

LESSER KNOWN MEMBERS OF THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY: ROBERT FRAZER

Submitted by Tom Schenarts

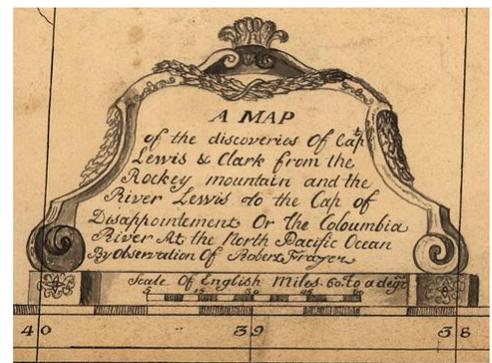
Robert Frazer was an ordinary soldier and a solid person who you could depend on for good judgment. He was trustworthy but was not a hero nor did he stand above the others. Frazer was born about 1784, in Augusta County, VA. Nothing is known about his early life or when he joined the Army. It is possible that he was recruited at Fort Kaskasia in January, 1804.

In May, 1804, he is listed in Cpl Warfington's mess. Originally Frazer was to be part of the crew that was to return down the Missouri from Fort Mandan. On October 8, 1804, he was transferred to the permanent party and was part of Sgt Gass's mess. He replaced Pvt. Reed who was dismissed for attempted desertion.

As a private he performed most ordinary duties, though he was only a fairly successful hunter. Some interesting references to him in the journals include: On Feb. 14, 1805, he was one of the party from Fort Mandan sent to retrieve a large load of meat and was set upon by over 100 Sioux who took the meat and two of their horses. In June he helped assemble the iron boat at the head of the Great Falls. "Frazier Creek" was named for him in August, 1805, but is now known as S. Boulder Creek in Montana. On August 25, he fired his musket at some ducks on a pond and nearly hit Captain Lewis. On the return trip Frazer was often successful in bartering with the Indians for food and horses. In May, 1806, he was sent with several others to go from the Clearwater River to the Snake River a distance of over 20 miles to procure salmon from the Indians.

He took a great interest in the Nez Perce language and could converse with them in their language. In June, 1806, Frazer was given a fine horse by a Nez Perce Chief Hohots Ilppilp. Frazer had previously given the Chief a pair of Canadian "shoe-pacs" (snow shoes). On July 1, while at Travelers' Rest, he volunteered to accompany Captain Lewis to the source of the Marias River later in the month. However, Indians stole some of their horses and he was not able to make the Marias trip for lack of a horse.

Robert Frazer was described as a man of education and talent and he kept a journal of his own. Upon his return to St. Louis he planned to publish his journal and even published a prospectus to solicit orders to raise funds to publish. Lewis read the prospectus and warned Frazer not to discuss the scientific aspects of the expedition. On March 14, 1807, Lewis published a notice in the "National Intelligencer" Washington D.C. that Frazer only has permission to publish what General Wm. Clark or I approve. Lewis had reviewed Frazer's journal for publication in October, 1807. Lewis then withdrew his permission from Frazer, saying the Frazer was only a private and was unacquainted with scientific observations. Frazer's journal was never published, though he still had it in his possession in 1836/37 when it is recorded that he often quoted from it for visitors. His journal has never been found. He did publish *A Map of the Discoveries of Capt. Lewis & Clark from the Rocky Mountains and the River Lewis to the Cap of Disappointment or the Columbia River at the North Pacific Ocean*. The map is very inaccurate.



After the Expedition he accompanied Capt. Lewis to Washington and Virginia and returned to St. Louis where he received land grants for his service. In 1807, during the Aaron Burr conspiracy, Frazer had been uncovering evidence of treason and was a witness at the Burr trial. He served with the Louisiana Militia against Aaron Burr plotters in St. Louis and New Orleans. He may also have served in the War of 1812.

Frazer was in several scrapes with the law in St. Louis until 1815. Then settled down and from 1825-1829 lived on the Gasconde River in Missouri where he was a watchmaker. He married Tabitha and had a number of children. Robert Frazer died in Franklin County, Missouri in 1837, at about the age of 53. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

To Dig Deeper into the life of Robert Frazer, explore the resources in this bibliography:

Journals of Lewis and Clark. Gary Moulton: www.lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu (on line edition):

Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with related documents 1783-1854, edited by Donald Jackson

The Race to Publish Lewis & Clark, Pennsylvania Magazine of Biography

PBS / pbs.org, Inside the Corps of Lewis and Clark, Article on Robert Frazer

American Journeys, Document AJ-160, Prospectus for the Publication of Robert Frazer's Journal of the Lewis & Clark Expedition, Wisconsin Historical Society