

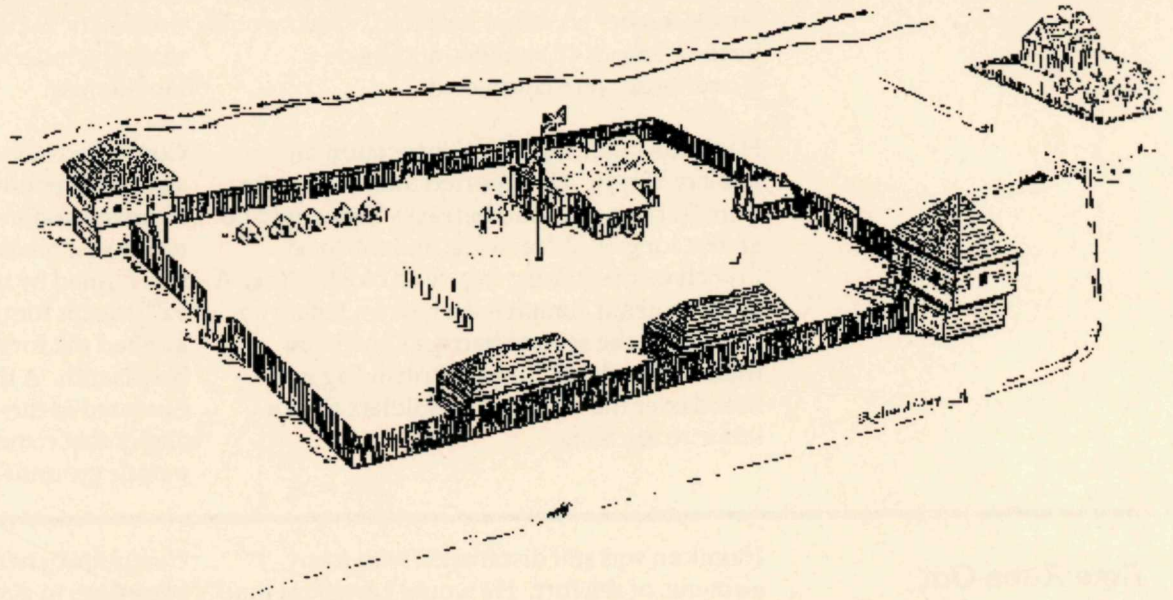
George Rogers Clark

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

George Rogers Clark
National Historical Park



Fort Sackville



A Frontier Outpost

Fort Sackville was a British outpost located in the frontier settlement of Vincennes. Begun during 1777 and named for a British government official, it was one of several forts built by the French, British or Americans from 1732 to 1813 in this important frontier settlement.

British Occupation

British Lieutenant Governor Edward Abbott arrived in Vincennes on May 19, 1777, and immediately organized the villagers into three companies of militia. Shortly after his arrival, Abbott was alarmed by a number of Indians who freely roamed the town. As a result, a courier was sent to Kaskaskia with orders for Commander Philippe de Rocheblave, to send four pieces of artillery from Fort Gage. Abbott then ordered a stockade built around the two-story headquarters building. Fatigue details composed of Vincennes militia and soldiers from Detroit completed the stockade by fall.

Abbott named the fort "Sackville" in honor of Lord George Germain who had been known as Lord Sackville from 1720 until 1770. The stockade was quadrangular in shape with four sides of different lengths. The west wall was approximately 35 feet from the Wabash River. The wall was 215 feet in length. The main street or north side was 190 feet in length and a gate within this wall aligned with St. Louis Street (today's First Street). The south wall was 165 feet, while the east side, which faced the

Catholic Church, was 203 feet long. The logs of the stockade walls were leveled at 11 feet and midway along each wall a salient angle with shooting platforms was constructed. Abbott's two-story quarters were located in the northeast part of the fort. After laying the foundation for Fort Sackville, Abbott left Vincennes on February 5, 1778.

On December 17, 1778, Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton, Abbott's successor, arrived with companies of British soldiers, French militia from Detroit and Indian allies. Hamilton was dismayed at the condition of the fort. Work parties immediately turned out to correct the deficiencies. At first Hamilton planned to take the walls down and build a new triangular fort with a blockhouse at each corner. Major Jehu Hay, Hamilton's second in command, offered an idea that would prove to be less expensive and more easily defended. Hay's plan called for leaving the stockade as it was and constructing two blockhouses. One blockhouse would be at the northeast angle the other at the southwest.

Rebuilding a Fort

Work progressed quickly on the fort. British soldiers built a powder magazine and all the King's gunpowder was safely stored. Gunpowder also was collected from the inhabitants and was stored in the fort. Unbeknownst to Hamilton, some inhabitants had hidden gunpowder (powder that would prove indispensable to Clark's invading army). On December 28, a new barracks, which would be the home of 50 soldiers, and a gate guardhouse were completed.

Hamilton made an official inspection on January 6, 1779. He reported that carpenters were framing a second barracks that would be 40 feet long by 18 feet wide, and the local French were squaring logs for a blockhouse. A six-man detail completed a well on January 7. By the 15th, the second barracks had been framed. On the 18th, a new British flag was raised over the fort and the soldiers fired a salute to the King.

Hamilton's report to his superiors on January 27 stated that timber and scantling for one of the blockhouses was finished and ready for raising and that the second barracks had been clapboard. The next day, the southwest blockhouse was erected. This blockhouse was musket proof and had five gun ports for a cannon; its lower level was drilled for the defenders' muskets. On January 30, one of the three-pounder cannons was mounted in this blockhouse.

Continued labor throughout the 9th and 10th saw the two unnecessary salient angles removed and new straight walls installed. The northwest blockhouse, begun on February 6, was framed by the 18th and completed on the 22nd except for the hanging of five shutters that awaited the forging of ironwork by the blacksmith. A three-pounder cannon was mounted in this blockhouse. The two salient angles that remained were loop holed. The parade grounds were graveled.

Time Runs Out

Hamilton was still dissatisfied with many elements of the fort. He would have little time to think about such things. George Rogers Clark would attack February 23, 1779. In his journal, Hamilton states reasons he considered for surrender, "The Stockades had originally been so ill set up, that a man might pass his

closed fist between them, which gave a great advantage to people armed with rifles- The Fort was nearly surrounded by houses or other buildings . . . - The N.E. Angle of the fort projected over the sandy bank of the river, & could have been undermined by the assailants under cover."

The Surrender

The Americans renamed the fort in honor of the Virginia Governor Patrick Henry. At the end of the American Revolution, the fort was abandoned. During the fall of 1787, Major John Hamtramck and his soldiers camped on the ruins of Fort Patrick Henry. The deteriorated condition of the fort dictated that a new fortification would be needed. The new fort was built north of the original site and named Fort Knox. It is probable that the local townspeople used timbers from the old fort. It would have been easier to carry away a log from the abandoned structure than to cut new timber in the woods. Maybe a beam from the old fort still is in the town somewhere

contained within one of the city's many historic buildings.

From 1969 to 1971, Indiana University conducted archeological investigations in the park north of the George Rogers Clark Memorial. Some 18th century artifacts were discovered along with 19th century odds and ends. Portions of stockade walls were discovered. Identification of their origin was impossible because of the closeness of the 1732 French stockade, Fort Sackville, and the 1812 Fort Knox III. All three of these fortifications were on approximately the same site.