

Student Reading: Drying and Pressing

Unit: Plants (Middle and High School)

Selection 1

Historian Gary Moulton describes the methods Lewis learned for pressing plants:

We can imagine how Lewis worked. He clipped or pruned plant parts or uprooted entire specimens, and placed them in a dry oilskin bag. Later, laying the plants flat on a specimen page, Lewis sandwiched them between pages made of blotting material. He recorded the collection locality, date, and habitat on the blotter paper itself, along with occasional comments on how the Native Americans ate or used the plants. Lewis then stacked the plants between two boards and tied the plant press together with straps. Lewis probably placed the plant press near the evening fire, where warm air helped dry the collection. Over the course of several days, water was squeezed from the plants, and, once dry, specimens were kept flat and dry in another press. Much later, other botanists glued the specimens to high-rag content herbarium sheets and stored them in protective cabinets in a museum.

Spamer, Earle E., and Richard M. McCourt. *The Lewis and Clark Herbarium*, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (PH-LC): Digital Imagery Study Set, 2002.

Selection 2

Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide, Carolyn Gilman

“Lewis said little about his collecting methods. He probably had a botanist’s specimen book—a bound book of unmarked sheets interspersed with blotting paper. After taking a clipping he placed it into the book, writing short notes on the date and place of collection and other interesting points, and then pressed it.”