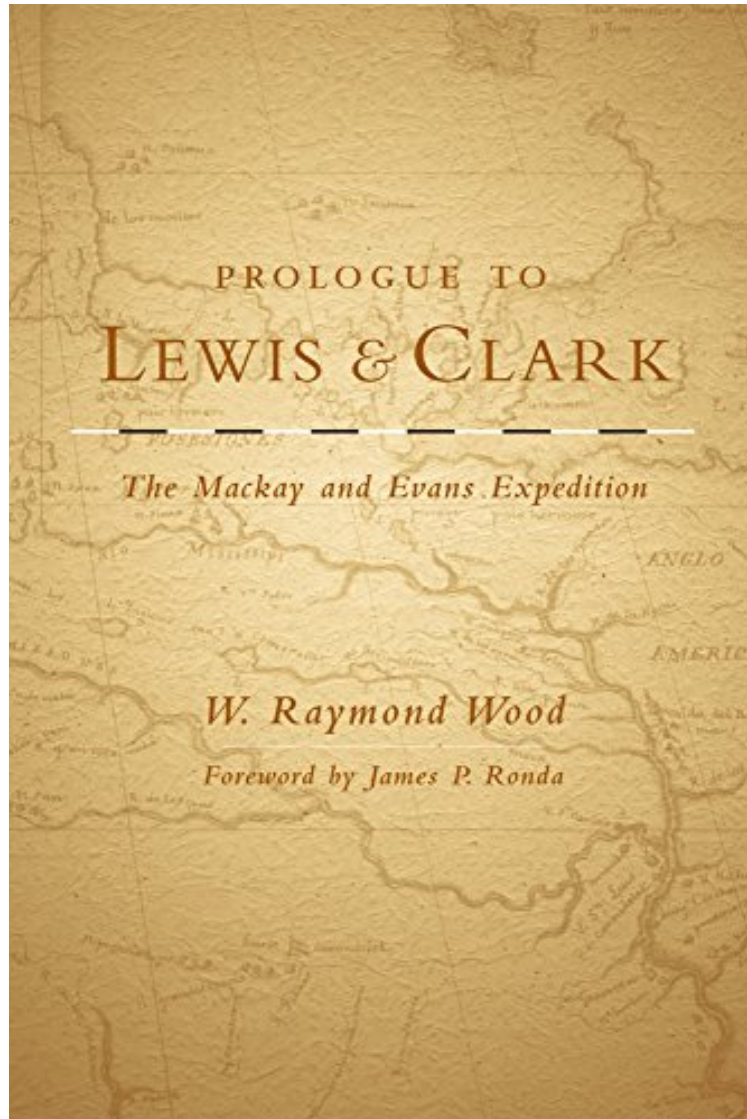


Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition

W. Raymond Wood

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W. Raymond Wood : Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. forgotten explorersBy dan mckaygreat book, glad someone took the time to research and document it.....a lesson in wise management of your affairs.Dan McKay4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Prologue to Lewis Clark: The Mackay and Evans ExpeditionBy Barney ConsidineToo many Lewis and Clark fans tend to assume that the Corps of Discovery was blazing trail all the way from St. Louis to the

Pacific. It in no way diminishes the fame due the Corps to point out that for the first half of their journey they were following a trail well blazed by fellow Europeans and Euro-Americans. A French explorer, Pierre Gaultier de la Vrendrye, and his two sons visited the Mandan villages in the Dakotas approximately six-and-a-half decades before Lewis and Clark. A number of British fur traders were working the area in the late eighteenth century, including some that went up the Missouri from St. Louis. The explorer-surveyor David Thompson computed the latitude and longitude of the Mandan villages in 1798. Observations from these many explorers lead to progressively more accurate maps. Lewis and Clark carried the latest of the maps and personally interviewed several of the people who had been all or part of the way to the Mandans. The journey of James Mackay and John Thomas Evans contributed to both the maps and the interviews. It was, in fact, British incursions into territory where the Spanish had legal claim that prompted the Mackay and Evans expedition to the Mandan Villages. Mackay had been part of the British fur trade and Evans was Welsh. Both had to swear loyalty to the Spanish crown before they were accepted to lead a trip reaffirming the Spanish claim and to warn British traders to cease and desist. Technically, Mackay and Evans represented the Missouri Company, a commercial firm operating under charter (and tight control) of the Spanish government. Mackay and Evans were instructed to proceed up the Missouri and cross the continent to the Pacific, although they only made it as far as the Mandan Villages. Actually, only Evans made it that far. Mackay established a post near the Omaha Indian village north of the Platte River and explored by land into present day Nebraska. Mackay, the leader of the expedition, was essentially an experienced explorer-for-hire. A primary motivation for Evans was to verify and/or find an Indian tribe descended from Welshmen, believed by many to have discovered North America. Although he failed to find Welsh Indians, Evans was a valuable addition since he became the primary mapmaker. They departed from St. Louis with a sizeable party and stock of trade goods in 1795. Late that year they established Fort Charles close to the Omahas. Evans went on to the Mandan villages in 1796. There he found a British trading post. He evicted the British and established a post of his own. Both men returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1797. It should be noted that the Missouri River and most of its drainage was controlled entirely at the time by the Indians. The Europeans that went into the area did so largely at the sufferance of the natives. Unless they bought their way in with trade goods or with believable promises of trade goods, they were unlikely to get far. Boats going up the river paid tribute to several tribes and frequently lost their entire stock to the tribes. Representatives of the nations attempting to establish claims in the area tried to outdo one another with promises. The Indians were superb traders and successfully played the foreign nations against one another. This was the environment that Mackay and Evans encountered. They lacked the continuing supply of goods and Spanish support they needed to succeed completely. This book is not an easy read. It is somewhat disjointed and repetitious. The author has devoted many pages to the various maps derived from, or preceding, the Mackay and Evans expedition. This breaks up the flow of the narrative. The Mackay and Evans experience is, however, an additional chapter that American historians and Lewis and Clark aficionados should not miss. Any exploration stands on the shoulders of the experience and discoveries of those who come before. Mackay and Evans made an important contribution to the changes (for good or bad) that have occurred in North America since 1797. Their connection has been overlooked partly because the territory they explored went from Spanish to French to American control within only a few years after they returned. Lewis and Clark, the American explorers, had a much greater impact and reaped the most press. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant, scholarly By William J. Higgins, III A fascinating read of pre-Lewis and Clark explorations into the upper Missouri River Basin from its earliest beginnings, with the main focus on the 1795-1797 Mackay-Evans expedition. Most people have never heard of Scotsman James Mackay and Welshman John Evans, but if it wasn't for their efforts in cartography and ethnology, the celebrated Lewis and Clark expedition would have been quite hampered in its early stages. When the Louisiana Territory was still under Spanish rule, Mackay became a naturalized citizen and Evans swore allegiance to Spain. Their responsibilities to Spain included exploring, mapping and locating a route to the Pacific for trade possibilities, evicting British traders in its territory and promoting Indian intertribal peace to further enhance trade with Spain. Evans' primary objective in accepting this offer was to locate the mythological Welsh Indians whose original Welsh ancestors were supposed to have settled in mid-America during the year 1170 AD. Although not a completely successful mission, the Mackay-Evans expedition did produce maps of the upper Missouri which Lewis and Clark referred to on numerous occasions and opened understandings of Missouri River Indian cultures and customs. Dr. Wood effectively sifts through the available journals and maps of Mackay and Evans, along with other pertinent papers and charts of the day, to make this an exciting work.

To follow the journeys made by Mackay and Evans up the Missouri and across the plains in 1795-97 is to begin to appreciate the kind of world Lewis and Clark found when they voyaged up the river in 1804. . . . Of all those waterways, none has captured the American imagination more than the Missouri. . . . It is a river of promise, of dreams, and of dreams denied. James P. Ronda, from the Foreword When Mackay and Evans returned to Spanish St. Louis in 1797, they were hailed as the two most illustrious travelers in the northern parts of this continent. Ironically, though the findings of Mackay and Evans were responsible for much of the early success of Lewis and Clark in their expedition, the adulation that followed Lewis and Clark's successful return completely eclipsed Mackay and Evans

reputations. In *Prologue to Lewis and Clark*, W. Raymond Wood narrates the history of this long-forgotten but important expedition up the Missouri River. The Mackay and Evans expedition was more than an exploratory mission. It was the last effort by Spain to gain control over the Missouri River basin in the decade before the United States purchased the Louisiana territory. In that respect, it failed. But the expedition was successful as a journey of exploration. The maps and documents they created later provided the Lewis and Clark expedition with invaluable information for its first full year. Consolidating a collection of eighteen contemporary documents relating to the Mackay and Evans expedition as well as his own research and analysis, Wood provides an in-depth examination of the expeditions background, execution, and final results. Volume 79 in the *American Exploration and Travel Series*

"To follow the journeys made by Mackay and Evans up the Missouri and across the plains in 1795-97 is to begin to appreciate the kind of world Lewis and Clark found when they voyaged up the river in 1804. . . . Of all those waterways, none has captured the American Imagination more than the Missouri. . . . It is a river of promise, of dreams, and of dreams denied." About the Author W. Raymond Wood is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Missouri, Columbia. He has authored or edited numerous articles and books on western American history and archaeology, including *Prologue to Lewis and Clark: The Mackay and Evans Expedition*, also published by the University of Oklahoma Press.