

INDIANA HISTORICAL LEAFLETS No. 2



La Salle and his exploring party at the St. Joseph-Kankakee portage (South Bend) in 1679.

THE FRENCH IN INDIANA

The first white man to visit Indiana was a Frenchman named Robert La Salle. He was an explorer who dared go where no one else had gone in North America. He claimed the land he explored for the King of France.

In 1679 La Salle and a party of Frenchmen with their Indian guides made a trip up the St. Lawrence River and through the Great Lakes to the southern end of Lake Michigan. While paddling their canoes around the southern end of Lake Michigan, they discovered the mouth of the St. Joseph River.

Slowly the canoes were paddled up the St. Joseph River as far south as they could go before the river bends back north. At this south bend the Indian guide pointed to a path which led to the beginning of the Kankakee River. A path between two nearby rivers is called a portage. La Salle and his party pulled their canoes from the water and made camp for the night on the portage. Many years later the city of South Bend was built on their camp site. Next morning the canoes were carried along the portage to the Kankakee River. The Frenchmen paddled down the Kankakee into the Illinois River, which flows into the Mississippi River.

In 1701 some French people built a fort at Detroit. They looked for a shorter route to the Mississippi. From Lake Erie they went up the Maumee River to where Fort Wayne now stands. From the source of the Maumee River they followed a portage or path to the Little Wabash. On it they paddled down to the Wabash and on into the Ohio River, which flows into the Mississippi. This route was an important waterway, because canoes were the chief means of travel in the early days.

The French had two large colonies in North America. The first settlements

were made along the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. Those places formed the colony of Canada. The other settlements were made at New Orleans and along the Mississippi River. They were the colony of Louisiana. Indiana as we know it today lay between these two colonies. The northern part of Indiana was in Canada, the southern part in Louisiana. The rivers that flowed across Indiana joined the two colonies by their back doors. France built a chain of forts along the river route to guard travelers and to protect the fur traders who came to live in Indiana.

FRENCH FORTS

The first French fort in Indiana was built at the head of the Maumee River where the city of Fort Wayne now stands. The fort was built in 1714 and was called Fort of the Miamis, or Fort Miamis, because many Miami Indians lived near it. A high fence or wall made of posts standing upright was built around the fort. This wall or stockade was probably fifteen feet high. A blockhouse was built into the stockade at one or two of the corners. The blockhouses were higher than the wall so that

soldiers could keep a sharp lookout for unfriendly Indians. Holes were made in the walls of the blockhouses through which the soldiers could shoot at their enemies as they crept up to the fort. Inside the stockade were log cabins in which the soldiers lived. French fur traders often lived at the forts, too.

The second fort was built on the Wabash River near the place where Lafayette now stands. It was built in 1719 and was called Fort Oui-at-e-non, after the tribe of Indians living there. It also had a stockade and one strong blockhouse. The soldiers and fur traders lived in log cabins inside the stockade.

The third fort was built in 1731 on the lower Wabash River. It was named Fort Vincennes for the French soldier who built it. Many French families came to live around the fort, and the settlement grew into the city of Vincennes.

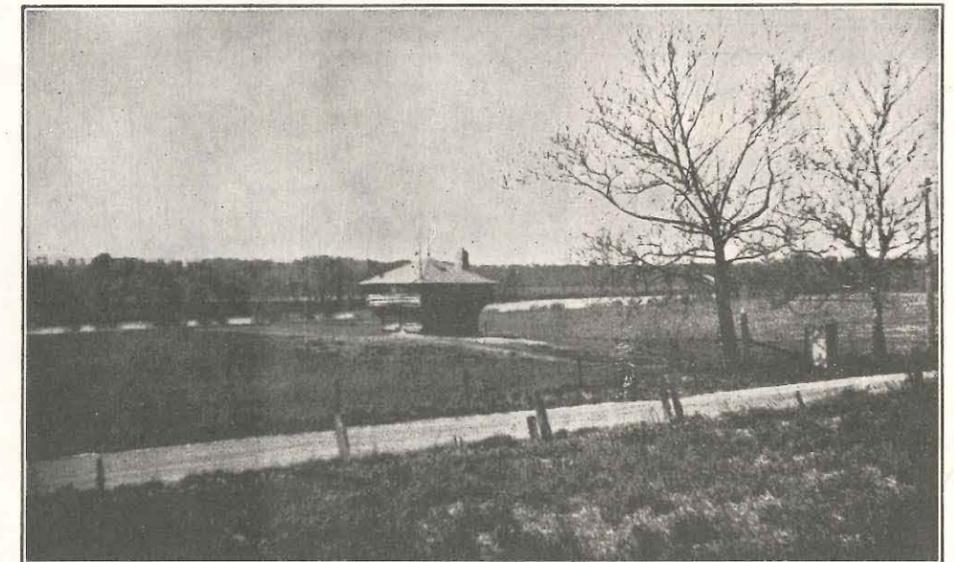
THE FRENCH AND THE INDIANS

Each spring the Indians came to these forts with the furs of beaver, raccoons, bears, mink, otters, foxes, muskrats, and deer which they had killed during



Three forts in Indiana guarded the waterway from Lake Erie to the Mississippi River.

the winter. The Indians wanted gun powder and bullets, bright red and blue blankets, colored shirts, knives, hatchets, steel traps, hoes, pots and pans, ornaments and beads, and brandy to drink in exchange for their furs. No money was used in trading. The furs were sorted and tied in bundles by the traders. Then they were loaded in canoes and sent away to be shipped to France.



Blockhouse of Fort Ouiatenon, near Lafayette, rebuilt.

Some of the French traders brought their families to live at the forts. The men hunted and fished in the winter. They raised corn and vegetables in the summer. They also planted fruit trees. Some of the men worked as carpenters, blacksmiths, stone masons, and shoemakers. The French people had many good times among themselves. They danced, played cards, and played outdoor games. A Catholic Church was built at Vincennes. The priest was a friend and leader among the people. The Indians liked the French.

Then came the French and Indian War against England. The English soldiers won the battles. In 1760 France had to give up Canada to England. The English flag was raised over Fort Miamis and Fort Ouiatenon. The French soldiers left, and red-coated English soldiers came to Indiana to guard the forts. Only Fort Vincennes remained in the hands of the French, because Louisiana was not turned over to the English until 1763.

The Indians were sorry to see their French friends leave. They did not like the English. In 1763 the Indians at Detroit under Chief Pontiac made war on the English and tried to drive them out of the country. The Miami Indians captured Fort Miamis from the English soldiers. The Ouiatenon, or Wea, Indians took Fort Ouiatenon, but Fort Detroit was never captured by the Indians. They had to give up their war. The English did not send any more soldiers to hold Fort Miamis or Fort Ouiatenon, so the French people stayed.

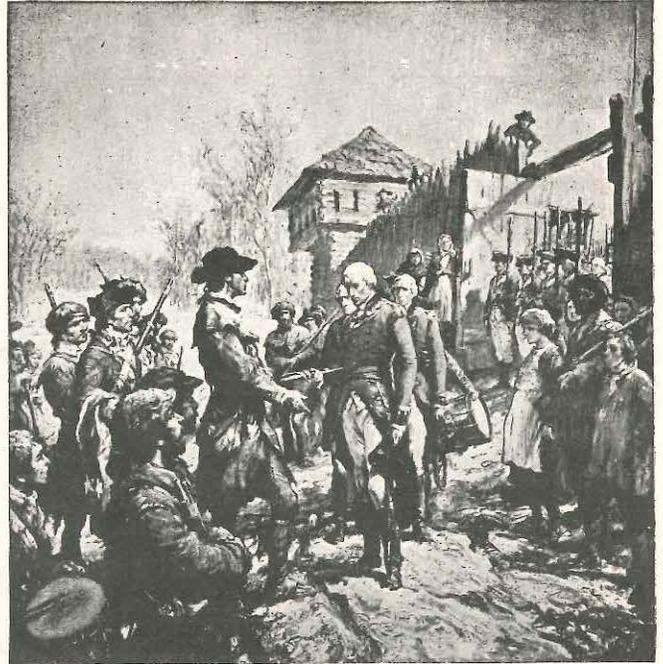
GEORGE ROGERS CLARK

The English colonists in America wanted to have their own government. They did not like the English King and his laws. In 1775 they started a war for their freedom which was called the American Revolution. George Washington led the American soldiers in the war. Many battles were fought in the East, but one battle was fought in Indiana.

George Rogers Clark, a soldier from Kentucky, planned to free Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan from the English. He is often called the George Washington of the West. In the summer of 1778 he led a small army through the wilderness to the English fort at Kas-kas-ki-a in Illinois. He took the English by surprise and easily captured the fort. Then he sent a Catholic priest, Father Gibault, to talk with the French people at Vincennes. France had joined the colonists in America in their war against England, so the French people at Vincennes were persuaded to join the Americans against the English.

When the English soldiers at Detroit heard this, they were angry. They marched down to Vincennes and took possession of it. George Rogers Clark was determined to win the town away from the English troops. In the middle of winter he and his little army started from Kaskaskia towards Vincennes. They had to wade across rivers and swamps. They could carry only a few supplies and had to sleep on the ground. They could not find enough to eat. After seventeen days of marching they came in sight of Vincennes. Clark surprised the English soldiers in the fort at night. After many hours of fierce fighting, the English troops came out and surrendered.

By Clark's victories all the land north of the Ohio River became part of the United States. The three old French forts in Indiana became American posts. Clark's soldiers were given land in southern Indiana in 1784, after the war. They were the first Americans to settle in Indiana. The town of Clarksville was built by them.



George Rogers Clark receives the surrender of the English at Vincennes, Feb. 25, 1779.