

**ADMINISTRATION**

George Rogers Clark National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A park manager, whose address is Vincennes, IN 47591, is in immediate charge.

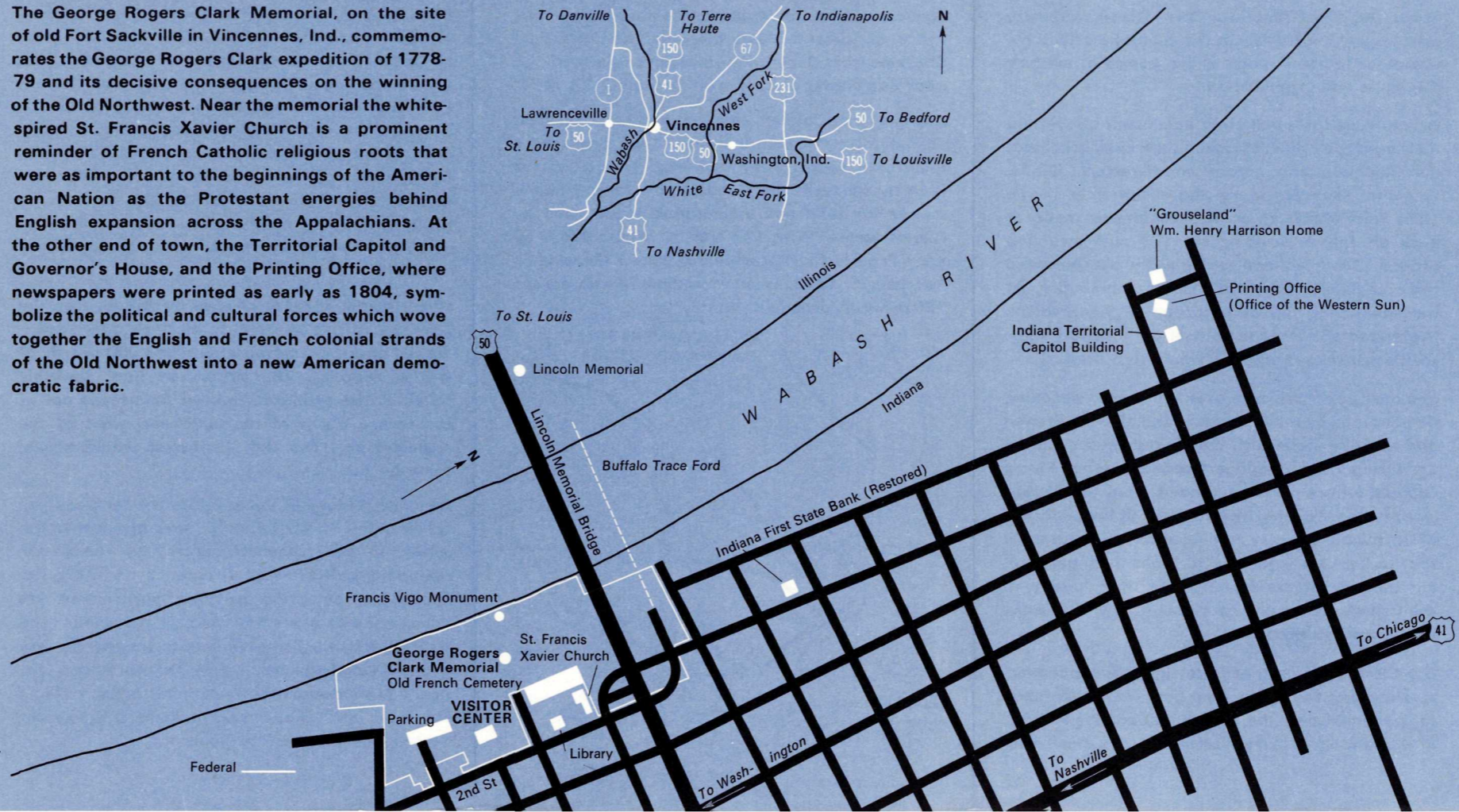
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, park and recreation areas, and for the wise use of all those resources. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

**National Park Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

# George Rogers Clark

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • INDIANA

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 American Nation as the Protestant energies behind English expansion across the Appalachians. At the other end of town, the Territorial Capitol and 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 and French colonial strands of the Old Northwest into a new American democratic fabric.



**THE MEMORIAL**

Architects for the Clark Memorial were Hiron & Mellor of New York; the grounds were landscaped by Bennet, Parsons & 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 four years later. In 1966 Congress made the memorial a part of the National Park System.

**ABOUT YOUR VISIT**

The entrance to the park is on Second Street, south of U.S. 50. The park 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 the sites shown on the map.

**FOR YOUR SAFETY**

Please do not walk on the seawall and do not run on the steps in front of the memorial.

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 frontier settlements.

In 1777, the Americans found a man who would end Britain's dominance of the region. George Rogers Clark, a fiery young Virginian, 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 of those villages would aid his cause; the Virginia 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.

In the spring of 1778, Clark gathered his men and supplies in western Pennsylvania, and boated

down the Ohio River to Corn Island, opposite present-day Louisville. On the island he drilled his volunteer Indian fighters in the basics of military discipline and organization.

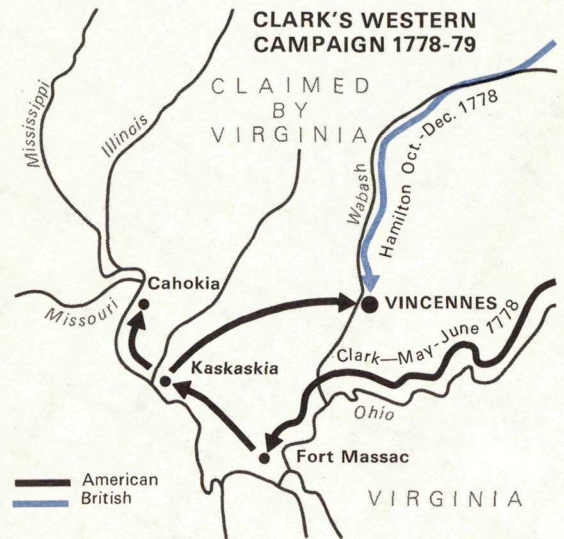
Late in June the small army again cast off. Hiding their boats near Fort Massac, Clark and his column marched overland across southwestern Illinois to avoid discovery along the easier river route. Their final approach to Kaskaskia was made at dusk on July 4. Dividing his 170 men into two groups, Clark led one and quickly overpowered the completely surprised British commander. At the same time the other group of Kentuckians frightened all resistance out of the villagers. Kaskaskia was taken without a single shot fired.

The next day Clark won over the French-speaking Kaskaskians by telling them of the alliance France had recently made with the United States and by promising them religious freedom. Father Pierre Gibault, whose parish extended from the Mississippi to the Wabash, helped Clark in his conquest of the Illinois Country immeasurably. Gibault went first to Cahokia, and then to Vincennes, persuading the inhabitants to renounce their loyalty to the British crown and to swear a new allegiance to the American cause.

But Clark would still have to fight for Vincennes. Hearing that the lightly held post there had fallen to the Americans, the British lieutenant-governor at Detroit, Col. Henry Hamilton, led a small mili-

tary contingent to retake it. Reinforced by hundreds of Indians along the way, he took Fort Sackville from Capt. Leonard Helm's four-man garrison as a matter of course on December 17, 1778.

Learning that Colonel Hamilton had released most of his Indian allies until spring, Clark prepared a mid-winter surprise. Francis Vigo (whose statue is on the banks of the Wabash) gave large sums of money for food and ammunition to be used by Clark's forces. With 127 men, of whom about 50 were 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 Fort Sackville, 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 24. 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 north 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. The seat of the temporary territorial government was established at Marietta, Ohio, in the same year. In 1800 Indiana Territory was formed when Congress divided the Northwest Territory, and Vincennes was designated the capital. William Henry Harrison, later to be ninth President of the United States, became the first governor.



Only four known portraits of George Rogers Clark exist. This drawing was made from the portrait that hangs in the Governor's Mansion in Richmond. Clark came from a distinguished family in Albemarle County, Va., also home to Thomas Jefferson. Clark's younger brother, William, accompanied Meriwether Lewis, on the famous 1804-6 expedition to survey the Louisiana Territory.