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## Review of Before Lewis and Clark Volume 1: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785- 1804 and Before Lewis and Clark Volume 2: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785- 1804

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*Before Lewis and Clark Volume 1: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804.* Edited and with an Introductory Narrative by A.P. Nasatir. Bison Book Edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Introduction by James P. Ronda, xx + 375 pp. \$40.00 cloth, \$11.95 paper.

*Before Lewis and Clark Volume 2: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri, 1785-1804.* Edited and with an Introductory Narrative by A.P. Nasatir. Bison Book Edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Illustrations, index. 475 pp. \$40.00 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

It now has been nearly forty years since the publication of Nasatir's landmark study *Before Lewis and Clark*. In those decades it has grown to be an indispensable aid in the historical scholarship of the Great Plains. The reason? This history of the pre-Lewis and Clark Missouri River provides a comprehensive data base and summary that is unobtainable in any other form. The original two-volume set, unfortunately, has been out of print for many years, and the great cost of the original volumes (usually in three figures) on the used book market is added testimony to their scholarly value. A reprint of this landmark study was long overdue.

The 115-page introduction to the work is a revised and somewhat expanded version of a paper originally published in two parts in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* in 1929-30. In this essay, Nasatir traces the first surge of recorded exploration of the Missouri River by the French and the Spanish; describes the founding of the Missouri Company by Spanish St. Louis merchants; and details the explorations that employees of this company carried out as far upriver as the Mandan villages in present North Dakota. The introduction is followed by a documents section containing nearly 240 translated French and Spanish documents that provide cross-referenced, supporting evidence.

The resulting study by this distinguished historian is an exhaustive and competent overview

of much of the Great Plains. A good finding guide is necessary for such a study, and the detailed, seventy-eight-page cross-listed index provides every possible assistance to the beginning and professional reader. Four foldout maps in the original are missing in the reprint (a deletion specified on the copyright page of volume 1). Since the maps are not closely tied to the text, however, this is a minor point despite the fact the maps are rare and difficult to consult in readable, published form.

I've used *Before Lewis and Clark* in my research for thirty-five years, as anyone must who has any conceivable interest in the early history of the Missouri. The study is as valuable today as when it first appeared, and my admiration for the work—and the scholar—continues to grow. Bison Books has again earned the thanks of students of the Great Plains for making this classic available once more at moderate cost. Perhaps, too, its availability will stimulate new archival and interpretive work focusing on the river whose hinterlands were the object of so many explorers for so many decades.

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