

STATION 2: Yellow Corn

Unit: Women (Middle and High School)

At this station you will find:

- IMAGE: Portrait of Yellow Corn
- OBJECT: Agricultural Tools
- Information about Yellow Corn

Information about Yellow Corn

Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide excerpt

She [Yellow Corn] was the wife of Shehek-Shote, the chief of the Mandan village closest to the spot where the expedition wintered. Her husband held a public position dealing with war and diplomacy, and Lewis and Clark often crossed the river to speak to him in his earth lodge. What they did not know was that the house he lived in and the food he ate belonged to Yellow Corn and her family. The chief's children traced their descent through their mother's line, and belonged to her clan. With others of her age group, Yellow Corn was a member of women's societies that exercised sacred power over growing things, and she had the right to purchase knowledge of female mysteries like pottery and housebuilding.

On the return trip, she and her family traveled with the expedition to St. Louis and continued on to Washington, D.C.

Journal entry:

William Clark, Friday, August 16, 1806

“...we Sent for Mr. Jessomme and told him to use his influence to prevail on one of the Chiefs to accompany us and we would employ him. He informed us soon after that the big white Chief [Shehek-Shote] would go if we would take his wife & Son...this we wer obliged to agree to do.”

When her husband decided to accompany Lewis and Clark to Washington, D.C., Yellow Corn wanted to go along. Evidently, she wielded quite a lot of influence; it seems that the expedition did not particularly want to include her on the trek to Washington, but she went. She traveled to Washington, D.C., with her husband and met President Jefferson.

Because of difficulty involved with their return to the Mandan village, Yellow Corn and her family spent years with Euro-Americans.

One eyewitness, Augustus John Foster, described Yellow Corn at a performance of Indian rope dancers in Washington: she “sat by her husband with whom she talked in a whisper ... She had pretty features, a pale yellowish hue, bunches of earrings and her hair divided in the middle, a red line running right across from the back part of the forehead – tho’ no paint was on the face.”