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A New Vision Of America Lewis And Clark And The Emergence Of The American Imagination

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JAMES P. HENDRIX JR.

The consequences of an event take place in the mind, and the mind holds on best to images.

Nothing ever begins where one thinks it should.

—William Irvin Thompson

When Lewis and Clark awakened in St. Louis on 24 September 1806, one suspects that they felt quite well rested. They had just slept in regular beds for the first time in 864 days. As men who "had forgotten the use of chairs . . . they must have had a way of standing and a look in their eyes," Bernard DeVoto imagines.

Now was the time for reverie, and celebration, as the capital of the Northern Louisiana Territory welcomed back explorers who had been given up as lost.

Two days later, as the initial fanfare began to subside, Clark told us that they "commenced wrighting." The precise nature of this "wrighting" is unclear. It may have been letters or other routine matters and may even have involved some copying of journal entries. But what we do know is that a series of circumstances would delay for eight years the publication of an "official" paraphrase of the journals of Lewis and Clark, and a century would pass before they would be seen in relatively full form. But America quickly became aware of the great journey by other means, and this would prove to have a significant impact on the development of an American culture.

It is conventional to view Lewis and Clark's expedition as the essential first step in America's trans-Mississippi expansion. William Goetzmann sees the return of Lewis and Clark as marking the emergence of the American imagination.
Clark as not so much the end of a major period of exploration, closing the door on the quest for the Northwest Passage that had dominated since the time of Marquette, but the beginning of a new phase. In the imperial struggles of the times, Lewis and Clark mark for Goetzmann the first important step in a sequence that would result in the “winning” of the American West for the United States.

I believe it is appropriate to view the expedition of Lewis and Clark as the initial phase of an emerging American imagination, the starting point for what has variously been described as “cultural nationalism” and “cultural patriotism.” Their journey, and America’s marveling over what they did, saw, and reported, is a pivotal point in a turning away from Europe by American writers, painters, and other intellectuals to their own land and culture, and to an emerging American imagination. The Voyage of Discovery, in short, engendered a new vision of America.

Lewis and Clark were not conquistadors, as their voyage did not seek gold and silver. Mountains of salt and lead, mastodons, Welsh Indians, and furs, yes, but the fortuitous last-minute acquisition of the Louisiana Territory had added a new thrust to their purpose, one that likely was of comparable importance to the original Enlightenment science and Northwest Passage themes. While it is not explicit in the formal instructions Jefferson had given to Lewis in June 1803, there is no question that the president looked to his explorers for confirmation that the newly acquired West constituted a Garden of the New World, space into which his agrarian “chosen people of God” could expand. Concerned about a burgeoning American population, and using a density alarm factor of ten people per square mile, Jefferson felt an American West suitable for agriculture and settlement would provide the ideal answer for potential overpopulation. The journals and other reports from the two sons of agrarian Virginia abound in commentary as to the perfect nature of the new lands for such purposes.

To most Europeans the American West was a barrier, an obstacle, that hampered the Passage to India and its great commercial potential. But to Jefferson such a route was a way into, rather than only through, the Garden of the New World. The path he looked to Lewis and Clark to find would lead into “a farmers paradise...” The passage might be the highway that could link this garden to the markets of the world... The passage and the garden would ensure the future of the republic... giving it room to escape.” American optimism and the developing American nationalism combined to form out of the return of Lewis and Clark “a new image of the West... [one of] many dreams of [its] fertility, beauty, and vastness.” This new image would prove to be central to the awakening of an American culture in the two decades following their return.

Lewis and Clark came back to a country whose culture was still seeking identity. National identity would develop with fits and starts, but it had reached considerable maturity within two decades. Twenty years after Lewis and Clark beached their dugout canoes in St. Louis, a remarkable year of productivity would make it clear that a distinctive American culture had evolved, one of considerable merit. In 1826, James Fenimore Cooper would publish the best known of his Leatherstocking novels, The Last of the Mohicans; Thomas Cole would establish himself as a well-respected American artist with two paintings, “The Falls of the Kaaterskill” and “Daniel Boone at Home in His Cabin on Great Osage Lake”; George Catlin would begin his long crusade to document Native Americans with two paintings of the Seneca chief Red Jacket; and the patriotic song “The Hunters of Kentucky” would be formally published and would thus receive widespread circulation with its celebration of the victory at the Battle of New Orleans by the American frontiersmen over their European adversaries. The Jacksonians were at work establishing a new and distinctive American political style, and the American language Noah Webster had called for in 1783 was giving evidence of a full appearance. How these
changes came to be, and how they might relate to Lewis and Clark, is the subject of this study.

A steady flow of fine scholarship over the past forty years has explored many other dimensions of the "voyage of discovery." The scientific, diplomatic, economic, ethnographic, geographic, and even geopolitical implications of the journey have all received excellent treatments. But there remains a paucity of scholarship on the possible impact of the expedition on an American culture that was evolving in the two decades following Lewis and Clark's return.

At least a decade would pass between that return and the emergence of strong examples of an American culture. And, as has been noted, a relatively full flowering did not come forth until 1826. But given the fact that transplanted Europeans had been living in America for almost 200 years before Lewis and Clark, such a ten- to twenty-year period seems relatively brief in the context of cultural evolution.

The evidence for connections between an emerging American culture and Lewis and Clark ranges from overt, as in the cases of Washington Irving, Cooper, and Catlin, to much that either must be inferred or is circumstantial. Whether the evidence is direct or more subtle, a necessary beginning point is to demonstrate the various ways in which the writers and artists who were to be in the forefront of an emerging American culture had access to information about Lewis and Clark in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

**THE EXPEDITION AND ITS AUDIENCE: JUNE 1805-1814**

Information about the explorers and their expedition was available from multiple sources, some as early as June 1805. One April 1805 letter from Fort Mandan appeared in several newspapers in June and July of 1805, and another as part of a pamphlet published in several cities in 1806. The return to St. Louis in September 1806 led to other letters that were widely reprinted in newspapers from Kentucky to Massachusetts in October and November. The first of the published journal accounts came in June 1807 (Sergeant Gass), followed by several spurious versions, dubbed the Apocrypha by Elliott Coues, beginning in 1809.

What is it about these early accounts that piqued public imagination? In the broadest sense, Bernard DeVoto's axiom regarding news of the expedition seems to catch the essence of the reaction: "it satisfied desire and it created desire: the desire of the westerning nation." Specifically, the Fort Mandan letters gave detailed descriptions to a curious populace of previously unknown Native American peoples and of the flora, fauna, and physical characteristics to be found in the heart of the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. The letters written upon the return to St. Louis amplified such information, as well as gave some appreciation of the drama and arduousness of the expedition and of the commercial potential of abundant furs and even the Canton trade.

But the nature and success of the Gass and Apocrypha journals are more instructive as to the public appetite. The initial Gass version, with its more detailed descriptions of the new territory, sold well and was reprinted several times, including abroad. But what the public most seemed to want is seen in the addition of six romanticized woodcuts of encounters with grizzlies and Indians to 1810-12 editions of Gass, and especially in the Apocrypha phenomenon. Appearing first in Philadelphia in 1809, and then both in the US and abroad in various editions up until 1851, these largely fictional accounts told of Indian chiefs, warriors, kings and queens; of gold and silver; and of Edenesque, fertile, well-watered lands filled with animal and vegetable abundance.
explorers. That much of the information about the two captains, and their Corps of Discovery, was of questionable veracity seems of little import. An American imagination had been awakened.¹⁶

**ROMANTIC NATIONALISM AND THE MAKING OF HEROES**

When Lewis and Clark reached St. Louis in September 1806 they were immediately heralded as heroes, and it is interesting to consider what might have sparked such public adulation. Zebulon Pike, and other explorers who were essentially contemporaries of Lewis and Clark, did not receive a fraction of such attention. One obvious and inherent difference is that Lewis and Clark would, as De Voto describes it, "always be the first."¹⁷ Beyond being the trailbreakers, what is it about the expedition that so seizes the public imagination? It could not have been scientific information. For Jefferson, Barton, Humboldt, and others who had such high hopes for the scientific impact of the journey, a decent report of the findings would have to await the Coues and Thwaites journal editions which bracket the turn of the twentieth century. The Passage to India was as good as could be found but was not a practical route after all. Abundant furs were to be had, and an Edenesque land awaited the country, but these, too, do not seem to justify the glowing words of the newspaper accounts, toasts at celebratory banquets, and lionizing poems of the sort Joel Barlow read at a January 1805 White House banquet. What is it that accounts for this public acclaim and for the widespread sale of early accounts of the journey such as those of Patrick Gass and the various Apocrypha editions?

It seems that Lewis and Clark, in addition to the undeniable magnificence and romance of their achievements, were fortunate in the timing of their adventure. Stephen Ambrose describes the United States of 1801 as a rather primitive and struggling place.¹⁸ The 30-year period from Independence to the return of Lewis and Clark proved to be a road every bit as difficult for the young country as was the passage across the continent for the Corps of Discovery. Fighting a war with the most powerful nation on Earth; writing, debating, and ratifying two Constitutions; struggling to reestablish a viable economy; enduring the rise of the political parties that the Founders so feared; being insulted and internationally abused by both France and England—whatever the young country chose to celebrate in these trying formative years was often more illusory than real.

But Lewis and Clark were certainly real, and a new nation hungry for such American heroes responded with romantic and nationalistic enthusiasm.¹⁹ The country's turning away from Europe, politically and especially culturally, would take some time to achieve the levels of articulation Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and others would give it in the second quarter of the century. But Lewis and Clark seem to have been at the front edge of a trend to "turn away from the feudal past of Europe to build a new order founded upon nature."²⁰

The fortuitous timing of the expedition also relates to a broader change in the intellectual climate of the times. As the Enlightenment began to yield to an emerging romantic movement in America, Lewis and Clark are a bridge between the two. William Goetzmann points out that Catlin, Miller, Bodmer, and other early artists of the American West have one foot in the European artistic tradition they so envied and another in the New World subject matter of the American West they were beginning to use. They remained somewhat rooted in eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationality, while they simultaneously reflected an emerging nineteenth-century romanticism. Thus Goetzmann uses wonderfully descriptive terms for them: "Euro-Americans" and "romantic scientists."²¹ In many ways these terms fit Lewis and Clark, especially as they served as a major stimulus for an emerging American imagination.

The country celebrated their heroes. They were greeted in St. Louis on 23 September by a "great concourse of people that lined the
bank of the river [and this] must be considered as strong evidence of the respect entertained of those gentlemen for the danger and difficulties they must have encountered in their expedition of discovery. The town buzzed with talk of the accomplishment: “The daring adventure became the theme of universal conversation in the town,” reported a local chronicle. Two days later, St. Louis honored the two leaders with a dinner and a ball. The newspaper account of the event deemed the evening appropriate “honorable testimony . . . for those characters who are willing to encounter, fatigue and hunger for the benefit of their fellow citizens . . . to those who penetrate the gloom of unexplored regions.” The eighteen toasts ranged in praise from Jefferson and Washington, to Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry, and even to “the fair daughters of Louisiana.” But after the captains had retired, and modesty was no longer a deterrent, the final toast of the evening was offered to “Captains Lewis and Clark—Their perilous services endear them to every American heart.”

Earlier reference has been made to Clark’s letter of 23 September 1806 to his brother Jonathan, a communication that had been drafted by Lewis. This letter, clearly intended for publication, as was the custom of the day, was first printed by the Frankfort (Ky.) Palladium on 9 October, along with an editorial note explaining that this “private” letter was being printed “to gratify, in some measure, the impatient wishes of his countrymen” [for news of the returned expedition]. As has been noted above, Clark’s letter was widely reprinted.

This “public report” of Clark made its way east at about the same pace as that of the two captains. As they traveled, the public expressed its adulation. Banquets and dinners were held in St. Louis on 25 September; Louisville on 9 November; Charlottesville, 15 December; Fincastle, Virginia, 8 January (1807); and Washington, D.C., on 14 January. Louisville lit bonfires in their honor following the banquet, while the address at the Charlottesville dinner praised Lewis for “the difficult and dangerous enterprise which you have so successfully achieved.” Not only had the adventure “covered [him] with glory . . . , the man who achieved this interesting and arduous enterprise, is the produce of our soil, was raised from infancy to manhood among us, is our neighbour, our friend.” An American hero—better yet, a native son of Virginia! A similar hero’s welcome was afforded Clark when he returned to his wife’s home in Fincastle, Virginia. The words of the 8 January 1807 public proclamation are instructive. Clark was praised for his “prudence, courage and good conduct, . . . [for having] acted so distinguished & honorable a part on the theatre of human affairs; . . . navigated bold & unknown rivers, traversed Mountains, which had never before been impressed with the footsteps of civilized man, and surmounted every obstacle, which climate, Nature, or ferocious Savages could throw in your way . . . extended the knowledge of the Geography of your country; in other respects enriched Science; and opened to the United States a source of inexhaustible wealth.” In all this Clark was championed for having “uniformly respected the rights of humanity, actuated by the principles of genuine philanthropy, [yet] you have not sprinkled your path with the blood of unoffending savages.” As a result of all these accomplishments, the spokesman for the citizens of Fincastle proclaimed to Clark that his “fame will be as pure and unsullied, as of that great man to whom Europe is indebted for a knowledge of our continent; the extent and importance of which, it has been reserved for you to disclose to the world.” Here we have a true American hero: prudent but strong, courageous and skilled, but also compassionate. The time had come for an American to assume a Columbus-type role for our continent, with the quasi-religious inference that Clark had been “called” to make better known to America and the world that which Columbus had discovered.

American poet Joel Barlow also had such a relationship between Columbus and Lewis and Clark very much on his mind. Four
months after the return of the expedition, he wrote President Jefferson suggesting that the Columbia River be renamed for Lewis "and one of its principal branches [for] Clarke." In support of this nationalistic expression he enclosed a nine-stanza poem "On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis." These verses proclaimed a North America that Lewis had united via his "discovery" of a Northwest Passage and its supposed relationship to other major rivers of the continent. Most important, the key findings claimed by Barlow for Lewis had been accomplished not by an Italian sailing under the Flag of Spain, but by a great American:

Then hear the loud voice of the nation proclaim,
And all ages resound the decree:
Let our Occident stream bear the young hero's name,
Who taught him his path to the sea.26

This poem was part of a 14 January 1807 banquet in Washington that honored Lewis, a Mandan chief, and other notables. Although Jefferson did not attend those present indulged in excessive praise of Lewis and the expedition. In addition to the Barlow poem, songs and instrumental music celebrated the occasion and over two dozen toasts were given. Lewis was heralded as "patriotic, enlightened, and brave; who had the spirit to undertake, and the valour to execute an expedition, which reflects honor on his country," while Clark and other corps members were praised, in absentia, for "patriotic and manly perseverance [which] entitles them to the approbation of their countrymen." Barlow, not willing to rest with his poem, offered one of the final toasts. Of Lewis, and the expedition in general, he proclaimed "victory over the wilderness, which is more interesting than that over men."27

Demonstrating patriotism, bravery, "manly perseverance," and "victory over wilderness," Lewis and Clark were well on their way to entry into an American pantheon. Over and over, romanticism and nationalism were expressed in the praises bestowed upon them.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron were defining for Europe the characteristics of romanticism at essentially the same time Lewis and Clark were twice-crossing the continent. If romantics sought bravery, exotic places, massive mountains, wild rivers, and so on, America now had a powerful source of them at hand. In addition, Lewis and Clark had provided the country with a hero-tale of "courage, tenacity, expansiveness . . . curiosity, and a willingness to aspire to lofty goals—all qualities pervading . . . [an emerging] American character."28 Thus the heroes were received and proclaimed. All knew they had opened the American West. How might they also have opened the American imagination?

THE EMERGENCE OF AN AMERICAN LITERATURE

We are harassed with a class of authors more numerous here [in the United States], in proportion, than in any other country—worthless weeds springing up prematurely.

—January 1807 preface to the Monthly Anthology and Boston Review

It would be over a decade before this dismal assessment of the state of American letters could be contradicted. In August 1820 the Edinburgh Review proclaimed Washington Irving's Sketch Book to be, in effect, the first true American literature.29 This literary publication, perhaps the most prestigious of its day, bestowed the honor on Irving for his use of American natural settings, language, dress, politics, and other customs and mores of the young country. Consider, for example, his description of a lake in the Hudson River Valley from The Sketch Book short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow:"

The wide bosom of the Tappan Zee lay motionless and gossipy, excepting that there and there a gentle undulation waved and prolonged the blue shadow of the distant mountain. A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The
horizon was of a fine golden tint, changing gradually into a pure apple-green, and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. A slanting ray lingered on the wood crests of the precipices that overhung some parts of the river, giving greater depth to the dark-gray and purple of their rocky sides. A sloop was loitering in the distance, dropping slowly down with the tide, her sail hanging uselessly against the mast; and as the reflection of the sky gleamed along the still water, it seemed as if the vessel was suspended in the air.30

Stanley Williams has pointed out the affinity between this description and the soon-to-emerge landscape painting of Thomas Cole and others of the Hudson River School. In addition, Irving’s verbal panoramas can be seen as precursors to Cooper’s Leatherstocking novels, the first of which was published in 1823.31 Irving, Cooper, and Thomas Cole—all entered the American cultural scene less than two decades after the return of Lewis and Clark—a remarkable convergence of three early pillars of a rapidly developing American culture.

These three, of course, were preceded by over 200 years of previous writing and painting in America. From the earliest days of Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay, works had been produced. Novels were being written in the young country by the 1790s, as well as accounts of early frontier heroes. But such works were either set in exotic foreign locales; were clearly imitative of English, other European models, or the Classical World; or, as in the case of John Filson’s biographical sketch of Daniel Boone (1784), were presented in a language nearly indistinct from that of the Mother Country. In other instances, as with Charles Brockden Brown’s Wieland (1798), early conscious attempts to write an American novel fell short due to both timing and the continuing literary shadow of England.32

Irving places five of his Sketch Book pieces in the Hudson River Valley. This and other American settings, and characters such as Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane, use a language and reflect other mores that are clearly differentiated from Old World antecedents. In addition, his two sketches of Native Americans in The Sketch Book are obvious reflections of indigenous culture.

Such topics, settings, and focus came naturally to Irving. Born in New York City in 1783, he spent childhood days hunting and fishing in what was then a quasi-frontier setting on the outskirts of the city. Two older brothers, already men of letters, recognized a precocity in their youngest sibling and sent him on a two-year tour of Europe in 1804-6 to broaden his education. By this time he had already developed a fascination with the frontier, both from childhood experiences and from a September 1803 visit to Canada where he was spellbound by stories of North West Company traders and trappers living and working in Indian country. Unlike his fellow New Yorker John Jacob Astor, Irving did not see this frontier “in terms of its potential wealth or its promise of commerce . . . but [rather] in the spirit of romance.”33

Irving’s interest in the frontier, and Native Americans in particular, led to much reading about the topics and to early publishing. He also served as editor of the Analectic Magazine, a Philadelphia magazine published by Moses Brown, in 1813 and 1814. The two pieces on Native Americans that later appear in The Sketch Book were initially published by Irving in the February and June 1814 issues of the Analectic. In addition, an article in the 28 June 1813, issue of the magazine makes reference to “the travels of the American Captains, Lewis and Clarke . . . lately published,” and the February 1814 issue had a review by Irving of Zebulon Pike’s Exploratory Travels.34

How much of Irving’s early writing is attributable to his knowledge of Lewis and Clark is difficult to establish with precision. Circumstance, however, makes it likely that his awareness of the expedition came early and was as comprehensive as the initial sources would afford. He returned from his first European travels about the same time
Lewis and Clark completed their journey at St. Louis. He immediately immersed himself in the literary life of New York, in which his brothers were already well established, publishing the *Salmagundi* papers in 1807 and his farcical *History of New York* late in 1809. One would expect him to have stayed current with New York and other eastern newspapers, all of which carried the early accounts of Lewis and Clark. In addition, his knowledge of the 1807 Gass journal, or one of the multiple versions of the Apocrypha, was very possible. Finally, it appears likely he was familiar with the 1814 Biddle edition of the journals. The February 1815 issue of the *Analectic Magazine* carried a review of the Biddle publication and, given Irving's close relationship to the *Analectic* during these years and the fact that he did not go abroad until three months after this issue appears, his awareness of the review, and of the Biddle edition of the journals, seems quite likely.35

In any event, it is logical to surmise that the Lewis and Clark expedition played a role in shaping, at some important formative stage, Irving's vision of the American West. Stanley Williams tells us that by the time Irving returned in 1832 from seventeen years abroad, he “had an intimate knowledge of the various editions concerning the expedition of Lewis and Clark.” He would augment this knowledge with a personal visit to Clark in St. Louis in mid-September 1832 and make extensive use of the Biddle edition of the journals in his three frontier-related 1830s publications: *A Tour of the Prairies* (1835), *Astoria* (1836), and *The Rocky Mountains: or Scenes, Incidents and Adventures in the Far West* (1837).36

As the first legitimate literary voice of the emerging American imagination, Irving likely had a full knowledge of Lewis and Clark from the earliest days of their return. While it is impossible to conclude exactly what influence this awareness had on his development as our first writer, a claim for a significant impact seems legitimate.

A fellow New Yorker was soon to follow Irving on the burgeoning American literary scene, this time with an internationally popular character taken straight from the American wilderness. But it was to take him a while to find this literary hero. James Fenimore Cooper was thirty-one years old when he wrote his first novel, *Precaution*, in 1820. Tradition has it that he produced this book on a dare, as he and his wife had been reading a novel they judged to be of limited merit, and Cooper offered the opinion that he could write a better one. His wife called his bluff, resulting in *Precaution*, a mediocre work heavily imitative of English models. He achieved better quality with *The Spy* in 1821. Set in Revolutionary America and with a patriotic message, it met with excellent success and was heralded as the first American novel of merit.37

Cooper intentionally set out to write an American novel with *The Spy*. His quest for the “mental independence” of the United States was a driving force in much of his writing. He had lamented in 1812 that England remained “the idol” of America’s “literary adoration,” and when he finally set his mind to write an American literature, he found a very receptive audience. Victory over England in the War of 1812, and the ensuing fervent nationalism of the “Era of Good Feelings,” created a favorable climate for Revolutionary heroes like those in *The Spy*.38

At the same time he was basking in the afterglow of the success of *The Spy*, Cooper began work in December 1821 on what would prove to be his most compelling and memorable character. Natty Bumppo—“Leatherstocking”—was created and introduced as a preliminary sketch in *The Pioneers* (1823.) He proved to be so popular, however, that Cooper was encouraged to go further with this American child of the forest, and he subsequently wrote four more novels in the Leatherstocking saga.

Greg Nobles has pointed out that Cooper introduces Leatherstocking at a time American “popular culture became fascinated with the frontier.” The images of Natty Bumppo joined those of Crockett, Indians both “noble” and “savage,” and even the emerging mythical
Andrew Jackson as visions of the American frontier that “intrigued easterners looking west.” The fear of a hostile wilderness of earlier generations was being replaced by romantic literature and painting that portrayed the West as “the new hope for the nation’s future.” Even though few east of the Mississippi had actually seen the trans-Mississippi West, “thousands had envisioned it in their minds,” and Cooper and subsequent writers of “Western fiction” were pleased to feed this interest. Lewis and Clark certainly should be seen as part of the process that generated this emerging American imagery, but they have received little such attention from scholars.

It was, in many different ways, a new America that Cooper was writing for. The first quarter of the nineteenth century had witnessed a doubling of the size of the country through the Louisiana Purchase, rapid western expansion, major population growth, victory over the very nation that had just vanquished Napoleon, and a concurrent explosion of nationalism. Henry Nash Smith makes the point that, prior to Cooper, ambivalence characterized America’s attitude toward the frontier. Daniel Boone was seen both as a necessary “conqueror” and “civilizer” of wilderness and as a “fugitive” from the ills of civilization. But the growth and urbanization of the country were such that this ambivalence disappeared by the time of Leatherstocking. As Cooper began his writing career, civilization, in the eyes of many, was now unequivocally wicked, and “untouched nature . . . a source of strength, truth, and virtue.”

Whether by instinct or design, Cooper seemed to sense these changes, knew his audience well, and produced in The Pioneers a frontier-type novel that experienced even more praise than The Spy. Laudatory reviews came from virtually every periodical in the land, as well as from abroad. Sales were of such magnitude that Cooper was able to survive a serious financial crisis, buy back the old family estate in Cooperstown, and sustain a life of relative prosperity and growing prestige. After witnessing only moderate success for a novel of an American frigate in the Revolution, The Pilot (1823), and the first of what was intended as thirteen historical novels celebrating Revolutionary events in each of the original states, Lionel Lincoln (1824-25), he returned to the proven Leatherstocking formula with four more novels in that saga. The best known of the five, The Last of the Mohicans, was published in 1826 and The Prairie in the following year. Over a decade would pass before he completed the series with The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841). Cooper’s background up to the writing of the first Leatherstocking novels is an interesting one. Born in Burlington, New Jersey, the same year the country ratified its new Constitution, he was raised in the upstate New York town his father, in quasi-Thomas Sutpen fashion, carved out of the wilderness. William Cooper, a classic “type” of the Revolutionary and Early National periods, used the economic turbulence of the Revolutionary era as the opportunity to seize Loyalist lands and propel himself on a fascinating journey, from wheelwright to land baron, judge, successful politician, and former revolutionary turned staunch conservative of Federalist political persuasion.

Cooper’s eight surviving children were unremarkable in the accomplishments of their youth and early adulthood. James, the youngest of the brood, was something of a ne’er-do-well who was dismissed from Yale after two years, had a brief stint as a midshipman in the navy, and then achieved some financial stability by marrying into a wealthy family of Westchester County, the De Lanceys. But even with this financial windfall, Cooper and his siblings, dubbed “idle aristocrats” by one Cooper scholar, manage to squander the estate left to them by Judge Cooper’s death in 1809. Things began to crumble in the 1820s, and by the end of the decade William Averell, the son of a shoemaker who had once made shoes for Judge Cooper’s family, had gained complete control of the judge’s former assets.
financial success. The origins of the Leatherstocking saga and the subject matter therein are complex, as they are with analysis of any author. Most important to this study, what role did Cooper’s knowledge of Lewis and Clark play in his emergence as America’s first successful novelist, and particularly in his focus on Natty Bumppo and the American frontier? The developments of Cooper’s novels, leading to and including the creation of this memorable character and the locales he frequents, deserve considerable attention.

Precaution, as we saw above, was written as a whim in an attempt to improve upon an English novel, so its origins are self-explanatory. With The Spy he turned to a tale he had heard from fellow New Yorker John Jay of a selfless American spy who had served heroically in divided Westchester County during the Revolution. The setting was in the New York he knew well, both from his youth in Cooperstown and his current residence in Westchester County. The patriotic tone reflects Cooper’s immersion in the “cultural patriotism” and “cultural nationalism” so evident at the time, and in particular his determination to create a novel that would answer the contemporary cultural slur of British writer Sydney Smith: “Who reads an American book?”

The Pioneers, with its unveiling of Natty Bumppo, is more complex in its genesis. Explanation of the physical location for the novel is straightforward. Set in frontier New York, in what appears to be an area very akin to that around Cooperstown and Otsego Lake, both his daughter and a leading Cooper scholar see the novel’s descriptions and landscapes as derived “from an entire childhood and youth . . . [a] reservoir of images.” But the romantic story line appears to reflect much deeper issues.

In The Pioneers Cooper created a fictional world more to his liking than the realities of financial and personal failure. In his novel the potential anarchy and economic turbulence of the frontier are suppressed by the instinctive wisdom of a new fictional type that Cooper introduced, the “American Abraham,” and by the smooth transition of wealth, power, prestige, and control to this patriarch’s wise and successful patrician heirs. His writing became a psychological vehicle that could take him to a fantasy world infinitely more pleasing than the realities of his life in the 1820s. As Alan Taylor puts it, “Cooper imagined an America where he securely belonged to an honored, ruling class—defying the actual instability of fortune and subdivision of authority in the Republic. . . . In The Pioneers he crafted a reassuring past intended to secure the Republic’s future stability.”

In Cooper’s ideal world the shortcomings of legal and other institutions are overcome by the leadership and control of a natural elite, a patrician class in which the author fantasized himself as a leading member. But in this process the free-spirited Natty is a casualty. He is called before the patriarchal judge for killing a deer out of season, and he causes trouble by being a “squatter” on privately owned land. Cooper resolves these dilemmas for his child of nature by having him depart Otsego for the trans-Mississippi West. When we next see him in The Last of the Mohicans he has grown young and near superhuman and has abandoned civilization for life in the wilderness. And in The Prairie, published the year after Mohicans, Natty has progressed to the heart of the Louisiana Territory and is traveling on a parallel track to Lewis and Clark, headed, like the two captains, for the Pacific.

It is not known precisely when Cooper became interested in and influenced by Lewis and Clark. But it is clear that such influence was present and significant. In his writing up to 1825 he had sufficient material from his life experiences to sustain his characters and settings. But Cooper had to research The Last of the Mohicans, with its attempted immersion in the culture of Native Americans, as well as The Prairie, particularly, with its trans-Mississippi setting (an area of the country Cooper had not visited).

Cooper came up with the plot structure for Mohicans while on a tour of Lake George,
Glens Falls, and other upstate New York sites in 1824. When he sat down to write the novel in the early summer of 1825, he turned to the Biddle edition of the Lewis and Clark journals for information on Native Americans.\(^47\) In *The Prairie*, begun early in 1826 while at home but completed in Paris (he and his family sailed for Europe in June 1826), the influence of Lewis and Clark was much more overt.

Much of the plot of *The Prairie* revolves around a journey by Leatherstocking that replicates Lewis and Clark’s. Indeed, his travels occur virtually simultaneous to that of the Corps of Discovery, although Natty reaches the Pacific in 1804, a year prior to Lewis and Clark. Scenes of hunting, cooking, and other elements of camp life are derived from the journals, as are the names and characteristics of Native Americans. Cultural references such as the use of buffalo hides in making “bull boats” by Plains Indians also appear to be taken from the Biddle journals.\(^48\)

It is surprising that studies of Cooper do not suggest a connection between Lewis and Clark and the creation of Natty. Many sources on Cooper expound theories about Natty’s origins, ranging from a local hunter Cooper had known in his youth to models such as Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, and Jedediah Smith, but none mention Lewis and Clark as possible influences. Given Cooper’s close knowledge and detailed use of Lewis and Clark, it is logical to assume they became one of the amalgam of sources that went into Cooper’s creation of Leatherstocking. Legitimate American heroes of their ilk were very appealing to Cooper, and they likely had a significant influence on him in imagining Natty Bumppo.

Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were the pioneers in the establishment of a viable American literature. Just how significant the influence of Lewis and Clark was on them, in the absence of more direct documentary evidence, probably cannot be established. Strong circumstantial evidence, however, makes substantial impact quite likely.

The same influences that led to self-conscious efforts by Irving and Cooper to produce an American literature also impacted American artists in the 1820s. And it was certainly time for American artists to focus on their homeland. They were stuck in the ruts of neoclassicism, the “high style,” and epic historical paintings. Most fled abroad as soon as possible to study with, and imitate, the European masters they so admired. None yet seemed to recognize the artistic potential of American scenery, what Thomas Cole would later proclaim to be “a rich and delightful banquet . . . [an] Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly [if we turn to Europe. . . . It is [the artist’s] own land; its beauty, its magnificence, its sublimity—all are his; and how underserving of such a birthright, if he can turn toward it an unobserving eye, and unaffected heart!”\(^49\)

James Thomas Flexner calls Thomas Cole an “Eagle Emergent” and credits him with starting a revolution in American art, the “Native School.” Born in 1801 in the heart of England’s textile industry, Cole read of the American West as a child and dreamed of this new world where relatives from both sides of his family had gone. His father’s economic troubles led the family to move to America in 1819, and they initially settled in Philadelphia. But continuing financial struggles forced four relocations in the next five years. The first of these changes took the bulk of the family to Steubenville, Ohio, but Cole remained in Philadelphia. In the fall of 1819, however, he walked 300 miles across the Alleghenies to Steubenville. Since childhood he had had an interest in drawing and had dabbled in engraving both in England and Philadelphia, but it was an itinerant painter by the name of John Stein that apparently inspired him to become an artist, with his first attempts being as a portrait painter.\(^50\)

Traveling by foot in February 1822 and attempting to drum up business, Cole battled
the competition of a German portrait painter named Des Combes, as well as his personal dislike of the itinerant portrait business. Heavily in debt, he rejoined his family, now in Pittsburgh, but discarded their advice to enter a more lucrative trade and moved on to Philadelphia in the fall of 1823. Still impoverished, ill-fed and -clothed, and suffering from rheumatism, he spent so much time studying the art in the Pennsylvania Academy that he was almost tossed out as a vagrant. 51

The next three years were critical ones for Cole. While it is impossible to establish with precision what led him to the American landscape, a number of influences seemed to converge during this brief time frame. The landscape paintings he saw in the Pennsylvania Academy of Americans Thomas Doughty and Thomas Birch, as well as those of the Italian Salvator Rosa, apparently made a major impression. Cole obtained a copy in 1825 of William Oram’s treatise on landscape painting, and his study of this work helped him refine his technique. An instinctive love of nature, an inherent romantic temperament, and a shy and brooding personality also came into play. But whatever the mental processes might have been, Cole completed and showed a landscape painting (now lost) at the Pennsylvania Academy’s annual show of 1824. 51

In the summer of 1825 Cole traveled up the Hudson into the Catskills, sketching “until his hands and his eyes ached.” Returning to New York City to transform these sketches onto canvas, he produced three landscapes that initiated the “revolution” Flexner credits Cole with starting. 53

These three paintings first met the public eye at a pivotal time in the history of New York and of the nation. In November 1825, New York and the country were celebrating the opening of the Erie Canal, a development with enormous economic, political, and even sectional implications. Flexner tells us that it is at this precise moment of celebration that the venerable American painter John Trumbull visited the shop of a New York frame maker who had on display the three landscapes by Cole. Trumbull, who supposedly had been musing over the unachieved potential of American art, was seized by the brilliance of Cole’s work and is reported to have proclaimed: “This young man has done what all my life I attempted in vain to do.” Trumbull bought one of the paintings, of “The Falls of Kaaterskill,” and told fellow artist Asher Durand and poet William Cullen Bryant of his discovery. They purchased the other two paintings and Cole’s fame, according to Durand, “spread like wildfire.” 54 Thus was launched Cole’s career, one that would prosper until his premature death in 1848. By that time his reputation was clearly solidified as the founder of the Hudson River School, and of what Flexner calls the Native School. His death was declared a “national loss” by a contemporary newspaper, he was eulogized by the likes of William Cullen Bryant and James Fenimore Cooper, and he was memorialized by what was tantamount to a competition among surviving Hudson River painters to see who could best honor their mentor. 55

How might Cole’s popularity relate to Lewis and Clark’s journey into the Louisiana Territory two decades prior to the “discovery” of Cole in New York City? Perhaps it is best explained by the cultural climate of the times. The same forces that influenced Irving and Cooper, and that help explain their roles as leading writers of their time, are also significant for Cole. In addition to his childhood interest in the wilds of America, “from the beginning of his career [as a young adult] Cole was deeply attracted to wilderness tales and rural stories—‘Rip Van Winkle,’ The Last of the Mohicans, the legend of Daniel Boone,” and the like. 56 Lewis and Clark should be considered an essentially formative influence on the development of such uniquely American images, hero stereotypes that were attractive to Cole, Cooper, and many others of that period.

The same “cultural nationalism,” “cultural patriotism,” and “romantic nationalism” that propelled Lewis and Clark to hero status and created a viable market for the “American”
writings of Irving and Cooper also lay behind Cole's successes. There was a "taste" in the 1820s for celebrations of American wilderness vistas, and Cole was careful in his paintings to remove fences, handrails, and steps in order to present Kaaterskill Falls, and other rustic scenes, as they would "have appeared before the advent of white settlement." The beauty and abundance of the American landscape, which Cole celebrated in his 1836 lecture "On American Scenery," was a substitute "for [the] missing national tradition" of a young country. A "natural backdrop," in the words of Perry Miller, "relieved us of having to apologize for a deficiency of picturesque ruins." General ambivalence among American intellectuals over progress and utilitarianism, over the impact of "the axe" and "the machine in the garden," made Cole's celebrations of Nature all the more popular ("Nature" having come to be "spelled with a capital and referred to as feminine" by Cole's time, as Miller points out). Perhaps the best validation of such an intellectual climate is the marketability of Cole's American landscapes. As one scholar puts it, Cole quickly learned, and somewhat resented, that the public would buy most anything from him as long as the title included "The Catskills," or otherwise appealed to the thirst for representations of American "Nature" scenes.

Arguably our first American painter, Cole succeeded because of his ability to produce paintings that appealed to the same images and ideas that Irving, and especially Cooper, so successfully tapped—sentiments that the Lewis and Clark expedition helped set into motion.

Cole's American landscapes focused on the Hudson River Valley, the Catskills, and other scenes from the East. The first major American artist to mine successfully the trans-Mississippi terrain made known by Lewis and Clark was George Catlin. And Catlin's adventures traveling the West in the early 1830s come close to matching some of those endured by Lewis and Clark thirty years earlier.

Catlin was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1796 into a family that had been in America since 1644. His childhood was filled with formative influences that contributed to his life's work. Wilkes-Barre at the turn of the century was a major disembarkation point for travel west, much as St. Louis was to become a generation later. When he was only one year old, the family moved even farther into the frontier, traveling forty miles over an Indian trail to a "farm in a forest" on the bank of the Susquehanna River. Both Catlin's father and paternal grandfather had served honorably in the American Revolution, and his maternal grandparents had fought against Indians during the Pennsylvania "Wyoming Massacre" of 1778. His mother had been captured by the Iroquois during these hostilities but was released unharmed after a short period. She was only seven at the time.

Although his father had been classically educated and the Catlin home was filled with books, Catlin observed later in life that his childhood days were "whiled away, apparently somewhat in vain, with books reluctantly held in one hand, and a rifle or fishing-pole firmly and affectionately grasped in the other." His first adventure hunting with the rifle, at age nine, led to a dramatic encounter with an Iroquois warrior. Just as Catlin was taking aim at a ten-point buck, the animal was felled by another shot, fired, he soon learned, by an Iroquois chief who had been searching the area for gold supposedly buried by the Indian's father during the Wyoming conflict. Catlin's father encouraged a friendship between the Indian and the boy, a relationship that may have had considerable significance in Catlin's later career as a painter, ethnologist, and champion of the Indian cause. The gift of a tomahawk by the chief, however, was later to have a scary outcome. As Catlin was "playing Indian" with the weapon the next year, it ricocheted off a tree and left a life-long scar on his left cheek.

His father had been grooming Catlin to follow in his footsteps as an attorney and sent him in 1817 to study law in Litchfield, Con-
nectedicut. This career, however, was to be short-lived. After only a year or two of practice in the courts of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, Catlin, as he later described it, “very deliberately sold my law library and all (save my rifle and fishing-tackle), and converting their proceeds into brushes and paint pots; I commenced the art of painting.” Quickly gaining a good local reputation as an amateur portrait painter, he moved to Philadelphia in 1821 determined to gain more formal training for a career in painting. His time in Philadelphia, then clearly the center of American art, likely included exposure to the Peale studios, where he may well have crossed paths with Thomas Cole. Portraits, both full-size and miniature, mark his early work and were of sufficient merit to gain him election in February 1824 to the Philadelphia Academy and in 1826 to the National Academy (of New York.) Early portrait subjects included Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York, with the first of three such works completed by Catlin in December 1824.62

At some point in these early Philadelphia years, probably in 1824, Catlin underwent a life-changing experience. A delegation of Indians were in town en route to discussions in Washington. Encountering this group, in all the majesty and splendor of their native garb, Catlin was transformed. He resolved that his life’s work must be to document “the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations.” Such work he felt to be “worthy the life-time of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian.”61

A lack of funds and backlog of portrait obligations temporarily delayed the implementation of this dream, but Catlin immediately began to read about the West and soon turned his artistic attention to Native American subject matter. In 1826 he painted two portraits of the Seneca chief Red Jacket. Catlin married in 1828 and moved to Albany, New York. This gave him a good base from which to pursue his newfound passion, as he spent time visiting and observing on the Indian reservations of western New York.62

At least four contemporaries—Charles Bird King, James Otto Lewis, Peter Rindisbacher, and Samuel Seymour—were gaining reputations as painters of American Indians. Along with genre paintings of the West, this must have created a sense of urgency in Catlin.65 Finally, in the spring of 1830, he departed for St. Louis. Armed with letters of introduction from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and others, his first and most important call in St. Louis was on William Clark, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs and former Governor of the Missouri Territory.

Clark, in his position as gatekeeper and caretaker of the trans-Mississippi West, was bombarded with callers such as Catlin. In addition, he was aware of the current efforts of Charles Bird King and James Otto Lewis to paint Native Americans. Thus, there were multiple reasons for him to give Catlin only cursory attention, and Catlin seemed to be aware of potential dismissal. While no record of their initial meeting has survived, it appears that Catlin overwhelmed Clark, in the most positive of ways, with a rapid display of Indian paintings from his portfolio, letters of introduction, and personal charm. Clark’s favorable initial impression was cemented by his observing the speed and excellence of Catlin’s work, as he invited him to sketch and paint various Indians who frequented his office. And the production of a formal, flattering portrait of Clark by Catlin also likely helped the painter’s cause. But whatever the reasons, it is clear that Clark took Catlin under his wing and was of immense assistance to him. Clark actually accompanied Catlin on several trips in 1830 to visit Indian locales of the Missouri drainage and provided helpful introductions for more trips Catlin took on his own in 1831.64

On 26 March 1832, shortly after “ice-out” on the Missouri, Catlin left St. Louis on the maiden voyage of the American Fur Company’s steamboat Yellow Stone. This journey, the first by such a vessel to the mouth of the
Yellowstone River, became the foundation of Catlin’s greatest work. By the time he returned to St. Louis in the fall of 1832, he had traveled 2,000 miles up the Missouri, including a 200-mile overland stretch, and canoed with two trappers all the way back down the river to St. Louis from Fort Union at its junction with the Yellowstone. In the course of these travels he observed, lived with, and hunted with innumerable tribes, recording their manners and customs. Working rapidly and aided by a photographic memory for detail, he used a standard canvas (28” x 23” or 11” x 14”) to produce 135 paintings: sixty-six portraits of Indians from life, thirty-six scenes of Indian life, twenty-five landscapes, and eight hunting scenes. Catlin reported on his journeys in a series of letters to the New York Commercial Advertiser in the summer of 1832, and when these written reports were enhanced by viewings of his work in St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and finally, by 1836, in Albany, New York City, and other eastern cities, the West of the American imagination had its first significant pictorial representations.

Catlin was to live forty more years. These four decades encompassed several more journeys to the West, as well as to the Southeast and South America, to record Indian life. These adventures included a 1,000-mile solo ride on his horse, “Charley,” from the far Southwest, across the Plains, back to St. Louis. His grand plan was to generate high interest in his work via “Catlin’s Indian Gallery,” which met with initial success in eastern showings in 1837, and then to sell his collection to Congress as a foundation for a National Indian Gallery. But his proposals to Congress, in spite of powerful endorsements and appropriate Committee approvals, never passed, for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most significant was Catlin’s impassioned advocacy of American Indians, which one Catlin scholar pointed out put the painter “on the wrong side” of a “guilty conscience regarding the treatment of Indians” that Congress was already feeling by the 1830s and 1840s. He died, deaf, destitute, and unappreciated, in 1872.

Catlin’s work moved from the mind’s eye to the visual senses the images of the West that the words of Lewis and Clark and their successors had established. As Bernard DeVoto puts it, Catlin’s portraits brought “the Plains Indian to the American eye for the first time,” and his landscapes of the West gave the young country its first view of a vast region which “by 1837, was exercising an exceedingly powerful influence on the national imagination.”

Predisposed toward the frontier and its original inhabitants by his upbringing, Catlin’s 1824 “conversion” unleashed an amazing career, one whose subject matter initially fit well with the romantic nationalism of the times. Given his access to the Peale studios and museum, it seems inconceivable that his post-1824 immersion in the literature of the West would not have included the Biddle edition of the Lewis and Clark journals. The Biddle volumes had been printed in Philadelphia, specimens from the journey were abundant in Peale’s Museum, Charles Willson Peale had done drawings for the “scientific volume” Barton was to have prepared to accompany the publication of the journals, and Philadelphia, generally, was one of the primary intellectual sources for the expedition. Once again, by both direct and more subtle ways, Lewis and Clark likely played a significant role in Catlin’s development as an early American painter and in his concurrent “powerful influence on the national imagination.”

THE REORIENTATION OF A CULTURE

“The Lewis and Clark expedition excited the country as Raleigh and Hakluyt excited the people of England, for it disclosed an unknown world of mystery and thought.” This bold assertion by Van Wyck Brooks, while undocumented in his popularized treatment of early American intellectual life, is an apt summary of my study. An immersion in the early writings of Irving and Cooper, and in the paintings of Cole and Catlin, continually suggests connections to Lewis and
Clark. In some instances the 1804-6 expedition serves as a direct source for these early American writers and artists, but the greater impact is more subtle and indirect.

Many others follow Lewis and Clark and deserve their own just place as influencers of an emerging American culture. The efforts of Zebulon Pike in 1805-6 and Stephen H. Long in 1819-20, to give two early examples, were made known to the country more rapidly and fully. Probably in reaction to the delays associated with the publication of the journals of Lewis and Clark, accounts of the Pike and Long explorations came into print almost immediately after the return of the expeditions. Those of Long were further enhanced by the addition of professional artists and scientists to the team.71

The road to public awareness was smoother for the later ventures but the fact remains that there were multiple ways, as early as June 1805, that America came to know about Lewis and Clark. As we have seen, newspaper accounts were widespread, especially in 1806 and 1807, the Gass and Apocrypha versions of the journals were readily available from 1807 and on, and the Biddle “official” version finally came into print in 1814. It was not the immediate and definitive information track envisioned by Jefferson, but it was more than enough to fascinate the mind of a young country.

Perhaps most important, Lewis and Clark, as DeVoto continually reminds us, “will always be the first.” They deserve more attention as a logical starting point for significant cultural changes that swept early-nineteenth-century America; changes that created a climate that challenged, inspired, and nurtured our formative writers and artists to a reorientation of our culture. It seems far more than coincidental that after Lewis and Clark these intellectuals finally began to abandon the obsession with English and European culture that had stifled for so many years the emergence of an indigenous culture. They began to turn away from the formalism of European antecedents with increasing comfort and even national pride, for the “wilder images” of what they viewed as a vast and largely untamed new land.72

Lewis and Clark had truly seen the “brave new world” beyond the Mississippi and Missouri, and they were the essential first step in making these marvels known to their fellow countrymen. They did so precisely at the right historical moment, when a surge of romantic nationalism was sweeping the country. The Corps of Discovery, indeed, is at the very heart of these fundamental changes. They were the instruments of a visionary, geopolitically astute president who commissioned the expedition to counter British continental ambitions, and whose purchase more than doubled the amount of land available to his “chosen people of God.”

Inscribed in the bark of a large Pacific Coast pine: “Capt William Clark December 3rd 1805. By Land [from the] U States in 1804 & 1805.” The first Americans to cross the continent by land, they also become, both directly and subtly, the first major force to turn the American mind away from an obsessive focus on the Old World, redirecting it to the fertile subject matter so abundant in the Garden of the New Land.

They were also a microcosm of the complexities of the young country. In addition to the two leaders and nine others from Virginia, these were four from New Hampshire, nine from Kentucky, seven from Pennsylvania, at least one from six other states, an African-American, a young native American woman and her infant, French-Canadians, Protestants, Roman Catholics, non-believers, and even a Newfoundland retriever. Their makeup and their adventures could have filled volumes of print and miles of canvas. The impact was not to be so direct, but they were there, always the first, and deserve greater recognition for their role in the early-nineteenth-century emergence of an American imagination.

NOTES


7. Ronda, “So Vast” (note 5 above), pp. 6-7; John Logan Allen, *Passage through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 45, 330. Allen, p. 371, points out that the Passage to India, with its geopolitical, imperial, and long-range commercial implications, was of little interest to those who lived in "the small towns and on the farms of the South and Old Northwest." Rather, these Jeffersonian yeomen "instead . . . thought of the promised Garden that had been proclaimed."


10. For examples, see Paul R. Cutright, *Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1969); DeVoto's *Course of Empire* (note 1 above); James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln, Nebr: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Jackson, *Jefferson and the Stony Mountains* (note 6 above); Allen, *Passage through the Garden* (note 7 above); and Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire* (note 4 above). With the exception of DeVoto, all of these studies have been published within the last four decades.
11. Cutright, Moulton, and Lawson-Peebles, all cited in note 3 above, give a full history of the various publications related to the expedition and should be consulted for details of items appearing between 1805 and 1814. See also Donald Jackson, “The Race to Publish Lewis and Clark,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 85 (April 1961): 163-77. The Fort Mandan letters, one dated 2 April 1805 from Clark to William Henry Harrison (then serving as governor of the Indiana Territory and who had assisted the two captains in preparation for their journey), and the other from Lewis to Jefferson, dated 7 April 1805, are in Jackson, Letters (note 9 above), 1: 227-36.


15. A reprint of a Gass edition that includes the woodcuts, added by Philadelphia publisher Matthew Carey, is in Carol Lynn MacGregor, ed., The Journals of Patrick Gass (Missoula, Mont.: Montana Press Publishing Co., 1997). This edition is enhanced by an excellent introduction by MacGregor about Gass and the various editions of his journal. Lawson-Peebles, Landscape and Written Expression (note 3 above), pp. 226-7, stresses the romanticizing of the West by the Apocrypha editions, especially the emphasis on “innumerable riches” of precious stones, gold and silver, furs, and on a “Garden” of unparalleled fertility and agricultural potential. On the Apocrypha, see also Jackson, Letters (note 9 above), 2: 554-5.


19. Allen, Passage through the Garden (note 7 above), p. 369, makes the excellent point that the glamorization and romanticizing of the expedition may have been enhanced by the delay in publishing the scientific findings of the journey. In the absence of this information, emphasis was instead placed on more intangible elements.

20. The quote is from Smith, Virgin Land (note 5 above), p. 47. Smith, pp. 48-51, is an excellent discussion of Emerson and Whitman on this point. On the “turning away” from Europe and the relationship between nationalism and the push for an American culture, see also Loren Baritz, “The Idea of the West,” American Historical Review 66 (1961): 618-40; and John C. McCloskey, “The Campaign of Periodicals After the War of 1812 for a National American Literature,” PMLA 50 (1935): 262-73. McCloskey’s emphasis, as his title indicates, is on the formative role of the War of 1812.


22. The only known newspaper account of the event is the Frankfort (Ky.) Western World, 11 October 1806. This account also describes the reception afforded the expedition on 23 September. It is available in Ronda, ed., Voyages of Discovery (note 5 above), pp. 203-5. The “universal conversation” about Lewis and Clark in St. Louis is recorded in Arlen Lange, “Expedition Aftermath: The Jawbone Journals,” WPO 17 (February 1991): 13. [Note: Original spelling and punctuation has been maintained in all quotations taken from primary sources.]

23. Jackson, Letters (note 9 above), 1: 325-30. Western World, in reporting on 11 October the 25 September banquet, had lamented that while the citizens of St. Louis wished “to evince fully their joy at this event,” such a celebration “cannot but be considered as very interesting to every American.” Ronda, ibid., p. 204.


26. Barlow’s letter to Jefferson is in ibid., pp. 361-6. A discussion of this attempt by Barlow to


31. Ibid.

32. Spencer, Quest for Nationality (note 8 above), passim; Arthur K. Moore, The Frontier Mind: A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman, (Lexington, Ky: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), passim; and Cathy N. Davidson, Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 83-109. On this general point see also note 8 above. Moore, p. 105, says that the 1813 effort of poet Daniel Bryan to write an epic poem about Boone fails because it "transforms the old hunter into a preposterous Miltonic hero." Lawson-Peebles, Landscape and Written Expression (note 3 above), chap. 7, makes the case for Charles Brockden Brown as an early American novelist. While Brown deserves recognition as our first "professional novelist," that is, one who makes a living by writing, and for making a conscious effort to escape "European canons of style," Lawson-Peebles concludes that this early Pittsburgh writer is never able to do so with completeness. See Lawson-Peebles, ibid., p. 261.


34. The Analectic Magazine, 2 (28 June 1813): 408; 3 (February 1814): 89-104, 145-56; 3 (June 1814): 502-15. The 1813 reference to Lewis and Clark journals would have to be to one of the Apocrypha editions, as Biddle was not to appear until the next year. For an overview of Irving's brief stint as editor of The Analectic, see Williams, ibid., 1: 136-41.

35. Williams, Life of Irving (note 29 above), 1: 144, reports him sailing from New York on 25 May 1815. A review of the Irving Papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale University does not shed light as to when Irving first used the Biddle edition or otherwise gained initial knowledge of Lewis and Clark. The journal Irving kept during the time he wrote The Sketch Book also has no such references, and a survey of his letters from 1806 through the 1820s is similarly unproductive. See Stanley T. Williams, ed., Notes While Preparing Sketch Book, etc., 1817 (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1927), and Ralph M. Aderman et al., eds., The Complete Works of Washington Irving: Letters, 4 vols. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978-82). Rust, Astoria (note 33 above), p. xxi, says Irving used the Biddle edition prior to his 1815 departure for Europe but does not offer documentation in support of this claim. Williams, ibid., 2: 79, says that Irving "was still reading frontier tales when he left America in 1815, and he had sent . . . for more books on the Indians," but makes no specific mention of Lewis and Clark.

36. Williams, Life of Irving (note 29 above), 2: 39, 79, 89, 351-2, quote from p. 351. See also Rust, Astoria (note 33 above), pp. xxi-xxiii. Irving acknowledges in his introduction to Astoria that "I have . . . availed myself occasionally of collateral lights supplied by the published journals of other travellers who have visited the scenes described: such as Messrs. Lewis and Clarke." Quoted in Edgeley W. Todd (ed.), Astoria, or Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains (Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), pp. xlvii-xlviili. Williams, ibid., 2:353, is critical of Irving for going far beyond "occasional" use of Lewis and Clark, and without attribution. On Irving and Astoria, see also James P. Ronda, Astoria and Empire (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), pp. 337-41.


38. In a retrospective 1831 letter to a friend, Cooper made reference to a major purpose of his


40. Smith, *Virgin Land* (note 5 above), p. 77. The size of the United States prior to the Louisiana Purchase was 892,135 square miles; the Purchase added 924,279. One index of the rapidity of western expansion is the growth of Kentucky. Its population in 1790 was 73,677; in 1800, 220,955; 1810, 406,511; 1820, 564,317. What were to become Mississippi, Alabama, Missouri, and Tennessee experienced the same explosive growth. The general population of the United States grew from 3.9 million in 1790 to 9.6 million in 1820.

41. James Franklin Beard, "Historical Introduction" to *The Pioneers*, by James Fenimore Cooper (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1980), pp. xliii-xlviii, gives an extensive summary of the reviews. *The Pioneers* sold 3,500 copies on the first day, an unprecedented figure for an American writer. His success with this novel, and *The Spy*, led to his election to the prestigious American Philosophical Society in April 1823 and to his receiving an honorary degree from Columbia University in August 1824. In addition, his reputation was such that he was able to form a New York City-centered society of writers and artists, the Bread and Cheese Club, including as initial members Asher Durand, Samuel F. B. Morse, and William Cullen Bryant. See Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), pp. 408-11.

42. On this background, see Taylor, ibid., passim, a superb blending of literary and historical scholarship.

43. Taylor's description of this "nineteenth-century bourgeois morality play" is fascinating. See Taylor, ibid., p. 404.

44. Taylor, ibid., pp. 406-9; Spencer, *Quest for Nationality* (note 8 above), p. 74. On the "cultural patriotism" and "cultural nationalism" climate of the times, see also note 5 above.


47. Susan Cooper, *Pages and Pictures* (note 37 above), p. 129. John G. E. Heckewelder's 1819 work on Indians in the Pennsylvania and New York area was also a source for *Mohicans*. See Arthur C. Parker, "Sources and Range of Cooper's Indian Lore," *New York History* 52, no. 4 (1954): 451. Cooper places the travels leading to *Mohicans* in 1825, but James Franklin Beard's "Historical Introduction" to *The Last of the Mohicans*, *A Narrative of 1757*, by James Fenimore Cooper (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1983), p. xx, establishes 1824 as the correct date. Regarding the important issue as to when Cooper obtained a copy of the Biddle edition, neither review of Beard, ed., *Letters and Journals of Cooper* (note 38 above), nor of the Cooper papers at the American Antiquarian Society and in the Beinecke Collection at Yale sheds any light on the question. A compulsive record keeper, Cooper kept receipts for virtually everything he purchased, including books and newspaper subscriptions. My research in these documents and related materials, however, found no mention of the Biddle edition or other material available at the time about Lewis and Clark. This research, combined with my correspondence with leading Cooper scholars Wayne Franklin and Hugh MacDougall leads me to the conclusion that, barring some future documentary discoveries, we will never be able to establish with precision when and exactly how Cooper was influenced by Lewis and Clark. Some such influence is clear, but its precise nature is, and will likely remain, cloudy.
48. E. Soteris Muszynska-Wallace, "The Sources of The Prairie," American Literature 21 (May 1949): 193-200, gives several examples of Cooper's direct use of the Biddle journals. Muszynska-Wallace and several other scholars make it clear that Stephen H. Long's journals, published in 1823, were also a significant source for Cooper. Muszynska-Wallace, pp. 196-200, undertakes the laborious chore of comparing excerpts from The Prairie to appropriate parts of the Biddle edition and to the 1823 printing of Long's journals. This work makes clear portions of Cooper that must have come from Lewis and Clark. Henry Nash Smith, in his introduction to the 1950 Holt, Rinehart, and Winston edition of The Prairie, pp. vi-vii, sees Long as the dominant source but does make brief mention of Lewis and Clark. Orn Overland, The Making and Meaning of an American Classic: James Fenimore Cooper's 'The Prairie' (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), pp. 60-61, 67, 68-86, sees the use of the Biddle edition as especially important in Cooper's portrayal of the Sioux. The most intriguing suggestion regarding the influence of Lewis and Clark on Cooper is in Overland, ibid., pp. 59-60. He suggests that Cooper's stereotyping in The Prairie of the Sioux (villainous) and the Pawnee (virtuous) may have derived from Meriwether Lewis's characterization of the two tribes in his April 1805 report from Fort Mandan to Jefferson. As discussed in the text, this report was widely available in 1806.


51. Flexner, ibid., pp. 6-9; Truettner and Wallach, ibid., pp. 25-26.


54. Ibid., pp. 3-5, 19-20; see also Vesell, p. xviii, and Noble, pp. 34-36 (both note 49 above).


59. McCracken, ibid., p. 18; Millichap, ibid., pp. 7-9. The quote is from Catlin, Letters and Notes, ibid., p. 2.
60. Truettner, *Natural Man* (note 58 above), pp. 12, 81-2; McCracken, ibid., pp. 21-27; Goetzmann and Goetzmann, *West of Imagination* (note 58 above), pp. 16-17.

61. Catlin, *Letters and Notes* (note 58 above), p. 2. McCracken places the date of this event in 1824; Goetzmann and Goetzmann in 1826; Millichap in 1823; Dippie simply says that Catlin “never gave the year.” Truettner does not suggest a specific date, but says it was “presumably before 1826.” My reading of the multiple sources points to 1824 as the most likely year, but certainly a date prior to 1826.


64. Truettner, *Natural Man*, pp. 16-17; Halpin, introduction to *Letters and Notes*, pp. xi-xii; McCracken and Goetzmann, *West*, p. 18 (all note 38 above). The portrait of Clark is in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. Catlin’s familiarity with Lewis and Clark is evidenced on many occasions. One of the most obvious comes when he makes a stop during an 1832 descent of the Missouri to visit, and paint, the site of Sergeant Floyd’s grave. See Truettner, ibid., pp. 79, 248-9.

65. Truettner, ibid., pp. 20-26, 105; Halpin, ibid., p. x; McCracken, ibid., pp. 44-132. Goetzmann and Goetzmann, ibid., pp. 10-14, credit Samuel Seymour, who along with 19-year-old Titian Peale, accompanied the 1819-20 expeditions of Stephen Long, with producing “the first eye-witness pictorial representations of the West to be placed before the American public.” Seymour’s 1820 “Distant View of the Rocky Mountains,” appeared as a hand-colored aquatint frontispiece to the 1823 account of the Long expedition.

66. McCracken, ibid., pp. 158-60, 183-208. Most of Catlin’s paintings eventually do make their way to the Smithsonian Institution, via their purchase by an American railroad magnate in 1852, and their subsequent bequest to the Smithsonian (ibid, p. 204). Millichap, *Catlin* (note 38 above), p. 17, points out that Catlin proposed that the entirety of the Plains between the Mississippi and the Rockies be set aside for the Indians. This was not, of course, a popular position to take in a time when the doctrine of Manifest Destiny was nigh sacred.


68. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire* (note 4 above), passim, remains the best treatment of these post-Lewis and Clark efforts, and of their “programmed” nature of mission, makeup, etc.

69. The “wilder image” phrase is from William Cullen Bryant’s sonnet, “To Cole the Artist Departing for Europe,” quoted in Truettner and Wallach, *Thomas Cole* (note 50 above), p. 52. The citation for the DeVoto quote is *Course of Empire* (note 17 above).

70. Moulton, *Journals* (note 2 above), 5: 106. Clark’s inscription is in response to a similar phrase Alexander MacKenzie had carved into a tree at the completion of his 1793 transcontinental crossing of Canada.