

Missouri River

Missouri National Recreational River

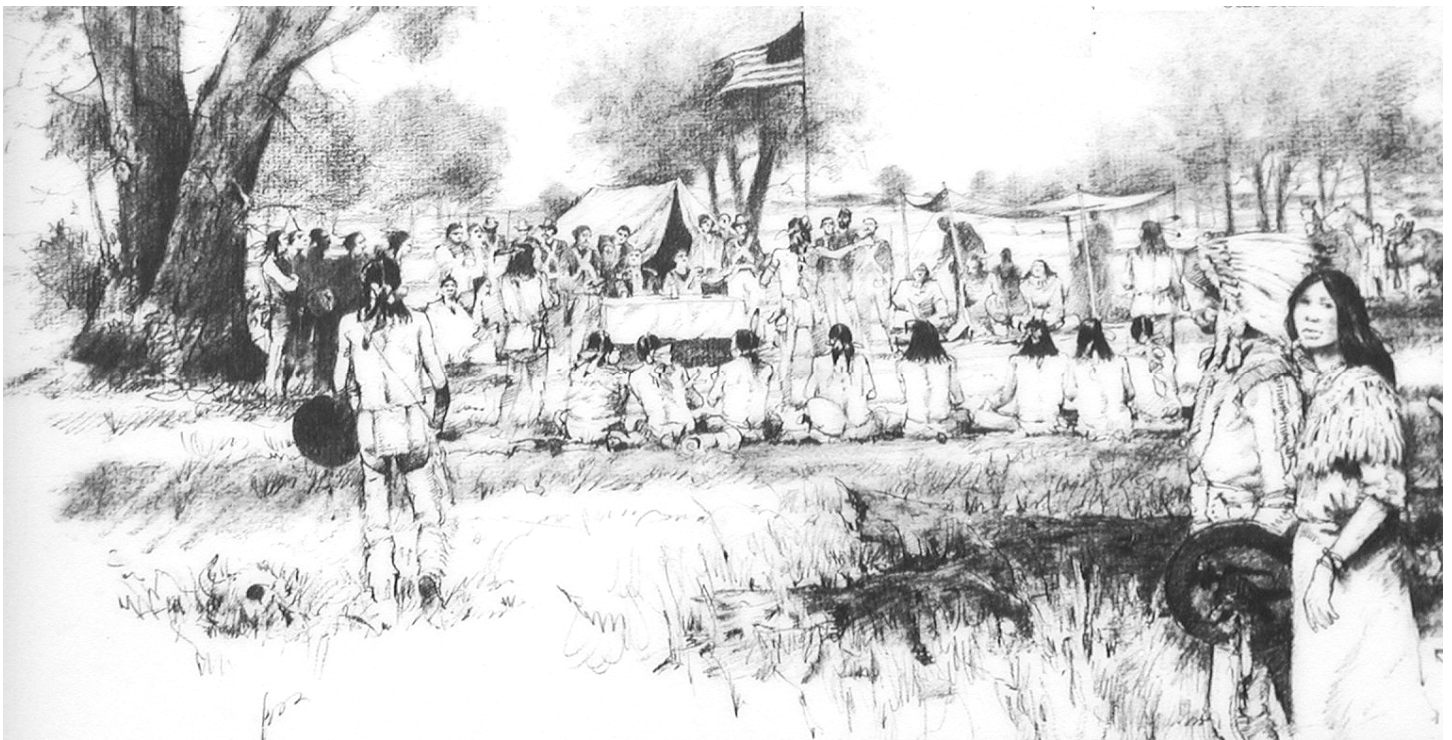


Captain Meriwether Lewis's speech to the Yankton Sioux, August 30, 1804

Captain Meriwether Lewis gave a speech to a band of the Yankton Sioux during the council at Camp Calumet Bluff on August 30, 1804. As none of the journals recorded this address, historians could only guess as to its contents. That is, until March 2003. This eleven-page manuscript, in Captain William Clark's handwriting, was part of a donation in the possession of descendants of Oto Chief Big Ax. It and other documents were kept and passed down through the descendants of the Oto chief until their donation to the Oklahoma Historical Society in March 2003 by Joan Aitson and her daughters. No one knows how the manuscript came into the possession of the Oto.

Lewis addressed We oog shen (Shaking Hand). Apparently the two captains "made" him the principal chief of the Yankton Sioux during the two-day council.

Notice that William Clark signed "for N W D" after his name. This means "for North Western Discovery" and is, in the captains' view, the official designation of the expedition.



To We oog shen (or Shaking hand)

The Great Chief of the of the Du bois rulé Tribe of the Soues Nation, and to the Chief and Warriors of the Said Nation.

Children. – It gives us much pleasure to have met you here this day in council. We salute you as the children of your Great Father the great Chief of the Seventeen great Nations of America. We see around us a number of the Old and experienced, the wise men and Warriors of the Soues nation.

Children. – It will please your Great Father when he is informed of the readiness with which you have assembled yourselves to hear good councils which he has commanded us to give you.

Children. – Now open your ears that you may hear his words, and dispose your minds to understand them. Reflect on the time past, and that to come; do not deceive yourselves, nor suffer others to deceive you, but like men and warriors devoted to the real interest of their nation; seek those truths, which can alone perpetuate its happiness ---

Children. – Commissioned and sent by the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great Nations of America, we have come to inform you, as we go also to inform all the nations of red men who inhabit the borders of the Missouri, that a great Council was lately held between this great Chief of the Seventeen Great Nations of America, and your Old fathers the French and Spaniards. In this council it was agreed that all the white men on the waters of the Missouri and Mississippi, should obey the commands of the Great Chief of America, who has adopted them as his children, and they now form one Common family with us. Your old traders are of this description; they are no longer the subjects of France or Spain, but have become the citizens of the Seventeen great Nations of America, and are bound to obey the commands of their great chief the President, who is now your only great father.

Children. – This Council being concluded between your old Fathers the French and Spaniards, and your great father the great Chief of the Seventeen Great Nations of America, your Old fathers the French and Spaniards in Compliance with their engagements made in that council, have withdrawn all their troops from all their Military Ports on the Waters of the Missouri and Mississippi, and have surrendered to our great chief all their fortifications and Land in this Country, together with the mouths of all the Rivers through which the traders bring goods to the red men on the troubled waters.

Children. – Those arrangements being made your old Fathers the French and Spaniards, have gone beyond the great lake toward the rising sun, from whence they never intend returning to visit their former red Children in this quarter; nor will they or any other nation of white men, ever again display their flag on the troubled waters; because the mouths are now in the possession of the great Chief of the Seventeen great nations of America, who can command his War Chiefs to suffer no Vessels to pass but such as sail under the protection of his flag and acknowledge his authority.

Children. – You will proceive from what has been sade, that the Great Chief of the Seventeen great nations of America has become your only father; he is the only friend to whome you can now look for Protection, or from whome you can ask favour or receive good Council, and he will take care that you Shall have no just cause to regret the change; he will serve you and not deceive you.

Children! – Know that this great Chief as powerful as he is just, and as beneficent as he is wise, always entertaining a sincere and friendly disposition towards the red people of America, has commended us his war Chiefs to undertake this long journey which we have so far accomplished with much labour and great expense, in order to Council with you, and his other red children on the troubled waters; to give you his good council to enquire into the nature of your Wants, and on our return to inform him of them, in order that he may make the necessary arrangements for your relief; to clear the road, to remove away obstructions, and make it the road of

peace between himself and his red children in this quarter; and finally to inform all nations of red men the line of conduct they must pursue on order to enjoy the benefit of his friendship and become happy.

Children! – Your Great Father the great Chief of the Seventeen great nations of America has sent by us medal, and some cloathes such as he dresses his war Chiefs with; to the other Chiefs a Medal

Children! – your great father has sent you those things to be kept by you as a pledge of his sincerity with which he now offers you the hand of friendship he has commanded us to tell you when you accept his flag and medals, that you receive these with his hand, which will never be withdrawn from yourselves and the Soues nation so long as you continue to follow the Councils which he may command his Chiefs to give you, and shut your ears to the councils of bad birds.

Children! – Know that the great chief who has thus offered you the hand of unalterable friendship, is the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great Nations of America, whose Cities are a[s] numerous as the Stars of the heavens, and whose people, like the grass of the Plains, cover with their cultivated fields and Wigwams, the wide extended country reaching from the western border of the Mississippi to the Great Lakes of the East, where the land and the Sun rises from the face of the Great Waters.

Children. – Know that the road in which your great father and friends has commanded us to tell you and your nation that you must walk in order to enjoy the benefit of his friendship, is, that you must live in peace with all the white men, for they are his children; neither wage war against your neighbours the red men, for they are equally his children and he is bound to protect them, injure not the persons of any traders who may come among you, neither destroy, nor take from them their property by force, more particularly those who visit you under the protection of your fathers flag. Do not obstruct the passage of any Boat Perogee or other vessel which may be ascending or Descending the Missouri River, more especially when under cover of your great fathers flag. Neither injure the persons of any red or white man on board of such vessel as may possess the flag, for by that signal, you may be confident that they are good men and do not intend to injure you, they are therefore to be treated as friends, and as the Common Children of your great father the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America. Keep order among yourselves, and obey the councils of such chiefs as your Great father may from time to time cause to be appointed among you from your Own nation; and those particularly who are this day acknowledged by us as Chiefs of the Soues in the name of your great father; Suffer no trader of any description to make Chiefs among you, nor obey such as are thus made hereupon, for your Great father will not permit his traders to give medals or make Chiefs, nor will he acknowledge Such Chiefs as are thus made, but he will always take care to send by one of his confidential Chiefs a Sufficient ~~quantity~~ number of medals to bestow on those among you, who follows his councils and act in Such a manner, as to gain the Confidence and esteem of their nation. The traders only make Chiefs among you to Serve their own purposes, your Great father makes Chiefs with a view to the happiness of your nation. – Your great American father has ... and will raise you up and make a great

Children. – Do these things which the great Chief of the Seventeen great nations of America has commanded and you will be happy; Should any person advise you ... Contrary to ... shut your ears, and listen not to the councils of bad birds, spurn them from you and turn on your heels from their advice as you would from the precipice of a high rock, whose summit reached the clouds, and whose base was washed by the gulf of human woes, lest by one false step you should bring upon you the displeasure of your great father who could destroy you and your nation as the fire destroys and consumes the grass of the plains. (as I before observed) the mouths of all the rivers through which the Traders bring Goods to your Country are in his possession, if you offend him he could at pleasure! Shut up those Channels and prevent those traders from coming among you, and thus bring all the Calamities of want upon you, but it is not the wish of your great father to injure you, on the contrary he is now persuing those measures which are but calculated to make you happy.

Children. – If you will now open your ears to the council of your great father the great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, and strictly persue the advice which he has now given you through us, he will as soon

as possible after our return Send a large Store of Goods to trade with you for your Peltries and furs; those goods will be furnished you annually in a regular manner, and in such quantities as will be equal to your necessities. [You] may then obtain goods in greater abundance, and on much better terms than you have ever received them heretofore. Because your great father doze not wish to profit by your necessities or enrich himself with your furs, and peltries; he is already as wealthy as he wishes to be, and can command at any moment goods for his red children than all the traders who trade on the waters of the Missouri and Mississippi.

Children. – As it will necessarily take Some time before we can return, and your great Father Send and establish this store of Goods, he will permit your old traders who reside among you, or who annually visit you, to continue trading with you as usual provided they give you good Council. –

Children. – We are now on a long journey to the head of the Missouri; the length of this journey compelled us to load our boat & pirogues with Provisions, we have therefore brought but very few goods as presents for yourselves or any other nation which he may meet on our way. We are no traders; but have come to consult you on the Subject of your trade, to open the road and prepare the way, in order that your nation may hereafter receive a regular and plentiful supply of goods ---- That tobacco and those articles you see were sent to you by your great father as a testimony of his parental affection, receive them therefore in his name, he would have sent you more but we could not bring them.

Children. – Your great father will be very sorry to hear that yourselves and his red children the Ottoes and Missouriias your near neighbours are not at peace with each other, we wish therefore that you should make peace with the Ottoes & Missouriias, Smoke out of the Same Pipe and become good friends and ... again; this would please your great father, and be an additional inducement for his performing those things he had promised you; if you do not make peace with your niehgbours, your great father will be very angry with you. We held a council a few days ago with the Ottoes at the Mahar Village to which place they came to make a peace with that nation by our advice. This ... evidences on the part of the Ottoes a disposition to make peace with their neighbours in conformity to the wishes of their great father, & we hope that you are equally disposed to be at peace with them. In the Council with the Ottoes and Missouriias, we told them but we now tell you, that their great father says they must make peace with the Soues and Mahars. They promised us they would do as their great father wished them; we gave them a flag and some medals in the name of their great father and have accepted them as his children. Thus the Ottoes and Missouriias have become his children and he is bound to protect them, therefore you must not strike them; they will not strike you, steal your horses, or stop your goods again.

Children – If your great Chief wishes to See your great father and make known to him the wants of his nation, he can now do so with much convenience. The road is open and Safe, no nations below will dare to Strike any red man, who is under the protection of your great Father's flag, and guarded by his Warriors. Let this then be a course of rejoicing among you – that you have a great Father living on the same land with yourselves, whome you can See at all times, and who is more sincerely disposed to Serve you than your former fathers ever were.

Our Oldest Son. – the We-oog-shen ----- we have a pirogue here and some of your great fathers Soldiers in readiness to convey you to St. Louis, provided you think proper to accept an invitation and visit your great father you may take with you four or five of the Principal Chiefs and Warriors; Mr. Dorion your old friend will accompany you to the Seat of your Great Father. On your arrival in St. Louis the Commandant will furnish Mr. Dorion, and yourselves with the necessary number of horses, and all other necessary means to make your journey from thence to your great fathers town comfortable and safe.

Our Oldest Son. – We oog-shen (Shaking Hand) In order that the Commandant of St. Louis as well as your Great Father and all his Chiefs may know you, you must take with you the medal and this Speech which we now present you. When your great father and his Chiefs See those things, they will know that you have opened your ears to the voice of the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, and have Come to receive his Good Councils, and his abundant gifts.

Our Oldest Son. – We oag-shen ----- If the Situation of your nation is such that you cannot with propriety leave them, you may in the manner already pointed out, Send four or five of your Principal men impowered to act for you and your nation; your great father will receive them as his children, and will give them his good councils, and Send them back loaded with presents to their Nation; the Soues will then See that all we have Said to them is the truth; and that your great father never Sends his red Children away from him to return to their villages with empty hands.

Our Oldest Son. We oog e chen Whomsoever you Send to your great father must carry the flag and this parole in order that your great father and his chiefs may know that they have come to See them by our invitation. Send by them also all the flags and medals which you have received from your old fathers, the French & Spanish or from any other nation of white men whatever, your great father will give you new flags and new medals of his own in return for those you send him. It is not proper since you have become the children of the Great Chief of the Seventeen great nations of America, that you should wear, or keep these emblems of attachment to any other great father but himself nor will it be pleasing to him that you do so. -----

Children. We have now Spoken to you at Some length, and have touched on some Subjects on which your decision is deeply interesting to the future happiness of your nation and which of Course will require your most mature deliberations; we therefore do not expect, neither do we wish your determination on those points at this moment, but will wait patiently until you have held a Council among yourselves and have consulted each other, and made up your minds with regard to them.

Children. – When you have made up your minds, and determined upon the conduct which you mean to proceed in future, you will meet us again in Council; tell us whether you mean to follow the Councils of your great father the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, whether you mean to go and See you Great Father, to hear his Councils and receive his good Gifts, and finally whether you mean to make peace with your neighbors the Ottoes & Missouriias and live in friendship with all the red skins now the Children of your Great Father. -----

Children. – The coald season is now fast approaching and we have a great way to go; we wish you therefore to consume as little time as possible in your deliberations, and meet us again in Council, and inform us of your decisions. -----

Children. – We hope that the great spirit will open your ears to the Councils of your only Great father, the Great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, and that he will dispose your minds to understand and observe them.

Children. – Follow the Councils of your great father, and the great spirit will smile upon your nation, and in future years will make you to outnumber the trees. -----

Signed and Sealed this 30th day of
August 1804 Camp Calumet Bluff
above the River Jacque

Wm Clark (Capt?) Expd
For N W D

Meriwether Lewis Capt.
1st U'S Regt Infty.