

# SEAMAN

THE DOG WHO EXPLORED THE WEST  
WITH LEWIS & CLARK



Gail Langer Karwoski

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AC

For Chester,  
*who encourages me as I paddle up this river of words.*

—GLK



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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

Meriwether Lewis and his co-captain William Clark opened up a whole new world.

Through the Louisiana Purchase of 1801, President Thomas Jefferson acquired a vast amount of land west of the Mississippi River. This purchase doubled the size of the national domain, and President Jefferson chose Meriwether Lewis to head an expedition that would explore the West and search out a route to the Pacific.

The journals of Lewis, Clark, and the other men of the Corps of Discovery—as this group came to be called—record an America that few other people would ever experience firsthand. These journals, one of America’s most valued treasures, capture a land poised at the brink of a period of explosive growth—a country in search of its national character and identity.

One of the earliest members of the Corps, a big shaggy Newfoundland dog by the name of Seaman, teamed up with Meriwether Lewis before the captain left the east coast of America. Seaman was as loyal a member of the Corps as any of the men. His faithful friendship and constant companionship undoubtedly brought comfort to the Corps members as their thoughts occasionally turned forlornly to their friends and families in their faraway homes.

Captain Lewis recorded a number of Seaman’s adventures, from being kidnapped by Indians to saving the captains from the charge of a confused and frightened buffalo. When trying to impress the native peoples they met, Lewis not only showed them many items of “modern” technology, such as magnifying glasses, compasses, and his repeat-firing airgun, but he also proudly demonstrated the cleverness, or “segacity,” of his dog, Seaman.

However, our knowledge about this remarkable dog has been slow in coming. When the Lewis and Clark journals were first published in 1814, in heavily edited form, they contained only five mentions of “the dog.” It wasn’t until ninety years later, in 1904, that the journals known at that time were finally published in a more extensive form. This edition revealed many more adventures of our furry hero, but still no name.

## S E A M A N

In 1916, editor Milo M. Quaife published two more recently discovered journals (Lewis's Ohio River journal and the journal of Sergeant John Ordway), and for the first time the world learned the name of Captain Lewis's dog. But Quaife, in trying to decipher the handwriting of Lewis and Ordway, decided that the name they had written looked most like "Scannon." For years people who spoke or wrote about Lewis's dog called him Scannon.

Decades later, in 1985, a historian named Donald Jackson took a closer look. As he studied Captain Lewis's journal entry for July 5, 1806, the historian noted that Lewis had named the stream near their camp Seaman's Creek. Jackson became curious about the origin of this name. He wondered if it should have been written as Scannon's Creek. After examining samples of Lewis's and Ordway's handwriting, Jackson decided that what Quaife thought was a *c* was an *e*, the *nn* was an *m*, and the *o* was an *a*. The dog's name was actually Seaman, a very appropriate name for a water-loving Newfoundland dog!

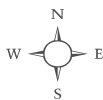
Over the years, other journal manuscripts have been discovered and published, and information about Seaman has been found in other sources. As interest in Lewis, Clark, and Seaman grows through the bicentennial years, our knowledge of these intrepid explorers will also continue to grow.

When you open up this book, you too can enter into this new world. Originally recorded by the quill pens of the men of the Corps of Discovery, the description of this extraordinary journey has been lovingly crafted into an accurate, interesting, and highly readable story by Gail Karwoski. Join Lewis, Clark, Seaman, and the others as they toil daily against the mighty currents of great rivers, as they meet and interact with native peoples, as they discover geologic formations and wildlife unknown to the scientists of their day, and as they experience the adventure and sudden danger waiting for them around nearly every bend.

*Jay Rasmussen*  
President, Oregon Chapter of the Lewis and Clark  
Trail Heritage Foundation



## CHAPTER ONE



# A DUCK, A DOG, AND A DEAL

*Pittsburgh—August, 1803*

**T**he huge black dog trotted cheerfully beside his owner. His long fur ruffled in the summer breeze blowing off the river. He held his head high to sniff the air. A hunter was standing on the riverbank ahead, just at the point where two rivers flowed together to form the Ohio River. The hunter's smell was unfamiliar—starched cotton shirt, new leather boots. The dog watched the stranger closely.

As soon as his owner stopped walking, the dog sat down. "Good job," his owner said, smiling. "When I stop walking, you sit." He stroked the dog's fur. "Nobody has to teach you manners, do they? They come natural to you."

The dog studied his owner's face, waiting for a command. But his owner was looking at the hunter on the riverbank. The dog followed his owner's gaze. The hunter raised his long rifle and aimed at a flock of ducks on the water.

*Crack!* The hunter fired and the ducks squawked and flew in a panic downriver. One duck floated limp on the water.

The dog's owner chuckled. "Let's have a little fun with that city fellow," he said as he slipped the rope off the dog's collar. "Get it!" he said.

Instantly, the dog bounded toward the water. He leaped into the river and swam to the limp duck. Picking up the duck in his mouth, the dog wheeled around and swam back toward the shore.

Grinning, his owner admired the dog's performance. The dog's spread forepaws stroked through the water like paddles. This dog was a natural swimmer. He moved with the grace of a finned creature.

When the dog climbed onto the riverbank, he shook off and trotted back, duck in mouth. Sitting in front of his owner, he waited for him to take the duck.

The hunter watched, astonished. He strode over to the dog's owner, his cheeks red with anger. "What is the meaning of this, sir?" he demanded. "Why did you send your dog to snatch the duck I just shot?"

The dog's owner put his hands on his hips and laughed. Of course, he never intended to keep the duck. He was just having himself a little joke, that's all. But that hunter looked plenty angry! It was a good thing his fancy rifle could only shoot one slug at a time before it had to be reloaded.

"Thought we'd save you a dunk in the river to get your bird!" he chuckled. He looked at his dog and said, "Give the man his duck."

The dog hesitated.

"That's right," the man said, pointing at the hunter. "Give. To him."

Obediently, the dog walked over, sat in front of the hunter, and waited for the duck to be taken from his mouth.

The hunter hesitated, suspicious. This dog's huge mound of a head was as high as a man's hip. Those powerful jaws could deliver a nasty bite.

"My name's Hanson. James Hanson," said the dog's owner, holding out his hand to introduce himself. "Ain't you the fellow who's come from Philadelphia to pick up a keelboat?"

The hunter's face relaxed, and he shook Hanson's hand. "I'm Meriwether Lewis. And yes, I've come to pick up the keelboat I

ordered from the shipyard here in Pittsburgh.” Lewis shook his head and grinned. “I have to admit you had me going there for a minute, Mr. Hanson.”

Lewis reached for the duck, and the dog gently released it. Turning it over, Lewis examined its feathers. “Seems your dog has a very soft mouth. Except for the spot where my slug entered, the duck isn’t damaged at all. I commend you for your skill as a trainer, Mr. Hanson.”

Hanson chuckled. “Aye, he has a soft mouth, that’s for sure.” He patted the dog. “But I can’t take much credit for his training. He watched his mama work, that’s how he learned. He took to the water right away, when he was still a fuzzy little pup, and he started retrieving by himself. ’Course I did train his mama. Always say she’s the finest working dog on the Ohio River.”

Lewis held out his hand to let the dog smell him. The dog sniffed the hunter’s fingers, and he recognized the familiar scents of gunpowder and river water.

Lewis gently stroked the dog’s head. The fur was dense and soft as velvet. “He’s a handsome animal, Mr. Hanson. Is he a Newfoundland?”

“He’s a Newfoundland, all right. Best dog a man can have on the water!” Hanson declared proudly.

Brushing his sandy hair from his eyes, Lewis studied the dog. Standing stiffly, with his legs ever so slightly bowed, Lewis held his chin in his hand. The way he stood, so straight, reminded Hanson of a soldier.

Finally, Lewis spoke. “Is this a young dog, Mr. Hanson?”

“He’s about a year old,” Hanson answered. “But if you’re asking if this dog’s for sale, I’m afraid I can’t oblige you. He’s been promised to a fellow who’s having a ship built here in Pittsburgh. A seagoing ship!” Hanson smiled. “I figure a dog that works this good on the river deserves the chance to work a seagoing ship.”

The dog looked back and forth at the men’s faces as they talked. He panted quietly, the tip of his pink tongue sticking out.

"I'd be glad to do business with you, though," Hanson added in a friendly voice. "I've bred this dog's mama to the same sire. Every one of his pups is a fine, healthy animal. Full-blooded Newfoundlands, they are. The new litter will be ready come fall. I'd be pleased to save one of the pups for you."

Suddenly Lewis spoke in a rush of words. "Mr. Hanson, would you be persuaded to part with this dog if I told you that I was also about to travel to the sea?"

Hanson looked skeptical. "Didn't you say you came to Pittsburgh to pick up a keelboat?"

Lewis nodded.

"A keelboat ain't no seagoing vessel," Hanson said. "It's made for river travel. For taking supplies up a river."

"What if I told you that I plan to take my keelboat upriver to the sea?"

"Mr. Lewis, I wasn't born yesterday!" Hanson exclaimed. "Ain't no way to get to the sea from Pittsburgh by going upriver. To get to the sea, you go down the Ohio to its mouth, then you go down the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean."

Lewis paused. "The Atlantic is not the only sea."

Hanson wrinkled his brow and squinted at Lewis.

"I intend to take my keelboat down the Ohio to its mouth, then up the Mississippi to the Missouri River," Lewis explained. "Then I'll go up the Missouri River to its source in the Rocky Mountains, where I'll look for the Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean!"

"I ain't never heard of anyone making such a trip," Hanson scoffed and started to turn away. But something about Lewis's face held him there. Something made Hanson think he was hearing the truth.

"Mr. Hanson, nobody has ever made such a trip before," Lewis said earnestly. "I've been chosen by President Thomas Jefferson to lead the first expedition to the western sea."

Hanson raised his eyebrows and stared at the young man.

## A D U C K , A D O G , A N D A D E A L

"I want to take this dog with me," Lewis continued. "I need a working dog. A dog that can retrieve game. An intelligent dog that learns quickly and can take commands. A dog that stays calm around strangers, but alert to danger. Your dog is just what I've been looking for. But I can't wait for the next litter of pups, because I'll be leaving as soon as my keelboat is ready." Lewis paused to get his breath.

"What do you say, Mr. Hanson?" Lewis continued. "I'm willing to pay your price."

Hanson hesitated. If what this fellow Lewis said was true—if he really was taking his orders from President Jefferson—then he might be willing to pay a handsome sum for a well-trained dog.

"I'll take twenty dollars for him," Hanson announced, "and not a penny less! As it is, the fellow that I've promised him to will be madder than a hornet. So don't even bother to tell me you want to bargain, Mr. Lewis. The deal is twenty dollars or no sale!"

"Twenty dollars, then," Lewis said without blinking an eye. He reached for his purse.

Hanson stood openmouthed. Twenty dollars was more than a man could earn in a month working at a farm near Pittsburgh, picking crops and mending fences from sunup to sundown six days a week! Why, with twenty dollars, Hanson could outfit himself and his five sons from head to foot, without his missus so much as picking up a sewing needle! Hanson grinned at his good fortune. It certainly wasn't every day that someone agreed to pay twenty dollars for a dog! And in cash, right on the spot.

Lewis handed Hanson the money, and Hanson counted it. Then Hanson handed Lewis the dog's rope.

The dog watched the men exchange the money. When Hanson handed Lewis the rope, the dog whined softly.

Lewis sat down next to the Newfoundland. The man's sandy-colored hair fell onto his forehead, and his fair cheeks rounded into a boyish smile. The dog wagged his tail. Lewis stroked the thick, soft fur on the dog's chest, and the dog licked Lewis's face.

## S E A M A N

“You say you’re going to take this dog to the Pacific Ocean on orders from President Jefferson?” Hanson repeated.

“That’s right, Mr. Hanson. As soon as my keelboat is ready, I’ll be leaving,” Lewis said. Hanson shook his head at the wonder of it. What a tale this would make, he thought to himself. Selling a dog for twenty whole dollars to a fellow who was going all the way to the Pacific Ocean! On the orders of none other than the president himself.

Hanson leaned down to stroke the dog. The dog sprang to his feet. “That’s all right,” Hanson said quietly. “You have a new owner now. Sit.”

The dog sat, but his eyes were glued to Hanson’s face.

Lewis fastened the rope to the dog’s collar. He put an arm around the dog’s shoulders and smoothed the soft fur around the dog’s ears. “It’s okay, boy,” he said in a comforting voice. “You’re my dog now. I’m going to take you with me to explore the West. You’ll get to swim every day. And retrieve game. And hunt whenever you want.”

The dog licked Lewis’s cheek. Hanson turned to leave.

“One thing more, sir,” Lewis called after him. “What name does this dog answer to?”

“Seaman,” Hanson replied slowly. Then he shrugged, a grin spreading across his face. “I named him Seaman ’cause I knew he’d be going to sea!”