



The Lewis and Clark Compass

In November 2000, the exhibition *The American Presidency* opened at the Smithsonian Institution's **National Museum of American History**. Among the objects on display in the exhibit was the Lewis and Clark compass. The brass and silver compass, set in a mahogany box was made by Thomas Whitney of Philadelphia. It was used by William Clark, and is one of the few surviving scientific instruments from the expedition organized by President Thomas Jefferson in 1803 to explore the Missouri River and search for possible routes across the continent to the Pacific Ocean.

The following spring, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and the Corps of Discovery set out from St. Louis to survey the Northwest. Some time after completion of the expedition, Clark gave the pocket compass to Captain Robert McCabe, an army man with whom he had dealings in the 1820's. It passed down through the McCabe family to the Smithsonian Institution.

Two hundred years after Lewis and Clark embarked on their transcontinental journey of exploration, the compass and numerous

other items were lent by the Smithsonian to the Missouri Historical Society for *Lewis & Clark: The National Bicentennial Exhibition* - a multi-city museum exhibition - commemorating Lewis & Clark's adventure. A companion volume, *Lewis & Clark Across the Divide*, was published by Smithsonian Books in association with the Missouri Historical Society.

The *National Bicentennial Exhibition* opened at the Missouri History Museum in St. Louis in January of 2004. As the compass did in the hands of Clark so many years before, the exhibit traveled to many places before reaching its ultimate destination. It visited the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. Finally, in May 2006 it opened at the Smithsonian's **National Museum of Natural History** where it remained until September 2006.

For more information you may visit these web sites:

www.americanhistory.si.edu

www.nmnh.si.edu