

Meriwether and Clark

July 30 – August 2, 2019
Saskatchewan and Montana



Meriwether

July 30, 2019

Fort Benton, Montana

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark explored the Missouri River, through what is now Montana, in the summer of 1805.

Neighbour Dave Clarke and I decided to catch up with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and follow them along the river for a few miles. We plan to sweep through Montana, and then on to Saskatchewan.

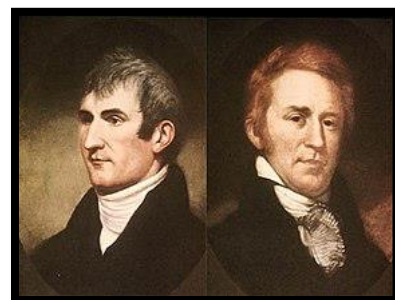


Aside from being next-door neighbours, Dave and I share an interest in history, agriculture, aviation, gravel roads, tall tales, art, music, cribbage, and beer. We are the same age; we were both born in small towns in south-eastern Saskatchewan and we both spent summers at Kenosee/Carlyle Lake. We both lived in Regina for a time and, while we didn't know each other then, we have some common acquaintances. Dave's wife, Cheryl, grew up near Palmer Saskatchewan, about a nine-iron shot from where I was born.

Needless to say, Dave and I travel well together, and this trip will encompass almost all of our common interests.

We arrived in Fort Benton one month and 214 years too late to catch Lewis and Clark, but we did come across this monument to the explorers on the bank of the Missouri River.

Having missed Lewis and Clark, we will assume their identities for a few days. Dave and William Clark share the same last name, so it isn't a big stretch for Dave to become William. Which would make me.....

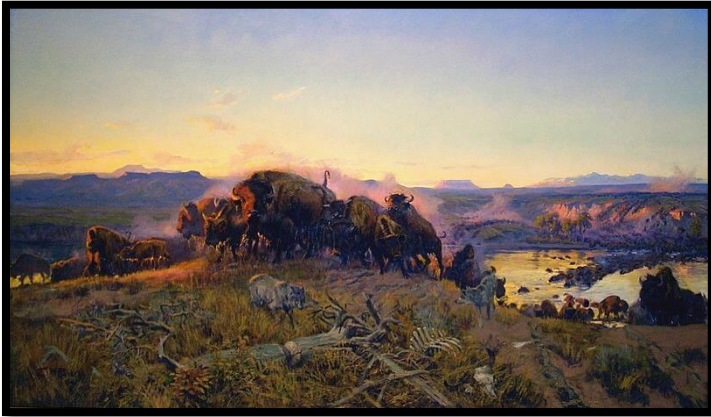


....."Meriwether".

The Gift

July 31, 2019

Fort Benton, Montana



The painting on the left is entitled “*When the Land Belonged to God*”. Charles M. Russell painted it from the perspective of a point on the Missouri River at the confluence of Shonkin Creek, just north of Fort Benton.



Dave and I did a reconnaissance of the location in the evening, then came back before sunrise to match the landscape with the artist’s rendition. Just after we arrived, light from the emerging sun bled colour into the river bottom. For one glorious moment nature’s reality was in harmony with the artist’s impression.

Charlie Russell took some liberties with the Montana skyline in “*When the Land Belonged to God*”; he moved Square Butte about 50 miles closer, put Round Butte in a more prominent location and positioned the rising sun so that it emphasised the entire scene to spectacular advantage. Charlie painted a herd of buffalo and a wolf in an impossible place on the steep riverbank and gave the sky breath-taking depth and shading. Charlie Russell’s composite image is so majestic it exceeds the magnificence of Montana.

But I am not the first to recognize his supernatural artistic talent. In Ian Tyson’s song *The Gift*, Tyson describes Charlie Russell’s talent this way:

*When the Lord called Charlie to his home up yonder,
He said, "Kid Russell, I got a job for you.
You're in charge of sunsets up in old Montana,
'Cause I can't paint them quite as good as you,*



Virgelle Ferry

August 1, 2019
Virgelle, Montana

Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer and their grandma operate the ferry on the Missouri River at Virgelle, MT. The single-vehicle ferry crosses the river semi-irregularly during the summer months.



To board the ferry from the south side of the river we drove about 20 miles on gravel road, from Fort Benton to the south bank landing. There is a switch on a roadside box at the levee which alerts Huckleberry's grandma at her house on the north side of the river. At our signal, Grandma and the two boys launched the cable ferry and putted across the river to greet us.

We rolled the truck down from the gravel road, over a short ramp and onto the deck of the ageing ferry boat. Grandma, roughly the height and width of an oak barrel, greeted us with a friendly, gap-toothed smile.

Huckleberry and Tom (cousins we were told), each gave us a similar smile, then proceeded to get into as much trouble as you might expect from two feral 5-year-olds.

I had never been on a river ferry so the trip to the north shore was fascinating. The boat is attached to a strong cable overhead and upstream, which keeps it from drifting down the Missouri to the Mississippi. Another cable runs through the pilothouse to an engine, which propels the craft back and forth across the River. There were fishing rods propped along the guardrail, so we chatted with Grandma about fishing and life on the river as we putted across. She was very friendly and informative; all the while riding herd on the cousins.

"Tom! Get your pants back on, you can't swim out here!"



As we approached the north dock, Grandma stopped the boat and tried to operate another cable mechanism which was supposed to drop the ramps. The gearbox emitted a few feeble clicks then stopped altogether - the ramps stayed stubbornly in an upright position. The look on Grandma's face told me that this was not good. I could also tell by the way she continued to press the unresponsive switch, that Grandma had not the foggiest clue what to do next.

Dave and I went around to investigate. It was clear that the cable winch was battery-operated and the clicking sound was very much like a weak battery on a winter morning. I popped the top off the battery housing and could see that the connection was poor. In fact, the battery had melted around one of the terminals.

This was quickly becoming a "Lewis and Clark" scenario. I had visions of the cable coming loose and all of us drifting down the Missouri together, to God-Knows-Where. We had fishing rods and two wild brats, so we might not starve, but our rotund Sacajawea was not going to be much help as a guide on our way to St Louis and on to the Gulf of Mexico.

It was clear that we were going to need to improvise to put the landing gear down on the north shore. I keep a set of booster cables in my truck; with a little manoeuvring I thought I could get the truck turned sideways enough so the cables could connect the truck battery with the control box. Dave watched the back end of the truck to make sure I didn't run over Tom or Huckleberry while I shifted the vehicle to the starboard side of the boat. The cables reached the control box, but I wasn't 100% sure that the contacts I clamped onto were the right ones. I closed my eyes and pressed the button. The winch emitted a satisfying hum and the ramps slowly descended to the launch pad.



Huckleberry and Tom chased one another off the ferry before it was fully docked.

Grandma's face was visibly relieved, whether it was from being safely back on shore, or just being free of the cousins, I couldn't say. She was very grateful to us and acknowledged, several times, that she was lucky to have picked up farm boys as passengers on this particular trip.

We parted company, then spent the next hour touring an antique store in

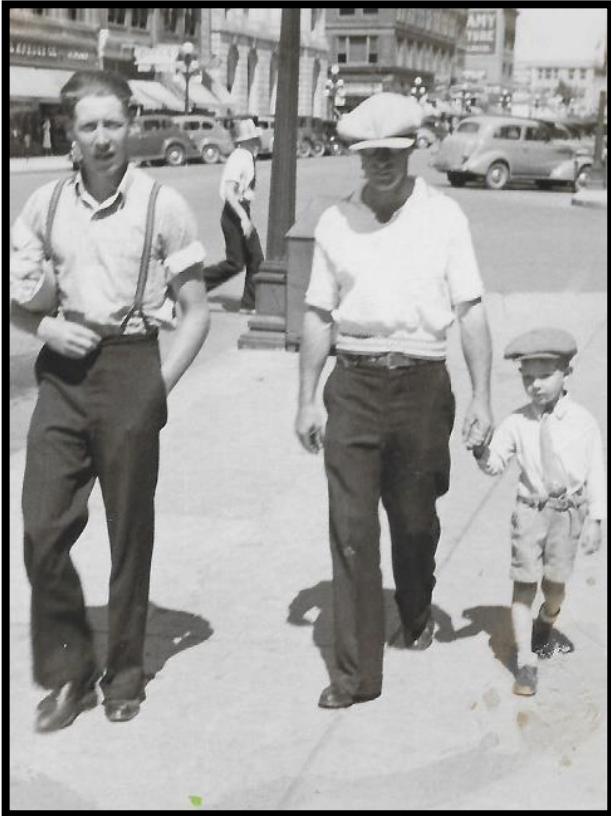
Virgelle. The store had a derelict ferry boat on display across the parking lot. I noticed the old ferry had a hand crank instead of a battery system to lower the landing gear.

Some innovations aren't an advancement.

A Patch of Shade

August 1, 1938

Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan



This photograph was taken on a summer day on Main Street in Moose Jaw, Sask. The subjects are facing south and their shadows are very short, so it would have been about noon when their image was captured.

The handsome young man on the right is my father, Adrian Paton. He is holding Grandpa Billie's hand, while his Uncle Jim walks beside them. I don't know who took the photo.

Adrian appears to be about 4-5 years old so the photo would have been taken in about 1938. Adrian thinks the family had traveled to Regina for a fair and were returning home through Moose Jaw, but no other details survive.

Dave and I made our way to Moose Jaw as part of our Montana/Saskatchewan trek and decided to spend the night there. We were more than a little thirsty given the 34-degree heat, so we stopped at the recently renovated Grant Hall Hotel on Main Street for a beverage. The air conditioning, cold beer and opulent surroundings made for a very pleasant half hour. I pulled up the picture above on my I-phone as we settled the dust and asked our waitress if she could place any of the buildings.

"That's City Hall", she never hesitated, "it's right across the street."

We finished our beer and walked back into the mid-day heat. The arched windows of City Hall matched the photo exactly. Then Dave put one eye on the picture and the other on a brick building across the





street and made a match of the “AMY” painted on the side. From there, we simply triangulated across the street to determine where the Patons were standing when the photo was taken - on the east side of Main Street, just south of the intersection of High Street.

We wandered over to the spot and, for a few moments, I was standing with Dad, Grandpa and Uncle Jim, in Moose Jaw, circa 1938.

It would have been the height of the Great Depression when the picture

was taken, but they all seem happy enough. They were certainly all healthy and trim, which is more than I can say for the interloper from 2019.

I will never be as thin as my ancestors were, but they inspire me to go on a diet when I get home. In the meantime, another beer in the Grant Hall Hotel lobby seems more likely.

My patch of shade is going to take up more space on Moose Jaw’s sidewalk than it should, for a while longer yet.



80 years on and Bellamy Furniture Company Limited’s sign is still visible, right where it was in 1938.

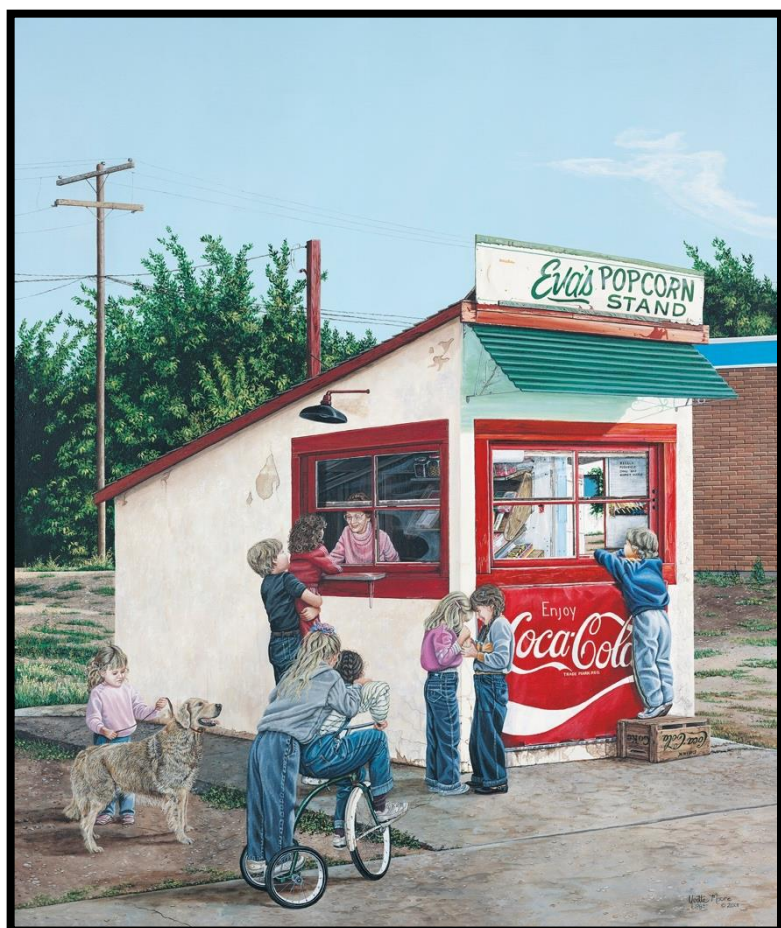
Buttered Popcorn

August 2, 2019

Regina, Saskatchewan

How Dave and I never bumped into one another before we became neighbours in 2005 is remarkable. We must have crossed paths a hundred times over the years, but never connected. Ah well, we are making up for lost time now and, with retirement getting into full swing, I expect we will share many more adventures.

We both trained as pilots in Regina a lifetime ago. Dave went on to a 45-year career with Air Canada and I still fly a Cessna. In fact, getting my C182 home is the final part of our mission on this trip. I left the plane at YQR last week when it was too windy to fly home, so I am going to retrieve it today - Dave will drive the truck back to Alberta. It will be interesting to see which gets more bug splats on the way home, the Ford or the Cessna.



While we were in Moose Jaw, we dropped into Yvette Moore's art gallery. Moore is an iconic prairie artist. Her work is quintessential "Saskatchewan", much of it from the perspective of children. Dave and I both found common ground in her "Everytown, Saskatchewan" artwork.

Dave pointed out that Moore is from his hometown of Radville. The painting on the left depicts "Eva's Popcorn Stand", an establishment Dave frequented as a kid. With the use of only a little imagination, Dave could be the guy standing on the Coke box.

Dave and I never connected at Eva's, but the picture depicts yet another of our common interests....

....Buttered Popcorn.

