



George Rogers Clark National Historical Park

401 South Second Street, Vincennes, Indiana 47591 (812) 882-1776

Historical Site Bulletin



FRONTIER FINANCIER

Francis Vigo was one of important Revolutionary War heroes who assisted George Rogers Clark and the American cause. Vigo's efforts aided Clark in turning the tide of events in the West and in winning the region between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River for the new nation.

Vigo was born December 3, 1747, in the town of



Francis Vigo

Mondovi in what is now northern Italy. Little is

known of his early life until he enlisted in a Spanish regiment and was sent to New Orleans, then a possession of Spain. After his discharge, Vigo entered the fur trade. By 1772, he was established as a merchant and trader in St. Louis in Spanish Upper Louisiana. Later, as a business associate of Lieutenant Governor Fernando de Leyba, Vigo was quite successful trading among the area's Indians and French settlers.

In July 1778, George Rogers Clark and his small force of 180 frontiersmen captured British-controlled, but French-inhabited, Kaskaskia and Cahokia in the Illinois country across from St. Louis. The French there and also at Vincennes soon were won over to the American cause, in large part through the efforts of Father Pierre Gibault. Vigo, in St. Louis, decided to support Clark and the Americans by furnishing them with supplies from his own stores. In making this decision, Vigo no doubt was influenced by the assistance being given the Americans

by Lieutenant Governor de Leyba. Vigo also loaned Clark money to pay the local inhabitants for needed goods. Vigo's visible assistance was noted by the French and further solidified their support behind Clark.

Learning of Clark's success, British Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton left Detroit on October 7, 1778, with a force of British soldiers and Indians, plus still-loyal French volunteers and militia. He recaptured Vincennes without a fight on December 17. Vigo, unaware of this turn of events, set out December 18 for Vincennes to help the Americans with supplies. As he approached the settlement, he was taken prisoner and was held for several days.

Hamilton didn't realize the extent of Vigo's involvement with the Americans. Therefore, Vigo was released on the condition that on his way back to St. Louis, he do nothing that would harm the British cause. Vigo complied with the letter, if not the spirit, of this agreement by first

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returning to St. Louis before starting out for Kaskaskia to report to Clark. Arriving on January 29, 1779, he provided Clark with valuable detailed information on the situation at Vincennes. Vigo told Clark that the British intended to descend upon the Americans at Kaskaskia in the spring and that they would not expect the Americans to attack them at Vincennes during the winter. Clark later wrote of Vigo: "in sho[r]t we got Every Information from this Gentr [gentleman] that we could wish for as he had had good opportunities and had taken great pains to

inform himself with a design to give intelligence...."

Capitalizing on Vigo's information, Clark gathered a force of approximately 170 men to march across the flooded Illinois country. Departing on February 5, his army endured an incredible epic trek through frigid flood waters and captured Fort Sackville at Vincennes on February 25, 1779.

Vigo's service to the United States continued during the remainder of the Revolution and in the years following. By 1783, Vigo had moved to Vincennes where he spent most of the next 50 years working in the fur trade and serving as a colonel in the militia. Vigo's business affairs eventually suffered setbacks; virtually impoverished, he died at age 88 in 1836. He was buried in Greenlawn Cemetery in

Vincennes. Prior to his death, Vigo had specified that a portion of any money received by his estate should be used to purchase a bell for the Vigo County Courthouse in Terre Haute. Finally in 1875, almost a full century after the war, Vigo's estate was paid \$8,616 principal and \$41,282 in interest for his services both to Clark and to his country.

In 1934, sculptor John Angel was commissioned to prepare a suitable statue of Vigo to be placed on the park grounds adjacent to the George Rogers Clark Memorial. On May 4, 1936, the 10-ton granite work was positioned where it overlooks the Wabash River. To the thousands of visitors to the George Rogers Clark National Historical Park, the Vigo Statue serves as a fitting tribute to the contributions of this important American patriot.