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Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks
Of the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and
The Potential Extension of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
October 4, 2006

Thank you for allowing me to come today to discuss Clarksville's place in the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and explain why I believe it belongs on the National Lewis and Clark Historic Trail.

When Meriwether Lewis wrote William Clark in June of 1803, inviting him to serve as co-Captain of the expedition to explore the west, William was living in Clarksville, in the Indiana Territory. Lewis explained his plans and suggested that Clark find, in his neighborhood, "some good hunters, stout, healthy, unmarried, accustomed to the woods and capable of bearing bodily fatigue to a considerable degree." It took a month for his letter to reach William. On July 18th, William replied, writing from Clarksville to accept Lewis's offer.

Clarksville had been founded in 1783 in honor of William's brother, General George Rogers Clark. A hero of the American Revolution in the West, General Clark built the only home he ever owned on a hill overlooking the river, in the town named for him. By 1802, William had also moved to Clarksville. William may have lived with his brother, although he did own a number of town lots, and was credited with having settled and improved lot #8, which meant that he had built a cabin there to the specifications required by the Town Trustees.

William had become quite involved in Clarksville affairs. He was appointed Town Trustee on December 7th of 1802, and was named town surveyor. During the next spring he was busy surveying a road (now South Clark Boulevard) from Clarksville to the new town of Jeffersonville. He had been charged by the Board of Trustees with designing a bridge over Mill Creek in December and by March of 1803 had given the Trustees a drawing of his design. It was later built by his brother, Edmund. In April, William was surveying and conducting the sale of town lots.

Business for William was not to continue as usual, however. On August 31st, Meriwether Lewis left Pittsburgh, heading down the Ohio River. He reached the head of the Falls on October 14th and the next day hired a pilot to take the boats through the rapids to Clarksville. Stephen Ambrose, in his book, Voyage of Discovery, said that "when the two would-be explorers shook hands on General Clark's porch, the Lewis and Clark Expedition was born."

William Clark had spent late summer of 1803 finding the "good hunters" and woodsmen that Lewis had asked for. The men he had chosen were inducted into the Army at Clarksville and were to become known as the "nine young men from Kentucky." Those from the Falls area were Charles Floyd (also a Clarksville resident), Nathaniel Pryor, William Bratton, Reuben and Joseph Field, George Gibson, and John Shields. Two others, John Colter and George Shannon, were included in that group, although they were probably with Lewis when he arrived at Clarksville. Clark's African-American slave and lifelong companion, York, who was to prove such an excellent emissary to the Native American tribes, completed the group.

The two men spent almost two weeks here, recruiting, training, and equipping what was only now the Corps of Discovery. This nucleus of the Lewis and Clark Expedition set off on their ambitious journey from Mill Creek, in the center of the original town of Clarksville, on October 26, 1803.

On November 5, 1806, William's brother, Jonathan Clark, noted in his diary: "Captains Lewis and Clark arrived at the Falls on their return from the Pacific Ocean after an absence of a little more than three years."

After his homecoming, William continued to be a Clarksville resident, attending meetings of the Town Board. He later wrote that he would never consent to “give up my appointment as Trustee for Clarksville.”

Although he moved his family to St. Louis on June 2nd of 1808, William continued to concern himself with Clarksville affairs, retaining the important rights to the mill slip there that had been granted him. Despite his determined statement regarding his office, he was removed as Trustee on February 11, 1811. By then he was living in St. Louis and very involved in Missouri matters, becoming Governor of Missouri Territory in 1813.

Clarksville began to rediscover its significance to Lewis and Clark’s journey nearly 10 years ago, in 1997. Since then much progress has been made in researching and advancing the story of the town’s role as the threshold of the Expedition. An annual commemoration on the anniversary of their departure has been held since 1998, featuring a reenactment of the town of 1803 and the recruitment of the Corps of Discovery. This year the event will depict the year of their return in 1806 with parties, exhibits, personal accounts of those who have reprised the journey, a reenactment, and much more.

The town recently renamed a major thoroughfare “Lewis and Clark Parkway,” upgrading and beautifying the street named in honor of the two men.

A statue of Lewis and Clark was placed on the grounds of the Falls of the Ohio State Park, and provides a popular and scenic venue for visitors to learn about our part in the story.

A new, decorative bridge has been built by the Lewis and Clark Greenway on the site where William Clark’s 1803 bridge stood.

Our newest commemorative feature is the Lewis and Clark Park, near the site where the Expedition set sail. It will feature interpretative panels that tell the local Lewis and Clark story, a replica of the flag that flew from their keelboat, other flags of the period, and native plants that grew here in 1803. The park will serve as a lasting legacy which will continue to educate the public about our Lewis and Clark history for many years to come.

Clarksville continues to be governed today by the same Town Council on which William Clark served. It is one of the few remaining places where one may walk the land that Lewis and Clark walked, view the vistas they saw, and gaze down the river at the route which began America’s most famous exploration. Our lovely riverside site where the expedition was launched has been largely left unchanged and undeveloped and remains much as it was on that day in October when the Corps of Discovery sailed into history.

Clarksville’s role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition is unique, well documented, and significant. It began here. It well deserves a place on the National Lewis and Clark Historic Trail

Record Group C10.00

Clark County

Board of Trustees

Records Series C10.00.U

Clarksville Minute Book

Dated: 1784 – 1889

Indiana State Archives

Commission on Public Records

Data Base Entry: 22 March 2001

Accession # 1927001

Ordered, that Provided the Governor of the Indiana Territory, shall fix the permanent seat of Justice of the County which is about to be laid off (and which will include the Illinois Grant) in the Town of Clarksville, the Trustees will furnish two Acres of the public square in said Town, for the purpose of erecting Public Buildings thereon - And will also appropriate the sum of Two thousand Dollars towards defraying the expenses of making the necessary Public Buildings of said County

Ordered that Marston Clark be requested and he is authorized to go forward to the Governor of the Indiana Territory and make proposals to him agreeable to the above order

Clark Chairman

At a meeting of the Trustees of the Town of Clarksville at Jeffersonville on Tuesday the 17th day of Dec. 1802

Present George Clark, Saml. Oldham
John Harrison William Sullivan
David Floyd

Resolved that Capt. William Clark be appointed as Trustee of this Town in the room of Capt. Richard Torrey decd

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* Resolved that Samuel Swathmey be appointed a Trustee of this Town in the room of John Bailey removed
Present William Clark & Samuel Swathmey

As it appears to this Board that the Surveyor of the Union Grant (who was appointed to lay off the whole of the vacant Lands of the Town of Blacksville into Lots not exceeding twenty Acres, by a Resolution of the Board on the 14th October 1796) is now absent, It is Resolved that Capt. William Clark be appointed Surveyor of the Town of Blacksville to lay off such Lots as the Board may order

Resolved that Capt. William Clark, Surveyor of the Town of Blacksville do lay off the whole of the vacant Lands belonging to the Town of Blacksville agreeably to the Resolution of the Board of Trustees of the 14th of October 1796 and that he advertise the same according to Law.

Resolved that the Surveyor of the Town of Blacksville do lay off a road the most convenient way through the unappropriated Land of the Town of Blacksville from the N.E. Corner of lot No 11 of 20 Acres, towards the Town of Jeffersonville, and that he make report to the next Board

Ordered that the Board adjourn