



# Tours Supplement 'Framing the West'

To complement the exhibition that is the centerpiece of Monticello's observance of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, tours of the house are highlighting Thomas Jefferson's role as the originator and steward of the storied expedition across North America.

*Framing the West at Monticello: Thomas Jefferson and the Lewis and Clark Expedition* – the first year-long exhibition in the house since *The Worlds of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello* in 1993 – and the themed tours are part of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's ongoing efforts to place Jefferson and Monticello in wider historical, social, and intellectual contexts.

Jefferson's stewardship of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, his display of objects sent back by the explorers



House interpreter Amber Culp makes a point to a group of visitors in the re-created "Indian Hall" at Monticello.

in his newly completed Entrance Hall, and his push to promote the expedition's findings exemplify his zeal for spreading useful knowledge and improving the condition of Americans' lives. Jefferson touched on several of his goals for the expedition when he wrote in February 1803: "We are now actually sending off a small party to explore the Missouri to it's source, and whatever other river, heading nearest with that, runs into the Western ocean; to enlarge our knolege of the geography of our continent ... and to give us a general view of it's population, natural history, productions, soil & climate."

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# MONTICELLO



## Tours

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*Framing the West at Monticello*, which will be in place through the end of this year, features a re-creation of Jefferson's "Indian Hall" in the Entrance Hall with both original objects and pieces made by contemporary American Indian artists, plus a small but significant number of loan objects elsewhere in the house.



On tours, Monticello guides – whose training for this year included extensive reading and a series of lectures featuring visiting artists, curators, and historians – discuss how the various objects on view offer insight to some of Jefferson's thoughts and deeds during his two terms as president.

The Indian objects displayed in the Entrance Hall, which were commissioned by Monticello because the whereabouts of the original items is not known, reflect more than Jefferson's mere curiosity about Native Americans. As house interpreters point out during tours, Jefferson's decision to show tribal weapons, clothing, and other pieces obtained by Lewis and Clark alongside European paintings and sculpture, maps, and natural history specimens is indicative of the significance he placed on Indian culture.

While the Lewis and Clark Expedition did expand knowledge in many fields, Jefferson's interests in the American West were not purely scholarly. Geopolitical and commercial interests also played prominent roles.

Jefferson was keenly aware that European powers were capable of enforcing control over vast lands beyond the Mississippi, which would damage American security and commercial interests. He owned a copy of Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal*, an account of the explorer's trek across Canada and a clear indication of Britain's potential for expanding its commercial and political power in North America. The 1801 edition of Mackenzie's book on display in Monticello's Parlor is pointed out to visitors as an example of how the geopolitics of the day influenced Jefferson's thoughts and his actions, which came to include commissioning the Lewis and Clark Expedition and purchasing the Louisiana territory from France.



## Tours

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The exhibition and tours also present multiple aspects of Jefferson's involvement with the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement of the 18th century that celebrated the powers of human reason. For example, many of the works of art in the Parlor now receive special attention on tours; they are interpreted as evidence of Jefferson's goals of recording history and edifying his visitors. Among these are two new paintings, copies of Jefferson's portraits of Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, which hang beside Jefferson's portrait of John Locke. Jefferson once referred to Bacon, Newton, and Locke as "my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced."

Together, the current exhibition and tours aim to illustrate Jefferson's vital role in Western exploration, his dedication to the principles of the Enlightenment, and what the late Dumas Malone called his "abiding conviction that human intelligence can unlock not only the treasure house of the past but also the secrets of the universe, thus leading mankind onward to a richer and better life."

— JOHN B. RUDDER

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**COMMENTS? [newsletter@monticello.org](mailto:newsletter@monticello.org)**