



Arrow points, Plains Indian, of bone (top), quartz, chalcedony, and three of metal. "Excepting epidemic disease," writes Castle McLaughlin, "steel was the most profound agent of social change introduced by European colonizers of the Americas."

Buckskin Diplomacy

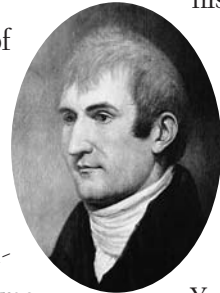
The objects Lewis and Clark acquired in negotiations with Indian nations have much to say.

THIS IS HOW HARVARD came to possess what are probably the only surviving Indian objects brought east by Lewis and Clark, objects showcased in two exhibitions and explored in a new, landmark book.

Housed in Philosophical Hall in the bustle of downtown Philadelphia, Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum was packed with "curiosities" from around the world, and in the early nineteenth century it served as an unofficial depository for the young nation's curiosities, there being no Smithsonian at the time. President Thomas Jefferson and Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark gave Peale more than 70 objects that the captains had acquired from Native Americans during the epic journey of the Corps of Discovery across North America from 1804 to 1806. In 1809 Peale entered into his ledger a list of expedition items turned over to him, viz., "A Tobacco Pouch, from the Ioway's," and "Wampum, of various descriptions, indicating Peace, War, Choice of either, Hostilities commencing, and a disposition for them to ceace &c."

The gift turned out to be providential. Jefferson had kept many expedition objects for display at his plantation, Monticello, and

Above, portraits of William Clark, top, 1807-8, and Meriwether Lewis, 1807, both by Charles Willson Peale, an artist as well as a museum builder. Right: Basketry whaler's hat from the Northwest Coast, of Makah or Nootka origin, made of spruce root, cedar bark, surf grass, and unidentified fur and mammal hide. Such onion-dome hats were worn only by high-ranking tribal members, usually harpooners.



Clark had hung on to some to show at his Saint Louis council hall, but upon the deaths of these gentlemen, the Indian artifacts slipped away, their fate unknown today.

Over the years, Peale repeatedly urged the government to purchase the entire contents of his museum (an estimated 100,000 objects by 1820) and create a national institution to preserve them, but the government declined. The Philadelphia Museum was a staid institution, and by the 1830s its fortunes flagged as the public hungered for more excitement, of the sort provided at the American Museum in New York City by its proprietor, P.T. Barnum—"The Sun

of the Amusement World, from which All Lesser Luminaries Borrow Light," as one of his posters described him. Barnum offered the public such attractions as an 18-inch-long "Feejee Mermaid" (a fish-monkey composite, but a wow). By 1850 Barnum and his friend Moses Kimball, owner of the Boston Museum, who had loaned Barnum the mermaid, had together purchased and divvied up much of the contents of Peale's by-then-bankrupt museum.

Barnum apparently came to feel that his Lewis and Clark and other Native American things had scant popular appeal and sent some of them to Kimball, a good thing because in 1865 Barnum's museum burned to the ground. In April 1899 a damaging fire visited the Boston Museum, too.

Kimball heirs—he had died four years before—invited Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology to





select what it wanted from objects remaining in the exhibit cases. Even before the fire, the Boston Museum had become more interested in staging theatrical presentations than exhibits. The Peabody, on the other hand, was America's first ethnographic museum, established in 1866 and meant to facilitate the scientific description of individual cultures. In May the Peabody's assistant curator crossed the river to Boston and chose more than 1,400 pieces, including objects from Peale's museum, some still with labels handwritten by Peale and his sons. The things associated with Lewis and Clark were not numerous.

Nobody paid serious attention to the Lewis and Clark collection, about 50 items, until 1997. But as the bicentennial of the storied expedition approached, and a paroxysm of celebration planning got going nationwide, anthropologist Rubie Watson, Howells director of the Peabody (who steps down from that position in December), asked Castle McLaughlin, now the museum's associate curator of North American ethnography, to research the objects ascribed to the expedition. Like any curator, McLaughlin began by considering the objects themselves and their provenance. But her project became mammoth. She found she had to address Lewis and Clark scholarship, the history of the U.S. government's relations with the Indians, the history of museums, and detailed analysis of materials. McLaughlin consulted Peabody colleagues and a host of outside specialists, including contemporary Indian artists and a forensic ornithologist who could identify feathers and link ceremonial pipes to particular regions.

From top: More than a dozen materials were used on this decorated pipe stem, from the eastern Plains or western Great Lakes, including the head and scalp of an ivory-billed woodpecker and the face patch of a wood duck. Each had symbolic meaning for the maker. Pipe bowl, probably of catlinite, eastern Plains or western Great Lakes. Bow case and quiver with bow and arrows, upper Missouri River, Mandan or Hidatsa (?), of mountain-lion hide. Raven belt ornament incorporating four raven skins, likely worn by a member of a military society. Beaded baby carrier, Transmontane, Crow(?). The baby must have been highly regarded: the Crow would exchange a horse for 100 blue beads such as these.

Among the tangible results of McLaughlin's work is a handsome volume packed with new knowledge, *Arts of Diplomacy: Lewis and Clark's Indian Collection*, written by her with contributions from others, including Native Americans. McLaughlin argues that Lewis and Clark—and Jefferson, who sent them—were not in pursuit of scientific discovery. Their interests were commercial and imperial. With the Louisiana Purchase, the government had acquired huge new territory. Jefferson instructed Lewis and Clark to explain to the

Indians who their new “fathers and friends” were and explore economic opportunities along the way, while searching for a Northwest Passage to the Pacific. The Indians, variously disposed toward these initiatives, had their differing agendas, but if they were to be allies of their new fathers, they wanted to profit from the arrangement. James P. Ronda, Barnard professor of Western American history at the University of Tulsa, writes in his foreword, “McLaughlin’s Lewis and Clark are diplomats in buckskin engaged in complex exchanges with Native diplomats adept at the arts of rhetoric and negotiation.” Diplomatic relations between nations brought the exchange of meaningful gifts—peace medals from Jefferson’s travelers, pipes, hats, and baskets from the Indians—after which items could change hands through barter. The Indian artifacts McLaughlin studied *are* the arts of diplomacy. “They were chosen and given by the Indian people,” she says. “They are like voices from the past.” Writes Ronda, “The voices in the objects now join those already present in the expedition’s written record.”

McLaughlin’s book will be published by the museum and the University of Washington Press in conjunction with an exhibition at the Peabody, “From Nation to Nation,” which opens December 12 and runs through 2005. The centerpiece of the exhibition will be the diplomatic pipe below as it might have been presented, with contemporary artist Butch

Clockwise from right, top: “Sioux-type” side-fold dress, Central Plains, Lakota or Cheyenne (?). Globalization arrived long before Lewis and Clark. Along with dyed and undyed porcupine quills and dyed bird quills, this dress is adorned with English brass buttons, Italian glass beads, and cowrie shells. A special-occasion dress, worn for dancing, it has at bottom tin-plated sheet-iron tinklers. Calumet stem, Missouri River. Pipes with cylindrical stems are called calumets. Wooden cradle, Chinook, carved from cedar.

Thunder Hawk consulting on the dis-





Clockwise from top: Pictographic bison robe, upper Missouri River, Mandan or Yankton (?). The 64 pictographs of battling warriors were probably painted by as many as three different artists. Grizzly-bear-claw ornaments, western North America, worn by warriors. Beaded garter, western Great Lakes or eastern Plains, Sauk (?), with an hourglass or thunderbird design. Root-gathering basket or "sally bag," mid Columbia River, Wasco-Wishram, for one's bitter-root, camas bulbs, and cous roots.

McLaughlin's primary task at the start was to determine which of the "Lewis and Clark" objects given to the museum in 1899 could in fact be ascribed to the expedition, which probably could, which possibly could, and which were simply of the period. After meticulous study, she and her colleagues can say with confidence that six of the objects were acquired by Lewis and Clark. They include an otter bag, three men's raven ornaments (see page 34), and two basketry whaling hats (see page 33). The record might be clearer had Congress acquired Charles Willson Peale's museum.

~CHRISTOPHER REED

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play. The side-fold dress (see page 35) will also be a highlight, with an accompanying interactive computer exploration of its cosmopolitan components. Additionally, the Peabody is lending about 55 Indian objects, many not directly associated with the expedition but illustrative of the period, to a major show organized by the Missouri Historical Society, opening in St. Louis in January and traveling, through September 2006, to Philadelphia, Denver, Portland, Oregon, and Washington, D.C.



Biographical war shirt, upper Missouri River, Mandan (?). Strips of quillwork outlined with blue beads and strands of colored horsehair decorate the shoulders. The human figure is probably the owner of the shirt. His red sash signifies his membership in a warrior society.