GEORGE ROGERS CLARK NATIONAL MONUMENT

Vincennes, Indiana

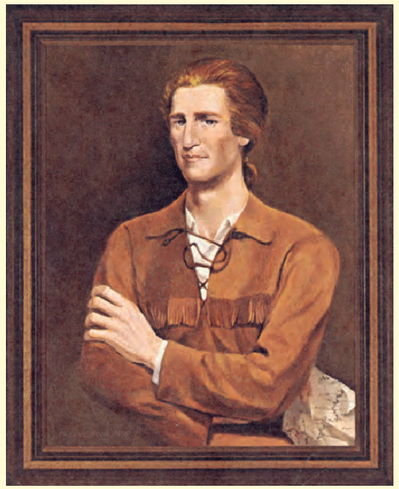
ZIMCO PUBLICATIONS

The most impressive monument you've never seen,
in an historic town you haven't visited,
honoring an American hero you've never heard of

George Rogers Clark (1752-1818) had qualities common among heroes of novels and adventure films but rare in real life. Six feet two inches tall with auburn hair, he cut a striking figure. A native of Virginia, he migrated to the wilderness beyond the Appalachian Mountains at age 20. Within three years he became a military leader in the Kentucky region. General Lafayette believed Clark second only to George Washington in military prowess.

A magnetic leader, persuasive orator, and master of psychological warfare, Clark had the capacity to plan and think strategically. He also understood Native tribal customs, habits of thought, and warfare.

Clark mounted a spirited defense of American emigrants to Kentucky Country, as the wesstern counties of Virginia were known in the late 1700s, He pave the way for weastern expansion, as did his brother William Clark's explorations of the Louisiana Territory. His successes hinged on an ability to craft alliances with the French against the British and their Native surrogates.



By 1775 when the long, bitter struggle for American independence began in the east, waves of emigrants had begun moving west. In the wild, remote country near present-day Lexington, Kentucky, then part of Virginia, about 300 resourceful men and women had carved a rough existence. Among them was George Rogers Clark, from a Charlottesville family of patriots.

British Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton, who commanded Fort Detroit, tried to stem the tide of westward emigrants. He recruited Native surrogates—already angry over the Americans' invasion of their lands—to attack the small forts and stations.

As the raids grew more frequent, Clark raised a citizen militia that fought back with ferocious vengeance. In the winter of 1777-78, he persuaded Gov. Patrick Henry of Virginia to let him carry the revolution west into British-controlled territory north of the Ohio River. Clark's public orders were to protect the Kentucky frontier. His secret instructions from the governor were to forge an alliance with the French nationals who lived in the British-controlled posts at Kaskaskia and Cahokia (in present-day Illinois). If Clark succeeded in turning the French against the British, the ultimate prize—Fort Detroit, key to the contested region west of the Appalachians—would lie within his grasp.

In May 1778, Clark left western Pennsylvania with 150 volunteers and a daring plan to take Britain's outposts north of the Ohio River. He floated west 900 miles to Corn Island (near present-day Louisville, Kentucky), then marched 120 miles further west across present-day southwestern Illinois to Kaskaskia, on the Mississippi River.

On the evening of July 4 Clark approached the village. He took it without firing a shot, by disclosing the recent French-American alliance and promising the villagers religious freedom. He sent Capt. Joseph Bowman and a group of Kaskaskians northwest to Cahokia where residents also embraced the patriot cause. Clark then traveled northeast to Vincennes and Fort Sackville. Father Pierre Gibault, vicar-general of the Illinois country and head of Kaskaskia's Roman Catholic mission, helped sway Vincenne's French inhabitants and militia to switch their allegiance to the American side. Placing Capt. Leonard Helm in command of Fort Sackville, Clark then moved west to Kaskaskia. From this base he sought and secured hostile Native tribes' temporary neutrality.

Built in 1931 in classic Greek style, the granite exterior 80-feet-high is encircled by 16 columns supporting a massive round roof. Inside, a bronze state of George Rogers Clark stands on a marble pedestal. The rest of the ceiling and rotunda walls are Indiana limestone. The floor is Tennessee marble. Seven murals depict Clark's role in winning the region west of the Appalachians. The architect was Frederick Hirons; the sculptor Hermon A. MacNeil; the painter Ezra Winter. The monument sits in a park maintained by the National Park Service alongside the Wabash River in Vincennes, Indiana.

Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

Clark's web of intrigue did not hold for long. When the British learned that Fort Sackville had fallen into American hands, Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton headed south from Fort Detroit with a small force of British regulars and still-loyal French militia. Hundreds of Native warriors still allied to the British joined him along the way. Overwhelmed, the French renounced their recent alliance with the Americans. Capt. Helm surrendered to the British in December 1778. Hamilton then dismissed most of his Native allies and French militia for the winter. It proved to be a tactical error.

When the Italian merchant-trader Francis Vigo informed the Americans that Fort Sackville was vulnerable, Clark seized the opportunity. With 170 volunteers, he marched across 160 miles of "drowned country," at times wading through icy, shoulder-height water. Clark's men took positions around the fort and opened fire on the surprised British, who surrendered.

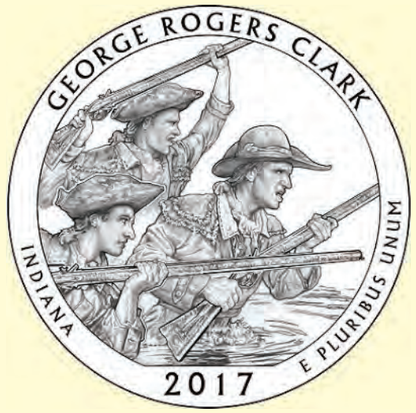
Despite his recapture of Fort Sackville, Clark never reached Fort Detroit, but he weakened British resolve. In 1783 the United States and Britain acquired the lands west of the Appalachians in the Treaty of Paris. Four years later, the Continental Congress established the Northwest Territory, composed of present-day Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and eastern Minnesota.

It was an uneasy peace. North of hte Ohio River, Native resistance continued to slow westward migration. In 1794 American General Anthony Wayne's troops defeated warriors from several tribes at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, in present-day Ohio. Westward emigration surged. By 1800 the Northwest Territory population had swelled to nearly 60,000.

Two new Shawnee leaders—Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa—arose to lead a new wave of Native resistance. It culminated in the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811, when William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, defeated Tenskwatawa. The final defeat of the British and their Native surrogates in the Northwest Territory did not come until the War of 1812.

The 1929 George Rogers Clark commemorative 2-cent stamp.

The George Rogers Clark commemorative U.S. Mint quarter design, to be released in December 2017.



Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

George Rogers Clark was the heroic Revolutionary War commander who led a small force of frontiersmen through the freezing waters of the Illinois country to capture British-held Fort Sackville at Vincennes during February 1779. Clark's second-in-command, Captain Joseph Bowman, kept a journal throughout the entirety of the march to Vincennes. It can found here. Although this was Clark's most dramatic accomplishment, he continued his exertions on behalf of the American cause in the West during the entire war. Nine months after capturing Fort Sackville, Clark wrote a letter to George Mason chronicling his adventures against the British and the daring mid-winter march. That letter can be found here. These efforts included building forts on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, repelling a British-led Indian attack in the Illinois country, and leading two major expeditions that destroyed the major Shawnee towns in the Ohio country. Despite these accomplishments, the second half of his life witnessed a sad decline in his fortunes and health.

During September 1783, the Revolutionary War officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris and Clark returned to private life. His health continued to deteriorate and he died on February 13, 1818, at the age of 65. On February 15, a cold and stormy day, Clark's body was laid to rest in a ceremony attended by a large crowd. In his funeral oration, Judge John Rowan succinctly summed up the stature and importance of George Rogers Clark during the critical years on the Trans-Appalachian frontier: "The mighty oak of the forest has fallen, and now the scrub oaks sprout all around."

Kentucky: Entering the Great Valley

George Rogers Clark was born in Virginia in 1752. During 1772, at the age of 20, he moved west to the Ohio River Valley. He was quickly recognized as a leader in this area. By 1777, he was in command of the Kentucky Militia. This mural depicts George Rogers Clark on a white horse leading settlers across the Allegheny Mountains. By the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, significant numbers of American settlers had begun to make their homes in the western frontier. However, this area, like the 13 original colonies, was still under British control. The Proclamation Line of 1763 had not held, and British forces were about to find out how their limited resources would be able to contend with these western American settlers.

This and Following Pages:
Seven Murals inside the memorial by painter Ezra Winter on Belgian linen, 16x28 feet.

Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

Cahokia: Peace or War with the Indians

This mural depicts George Rogers Clark in the late summer of 1778 in Cahokia, at a council he called with local Indian tribes in an effort to negotiate peace. By convincing Hamilton's Indian allies to switch sides, Clark could further diminish the resources available to the British. Although Clark‚Äôs forces at this council were far outnumbered by the Indians in attendance, he impressed the warriors with his bold manner. Many of the leaders of these tribes were convinced to accept the white belt of peace rather than the red belt of war. While this council certainly strengthened Clark's efforts, there were still many tribes who chose to continue their alliances with the British.

Wabash: Through Wilderness and Flood

Clark knew his small force of frontiersmen could not succeed in the taking of Fort Sackville once spring arrived and Hamilton's Indian allies returned to Vincennes from their winter homes. Clark‚Äôs only hope of taking the fort lay in a surprise midwinter attack. Clark set out with approximately 170 of his men and began a 160 mile trek across the freezing plains of southern Illinois. A midwinter thaw had set in, causing a torrent of water to come down from the north. This meant that the last 10 days of this 19 day journey were spent in icy cold water that at times reached the men's necks. Finally, on February 23, Clark and his men arrived at Fort Sackville.

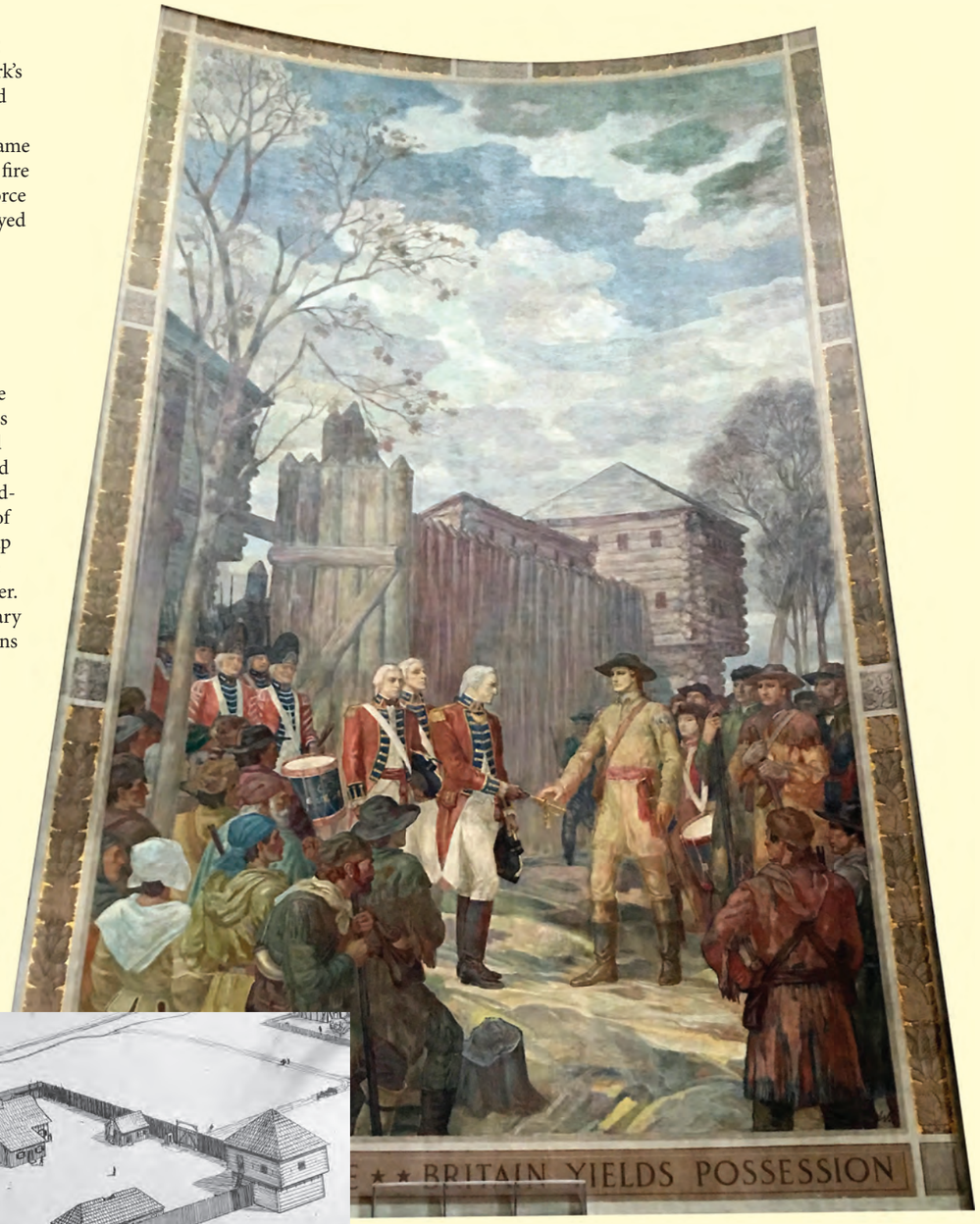
Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

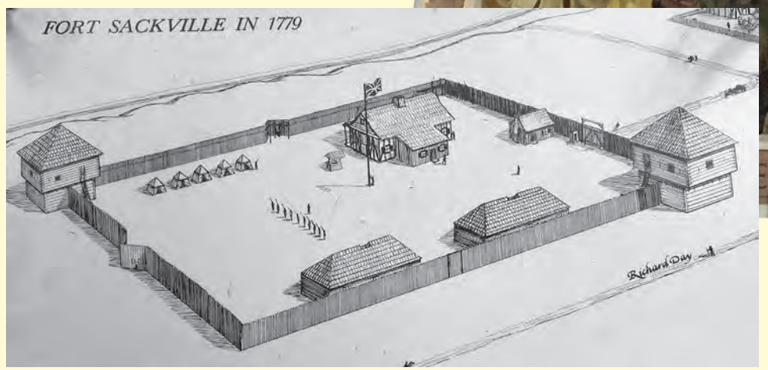
Vincennes: The British Barrier to the West

Upon arriving in Vincennes on February 23, 1779, Clark's men, tired, cold, wet, and starving from the lack of food on the march, were provided for by the local French inhabitants who greeted the Americans warmly. That same evening, Clark's men surrounded the fort and began to fire on it. Clark knew it would still be tricky for his small force to intimidate Hamilton into surrendering, so he employed several different strategies to strengthen his position.

Fort Sackville: Britain Yields Possession

This mural shows the formal surrender of Fort Sackville by British Lt. Governor Henry Hamilton to George Rogers Clark on February 25, 1779. Since Hamilton was not a military officer, it is not known whether he would have had a uniform or a ceremonial sword that he could have handed over to Clark during the surrender. Regardless of those details, it is undisputed that this moment of surrender represented so much more than just giving up a little one acre fort on the frontier. Clark's victory here completely changed the dynamics of the western frontier. Clark succeeded in his plan to disrupt the British military presence in the western territory and confuse the Indians about where to bestow their loyalty.





Marietta: The Northwest, a new territory
Winthrop Sargent, Secretary of the Northwest Territory, reads the Northwest Ordinance to settlers of the region.

St. Louis: The way opened to the Pacific
On Oct. 1, 1804, the United States took possesion of the upper part of the Louisiana Purchase. In the background, the flag of Spain, to which Louisiana belonged from 1763 to 1801, has been lowered to allow the French to salute their tricolor. The flag of France was, in turn, lowered to make way for the Stars and Stripes

Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

The beautiful arched Lincoln Memorial Bridge spans the Wabash River at Vincennes, as viewed from the Clark Memorial. Just across the river, in Illinois, stands the impressive limestone and bronze Lincoln Trail Monument by Nellie Verne Walker depicting a young Abraham Lincoln and his family entering the prairie state in March of 1830. The statue of Italian-born Francis Vigo, a wealthy St. Louis merchant who greatly assisted Clark in his mission, sits along the river, just out of view to the left of the panorama. The sculptor was John Angel. Also at the site are the Old Cathedral Complex, dating to 1749, and the statue of Father Pierre Gibault by Albin Polasek.

Text by National Park Service. All photos by Mark Zimmerman, with Apple iPhone 6.

The wooden sculpture of Chief Tecumseh sits in Vincennes at the northern end of Hart Street.

Grouseland is the magnificent brick home (1803-04) of Indiana Territory Governor William Henry Harrison, the heroic victor of the Battle of Tippecanoe (near present-day Lafayette, Ind.) and the 9th President of the United States. Harrison's inaugural address was lengthiest in history; the newly elected President caught pneumonia and died 30 days later, the shortest term of any U.S. President. He was succeded by Vice-President John Tyler.

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