

# George Rogers Clark

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, INDIANA



National Parks Centennial 1872-1972

*The George Rogers Clark Memorial, on the site of old Fort Sackville in Vincennes, Ind., commemorates the George Rogers Clark Expedition of 1778-79 and its decisive consequences on the winning of the Old Northwest. Near the memorial the white spired St. Francis Xavier Church is a prominent reminder of French Catholic religious roots that were as important to the beginnings of the America Nation as the Protestant energies behind English expansion across the Appalachians. At the other end of town, the Territorial Capitol, the Governor's House, and the Printing Office (where newspapers were printed as early as 1804) symbolize the political and cultural forces which wove together the English-American and French colonial strands of the Old Northwest into a new democratic fabric.*

During the opening years of the American Revolution, the British dominated the Old Northwest (present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) from their military post at Detroit. Already angered at the white man's intrusion into their lands, the Indians allied themselves with the redcoats and devastated American frontier settlements.

But in 1777 a fiery young Virginian, George Rogers Clark, appeared who would end Britain's dominance of the region. After suffering with his fellow frontiersmen in their wilderness stations, he decided that Indian attacks could best

be ended by striking against the British posts north of the Ohio. During the winter of 1777-78, Clark persuaded Gov. Patrick Henry and the Virginia legislature to authorize an expedition against the villages of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes. He believed that the French inhabitants would aid his cause; the Virginian authorities expected that the expedition would bolster their State's claim to the Northwest.

Clark received a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the Virginia militia, an authorization to raise 350 men, and permission to spend about \$6,000 for supplies and ammunition. He also received two sets of orders. The public directions ordered him to defend Kentucky; the secret instructions ordered him to attack Kaskaskia, and if possible, Detroit.

On June 26, 1778, Clark set out from Corn Island, 10 miles below the Falls of the Ohio, with 175 well-trained Indian fighters. Disembarking at Fort Massac, Clark's column cut across country rather than risk discovery along the river route. The little army reached Kaskaskia on July 4, approaching so stealthily that the English commander was unaware of its presence until the Americans pushed open the gates of the palisade. The British had no choice but to surrender, for Clark won over the French inhabitants by telling them of the newly concluded alliance between the United States and France.

Cahokia also capitulated without resistance; a little later Vincennes surrendered—in good part because Father Pierre Gibault, the vicar-general of the French in the Illinois region, journeyed there and induced the village to accept American rule.

But Clark would still have to fight for Vincennes. Hearing that the lightly held post had fallen to the Americans, a British contingent set out from Detroit to retake it. Reinforced with Indian tribes along the way, this contingent was able to force Capt. Leonard Helm and his one-man garrison to surrender Vincennes on December 17, 1778.

Learning that Col. Henry Hamilton, the British commander, had released most of his fighting force after recapturing Vincennes, Clark prepared a mid-winter surprise. Francis Vigo (whose statue is on the banks of the Wabash) gave large sums of money for ammunition to be used by his forces. With 127 men (some 50 of them French), Clark started out from Kaskaskia on February 5, 1779 in an incredible march across 180 miles of "drowned country."

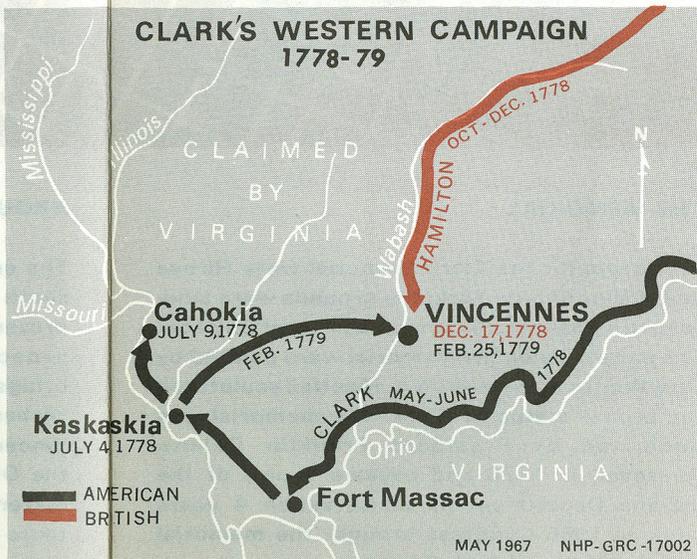
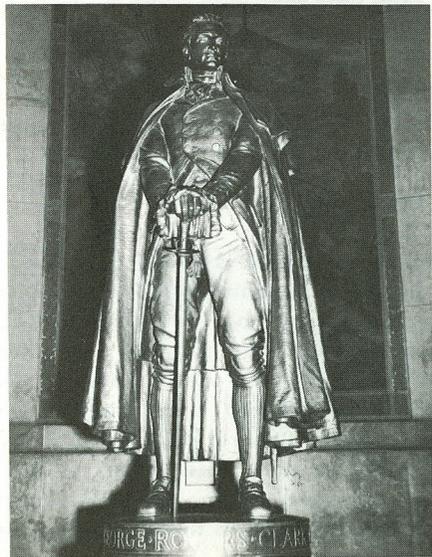
Wet, cold, and hungry, Clark and his men arrived at their destination on February 23. Taking up strategic positions around the fort, the Americans began firing on the surprised British. Unable to man their artillery because of Clark's sharpshooters, the British raised a flag of truce

over the fort on February 24th. Their offer of conditional surrender was refused, and fighting continued. Clark's threat to storm the fort finally brought about a parley between the two commanders. Formal surrender came on February 25, 1779.

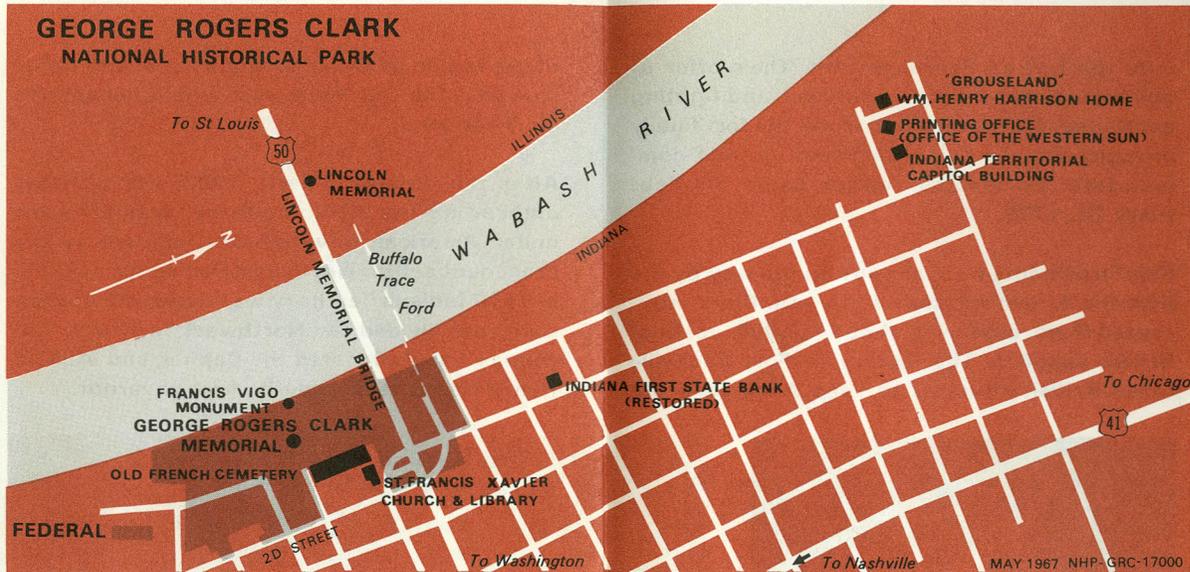
Reinforcements were already on the way by the time the British learned of the loss. Clark intercepted them, capturing about \$50,000 worth of British supplies. The victory at Fort Sackville foiled British attempts to keep Americans out

of the region of the Ohio and west of the Appalachians. The Old Northwest would henceforth be American.

After the Treaty of Paris, 1783, the territory embracing the "Ohio country" was brought under American governmental control by the precedent-setting Northwest Ordinance of 1787. In 1800 Indiana Territory was established when Congress divided the Northwest Territory. Vincennes was designated the Capital, and William Henry Harrison became its first governor.



## GEORGE ROGERS CLARK NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

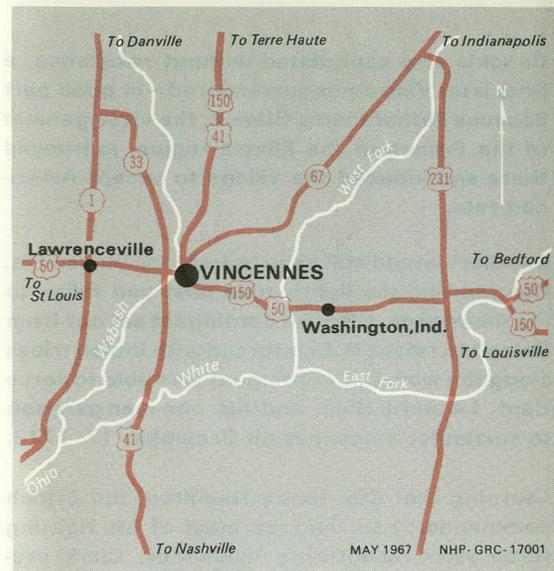


### THE MEMORIAL

Architects for the Clark Memorial were Hiron and Mellor of New York; the grounds were landscaped by Bennet, Parsons and Frost of Chicago. The murals inside the memorial were painted by Ezra Winter, and Hermon A. MacNeil sculptured the bronze statue of Clark. The memorial was dedicated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936 and became a unit of the Indiana Department of Conservation 4 years later. In 1966 Congress brought the memorial into the National Park System.

### ABOUT YOUR VISIT

The entrance to the park is on Second Street, south of U.S. 50, Vincennes, Ind. The park also preserves the site of Fort Sackville, the approaches to the Abraham Lincoln Memorial bridge, and the Buffalo Trace crossing of the Wabash River into Illinois. Other sites in the Vincennes area also illustrate the unfolding of the Old Northwest story. In summer, a "Trailblazer" train operated by Vincennes University tours these sites (shown on the accompanying map).



### ADMINISTRATION

George Rogers Clark National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great natural, historical, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of all the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Vincennes, Ind. 47591, is in immediate charge of the park.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

**National Park Service**  
**U. S. Department of the Interior**