succeeded in reaching the Mandan and Hidatsa villages at the mouth of the Knife River, in present North Dakota, on September 23, 1796. He remained near these villages through the following winter.

A few days after his arrival he took "Possession of the fort built at the Mandaine Village" by British Northwest Company employees. This installation, which he occupied and renamed "Fort Makay," is probably the post described by Juan Fotman (or Tremont) as having been built on the right (or south) bank of the Missouri River between the Mandan and Hidatsa villages by Rene Jussaume’s trading party a year earlier, in late October, 1795.\(^5\)

Evans apparently left the area on May 9, 1797. He returned to Saint Louis by July 15, judging from a notation dated four days later that appears on the back of one of the sheets of his map: "July 19th 1797 at St. Louis / Suns meridian attitude 72..24." The note is in the same hand as that of the person who drafted the map.\(^6\)

The Mackay and Evans expedition up the Missouri River was the most important one preceding that of Lewis and Clark. The geographical information they gathered was the best available for the region until 1805, when Clark sent a map of what was to become western United States to Washington from Fort Mandan.\(^7\)

The map produced by the expedition was based almost entirely on Evans’s 1796–97 experience. Evans had not been on the Missouri before; Mackay had visited the Mandans in 1787 from Canada while in the service of the British Northwest Company, but he had no previous experience in the region below their villages. Mackay subsequently moved to Saint Louis, then in Spanish hands, where in 1794 he is believed to have supplied information for the Soulard map of 1795.\(^8\) The extent of his influence on this map was slight, however, because the Mandan and Hidatsa territory is shown in only the most rudimentary detail.\(^9\)

Nevertheless, he did have firsthand knowledge of the area near the mouth of the Knife River that he later passed along to Lewis and Clark.

THE EVANS MAP

The original map that Evans produced of his exploration from Fort Charles to the Mandan-Hidatsa villages has been lost, but a copy of it is now in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. This copy first appeared in 1903, when it was discovered by Reuben Gold Thwaites in New York in the Clark-Voorhis Collection of Lewis and Clark documents. Thwaites published it in his edition of the original journals of Lewis and Clark, believing that the map was a Clark original of the Missouri River beginning at Saint Charles, Missouri, since the map commenced at Fort Charles.\(^10\) This blunder, precipitated in part because Clark’s own route maps from Camp Dubois to the Mandan-Hidatsa villages have been lost, had the effect of concealing the identity of the Evans map for forty years. Its
correct identification was made by Aubrey Diller, who first recognized its significance in his classic 1946 paper, "Maps of the Missouri River before Lewis and Clark."\textsuperscript{11}

Diller reported that this copy of the Evans map had been "sent to Lewis by Jefferson on 13 January 1804, and [is] cited by Evans' name in Lewis and Clark's journals."\textsuperscript{12} President Jefferson obtained this copy from William Henry Harrison, governor of Indiana Territory.\textsuperscript{13} The extant map is clearly not the original: in addition to the fact that Harrison said it was a copy, the sheets are clean and show none of the wear one would expect of a map produced in the field.

The map is in seven parts. Six of the sheets show the Missouri River from Fort Charles to the mouth of the Knife River. Sheet 4 has been torn in half, and was published by Thwaites in two parts. These six sheets may be overlaid, using the 1-inch grid subdividing each sheet, to form one continuous, 42-inch-long map of the river. The scale is variable, but ranges from about eight to ten miles to the inch. The map's precision indicates direct observation by an eyewitness. A seventh map, clearly part of the same set, is an impressionistic chart of the Missouri River from the mouth of the Knife River to the Rocky Mountains. Apparently based on hearsay information that Evans obtained during his stay near the Mandans, it is on a much smaller scale than the preceding sheets and carries no grid. Like the first six sheets, it is labeled in either French or English and is done in the same hand. All notations on each of the sheets were made in brown ink.

Whoever composed the map (whether Evans himself or one of his party) was English-speaking for all notes on features along the river plus all astronomical observations are in English. Evans probably obtained the French names for some streams from his crew because, like later explorers on the Missouri, he was undoubtedly accompanied by French \textit{engagés} and must also have met French fur traders on the river. The precision with which the map was drawn suggests that its author was a person skilled in the surveyor's craft. We know that Evans was a surveyor in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, for a time after his return from the expedition.\textsuperscript{14} So, although it is unlikely that anyone other than Evans drew the original map, the surviving portion of his journal sheds no light on this question.\textsuperscript{15}

Regardless of authorship, the Evans map provides the earliest place names for this part of the Missouri basin. Most of these names have continued in use to the present time, although some of them have been translated into English.

Many of both the English and French inscriptions are difficult to read. This occasionally led to errors by Clark, not to mention persons not familiar with the map and the history of the area it depicts. For example, lack of clarity in the appearance of the word "Ponca" led to a misreading of it as "Pania" (that is, as Pawnee) by Clark and later students of western history, thereby producing what Diller has described as a "paper invasion by the Pawnee, and a paper colony of the Pawnee on the Missouri."\textsuperscript{16}

In order to resolve these and other ambiguities, I have made a new draft of the entire Evans map in order to make it more useful and accessible to scholars. My maps are included here (Figs. 2–8). They are based upon a personal inspection of the original copy in the Beinecke Library at Yale University. A facsimile of Sheet 2 of the map is reproduced here to illustrate the nature of the original (Fig. 1). All symbols of physical features are reproduced exactly as they appear on the original. I have replaced the original transcriptions with modern type, but have retained their original placement, which in some cases appears capricious or thoughtless. Similarly, the positions of the grid, the directional symbols, and the identifying numbers of the sheets have all been retained, although some inscriptions have been rotated 90 or 180 degrees so they may be read without turning the map. A few inscriptions on the original map were scratched out, either by the draftsman, copyist, or later users such as William Clark. Some of these inscriptions can still be read, in whole or in part, on the original. I have indicated in parentheses what I
FIG. 2. Sheet 1 of the Evans map, from Fort Charles (near modern Sioux City, Iowa) to "I au Parish" (modern Hamilton Island), South Dakota. Size of original: 10 by 15 7/8 inches.
believe to be the wording in these instances. All wording on the map has been transcribed, including several marginal notations on Sheets 1 and 2. Most of these notations consist of figures in Clark’s hand, although the figures directly south of “R & village Pettite Arch” on Sheet 1 are in a hand not identifiable as that of either Clark or the original copyist.

Later Additions to the Map

Although the Evans map is essential for understanding the geographical knowledge of the northern plains in the years before the Lewis and Clark expedition, it must be used with caution. It contains not only the data recorded by Evans in 1796 or 1797, but also a variety of additions made by later users. In at least one instance, for example, an inscription appears in Mackay’s hand that was probably added in 1803.

The most extensive modification of the map was by William Clark. Inscriptions I believe to be in Clark’s hand appear on each sheet. On Sheet 1 he wrote “Rapid R” and “R que courre” at the mouth of the Niobrara River (Fig. 2). On Sheet 3 a triangular symbol labeled “Teton” is shown on the bottomlands just above the mouth of the “Litle Missurie” (sic) or modern Bad River (Fig. 4). Clark added this notation because of the large Teton Indian encampment that the expedition met at this location. An unidentified triangular symbol also appears on the west bank of the Missouri about halfway between the mouth of modern Chantier Creek and that of the Cheyenne River, on what appears to be the bluff edge about opposite the later site of the second Fort Sully. This may have been added by Clark to denote the Teton Indians he refers to in the journals at this location. Both Indian camps are marked on copies of Clark’s maps showing the expedition’s route made for Prince Maximilian in 1833. Another feature on this sheet which appears to be Clark’s handiwork is the sketch of the horse in the lower left-hand corner. This resembles other sketches believed to have been made by Clark. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that a copyist would duplicate such a sketch, even if it appeared on the original map.

Other examples of Clark’s additions appear on Sheet 4, where “Marapa R,” or modern Oak Creek, is placed above the Grand River (Fig. 5). A nearby island is labeled as “I au Brim,” and probably represents modern Ashly Island; and an inscription in Clark’s hand reads “I Ricaras,” probably in reference to the Arikara village that was located on an island above Oak Creek. Above this island Clark labeled two streams that enter the Missouri from the northwest as “Kakawissassa or Light[ing] Crow,” and “Parnorni.” Two oval symbols are set on either side of the latter creek, denoting the twin Arikara villages there that are now collectively known as the Leavenworth site. “Kakawissassa” Creek was named by Clark after an Arikara chief. Since Clark so carefully noted new information on this part of the map, did he also add the symbols for the Leavenworth village site?

Near the top of Sheet 4 two streams are shown to enter the Missouri from the northwest; both are labeled in Clark’s hand. The lower one is “Pocass or Hay,” and the upper one, “Piaheto or Eagle Feather.” Both streams were named after Arikara chiefs and are probably modern Blackhawk Creek and John Grass Creek, respectively. Modern Spring Creek, shown on the Evans map as heading in a lake a few miles from the Missouri River, was labeled by Clark as “Stone Idol C.” Pocass, Kakawissassa, and Piaheto (as Clark spelled them) were the names of the chiefs of the three largest divisions of the Arikara Indians, as noted by Pierre-Antoine Tabeau. Tabeau had wintered at the Arikara villages near the mouth of the Grand River in 1803, and was a valuable source of information for Lewis and Clark.

On Sheet 5, the term “Chiss.chect” was applied by Clark to modern Little Heart River (Fig. 6). An inscription on an unidentified creek to the south of it was scratched out, perhaps also by Clark.
FIG. 3. Sheet 2 of the Evans map, from "I au Vase" (modern Mud Island) to "I au Biche" (probably modern Fort George Island), just east of Pierre, South Dakota. Size of original: 5 3/4 by 8 inches.
Evans’s Sheet 6 depicts the area between the Heart and the Knife rivers (Fig. 7). The course of the Missouri in that area is shown much as it appears on later and more detailed maps, except that the tight, U-shaped bend near the center of the map had not yet been cut off to form modern Painted Woods Lake. By the time Lewis and Clark passed this spot on October 24, 1804, the bend had been cut off to form an island. In his field notes, Clark dates the cutoff as having taken place seven years earlier—that is, the date of the Evans map.26

There are at least two notations on Sheet 6 in Clark’s hand: the inscription “Village Chisschect R” on the right bank of the Heart River, and “Wah hoo toon—Wind,” on the map margin. The meaning of the latter term is unknown. Another notation appears to be in the hand of James Mackay, on the basis of the 1797 sample of his handwriting reproduced by Nasatir and a variety of other documents.27 This inscription appears north of the mouth of the Knife River and shows the “Track to Catepoi river.” Not only is the handwriting similar to Mackay’s, but the spellings of “Catepoi river” (the Q’Appelle River) and “Lake Ouinipique” (Winnipeg) are the same (except for one letter) as those used in Mackay’s journal.28 Evidently Mackay added this notation some time after he visited Lewis and Clark at Camp Dubois near Saint Louis on January 10, 1804.29 Since this visit occurred three days before Jefferson dispatched the Evans map from Washington to Camp Dubois, it is obvious that Mackay must have visited the explorers again at a later date and added the notation to the map at that time.

Bluffs along the Missouri are shown by hatch marks on Sheet 6 and are twice designated by the term “Yellow Ecore,” a corrupted spelling of the French word accore (bluff or bank). The “R du Coer” on Evans’s map is the present-day Heart River.
FIG. 5. Sheet 4 of the Evans map, from "I good hope" (a modern unnamed island) to "Piaheto / Eagle Feather" Creek (modern John Grass Creek), South Dakota. Size of original: 6 1/8 by 7 3/4 inches.
Most of the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on Sheet 6, marked “Wanutaris & Mandans,” can be precisely identified with modern archaeological sites because they are described by later travelers and are shown on more detailed maps.

The Mandan and Hidatsa villages at the mouth of the Knife River are depicted by two symbols: open circles and solid ones. Donald J. Lehmer believed that the open circles were Mandan villages, and the solid ones were Hidatsa. The open circle farthest down the Missouri River is the Mandan Deapolis site, and the one directly across the river to the northwest is the Mandan Black Cat site. The solid symbol north of the Knife River is the Big Hidatsa site, and the one on the Missouri River below the mouth of the Knife is the Amahami site. The open circle between the latter two sites is probably the Sakakawea site. The dichotomy in symbols suggested by Lehmer is supported by information obtained by David Thompson when he visited the Mandan and Hidatsa villages in December, 1797, and January, 1798, and which is contained on his 1798 map and in his field notes for the days he was in those villages during the winter following Evans’s departure in May of 1797. Thompson says that the middle village consisted of thirty-seven Mandan and fifteen

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FIG. 6. Sheet 5 of the Evans map, from about the modern North Dakota-South Dakota boundary to “Chiss.cheutt R” (modern Little Heart River), North Dakota. Size of original: 7 3/4 by 6 inches.
Hidatsa dwellings. Under those circumstances, it is reasonable that Evans would have plotted it as a Mandan community.

On Sheet 7 the word "Conjecturall" is written in Clark's hand, upside down, across the Rocky Mountains along the upper reaches of the Missouri River, reflecting Clark's justified pessimism about the map's precision (Fig. 8). An enigmatic symbol, but obviously intended to depict a fort on a stream flowing west from the Rocky Mountains, is shown on the map. Perhaps, as John Allen suggests, this indicates "a European establishment (possibly Russian since the Louisiana Spanish of Evans's time knew of Russian posts in the Pacific Northwest)."

Two other puzzling features appear on this sheet. One of them is the notation "Shevitoon,"
FIG. 8. "Sheet 7" of the Evans map, showing the Missouri River from the Mandan and Hidatsa villages in North Dakota to the Rocky Mountains in Montana. Size of original: 14 7/8 by 9 3/8 inches.
just north of the mouth of the Yellowstone River. This term is also applied to an Indian group shown on the 1795 Arrowsmith map down the Missouri River from the Mandans. A group called the “Shevitaun” is also noted in Mackay’s journal. From its listing between the “Sious” and “Corbeaus” (Crows), one is led to suspect that the group was a nomadic one, but its identity is unknown. The other puzzling feature is the “Village de Boitife” (the spelling is not distinct) on the middle reaches of the Yellowstone River. Its identity is also unknown.

Although Mackay had given Evans instructions in 1796 “for crossing this continent,” there is no evidence that he ever went west of the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. The information on Sheet 7 about the area west of those villages could only have come from Indian sources or from Canadian traders whom Evans met at the mouth of the Knife River. However, these traders could only have obtained it from native informants. The sketchlike character of the map above the Knife River and its lack of precision compared to that which characterize the maps showing the area below the Knife are evidence enough that it was not based on Evans’s own exploration.

CONCLUSIONS

John Evans's map of his explorations of the Missouri River in what is now North and South Dakota is the earliest known eyewitness map of the area. By deleting later additions to the map apparently added by James Mackay and William Clark, one can obtain a more precise notion of the original map, which was an important source for Clark’s own maps of the Missouri River. Furthermore, Evans’s map served as a basis for later English, Spanish, and French maps until the publication of Clark’s map, which was first published in 1814. It rendered all earlier maps of the area obsolete.

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NOTES


3. The history of this expedition has been told many times. The reader wishing further details should consult A. P. Nasatir, “Anglo-Spanish Rivalry on the Upper Missouri,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 16 (December 1929): 359-82, (March 1930): 507-28; “John

17. John Logan Allen, author of Passage through the Garden, has independently confirmed my identifications with the aid of handwriting specialists.
19. Ibid., p. 173.
21. I am indebted to Bob Saindon, who has made an exhaustive study of Clark’s sketches, for this observation.
23. Ibid., p. 184.
24. Ibid., p. 185.
25. Ibid., pp. 185–86; see also A. H. Abel, Tabeau’s Narrative of Loisel’s Expedition to the Upper Missouri (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), pp. 124–25.
27. Nasatir, Before Lewis and Clark, 2:533. Microfilm copies of numerous documents by Mackay in the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri-Columbia Library were also consulted.
29. Osgood, Field Notes of Captain William Clark, p. 16.
31. Frank Stewart, in “Mandan and Hidatsa Villages in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” Plains Anthropologist 19 (November 1974): 287–301, suggests that this is the Lower Hidatsa site. On the basis of its archaeological content, however, it is surely the Sakakawea site. See Donald J. Lehmer, W. Raymond Wood, and C. L. Dill, “The Knife River Phase” (Report
submitted to the Interagency Archeological Services–Denver by the University of Missouri–Columbia and by Dana College, Blair, Nebraska, 1978).


34. A copy of this map is in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. It is discussed by Wheat, *Mapping the Transmississippi West*, 1:155, 175, 242; a small part of this very large map is illustrated in Allen, *Passage through the Garden*, figure 9, and shows the area in question.


36. Ibid., 1:107, n. 88; and 2:410–15.