President Jefferson and the Lewis and Clark Expedition

Louisiana Purchase
You recall that Spain acquired claim to territory west of the Mississippi River in 1763 as a result of the Seven Years' War. By the late 18th century, Spain's status as European power had declined and Napoleon was on the rise in France. He reacquired the Louisiana Territory from Spain in 1800. The United States feared his ambitions in North America after watching Napoleon's attempts to control all of Europe. Jefferson sent envoys to Napoleon to secure the vital port of New Orleans for the United States (the 1795 Pinckney Treaty with Spain had opened the port for American trade down the Mississippi River from the Ohio Valley). Napoleon shocked Jefferson when he offered all of Louisiana Territory for $15 million (825,000 sq. miles at $18/sq. mi. or 2.8 cents/acre).

When Jefferson purchased Louisiana Territory, he more than doubled the size of the United States, the largest peaceful acquisition of territory in United States history. Note that while in the Washington Administration, Jefferson had supported a strict constructionist view of the Constitution under which the federal government including the President should not assume powers not specified in the Constitution when he opposed Hamilton's fiscal plan. Do you see in Article II under the President's powers the authority to purchase land for the United States? No. With the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson allowed an expansive interpretation (loose construction) of his presidential powers.

Lewis and Clark Expedition
If you have ever visited Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello in Virginia then you have seen first-hand Jefferson's interest in natural history, his inventions, and also his slaves' quarters.

Here is the home page for Monticello, Jefferson's home:
http://www.monticello.org/

After the acquisition of Louisiana Territory, Jefferson secured congressional approval (and $2500 financing) of an expedition across it to find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean. Jefferson tasked his expedition leaders Meriwether Lewis and David Clark not only with finding that route but with learning about the American Indian people on the way as well as the flora and fauna. The expedition mapped its route, collected specimens, and members recorded journals that remain to this day invaluable sources.
on the land they crossed and the people they met.

Above is a map of the expedition's route, showing how Lewis and Clark diverged on the return and then reunited. Below are maps from the "Maps" folder of the United States in 1800 (before the purchase) and in 1810 to demonstrate the extent of the Louisiana Purchase.

The Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery left St. Louis in 1804, reached the Pacific in 1805, and returned to St. Louis in 1806. Though the bicentennial commemoration festivities have ended (note the use of "commemoration" rather than "celebration"), explore the Website below of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation and plan a visit to a site along the trail or a trek a section of Lewis and Clark's route.

http://www.lewisandclark.org/
Territorial Growth, United States: 1800 (before the Louisiana Purchase)

Territorial Growth, United States: 1810 (after the Louisiana Purchase)