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INDIANA HEROES FOR YOUNG HOOSIERS No. 1



The Clark Memorial on the site of the old fort at Vincennes, beside the Wabash River.

GEORGE ROGERS CLARK

The tall, broad-shouldered young man with red hair walked uneasily down Duke of Gloucester Street in Williamsburg, Virginia. Dressed in buckskins, powder horn over one shoulder, pack on his back, and rifle in hand, he trod lightly in his moccasins, as he did in the forest. His head turned from side to side at the wonders of the beautiful capital town—its shop windows, fine houses, colorful gardens, and occasional carriages.

He was 23 years old and he had come on foot and horseback 700 miles from the new settlements of Kentucky. His name was George Rogers Clark.

He had been born and reared on a farm in western Virginia, near Charlottesville. When he was 19, he had struck out for the Ohio River to see the West and earn his way as a surveyor. He marked the boundaries of the claims of the early settlers in Kentucky. He helped them fight the Indians who tried to block their way. Most of the settlers were Virginians and they considered this new area of Kentucky as a part of Virginia. In June 1776 they elected the popular young Clark as a delegate to the Virginia Assembly.

Now he had come to ask for two things: that Kentucky be organized as a county, and that 500 pounds of powder be sent to the settlements at once so they could protect themselves from the Indians. Since the colo-

nies had begun fighting for their own independence from Great Britain, the British were urging the Indians to attack the western settlements.

Clark approached the splendid red-brick capitol. No one was around but a gateman.

"Where are the Burgesses?" Clark asked, using the local name for the Virginia legislators.

"Gone home," said the gateman. "Adjourned."

"Adjourned! But I have to meet with them. What about the Council?"

This was the upper house of the legislature. The gateman shrugged.

"Not meeting this week."

"Where is the governor? Where is Patrick Henry?"

"Home, too. In Hanover."

Clark knew the town. It was 45 miles away. But he must see Governor Henry.

Next day Clark rode to Hanover and talked to Patrick Henry on his porch. The fiery orator agreed with the young woodsman. He gave Clark a letter urging that the powder be sent and dispatched him back to Williamsburg to see the Council. Before these aristocratic planters Clark argued his case for extending Virginia's protection over the Kentucky settlements and for defending them with powder. Some of the men were not



Clark guiding settlers into Kentucky

interested in expanding the frontier of Virginia. Some said the Revolutionary War in the East was taking all the colony's money and powder. But Clark was firm and logical. Finally the Council voted to provide the 500 pounds of powder and to transport it as far as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From there Clark would have to make arrangements for its delivery.

While waiting for the powder to be made and taken by wagons to Pittsburgh, Clark stayed in Williamsburg. The House of Burgesses met again, and he took his seat. Day after day he pleaded for the organization of Kentucky as a county. Finally he won.

Then he learned that his message to Kentucky about picking up the powder had never been delivered. The powder was still at Pittsburgh unclaimed. Clark left Williamsburg at once and traveled there. He rented a flatboat and loaded on it the twenty kegs of powder, each weighing twenty-five pounds. With a crew of seven men he set off secretly at night. He feared the Indians might try to stop him, if they knew about his cargo.

Far down the Ohio River, nearly to the end of the voyage, Clark saw Indian canoes following him. As darkness fell he ran the boat

ashore on an island and hid the powder kegs in the woods. Then he quickly got under way again and headed for the Kentucky shore. There he landed in the night and set the empty boat adrift. The Indian war party followed it on down stream, preparing to capture it.

Clark and his men set off through the woods for Harrodsburg, 90 miles away. Arriving there, they sent back a party of 30 men to bring in the precious powder. Clark had saved the settlements. They were able to fight off Indian raiders all during 1777. Clark was made commander of all the militia to protect the three little towns of Harrodsburg, Boonesborough, and Logan's Station.

A DARING PLAN

In the fall of 1777 Clark made the long journey to Williamsburg again. This time he carried in his mind a new plan, based on what he had learned about the Indian raids. He explained it to Governor Patrick Henry:

"The Indians are being sent against us by the British in Detroit! They get supplies at Vincennes on the Wabash, and Kaskaskia, near the Mississippi. We fight them off, but new war parties come back. We are not stopping the raids by waiting till we're hit."

"What do you propose to do?" Governor Henry asked, admiring the bold young frontiersman.

"We've got to take the offensive. We've got to strike across the Ohio River!"

"Do you mean pursue the Indians northward?"

"More than that. I mean to capture Kaskaskia—Vincennes—and then Detroit!"

The candles on the table between them flickered from his breath. Governor Henry was startled by this ambitious plan.

"But—but how can you expect—what can we do—"

"I have information," Clark went on eagerly. "Kaskaskia and Vincennes are weak. They have no soldiers, just officials. Most of the people are French—"

"And France is friendly to us," Governor Henry put in.

Clark nodded. "Both forts could be taken by surprise. I don't want a large army. I need—I can do it with 500 men, or less!"

Governor Henry's fingers drummed on the table. "General Washington needs all our

men. But I'll consult a committee—in secret."

The committee liked Clark's plan. They promoted the young man to colonel, authorized him to raise 350 soldiers, and allowed him \$6,000 for supplies. To keep his plan secret, Governor Henry gave him written orders to enlist 350 men to fight "in Kentucky."

Clark named four of his bravest friends in the Kentucky militia to be captains and to enlist men in four companies of 80 to 90 men. They would all meet below Pittsburgh in the spring.

But when they all came together there were only 175 men enrolled. Clark was disappointed, yet did not give up. He took them in flatboats down the Ohio River to Corn Island, near modern Jeffersonville. There they planted corn, built huts, and drilled.

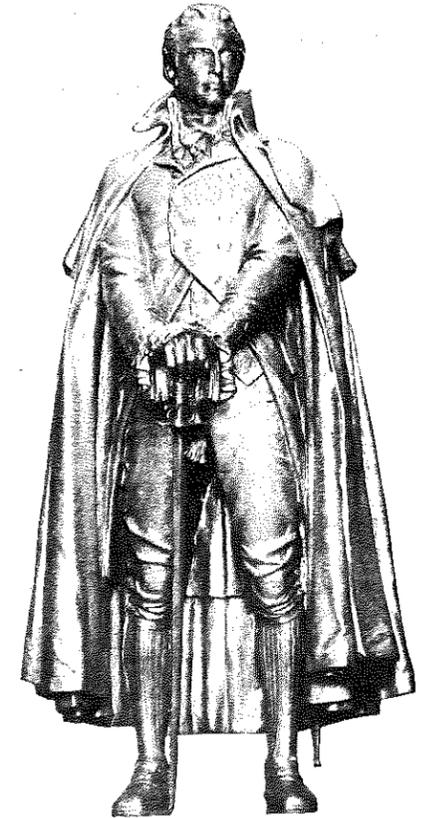
When the corn was ripe, it was harvested and shelled so it could be carried on a march and cooked. Clark called the men together and for the first time told them where they were going and why. Kaskaskia! Three hundred miles into the wilderness. Then a swing over to Vincennes! They embarked in boats late in June 1778. After four days and nights on the river, they landed on a wild shore and hid their boats. A long march of 120 miles through the woods and across the prairie country brought them to Kaskaskia, near the Mississippi.

They came in sight of the old French fort and town toward night on July 3. All day on the second anniversary of the Declaration of Independence they lay hidden in the tall grass. Then they crept forward, one party surrounding the town, the other approaching the fort. Clark led the attack on the fort. The river gate hung open; there was no sentry. The Americans swarmed in. Their noise brought out some British troops who were quickly overpowered. The commanding officer was seized in his bed. The fort was taken without firing a shot!

Clark fired his musket as a signal. The other party of Americans had moved through the sleeping village. On hearing the shot, they whooped and shouted, warning the inhabitants to stay in their houses till morning. Frightened and unable to see how many invaders there were, the French obeyed. Indeed, they expected to be separated and carried off as prisoners of war.

Clark was not interested in "capturing" them. He wanted to win them over as

Frenchmen to the American cause. Next day he told a committee of leading citizens and their priest, Father Gibault, that he had no intention of sending them away. They were free to stay in Kaskaskia and worship in their church. France was now an ally of the new United States of America, and Clark invited them to take an oath of allegiance to the United States. Rejoicing, the people of Kaskaskia took the oath. Clark had added to his strength. He now sent some troops,



Statue of Clark in Memorial at Vincennes

accompanied by a few citizens of Kaskaskia, up to Cahokia and won the allegiance of the people there too.

WINNING AND LOSING VINCENNES

Vincennes, on the Wabash, was next! But Clark dared not march off and leave the Mississippi settlements unguarded, for British troops might appear. Yet if he divided his forces, he would not be strong enough if Vincennes resisted. He would have to bluff it, Clark decided. So he talked to Father Gibault of a greater army coming down the Ohio to

conquer Vincennes. The good father believed that the people of Vincennes would ally themselves with the Americans, once they were informed that France had done so. He would make the journey and speak to them.

Clark waited uneasily while Father Gibault and Dr. Jean Laffont made their way to Vincennes. Relaying Clark's threat and telling what the people of Kaskaskia and Cahokia had done, the priest persuaded the inhabitants of Vincennes to take the oath of loyalty to the United States. After he carried the good news back to Kaskaskia, Clark sent Capt. Leonard Helm and a handful of soldiers to command at Vincennes. Thus, without bloodshed, Clark had won three important posts from the British and made friends out of enemies!

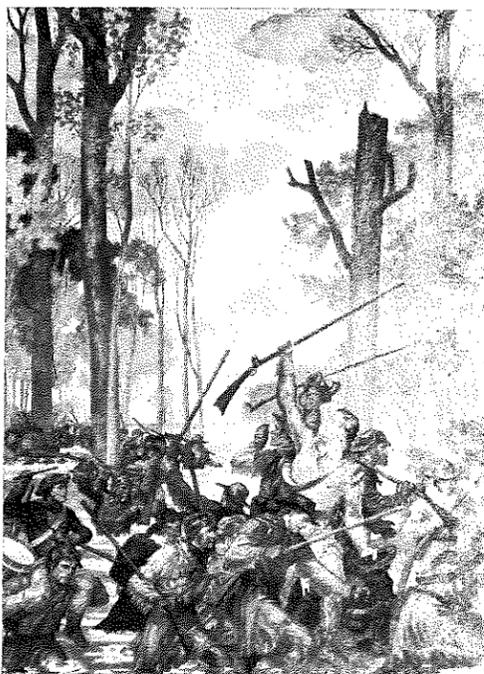
When news of these victories reached Detroit, Col. Henry Hamilton, the British commander, was astonished and angry. He realized that Clark might advance on him next spring. He rounded up some friendly Indians, enlisted the local French militia, and with the regular troops he could spare from Detroit embarked in boats down the Detroit River to Lake Erie. They rowed up the Maumee River to Kekionga, the Miami Indian town on the site of present-day Fort Wayne. They crossed the Wabash and descended that river. In December, Hamilton came in sight of Vincennes.

Captain Helm had no choice but to surrender to the great army. Satisfied for the moment, Hamilton dismissed his Indians and Frenchmen and settled down for the winter with a garrison of about 80 men. He renamed the fort at Vincennes Fort Sackville. When the bad weather ended, he would enlist some Frenchmen, recall the Indians, and move toward the Mississippi to capture Clark.

The bad news about the fall of Vincennes reached Clark at Kaskaskia at the end of the year 1778. He too had lost some of his troops, who had gone home to Kentucky. He was expecting reinforcements from Virginia—sometime. If he did nothing, he was almost certain to be taken by Hamilton in the spring. Should he abandon the Illinois country and retreat to Kentucky so as to save his little army? Should he try to move against Hamilton despite the winter weather? For a month he waited and pondered and hoped for reinforcements. Finally, on February 3, he wrote to Governor Patrick Henry in Virginia. As the candle flickered, his quill pen

scratched across the paper explaining his gloomy situation:

"I know the case is desperate, but, sir, we must either quit the country or attack Mr. Hamilton. No time is to be lost. Was I sure of a re-enforcement I should not attempt it. Who knows what fortune will do for us? Great things have been effected by a few men well conducted. Perhaps we may be fortunate."



Clark leading his troops to Vincennes, 1779

THE MARCH TO VINCENNES

Two days later Clark marched out of Kaskaskia with a force of only 170 men to risk everything he had won. He sent powder and provisions by boat down the Mississippi and up the Ohio and Wabash to meet them below Vincennes. The weather was not excessively cold; there had been more rain than snow. The creeks and rivers had flooded, and water stood in the flat lowlands. The men tramped through swamps and waded streams. The distance was more than 200 miles.

Chilled to the bone they were barely able to dry their clothes around sputtering campfires. They were cheered by the antics of a young drummer boy, who one day floated across a flooded prairie on his drum. As they neared Vincennes, Clark had to forbid fires lest they be seen by wandering hunters or

Indians. The men consumed the last of their food. With empty stomachs the last two days, they crossed the Wabash south of Vincennes. Their supply boat was not in sight and could not be found. They had been 20 days on the exhausting march.

Two miles from town Clark's men captured a duck hunter. Clark wrote out a message and sent it into town by the prisoner: "I request such of you as are true citizens and willing to enjoy the liberty I bring you, to remain still in your houses, and that those (if any there be) that are friends to the King of England will instantly repair to the fort and join his troops and fight like men."

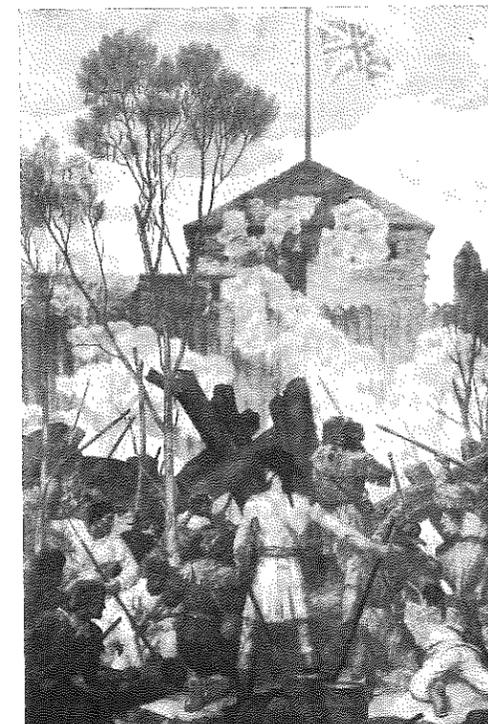
Clark had with him 20 American flags made by the women of Kaskaskia. He now had them attached to poles and he spaced the flag bearers at wide intervals in his column of troops. Then he started his men marching in a zigzag course toward the town as dusk came on. The inhabitants of Vincennes, having received his message, looked across the prairie and could dimly see the invaders approaching. Only a few troops were visible at a time, but they could count the flags. Twenty! Twenty companies, they whispered; a great army! The Frenchmen wisely took to their houses.

It was dark by the time the Americans reached the town and advanced to the church. Clark spread them around the unsuspecting fort, so close that the cannon could only fire over their heads. The men crouched and waited for his command.

"Fire!"

The muskets rattled and snapped as the men fired through the portholes out of which the cannon pointed. British cries broke the night. A bugle sounded. A cannon answered, its thunderous ball passing harmlessly overhead. The attack was on. But Clark's men had little powder and fired only when they spotted a light through the portholes. Their supply of powder and bullets was on the boat, somewhere down the river.

Then some Vincennes inhabitants crept out of their houses and whispered to the Americans. Powder and bullets they had buried when Hamilton came. Now they would like to dig them up for Clark and his men! The men cheered and soon were provided with plenty of ammunition. The firing continued all night. The men also dug ditches and piled up fence rails and logs as breastworks.



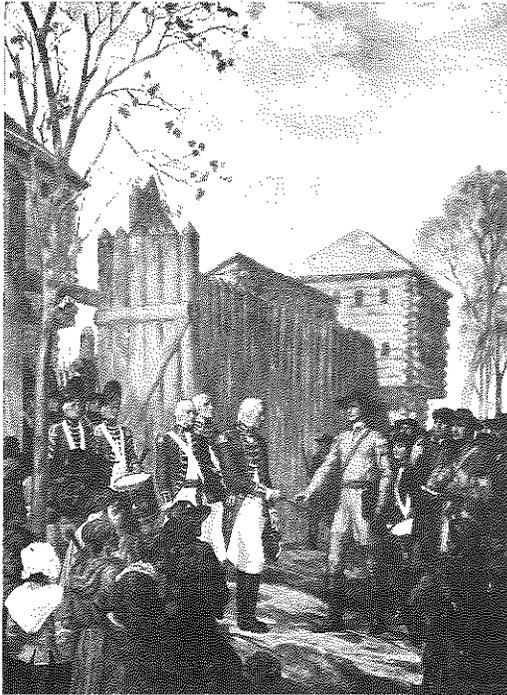
Attacking the British in the fort at Vincennes

At dawn Clark sent in a note to Hamilton asking him to surrender. He indignantly refused. But shortly after noon Hamilton proposed a truce in order to talk with Clark. The Virginian refused, demanding surrender.

Then a party of Indians appeared at the edge of town. Scalps hung from their belts. They had just returned from a raid in Kentucky and were expecting a welcome and a reward from Hamilton. Suddenly they found themselves prisoners in the hands of Kentuckians. Clark showed them no mercy. Brutal action would warn all Indians and frighten the British. In full view of the fort he let four of the Indian raiders be killed.

Shortly afterward the gate opened, and a British officer walked out carrying a white flag, with Captain Helm beside him. They went to the church, where Clark and Major Bowman met them. Hamilton was ready to surrender. Next morning the American flag was run up over the fort, and the British garrison marched out as prisoners of war. Clark's men fired their rifles together thirteen times, for the thirteen United States.

Clark wanted to march on to Detroit, the real source of British power in the West. But



Clark receives the surrender of Vincennes fort.

his men wanted to go home, and no fresh troops were in sight. Spring passed into summer, and the campaign was given up. The winter of 1779-80 was excessively cold. The Ohio River froze over; snow lay deep on the ground. The Indians of the north attempted no raids on Kentucky. Yet more and more settlers came into the new country, adding to its strength. Louisville began to rise in 1780, and Clark built a fort nearby to protect it.

HIS LAST CAMPAIGNS

British and Indians united in a big raid on Kentucky that year and captured 100 prisoners. Clark raised some militia and started after them. In northern Ohio he cornered several hundred Indians and roundly defeated them.

Clark made fresh plans to attack Detroit in 1781. Besides local militia, he was to get 100 Pennsylvania troops under Col. Archibald Lochry. They came down the Ohio River, camping one night on the Indiana shore

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near present-day Rising Sun. There they were ambushed by Indians. Forty men were killed, some captured, and others scattered. On top of this disaster, Clark could not get money to pay his troops. Reluctantly he let them go home again.

The British and Indians struck again in 1782 and defeated the Kentucky militia in the Battle of the Blue Licks. Clark was on duty elsewhere but was called upon to strike back. He burned the villages of the Shawnee in Ohio. The frontier was quiet as the Revolutionary War came to an end.

Virginia granted Clark's men 150,000 acres of land across the river from Louisville. Clark laid out a town, called Clarksville; it was the first American settlement in what later became Indiana. The veterans began settling there in 1784, and a town government was organized. Federal troops, sent out to the Ohio River, built a fort near Clarksville in 1786. It was named Fort Finney, for Capt. Walter Finney, the builder. Later it was called Fort Steuben.

Clark finally settled in Clarksville. He built a house and operated a mill. In 1809 he suffered a stroke that left him lame. He hobbled about, but one day he fell on the hearth burning his leg. Infection set in. The doctor said he must cut off the leg. There was no anesthetic then, so Clark asked for a fifer and drummer. While they marched around the cabin playing martial music, Clark clenched his teeth and the doctor cut away the leg. He returned to Louisville and lived with his sister. Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois were all states now. He died in Louisville early in 1818 and is buried there.

George Rogers Clark is remembered because he was a brave soldier who planned and fought for his country. He was always looking ahead to the settlement of the wilderness on both sides of the Ohio. As a result of his victories, the United States was able to claim the Great Lakes area north of the Ohio as part of the new nation in the peace treaty of 1783. A great marble memorial rises to Clark's honor in the city of Vincennes. Another statue of him may be seen on Monument Circle in Indianapolis. (H.H.P.)

Rogers Clark, Soldier in the West, by Walter Havighurst; *Hobnailed Boots*, by Jeannette C. Nolan; *Big Knife*, by William E. Wilson; *George Rogers Clark*, by Ross F. Lockridge.