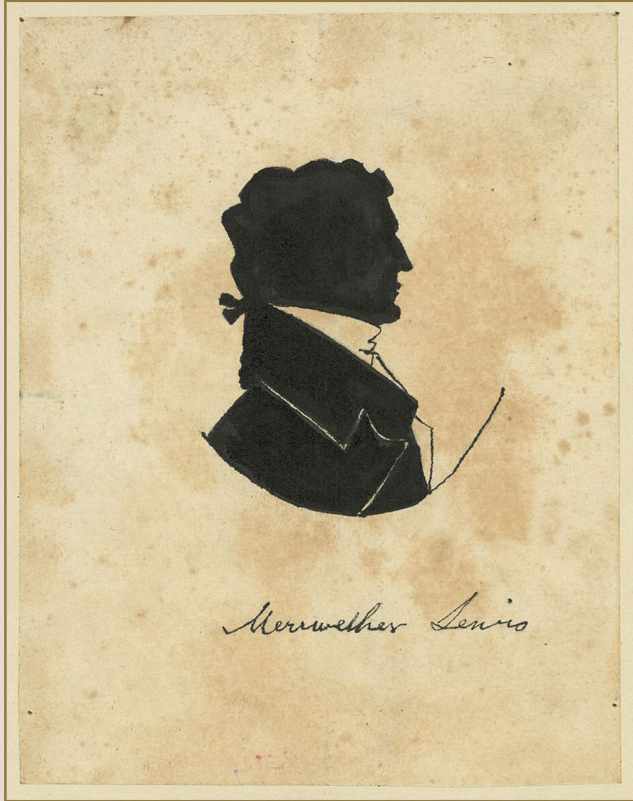


SHOT IN THE BUTT

Lessons I've Learned About What *Not* to Write



The Lewis & Clark Story They Didn't Teach in School

Gary W. Clark

Shot in the Butt

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Meriwether Lewis silhouette drawing on cover, Library of Congress

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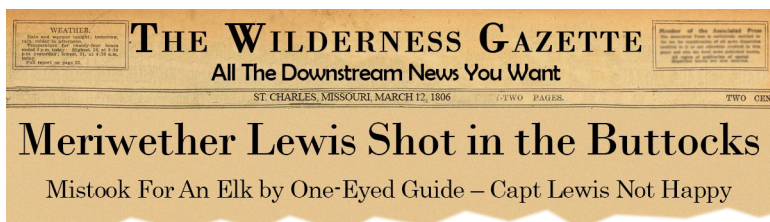
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Introduction

This is a short and frivolous story—a real story not fiction—with valuable lessons. However, who isn't going to take a look at a book titled *Shot in the Butt*? Especially when it involves a celebrity butt. Now, this tale is not about a cover-up worthy of a congressional hearing. This story has been hiding in plain sight for over 200 years in original journals written by the victim himself. Admittedly, it exploits a delicate story for sheer fun—though it also holds a valuable message for history writers both new and experienced.

The good news is, I saved the lessons for last. So, if you like, you can stop reading before the lecture begins—I'll even tell you when that time has come. Until then, enjoy some irreverent fun.

Chapter 1 – The Fun Part



This would have been the headline in the *Wilderness Gazette* if the newspaper really existed in 1806, selling out on muddy streets across the country. Telegraph wires would have been singing—if telegraphy had been invented by then. Unfortunately, that technology would be decades away, but let's not let that get in the way of a good story.



Why was it that our grade school teachers never taught us this irreverent piece of Americana? We might have paid more attention during history classes had we been allowed to snicker while the teacher read us this tale, bloody details and all. And sadly, I suppose a historical re-enactment was really out of the question.

My desire to report the legend began with a family history book I was writing some time ago. Even though this particular Lewis and Clark episode reads as a 5th grader's snort-worthy playground story, I wanted to include it as relevant background to the Homestead Act which was directly related to my family story.

It seemed like a good idea at the time—in retrospect my idea of relevant was a little wonky.

For reasons that will soon become apparent, it landed on the cutting room floor after my editor told me I couldn't or shouldn't include it in this work. Her tone dripped with red ink during daily Skype sessions and emails as she slashed my favorite tale from the book.

That is exactly what brutal editors do. We authors craft our stories with self-indulgent passages that editors seem to think saddle the main story with unnecessary flights of whimsy. Years ago, a previous editor told me that I “over wrote”—I fired her shortly thereafter.

Writers are like naïve pioneers crossing the Oregon Trail in over-packed Conestoga wagons, while the wagon train boss—our editor—is in the back throwing out mother’s cherished piano, father’s favorite iron tools, steamer trunks of fancy cloths, and extra pots and pans; with the goal to make the wagon lighter and easier to pull while lessening the burden on the overworked reader, (oops) I mean oxen. The rutted countryside behind us is littered with some of our favorite belongings which we held dear to our literary-inspired hearts. Boohoo!



However, let’s get back to being shot in delicate places. So delicate, that even in 1806 the perturbed leader of the famous

exploration, Captain Meriwether Lewis, deemed it necessary to spin the description of his wound's location, only to be countered by more explicit reports from others. This is common problem with multiple people observing the same event; viewpoints vary. But first a short refresher course in American history, real short I promise.

France's Emperor Napoleon sold the United States a vast swath of North America in 1803 to pay for his failed wars with England. This transaction became the greatest real estate deal in history. While President Jefferson set out to buy just the city of New Orleans for its ports, he walked away with what we know as the Louisiana Purchase for a mere \$15,000,000. This is like a 20th century version of "Quick honey, get in the car, the short guy just WAY undercharged us."



1803 U.S. Map (Library of Congress)

Like a dog catching a car, Jefferson had no idea what he just snagged. So, he commissioned his friend Army Captain Meriwether Lewis to assemble an adventurous group of explorers to survey the virgin land from the Missouri up through the middle of the U.S. to the Pacific Ocean. This was not a trivial trip since there were no roads, no maps, or GPS—and the last sign they would see was “Next Rest Area 3,000 Miles.”

By the spring of 1803, Lewis enlisted his friend Lieutenant William Clark and assembled the rest of the expedition for three months of training at Camp Dubois, Illinois which is just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. They broke camp May 14, 1803 arriving in St. Charles, Missouri two days later where three boats awaited them for the expedition up the Missouri River. With the boats crewed by a motley bunch of soldiers and civilian frontiersmen, Lewis and Clark were tasked with a lengthy and challenging mission. President Jefferson specifically defined in his orders that multiple journals record all expedition activity and observations. Not only were several members to keep journals, the diaries were to be copied frequently so that all collected information would not be lost if a single accident ruined some.

It is these journals that we owe a debt of gratitude for the history of the expedition, and hence this book. We are so grateful.

The journals were written by Lewis, Clark, and several other crew members including Sergeants Ordway, Gass, Floyd, and

Private Whitehouse. While none of them were grammar or spelling giants, their writings were quite detailed, accurate, and entertaining.

Rounding out the crew were eight more soldiers, nine civilians from Kentucky, two French boatmen, a translator, and Clark's slave named York. All non-military men, except for York, were enlisted as Privates in the Army to establish a sense of order and command to the crew.

The boatmen had spent most of their lives as trappers. Their river skills were critical to navigation through rapids and eddies, and their hunting talents kept the expedition fed. One of them, Pierre (Peter) Cruzatte, who was half Omaha Indian and spoke various Native American dialects, figured prominently in the storied trip, that being an understatement. Despite some handicaps, his skills made him a valuable member of the crew, including his musical talent. Seems his fiddle music not only entertained the crew, but he also was designated the opening act at council meetings with newly-encountered Indian tribes.



Frederic Remington Painting, *Colliers Weekly* May 12, 1906. (Library of Congress)



For over two years, the journey ventured up the Missouri River, westward across the Rocky Mountains, and along the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean before retracing their steps back to civilization. *Shot in the Butt* jumps over that grueling portion of the expedition and thousands of journal pages since the attention of this short-story is focused on an utterly trivial tale towards the end of the expedition.

With only 40 days away from returning to St. Charles, Missouri, our headline story from the *Wilderness Gazette* became one of the most dramatic and near-tragic events of the expedition. Arriving at the most northern point of the Missouri River (near

today's Montana and North Dakota border), the rest of the trip should have been comparatively easy as they would ride the winding flow of the Missouri River south through present day North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri.

[Journal excerpts are reproduced in shaded areas, words as originally penned. Bold and italics applied by this author.]

On August 11, 1806 Captain Lewis recorded the smallest details of a traumatic day:

We set out very early this morning. it being my wish to arrive at the birnt hills by noon in order to take the latitude of that place as it is the most northern point of the Missouri,

jus opposite to the birnt hills there happened to be a herd of Elk on a thick willow bar and finding that my observation was lost for the present I determined to land and kill some of them

accordingly we put too and I went out with Cruzatte only. we fired on the Elk I killed one and he wounded another, we reloaded our guns and took different routs through the thick willows in pursuit of the Elk;

I was in the act of firing on the Elk a second time when a ball struck my left thye about an inch below my hip joint, missing the bone it passed through the left thye and **cut the thickness of the bullet across the hinder part of the right thye**; the stroke was very severe; I instantly supposed that Cruzatte had shot me in mistake for an Elk as I was dressed in brown leather and he cannot see very well;

Captain Lewis, being an educated man, was embarrassingly polite with his description of the wound, describing it as the *hinder part of the right thye* (thigh). I believe that would be his butt.

under this impression I called out to him **damn you, you have shot me**, and looked towards the place from whence the ball had come, seeing nothing I called Cruzatte several times as loud as I could but received no answer; I was now preswaded that it was an indian that had shot me as the report of the gun did not appear to be more than 40 paces from me and Cruzatte appeared to be out of hearing of me; in this situation not knowing how many indians there might be concealed in the bushes I thought best to make good my retreat to the perogue, calling out as I ran for the first hundred paces as loud as I could to Cruzatte to retreat that there were indians hoping to allarm him in time to make his escape also

when I arrived in sight of the perogue I called the men to their arms to which they flew in an instant, I told them that I was wounded but I hoped not mortally, by an indian I beleived and directed them to follow me that I would return & give them battle and releive Cruzatte if possible who I feared had fallen into their hands;

the men followed me as they were bid and I returned about a hundred paces when my wounds became so painfull and my thye so stiff that I could scarcely get on; in short I was compelled to halt and ordered the men to proceed

. . . when the party returned with Cruzatte and reported that

there were no indians nor the appearance of any; Cruzatte seemed much allarmed and declared if he had shot me it was not his intention, that he had shot an Elk in the willows after he left or seperated from me.

Sergeant Ordway wrote a more succinct layman's report that day, including a slightly different anatomical description of the wound:

Peter Cruzatte a frenchman went out with Capt. Lewis they Soon found a gangue of Elk in a thicket.

Capt. Lewis killed one and cruzatte killed two, and as he Still kept firing one of his balls hit Capt. Lewis in his back side and the ball passed through one Side of his buttock and the ball went out of the other Side of the other buttock and lodged at his overalls which wounded him bad.

Captain Clark's log of August 12th sheds even more clarity on the situation and how it might have come to be:

I was alarmed on the landing of the Canoes to be informed that Capt. Lewis was wounded by an accident—. I found him lying in the Perogue, he informed me that his wound was slight and would be well in 20 or 30 days this information relieved me very much. I examined the wound and found it a very bad flesh wound the ball had passed through the fleshey part of his left thy below the hip bone and **cut the cheek of the right buttock for 3 inches in length and the debth of the ball.** Capt L. informed me the accident happened the day before by one of the men Peter Crusat misstakeig him in the thick bushes to be an Elk.

This was finally a depiction that even today's 5th grader can understand, ". . . *cut through the cheek of the right buttock.*" I would have thought the word *cheek* was purely contemporary slang for one's backside, yet it appears to be an ordinary expression in 1806.

Capt. Clark's entry continued with even more honest revelations:

Capt Lewis with this Crusat and Several other men were out in the bottom Shooting of Elk, and had Scattered in a thick part of the woods in pursute of the Elk. Crusat Seeing Capt L. passing through the bushes and **takeing him to be an Elk from the Colour of his Cloathes which were of leather and very nearly that of the Elk** fired and unfortunately the ball passed through the thy as aforesaid.

This Crusat is near Sighted and has the use of but one eye, he is an attentive industerous man and one whome we both have placed the greatest Confidence in dureing the whole route.

Who hires a one-eyed guide? Did they get a 50% discount on his services?



The near-tragic shooting accident had no lasting effect on Captain Lewis. He may have forgiven Pierre Cruzatte, but I bet he did not forget. My research into ancestors and historical figures from the past has revealed they were not much different from us. They possessed a lively, if not wicked sense of humor,

and enjoyed telling stories that frequently became stretched—sometimes at the expense of others. I believe, based on utterly no solid evidence, that this story was the source of ale-infused howls coming from taverns up and down the Missouri River for years to come.



OK, you can stop here if you like, as I promised. Hopefully you enjoyed the story as much as have.

Yet, we all should learn from our mistakes, and mistakes of others. That is largely what becoming a good writer is all about, fixing or preferably avoiding literary blunders—which still plague me, but to a lesser degree with every keystroke. Maybe the seven tips in Chapter Two will help you.

Chapter 2 – Lessons I’ve Learned . . .

“Sorry this letter is so long, I didn’t have time to write a shorter one.”

Attributed to Mark Twain and many others.

The point my editor was making when she struck the shot-in-the-butt section from my family history book was that it had no place or anything to do with the story I was writing. That book was about a great-aunt who grew up at the turn of 20th century, lived through two World Wars and the Depression, and eventually committed suicide in a mental institution. She was a psychiatric nurse who worked in a mental hospital and later found herself committed to one, hence the title *Cruel Irony*. So, you may be asking what did the shot in the butt story have to do with her life? Nothing mostly.

My intent was to include historical perspective to her life as to how and why she came to be a pioneering woman from the plains of Kansas. I Just didn't know when to shut up.

The butt story had at least five degrees of separation from her life. Her father brought his family to Kansas in the 1870s and acquired land via the Homestead Act. To add background, I felt compelled (erroneously) to provide a lengthy history lesson about how the Homestead Act came to be. This led to a discussion of how land was gained in the Louisiana Purchase, and then why the land had to be surveyed, and that it had to be explored—by Lewis

and Clark. Then of course, Cruzatte's *looks-like-an-elk-to-me* episode hijacked my focus, and like a dog bolting after a squirrel I lost all literary bearing.

While it was important to include information on the Homestead Act considering the reader might not have been familiar with it, I was like a focused fifth-grader (an oxymoron) who liked this titillating story so much that I was bound to include it.

I shortly understood the error of my ways, and “shot in the butt” became a code-phrase with my editor (no I haven't fired her yet) for nearly five years. It means lose the dang piece. It's not relevant. Oh, and apologizes to my editor.



So, I came to realize my futile attempt at creativity was an excellent example of what not to write. To prevent you from undertaking similar follies, consider what I have learned.

1. **Get an Editor** – Even if you are writing for only family or friends, enlist some help from someone you respect to review your work. It will help if they are really, really, good at understanding the parts of speech and grammar. However, even a well-read person can spot simple things like typos and awkward sentences, to passages that make no sense. Be sure to reward all your helpers.

2. **Listen to Your Editor** – There is a reason you have them, assuming you do. If you are serious about writing books that people will want to read, listen to your editor. You are a lousy self-editor.
3. **Don't Justify** – If confronted by an editor or reviewer about a passage, do not spend a lot of time explaining why you wrote what you did, unless you are planning on traveling to the home of all of your readers and explaining it to them. Your book has to stand alone out in the cold all by itself.
4. **Be Honest with Yourself** – Does everything belong in the story you are writing? Who Cares? A popular if not shocking maxim, attributed to William Faulkner, tells budding writers to "kill your darlings."
5. **See Mark Twain Quote** – A cousin to a misplaced passage is one that is laced with way too much detail that doesn't pertain to your main story. Don't put too many forks in the road. The reader will quit taking them and soon quit.

6. **Think of the Reader** – Find or identify an audience, then write to them. Just don't tell them everything in the world that you like. What is the title (and subtitle) of your book? Write about that.
7. **Don't Hire a One-Eyed Guide** – See Chapter One.



See, that wasn't so bad. You read this in less than half an hour.
And hopefully some part of it put a smile on your face.

Epilogue

This was written on a whim, the timing of it anyway. As mentioned earlier, I have wanted to write the flippant story for a long time.

Finally, a spark of inspiration came from a planned visit to the Lewis and Clark Boat House and Museum in St. Charles, Missouri. Being involved in the genealogy world, I'm attending the National Genealogical Society's annual conference in May 2019. The museum is within walking distance of the conference—this is karma—where I will be selling my books and of course attending classes to further my own genealogy knowledge. I thought it would be fun to have this short eBook available to everyone.

Bibliography

There are scores of books on Lewis and Clark, and I found their original journals fascinating and indispensable.

The Journals of Lewis and Clark, edited by Bernard de Voto, 1982, Franklin Center, PA: The Franklin Library, 1982

There are many versions and editions of the raw journals, usually available in your library and of course from booksellers. In addition, the journals are available online from the University of Nebraska:

<https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/>

Books by Gary W. Clark

Photography

Photo Restoration

A Guide to Repairing Photographs with Photoshop Elements.

19th Century Card Photos

A Guide to Dating Cartes de Visite and Cabinet Cards.

20th Century Photographs

A Guide to Identifying and Dating 1900 to 1950 Photographs.

Cased Images and Tintypes

A Guide to Dating Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes, and Tintypes.

Real Photo Postcards

A Guide to Identifying & Dating Real Photo Postcards.

Archive Photography

How to photograph oversize photos, curled documents, and heirloom treasures.

Gravestone Photography and Documentation

Document ancestor graves with photographs and location data.

Slides and Negatives

Digitize and Protect Your Vintage Film.

Historical

Lessons From The Gibson Girl

Her Quest for Equality, Justice, *and* Love

Cruel Irony

Triumphs and Tragedies of a Modern Woman

Teenage Soldier

Don K. Clemence, A Greatest Generation Story

Write a Captivating Family History

Don't Bore Your History to Death – Add Context to the Story

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A Soldier's Insight into Military Chaos

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