

## Gateway West

The Missouri River. 'Missouri' is an Indian word meaning "people of the big canoe." In 1673, Fr. Jacque Marquet, a French missionary and explorer, wrote the word Missouri on a map he had drawn, he put the name he had borrowed from the Indians beside the river, to show the location of a group of people who lived along its banks. The Indians didn't call this Great River, or this region Missouri, but in one of those odd quirks of history, the name the Frenchman put on his map stuck, both for the river, and for the region around it. Missouri. And, much of the history of this state is linked to this river, the river of the people of the big canoe.

This is the Missouri River and this is a site of Ft. Osage. This is a modern reconstruction, but it's built on the original foundation, and they say it looks like the real thing. Come on, let's explore!

It was built in 1808 when William Clark, of Lewis and Clark fame, came here with a group of soldiers and some workers to establish a trading post and a fort for the U.S. government. In just ten days, three block houses were built and they were started on a fourth. Two buildings were ready trade goods and the blacksmith shop and work shop were already finished. Within the same ten days, Clark negotiated a treaty with the Osage Indians, granting the United States title to nearly half of present day Missouri. He also kept a journal of his trip, which later became a book called, "Westward with the Dragoons". Man, those cats were super busy!

Fort Osage consisted of two separate, but combined operations, the military was here, to make sure that no foreign power tried to come into the brand new territory of Louisiana that we'd just acquired from France. They were also to make sure that disputes among the Indians did not get out of hand. The trade side of the operation was manned by civilians, we only have the factory building and a couple of other buildings, to Fort Osage to be complete the way it was in 1812, we need 41 more buildings to build. We had between 100 and 120 people living here full time. This was very much like a large city all crammed inside a tall wooden fence.

Before 1804, the area we now call Missouri was controlled by the French and the Spanish. But, the story of Ft. Osage is about the American colonization of Missouri. It starts with two men, Lewis and Clark and a little thing called the Louisiana Purchase. Imagine you're a young man setting off on a journey into the unknown regions of the American continent.

Honored parents, I now embrace this opportunity of writing to you once more to let you know where I am and where I'm going. I am well, thank God, and in high spirits. I am now on a expedition to the westward with Captain Lewis and Captain Clark who were appointed by the President of the United States to go on an expedition through the interior parts of North America. We are to ascend the Missouri River with a boat as far as navigable, and then go by land to the western ocean. John Ordway, April 8, 1804.

In 1804, the Missouri River was a mystery to the American explorers, Lewis and Clark. Around every bend there were new discoveries. They set out with about 40 men in a keel boat which they pulled, paddled and even sailed upstream as far as what is now North Dakota. From there they used canoes and horses to push through to the Pacific Ocean and the history books. How they came to be there is a story in itself.

Exploring the western portion of North America had long been a dream of newly elected president Thomas Jefferson. With Merewether Lewis, William Clark and their hand-picked band of men, Jefferson felt confident the goal of reaching the Pacific Ocean could be achieved. But the lands west of the Mississippi were controlled by the Spanish. Technically, the Lewis and Clark expeditions would be trespassing. Events in Europe soon changed the nature of their journey. In 1803, shortly before the expedition was to leave St. Louis, the Spanish government transferred title to the Louisiana territory to France, and France was ready to deal. Jefferson saw his opportunity and purchased the territory for \$15

million dollars, doubling the size of the United States. The voyage of discovery took on a new meaning. Lewis and Clark would be exploring American territory.

In 1804 the expedition passed this bend in the river, near present day Kansas City. William Clark noted the location, calling it a fantastic location for a fort. Four years later he was back, but not as an explorer, but as an Indian agent, a representative for the United States government. He was here to make a treaty with the Osage; he was here to make a deal for much of the land that you and I have come to know as Missouri.

Wednesday, 14 September, 1808. Met agreeably in treaty on the banks of the Missouri, about four or five miles above fire prairie. In the presence of the public and part of the military, the great Osage and little Osage chiefs and warriors and myself entered into a treaty in which the Osage ceded, conveyed, and relinquish all the land east of a line south drawn from where we treated to the river Arkansas, and amounting to nearly 30 million acres of excellent country, including the settlements below the Missouri.  
William Clark

The treaty Clark negotiated effectively gave the United States title to much of Missouri. Though Clark's treaty of September was challenged by some Osage warriors not present at Fort Osage, and was later superseded by a broader treaty negotiated with the Osage in November of that year, the dye was cast on the banks of the Missouri in 1808. The Osage were giving up their claim to Missouri.

The treaty offered peace, protection and trade. Years before, a strong Osage nation would have laughed at that. But, by now their world was falling apart. The people were in a terrible crisis. It was not just the white settlers moving in on them, it was many other Indian nations, people who had been crowded out of their hunting grounds and their homes, east of the Mississippi River, were now moving into the Osage territory. And there were so many enemies that the Osage could no longer defend themselves, they needed allies, and this treaty seemed to offer that.

On Friday, September 16, 1808, Clark, his mission to the Osage concluded, boards a barge for the float downstream.

We leave this handsome spot at 2:00, and did not get out of site till past three. The situation is elegant, commanding and healthy, the land about it fine, well-timbered and watered.

The ... is at the hands of Captain Clemson, who handled military affairs and a government agent or factor, named George Sibley, who traded with the Osage people out of a room just like this one for 13 years. During this time, Sibley came to know the Osage very well, and then the white man. Sibley reports a conversation he had with the Osage chief, Big Soldier.

I admire your manner of living. You can do almost what you choose. You whites, possess the power of subduing almost every animal you use, but everything about you is in chains and you are slaves yourselves. Talk to my sons. Perhaps they may be persuaded to adopt your fashions, or at least recommend them to their sons. But, for myself, I was born free, was raised free, and wish to die free.

Fort Osage, the Missouri River, Lewis and Clark, the pride of the Osage Indians--it's all part of your Missouri heritage. You gotta check it out!