

# Death of Meriwether Lewis

1. Suicide
2. Bandits on trail
3. Murder/cover up

~~A. Ballistics Test Vid~~

~~B. Autopsy report (2 shots)~~

C. The Grinders: changing stories of  
Priscilla Grinder,

D. Neely letter saying suicide, ~~Clark~~  
~~said, Jefferson said...~~

E. Wilkinson something (transcript)

~~F. Expert marksman~~

~~F. Grinder Indictment – charges  
dismissed~~

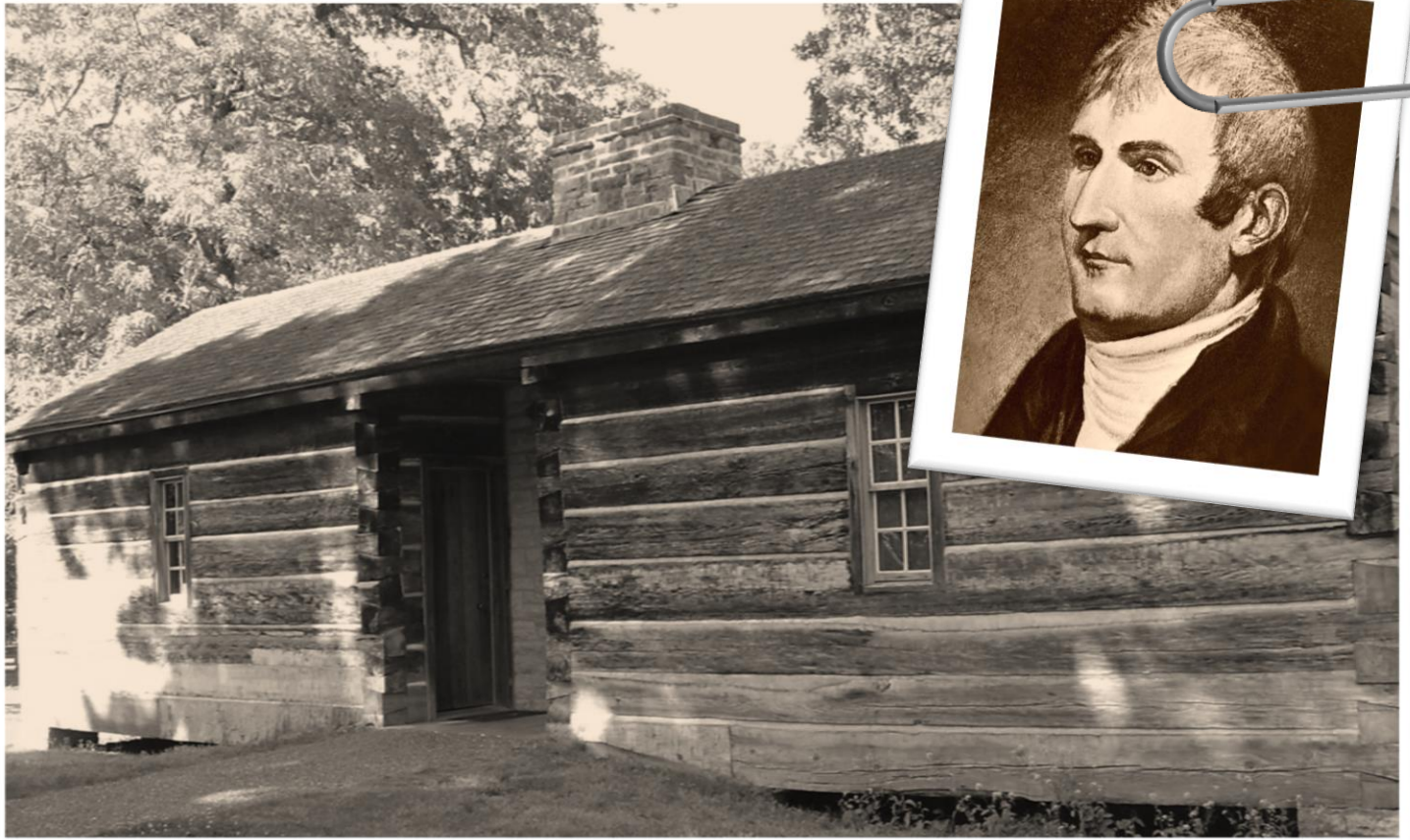
G. The Codes

~~H. Video clip about neely forgery~~

# COLD CASE FILES

CRIME REPORT

October 11, 1809



On October 11, 1809 Meriwether Lewis died of gunshot wounds to his stomach and head. The death was initially ruled a suicide and most historians have accepted that theory since. Lewis' family, however, believes he was murdered. The suicide claim is based primarily on a letter from Lewis' traveling companion, James Neely, who quotes the testimony of Priscilla Grinder who was only witness to his death. She, however, did not see it directly.

Some suspects in the possible murder include James Wilkinson, an army general who once tried to separate from the US and start his own country, Robert Grinder, the owner of the inn where Lewis died who later found himself with a great deal of money and James Neely, the man travelling with Lewis to Washington.

The family has requested his body be dug up and studied to determine what really happened. In hopes of avoiding this drastic measure you have been asked to review the available evidence and draw your own conclusions.

# Office of the Medical Examiner

Hohenwald, Tennessee

## REPORT OF INVESTIGATION BY THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

NAME: Lewis, Meriwether

SEX: male

AGE: 35

CAUSE OF DEATH:  violent     suicide     sudden  
(mark one only)     suspicious, unusual or unnatural

Investigating Agency: FBI (unsolved crimes division)

Figure 1 shows the location of the two gunshot wounds found on the victim. The shot to the back of the head took off part of Lewis' skull exposing his brain. There is no exit wound so the bullet likely would have lodged in the brain.

The shot to the stomach destroyed vital organs and also does not have an exit wound.

As a result it seems unlikely that the victim could have taken both shots himself. Either shot would have left him incapacitated. The previous idea of suicide then seems unlikely. It appears the victim was assassinated purposefully.

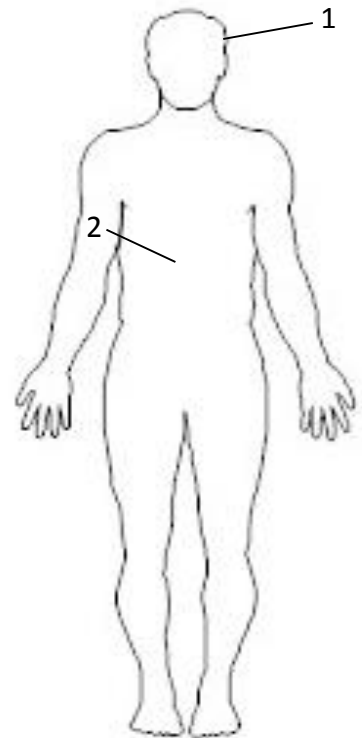


Figure 1

### PROBABLE CAUSE OF DEATH

Blood loss from bullet wounds to the chest and head.

### MANNER OF DEATH

natural     suicide     homicide  
 accident     unknown

I hereby declare that after receiving notice of the death described above I took possession of the body and made inquiries regarding the cause of death in accordance with Section 28-654038.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Priscilla Grinder

As the only witness to Lewis' death Priscilla Grinder's testimony has been of the greatest importance. It is the main reason both Clark and Jefferson believed their friend committed suicide. Her early testimony, however, comes from two letters written by other people. Later in life she was personally interviewed and her story turned out quite different.



*Artist's rendering*

### **1809 (As quoted by James Neely)**

Mr. Lewis came while my husband was away looking quite deranged. I feared him so I gave up the house to him and slept in the out building nearby. At about 3' o clock I heard two gun shots from the Governor's room. I woke Mr. Lewis' servants but they came in too late to save him. He had shot himself in the head with one pistol and the in the chest with another. When his servant came in he said "I have done the business, my good servant fetch me some water.



### **1811 (As quoted by Gilbert Russell)**

It being now dusk I went off to the kitchen. I was so alarmed by his behavior that I could not sleep but listened to him walking backwards and forwards, for several hours, and talking aloud, like a lawyer. I then heard the shot of a pistol, and something fall heavily on the floor, and the words "Oh Lord" Immediately afterwards I heard another pistol, and in a few minutes I heard him at the door calling out "Oh madam! Give me some water, and heal my wounds."

I left him in this most deplorable situation out of fear for two hours. He expired in about two hours, or just as the sun rose above the trees.



### **1839 (As quoted in a newspaper article)**

About dark two or three other men rode up and called for lodging. Mr. Lewis immediately drew a brace of pistols, stepped towards them and challenged them to fight a duel. They not liking this salutation, rode on to the next house, five miles."

Two or three hours before day I was alarmed by the sound of a pistol, and then two more. After the third, I heard someone fall and exclaim, "O Lord! Relieve me." In a few minutes I heard some person at the door of my room. I asked "Who is there?" Mr. Lewis spoke and said, "Dear madam, be so good as to give me a little water." I was afraid and did not open the door. I heard him fall, and soon after, looking through a crack in the wall, saw him scrambling across the road on his hands and knees.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE LOUISIANA TERRITORY

People

Case no. 1008123

v.

Robert Grinder

defendant

The above-named defendant is accused by this indictment of the following offense: MURDER

The said defendant on October 11, 1809 in the Louisiana territory did unlawfully cause the death of MERIWETHER LEWIS.

The state charges that the defendant, ROBERT GRINDER, shot the victim two times - once in the stomach and once in the back of the head. The defendant was later found with a great deal of money while the victim was found with none despite being known to have carried at least \$120 into Grinder House.

The defendant's wife, Mrs. Grinder, was the one witness to the death of Lewis and has changed her story three times when interviewed by authorities further making her husband appear guilty.

Mr. William Johnson, District Attorney

Judge's Response

Due to a lack of reliable evidence I order Mr. Robert Grinder be released from custody and be set free. The district attorney has provided only vague circumstantial evidence and no real proof of Mr. Grinder's guilt or any participation in the death of Meriwether Lewis. Multiple witnesses including Mr. Neely and Mrs. Grinder tell us he was not even there at the time.

Mrs. Grinder was clearly frightened by the events that took place in her home. In such a situation one can be expected to forget details from time to time. This is, in no way, evidence of guilt.

The Honorable Mr. Royce Hartley

SECRETS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

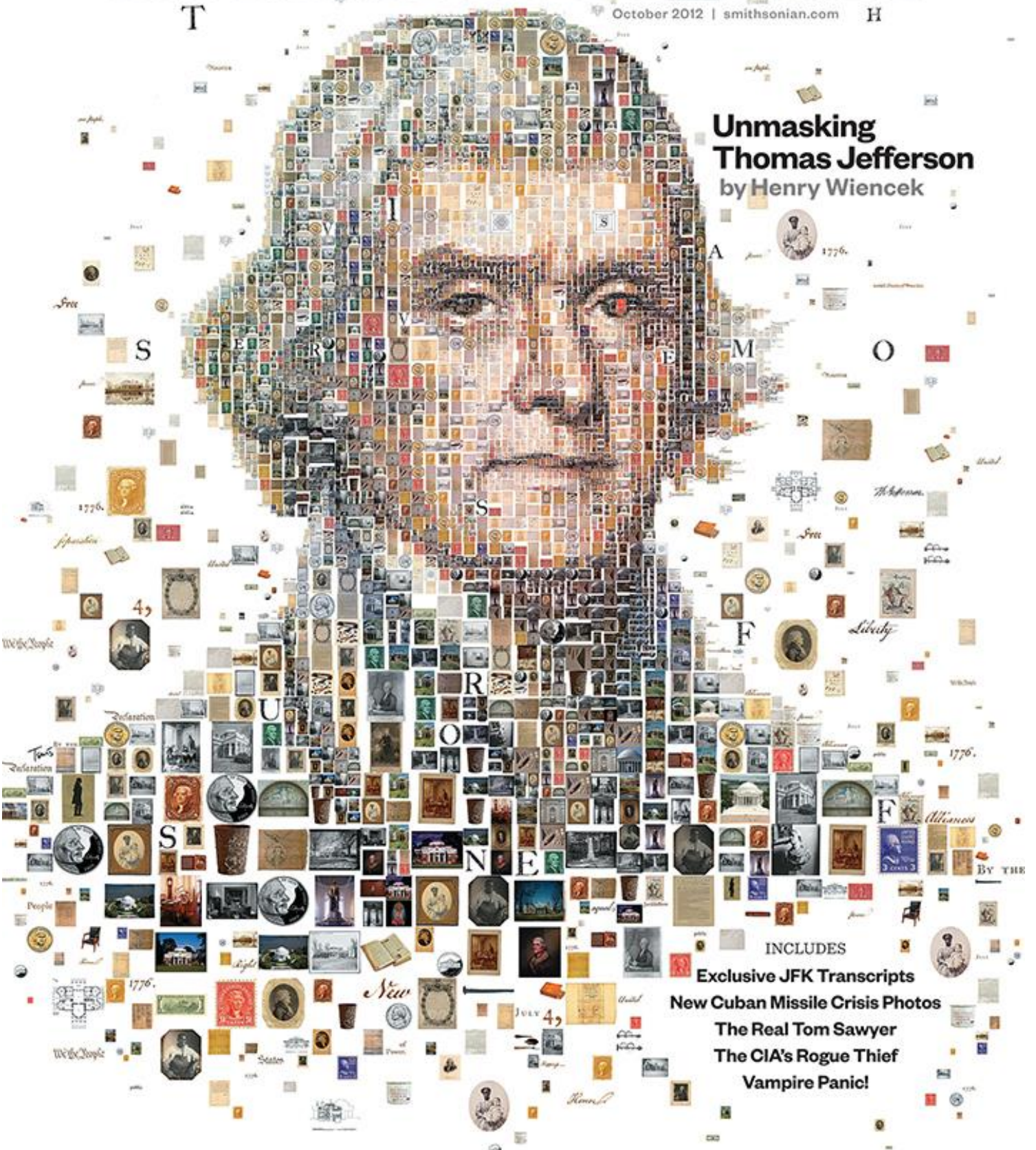
# Smithsonian

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October 2012 | smithsonian.com H

## Unmasking Thomas Jefferson

by Henry Wiencek



INCLUDES  
**Exclusive JFK Transcripts**  
**New Cuban Missile Crisis Photos**  
**The Real Tom Sawyer**  
**The CIA's Rogue Thief**  
**Vampire Panic!**



## **Major James Neely's Letter Thomas Jefferson 18 October, 1809**

Sir:

It is with extreme pain that I have to inform you of the death of Meriwether Lewis who died on the morning of the 11th and I am sorry to say by suicide.

I arrived at the Chickasaw Bluffs on or about the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, where I found the governor (who had reached there two days before me) in very bad health. It appears that his first intention was to go around by water to the City of Washington; but his thinking that a war with England with probable, and that his valuable papers might be in danger of falling into the hands of the British, changed his route. On our arrival at the Chickasaw nation I discovered that he appeared at times deranged in mind.

One days Journey after crossing Tennessee River where we encamped we lost two of our horses. I remained behind to look for them and the governor went on, promising to wait for me at the first house he came to. He reached the house of a Mr. Grinder about sunset. No person was there but a woman who discovering the governor to be deranged, gave him up the house and slept herself in one near it.

The woman reports that about three o'clock she heard two pistols fire off in the Governor's Room. He had shot himself in the head with one pistol and a little below the breast with the other. When his servant came in Lewis said; "I have done the business my good servant give me some water." He gave him water, he survived but a short time. I came up sometime after, and had him as decently buried as I could in that place.

James Neely

U. S. agent to the Chickasaw Nation


## **Captain Gilbert Russell's Statement for the Record**

### **November 26, 1811**

On the morning of the 15th of September, the Boat in which he was a passenger landed him at Fort Pickering in a state of mental derangement, which appeared to have been produced as much by indisposition as other causes. The Subscriber being then the commanding Officer of the Fort on discovering his situation, and learning from the Crew that he had made two attempts to kill himself, in one of which he had nearly succeeded, resolved at once to take possession of him and his papers, and detain them there until he recovered, or some friend might arrive in whose hands he could depart in safety. In this condition he continued without any material change for about five days, and on the sixth or seventh day all symptoms of derangement disappeared and he was completely in his senses.

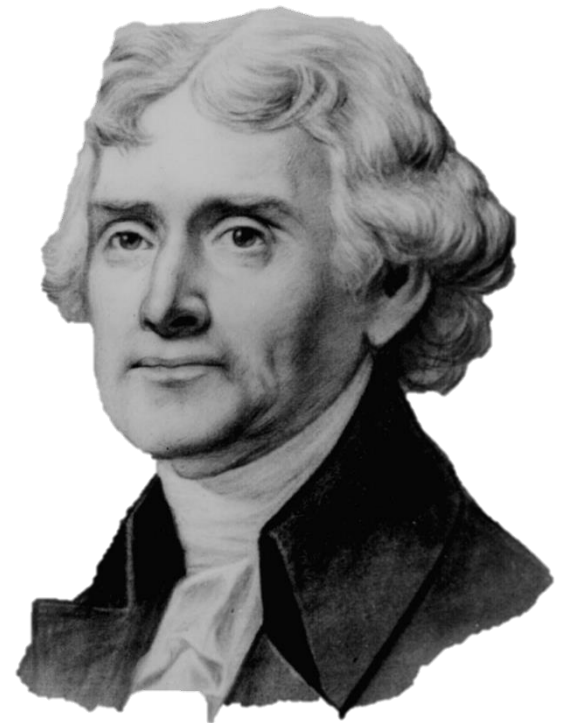
At the house of a Mr. Grinder, where in the apprehension of being destroyed by enemies which had no existence but in his wild imagination, he destroyed himself, in the most cool desperate and Barbarian-like manner, having been left in the house entirely to himself.

After shooting himself twice he then got his razors from a portfolio which happened to contain them and cut himself from head to foot. He again begged for water, which was given him and so soon as he drank, he lay down and died with the declaration to the Boy [his servant] that he had killed himself to deprive his enemies of the pleasure and honor of doing it.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gilbert Russell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned at the bottom left of the page, below the main text.

While he lived with me in Washington, I observed at times sensible depressions of mind... During his western expedition the constant exertion which required of all the faculties of body & mind, suspended these distressing affections; but after his return they returned upon him with redoubled vigor, and began seriously to alarm his friends. He was suffering greatly from this when his affairs made it necessary for him to go to Washington."

-Thomas Jefferson



I fear the weight of his mind has overcome him.

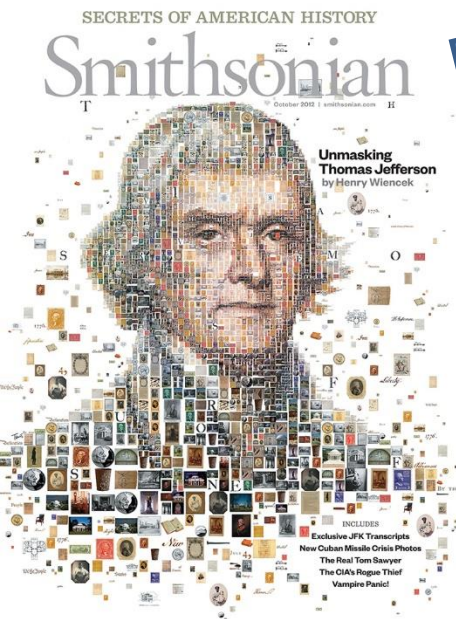
-William Clark



"At the end of his life he was a horrible drunk, terribly depressed, who could never even finish his journals," The expedition was the pinnacle of Lewis's life. He came back and he just could not readjust. There's a certain amount of stress to reentering the world. It was like coming back from the moon."

-Paul Douglass Newman, Historian

# Poster



**Major James Neelly's Letter to Former President Thomas Jefferson About the Death of Governor Lewis**  
**Nashville, 18 October, 1809**  
 Sir:

It is with extreme pain that I have to inform you of the death of Meriwether Lewis who died on the morning of the 11th and I am sorry to say by suicide.

I arrived at the Chickasaw Bluffs on or about the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, where I found the governor (who had reached there two days before me) in very bad health. It appears that his first intention was to go around by water to the City of Washington; but his thinking that a war with England with probable, and that his valuable papers might be in danger of falling into the hands of the British, changed his route. On our arrival at the Chickasaw nation I discovered that he appeared at times deranged in mind.

One days Journey after crossing Tennessee River where we encamped we lost two of our horses. I remained behind to look for them and the governor went on, promising to wait for me at the first house he came to. He reached the house of a Mr. Grinder about sunset. No person was there but a woman who discovering the governor to be deranged, gave him up the house and slept herself in one near it.

The woman reports that about three o'clock she heard two pistols fire off in the Governor's Room. He had shot himself in the head with one pistol and a little below the breast with the other. When his servant came in Lewis said, "I have done the business my good servant give me some water." He gave him water, he survived but a short time. I came up sometime after, and had him as decently buried as I could in that place.

James Neelly  
 U. S. agent to the Chickasaw Nation

While he lived with me in Washington, I observed at times sensible depressions of mind... During his western expedition the constant exertion which required of all the faculties of body & mind, suspended these distressing affections; but after his return they returned upon him with redoubled vigor, and began seriously to alarm his friends. He was suffering greatly from this when his affairs made it necessary for him to go to Washington."

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at the house of a Mr. Grinder within the Jurisdiction of Tennessee and only Seventy miles from Nashville, where in the apprehension of being destroyed by enemies which had no existence but in his wild Imagination, he destroyed himself, in the most cool desperate and Barbarian-like manner, having been left in the house entirely to himself.

After shooting himself twice he then got his razors from a portfolio which happened to contain them and cut himself from head to foot: He again begged for water, which was given him and so soon as he drank, he lay down and died with the declaration to the Boy [his servant] that he had killed himself to deprive his enemies of the pleasure and honor of doing it.

*Gilbert Russell*



"At the end of his terribly depressed his journals," The Lewis's life. He can readjust. There's a reentering the wo from the moon."

-Paul Douglass Neill

# General Staff

XXXX:

Names	Rank	Date of Commission	Staff appoint	Date of Staff app.	State	Remarks
James Wilkinson	Brig. Gen.	March 5, 1792	—	—	Kentucky	
John Wilkins	Lt. Colonel	3, 1799	2. M. G.	June 1, 1796	Pennsylv. <sup>10</sup>	+++++
Caleb Swan	—	—	L. M. G.	May 2, 1792	Mass <sup>11</sup>	++
Thomas A. Bushing	Major	Nov. 3, 1793	Inspector	Feb. 20, 1797	d. <sup>o</sup>	+++++
Isaac Guion	Captain	2, 1792	Brig. Insp.	Nov. 1, 1799	New York	Particula.
Edward L. Turner	d. <sup>o</sup>	Nov. 11, 1793	Brig. Insp.	1, 1799	Mass <sup>11</sup>	+++++
Barth <sup>l</sup> Straumburg	d. <sup>o</sup>	June 20, 1792	Brig. 2. M.	1, 1799	New York	+++++

# Adjutants

Names	Rank	Date of Commission	State	Remarks
James Taylor	Captain	Feb. 20, 1792	Pennsylv.	Y
James V. Ball	d. <sup>o</sup>	4, 1799	Virginia	off
William Sharp	1. Lt.	Nov. 12, 1800	Pennsylv.	A. X X
Archibald Lee	d. <sup>o</sup>	June 6, 1801	Maryland	—

# List of Army Officers

War Department, July 24, 1801,  
by Meriwether Lewis

## General Staff

Names	Rank	State	Remarks
James Wilkinson	Brig. General	Kentucky	
John Wilkins	L. Colonel	Pennsylvania	<i>t.t.t.t.t.</i>
Caleb Swan	_____	Massachusetts	<i>t.t.</i>
Thomas H. Cushing	Major	Massachusetts	<i>t.t.t.t.t.</i>
Isaac Juion (?)	Captain	New York	Promoted
Edward D. Turner	Captain	Massachusetts	<i>t.t.t.t.t.</i>
Garth M. Shaumburg	Captain	New York	<i>t.t.t.t.t.</i>

## Cavalry

James Taylor	Captain	Pennsylvania	<i>••/</i>
James V. Ball	Captain	Virginia	<i>/</i>
William Sharp	Lieutenant	Pennsylvania	<i>/XX</i>
Archibald Lee	Lieutenant	Maryland	_____

(71)  
Explanation of the notes set opposite (in the column of remarks) to  
to the names of the several officers comprising the Army of the  
United States. —

- o — Denotes such officers as are of the 1<sup>st</sup> class, as esteemed from a  
superiority of genius & Military proficiency.
- : — Ditto . . . Ditto second class, respectable as Officers, but not  
altogether entitled to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. —
- oo. — Ditto . . . Ditto Republican.
- o. — Ditto Officers whose political opinions are not positively ascertained.
- o. — Ditto Political apathy.
- x: — Ditto opposed to the Administration, otherwise respectable officers.
- !f. — Ditto opposed to the Administration more decisively. —
- ++++. — Ditto Ditto most violently to D<sup>o</sup>. and still active in its vilification.
- ::. — ditto professionally the soldier without any political creed —
- ! — Ditto. unworthy of the commissions they bear —
- — Ditto. unknown to us. —

# Transcription of Classification of Army Officers Key

Denotes such officers...

0.

as are of the 1st class, superior genius & Military proficiency.

o

second class, respectable as officers

oo.

who are Republican.

o/

whose political opinions are not positively ascertained.

o/.

who show political disinterest

x:

opposed to the administration, otherwise respectable officers.

t.t.

opposed to the administration more decisively.

++++o/

opposed most violently to the administration and still active in its vilification.

o o

professionally the soldier without any political creed.

o/

unworthy of the commissions they bear.

\_\_\_\_\_

unknown to us.



# Interrogation Transcript of General James Wilkinson

## July 17, 1811

<Begin Recording>

*DETECTIVE STONE:* General, you and I both know this is not the first time you've been accused of a crime.

*JAMES WILKINSON:* I was not guilty of those treason charges and you know it. I was framed, everyone knew it and I was set free. Plus, what would any dealings I might have with Spain have anything to do with Mr. Lewis' suicide?

*DETECTIVE STONE:* We know you two didn't get along well. We suspect he may have had information on your treason. We also know you were jealous of him since Jefferson picked him over you as governor of Louisiana.

*WILKINSON:* Jealous? What do you think made him so deranged and depressed? He couldn't handle the stress of running that giant territory. Why would I want to do that to myself? And, again, I was cleared of those treason charges.

*DETECTIVE STONE:* Deranged, you say? I assume you're referring to the comments by Captain Russell.

*WILKINSON:* Yes, I am. Everyone read them. Everyone knows what he said about Lewis. The fact is the guy tried to kill himself twice before and the pressures only got worse. I feel bad but come on, it is obvious what happened here.

*DETECTIVE STONE:* Don't you find it a little odd that both Captain Russell and Major Neely, the two men who seem to know most about the incident, were men who worked for you?

*WILKINSON:* I led the army – they were soldiers – of course they worked for me. It just so happens that they were men who knew Lewis and travelled with him.

*DETECTIVE STONE:* I suppose that is convenient but how do you explain the fact that Lewis' money was missing after his death?

*WILKINSON:* Are you implying that I would be dumb enough to kill a governor, then rob him and then carry the evidence around with me?

*DETECTIVE STONE:* No, I'm implying that perhaps someone paid you to have him killed, like Mr. Grinder perhaps, and you had him steal the money to make it look like a simple robbery.

*WILKINSON:* So, now it is a conspiracy? Look, there is no physical evidence I was involved. Yes, we had our differences but so what? I'm a general in the U.S. army, I have no reason to be jealous of anyone's position. I have personal contact with the president himself, how many people can say that? Face it, you've got nothing on me.

<End Recording>