

LEWIS & CLARK IN COLUMBIA RIVER COUNTRY

1809, Oct. 18

Genl
Nashville Tennessee
18th Oct 1809

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I arrived at the Chickasaw Bluffs on or about the 18th of September, where I found the Governor, who had reached there two days before me from St. Louis) in very bad health - It appears that his first intention was to go around by water to the City of Washington; but his thinking a war with England probable, that his valuable papers might be in danger of falling into the hands of the British, he was thereby induced to change his route, and to come through the Chickasaw nation by land; I furnished him with a horse to pack...

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Major James Neelly's Letter to Former President Thomas Jefferson About the Death of Governor Lewis

Nashville, 18 October, 1809

Sir:

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I arrived at the Chickasaw Bluffs [Fort Pickering on the Mississippi River] on or about the 18th of September, where I found the governor (who had reached there two days before me from St. Louis) in very bad health. It appears that his first intention was to go around by water to the City of Washington; but his thinking a war with England probable, & that his valuable papers might be in dainger of falling into the hands of the British, he was thereby induced to Change his route, and to come through the Chickasaw nation by land; I furnished him with a horse to pack...

[CONTINUED NEXT PAGE]

his trunk on, and a man to attend to them; having recovered his health in some degree at the Chickasaw Bluffs, we set out together. And on our arrival at the Chickasaw nation I discovered that he appeared at times deranged in mind, we rested there two days & came on one days Journey after crossing Tennessee River & where we encamped we lost two of our horses, I remained behind to hunt them & the governor proceeded on, with a promise to wait for me at the first houses he came to that was inhabited by white people; he reached the house of a Mr. Grinder about sun set, the man of the house being gone home, and no person there but a woman who discovering the governor to be deranged, gave him up the house & slept herself in one near it, his servant [John Pernier] and mine slept in the stable loft some distance from the other house; the woman reports that about three o'clock she heard two pistols fire off in the Governors Room: the servants being awaked by her, came in but too late to save him. He had shot himself in the head with one pistol & a little below the Breast with the other - when his servant came in he says, that's done the business my good servant give me some water, he gave him water.

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He gave him water, he survived but a short time. I came up sometime after, and had him as decently Buried as I could in that place-if there is any thing wished by his friends to be done to his grave I will attend to their Instructions.

I have got in my possession his two trunks of papers (amongst which is said to be his travels to The pacific Ocean) and probably some Vouchers for expenditures of Public Money for a Bill which he said had been protested by the Secy. Of War; and of which act to his death, he repeatedly complained. I have also in my Care his Rifle, Silver watch, Brace of Pistols, dirk & tomahawk; one of the Governors horses was lost in the wilderness which I will endeavour to regain, the other I have sent on by his servant who expressed a desire to go to the governors Mothers & to Monticello [President Jefferson's home]: I have furnished him with fifteen Dollars to Defray his expences to Charlottsville; Some days previous to the Governors death he requested of me in case any accident happen to him, to send his trunks with the papers therein to the President

1809, Oct. 12
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but I think very probable he meant to you. [Editor: Madison was now president.] I wish to be informed what arrangements may be considered best in sending on his trunks &c. I have the honor to be with Great respect Yr. Ob. Sert.

James Neelly
U. S. agent to the Chickasaw Nation

The Governor left two of his trunks at the Chickasaw Bluffs in the care of Captain. Gilbert C. Russell, Commanding officer, & was to write to him from Nashville what to do with them.



The trunk shown above, from the collections of the Washington State Historical Society, is similar to the ones that Neelly refers to above. This style was common in the early 1800's.
Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

Neelly James Nashville Oct. 1809, rec'd Nov 21.
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The Honble
Thomas Jefferson
late President of
America
Monticello near
Charlottesville Va