

George Shannon

By: Frater Lawrence J. Zwart, VII^o

At 18 years of age, Private George Shannon was the youngest permanent party member of the Corps of Discovery. Born in Pennsylvania, he was a relative of Gov. Shannon of Kentucky. While attending school in Pennsylvania, he made a visit to Pittsburgh, where he met Capt. Meriwether Lewis and in October 1803 was enlisted by William Clark to become a member of the expedition. Shannon served under Sgt. Nathaniel Pryor. He was sent out by Drouillard on August 16, 1804 near Vermillion South Dakota to chase down horses that had wandered off. He had been instructed to follow the expedition and keep to the high lands. Drouillard reported the following day that he had not been able to find the horses and that Shannon, too was missing. His tracks and those of the two horses were found at Calumet Bluff when the Corps arrived, indicating that for three days Shannon was traveling up river ahead of them. John Coulter was sent to find young Shannon who was describes as not "a first rate hunter" according to Clark. Coulter returned September 6, 1804 without Shannon. Five days later they saw him standing on shore – waiting for a trade boat to come by and rescue him. All he had to eat during the 16 days was wild grapes and a rabbit (shot with a stick as he had no more ammunition). He had been ahead of the Corps while thinking he was behind it. "Thus a man had like to starved to death," Clark entered into his journal. "In a land of Plenty for want of bullets or something to kill his meat."

Private Shannon would have other lost-and-found episodes during his travels; most lasted only a few hours, but on August 6th, 1805 Shannon was in trouble again. This time while hunting near Dillon, Montana he didn't find the party until August 9th. Again Shannon thought that the Corps was up river from him. Captain Lewis wrote: "Shannon arrived, and informed us that having missed the party the day on which he set out he had returned the next morning to the place from whence he had set out or first left them and not finding them that they were not above him as the river could not be navigated; he then returned to the forks and had pursued us up this river. He brought the skins of three deer, which he had killed, which he said were in good order. He had lived very plentifully this trip, but looked a good deal worried with his march."

Dispute this ordeals, Shannon recovered and made it to the Pacific and back. Shannon was instrumental in editing the 1810 versions of the Lewis and Clark journals. He went on to study law and served in the Kentucky House of Representatives from 1820-1822. He practiced law in Missouri and later became a Missouri Senator and judge before he died in a courtroom in 1836.

William Clark named a tributary to the Yellowstone River in Montana "Shannon's Creek" as a way to signify the private's contribution to the expedition.

Sixteen Communities and two tribes have joined together and created 12 Private Shannon and One Lewis and Clark Statue --all hand carved and life-size Communities along the trail that have the Shannon statues are Bloomfield, Crofton, Lindy, Santee (Ohiya Casino), Niobrara, Verdigre, Winnetoon, Center, Creighton, Wausa, Hartington, and the Wynot Area (which is St. Helena) St. James, Bow Valley and Wynot. The Lewis and Clark statue is located in Verdel All towns listed above have the passports and stamps for the trail. Stop-in at businesses displaying the bright-yellow Shannon sign and pick up your passport and stamps to start the trail.

If you collect all 13 stamps from the communities above you will receive a limited edition print of Private Shannon complete with a poem --from artist Ray Kelly of Tea, South Dakota and poet Edward Cook



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