

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Fincastle Historic District
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N/A
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LISTED ON:
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Additional Documentation, October 2012

The following historic context provides additional documentation to the 1969 National Register nomination for the Fincastle Historic District. The purpose of this narrative is to elevate the visibility of the Fincastle Historic District for its association with the Lewis and Clark Expedition and with specific members of the Corps of Discovery. In 2007, the National Park Service conducted a study on the Eastern Legacy of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which focused on the preparation and return phases of the Corps of Discovery's journey across North America from the Eastern Seaboard to the Pacific Ocean and back. The study also inventoried sites identified with the eastern phase of the expedition and made recommendations with regard to further documentation efforts.<sup>1</sup> Fincastle was identified as one of the locations associated with the expedition and in need of additional documentation.

Statement of Significance Summary

The 1969 National Register nomination for the Fincastle Historic District noted that the county seat "played an important role in the development of western Virginia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Virtually unchanged from the time of the Civil War until recently, the village presented a little altered picture of rural nineteenth-century America." The district was identified as possessing significance in the areas of Agriculture, Art, Commerce, and Urban Planning.

This additional documentation adds Exploration/Settlement to the identified areas of significance for Fincastle's role as a significant outpost and supply center for late-eighteenth-century settlers heading west and for its association with the Lewis and Clark expedition. The boundaries of Botetourt County, which was formed in 1770, once stretched as far west as the Mississippi River. With the cessation of the Native American conflicts in the late eighteenth century, settlement increased throughout Southwestern Virginia and the western frontier. Many of these settlers came along the Great Wagon Road or other historic routes that passed through Fincastle. Lewis and Clark were among the thousands who travelled along these routes when their military service took them out west from Virginia and later, as they prepared for and returned from their famed exploration of the western territory.

Introduction to Lewis and Clark

Prior to and following the Corps of Discovery's expedition, personal relationships brought Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to Fincastle. On these occasions, the explorers may have stayed at country residences of friends, but later, as Clark's relationship with the Hancock family drew closer, he stayed as a guest of Col. Hancock, whose home, Santillane (011-0032; 218-0051-0195), was located at Fincastle.

Of the two, Clark clearly had a closer and longer-lasting relationship with Fincastle and its citizens. In 1807, Clark returned to the town for a public celebration following the Corps's successful journey and

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returned the next year for his nuptials there. It also would be in Fincastle that Clark finalized plans for the publication of the expedition journals.

Prior to the Expedition, 1796-1801

Prior to the expedition, both Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had often stopped in Fincastle, which at the time served as the last supply outpost for travelers headed westward.<sup>2</sup> The town lay near the Great Wagon Road, as well as the Wilderness Road, both of which served as major eighteenth century transportation routes. Lewis and Clark had friends in the town and both pursued romantic interests there, although Clark was more successful than his friend was in his efforts.

Between 1796 and 1797, Lt. William Preston, Jr., who lived near the village of Amsterdam on the Greenfield Farm (011-0026) along the Great Wagon Road (present-day Route 11), and Lt. Benjamin Strother, a Fincastle native, served with both Lewis and Clark in the Fourth Sub-Legion of the U.S. Army. Perhaps it was these friendships that drew the explorers closer to the town, but at least one noted historian contends that Clark had relatives living in Fincastle.<sup>3</sup> In 1801 or 1802, Clark was visiting Preston when he first met Julia (also called Judith) Hancock. At the time, Preston was courting Caroline Hancock, whom he married in 1802, and it appears that Preston introduced Clark to Julia, Caroline's younger sister. The Hancock girls were the daughters of prominent Fincastle-resident Col. George Hancock, who served in the Army during the American Revolution, represented Botetourt County in the House of Delegates (1784-1793), and was the county's first representative to the U.S. Congress (1793-1797).<sup>4</sup>

The Expedition, 1803-1806

On June 19, 1803, Meriwether Lewis wrote to his friend, William Clark, who was then stationed in Clarksville in the Territory of Indiana, and offered him a position with his westward expedition as co-commander. Lewis detailed the Congressional approval of the expedition and the authority that had been entrusted to him by President Thomas Jefferson, stating "...believe me there is no man on earth with whom I should feel equal pleasure in sharing [the dangers and honors of the enterprise] as with yourself."<sup>5</sup> On July 29, Lewis received Clark's response (dated July 18, the date Clark received Lewis's letter) accepting his offer. Clark joined the exploration party on October 15, 1803, when it reached Clarksville.<sup>6</sup>

Clark appears to have kept Fincastle, and his Fincastle love interest, in his thoughts throughout the expedition. On May 28, 1805 as the band camped along the banks of the Missouri River, Meriwether Lewis recorded in his diary that "Captain Clark who ascended this R[iver] much higher than I did has [thought it proper] to call it Judieths (sic) River" in honor of Judith Hancock.<sup>7</sup>

The Corps returned to St. Louis at noon on September 23, 1806. Following the Corps's ascent of the Missouri River, Meriwether Lewis wrote to President Jefferson indicating that the group would return to Washington, D.C., via a route that would take them by way of "Cahokia, Vincennes, Louisville Ky., the Crab Orchard, Abington, Fincastle, Staunton and Charlottesville."<sup>8</sup>

In November 1806, after several weeks of letter writing, reporting, and celebrations, the explorers' party

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left St. Louis and headed east. The group stopped in Louisville to visit George Rogers Clark, William's brother. At Frankfort, the party separated, although Lewis and Clark may have continued to travel together into Virginia. They both may have wished to visit their friend William Preston at Greenfield. Lewis continued on to Ivy to see his family, while Clark remained in Fincastle.<sup>9</sup> Although Lewis arrived in Washington, D.C., on December 28, Clark did not arrive at the Capital until January. Clark remained in Fincastle over the Christmas and New Year's holidays, missing some of the entertainment President Jefferson had planned in Washington for the two explorers. Two Hancock family marriages took place in Fincastle on December 23, and Clark may have attended or even participated in these. It is also likely that Clark spent much of his time in Fincastle at Santillane, the home of Col. Hancock, both recounting his recent adventure and courting the then 15-year-old Julia.<sup>10</sup>

Following the Expedition, January 8, 1807

On January 8, 1807, the citizens of Fincastle and Botetourt County held a public reception to officially welcome Clark back from his journey and to congratulate him on his successful exploration. The celebrations were held in front of the county courthouse (218-0005; 218-0051-0133) in Fincastle.<sup>11</sup> Speeches delivered at the gathering indicate that the citizens felt a strong, personal connection with the explorer:

Sentiments of esteem and gratitude induce us to offer you our sincere congratulations, upon your safe return to the bosom of your country. During your absence upon a perilous & laborious service, we have reflected with the deepest solicitude, on the dangers which you must necessarily encounter; our anxiety for your safety, and that of the party under your command, is now happily terminated.<sup>12</sup>

Clark reciprocated the feelings in his remarks:

Those sentiments of esteem and solicitude for our personal safety expressed in your affectionate address has excited in me the liveliest sensibility...the friendly attention manifested towards us by many of our fellow citizens is highly flattering, but the distinguished attention shown to me by the citizens of Fincastle & its vicinity produces those emotions which I am unable to describe, I will do myself the honor to hand Capt. Lewis and make known to the faithful party that accompanied us, your friendly address, which I will undertake to say for them will be justly appreciated.<sup>13</sup>

Clark then travelled to Washington, D.C., where he joined Lewis and Jefferson on January 18. Clark wrote to his brother, Jonathan, indicating that he would be leaving the Capital and heading back to Fincastle "by Colo. Hancocks near Fincastle and the family of the Prestons." In his letter, Clark wrote that he had an important matter he wished he could discuss with Jonathan. His postscript stated that he had an "object in view" and that it was near time "to put up the chickens & ducks to fatten and prepare sugar and plums for pies," which alluded to a feast promised by Sarah Clark (Jonathan's wife) if William were to marry.<sup>14</sup>

It was while he was in Fincastle in March 1807, at the home of Col. Hancock, that Pvt. Robert Frazier, a

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member of the Corps of Discovery, delivered to him a commission as Brigadier General of the Missouri Territory Militia. The commission, dated March 7, 1807, was granted by Meriwether Lewis, whom Jefferson had appointed as Governor of the Missouri Territory.<sup>15</sup>

Through his extended efforts, Clark was successful in winning Julia's hand. In mid-March 1807 Clark wrote to Lewis to tell him the news: "I have made an attack most vigorously, we have come to terms, and a delivery is to be made first of January" and alerted Lewis that his nuptials would take him from his official duties at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps intrigued by his friend's romantic success, and also acquainted with many of the young ladies in Fincastle, Meriwether Lewis and his bother Reuben visited the town in November 1807 as they travelled westward on family business. Both brothers, who stayed at the home of Col. Hancock, were interested in courting Letitia Breckinridge of Grove Hill, but neither was successful. The brothers left Fincastle for Kentucky to complete their business transactions; Lewis appears to have been heartbroken.<sup>17</sup>

Clark's Marriage and Later, 1808-1821

On Clark's third post-expedition visit to Fincastle, he married Julia Hancock. Records do not indicate where the wedding took place, but the January 5, 1808, ceremony likely occurred at Santillane, the Hancock home, or at the Fincastle Presbyterian Church (218-0012; 218-0051-0082), since county marriage returns indicate that the Presbyterian minister presided. Henry Bowyer, Clerk of the Court, and Col. Hancock witnessed the marriage license, which was bonded for \$150 by Clark's friend William Preston. A letter of consent from Julia's father is included with the license, indicating that she was a minor.<sup>18</sup>

William and Julia Clark remained in Fincastle until about May 1808. During this time, Clark was working on his map of the expedition. In June 1808, the couple arrived in St. Louis, where they occupied a house with Meriwether Lewis. On January 10, 1809, Julia gave birth to the couple's first son, Meriwether Lewis Clark.<sup>19</sup>

Later that year, Lewis and Clark planned to visit Jefferson in Washington, D.C. The two traveled separately since Clark intended to leave his family in Fincastle. Clark learned en route that his friend Lewis had been found dead along the Natchez Trail. Clark was devastated at the loss of his friend and immediately was concerned for the safety of expedition materials in Lewis's possession. On October 30, Clark wrote to his brother Jonathan that he would proceed to Fincastle, where he arrived on November 22.<sup>20</sup>

With Lewis's death, the responsibility of publishing the expedition journals fell to Clark. During his time back East, he traveled to Philadelphia in search of materials he had left with Lewis ("I have received my journals and maps but not the Botanical and Calculations or Celestial observations"). While in Philadelphia, Clark was successful in contracting with C. & A. Conrad & Co. to publish the journals and invited Nicholas Biddle to help write the narrative section. Clark received permission from his supervisor, the Secretary of War, to remain in Fincastle until April "to prepare my papers for the work to be written." Clark wrote to Biddle on February 20, 1810, asking him to visit him at Col. Hancock's

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house “on a retired and pleasantly situated [place] in view of the Town of Fincastle.” Clark suggested that Biddle “Come to this place where I have my books & memorandums and stay with me a week or two.”<sup>21</sup> Biddle visited with Clark for two or three weeks in Fincastle where he studied the expedition journals, maps, and materials with Clark and interviewed the explorer on numerous subjects to be covered in the publication.<sup>22</sup> With Biddle briefed and ready to begin his writing, Clark returned to St. Louis, arriving on July 7.

In late July 1812, the Clark family once again made a trip east. At Hagerstown, Maryland, Julia and the two Clark sons turned south for Fincastle, while Clark continued on to Washington and travelled elsewhere on official duties before returning to Fincastle in January 1813. The New Year began for the Clarks with the birth of their daughter, Mary Margaret, on New Year’s Day. After this, the Clarks remained in the East, perhaps due to Julia’s declining health. The couple travelled to Philadelphia, both on Julia’s desire to meet Biddle, but also to visit a physician.<sup>23</sup>

Clark, then Governor of the Missouri Territory, returned to St. Louis and undertook responsibilities related to the War of 1812. Julia and her children likely returned to St. Louis in the summer of 1815. In 1818, after the birth of her fourth child, John, Julia asked Clark to return to Virginia. Arriving in late April or early May 1819, the Clarks stayed at Fotheringay, where Julia died on June 27, 1820.<sup>24</sup>

On November 28, 1821, Clark married Harriet Kennerly Radford, Julia’s widowed cousin who lived in St. Louis. Although Harriet was also a Fincastle native, it does not appear that the couple returned to Virginia.

### Integrity

The Fincastle Historic District was listed in the National Register in 1969 and at present retains good integrity. In 1970, the courthouse burned, which gutted the building leaving intact only the front columns and parts of the exterior walls. The building was rebuilt in the same location and still serves as the governmental center of the county. Other buildings in the district remain little altered and are well maintained, including those associated with Lewis and Clark’s visits to the area. Some new construction has occurred in the town, including a new library and a regional jail; no buildings have been demolished in the historic district since the 1969 designation. As a result, the skyline of the town still is dominated by its historic church spires and the courthouse cupola, as it was in 1969. Civic pride continues to run high and contributes to the preservation of this historic western Virginia outpost and court house town.

### Conclusion

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark shared friendships with Fincastle and Botetourt County citizens and visited the area frequently as their travels brought them through the area. Clark possessed stronger ties to the region and his extended stays there likely took him into several homes of prominent citizens, as well as to shops, offices, taverns, and churches in the courthouse town. Since the Hancocks were members of the Fincastle Presbyterian Church, it seems likely that Clark and Julia Hancock spent time at that location and perhaps at the adjacent Big Spring during their courtship (218-0002; 218-0051-0083)

Romantic ties also lured the explorers back to Fincastle. Clark married twice, each time selecting a

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Fincastle native as his wife. Lewis seems to have followed Clark's path in search for a wife in Fincastle, but was unsuccessful in his pursuit. Friendships and family ties secured the close bond between the famed explorers and the locality.

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Endnotes

1. John S. Salmon, *Lewis and Clark Eastern Legacy Study*. Completed for the National Park Service, 2007.
2. Robert Douthat Stoner, *A Seed Bed of the Republic: A Study of the Pioneers in the Upper (Southern) Valley of Virginia* ([Roanoke, VA]: By Author, 1962), 251.
3. Gene Crotty, *The Visits of Lewis & Clark to Fincastle, Virginia* ([Roanoke, VA]: The History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, 2003), 9; James J. Holmberg, ed., *Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 277; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Touchstone Edition, 1997), 227. Ambrose states that Julia (Judith) Hancock was Clark's cousin, but no local records substantiate this relationship (Crotty, 9). It may be that Lt. Strother was Julia's cousin, since her mother, Margaret, was a Strother (see Crotty 45).
4. Stoner, 295. It is noted that in 1801, Clark was 31 years old and Julia was about 10 years old. The age difference between Clark and Julia is striking, although perhaps not too uncommon for the period. When Strother married Caroline, he was 31 and she was 17. Perhaps Hancock saw good matches for his daughters in the two Army men. Crotty also notes that Strother very likely would have joined his friends on the Westward Expedition, but was barred due to the Corps' "single-men only" policy. Crotty, 14.
5. Donald Jackson, ed. *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 60.
6. Salmon, 4.
7. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *Lewis and Clark Journals: An American Epic of Discovery* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 116. Judith River is located in Fergus County, Montana. The river formerly was known as the Big Horn.
8. Jackson, 319-324. N.B.: Spellings from the original letters have been altered to modern conventions to assist the reader.
9. Ambrose, 417.
10. Ambrose, 422; Crotty, 39-40; Holmberg, 119. Santillane (011-0032; 218-0051-0195) is located just outside of the Fincastle Historic District boundaries, but is listed individually in the National Register. The present house known as Santillane is a Greek Revival-style, two-story, brick dwelling probably built around 1830. Some research suggests that Hancock did not build a house at this site, while other

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historians contend that Hancock's house was on this site, but may have been an earlier, late-eighteenth-century house that burned or was modified. Local legend holds that Santillane was Hancock's home and was the site of the Clark-Hancock wedding. See Beth Logan, "Henry Bowyer, Not George Hancock, Built 19<sup>th</sup> Century Santillane" in *Journal of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia* Vol. 14, No. 1(1999):13-21.

11. The 1773 courthouse was replaced around 1818 with a new courthouse built at the same site and according to plans provided by Thomas Jefferson. Col. James Breckinridge requested the plans from Jefferson around 1811. The second courthouse remained until 1970, when a fire gutted the building leaving only the exterior walls and front columns. The restored courthouse, completed in 1975, incorporated the extant walls and columns into the new design, which closely resembled the earlier courthouse on the exterior. The courthouse is a contributing element (218-0005/218-0051-0133) to the Fincastle Historic District.

12. Jackson, 358.

13. Jackson, 359-360.

14. Holmberg, 119-126.

15. Jackson, 387-388. Clark states in his reply to Lewis (written some time after March 15, 1807) that "Frazier overtook me at Col. H. [Hancock] with a letter from you to me one to Mr. Bates, and a commission of B G of the Milit[i]a of Louisiana."

16. Jackson, 388. Although Clark had spent long visits with the Hancocks, he expressed to Lewis his surprise to find that Col. Hancock "is also a Fed which I did not know until the other day. I took him to be a good plain republican. At all events I will hope to introduce some substantial sincere republicanism into some branch of the family about January."

17. Ambrose, 440-441; Crotty 55. Crotty (54) speculates that the Lewis brothers would have stayed with the Prestons at Greenfield or in a Fincastle tavern. The Hancock home would have been close to Grove Hill, which was located just northwest of Fincastle, and would have provided a convenient "headquarters" for their assignment. Most historians indicate that Lewis may have "come on too strong" and frightened Letitia away. She married Robert Gamble of Richmond six months later (Ambrose 449). Lewis later wrote to his friend Preston detailing his heartbreak at losing Letitia.

18. Crotty, 16, 59. The closeness of the friendship between Clark and Preston is evidenced by Preston's pledge of security for Clark's marriage license to Julia and by Clark's naming his second son William Preston Clark. The two friends grew even closer as in-laws. Clark's marriage license, bond, and invitation are on file in the Clerk of the Court's Office, Fincastle, Virginia.

19. Ambrose, 448; Holmberg, 193; Crotty, 69. After a short period, Lewis moved out of the house, but continued to take meals with the Clarks.

20. Jackson, 216-228; Crotty, 71-75.

21. Holmberg, 233-237; Jackson 494. Clark soon learned that Lewis had done nothing with regard to publishing the journals.

22. Holmberg, 497-545. This section of Clark's letters contains "The Biddle Notes," which is a compilation of Biddle's notes on subjects relating to the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Biddle probably arrived in Fincastle during the last week of March and left on April 14.

23. Jackson, 578, 581-582; Crotty, 86.

24. Crotty 86-89.