

175th anniversary of expedition

Bodmer's 'Vanishing Frontier' images put North Dakota on global platform



Bodmer's "Mih-Tutta-Hangkusch, a Mandan Village" depicts the village adjacent to Fort Clark, with Mandan women ready to set out in their "bull boats" in the foreground.

By Andrea Winkjer Collin

Three decades after the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery made its epic journey across the United States, another expedition traveled the same 3,000 miles on the Upper Missouri River from St. Louis to Fort McKenzie near Great Falls, Montana.

They spent approximately seven months in what is now North Dakota at Fort Clark Trading Post near present-day Washburn and Fort Union Trading Post near present-day Williston.

The key figures on this 1832-1834 expedition were German naturalist-explorer Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuweid and a 22-year-old painter named Karl Bodmer. Maximilian, a trained scientific observer, kept a detailed journal and collected natu-

ral history specimens. Bodmer sketched and painted scenes of everyday Plains Indian life, Indian portraits and landscapes along the Missouri.

Combined, their works present a vivid word and picture account of their journey to the upper Midwest frontier, and are considered one of the most complete and reliable eyewitness accounts of the Upper Missouri Indian cultures, says David Borlaug, president of the North Dakota Lewis & Clark Fort Mandan Foundation in Washburn. Its Center is one of only six galleries in the world to have on display the complete set of the 81 watercolor prints Bodmer painted from the trip.

These images are often used to illustrate the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Borlaug says, because they are from the same generation of Man-



Mato-Tope, a Mandan chief.

dan and Hidatsa Indians that Lewis and Clark met. Chief Four Bears, for example, was 10 years old when he met Lewis and Clark, and he was one of the prominent Mandan leaders Maximilian and Bodmer met.

“Lewis and Clark could have benefited from having someone like Bodmer on their expedition,” Borlaug says. “He proved himself to be a remarkable artist, who painted exactly what he saw. His work gives a snapshot of this area before the changes that came with the railroad and homesteaders.”

Of Bodmer’s 81 images, more than a third are from what is present-day North Dakota, with 22 from Fort Clark and 16 from Fort Union. “These images put our state on a global platform,” says Borlaug. “Karl Bodmer’s America is



Bodmer’s “Encampment of the Travellers on the Missouri” provides an image along the lower Missouri River.

North Dakota.”

The official bicentennial commemoration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition between 2003 and 2006 was the impetus for the development of the North Dakota Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, as well as other destinations in the state, Borlaug says. “But it was only one chapter in the history of the area. We hope to expand our interpretation

of other chapters now, such as the fur trade era, which was thriving during the Maximilian-Bodmer Expedition.”

To better interpret this history, the Lewis & Clark Fort Mandan Foundation has established The Dakota Institute to study other significant issues relating to the past, present and future of North Dakota.

The Institute’s first project is a symposium on Maximil-



“Fort Clark on the Missouri” was painted in February of 1834 by Karl Bodmer. All 81 of his aquatints are currently on display at the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center in Washburn.



Clay Jenkinson, at left, and David Borlaug, right, visited with Prince Carl and Princess Isabella ZuWied at their palace in NeuWied, Germany. The family is loaning artifacts for display at the Interpretive Center in Washburn.

ian and Bodmer in October. “I hope anyone interested in these fascinating stories that happened in our own backyard will attend,” says Borlaug. “It will be a chance to commemorate the historic nature of this expedition and to better appreciate what Bodmer captured in his art.”

Because there were so many people interested in being presenters at the symposium, Borlaug says a second one is being planned for April to cover additional topics. “This was really a magical contribution to our sense of place here that makes it such a compelling story.”

Symposium commemorates Maximilian and Bodmer visit

The 175th anniversary of the Maximilian-Bodmer expedition will be commemorated October 23 through 27 in Bismarck and Washburn. *The Travels of Maximilian and Bodmer: The Prince, the Painter and the Indians of the Upper Missouri, 1833-34*, will bring together world-class scholars from the United States and Germany to present this humanities-based program.

Moderated by humanities scholar Clay Jenkinson of Bismarck, symposium presenters will include three from Germany and Switzerland. They include Dr. Sonja Schierle, North American Curator of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany; Dr. Peter Bolz from the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, and Dr. Hartwig Isernhagen from the University of Basel in Switzerland.

Other presenters will be Dr. Elliot West, professor of history at the University of Arkansas; artist Michael Haynes; George Horse Capture, special assistant for cultural resources for the Museum of the American Indian; Gerard Baker, superintendent of Mount Rushmore National Me-

morial; Frederick Baker, Mandan/Hidatsa historian; Marilyn Hudson, administrator, Three Tribes Museum, New Town; Gary Moulton, editor of the 13-volume edition of the Lewis and Clark Journals; Dr. James Hanson, curator of history, Museum of the Fur Trade, Chadron, Nebraska, and Dr. Raymond Wood, professor emeritus, University of Missouri Department of Anthropology.

Participants will also tour Fort Clark, Knife River Indian Villages, the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center and Fort Mandan.

Registration information for the Symposium is available online at www.fortmandan.com or by calling toll free 877-462-8535.



“Pehriska-Ruhpa, a Minatarre Warrior, in the Customer of the Dog Danse,” is one of Bodmer’s most compelling portraits.