



*The* DENVER WESTERNERS  
**ROUNDUP**

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*Author's photo at Sgt. Floyd Museum,  
Sioux City, IA*

**Sergeants Charles Floyd and  
Nathaniel Pryor  
Cousins on the Lewis & Clark Voyage of  
Discovery**

**by Lawrence R. Reno, P.M.  
(presented June 22, 2005)**



## **Our author**

Larry R. Reno, Denver West-erners Posse member, is a third-generation Coloradan. He has a degree in Industrial Engineering from Yale University, where he excelled in varsity track and football.

His military career included two years in Germany as a field artillery captain. After working four years for the Martin Company, he obtained a degree from the University of Colorado Law School. He then practiced law for 40 years and is now semi-retired.

Larry was president of the Children's Hospital Board and of the University Club, current Chancellor of the Colorado Society of the Sons of the Revolution and current board member of the boards of the Trout and Salmon Foundation and the Western Outlaw and Lawman History Association. His knowledge of military and Western American history is extensive.

# Sergeants Charles Floyd and Nathaniel Pryor Cousins on the Lewis & Clark Voyage of Discovery

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According to the relationship calculator of my *Family Tree Maker*, I am a first cousin, four times removed, of these two very interesting individuals. To date, no one has written very complete biographies for either man.

## Floyd Family Genealogy

My Floyd ancestors arrived in the Virginia Colony from Wales or England before 1650. The family first settled upon the Eastern Shore of Virginia before moving to central and western Virginia in the early 1700s. The Floyds were a large family and quickly dispersed themselves from Virginia south to Georgia. I will not go into detail about the various branches of the family, but will start with William Floyd, born about 1720 in Accomac County, Virginia. He is the progenitor of the Virginia-Kentucky branch of the family.

William Floyd married Abadiah Davis in the autumn of 1747. Family tradition holds that Abadiah was descended from Powhatan, the noted Algonquian. William had a little education and became the Amherst County, Virginia surveyor and also a captain in the county militia, during the French and Indian War, and until the outbreak of the Revolution. William

and Abadiah had ten children. John Floyd, the oldest son of William and Abadiah, was also a surveyor and went out to the western part of Virginia that is now Kentucky in the mid-1770s, where he became a close friend and ally of Daniel Boone. In fact, at the time that Boone's daughter and another girl were abducted by Shawnee Indians and carried away, John Floyd accompanied Boone and the other father when they trailed the Indians for some 60 miles, then fought with the Indians and retrieved the girls alive.

At the outbreak of the Revolution, John Floyd was appointed a Colonel of the Jefferson County Militia and was responsible for the defense of the Beargrass Stations and the tiny settlement of Louisville from 1779 to 1783. As such, he worked closely with General George Rogers Clark and the Floyd family in Kentucky became closely allied with the Clark family. At the time, that part of Virginia was involved in brutal frontier warfare with the British and the Indians. In 1783, while returning from a meeting, a party of Shawnees ambushed Colonel John Floyd and his younger brother, Charles, my great-great-grandfather. John was shot and about to fall from his horse when Charles jumped off his own and

mounted behind John, holding him in his arms. They rode to safety, but John died two days later. At the time, John's wife was pregnant with their third child. If Charles had been the victim, I wouldn't be here, as Charles was unmarried then. John Floyd's line is probably the most illustrious branch of our family. One of his sons, also named John Floyd, became a prominent physician in Virginia, a Congressman and a governor of the state of Virginia. His son, John Buchanan Floyd, also was a Congressman, a Virginia governor, the Secretary of War under President Buchanan and a Confederate general in the Civil War.

Most of the rest of the Floyd family came west to join Colonel John Floyd at least by 1779. His sister, Nancy Floyd, married John Pryor in Virginia, but they were in the Louisville area by 1779. They were the parents of Nathaniel Hale Pryor of the Expedition. Another sibling, Robert Clark Floyd also accompanied Colonel John to the western settlements. He was the father of Charles Floyd of the Expedition. As indicated, my ancestor, another Charles Floyd, was in the area and served with his brother in the militia during the Revolution.

### **Charles Floyd**

Charles Floyd was born in 1782 at or near Floyd's Station (then Virginia), in the vicinity of what is now Louisville. Charles was one of the children of Robert Clark Floyd and Lilleyan Hampton. Robert Clark Floyd served under General George Rogers Clark during the Revolution. About 1799, the new settlement of Clarksville (now Indiana) was established across the

Ohio River from Louisville. Robert Clark Floyd moved his family across to Clarksville where he and his oldest son, Davis Floyd, ran a ferrying operation. When Clark County was formed in 1801, Charles Floyd though only 19 years of age was appointed or elected as the first Constable of Clarksville Township. This indicates that he must have been very highly respected at such a young age by his neighbors.

Later in 1801, Charles Floyd was awarded a mail contract from the Postmaster General of the United States to deliver mail from the Clarksville area to Vincennes, a distance of about 100 miles. Charles received an annual salary of \$660 from this mail contract, which included extra hazardous duty pay of \$60 per year, as the route along the Buffalo Trace to Vincennes was beset with bandits and hostile Indians. In 2003 I visited the Carnegie Library at New Albany, Indiana, where they have a Floyd Family Exhibit in one wing. In referring to young Charles Floyd, the exhibit aptly noted that: "These two positions - constable and mail carrier - demonstrated that Floyd could be trusted to exert authority over other men and handle himself in the wilderness. For his age, he was undoubtedly a very mature and confident individual." As William Clark was living in the small community of Clarksville (named for his brother) at the time, William Clark undoubtedly knew Charles Floyd and was aware of his character and accomplishments.

In the summer of 1803, Meriwether Lewis instructed William Clark to "find and engage some good hunters, stout, healthy, unmarried men, accustomed to the woods and capable of bearing

bodily fatigue in a pretty considerable degree." In early August, after interviewing over 100 men, Clark selected only Charles Floyd and the Field brothers, Joseph and Reubin. Their selection was conditional, pending the approval of Lewis who arrived at Clarksville on October 15, 1803. In late August 1803, Clark wrote to Lewis about these recruits in his usual original style complete with misspellings, as follows:

"The Young men that I have engaged or rather promised to take on this expedition are the best woodsmen and Hunters, of young men in this part of the Country. I have had many applications from stout likely fellows but have refused to retain some & put others off."

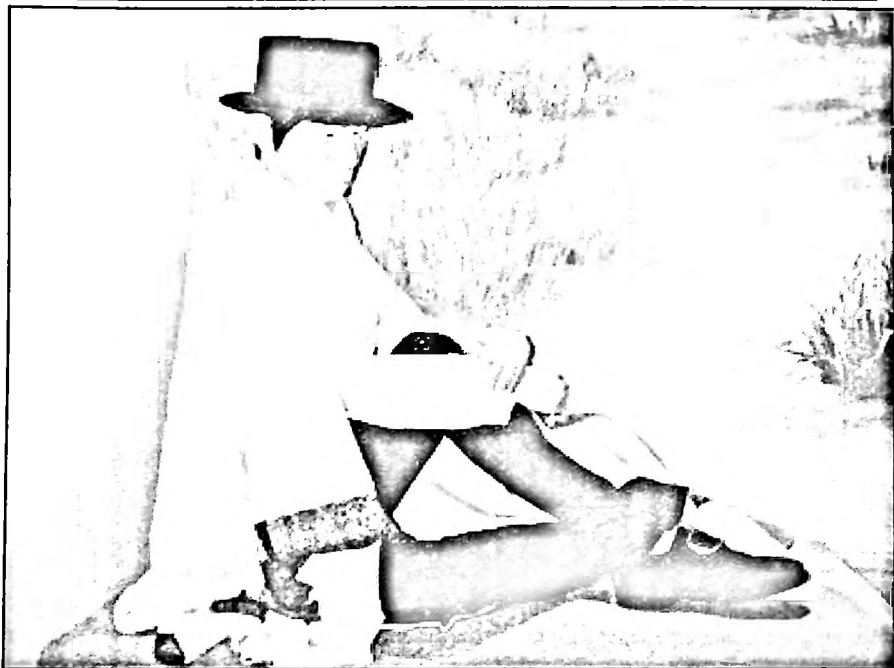
When Lewis arrived on October 15, Lewis immediately approved the enlistments of Floyd and the Fields, plus John Colter, on that date, with the enlistments of Floyd and the Fields effective retroactively to August 1. George Gibson, George Shannon and John Shields were enlisted on the 19 and Nathaniel Pryor and William Bratton were officially enlisted on the 20<sup>th</sup>. This completed the so-called "Nine Young Men of Kentucky," actually a misnomer as Colter and Shannon had accompanied Lewis down the Ohio from Pittsburgh.

The members of this small flotilla journeyed down the Ohio to its confluence with the Mississippi, then went up the Mississippi to a point a little above St. Louis at Camp River Dubois, where they wintered and prepared for the long trek ahead of them. By this time they had also

enlisted more men, primarily from the Regular Army. On April 1, 1804, Clark issued a detachment order designating John Ordway, Charles Floyd and Nathaniel Pryor as sergeants, equal in rank and pay. In Ordway's case, this was simply a confirmation of the rank he already held in the Regular Army before joining the Expedition. The military members of the Expedition were then divided into three squads, with a sergeant in charge of each one. It is significant that Charles Floyd was appointed a sergeant, as he was just 21 or 22 years of age and, next to Shannon, probably the second youngest member of the permanent party.

Clark wrote that Floyd was a man "of much merit." As instructed by the Captains, Sergeant Floyd kept an uninterrupted daily journal from May 18, 1804, to August 18, 1804, just two days before his death. Similar to the journals of the Captains and the other Expedition members, Floyd's journal is replete with misspellings, poor grammar and poor syntax. Floyd did make several observations regarding the land through which they passed and commented on the excellent quality of the soil. On June 7, 1804, he reported seeing Indian pictographs and thought them to be "pictures of the Devil and other things." His entry of August 7 is the only detailed report of the desertion of Private Moses Reed. Floyd's poor spelling is illustrated by his entry that Reed "Desarte from us with out aney Jest Case." That is, that he deserted without any just cause.

Sergeant Floyd died on August 20, 1804, of what Clark described as a "billiose collick." Most observers have assumed that this was probably appen-



*Author's photo at Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, Sioux City, IA*

### Sgt. Floyd in poor health

dicitis. He was buried with full military honors on a high bluff over the Missouri River. The location was about one-half mile below the mouth of a small river that the Captains named for Floyd. That river, at Sioux City, Iowa, still bears his name. His grave was marked with a "Seeder" post and Clark's journal entry of the 20<sup>th</sup> noted the ceremony and that "This man at all times gave us proofs of his firmness and Determined resolution to due Service to his Country and honor to himself." For his services of one year and 18 days, Sergeant Floyd's family received \$86.33. After his death, most of Floyd's personal effects were given to his cousin, Nathaniel Pryor.

When the Expedition returned to the site of Floyd's burial in 1806, they found that the grave had been disturbed and opened by Indians, so they buried him a little deeper. The site became a landmark for travelers. George Catlin painted a scene from the bluff in the 1830s, as did Carl Bodmer somewhat later. In 1857, a spring flood eroded much of Floyd's bluff. Part of his skeleton was exposed and some of his bones had fallen into the river. A local group retrieved as much of Floyd's remains as they could find and reburied him in a second grave on a prominent bluff about 600 feet east of the original grave.

Floyd's second grave was evidently

not well defined or marked and was forgotten. It was not until the publication of his journal in 1894 that interest in Sergeant Floyd was rekindled. The second grave was located and opened and his remains were identified. The Floyd Memorial Association was formed in 1895 to raise funds for a fitting memorial. Construction of the monument began in May 1900, and it was dedicated on Memorial Day, May 30, 1901. The monument is a very impressive 100-high foot obelisk, nine-foot square at the base, second in height only to the Washington Monument. The bones and skull of Sergeant Floyd were placed in urns and are buried in the concrete core of the monument. In my opinion it is the most impressive memorial to have been erected relative to any of the members of the Expedition, including the Captains.

Fortunately, in 1895, some one had the foresight to take photographs and measurements of Sergeant Floyd's bones, including his skull and lower jaw. A plaster cast of his skull was made. That cast and the photos and measurements of Floyd's surviving bones, were used by Ms. Sharon Long, a forensic anthropologist at Wyoming University, to make a forensic reconstruction of Sergeant Floyd in 2000, indicating that he was six feet tall. Complete manikins of Floyd, based upon Ms. Long's reconstruction, have been installed at the Sergeant Floyd Museum and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, both in Sioux City and in the Carnegie Library Museum in New Albany, Indiana.

There are no contemporaneous descriptions of either Charles Floyd or Nathaniel Pryor. However, it is be-

lieved that a description of their uncle Col. John Floyd would have fitted most of the Floyd relatives of that time. In the appendix to *The Life of Daniel Boone*, Col. Floyd is described as "upwards of six feet high, somewhat slender, straight as an Indian and almost as dark as one, indicative of his aboriginal descent; brilliant black eyes and very black straight hair, presenting altogether a handsome appearance. He possessed a fine natural understanding, great integrity of character, and displayed on all occasions cool, undaunted courage and a heart full of the milk of human kindness. He and his connections suffered greatly from the Indians. Five of his relatives of the Davis family were killed by them [and three of his Floyd relatives]... but he lived long enough to make a name that shall long remain illustrious in the early annals of the West."

### **Nathaniel Hale Pryor**

Nathaniel Hale Pryor was born in Amherst County, Virginia about 1775, a son of John Pryor and Nancy Floyd. The family migrated to the Louisville area with other Floyds at least by 1779. John Pryor served as a spy or scout under George Rogers Clark and probably accompanied Clark and his army in the expeditions against Vincennes and Kaskaskia.

Very little is known about Nancy Floyd and John Pryor. We do not know the dates of their births, the dates of their deaths, or the places of their burials. We do know that they were both deceased at least by July 1791, as young Nat Pryor and a brother were placed as orphans with a local resident, by the Orphans' Court of Jefferson

County. There were four other children of John and Nancy Pryor, presumably older than Nat and his brother.

Nat Pryor married Peggy Patton on May 17, 1798. She was the daughter of a prominent pioneer in the area of Louisville, James Patton, a close friend of George Rogers Clark. It is presumed that Peggy died before Nat was selected for the Expedition, due to Lewis's instructions to enlist only unmarried men. I have already covered the selection of the first nine men for the Expedition by the Captains, one of whom was Nat Pryor.

### **Sergeant Pryor's Service on the Voyage of Discovery (1803-1806)**

Nathaniel Pryor's actions on the Voyage of Discovery are well documented in the journals of Lewis, Clark and the others. I noticed that the indices in Gary Moulton's 13-volume set refer to Pryor at least twice as many times as they refer to Sacagawea. The Captains considered Pryor to be "a man of character and ability." He was frequently assigned to special duties of Army administration and discipline. Pryor was appointed as the presiding authority in the court martial proceedings against Privates Collins and Hall for being drunk while on duty. They were found guilty and Collins received 100 lashes on his bare back, while Hall received 50.

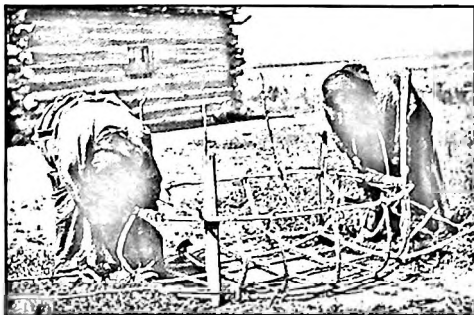
Throughout the Expedition it appears that the Captains placed a great deal of trust in Pryor's ability and judgement. More than any of the other subordinate men, Pryor was given special duties and important missions away from the main body. Pryor was sent to the Yankton Sioux to invite

their chiefs to visit the Captains, the first meeting the Captains had with Indians. Pryor discovered the first salt spring encountered on the Expedition, an essential commodity. He must have been a good hunter, as he was frequently sent out to hunt by himself or to accompany other hunters. In September 1804, his quick action averted a major disaster when he discovered that the river had shifted and was eroding the sand bar on which the voyagers were camped. At the critical fork of the Missouri, it was information from Pryor, reporting the northward trend of the Marias River that led the Captains to select the correct fork to continue up the Missouri.

Unfortunately Pryor dislocated his shoulder in July 1805, and that injury continued to plague him for the rest of the journey and in later life. Pryor was among the small group that accompanied Clark for the first view of the Pacific. As they wintered at Fort Clatsop, Pryor was frequently sent out to hunt, to retrieve canoes, to trade with the Indians, to retrieve some of the men lured away from the Fort by women, and similar duties.

On the return trip, Pryor continued to perform his many duties. He was with Clark's detachment when they reached the Yellowstone River and no longer needed the horses they had gotten from the Shoshones. The Crow Indians, known as among the best horse stealers of all of the Plains Indians, had already stolen half of the Expedition's horses while Clark camped at the Yellowstone. He then detached Pryor and three<sup>3</sup> men to take the remaining 24 horses across country to the Mandan





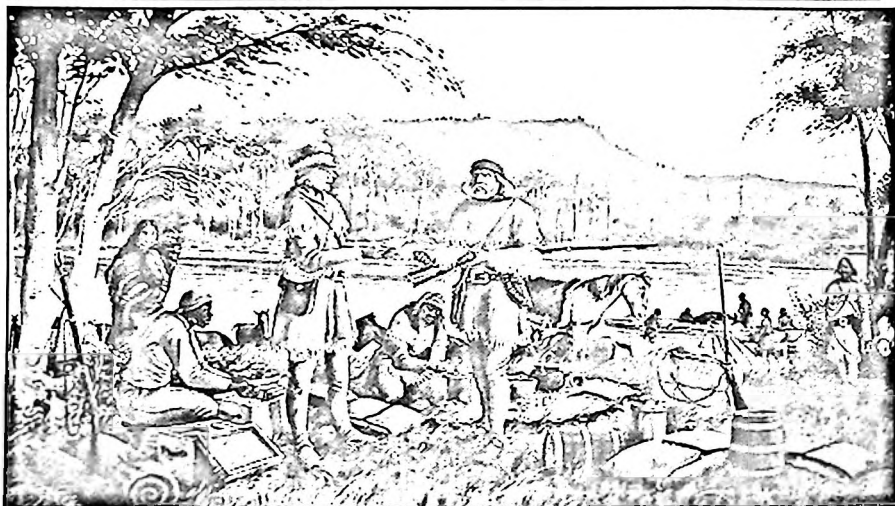
*Time-Life, The Old West Series*

### Making a "Bull Boat"

Villages. He also entrusted Pryor with an important message to an Englishman who traded with the Mandans and Hidatsas. The first night after crossing the river, the Crows struck again and stole all of the remaining horses. Pryor and his men, followed them for about 10 miles on foot, but gave up the chase. Returning to the river, they killed buffaloes and built two bullboats. Using the bullboats, they easily caught up with Clark several days later, passing Pompey's Pillar (east of present-day Billings), where Clark had left his signature and the date, the only permanent vestige of the Expedition discovered so far. Pryor and his men pronounced the bullboats as better handling than the canoes. Pryor then accompanied the Expedition down the Missouri to St. Louis where the Corps of Discovery was disbanded. Pryor was discharged on October 1, 1806. For his service of almost three years, Pryor received \$557.00, plus a certificate entitling him to a tract of 320 acres to be selected in the Louisiana Purchase land west of the Mississippi. The land warrant was recorded as "satisfied" and it is assumed that Pryor sold or assigned his warrant.

### Ensign Pryor Assigned to Escort Mandan Chief Sheheke to his Home (1807)

Nathaniel Pryor reenlisted in the Army on February 27, 1807, at St. Louis, receiving the officer's rank of Ensign. One of his first duties as an Ensign was to lead an expedition to return Mandan Chief Sheheke and his family to the Mandans. Sheheke and his family had been among the group of Mandan, Osage and other Indian Chiefs that had accompanied Lewis and Clark back to Washington to meet with President Jefferson. While there, the portraits of Chief Sheheke and his wife, Yellow Corn, were painted by Charles Balthazar Julien Febret de Saint Memin. A large party of soldiers under Pryor and traders under A. P. Chouteau was formed. The entire party comprised about 90 persons and set out from St. Louis on May 18, 1807, for the journey of about 1700 miles up the Missouri. On September 9, after proceeding some 1500 miles upriver, the expedition was met by a large band of about 600 heavily armed Arikara and Sioux Indians. The Indians ordered Pryor to land and trade with them, but Pryor sensed that they were hostile and refused to put in. Chouteau and his trading party did put in and attempted to trade but the Indians turned hostile and a fight erupted into a floating battle. Chouteau retreated to his keelboat and then both Pryor and Chouteau took their boats downstream beset from both banks by rifle fire and arrows. Chouteau's trading party had three dead and six wounded, with one of the dead men presumed to be Joshua Field from the Expedition. Pryor had three men wounded, including his



*Robert F. Morgan and the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation*

### "Take the horses to the Mandans"

Expedition friend George Shannon, whose leg required amputation. It was almost two years before Sheheke and his family were taken back to the Mandans. That required a much larger force and it cost almost as much to return Sheheke and his family to the Mandans as the entire expenses of the Expedition to the Pacific.

Pryor remained in the Army, stationed at Fort Belle Fontaine, the first American army post west of the Mississippi. On one assignment, ordered by Meriwether Lewis, Pryor led a party of soldiers to escort William Clark and his family from the mouth of the Ohio to St. Louis. Promoted to Second Lieutenant in 1808, Pryor was second in command of a force to build Fort Madison, one of the forts built upriver to have a military presence in the area to oppose the encroachments of British traders and perhaps the British military. Pryor resigned his commission

and left the Army again, effective April 1, 1810.

### **Pryor's Trading House Near the Galena Lead Mines (1810-1811)**

After leaving the Army, Pryor joined the "Lead Rush" and went to the area of what is now Galena, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from Dubuque. It's hard for us now to think of lead as a precious metal, but it was in the early 1800s. Pryor established a trading house and a lead smelter furnace operation at a place called by its French name "Toledo Mort." Pryor was apparently successful as he had several employees and traded with several Indian tribes, especially the Sac and Fox tribes, with which he had a trading license issued by William Clark, then the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Louisiana Territory.

During the summer of 1811, Clark,

who was also a Brigadier General in command of the Louisiana Territory Militia, became alarmed by the news that Tecumseh and his brother were attempting to establish a confederation of Indian tribes with the avowed intention to drive all of the whites back beyond the Appalachians. Tecumseh was a strong leader and organizer and hoped to unite all of the tribes from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. William Henry Harrison, the Governor of the Northwest or Indiana Territory, shared Clark's concern. Clark contacted Nathaniel Pryor and requested Pryor to spy on Tecumseh's camp and gather information. Pryor did so, and his information prompted Harrison to raise an army of about 1,000 men and march to Tecumseh's camp on the Tippecanoe River in Indiana. Tecumseh was not present at the time, but his one-eyed brother, known as the Prophet, led his large gathering of warriors in a surprise attack against Harrison's army at 4:00 in the morning of November 7, 1811. The Prophet, through incantations, trances and superstitious propaganda, had convinced his Indians that they were invulnerable to the guns of Harrison's troops. They quickly found out otherwise and the Indians suffered a disastrous defeat. This battle, plus later defeats of the Indians and their British allies during the War of 1812, opened the western frontier to the Americans for all time.

Nat Pryor was not present at the battle, as he had returned to Toledo Mort. An unfortunate circumstance at Tippecanoe was that a Winnebago hunting party returning from Michigan arrived at the Prophet's camp the day before the battle. The Winnebagos took

part in the battle and lost 25 of their best warriors. The Winnebagos, who had previously been friendly with Pryor, learned of Pryor's involvement. On January 1, 1812, a large armed party of Winnebagos attacked Pryor's post and smelter at Toledo Mort. They killed two of Pryor's men, slaughtered his livestock, destroyed his smelter and post, and held him prisoner for most of a day. An Indian woman aided Pryor and no doubt saved his life, by not telling the Winnebagos the name of their captive. First, she told the Winnebagos that the man (Pryor) was English, not American. Then, while the Winnebagos debated this, the woman aided Pryor to escape shortly before the Winnebagos decided to kill him. Pryor escaped by crossing the Mississippi on chunks of ice as the river was almost totally frozen. Pryor hid out on the Iowa side with French families and then made it to St. Louis by late spring. Some years later, Pryor submitted a claim to the government for in excess of \$5,000 as his damages for the losses incurred by him. Affidavits supporting his claim by others from the area verify his claim and the foregoing facts regarding Pryor's assistance to Clark and Harrison.

### **Pryor and the War of 1812 (1812-1815)**

During the War of 1812, Pryor reenlisted in the Army as a Second Lieutenant. He served in the 44<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, one of the units under the command of Andrew Jackson. He was promoted to First Lieutenant on August 30, 1813, and to Captain on October 1, 1814. He was known as "Captain Pryor" for the rest of his life.

Serving under Jackson, he no doubt took part in Jackson's southern campaigns. Davy Crockett and Sam Houston also served in Jackson's army and, as the force was small, the three men probably got to know each other.

Pryor was at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, serving in Jackson's army of about 4,000 men, including Regular Army, militia, pirates and civilians. The effective British force in the battle is estimated at 10,000, most of whom were battle-hardened veterans of the Napoleonic wars. It was a slaughter of epic proportions. The British suffered 2,000 men dead, including their two highest-ranking Generals. Five hundred Brits were captured and untold number were wounded. The losses suffered by the motley collection of Americans were just seven dead and six wounded. The Floyd/Pryor family was very well represented at the Battle of New Orleans. I have verified that both of Pryor's brothers and three of his cousins were among the Kentucky contingent that rafted down the Ohio and Mississippi in answer to Jackson's call for volunteers. Included among those cousins was Davis Floyd, the older brother of Sergeant Charles Floyd of the Expedition.

### **Captain Pryor to the Arkansas and Indian Territories (1815-1819)**

Pryor was honorably discharged from the Army in June 1815. We are unsure of his precise movements, but he did end up at Arkansas Post on the Arkansas River in late 1815 or 1816. That post was about 20 miles up from the mouth of the Arkansas River. He



*Louis F. Burns, History of the Osage People*  
**Osage lands before the Louisiana Purchase**

formed a trading partnership there with Samuel Richards and got back into the business of trading with the Indians. Soon thereafter, the two men moved their operation further up the Arkansas to the area known as "Three Forks," approximately 700 miles up the Arkansas River from the Mississippi. This is the area where the Verdigris, Grand and Arkansas Rivers come together, roughly in the area of present-day Muskogee. As my maternal Floyd family was from southern Kansas just across the border from Oklahoma, I should mention that there is some dispute as to the names and pronunciation of these rivers. In Kansas, it is Arkansas instead of Arkansas; Verdigris instead of Verdigrée; and the Neosho instead of the Grand.

By some time in 1817, Pryor had married the daughter of the prominent Osage chief Clermont, or Claremore. From that time on, Pryor was closely allied with the Osage Nation.



*Louis F. Burns, History of the Osage People*  
Osage lands, early 1800s

## The Osage Nation

At the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the Osage Nation was probably the largest, strongest and most war-like Indian tribe west of the Mississippi. From 1500 to 1800 the Osage had expanded their territory. This expansion belies the premise that Indians were never territorial. The land controlled and claimed by the Osage was almost as large as the American Northwest Territory at the time.

Officials in Washington were well aware of the necessity to keep the Osages on friendly terms with Americans so that the Osage would not ally themselves with the British. The importance of that is emphasized by the fact that the first delegation of Indian chiefs sent to Washington from west of the Mississippi was the Osage delegation sent to meet with President Jefferson in 1804. Jefferson welcomed the delegation of 12 Osage chiefs and two boys. Saint Memin painted the portrait of one of the Osage chiefs. The people in Washington were amazed by

the size and appearance of the Osage men. Navy Secretary Robert Smith described them as "... the most gigantic men we have ever seen." President Jefferson even wrote that: "They are the finest men we have ever seen."

At the time, the average height of the Osage male was six feet, two or three inches, with some men being as much as seven feet tall. This size gave them advantages in

the hunt and in war and the Osage even practiced a modified form of selective breeding to insure this height and size.

As shown on the next map, the Osage claimed control over most of Missouri and Arkansas, the southern half of Kansas, the northern half of Oklahoma and even into southeastern Colorado. A quote from the Osage author Louis F. Burns is apt:

"In a one hundred twenty-five year period, 1678-1803, the Osages performed a feat no other American Indians duplicated. They stopped the westward expansion of the Euro-American peoples (the Spanish, French and the Americans) and simultaneously tripled the size of their own domain."

Due to their expansionist tendencies, the Osage were almost constantly at war with the neighboring tribes, including Missouris, Pawnees, Kansas, Sac and Fox, Apache, Comanche, Cheyenne, Caddo, Quapaw, and others. That the Osage more than held their

own attests to their strength and domination. In 1791, the Osage even crossed the Mississippi and participated with the coalition of tribes that inflicted the disastrous defeat upon General St. Clair's American Army at the Wabash River in present-day Indiana. This was the worst defeat ever suffered by an American Army in the Indian wars, almost triple the number of men killed with Custer at the Little Big Horn.

Unfortunately, the Osage proved to be poor negotiators and did not fare well in their dealings with the United States. By 1839, in four treaties, the Osage ceded several million acres of their territory to the US for compensation of less than five cents an acre. Sometimes, by the terms of the treaty, no payments were received, as the compensation was the paying off of claims against the Osage by other Indians and whites. In one especially egregious deal, the Osage were paid \$54,000 for approximately 1,200,000 acres in Arkansas and Oklahoma. That is about four-and-one-half cents an acre. The US then sold the land to the Cherokees for \$2,000,000. The Osage were not one of the so-called "Five Civilized Tribes" and were considered to be untamed, uncivilized and dangerous by the officials in Washington. Accordingly the five "civilized" tribes were treated more favorably than the Osage. The US failed to enforce the various treaties to prevent encroachments into the Osage lands by white settlers and the neighboring tribes, thus encouraging such encroachments.

### **Captain Pryor and the Osage at Three Forks**

As previously stated, Pryor was in

the Three Forks area by at least 1817 and had married Ah Sin Ka, the daughter of Chief Clermont. Later baptismal records verify that the first child of Pryor and Ah Sin Ka was born by September of 1818. Chief Clermont was a prominent Osage chief and had accompanied William Clark and other Osage Chiefs when Clark took them to Washington in the summer of 1812 to meet with President Madison.

The western Cherokees began moving across the Mississippi and into the Osage lands in 1810. The two tribes then began hostilities that continued for about 50 years. Those hostilities erupted in the fall of 1817. A large war party of approximately 600 armed men, including eastern and western Cherokees, Choctaws, Shawnees, Delawares, Caddos, Tonkawas, Comanches, Coshattas and a sizable body of white men, raided Clermont's village while the Osage warriors were away on their fall buffalo hunt. The raid was especially treacherous as the Cherokees approached the village under the pretext of having a peace parley, but primarily to make sure that the Osage warriors were not present. An old Osage chief told the Cherokees the peace parley could not be held until the return of the main body of chiefs and warriors. That old chief was then invited to the Cherokee camp where he was fed and regaled, usually a sign of peace. The next day the old chief was killed and scalped and the Cherokees and their allies attacked Clermont's unprotected village, killing over 80 old men, women and children, and taking over 100 prisoners. They also looted and set fire to the village, destroying all of the provisions that were sorely needed by

the Osage for the winter. The similarity to the attack at Sand Creek is also noteworthy. The Cherokees celebrated this surprise attack upon the relatively defenseless Osage as a great victory. Because of this and other depredations, the Osage prepared for an all-out war against the Cherokees the following year. To prevent the war, Captain Pryor went to Fort Smith and prevailed upon its commander, Major Bradford, to go with him to Clermont's village and talk with the chiefs. Bradford did so and war was averted when Pryor and Bradford were able to have most of the Osage prisoners returned in 1819. The Cherokees' failure to return all of the prisoners, however, led to continued bitterness between the two tribes.

The famous English naturalist, Thomas Nuttall, in his *Journals*, mentioned meeting Pryor and Richards while "descending the Arkansas on their way to New Orleans with cargoes of furs and peltries gotten in trade with the Osages." Richards must have died in 1819 and Pryor then went into partnership with another trader named Hugh Glenn. Pryor's good reputation is shown by another quote from an early historian:

"Captain Pryor figured prominently in the affairs of the region surrounding the Three Forks, for he was especially held in high esteem by the Osages."

### **Pryor's Assistance to Establish Protestant Missions (1819-1823)**

Also in 1819, Captain Pryor assisted two Protestant ministers in locating a site for the Union Mission. The ministers then returned to the East and brought out about 20 people,

including their families and other teachers. The Union Mission opened in 1821 and was the first school in Oklahoma; had the first printing press and printed the first book in Oklahoma; held the first protestant wedding; established the first church; and several other firsts. A few years later, the mission was moved and Pryor again assisted in locating the second site, known as Hopewell Mission.

Mayes County, Oklahoma has a number of historic sites. The enmity between the Osage and the Cherokees even continued into the Civil War, with the Osage being decidedly Union and the Cherokees, under General Stand Watie, fighting for the Confederacy.

### **Nathaniel Pryor's Dealings With the Cherokees and Other Tribes**

In February 1820, one of Chief Clermont's sons, Bad-Tempered-Buffalo, let his warriors kill three Cherokee bear hunters who had intruded onto Osage land and killed sows and cubs as well as boars. That was not the Osage practice. The small party of about four Osage then went to Pryor's trading post at Three Forks. A large war party of about 25 Cherokees also went to Pryor's and assumed that they would capture the Osage when they left the post. To distract the Cherokees and permit the Osage to escape, Pryor and his employee showed the Cherokees a shipment of new shiny copper kettles that had recently arrived and were highly prized by the Indians. Bad-Tempered-Buffalo and his men escaped and outrode the Cherokees as the Osage were better mounted. The Cherokees returned to Pryor's post later that night and robbed it of about 150 pounds of

furs. The Cherokees were under the leadership of their most prominent and most feared war chief, Dutch, so Pryor's intervention was a very brave act. Dutch was an implacable enemy of the Osage and was said to have killed over 26 of them in his numerous confrontations with the Osage. McKenney and Hall painted Dutch's portrait ("Tah-chee"), about 1830. George Catlin traveled with Dutch for several months in 1834 and also painted his portrait ("Tuch-ee"). Catlin wrote of his great admiration for Dutch. This confrontation between Pryor and Dutch demonstrates Pryor's courage and his resourcefulness in avoiding a very serious situation that could have inflamed the war between the tribes. It also illustrates the fine line required to be walked by traders and other white settlers on the fringes of the western frontier.

### **Nathaniel Pryor's Assistance to Traders and Explorers**

On September 27, 1821, Mexico proclaimed its independence from Spain and began to encourage trade with the US. Anticipating this news several American traders mounted expeditions to Santa Fe in 1821 in order to be the first traders to reach that historic town. Most of these trading parties took the route up the Arkansas and then overland, roughly along what became known as the Santa Fe Trail. The first trading party, led by General Thomas James and John McKnight, reached Pryor's trading post at Three Forks in late August 1821. James had been told that the Arkansas was navigable to a point within 60 miles of Taos. Pryor told him he was misin-

formed, but James and McKnight ignored Pryor's advice and set off in their large, heavily laden dugout canoes. Two days later James sent back to Pryor requesting horses and assistance. Pryor led a party of Osage braves and sufficient horses to help James, who then continued overland to Taos and Santa Fe. At the time, Three Forks was the upstream limit of navigability on the Arkansas. General James did supply some insight into Pryor's departure from military service, when James wrote in his journal as follows:

"On reduction of the Army after the war, Pryor was discharged to make room for some parlor soldier and sunshine patriot, and turned out in his old age upon the world's wide common. I found him here among the Osages with whom he had taken refuge from his country's ingratitude, and was living as one of the tribe, where he may yet be, unless death has discharged the debt his country owed him."

About a month after the departure of the James-McKnight expedition, another trading party reached Pryor's trading post at Three Forks, led by Major Jacob Fowler. Pryor's trading partner, Hugh Glenn, decided to join Fowler's expedition and help guide it. The Fowler-Glenn expedition reached the area of present-day Pueblo in late November, where some of the party wintered and trapped, while others went on to Taos and Santa Fe. Both the James-McKnight and the Fowler-Glenn trading expeditions were very successful and the both returned to St. Louis in the summer of 1822.



## **Nathaniel Pryor's New Trading Store at Pryor Creek**

Sometime after 1821, Pryor moved his trading store to a location closer to Clermont's village. This location was on Pryor Creek, near where it joins the Grand (or Neosho) River, between Union Mission and a trading post established by the Chouteaus near present-day Salina, Oklahoma. Later, the town of Pryor was located about seven miles from the site of Pryor's trading post and the town proudly proclaims that it "was named for the redoubtable Nathaniel Pryor, pioneer Indian trader and subagent to the warlike Osages." It should also be noted that Pryor had been a friend, ally and sometime business competitor of the Chouteaus since meeting them in St. Louis during and after the Voyage of Discovery.

## **Osage Conflicts With White Settlers and Nearby Tribes**

In November 1823, Chief Clermont's son, Bad-Tempered-Buffalo, once again caused trouble. This time, he and his men killed five hunters from Arkansas who were trespassing on Osage lands in violation of an 1822 treaty. The event may not have caused so much trouble had not the Osage looted the camp, taken 30 horses from the hunters, and killed and decapitated a Major Welborn of the US Army, either recently retired or on leave. The Army and the settlers in the area pressured Col. Arbuckle, the commander at Fort Smith, to demand the surrender of the "murderers" or to take them by force.

To diffuse the situation, Captain Pryor took Chief Clermont to Fort

Smith to meet with Col. Arbuckle. One historian has written, "Capt. Pryor, a trader friend of the Osages, wanted the matter of the white hunters settled so there would be peace." Arbuckle conveyed fears of an attack to General Winfield Scott who ordered Arbuckle to establish another fort further up the Arkansas River near Three forks. Pryor assisted Arbuckle in locating and establishing the fort, named Fort Gibson, above present-day Muskogee.

In June, 1824, some 500 Osages came to Fort Gibson and delivered six men, including Bad-Tempered-Buffalo, to Col. Arbuckle as the leaders and perpetrators of the killing of the white trespassers. Pryor had been instrumental in this. The tribal leaders had ordered the six men to even accept a verdict of death. One of the Union Mission missionaries observed the event and wrote in his journal:

"...to see six brave men come forward, and voluntarily submit to become prisoners; to be put in irons; and sent away to be tried for their lives; to see this done with firmness and decision, by the unanimous consent of the Nation, and without a single sign from their affectionate wives ...to see the senses of honor manifested on the part of the criminals, and the desire to [do] justice in the Nation, was indeed affecting to every spectator."

One man escaped on the way to Little Rock where the remaining five were tried. Three were acquitted, but Bad-Tempered-Buffalo and another were sentenced to death. Their executions were postponed, however, and President John Quincy Adams par-



*"Osage Treaty of 1825" - Mike Wimmer, Art Treasurers of the Oklahoma State Capitol*

### Signing of the Osage Treaty in 1825 at Clark's office

done the two men on March 21, 1825.

Also in 1825, Chief Clermont went to St. Louis with a group of Osage chiefs and signed another treaty with William Clark. Artist Michael Wimmer has depicted that signing. The painting shows Chief Clermont, William Clark and Pierre Chouteau, the Osage agent at the time, together with other Osage chiefs.

In 1827, another dispute flared up between the Osages and the Cherokees. A large Cherokee war party, intent upon attacking the Osages, was intercepted near Fort Gibson and the Fort Gibson post sutler, "with the influence of Captain Pryor, succeeded in preventing them from making an attack." Later, the Cherokees "prevailed upon their mutual friend Captain Nathaniel Pryor to go to the Osage Nation to counsel with them" on peace negotiations between the tribes. The Cherokees had Pryor convey that "they wished to

become friends - 'that when we meet, we can smoke together and shake hands as Brothers.'"

Sometime in the mid-1820s, the Choctaws crossed the Mississippi, violating treaties, and took some Osage prisoners. Nathaniel Pryor worked with the Choctaw Indian Agent to obtain the release of the prisoners and facilitated peace negotiations between these tribes.

There was continual strife during this period between the Osage Nation and the eastern tribes being relocated into the land of the Osage, as well as the Osage' traditional enemies among the Plains Indians. In an article about the history of Fort Gibson, Charles W. Sasser enumerated several serious fights between the Osage on one hand and the Cherokee, Choctaw, Delaware, Pawnee, and Comanche on the other. Captain Pryor was frequently called upon to negotiate for peace on behalf of the Osage.

## The Last Days of Captain Nathaniel Hale Pryor

During all of this period from at least 1817-1830, Nathaniel Pryor was no more than an "unofficial sub-agent" for the Osage, serving as a volunteer without pay. Nonetheless, he apparently rendered considerably more effective service to the Osage than any of the official agents appointed by Washington. Whenever there was a vacancy for the post of Agent or Sub-Agent, his friends, including William Clark, usually nominated Pryor, but others with more political "pull," or better connections, received the appointments.

By 1829, Sam Houston had resigned as the Governor of Tennessee and had come to the Indian Territory. He married a Cherokee and also renewed his friendship with Nathaniel Pryor, as Houston lived for a time on the Grand (Neosho) River a short distance from Pryor's trading post. When a vacancy occurred for the post of Osage sub-agent, Houston wrote an excellent recommendation letter to President Andrew Jackson on December 15, 1830, as follows:

"I have the honor to address you upon the subject of one of your old soldiers at the Battle of New Orleans. I allude to Capt. Nathaniel Pryor, who has for several years past, resided with the Osages as a sub-agent, by appointment of Gov. Clark, but without any permanent appointment from the Government. He was the first man who volunteered to accompany Lewis and Clark on their tour to the Pacific Ocean... [A]t the commencement of the last war entered the Army again and was a Captain in the 44<sup>th</sup> Regiment under

you at New Orleans; and a *braver* man never fought under the wings of your Eagles. He has done more to tame and pacificate the dispositions of the Osages to the whites, and surrounding tribes of Indians than all other men and has done more in promoting the authority of the U. States and compelling the Osages to comply with the demands from Colonel Arbuckle than any person could have supposed. Capt. Pryor is a man of amiable character and disposition - of fine sense, strict honor - perfectly temperate in his habits - and unremitting in his attention to business." (The emphasis is Houston's).

On the same date, Houston also wrote to General John H. Eaton, the Secretary of War, as follows:

"It is impossible for me ever to wish or solicit any patronage from the Government for myself or anyone connected with me, but when I see a *brave, honest, honorable and faithful servant of that country which I once claimed as my own, in poverty with spirit half broken by neglect, I must be permitted to ask something in his behalf.* Could any just man know him as I do, who had power to offer reparation for what he has done for his country, what he has suffered, I am sure he would not be allowed to languish in circumstances hardly comfortable. I trust to God that he will be no longer neglected by his country." (The emphasis is Houston's).

Pryor's hard circumstances were probably a mirror image of what had

happened to the Osage. On January 22, 1831, Pryor wrote to William Clark, no longer Governor of Missouri, but the Superintendent of Indian Affairs west of the Mississippi. With regard to the Osage Village on the Verdigris, which would have included Clermont's village, Pryor perceptively reported that:

"...the Osages appear to be a very unhappy people, and I think it is altogether attributable to the emigration of so many Red People to the West. The Game is entirely destroyed and they see that they must now cultivate the soil for a subsistence. They are extremely poor and they feel their inability to do any thing for themselves without the assistance of the Govt who, they are anxious would enable them to commence farming by furnishing them with the necessary means and would like to have among them persons to instruct their young to spin and weave."

During the winter of 1831, Pryor contracted some sort of illness, probably pneumonia, and the condition lingered. On May 1 and 5, 1831, Pryor assisted at a peace conference between Clermont's Band of Osage and the Cherokees at Fort Gibson. On May 7, 1831, Nathaniel Pryor was finally appointed as the permanent sub-agent for the Osage of the Verdigris, Clermont's Band, at an annual salary of \$500. On May 10, 1831, Captain Pryor, as a witness, signed a treaty between the Creek and all bands of the Osage Nation at Fort Gibson. He was in failing health, however, and died on June 9, 1831. We do not know if he or

his heirs ever received any part of his annual salary.

Captain Pryor was buried without ceremony on his own land at Pryor Creek. Similar to the burial of his cousin, Charles Floyd, Pryor's original grave marker was evidently lost and his grave was forgotten. Fortunately, in 1934, the Oklahoma Historical Society found someone who remembered the location of the grave. The site was located and the Society received a permanent marker from the War Department that was placed upon the grave. In 1982, Pryor's remains were exhumed and reburied under a beautiful granite memorial slab in the cemetery in his namesake town of Pryor, Mayes County, Oklahoma. Pryor's probate estate listed his claim against the Government for his losses at his Galena lead smelter and trading post. Pryor's heirs received notice a year after his death that the claim had been disallowed.

### **Nathaniel Pryor's Osage Wife, Children and Descendants**

As stated, Pryor had married Ah Sin Ka and had four children. In order they were Marie, Wa Hula Sha, William (known as Quiver) and Mary Jane. Ah Sin Ka and her daughters Marie and Mary Jane died in the 1840s, probably from an epidemic of smallpox or cholera. Both Marie and Mary Jane had married, but apparently died without issue. There are strong lines of descent from William (Quiver) Pryor and his sister, Wa Hula Sha Pryor. Nathaniel Pryor's descendants have played an important role in the history of the Osage Nation. James Bigheart was a grandson of Nathaniel Pryor and was a



*Author's photo*

### Pryor's Monument - Cemetery at Pryor, Okla.

principal Chief of the Osages in the late 1800s, as was Fred Lookout, the husband of Julia Pryor Mongrain, a granddaughter of Pryor. Julia was also one of the most celebrated Osage artists. Some of her objects were on display last year at the St. Louis Art Museum. In 1896, Chief James Bigheart was instrumental in working out an oil and gas lease covering the entire Osage Reservation. As a result of the ensuing oil exploration and production, the Osage were probably the most successful and wealthy tribe prior to the advent of casinos.

In recent years, the Red Eagle family has been prominent in the affairs and governance of the Osage. Henry Red Eagle was a principal chief in the

early 1900s; his son Edward Red Eagle was an assistant chief until his death in 1999, and Edward's son, Eddy, is the Director of the Osage Cultural Heritage Center. In the summer of 2004, two Osage cousins contacted me and we met and had a small reunion in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, last November.

### A Possible Son of Nathaniel Hale Pryor

I will mention only briefly that Mrs. Betty Thomas, the Director of the Mayes County Historical Society in Pryor, Oklahoma, strongly believes that a son was born to Nathaniel Pryor and his first wife, Peggy Patton. However, she has been unable to furnish the genealogical documentation to me to support that belief, so I am reserving judgement on the possibility. That possible son is variously referred to as "Nathaniel Miguel Pryor" or "Louis Nathaniel Pryor." There is a record that a "Luis Nathaniel Miguel Pryor" passed through the Three Forks and Pryor Creek areas in the mid-1820s, but there are too many discrepancies in the story to satisfy me. That Pryor went first to Santa Fe with the Fowler-Glenn expedition described above; stayed in Santa Fe for three or four years; then returned to the Three Forks area. In 1828, he went to Santa Fe again with the Pattie expedition. He then led a party of men to California where he became a silversmith, settled, married twice, had children, and died in about 1850 in Los Angeles.

The LDS International Genealogical Index (IGI) in the Mormon records at Salt Lake lists a "Miguel Luis Nathaniel Pryor" born about 1806, in Louisville, Kentucky. This is the man



*Author's photo*

Photo of the first reunion of our branches of the Floyd/Pryor families since 1815, if not 1804. Pictured with the author (right) are Linda Thiry and Eddy Red Eagle, (center left) with my Floyd cousins Jim Mordy (left) of the Kansas City area and John Floyd (center right) of Sedan, Kansas. My mother and her family were from Sedan, which is only about 40 miles from Pawhuska, the tribal seat of the Osage Nation. Although my great-grandfather, Martin Van Buren Floyd, settled there in 1870, none of our family knew for sure that we had Osage relatives until that contact from Eddy and Linda in 2004.

described above, who went to California. His parents are listed as Miguel Nathaniel Pryor and Mary Davis, of Louisville, Kentucky. I have been unable to find any record of any "Miguel (or Michael) Nathaniel Pryor" in the Louisville area during the period of 1790-1810. Nor have I been able to determine the identity of "Mary Davis." The 1806 birth date and the names of the parents would seem to preclude this

man from being the son of Nathaniel Hale Pryor. However, the undocumented IGI records are known to contain many errors. I base my conclusion against the finding of descent upon the fact that Lewis and Clark intended to select only single, unencumbered men for the Expedition; the Patton family genealogy does not list any such child; and, there is no evidence that Nathaniel Hale Pryor had any relation-

ship with a son during the period from 1803 until at least after 1815.

### **Nathaniel Hale Pryor's Legacy and Place in History**

Perhaps no other member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition has had more places named for him, other than the captains themselves. In Montana, Pryor was the namesake for the town of Pryor, the Pryor Mountains, Pryor Creek, and the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Preserve. In Oklahoma, the town of Pryor and Pryor Creek are named for him.

It is astonishing to think of all of the famous men and women encountered by Nathaniel Hale Pryor during his lifelong odyssey. How many other

men in history had the opportunity to associate with, be involved with, or to spend time with the likes of Lewis, Clark, the other men of the Expedition, Sacagawea, Pomp, various Indian chiefs, including Sheheke, Clermont, and Dutch, General George Rogers Clark, William Henry Harrison, Tecumseh, the Prophet, Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Thomas Nuttall, early traders and explorers, etc., not to mention the momentous events in which he was involved, such as the Voyage of Discovery, and the Battles of Tippecanoe and of New Orleans. Nathaniel Hale Pryor did indeed lead a very full, albeit unappreciated and unrecompensed life.



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