



## Later Life of George Rogers Clark



George Rogers Clark is remembered as 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 in February 1779. 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. 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.

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### Clark's military career continues

In September 1783, the Revolutionary War officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris and Clark returned to private life. Following the war, Clark served as chairman of a board of commissioners that allotted lands across the Ohio River from Louisville to those individuals who had taken part in his 1778 and 1779 campaigns. He also was appointed a commissioner to make treaties with the tribes north of the Ohio River that were continuing their raids into Kentucky. In 1786, after it became apparent that the treaties were

ineffective, Clark was requested by the Kentucky and Virginia authorities to lead a retaliatory expedition against the tribes on the Wabash River. From the beginning, however, Clark was plagued by questions of his authority and by the unruly behavior of the troops. After proceeding along the Wabash River north of Vincennes, a large portion of the men mutinied. Clark returned to Vincennes and established a garrison to protect this outpost before returning to Kentucky.

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### In Spanish Territory

This expedition was the low point of Clark's career. Soon he became the victim of a deliberate campaign to ruin his reputation. Hounded too by creditors, Clark turned to a series of projects in an attempt to recoup his fortune. The first of these undertakings was to start a colony across the Mississippi River in Spanish Louisiana with the consent of the Spanish government. When this consent was not given, Clark made preparations to establish a colony of American adventurers in Spanish

territory near Natchez, but President Washington issued a proclamation against this project. In 1793, Clark agreed to accept a French commission as major-general and lead an expedition of American frontiersmen against Spanish Louisiana. This venture also failed when Washington again issued a proclamation against American citizens invading foreign territory. In 1798 the plan was resurrected, but once more came to naught.

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### Finally recognized

In 1803, at the age of 51, Clark moved from Louisville across the Ohio River to Clarksville. Six years later he suffered a stroke of paralysis and also the amputation of his left leg. He returned to Louisville where he lived with his sister, Lucy Croghan at Locust Grove. In 1812, in belated recognition of Revolutionary War services, the General Assembly of Virginia granted Clark a sword and half pay of \$400 a year. His health continued to deteriorate and he died on February 13, 1818, at the age of 66.

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.**"