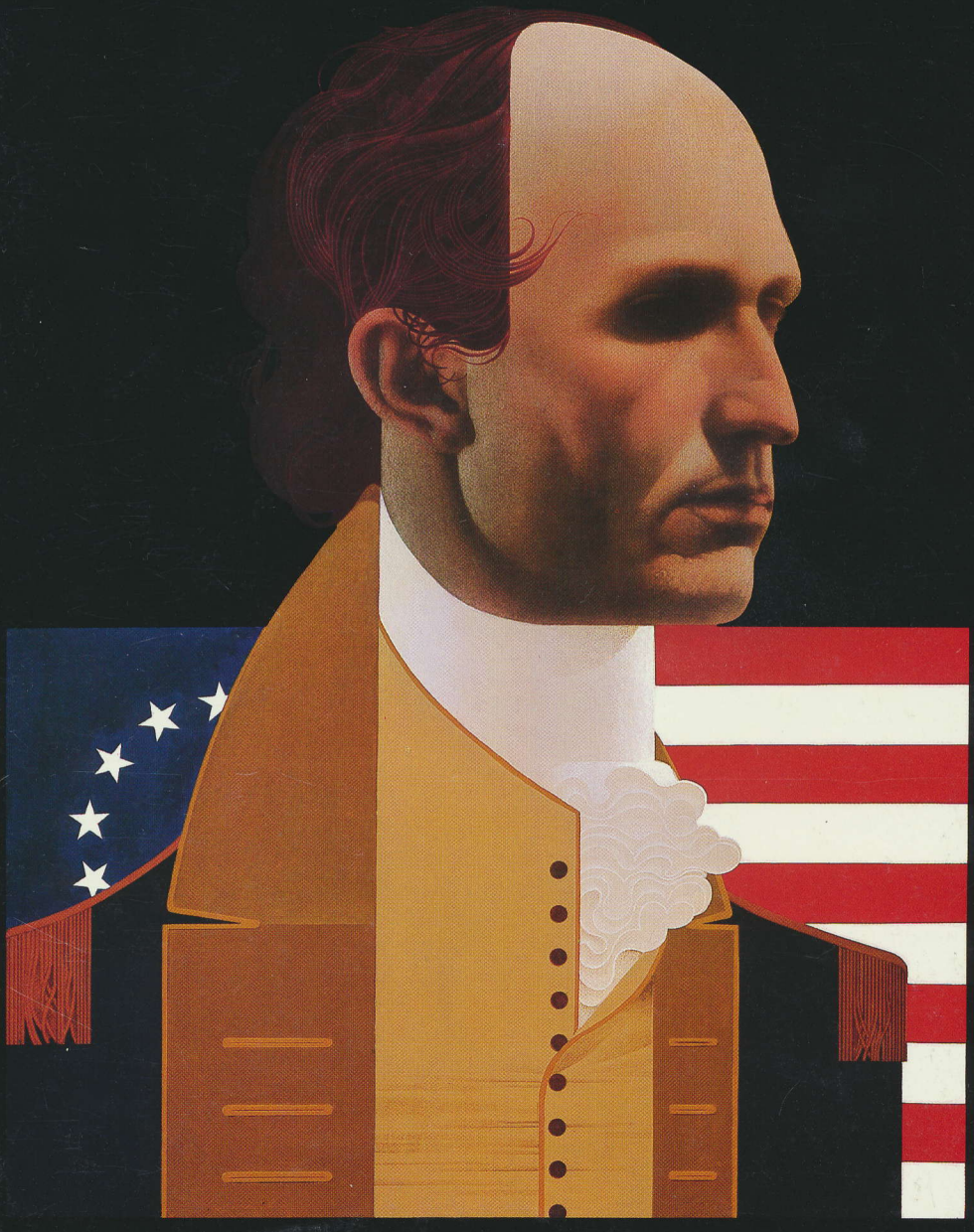
George Rogers Clark

AND THE WINNING OF THE OLD NORTHWEST



Ellark

George Rogers Clark and the Winning of the Old Northwest

by
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1

Colonel Clark Organizes an Army

It was June 1778, early in the fourth year of the American Revolution. Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark, a young soldier-frontiersman, was encamped with nearly 200 men on Corn Island at the Falls of the Ohio (across from the site of present-day Louisville). In his dispatch case he carried two sets of orders dated January 2, 1778, and signed by Patrick Henry, Governor of Virginia. His "public orders," designed to keep the British unaware of his true mission, instructed him to raise seven companies of 50 men each, with the pay and allowances of Virginia militia, for the defense of the County of Kentucky. His secret orders, known only to a few of Governor Henry's principal advisers in Williamsburg and to a few of Clark's officers, called for him to carry out a daring and hazardous campaign deep in enemy territory, a campaign that would develop into one of the great epics of American history.

Clark had arrived at the Falls of the Ohio on June 1 with 150 frontiersmen, many of them recruited with difficulty around Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh) in Pennsylvania. He had expected four additional companies to be waiting for him at the Falls, but to his "mortification" he found only part of one company from Tennessee and a small force from Kentucky. Each village on the frontier, each valley, each region, was intent on keeping its men at home for its own defense; some let it be known that anyone who left to join Clark would be pursued, apprehended, and confined. The loss of these reinforcements created, as Clark himself admitted, a "desperate" situation, for it meant that he would have to confront a vastly superior enemy with a ludicrously small force. Nevertheless, he was determined to go on.

The Falls of the Ohio was ideally suited for a base camp and control point because vessels moving up or down the river usually had to unload to navigate the rapids. Clark chose the 7 acres of Corn Island (now long since washed or dredged away) as his campsite because the channels of the rapids would help to discourage those men who might choose to desert when they learned where he planned to lead them.

At 26, Clark had a combination of qualities commonly found in heroes of romantic novels and derring-do films but rarely met with in real life. He was a striking figure of a man—6 feet 2 inches tall, hazel-eyed, handsome, agile, tough, with auburn-reddish hair flowing to his broad shoulders. As an organizer of the Kentucky militia and commander of its defenses over the past two years, he was known to be a skilled and fearless fighter. He had the gifts of a magnetic leader and persuasive orator, both in the field and in the council chamber. He understood Indian customs and habits of thought. And he had the capacity, in a phrase he often used, of "reflecting on things in general"—to reason, to see far ahead, to think strategically.

It was Clark's strategical ability that had brought him to Corn Island. He had recruited this force with the announced purpose of defending the Kentucky frontier, but his real intention was to lead his men as far west as the Mississippi River and there to strike and occupy the British base camps. It was Clark's own plan, which he had carried to Williamsburg and presented to Governor Henry and a few other leading patriots of the commonwealth. When he found fewer than half the men he expected at the Falls, Clark was disappointed but not disheartened. "I knew my case was desperate," he wrote, "but the more I reflected on my weakness the more I was pleased with the enterprise."

One day in June he interrupted his training exercises on Corn Island, assembled his men, and read his secret orders aloud. He proposed, he said, to take them into the Illinois country. There they would seize three settlements: Vincennes on the Wabash River, Kaskaskia on the Mississippi, 130 river miles above the mouth of the Ohio, and Cahokia, up the Mississippi near the mouth of the Missouri. He then hoped to obtain reinforcements, march north, and seize Fort Detroit on the neck of land between Lake Erie and Lake Huron.

"I was sensible," he said later, "of the impression it would have on many, to be taken near a thousand miles from the body of their country to attac[k] a people five times their number, and merciless tribes of Indians their allies and determined enemies to us." Point by point he gave his men the strong arguments for such an action. The frontier settlements, he said, were trying to defend themselves against the attacks of Indians stirred up by British agents and led by British officers, but they could never succeed if they remained on the defensive against an elusive enemy that could always choose the time and place of

his attack. The Americans must go on the offensive and cut off the attacks at their source. This they could do by taking the Northwest posts and separating the British from their Indian allies. Seizure of Vincennes and Kaskaskia would bring control of two great rivers into American hands and would open the way for supplies from friendly Spaniards in New Orleans.

Two of his spies, Ben Linn and Lt. Sam Moore, had spent some weeks at Kaskaskia posing as hunters with beaver skins to sell. They reported that the British did not expect and could not resist a resolute, lightning-like thrust from the Americans. There was artillery at Kaskaskia, but no one to fire it. The fort was in bad condition. There were no British regulars in the area, only French militia. The French, after 14 years of British rule, were dissatisfied and would not resist the Americans; they might be won over to join the fight against their old enemy. Clark had friends among the Indians and believed he could win over some of the tribes.

Clark read aloud a letter from three prominent members of the Virginia House of Delegates, Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, and George Wythe, promising that each volunteer would receive 300 acres "out of the lands which may be conquered in the country now in the possession of the said Indians." He bore down hard on two convictions that dominated his thinking and actions: "We must either quit this country or attack," and "Great things have been effected by *a few men well conducted.*"

Following the custom of frontier commanders of the time, Clark laid his plan open to discussion, with the understanding that all must obey the decision of the majority. "Almost every gentleman," he said, "warmly espoused the enterprise and plainly saw the utility of it, and supposed they saw the salvation of Kentucky almost in their reach, but surely repined that we were not strong enough to put it beyond all doubt. The soldiery in general debated on the subject but determined to follow their officers. Some were alarmed at the thought of being taken at so great a distance into the enemys country." Despite their doubt and alarm, a majority voted to make the attack.

A party of about 50 Tennesseans from the Holston Country, however, were not won over by Clark's oratory, personal magnetism, or arguments; they felt they had been tricked and delegated one of their number, a Lt. Thomas Hutchins, to ask leave to return home. Clark refused. He put guards on the boats and sentinels "whare it was thought their was a possibility of their waiding from the island," but the men found an unguarded shallow crossing and, led by Hutchins, deserted shortly before dawn.* Though Clark was willing to let such faint-hearted warriors go, he feared the effect the desertions might have on his other

* Clark's spelling habits were somewhat erratic by today's standards, and numerous misspellings abound in the writings quoted herein. But to provide some flavor of the man's personality, these have not been corrected to conform to modern usage.

men, and he sent out a strong party, some on horseback, some on foot, with orders to kill any who did not surrender. Seven or eight men were captured, brought back to camp, and apparently reassigned to other companies. The soldiers that night hanged and burned Lieutenant Hutchins in effigy. When the deserters staggered into Harrodsburg, some 60 miles away to the southeast, the indignant citizens for a time denied them entrance to the town and refused to give them food.

When Gideon, liberator of Israel, prepared a night attack on the hordes of Midianites and other desert raiders oppressing his country, he stripped down his army of 32,000 to 300 chosen soldiers. Despite his inadequate numbers and the loss of the Tennessee contingent, Clark followed the same policy. He selected only his hardiest men and left behind those "judged not competent to the expected fatiegue." He now had 175 men, which he divided into four companies under Capts. John Montgomery, Joseph Bowman, Leonard Helm, and William Harrod (brother of James, the founder of Harrodsburg). Young Simon Kenton, an experienced frontiersman, served as chief scout.

Clark broke camp in the last week of June after a let-up in training—"a day of amusement." He loaded his men into flatboats, rowed a mile upriver, and swung into the main current of the Ohio. While they were running the rapids, the eclipse of June 24, 1778, darkened most of the sun. "This," said Clark, "caused various conjectures among the suspicious." Some took it as a good omen, some as a bad, but all were impressed that their departure was marked by such particular attention from the heavens.

These were a special breed of men—skilled frontiersmen, tough as leather, expert marksmen, completely at home in the forest. Not all were young; some had been trained, tested and hardened by years of experience. They supplied most of their own equipment. They wore moccasins and linen or fringed buckskin hunting shirts. Since it was summer, most had wide-brimmed felt hats, though some wore coonskin caps. Each man carried a rifle, a belt axe, a belt knife, a powder horn, a bullet pouch, flints, a tinder box, and a salt horn. Each carried a "possible bag" in which were stuffed patch materials, a handful of tow for starting fires, snuff or smoking tobacco, and food—strips of dried meat ("jerky") and "pocket soup" (the ingredients of thick soup boiled down into a dry, solid cake). Most men carried a favorite medicine for injuries—perhaps toad salve. Some carried bullet molds and ladles for lead, so that they might reshape the bullets retrieved from the game they killed.

It may be argued that no body of soldiers ever sent on a military mission—not even Robert Rogers' Rangers of French and Indian War fame—was then or has since been better trained and prepared to carry out its assignment. It may also be argued that few troops have ever been sent on what appeared to be so foolhardy a campaign.

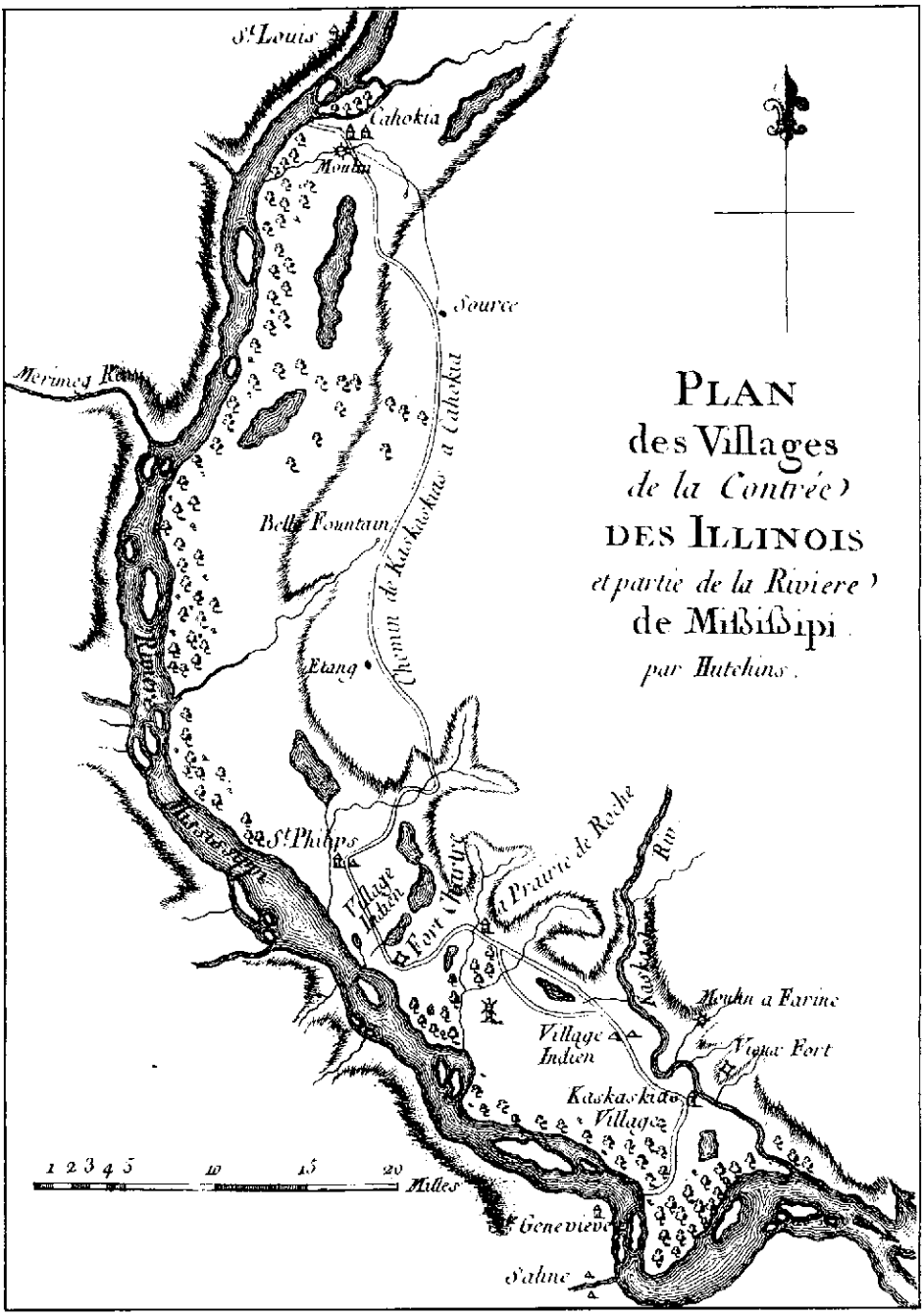
2

A Dark and Bloody Land

Clark and his men were headed for land the French had discovered and explored 100 years earlier—the "Illinois Country," made up, roughly, of modern Illinois, Indiana, and some of the adjoining lands between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes. The French fur traders, explorers, and missionary priests were the earliest white men to set foot in the Upper Mississippi Valley. Then came the settlers. The numbers were never large; probably no more than 5,000 French (perhaps as few as 2,000) were living north of the Ohio in 1760. Most of them occupied the four principal villages—Kaskaskia, Prairie du Rocher, Cahokia, and Vincennes—for they almost never built their homes to stand alone in open country.

Kaskaskia, founded by Jesuit missionaries in 1703, stood on the right bank of the Kaskaskia River, about 5 miles above the point where it discharged into the Mississippi. (The old town is now under water.) Prairie du Rocher lay some 17 miles to the northwest. Cahokia was 40 miles farther north on the Mississippi, a few miles south of and across the river from Spanish-held St. Louis. These three small villages, originally settled by missionaries, had evolved into fur trading posts; they had been occupied only briefly by the British forces sent between 1763 and 1765. Vincennes, the one sizable community, lay to the east on the left bank of the Wabash River, 100 miles above its junction with the Ohio.

Vincennes, also known as Post Vincent, had been founded in 1732 by Francois Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, a lieutenant in the French-Canadian forces. It held about 80 Frenchmen and



PLAN
des Villages
de la Contrée
DES ILLINOIS
et partie de la Riviere
de Miſſiſipi
par Hutchins.

their families and several times that number of Indians. An English officer who was there about 1770 described the valley and the community:

"The land on this river is remarkably fertile, and several parts of it are natural meadows, of great extent, covered with fine long grass. The timber is large and high. . . . They raise Indian corn, wheat, and tobacco of an extraordinary good quality. . . . They have a fine breed of horses (brought originally by the Indians from the Spanish settlements on the western side of the River Mississippi) and large stocks of swine and black cattle. The settlers deal with the natives for furrs and deer skins. . . . Hemp of a good texture grows spontaneously in the low lands of the Wabash, as do grapes in the greatest abundance, having a black, thin skin, of which the inhabitants in the Autumn make a sufficient quantity (for their own consumption) of well-tasted red wine. . . ."

Vincennes had rows of whitewashed wooden houses, most of them one-story, surrounded by picket fences, each house with its own flowerbed and kitchen garden. The agricultural methods were primitive. Farmers drove large wooden mouldboard plows that were mounted on wheels and pulled by oxen. Each villager had a strip of land for cultivation in the 5,000-acre Commons that adjoined the village to the southeast. The Commons was enclosed by a picket fence, each family having an assigned stretch it was required to maintain. After the harvest the Commons was generally used as a pasture for the cattle. A local magistrate presided over village meetings at which decisions were made when to plant the Commons and when to bring in the harvest.

Despite the primitive methods, no one had to work very hard. As one historian has observed, these farmers did not need to grub with the energy required of the New Englanders, who were struggling to clear their fields of rocks and stones. The expanses of virgin lowland required only the easiest cultivation to yield plentiful crops. Apple, peach, and pear trees and wild plums provided fruit. Game, moreover, was abundant: wild turkeys, wild hogs, deer, buffalo. In addition to its wheat, furs, and pelts, the village had an excess of salted venison and buffalo meat to float down the rivers to New Orleans.

Visiting and resident traders brought in goods for trading: cloth, blankets, paint, edged tools, kettles, traps, and whiskey. The French had to exchange their furs and skins for these goods in a single community trading center, where the prices were considerably higher than those charged at the British posts to the east. The high cost of trade goods (in terms of the number of skins required to buy a blanket or a kettle) was a constant complaint of even the most pro-French Indian tribes.

About the middle of the 18th century, government leaders in Versailles, France, embarked on a program to connect and consolidate their holdings in New France (Canada) and Louisiana. In so doing, they claimed ownership of the vast area lying between those two possessions—all the land, in fact, between the last range of the Appalachian Mountains in the east and the

Mississippi River in the west. Their claim, and the military steps they took to enforce it, led to the French and Indian War in North America (1754-1763). France lost that war, and the British and Spanish took over all French possessions on the North American continent. The forts and villages of the Illinois Country became a part of the British Province of Quebec.

The push of the colonial Americans to the west increased after 1760. In 1763 the Indians tried to stop it by force. In a general uprising, they took eight frontier forts and killed or captured some 2,000 English-American soldiers, traders, and settlers. That same year the British government also tried to stop the flow of settlers by Royal Proclamation. The Americans repulsed the Indians, ignored the Proclamation, and continued the push to the west. Lord Dunmore, the last British governor of Virginia, wrote his superior in London to deplore the American attitude: "I have learnt from experience that the established authority of any government in America and at home are both insufficient to restrain the Americans; and that they do and will remove as their avidity and restlessness excite them. They acquire no attachments to place; but wandering about seems engrafted in their nature; they do not conceive that Government has any right to forbid their taking possession of a vast tract of country either uninhabited or which serves only as a shelter to a few scattered tribes of Indians."

The Indiana historian Frederick A. Ogg, writing in 1904, described the appeal of the western lands to the British-American immigrants, many of whom had recently arrived from countries where all the land was taken. After crossing the Alleghenies the pioneer settler "stood on the threshold of the most magnificent heritage that has ever been vouchsafed to an enterprising people." An area of more than one and a quarter million square miles stretched before him, extending to the Gulf of Mexico, the Rocky Mountains, and the Great Lakes. It was an area whose economic possibilities no region in the world equalled. No area in the Old World or the New matched the Mississippi Valley for richness of soil and variety of climate. "All the great countries of central Europe—Germany, Austria-Hungary, France and Italy—could be set down in it, and yet there would be room to spare."

George Rogers Clark put his admiration for this land more simply in a letter he wrote to his brother after seeing Kentucky for the first time: "A richer and more beautiful country than this I believe has never been seen in America yet." And he considered it worth fighting for.

The chance came in the spring of 1775 when the long-smoldering hostility between England and her American colonies erupted into armed conflict. At that time Clark was a 23-year-old assistant surveyor in Kentucky, working for £ 80 per year plus the privilege of claiming land for himself. As a captain of militia, he joined with other officers at Fort Gower to vote the resolution, "As the love of liberty and attachment to the real interests and just rights of America outweigh every other consideration, we resolve that

we will exert every power within us for the defense of American liberty." When Kentucky became a county of Virginia in December 1776 and a government was set up, Clark, now a major, was placed in charge of the militia and of defending the county against its enemies.

For two years after the war began there was little fighting on the Pennsylvania and Virginia frontier, but in 1777 the British government began a series of raids in the Trans-Appalachia West to force Gen. George Washington to send troops from the Continental Army to defend the "back country." British commanders were ordered to use every means "that providence has put in His Majesty's hands for crushing the rebellion"; they were told, in organizing Indian attacks, to urge the Indians to act "with humanity." Lt. Col. Henry Hamilton, lieutenant governor of Canada and commandant at Detroit, was sent 150 dozen scalping knives. In one month he reported that he had received 73 prisoners and 129 scalps from the Indians; in another month he reported 34 prisoners and 81 scalps. He rewarded the Indians with presents according to the number of victims, regardless of their sex or age, for which activity patriot Americans branded him with the name "Hair Buyer." Some settlers fled back to the east; others huddled in the only three settlements left in Kentucky: Harrodsburg, Boonesborough, and Fort Logan. To generations of Kentuckians, 1777 was known as "the dark and bloody year."

In October 1777, after months of terror on the frontier, Clark was led "to a long train of thinking" that eventually started him on a 700-mile journey to Williamsburg. There he presented a plan for recruiting 500 men to carry the war to the British bases and to conquer the northwest for Virginia.*

Governor Patrick Henry consulted a few "select gentlemen" about Clark's plan. The gentlemen approved, though they reduced the size of the force he was to lead. On January 4, 1778, Clark "set forward cloathed with all the authority I wished for." He had the rank of lieutenant colonel, £1200 in depreciated Continental currency, the authority to recruit 350 men, and an order on the commanding officer at Fort Pitt to give him boats, ammunition, and provisions. He was publicly charged with the defense of the Kentucky frontier, but his real orders called for him "to set on foot the expedition against Kaskasky with as little delay & as much secrecy as possible." These were the orders Clark read to his small force on Corn Island in June 1778.

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* On the way to Williamsburg, Clark stopped for one day to visit his family. Four of his five brothers were fighting with George Washington's forces. At war's end, one was a general, one was a captain, and two were lieutenants. Clark's youngest brother, William, born in 1770, was too young to serve in the Revolution, but in 1804-1806 he and Meriwether Lewis would explore the vast Louisiana Territory for President Thomas Jefferson and add to the existing body of geographical and scientific knowledge about the new American nation.

3

First Victory in the West

Before Clark and his little army had gone many miles down the Ohio, the invasion of the Illinois Country was no longer a secret; it was being talked about in the settlements and on the trails throughout Kentucky. His only hope now for success lay in his ability to travel faster than the news. Pairs of men were put on each oar, and for 4 days and nights they rowed continuously in double shifts.

The train of boats came to the mouth of the Wabash. Vincennes lay 100 miles up that river, but Clark continued on down the Ohio. He had decided to by-pass Vincennes and attack Kaskaskia first.

Leading a body of men on a dangerous military mission calls for a series of such tactical command decisions. If all or most of the decisions are right, and if he is lucky, the commander may succeed. If one major decision is wrong, with or without luck, he may fail. Clark knew that there were more armed Frenchmen in the Kaskaskia area than in Vincennes, but he also knew that they were scattered in different villages. If his attack failed, he and his men might make a safe retreat to the Spanish side of the Mississippi. Moreover, the influence of the Kaskaskians over the Indians was so strong that their chiefs might be persuaded to avoid a clash with the "Long Knives"—the Americans.

They saw no one on the river for several days, but then a canoe appeared behind them, drew nearer, and overtook Clark's lead boat. The canoe was manned by William Linn, the brother of Clark's agent in Kaskaskia a year earlier. A dispatch had been brought into Corn Island from Fort Pitt shortly after Clark's

departure, and Linn had volunteered to leave his family and deliver it. France had recognized American independence, the dispatch said. France was sending military aid. France would open hostilities against England. This was indeed news of the highest importance. It made Clark's mission even more vital to the patriot cause, and it substantially improved the chances for his success. Linn had a copy of the French treaty, and after it was shown to the Illinois French with suitable explanation and persuasion, they might well take up arms against the British.

Clark accepted Linn's offer to join the expedition and conferred on him the rank of major. The boats passed the mouth of the Cumberland River and, on June 28, the fourth day of the journey, the mouth of the Tennessee (at present-day Paducah). About 9 miles below the Tennessee stood Fort Massac, built by the French in 1758. The British had never occupied the fort, and it had become a crumbling ruin. Clark moored his boats there. In the second of his major decisions, he decided to leave the Ohio 3 miles above Fort Massac and march 120 miles overland to Kaskaskia. The water route down the Ohio and up the Mississippi was faster and easier, but there was little chance of navigating it without being seen by French patrols, unfriendly Indians, or British agents. He would try to find and use an old military trail that ran north-northwest from the fort to Kaskaskia. It was essential to his plan that he avoid an engagement with the enemy, for he could not afford to lose men or spread an alarm.

While the companies were preparing for the march, a party of hunters was seen on the river and was, in Clark's words, "brought too by one of our boats." Their leader was a John Duff, their guide a John Saunders, both Americans, and they had been in Kaskaskia only 8 days earlier. They gave Clark—whose information on that place was almost a year old—"all the intelligence we wished for." By this stroke of fortune he learned that Edward Abbott, French superintendent of Indian affairs for the Ohio Country, had left for Detroit in February. Philippe de Rocheblave (a former French official appointed by the British to continue in his post at Kaskaskia) had ordered spies, hunters, and others in the area to keep a good lookout for rebels. Kaskaskia's chief defense work, Fort Gage, was in good order, but "more from the fondness of perade than the expectation of a visit." There were no British troops there. The chances of taking the town and fort by surprise were good. The hunters warned him, however, that the French "were taught to harbour a most horrid idea of the barbarity of the rebels, espetially the Virginians," and so would be likely to fight for their lives if forewarned. No part of their information," Clark said, "pleased me more than that of the inhabitants viewing us as more savage than the . . . Indians. I was determined to improve on [make use of] this if I was fortunate enough to get them into my possession." On that knowledge, in fact, he based a remarkable program of psychological warfare and civil control.

The hunters asked to join the expedition and Saunders offered to

lead it over the trail to Kaskaskia. Clark faced another major decision. Should he accept the offer? The men could be agents in the pay of the British and could lead him into a trap. They were now aware of his reasons for being in the Illinois Country. If he rejected their offer, should he risk sending them about their business, or should he deplete his small force by sending them back under guard? He decided to trust and accept the hunters, and, as he reported later, "they proved valuable men."

The little army hid its boats and some of its equipment in a ravine 3 miles above Fort Massac and started off on foot behind Saunders, each man carrying a minimum of supplies. They marched in single file so as to leave as little trace as possible, probably two to three yards apart, forming a column a quarter of a mile long. For the first 50 miles, which they covered in 2 days, they traveled through thick forest. Clark wrote, "Nothing remarkable on this rout. The weather was favorable," though the march was "very fatieguing."

They emerged on the third day onto a vast treeless plain, which speeded their progress but exposed them to view for miles around. At this point, Saunders, who had been following a trail of blazed trees without difficulty, became "totally lost." Clark, in a fearful rage, told the man he "was suspicious of him from his conduct . . . and that if he did not discover and take us into the Hunters Road . . . that he had frequently described that I would have him immediately put to death." Saunders went off under guard to reconnoitre and returned after several hours to announce happily that he had found "a place that he perfectly knew, and we discovered that the poor fellow had been as they call it bewildered." The march resumed.

The food gave out on the fourth day of the march, and for 2 more days the men ate only the wild blackberries, raspberries, and dewberries they found in patches along the trail. They crossed the Big Muddy River on July 4—the second anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—and that evening they came within sight of Kaskaskia.

The company lay concealed until dark and then "took possession of a house where in a large family lived on the bank of the Kaskias River about three quarters of a mille above the town." The head of the family, when questioned, reported that the militia had been called out some days earlier to face what turned out to be a false alarm, and now it had been disbanded. There were a great many men in town, but most of the Indians were away. A burst of revelry that aroused Clark's suspicions was explained as that of a group of Negroes at a dance. There was at the farmhouse "a sufficiency of vessels in care to convey us across the river." Historians have debated whether Colonel Clark was incredibly lucky, or had taken over the house of the town ferryman, or had agents in the community who had done their work well.

Clark revealed his plan of attack to his battalion. They would

make the assault that night in full darkness and rely on taking the enemy by surprise. A night attack was a difficult and dangerous operation requiring the strictest discipline, and he could not be sure that his column had not been reported and would not be walking into an ambush. The risks, however, were worth taking. The force would divide into three columns. He and Simon Kenton would lead the assault on Fort Gage. If they captured it by surprise, they were to signal with "a general shout." The other two columns would then rush the town. Men who could speak some French were to run through every street ordering the inhabitants to remain indoors and threaten to shoot them if they left their houses. Each man was to make the noise of at least four others to convince the community that it was being attacked by overwhelming numbers. Guards were to be posted at the roads and fields to take any of those who tried to escape. There was to be no looting and no unnecessary violence. All forces were to be committed, none held in reserve. The men were to strip to the waist, leaving their shirts on the river bank.

With the orders given, discussed, and understood, the battaljon divided, went to the Kaskaskia River, about 175 yards wide at that point, and "with the greatest silence," began to cross. Within two hours Clark's force was on the west shore. There is strong reason to believe that several French militiamen friendly to the Virginians had to guide the company.

The French commander, Phillippe de Rocheblave was unaware of Clark's presence. He had spent July 4 in St. Genevieve, having journeyed across the Mississippi to dine with the Spanish commander there. He returned that evening to his house in the fort and before retiring wrote a letter to his English superiors in Quebec. He had written many such letters in recent months, asking to be relieved and replaced by an English officer. He wanted his back pay and repayment of the money he was spending at his post for the presents he was obliged to give the Indians. He complained that his letters were being ignored. This evening he wrote that a strong force of American patriots had lately been sighted going down the Ohio; he thought they were headed for the Spanish post at St. Genevieve. Having finished his letter, he retired to his bedchamber with Madame Rocheblave.

Shortly after midnight, the Rocheblaves were awakened by two grimy, unshaven, half-naked young giants at the open door announcing in English that they were now prisoners of the Americans. Clark and Kenton had walked through the open and unguarded gate, stealthily deployed their men, found Rocheblave's house with the aid of one of the hunters, and let out a general shout. Madame Rocheblave, born Marie Defresne, a Kaskaskian, undoubtedly screamed, clutched a garment to her bosom, and protested in rapid-fire French. Rocheblave, who understood a little English, indignantly refused to come out of the room; he would not leave his wife unprotected against such savages. At this point Clark withdrew to allow the lady to dress. As it turned out, this was a mistake, for during this time the Rocheblaves successfully

destroyed or hid most of the official documents and correspondence. "I don't suppose among her trunks," Clark wrote, "although they never was examined. She must have expected the loss of eaven her cloaths from the idea she entertained of us."

In the meantime, the town—it had about 80 houses—was secured by what sounded like an army of a thousand men. "I don't suppose" Clark wrote, "greator silence ever reagnd among the inhabitants of a place than did at this at present."

"Not a person to be seen, not a word to be heard by them for some time, but designedly the greatest noise kept up by our troops through every quarter of the town and patrools continually the whole night round it as intercepting any information was a capitol object, and in about two hours the whole of the inhabitants was disarmed."

At daybreak Richard Winston and Daniel Murray, inhabitants "who prooved to have been in the American interest" (they had sheltered Linn and Moore a year earlier), appeared with food for the entire company. "After the troops had regaled themselves they whare withdrawn from within the town and posted in distant positions on the borders of it."

Clark now proceeded to put into operation the psychological plan by which he would thoroughly terrify and then win over the inhabitants, "as I conceived the greator the shock I could give them at first, the more sensibly would they feel my lenity and become more valuable friends; this I conceived to be agreeable to human nature, as I had observed it in many instances. . . . It was my interest to attach them to me, according to my first plan . . . for I was too weak to treat them any other way." His troops were forbidden to hold any but necessary official conversation with the inhabitants. The villagers were permitted to walk on the streets on their private business, but they could not congregate or talk with one another. "After finding they was busy in conversation I had a few of the principal malitia officers put in irons without hinting a reason for it or hearing any thing they had to say in their own defence. The worst was now expected by the whole. I saw the consternation the inhabitants ware in."

Clark then sent for the leading citizens one by one, "who came in as if to a tribunal that was to determine their fate forever." They were questioned, ordered not to discuss the meeting with anyone, and released. He let it be known that his troops were only a small detachment of the main American army forming at the Falls of the Ohio. During the day, Father Pierre Gibault appeared at Clark's headquarters with a half dozen of the town's elders and asked to be heard. Gibault, vicar general for the region under the Quebec diocese, had been sent to the Illinois Country 10 years earlier. He understood the American cause and, in Clark's words, "was rather prejudiced in favor of us." Clark seems to have known this from the first, but his plan called for him to be severe in the first meeting. The story of the extraordinary interview and of the events

that followed is best told in Clark's own words:

"How ever shocked they already ware from their present situation, the addition was obvious and great when they entered the room whare I was siting with other officers—a dirty savage apperance. As we had left our cloaths at the river, we ware almost naked and torn by the bushes and bryers. They ware shocked, and it was some time before they would venture to take seats and longer before they would speak.

"They at last was asked what they wanted. The priest informed me (after asking which was the principal) that as the inhabitants expected to be separated, never perhaps to meet again, they begged through him that they might be permitted to spend some time in the church to take their leave of each other. (I knew they expected their very religion was obnoxtious to us). I carelessly told them that I had nothing to say to his church, that he might go their if he would; if he did, to inform the people not to venture out of the town.

"They attempted some other conversation but was informed that we was not at leisure. They went off after answering me a few questions that I asked them with a very faint degree that they might [be] totally discouraged from petitioning again, as they had not yet come to the point I wanted."

The whole town collected at the church, leading or carrying their children, as if they expected to be deported *en masse,* as the British had treated some 7,000 to 10,000 French Acadians in 1755. Clark took precautions to see that none of their houses was entered.

"They remained a considerable time in the church, after which the priest and many of the principal men came to me to return thanks for the indulgence shown them and beged permission to address me farther on a subject that was more dear to them than any thing else: that their present situation was the fate of war; that the loss of their property they could reconsile, but was in hopes that I would not part them from their families and that the women and children might be allowed to keep some of their cloaths and a small quantity of provitions. . . . All they appeared to aim at was some lenity shewn their women and families, supposing that their goods would appease us.

"I had sufficient reason to believe that their was no finess in all this but that they really spoke their sentiments and the height of their expectations. This was the point I wished to bring them to.

"I asked them very abruptly whether or not they thought they were speaking to savages, that I was certain they did from the tenor of their conversation. Did they suppose that we meant to strip the women and children or take the bread out of ther mouths? Or that we would condesend to make war on the women and children or the church? That it was to prevent the effution of innocent blood by the Indians through the instigation of their commandants and enemies that caused us to visit them, and not the prospect of plunder. That as soon as that object was obtained we should be perfectly satisfied."

Clark now played his ace. The King of France, he said, displaying the copy of the Franco-American treaty, had given his support to the United States, and even now arms and supplies were arriving. France and the United States were now allies in the war against Great Britain. They were at liberty, he said, to take whichever side they pleased in the war without fear of losing their property or having their families distressed. As for their church, all religions would be tolerated in America, and anyone who offered insult to it in Kaskaskia would be punished. The Americans were not savages and plunderers, as they had thought. They might now return to their families and inform them that they could conduct themselves as usual with all freedom and without apprehension of any danger. Their friends in confinement would be immediately released and the guards withdrawn from every part of the town. He was convinced from what he had learned since his arrival that they had been influenced by false information from their leaders, and so he was willing to forget everything in the past.

"They retired and in a few minutes the scene was changed from an almost mortal dejection to that of joy in the extream. The bells ringing, the church crowded, returning thanks, in short, every appearance of extravagant confution. . . . Addorning the streets with flowers and pavilians of different colours, compleating their happiness by singing, etc."

Clark drew up a proclamation about swearing allegiance to the United States, but "wishing to prove the people farther I ommitted it for a few days." In due course, most of the inhabitants took the oath.

With Kaskaskia secured, Clark ordered Capt. Joseph Bowman to take 30 men, ride the 60 miles to Cahokia, and "if possible get possession." Accompanied by a body of armed Kaskaskian volunteers, Bowman arrived at the unsuspecting village of 50 houses on the morning of July 6. When the Kaskaskians told their story, "Liberty and Fredom and hozaing for Americans ran through the whole town. In a few hours Major Bowman [was] snugly quartered in the old British fort. . . . The whole of the inhabitants took the oath chearfully."

A major area was now under Clark's control, but Vincennes, the largest community and the strongest center of enemy power, was still unconquered. Were British troops garrisoned there? How many and of what quality? Had they heard of the conquest of Kaskaskia and Cahokia? To find out, Clark sent three men—Simon Kenton, Shadrach Bond, and Elisha Batty. They made the 240-mile journey without being discovered, boldly spent three nights wandering about the town, and learned that there was no force of British troops in Vincennes, no large body of Indians, and no knowledge of the American invasion. Bond and Batty returned to Kaskaskia with this information. Kenton continued on to Harrodsburg with news of the western victories.

Clark, meanwhile, had spread the word that he was about to send

a messenger to the Falls of the Ohio to summon a large body of troops to join him in attacking Vincennes. As he expected, a number of Kaskaskians appeared as advocates to save Vincennes. He sent for Father Gibault, who assured him that when the inhabitants of that town were told of what had happened in the Illinois Country and of the present happiness of their friends, they too would join the Americans. Clark, in that case, would not have "the trouble of marching troops." He was so sure of it that if Colonel Clark was agreeable, he would take the business on himself and go to Vincennes. As a priest, Gibault said (surely with an arched eyebrow), he had nothing to do with temporal business, but "he would give them such hints in the spiritual way that would be very conducive to the business." To speak on temporal matters, he would like to take with him Dr. Jean Baptiste Laffant, the town physician.

Gibault and Laffant left on July 14 with letters of instruction, a flag, a message and a proclamation to the people of Vincennes from Clark, letters from friends to friends, and a small party ("among whom I had a spie"). About two weeks later they returned, their mission accomplished. They were accompanied by several of the leading citizens of Vincennes. After a day or two spent "explaining matters," Father Gibault told Clark, "they universally acceeded to the prepotial (except a few Europeans . . . that ammediately left the Cuntrey) and went in a body to the church where the oath of allegiance was administered to them in the most solem manner."

Capt. Leonard Helm was sent to occupy Vincennes with a platoon of men. He took possession of Fort Sackville, wrapped the British flag around a rock, and threw it into the Wabash. The Indians were astonished, wrote Clark, "and every thing setled far beyond our most sanguine hopes. . . . I now found myself in possession of the whole, in a country where I could do more real service than I expected."

It was the only successful American campaign in the War for Independence in the year 1778.

4

"Perhaps We Might Be Fortunate"

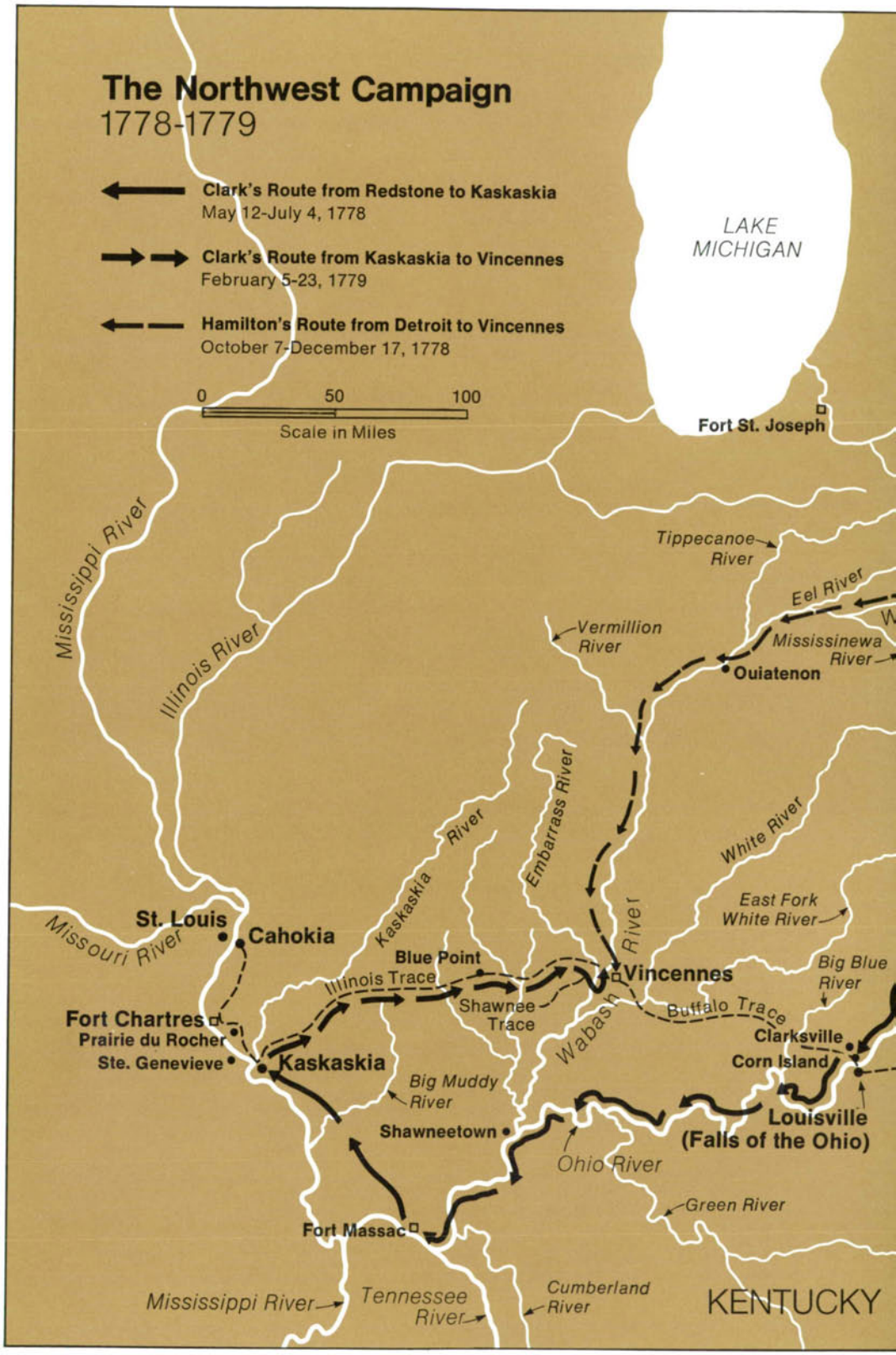
Clark was indeed "in possession of the whole," but he now faced the decisive question: Could he hold it? He had no supplies and no money. The term of enlistment of many of his men was about to expire, and there was no prospect of help or replacements from Virginia or Kentucky. He was vastly outnumbered by the Indians in the region. And the English were certain to descend in force from Detroit when they learned of the loss of their outposts.

Under the terms of his orders from Governor Henry, Clark could have destroyed the English forts, gathered up their cannon, and returned honorably and in triumph to Kentucky. Instead, he elected to stay.

Characteristically, he made his decision serve his other planned objectives. He announced that he would return to his base in Kentucky. The British, he said, were defeated, and if troops were needed he could always bring them on short notice from his main army at the Falls of the Ohio. The French begged him to stay, and with apparent reluctance he complied with their wishes.

"I took every step in my power," he wrote, "to cause the people to feell the blessings injoyed by an American citizen. . . . I caused a Court of sivil Judicature to be established at Kohos [Cahokia], elected by the people." Captain Bowman was elected judge of the Court in this first extension of American government to the Illinois Country.

Clark made Kaskaskia his headquarters. He persuaded 100 of his men to extend their enlistments 8 months, and from the villages


The Northwest Campaign
1778-1779
Clark's Route from Redstone to Kaskaskia
May 12-July 4, 1778
Clark's Route from Kaskaskia to Vincennes
February 5-23, 1779
Hamilton's Route from Detroit to Vincennes
October 7-December 17, 1778
0
50
100
Scale in Miles
LAKE MICHIGAN
Fort St. Joseph
Mississippi River
Illinois River
Tippecanoe River
Eel River
Vermillion River
Mississinewa River
Ouiatenon
Embarrass River
White River
Kaskaskia River
East Fork White River
St. Louis
Missouri River
Cahokia
Blue Point
Illinois Trace
Vincennes
Big Blue River
Shawnee Trace
Buffalo Trace
Wabash River
Fort Chartres
Prairie du Rocher
Ste. Genevieve
Kaskaskia
Clarksville
Corn Island
Big Muddy River
Shawneetown
Louisville
(Falls of the Ohio)
Ohio River
Green River
Fort Massac
Mississippi River
Tennessee River
Cumberland River
KENTUCKY

LAKE HURON
CANADA
Detroit
LAKE ST. CLAIR
St. Joseph River
River Rouge
LAKE ERIE
River
Maumee
Auglaize River
Cuyahoga River
Allegheny River
PENNSYLVANIA
Fort McIntosh
Fort Pitt
McKeesport
Redstone
Wheeling
Scioto River
Muskingum River
Ohio River
Miami River
Monongahela River
Point Pleasant
Limestone (Maysville)
Blue Licks
Kentucky River
Bourbon
Lexington
Boonesborough
Harrod's Town
Danville
Licking River
Big Sandy River
VIRGINIA
Kanawha River
COUNTY

he recruited and trained enough young French replacements to make up his losses. To provision, supply, and pay his men, he depended on the French merchants in the area, giving them bills of credit drawn on Oliver Pollock, commercial agent of Virginia (later of the United States) in New Orleans. Pollock, an Irish-born merchant, was a dedicated patriot; he paid those and other such bills with his own money; he sent additional supplies up the Mississippi, including powder and some small cannon (swivel guns); and he ruined himself in the process.

Francis Vigo, a St. Louis merchant, was no less generous. A native of the Kingdom of Sardinia, he had enlisted as a private in a Spanish regiment, served in Cuba and Louisiana, and when his term of enlistment expired, decided to stay in America as a trader. With St. Louis as his headquarters, he set up in the business of buying furs from the Indians and selling supplies to settlers and hunters. When Fernando de Leyba came to St. Louis as lieutenant governor of Upper Louisiana, he became a silent partner in the firm of Vigo and Yosti.

Vigo lent about $11,000 to Clark as a representative of Virginia (which the State never repaid), and he acted as Clark's advocate with the lieutenant governor. De Leyba was friendly and even indicated that he would step in with his own soldiers if the Indians attacked the Americans. Clark wrote:

"He ommitted nothing in his power to prove his attachment to the Americans with such openness as left no room for a doubt. As I was never before in company with any Spanish gentleman, I was much surprised in my expectations, for instead of finding that reserve thought peculiar to the nation, I here saw not the least symptom of it; freedom, almost to excess, gave the greatest pleasure."

De Leyba's sister Teresa had accompanied his wife to St. Louis. Writers of biographies and historical novels have made much of a romance that sprang up (or should have sprung up) between Colonel Clark and Senorita de Leyba.

Clark was less successful in winning over Rocheblave. "The principals of the gentleman," Clark said, "were fixed and violent." When Rocheblave went to a private party and abused some of the soldiers present, either Virginians or Kaskaskians, "in a most intolerable manner as rebels, etc.," Clark put him in iron manacles, confiscated and sold his slaves, and distributed the proceeds—$1,500—among his private troops. When a contingent of his men left for the east, Clark sent Rocheblave with them as a prisoner of war. (Madame Rocheblave remained in Kaskaskia with her children. Governor Henry sent an order to reimburse her for the loss of her husband's property.)

In August, Clark began a 5-week conference at Cahokia with the braves of a dozen Indian tribes, some of whom came from as far away as 500 miles to attend. He found that his appearance in their country

"had put them under the greatest consternation. They were generally at

war against us, but the French and Spaniards appearing so fond of us confused them. They counseled with the French traders to know what was best to be done, and of course was advised to come and solicit for peace, and did not doubt but we might be good friends."

Skilled in the difficult and tedious art of negotiating with Indians, fully aware of the weaknesses of his position, Clark appeared confident, brusque, even contemptuous; he affected to be totally indifferent whether they wanted peace or war. He later confessed that he "was under some apprehension" among such a large number of Indians. His concern was justified. On the second night of the conference, a body of Puan (Meadow) Indians, dreaming of the rich reward the British would give for Clark, charged his quarters and attempted to seize him. He was awake "having to much to think of to sleep much," and well guarded, however, and, with the help of the French volunteers, the Indians were captured and their leaders put in irons. (They explained that they had merely wanted to find out if the French would really come to the aid of the "Big Knives.") After interminable speeches and pipe-smokings, peace treaties were made with 10 or 12 different tribes. "Our influence now began to spread among the nations," Clark wrote, "even to the border of the lakes. I sent agents into every quarter."

While Colonel Clark made treaties with the Indians and dreamed of capturing Detroit, Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton dreamed of capturing Fort Pitt and of extending in one stroke British domination to western Pennsylvania and the entire Ohio Valley. Hamilton was organizing a force for that campaign when, on August 6, he received word that the Americans had taken Kaskaskia and were in control of much of the Illinois Country. He abandoned the Fort Pitt venture and slowly, methodically, prepared to march on Vincennes, 600 miles away. He dispatched messengers to various Indian chiefs informing them of his plans and urging them to bring their warriors to join the march.

Hamilton embarked from Detroit on October 6, 1778, with about 60 Indians, 4 regulars, 8 irregulars, 70 volunteer militiamen, and one 6-pounder cannon, a heavier artillery piece than was commonly seen in the west. As a parting salute, the artillerymen fired the cannon from the bateau on which it was carried. The shock of the recoil caused the vessel to sink, and the departure was delayed for rescue of the weapon. The force made its first camp at River Rouge.

To save a hard overland march, Hamilton decided to risk a dangerous passage across 36 miles of open water at the western end of Lake Erie. Despite, rain, wind, early darkness, and a rock-studded shore, the expedition arrived safely within 1 mile of the objective, the mouth of the Maumee River.

The men pulled and poled the boats up the Maumee as far as the rapids, where navigable water ended and a portage began. Arriving there on October 11, they met a force dispatched earlier, made up of 33 regulars of the 8th Regiment with 14 tons of

supplies. Because of the unusually low waters, 18 days were required to make the 9-mile portage from the rapids to Little Creek, which flowed southwardly into the Wabash. During the portage Hamilton met at Miamitown with several friendly Indian tribes.

He reached the Wabash on November 9th after a difficult 10-day trip down Little Creek, and there he stopped to repair and caulk his bateaux. During a practice drill of his troops, the Indians were astonished to see the 6-pounder hit a small target at a distance of 300 yards. The force descended the Wabash through snow and ice, with patrols moving ahead on each side of the river. More Indians were joining him on the march, and Hamilton now had an army of about 500 men.

When he was within 2 days' run of Vincennes, Hamilton sent ahead one of his companies, accompanied by several Indian chiefs, to negotiate the surrender of the French civilians at Vincennes. Despite his reputation for cruel use of Indian terror on the frontier, on this occasion he avoided an orgy of looting, and perhaps a massacre, by holding his braves in check some miles short of the town. When he arrived at Vincennes on December 17, he found that the civilians had surrendered their arms without resistance. He deployed his troops to surround Fort Sackville.

On receiving word of the advance of the British and Indians, the French militia had faded away, leaving Captain Helm with three Virginians to defend the fort. He sent a letter to Clark (which never arrived because the bearer was captured) declaring, "I am determined to act brave," and waited for the enemy beside a loaded cannon, legend has it, with a bottle of apple brandy in one hand and a lighted slow-burning fuse in the other. Two of the town's leaders, however, persuaded him not to fire the cannon, as it would uselessly endanger the townspeople; and when Hamilton promised to treat him with "humanity," Helm opened the gate and surrendered. The Indians were given 32 horses belonging to the Virginians, and they were permitted to cut a lock of hair from one of the American prisoners as a token of victory.

Hamilton now faced a major decision: should he march to the west and attack Clark at Kaskaskia, or should he spend the winter at Vincennes? He decided to stay. The Indians were restless, some of the provisions were low, and the rivers between Vincennes and Kaskaskia were too high to permit movement of troops by land. He would remain at Fort Sackville and make the attack in 3 or 4 months, when spring came.

Except for this blunder, Hamilton was in every other respect a dynamic and efficient commander and civil governor. He assembled the inhabitants in the church at noon on the 19th, reproached them for their disloyalty to the British crown, and had them again swear an oath of allegiance. He took a census of the village and registered 621 inhabitants, of whom 250 were found able to bear arms and were formed into a militia company. He sent 30 men and an officer to the mouth of the Wabash to intercept any

of Clark's boats going up or down the Ohio. To conserve supplies, he sent all but 80 of his soldiers back to Detroit. He sent some of the Indians out on scouting parties along the Ohio, others on war parties to the Kentucky settlements, and 40 braves and 3 white officers to try to waylay and capture Clark at Kaskaskia. The rest of the Indians were permitted to return home to hunt game and plant their spring corn. And he set about making Fort Sackville into a stronghold that would dominate the whole region and persuade the defecting Indian tribes to rejoin the British.

Hamilton described in his diary the weakness of Fort Sackville: "In this miserable picketted work called a fort was found scarcely anything for defense, the want of a well was sufficient to evince its being untenable —two iron three pounders mounted . . . and two swivels not mounted constituted its whole defense, for there were not even platforms for small arms or even a lock to the gate."

He put his men to work repairing and strengthening the structure. He erected blockhouses at the northwest and southeast corners of the rectangular stockade, each of them "muskett proof" and with five ports for cannon, the lower story having loopholes for the discharge of small arms. He built a powder magazine, a guard house, and two barracks quartering 50 men each. He dug a well, graveled the parade ground, and threw up platforms along the 11-foot-high palisade walls on which defenders might stand and fire. By February 22, Hamilton reported that Fort Sackville was in a "tolerable state of defense."

While the work was progressing, Hamilton's scouts brought in a prisoner—Francis Vigo, who said he was a Spanish merchant from St. Louis traveling to Vincennes to visit his store there and conduct some business. (Actually, he had been sent by Clark to arrange for supplies for Captain Helm.) Vigo spoke freely about the pitiful American army at Kaskaskia, "billited upon inhabitants" and with "no discipline or regularity." Hamilton talked with equal freedom; he told (probably to frighten Clark and the French and to impress the Spaniards and Indians) of the large army that would descend on Kaskaskia in the spring. He released Vigo on his sworn oath that he would give no information to the Americans on his way back to St. Louis. It was Hamilton's second blunder.

For months on end, Clark received no word about these developments at Vincennes. Moreover, he suffered throughout this period from an almost total lack of information from Kentucky. He did receive in November 1778 an expression of gratitude and thanks from the Virginia House of Burgesses for his successful campaign, but for almost a year he had heard nothing from Governor Henry. He did not know if Gen. Lachlan McIntosh had led an army from Fort Pitt into the Ohio Country as planned, and perhaps on to Detroit.

From a captured enemy agent, Clark finally learned that McIntosh and his army had not marched and that Hamilton had moved south in force—perhaps to attack Vincennes but more probably, Clark

felt, to take Kaskaskia, the strongest of the American posts. At that point, on January 29, 1779, "in the hight of our anxiety," Francis Vigo appeared in Kaskaskia.

True to his word, Vigo had gone straight to St. Louis without imparting any information to the Americans; but there, released of his oath, he turned around and hurried back to Kaskaskia. He had a great deal to report. "We got every information from this gentleman," Clark said, "that we could wish for as he . . . had taken great pains to inform himself with a design to give intelligence."

With what Vigo told him, Clark knew he was "in a very critical situation." He had fewer than 200 men, nearly half of them French volunteers of unproved dependability, and he was cut off from communication and probably from reinforcement from the east. He now had three courses of reasonable action. He could attempt to fight his way up the Ohio to Kentucky, but even if he succeeded he would probably be too late to raise men and save that country. He could wait in Kaskaskia until spring, when he would be overwhelmed by a convergence of northern and southern Indians and the British. Or he could retreat to the Spanish side of the Mississippi and give up all he had won. "I would have bound myself seven years a slave," he wrote later, "to have had 500 men."

Clark turned his thoughts to an unlikely fourth possibility. He might assemble his men, march on Vincennes, and take the British by surprise. Vigo had said that Hamilton, while keeping a close control on his people, did not expect a visit from the Americans. The season of the year and the flooded lands were advantages, not handicaps.

"The enemy could not suppose that we should be so mad as to attempt to march 80 leagues [240 miles] through a drowned country in the depth of winter. . . . They would be off their guard and probably would not think it worth while to keep out spies. If we fell through, the country would not be in a worse situation than if we had not made the attempt. . . . Perhaps we might be fortunate."

Clark offered the proposal to his officers and "found it the sentiment of every one of them and eager for it." He summoned his company of volunteers from Cahokia and gave orders to prepare for the march.

"I conducted myself as though I was sure of taking Mr. Hamilton [and] instructed my officers to observe the same rule. In a day or two the country seemed to believe it."

When the company arrived from Cahokia, Clark gave a banquet and dance to which the Kaskaskians were invited. There he revealed his intention to carry the war to Vincennes.

"By twelve o'clock the next day application was made to raise a company

at Kaskaskia, which was granted and completed before night. . . .

"The whole country . . . took fire and every order was executed with chearfulness by every description of the inhabitants—preparing provisions, encouraging volunteers, etc.—and, as we had plenty of stores, every man was completely rigged with what he could desire to withstand the coldest weather. . . .

"The ladies began, also, to be spirited and interest themselves in the expedition, which had a great effect on the young men."

The women busied themselves in sewing company, regimental, and Virginia flags. They made enough flags for an army of 1,000 men, but the patriot commander insisted that he would need them all in the campaign.

He had bought a large Mississippi bateau and within two days had it converted and rigged into a row-galley, armed with two 4-pounder cannon and 4 swivel guns, and manned by 46 men. It was, he said, "much admired by the inhabitants, as no such thing had been seen in the country before." This vessel, named the *Willing*, carrying ammunition and the other heavy supplies, was to go down the Mississippi, up the Ohio, and north up the flooded Wabash to within 10 leagues of Vincennes. There the men were to conceal the craft and wait for orders. If Hamilton should attempt to escape down the Wabash, they were to pursue and take him. The *Willing* sailed on February 4, the inhabitants of Kaskaskia lining the river bank to watch her go.

The next day at 3 p.m.—7 days after Vigo's arrival in Kaskaskia—Clark mounted a Spanish stallion and led his column out of the village. He had 179 men in 5 companies—2 volunteer companies "of the principal young men of the Illinois" commanded by Capts. Richard McCarty and Francois Charleville, and 3 companies of Virginians commanded by Capts. Joseph Bowman, John Williams, and Edward Worthington. They were accompanied as far as the bank of the Kaskaskia by the villagers. While they were waiting to cross the river, Father Gibault delivered "a very suitable discourse to the purpose, gave us all absolution, and we set out on a forlorn hope indeed."

Clark left a letter to be forwarded to Governor Henry. "I am resolved," he said, "to take advantage of this present situation and risk the whole on a single battle. . . . I know the case is desperate, but Sir, we must either quit the country or attack Mr. Hamilton. No time is to be lost. . . . We have this consolation, that our cause is just and that our country will be grateful and not condemn our conduct in case we fail."

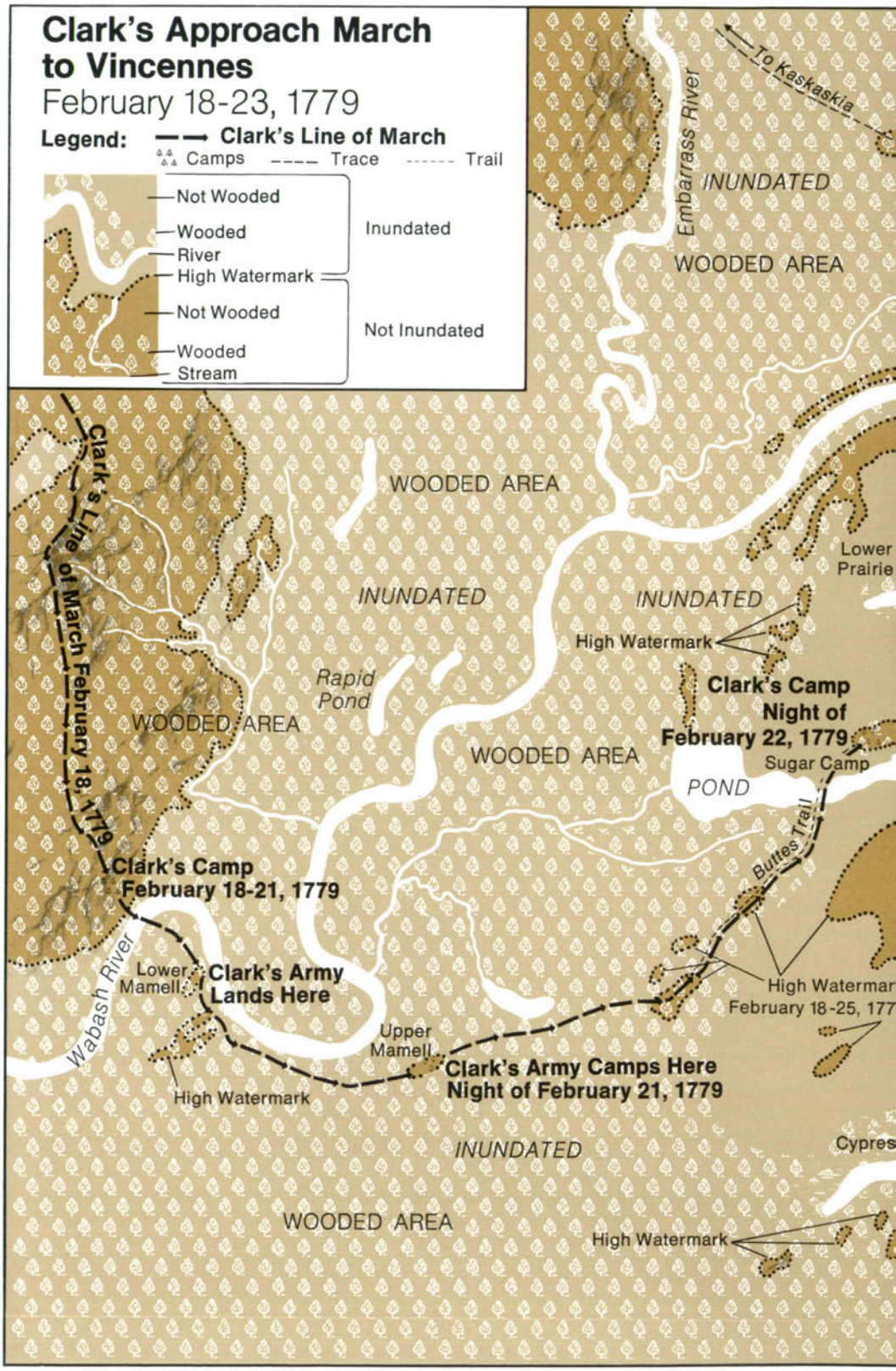
5

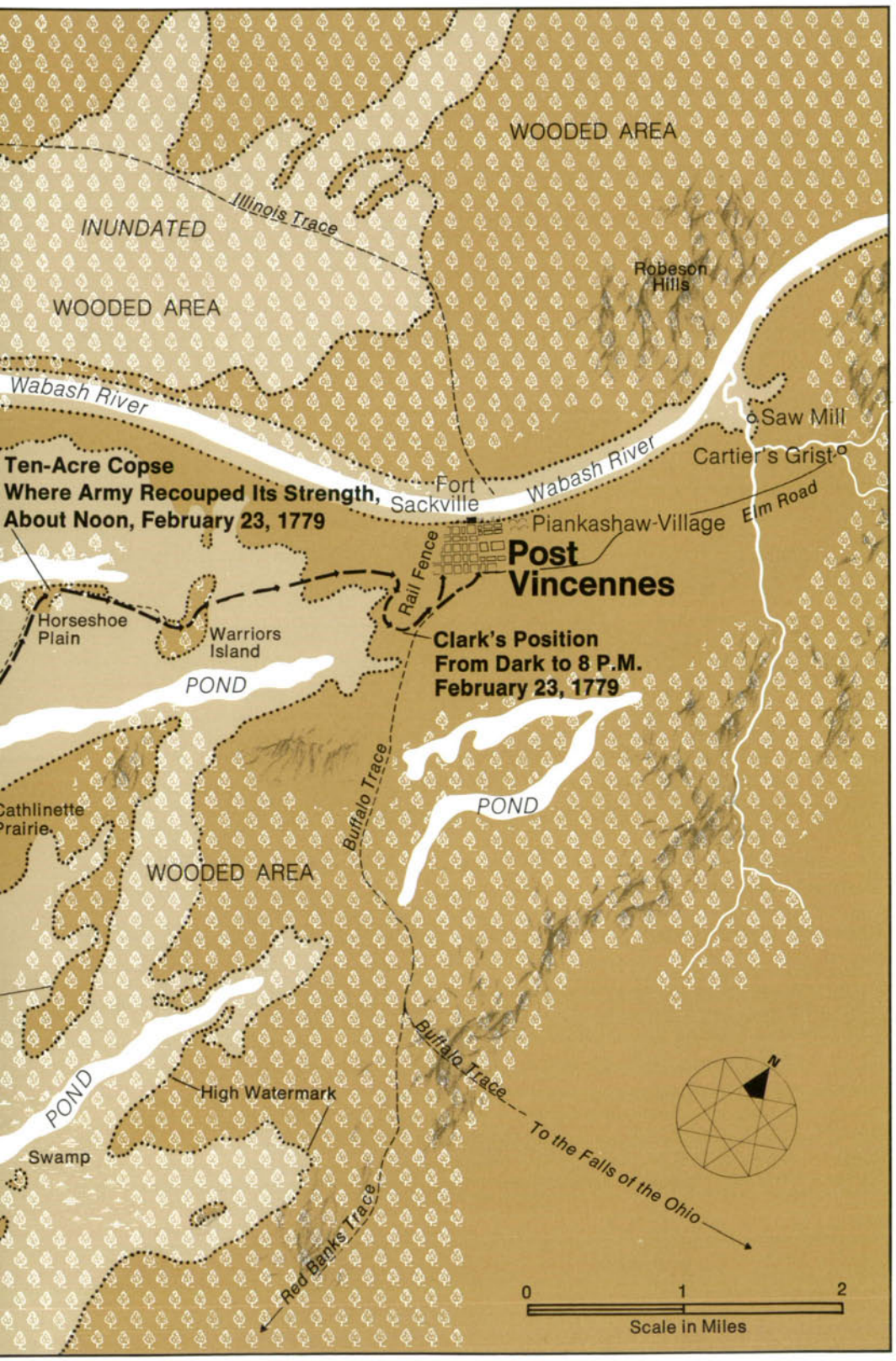
The March on Vincennes

Because of the late afternoon start, the regiment marched only 3 miles the first day before it made camp. For reasons not known, it spent the entire second day, Saturday, February 6, in camp. There was a steady light rain, but the weather was unseasonably warm.

The regiment moved out early Sunday morning. The march was over lowland plains flooded to a depth of several inches, the trail being churned by the men and horses into a ribbon of slippery mud. Clark called a halt at the end of 9 hours. For security, the regiment made its camp in a square, the pack train in the middle, each company being responsible for guarding its portion of the square. (The camp was a short distance beyond where the town of Sparta, Ill., now stands, 17 miles from Kaskaskia.)

The column progressed steadily for the next 5 days. At first the march was over large and level plains. Captain Bowman, who kept a daily journal on the expedition, observed, "From the flatness of the country the water rests a considerable time before it draws off, notwithstanding our men were in great spirits, tho much fatigued." (One of the prairies crossed was Grand Coté, northeast of present-day Coulterville. The camp was a little north of Nashville, Ill.) The men reached Petit Fork (Casey Fork) on Wednesday, February 10, and since the stream was too deep to ford, they felled trees to span it. With their baggage still on the west side of the stream, they spent a miserable night without their tents. They


Clark's Approach March to Vincennes
February 18-23, 1779
Legend:
Clark's Line of March
Camps
Trace
Trail
Not Wooded
Wooded
River
High Watermark
Inundated
Not Wooded
Wooded
Stream
Not Inundated
To Kaskaskia
Embarrass River
INUNDATED
WOODED AREA
Clark's Line of March February 18, 1779
WOODED AREA
INUNDATED
INUNDATED
Lower Prairie
High Watermark
Rapid Pond
Clark's Camp Night of February 22, 1779
WOODED AREA
WOODED AREA
Sugar Camp
POND
Buffles Trail
Clark's Camp February 18-21, 1779
Wabash River
Lower Mamell
Clark's Army Lands Here
High Watermar
February 18-25, 177
Upper Mamell
Clark's Army Camps Here Night of February 21, 1779
High Watermark
INUNDATED
Cypres
WOODED AREA
High Watermark


WOODED AREA
Illinois Trace
INUNDATED
WOODED AREA
Robeson Hills
Wabash River
Saw Mill
Cartier's Grist
Ten-Acre Copse
Where Army Recouped Its Strength,
About Noon, February 23, 1779
Fort Sackville
Wabash River
Elm Road
Piankashaw-Village
Post Vincennes
Rail Fence
Horseshoe Plain
Warriors Island
Clark's Position
From Dark to 8 P.M.
February 23, 1779
POND
POND
Buffalo Trace
Cathlinette Prairie
WOODED AREA
Buffalo Trace
To the Falls of the Ohio
POND
High Watermark
Swamp
Red Banks Trace
N
0
1
2
Scale in Miles

forded more streams the next day: Horse Creek, Paddy Creek, Skillet Fork (Saline River), and Brush Creek. They camped at a spring (1½ miles west of present-day Blue Point). They spent Friday the 12th marching across Cot Plains (Long Prairie and Six Mile Prairie). The company that had been detailed to hunt game that day killed a number of buffalo. The rain had stopped, but the Illinois Trace was so muddy that it became almost impassable. Bowman wrote, "The men much fatigued, encamped at the edge of the wood, this plain or meadow being fifteen or more miles across—it was late in the night before the troops and baggage got together." (The camp was several miles north of today's Mount Erie.)

On Saturday the 13th, the ninth day of the march, Clark came upon "the first obstruction of any consequence that I met with." He arrived at the western bank of the Little Wabash River. Three miles of dry land normally separated the Little Wabash and the Fox River to the east, but now the ground between them, known as Sugar Grove Island, was flooded to a depth of 3 and sometimes 4 feet, never less than 2 feet. (The two river channels, of course, were far deeper.) The hills to the east were nearly 5 miles distant. "This," Clark said, "would have been enough to have stop'ed any set of men that was not in the same temper that we was."

But he was worried:

"I viewed this sheet of water for some time with distrust but accusing myself of doubting I ammediately set to work without holding any consultation about it or suffering any body else to do so in my presence."

He had the men camp on the high ground and assigned a detail of skilled woodsmen to fashion a large pirogue—a canoe hollowed from the trunk of a tree.

"I acted as though crossing the water would be only a piece of divertion and as but few could work at a time, pains was taken to find divertion for the rest to keep them in high spirits but the men ware well prepared for this attempt as they had frequently waided farther in water, but perhaps seldom above half leg deep. My anczіety to cross this place continually increased as I saw that it would at once fling us into a situation of a forlorn hope, as all ideas of a retreat would in some measure be done away with."

The pirogue was completed and launched in the late afternoon of the following day. A picked crew went out to reconnoiter the flooded area; they returned to report that they had found about a half acre of ground above water at the west or near bank of the Fox River. They had blazed trees to mark a trail between the camp and the high ground.

Early next morning Clark began the difficult maneuver of getting his men and supplies across the two rivers and the miles of flooded plain between them. The weather, fortunately, though wet, was extraordinarily warm; even the peach trees were in bloom and the apple trees had put out buds. He first sent a working

party in the canoe to the opposite shore of the Little Wabash. There, standing waist deep in water, the men built a platform to hold the baggage. Another party then ferried the baggage across and piled it on the platform. The horses were swum across and reloaded with their packs. While this was being accomplished, the rest of the men, a few at a time, crossed in the canoe, assembled by companies on the east side, and started the march through the water, following the blazed trees to the half acre of raised ground. Some of the men were sick and were placed in the canoe.

The regiment crossed the Fox River in the same manner, with the help of a second baggage platform built on the far bank. The men reached the hills by nightfall and made camp. Clark now issued an order: no firearms were to be used except in self-defense or by those detailed to procure meat. He wrote:

"By the eavening we found ourselves incamped on a pretty height in high spirits each laughing at the other in consequence of something that had happened in the course of this ferrying business as they called it and the whole of the great exploit as they thought that they had accomplished this. A little antick drummer afforded them great divertion by floating on his drum, etc. All this was greatly incouraged and they really began to think themselves superiour to other men and that neither the rivers or seasons could stop their progress. Their whole conversation now was what they would do when they got about the enemy and now began to view the main Waubash as a creek and made no doubt but that such men as they ware could find a way to cross it. They wound themselves up to such a pitch that [mentally] they soon took St. Vincennes, divided the spoil, and before bed time was far advanced on their route to DeTroit."

The men marched all the next day through the rain, though now for the most part the ground was above water. They crossed Bompass Creek. Much of the food had been lost or damaged on the march, and there was little opportunity to replenish it, as wildlife had fled from the flooded areas. Bowman wrote ominously, "Our provisions began to be short." On Wednesday, about an hour before night-fall, they reached the flooded Embarrass River. Since there was no high ground on which to camp, Clark's men continued on, marching southeast along a ridge that paralleled the river and would eventually lead to the Wabash. They ran into mud and water and had to march for several hours in the dark before they found a place to camp—on a hillock from which the water had recently receded. Clark, in the meantime, had sent an officer and three men to cross the Embarrass, if possible, and proceed to a plantation known to lie on the Wabash across from Vincennes. There they were to steal some boats or canoes and "get some intelligence." They came late into camp to report that they had been unable to cross the river.

The men were wakened next morning (Thursday, February 18) by a sound that stirred their hearts and raised their spirits: the boom of the morning gun at Fort Sackville. The march continued down the west side of the Embarrass, through what Bowman called "some fine land." At 2 p.m. they reached the Wabash, at a point they estimated to be 9 miles south of Vincennes (actually 11 miles,

at present-day St. Francisville). There they made camp. Clark sent out a party on a raft with orders to commandeer some boats, obtain information, and (it has been suggested) to contact his agents in or near Vincennes. The regiment went to sleep that night with empty stomachs, for the food was now completely gone.

In a report on the expedition he sent to his friend George Mason some 8 months later, Clark wrote of "our suffering for four days in crossing those waters." He would not describe in writing how it was done, he said, but would tell the story when he saw Mason personally, for "it is too incredible for any person to believe except those that are as well acquainted with me as you are."

Friday was a bad day, with the men camped on the bank of an impassable river, without boats and without food. Clark put out a "water guard." He sent out another party in a small canoe built on the spot with the same instructions given to the men sent on the raft the day before. He dispatched two men down the Wabash to find Captain Rodgers and the *Willing* and bring them upstream as quickly as possible. That, Bowman wrote, was "our last hope. Starving. Many of the men much cast down, particularly the volunteers. No provisions of any sort now for two days. Hard fortune." The gloom deepened when the men on the raft returned without boats or information; the raft had broken up and they had lain all night in the river clinging to some logs. The men in the canoe returned with word that they had turned back when they saw the campfires of what appeared to be a large body of either Englishmen or Indians. Clark described that day:

"Many of our volunteers began for the first time to despair. Some talked of returning, but my situation . . . was such that I was past all uneasiness. I laughed at them without perswading or ordering them but told them I should be glad they would go out and kill some deer. They went confused with such conduct. My own troops I know had no idea of abandoning an enterprise for the want of provition while there was plenty of good horses in their possession. [That is, the horses could be butchered.] And I new that with out any violence the volunteers could be detained for a few days, in the course of which time our fate would be known. I conducted myself in such a manner that caused the whole to believe that I had no doubt of suckcess, which kept up their spirits."

The next day, Saturday, February 20, Clark turned his men to making canoes "in a private place," both to keep them occupied and to have the means of crossing the Wabash if the *Willing* did not appear. The camp was unusually quiet that morning. Many of the volunteers continued to talk of abandoning the expedition and returning home.

About noon, the water guard brought in a boat with five French-Canadians from Vincennes heading south to join a hunting party. The men were astonished, friendly, and eager to talk. The people of Vincennes, they said, were well disposed toward the Americans and would welcome them. The British were quite unaware of Clark's advance. They had strengthened the fort. Hamilton had the same number of regulars and militia that Francis Vigo had

reported 3 weeks earlier. There were a good many Indians in the town. The hunters had seen two empty canoes adrift on the river. (A party sent out in search of them found one and brought it back.) The hunters would be pleased to guide the regiment to Vincennes.

That afternoon one of the soldiers killed a deer and brought it into camp, where it was divided among the five companies. It was, Bowman wrote laconically, "very acceptable."

Clark and his weary, hungry men now had to make the last great effort—to cross the Wabash and almost 5 miles of flooded countryside, with only a few canoes to help them. In the crossing Clark would have to divide his army into two parts, one or both of which could be easily wiped out by the enemy if discovered, neither of which could come to the aid of the other in an emergency. He decided to leave behind the horses, the excess baggage, and a small rear guard. He would try to reach what Bowman described as "a small little hill called the lower Mamell (or Bubbie)" on the east bank of the Wabash.

The ferrying began at daybreak and was completed successfully. The regiment was now, at least, on the same side of the river as Vincennes. The next goal was another hillock, the Upper Mamell, more than 3 miles away. Clark ordered the men forward. They reached the second hillock by dusk, wading in water sometimes up to their armpits, and made camp there. Bowman ended his day's entry, "Rain all this day and no provisions." The French guides said that the next land above water was at the Sugar Camp, a grove of sugar maple trees several miles distant. The regiment, they said, could not possibly reach it on foot.

Many writers have summoned up their best talent to describe the events of the next two days. All have relied mainly on Clark's account, and none has told it more effectively than Clark himself, describing a historic and heroic action in his homespun prose.

"A canoe was dispatch of and returned without finding that we could pass. I went in her myself and sounded the water, found as deep as my neck.

"I returned with a design to have the men transported on board the canoes to the Sugar Camp, which I new would spend the whole day and insuing night, as the vessels would pass but slowly through the bushes. The loss of so much time to men half starved was a matter of consequence. I would have given now a good deal for a days provition or for one of our horses. I returned but slowly to the troops, giving myself time to think. On our arrival, all ran to hear what was the report. Every eye was fixed on me. I unfortunately spoke serious to one of the officers. The whole was allarmed without knowing what I said. They ran from one to another bewailing their situation."

Clark "viewed their confusion" for a moment and then whispered to those men nearest him to do as he did. He immediately took some gunpowder in his hands, poured water on it, blackened his

face, gave a war whoop, and, without saying a word, marched into the water. The other men, he said, "gazed and fell in one after another without saying a word, like a flock of sheep." He ordered those nearest him to begin singing their favorite song. It soon passed through the line of men "and the whole went on chearfully."

"I now intended [to] have them transported across the deepest part of the water, but when geting about waist deep one of the men informed me that he thought he felt a path. (A path is very easily discovered under water by the feet.) We examined and found it so and concluded that it [would] keep on the highest ground, which it did, and by pains to follow it we got to the Shugar camp without the least difficulty . . . whare their was about half an acre of dry ground, at least not under water, where we took up our lodgings."

The French guides were alarmed at the situation. It was impossible, they said, to march from that place and over the plain ahead until the water fell. They begged that they might take their canoe into town that night. They promised to obtain provisions from their homes very quietly and return with canoes. Some of Clark's men could go with them as surety of their good conduct. The request seemed a good gamble, and a number of the officers favored it, but Clark refused.

"I would not suffer it, by no means. I never could well account for this piece [of] obstinacy and give satisfactory reasons to myself or any body else why I denied a proposition apparently so easy to execute and so much advantage, but some thing seemed to tell me that it should not be done and it was not."

Bowman ended his journal that night, "No provisions yet. Lord help us."

Of Tuesday, February 23, Clark wrote:

"The most of the weather that we had on this march was moist and warm for the season. This was the coldest night we had. The ice in the morning was from ½ to ¾ inch thick near the shoars and in still water. The morning was the finest we had on our march.

"A little after sun-rise I lectured the whole. What I said to them I forget, but it may be easily imagined by a person that could possess my affections for them at that time. Concluded by informing them that surmounting the plain that was then in full view and reaching the oposite woods would put an end to their fatiegue. That in a few hours they would have a sight of their long wish for object, and amediately stept into the water without waiting for any reply. A huza took place.

"As we generally march through the water in a line, as it was much easiest, before a third entered I halted, and further to prove the men and having some suspition of three or four, hollowed to Major Bowman, order him to fall in the rear with 25 men and put to death any man that refused to march, that we wished to have no such person among us. The whole gave a cry of apperbation that it was right, and on we went.

"This was the most trying of all the difficulties we had experienced. I generally kept 15 or 20 of the strongest men next myself, and judging from my own feeling what must be that of [the] others. Geting about the middle of the [Horseshoe] plain, the water about knee deep, I found myself sensibly failing. As there was hear no trees or bushes for the men to support them selves by, I doubted that many of the most weak would be drownd."

Clark ordered the canoes to make for land, discharge the men they carried, and to "ply backwards and forwards with all diligence and pick up the men." To encourage the others he sent his strongest and tallest men forward with orders that when they got to a certain distance, to pass the word back that the water was getting shallower, and when they neared the woods to cry out at the top of their voices, "Land!"

"This stratagem had its desired effect. The men incouraged by [it] exerted themselves almost beyond their abilities, the weak holding by the stronger and frequently one with two others holt. This was of infinite advantage to the weak, but the water never got shallower but continued deepening. Geting to the woods whare they expected land, the water was to my shoulders, but gaining those woods was of great consequence. All the low men and weakly hung to the trees and floated on the old logs until they were taken of by the canoes."

Those who reached the shore immediately built fires. Many of the others reached the shore and fell, unable to stand without the support of the water. It was, Clark said, "a delightful dry spot of ground of about ten acres." He found that the fires "answered no purpose" in reviving the weaker men, unless the stronger took them by the arms and made them walk up and down until they recovered, "and being a delightful day it soon did."

"But fortunately, as if designed by Providence, a canoe of Indian squaws and children was coming up to the town and took through part of this plain as a high way, was discovered by our canoes as they were out after the men. They gave chase and took them on board, of which was near half quarter of buffaloe, some corn tallow, kettles, etc. This was a grand prise and was invaluable. Broath was amediately made and served out to the most weak [but] with great care most of the whole got a little, but a great many would not tast it but gave their part to the weakly, jocosely saying something cheary to their comrades.

"This little refreshment and fine weather by the afternoon gave new life to the whole. Crossing a narrow deep lake in the canoes and marching some distance we came to [a] copse of timber called the Warriours Island. We ware now in full view of the fort and town, not a srub between us, at about two miles distance. Every man now feasted his eyes and forgot that he had suffered any thing, that all that had passed was owing to good policy and nothing but what a man could bear, and that a soldier had no right to think, etc., passing from one extream to another, which is common in such cases.

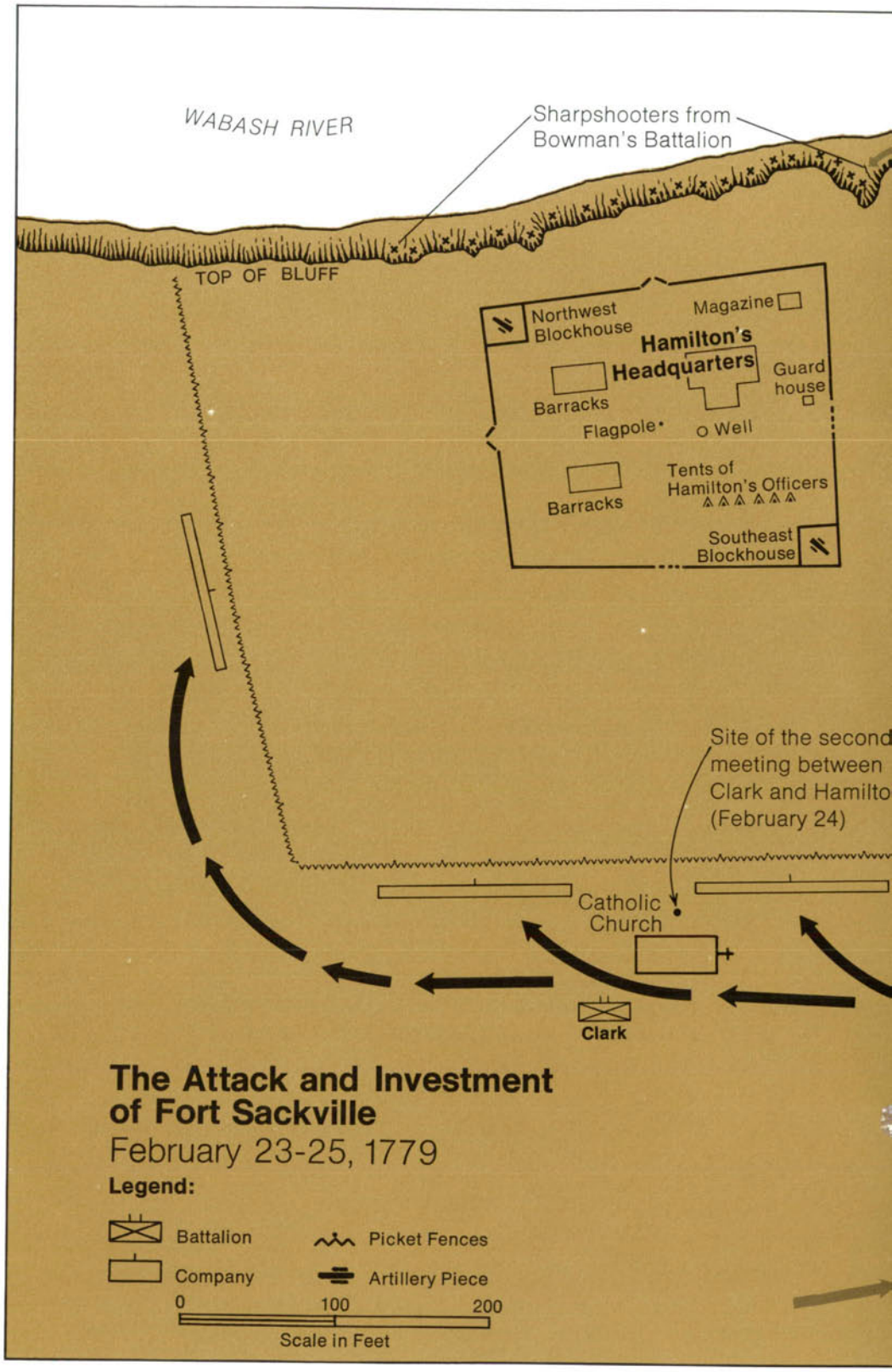
"It was now that we had to display our abilities."

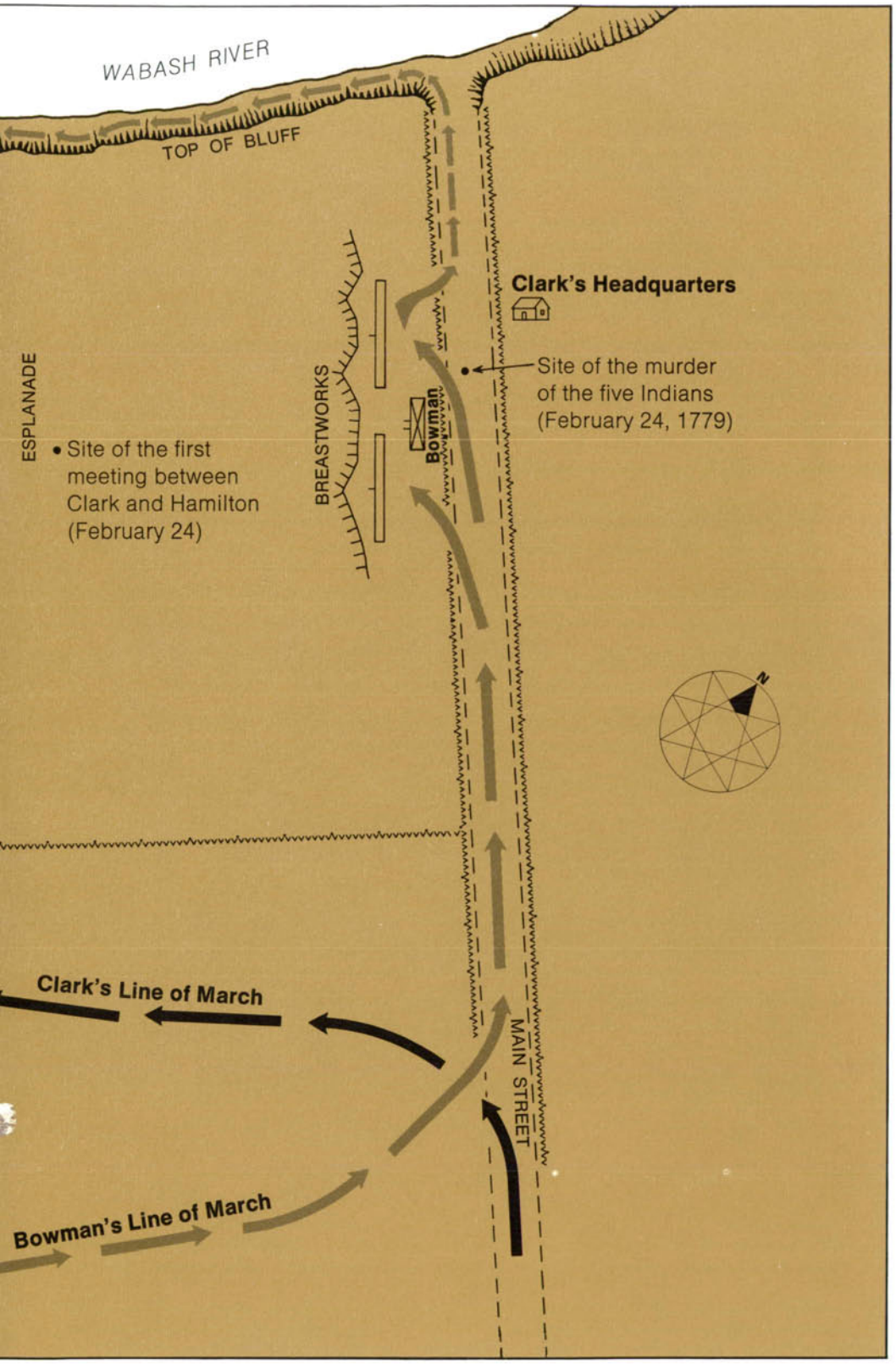
6

"Never Was a Man More Happy"

Between February 11, the 5th day of Clark's march, and February 23, Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton sent out several patrols in an unsuccessful search and pursuit of 7 deserters who had fled Fort Sackville. All the patrols, by an extraordinary stroke of "Clark luck," missed the advancing army, partly because they detoured to travel on high ground, partly because an army marching through water leaves no trail. Capt. Francois Maisonville's patrol returned on February 22 with some results to show for their week on the trail. They had taken two Virginia soldiers on the Ohio River who claimed they were on the way west from Fort Pitt and knew nothing of what was happening in the Illinois Country; and they had found the ashes of 14 camp fires. They could not tell whether the fires had been built by Indians or Virginians. Hamilton decided to send Capt. Guillaume La Mothe, a lieutenant, and 20 men on a reconnaissance patrol. They would leave the next day. Captain Maisonville volunteered to accompany them.

Hamilton felt that the campfires were those of the enemy, but he was not deeply concerned. The Wabash was in its worst flood in years, and several of his patrols had returned with word that the enormous lake southwest of Vincennes was impassable. Obviously, no American force of any size could get near the town. Still, he took some routine precautions. He had ammunition issued and stored in the blockhouse and he brought in extra provisions. He called out the Vincennes militia. He asked the paroled prisoners, including Captain Helm, to stay in the fort. And he put his men to erecting a scaffold in the north and south angles of the fort on which they might stand and fire over the 11-foot palisade.


WABASH RIVER
Sharpshooters from Bowman's Battalion
TOP OF BLUFF
Northwest Blockhouse
Magazine
Hamilton's Headquarters
Guard house
Barracks
Flagpole
Well
Barracks
Tents of Hamilton's Officers
Southeast Blockhouse
Site of the second meeting between Clark and Hamilto (February 24)
Catholic Church
Clark
The Attack and Investment of Fort Sackville
February 23-25, 1779
Legend:
Battalion
Company
Picket Fences
Artillery Piece
0
100
200
Scale in Feet


WABASH RIVER
TOP OF BLUFF
Clark's Headquarters
Site of the murder
of the five Indians
(February 24, 1779)
ESPLANADE
• Site of the first
meeting between
Clark and Hamilton
(February 24)
BREASTWORKS
Bowman
N
Clark's Line of March
MAIN STREET
Bowman's Line of March

The garrison spent Tuesday, February 23rd, building the scaffold and completing repairs to one of the blockhouses. Later in the afternoon the men engaged in field sports.

Meanwhile, on Warrior's Island, 1½ miles away, Clark's men searched for nuts (hickory and pecan), caught, killed, and roasted a fox, dried their clothes, and readied their gear for the assault. Clark and his officers lay at the edge of the woods studying the village through their glasses. Clark later recorded his thoughts:

"Our situation was now truly critical. No possibility of retreating in case of defeat in full view of a town that at this time had upwards of six hundred men in it, troops, inhabitants, and Indians. The crew of the gally [*Willing*], though not fifty men, would have been now a reinforcement of imence magnitude to our little army (if I may so call it), but we would not think of them. We ware now in the situation that I had laboured to get ourselves in.

"The idea of being made prisoner was foreign to almost every man, as they expected nothing but torture from the savages if they fell into their hands. Our fate was now to be determined probably in a few hours. We knew that nothing but the most daring conduct could insure sucksess. I knew that a number of the inhabitants wished us well [and] many [were] luke warm to the interest of either [the British or the Americans]. And also learned that the Grand Chief [of the Piankashaws], the Tobacco's Son, had . . . but a few days past openly declared in counsell with the British that he was brother and friend to the Big Knife [Col. Clark]. These ware favourable circumstances."

When several mounted duck hunters appeared on the plain before them, Clark "sent out as many of our active young Frenchmen to decoy and take one of them prisoner in such a manner as not to allarm the others, which they did." By a remarkable coincidence, the man taken was "known to be a friend, by which we got all the inteligence we wished for: but would not suffer him to see our troops, except a few."

"A thousand ideas flashed in my head at this moment. I found that Govr. Hamilton was able to defend himself for a considerable time, but knew that he was not able to turn out of the fort; that if the seige continued long, a superior number might come against us, as I knew there was a party of English not far above in the river: that if they found out our numbers [they] might raise the disaffected savages and harass us. I resolved to appear as darring as possible, that the enemy might conceive by our behaviour that we were very numerous and probably discourage them. I immediately wrote to the inhabitants in general.

"GENTLEMEN: Being now within two Miles of Your Village with my Army, determined to take your fort this night and not being willing to surprize you, I take this step to request of such of you as are true citizens and willing to enjoy the liberty I bring you, to remain still in your houses, and those (if any there be) that are friends to the King, will instantly repair to the fort and join the hair buyer Genl and fight like men. And if any such as . . . do not go to the fort, shall be discovered afterwards, they may depend on severe punishment. On the contrary, those that are true friends

to liberty may depend on being well treated and I once more request that they shall keep out of the streets, for every person I find in arms on my arrival I shall treat him as an enemy."

"I had various ideas on the supposed result of this letter," Clark said. "I knew that it could do us no damage, that it would incourage our friends, cause the lukewarm to be desided, and astonish our enemies [among the French], that they would of course suppose our information good and our forces so numerous that we ware sure of sucksess."

The captured French duckhunter carried the letter into Vincennes while Clark and his officers "anctiously" watched through their glasses. Very soon there was "some stir in every street we could penetrate into, and great number running or riding out into the Commons, we supposed to view us, which was the case." The Frenchman, in what must have been one of the great moments of his life, supplemented the letter with what he had seen, surmised, and been told. An American army was on Warriors Island. It had upwards of 1,000 men, and more were coming with artillery. The army was from Kentucky. (No one, Clark felt, would have believed it was from Kaskaskia.) He carried messages from a number of officers to friends in Vincennes—friends who knew that the officers lived and were lately in Kentucky. (Clark had borrowed their names for this occasion.)

"But what supprised us was that nothing had yet happened that had the appearance of the garisons being allarmed—no drum nor gun. We began to suppose that the information we got from our prisoner false and that the enemy already knew of us and was prepared."

The facts were that houses screened the fort from Warriors Island and that some of the British did ask the villagers what all the excitement was about and were satisfied with the answer: the people were gathered to watch Captain La Mothe and his patrol march out. A Mrs. Moses Henry went into the fort to visit her husband, who was being held there under suspicion of having been in communication with the enemy. As she gave him the food she carried, she whispered the great news. Henry at once told Captain Helm and the other prisoners.

Clark assembled his force shortly before sundown.

"We had but little to say to our men except inculcating an idea of the necessity of obedience, etc. We knew they did not want incourageing and that any thing might be attempted with them that was possible for such a number perfectly cool, under proper subordination, pleased with the prospect before them, and much attached to their officers. They all declared that they ware confinced that an implicit obedience to order was the only thing that would insure suckcess."

The army marched at dusk in two battalions, one headed by Clark, the other by Bowman. They moved slowly, "in the greatest order

and regularity," with banners streaming and drums beating, in full view of the inhabitants gathered at the edge of town. The battalions came to several ridges in the plain 7 to 8 feet high, running obliquely to the town; and behind these they wheeled, marched, and counter-marched, raising the extra banners on long poles cut for the purpose, "as many of them as would be sufficient for a thousand men." Officers dashed back and forth on horses taken from the captured duck hunters. His army, Clark thought, "made no despicable appearance." The exhibition went on until dark. "We then suddenly altered our direction and crossed ponds whare they could not have suspected us and about eight o'clock gained the heights back of the town." (The heights, southwest of the village, were later named Bunker Hill.)

Incredibly, those in the fort still did not see or hear the flamboyant maneuvers, and no one alerted them. Clark sent Lieutenant Bayley with 14 Virginians to take up positions around the fort and to open fire on a given signal, while the two battalions quietly occupied the village. (Clark's companies entered Vincennes along today's Main Street, Bowman's along Prairie Street.) There was no disorder and no resistance. The British Indians fled from the village. A number of the inhabitants appeared with plates of food, which the famished troops ate as they stood guard or went about their duties. It was the first "meal of victuals" they had eaten in 5 days. Francois Bosseron, one of Hamilton's militia captains, led a detail of Virginians and volunteers to a cache of powder, hidden 3 months earlier when the British took Vincennes. He then hurried to the fort to report for duty, apologizing for having been unavoidably delayed.

Governor Hamilton that evening invited Captain Helm, whose company he had come to enjoy, to join him in his quarters for a game of cards. About 5 minutes after the candles were lighted, the two men heard a shot. A few minutes later, a second shot was fired, followed by a volley. Hamilton was startled but not alarmed, for the Indians commonly fired off their weapons in celebrations and on returning from a hunt. But when he heard another volley of shots, he left his card game and descended to the parade ground to find out what was happening. Several bullets whistled by him and impacted. Sgt. John Chapman was struck in the chest. Hamilton ordered the drummer to beat the call to arms. The soldiers ran to occupy the two blockhouses, mount the firing platforms, and man the cannon. At that point John McBeath, regimental surgeon, having just worked his way back from the village, came running in to report that Clark had surrounded the fort and was attacking with an army of 500 men.

During the brisk fire fight that followed, Bowman's men erected a barricade parallel to the main street about 120 yards from the fort's main gate. Picked men were sent to take position on the bank of the river about 30 yards from the northeast palisade. Other troops from Clark's force deployed, mostly within 30 yards of the fort, in ditches, behind houses and barns, behind solid, well-made garden fences, and behind the church, which stood

about 80 yards from the southeastern wall. Clark held 50 men in reserve, ready to move quickly if the British sallied from the fort.

Those surrounding the fort fired into the gun ports and through the spaces between the palisades, some of which were as large as a man's fist. The defenders were forced to shutter the embrasures and virtually discontinue using their cannon, for the barrels could not be depressed to hit the men near the walls, and a hail of rifle bullets came through the embrasures when the gunners, after loading, ran the piece out and attempted to aim and fire. Six of the garrison—one-sixth of the regulars—were wounded.

During the night, Tobacco's Son appeared at Clark's headquarters in a house on the northeast side of Main Street near the river. He led about 100 Piankashaw and Kickapoo warriors and announced that he wished to take part in the attack on the British. Clark thanked his old friend for the offer of help but suggested that he hold his men away from the action until morning, as in a night attack "some confution might happen if our men should mix in the dark." He asked the chief to stay at his side throughout the night as his advisor, "which was agreable to him."

In the meantime, Captains La Mothe and Maisonville and their Canadians, having heard the firing behind them, abandoned their patrol, returned to Vincennes, and lay concealed in a barn watching the action and hoping for an opportunity to enter the fort. Two of their men, deciding to declare their own private peace, slipped away. Captured by the Virginians, they revealed the presence of La Mothe and his men in the village.

Capture of this force would have been easy, but Clark made a characteristically unorthodox decision: he took steps to let the men rejoin the garrison. Word was passed to cease firing and to withdraw a little. La Mothe and his men crept to the wall, gave the password, and began to ascend the ladders that were lowered. As they reached the top of the palisade, some fun-loving Virginians a few yards away let out a blood-curdling yell. The Canadians, in a panic, tried to scramble over the wall in a body; some of them fell or leaped to the ground inside or outside the wall. All but one managed to struggle up the ladders and over the wall. Captain Maisonville, betrayed by a cousin in the village, was captured. Now Clark's worst fear was eased: La Mothe and his patrol were penned up in the fort; they could not go into the countryside and rally the Indians to attack his small force. The addition of 20 men would add no great strength to the garrison, and it surely would lead Hamilton to believe the Virginians were massed in great numbers.

The moon went down at 1 a.m., but the firing continued intermittently all night. At daybreak the defenders increased their fire sharply, and the first Virginian was wounded; he was grazed slightly on the head. From deserters or prisoners, Clark learned during the night about the two Virginians Maisonville had captured

on the Ohio. These, he supposed (mistakenly) were carrying dispatches for him from Williamsburg—dispatches that Hamilton might destroy. At 8 a.m. he called for a truce and sent one of his French captains to the fort with a letter to Hamilton:

"Sir—In order to save yourself from the impending storm that now threatens you, I order you to immediately surrender yourself up with all your garrison, stores, etc. etc., for if I am obliged to storm, you may depend upon such treatment justly due to a murderer. Beware of destroying stores of any kind or any papers or letters that is in your possession or hurting one house in the town, for by heavens if you do, there shall be no mercy shewn you."

Hamilton read the letter to his officers. He would, he said, "undergo any extremity rather than trust to the discretion of such sort of people." The officers agreed. When this decision was conveyed to the troops, Hamilton later said, the regulars declared "they would defend the King's colors to the last, adding a homely but hearty phrase, that they would stick to me as the shirt to my back." The Canadians were not so resolute; they stood with their heads bowed. Hamilton wrote his answer in one sentence:

"Govr Hamilton begs leave to acquaint Col. Clark that he and his garrison are not disposed to be awed into any action unworthy of British subjects."

The firing then resumed, "very hot on both sides." The attackers began to dig a tunnel at the river bank, directed toward Hamilton's powder magazine, intending to mine and blow up the fort. As he surveyed the situation, Hamilton felt that his position was hopeless. He was 600 miles from Detroit and reinforcements. His casualties were mounting. About half of his 80-man garrison were French, and they were muttering within his hearing (no doubt encouraged by Captain Bosseron) that "it was very hard to be obliged to fight against their countrymen and relatives." He was surrounded by an army estimated to number more than 500. He could see (as Clark meant he should see) that the enemy was digging a tunnel toward his powder magazine. To continue a defense, he would have to burn the houses near the fort; but if he did so he would be liable to "an extremity of revenge" from the inhabitants. He decided he would "accept honorable terms if they could be obtained." ("Not knowing the number of the enemy," Clark said, they "thought themselves in a worse situation than they really was.") Hamilton sent out a white flag and another letter, proposing that the two commanders call a 3-day truce, during which time they would hold a conference. If Colonel Clark did not wish to come into the fort, they could meet before the gate. Clark, of course, refused the request for a truce. Mr. Hamilton must surrender himself and his garrison as prisoners "without discretion" (unconditionally). If Hamilton desired a conference, he should come to the church.

While this exchange was taking place, some 15 to 20 Ottawa and Delaware warriors, led by two French partisans, came down the hill on the Buffalo Trace. Hamilton had sent them out on patrol as far as the Falls of the Ohio. They had two Canadian prisoners

(presumably deserters). Clark was expecting them, for his Kickapoo allies had told him they were coming. He assigned Capt. John Williams to greet, salute, and capture them.

Because there was no exchange of fire between Clark's and Hamilton's forces at the time and the British flag was still flying over the fort, the Indians and their French leaders assumed that Williams and his men were a party sent out to escort them to the fort, an honor commonly paid them on returning from a foray. They gave a war whoop and, in Clark's words, "came on with all the parade of sucksessful warriors. I was highly pleased to see each party hooping, hollowing, and striking each other's breasts. As they approached in the open fields, each seemed to try to out do the other in the greatest signs of joy." The Indians discharged their pieces in the air, as was the custom when meeting friends. Williams discharged his rifle. When a few steps away, the French leader stopped, suddenly suspicious. Williams immediately seized him. The others, seeing their mistake, turned and ran. Williams' men opened fire, killing two, wounding three, and capturing eight. Two of those captured were recognized as prisoners and were released. Said Clark:

"I had now a fair oppertunity to make an impression on the Indians that I could have wished for; that of convincing them that Governor Hamilton could not give them that protection that he had made them believe he could. In some measure to insence the Indians against him for not exerting himself to save their friends, [I] ordered the prisoners to be tomahawked in the face of the Garrisson."

Captain Williams paraded the Indians in the main street opposite the fort gate, their hands bound, and ordered them to sit in a circle. The British were watching over the palisade. The first Indian was tomahawked. The others began to sing their death song. They were singing when they were killed.

"It had the effect that I expected: Instead of making their [Indian] friends inviterate against us, they upbraided the English parties in not trying to save their friends and gave them to understand that they believed them to be liars and no warriors."

Clark also ordered the white partisan leader, painted and dressed like an Indian, to be killed, and Lieutenant La Croix, an elderly officer-volunteer from Cahokia, drew his sword to run the man through if he tried to escape. Clark: "The wretch, on seeing the executioner's tomahawk raised to give the fatal stroke, raised his eyes as if making his last addresses to heaven, cried out, 'O save me.' " La Croix at once recognized the voice of his own son. Clark: "Knowing there would be the greatest selicitations made to save him, that I immediately absconded myself: but by the warmest selicitations from his father, who had behaved so exceedingly well in our service, and some of the officers, I granted him his life on certain conditions."

About 2 p.m. the gate opened and Hamilton, in full dress uniform, walked down the street, accompanied by his major, Jehu Hay,

and Captain Helm. He was badly shaken by the executions he had just witnessed. He gave Clark a list of conditions under which he would surrender, a main one being that "officers and others of the garrison who have families to be permitted to return to their homes on parole." Clark rejected the conditions. Hamilton asked him to name his terms. Clark repeated his demand for unconditional surrender. It was foolish, he said, for Colonel Hamilton to make conditions and to continue to resist. The capture of the fort was inevitable. His cannon would arrive in a matter of hours. His troops were "already impatient and called aloud for permission to tear down and storm the fort."

"If such a step was taken [Clark later recounted], many of course would be cut down, and the result of an inraged body of woodmen breaking in must be obvious to him. It would be out of the power of an Am[er]ican officer to save a single man. Various altercation took place for a considerable time.

"We took our leave and parted, but a few steps before the Govr stopt and politely asked me if I would be so kind as to give him my reasons for refusing the Garison on any other terms than those I had offered. I told him that I had no objections in giving him my real reasons, which was simply those that I knew the greatest part of the principal Indian partisans of De Troit was with him; that I wanted an excuse to put them to death or other ways treat them as I thought proper; that the cries of the widows and fatherless on the frontiers that they had occationed now required their blood from my hands. . . .

"Some moments relapsed without a word passing on either side. . . . I told him that we would return to our respective posts, that I would reconsider the matter, and that I would let him know the result if we thought of making any further prepotials."

Clark finally agreed to moderate his terms in writing and gave Hamilton a half hour to accept them. They contained no provision for parole, but Hamilton accepted them, adding a postscript: "Agreed to for the following reasons, the remoteness from succours, the state and quantity of provisions, etc., the unanimity of officers and men on its expediency, the honorable terms allowed, and lastly the confidence of the enemy."

Hamilton did not raise the British flag the next morning (February 25) and so was spared the humiliation of having to lower it. He and his men marched out at 10 a.m. and stood in ranks on the esplanade, wearing their knapsacks, their bayonets fixed. There they stacked and surrendered their arms. Clark marched into the fort at the head of two of his companies and ran up the American colors. Hamilton looked at the handful of rough, ragged men and turned to the American commander. "Colonel Clark," he asked, "where is your army?" When Clark indicated that his army stood before him, Hamilton turned away, reportedly with tears in his eyes. "All my past sufferings vanished," wrote Clark to George Mason. "Never was a man more happy."

7

The Fruits of Victory

Clark learned from his French allies that a company of British soldiers had recently been sent up the Wabash to the town of Ouiatanon (which lay 4 miles below present-day Lafayette) to get supplies stockpiled there for the spring campaign. He ordered Captain Helm to take 50 volunteers from the Vincennes militia and intercept the company on its return. Helm and his men left on February 26, the day after the fall of Fort Sackville, in three armed bateaux. They returned 10 days later, bringing with them as prisoners two British officers and 38 enlisted men, captured near the mouth of the Vermilion River while sleeping around their campfires. They also brought seven boats loaded with 6 tons of stores worth about $50,000—trade goods for the Indians, arms, ammunition, six cannon, barrels of wine, kegs of brandy, gold and silver coins, food, and clothing, including more than 500 shirts and complete uniforms for 42 soldiers. According to the custom of the time, *all* this now belonged to Clark and his men. He turned the food over to his quartermaster, distributed the clothing among his half-naked Virginians, used the gold to make up arrears in pay, and divided the rest of the booty, including the goods taken at Fort Sackville, among his enlisted men. "They were," he observed, "almost rich."

Clark remained at Vincennes for almost a month. He gave the name *Patrick Henry* to the fort. He freed the French-Canadian militiamen, giving them boats for transportation to Detroit, a copy of the French treaty to show to their friends there, and a letter to the British commander at Fort Detroit in which he wrote: "I learn by your letter to Govr Hamilton that you were busy making new works. I am glad to hear it, as it saves the Americans some expences in building."

The *Willing* and its crew, delayed by floods and swift currents, finally arrived to find the battle already won, "to the great mortification of all on board." Clark put 26 prisoners in the *Willing* under guard—Hamilton, Hay, McBeath, Maisonville, La Mothe, three other officers, and 18 British enlisted men—and started them on a 19-week journey to Williamsburg. (After 18 months of rough treatment in Virginia, Maisonville committed suicide; the others were eventually paroled or exchanged. Hamilton became governor of Bermuda, giving his name to the island's capital city.)

After appointing Captain Helm as civil governor of Vincennes and Lieutenant Brashears as military commandant with a garrison force of two lieutenants and 40 men, Clark set out on horseback for Kaskaskia, the rest of the regiment returning in boats by way of the rivers. Kaskaskians gave him a hero's welcome. In the months that followed, he received a commendation from the Continental Congress; an elegant Sword of Honor from the Virginia Assembly "as a proof of their approbation of your great good conduct & gallant behavior"; promotion to full colonel; a promise that he would receive 500 Virginia militiamen in June for the march on Detroit; and the welcome news that his friend, John Todd, Jr., would soon arrive as civil administrator of the new Virginia County of Illinois.

The praise and good news were soon overmatched by misfortune. Instead of 500 men, Clark received only 130, and these were ill-trained, unpaid, unruly, unused to frontier life, and low in morale. And he learned that payment had been refused in New Orleans on $25,000 of his bills of credit. Oliver Pollock, he found, was bankrupt and could no longer help him. Without the supplies or men he needed, Clark postponed the attack on Detroit, "in the execution of which my very soul was wrapt." He personally guaranteed payment of his new bills of credit and sold or mortgaged his Kentucky lands, some 8,000 acres, to raise money.

With the northwestern country in American hands and the Indians seemingly pacified, easterners assumed that Kentucky was now safe for settlement. They came over the trails and down the Ohio on flatboats by the thousands in the summer of 1779. Their assumption was wrong. The British were no longer waging war in the New England and the central States, but in the years 1780-1781 they mounted full-scale campaigns in the South and on the western frontier. Hundreds of Indians led by British officers and renegade Americans descended the Miami, Scioto, and Muskingum rivers to the Ohio and attacked the Kentucky settlements. Ruddle's Station on the Licking River was the first attacked in the new campaign in June 1780 and the first to be assaulted by cannon fire. The commander surrendered on the British promise that the lives of the inhabitants would be spared, but the Indians got out of hand and massacred at least 200 of the 350 people in the stockade, driving the others north as prisoners. Kentuckians begged Clark to return and defend them; Governor Thomas Jefferson ordered him to withdraw from the Illinois Country, leaving only token forces and local militia at Vincennes,

Kaskaskia, and a new post, Fort Jefferson, just below the mouth of the Ohio.

Clark set up his base at Fort Nelson at the Falls of the Ohio, and for 3 years he energetically carried out the most difficult and thankless of military tasks, that of defending thousands of square miles of frontier country with inadequate supplies and insufficient troops. Within a period of a few months in 1780 alone he traveled up the Mississippi from Fort Jefferson to help drive off a British assault on Cahokia, helped to repulse an attack on nearby St. Louis, returned to Fort Jefferson, and rode overland to Harrodsburg to organize and lead an attack that destroyed the villages and crops of the Shawnees at Piqua and Chillicothe. He declared martial law in Kentucky, closed the land office, and put guards on the eastward trails to turn back men fleeing the country. In 1782, now a brigadier general, he made plans again to capture Detroit, but Virginia was a bankrupt State flooded with worthless currency, and all effort had to be directed at defending the frontier in what was forever after known as "The Year of Sorrow." Some settlers began to blame Clark for losses where he was not present and for defeats where he was not in command. He offered to resign, but Benjamin Harrison, now governor of Virginia, refused to allow him. He commanded the last campaign of the war late in 1782, leading 1,050 men against the Shawnees. His attempt to surprise them failed and he was unable to bring the warriors to an engagement, but he burned their villages and destroyed their winter provisions.

In the fall of 1782, British and American commissioners—Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, John Jay, and Henry Laurens for the United States—met in Paris and signed a preliminary treaty of peace. The British reduced their support of the Indians and the frontier raids stopped. The Treaty of Paris was completed in January 1783 and signed on September 3. Britain recognized American independence. In a stunning concession, it recognized American rights to the lands north of the Ohio River to the Great Lakes and west as far as the Mississippi.

Several modern American historians have held that Clark's campaigns in 1778-1782 had no important influence on the British decision to relinquish its claim to the northwestern country. They emphasize that Clark's name was scarcely mentioned during the peace negotiations, that he had withdrawn his troops to Kentucky, and that the whole contested area was a "no man's land." Was Clark's campaign simply a heroic action by a brave body of men that achieved no lasting result? Or did it have a decisive influence at the peace negotiations in Paris? There can be no final "yes" or "no" on this question, since we are unable to enter into the minds of the British negotiators at the peace table, but, through an exercise of logic, a strong positive case can be made for the influence of Clark's accomplishment. Let us suppose that Clark and his men had not captured Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Vincennes, and Colonel Hamilton; that they had not broken British power in the northwest and had not upset Hamilton's plans to drive the

Americans back to the Appalachian Mountains. Let us suppose further that the British, in firm alliance with the Indians, had been in control and possession of the lands north of the Ohio in 1782. If we make and accept these not unreasonable assumptions, it seems most likely that the British commissioners, with French concurrence, would have held on to those lands as part of Canada. The U.S. northwest boundary for decades to come, through and beyond the disastrous defeats of the War of 1812, perhaps even down to the present day, could have been the Ohio River. The traditional claim would thus appear to be valid: that George Rogers Clark and the men of the Illinois Regiment, American and French, decided the future of more territory than all the armies that raged back and forth in Europe's wars, and added to the United States a rich area almost as large as the Original Thirteen Colonies.

The historian Dale Van Every put it eloquently in his book, *A Company of Heroes,* when he wrote that in the storied role of frontiersmen, there has not been one whose exploits and achievements have approached those of George Rogers Clark. Throughout the frontier's 10 most dangerous years, he was the defender toward whom all turned in every recurrent crisis. It was largely because of his tireless exertion and the extraordinary force of his personality that, during the Revolution, the western frontier was everywhere held in the face of odds that seemed to call for a retreat. No one except Washington, Van Every holds, served the Revolutionary cause with more enduring effect. Clark's defense of Kentucky, his trans-Ohio conquests, and the defeats inflicted on the western Indians gave weight to American postwar claims to the West. Because of his efforts, the Mississippi boundary conceded at the peace table "seems to us now an English surrender somewhat less fantastic than it was then universally considered." One overriding fact was present at the peace negotiations: The settlers, after 7 years of war, were still there. It was upon them and their capacity to continue to endure their increasingly fearful trials that depended the real issue of their future and that of the nation.

Epilogue: the Northwest Country in the New Nation: 1783-1816

In January 1782 Virginia gave in to pressure from other States, especially from Maryland, and offered to cede the lands north of the Ohio to the United States. Under the "league of friendship" created by the Articles of Confederation, the central government had no authority to rule or tax, and for the next 8 years the region was subject to an ineffective, intermittent military control.

American settlers began to move into Vincennes—70 families by 1786, most of them squatters occupying land near the fort. With them they brought an independent spirit, initiative, advanced technology, and some small amount of capital with which to begin to build and develop. But they also brought the problems inevitable to newcomers in a changing economy and in the clash of dissimilar cultures. They distrusted and detested the Indians, and with no one to regulate the Indian trade, they debauched them with their corn whiskey. They quarreled with the French *habitants*, whom they considered lazy, whose ancient customs they scorned, and whose local government they mocked. They corrupted the economy with worthless Continental currency and claimed ownership of more and more land, some of it devoted to communal use, much of it occupied by the French for generations. Fort Patrick Henry (old Fort Sackville) was stripped for building materials and left in ruins. Vincennes was in a state of virtual anarchy, almost in a reign of terror. There was, in the words of explorer-historian John Filson, "a spirit of jealousy and aspersion" and "entire disaffection" between the French and the Indians on the one hand and the Americans on the other, "a hovering cloud pregnant with innumerable evil." Father Gibault, the best of friends to the

LAKE SUPERIOR
Michigan
LAKE HURON
LAKE MICHIGAN
Wisconsin
1848
Michigan
1837
LAKE ERIE
Mississippi River
Ohio
1803
Illinois
1818
Indiana
1816
Missouri River
Ohio River
Mississippi River
States Created out of the Northwest Territory
0
100
200
Scale in Miles

Americans in 1778-79, now regretted his actions in those years and lamented the loss of the mild absentee British rule.

The inevitable conflict between Indian and American caught fire again in the spring of 1786. Americans had to build and take refuge in a blockhouse in Vincennes and work their cornfields under arms. They charged the French with protecting the Indians and with being pro-British, but in July, when 450 Indians descended on Vincennes determined "to exterminate all the Americans who might be in these lands," it was the French who persuaded the warriors to withdraw.

Once again George Rogers Clark was called upon to command the defense of the frontier. He led 1,200 Kentucky militiamen—the largest American force assembled on the frontier up to that time—to Vincennes and on to attack the tribes of the upper Wabash. But Clark's fortunes, reputation, and strength had declined by the fall of 1786, and he was subjected to shameful humiliation by his troops. His authority to command was not clear-cut, his officers disputed his decisions, and the supply route broke down because of low water in the Wabash. One morning near the mouth of the Vermilion, a contingent of his troops became mutinous and chanted the refrain over and over, "Who's for home? Who's for home?" Clark confronted the men. They complained of a shortage of food. He stood before them with his hat in his hand, tears in his eyes, and pleaded, "Go with me two days' march, and if I can't furnish you with as much provisions as you want from the Indian towns, I will return with you." The men refused to listen; some in the rear ranks made rude remarks about their commander. They walked away, led by an ensign, and left him standing alone. Some troops offered to continue the march, but their numbers were too small and the expedition turned back to Vincennes. There Clark was able in some degree, by skillful negotiations with the Indians, to "cover the disgrace of his people."

The following year, Maj. John F. Hamtramck was sent with 100 men to establish a military post at Vincennes, with instructions to build a fort and enlist the support of the French militia in case of Indian attack. He built Fort Knox, named for Secretary of War Henry Knox, about a half mile upstream from the site of Fort Sackville (near the foot of Buntin Street).

Virginia had formally ceded the northwest lands to the United States in March 1784. The Government agreed to reimburse Virginia for all expenses of the conquest, to protect the personal and property rights of the settlers, and to convey to General Clark and the men of the Illinois Regiment the 150,000 acres promised them by the State. Accordingly, land around present-day Clarksville was taken up, starting about 1781. This became the first authorized American settlement in Indiana and the first in the Northwest Territory.

The thorny problem of what to do about the northwestern lands became a matter of national debate and dispute. The merchants,

planters, and shipowners in the seaboard cities feared the demands of and possible domination by the rough, brawling frontier, and it was their strong intention to treat the western territories as permanent provinces. The problem was taken up by the Congress of the Confederation. That this utterly ineffectual governing body could resolve the question was highly unlikely. For 9 months it had met without being able to muster a quorum of 9 States. Its president, Gen. Arthur St. Clair, did not even bother to attend its sessions or to notify the secretary of his whereabouts. But this lame and dying institution, with only 14 congressmen present, passed a piece of legislation that stands among the most enlightened in human history—an act called by historian James Truslow Adams "one of the greatest and most original of the contributions of America to the modern world of political thought."

In a series of ordinances originally drawn up by Thomas Jefferson, a totally new concept was introduced and adopted. In the first stage of territorial development, rule would be carried out by a governor, a secretary, and three judges appointed by Congress. During the second stage, when the free male population reached 5,000, the territory could send one representative to Congress; it could also elect a legislature, but one over which the governor had absolute veto powers. When the territory had 60,000 free male inhabitants, it was to be admitted into the Union as a State "on an equal footing with the original states in all respects whatever." The Northwest Territory, in accordance with the Ordinance of 1785, was to be developed in a gridiron township pattern, with a grant of one section of land in each township for public education. Slavery was prohibited. No fewer than three States and no more than five were to be carved from the Territory.*

General St. Clair, appointed first governor of the Territory, with his territorial capital at Marietta, Ohio, sent Winthrop Sargent, territorial secretary, to Vincennes with instructions to settle outstanding disputes over land titles, to organize the courts, and to lay out a county around Vincennes. Knox County, created in 1790, comprised all of present-day Indiana and large parts of Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. A militia was formed under command of Maj. Francis Vigo, who had moved from St. Louis to Vincennes some time between 1780 and 1783.

President John Adams, a Federalist, approved a bill on May 7, 1800, to divide the Northwest Territory. The area to the east, Ohio, was separated; it entered the Union as the 17th state in 1803. The remainder of the region was named the Indiana Territory, with Vincennes as the new capital and William Henry Harrison, a young Virginia captain, as governor. The new governor arrived in Vincennes in January 1801. When he learned that Thomas Jefferson, a Republican, would retain him as governor, he

* Jefferson had proposed that the Territory be divided into States to be named Sylvania, Michigania, Chersonesus, Assenisipia, Metropotamia, Illinoia, Saratoga, Polypotamia, Pelispia, and Washington.

constructed a 13-room, Georgian-style brick mansion named "Grouseland" on 300 acres he had bought (probably from Francis Vigo), with a large chamber designed for council meetings, outbuildings, and window glass brought from Great Britain.

The 1800 census showed a population of only 5,600 throughout all the Indiana Territory, including 163 free Negroes and 135 slaves. Many of the settlers lived under the protection of the Vincennes post. At Michilimackinac, the extreme northern settlement, there were 251 citizens. The fur traders scattered around the Great Lakes were estimated to number 300. There were 50 people in the settlement at Green Bay, 65 at Prairie du Chien. Lower down the Mississippi the settlements were more numerous and more populous. In and about Cahokia were 719 people; in Belle Fontaine Township, 286; L'Aigle, 250; Kaskaskia and Prairie du Rocher, 679; Mitchel Township, 334; Fort Massac on the Ohio, 90; and in Clark's Grant, 929. In the interior there was nothing that could be called a settlement except Vincennes, which had 714 inhabitants and 819 others in its near vicinity. But by 1805, land offices had been opened at Vincennes and Kaskaskia, and vast areas of new land were being surveyed and offered for sale. Settlements now stretched along the Ohio from Cincinnati to Evansville, and some were already situated far up the Whitewater, White, and Wabash rivers.

In 1804 the 4,000 inhabitants of Wayne County (the northern portion of the vast Indiana Territory) petitioned Congress for a separate government, and 5 years later Kaskaskia and Cahokia filed a similar petition. The Indiana legislature favored those developments, believing that local governments in Illinois would attract more settlers and increase land sales everywhere.

As Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Governor Harrison had been instructed to obtain the public domain on Indian land claims and open it to settlement. By a series of treaties signed with individual tribes between 1802 and 1809, he succeeded in extinguishing the Indians' title to much of the land south of the site of Indianapolis. Tecumseh, chief of the Shawnees, and his brother, Tenskwatawa (The Prophet), held that all the Indian land was the common possession of all the Indian tribes, and that no individual tribe had the right to sell or cede such land. The United States, of course, refused to accept that principle. Tecumseh and The Prophet sought to ally all the tribes in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys and drive the American settlers across the Ohio River. At Harrison's invitation, Tecumseh came to Vincennes for a conference, quietly leading several hundred warriors to camp under the trees near Grouseland. No agreement could be reached, and both sides prepared for war. Harrison gathered a force of about 900 militia and regulars to attack The Prophet's camp (near present-day Lafayette). In November 1811, at Tippecanoe, some 700 Indians attacked Harrison's force but were repulsed. While the battle was not a clear-cut military victory for the Americans, Indian power to resist white encroachment in the Old Northwest was broken forever. Nothing but natural impediments now kept the settlers

from taking over and developing the Indiana Territory. Indiana, with a population of 64,000, became the 19th State in 1816. Illinois became the 21st State in 1818. Michigan became the 25th State in 1837. Wisconsin became the 30th State in 1848.

In his later years, George Rogers Clark experienced nothing but misfortune, poverty, and unhappiness. He was for a time an Indian commissioner but lost his post to Gen. James Wilkinson, a sinister conspirator who (it was revealed decades later) was on the payroll of Spain. Clark retired to his father's new estate at Mulberry Hill near Louisville, his career ended at 35. Virginia commissioners examined his accounts and approved payment of £1,092 in back pay to January 1778 and £3,397 for debts he had incurred in the service of his country. Both Virginia and the United States, however, defaulted in payment. In the meantime, Clark was being held personally responsible for thousands of dollars of bills of credit he had signed in buying supplies for the Illinois Regiment. The claims poured in, the lawsuits piled up, and Clark was impoverished, his lands confiscated, his reputation ruined. He moved to a simple 2-story log house on his grant of land in Clarksville, across the river from and overlooking Corn Island, where in 1778 he had set out with 175 men to conquer an empire. He was a penniless, prematurely aged, lonely bachelor. Like Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton and others among the boldest pioneers, he had fought to win lands for the nation and lost his own to those for whom he had fought.

Thomas Jefferson had suggested to Clark in 1783 that he lead an expedition across the North American continent in search of a land route to the Pacific. Clark declined, but 20 years later Jefferson named Capt. Meriwether Lewis to carry out that assignment. Lewis chose as his second in command William Clark—the youngest of Clark's five brothers and the only one who had not fought in the War for Independence. At the start of his journey to fame and immortality, William Clark stopped at Clarksville to ask the advice and blessing of his older brother George.

In 1808 Clark became partly paralyzed and, after a fall, suffered the amputation of a leg. Virginia gave him another sword of honor and a pension of $400 a year—half his pay as a general officer. Twenty years after his death in 1818, his heirs received a settlement of $30,000 as payment in full for Clark's claims and services. Not until well into the 20th century did the United States acknowledge the enormous debt of gratitude it owed to George Rogers Clark.

The City of Vincennes, Knox County, and the State of Indiana joined in the 1920s in a program to build a suitable memorial to Clark and his company of heroes. They raised $900,000 with which to buy the site of old Fort Sackville and some adjoining land, totaling 22 acres, in downtown Vincennes. Congress appropriated nearly $2 million to build the memorial and landscape the grounds. The plans of Hirons and Mellor, New York architects, were selected in a nationwide competition.

Construction began in 1931 of a massive Doric temple, circular in shape, of granite and marble, with 16 columns, between the Wabash and St. Xavier's Roman Catholic Church (built 1824-1836). In the center of the monument under the dome stands a bronze statue of Clark, larger than life size, done by the sculptor Hermon A. MacNeil. It is mounted on a pedestal of mottled Italian marble. On the circular wall around it are seven murals on Belgium linen, each 16 by 28 feet in size, done by the artist Ezra Winter; these tell the story and the significance of Clark's campaign in the Northwest.

Nearby on the grounds are statues of Francis Vigo and Father Pierre Gibault, to whom Clark, his men, and the country owed so much.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the George Rogers Clark Memorial on June 14, 1936. In his address at the site he said: "Events of history take on their due proportions when viewed in the light of time. With every passing year, the capture of Vincennes, more than a century and a half ago when the thirteen Colonies were seeking their independence, assumes greater and more permanent significance. . . . In the year 1778 the picture of this Western country was dark indeed. The English held all the region northwest of the Ohio, and their Indian allies were burning cabins and driving fleeing families back across the mountains south of the river. Three regular forts were all that remained in Kentucky, and their fall seemed inevitable. Then, against this dark background, stood forth the tall young Virginian, George Rogers Clark. Out of despair and destruction he brought concerted action. With a flash of genius the twenty-six-year-old leader conceived a campaign that was a brilliant masterpiece of military strategy."

The thousands of visitors who stop at the Clark Memorial every year are, in the words of the Midwestern historian August Derleth, "far more sensible of Clark's great contribution to the growth and security of the United States than were the government and the citizens of his own time."

LEGISLATIVE COMPLIANCE

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Administration

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

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.