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Preface

Instructed by President Jefferson to keep meticulous records bearing upon the geography, ethnology, and natural history of the trans-Mississippi West, Lewis and Clark filled hundreds of notebook pages with observations during their expedition. Some of the enlisted men—those who were literate—did the same. The result is a national treasure: a complete look at the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Northwest, reported by men who were intelligent and well prepared, at a time when Easterners knew almost nothing about those regions so newly acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Getting at the actual words of the explorers, however, is either a formidable task (the party's diarists wrote more than one million words) or a disappointment, because existing condensations of the men's writings are outdated and incomplete.

A narrative based on the journals was prepared first by Nicholas Bidle and published in 1814. The journals themselves, most of which were deposited in the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia by Jefferson, lay largely unused and almost forgotten for nearly a century, until an edition of known materials was published in 1904–5. This first comprehensive edition of the journals, Reuben Gold Thwaites's *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804–1806*, was a superb tool for scholars and laypersons in its time. It had, however, suffered the various kinds of erosion that beset all such works: new manuscripts were discovered, much new information was available with which to annotate the journals, and documentary editing procedures had undergone profound changes. These deficiencies led to the project to publish an entirely new comprehensive edition of the journals. That effort, begun in 1979 and completed in 2001, was published as *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* in thirteen volumes by the University of Nebraska Press under the direction of the editor of this volume. However, that massive undertaking, targeted primarily at scholars and research institutions, does not reach a public who wants a less weighty introduction to the party's diaries. This book seeks to bring these important words to a wider audience

in a compact form: an accessible one-volume abridgment based on a reliable source with pertinent clarifying information.

Thwaites lacked both the time and knowledge to interpret fully the wondrous variety of raw materials produced by the explorers—ranging from reflections on Indian tribal customs to speculations on geological and ecological phenomena. Most important, documents were omitted from his edition because the material was either unknown or unavailable. These valuable resources include a journal kept by Lewis and later Clark as they traveled down the Ohio and up the Mississippi on the first leg of the expedition in 1803; a journal kept by Sergeant John Ordway, an intelligent soldier whose observations cover the entire expedition; Clark's rough field notes discovered in a Minnesota attic in the 1950s, which provide rich new data of a hitherto obscure period of the expedition; an extended copy of a journal kept by Private Joseph Whitehouse, not discovered until the 1960s (Thwaites had only a portion of the original); a number of Clark's original maps and a trove of historic copies, some replacing lost originals; and more than two hundred botanical items preserved from the expedition, many of them type specimens. Existing one-volume abridgments of the journals are all based on the limited Thwaites edition.

The abridged edition presented here proposes to overcome the inadequacies of Thwaites which were carried into current one-volume treatments. The new selections and annotations are made from the full corpus of journal materials, including those discovered since Thwaites's time and the important diaries of the enlisted men. Present condensations largely ignore the subordinates' diaries and miss the important collateral information that they provide. The captains' relations with and studies of the Native Americans with whom they came in contact is a major focus of the new selected edition. The men's extensive passages concerning American Indians are incorporated into this book in order to provide the fullest treatment possible. The natural history work of the party forms the second most prominent place in the selection process. Few other matters were so extensively noticed by the men. Finally, the exciting story the diaries tell is not neglected. The diarists observed, considered, and recorded it all.

If the Lewis and Clark expedition were a closed matter—an event that happened, made its contribution, and then was forgotten—a new se-

lected edition of the journals would be less pressing. Few events in American history are more alive today. Serious scholars have produced a number of significant books relating to the expedition in the last decades, books eagerly purchased by an interested public. The work of scholars has been greatly aided by the new edition, and it has been universally praised for its faithful transcriptions and valuable annotation. Indeed, the volumes of the new edition have already influenced new areas of scholarship and the reinterpretation of traditional themes. These scholars' works and scores of other books, articles, pamphlets, essays, scientific studies, film works, musical compositions, and artistic endeavors have relied on the new edition of the journals. This abridgment is based on that comprehensive edition. I hope it finds a ready reception and brings new enthusiasts to the words of the Corps of Discovery.

A number of persons and institutions have been supportive of my efforts in this work. Dr. Stephen E. Ambrose, Helena, Montana, provided the financial assistance that freed me to begin work on this book and develop general guidelines for the editing. I received a Faculty Development Fellowship from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in the fall of 1998 during which time I completed the first two chapters. Additional editing work was carried out while I was a scholar-in-residence at Fort Clatsop National Memorial, Astoria, Oregon, in the summer of 1999. I was able to make great headway on the work during the academic year of 2000–2001 while under a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Washington DC, that released me from teaching duties in Lincoln. In the spring of 2001 I spent a productive and enjoyable six weeks working on the book while a Resident Fellow at the International Center for Jefferson Studies, Monticello, Charlottesville, Virginia. I very much appreciate the assistance and generosity of Steve Ambrose and the many people who represent these acclaimed institutions where I carried out the work preparing this book. Having my wife, Faye, nearby during all this time lessened the tedium such a work inevitably brings and made life more pleasant and worthwhile altogether.