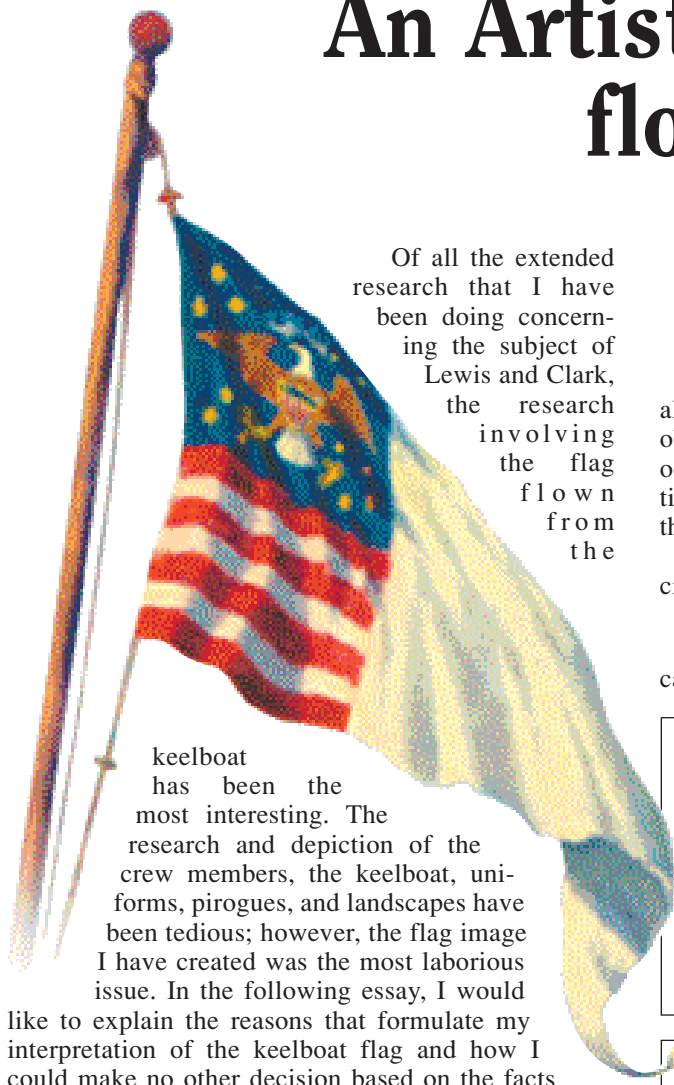


An Artist's Interpretation of the flag flown from the keelboat

By Gary R. Lucy



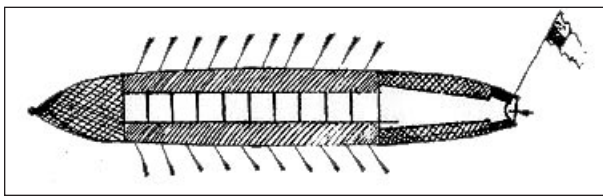
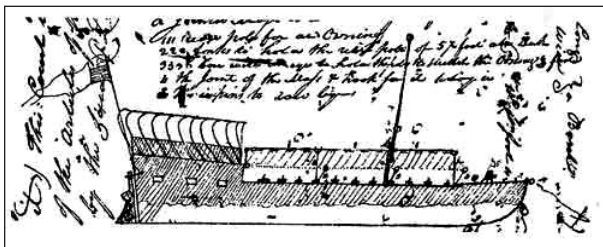
Of all the extended research that I have been doing concerning the subject of Lewis and Clark, the research involving the flag flown from the

keelboat has been the most interesting. The research and depiction of the crew members, the keelboat, uniforms, pirogues, and landscapes have been tedious; however, the flag image I have created was the most laborious issue. In the following essay, I would like to explain the reasons that formulate my interpretation of the keelboat flag and how I could make no other decision based on the facts as I found them.

There have been many attempts to interpret this flag by various respected historic groups. However, I believe, with respect to my friends in the historic community of differing opinion, the image I will outline is the most plausible explanation.

I would like to list my reasons for depicting the flag flown from the stern of the keelboat as an expedition flag approximately twelve to fourteen feet in length and fabricated by taking a portion of an Indian Presentation Flag and adding a white pennant. I will examine the keelboat drawings of William Clark to evaluate his techniques and instruments used to produce the images. As an artist, I will give my impression of what Clark is trying to convey to the viewer through his drawings of the keelboat. I will list the known flags of the period and explain why I feel an Indian Presentation Flag of that period with an Eagle in the canton area is the only choice for the flag used in the fabrication process.

First, let us examine Clark's drawings of the keelboat and the flag flown from it.



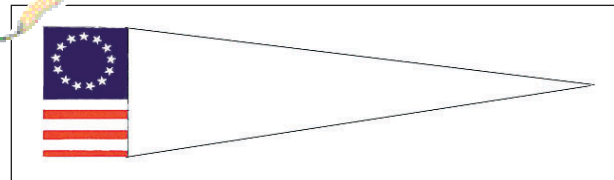
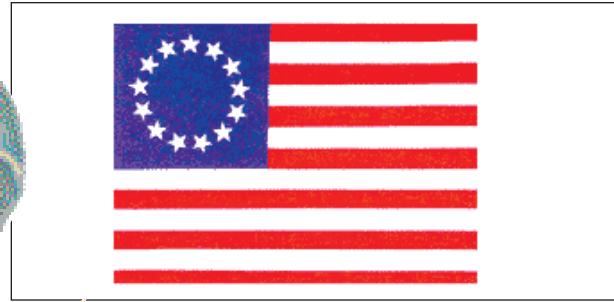
The above drawings, made at the Wood River encampment in the winter of 1803-04, were taken from the Lewis and Clark Journals. These were the only drawings made of the keelboat. We see a detailed drawing outlining the structure of the boat; and, in addition, we find a detailed drawing of the flag Clark is telling us flew from the stern of the boat. I can surmise no other conclusion from the drawing other than Clark is telling us that he is detailing the keelboat as it would have appeared on the journey. If we are to believe the journals, we must interpret this drawing as accurate.

The flag we see in the drawing is not like any other flag of the period. Lewis and Clark's flag appears to be an expedition flag. A flag fabricated specifically for the expedition. Thus, I feel that an existing flag of that period would have been used and a portion of the stripes would have been cut from the flag along side the canton area. The canton area of our American Flag is the field of blue. A white pennant, representing the expedition came in peace, would have been added. Based on the assumption that the keelboat was fifty-five feet in length at the water line, it can be mathematically surmised from the profile drawing that the flag would have been forty-eight to fifty-four inches high and twelve to fourteen feet in length.

What flags would have been available at that time to fabricate the expedition flag?

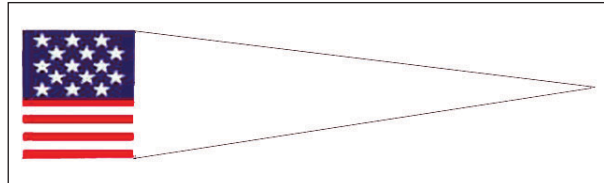
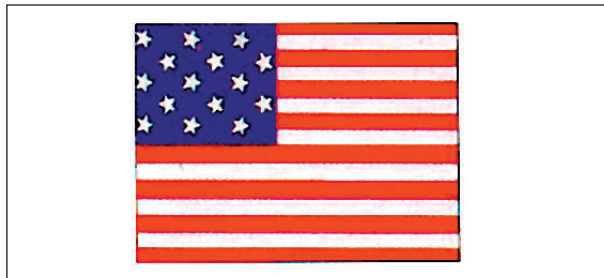
It was not uncommon for the flag at that time to be altered by cutting or writing on it to fit an occasion. My observations lead me to conclude that a flag of the period was altered to produce the Lewis and Clark expedition flag. What flag would have been altered? I have three possible suggestions:

- 1) The Betsy Ross American Flag of 1776 with a circle pattern of stars.
- 2) The American Flag of 1804.
- 3) An Indian presentation flag with an eagle in the canton area.



1. The Betsy Ross American Flag of 1776 with a circle pattern of stars. (Flag #1 above)

Because Clark's drawings may, at first glance, appear to be exhibiting a circular star pattern, some efforts have been made to use a circular pattern in the pennant flag; however, I cannot accept that Lewis and Clark would be using a flag from the 1776-1794 time period. The flag act of 1794 clearly states that the flag will contain 15 stars and 15 stripes. These stars appear in 5 rows with 3 stars per row in the canton area. There was another flag with 12 stars in a circle and one star in the center, the Cowpens Flag of 1781; however, this flag was not used universally and only on a regional basis. Lewis and Clark were official government representatives. To think they would be using a flag design outdated for ten years is not reasonable in my opinion. To my knowledge, no other flags used by the Army, of which Lewis and Clark were commissioned officers, exhibited stars in a circular pattern. Therefore the 1776 flag appears to be the only basis for this premise.



2. The American Flag of 1804. (Flag #2 above)

Because of the location of the dots, I feel that this flag can be discounted without further study. For dot theory and flag comparison log on to: www.garylucy.com.

3. An Indian Presentation Flag with an Eagle in the canton area. (Flag #3 below)



This possibility seems to be the only plausible solu-

tion to the problem. Let us examine this flag. Indian Presentation Flags were designed to be given to the chiefs of individual Indian nations. Lewis and Clark carried several of these flags with them and gave them as gifts to the tribal leaders.

The unique feature of the flag was the Eagle in the canton area of the flag. Several Indian Presentation Flags have been documented. Note the two examples.

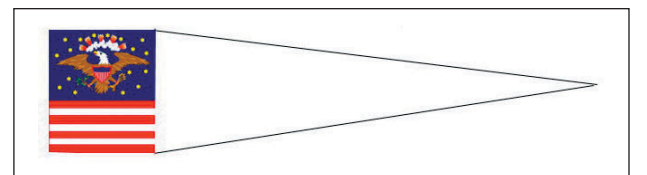


Above, is an Indian Presentation Flag dating to the 1790's time period and given to an Indian Chief by General George Rodgers Clark. The flag has been in a Native-American family for seven generations. The flag has thirteen stripes and an arch of thirteen stars. An Eagle can be found in the canton area. The second is an Indian Presentation Flag, flag #3, in the collection of the Chicago Historical Society dated to the 1808 time period. This flag most closely resembles the image I am portraying in my interpretation of the expedition flag. The flag has fifteen stripes and fifteen gold six point stars and an Eagle in the canton area. The stars and Eagle are painted in the canton area. The flag measures 58 inches by 150 inches. Thus, the 58-inch measurement is very close to the mathematical calculation taken from the Clark drawings pertaining to the possible size of the expedition flag.

Of the few documented Indian Presentation Flags, the one consistent symbol contained in the flag is the Eagle. I have used the two flags above because they bracket the time period of Lewis and Clark. The Eagle is not only a national symbol contained in our coat of arms and a symbol of the presidency directing the expedition; but, for Lewis and Clark this symbol constantly recurs as an image on buckles, gorgets, buttons, cockade pins, and sword handles to mention a few. To deduce that they would include an image of an Eagle in their expedition flag is a logical deduction. The Eagle would have also been included in the Indian Presentation Flag and in the expedition flag because to the Native-Americans the Eagle was a sacred symbol. Thus, the image I have interpreted as the expedition flag is the most logical choice. The white banner added to the Indian Presentation Flag would represent the fact that the Lewis and Clark expedition wished to be seen as coming in peace. The addition of the Eagle in the canton area represents not only the government of the United States of America but reinforces our respect for the symbols held in the highest regard by the Native-Americans.

Respectfully submitted, Gary R. Lucy
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My work with historic interpretation has been very rewarding. It appears that I will continue to work using history as a subject in some capacity for the remainder of my career. The rivers will also continue to be a venue of creative efforts. I have been working with the subject of the river for almost twenty years.