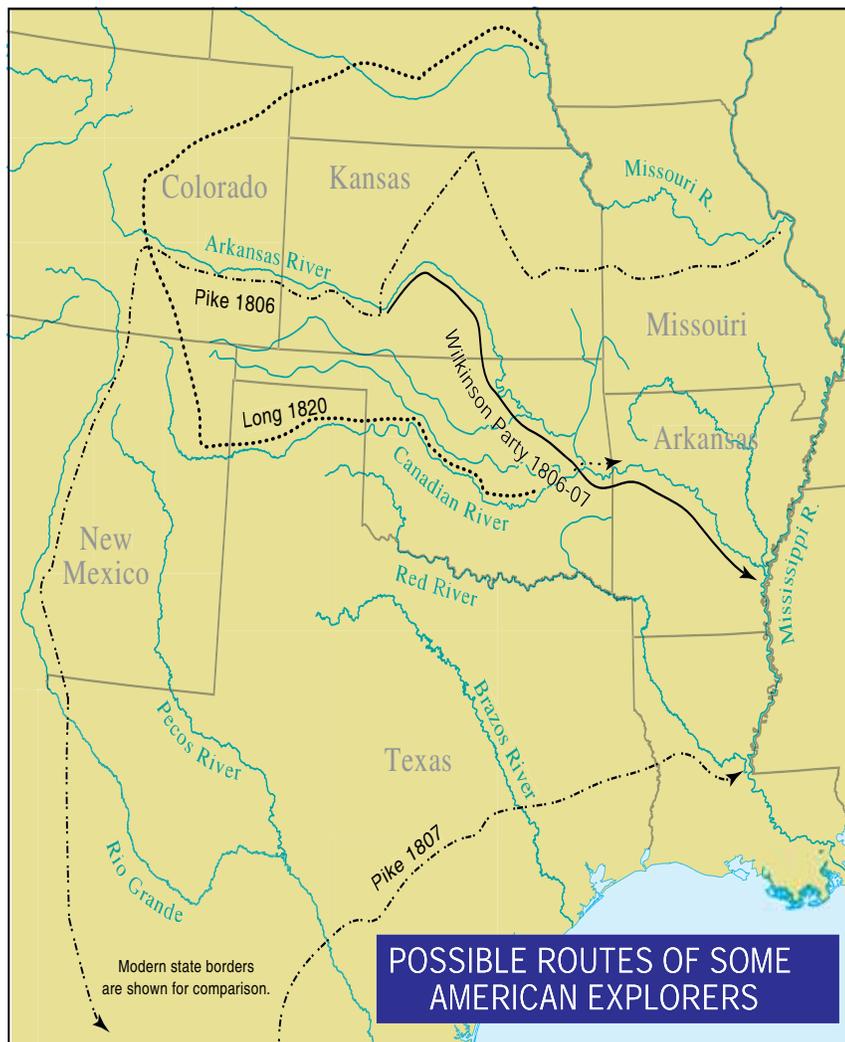


American Explorers

LOUISIANA PURCHASE. The European policy concerning land ownership in the New World was that the nation first discovering a region thereby secured legal ownership. The inhabitants of the land were insignificant, in the view of the European powers, and were considered *chattel*, or moveable property, of the discovering government. The explorer who made the discovery was considered the agent of his government. This policy was known as the “rights of discovery.” After a discovery was made and claimed, it became a pawn of peace, a spoil of war, or a tool of bargain, as the government saw fit. So, while European explorers were crisscrossing the new western continent, their rulers were playing geographical chess with their respective pieces of the New World.

LaSalle, who had actually seen very little of the territory he claimed, named Louisiana after King Louis of France in 1682. He claimed not only the Mississippi River valley but also the land into which all of its tributaries extended. This was approximately one-fourth of all the land which later became the United States.

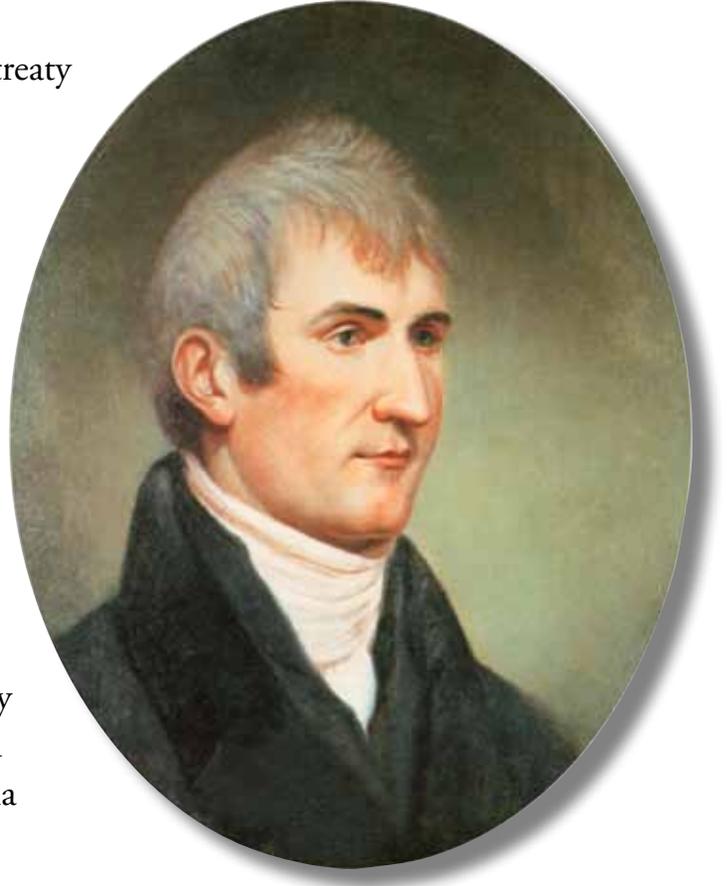
Meanwhile, Spain agreed to support France against England, and the two allies were defeated in the French and Indian War. (In Europe, this was called the Seven Years’ War.) Spain lost Florida to England and *demande*d remuneration. France *ceded* Louisiana as *compensation*, and Oklahoma was under Spanish rule in 1763.



In 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte of France and the king of Spain signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso, which returned Louisiana to France. With Napoleon waging war all over Europe, some Americans feared that the port of New Orleans would be closed to American traffic. In 1801, Robert Livingston, American minister to France, began trying to buy the Isle of Orleans, a narrow strip of land along the lower Mississippi leading to the Gulf.

At first, France denied owning Louisiana, as the treaty was to have been a secret, and in making the treaty, Bonaparte had promised Charles of Spain that he would not sell Louisiana. Talleyrand, the Chief Minister of France, finally acknowledged the treaty but declared that France had no wish to sell any part of the territory.

However, with several of his campaigns going badly, Bonaparte found himself in need of funds. He decided to sacrifice his dreams of French *Imperialism* in the New World for the money he needed to fight his wars. He instructed Talleyrand to sell — not only New Orleans but all of Louisiana. In May, 1803, the United States virtually doubled itself in area by purchasing Louisiana from France for the sum of \$15 million. Thus, Oklahoma became a part of the United States of America.



*Captain Meriwether
Lewis*

LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION. Thomas Jefferson was President at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. Of immediate concern to him was the exploration of the new territory. The people were moving continually westward in search of new land, but few had ventured farther west than the Mississippi River. Most people guessed that more hostile Indian tribes lived in the West. There were fantastic stories of Indian giants in the north, of salt mountains, and of strange beasts, but little was generally known about the area.

Moreover, no clear boundaries had been set for the territory, but Spain controlled the land to the California coast, and Jefferson knew an exact boundary needed to be *established* as soon as possible.

The first *expedition* sent out by the President did not venture into Oklahoma. Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark were commissioned to explore the Missouri River westward to its source

and to find a passage across the high mountains in the west. This *expedition* covered the northern part of the territory. They set out in May, 1804, one month after the formal transfer of land from France to the United States.

WILKINSON AND PIKE EXPEDITION. The second *expedition* commissioned by President Jefferson was the first official *expedition* into Oklahoma. Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 27 years old, and Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson set out in July, 1806. They accompanied a group of Osage and Pawnee Indians back to their homes from a trip they had made to Washington, D. C. They were to follow the Arkansas River, exploring the territory all the way to its source, and to establish friendly relations with any people along the way. Their explorations were to include the mountains surrounding the headwaters of the river, the area later known as Colorado.

Crossing Kansas, Lieutenant Wilkinson became ill. It was decided that Pike should take part of the men and continue to the source of the Arkansas. Wilkinson took the rest and explored to the mouth of the river, giving the young lieutenant a chance to recover without facing the rigors of the western mountains.

Pike took his men on to discover Pike's Peak in Colorado but then wandered into Spanish territory, where the group was captured. They were escorted back to American territory and released, after being held in several places in Mexico. While in the custody of the Spaniards, the explorers were relieved of the papers on which descriptions of explored territory had been recorded. The Spaniards kept those papers, and Pike was left with only the information he and his men could remember concerning their trip west from St. Louis.

Lieutenant Wilkinson, however, kept detailed records of all he had seen, and these became the first official records of Oklahoma. In his reports he referred to the land along the Arkansas River as a "paradise," and claimed that he saw "enough deer, buffalo and elk . . . to feed all of the Indians in the United States for one hundred years."

Wilkinson and his men spent Christmas Day in an Osage village near the present site of Claremore and then moved on down the ice-clogged river to Webbers Falls, which he estimated to be seven feet high. He reported meeting a few Cherokee and Choctaw Indians, who had apparently come west to hunt. He even found some white men, mostly trappers and traders, in this remote western land.

THE GREAT SALT PLAINS. The next *expedition* did not take place until 1811, when George C. Sibley, Osage Indian Agent from Fort Orange, Missouri, traveled with several Osage chiefs as they returned to their homes after a trip to Washington, D. C. Curious about the many stories and strange tales he had heard about the salt mountain and about the buffalo, Sibley was led across the prairies of Kansas, Nebraska, and northern Oklahoma. He finally came to the Great Salt Plains, which he said was “glistening like a brilliant field of snow in the summer sun.” The Indians, using turkey wings as brooms, swept the salt into bags to be taken home. Sibley made the first official record of the site, which *geologists* later reported had once been a great salt sea. The Salt Plains soon became a life-sustaining stop for pioneers moving west across the continent.

THE SPARKS EXPEDITION. While Wilkinson and Pike were exploring the Arkansas, Captain Richard Sparks followed the Red River to its headwaters. Preparing in New Orleans for the trip, he and his men traveled up the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Red River. They floated that stream until they found it blocked by the “Great Raft,” a mass of logs, debris, and plants. This tangled *phenomenon* choked the river for miles, and finally Sparks and his party took to the land route. Stopping for lunch, they were surprised by a column of Spanish soldiers, who warned them either to turn back or to face arrest. While the boundaries of the territory were still unsettled, the Spaniards suspected every American explorer of trying to claim Spanish lands. Considering that they were largely outnumbered, Sparks and his party returned to Natchitoches without completing their mission. They had just reached the edge of what is now Oklahoma when they turned back.

FIRST LONG EXPEDITION. The first of two *expeditions* led by Major Stephen H. Long was for the purpose of establishing a fort in the Far West. The site selected was at Belle Point, a ferned and flowered location near the mouth of the Poteau River, where it empties into the Arkansas. Named for Colonel Thomas A. Smith, and founded



*Lieutenant William
Clark*

in 1817, Fort Smith became a center of activity for trappers and traders. The fort itself, designed by Major Long, consisted of a *stockade* of heavy pickets set deep into the ground, with barracks at the corners of the *stockade* and other buildings inside the enclosure. It was first occupied by the Rifle Regiment, under the command of Major William A. Bradford. Fort Smith was destined to become very important in the development of Oklahoma.

SECOND LONG EXPEDITION. In 1819, Major Long and his party set out on their second *expedition* to complete Captain Sparks's mission, finding the source of the Red River. The War Department also instructed them to explore the Arkansas to its mouth, or where it empties into the Mississippi River. In July, 1820, at the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains, the party split. Captain John R. Bell and his party followed the Arkansas, and Major Long and his men were to find and follow the Red River.

Four days after separation, a creek was sighted which was thought to be a *tributary* of the Red River. They followed it to the river and set out down to the main channel. At the 100th *Meridian*, moving east, they camped for the night and were pleased with the resources there. Short of supplies, especially food, they found wild plums and grapes and plenty of good hunting. Dr. Edwin James, a botanist, recorded that there were excellent grasses in the area and that the soil appeared good for agriculture.

Many hardships were suffered on the trip because of the lack of sufficient food and supplies, however, and especially at one point because of a shortage of water. Apparently disillusioned by these hardships, three of the men stole away one night. They took most of the best horses and several saddlebags containing many of the records of the *expedition*, along with clothing and gifts for the Indians. The men were never found nor the records recovered, although an intensive search was launched by those left behind.

This incident sharpened the disappointment of the remaining members of the party when they found the mouth of the stream they were traveling and discovered that they had been exploring the Canadian River, not the Red River. Only three days away from Fort Smith, short supplied and weary, they did not attempt to find the Red River but reported instead back to Major Bradford. Captain Bell and his men awaited them there with their own tales of hardship. Although they had not completed the mission given them, the records which remained of Long's journey and

the records which they managed to rewrite from memory were of significant value a short time later, when the government decided to build additional forts in the West.

TRADING EXPEDITIONS. In 1821, a party led by Colonel Hugh Glenn, a trader on the Verdigris River, embarked on a private *expedition* into the West. Twenty men left Fort Smith that September morning, including Kentucky surveyor Jacob Fowler and his slave, Paul, an interpreter called “Baptiste Roy,” and Nathaniel Pryor, who had also accompanied Lewis and Clark in 1804. Fowler kept a diary of the trip, which later became invaluable to historians, despite his poor spelling.

The *expedition* crossed the Osage Hills and followed the Arkansas River west to the Purgatory River, where they encountered members of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes. The western tribes were pleased to trade with the explorers, exchanging *pelts* and furs for any items of use or interest offered them. This *expedition* was instrumental in opening trade with the western tribes, especially for the traders already stationed in what is now eastern Oklahoma.

William Becknell led a second trade *expedition* across the Great Plains in 1821, south from the Great Bend of the Arkansas all the way to Santa Fe in the Rio Grande Valley. Although Becknell’s party crossed Oklahoma only in the Panhandle, and left little knowledge of geographical value, they opened trade into that area, which brought a great deal of traffic across Oklahoma.

The explorers, both official and private, served several purposes in the early development of Oklahoma. They were the first to meet the native peoples and establish rela-

French trade with the Indians, an illustration by artist Charles Banks Wilson.



tions with them. They saw and recorded the varieties of resources and their locations in the new territory. They disproved wild stories of giants and monsters and natural disasters. They opened trade with western and southwestern tribes. They observed the lifestyles of the people they encountered and recorded what they observed. Traveling at various times of year, they even recorded the weather and the changes of the seasons.

In short, the courage and spirit of adventure possessed by a few made it possible for the rest of the nation to know what to expect in the land to the west. Pioneers began to trickle westward as soon as Lewis and Clark returned. By 1830, the traffic was steady and growing.

Prairie Fire, by Blackbear Bosin, shows the burning of the plains. Lewis and Clark noted during their expedition, "a cloudy morning & smoky all day from the burning of the plains, which was set on fire by the Minnetarries for an early crop of grass, as an inducement for the Buffalo to feed on. . ."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain how the United States came to own the Louisiana Territory.
2. For oral discussion or work outside of class, tell about each expedition below, its purpose, any important facts, its success or its failure:
 - a. Zebulon Pike Expedition
 - b. James B. Wilkinson Expedition
 - c. Richard Sparks Expedition
 - d. George C. Sibley Expedition
 - e. Stephen H. Long Expedition
 - f. Hugh Glenn Expedition

