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THE CHARACTER AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF GEORGE ROGERS CLARK

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Reprinted by the Indiana Historical Bureau through the courtesy of the Louisville *Herald-Post*. Mr. Thruston is president of the Filson Club, of Louisville, and has the most complete collection in private hands of historical material relating to Clark.

This article presupposes some knowledge of Clark and his achievements, otherwise what he accomplished could not be expressed in so few words, brief as his period of activity was.

It seems as though our Creator must have endowed him with especial gifts for a definite purpose. Born in Albemarle County, Virginia, in November, 1752, and reared on his father's plantation in Caroline County, George Rogers Clark grew to over six feet in height with an athletic figure, blue eyes and sandy hair inclining to redness. He was a lover of natural history and had wonderful powers of observation and an ability to analyze human character regardless of race, residence or degree of civilization. He had an innate sense of fairness and justice to all, a magnetic influence that attracted people to him and a sincere and forceful manner that added weight to his conclusions and arguments.

As a student, we know but little of him except that he preferred studying nature under the broad canopy of heaven rather than in the school room. As an observer we know a little more. When 19 he made one or two canoe trips on the upper Ohio and the next year settled at the mouth of Grove Creek some forty miles below Wheeling. When 21 he was a captain in Dunmore's War and the next year was in Kentucky with headquarters at Harrodstown. His knowledge of the region, the people and the conditions was so accurate and quickly acquired that it seems as though it must have been instinctive.

Doubts as to colonial jurisdiction and the validity of titles, coupled with the almost incessant presence of hostile Indians, had stemmed the tide of immigration from Virginia and was turning it backwards. In 1776, he planned a method for forcing Virginia to recognize her jurisdiction and then literally forced her to extend her protecting arm over Kentucky, first by furnishing 500 pounds of gunpowder for their struggling pioneers and later by erecting the county of Kentucky, which gave it a local self government with its militia of which Clark was made the major. This was the first step towards making Kentucky into a separate commonwealth. At this time there were only four stations left in Kentucky and one of them was soon abandoned, leaving only Harrodstown, Boonesboro and Logan's or St. Asaph.

In 1777, the Indian raids continued with increasing frequency and it looked as though Kentucky would soon cease to exist even as a county. Clark thought of carrying the offensive war into the British and Indian territory north of the Ohio. In the spring he sent two men to spy on forces at Kaskaskia, etc. They were absent nearly two months and in going and returning covered nearly 1,000 miles of territory. Desperate as the situation seemed, Clark returned to Williamsburg and laid his plans before Governor Henry, with Jefferson, Mason and Wythe as advisers. They gave him 1,200 pounds in Virginia currency with the rank of lieutenant-colonel, told him to select his officers, raise his force of 350 men and proceed with what today we know as the Illinois campaign. His troubles in recruiting were even more difficult than were those of Washington some twenty years before.

Their point of rendezvous was an island at the head of the falls of the Ohio opposite where Louisville now stands. Here there assembled only about half as many as he had hoped for.

Leaving a small force behind him to protect his base of supplies, he left in flatboats on June 24, 1778, landed near the mouth of the Tennessee and went overland, capturing Kaskaskia so early on the morning of July 5 that the commandant was in bed. The inhabitants were first terrorized and then filled with love and joy. With their assistance and the influence of a Catholic priest, the towns of Cahokia and Vincennes surrendered without a quibble. Clark then turned his

attention to the Indians, all of whom learned to respect him, though some loved and others feared him. He had but little trouble from them in the future.

Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Hamilton, the British Commandant at Detroit, soon learned of Clark's campaign and made extensive plans for a retaliative one, and indeed planned to wipe Kentucky and Tennessee off the political map. His journal is in existence but too long to quote here. He recaptured Vincennes on December 17, 1778, put out his scouts to prevent Clark from learning of his whereabouts, sent most of his Indians home and regulars to Detroit where food was more plentiful, but with instructions to return in the spring, and then proceeded to strengthen his position.

The term of enlistment of Clark's men had expired and about half had left him; the others had re-enlisted. Learning, though briefly, of the situation at Vincennes, he quickly arrived at a decision, recruited his force from his friends at Kaskaskia and started on February 5, 1779, to recapture Vincennes and make prisoners of Hamilton and his force.

The march was 240 miles across country and much of it through water and ice sometimes up to the armpits of his men. With but little bloodshed, Hamilton surrendered to Clark on February 25, 1779, and a few days later Clark captured reinforcements of men, ammunition and supplies intended for Vincennes. Hamilton and his officers were sent prisoners to Virginia, where they were put in irons and thrown into prison. His soldiers were paroled and sent back to Detroit in love with Clark and wishing for an American conquest of the place.

Most of the Indians from Indiana and Illinois, Clark soon made peace with, but the Shawnees from Ohio and those still under the influence of the British at Detroit continued to give trouble to the Kentuckians for many years, but notwithstanding their depredations, knowledge of Clark's victories again directed the tide of immigration to Kentucky so that in two years Kentucky had over 20,000 white inhabitants.

To hold this territory for our country, Clark expended his fortune and some of his officers did likewise. Their sacrifice resulted in the Treaty of Paris placing our boundary line at the Great Lakes and the Mississippi river instead of at the Appalachian Mountains, and made possible the further extension of our country to the Pacific ocean and beyond.