



EPISODE 2 2004 - LEWIS & CLARK CANE, RICHFIELD, MINNESOTA.

Wes Cowan: Our last story could change how many of us think about the epic expedition of Lewis and Clark. It's May 1804. Lewis and Clark are leaving St. Louis, in search of a river route across the North American continent. Over the next two and a half years, they will experience lands, animal, and people, few white men have seen before. They'll survive the toughest terrain and harshest weather. They'll reach the Pacific coast, and make it home again. And their success will be a milestone in the settlement of the American West. At least that's what many of us think happened. We've heard a story about an antique cane that could have belonged to the two explorers. A story that - if true - could reveal a very different version of those events. The cane is owned by a Patrick McClellan. Recently, he stumbled across it, hidden at the back of a closet, and was reminded of an old family legend.

Patrick McClellan: My grandparents told us that we had a distant relative who was a merchant. And in some way he had assisted the Lewis & Clark expedition, and in their gratitude, they had presented him with this cane.

Wes: Intrigued, Patrick searched an on-line version of Lewis and Clark's journals and came up with a surprising name - Robert McClellan. Could this be the merchant his grandparents' mentioned? And was his cane really carried on one of the most famous expeditions in U.S. history? I'm Wes Cowan. Tukufu Zuberi and I have come to Richfield, Minnesota to meet Patrick.

Tukufu: That must be the cane.

Patrick: Absolutely.

Tukufu: Can we see? Ohh...

Wes: Nice stick, huh?

Tukufu: It is. It really is. To prove Patrick's cane was a gift from Lewis & Clark, we've got a few questions to answer.

Patrick: ... is, first of all, is it old enough to have been from that time period? What was the relationship between Lewis and Clark and Robert McClellan? And am I actually related to the Robert McClellan that was mentioned in the Lewis and Clark journals?

Wes: Now, you've done some genealogical work already. What can you give us to go on?

Patrick: I have been able to trace back to my grandfather's grandfather. His name was Benjamin A. McClellan, and he was born in 1839. And that's as far back as I've been able to trace.

Wes: Well, you know, you've given us a little bit of information. I think it's going to be tough, but it's a good story, and I, I'm ready to get to work. Now I know something about antique canes. I've sold hundreds at auction, and this one is fabulous.

Wes: ...Everything about this cane, the long ferrule - very typical of that early period. These eyelets here - that's for a wrist strap. And this stag handled head. There's no question this cane could have been made at the time of Lewis and Clark.

Tukufu: While Wes focuses on Patrick's family history, I've come south, to the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. This is home to one of the most extensive Lewis and Clark collections in the country, and a comprehensive archive from the earliest days of the American West. If I can find any mention of Robert McClellan, it will be here. Now look at this! Robert McClellan, born in 1770... which would make him about the same age as Lewis and Clark. The file refers me to several sources. But here in the "Missouri Gazette" from 1813 is something especially interesting. It's an article listing the founders of Astoria, the oldest American trading post west of the Rockies.

Tukufu: "Mr. Robert Stewart. One of the partners of the Pacific Fur Company, with two Frenchmen, and Robert McClellan."

Tukufu: So this Robert McClellan was a merchant, just like Patrick's story says, a merchant who traded fur. Now that's

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important. In 1800 fur trading was big business. Hats made from American fur were the height of fashion as far away as Europe and China. To cash in, companies from countries like Britain and France employed merchants to trade with Native Americans, exchanging European merchandise for high-quality pelt. The search for fresh supplies drove many of these merchants deep into the American interior, and into contact with Native Americans who lived there – long before Lewis and Clark's famous expedition. In fact, the first European to cross the continent was a Scottish fur trader named Alexander Mackenzie who reached the Pacific in 1793. People like McKenzie and McClellan played a pivotal role in opening up the West for settlement, and their trading laid the foundation for America's future economy... which explains why McClellan could have crossed paths with Lewis and Clark. But is there any evidence they met? This copy of William Clark's original journal for September 12, 1806 may hold the answer. In it, Clark records meeting a merchant some 300 miles west of St Louis, a man who greeted them warmly and "gave us all the news and occurrences which had taken place within his knowledge." And who is it? It's our guy - Robert McClellan. But for Patrick's cane to have been given at that meeting, we need to confirm Patrick and Robert are related.

Wes: We know Patrick has traced his family back to a Benjamin McClellan, living in Iowa in the mid-1800s, and that Robert McClellan originally came from Hamilton, Ohio. I've come to the Butler County Historical Museum in Hamilton, Ohio, to see what I can find out.

Wes: ...McBride...What's this? ... McClellan. There's got to be a connection here somewhere.

Wes: And here, in a biography of early Hamilton County pioneers, I think I've found something. To be sure, I need some help from the Iowa State Archives.

Wes: Hi, yeah, I, I'm trying to find some information on Benjamin McClellan, death certificate, an obituary, anything about McClellan after 1880. Okay, great. I'll wait to hear from you. Thanks.

Wes: And here on this fax is the information I need. It reveals that Robert McClellan's brother was Patrick's great-great-great-great grandfather. So the cane could have been passed down through the family.

Tukufu: But did Lewis and Clark, and McClellan have the kind of relationship that would have resulted in a gift being given? To find out, I've come to meet museum curator, and Lewis and Clark expert, Carolyn Gilman, who immediately points out an editor's note, added when Lewis and Clark's journals were first published.

Carolyn: And they came across him just outside St. Joseph, Missouri. That's about 300 miles up the Missouri River from St. Louis. When you check Lewis and Clark's journals, someone has written in that this Mr. McClellan is an "old acquaintance in the army". When you look it up, it turns out that McClellan and Clark, and later on Lewis, all served in the campaign against the Indians in the Ohio Valley.

Tukufu: Now this is surprising. Lewis and Clark are remembered as scientists and explorers, not soldiers.

Carolyn: Few people realize that Lewis and Clark started out their careers as Indian fighters. The Indians were fighting the encroachments of American settlers, so the American government sent out an army in order to protect the settlers and to conquer the Indians.

Tukufu: According to Carolyn, when the three men met again some 10 years later, there was another, even more surprising connection.

Carolyn: The Missouri River was not a really safe place at the time, not because the Indians were fighting the Euro-Americans at that point, but they were fighting each other. That is one of the main reasons that Lewis and Clark went out into the Missouri Valley. It was to establish a situation of security so that traders like McClellan could move in and could start making money. Remember, Jefferson sent them west to find a water route across the continent "for the purposes of commerce".

Tukufu: Jefferson believed that securing trade routes through the newly acquired Louisiana Territory was vital to the future success of the United States. He commanded Lewis and Clark to find a river route to the Pacific so the U.S. could



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extend its fur trade to the Orient, and ordered them to co-opt Native American tribes so they would deal with the U.S., not its archrival, Britain.

Carolyn: People like McClellan were supported by the United States government because they were supplanting British traders. They were competing with the established British fur trade and driving those British entrepreneurs out of American territory.

Tukufu: So Lewis & Clark's mission was meant to make it easier for U.S. merchants like McClellan to operate, meaning Lewis, Clark, and McClellan weren't just old friends. They were vital allies in the incorporation of the American West.

Wes: Could Patrick's cane have been given at that meeting?

Wes: Hank. Wes Cowan.

Hank: Oh Wes, so nice to see you.

Wes : To get a second opinion, I've come to Manchester-By-The-Sea, just north of Boston, to meet one of the country's leading cane auctioneers, Henry Tarin.

Wes: Let's see... I'm just gonna open it right here Hank.

Hank: That's wonderful, yeah.

Wes: Okay.

Hank: Ohh...

Wes: And what do you think?

Hank: I think it's very nice, yes! This wood is very interesting, very interesting. This is vine strangled, very unusual result of a vine growing right up beside the sapling, twisting it, putting pressure on it, and you get this wonderful twisting effect that is not carved. See how uneven it is?

Wes: Yeah, yeah!

Hank: Notice that the stag horn came out of the deer's head, like that, and provided a simple natural top. And, of course, the long ferrule, because in order to protect the wood, because there was no paving of sidewalks, so the ferrule was longer in the early 19th century.

Wes: So in terms of the date range here, what are we talking about?

Hank: Well these kinds of canes were made from 1800 to 1840.

Wes VO: We know McClellan met Lewis and Clark in 1806, so this fits.

Wes: Is this the kind of cane that could have been given as a gift?

Hank: Oh yes, yeah, this piece would have been a fine gift. And it did have at one time, a cartouche, because I see the old post is still there.

Wes: Oh sure, right there.

Hank: Yes. Let me show you what I mean. This one has initials and it has a date, 1830.

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Wes: Unfortunately, our cane is missing this key piece of evidence... which leaves one last, crucial question.

Wes: Is this the kind of cane, that in your opinion, Lewis & Clark would have been carrying with them on the expedition?

Hank: I rather doubt that. This has got too much professional skill in creating it. Now the wood could have been found on the expedition and brought back, but I rather doubt that the entire cane was on the expedition. It's almost impossible.

Wes: Yeah.

Wes: If the cane was too elegant for Lewis & Clark to have carried it on their expedition, how did McClellan end up with it? Did they meet again after the expedition?

Tukufu: We know that after returning home, Lewis was appointed Governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory, but committed suicide only 2 years later. But what about William Clark? Well, he returned to St. Louis to become Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Brigadier General of the Louisiana Territory. Back in the archives, I've found a letter from him, dated 1807, mentioning McClellan. A year after the expedition, McClellan seems to have been working for Clark, protecting Native Americans from unscrupulous traders. But something has gone wrong, and McClellan has been sued for impounding another trader's merchandise.

Tukufu: And so here, Clark is asking the Secretary of War to intervene on Robert McClellan's behalf.

Tukufu: So Clark and McClellan must have been close for Clark to put his reputation on the line. And here's a newspaper report, from 1813, by which time Clark has been promoted to Governor of the newly formed Missouri Territory. Under his command, McClellan appears to have distinguished himself in a battle against British-backed Native Americans. But it's this last piece of evidence that's most revealing.

Wes: Okay, this is it right here.

Tukufu: Okay. I can't wait to tell Patrick what it says, and everything else we've discovered about Robert McClellan and his cane.

Patrick: I can't believe you guys found all that information. I mean, that's, that's amazing.

Tukufu: I then tell Patrick about my final discovery. It's a map of William Clark's estate. On it, is a grave, the grave of Robert McClellan. There must have been a special bond between the two men. Which means Patrick's cane could have been a gift from William Clark.

Patrick: Unbelievable!

Wes: To thank Patrick for his question, we took the epitaph from that gravestone, reputedly written by Clark himself, and had it inscribed on a new cartouche for the cane.

Wes: And what it says was that McClellan was "brave, honest and sincere, an intrepid warrior whose services deserve perpetual remembrance".

Tukufu: Well I guess it's time to take this cane out of the closet.

Patrick: It's definitely gonna come out the closet now, that's for sure.

Wes: Lewis and Clark's journey was an incredible achievement, and the journals they wrote captured a remarkable moment in American history. What's increasingly clear is that credit for the settling of the American West doesn't just belong to the big names of history, but many other smaller personalities... like Robert McClellan.

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