

## Edward B. Kaye: American Indian Flags and the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial

**Abstract:** In 2003-2006 the United States commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with events across the entire country. The "Corps of Discovery", as it was known, explored the North American Continent from Missouri to Oregon, expanding knowledge of the Louisiana Territory and the Oregon Country and strengthening the claims of the United States. In 1803-06 the Corps, led by U.S. Army captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, traveled over 13,000 km. through the homelands of over 50 native tribes.

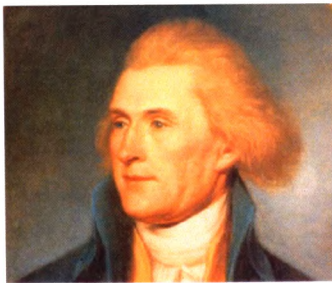
During the Bicentennial those tribes used their flags to represent their role as sovereign nations encountered by the expedition. While 200 years ago none of those tribes had flags of their own, today nearly all are vexilliferous. Their flags have been adopted primarily in the past 25 years, spurred by federal laws supporting tribal sovereignty and allowing operation of gambling casinos; some were adopted specifically in anticipation of the Bicentennial. The largest single use of American Indian flags took place during the opening ceremonies of the Bicentennial event in November 2005 at the Pacific Ocean, where representatives of tribes carried 50 flags, supplied by members of the North American Vexillological Association.



## Introduction



In the early 1800s, the United States was a very young country, occupying just the eastern coast of North America. Other countries, France, Great Britain, Spain, and Russia, all made territorial claims on and occupied parts of the continent. U.S. President Thomas Jefferson foresaw the expansion of the United States to the western coast. His administration purchased the Louisiana Territory in 1803, doubling the size of the country. He then sent his personal secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and Lewis's former army commander, William Clark, on an expedition to explore the territory and seek the "Northwest Passage" a water-based route across the continent.





From May 1804 to September 1806, Captains Lewis & Clark led a military corps of 31 men up the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains, and down the Columbia River to the

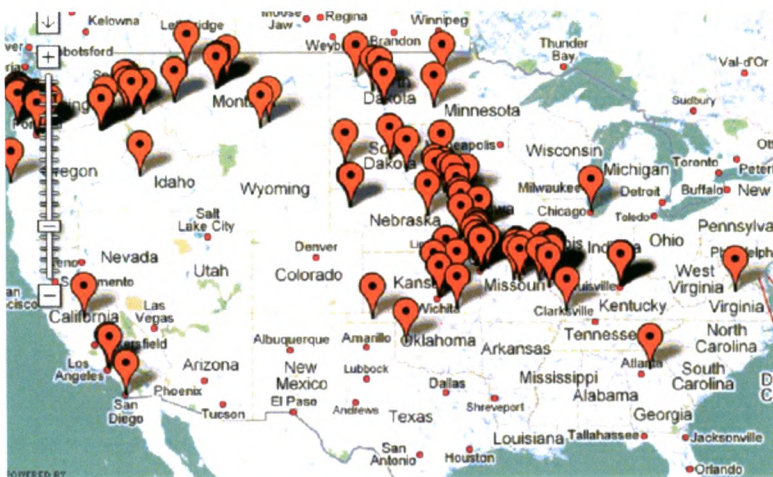
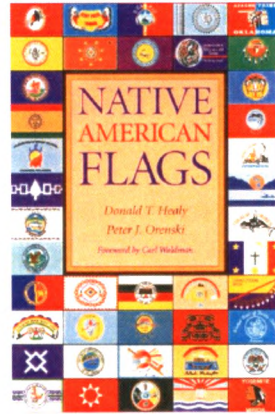
Pacific Ocean, and back. Their "Corps of Discovery" traveled over 13,000 km. through the homelands of over 50 native tribes, through the newly-acquired Louisiana Purchase and into the Oregon Country. The Lewis & Clark Expedition was the first Euro-American party to cross the present United States, map its travels, collect scientific specimens, and record detailed observations of the land and its native peoples. It traversed what would become 11 of the current 50 states. Lewis & Clark's journey became one of the most important chapters in the heroic opened up settlement.



Two hundred years later, the country commemorated the Lewis & Clark Expedition with a multi-year series of events, exhibitions, books, monumental art, park dedications, and educational opportunities. Nearly all of the over 50 “encounter tribes” participated in the bicentennial, seeing an opportunity to tell their side of the story. A few, recognizing that the Expedition marked the beginning of the end of their way of life, avoided the commemoration.

### Tribal Flags and the Bicentennial

While 200 years ago none of those encounter tribes had flags of their own, today nearly all have flags. President Jefferson’s detailed instructions to the captains described the tribes as “nations”, and indeed current U.S. government policy requires states and federal agencies to deal with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis. Along with federal laws allowing operation of gambling casinos, this has spurred tribal flag adoption over the past 25 years. Recently, dozens of tribes have been encouraged to adopt flags by the efforts of Peter Orenski’s TME Co. and the seminal work by Don Healy on American Indian Flags, first published by NAVA. Several tribal flags were adopted specifically in anticipation of the Bicentennial.



From January 2003 to September 2006, the national Lewis & Clark Bicentennial comprised thousands of events across the country. Not only did nearly every community along the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail - from St. Louis, Missouri to Astoria, Oregon - hold some form of commemorative event, there were fourteen national-level events. Every trail state had a substantial organizing group.



Several federal agencies sponsored significant participation, including the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service. Other agencies also

participated, including the Army National Guard, NASA, and the U.S.



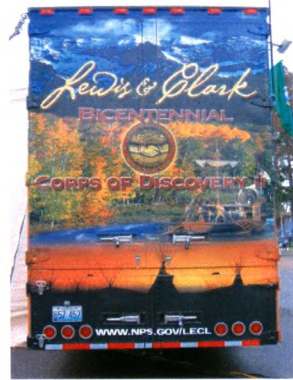
Mint, which featured Lewis & Clark's young Shoshoni interpreter, Sacagawea, on the U.S. one-dollar coin.





The National Park Service led the federal efforts. It created the “Corps of Discovery II”, a mo-

bile exhibit and event venue that traveled the length of the trail for over three years. TME Co. generously provided Corps II with a full set of encounter tribe flags. The staff of Corps II would take care to fly the flags of the host tribes in each of the sites it visited. While never more than three flags would be flying at once, for many of the hundreds of thousands of visitors it was the first time they had ever seen a tribal flag.

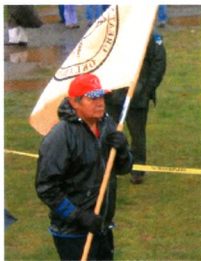


Two of the largest national-level events recognized the Expedition’s reaching the Pacific, in November 2005, and its triumphant return to St. Louis, in September 2006. Tribal flags figured prominently in both.





The largest single use of tribal flags took place during the opening ceremonies of the Destination: The Pacific” event in November 2005 at the Pacific Ocean. Held on Veterans Day and sponsored by the Army National Guard, the opening ceremonies combined historic, patriotic, and military ritual.



Kickapoo



Nez Perce



Omaha



Pawnee



Representatives of encounter tribes - all of them U.S. military veterans, carried tribal flags in a solemn procession. There, in the pouring rain near Lewis & Clark’s



winter encampment of Fort Clatsop, 50 tribes were represented by flags – the largest collection of encounter tribe flags ever used in bicentennial observances. Ironically, U.S. state flags were included in the display nearly as an afterthought. The tribal flags were supplied by members of the North American Vexillological Association, most coming from the collection of Dr. Dennis Moore.

That evening, the local tribe, the Clatsop-Nehalem, hosted a potlatch for all the visiting tribal representatives, with young “wolf dancers” in front of the tribe’s new flag.



The event coincided with the opening at the Oregon Historical Society of the National Lewis & Clark Exhibition, a large museum exhibition organized by the Missouri Historical Society. Tribal representatives and all the flags paraded in downtown Portland for the opening event.

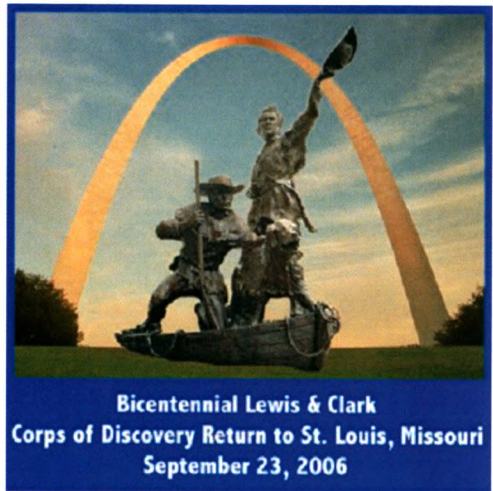


The organization of Lewis & Clark enthusiasts, the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, held its annual meeting in Portland three months before, on the campus of Lewis & Clark College. Tribal and state flags – 70 in all – decorated the main event facility.



The final national event, in September 2006, celebrated the return of the Corps to St. Louis, Missouri, on the Mississippi riverbank in front of the famous Gateway Arch. On the main flagpoles, the St. Louis city flag was replaced by the flag of the Osage Nation, in whose traditional homeland the events took place. Again, tribal representatives

carried in their flags, trooping in under the arch and forming a line in front of the crowd with the flags flying in the breeze.





### Tribal Flags

The following 50 “Encounter Tribe” flags appeared in the November 2005 events. They represent tribes currently on the Lewis & Clark Trail and others with only a historical connection. Not included are those tribes in the so-called “Eastern Legacy” portion of the Trail, from Virginia and Pennsylvania to Illinois, who have a less-direct connection to the Lewis & Clark story. Since many tribes no longer live in their native homelands, having been relocated to reservations, a geographic sequencing is difficult. Therefore, the tribes and their flags were announced and displayed alphabetically.



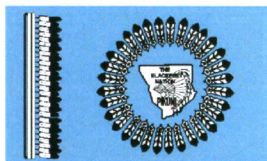
Absentee Shawnee Tribe  
Oklahoma



Fort Peck Assiniboine-Sioux Tribe  
– Poplar, Montana



Fort Belknap Gros Ventre-  
Assiniboine – Harlem, Montana



Blackfoot Nation  
Browning, Montana



Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe  
Eagle Butte, South Dakota



Chinook Indian Tribe  
Chinook, Washington



Clatsop/Nehalem Confederated Tribes  
Turner, Oregon



Coeur D'Alene Tribe  
Plummer, Idaho



Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation  
Nespelem, Washington



Comanche Tribe  
Lawton, Oklahoma



Cowlitz Indian Tribe

Cowlitz Indian Tribe  
Longview, Washington



Crow Nation  
Crow Agency, Montana



Crow Creek Sioux Tribe  
Ft. Thompson, South Dakota



Eastern Shawnee Tribe  
Oklahoma



Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe  
Flandreau, South Dakota



Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes  
Pablo, Montana



Kootenai Tribe  
Bonners Ferry, Idaho



Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde  
Grand Ronde, Oregon



Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma  
Oklahoma



Iowa Tribe of Kansas & Nebraska  
White Cloud, Kansas



Kalispel (Pend d'Oreille)  
Washington



Kanza Nation  
Kaw City, Oklahoma



Kickapoo Tribe  
Oklahoma



Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa  
Indians of Montana  
Great Falls, Montana



Lower Brule Sioux Tribe  
Lower Brule, South Dakota



Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort  
Berthold Reservation  
New Town, North Dakota



Nez Perce Tribe  
Lapwai, Idaho



Northern Arapahoe Tribe  
Fort Washakie, Wyoming



Northern Cheyenne Tribe  
Lame Deer, Montana



Oglala Sioux  
Pine Ridge, South Dakota



Omaha Tribe  
Macy, Nebraska



Osage Nation of Oklahoma  
Pawhuska, Oklahoma



Otoe-Missouria Tribe  
Red Rock, Oklahoma



Pawnee Indian Tribe of Oklahoma  
Pawnee, Oklahoma



Ponca Tribe of Nebraska  
Niobara, Nebraska



Rosebud Sioux Tribe  
Rosebud, South Dakota



Sac and Fox Tribe of Iowa  
Tama, Iowa



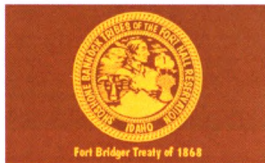
Sac and Fox Tribe of Missouri  
Reserve, Kansas



Santee Sioux Tribe  
Niobrara, Nebraska



Loyal Shawnee Tribe of  
Oklahoma  
Oklahoma



Shoshone-Bannock Tribes  
Fort Hall, Idaho



Confederated Tribes of Siletz  
Indians  
Oregon



Sisseton-Wahpeton of Lake  
Traverse Reservation  
Sisseton, South Dakota



Spokane Tribe  
Wellpinit, Washington



Standing Rock Sioux Tribe  
Fort Yates, North Dakota



Confederated Tribes of Umatilla  
Indian Reservation  
Pendleton, Oregon



Confederated Tribes of Warm  
Springs Reservation  
Warm Springs, Oregon



Yakama Indian Nation  
Toppenish, Washington



Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota  
Marty, South Dakota



Peace/Presentation Flag  
presented by Corps to Tribes

### Conclusion



Those flags had special meaning: they showed how the Indian side of the story was heard, respected, and included in the bicentennial. They provided a meaningful symbol of belonging to members of the participating tribes.

No matter that none existed at the time of the Expedition, today the flags heralded a new way of viewing the history of our country.



**Acknowledgements:**

Peter Orenski graciously provided most of the flag images used in this presentation.

**About the author**

**Edward B. (Ted) Kaye**, editor of *Raven* since 1996, is also advisory editor of *The Flag Bulletin*. A member of the North American Vexillological Association since 1985 and an organizer of the 12th International Congress of Vexillology in San Francisco in 1987, he serves as the chief financial officer of a small technology company and as NAVA's treasurer. His articles have appeared in *Raven*, *The Flag Bulletin*, *NAVA News*, the *Vexilloid Tabloid*, and *Flagmaster*. He compiled and published NAVA's guide to flag design "Good Flag, Bad Flag", and has led NAVA's Internet surveys of public perceptions of US and Canadian state/provincial flags and of US city flags. He presented papers on those surveys at the 20th and 21st ICVs.

From 1996 to 2002 he was executive director of Lewis & Clark Bicentennial in Oregon, the statewide coalition planning for the 2003-2006 national commemoration of the Corps of Discovery. He coordinated state and tribal flag displays for Oregon's major bicentennial events. As secretary of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Oregon Chapter, he is currently coordinating an inventory of expedition-related assets in Oregon.

**Address of the author:**

Edward B. (Ted) Kaye  
2235 N.W. Aspen Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97210  
USA  
e-mail: [kandsons@aol.com](mailto:kandsons@aol.com)