

Above: British Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton surrenders Fort Sackville to George Rogers Clark, February 25, 1779 (detail)

COMPANY OF MILITARY
HISTORIANS / ILLUSTRATION BY PETER COPELAND



A Daring Tactician

George Rogers Clark had qualities common among heroes of novels and adventure films but rare in real life. Six feet two inches tall with auburn hair, he cut a striking figure.

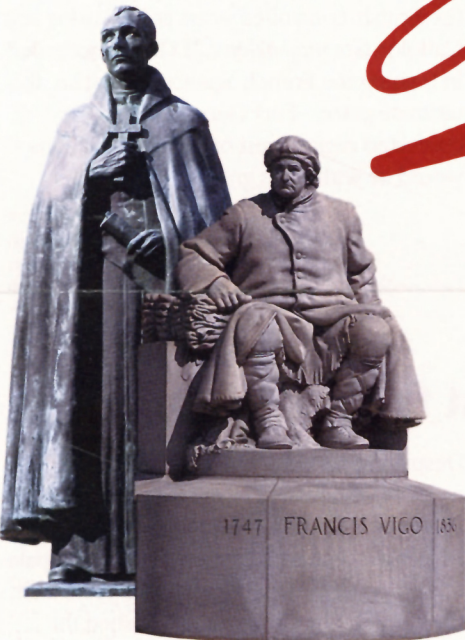
A magnetic leader, persuasive orator, and master of psychological warfare, Clark had the capacity to plan and think strategically. He also understood Native tribal customs, habits of thought, and warfare.

Clark mounted a spirited defense of American emigrants to Kentucky Country, as the western counties of Virginia were known in the late 1700s. He paved the way for westward expansion, as did his brother William Clark’s explorations of Louisiana Territory. His successes hinged on an ability to craft alliances with the French against the British and their Native surrogates.

Only a few decades after Clark launched his campaign to wrest the western territories from British control, the United States gained an area as large as the original thirteen colonies.

Right: George Rogers Clark (1752–1818) migrated to the wilderness beyond the Appalachian Mountains at age 20. Within three years he became a military leader in the Kentucky region. General Lafayette believed Clark second only to George Washington in military prowess.

NPS / SCULPTURE BY HERMON A. MACNEIL



Father Pierre Gibault (above left), whose parish extended from the Mississippi to the Wabash rivers, persuaded French inhabitants of Vincennes to surrender their town to the Americans.

NPS / SCULPTURE BY ALBIN POLASEK

Francis Vigo (above right), an Italian merchant in Spanish-controlled St. Louis, was well-known and respected by the French in the Vincennes area. Vigo embraced the patriot cause and helped finance Clark’s campaign.

NPS / SCULPTURE BY JOHN ANGEL

French Involvement

French explorers, fur traders, missionaries, and soldiers arrived in North America in the early 1600s. Many took Native wives and lived among the tribes. The French spread throughout the continent’s interior via the St. Lawrence, Great Lakes, and Mississippi waterways.

Claiming sovereignty over the interior, the French established small forts and posts. They did not usurp Natives’ rights to fish, trap, or hunt. The fur trade that fueled the French economy depended upon the Natives’ providing a steady supply of skins. The important French settlements—Detroit, Michilimackinac, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes—divided into an upper class of military officers and wealthy traders along with a lower class of smaller traders, farmers, and artisans.

The conflict between France and Britain for control of the interior culminated in the French and Indian War (1754–63). Britain emerged the victor. The French who stayed in the Ohio River valley had to serve in militias to supplement British forces.

At forts Detroit and Michilimackinac, French militias supported the British during the American Revolution. At Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes, the French militias first supported the British, then the Americans. They renounced their support for the patriots when British Lt. Gov. Henry Hamilton arrived in Vincennes with an overwhelming force of Native warriors.

Visiting the Park

Visitor Center Stop first at the visitor center for information, exhibits, a film, and bookstore. Staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. Closed most federal holidays but open Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day.

The Memorial In the mid-1920s, during the 150th anniversary celebration of the American Revolution, Indiana residents sought to commemorate George Rogers Clark’s accomplishments. Congress created a commission to design and construct a memorial. Frederick Hiron won the national competition, and construction began in 1931.

Touring the Memorial Built in classic Greek style, the granite exterior is encircled by 16 columns supporting a massive round roof. Inside, a bronze statue of George Rogers Clark stands on a marble pedestal. The rest of the ceiling and rotunda walls are Indiana limestone. The floor is Tennessee marble. Seven murals depict Clark’s role in winning the region west of the Appalachians.



NPS / FREDERICK HIRONS

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all; call or check our website.

George Rogers Clark National Historical Park is one of more than 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more visit www.nps.gov.

Emergencies call 911

More Information
George Rogers Clark National Historical Park
401 S. Second St.
Vincennes, IN 47591
812-882-1776
www.nps.gov/gero

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

Visiting Historic Sites in Vincennes (Eastern Time Zone)

Visit these sites to learn more about the early development of Vincennes.

- 1 Old Cathedral Complex** (205 Church St.) Dating from 1749, the Basilica of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral is Indiana’s oldest parish church. The present structure was begun in 1826. The Old Cathedral Library, bordering the historic French and Indian Cemetery, houses a collection of rare books and documents.
- 2 Old State Bank State Historic Site** (114 N. 2nd St.) Built in 1838 for the State Bank of Indiana, the interior includes the original two-door iron vault.
- 3 Old French House** (509 N. 1st St.) The home of fur trader Michel Brouillet, built about 1806, is one of the few vertical log houses surviving in North America. Visit the American Indian museum behind the house.

- 4 Grouseland** (3 W. Scott St.) William Henry Harrison, first governor of Indiana Territory and ninth president of the United States, lived in this house, completed in 1804.
- 5 Vincennes State Historic Sites** (1 W. Harrison St.) Indiana Territory, with Vincennes as its capital, included at various times the present states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota. The territorial legislature occupied the capitol in 1811. Nearby is a replica of the print shop where, on July 4, 1804, Elihu Stout first published the *Indiana Gazette*, the territory’s first newspaper.
- 6 Sugar Loaf Prehistoric Indian Mound** (2401 Wabash Ave.) Woodland Indians (CE 600–1000) used it as a burial site.

- 7 Fort Knox II State Historic Site** The fort served as the staging area for troops that fought in the Battle of Tippecanoe (1811). Also significant for its association with William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, and Shawnee leader Tecumseh, it is three miles north of the city, at 3090 Fort Knox Road.
- 8 Ouabache (Wabash) Trails Park** On 254 acres of wooded, rolling hills, the park includes two picnic areas, with playgrounds, shelter houses, cabins, and a campground. The park is next to Fort Knox II State Historic Site, at 3500 N. Lower Fort Knox Rd. Call 812-882-4316.

Safety Watch children closely when near the Wabash River.

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