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“I Carry War in my right hand and in my left Peace’: George Rogers Clark
and the Illinois Country Middle Ground during the American Revolution”

BY

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UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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Introduction

Following his bloodless capture of the French Illinois settlements of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes from the British in July 1778 George Rogers Clark was quick to send messengers to the surrounding Native American tribes calling them to come into Cahokia for a peace council. One chieftain that responded was a man called Lajes or Big Gate who arrived with the Potawatomi delegation to “to hear what we [the Americans] had to say for ourselves.”¹ Big Gate had earned his name as a young warrior during Pontiac’s War after shooting a man standing in a gate during the siege of Detroit while fighting against the British under the great Ottawa chief Pontiac. With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War Big Gate had sided with his former enemy the British and had already led several successful raids against American frontier settlements. He arrived at Cahokia defiantly, in his wardress and carrying with him a small British flag and a bloody war belt he had received from the British. However, after several day of listening to George Rogers Clark, Big Gate decided once again to turn against the British. Standing up in the middle of the council room he stripped off and threw to the ground his war belt, British flag, and all of his clothing declaring that “he was now convinced that the English were wrong and that the Big Knives [Americans] were right, and that he was a man and a warrior and would not fight in a wrong cause; struck his breast and said that he was now a Big Knife, and came and shook hands with me and the whole company as his brothers.”²

Big Gate’s story would not be considered a unique one in the land the French called *les Pays des Illinois* or the Illinois Country (see Map 1) where loyalties and alliances were

¹ It is unclear if Big Gate himself was a Potawatomi or if he belonged to a different tribe. Clark only says that “he fell in with some Potawatomi who were on their way to visit us.” Milo M. Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes: The Original Narratives of George Rogers Clark and of His Opponent GOV. Henry Hamilton*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merril Company, 1927), 99.

² Milo M. Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes: The Original Narratives of George Rogers Clark and of His Opponent GOV. Henry Hamilton*, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merril Company, 1927), 100.



Map 1: Hutchins, Thomas. *The Western Parts of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland and North Carolina*. Case Map. London: Thomas Hutchins, 1778. *David Rumsey Historical Map Collection*. <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~281~30139:A-New-Map-of-the-Western-Parts-of-V?qvq=q:Author%3D%22Hutchins%2C%2BThomas%22;lc:RUMSEY~8~1&mi=0&trs=4> (accessed January 10, 2014).

constantly adjusting and ever changing. The Illinois Country was a land divided between several vying powers European, colonial, and Native American in which identities were fluid and objectives shifted regularly. The French, British, Spanish, Americans, Illiniwek Confederation, Miami, Wea, Piankashaw, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Chippewa, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Delaware, Winnebago, and Shawnee all attempted in one way or another to gain dominance or exercise greater influence over the region. The Illinois Country was, to borrow historian Richard White's term, a unique middle ground. Before continuing I believe it is important to define just what the term middle ground means.

Since Richard White first coined the term "middle ground" in his 1991 book *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* historians have oversimplified and use the term in ways far outside its intended contexts. In his book White used the term "middle ground" to define a certain "historical space...the *pays d'en haut*, or the Upper Country of French Canada." However, despite his initial precise geographic definition of the term White still believes "that the middle ground as a process is replicable in other places and other times," although it still needs to fit certain criteria.³ As Philip DeLoria has noted, notwithstanding White's precision in employing the term, "'People are starting to take the middle ground as a general metaphor, a kind of watered down idea about the mechanisms of compromise in all kinds of social and political situations. Everything is starting to turn into a middle ground.'" ⁴ So what are the proper criteria for the use of the term "middle ground"? "The middle ground, White

³ Richard White, "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, (2006): 9-10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3491722>.

⁴ Philip J. DeLoria, "What Is the Middle Ground, Anyway?" *WMQ*, Third Series, Vol. 63, (2006): 15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3491723>.

wrote, requires a relation in which "whites could neither dictate to Indians nor ignore them."⁵

Richard White provides a more detailed answer in his article "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings":

I was fairly specific about the elements that were necessary for the construction of such a space: a rough balance of power, mutual need or a desire for what the other possesses, and an inability by either side to commandeer enough force to compel the other to change. Force and violence are hardly foreign to the process of creating and maintaining a middle ground, but the critical element is mediation... The space depended on the creation of an infrastructure that could support and expand the process, and this infrastructure was, I argue, possible only when there was a rough balance of power and a mutual need between the parties involved.⁶

The Illinois Country fits all of these elements of a middle ground.

Historians have long considered the Illinois Country as a middle ground in one way or another, however this middle ground has usually been viewed narrowly through the lens of French and Native American interactions. In her book *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* historian Sophie White looks at this Illinois Country middle ground by examining the "cultural cross-dressing" of Indians dressing like French and French dressing like Indians.⁷ James E. Davis addresses the Illinois Country middle ground more directly in his book *Frontier Illinois*. Following the arrival of French settlers in the Illinois Country Davis writes, "a middle ground society developed, a society in which French, Indians, and their offspring lived, mingled freely, borrowed from each other, got along, occasionally spat, and fashioned a hybrid world."⁸ This thesis on the other hand will focus on the Illinois Country's middle ground's most diverse period, 1763-1815. More specifically this

⁵ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x; Deloria, "What Is the Middle Ground, Anyway?", 16.

⁶ White, "Creative Misunderstandings and New Understandings," 10.

⁷ Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 18.

⁸ James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 30.

essay will examine the high water mark of the Illinois Country middle ground, the period between 1778 and 1783, through an analysis of George Roger Clark's Illinois campaign during the American Revolution. In doing so, it will not simply recognize that Clark's regiment was multicultural, as historians have often recognized that military units were often diverse. Instead, it will apply the concept of the 'middle ground' to postulate that Clark's force was both a middle ground in and of itself and a force that helped make and keep the Illinois Country a middle ground .

This thesis will be organized into three chapters. Chapter one provides a military analysis of George Rogers Clark's Illinois Campaign during the American Revolution. This chapter places the American Revolution in the Illinois Country into its proper background and context. Chapter two covers how the Illinois Country was a complex 'middle ground.' It is also where the main argument of this thesis is explained. The third and final chapter is on how George Rogers Clark and the Illinois Country's involvement in the American Revolution is interpreted today through public history.

CHAPTER ONE

George Roger Clark's 1778-79 Campaign: A Successful Operation that Conformed to the Army's Nine Principles of War and Operation

On June 28, 1778 George Rogers Clark at the head of 175 men, mostly Virginians, landed on the north shore of the Ohio River near the ruins of Fort Massac in what is today the southern tip of Illinois (see Map 2). Clark carried with him secret orders from Virginia's Governor Patrick Henry directing him to "attack the British post at Kaskasky."⁹

Marching overland Clark and his men reached the French town of Kaskaskia along the Mississippi River early on July 4th. They quickly surrounded the town and captured it without firing a shot. Clark was easily able to persuade the Illinois French to join the American cause after he informed them that France had, following the American victory at Saratoga, formally recognized the United States and had joined the war. The other major Illinois French settlements of Cahokia and Vincennes were quick to follow the example of Kaskaskia, switching their loyalty to the American cause. Within a month Clark had gained control of the whole Illinois Country without firing a shot in anger.

News of Clark's success soon reached the British governor at Detroit, Henry Hamilton. By December Hamilton had advanced on Vincennes and easily retaken the town and its fortification Fort Sackville from the small American garrison. Hamilton's task became easier when the local French militia switched their loyalties back to the British when Hamilton's forces entered the town, leaving only Captain Leonard Helm and two others to oppose Hamilton's force. On receiving the news of Hamilton's capture of Fort Sackville Clark was quick to counterattack. Marching for seventeen days in the middle of winter across flooded land Clark

⁹ *The Secret Orders & "...great things have been Done by a few Men...": Letters of Patrick Henry and George Rogers Clark Issued in Facsimile by the Indiana Historical Society as a Contribution to the Observance of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1974).



Map 2: Pamela Bennett, ed., "The Fall of Fort Sackville" in *The Indiana Historian*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1997), 4.
<http://www.in.gov/history/files/fallfortsackville.pdf>.

and his men were able to surprise Hamilton and on February 24, 1779 Hamilton was forced to surrender to Clark.

Clark's operations in the Illinois Country more than two centuries ago include a number of actions that resonate with contemporary military doctrines. Following the end of World War I the United States Army first codified several of these actions in what has become known as the Nine Principles of War and Operations. The purpose of these nine principles was not to act as a definitive checklist of dos and don'ts. Instead "while they are considered in all operations, they do not apply in the same way to every situation. Rather, they summarize characteristics of successful operations."¹⁰ However, "their greatest value lies in the education of the military professional. Applied to the study of past campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements, the principles of war are powerful analysis tools."¹¹ Application of the Army's Nine Principles of War to George Rogers Clark's Illinois Campaign of 1777-1779, particularly Clark's operation to recapture Fort Sackville from the British and their Indian allies during February 1779, will demonstrate that Clark during his campaign, for the most part, effectively employed all nine Principles of War.

The United States Army's Nine Principles of War and Operations are:

- 1) Objectives: Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.
- 2) Offensive: Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.
- 3) Mass: Concentrate the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time.
- 4) Economy of Force: Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.
- 5) Maneuver: Place the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power.

¹⁰ U.S. Army, *Operations*, Department of the Army. FM 3-0 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008. A-1. <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-0.pdf> (accessed April 12, 2014).

¹¹ Ibid.

6) Unity of Command: For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.

7) Security: Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.

8) Surprise: Strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.

9) Simplicity: Prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to ensure thorough understanding.¹²

While the Nine Principles of War were not codified in their current form by the United States Army until after the end of World War I the ideas and theories held within the Principles existed in one form or another in George Rogers Clark's time. One example of this is the famous *Rogers' Rules of Ranging* created during the French and Indian War by Major Robert Rogers, the commander of Rogers' Rangers. Another example that offered a broader conception of the principles of war is the military theorist Major General Henry Lloyd's 1766 book *The history of the late war in Germany Between the King of Prussia and the Empress of Germany and Her Allies*. Clark most likely knew very little or nothing about these ideas and theories. However by analyzing his eighteenth-century operations with the current United States Army's Nine Principles of War point by point it will become clear his actions incorporated the key elements of these principles.

The first Principle states to "direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective" and "when undertaking any mission, commanders should clearly understand the expected outcome and its impact."¹³ So what were the objectives of George Rogers Clark's Illinois Campaign? His overall objective was to capture the British outpost at Detroit in order to relieve Kentucky and other western settlements from the constant

¹² Ibid, A-1-A-3.

¹³ Ibid, A-1.

and brutal raids by Native American tribes that were supported and encouraged by the British from Detroit. Capturing the Illinois Country was just the first step in Clark's plan. He believed ending these raids into Kentucky would go beyond just saving the lives of Kentuckians but would also aid the American war effort. Clark was convinced "that as soon as they [the British and Indians] should accomplish the destruction of Kentucky they would descend upon our frontiers; and instead of the states receiving supplies from thence, they would be obliged to keep large bodies of troops for their defense."¹⁴

Clark was not the only American commander who saw the importance of capturing Detroit; George Washington also shared this opinion. This can be seen in two letters Washington wrote in 1779. The first was to Daniel Brodhead in which Washington observed, "it is of great importance to reduce it [Detroit], and I shall willingly attempt it, whenever circumstances will justify it, you will turn your [closest] attention to the subject."¹⁵ The second letter, addressed to Thomas Jefferson, directly gives support to Clark's stated objective, "if Colo Clarke could by any means gain possession of Detroit. it would in all probability effectually secure the friendship or at least the neutrality of most of the Western Indians."¹⁶

In Clark's operation to recapture Fort Sackville it is clear that he fulfilled this first principle of war. Clark had a very clear and straightforward objective: to march with every available man, to fight a decisive battle, and recapture Fort Sackville from Henry Hamilton while the British were at their weakest. This is seen clearly in a hastily written letter from Clark to

¹⁴ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 40.

¹⁵ George Washington, *George Washington to Daniel Brodhead, October 18, 1779*, Letter, From Library of Congress, *The George Washington Papers, 1741-1799*. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28gw160514%29%29>. (accessed February 5, 2014).

¹⁶ George Washington, *George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, July 10, 1779*, Letter, From Library of Congress, *The George Washington Papers, 1741-1799*. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mgw:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28gw150417%29%29>. (accessed February 5, 2014).

Governor Patrick Henry just before setting out for Vincennes, “I am Resolved to take the advantage of his [Hamilton] present Situation and Risque the whole on a single Battle and Shall set out in a few Days.”¹⁷ The First Principle of War also states that “combat power is limited; commanders never have enough to address every aspect of the situation. Objectives allow commanders to focus combat power on the most important tasks.”¹⁸ Clark was very aware of this and accordingly distributed his limited forces: “I can Raise accounting only to one Hundred & seventy...the Stores and Forts in I leave to the Care of a few Melitia and take only those with me that know will Die by me.”¹⁹ Staying focused on his objective Clark was able to make the decision to weaken the garrisons of Kaskaskia and Cahokia to almost nothing and gather all his available manpower to attack Fort Sackville.

The second Principle, that of the Offensive, states that commanders must “seize, retain, and exploit the initiative” and by doing so they are able to dictate “the nature, scope, and tempo of an operation.” A commander’s ability to do this allows them “to impose their will on an enemy or adversary or to control a situation. Seizing, retaining, and exploiting the initiative are all essential to maintain the freedom of action necessary to achieve success and exploit vulnerabilities.”²⁰ Of all of the Nine Principles of War it is this Principle that George Rogers Clark seemed to grasp most thoroughly. Clark’s Illinois Campaign was focused almost entirely on the offensive. Clark had previously conducted a purely defensive war in Kentucky against the constant British encouraged and supported raids by Native American tribes who nearly always held the initiative over the Kentuckians. Now Clark wished to seize the initiative from the British

¹⁷ *The Secret Orders & “...great things have been Done by a few Men...”* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1974).

¹⁸ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-1.

¹⁹ *The Secret Orders & “...great things have been Done by a few Men...”*

²⁰ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-1.

and their Indian allies by going on the offensive in order to “punish the Aggressors by carrying the war into their own Country.”²¹

Clark’s enemy Henry Hamilton showed he also fully grasped the principle of offense when he quickly took to the offensive and marched out of Detroit and captured Fort Sackville from the Americans in December 1778, seizing the initiative from Clark. It would have been reasonable for Clark to focus his efforts on building up his defenses in Kaskaskia and await Hamilton’s assault that would come when spring arrived. Hundreds of miles away from American reinforcements, Clark was heavily outnumbered with only around one hundred Americans troops still with him and around one hundred Illinois French militiamen of untested loyalty from Kaskaskia and Cahokia.²² Hamilton on the other hand arrived at Vincennes at the head of between five and six hundred men. His force consisted of forty-one men of “the king’s Eighth Regiment of regulars, eight irregulars, seventy thoroughly trained militia [most likely French Canadians]” and the rest made up of Native American warriors that he gathered along the way to Vincennes.²³ Hamilton also had quickly accessible reinforcements from the tribes in the surrounding regions that he could call upon at a moment’s notice. Clark however knew that in order to regain the initiative he had to go on the offensive and the opportunity to do just that arose following the arrival of Francis Vigo.

Francis Vigo was an Italian trader working for the Spanish out of St. Louis and when traveling to Vincennes on business he was captured by one of Hamilton’s scouting parties. After questioning Vigo, Hamilton saw no threat in releasing him and allowed him to return to St. Louis

²¹ George Wythe, *Letter from George Wythe, George Mason, and Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark*, Letter. From Library of Congress. *First American West: The Ohio River Valley, 1750-1820*. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/faw:@field%28DOCID+icufawcmc0020%29> (accessed February 7, 2014).

²² William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897), 265-266. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092886096>.

²³ English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783*, 226.

with the promise “to give no information to the Americans, while on his way to St. Louis.”²⁴ What Hamilton did not know was that the business that brought Vigo to Vincennes was the securing of supplies for the American garrison of Fort Sackville at the request of George Rogers Clark. After he had returned to St. Louis Vigo quickly crossed back over the Mississippi River and reported everything he had observed to Clark.²⁵ Clark learned from Vigo that Hamilton had sent most of his Indian allies home until spring arrived or out on raids along the frontier and that there were only eighty men garrisoning Fort Sackville.²⁶ On learning of Hamilton’s weakened state Clark made the decision to regain the initiative and do what Hamilton least expected of him, go on the offensive and attempt an operation to recapture Fort Sackville. While Clark’s plan to strike Fort Sackville clearly demonstrated the Principle of Offensive, it also included yet another of the Nine Principles of War—the Principle of Mass.

The Principle of Mass states that a commander must “concentrate the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time.”²⁷ There are two methods of massing that commanders can use depending on the situation they face: “Massing in time applies the elements of combat power against multiple decisive points simultaneously. Massing in space concentrates the effects of combat power against a single decisive point.”²⁸ Following the elements of this Principle properly allows a commander to “overwhelm the entire enemy or adversary force before it can

²⁴ John Bakeless, *Background to Glory: The Life of George Rogers Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1957), 139.

²⁵ It is interesting to note that Francis Vigo technically followed the conditions of his parole of not revealing any information to the Americans while on his way to St. Louis to the letter. He did not inform Clark of anything until after he had crossed the Mississippi River and entered St. Louis. Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 139.

²⁶ George Rogers Clark, “Letter to George Mason, of Virginia, dated Louisville, Falls of Ohio, November 19, 1779” in William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897). <http://www.in.gov/history/2963.htm> (accessed February 7, 2014).

²⁷ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-2.

²⁸ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-2.

react effectively.²⁹ During the Illinois Campaign George Rogers Clark never commanded more than two hundred men at any one time. The proper use of those limited forces was vital for Clark to achieve success, thus making this principle one of the more critical that he had to execute.

Clark's operation to recapture Fort Sackville is an exemplar of the use of massing in space. In this operation Clark had only one target, Fort Sackville and he concentrated his entire force on capturing that target. Clark was only able to gather one hundred seventy men for his operation and about forty of those men he placed on a gunboat. As a result when he began his march to Vincennes, Clark only had around one hundred and thirty men under his command.³⁰ Of those one hundred thirty men only sixty-eight of them were Americans. The remaining sixty-two had been raised from the French militias of Kaskaskia and Cahokia. In Kaskaskia thirty-four men volunteered in Captain Richard McCarty's company and in Cahokia twenty-eight men volunteered to serve in Captain Francis Charleville's company.³¹ By supplementing his American forces with local French volunteers Clark was able to mass the needed amount of personnel to achieve his goal of making a decisive blow against Hamilton by recapturing Fort Sackville.

The best example of Clark's use of massing in time can be seen in his capturing of the French settlements along the Mississippi River in July 1778, especially the village of Kaskaskia (Map 2). Clark and his men reached the outskirts of Kaskaskia late in the evening of July 4th completely unobserved by anyone in the village. Clark then divided his force "into two divisions." He ordered the first to surround the village while he led the second division in

²⁹ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-2.

³⁰ Joseph Bowman, "Journal of the Proceedings of George R. Clark from the 27th January, 1779, to March 20th inst." in William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897). <http://www.in.gov/history/2964.htm>

³¹ "Document 7 (19 January—5 April 1779)" and "Document 27 (6 February—13 March 1779)" in *George Rogers Clark and His Men: Military Records, 1778-1784*, Margery Harding, ed. (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1981), 17-20.

capturing Kaskaskia's blockhouse Fort Gage.³² Clark and his division entered Fort Gage unopposed and quickly secured it while also capturing the acting lieutenant governor of the Illinois Country, Francois Rocheblave, who was asleep in bed with his wife. A signal was then given to the second division and "bedlam broke loose in the town...Virginians who could speak French rushed through the town shouting that Kaskaskia had been captured, inhabitants must stay indoors, anyone appearing in the streets would be shot."³³ Through the proper use of massing in time Clark was able to capture the largest settlement of the Illinois Country and its acting lieutenant governor without firing a shot in anger.

The fourth Principle Economy of Force "is the reciprocal of mass. Commanders allocate only the minimum combat power necessary to shaping and sustaining operations so they can mass combat power for the decisive operation."³⁴ This Principle comes with inherent risks for commanders. They must determine the proper "minimum combat power necessary" without leaving the operation too weak to succeed. Of all the Nine Principles of War this is the one Principle that George Rogers Clark failed in executing effectively.

When it came to the village of Vincennes Clark seemed to always push this Principle to the extreme. Clark gained initial control of Vincennes by allocating no combat power at all. Instead he relied upon a civilian diplomatic delegation of prominent Kaskaskia and Cahokia villagers led by Father Pierre Gibault, the Illinois Country's only Catholic priest, and Dr. Jean B. Laffont. Father Gibault "believed that he could secure [Vincennes'] allegiance to the Americans by proper representations as to the treaty that had been made with France, and assurances that

³² Clark, "Letter to George Mason, of Virginia."

³³ Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 75.

³⁴ U.S. Army. *Operations*, A-2.

they would be treated as friends.”³⁵ The delegation was met with success, and the people of Vincennes “universally acceded to the proposal...and went in a body to the church, where the oath of allegiance was administered to them in the most solemn manner.”³⁶ By relying on an all-civilian delegation to gain control of Vincennes Clark was able to keep his meager forces in a consolidated area and thus strengthen his position along the Mississippi River. While used in the extreme this shows Clark’s ability to successfully execute the Principle of Economy of Force.

Clark’s decision on what the American garrison strength of Vincennes’ Fort Sackville would be, on the other hand highlighted his failure to effectively carry out this Principle. At the time of the gaining of Vincennes the enlistment period of Clark’s volunteer army had expired. As a result nearly seventy men decided to return home. Clark was only able to persuade approximately one hundred men to reenlist for a period of eight months forcing him to heavily rely on the untested loyalty of local French militias.³⁷ This was also true with the garrison of Fort Sackville under the command of Captain Leonard Helm. When Henry Hamilton captured Fort Sackville Helm only had three Virginians with him while the other seventy men were from the French militia of Vincennes, who promptly deserted the moment Hamilton’s forces, entered the village.³⁸ Helm’s weak garrison allowed the British to again gain control of Vincennes and Fort Sackville in the face of no opposition. While Clark did adhere to the Principle of Economy of Force, he did so too literally and in consequence failed to effectively execute the Principle.

The fifth Principle of Maneuver states that a commander must “place the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power” allowing a

³⁵ English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783*, 200.

³⁶ Quaipe, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 74.

³⁷ Clark, “Letter to George Mason, of Virginia.”

³⁸ “Henry Hamilton’s Journal.” In *Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with The Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton*, ed. John D. Barnhart (Crawfordsville: R. E. Banta, 1951) <http://www.in.gov/history/3010.htm>.

commander the ability to achieve “results that would otherwise be more costly.”³⁹ When commanders effectively fulfill this Principle they keep “enemy forces off balance by making them confront new problems and new dangers faster than they can counter them.”⁴⁰ Clark’s understanding of this Principle can clearly be seen in his assault on Fort Sackville.

Late in the evening of February 23, 1779, Clark and his men left Warrior Island, where they had spent the day recovering from their march, and advanced in full view of Vincennes to a ridgeline just south of the village (Map 3). It was not carelessness or foolishness that compelled Clark to advance in such an exposed manner. Clark knew full well that Hamilton’s forces outnumbered him. He understood that he needed to convince Hamilton, who did not know the number of men Clark commanded, that he possessed a much more formidable force. To accomplish this Clark’s small army “marched and countermarched in a fashion calculated to magnify our numbers.”⁴¹ Clark’s forces had brought along with them ten or twelve flags that they now flew “fixed to long poles” while marching beneath a ridge line with just the flags visible above, making it seem to an observer that they were a much larger force than just one hundred thirty men.⁴² This ruse had the desired effect. When Hamilton’s surgeon, who was in the village when the fighting began, returned to the fort he informed Hamilton that the “woman at whose house he was cried out, there is Colonel Clarke arrived from the Illinois[sic] with 500 men.”⁴³

Clark’s men continued their marching until the sun set. He then divided his forces and began his assault on Fort Sackville. Clark had the fort quickly surrounded and had his concealed riflemen keep up a constant harassing fire from all sides (Map 4). Clark positioned his men in

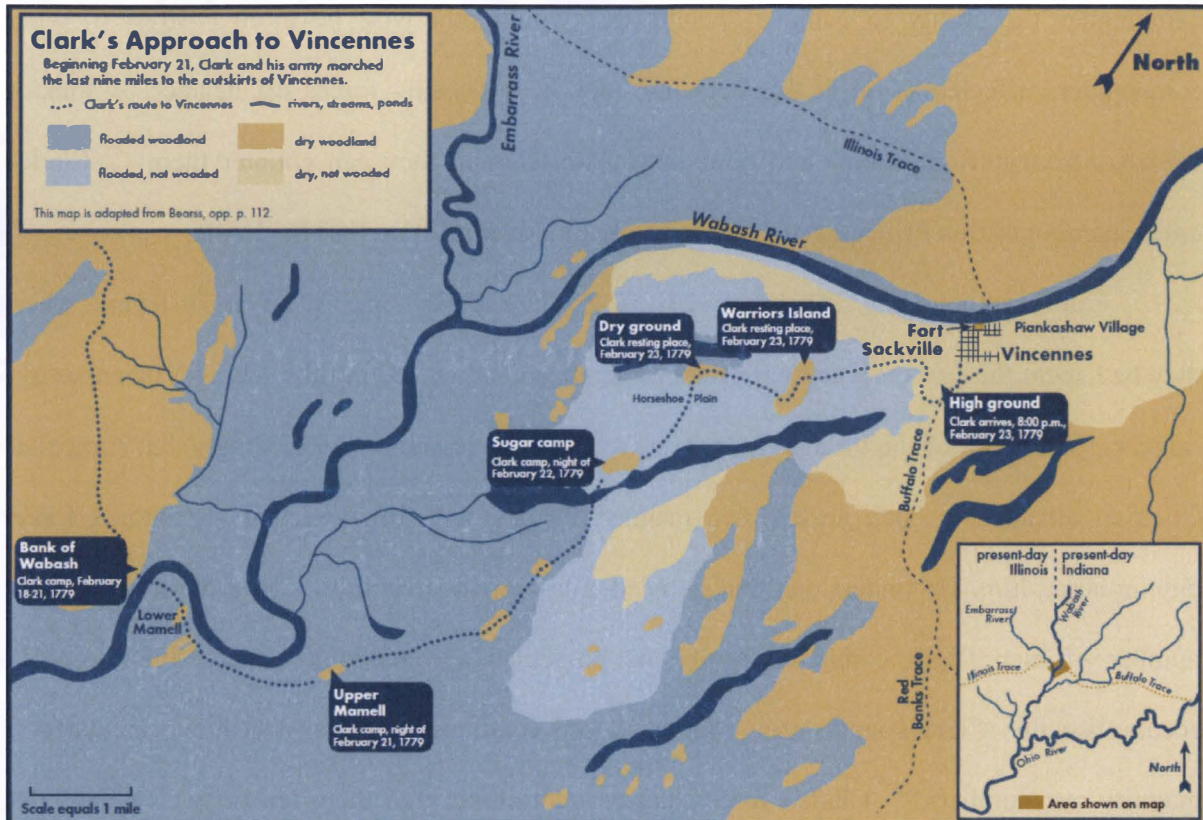
³⁹ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-2.

⁴⁰ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-2.

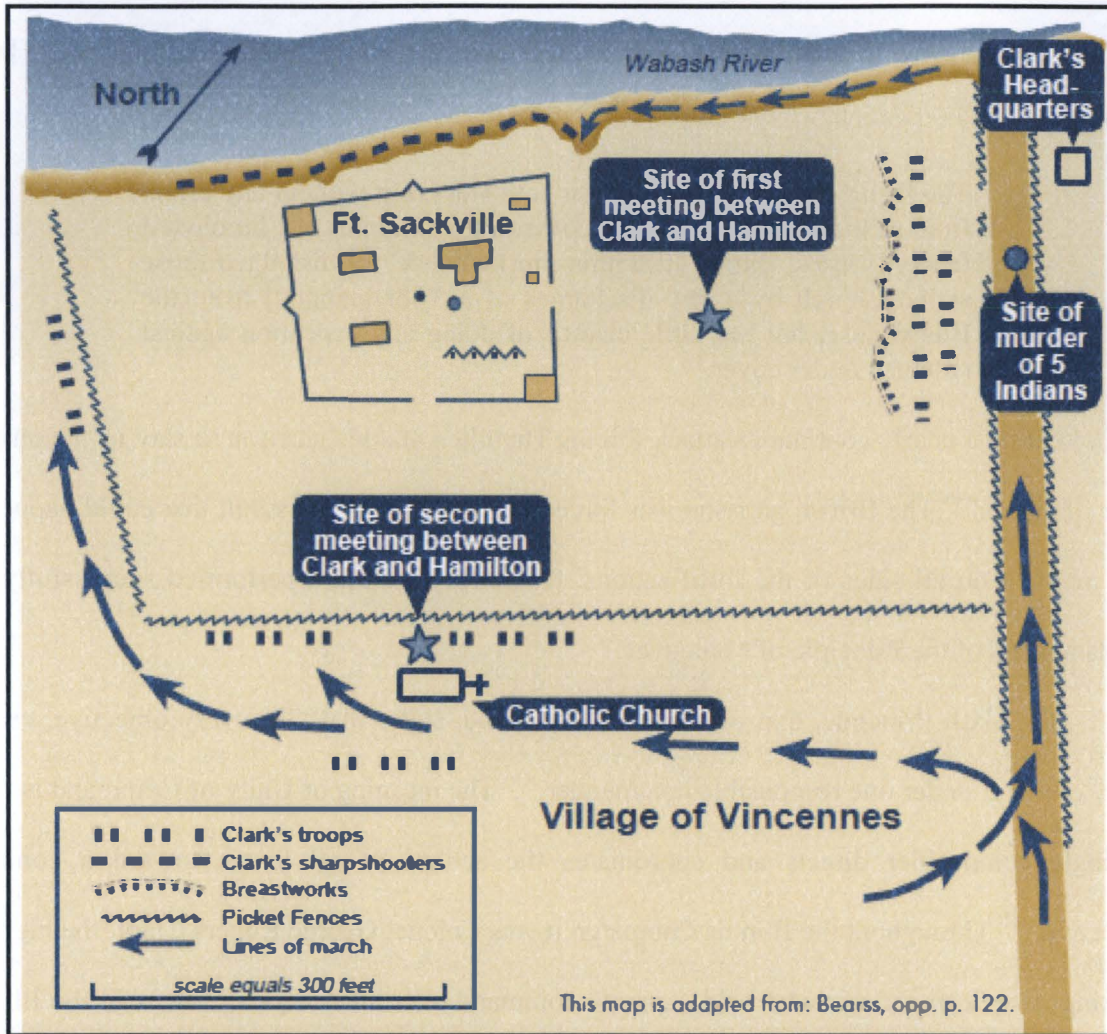
⁴¹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 134.

⁴² Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 134-135.

⁴³ “Henry Hamilton’s Journal.”



Map 3: Pamela Bennett, ed., “The Fall of Fort Sackville” in *The Indiana Historian*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1997), 7.
<http://www.in.gov/history/files/fallfortsackville.pdf>.



Map 4: Pamela Bennett, ed., "The Fall of Fort Sackville" in *The Indiana Historian*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1997), 13. <http://www.in.gov/history/files/fallfortsackville.pdf>.

such a way to provide them with the best cover possible, much to the frustration of Henry Hamilton:

The firing continued all night on both sides, but without any effect from us the Enemy having the cover of the Church, the Churchyard fence, Houses, Barns, all within muskett shot. we dislodged those at the Church by a few discharges of a 3 lbr [cannon] from the Blockhouse, but had little chance of doing any execution against riflemen under cover.⁴⁴

Clark kept up a nearly continuous attack forcing Hamilton and his garrison to stay in “a constant state of alarm.”⁴⁵ The British garrison was forced to defend from an assault that could happen at any moment on all sides of the fortifications. It is clear that Clark performed successfully the fundamentals of the Principle of Maneuver.

The sixth Principle, that of Unity of Command, states that “for every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.”⁴⁶ The meaning of Unity of Command is “that a single commander directs and coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective.”⁴⁷ Throughout the Illinois Campaign it was Colonel George Rogers Clark, the highest-ranking American officer, who held supreme command over all American forces in the Illinois Country. The small size of his forces allowed Clark to be in direct command of almost all major operations during the campaign. Since Clark’s forces were so small he never commanded more than an under strength regiment no larger than four companies at any given time. Clark’s Illinois Regiment had a basic regimental command structure. At the head of the regiment was Colonel Clark and directly under him were his four company captains: Joseph Bowman, Leonard Helm, William Harrod, and John Montgomery.⁴⁸ Each company had up to two lieutenants, an ensign,

⁴⁴ “Henry Hamilton’s Journal.”

⁴⁵ Quaipe, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 140.

⁴⁶ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

⁴⁷ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

⁴⁸ *George Rogers Clark and His Men: Military Records, 1778-1784*, 1.

and up to four sergeants.⁴⁹ However, unlike a normal regiment, Clark had no majors under his command at the beginning of the campaign giving him even more direct control of the regiment.

In the operation to recapture Fort Sackville the command structure was much the same. However the officers and men under Clark had changed following the end of their enlistment when many of Clark's Virginians went home. This forced Clark to recoup those losses by recruiting new men from the local French population. Clark was again in direct command of four companies. Two of these companies were made entirely up of French militia volunteers from Kaskaskia and Cahokia under the command of captains elected from the local population, captains Richard McCarty and Francis Charleville.⁵⁰ The other two companies consisted of American soldiers under the command of captains Joseph Bowman and John Williams.⁵¹ Clark again had no majors with him, which put him in direct command of nearly all aspects of the operation. This organizational structure clearly reveals that through direct command of his units, Clark employed this Principle.

The Principle of Security states that a commander must "never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage." It also states that "security results from measures a command takes to protect itself from surprise, interference, sabotage, annoyance, and threat surveillance and reconnaissance."⁵² Clark throughout the Illinois Campaign proved time and time again that he understood the importance of this Principle. He was nearly always well prepared and informed through up to date intelligence from spies and scouts.

As early as 1777 Clark had sent two young Kentuckians Sam Moore and William Linn as spies into the Illinois Country. These two spies masquerading as hunters spent several weeks in

⁴⁹ *George Rogers Clark and His Men: Military Records, 1778-1784*, 1-3.

⁵⁰ *George Rogers Clark and His Men: Military Records, 1778-1784*, 17-19.

⁵¹ *The Secret Orders & "...great things have been Done by a few Men..."*

⁵² U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

Kaskaskia gathering intelligence and contacting those friendly to the American cause.⁵³ When these men returned to Kentucky they brought with them highly detailed information on the condition of the Illinois Country. Before he even entered the Illinois Country Clark knew the layout of the Kaskaskia and its defenses, the number of inhabitants, who encouraged and supplied Indian raids, who was friendly to the American cause, and even the quality of their houses, which were “framed and very good.”⁵⁴ Once he had gained control of the Illinois Country Clark established a screen of scouts and spies to keep him informed of his enemies’ movement. Using French traders who traveled throughout the Illinois Country and friendly Native Americans Clark was able to have spies as far away as Detroit.⁵⁵ So with this extensive network of spies and scouts how was it that Clark was completely surprised when Hamilton captured Fort Sackville?

On the surface it would seem that Clark failed in this Principle. He was taken entirely by surprise when the British re-captured Fort Sackville. Clark did not even hear a rumor of Henry Hamilton leaving Detroit until his men discovered a spy in Cahokia. On questioning the spy they discovered “Hamilton's intentions on the Illinois, but not so fully expressed in the latter as to reduce it to a certainty.”⁵⁶ Even with this information Clark believed that the British would attack Kaskaskia where his operational center of strength was.⁵⁷ Clark would not know that Fort Sackville had fallen until Francis Vigo arrived from Vincennes twelve days after the fact. This lack of knowledge on Clark’s part was not the result of negligence in fulfilling the Principle of Security. Instead it was a combination of external factors, Mother Nature, and plain bad luck.

⁵³ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 41.

⁵⁴ “Clark to [Patrick Henry?], 1777.” in *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*, ed. James Alton James. (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1912) 30-31. <http://archive.org/details/georgerogerscla00jamegoog>.

⁵⁵ Clark, “Letter to George Mason, of Virginia.”

⁵⁶ Clark, “Letter to George Mason, of Virginia.”

⁵⁷ Clark, “Letter to George Mason, of Virginia.”

Hamilton commanded several hundred Native American warriors and sent them in outlying parties to cover his line of march. As a result most of Clark's spies were captured by these parties leaving Clark blind and confused about Hamilton's whereabouts.⁵⁸ Then, to make Clark's situation more challenging, the weather took a turn for the worse. A snowstorm came, preventing travel for several days, followed by severe flooding.⁵⁹ Just before Francis Vigo arrived Clark again attempted to gain some scrap of intelligence by sending several horsemen to Vincennes in order to capture some prisoners to question, but they were turned back by high waters.⁶⁰ Plainly, then, Clark made every possible attempt to properly execute the Principle of Security, but he was met with unusual and difficult challenges at every turn. Clark on the other hand had much better luck fulfilling the Principle of Surprise.

The Principle of Surprise, states that a commander should "strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared."⁶¹ The elements that allow for the achievement of surprise "include speed, operations security, and asymmetric capabilities."⁶² Clark's operation to recapture Fort Sackville is a textbook perfect example of this Principle being fulfilled. Clark knew that the only way that he would be able to defeat the numerically superior British would be by catching them by surprise. He wrote, "the season of the year was also favorable to our design, since the enemy could not suppose that we would be so mad as to attempt a march eighty leagues through a drowned country in the depth of winter."⁶³ Before the introduction of modern drainage systems the Illinois Country had heavy flooding every winter as a result of rain and melting snow, especially on "large and level plains. where, from the flatness of the country [the water]

⁵⁸ Clark, "Letter to George Mason, of Virginia."

⁵⁹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 108-109.

⁶⁰ Clark, "Letter to George Mason, of Virginia."

⁶¹ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

⁶² U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

⁶³ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 118.

rests a considerable time before it drains off" (Map 3).⁶⁴ To give an idea on just how bad the flooding was, the river was flooded so high at the Petit Fork that before Clark and his men could cross they had to cut down several trees to use as makeshift boats to float across.⁶⁵ Another perhaps more amusing image of how high the flood waters were is that of the regiment's drummer boy floating along on his drum.⁶⁶

It is clear from Henry Hamilton's journal that he was completely taken by surprise when Clark and his men attacked Fort Sackville. Even when Clark's men began firing on the Fort Hamilton did not realize he was under attack. Instead he believed that it was just "some drunken frolic of the inhabitants" that were firing off their guns in drunken celebration.⁶⁷ It was not until a Sergeant Chapman of the King's Regiment was struck, amazingly only on a metal button, by one of the bullets that Hamilton realized he was under attack.⁶⁸ Clark had so effectively executed the elements of this Principle that he caught Hamilton completely off guard, which in turn prevented the British commander from making a long-term defense of the fortification.

Great pains were taken by both Clark and his superiors back in Virginia to keep the entire Illinois Campaign secret from the British, beginning with the planning stages of the campaign. Clark met privately with Virginia Governor Patrick Henry several times to discuss his plan for the taking of the Illinois Country. In fact it was only Clark, Governor Henry, and a handful of advisors that even knew of the plan. They did not take the plan public before the Assembly for the fear that British spies would catch wind of it.⁶⁹ Once his plan was approved Clark was given

⁶⁴ Joseph Bowman, "Journal of the Proceedings of George R. Clark from the 27th January, 1779, to March 20th inst." in William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897). <http://www.in.gov/history/2964.htm>

⁶⁵ Bowman, "Journal of the Proceedings of George R. Clark..."

⁶⁶ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 123.

⁶⁷ "Henry Hamilton's Journal."

⁶⁸ "Henry Hamilton's Journal."

⁶⁹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 42-43.

two sets of orders. The first was a public order that claimed he was simply raising men for the defense of Kentucky and the second was a secret order telling Clark to “attack the British post at Kaskaskia.”⁷⁰ Perhaps the best example of Clark’s and the Virginia authorities’ commitment in fulfilling the Principle of Surprise was the fact that they imprisoned the two spies Clark had sent into the Illinois Country, Sam Moore and William Linn, to stop them from inadvertently releasing any information about the campaign until Clark had completed his mission.⁷¹ These precautions seemed to work perfectly. When Governor Hamilton learned about the loss of the French villages of the Illinois Country he had no idea who commanded the American forces. He only learned Clark’s name after his capture of Fort Sackville from Captain Helm.⁷² These events show that Clark effectively implemented the Principle of Surprise.

The ninth Principle that of Simplicity, states that a commander must “prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders to ensure thorough understanding...Simple plans executed on time are better than detailed plans executed late.”⁷³ Simplicity also greatly aids a commander of a force of multiple nationalities: “Differences in language, doctrine, and culture complicate them. Simple plans and orders minimize the confusion inherent in this complex environment.”⁷⁴ Clark’s Illinois Campaign plan was simple, clear, and reasonably achievable. He outlines his campaign plan in a 1777 letter to Patrick Henry:

An expedition against [Kaskaskias would be advantageous] seeing one would be attended with so little expence. The men might easily raised [blank in MS.] with little inconvenience Boats and canoes with about forty days provisions would [answer] them: they might in a few days run down the river with certainty [to the] Waubash, when they would only have about five to march to the town with very little danger of being discovered until almost within sight,

⁷⁰ *The Secret Orders & “...great things have been Done by a few Men...”*

⁷¹ *The Secret Orders & “...great things have been Done by a few Men...”*

⁷² “Henry Hamilton’s Journal.”

⁷³ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

⁷⁴ U.S. Army, *Operations*, A-3.

where they might go in the night: if they got wind [of us they might] make no resistance: if [they did] and were able to beat us in the field, they could by no means defend themselves for if they flew to the fort, they would loose possession of the, town where their provisions lay, and would sooner surrender than to try to beat us out of it with the cannon from the post, as [they] would be sensible that should [we fire] it before we left it, which would reduce them to the certainty of leaving the country or starving with their families. as they could get nothing to eat.⁷⁵

Clark followed his plan to success nearly exactly to the letter. The simplicity of his plan allowed Clark to achieve the campaign`s objectives with no major set backs or errors.

In the operation to recapture Fort Sackville Clark`s plan again fulfilled the Principle of Simplicity. In fact it was simplistic in the extreme, “I am Resolved to take the advantage of his [Governor Hamilton] present Situation and Risque the whole on a single Battle and Shall set out in a few Days with all the force I can Raise.”⁷⁶ While Clark`s plan was simplistic it was not hastily planned or reckless. He had a clear goal of attacking Henry Hamilton when he was at his most vulnerable: the middle of winter when Hamilton believed no attack was possible. This plainly indicates that Clark effectively implemented the Principle of Simplicity.

It is clear that Clark, for the most part, did carry out effectively all nine of Principles of War and Operations in both the overall Illinois Campaign and his operation to recapture Fort Sackville. Clark`s greatest strengths were in his fulfillment of the Principles Offensive and Surprise. The only Principle that Clark did not execute effectively was the Principle of Economy of Force when he failed to properly garrison Fort Sackville. While Clark operated over two hundred years ago it is still practical for commanders of today to study his operations. Commanders in combat today often find themselves in similar situations. Often operating in

⁷⁵ “Clark to [Patrick Henry?]. 1777,” in *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*, 32.

⁷⁶ *The Secret Orders & “...great things have been Done by a few Men...”*

small numbers in enemy territory forced to rely heavily on local populations of questionable loyalty.

CHAPTER TWO

Illinois Country as a "Middle Ground"

The Illinois Country that Clark and his men entered was a land divided between several vying powers in which identities were fluid, and loyalties and objectives shifted regularly. With the French Inhabitants, British, Spanish, Americans, Illiniwek Confederation, Miami, Wea, Piankashaw, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Chippewa, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Delaware, Winnebago, and Shawnee all attempting to gain dominance. The Illinois Country was a middle ground. Entering the Illinois Country Clark and his superiors back in Virginia understood that he would not be able to gain control of the area through military might alone. Commanding just one-hundred and seventy-five men Clark knew that his small army could easily be overwhelmed by any of the powers inhabiting the Illinois Country, the weakest group of Illinois Native Americans, the Illiniwek Confederation, could still raise around one-hundred to three-hundred warriors.⁷⁷ Instead Clark was continually forced to use persuasion, diplomacy, deception, and to make concessions to keep the various groups in the region satisfied. However, as outlined in the preceding chapter it is clear Clark was willing to use force when it was to his advantage.

It is clear that even in the initial planning stages of the campaign Clark understood he would not be entering the Illinois Country as a conqueror:

I was certain that with five hundred men I could take the Illinois, and by my treating the inhabitants as fellow-citizens, and (*showing*) them that I meant to protect rather than treat them as a conquered people---engaging the Indians to our interest, etc.---it might probably have so great an effect on their countrymen at Detroit (they already disliked their master), that it would be an easy prey for me.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Sara Julia Tucker, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country* (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1942), 53. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89069938801> (accessed February, 15, 2014).

⁷⁸ Clark, "Letter to George Mason, of Virginia, dated Louisville, Falls of Ohio, November 19, 1779."

Clark's superiors in Virginia also recognized that in order for Clark to succeed he first had to gain the support and loyalty of the people of the Illinois Country, both white and Native American. Governor Patrick Henry was explicit in his orders to Clark on how he was to treat the "white Inhabitants" of the Illinois Country that fell into his hands. Once they had sworn loyalty to Virginia they were to "be treated as fellow Citizens & their persons & property duly secured. Assistance protection against all Enemies whatever Shall be afforded them & the Commonwealth of Virginia is pledged to accomplish it."⁷⁹ Even following Clark's initial success in the capture of the French settlements of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes Governor Henry stressed to Clark in a letter the importance of treating the people of the Illinois Country cordially and fairly:

I consider your further success as depending upon the good will and friendship of the Frenchmen and Indians who inhabit your part of the Commonwealth: with their concurrence great things may be accomplished... spare no pains to conciliate the affections of the French and Indians. Let them see and feel the advantage of being fellow citizens and freemen. Guard most carefully against every infringement of their property, particularly with respect to land, as our enemies have alarmed them as to that.⁸⁰

The people of the Illinois Country were not to be a subjugated people under the heel of Virginia; instead they were to be convinced to become allies or equal free citizens of Virginia. The first group that Clark had to persuade to do this was the French inhabitants of the Illinois Country.

When George Rogers Clark and his men entered the Illinois Country the French inhabitants were faced with several choices. Should they stay loyal to the British, switch loyalties and join the American cause, or should they stay neutral? If they decided to join one

⁷⁹ *The Secret Orders & "...great things have been Done by a few Men...": Letters of Patrick Henry and George Rogers Clark Issued in Facsimile by the Indiana Historical Society as a Contribution to the Observance of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1974).

⁸⁰ Patrick Henry, "Instructions to George Rogers Clark from the Governor Patrick Henry, December 15, 1778." In *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord (Springfield: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1909), 61. <http://archive.org/details/kaskaskiarecords00kaskrich/>.

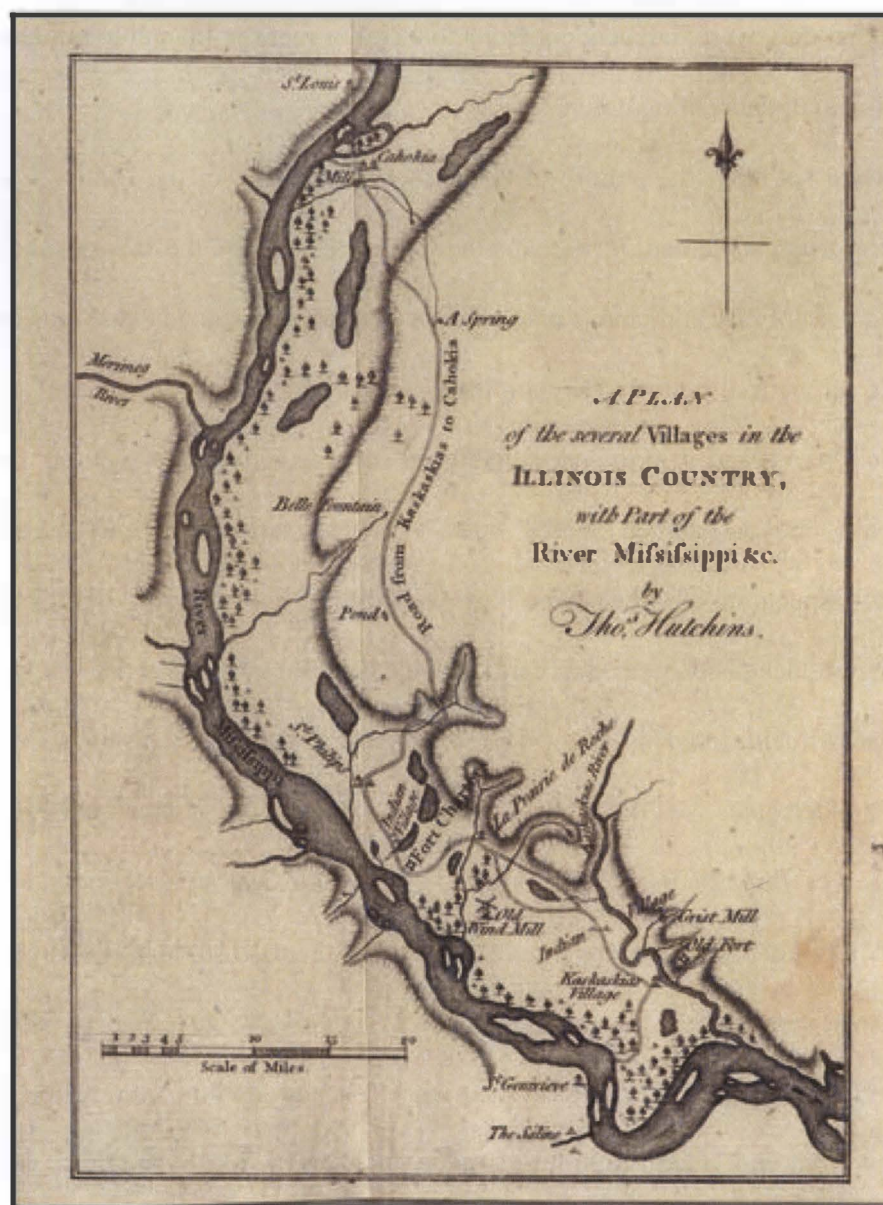
side over the other how much and what manner of support ought they give? Should they proclaim allegiance in words only, fight alongside their allies, or provide only monetary and material support? Each of these questions had to be answered by both individuals and by entire communities of the Illinois Country French inhabitants. To better understand how and why these decisions were made by the French inhabitants it is important to take a brief look at the history of the French settlement of the Illinois Country.

The first known white men to enter the Illinois Country were the French missionary Father Jacques Marquette and explorer Louis Jolliet in 1673. However, the permanent French settlement of the Illinois Country did not begin until 1699 when the first Catholic mission the Mission of the Holy Family was established at Cahokia.⁸¹ The first French settlers of the Illinois Country were *ex coureur de bois*, many with Indian wives, who had settled illegally, following Louis XIV's ordinance of 1696, on the rich farmland along the Mississippi River around the missions at Cahokia and Kaskaskia (see map 5).⁸² Louis XIV's ordinance of 1696 had abolished the fur trade, prohibited travel or settlement in the West, and "also required that all except authorized officials and missionaries return forthwith to the stifling atmosphere of Canada under the eyes of intendant, subdelegate, and bishop."⁸³ These *ex coureur de bois* did not wish to live under the tight control of government and church officials in Canada. The French settlements along the Mississippi quickly grew and developed a culture that was unique in French colonial

⁸¹ James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 40.

⁸² Winstanley Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47 (1990): 32-33., <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2938040> (accessed Jan. 8, 2014).

⁸³ Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," 32.



Map 5: Hutchins, Thomas. *A Plan of the several Villages in the Illinois Country, with Part of the River Mississippi*. Book Map. London: J. Almon, 1778. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection. <http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~1001~50115:A-Plan-of-the-several-Villages-in-t> (accessed January 10, 2014).

America in that they were independent from “official or metropolitan elite guidance and control’ and avoid habitual, demeaning deference.”⁸⁴

So what set apart the culture of the French settlements of the Illinois Country from the culture of Canadian settlements? Perhaps the biggest factor was the lack of a controlling ruling class of colonial nobility and clergy in the Illinois Country. In Canada land was controlled under a feudal-like seigneurial system. The land itself was owned by either individual seigneuries or by the Catholic Church and was rented to habitants in twenty-five acre sections for which tenant farmers “paid onerous annual feudal dues.”⁸⁵ These seigneuries and the Church strictly controlled all aspects of life in Canada. However in the Illinois Country the exact opposite was true. The region lacked seigneurs, settlers received fee title to not less than sixty acres of fertile soil, and the residents paid no dues. Moreover, they governed themselves in the absence of intendants, subdelegates, seigneurs, or bishops.⁸⁶ In the Illinois Country the French inhabitants ruled themselves through parish meetings far from any central governmental control. What governmental authorities that were present took a hands off approach allowing each village to make their own decisions on local affairs.⁸⁷ This system of self-governance, personal ownership of land, and absence of a ruling seigneuries class and domineering Church aided in the development of a individualist culture unique in French North America. This individualist culture of the French inhabitants along the Mississippi River can help better explain why they were able and willing to make their own decisions when George Rogers Clark arrived in the Illinois Country.

⁸⁴ Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 49.

⁸⁵ Briggs, “Le Pays des Illinois,” 36.

⁸⁶ Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 49-50.

⁸⁷ Briggs, “Le Pays des Illinois,” 43.

When Clark and his men entered the Illinois Country the majority of the French inhabitant population was centered in three main villages: Kaskaskia and Cahokia along the banks of the Mississippi River and Vincennes in what is today western Indiana (see Map 2). Clark understood that he could not force the French inhabitants to join the American cause. Instead the American commander had to persuade them to join of their own free will because he was “too weak to treat them any other way.”⁸⁸ Through the use of a combination of deception, threats, persuasion, and diplomacy Clark was able to persuade the majority of the French inhabitants to join wholeheartedly, for the most part, the American cause. There were several leading factors that helped in convincing the majority of the French Inhabitants to switch their loyalty to the American cause.

The first of these factors was the psychological warfare used against the French by Clark and also the several concessions that he made when he first captured the villages of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes. Late in the evening of July 4, 1778 Clark and his men had without firing a shot gained complete control of the village of Kaskaskia. Following this Clark quickly began to build upon the French inhabitants’ confusion and fear in a plan to sway them to the American cause. Clark initially had no communication with any of the village’s residents beyond ordering them “to remain in their houses on pain of being shot down.”⁸⁹ Instead he allowed their imaginations fueled by fear to run away with them until they pictured the worst possible scenarios for themselves and their families. In doing so Clark understood the French residents might believe that like the Acadians who were forcibly removed from New France in 1755 “they were about to be scattered to the four winds and, in the process, families would be separated, the

⁸⁸ Clark, “Letter to George Mason of Virginia.”

⁸⁹ Quaipe, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 57.

men led into captivity and the women and children left to shift for themselves.”⁹⁰ Clark did nothing to alleviate these fears. When a delegation of leading men of the village led by their priest Father Pierre Gibault attempted to speak with Clark in order to learn their fate and to ask permission for the people to gather in the church so they could spend what they believed to be their last few hours together with their families, Clark’s and his men’s appearance did little to alleviate their fears. After their long march from Fort Massac to Kaskaskia, Clark’s and his men’s clothing were in rags “we were almost naked: torn by the bushes and briars, we presented a dirty and savage aspect.”⁹¹ He did however allow the French residents to gather in the church since it would serve to inflame their worries and fears.

Once Clark believed that he had the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia at the peak of their fears he began to change his tune. He then began to assuage the settlers’ fears. He again met with Father Gibault and the leading men of the village reproaching them for their fears:

I now asked them very abruptly whether they thought they were addressing savages...Did they suppose we meant to strip the women and children or take the bread out of their mouths? Or that we would condescend to make war on woman and children or the church? I informed them it was to prevent the effusion of innocent blood by the Indians, instigated by their commandants and enemies, and not the prospect of plunder, that had caused us to visit them.⁹²

The American commander then informed them of the recent alliance between France and the United States and the imminent entry of France into the war, which “affected them very visibly.”⁹³ This news most likely dispelled the French resident’s fears and made joining the Americans a much easier choice to make. The Illinois French inhabitants still viewed themselves

⁹⁰ Joseph P. Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault, Missionary: 1737-1802* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1971), 69; Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

⁹¹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 61.

⁹² Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 63.

⁹³ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 63.

as very much French. They had kept their French culture and language alive throughout the fourteen years of British occupation of the Illinois Country and only a very few felt any loyalty to the British.

Clark gave the people of Kaskaskia the freedom to choose where they would place their loyalty with out fear of losing their property or having their families being dispersed or in distress.⁹⁴ All that Clark would require is that the French residents take the following oath of fidelity to Virginia:

You make oath on the Holy Evangel of Almighty God to renounce all fidelity to George the Third, King of Britian, and to his successors, and to be faithful and true subjects of the Republic of Virginia as a free and independent state: and I swear that I will not do or cause anything or matter to be done which can be prejudicial to the liberty or independence of the said people, as prescribed by Congress, and that I will inform some one of the judges of the country of the said state of all treasons and conspiracies which shall come to my knowledge against the said state or some other of the United States of America: In faith of which we have signed...Long live the Congress.⁹⁵

Upon realizing that their fears were unfounded and seeing the lenient terms Clark was offering them the majority of the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia decided to switch their allegiance to the American cause.

With Kaskaskia under his control Clark then turned his attention toward the remaining French villages of Cahokia and Vincennes. Persuading the French inhabitants of these two villages was a much quicker and easier task than it had been in Kaskaskia as Clark now had the assistance of prominent Kaskaskia French residents. Clark decided on a more diplomatic approach in the capturing of Cahokia. Clark ordered Major Joseph Bowman to take thirty

⁹⁴ Quaipe, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 63.

⁹⁵ "Oath of Inhabitants of Vincennes, July 20, 1778," In *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*, ed. James Alton James. (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1912) 56.
<http://archive.org/details/georgerogerscla00jamegoog>

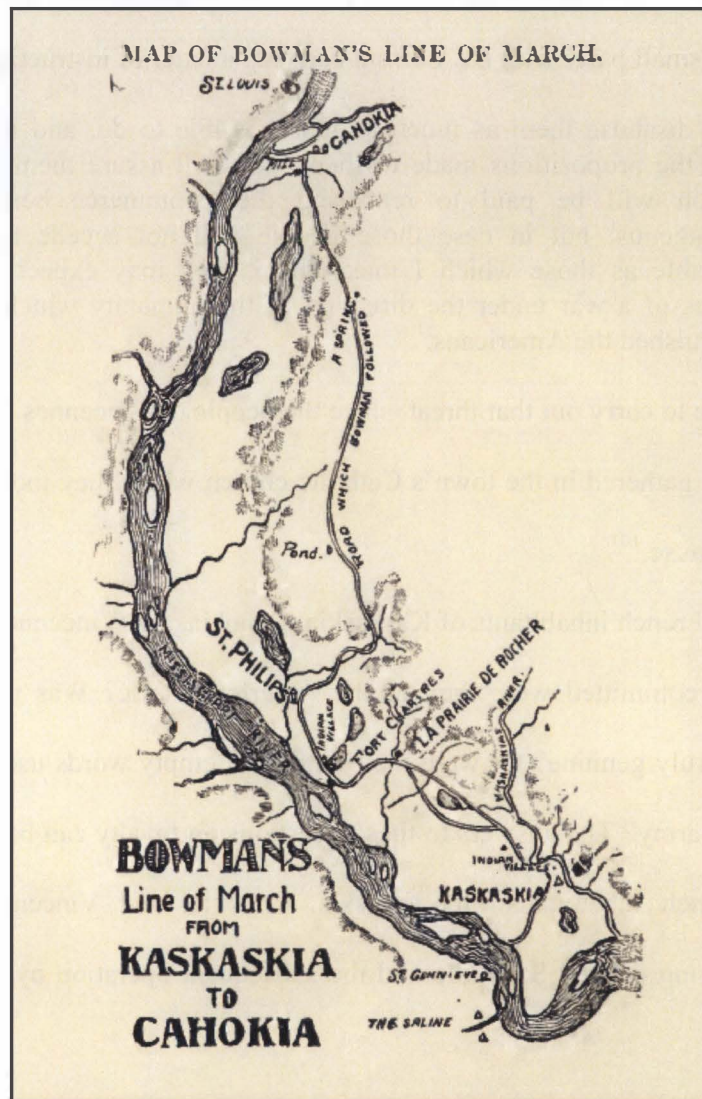
mounted men and gain control of the village, which was sixty miles north of Kaskaskia (see Map 6). Several Kaskaskia gentlemen who had friends and relatives in Cahokia volunteered to accompany Bowman and his men telling Clark “that one of their townsmen was enough to put me in possession of that place, by carrying the good news that the people would rejoice.”⁹⁶ Clark realizing that he did not have the military strength to force the French at Cahokia to join the American cause agreed to allow the Kaskaskians to join Major Bowman. Bowman’s company entered the town early on July 6 getting to “the middle of the town before they were discovered--the French gentlemen calling aloud to the people to submit to their happier fate, which they did with very little hesitation... the inhabitants of the country took the oath (*prescribed*) by law, and every person appeared to be happy.”⁹⁷

In the taking of Vincennes Clark relied to an even greater extent upon fellow Frenchmen to convince the town’s inhabitants to embrace the American cause. The credit for the French inhabitants of Vincennes joining United States forces was due to the efforts of French inhabitants especially Father Pierre Gibault and Dr. Jean B. Laffont and not the actions of Clark. It was Father Gibault, the only Catholic priest in the Illinois Country, who persuaded Clark that there was no need for a military operation. Instead diplomacy was to be used by an all French Inhabitant party. Father Gibault was of the opinion that, as had worked at Kaskaskia and Cahokia, French residents in Vincennes would “secure their allegiance to the Americans” if properly shown that France had entered into a treaty with the Americans and “assurances [were made] that they would be treated as friends.”⁹⁸ However, given his role as a spiritual leader among the French in Illinois Country “he desired that another person might be charged with the

⁹⁶ Clark, "Letter to George Mason of Virginia."

⁹⁷ Clark, "Letter to George Mason of Virginia."

⁹⁸ English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783*, 200. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092886096>.



Map 6: William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897), 196. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092886096>.

temporal part of the embassy, and named Dr. Laffont as his associate.”⁹⁹ The two men set out for Vincennes with a small party with Dr. Laffont carrying a letter of instruction from Clark:

Please disabuse them as much as it is possible to do, and in case they accept the propositions made to them, you will assure them that proper attention will be paid to rendering their commerce beneficial and advantageous; but in case those people will not accede to offers so reasonable as those which I make them, they may expect to feel the miseries of a war under the direction of the humanity which has so far distinguished the Americans.¹⁰⁰

Clark did not have to carry out that threat, since the people of Vincennes “universally acceded to the proposal” and gathered in the town’s Catholic church where they took an oath of allegiance to the American cause.¹⁰¹

While the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes had taken the oath of loyalty just how committed were they to the American cause? Was their conversion to the American cause truly genuine? Or were their oaths just empty words used for self-preservation from an invading army? The answers to these questions on loyalty can be answered by focusing on how the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes reacted to Henry Hamilton’s capturing of Fort Sackville and the subsequent operation by Clark to recapture the same fort.

On the surface it seems that the loyalty of the village of Vincennes was determined on the proximity of whoever had the largest body of armed troops. When Hamilton arrived in Vincennes on December 17, 1778 at the head of his army the French militia promptly abandoned Captain Helm who commanded the garrison in Fort Sackville leaving him with only three American soldiers. The same men that only a few months earlier had sworn loyalty to Virginia and the United States were renouncing that oath and swearing a new one to the British Crown:

⁹⁹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 73.

¹⁰⁰ “Clark to Jean B. Laffont, July 14, 1778,” in *George Rogers Clark Papers*, 53-54.

¹⁰¹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 74.

We whose names are hereto subscribed declare and acknowledge having taken an oath of fidelity to the Congress, that in so doing we have forgot our duty to God and Man, we implore the pardon of God, and hope from the goodness of our lawfull Sovereign the King of Great Britain that he will accept our submission, and take us again under his protection as good and faithfull subjects which we promise and swear before God and men we will hereafter become, in Witness whereof we sign our respective names, or set our customary Mark, this 19th. day of December 1778¹⁰²

On its face this seems like damning evidence against the French inhabitants of Vincennes taking oaths lightly and making it seem as though they were not sincere in their oath of loyalty to the United States. In truth the language of this new oath was not as indicative of the French residents' allegiances as it would appear to be.

It is clear from this passage from Governor Henry Hamilton's journal that Vincennes French inhabitants' oaths of loyalty to the British were coerced:

19th. Met the inhabitants in the Church at noon-- I informed them of the cause of my assembling them, that as they had brought in their arms when summoned, their lives had been spared, but that they could not expect protection unless they adjured their attachment to the Rebels, and returned to their Allegiance to their rightful Sovereign, renewing their Oath¹⁰³

Hamilton arrived at Vincennes at the head of around five hundred to six hundred men consisting of forty-one men of "the king's Eighth Regiment of regulars, eight irregulars, seventy thoroughly trained militia [most likely French Canadians]" and the rest made up of Native American warriors that he gathered along the way to Vincennes.¹⁰⁴ French inhabitants' first concern undoubtedly their families' safety. Hamilton made it clear that he would not give them any protection if they failed to rejoin the British. The oaths of fidelity to Virginia and the United States had been given willingly by the French of Vincennes with no soldiers present and was a

¹⁰² Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 186.

¹⁰³ "Henry Hamilton's Journal," In *Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with The Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton*, ed. John D. Barnhart (Crawfordsville: R. E. Banta, 1951) <http://www.in.gov/history/3010.htm> (accessed February, 16, 2014).

¹⁰⁴ English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783*, 226.

largely influenced by France and America having become allies. In contrast, the inhabitants' oaths to the British crown were empty words, uttered only for self-preservation. As can be seen by the subsequent actions of the majority of the French inhabitants when they did nothing to aid the British when Clark and his men recaptured Fort Sackville and how they remained loyal for the rest of the war.

The majority of the French residents of Kaskaskia and Cahokia were firm in upholding their oaths to the American cause. When Hamilton captured Fort Sackville Clark had approximately one hundred American troops in the Illinois Country and was hundreds of miles away from any American reinforcements. The French of Kaskaskia and Cahokia were more than eager to volunteer to fight alongside their new fellow citizens. This is especially clear in a letter sent by Major Bowman to Clark from Cahokia: "It was with great difficulty I Could Restrain maney of the old Married people from turning out With us."¹⁰⁵ When Clark set out on his march to Vincennes he only had around one hundred and thirty men under his command.¹⁰⁶ Of those one hundred thirty men only sixty-eight of them were Americans while the rest were raised from the French militias of Kaskaskia and Cahokia. In Kaksaksia thirty-four men volunteered in Captain Richard McCarty's company and in Cahokia twenty-eight men volunteered to serve in Captain Francis Charleville's company.¹⁰⁷ Such actions by these Frenchmen demonstrated that their oaths were more than performances intended to save their and their families' skins. Instead,

¹⁰⁵ "Bowman to G. R. Clark' Kahous May 28th 1779," in *Cahokia Records, 1778-1790*, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord (Springfield: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1907), 611-612. <http://archive.org/details/cahokiarecordsl700illirich>.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Bowman, "Journal of the Proceedings of George R. Clark from the 27th January, 1779, to March 20th inst." in William Hayden English, *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783 and Life of Gen. George Rogers Clark* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1897). <http://www.in.gov/history/2964.htm>

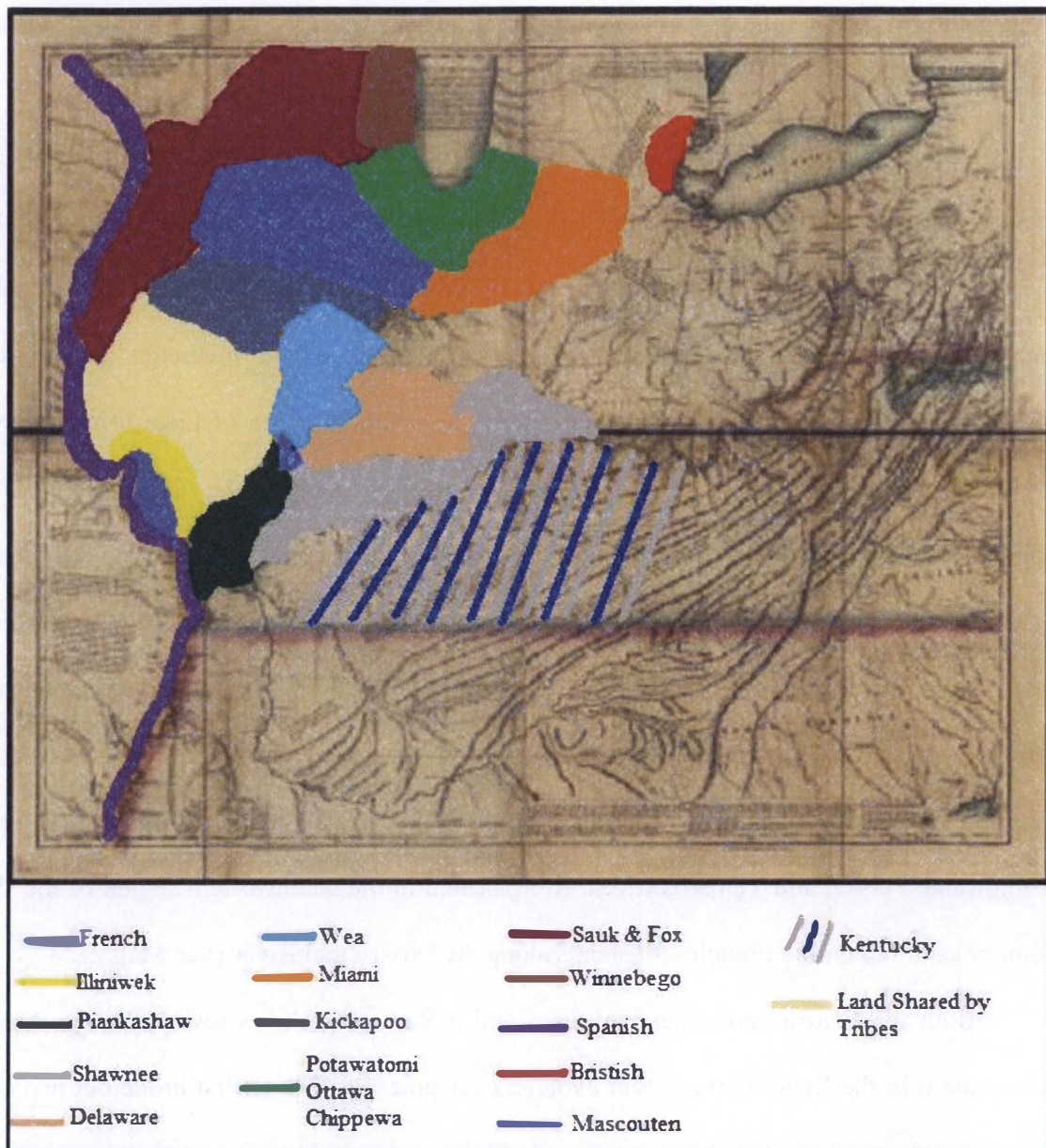
¹⁰⁷ "Document 7 (19 January—5 April 1779)" and "Document 27 (6 February—13 March 1779)" in *George Rogers Clark and His Men: Military Records, 1778-1784*, Margery Harding, ed. (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1981), 17-20.

these men by comprising more than one-half of the American force that captured Vincennes demonstrated a real and deep allegiance to the United States.

While the majority of the French inhabitants of the Illinois Country were relatively easily persuaded to join the American cause, Clark faced a much more difficult and complex challenge with Native Americans in the region. By the 1770s the Illinois Country was divided between fourteen individual Native American tribes, each a separate and sovereign nations. In the northeastern region of the Illinois Country along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, where present day Chicago is located, westward toward Fort Detroit the Potawatomi, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Miami tribes resided. The Kickapoo, Mascouten, Sauk, Fox, and Winnebago tribes were located in the northern region. In the east along both shores of the Wabash River, that today forms the border between Illinois and Indiana, were the Wea and Piankashaw tribes. Farther east in what is today western Indiana the Delaware and Shawnee tribes had settled. The Illiniwek Confederation, consisting of the smaller Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Michigamea, Moingwena, Peoria, and Tamaroa tribes, were located in the southwestern region of the Illinois Country centered on the French settlements along the Mississippi River (See Map 7).

Both the British and American views and diplomatic policies toward Native American involvement in the Revolutionary War evolved over time. When war first broke out in 1775 the British and American governments attempted official policies of keeping Native American tribes neutral.¹⁰⁸ This policy of neutrality by both British and American officials only lasted a short two years. In 1776 both sides began to abandon their official policies of seeking Native

¹⁰⁸ George C. Chalou, "George Rogers Clark and Indian America 1778-1780," in *The French, The Indians, and George Rogers Clark the Illinois Country* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1977), 36.



Map 7: Map of the location of the Illinois tribes. Location of tribes taken from Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes*, vol. 2. (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1966). Accessed March 20, 2014. http://www.museum.state.il.us/publications/epub/indian_villages_il_country_wayne_temple.pdf

American neutrality.¹⁰⁹ Each side justified this policy transformation by blaming the other of being the first to ally themselves with Native American tribes. Lord Dartmouth, the secretary of state for the colonies, wrote to Guy Johnson, British superintendent of Indian affairs, that:

The unnatural rebellion no raging calls for every effort to suppress it, and the intelligence His Majesty [sic] has received of the Rebels having excited the Indians to take a part, and of their having actually engaged a body of them in arms to support their rebellion, justifies the resolution His Majesty had taken of requiring the assistance of his faithful adherents the six Nations. It is therefore His Majesty's pleasure that you do lose no time in taking such steps as may induce them to take up the hatchet against his Majesty's rebellious subjects in America.¹¹⁰

On the national level the British and Americans were in a position that enabled them to negotiate with Native American tribes from a place of power or at the very least from a position of equality. This was not however the case between George Rogers Clark, Governor Hamilton, and the Native American tribes in the Illinois Country.

The Indian tribes of the Illinois Country were far from a united people and several tribes were in constant conflict with each other, however they and not European or American forces were still beyond a doubt the most dominant powers of the Illinois Country. It is estimated that all fourteen Native American tribes combined possessed roughly four thousand five hundred-fifty warriors.¹¹¹ Both the Americans under George Rogers Clark and the British under Governor Henry Hamilton were sorely lacking in the ability to force the Illinois Native American tribes to join their side or to remain neutral through the strength of arms alone. While in the Illinois

¹⁰⁹ Bernard W. Sheehan, "The Famous Hair Buyer General": Henry Hamilton, George Rogers Clark, and the American Indian," *Indiana Magazine of History* 79 (1983): 2. Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27790676>.

¹¹⁰ E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, 1857), 8: 596 in Edward Gilbert Williams, *Fort Pitt and the Revolution on the Western Frontier* (Pittsburgh: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1978), 62.

¹¹¹ Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes*, vol. 2. (Springfield: Illinois State Museum, 1966), 53; 62; 69; 77-78; 95; 130; 177; 183-184; 189. Accessed March 20, 2014. http://www.museum.state.il.us/publications/epub/indian_villages_il_country_wayne_temple.pdf

Country Clark never had under his command more than two hundred men. Similarly when Governor Henry Hamilton entered the Illinois Country his non-native forces consisted of only forty-one men of “the king’s Eighth Regiment of regulars, eight irregulars, seventy thoroughly trained militia [most likely French Canadians].”¹¹² Lacking strong military forces the Americans and British were forced to use persuasion, diplomacy, deception, and to make concessions whenever needed in their dealings with the Illinois Indians.

Americans in the Illinois Country were in a position of extreme weakness. Clark and his men could have easily been overwhelmed at any time by any one tribe; the weakest group of Illinois Native Americans the Illiniwek Confederation could raise around one-hundred to three-hundred warriors.¹¹³ Clark simply did not have the ability to take a heavy-handed approach such as that General George Washington and the Continental Army employed against the Iroquois tribes in New York that had allied with the British. In 1777 part of the Iroquois Confederacy joined forces with the British and began to take an active part in the war raiding the frontier settlements of New York and Pennsylvania. In retaliation Washington ordered in 1779 that an expedition under the command of General John Sullivan be sent

‘to chastise and intimidate the hostile nations, to countenance and encourage the friendly ones, and to relieve our frontiers from depredations to which [t]hey would otherwise be exposed.’ To achieve these aims, ‘it is proposed to carry the war into the heart of the country of the country of the Six Nations, to cut off their settlements, destroy their next year’s crops, and do them every other mischief, which time and circumstances will permit.’¹¹⁴

¹¹² English. *Conquest of the Country Northwest of the River Ohio 1778-1783*, 226. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092886096>.

¹¹³ Temple. *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country* 53.

¹¹⁴ “Gen. George Washington to Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates. letter dated Head Quarters, Middle Brook, March 6, 1779, *Writings of George Washington*, 14: 198-200. in Glenn F. Williams, *Year of the Hangman: George Washington’s Campaign Against the Iroquois* (Yardley: Westholme, 2005). 200.

General Washington and Sullivan unlike George Rogers Clark were in a position of superior strength. General Sullivan commanded a well trained and equipped army of around three thousand five hundred men with artillery support including, “two 6-pounder and four 3-pounder field guns, two 5 ½-inch howitzers, and a cohorn mortar.”¹¹⁵ Sullivan’s army wreaked havoc throughout the lands of the Six Nations: forty towns and sixteen thousand bushels of corn were destroyed, along with one hundred sixty-five houses, five hundred acres of fields and about “\$30,000 worth of produce in plunder.”¹¹⁶ George Rogers Clark and his men on the other hand were not able to interact with the Native American tribes of the Illinois Country middle ground in a similar fashion.

Instead Clark was forced to rely on the use of diplomacy, propaganda, threats, and bravado. Following his bloodless capture and occupation of the French villages of Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes, Clark sent messages out to all the tribes of the Illinois Country to attend a peace conference in Cahokia. Tribes from throughout the Illinois Country and beyond traveled to Cahokia to look at and listen to what the Big Knives had to say. There were “Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sac and Fox, Osage, Winnebago, Iowa, and Miami...Even some Mandans from the Missouri country came in.”¹¹⁷ However, the diplomacy that the Native American tribes encountered in Cahokia was unlike any American diplomacy they had encountered before, at least according to Clark. George Rogers Clark strongly disagreed with the prior methods that Americans had used in their diplomatic relations with Native Americans. He wrote that he:

had always been convinced that our [the American] general conduct of Indian affairs was wrong. Inviting them to treaties was considered by them in a different manner than we realized; they imputed it to fear on our part, and the giving of valuable presents confirmed them in this opinion. I resolved, therefore, to guard against this. I took great pains

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Year of the Hangman*, 240-243.

¹¹⁶ Williams, *Year of the Hangman*, 293.

¹¹⁷ Chalou, “George Rogers Clark and Indian America 1778-1780,” 40.

to acquaint myself with the French and Spanish methods of treating with the Indians.¹¹⁸

So just what was the French and Spanish method that Clark considered to be so much superior to other forms of negotiations? The French and Spanish method was the use of “harsh speech and the threat of immediate action. Elaborate festivities with much ceremonial talk and expensive gifts only fostered illusions in the Indians’ minds and led to greater demands and ultimately to another outbreak of conflict. Blunt language and speedy retribution would keep the peace.”¹¹⁹ It is clear from the speech that Clark gave to the assembled tribes in Cahokia that he truly took the French and Spanish method to heart. The speech was blunt, full of harsh statements and propaganda, veiled and obvious threats, and brimming with bravado, since Clark in reality lacked the needed power to actually fulfill any of his threats. Clark made it clear that the Native American tribes had only two options: “I am a man and a warrior, not a councilor. I carry War in my right hand and in my left Peace... Here is a bloody belt and a white one. Take whichever you please.”¹²⁰ He also made it very obvious what the consequences would be if they chose incorrectly: “If you take the bloody path you shall go from this town in safety and join your friends, the English, and we will try like warriors who can put the most stumbling blocks in the road and keep our clothes perfumed with the blood the longest.”¹²¹ If they should choose the path of peace they would “be received as brothers to the Big Knives and the French.”¹²² (see Appendix Document I for Clark’s entire speech) Just how effective this speech and Clark’s method of diplomacy was with individual Native Americans can never be truly known since there are no Native American primary sources that record such reactions. However, it can be

¹¹⁸ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*. 80-81.

¹¹⁹ Sheehan, “The Famous Hair Buyer General,” 16-17.

¹²⁰ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*. 82,85.

¹²¹ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*. 85.

¹²² Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*. 85.

argued that it must have had some affect if the account of Big Gate's change of allegiance described in the introduction of this thesis is to be believed.

Clark and the Americans were not the only group that had to deal with the middle ground complexity of diplomacy with the Illinois Country Native American tribes. Governor Henry Hamilton also faced many of the same issues that Clark encountered. Hamilton was too weak to force the Illinois Country tribes into joining the British side in the war. It is clear though that Governor Hamilton took a much different approach to diplomacy than Clark. In fact Governor Hamilton fully embraced what Clark rejected out right. Hamilton was very free with his ceremonial gift giving providing Native American tribes strong and effective incentives to stay loyal to the British cause.¹²³ He was also very liberal with his gifts of liquor. So much so that he astonished the Canadian Governor Frederick Haldimand with the amount of liquor consumed at Detroit in just one year, 17,520 gallons.¹²⁴ Perhaps even more astonishing than tens of thousands of gallons of consumed alcohol was Hamilton's willingness to immerse himself into some Native American cultural practices. The most famous account of this happened in the summer of 1777:

With the warriors arrayed in two lines, an ox was beheaded and a tomahawk sunk into its skull, after which Hamilton danced and sang the war song. The animal represented the Virginians against whom the Indians were about to fight. (In a later instance a bear played the symbolic role, and Hamilton himself wielded the tomahawk.) According to the account given by John Montour to Zeisberger, Hamilton was painted and dressed like an Indian for the occasion.¹²⁵

Just how much did these two very different styles of diplomacy influence the loyalties of the Native American tribes of the Illinois Country?

In the view of the British and Americans the Illinois Country Native American tribes had a simple decision they had to make, join one side or the other. However, it is important to

¹²³ Sheehan, "The Famous Hair Buyer General," 16-17.

¹²⁴ Sheehan, "The Famous Hair Buyer General," 9.

¹²⁵ Sheehan, "The Famous Hair Buyer General," 9.

remember that the Illinois Country tribes were not pawns. Instead they were independent nations that based their decisions on what was in their people's best interests.

Those tribes located in the north and west of the Illinois Country for the most part allied themselves wholeheartedly to the British cause. The Miami tribe, with about two hundred fifty warriors, was an active ally of the British from the beginning of the war.¹²⁶ During Henry Hamilton's advance to Vincennes he used the Miami village at the head of the Wabash River as a staging point for his army as it prepared to sail down the Wabash. While there Hamilton mentioned in his journal that he met favorably with three leading Miami chiefs who joined his army. Pacane the Nut the head chief of all the Miami, Gros Loup, and The Petit Gris.¹²⁷ To the north of the Miami along the southern shore of Lake Michigan were the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa tribes. These three tribes formed a confederacy called The Three Fires, in which "one member would not act upon important matters without consulting the other two."¹²⁸ Members of these three tribes were also active allies of the British. Raiding American settlements and the villages of those Illinois Country tribes who were allied with the Americans, especially the Illiniwek Confederation.¹²⁹ Even though the majority of Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa joined the British a small number did make a peace treaty with Clark after speaking with him at the peace conference in Cahokia.¹³⁰ So why did the vast majority of these four Illinois Country tribes become and stay staunch allies of the British? Geographically these tribes were located the closest to Fort Detroit. Because of this they relied on the British for the trade goods that were vital to their survival.¹³¹ This made allying with the British the most logical and

¹²⁶ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 62.

¹²⁷ "Henry Hamilton's Journal."

¹²⁸ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 126.

¹²⁹ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 131-132.

¹³⁰ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 132.

¹³¹ Chalou, "George Rogers Clark and Indian America 1778-1780," 42.

beneficial option for those tribes. The loyalties of the Illinois Country tribes located in the northwest and central regions of the Illinois Country were however a much more complex matter.

The Illinois tribes from the northwest and central regions of the Illinois Country were not as united in their allegiances as the northeastern tribes were. Many of these tribes were split as to where their loyalties should lie. In the northwest Sauk and Fox, two separate nations in a close alliance with each other, were split between those that chose to join the British cause and those that chose the American cause. Individual Sauk and Fox chieftains made their own independent decisions on who they would ally themselves with. It seems that some of the Sauk and Fox nations decided to join the British even though they had made a peace treaty with Clark at Cahokia. Major Joseph Bowman the American commander at Cahokia complained about this to Clark in a letter: "their compliance has not satisfied me with a Regard to peace, as they confessed to me that their principal chiefs wear gone to Montreall to fight against the big Knife."¹³² However, other chieftain stood unfalteringly with the Americans. One band of Sauk living at the mouth of the Rock River under the leadership of La Main Casse (Broken Hand) were close friends of the Americans. La Main Casse did not allow the British to pass done the river and even rescued several prisoners being held by the British.¹³³ This division of allegiances among the Sauk and Fox unintentionally became a benefit to the Americans as "those of the two tribes who were loyal to the Americans kept the remainder from an open assault upon the United States."¹³⁴

¹³² Joseph Bowman, "Joseph Bowman to Clark, October 30, 1778," in *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*, 71.

¹³³ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 96.

¹³⁴ Coll. State Hist. Soc. Wis., XI, 102, 106, 107, 109, 126, 139; Coll. Pioneer and Hist. Soc. Michigan, IX, 530, 573, XIX, 411 in Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 96-97.

Another northwestern tribe that was divided in their loyalties was the Winnebago. While the majority of the Winnebago were located outside of the Illinois Country in what is today Wisconsin they still sent a delegation to Clark's peace conference in Cahokia.¹³⁵ It is clear that some Winnebago strongly favored the British. During the peace conference at Cahokia part of the Winnebago delegation made a failed attempt to kidnap Clark with the hope of selling him to the British.¹³⁶ However, not all the Winnebago favored the British. There was one band of Winnebago, around one hundred fifty warriors, which had by 1777 moved south into the Illinois Country under the leadership of a Chief Chourarchon settling "on the Rock River within two leagues of the Mississippi."¹³⁷ At the Cahokia peace conference Clark made a peace treaty with these Rock River Winnebago that stated, "that he [Chief Chourarchon] and his said Nation are to treat all the Subjects of the said States of America with friendship and receive all those they may meet with, as their Brothers."¹³⁸

The Native American tribes of the central regions of the Illinois Country the Wea, Kickapoo, and Mascouten were also divided on their allegiances. "These Indians tended to favor whichever side promised them the most for their allegiance, and in June of 1778, representatives of the Wea, Kickapoo, and Mascouten gathered at Detroit to talk with the British."¹³⁹ At the beginning of the war the Wea, Kickapoo, and Mascouten joined the British raiding American settlements and joined Hamilton when he marched south from Detroit and recaptured Fort

¹³⁵ Clark, "Letter to George Mason of Virginia."

¹³⁶ Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 98.

¹³⁷ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 189.

¹³⁸ George Rogers Clark, "Clark to the Chief of the Winnebago, August 22, 1778; in *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*, 65.

¹³⁹ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 69.

Sackville.¹⁴⁰ However, following Hamilton's defeat these tribes quickly abandoned the British for the remainder of the war and made peace treaties with Clark.¹⁴¹

Unlike the tribes in the far northern region of the Illinois Country it is difficult to pinpoint one factor that influenced the tribes of the northwest and central regions to choose which side to join. Since these tribes were located farther from Detroit they did not rely exclusively on the British for trade goods. They could go to the French in Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and Vincennes or go to the Spanish on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Many were influenced by the advice of the French and British traders, who were influenced by both Clark and Hamilton, that lived with the tribes pushing for the tribe to join whatever side they were on.¹⁴² There was also the factor of joining the side that seemed to be winning at the time. This would explain why many of these tribes fought with the British at the beginning of the war, but then switch their loyalties to the Americans when Clark and his men arrived in the Illinois Country and began to gain the upper hand.

The tribes in the eastern region of the Illinois Country, in what is today western Indiana, the Delaware and the Shawnee both formed different alliances. The majority of the Delaware were located in Ohio and were hostile to the Americans. However in 1773 a small band of about one hundred warriors moved to the Wabash River and establish a village next to the Piankashaw.¹⁴³ This small band were close allies of the Piankashaw and followed their example remaining friendly toward the Americans throughout the war. The Shawnee on the other hand were one of the few tribes that did not have any division in their loyalties. For the Shawnee the war began in 1774 with the outbreak of Lord Dunmore's War and escalated into all out war with

¹⁴⁰ Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 125.

¹⁴¹ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 69, 163.

¹⁴² Clark, "Letter to George Mason of Virginia."

¹⁴³ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 183.

the murder of pro American chief Cornstalk.¹⁴⁴ By 1778 around three hundred Shawnee warrior lived in the Illinois Country along the western bank of the Wabash River. They took an active role in the war constantly raiding the American settlements in Ohio and Kentucky.¹⁴⁵

The tribes in the southern region of the Illinois country, the Illiniwek Confederation and Piankashaw allied themselves wholeheartedly with the American cause. This is easy to understand considering these tribes' close relationship with the French inhabitants of the Illinois Country. The Illiniwek Confederation had long been a close ally of the Illinois French. After years of constant warfare and raids from the Iroquois and Fox the tribes of the Illiniwek Confederation had been weakened to the point that they relied on the French for protection, even moving their villages to the outskirts of the French settlements along the Mississippi.¹⁴⁶ The French and the Illiniwek also intermarried creating an even stronger bond between the two groups. With this close relationship it is not surprising that the Illiniwek Confederation were the first Native American group to treat for peace with Clark following the French joining him. The Piankashaw were also closely allied with the French, their main village located on the outskirts of the French village of Vincennes. At the outbreak of the war the Piankashaw were friendly to the British, but once the French of Vincennes switched their allegiance to the American cause the Piankashaw under the leadership of Tobacco and his son Tobacco's Son made a peace treaty with Captain Helm.¹⁴⁷ Even though their relationship with the French heavily influenced the decision to join the American cause the Piankashaw did not blindly follow the French. The Piankashaw chief Tobacco's Son was a shrewd diplomat. He had the skill to convince both Clark

¹⁴⁴ Colin G. Calloway, "'We Have Always Been the Frontier': The American Revolution in Shawnee Country." *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992): 40-41. accessed March 3, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1185604>.

¹⁴⁵ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 177-178.

¹⁴⁶ Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 50-51.

¹⁴⁷ Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 77.

and Hamilton at the same time that he was the wholly on their side. Tobacco's Son informed Captain Helm, the American garrison commander at Vincennes, that. "He perceived that the Big Knife was in the right...and he would tell the Indians of the Wabash to bloody the land no more for the English. At this he sprang up, struck his breast, called himself a man and a warrior, and saying that he was now a Big Knife, took Captain Helm by the hand." In Clark's view Tobacco's Son was a staunch ally of the American cause. "To the day of his death this man proved a zealous friend. In all his conduct he appeared to have the American interest much at heart. He desired to be buried near the Americans."¹⁴⁸ When Hamilton recaptured Vincennes Tobacco's Son was able to convince him and his Indian allies that he was not truly an ally of the Americans, but had always been loyal to the British cause. Tobacco's Son:

made a solemn address to the divine being, invoking his wrath, if what he said was not true, he then declared the sincerity of his intentions in taking his brethren by the hand, and declining any further intercourse with or dependence upon the Virginians... he was as yet but young and ignorant, but that having been very ill in his younger days, and on the point of dying, he had been baptized, and since that time had had too great a reverence for the divine being to advance a falsehood, persuaded that he should be punished by him on the spot, if he professed what was not true, and begg'd the Chiefs to believe he was perfectly sincere.¹⁴⁹

Even though Tobacco's Son had convinced Hamilton of his loyalty when Clark arrived to recapture Fort Sackville Piankashaw abandoned the British and Tobacco's Son offered his services to Clark.¹⁵⁰ The main factor determining the allegiance of Tobacco's Son was the self-preservation of his people. He allied himself along the lines of who had the closest and largest force of armed men.

¹⁴⁸ Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes*, 79-80.

¹⁴⁹ Hamilton, "Henry Hamilton's Journal."

¹⁵⁰ Clark, "Letter to George Mason of Virginia."

The final group involved in the Illinois Country middle ground was the Spaniards. Although the Spanish were on the western bank of the Mississippi River in St. Louis and not physically located in the Illinois Country they heavily influenced the events happening there. Spain did not officially enter the Revolutionary War until 1779. However, always eager to weaken their enemy Britain they gave aid to the Americans with materials and finances as early as 1776. The Spanish lieutenant governor in St. Louis, Fernando de Leyba provided Clark with that same aid. Leyba supplied Clark and his men with food, weapons, ammunition, and even clothing. The need for the Spanish as an ally was well known by Clark and his superiors back in Virginia. In a letter to Clark, Governor Patrick Henry reminded Clark the need to stay in friendly relations with the Spanish:

I wish you to testify to all the subjects of Spain upon every occasion, the high regard and sincere friendship of this commonwealth towards them, and I hope it will soon be manifest that mutual advantages will derive from the neighborhood of the Virginians and the subjects of his Catholic Majesty. I must observe to you that your situation is critical, far detached from the body of your country, placed amongst French, Spaniards and Indians, strangers to our people, anxiously watching your actions and behavior and ready to receive impressions favorable or not so, of our commonwealth and its Government, which impressions will be hard to remove, and will produce lasting good or ill effects to your country.¹⁵¹

Clark understood that he had to keep a friendly diplomatic relationship with the Spanish Governor Fernando de Leyba. Clark accomplished this by keeping up a steady correspondence through letters and crossing the Mississippi River several times and meeting personally with Governor de Leyba. During those many visits Clark and de Leyba formed a personal friendship and Clark became welcome in the Spaniard's house.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Patrick Henry, "Instructions to George Rogers Clark from the Governor Patrick Henry, December 15, 1778" in *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 63.

¹⁵² Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 112-113.

Clark knew he had to treat the Spanish delicately in order not to offend them and damage their alliance. When some of his men deserted and crossed the Mississippi River to Spanish territory Clark had to send two officers over to ask Governor de Leyba permission to arrest them and return them to the American side of the river.¹⁵³ Governor de Leyba refused under Spanish law to allow them to look for the deserters. The two officers apologized to de Leyba and Clark, fearing he had offended de Leyba, even crossed over the Mississippi River to apologize personally.¹⁵⁴ Clark understood that keeping the Spanish friendly was vital for him and his men to be able to stay in the Illinois Country. The Spanish were Clarks only source of essential supplies from food to the clothing on the backs of his men and even more importantly his only source of powder.¹⁵⁵

The British also understood the importance of having the Spanish as an ally in the Illinois Country. Governor Henry Hamilton in January 1779 wrote a letter to the Spanish Governor of New Orleans Galvez full of praise and veiled threats in an attempt to end the Spanish assistance to the Americans. In a barely disguised threat Hamilton made it clear that if the Spanish continued to provide supplies to Clark he would release his Native American allies against Spanish traders and settlers.¹⁵⁶ Hamilton then makes a direct threat to the Spanish

As it is my intention early in the Spring to take a Progress towards the Illinois, I shall represent to the Officers commanding at several small Forts and Posts for His Catholic Majesty, the impropriety of affording an Asylum to Rebels, in arms against their lawful Sovereign-If after so candid a declaration the Rebels should find shelter in any Fort or Post on the Mississipi, it will become my Duty to dislodge them, in which case their protectors must blame their own Conduct, if they should suffer any inconvenience in consequence.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ “X Leyba to Galvez, San Luis, November 16, 1778”; in “Clark—Leyba Papers,” *The American Historical Review* 41 (1935): 102. accessed March 6, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1839358> .

¹⁵⁴ “X Leyba to Galvez, San Luis, November 16, 1778,” 102.

¹⁵⁵ Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 114.

¹⁵⁶ “XII Hamilton to Galvez, St. Vincennes, January 13th 1779” in “Clark—Leyba Papers,” 103-104.

¹⁵⁷ “XII Hamilton to Galvez, St. Vincennes, January 13th 1779,” 104.

It is clear from his letter that Hamilton fully understood the importance of the Spanish alliance was to Clark and the American cause.

The Illinois Country during the American Revolution was very much a complex and diverse middle ground. It was in the period of 1778-1783 that the Illinois Country fluidity of the region's middle ground became most apparent. During this period the middle ground was at its most intricate and at diverse times the French, British, Spanish, Americans, Illiniwek Confederation, Miami, Wea, Piankashaw, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Chippewa, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Delaware, Winnebago, and Shawnee all attempted in one way or another to gain dominance or exercise greater influence over the region. However, this time period proved also to be the beginning of the end of the middle ground in the Illinois Country. George Rogers Clark's Illinois Campaign opened up the door to land hungry American land speculators and settlers. With the entrance of more and more American settlers into the region the diversity of the middle ground began to continually shrink as other groups were forced out or assimilated into American society. This process marked the death knell of the region's middle ground. By the end of the War of 1812 the Illinois Country was dominated completely by Americans and the middle ground had entirely disappeared.

As early as 1779 the first permanent American settlers began to make their way into the Illinois Country. In the summer of 1779 several American families were permitted to settle about thirty miles south of Cahokia, near what is today Waterloo, Illinois, creating the village of Bellefontaine, which became "the first village of Americans north of the Ohio River."¹⁵⁸ By 1781 there were around one hundred thirty American men settled in the Illinois Country.¹⁵⁹ Through the late 1780s American settlers continued to steadily push their way into the Illinois

¹⁵⁸ *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, cxxii.

¹⁵⁹ *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, cxxii. It is not clear if these men were in the Illinois Country in 1781 with their families or alone. The only record is these men's signatures on a petition to be given land grants.

Country. By 1787 there were already another one hundred thirty seven Americans in Kaskaskia petitioning Congress for official land grants within the Illinois Country.¹⁶⁰ These first settlers were mostly men that had served under Clark in the Illinois Country, soldiers who had served on the western frontier, and people who had heard of the fertile lands and other benefits of the Illinois Country from the letters of earlier American settlers, former soldiers, and others who had traveled through the region.¹⁶¹

The steady influx of new American settlers into the Illinois Country the American relationship with the French inhabitants, and the Spanish across the Mississippi River, changed the political and military relationships in the region as the British and Native American tribes came to exert less and less power in the area. The presence of the French residents of the Illinois Country middle ground was the first to wane. By the end of 1779 George Rogers Clark had left the Illinois Country to organize an attack on Fort Detroit that never would materialize. So it is not surprising that American and French relations broke apart so quickly following the absence of Clark's unifying leadership. The American settlers entering the Illinois Country brought with them culture and beliefs that were vastly different from those held by the French residents. "Stark religious, linguistic, political, social, and other differences abounded, differences capable of igniting strife."¹⁶² That strife was quick to come.

The French of Cahokia and Kaskaskia faced constant cultural misunderstandings, livestock being killed, their property being confiscated, burdened with the care and up keep of an American garrison, being paid with worthless colonial paper currency, and dealing with corrupt

¹⁶⁰ "Contract Between the Americans and Tardiveau, August 27, 1787" in *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 443-445.

¹⁶¹ Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 81, 83-84.

¹⁶² Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 79.

American officials that showed a favoritism toward other Americans.¹⁶³ By 1780 many of the French inhabitants had had enough. The French of Cahokia in a letter to General Augustin de La Balme, a French officer serving in the Colonial Army, asked de La Balme to pass on their grievances to the king of France. In the letter they begged the king to let them become French citizens again and return the Illinois Country to the French realm: “May the Heavens bring it about that by your intervention we may be able to attain that to which we aspire, which is nothing else than the happiness of seeing ourselves again all French.”¹⁶⁴

Many French inhabitants took a more proactive approach and simply left the Illinois Country altogether, removing themselves across the Mississippi River into Spanish territory. In Kaskaskia the leading citizens of the village fled to the west bank of the Mississippi: “All these acts of tyranny are the causes that our best inhabitants have withdrawn to the Spanish government, and others, who were expecting your justice, prefer Spanish laws to the tyranny and despotism which they have suffered at the hand of your people.”¹⁶⁵ By the 1790s American settlers far outnumbered the French population that remained within the Illinois Country. This mass exodus of French from the Illinois Country effectively ended the French involvement in the Illinois middle ground. After a couple generations those French that remained were soon assimilated into the ever-increasing American population so that they were no longer seen as a separate group within the Illinois Country.

The Spanish presence in the Illinois Country middle ground unlike the French was not ended by the steady arrival of new American settlers, at least not directly. Instead a land hunger

¹⁶³ “Inhabitants of Cahokia to De la Balme, September 21, 1780,” in *Cahokia Records, 1778-1790*, 535-553; “Petition to the Governor of Virginia from the Inhabitants of Kaskaskia, May 4, 1781” in *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 233-238.

¹⁶⁴ “Inhabitants of Cahokia to De la Balme, September 21, 1780,” in *Cahokia Records, 1778-1790*, 551.

¹⁶⁵ “Petition to the Governor of Virginia from the Inhabitants of Kaskaskia, May 4, 1781” in *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, 238.

fledgling American federal government bought out the Spanish presence in the Illinois Country. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 the official presence of an independent Spanish authority was removed. Spain was no longer able to effectively influence events in the Illinois Country. While the French and Spanish presence in the Illinois Country middle ground was ended relatively quickly and peacefully the British and Native Americans proved not to be as easily or as peacefully pushed out of the Illinois Country.

The end of the Revolutionary War ended the physical presence of the British in the Illinois Country, however their influence among the region's Native American tribes would last until the end of the War of 1812. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1783 the British, fearing a backlash from angry Native American tribes, delayed their evacuation of the western fortifications of Fort Detroit, Oswego, Niagara, and Michilimackinac even though they were officially within the territory of the United States.¹⁶⁶ The British would remain in these fortifications providing trade goods and supplies to the region's Indians until the Jay Treaty was initiated in 1796. The British presence in the Illinois Country middle ground would finally come to an end in 1815 with Treaty of Ghent at the end of the War of 1812 when it was no longer beneficial to the British to encourage hostility among the Native American tribes toward the United States.

The steady influx of American settlers westward into Native American lands resulted in several outbreaks of major conflicts between Americans and Indians following the end of the Revolutionary War. The first of these conflicts was the Northwest Indian Wars 1785-1795, followed by Tecumseh's War beginning in 1811 and bleeding into the final conflict, the War of 1812. The consequences of these conflicts were a series of treaties that took more and more land from Native American tribes and pushed them westward out of the Illinois Country. The Native

¹⁶⁶ John Sugden. *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 43.

American presence following the American Revolution within the Illinois Country would last into the 1830s, however their participation in the Illinois Country middle ground came to an end following the end of the War of 1812. The Native American tribes of the Illinois Country no longer had the population or power to effectively resist American dominance, thus ending the Illinois Country middle ground forever.

CHAPTER THREE

The Public History of Illinois and George Rogers Clark during the American Revolution

Today the majority of the American people have mostly forgotten George Rogers Clark and the Illinois Country's involvement in the Revolutionary War. For most people their knowledge of the Revolutionary War stops at the Alleghenies Mountains and their knowledge of Clark is usually confused with his younger brother William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. They tend to forget that there were diverse and complex populations of peoples in the Midwest at the time of the Revolution. However this unawareness is understandable. The focus of both academic and public history of the American Revolution has long been on the thirteen original colonies where all the most celebrated events occurred and where the nation's founding fathers resided. The Midwest had largely been ignored until the early 1990s when interest in the American West emerged following the James A. Hijiya article "Why the West Is Lost."¹⁶⁷ The focus on the thirteen original colonies was also, until the 1990s, nearly exclusively an Anglo-centric version of American history ignoring the involvement of the Spanish, French, and Native Americans in the history of the Americas.¹⁶⁸ This ignoring of the importance of the American West and non-Anglo peoples was not just a problem of academic history it is also a major issue that public history must address.

Before proceeding I believe it is important that I define just what a public history is. On the Public History Resource Center's website they provide a definition of public history from New York University's web site for its graduate program in public history:

Public History is history that is seen, heard, read, and interpreted by a popular audience. Public historians expand on the methods of academic

¹⁶⁷ Claudio Saunt, "Mapping Early American Historiography," *WMQ* 65 (2008): 756. accessed March 3, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212024>.

¹⁶⁸ James A. Hijiya, "Why the West Is Lost," *WMQ* 51 (1994): 276-278. accessed March 3, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946864>.

history by emphasizing non-traditional evidence and presentation formats, reframing questions, and in the process creating a distinctive historical practice....Public history is also history that belongs to the public. By emphasizing the public context of scholarship, public history trains historians to transform their research to reach audiences outside the academy.¹⁶⁹

The purpose of this chapter is to uncover just how George Rogers Clark and the Illinois Country's involvement in the Revolutionary War is remembered and interpreted today in public history. I will be focusing narrowly on the public history from historic sites and monuments found within what was the Illinois Country of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and what is today the state of Illinois and the western half of Indiana.

Unfortunately the state of Illinois today is deeply lacking regarding places of public history that are exclusively dedicated to either George Roger Clark, or the Illinois Country's involvement in the American Revolution or in fact any place wholly dedicated to the American Revolution. Instead Illinois relies upon several individual placards and statues throughout the state to interpret its history during the American Revolution. It seems that today the state has little interest in promoting Illinois' involvement in the Revolution. Instead the main focus of much of Illinois public history is understandably on the state's favorite son, Abraham Lincoln. However this was not always the case. In fact Illinois' first state park owes its existence to Clark and his men having simply passed through its location when they first landed in the Illinois Country.

It was thanks to the involvement of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) that the state of Illinois established its first state park in 1908, Fort Massac State Park. It was at Fort Massac, on the southern tip of Illinois near what is today Metropolis.

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Evans, "What is Public History," Public History Resource Center, last modified November 5, 2010, http://www.publhistory.org/what_is/definition.html.

Illinois, that Clark entered the Illinois Country with his small force at the beginning of the Illinois Campaign and began his march overland to Kaskaskia. One of the main goals of the Daughters of the American Revolution is to “to protect historical locations related to the Revolution.”¹⁷⁰ Because of this Fort Massac made the perfect location, in a state with few connections to the American Revolution, for the Chicago Chapter DAR to promote for the first state park. Two prominent members of the DAR, Mrs. Letitia Green Stevenson wife to the former Vice President of the United States Adlai Ewing Stevenson I, and Mrs. Julia Scott led this push.¹⁷¹ Julia Scott argued, “In the east, there are many landmarks of the great struggle that made us a nation. Are landmarks of Illinois' heroic era less sacred than those in other parts of America?”¹⁷² Stevenson and Scott’s efforts paid off and in 1908 the location became Illinois first State Park.

It is clear that when first established Fort Massac State Park’s interpretive focus was to promote the heroic stature of military leader George Rogers Clark, his conquest of the Northwest territory, and establish Illinois connection to the American Revolution. This focus is seen clearly from the monument dedicated in 1907 by the Illinois DAR when the park was founded. The monuments plaque reads:

In memory of George Rogers Clark and his faithful companions in arms who by their enterprise courage devotion and sagacity won the Illinois Country for the Common Wealth of Virginia and so for the American Union this monument has been erected in the name of the grateful people by the Illinois Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ “History of the First State Park,” Fort Massac Chapter, National Society DAR, last modified September 28, 2013. <http://ildar.org/chapters/fortmassac/fort-massac-history.html>.

¹⁷¹ “History of the First State Park.”

¹⁷² *Historic Illinois*, Vol. 4, (1981), Illinois Department of Conservation, Springfield, IL in “History of the First State Park.”

¹⁷³ “In Memory of George Rogers Clark,” Plaque, Fort Massac State Park, October 12, 2013.

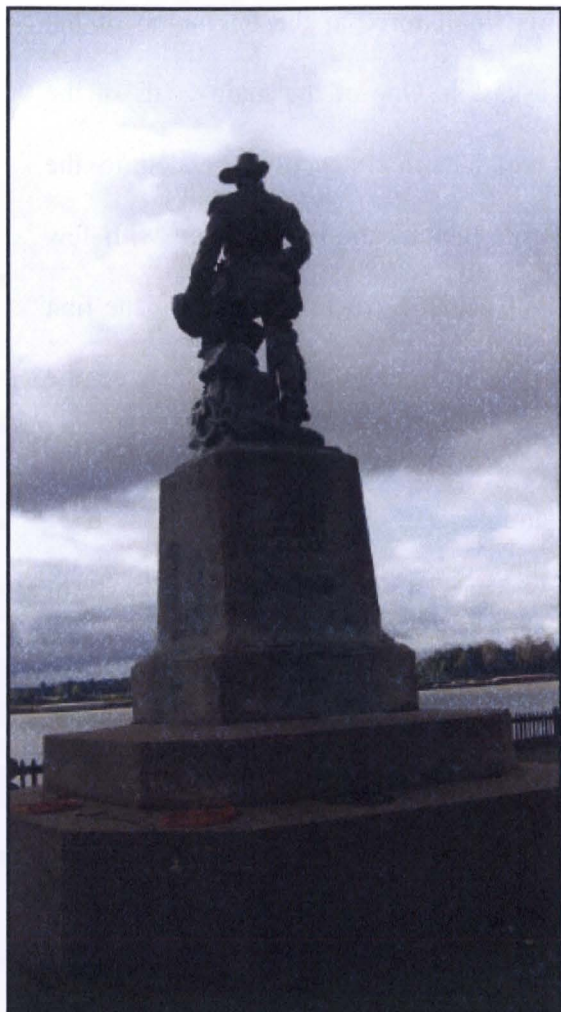


Image 1 and 2: The George Rogers Clark statue at Fort Massac State Park, Metropolis, Illinois. Photographs taken by author.

This interpretive focus would continue at the park into the 1930s. In 1932 the Illinois DAR funded and erected a George Rogers Clark statue made by sculptor Leon Hermant (Images 1, 2).¹⁷⁴ The statue shows Clark posing heroically looking out over the Ohio River dressed in a hunting frock and leggings with musket and map in hand. This interpretive focus would last at Fort Massac State Park up until the 1970s when following several archeological and historical excavations that were conducted focus began to shift to Fort Massac itself. In 1971 construction began next to the site of the original forts on a reconstruction of a replica of the 1794 American fort at Fort Massac and was completed in 1973.¹⁷⁵ Then in 2002 the 1794 replica was removed and replaced by a replica of the 1802 American fort that was on the site.¹⁷⁶

The current interpretive focus of the park has shifted nearly completely to the original French Fort Massac and the different British and American variations, up through the American Civil War, of the fort that were built overtime on the site. The park's interpretative focus is know mostly on the time period of the French and Indian War. While this shifting of interpretive purpose does bring into light the diversity and complexity of Illinois colonial and early American history in doing so the story of George Rogers Clark and Illinois' involvement in the American Revolution are nearly forgotten. Today beyond the DAR monument and George Rogers Clark statue there are only two museum exhibit plaques that mention Clark and Illinois contribution to the American Revolution.

Besides the George Rogers Clark statue at Fort Massac State Park there are only two other statues of Clark in the state of Illinois, the first is in Quincy and the most recent is in Flora.

¹⁷⁴ "History of the First State Park."

¹⁷⁵ "Fort Massac State Park," Illinois Department of Natural Resources, last accessed April 2, 2014. <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/R5/frmindex.htm>.

¹⁷⁶ "Fort Massac State Park."

These two statues of George Rogers Clark stand-alone and are not part of a larger historic site.

The George Rogers Clark statue in Quincy is located in Riverview Park along the eastern bank of the Mississippi river, which was at the time of the dedication of the statue the “most western point of high land in all Illinois.”¹⁷⁷ H. W. Clendenin in 1909 gave a description of what the statue looked like when it was first dedicated,

The statue is of heroic size and is the work of Charles J. Mulligan of Chicago. It represents General Clark as standing with folded arms, dressed in the military costume of his day, with sword in scabbard by his side, gracefully supported by a massive stone monolith, with sculptured medallions and bars on each side. The statue faces west-ward, as if taking in the view across the Mississippi river.¹⁷⁸ (see Image 5)

The George Rogers Clark Statue in Flora, Illinois is located just outside the historic B&O Railroad Depot. This life size statue is a much more recent addition being dedicated on October 8, 2005. The town of Flora lies along the route Clark and his men would in their operation to recapture Fort Sackville from the British.¹⁷⁹ (see Image 6)

There is one site in Illinois that is completely dedicated to the Illinois Country’s involvement in the American Revolution, the Kaskaskia Bell State Memorial. This memorial is located on Kaskaskia Island, which due to several floods and the shifting of the Mississippi River is now on the Missouri side of the river. The memorial itself is within a small brick building next to the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church (see Image 7). Within the small building is

¹⁷⁷ Steve Schneider, “The View from Here: The Story of the George Rogers Clark Statue in Quincy, Illinois,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 100 (2007/2008): 364. accessed March 5, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40204701>.

¹⁷⁸ H. W. Clendenin, “Dedication of George Rogers Clark Monument, at Quincy Illinois,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 2 (1909): 66. accessed March 3, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40193718>.

¹⁷⁹ Schneider, “The View from Here,” 371.

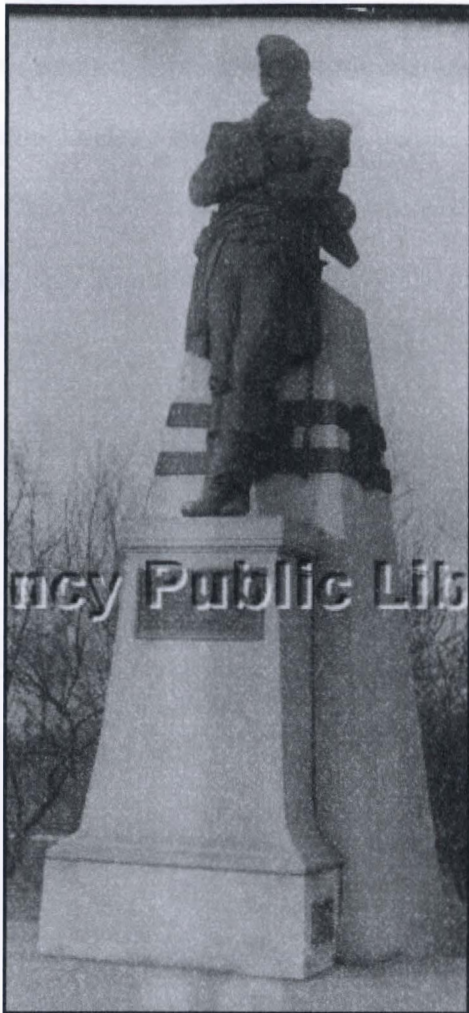


Image 5: Clark Statue in Quincy, IL¹⁸⁰



Image 6: Clark Statue in Flora, IL¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ "George Rogers Clark Statue Riverview Park" Photograph, Quincy Area Historic Photo Collection (1976) Accessed April 15, 2014. <http://www.idaillinois.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/qpl/id/1825/rec/2>.

¹⁸¹ "George Rogers Clark Statue | Flora Depot." Accessed April 15, 2014. <http://floradepot.com/?p=35>.

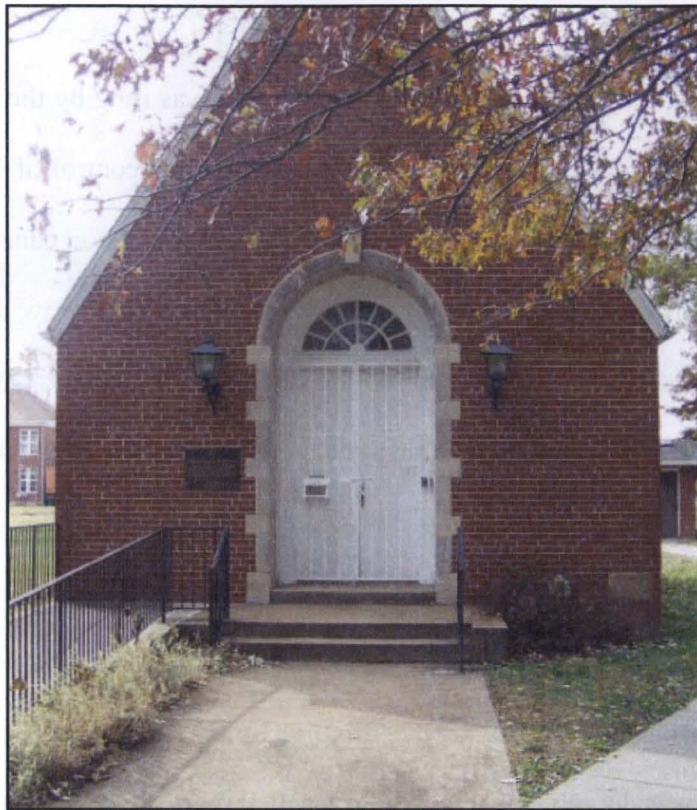


Image 7: Exterior of the Kaskaskia Bell State Memorial, Kaskaskia, IL.
Photograph taken by author.



Image 8: Interior of the Kaskaskia Bell State Memorial, Kaskaskia, IL.
Photograph taken by author.

housed the 'Liberty Bell of the West,' this was the bell that was rung by the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia on July 4, 1778 the day Clark and his men gained control of the village without firing a shot¹⁸² (see Image 8). There is no staff at the memorial and you cannot physically enter the building, there is a metal gate in front of the doors. So in order to view the 'Liberty Bell of the West' you must first press a button next to the door, which automatically opens the doors allowing you to look inside. Since there is no staff the interpretation of the site relies upon two plaques. The first plaque titled "The Liberty Bell of the West," located on the exterior wall of the building next to the doors, explains the origins of the bell and why it is called the 'Liberty Bell of the West.' The second larger freestanding plaque titled "Illinois in the American Revolution" very briefly describes the early stages of the Illinois Campaign and the capture of Kaskaskia. Although Kaskaskia was largely inhabited by French settlers in 1778; this plaque does not mention the French inhabitants of Kaskaskia at all. This failure to incorporate the French settlers into the public history of the site leaves visitors with no sense of the multi-national, multi-cultural nature of Revolutionary Illinois. It also ignores that Clark's orders were to treat the French settlers who swore allegiance to the United States as to equal free citizens.

It is clear that the state of Illinois is lacking in programs of public history that remember and interpret George Roger Clark, or the Illinois Country's involvement in the American Revolution. On the other hand the state of Indiana does a much better job when it comes to the public history of the American Revolution. The Mecca of Midwest historic sites of the American Revolution, the George Rogers Clark Memorial and National Historical Park, is located in Vincennes, Indiana. The idea for the need of a memorial that commemorated the American

¹⁸² "Kaskaskia Bell Memorial." IHPA, accessed April 15, 2014.
<http://www.illinois.gov/iHPA/Experience/Sites/Southwest/Pages/Kaskaskia-Bell.aspx>.

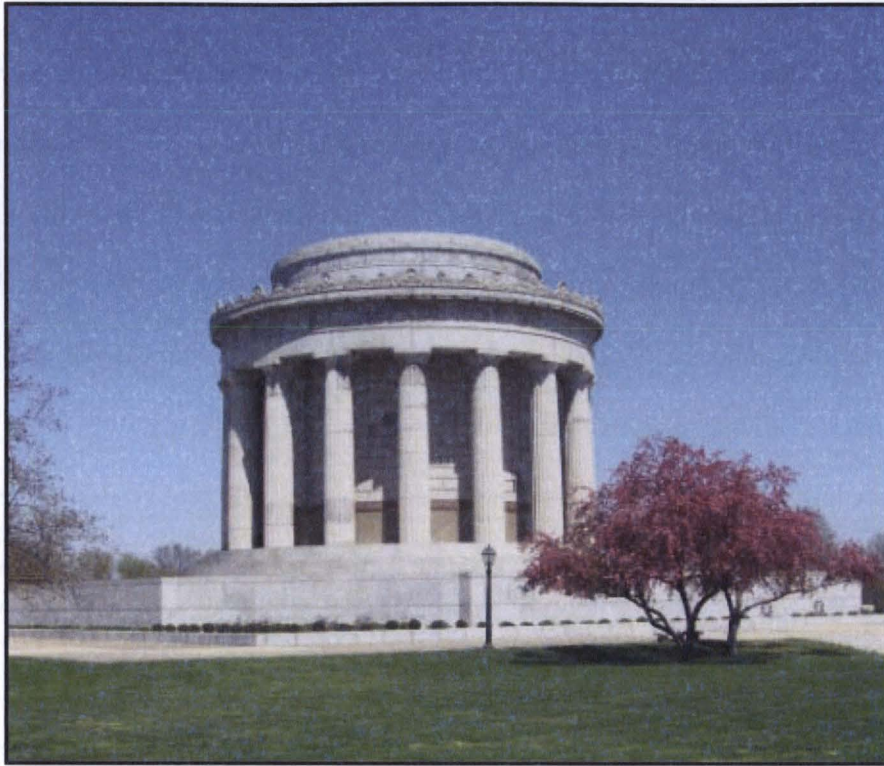


Image 9: Exterior George Rogers Clark Memorial, Vincennes, Ind. Photograph taken by author



Image 10: Interior George Rogers Clark Memorial, Vincennes, Ind. Photograph taken by author

Revolution in Indiana emerged during the 1920s. During those years there was a patriotic fervor that swept across the country leading up to the sesquicentennial of the beginning of the Revolutionary War and signing of the Declaration of Independence.¹⁸³ With the aid of local, state, federal, and private funding construction of the memorial began in 1931 and after just two years the memorial was finished.¹⁸⁴ The memorial's structure, built on the site where Fort Sackville used to stand, itself is an impressive thing:

The Clark Memorial is more than 80 feet high and is 90 feet across at the base. The walls are two feet thick. The exterior is composed of granite from Vermont, Minnesota, and Alabama. Towering over the entrance is an eagle with outspread wings. Above the 16 Doric columns is an inscription which reads: "The Conquest of the West - George Rogers Clark and The Frontiersmen of the American Revolution." (see Image 9)¹⁸⁵

The interior of the memorial is just as impressive. There are seven murals painted by Ezra Winter each sixteen by twenty-eight feet and in the center of the memorial is a larger than life bronze sculpture of George Rogers Clark (see Image 10).¹⁸⁶ Along with the commemoration of Clark and his men the park also recognizes the French and Spanish involvement in the region during the American Revolution. A statue of French priest Father Gibault was placed in front of the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, which is located next to the Clark memorial. Just outside of the memorial along the floodwall of the Wabash River is a statue of the Spanish merchant Francis Vigo who was so instrumental in Clark's success in recapturing Fort Sackville.

Today there is a visitor center, built in 1976, that aids in the interpretation of the George Rogers Clark Memorial. While there is a small staff that cares for the site, answers visitor's

¹⁸³ Hal K. Rothman and Daniel J. Holder, *Maintaining a Legacy: An Administrative History of George Rogers Clark National Historical Park* (National Park Service, 1994), chapter 2. accessed April 10, 2014. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/gero2/index.htm.

¹⁸⁴ Rothman, , *Maintaining a Legacy*, chapter 2.

¹⁸⁵ "George Rogers Clark Memorial," George Rogers Clark National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) Accessed April 05, 2014. <http://www.nps.gov/gero/historyculture/memorial.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ "George Rogers Clark Memorial."

questions, and give group tours at the memorial, the main component of the site's interpretive program is a thirty minute film *Long Knives*, which visitors are encouraged to watch before the begin their visit. Today the film is outdated and full of inaccuracies. One example of this is the film claims that Clark's force when he entered the Illinois Country were all stalwart Kentuckians when in fact the majority of his men were Virginian and only about thirty of his men were from Kentucky. The film is in need of a remake that shifts the focus off just George Rogers Clark and changes it to the complex and diverse Illinois Country 'middle ground' that Clark entered. This can be seen as true in all academic and public histories of the American Revolution in the Illinois Country. For too long the focus has been too narrow and Anglo-centric it needs to expand beyond just George Rogers Clark and his small band of Americans and start acknowledging the diversity and complexity that is the history of the Illinois Country.

Conclusion

The Illinois Country was a perfect example of the complexity and diversity of a 'middle ground.' The Illinois Country 'middle ground' was an ever-evolving presence and it was with the entrance of George Rogers Clark and his small army of Americans into the region in 1778 that resulted in this 'middle ground's' most intricate period. It was during the period of 1778-1783 that the French, British, Spanish, Americans, Illiniwek Confederation, Miami, Wea, Piankashaw, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Chippewa, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Delaware, Winnebago, and Shawnee all attempted in one way or another to gain dominance or exercise greater influence over the region. With no one group powerful enough to force the others into submission all had to instead rely on making concession they usually would not make and engage in diplomacy. The period of the American Revolution also proved to be the high water mark of the Illinois Country 'middle ground.' With the steady influx of new American settlers into the region following the end of the Revolutionary War the Illinois Country 'middle ground' quickly began to erode away as Americans became the unquestioned dominating power in the region and by the end of the War of 1812 the 'middle ground' of the Illinois Country had disappeared completely.

Today the Illinois Country 'middle ground' along with the Midwest's involvement in the American Revolution unfortunately has largely been forgotten. When historians, both academic and public, address it, they usually do so through the lens of a biography of George Rogers Clark. While Clark is an important figure in the history of the Illinois Country and many of the primary sources of the region exist because of him, the focus still needs to be shifted to the unique cultural diversity of the Illinois Country. The Illinois Country was one of the few regions in North America during the Revolution in which a multitude of nations and tribes contested control and yet all had great difficulty asserting hegemony over one another.

Appendix

Document 1: George Rogers Clark's Speech to the Illinois Tribes, August 1778

Men and warriors, pay attention. You informed me yesterday that the Great Spirit had brought us together, which you hoped was good, as He is good. I also have the same hope, and whatever may be agreed upon by us at the present time, whether for peace or war, I expect each party will strictly adhere to and henceforward prove ourselves worthy of the attention of the Great Spirit. I am a man and a warrior, not a councilor. I carry War in my right hand and in my left Peace. I was sent by the great council fire of the Big Knives and their friends to take control of all the towns the English possess in this country, and to remain here watching the conduct of the red men. I was sent to bloody the paths of those who continue the effort to stop the course of the rivers, but to clear the roads that lead from us to those who wish to be in friendship with us, in order that the women and children may walk in them without anything being in the way to strike their feet against; and to continue to call on the Great Fire for warriors enough to darken the land of those who are hostile to us, so that the inhabitants shall hear no sound in it but that of birds that live on blood. I know that a mist is yet before your eyes; I will dispel the clouds in order that you may see clearly the cause of the war between the Big Knives and the English, that you may judge for yourselves which is in the right. Then if you are men and warriors, as you profess to be, prove it by adhering strictly to what you may now declare, without deceiving either party, and thus proving yourselves to be only old women.

The Big Knives are very much like the red men; they do not know well how to make blankets, powder and cloth; they buy these things from the English (from whom they formerly descended) and live chiefly by raising corn, hunting and trading, as you and your neighbors, the French, do. But the Big Knives were daily becoming more numerous, like the trees in the woods, so that the land became poor and the hunting scarce; and having but little to trade with, the women began to cry to see their children naked, and tried to make clothes for themselves, and soon gave their husbands blankets of their own making; and the men learned to make guns and powder, so that they did not want so much from the English. Then the English became angry and stationed strong garrisons through all our country (as you see they have done among you on the lakes and among the French) and would not let our women spin nor the men make powder, nor let us trade with anybody else. They said we must buy everything from them, and since we had become saucy they would make us give them two bucks for a blanket that we used to get for one. They said we must do as they pleased, and they killed some of us to make the rest afraid. This is the truth and the cause of the war between us, which did not begin until some time after they had treated us in this fashion. Our women and children were cold and hungry, and continued to cry. Our young men were lost, and there were no counselors to set them in the right path. The whole land was dark, and the old men hung down their heads for shame, for they could not see the sun.

Thus there was mourning for many years. At last the Great Spirit took pity on us and kindled a great council fire that never goes out, at a place called Philadelphia. He struck down a post there and left a war tomahawk by it, and went away. The sun at once broke out, and the sky became blue. The old men held up their heads, and assembled at the fire. They sharpened the hatchet and put it into the hands of the young men, and told them to strike the English as long as they could find one on this side of the Great Water. The young men immediately struck the war post and blood ensued. Thus the war began, and the English were driven from one place to

another, until they became weak and hired you red men to fight for them, and help them. The Great Spirit became angry at this, and caused your Old Father, the French king, and other great nations to join the Big Knives and fight with them against all their enemies, so that the English have become like deer in the woods. From this you may see that it is the Great Spirit that caused your waters to be troubled, because you fought for the people he was angry with, and if your women and children should cry you must blame yourselves for it, and not the Big Knives.

You can now judge who is in the right. I have already told you who I am. Here is a bloody belt and a white one. Take whichever you please. Behave like men, and don't let your present situation, being surrounded by the Big Knives, cause you to take up the one belt with your hands when your hearts drink up the other. If you take the bloody path you shall go from this town in safety and join your friends, the English, and we will try like warriors who can put the most stumbling blocks in the road and keep our clothes perfumed with the blood the longest. If you should take the path of peace and now be received as brothers to the Big Knives and the French, and should hereafter listen to bad birds that will be flying through your land, you will no longer be counted as men but as persons with two tongues, who ought to be destroyed without listening to what you say, as nobody could understand you. Since I am convinced that you have never heard the truth before, I do not wish you to give me an answer before you have had time to council if you wish to do this. We will part this evening and when you are ready, if the Great Spirit will bring us together again, let us prove ourselves worthy by speaking and thinking with but one heart and one tongue.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Milo M. Quaife, *The Capture of Old Vincennes. The Original Narratives of George Rogers Clark and of His Opponent GOV. Henry Hamilton* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1927), 82-85.

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