An Incident at Grinder's Stand:
A Reconsidering of the Death of Meriwether Lewis

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Though much information is available about the life of Meriwether Lewis, the circumstances surrounding his death have long been shrouded in mystery. What is generally agreed upon is that Lewis, Governor of the Upper Louisiana Territory at the time, set out from St. Louis to Washington D.C. on September 3, 1809, with the intent of settling business debts, and delivering the journals he kept during the expedition to a publisher. On October 9, Lewis arrived with his two servants at an inn called Grinder's Stand, located on the Natchez Trace approximately 75 miles southwest of Nashville, Tennessee, with plans to wait for his travelling companion. Major James Neelly, U.S. Indian agent to the Chickasaw Tribe, who had been travelling with the governor, stayed behind on the trail to locate horses that had escaped one night, and scheduled to arrive within a day or two. What actually took place at Grinder's Stand the following days is somewhat unclear. What is known, though, is that by the morning of October 11, 1809, Meriwether Lewis lay dead of multiple wounds, including at least two from gunshots. In the following pages, this paper not only will discuss the life of Meriwether Lewis and how it ended that fateful night at Grinder's Stand, but also

explore the evidence surrounding his death: that Meriwether Lewis did not commit suicide, but that he was murdered. The combination of various elements including the inconsistencies in the evidence supporting various theories, and the opinions of historians, forensics experts, and even many related to Lewis provide enough justification for the careful exhumation and forensic examination of Meriwether Lewis' remains. Through exhumation, experts will hopefully be able to gather enough physical evidence, and determine, once and for all, how one of our nation's greatest explorers met his premature demise at the age of 35.

To begin to understand how Meriwether Lewis' life ended, one must first know how Lewis lived. Born to William and Lucy Lewis (nee Meriwether) on August 18, 1774 near Charlottesville, Virginia, young Meriwether began life as many other Virginians of the time. His early years were spent unremarkably, helping with the family farm as he grew, and spending his free time hunting in the woods with his dogs. At the age of thirteen, he began the first of what would be five years at a Latin school, returning home at the age of eighteen to run the family farm. After joining a local militia at the age of twenty, Lewis, under the influence of Thomas Jefferson, was later transferred to the United States Army, where he was commissioned the rank of lieutenant. With the inauguration of President Jefferson came Lewis' appointment as

president's personal secretary and military promotion to captain. [1] With the Louisiana Purchase soon to be completed, President Jefferson needed to form an expedition to explore the newly acquired territory, in hopes of finding the sources of the Colorado, Missouri, and Columbia rivers, as well as exploring the territory to see what the massive territory contained. With an intimate knowledge of Lewis' character and skills as an outdoorsman, President Jefferson recommended him for the role as leader of this expedition, referring to him as a man of "undaunted courage."[2] Lewis selected Kentuckian William Clark as his assistant, and Clark was immediately commissioned a captain in the regular army.[3] Lewis left Washington D.C. on July 5, 1803, destined for Pittsburg, where he would begin his journey down the Ohio River, collecting supplies and men for the expedition, as well as picking up Clark at Louisville. Eventually, the expedition chose to spend winter at the mouth of the Wood River on the Mississippi, in Illinois.[4] Starting up the Missouri River May 14, 1804, little time passed before the expedition encountered the first of many hostile native tribes. Luckily, Lewis and Clark's show of force won the respect of the Sioux tribe, and they were

[1] Andrew T. Lewis, "Meriwether Lewis." *The Quarterly of The Oregon Historical Society* 6 no. 4 (1905): 391-392.
[2] Ibid, 392.
[3] Ibid, 393.
[4] Ibid, 394.

treated as guests. [5] By winter, the expedition has travelled as far as present day Bismarck, North Dakota, where they wintered with the friendly Mandan tribe. By August 12, 1805, Lewis and his men had found the headwaters of the Missouri River while and soon after, met Shoshone Indians, from which they would acquire horses and supplies. Now travelling downstream on the Columbia River, the expedition advanced quickly, reaching the Pacific Ocean on November 7, 1805. There, they wintered at Fort Clatsop, near present day Astoria, Oregon.[6] On March 23, 1806 the expedition left Fort Clatsop to begin its long journey home, having successfully located the headwaters of the Missouri River, and reached the Pacific Ocean. Reaching St. Louis on September 23, 1806, Lewis and his men had accomplished much on their nearly 8,300 mile adventure.[7]

Upon their return to Washington D.C., Lewis and Clark were met with a hero's welcome, including a President so delighted that he wept tears of joy.[8] Both Lewis and Clark were paid double the agreed upon salary, and were granted tracts of land.[9] By March 12, 1807, Lewis had been given the governorship of the Upper Louisiana Territory, and

[5] Ibid, 395.
[6] Ibid, 398.
[7] Lewis, "Meriwether Lewis," 399.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Lewis, "Meriwether Lewis," 400.

resigned from his position in the army. During his role as territorial governor, Lewis was able to improve life in Louisiana, helping settle differences between factions, alleviate what was described as a "general discontent," and helped improve regional relation with the Sacs, Fox, and Iowa tribes.[10]

Though he was successful at improving some aspect of life in the Louisiana Territory, Meriwether Lewis soon found his position as governor to be much less satisfying than that of the leader of an expedition. Lewis had little cooperation from his chief assistant, Territorial Secretary Frederick Bates. Bates, who had been appointed before Lewis, had acted as governor of the territory for over a year before Lewis finally arrived. Annoyance at Governor Lewis' procrastination, and his reversal of some of Bates' Indian policy and appointments, created a tension between the two that rose to the point of a call to duel, which was only prevented by William Clark.[11] Additionally, Secretary Bates began spreading (not unsubstantiated) rumors of Lewis' incompetence, stating that Lewis was "altogether military and he never can…succeed in any other profession."[12] Governor Lewis, whose authoritarian style of governorship failed to garner much

[10] Ibid.
[11] Howard I. Kushner, "The Suicide of Meriwether Lewis: a Psychoanalytic Inquiry," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (July 1981): 465.
[12] Ibid.

support, seemed to confirm Bates' hostile words. The Department of War was not much in favor of Lewis' governorship, either. Lewis had used government funds to pay for various debts without the approval of the federal government. As a result, Secretary of War William Eustis refused the reimbursement of these sums, and Lewis was forced to pay out of pocket. These events, plus failed land speculation and the cost incurred from moving his mother from Virginia to St. Louis, pushed Governor Lewis to bankruptcy.[13]

The refusal of reimbursement provoked Lewis to journey from his post in St. Louis to Washington D.C., with a secondary motive of delivering his expedition journals to an editor to prepare for publishing. On August 19, 1809, before leaving on what was to be his final journey, he granted power of attorney to his three most trusted friends: William Clark, Alexander Stewart, and William C. Carr.[14] Arriving at Fort Pickering (near the site of present day Memphis, Tennessee) on September 19, Lewis was described by Chickasaw Agent Major James Neelly as being "extremely indisposed, and he betrayed at times considerable derangement of the mind."[15] Because of this, Major Neelly volunteered to travel with Lewis to ensure his safe passage, leaving on

[13] Kushner, "Suicide of Meriwether Lewis," 466.
[14] Lewis, "Meriwether Lewis," 400.
[15] Lewis, "Meriwether Lewis," 401.

September 29.[16] A day's travel past the Tennessee River, it is known that two of the pack horses wandered off in the night, and Lewis journeyed on alone, while Major Neelly searched for them. Lewis promised to stop and wait for Neelly at "the house of the first white inhabitant on the road."[17] Governor Lewis arrived at Grinder's Inn along the Natchez Trace on October 9, 1809. At this point, discernable facts become scarce, as the only people present at the time were Mrs. Grinder, who gave various accounts of the events that contained conflicting information, Lewis' two servants, and Meriwether Lewis, himself. Of those who were present on the property, only the inconsistent accounts of Mrs. Grinder were recorded of the events of October 10 and 11.

It is well documented that Meriwether Lewis was often the victim of depression, sometimes so powerful that he seemed deranged. From early in his life, "Governor Lewis had been subject to bouts of despondency and melancholy, a disease which he had inherited from his father."[18] After the excitement of the successful expedition to the west, Lewis very likely found his position as territorial governor extremely anticlimactic. The transition from the life of an army officer in charge of a group of men, exploring newly acquired, uncharted land to that of the

[16] "Statement of Gilbert C. Russell," November 26, 1811.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "A Sketch of Meriwether Lewis," page 9, Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

governor of the Louisiana Territory, doing desk work and keeping constituents happy would have been massive. The boredom alone had the potential to disrupt Lewis' mental stability. His severe depression, brought on by the lack of satisfaction with his current position, financial troubles, and predisposition towards depression give credence to those who believe Meriwether Lewis died by his own hand in the cabin on the Natchez Trace.

Of the events that occurred when Lewis arrived at Grinder's Stand, very few are universally agreed upon. Most agree that Lewis arrived at the Grinder's Stand on the evening of October 9, 1809. With Robert Grinder was away at the time, Mrs. Grinder, seeing Governor Lewis in what has been described as a "deranged state," offered him a bed inside the cabin, while she would sleep in the other room, and Lewis' servants would sleep in the barn, approximately 200 yards from the cabin. Dinner was served that night, but it is reported that Lewis ate but a few bites, all the while allegedly speaking to himself in a violent tone. Accounts say he after dinner, he walked to the door, lighting his pipe, kindly saying to Mrs. Grinder: "Madam, this is a very pleasant evening."[19] Though Mrs. Grinder prepared a bed for Lewis, he requested

[19] James E. Starrs, *Meriwether Lewis: His Death and His Monument* (J.E. Starrs ,1997), 12.

to sleep on the floor, calling for his servant to bring his buffalo robe and bear skins. What happens from this point forward has been the subject of debate for over two centuries.

The accounts of the actual death of Lewis seem to vary on several important details, including number of gunshots fired, location, type, and severity of the wounds, and the amount of time Lewis lingered in agony before finally succumbing to those wounds. The account given to President Jefferson in a letter from Major James Neelly described the event as follows:

> The woman reports that about three o'clock, she heard two pistols fire off in the governor's room: the servants being awakened by her, came in but too late to save him. He had shot himself in the head with one pistol, and a little below the breast with the other. When his servant came in, he said 'I have done the business. My good servant give me some water.'[20]

This account is the most commonly known, and is most likely responsible, along with Lewis' history of mental instability, for the popular belief that his death was indeed by his own hand. It reports of Lewis' injuries being two, self-inflicted gunshots: one in the head, and the other just under the breast. Additionally, it states that he died soon after. The reason for this account's popularity is most likely attributed to

[20] "Letter from Major James Neely to President Thomas Jefferson, October 18, 1809."

the fact that it was sent to President Jefferson, who believed it to be accurate.

In this next account, given by Gilbert C. Russell in November of 1811, who after speaking to Mrs. Grinder, stated:

> He then discharged the other [pistol] against his breast where the ball entered and passing downward through his body came out low down near his backbone. […] He then in returning got his razors from a port folio which happened to contain them and sitting up in his bed was found about day light, by one of the servants busily engaged in cutting himself from head to foot. He again [begged] for water which was given to him and as soon as he drank, he lay down and died with the declaration to the boy that he had killed himself to deprive his enemies of the pleasure and honor of doing it.[21]

This account from two years after the event describes Governor Lewis' wounds as not only the two from his pistols, but also many wounds inflicted by means of a razor. The differences including the mention of Meriwether Lewis cutting himself with a razor, and statement that he was committing suicide to avoid being murdered by some enemy, imagined or otherwise are not something that most would forget to mention. Major Neelly, who claims to have seen Lewis' body before burial, would have definitely noticed the additional wounds, and would have mentioned them. This account describes Lewis' actual death as being sometime after daybreak on October 11. A number of the

[21] Starrs, *Death and His Monument*, 10.

descriptions, including the description of Lewis' wounds, as well as his time of death conflict with the account sent to President Jefferson by Major Neelly.

In May of 1811, a letter to Alexander Lawson, Alexander Wilson wrote that he had travelled to the location where their mutual friend, Meriwether Lewis, had died. After talking with Mrs. Grinder, he was able to write this account:

> She then heard the report of a pistol, and something fall heavily on the floor, and the words "O Lord!" Immediately afterwards she heard another pistol, and in a few minutes she heard him at her door calling out "O madam! Give me some water and heal my wounds."…As soon as day broke and not before, the terror of the woman having permitted him to remain for two hours in the most deplorable situation, she sent two of her children to the barn, her husband not being at home, to bring the servants; and on going in they found him lying on the bed; he uncovered his side and [showed] them where the bullet had entered; a piece of forehead was blown off, and had exposed brains, without having bled much. He begged they would take his rifle and blow out his brains, and he would give them all the money he had in his trunk. He often said, "I am no coward, but I am so strong, so hard to die.[22]

This account, which provides the most details (though their accuracy is questioned), describes Lewis firing two shots in to himself, but describes the wounds differently. The wound to his forehead is described as much more serious than the other accounts, actually removing a piece of

[22] Starrs, *His Death and His Monument*, 12.

Lewis' skull and exposing a small portion of his brain. The bullet wound to his abdomen was described as being on his side, not his breast, as other accounts have stated. Lewis is quoted very differently, reasserting his bravery, but also his desire to die, even imploring them to put him out of misery with his rifle. The death of Lewis is described as being right at sunrise, approximately two hours after he shot himself. This detail agrees with the account Mrs. Grinder gave to Gilbert Russell, but different from the Russell account, she never mentions Lewis cutting himself with a razor.

According to the account Alexander Wilson received from Mrs. Grinder, she stayed in her quarters out of fear, only observing Lewis through the gaps in the logs. Despite her obscured view, she provided much more detail in this account, than even the account taken from my Major Neelly, only hours after the Governor's death. Other, less substantiated accounts of the event given by a woman working as a scullery maid at Grinder's Stand claim that three shots were fired, and that Mr. Grinder, who was said to have been absent in other accounts, was seen fleeing the scene. Lewis reportedly crawled 150 yards from the house, and was found dead the next morning by a passing postman. Additionally, this account claims that Grinder was later tried for Lewis' murder, but acquitted due to a lack of evidence. In the years following,

he "bought slaves and a farm and seemed to have plenty of money."[23] In the 1890s, numerous descendants of the men who they claim were on a coroner's jury assembled to investigate the circumstances surrounding Lewis' death stated that even though the jury concluded that Lewis had committed suicide, that there was reason to believe that "because of some unnamed fear, the jury had brought in a verdict which it did not believe to be true." Accounts like these are difficult to corroborate because all judicial records from Maury County, Tennessee from these times have been lost.[24]

As one can see, there are many inconsistencies in details between the accounts of the last hours of the life of Meriwether Lewis. The lack of clarity in what actually happened in the early hours of October 11, 1809 proved to be fertile grounds for skepticism in regards to the accounts given by Mrs. Grinder and Major James Neelly. The fact that Lewis was downtrodden, dissatisfied with his position as governor, bankrupt, and often depressed, does not prove that he committed suicide. Since the accounts of the early hours of October 11, 1809 are all so inconsistent, no one can prove beyond a doubt how Lewis died. Many believe that Lewis' death was the result of foul play.

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[23] Dawson A. Phelps, "The Tragic Death of Meriwether Lewis," *The William and Mary Quarterly* (July 1956): 307.
[24] Phelps, 308.

Over two centuries after this event, many are still trying to find the truth. A leader in modern research surrounding Lewis' death is Dr. James E. Starrs. Having assisted and examined such cases as The Boston Strangler and the Lizzie Borden murders, Starrs, professor emeritus of both law and forensic science at George Washington University, is no stranger to dealing with cases that are both dated, and lacking in solid evidence. His interest in the death of Governor Lewis began when he and his wife were travelling through Tennessee on the Natchez Trace Parkway (A scenic road that closely follows the route of the Old Natchez Trace from Natchez, Mississippi to Nashville, Tennessee). Stopping to explore various historical spots along the way, including a spot marked "Pioneer Cemetery." At the end of the small graveyard littered with flat stone grave markers of early settlers of the area stands the monument marking Lewis' burial site. Starrs' wife's short lesson on the details of the Governor's death, in his words "set me on my journey of exploration seeking the answers to the tragedy and dilemma of Meriwether Lewis' death."[25] Throughout his research, Professor Starrs has uncovered new evidence that directly contradicts much of what has been believed as fact in this case, including the account given my Major James Neelly.

[25] James E. Starrs and Kira Gale, *The Death of Meriwether Lewis: A Historic Crime Scene Investigation, Coroner's Inquest* (Omaha, NE: River Junction Press), 4-6.

Because Neelly's account was the one that President Jefferson read and believed to be accurate, it became the story the American public accepted as fact. The dissection of Major Neelly's account began to show significant holes by October 7, 1809. On this day, Neelly claimed that two horses had run off in the night, and Lewis had ordered him to stay behind and find them before continuing on. This has been proven to be false. Neelly did leave Lewis, with the actual reason being that he needed to travel to Franklin, Tennessee (about 50 miles north of Lewis' final location), as he was scheduled to appear in court on October 11. Williamson County, Tennessee records show James Neelly was brought before a three man jury being sued for an unpaid debt, and ended up losing his case, being forced to pay the debt. Had he not appeared in person, he would have forfeited his appearance bond, which would have been documented in the minutes.[26] Contrary to what Major Neelly stated in his alleged account, he actually arrived at Grinder's Stand two days later, on October 13.[27] Strong local tradition claims that a coroner's jury was also held on October 13, in which they determined that Meriwether Lewis' had been murdered by Robert Grinder and his nephew, but the jury was too frightened to convict Grinder. Unfortunately, the story of

[26] Ibid, 16.
[27] Ibid, 5.

the coroner's jury cannot be confirmed, as the records from the inquest have since been lost.[28] It has also been discovered that the account of Lewis' death which was sent to Thomas Jefferson, and originally attributed to Major Neelly (It was signed in his name), was actually written by a Captain John Brahan, who also wrote three other letters describing Lewis' cause of death as a suicide. Starrs was able to compare the handwriting on original documents from both Major Neelly and Captain Brahan, and confirmed that Brahan did indeed write the letter to President Jefferson under the guise of Major Neelly.[29] Creating further belief in Lewis' death by suicide, a story claiming so appeared in the *Nashville Democratic Clarion* newspaper on October 20, and the account attributed to Major Neelly was published in advertisement space.[30] Because of this obvious misinformation, Professor Starrs believes that the letter was forged to conceal a conspiracy to assassinate Lewis.

Along with Major Neelly's dishonesty about his whereabouts on the days surrounding Meriwether Lewis' death, evidence has since been discovered that Major James Neelly was not a man of good character. Captain Gilbert C. Russell, commander of Fort Pickering, accused Major Neelly of stealing some of Governor Lewis' belongings, and blamed

[28] Ibid, 6.
[29] Ibid, 13-15.
[30] Ibid, 6.

Neelly for Lewis' death (he thought by suicide) in a letter to President Jefferson. "I should have employ'd the man who packed the trunks to the Nation to have them taken to Nashville & accompany the Govr." said Captain Russell, "Unfortunately for him this arrangement did not take place, or I hesitate not to say he would this day be living."[31] Captain Russell continues, saying that while at Fort Pickering, Lewis was determined to quit drinking and using snuff. Instead of helping Lewis abstain from his vices, Russell learned, having received a report from his employee who accompanied Neelly and Lewis from Fort Pickering to the Chickasaw Agency, that Major Neelly openly encouraged Lewis to drink,[32] and "gave the man every chance to seek an opportunity to destroy himself."[33] Russell even goes as far as to describe Major Neelly as being "extremely fond of liquor."[34] Russell's accusation of Neelly's theft of Lewis belongings states that "This Neelly says he lent the Gov'r money which cannot be true as he had none himself & Gov'r had more than one hund. $ in notes and species besides a check which I let him have of $99.58 none of which it is said could be found."[35] Upon the

[31] Ibid, 248.
[32] Ibid, 11.
[33] Ibid, 249.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 12.

pretext of Governor Lewis owing him money, Major Neelly took his (Lewis') rifle, horse, knife, and pistols, and possibly even his gold watch.

The combination of numerous accounts discrediting Major James Neelly, along with his proven dishonesty in regard to his whereabouts on October 11, 1809, the proven forgery of his account of Governor Lewis' death, and the radical inconsistency of anything even resembling a statement from Mrs. Grinder, the person closest to the event itself, should prove to be enough evidence for anyone who cares about the truth to reconsider the case. The number of those curious about the circumstances surrounding Meriwether Lewis' death reached such a level that several people are calling for the exhumation of Governor Lewis' remains. In 1996, a coroner's inquest was held in the area where Lewis died (Lewis County, Tennessee: composed of parts of Maury, Lawrence, Perry, Wayne and Hickman counties, named in Lewis' honor in 1843) in order to better determine his cause of death. Experts representing both those who believe Lewis' committed suicide and those who believe he was assassinated were able to come to the agreement that one of the things that could very possibly help with solving this long standing mystery was the exhumation of Lewis' remains. An article in the *Nashville Banner* stated "There simply isn't enough reliable information from hearsay accounts to rule on his untimely death, and the

history books have been written using second hand evidence and rumors."[36] Experts from both sides of the argument agreed that modern forensic science would most likely allow them to discover new evidence that would be invaluable to in finally determining what happened in the early hours of October 11, 1809. At the end of its proceedings, the coroner's inquest deemed that there were sufficient grounds to warrant the exhumation of Meriwether Lewis' remains.[37] Along with the experts and investigators, including Professor Starrs, around 150 people directly related to Lewis want his remains exhumed.[38] Along with the obvious desire to determine how Lewis actually died, his family members have much more personal reasons.

Lewis' family members wish to reestablish a sense of dignity surrounding their relative. William Anderson, a retired physician, and great-great grandson of Meriwether Lewis' sister, stated "The tendency has been to picture him as a bumbling, incompetent drunkard…who didn't even know how to commit suicide. It makes him appear anything but what I had always thought of him." Anderson continued, saying "I never dreamed that it might be possible to someday find out what really

[36] Craig Miller, "Experts Urge Explorer's Bones be Dug Up," *The Nashville Banner*, June 4, 1996.
[37] Bob Holladay, "Digging For Answers," Undated newspaper (most likely *Nashville Banner)*, Meriwether Lewis file, Nashville Public Library.
[38] Ibid.

happened."[39] Thomas C. McSwain, a distant nephew of Meriwether Lewis also stated in the foreword to the June, 1996 coroner's inquest: "Finding the truth also matters to our family members who are the collateral descendants of Meriwether Lewis.…So, as in the words of Voltaire, we believe that 'We owe respect to the living; to the dead we owe only truth.'"[40]

Other family members are more concerned with the way Lewis was buried. Since it is reported that Lewis may have attended church with Thomas Jefferson, many want the Governor to have a proper Christian burial.[41] While the plan of exhuming the remains of Meriwether Lewis has much support, it is not something as simple as moving the monument and assembling a group of forensic scientists and archeologists to carefully excavate the site. The land on which Lewis is buried is in close proximity to the Natchez Trace Parkway. Because of this, it is under the control of the National Park Service, who has been reluctant to approve of any sort of exhumation, as they believe it would set a precedent which would create requests to exhume the remains of

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[39] Lori Wiechman, "Explorer's Descendant Joins Request to Exhume Body," *Daily Tennessean,* December 17, 1997.
[40] Thomas C. McSwain, Jr. Foreword, Part One, *The Death of Meriwether Lewis,* James E. Starrs and Kira Gale.
[41] J.R. Moehringer, "Descendants Seeking Peace of Mind Over True Cause of Ancestor's Death," *Nashville Banner,* December 10, 1997.

many other famous Americans who died by suspicious means.[42] On January 11, 2008, The Department of the Interior, which operates above the National Park Service, approved the request for exhumation, only after receiving a petition from over 200 descendants of Meriwether Lewis. For a time, it appeared that there might finally be answers to the many questions surrounding the final hours of Lewis' life. Without warning, though, on April 2, 2010, the Department of the Interior reversed its decision, denying the request of the many Lewis family members, scientists, and historians by halting the permit process.[43]

With so much controversy surrounding nearly every detail of the last days of Meriwether Lewis, it seems difficult to believe that the events occurred as told in accounts like that of Major Neelly or Mrs. Grinder. The discovery of new evidence heavily discredits the character of Major Neelly by confirming that he was not at Grinder's Stand on October 11, 1809, as he had claimed, but 55 miles away in Franklin. Further evidence suggest that the letter penned in Neelly's name was written by Captain Brahan in Nashville, causing Thomas Jefferson to believe an account of Lewis' death written by someone who had no knowledge on the actual event. Additionally, Mrs. Grinder, who was the

[42] Bob Holladay, "Digging For Answers," Undated newspaper (most likely *Nashville Banner)*, Meriwether Lewis file, Nashville Public Library.
[43] Starrs and Gale, *The Death of Meriwether Lewis,* 9.

closest to a witness to the Governor's death, seemed unable to provide a consistent account. Did she hear one shot, two, or three? Did the musket ball deal a glancing blow to his forehead or did it remove a piece of skull? Did the second shot exit through Lewis' back near his spine, or did it exit through his side, like one account said? Did Lewis die soon after he allegedly shot himself or did he linger, becoming delusional with pain? Which of the quoted lines were his last words? Was his body found by Mrs. Grinder, the servant, or by a passing postman? The inconsistency of the answers to these questions should have created suspicion from the start.

The questions that can be answered about the death of Meriwether Lewis are far outnumbered by those that cannot. Even with hopes of receiving permission to exhume his remains to perform an autopsy, one still wonders what thoughts crossed Lewis' mind during his stay at Grinder's Stand. What is known about the life of Meriwether Lewis in the period of less than 10 years, is that he would experience the adventure of exploring the newly purchased Louisiana Territory, be elevated to the status of national hero, feel boredom and lack of satisfaction of his post as territorial governor, become disparaged as he experienced financial ruin, and come to the end of his troubled life at an

inn on the Natchez Trace, by means which we will hopefully someday be able to determine.

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