

## **François Labiche: Metis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.** (d. 1829)

Labiche was a Metis of French and Omaha descent. He enlisted as a private with the Lewis and Clark expedition on May 16, 1804 at St. Charles, Missouri. In a Detachment Order dated May 26, 1804, both men were given assignments as boatmen. As Lewis wrote, "Labuche and Crusat will man the larboard bow oar alternately, and one not engaged at the oar will attend as the Bows-man, and when the attention of both these persons is necessary at the bow, their oar is to be maned by an idle hand on board."

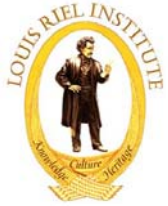
He was hired because of his translation skills and experience as a river boatman and Indian trader. LaBiche was an expert in English, French and several lower Missouri Indian languages. On August 6, 1804, Labiche was called upon to interpret during a council with the Oto Indians. Chief Petieit Villelu (Little Thief), who apparently had known Labiche during his former trading days, said, "I want ...Mr. La Bieche to make a piece with the Panis Loups [Skiri Pawnees]...he can Speake english & will doe well." On August 7, Labiche and four others were assigned by Clark to bring Moses Reed, a deserter, back into camp "with the order if he did not give up Peaceibly to (put him to) Death." Reed confessed that had deserted, and the captains "only Sentenced him to run the Gantlet four times throughn the Party & that each man with 9 switches Should punish him and for him not to be considered in future as one of the Party."

When the expedition came in contact with the Shoshone Indians at the Great Divide, Labiche was able to translate English into French for Charbonneau, who then translated it into Hidatsa for Sacagewea, who finally translated it into Shoshone. Labiche's translation was again helpful in September 1806 when the expedition passed through Teton Sioux territory.

In late November 1805, while the Corps was attempting to decide on a suitable winter camp location, Lewis, accompanied by Labiche, Drouillard, Colter, Reuben Field, and Shannon, explored the coast of what is now Young's Bay. It was during this trek that the crew discovered an inlet to the Neteul River (now the Lewis and Clark River). After the survey of the river's inland was complete, they determined that the area, with its abundant wild life and vegetation, would be a good place to set up camp. Within the next week-and-a-half, the entire Corps returned, building what would become Fort Clatsop, their winter camp among the Clatsop Indians.

In October 1806, after returning to St. Louis, Labiche and Sergeant Ordway were placed in charge of a pack train that was bound for the East and loaded with whatever "plants, seeds, bird skins, animal skeletons, and furs [that] had not been ruined in water-soaked caches." The Washington-bound party included Lewis and Clark, Mandan Indians, and Osage Indians.

He was also an excellent hunter. In August of 1804, Labiche interpreted for a meeting with Chief Petite Villelu, “Little Thief,” who had known Labiche when he previously traded with the Otoes. Labiche also interpreted in meetings with the Bois Brule and Teton Sioux. Following the expedition, Labiche accompanied Lewis to Washington D.C. to interpret for President Jefferson and visiting Indian Chiefs. Clark named the River Labiche (now the Hood River) in honour of François Labiche. In October of 1806, Labiche and John Ordway were in charge of transporting the Expedition’s scientific evidence to Washington D.C. Labiche was married to Genevieve Flore and they had seven children. He died in St. Louis in 1829.



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