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Denise Marie Wilson

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**VINCENNES:
FROM FRENCH COLONIAL VILLAGE TO
AMERICAN FRONTIER TOWN
1730-1820**

DISSERTATION

Submitted to The Eberly College of Arts and Sciences

of

West Virginia University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Denise Marie Wilson

Morgantown, West Virginia

1997

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VENGEANCE ON THE WABASH

by Denise Wilson

When the people and government of the United States came to the French village of Vincennes, no change was more difficult for the French settlers than coping with the animosity and violence between American settlers and neighboring Indians. The incident described below is representative of the many years of violence between Anglo-Americans and Indians on the frontier after the American Revolution. After I wrote the historical details of the event which appear in Chapter 8, I was compelled to write this song in an effort to personally appreciate and express the intensity of emotions which were felt by the French inhabitants, American settlers, and Indians as events unfolded on July 13-15, 1786. When I first read the contemporary accounts of this event, I was moved by the surprise and disbelief of the French that their Indian friends would attack Vincennes, the intense fear of the American and French settlers as they readied the town for the attack, and the Indians' concern for the lives and property of the French settlers.

On the banks of the Wabash two hundred years ago
 In a place that the people called Vincennes
 A messenger came riding with sweat upon his brow
 He said "Ring out the church bell, people gather now!

All that we've dreaded so many months past
 Has finally come to meet us at last
 The Indians come riding intending us harm
 Women hide your children, men take up your arms."

The first to assemble, the French-Canadians of the town
 Listened to the news in disbelief
 One man shouted "How can they do this, they have always been our friends
 For a hundred years they've lived with us in peace."

The answer was given by a man named LeGras
 The leader of the town who did reply
 "It's the Americans they come for, it's the Americans they hate
 And I don't need to tell you, every person here knows why.

I don't know where this all started
 I don't know where this will end
 All I know is I will never give up hope
 That peace will come again."

(continued on next page)

Nearly five hundred Indians from many different tribes
Rode as one with one goal that day
Revenge for their families the Americans had killed
Simple honor demanded the Americans must pay.

But before the angry warriors descended on the town
They sent a message to the French men there
It said "Meet us 'cross the river, you've nothing to fear
We will not attack 'til we've spoken with you there."

The war chiefs had hoped the French would merely step aside
While vengeance was delivered sure and sweet
And though the French had tried and failed to drive the Yankees out
They wouldn't watch a slaughter on their streets.

So they pleaded and they threatened and they offered gifts and food
And they finally turned the Indians away
But a bitter chief cried "Look for us when harvest time is near
For their cruel inhumanity the Americans must pay!"

I don't know where this all started
I don't know where this will end
All I know is I will never give up hope
That peace will come again.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| IIHC | Illinois Historical Collections |
| KCCR | Knox County Court Records. Knox County Courthouse Archives Library. Vincennes, Indiana. |
| KCMP | Knox County Miscellaneous Papers, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. |
| VPR | Vincennes Parish Records, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Vincennes, Indiana. |
| WHC | Wisconsin Historical Collections. |
| WLCL | William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. |
| WSML | William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. |

Maps and Illustrations

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INTRODUCTION

My first visit to Vincennes, Indiana was in 1976 when I attended a historical reenactment which commemorated the early French history of the town. I was still a teenager and a member of a group of young people who gave living history demonstrations which portrayed *Les Compagnies Franches de la Marine*--or the Independent Companies of Marines. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these French soldiers protected a line of forts, trading posts, and settlements which reached from Canada, along the Great Lakes, and descending southward into the upper and lower Mississippi Valley. Vincennes (or Post Vincennes as it was commonly called) was one of these forts. From an early age I was well aware of the early French heritage of my state and the midwest in general because of frequent family visits to a reconstructed French fort, Fort Ouiatenon, which was located just a few miles from my home in Lafayette, Indiana.

During my years of performing as a fifer with *Les Compagnies Franches*, I traveled to other midwestern towns which were once old French settlements such as Detroit, Fort Wayne, Michilimackinac, Fort de Chartres, and Ste. Genevieve. My curiosity about what life was really like in these colonial French villages grew over time. I also began to wonder what happened to the French inhabitants of the Middle West when the region was transferred to Great Britain (in 1763) and later to the United States (in 1783).

As an undergraduate history student in the late-1970's I was discouraged to find that few historians shared my enthusiasm for the early French history of the midwest or any other midwestern historical topics for that matter. Although I did not know it at the time, scholarly interest in the American West--which had flourished in the opening decades of the twentieth century--had waned considerably by mid-century. Whereas Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis had once provided years of lively historical debate over the nature of western settlement and the significance of "the West" on the development of the American character, professional historians eventually ran out of ways to attack or support Jackson's thesis. For several decades scholars lost interest in the West altogether. There just didn't seem to be anything new or important to say.¹

During the 1960's and 1970's historians were drawn increasingly to fields that seemed more "relevant" to the contemporary issues of racism, feminism, urban poverty, and ethnic divisions in American society. The history of women, African Americans, Native Americans and other minority groups took center stage. What this meant to me as an undergraduate student was that although I attended Purdue University, one of the largest universities in the midwest, the selection of courses offered little to satisfy my curiosity about the early history of the Midwest. Purdue was like a large number of other colleges which no longer offered courses in western history.

The scholarly interest in Native American studies which began in the 1960's eventually sparked a renewed interest in the West and contributed

¹Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1920).

to a more sophisticated analysis of frontier history. Historians are gaining a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between the native and nonnative peoples who lived and worked in each of the many "Wests" which eventually became part of the United States. Turner's model of a universal frontier experience has long since been dismissed as historians begin to appreciate the diversity of conditions and experiences in various frontier regions. Unlike earlier western narratives, Indians no longer appear only as straw men who try and fail to block the expansion of Anglo-American settlers. Works such as Francis Jennings' The Invasion of America and Richard White's The Middle Ground revealed the complicated relationships between Indians and Euroamericans, relationships which were characterized by both cooperation and conflict. These works and others like them describe the Native Americans as active participants in the social, economic, and political development of the many frontier zones that formed the West.¹

The effort of historians to bring Indian history back into the mainstream of American history has reopened the debate over the role of empire on the frontier. Jay Gitlin, in his "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," points out the importance of unravelling the "complex transoceanic and cross-cultural connections that shaped those areas of the West claimed by the Spanish, the French, and the Russians" and the need to "integrate the histories of those non-Anglo imperial frontiers with the narrative of Anglo-American settlement" since

¹Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1992); Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

those various frontiers converged throughout the period of national expansion.¹

Integrating the history of non-Anglo frontiers into the mainstream narrative of western history first requires the exploration of French, Spanish, and Russian frontiers. It requires frontier studies that combine a local perspective with an awareness of national and international developments. These studies will not only increase our understanding of life on various frontiers prior to the coming of Anglo-Americans, but they will also serve as a valuable contrast for understanding the history of the English seaboard colonies. Most importantly, a familiarity with regional histories prior to the coming of Anglo-American settlers is absolutely necessary to understand the complicated developments which occurred as Anglo-Americans invaded those territories in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The existence of French and Spanish settlers and settlements in the Midwest not only affected the course of political and military events but also made a unique imprint on the social, cultural, and economic landscape of the West. The following pages present a history of one midwestern French village, Vincennes. My purpose for researching and writing the history of Vincennes is threefold: (1) to tell what daily life was like for the French villagers who lived there in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; (2) to explore the ways in which French settlers and settlements in the Midwest differed from their English counterparts in the East; and (3) to describe how the imperial struggles for control of the American West

¹Jay Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," in William Cronon et al. (eds.), Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1992, 73.

affected local French inhabitants as well as to explain how the presence of the French influenced western political and military developments.

Throughout the following pages I have tried to explain the developments in Vincennes as they relate to regional, national and international concerns while at the same time capturing the details of life as it was experienced in old Vincennes.

My interest in writing a history of Vincennes was born of my life-long interest in the French heritage of the Midwest and also from a gap which exists in the historiography of the American Middle West. Few studies have explored the colonial history of this region in recent decades, and even fewer make the chronological transition from the Colonial Period to the Early National Period. Part of this is because historians who specialize in French colonial history, while quite knowledgeable about the history of France and New France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, have little knowledge of the American frontier during the Early National Period. Although a few works conclude with a brief aftermath telling about the fate of the French towns under American rule, these concluding remarks provide only an outline without much in-depth analysis. Whereas my initial intent was to begin where other works left off and write a history which focused on the "transition" years, I quickly realized that it was impossible to convey the changes which transpired in Vincennes and the Middle West, as well as the differences between French and Anglo-American settlers, without first describing the Vincennes of the French Period.

My exploration of the French in Vincennes was aided by the works of a handful of historians who have studied life in other midwestern French villages. Carl Ekberg's Colonial Ste. Genevieve: An Adventure on the

Mississippi Frontier offers one of the finest accounts of French settlers who lived in the upper-most region of the Mississippi Valley frequently called the Illinois country. Ekberg's book covers topics as diverse as daily life, community organization, work patterns, religion, and imperial developments which affected the town. Older works such as Natalia Belting's Kaskaskia Under the French Regime and the more recent writings of Winstanley Briggs on the Illinois French offer valuable information, but these works end with the loss of France's North American empire in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years' War.¹ Few works have bridged the gap between the end of the "official" French presence in the west and the arrival of large numbers of Anglo-Americans. This study will help to bridge that gap by examining the social, political and economic developments in and around Vincennes from 1730 to 1820.

In addition to providing a fuller understanding of midwestern history, this narrative presents a picture of colonial America which is rarely seen. While monographs and textbooks abound with images of Anglo-American colonists and the non-Anglo peoples with whom they interacted, only fleeting glimpses are offered of the French men and women who first settled the American Middle West. Although the term "early-American colonist" generally illicit images such as New-England farmers, Puritan church-goers, or Southern planters, the term equally applies to the early French colonists as well. This study highlights the cultural distinctness and the political and economic importance of the

¹Natalia Belting, Kaskaskia Under the French Regime; (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948); Winstanley Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays des Illinois," Doctoral dissertation, (University of Chicago, 1985) and "Le Pays des Illinois," in The William and Mary Quarterly, 47 (1990).

"early-American colonists" who were French midwesterners and whose experiences contributed to the fabric of American life.

PART I

DAILY LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

The French who settled in Vincennes and the other villages situated in the American Middle West experienced a world which was much different from that which developed in the English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. Perhaps the most striking difference between the French and Anglo-Americans was that land acquisition did not hold the importance for the French that it did for their English counterparts.¹ Though many French settlers were farmers, few depended strictly on agriculture to support themselves and their families. While the English looked to the land for profits, the French made a living by hunting, trapping, trading, farming, and working as *voyageurs*.

Strikingly different from the tense and often violent interactions between the English and their Indian neighbors, the French in Vincennes lived peacefully with neighboring tribes. Though small in number and situated deep in the frontier, the French in Vincennes did not fear Indians. The friendships and family ties they developed among local Indian tribes

¹In spite of the considerable amount of cultural diversity in the English seaboard colonies, the predominant social and political institutions and the main language used were English. I have therefore restricted the scope of my comparisons to the colonial French and English societies in North America. Likewise, although there was considerable ethnic diversity among the early- to mid-nineteenth century midwestern settlers, the Anglo-Americans were by far the largest group and the most influential in the development of western political, economic, and social institutions. Significantly, the typical frontier "American" desire to own and farm land was shared by most non-Anglo settlers.

not only made them feel safe among their neighbors, but these attachments also created reliable Indian allies who would protect French settlers if they were threatened by more distant tribes.

Another unique feature of the French settlements in the Illinois country was the French settlement pattern. They always built their homes in nuclear villages with their plow fields surrounding the town. Their long ribbon-like fields, often extending from a river, looked strange to the eyes of Anglo-Americans who had long since abandoned their ancestors' practice of strip farming. So too was the French practice of farming in common fields where only a furrow separated one man's land from another.

There was no religious strife in the French villages where the only religion was Roman Catholicism. The villagers of Vincennes, however, were anything but devout in many aspects of their religious life, in part because of the chronic shortage of priests in the Illinois country. The amicable, polite, social nature of the French was a less tangible, yet important difference between the French and the Anglo-Americans who eventually settled among them. The easy-going, relaxed, fun-loving character of the Midwestern French inhabitants stood in contrast to the Anglo-American settlers who arrived in Vincennes in the 1780's. Americans ridiculed the French for the many ways they "wasted" time, finding little of value in the French commitment to enjoying life's pleasures.

After years of studying the Illinois French, Natalia Belting captured the distinct character of the French when she wrote:

The Illinois habitant was a gay soul; he seemed shockingly carefree to later, self-righteous puritans from the American

colonies. He danced on Sunday after mass, was passionately attached to faro and half a dozen other card games, and played billiards at all hours. He gossiped long over a friendly pipe and a congenial mug of brandy in the half-dusk of his porch or in the noisy tavern.¹

Part I of this study describes how French settlers experienced life in colonial Vincennes--their daily life, work patterns, religious life, Indian relations, material culture, and the particular experiences of women. All of this contributes to a deeper knowledge of traditional French culture and life which is an important thread in the cultural tapestry of colonial America.

¹Belting, Kaskaskia, 68.

CHAPTER 1

VINCENNES: THE VILLAGE AND THE VILLAGERS

In the decades after the French government established Post Vincennes on the Wabash River in 1731, a steady stream of fur traders, trappers, ex-soldiers, and their families settled in the village which grew up around the local fort. Though situated deep in the frontier, the people of Vincennes were not completely isolated from other Frenchmen. Several other French villages were established in the upper Mississippi Valley within two or three hundred miles of Vincennes. The northernmost part of the Louisiana territory was referred to as the Illinois country, and Vincennes was one of seven French villages which had been established there by the middle of the eighteenth century. The largest of the other villages were Cahokia and Kaskaskia.¹

Most of the people who settled in Vincennes were French-Canadians though some spent a few years at Detroit, Kaskaskia, or one of several other French outposts before settling in Vincennes. Many of the Canadians who emigrated to Vincennes and the other Illinois villages were connected

¹All of the Illinois villages except Vincennes were located near the Mississippi River, though far enough from it to avoid the frequent floods. Aside from Kaskaskia and Cahokia, three small villages grew up near the only large French military installation, Fort de Chartres. These villages were St. Philippe, Chartres, and Prairie du Rocher. Ste. Genevieve was the only French village located on the western bank of the Mississippi River.

by marriage or kinship to people who had already established themselves in the Illinois country. A few residents traveled up the Mississippi River from New Orleans hoping to prosper in the small village located in what is now southern Indiana. Occasionally immigrants arrived in Vincennes directly from France.¹

The character of French settlement was dramatically different than that of English settlement in America. Rather than settle on isolated family farms, the French always settled near each other in nuclear villages. Their agricultural fields were located outside the village within walking distance. Thus, the isolation that plagued so many pioneer Anglo-American settlers as they pushed westward was never experienced by the French. In addition to the close physical proximity of their houses, the social nature of the French character was expressed in other ways. The French in America placed a much higher value on relaxation and recreation than did most English settlers. The English, and later the Americans, scoffed at the considerable amount of time the French spent "gossiping," dancing, and celebrating. While Anglos "wasted" little time at "frivolous" forms of entertainment, the French balanced hard work with pleasurable activities.²

Contributing to the uniqueness of French settlement was the nature of the work performed by colonists in Vincennes. Another significant

¹The parish records of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Vincennes include marriage records which list the home parishes of the bride and groom as well as the home parishes of their parents. From these records it is clear that the vast majority of inhabitants were originally from Canada. When Americans began arriving in Vincennes in the 1780's, they referred to the local French simply as "Canadians." Parish Records of St. Xavier Catholic Church, 1749-1913 (hereafter VPR). Originals in Old Cathedral Library, Vincennes, Indiana. Due to difficulty of gaining regular access to originals, I used a typed copy of the original which was translated by Father Schmitt. Copy of original on file at Genealogy Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

²Carl Ekberg, "Agriculture, Mentalités, and Violence on the Illinois Frontier," in Illinois Historical Journal 88 [1995]: 101-116.

difference between French and English settlement in America was the way these two groups interacted with native Indian tribes. While English settlers wanted only to remove Indians further and further west to open new lands for English occupation, the French depended upon the Indians for the smooth operation of the fur trade. French settlers therefore had a greater familiarity with and appreciation for Indian cultures and peoples. The people of Vincennes knew their Indian neighbors well and felt very safe and secure in their village until the arrival of Americans late in the eighteenth century. The good relations between the French and Indians in the Illinois country was based primarily on their economic interdependence. The kind of long-term trust and friendship that developed between the French and Indians was only one of the numerous factors that made the French colonial experience in the midwest quite different from the English experience farther east.

Nearly all of the Vincennes residents worked in and profited from the fur trade, and many of necessity also became farmers. The name *habitant* was used to describe the permanent settlers in Vincennes who tilled at least a small amount of land. In time some *habitants* devoted all of their energy to farming, although these remained a distinct minority throughout the eighteenth century. Much of the farmers' wheat, corn, and tobacco was consumed locally by the townspeople or the neighboring Indian tribes, and the surplus was shipped downriver to New Orleans. Before the American Revolution, the people of Vincennes owned a large number of cattle and hogs in addition to their fine horses to which they

were quite attached. The fertility of the soil and the abundance of wild game in the prairies, forests, and rivers enabled residents to prosper.¹

Not only the French but the Indians before them and the Americans who came later were impressed by the advantageous location of the site of Vincennes, situated about 150 miles north of the point where the Wabash [Ouabache] River empties into the Ohio. The Piankashaw Indian tribe inhabited the Vincennes region prior to the establishment of the French fort and village. Centuries earlier Native American mound builders had lived in the area, but the only signs remaining of that great civilization were two giant mounds just outside of Vincennes.² Attractive to the Indians and French alike were the fertile prairies bordered by beautiful forests where wild game was plentiful. The high banks of the Wabash River meant that it flooded less often than most rivers of the region, and the village of Vincennes was situated on high ground which provided additional protection from flooding.³

¹For more information on livestock, horses, and crops, see "Census of Illinois, 1767" in Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, (hereafter IIHC) 11 (1916), 469-70. For evidence that only a minority of Vincennes villagers were devoted strictly to farming, see Father Pierre Gibault to Bishop Briand, Spring 1770, in Shirley McCord, (comp.), Travel Accounts of Indiana, 1670-1961, Indiana Historical Collections, 47 (1970), 25; Paul C. Phillips, "Vincennes in Its Relation to the French Colonial Policy," in Indiana Magazine of History 17 (1921), 311-37; "John Heckewelder's Journey to the Wabash in 1792," McCord, Travel Accounts, 35; Victor Collot, "A Journey in North America" in Transactions of Illinois State Historical Society (1908), 271. A study of the method and numbers of acres under cultivation in Vincennes led Leonard Lux to estimate that over half of the residents tilled some land, though this was not their only occupation. Leonard Lux, The Vincennes Donation Lands, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1949), 430.

²Bert Anson, The Miami Indians, (Norman: Oklahoma Press, 1970), 56. French and Americans were aware that the unusually shaped large mounds were a product of an early Indian culture. See David Thomas, "Travels through the western country in the Summer of 1816" [1819], as reprinted in Harlow Lindley, (ed.), Indiana as seen by Early Travelers, in Indiana Historical Collections, 3 (1916), 66.

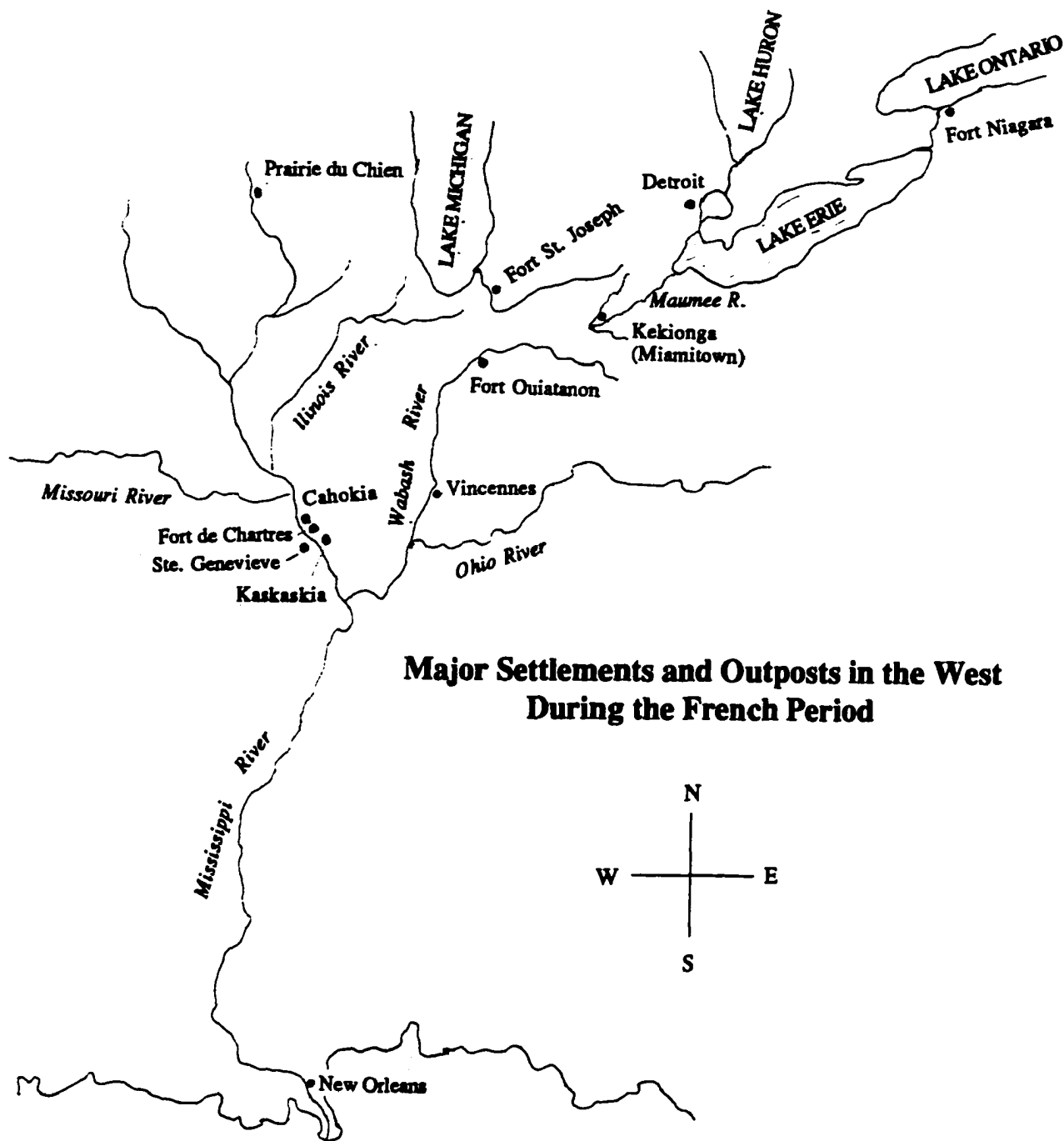
³Thomas Hutchins, "A Topographical Description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, . . ." [1778], in Lindley, Indiana, 7-8. For rarity of floods along Wabash, see Victor Collot, "A Journey," in Transactions, 271.

The British Indian agent, George Croghan, was impressed with the region surrounding Vincennes. He believed it was "one of the finest Situations that can be found the Country is level and clear and the Soil very rich. . . Post Vincent is a place of great consequence for Trade being a fine hunting Country all along the Ouabache. . . at any Time in Halfe an Hour we could Kill as much as we wanted." Fertile land which was not often subject to flooding, abundant game, a mild climate, and good relations with neighboring Indian tribes made Vincennes attractive to a steady stream of settlers throughout the eighteenth century.¹

The geographical location of Vincennes contributed to the town's importance as a trade center and later as the capitol of the Indiana Territory (the Northwest Territory lands after Ohio had become a state). Though situated deep in the interior of the continent, Vincennes residents had ready access to all the major midwestern rivers. The town was located just a few miles north of what the French called the "Belle Rivière [Beautiful River]," or the Ohio River. In an era where rivers served as highways, the inhabitants of Vincennes easily could float downriver to the Ohio and quickly reach the Mississippi River. A northward turn on the Mississippi led to the other Illinois French villages; heading south led to New Orleans. To reach Detroit, Canada, or other Great Lakes posts, travelers went north from Vincennes on the Wabash River until reaching the Miami village of Kekionga (later Fort Wayne, Indiana). A short portage led to the St. Joseph River which emptied into Lake Michigan.²

¹Excerpts from "George Croghan's Journal" as reprinted in McCord (ed.), Travel Accounts, 19-20. For other comments concerning the fertile soil, abundant game and fish, and desirability of territory surrounding Vincennes see excerpt from "Heckewelder's Journey," as reprinted in McCord, Travel Accounts, 35.

²For a clear map of the western country and Vincennes' relation to the western water highways see, Anson, Miami Indians, 41. For description of water



**Major Settlements and Outposts in the West
During the French Period**

Map by Author

travel to and from Vincennes see "Jervasse Cutler's Book of travels," [Boston, 1812] in Lindley, Indiana, 37.

Centrally located between Quebec and Detroit to the north and the other Illinois villages and New Orleans to the south, Vincennes was somewhat of a crossroad town during the French period. In addition, for many decades after its settlement, Vincennes was the first town travelers visited when floating down the Ohio River from the eastern English colonies. In spite of the town's distance from large commercial cities, the people of Vincennes received regular imports of goods and news from the outside world. Local merchants and boatmen traveled to distant markets bringing back supplies and the latest news. Equally as useful as communication links were the many *voyageurs*, Indian agents, government officials, soldiers, or merchants who stopped in Vincennes on business or to rest and gather new supplies before continuing their journeys. According to a French visitor, Constantin Volney, the people of Vincennes spoke of going "to town"--meaning New Orleans--as if it were "a walk of half an hour though it is fifteen hundred miles down the river."¹ There was so much coming and going from Vincennes that government officials had difficulty calculating the number of actual residents.²

In spite of the advantageous conditions which attracted a steady stream of French settlers to Vincennes, during most of the town's history population growth was slow. The low population density of French inhabitants throughout the Great Lakes, Ohio Valley, and Illinois country contributed to friendly relations between the French and the Indians. Few in number, the French did not pose a threat to regional Indian tribes. The

¹Constantin Volney, "A View of the soil and climate of the United States of America" [1804], excerpts reprinted in Lindley, *Indiana*, 22.

²For difficulty estimating number of Vincennes population, see "Report of Lieutenant Fraser," May 1766, in Jacob Piatt Dunn, Documents Relating to the French Settlements on the Wabash, (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Company, 1894), 414.

French occupied the land with permission from the Indians, and the survival of Vincennes and the other remote French villages in the West depended on maintaining peaceful relations with those tribes. In 1742 a large tract of land surrounding Vincennes was given to the local French settlers by the Piankashaw Indians. The boundaries always were vague, but generally were conceded to extend about forty miles along the Wabash River and to measure about seventy-two miles across. This gift of land was intended for the common use of the French community. Newcomers had only to apply to the local commandant to receive a grant of land.¹

It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of people who resided in Vincennes during the eighteenth century. Census information is sparse, and precise contemporary calculations were impossible because of the large number of inhabitants who were absent at any given time hunting, trapping, trading with local Indians, or making a lengthy commercial trip to buy or sell goods. Military officials, Indian agents, and other visitors recorded estimates of the Vincennes population, but their figures were only guesses and often quite imprecise. Nonetheless, these estimates help to establish a general impression of the size of Vincennes and the rate of growth over the course of the eighteenth century. In 1757 there were seventy-five "habitants who till the soil and harvest the grain" in addition to the commandant and small number of troops stationed at Post St. Vincent. By 1765 that number had increased only slightly to 80 or 90 families.² A census taken in 1767 stated that there were 232 inhabitants (men, women and children) and 168 "strangers." The identification of

¹Lux, Donation Lands, 429-30.

²For 1757 population count see Bougainville memoir in Wisconsin Historical Society Collections, 8:167-95. For estimation of population in 1765 see Croghan's Journal, June 15, 1765, in IJHC, 11:227.

these strangers can not be made with certainty, but the comments of Father Gibault, an Illinois priest, provide valuable clues. In 1770 he commented that Vincennes had seen the recent arrival of many young men of all trades who were "establishing themselves" in the town.¹ These men were likely fleeing areas which had come under British rule at the end of the French and Indian War. It is impossible to know how many of these newcomers settled permanently in Vincennes, but at least for a few years during the late 1760's the town experienced a very rapid population growth compared to the years before or after.²

When British Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton took possession of Vincennes in 1778, he reported that there were 621 people living there, with 217 fit to bear arms. He added that an undetermined number of men were away hunting buffalo.³ In the years following the American Revolution the previously homogeneous French population of Vincennes was joined by American settlers. In 1787 the American Colonel Josiah Harmar estimated that there were 900 French and 400 Americans in Vincennes. The Americans who were counted in this census, however, did not significantly alter the French character of Vincennes. The reason for this is that Americans tended to settle on individual farms outside of town, while the town itself continued to be inhabited primarily by the French. By 1800 census takers no longer differentiated between French and Americans, but they did note that 714 persons lived in Vincennes while

¹Census of Vincennes 1767, IIIHC, 11:469. Gibault to Bishop Briand, Spring 1770, as reprinted in McCord, Travel Accounts, 25.

²For population increase in Vincennes see Jack Sosin, "French Settlements in British Policy for the North American Interior, 1760-1774," in The Canadian Historical Review 39 [1958], 201.

³James A. James (ed.), The George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781, IIIHC, Vols. 8 and 19, (Springfield, 1912), 8:182.

819 lived in the surrounding "neighborhood." The town-country division between French and Americans which persisted until after the turn of the century gives some indication of the identification of the 714 (predominantly French) town dwellers, and the 819 people (Americans) who settled outside of the town.¹

During the first decade of the nineteenth century the village of Vincennes nearly doubled its size, jumping from 714 in 1800 to 1390 by 1810. From 1800 to 1810 the number of Americans living in the surrounding county (Knox) had grown to 4,000.² As these figures reveal, the periods of greatest population growth occurred in the late-1760's as French settlers came to Vincennes to escape British rule and again when American settlers began to arrive during the 1780's.

Population growth in Vincennes

| | |
|------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1757 | 75 "men who till soil" |
| 1765 | 80-90 families |
| 1767 | 232 inhabitants, 168 strangers |
| 1778 | 621; 217 fit to bear arms |
| 1787 | 900 French and 400 Americans |
| 1800 | 714 in Vincennes; 819 in neighborhood |
| 1810 | 1390 in Vincennes; 4,000 in Knox County |

The vast majority of the people living in Vincennes were of French descent, but there were also a small number of black slaves and Indian

¹For 1787 census see Harmar Papers, Letter Book B, Letter lxxviii, William L. Clements Library (WLCL hereafter), Ann Arbor, MI. In 1787 a report to the Continental Congress on the number of male inhabitants living in the Illinois country listed 520 French and 103 American males at Post Vincennes. See "Enumeration of the Male Inhabitants, French and Americans of Post Vincennes and the Illinois," in IIHC, 5:449. For 1800 census see "Census Return of the Indiana Territory" in William Wesley Woollen et al. (eds.), Executive Journal of the Indiana Territory, 1800-1816 (Indianapolis, 1900), 83.

²"Census of Indiana Territory, 1810" in Woollen et al., Executive Journal, 85.

domestic servants called *panis*. Both the black slave and Indian servant populations were considerably less numerous in Vincennes than in the neighboring French villages of Kaskaskia, St. Genevieve, and Cahokia.¹ Many free Indians visited Vincennes to trade. The French developed particularly close relations with members of the Piankashaw tribe (a branch of the Miami nation) who lived in a nearby village. The close proximity of the Piankashaw bred familiarity between the red and white neighbors. Many of the French men, women, and children in Vincennes spoke the Piankashaw language, as well as the dialects of other nearby tribes. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, the only languages heard on the streets of Vincennes were French and various Indian dialects.²

The people of Vincennes were quick to take on various aspects of Indian culture such as vocabulary, clothing, diet, and canoe construction. The dominant cultural expressions in Vincennes, however, reflected the background of the predominantly French-Canadian population who lived there. The only European religion in town was Roman Catholic, and the only church in the vicinity until well into the nineteenth century was St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church. Though the villagers' behavior did not

¹The 1767 census for Vincennes listed ten negro slaves and seventeen "savage domestics" in a French population of four hundred. That same year there were 223 slaves in a French population of 600 at Kaskaskia. "Census of Illinois, 1767" in *IllHC*, 11:469. The Vincennes census in 1800 listed 8 slaves. Sixteen persons fell under the category "All other persons except Indians not taxed." This may refer to free blacks. In 1800 there was no mention of Indian domestics. "Census Returns for Indiana Territory in 1800," in Woollen et al., *Executive Journal*, 83. For discussion of black and red slavery in Illinois country, see Ekberg, *Colonial Ste. Genevieve*, 104-112, 197-239. For black slavery in Vincennes from earliest years see Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957), 1-30.

²Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America* [1817], (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 96. According to Birkbeck, various tribes of Indians were usually encamped around Vincennes and were continually riding in to the "stores and whiskey shops."

always reflect a firm attachment to many of the tenets of their faith, they clung to the parts of their religion which were most important to them. Most villagers believed in the importance of the sacraments, everyone celebrated the many Catholic holidays, and all relied on the intervention of the saints when life's challenges caused them to seek solace or divine assistance through prayer.¹

The people's diet, clothing, architecture, and lifestyle also reflected their French and Canadian cultural heritage. All of these, however, were modified to reflect local environmental factors such as climate, availability of resources, and exposure to Indian culture. Vincennes *habitants* mixed traditional European clothing styles and fabrics with those worn by their Indian neighbors. They chose clothing that they considered "stylish," but comfort and practicality were also important criteria when buying or making clothes. When villagers dressed in their finest clothes for special occasions, social distinctions were apparent in the clothing of the richer and poorer *habitants*. On most days, however, it was virtually impossible to discern a person's wealth or status from the clothes he or she wore, for most everyone dressed much the same.

Since colonial French women were forbidden by the French government to produce their own cloth, all fabric in the Illinois country was imported from Europe. In the many estate inventories which were taken in Illinois villages, there is not one mention of spinning wheels, distaffs, or looms. Nor is there mention of a single sheep prior to the arrival of Americans. While the wealthier Vincennes citizens imported

¹The best secondary accounts of Catholicism in Vincennes during the eighteenth century is Thomas McAvoy, The Catholic Church in Indiana, 1789-1834, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940) and Joseph Donnelly, Pierre Gibault, Missionary, 1737-1802, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1971).

some of their clothing ready-made, most garments were hand-sewn by local women who bought fabric at one of the local merchant shops. The colorful, high-quality fabric used for clothing in the Illinois country stood in stark contrast to the drab homespun linen and wool garments so often worn by frontier American families. While the fabrics worn by the Illinois French were varied, striped and floral prints were especially common. Blue was by far the most common color of garments in the Illinois country, either because of preference or availability.¹

Men's everyday clothing consisted of a cotton shirt, open at the neck, and rough-woven cotton trousers. When hunting or trapping in the woods, however, men often wore leather shirts and/or buckskin leggings which were more durable against the underbrush than cotton or wool clothes. By the last decade of the eighteenth century, overalls were common and knee-length breeches had given way to ankle-length trousers.²

¹For French importing all of their cloth, see Winstanley Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," in William and Mary Quarterly 47 (1990): 52-3; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 172. For French predilection to the color blue, see John Monnett, History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Mississippi, 2 vols. (New York, 1846), 1: 188-89; John Reynolds, Pioneer History of Illinois, (Belleville, 1852), 51. This fact is upheld by the many blue clothing items listed in the inventories of residents in Vincennes and other Illinois towns.

²The estate inventories of the people of Vincennes are the most reliable source of information concerning the clothing they wore. Many documents which list clothing items (estate inventories, estate sales, or merchants' invoices) are filed with the Knox County Miscellaneous Papers, M63, (hereafter KCMP) at the William Henry Smith Memorial Library at the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis (WSML). The Lasselle Papers in the Indiana State Library contain much information on clothing in Vincennes. The wide array of letters, deeds, legal documents, financial records and estate inventories in the Lasselle Papers are the most valuable collection of materials reflecting upon life in early Vincennes. The merchants' account books and bills made out to local residents tell much about the villagers' clothing. While only a few estate inventories are available for Vincennes during the French period, detailed inventories which include descriptions of French villagers' clothing still exist for other Illinois villages in the early eighteenth century. See Belting, Kaskaskia, 48-51; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 314-15; John Anthony Caruso, The Mississippi Valley Frontier: The Age of French Exploitation and Settlement, (New York: 1966), 362-64.

Since European-made shoes were rare and expensive, most men and women wore leather moccasins. Womens' moccasins were lighter than those worn by men, and were often ornamented with beads or brightly painted porcupine quills. In summer both sexes went barefoot. When it rained, the *habitants* donned locally-produced wooden *sabots* (shoes) to keep their feet clean and dry. Turban-like cotton handkerchiefs (almost always blue) were tied around the heads of both sexes to keep hair out of their faces. During periods of intense heat or hard labor, these brightly colored swatches of cloth also absorbed perspiration before it began trickling down *habitants'* necks and faces.¹

The casual daily garments of Vincennes women consisted of a cotton or linen chemise, a sleeveless bodice (vest), and skirts made of cotton, calico, or gingham. Aprons protected underlying skirts from the dirt and stains which were difficult to avoid while cooking, gardening, milking cows, and doing other work. Like their Canadian sisters, the women of Vincennes wore their skirts and petticoats shorter than was common in Europe during the eighteenth century. A Swedish botanist visiting Canada, Peter Kalm, was surprised at the short skirt lengths which "hardly reaches halfway down their leg, and sometimes not that far." French women in Canada and the Illinois country had good reasons for wearing short skirts. Shorter lengths were not only more comfortable during the hot Vincennes summers, but they also were safer than long skirts. Long skirts could easily catch fire during the many hours women spent cooking over open fires. A long skirt could easily be torn on sticks and brush when women walked to the forest to gather firewood, wild nuts and berries, or medicinal

¹ibid.

plants. Perhaps most importantly, short skirts were simply less heavy and cumbersome than long ones, thus providing more comfort and freedom of movement while performing daily chores.¹

On his first trip to the west, John Cleves Symmes, one of the judges of the Northwest Territory, wrote that he was quite favorably impressed with the appearance of the French women in Vincennes. He described their attire as "clean and sometimes rich" but commented that they appeared a bit "odd" to American observers because of their short petticoats and the handkerchiefs tied loosely around their heads. These "odd" clothing styles, however, did not affect Symmes' interest in the women of Vincennes. From his lodging quarters situated directly across from the local church, Symmes had "a good opportunity of seeing the handsomest women in the town when they go to confess their old sins, and contrive to commit new ones." He believed that if he could speak French he could "make some of them turn protestants, at least while I stay in town." Symmes probably gained hours of enjoyment from watching the short-skirted local women coming and going from church.²

Short skirts were comfortable during the hot summer months, but during the winter women added one or more ankle-length petticoats under their skirts for warmth. When cold weather came, both male and female *habitants* donned the warm woolen capote, a hooded knee-length coat which was belted at the waist with a sash. Some women wore long, woolen capes instead of capotes. Brightly colored, tasseled caps kept heads and ears protected from cold temperatures and winter winds.

¹Peter Kalm, Travels in North America, [English Version of 1770], 2 volumes (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1937), 2: 402-03, 417, 525-26.

²Beverly Bond, (ed.), The Correspondence of John Cleves Symmes, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926), 288-89.

On Sundays or important occasions the clothing worn by the people of Vincennes was little different from that worn in Boston, London, or Paris. The wealthiest male residents sported ruffled linen shirts, linen breeches, and dress coats trimmed with gold braid. The finest ladies in Vincennes wore dresses of silk taffeta decorated with ribbons or fur. Ladies' hats were wreathed with bright-colored ribbons or artificial flowers. Both men and women who could afford them wore silk stockings and shoes which were sometimes embroidered or adorned with silver buckles. While most residents could not afford such luxuries, most could afford a respectable coat or dress for special occasions. While both sexes enjoyed opportunities to deck themselves in their finery, the women particularly "caught up the fashions from New Orleans and Paris, and with a singular avidity adopted them to the full extent of their means and talents. . . both sexes were always provided with something tasty and neat for the church and ball room."¹

The attention to both style and practicality which marked the villagers' choice in clothing was also evident in the way they built their homes. Visitors were often impressed by the whitewashed houses, picket fences, and beautiful gardens which were quite common in Vincennes. The layout of the town lots which surrounded the homes, however, reflected practical needs more than stylish considerations. The architecture of houses in the Illinois country was quite distinct, blending architectural elements from eastern Canada, Lower Louisiana, northern France, and the West Indies. The homes were made by imbedding logs, sometimes hewn flat on two or four sides, vertically into the ground and filling spaces

¹Merchant Inventories and Estate Inventories in KCMP; Belting, Kaskaskia, 51; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 315. Quote is from Reynolds, Pioneer History, 51-2.

between logs with a mixture of mud mixed with straw, sticks, and/or prairie grass. The walls of the homes were thus quite airtight. This type of construction was known as "poteaux en terre" or "posts in the earth." Roofs were thatched or covered with strips of bark, and the chimneys were constructed of wood and mortar. A shortage of stones in the area made both stone chimneys and stone homes rare and expensive.¹

The houses were single-story rectangular buildings, though they varied in size. Many had galleries, (wide porches) running across the front and backs of the homes, and some had them running along all four sides. When the weather was good, these galleries provided additional living space. Such space was needed since the homes were generally only one, two, or three rooms placed end to end. The *galerie* roofs also protected the main part of the house from the elements. Many of the homes in Vincennes were whitewashed with a lime made by burning ground mussel shells from the nearby Wabash River. After a long trip through the wilderness, travelers' spirits were uplifted to see the Vincennes houses "whose cheerful white relieves the eye, after the tedious dusk and green of the woods."²

Most of the furniture in Vincennes homes was home-made or built by local artisans. The chief piece of furniture in every household was the *grand bois de lit* or large wooden bed. The bed was usually made of rope network on which were placed feather mattresses. Under the larger bed

¹Joseph Henry Vanderburgh Some, Old Vincennes: The History of a Famous Old Town and its Glorious Past, (New York: Graphic Books, 1962), 38; Belting, Kaskaskia, 31; Briggs, "Le Pays," 38-40; Caruso, Mississippi Valley, 365-66; John Francis McDermott, Old Cahokia: A Narrative and Documents Illustrating the First Century of Its History, (St. Louis, 1949), 45-6; "Heckewelder's Journey" in McCord, Travel Accounts, 34-38.

²ibid. Quote is from Constantin Volney in Lindley, Indiana, 19.

was a trundle bed for children. Most families sat down to meals at simple wooden tables and roughly-hewn benches. Apart from the feather beds, wooden tables and benches, and perhaps a chair or chest, other furnishings were sparse in most Illinois French homes. The affluent, however owned armoires, cabinets, and a *fauteuil*, or armchair. They also hung curtains on their windows and enjoyed the comfort and luxury of many other household items such as candleholders, proper dishes, silverware, and linen sheets. Nearly every home, rich or poor, had at least two or three mirrors which could be purchased at local shops in a variety of shapes, sizes, and styles. Many households also were ornamented with some small religious artifacts, such as small framed paintings or statues.¹

The houses themselves sat on rather large town lots. The standard plot of land for each family domicile in Vincennes was large, measuring 150 feet square or "twenty-five toises by twenty-five toises" in the words of the inhabitants. Large lots were necessary to allow space for a vegetable garden, fruit trees, the hen house, the pig pen, and the horse and cow stable. Some lots also included a bake oven, a detached kitchen, or perhaps a well. These large residential compounds were often enclosed by high picket fences.²

The fine orchards and gardens which so often impressed visitors contributed to the diverse and healthy diet of the Vincennes *habitants*. Women used the wide assortment of fruits and vegetables they grew to create tasty and healthful salads, stews, fruit preserves, pies, and other

¹Charles Van Ravenswaay, "Creole Arts and Crafts of Upper Louisiana," Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society, 12 [1956]: 213-48; Briggs, "Le Pays," 52-3; Caruso, Mississippi Valley, 368.

²Somes, Vincennes, 38; Volney in Lindley, Indiana, 19; Ronald Baker, French Folklife in Old Vincennes, (Terre Haute, Indiana: Indiana Council of Teachers of English, 1989), 15.

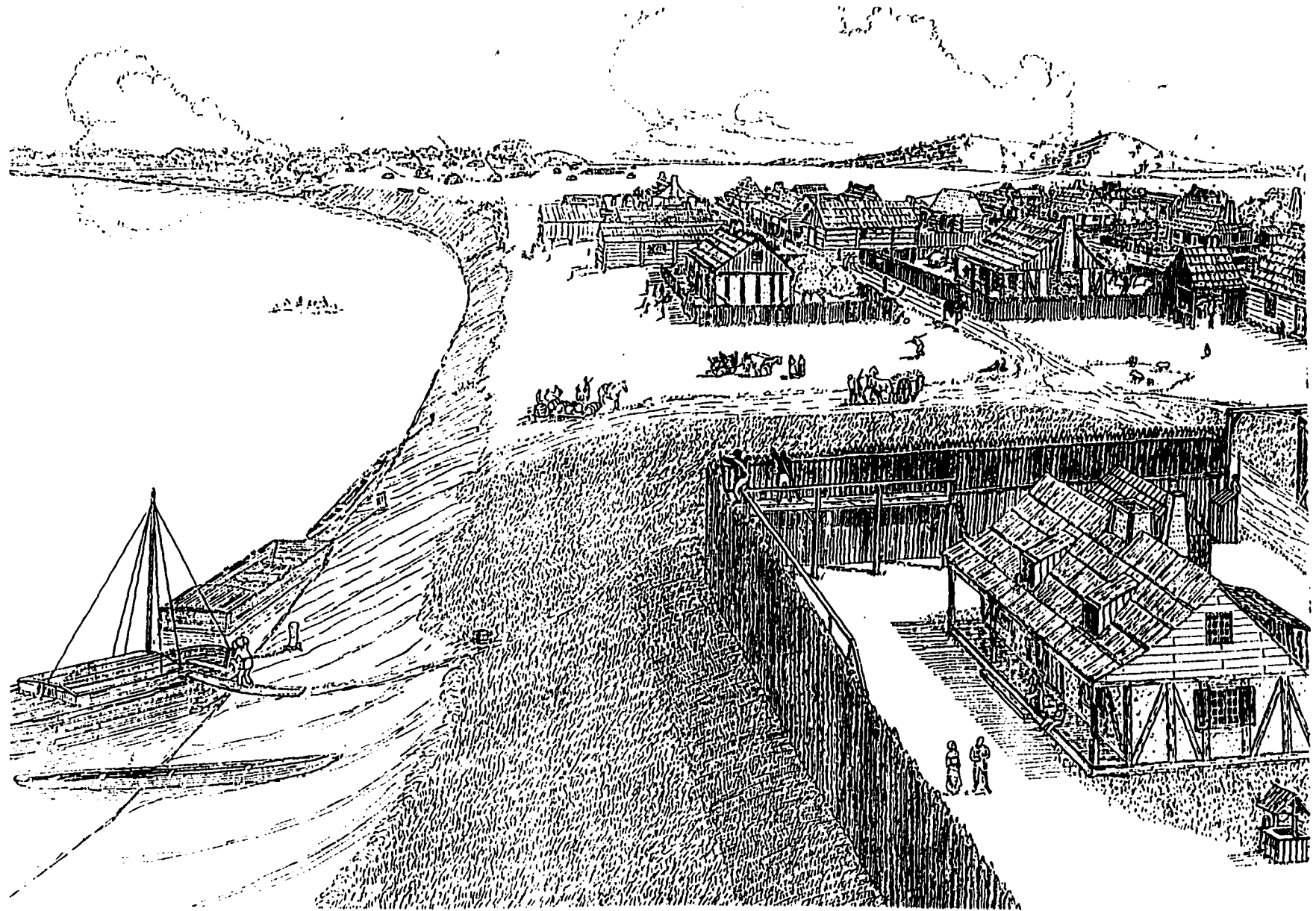
delicacies. Home produce was particularly important during years when the grain harvest was destroyed by drought or occasional flooding of the Wabash River. Home-grown fruits and vegetables were a welcome supplement to the wheat bread and other grain products which were mainstays of every *habitant's* diet. Equally important, however, were the fish, wild game, herbs, maple sugar, nuts and berries which the *habitants* harvested from nearby forests, rivers, and prairies.¹

The town lots of the wealthier citizens of Vincennes were not much different than small rural estates. When residents stepped outside their front doors, they experienced the sights, sounds, and smells associated with rural living. They awakened to the sounds of roosters and then spent the day listening to pigs squealing, hens clucking, and numerous dogs barking. The delicious aromas of baking bread and flowering fruit trees competed (rather unsuccessfully most of the time) with the foul smells of animal urine and manure.² In spite of the rural-like residential surroundings, however, the people of Vincennes enjoyed all the advantages of town life.

One of the most important advantages for the French was their opportunity to interact with each other for business or pleasure. Vincennes habitants never felt the intense loneliness experienced by so many American frontier settlers. Social interaction was vital to the French

¹For descriptions of gardens in Vincennes see John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America, (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, Inc.), 264; Hutchins, "A Topographical Description" in Lindley, Indiana, 7-8; Samuel Brown, "The Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory" [1817] as reprinted in Lindley, Indiana, 159. For gardens elsewhere in Illinois country, see Belting, Kaskaskia, 46-7; Caruso, Mississippi Valley, 368.

²Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 285.



This sketch of early Vincennes shows the general layout of the town, the architecture of the French homes built in the *poteaux en terre* style, the location of the fort near the river in the center of town (lower right corner), the Indian village situated just outside of the village (upper left corner), and the prehistoric Indian mounds (upper right corner). Also notice the French style of boats on the river, the *pirogue* (dugout canoe) and larger *bateaux*. Sketch by Richard Day. Property of National Parks Services.

habitants, and in the course of their daily lives they had plenty of opportunities to converse and enjoy the company of their neighbors.¹

The yards and streets of the townspeople provided the setting for much social intercourse, but there were specific places in town which served as recognized gathering places. The waterfront was one such area, and so were merchants' shops, taverns, and the parish church. St. Xavier Catholic Church, located in the center of town, was frequented often for social and political purposes as well as for religious services, marriages, and baptisms. One of the larger physical structures in town, the church was also the spot where people gathered to vote on various propositions, to engage in public sales of land or other property, to take an oath of loyalty to the British or Americans during the Revolutionary War, and later to hear the laws of the Northwest Territory read aloud on the steps of the church.²

For most of the early part of Vincennes' history, the local church was a crudely built, small building which was often in disrepair. It was replaced by a larger and more substantial structure in 1785. The townspeople were motivated to build a respectable church in hopes of persuading the resident priest, Father Pierre Gibault, to continue serving at Vincennes. With a shortage of priests in the Illinois country, the people of the neighboring village of Cahokia were beseeching Father Gibault to settle in their community. Before the new church was completed, one of the

¹Ekberg, "Agriculture, *Mentalités*, and Violence."

²For people of Vincennes gathering at the local church to take an oath of allegiance to Americans, then to the British, and again to the Americans, see Donnelly, *Gibault*, 73-4. For Hamilton administering oath in church see "Letter of Lieutenant Governor Hamilton to General Haldimand," Dec. 18, 1778 in Kathrine Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure in the Illinois and Selected Documents*, (New Orleans: Polyanthos Press, 1981), 334.

town's most prominent citizens, François Bosseron, donated a bell for its steeple and paid the cost of transporting it from Philadelphia. On December 3, 1785, Father Gibault blessed the bell and recorded its "baptism," naming it Marie Françoise in honor of one of Bosseron's daughters. Gibault remained in Vincennes until 1789 when he left for Cahokia.¹

In addition to the St. Xavier Church, the local shops and taverns were common places to meet for business and pleasure. Many of these were located on the streets nearest to the river. In the merchants' shops the villagers could market their surplus agricultural goods, sell their peltry, and buy needed supplies.² Though the townspeople were adept at making many of their own tools, household items and other necessities, they looked to the local merchants' shelves for cloth, imported liquor, coffee and refined sugar, and manufactured goods. These items came principally from New Orleans in the early decades of settlement, but by the 1780's American merchants brought increasing amounts of goods to the western country via the Ohio River. New Orleans continued to be the main export outlet until canals joined the midwest to the east in the 1830's.³

The estate inventory of one man, a modest trader named Jean Toulon, reveals the types of items which stocked the stores in Vincennes in

¹Dec. 3, 1785 in VPR, 43; McAvoy, Catholic Church, 58; Donnelly, Gibault, 117, 124-26. In 1819 David Thomas described the new church as being sixty-six feet in length, about twenty-two feet wide, and nine feet from the ground. Lindley, Indiana, 105.

²Somes, Vincennes, 46.

³Writing in 1818, William Darby stated that "With but little exception, Natchez and New Orleans are the outlets of the surplus produce of Indiana." He also stated that while many imports came from New Orleans, Indiana residents also imported considerable quantities of dry goods, hardware, paper, and books from Pittsburgh. William Darby, "The Emigrant's Guide to the western and southwestern states and territories," [1818] in Lindley, Indiana, 192.

1795. Kitchen items listed in Toulon's estate inventory included pewter plates, Queensware dishes and a Queensware tea pot, a dutch oven, coffee pots, copper kettles, pewter spoons, forks, and knives, and wine glasses. Hunting supplies included powder horns, gun powder, powder horn and pouch, a brass pistol, beaver traps, knives, augurs. Farm and garden work created a demand for the kind of tools Toulon sold such as shovels, scythes, sickles, hand saws and hammers. Ready-to-wear clothing items such as moccasins, short coats and frocks, overalls, and capotes were displayed on the shelves. Merchandise targeted to Indian customers included silver Indian ear bobs, a silver gorget, Indian plated wrist bands, silver broaches, silver arm bands, knives, and blankets. Personal items included smoking pipes, razors, looking glasses, and various types of fabric such as chintz, linen, and "Marseilles quilting." No store inventory would be complete without the various types of liquor which were in high demand including wine, rum, taffia, and sometimes more expensive imported liqueurs. With the coming of Americans, the sale of whiskey, or "wouisky" increased considerably.¹

The variety of items listed in Talon's inventory was available in the Illinois country from the earliest days of settlement. Though early records for Vincennes are not available, estate inventories from Kaskaskia reveal that as early as the 1720's French *habitants* imported such necessary and luxury items as hunting supplies, cooking utensils, dishes, silver goblets, paper, mirrors, tools, fabrics, and expensive European-made garments.²

¹See estate of merchant John Toulon dated November 1, 1795 in KCMP. Many other estate inventories from Vincennes during the late eighteenth century are included in this collection. For other detailed inventories of the types of goods owned by the Illinois French in the early decades of French settlement (beginning in 1720's), see Belting, *Kaskaskia*, 43-51.

²Belting, *Kaskaskia*, 43-51.

A variety of merchandise was available in the shops of Vincennes, but customers rarely paid for goods with hard currency. Payment generally was made with beaver, tobacco, flour, domestic meats, doe skins, or other commodities since specie was rare in the Illinois country. For example, on January 27, 1776 Jean Marie Legras bought a section of land for 200 francs in peltry and 2,000 livres in flour.¹ During the French period prices were calculated in livres and piastres, and this practice continued until the first decade of the nineteenth century when financial transactions increasingly were calculated in dollars. An example of the unusual currency situation which operated in Vincennes is a loan note of 1802 where Daniel Rizley promised to repay Antoine Marshali [Marchal] "vingt trois piastres quatre vingt six cents bonne et valable monoye des Etats Unis." The language is French, the loan is calculated in Spanish piastres, but also added is the descriptive phrase "good and valid money of the United States."²

Like the merchants' shops and the parish church, the local taverns provided public space where villagers could meet for business or pleasure. Though villagers frequented taverns to drink and socialize, the village taverns were also used in other ways. Taverns served as inns where travelers found lodging and food for themselves and their horses. Court hearings, auctions, and other business transactions were conducted in the taverns or on the steps outside. On April 5, 1806 a crowd congregated

¹Land deed dated January 27, 1776, Lasselle Papers.

²Loan note from Daniel Rizley to Antoine Marshall, November 27, 1802 in Lasselle Papers. See Lasselle Papers for a wide variety of financial documents (loan notes, land sales, account books, etc.) spanning the period under consideration here. For additional evidence of peltry, domestic meats, wheat and corn being used for currency in early 1800's, see ad for Wm Bullit & C. Smith, September 25, 1804, Indiana Gazette, Indiana State Library.

around the front door of Mr. Joseph Becker's tavern to peruse various effects of the late Pascal Gaudreau which were to be sold that day. As the administrator of the Gaudreau estate, Hyacinthe Lasselle (the prominent local merchant) presided over the sale of goods. Gaudreau was not a wealthy man, and aside from some tools and clothing items, the most expensive item sold that day was \$37.50 worth of cut timber for a house.¹

In the absence of banks, a good deal of borrowing and lending took place in the village taverns from wealthy villagers who had enough money to lend. Several of the wealthiest individuals in Vincennes owned taverns, and often a merchant shop as well. The surest evidence of the great quantity of large and small loans which were made by the town elite are the hundreds of loan notes which are preserved in the Lasselle Papers at the Indiana State Library. Loan notes were handwritten on loose scraps of paper and simply stated that the borrower promised to repay the lender the amount borrowed (in livres or piastres well into the American period) by a certain date. Often the repayment date was quite vague such as "next autumn." Some of the leading lenders near the end of the eighteenth century were Antoine Marechal, François Bosseron, Hyacinthe Lasselle, and Ambroise Dagenet.²

While taverns certainly were important as centers for lodging and business transactions, their main function was to provide a meeting place where people could drink, catch up on local news, relax among friends, or play cards or billiards. Every respectable tavern housed a billiard table for the amusement of local patrons. The popularity of billiards in early

¹Document dated April 5, 1806 in KCMP.

²The example I mention is a loan note from Pierre Cartier to repay Hyacinthe Lasselle "75 livres, 10 sols payable l'automne prochaine" dated May 12, 1800, Lasselle Papers.

Vincennes is revealed in the account books of one of the town's leading merchants and tavern owners, Hyacinthe Lasselle where a good portion of the local male population was charged for "parties [games] de billiards" as well as considerable consumption of "wouiskey," "brindy," or "ponche." When patrons ran out of money, they often borrowed money from the tavern owner, and their debts were duly recorded in the account books. Sometimes a running tab was kept for weeks or even months before a patron finally paid the account.¹

William Henry Harrison, first governor of the Indiana Territory, enjoyed playing billiards as much as the local French residents. During the spring of 1809 he was charged for twenty-five games at the tavern of Christian Graeter. The local newspaper editor, Elihu Stout, must have had considerably more free time than Harrison, however, since he completed over three hundred games during the same period. The cost of a game was 8 1/3 cents and during most of the year the tables were heavily used.²

The local taverns and the parish church were important sites for social interaction, but most public life in early Vincennes was experienced on the streets in the open air. In today's world where people spend nearly all of their work hours and most of their free time indoors, it is difficult to imagine the predominantly out-of-doors existence which marked life in the eighteenth century. Men and women gossiped and conducted

¹Account book of Hyacinthe Lasselle for 1809 in Lasselle Papers. In 1778 the British Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton complained of the corrupting influence of the billiard tables upon the people of Vincennes. Hamilton to Haldimand, December 30, 1778 in the Haldimand Papers as quoted in John Barnhart and Dorothy Riker, Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1971), 202.

²Frederick and Christian Graeter were prosperous fur traders who came to Vincennes from Alsace-Lorraine prior to 1800. Prices for meals, lodging, liquor, and billiard games are recorded in the Graeter Account Books which are among the documents in the Graeter Collection at the Indiana Historical Society Library, WSMU.

business on front porches, along the town streets, and at the waterfront. Farming, hunting and trading took men to fields, forests, and rivers. Women spent a good deal of time working out-of-doors at gardening, laundry, tending to animals, gathering wild fruit and nuts, and other tasks. In addition to work, much recreation was also enjoyed out-of-doors.

Mere survival demanded that the French villagers work hard at a variety of tasks, but the people of Vincennes reserved plenty of time for recreation, relaxing, and doing those things which brought them pleasure. Unlike some Yankee farmers who worked unceasingly to maximize crop yields, increase profits, and save for the future, the Illinois French put a high priority on enjoying life in the present.¹ Inveterate sportsmen, they took great pleasure in hunting the country's abundant game, riding and racing their fine horses, and engaging in athletic contests which tested strength, speed, coordination, and endurance. The contests were festive occasions when large crowds turned out to cheer for their favorite competitors. Betting on the winner made the events even more exciting. Pious eyebrows were raised whenever the local priest, Father Gibault, stepped forward to match his strength or speed against the village youth. The horse races were held on the streets of the town or the village commons, and during the short period when the Wabash froze in the winter, the races were moved onto the ice. Rooster fights were also a favored pastime. Spectators roared with laughter when roosters pecked the arms of their owners hard enough to draw blood before the fights ever

¹Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 331; Belting, Kaskaskia, 68.

started. In colonial Vincennes, taking time for relaxation and amusement was not considered a frivolous luxury; it was a necessity.¹

Everyday forms of amusement provided relief from the hard work and monotony of daily life. Villagers also looked forward to special occasions such as weddings and holidays. They never had long to wait for the next holiday, as a good many religious holidays were interspersed throughout the year. Among these were Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, Assumption, All Saint's Day, Advent, and Christmas. The religious nature of holidays for the Roman Catholics in Vincennes is demonstrated by the fact that people celebrated their saint's day rather than their own birthday.²

Perhaps more than any other type of entertainment, the townspeople enjoyed the dances or *balls* where *habitants* of all ages turned out to socialize, listen to music, and kick up their heels. Outsiders were amazed both at the frequency of nocturnal dances and at the stamina of both men and women who danced cotillions, reels, and the minuet late into the night--sometimes until ten or twelve o'clock the next day. Commenting on the similar passion for dancing among French residents in the nearby village of St. Genevieve, Christian Schultz wrote "one ball follows another so close in succession, that I have often wondered how the ladies were

¹Baker, 27. For Gibault taking part in athletic contests (as well as card playing, drinking, and "celebrating") see Donnelly, Gibault, 60-61. For recreation and entertainment in nearby Ste. Genevieve, see Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 319-330.

²For a good description of religious holidays in the Illinois country see Belting, Kaskaskia, 68-70. See also Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 318-23; Baker, French Folklife, 21-29.

enabled to support themselves under this violent exercise, which is here [St. Genevieve] carried to extremes."¹

Catholic priests who resided in Vincennes were continually frustrated by their failed attempts to persuade the villagers to curtail the frequency of their dancing and merrymaking. Particularly irksome to the priests was the fact that dances often occurred the nights before Sunday mass and religious holidays. After dancing through much of the night, the villagers were too exhausted for the "proper observance" of the holy days. Though they generally respected the authority of the priests, the Vincennes townspeople refused to curtail their nocturnal gatherings and refused to even listen to the priests' lectures condemning their favorite sport and chief amusement. Priests tread on dangerous ground when they spoke out against the beloved public dances.²

When the Vincennes *habitants* collectively agreed on any issue -- such as the commitment to holding public dances--there was little chance that an outside authority could compel them to follow an unpopular course of action. Situated far from centers of political power, the people of Vincennes enjoyed a considerable amount of independence prior to the American Revolution. The desire to live free from the constraints of government and church officials in Canada was a key reason French-Canadians had settled in the Illinois country in the first place. Natalia

¹Christian Schultz, Travels on an Inland Voyage . . . performed in the years 1807 and 1808, 2 volumes, (New York, 1810), 1:60; Henry Brackenridge, Recollections of Persons and Places in the West (Philadelphia, 1834), 29; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 329-30.

²Gibault to the Bishop of Quebec, June 6, 1786 IIIHC, 5:543; Rivet to Carroll, Feb. 10, 1798 as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 95. See also McAvoy, 52, 88-9; Reynolds, Pioneer History, 71-2.

Belting aptly described the independence and self-sufficiency of the Illinois French when she wrote,

In the wilderness, they acknowledged no lord; in the village they made their own law. When they disobeyed the commandant, which was frequently, threats of imprisonment hardly worried them, escape was so simple a matter. They were scarcely more concerned that the priests might deny them the sacraments.¹

The only figures of authority in Vincennes were the commandant, a priest (though the town was often without one), and the town's elite comprising wealthy men who were both merchants and fur traders. Most important village decisions were settled at town meetings where a representative from every household voted. The locally-constituted elite undoubtedly exercised considerable influence over the attitudes of the rest of the townspeople. During the French period, the local commandant was the only French-appointed government official living in Vincennes except for a few lesser military officers. By mid-century, most of the military commissions at Post Vincennes were held by local residents.

Winstanley Briggs, in his article "Le Pays des Illinois," suggests that the type of self-regulating town government which operated in the Illinois country was quite similar to local government in early New England towns. Both the French and the English settlers had similar ideas about what the early modern village *ought* to be, and thus the societies they created shared many features. The similarities included "no feudal lord, fee-simple land, governance in a village meeting by an effectively unanimous vote, and local control of the village church."²

¹Belting, *Kaskaskia*, 41.

²Briggs, "Le Pays," 30-31.

During the French period, the *habitants* generally valued the leadership provided by the local military commandant. The presence of a small number of French soldiers and a larger local militia backed up the commandant's authority as he fulfilled his responsibilities as chief lawmaker, administrator, and distributor of justice. The long tenure of Louis St. Ange de Bellerive (commonly called St. Ange), who served as the commandant at Post Vincennes from 1736 to 1764, contributed to a significant degree of continuity in local government. There is nothing in the records to indicate friction between St. Ange and the people of Vincennes.

Though the villagers frequently turned to the commandant or local priest to settle disputes, the town's prominent citizens also played a key role in maintaining peace and order in the village. When St. Ange prepared to leave Vincennes in 1764, he advised his successor, Droit de Richardville, to continue to rely upon the town elite to mediate local disagreements. In cases where citizens brought complaints to Richardville, St. Ange instructed him to "call an assembly of the more notable of the citizens of the place, where the matter shall be decided by a plurality of votes."¹ These instructions indicate that even though the commandant theoretically held much power, he found it advantageous to let the townspeople govern themselves whenever possible. The voting practice which required that votes be decided according to a plurality indicates that the Vincennes French saw the value in reaching a broad consensus (at least among the elite) before attempting to enforce any decision.

¹"Farewell Address of St. Ange" in Dunn, (ed.), Documents, 408.

Self-government was the *only* government in Vincennes after the village passed into British hands in 1763 at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. Local people saw no British troops and only one British officer who stayed a few months.¹ Therefore, the local people chose their own commandant and other minor officials. Even after Vincennes and the other Illinois villages came under American rule in 1783, it was nearly twenty years before United States officials effectively instituted American law in the west. In the absence of British or American government officials, the people of Vincennes continued to operate according to French laws and local customs and to rely upon themselves for the preservation of order.²

Not knowing when the changing fortunes of empire would transfer "ownership" of Vincennes from one government to another, the local traders and *habitants* took a practical approach to external imperial politics. A natural loyalty to France persisted throughout most of the eighteenth century, but the Vincennes villagers readily swore allegiance to both the British and American governments in order to survive and prosper. After the French and Indian War, villagers were happy to learn that being transferred from one imperial power to another did not necessarily cause major changes in daily life. Still there was always uncertainty about the ways international developments might affect the fur trade, Indian relations, access to major rivers, new forms of government. Having little influence over imperial decisions, the people of Vincennes fashioned a lifestyle at the local level which provided a certain amount of security against changes in their political situation. One of the

¹Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 178-79 and 188-89.

²*Ibid.*, 148-77.

key features of this lifestyle was the preservation of friendly relations with regional Indian tribes.

Vincennes residents had little to fear from local Indians as they went about their daily routines in the village. When traveling to other destinations in small groups the French had to be on their guard against Indians from distant tribes who might plunder their goods or even kill them. While in Vincennes, however, the people felt safe. Nowhere in the many primary and secondary sources on the history of colonial Vincennes is there mention of a single Indian attack on the village. Not until American settlers provoked the anger of western Indians in the 1780's did the French *habitants* live with constant fear of Indian attacks.

Good relations between the people of Vincennes and their Indian neighbors was a product of frequent face-to-face interaction which bred familiarity, understanding, and mutual respect. In addition, the French needed the friendship of local tribes for their own physical security. The economic well-being of both groups depended on the continuation of the fur trade, which in turn depended on mutual trust, cooperation, and goodwill.¹

The friendly ties between the Illinois French and their Indian neighbors were strengthened by marriages between French traders and Indian women. Though quite common during the first half of the eighteenth century, the frequency of mixed marriages declined throughout

¹For congenial relations between French and Indians see Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For friendly interaction between Vincennes French and local Indians see Birkbeck, 96. For instances of cooperation between the two groups in Vincennes, see James, (ed.), The George Clark Papers, 1781-84, IIIHC, 19: 100-101, 117-118; "Memorial of the Inhabitants of Vincennes to the French Minister", Aug. 22, 1780 in James, ed., Clark Papers, 1771-1781, IIIHC, 8:445.

the century when there were more white and métis (offspring of white and Indian) women available for matrimony.¹

The Vincennes Parish Records provide documentation of several French-Indian marriages. For example, in 1756 an entry marks the burial of "Marie of the nation of the Pianquichias, legitimate spouse of Toussaint Laframboise." Such marriages might be expected in the early days of settlement when white women were small in numbers, but some French men continued to marry Indian women well into the nineteenth century. In 1814 Priest D. Olivier baptised Joseph, son of Angelique a "savage woman" and Honoré Genier. Prior to the baptism, Angelique and Grenier were living together but were not officially married. When the couple appeared in front of the priest at church for the baptism of their child, Grenier declared on the spot that "he wished to marry her [Angélique] in the face of the Church" and three days later he did. The godparents for the couple's child were respected, influential members of the community, Joseph Barron (Indian agent) and his wife, Josette Gamelin. Prior to his marriage to Josette, Joseph Barron had himself been married to an Indian woman named Cécile.²

While some French/Indian unions were sealed with the priests' blessings, other couples lived as husband and wife without legitimizing their unions. The 1809 burial record of a Potawatomi Indian woman named Angelique states that she had been "living for several years with

¹Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 114. For the advantages and disadvantages of mixed marriages for both Indian women and French traders, see Walter O'Meara, Daughters of the Country: The Women of the Fur Traders and Mountain Men. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1968), 175-95. See also Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown, eds., The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America. (University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

²May 15 and 18, 1814 in VPR. For Barron's marriage to Cécile, see Somes, Vincennes, 156.

Francois Hamelin." The priest acknowledged that she had been baptized, but did not mention the legitimate marriage of the two.¹

An unusual situation arose in 1784 when Antoine Gamelin, a member of one of the town's wealthiest and most prestigious families, learned that he had fathered the child of a local Indian woman. He did not choose to marry her, but his attachment to her and the child was such that he publicly recognized the child as his. The priest's shock that Gamelin would claim the child was evident in the baptismal record that states that the child, Rosalie Louise, was "born of a savage woman, and illegitimate, and yet Sieur Antoine Gamelin declares she belongs to him."² Like the other Indian children born in Vincennes, Rosalie Louise was probably raised as part of the French community in which she lived.

Intermarriages were only one of the factors which promoted familiarity, understanding and good relations between the French and Indians in Vincennes. French traders sometimes lived in Indian villages, and many others traded there often. Indians came to Vincennes to sell peltries and buy supplies, have a child baptized, or visit female relatives who lived there as wives or domestic slaves. They also were frequent customers at the "whiskey shops."³ Face-to-face daily interactions with Indians was a prominent characteristic of life in Vincennes. Peaceful relations with local tribes enabled the Vincennes villagers to plow their fields, work in their shops and taverns, celebrate holidays, and dance through the night without fear of being disrupted or harmed by angry Indians.

¹Feb. 23, 1809 in VPR.

²July 7, 1784 in VPR.

³Morris Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey, 94.

In addition to the peaceful social and economic exchanges with local Indians which were so prominent a feature of daily life, the sociability of the French is one of the most defining aspects of life in colonial Vincennes. Unlike American frontiersmen and their families who usually staked out their homesteads far from neighbors or towns, the French always settled in compact nuclear villages. While American frontier settlers coped as best they could with loneliness, isolation, and a relatively monotonous existence, the Vincennes *habitants* thrived on social gatherings and social interdependence. Like their French counterparts in Canada and Louisiana, the inhabitants of the Illinois villages felt sorry for the "odd" or "remote" neighbor who "lived in the woods like a bear, a league from any house, with nobody to talk to."¹

Though hardly comparable to social opportunities in large urban cities, the social life of Vincennes was as vibrant as the people who lived there. The townspeople derived great pleasure from the simple forms of amusement available to them. They gossiped and conducted business in their yards, on the streets, and in local shops and taverns. Their competitive nature found expression at the billiard table, in card games, athletic contests, and horse racing. Equally enjoyable were the moments when people drifted together in small groups to chat, trade stories and songs, and plan for the future or reminisce about the past.

It is wrong to think that the people of Vincennes spent all of their time dancing, celebrating, and amusing themselves. The townspeople experienced their share of hardships, worries and sadness: harvests failed,

¹Carl Ekberg, "Agriculture, Mentalités, and Violence on the Illinois Frontier," *Illinois Historical Journal* 88 [1995], 102, Caruso, *Mississippi Valley*, 361. Quote from C.F. Volney, *View of the Soil and climate of the United States of America*, Philadelphia, 1804, 345.

kinfolk died, summer mosquitos brought discomfort and disease, exports in transit were lost to white or Indian thieves, and the Wabash did occasionally overflow its banks. In spite of hardships and challenges, however, the relaxed lifestyle and the *joie de vivre* of the Vincennes *habitants* was an enduring characteristic of this French frontier community.

When travelers from England's Atlantic seabord colonies (or later American states) visited Vincennes, they found much that was unfamiliar to them. The Catholic religion of the Vincennes villagers was an obvious characteristic which set them apart from the vast majority of Anglo-American settlers. The interactions between the French and neighboring Indians seemed particularly strange to outsiders. The friendly mingling between the French and the local Indians, a local French dialect which contained many Indian words and phrases, and the frequent marriages between French traders and Indian women were not a part of the Anglo-Indian experience in the eighteenth century. English or American travelers also were struck by differences in architecture, food preparation, clothing styles, and an entire female population who did not know how to weave or spin. Visitors rarely failed to comment on the distinct character of the French in Vincennes and the other Illinois settlements. Though sometimes described as lazy and frivolous, the French were almost universally commended for their friendliness and their cheerfulness. The distinct character of life in Vincennes was also apparent in the work lives of the people who lived there.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING A LIVING

Unlike Anglo-American residents in eastern eighteenth-century cities, the majority of Vincennes *habitants* spent more time hunting, gathering, fishing, and trading in furs than they did working in their fields. The Frenchman Constantin Volney described some important features of the Vincennes economy during the French and British periods when he wrote:

Unmolested and sequestered in the heart of the wilderness, fifty leagues from the nearest post on the Mississippi, without taxes, and in friendship with the Indians, they [the people of Vincennes] passed their lives in hunting, fishing, trading in furs, and raising a few esculents and a little corn for their families.¹

Volney's description is simplistic and a bit romantic, but his observations contain much truth. Vincennes residents did not pay taxes, and the fur trade and other economic transactions were generally "unmolested" by the efforts of colonial governments to regulate or control economic activity. What is missing from Volney's account is an appreciation of the habitants' complex patchwork of activities which produced the greatest possible level of comfort and security on the remote Illinois frontier.²

¹Volney in Lindley, *Indiana*, 22.

²For people of Vincennes being primarily hunters and fur traders see Victor Collot, "A Journey," in *Transactions*, 270.

Making a living in the Illinois country meant working at a wide variety of tasks. Rather than relying strictly on market agriculture or the fur trade, most *habitants* combined hunting, herding, fishing, and working in the fur trade with varying degrees of commitment to the production of agricultural export crops. Many villagers also worked as skilled craftsmen. Vincennes *habitants* divided their time between commercial farming, small-scale trading, and a variety of subsistence activities. Though only a few of the town's wealthiest citizens enjoyed such luxuries as European-made clothing, fine linens, or imported dishes, most of the Vincennes population enjoyed a comfortable physical existence.¹

Though the commercial exportation of furs and agricultural goods to Montreal or New Orleans was vital to the local economy, equally important was the exchange of goods within the Illinois country. In addition to raising livestock and agricultural crops, the people of the Illinois country produced tobacco, lead, salt, wine and beer, maple sugar, rawhide and tanned leather, poultry and livestock, furniture, canoes, and other goods--for their own subsistence and to trade with each other. Participation in the network of economic exchanges which operated in the Illinois country was hardly limited to the French. Indians and black slaves participated in the

¹For a detailed description of the workings of a frontier exchange economy, see Daniel Usner, Jr., Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Although the experiences of the peoples living in Upper and Lower Louisiana differed in some important ways, the Illinois country had its own vibrant regional economy which shares many similarities to the frontier exchange economy which Usner describes. Many documents revealing the work activities of Vincennes residents are located in the Lassel Papers. Such documents include bills and receipts pertaining to carpentry work, masonry work, doctors' visits, leather tanning, etc. Many letters and merchants' account books document fur trading activities. A letter from the people of Vincennes to British General Gage in 1772 refers to the settlers' mixed economic activities including hunting, raising domestic animals for market, and cultivating lands. See "French Inhabitants to General Gage, September 18, 1772" in Watts, "Some Vincennes Documents", 212.

regional economy, contributing labor, skills, agricultural goods, animal peltries, and other products, and consuming goods produced by the French.¹

Though the largest amount of time and energy expended by Vincennes villagers went to the wide variety of tasks which might collectively be labeled "subsistence activities," the majority of men in Vincennes perceived themselves primarily as trappers and traders. Few villagers did not profit in some manner from buying, selling, trading, and transporting furs. Unlike the situation in Canada, the fur business in the Illinois was almost totally unregulated. Vincennes merchants and voyageurs traded freely among the region's tribes, much to the dismay of distant French officials in Quebec or New Orleans who had little success regulating trade in the Illinois country. Part of the difficulty in regulating the fur trade in Vincennes lay in the fact that geographically Vincennes was on the furthest outskirts of both Canada and Louisiana. In 1754 the Canadian government attempted to regulate the fur trade in Vincennes by granting a monopoly to a single Canadian merchant, Sieur Monière. When the people of Vincennes learned that the Canadian governor, Michel-Ange de Menneville, Sieur de Duquesne, had granted Monière a monopoly on the local trade, they vehemently protested. Their livelihood depended upon the profits they made from the fur trade, so they presented their complaints to the governor of Louisiana, the Sieur de Kerlérec. Kerlérec in turn took their case to government officials in France. The matter was

¹Thomas Hutchins, "A Topographical Description [1778]," in Lindley, Indiana, 7.

resolved when Duquesne was replaced by a new governor and trade in Vincennes continued undisrupted and unregulated.¹

Both the French and local Indians hunted and trapped year-round in the area surrounding Vincennes, constantly bringing small quantities of pelts to the local trading establishments. The winter hunting trips to more distant locations, however, yielded large quantities of furs and skins for both groups. Some of the local Frenchmen spent a good part of the winter in primitive camps collecting their own furs and peltries which were used to buy necessities for themselves and their families. Others traveled to the camps or villages of various Indian tribes to trade for the furs which the Indians had already collected. Men who limited their fur trading activities to the Illinois country were more likely to have families in Vincennes and to engage in agriculture and other economic ventures close to home. Full-time *voyageurs*, men who made a living primarily transporting goods, used Vincennes only as a home base between trips that took them to distant Indian villages, New Orleans, Detroit, and Montreal.²

¹The trade agreement is in Theodore Pease and Ernestine Jenison, (eds.), Illinois on the Eve of the Seven Years' War, 1747-1755, IIIHC 29:854-57; Kerlérec to the French minister, December 17, 1754, in *ibid.*, 920-241; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 115-16. For additional information on the fur trade in the Illinois country see Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," 54; Clarence Alvord, The Illinois Country, 1673-1818, (Springfield, 1920), 210-11; Rhoda Gilman, "The Fur Trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1630-1850," Wisconsin Magazine of History 58, no. 1, (1974): 3-18.

²For general works on the French fur trade see W.J. Eccles, "A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada," Canadian Historical Review, 60 (1979): 427-34; Paul C. Phillips and John W. Smurr, The Fur Trade (2 vols., Norman OK, 1961), Vol. I. For Vincennes habitants constantly visiting and trading with regional Indian tribes see "Report of Lieutenant Fraser," May 1766 in Dunn, Documents, 414. Describing Vincennes in 1796, Victor Collot wrote that although the inhabitants did some farming "hunting and trading with the Indians are their principal occupations. The exportation of fine furs and skins of roebucks amounts annually, on an average, to one hundred and twenty thousand livres." Victor Collot, "A Journey," in Transactions, 271.

The voyageurs were the equivalent of twentieth-century truck drivers. They were employed by merchants who drew up contracts stating precisely what payment the voyageur would receive in return for his labor and time spent transporting goods from one location to another. Though many voyageurs were content to work as salaried employees, others acquired enough wealth to finance their own expeditions. They became *voyageur-marchands* (voyageur-merchants). Whether working for themselves or another merchant, the voyageurs carried trade goods to Indian tribes, exchanged the goods for furs, and then returned to Vincennes with the valuable peltries. The "harvest" of peltries included skins and furs from deer, bear, beaver, otter, wolf, red fox, and raccoon. From Vincennes most of the furs were transported to Detroit or Montreal, the main collection point for furs. Smaller amounts of peltries, mainly deer and buffalo, were carried to New Orleans. Since the hot southern temperatures could spoil furs which were hauled south, Illinois traders continued to make the long trips northward to Canada throughout the eighteenth century.¹

The fur trading posts in Vincennes also served as general stores where local Indians or French villagers could choose from a wide assortment of European manufactured goods and liquor, as well as

¹For types of furs which were traded at Vincennes see "Receipt from Sharp and Wallace to Ambroise Dagenet" [Vincennes merchant], September 10, 1783, in Lasselle Papers; "Indian Book of H. Lasselle [1801-1803], in Lasselle Papers; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 70-71; Norman Caldwell, *The French in the Mississippi Valley, 1740-1750*, in *Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences* 26, No. 3, (1941): 57-8. For Montreal being largest collection site for furs, see W.J. Eccles, "The Fur Trade and Eighteenth-Century Imperialism," *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (1983): 351-52; Winstanley Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony: Le Pays des Illinois" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1985), 257-278. For general discussion of voyageurs, see Caruso, *Mississippi Valley*, 371-75. For discussion of changing status of French as voyageurs, voyageur-marchands, and merchants, see Briggs, "Forgotten Colony," 258.

locally-produced items. Indian trade items included hunting supplies (guns, lead, balls, powder, knives), blankets, glass beads, cloth and clothing items, mirrors, brandy, tobacco, and paints.¹

When Indians brought furs and skins to Vincennes trading houses, the merchants offered them credits or "plus" which they used to buy powder and bullets, items of clothing, cloth, liquor, traps, blankets, and other goods. Each "plus" was represented by a straight vertical mark and was worth about two dollars. The account books of trader Hyacinthe Lasselle helps to demonstrate how the "plus" system worked. The pages of the account books reveal that merchants recorded sales by indicating the worth of an item in "plus" and also in a dollar amount. A look at a page from Lasselle's account book helps to clarify this system of economic exchange. In the following example, Lasselle has entered the purchases made by an Indian named Kielswah, or "Le Soleil" (The Sun).²

¹"Indian Book of H. Lasselle, 1801-1803," in Lasselle Papers; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 70-71; Caldwell, The French in the Mississippi Valley, 57-8.

²An explanation of the plus system and information on the worth of various skins is in the "Indian Book of H. Lasselle, 1801-1803," Lasselle Papers. Prior to the arrival of Americans, the "plus" system would naturally have been based on French livres.

**Le Soliel (Kielswah)
To H. Lasselle (1801 to 1804)**

| | Skins | \$ cts |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------------|
| flour | 1 1 | 4.00 |
| pr. stirrups | 1 | 2.00 |
| 2 traps (beaver) | 11111111 | 16.00 |
| Bal on 300 bullets | 1 | 2.00 |
| powder | 1111 | 8.00 |
| 1 Blanket 2 1/2 point | 111 | 6.00 |
| 1 shirt | 11 | 4.00 |
| 1 small shirt | 1 | 2.00 |
| 1 shirt for son | 11 | 4.00 |
| 2 pr. leggins | 11 | 4.00 |
| 1 pr. fine blue leggins | 11 | 4.00 |
| 4 brace ferretting (wide) | 00 | 1.00 |
| 8 small buttons | 00 | 1.00 |
| Ballance due on Blanket by wife | 100 | 3.00 |
| | | \$61.00 |

Each "plus" represented a certain number of skins or furs, the number fluctuating according to the greater and lesser values of different types of peltries. Lasselle's account book explains the worth of several types of peltries often traded for goods:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|--|
| 4 raccoon skins | 1 plus | |
| two deer skins | 1 plus | |
| bear skins | 1 1/2 plus | |
| 2-3 otter | 1 plus | |
| beaver (per pound) | 1 to 2 plus | |

Though the early French are best known as trappers and fur traders, they were also expert hunters. Hunting wild game was an important subsistence and commercial activity for many Vincennes villagers. French

families in Vincennes regularly sat down to meals prepared from deer, bear, buffalo, rabbit, opossum, squirrels, turkey, and other birds. The bountiful wild game in the country surrounding Vincennes enabled hunters to feed their own families, sell surplus meat locally, or export it to New Orleans. Villagers preserved meat by smoking or salting it. Hunters found ready markets not only for surplus meat but also for the furs and hides of many of the animals they caught. Bearskins and buffalo hides made warm winter blankets or could be sold for profit. Deerskins could be processed into rawhide or finer leather by the local French, but they were also a valuable export commodity which found a ready market in the European leather industry. The better quality skins were processed into soft leather goods such as hand gloves. The lower-quality skins were manufactured into sheets of parchment from which bookbindings were made.¹

Another animal product which was traded locally and also marketed in New Orleans was bear oil. Both the French and Indians used it for cooking and for curing meat. Rubbed on the body, bear oil also provided relief from rheumatism. The wide use of bear oil made it a valuable commercial commodity which was bought and sold by both the French and Indians. The French learned the art of preparing and cooking with bear oil from the Indians. The first step was to boil bear flesh and fat together, sprinkling in salt and laurel during the boiling process. After a week of settling, the clear oil that rose to the surface was ready to be used or stored for future use. Indians stored the bear oil in dried bladders or in

¹ Alvord, Illinois Country, 209; R. Reed, Ancient Skins, Parchments, and Leathers, (London, 1972), 119, 132; Usner, 249-50. For types of wild game which were eaten, see Bradbury, Travels in the Interior, 261; Caruso, Mississippi Valley, 368.

deer heads which were plugged with a paste made from fat and ashes. In the stores of Vincennes, bear oil was also available in containers made from gourds.¹

Although hunting and the fur trade overshadowed agriculture as the primary occupations of Vincennes *habitants*, agriculture was still vitally important to the local population. The rich soil, temperate climate, and broad expanses of alluvial bottomland made the Illinois country the best place in all of French North America for the production of cereal grains. In spite of the primitive state of agriculture and the minimal efforts put forth by the people of Vincennes, the town raised enough agricultural products for its own use with surplus left over for export to New Orleans. The urban dwellers in New Orleans depended to a great extent upon the flour and grain which was shipped from the Illinois farmers.²

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact number of Vincennes residents who farmed, but Leonard Lux's in-depth study of the method and numbers of acres under cultivation in Vincennes indicates that slightly over half of the residents engaged in farming, although this was not their only occupation. Lux's figures are strengthened by an investigation of land claims in 1790 which revealed that although one hundred twenty people owned town lots, only sixty of them claimed farms in the prairies surrounding Vincennes. If some of the town residents did not farm at all,

¹Usner, *Indians, Settlers, Slaves*, 206. The estate inventory of Jean Toulon, a merchant in Vincennes, lists "30 pots bear oil in a gourde" among the possessions of the deceased. Estate Inventory of Jean Toulon, November 1, 1795 in Knox County Miscellaneous Papers (M63), WSML.

²Alvord, *Illinois Country*, 208. For detailed description of farming in the Illinois country, see Ekberg, *Ste. Genevieve*, 126-44.

it was because those who did farm were able to supply the needs of the whole village.¹

The fact that nearly half of the villagers did not farm indicates that agriculture and land possession did not hold the same importance for the Vincennes villagers that they did in the English colonies or even in some of the other Illinois villages. Profits could be made from farming, but they could be made in other ways as well. Necessity demanded that the townspeople grow at least enough crops for their own use, which they easily did most years. Except for a small number of full-time farmers, most villagers spent little time in their fields outside of planting and harvest time.² The ability of the Illinois French to meet their agricultural needs with minimal effort made an impact on many visitors. According to John Bradbury,

Notwithstanding their want of industry, there is an appearance of comfort and independence in their villages, as, from the richness of the soil, and fineness of the climate, the labours attendant on agriculture, and attention necessary to their cattle, are comparatively trivial."³

¹Lux, Donation Lands, 430, 432, 449. Lux's estimate that slightly over half of the habitants were farmers was based on his own study of the method and numbers of acres under cultivation. For Clark's quote see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 231. The report of French land claims in Vincennes was made by Winthrop Sargent, Secretary of the Northwest Territory, in 1790. For Sargent's confirmation of town lots and outlying farms, along with a brief description of the location of each claim, see American State Papers, Public Lands (8 volumes. Washington, D.C. 1834-61), 1:12-15.

²Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 126-28. According to Ekberg, the principal employment of the people of Ste. Genevieve was farming. For Illinois farmers spending little time in their fields between planting and harvesting, see Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana: Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River in 1811, (Pittsburgh, 1814), 127.

³Bradbury, Travels, 264.

The principal crops in Vincennes were wheat, corn, and tobacco. Farmers grew smaller amounts of rice, hops, barley, melons, and squash. A small amount of cotton was also produced for local use. Since the production of cloth was forbidden in the French colonies and the Vincennes women had no spinning wheels, the demand for cotton was not great. Small quantities were probably used to stuff mattresses or pillows or for other uses besides cloth production.¹

A census taken in the Illinois country in 1767 tells much about the state of agriculture in Vincennes. Farmers produced large yields of corn and tobacco. Although Vincennes raised only 11,000 bushels of corn (counting both varieties) and Kaskaskia raised 25,000 bushels, there were more than twice as many people in Kaskaskia, and a much larger slave population. What is mysteriously absent from this census is an estimate of wheat production in Vincennes. The report of Lieutenant Fraser in 1766 concerning the "great quantity of tobacco and wheat" grown there confirms that wheat was indeed an important crop. Other observers also commented on the importance of wheat. One can only speculate on the reason that wheat was not listed on the census.²

¹For crops grown see Hutchins, "Description of Louisiana," in Lindley, Indiana, 7; Collot, "A Journey," in Transactions, 270; Census of Illinois, 1767 in IIHC, 11:469-70. "George Croghan's Journal," excerpts reprinted in McCord, Travel Accounts, 19. For production of cotton see Volney, "A View of the soil. . .," in Lindley, Indiana, 18; John Bradbury, Travels, 264.

²Census of Illinois, 1767 in IIHC, 11:469-70. Report of Lieutenant Fraser in Dunn, Documents, 410-13.

Census of Illinois, 1767
State of the Settlements in the Illinois Country

| At St. Vincent on the Oubache in 1767 | | At Kaskaskias in 1767 | |
|----------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Inhabitants, Men, Women, & Children | 232 | Inhabitants, Men, Women & Children | 600 |
| Strangers | 168 | Negro Men | 142 |
| Negro Slaves | 10 | Negro Women | 81 |
| Savage Do [domestics] | 17 | Negro Boys | 80 |
| Oxen | 352 | Oxen | 295 |
| Cows | 588 | Cows | 342 |
| Horses | 260 | Horses | 216 |
| Hoggs | 295 | Bushels of Indian Corn | 25,500 |
| Mills | 3 | Bushels of Wheat | 13,085 |
| Bushels Corn to be reaped | 5, 450 | Mills | 8 |
| Bushels Indian Corn to be reaped | 5, 420 | Hoggs | 912 |
| Tobacco growing n't Pounds | 36, 360 | | |

This census also reveals the importance of cattle, hogs, oxen, and horses to the economic life of settlers in early Vincennes. The oxen were used almost exclusively as work animals, and the French were famous for their passionate interest in their herds of riding horses. These horses were sometimes rented or sold to individuals or the military. Horses were also used to operate the three local grain mills listed in the census. Cattle provided *habitants* with milk and meat and, like hogs, could be marketed for profit to supply other needs.¹

Agricultural production in Vincennes was greatly affected by the small number of slaves living in Vincennes. Whereas villagers in other Illinois towns relied heavily on slaves to help work the fields, the people of Vincennes did not. The difference in the number of slaves at Vincennes as compared to other Illinois villages is worthy of attention. The 1767

¹Hutchins, "Description of Louisiana," in Lindley, *Indiana*, 8. For horses being sold, see George Croghan's Journal, McCord, *Travel Accounts*, 20. For use of horses to power flour mills, see Ekberg, *Ste. Genevieve*, 142-3.

census (as printed above) indicated that there were ten slaves among a white population of 400 at Vincennes and 223 slaves at Kaskaskia among a white population of 600. The nearby village of Cahokia had eighty negro slaves living among three hundred white inhabitants. In Ste. Genevieve there were 276 black and mulatto slaves among a white population of 676--in other words forty percent of the town's population was slaves. There are at least three reasons which may explain the comparatively small number of slaves at Vincennes. The people of Vincennes may have consciously avoided purchasing slaves because they preferred to channel their profits and energies into the fur trade. Perhaps large-scale agricultural production did not appeal to them. What is more likely is that the Vincennes villagers simply could not buy the slaves--either because they could not afford them or because the slaves were not available. With only small numbers of slaves being sent from New Orleans, it is likely that all available slaves were purchased in the other villages where the boats docked first. Though the reasons for the small Vincennes slave population remain cloudy, what is clear is that the people of Vincennes raised what crops they did by their own efforts.¹

The French in the Illinois country employed a system of communal open field agriculture which was traditional in much of Europe. All of the Illinois villages were laid out according to the same pattern of land use -- nuclear villages, open plowlands, and commons for pasture. This pattern, common in northern Europe since the Middle Ages, was not common in

¹Census of Illinois, 1767 in IIHC, 11:469-70. For information on slavery in Ste. Genevieve, see Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 201-239. For slaves in Cahokia, see McDermott, Old Cahokia, 22-3. The number of slaves in Vincennes did not increase during last decades of the eighteenth century. A census in 1800 listed only eight slaves in Vincennes and 15 in the "neighborhood of Vincennes." "Census of Indiana Territory" in Woollen, Executive Journal, 3: 83.

Canada. Canadian *habitants* preferred a dispersed form of settlement on homes along waterways, thus agricultural villages were rare.¹

Vincennes farmers walked from the village to their fields transporting tools and crops on their *calèches*, wooden two-wheeled carts. Their fields were located, for the most part, in three "prairies" near Vincennes, though some land was also cultivated across the Wabash River (on its west bank). The "Lower Prairie" stretched for about six miles along the river south of Vincennes, and the "Upper Prairie" was located north of the town, also along the river. The third field, the Cathlinette, was named for a particular kind of bush which grew wild in that vicinity and was located furthest from Vincennes, just east of the southern part of the "Lower Prairie."² There were no fences around any of the three common fields. To protect their fields from wandering livestock, the villagers kept all of their cattle pastured in the village commons located to the southwest of the town. The 5,000 acres of common pasture land was surrounded by a fence, and each resident was responsible to keep up his section of the fence.³

In the Upper and Lower Prairies, the individual tracts of land ran back from the Wabash River in long, narrow strips. Each strip measured two arpents wide (355 feet) by forty arpents deep (7,100 feet). The fields

¹Ekberg, Carl, "Agriculture, Mentalités, and Violence on the Illinois Frontier," in Illinois Historical Journal 88, No. 2, (1995): 103.

²Lux, Donation Lands, 431-32.

³*ibid.*, 432. For French at Vincennes fencing in animals and leaving plowfields open, see also John Heckewelder, "John Heckewelder's Journey to the Wabash in 1792," in McCord, Travel Accounts, 34. The village of Cahokia also left plow fields open and fenced their animals. See McCarty to Montgomery, Sept. 19, 1779, and McCarty to Todd, Sept. 18, 1779, both in Clarence Alvord, ed., Cahokia Records, 1778-1790, Collections of the Illinois State Library, Vol. 2, (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1907): 614-17.

in the Cathlinette were laid out in the same manner. When these tracts were later surveyed in terms of English acres, they amounted to around 66 acres. A few persons owned farms that were four arpents wide by forty arpents deep, or 136 English acres. The long narrow strips of farmland looked strange to most American farmers, but these ribbon-like fields remained a distinctive part of the local landscape well into the nineteenth century. In 1828 a visitor commented that the 5,000-acre common field (the Lower Prairie) was still cultivated "after the ancient French customs."¹

Within the common plowlands, only a double furrow divided one field from another. Although there were extensive rich lands nearby which could have been cultivated, the Vincennes *habitants* made no effort to increase their holdings and acquire large tracts. This distinguished them from their Anglo-American counterparts. The economic diversity of the Illinois French accounts for the lack of "land hunger" in the region prior to the coming of Americans. With farming being only a part-time occupation for most Vincennes *habitants*, and with land being so plentiful, the people of Vincennes were content to limit their landholdings to their two-by-forty-arpent fields which yielded all they needed.²

The methods of recording land ownership reveal the "loose" attitude of the Vincennes French concerning their lands. Land grants were generally made by the French commandant who scribbled the concession on a small piece of paper which was sometimes filed with a notary and other times handed over to the landholder. Other grants were made verbally, with no written record of the transaction being made. The

¹ibid., 432, 449. For continued use of Lower Prairie as a common field see Timothy Flint, "A condensed geography and history of the western states, or the Mississippi valley," [1828], in Lindley, *Indiana*, 444.

²Lux, *Donation Lands*, 432, 449.

boundaries of these tracts were not very accurate or well-defined. The inefficient manner of registering land ownership and the loosely-defined boundaries were never a problem for the French settlers in Vincennes. This system, however, created havoc for American surveyors in the opening years of the nineteenth century when they attempted to confirm land claims and assign precise boundaries to individual landholdings.¹

Although most French *habitants* in Vincennes were only part-time farmers, agriculture was nonetheless one of several essential components of the mixed frontier economy in the Illinois country. Vincennes farmers fed themselves and their non-farming neighbors, and their surplus agricultural products were sold in New Orleans. New Orleans was the primary outlet for all Illinois products except peltries. The trip to New Orleans was a long and potentially dangerous journey, but during the French period Illinois settlers benefited from a government-subsidized transportation system which protected precious cargos. Twice each year royal convoys set out from New Orleans to make a round trip to the Illinois country. To encourage the growth and prosperity of both regions and to guarantee access to needed food and supplies, the French government provided cheap and safe transportation between New Orleans and the Illinois country. Thanks to this convoy system, the people living in the Illinois country could depend on regular supplies of imported French cloth, brandy, tools and other manufactured goods and New Orleans residents received regular shipments of Illinois wheat, tobacco, domestic meats and other products.²

¹ibid., 343. For example of the loosely defined grants, see "Statement of French Commandant St. Ange" in Dunn, Documents, 430.

²Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 233; Alvord, Illinois Country, 213, Briggs, "Forgotten Colony," 244-47.

The products which were transported by the royal convoy were loaded onto large *bateaux*, sharp-bowed vessels made of flattened timber capable of carrying up to forty tons of cargo. Built at government expense, the *bateaux* were protected by soldiers commanded by an officer of the marine. A large number of privately-owned *bateaux* and *pirogues* (dug out tree trunks) accompanied the royal convoys to take advantage of the military protection. One convoy left New Orleans in late winter or early spring, and the other set sail in August. The *bateaux* were rowed and poled upriver at a laborious rate of about one mile per hour. The arduous journey took between three and four months to complete. The return trip from the Illinois country to New Orleans could be made in as little as twelve days, though it usually took two or three weeks.¹

Though the government charged reasonable rates for carrying goods, some merchants and private citizens chose to haul their own goods in order to maximize profits. Some accompanied the royal flotilla, but others made the journey independently. Traveling alone was always risky, as Indians or renegade whites regularly attacked boats and stole goods. To minimize risk, the people of Vincennes and the other Illinois villages often traveled in groups. Independently-organized convoys became even more important with the disappearance of the government-sponsored convoy system in 1765 at the end of the French period.²

The rivers which connected Vincennes with New Orleans, Detroit, and Montreal were the lifeline of the Vincennes habitants. The ability to import and export goods enabled French settlers on the distant frontier to enjoy a comfortable existence in spite of their geographic isolation. Though

¹ibid.

²ibid; Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," 55.

long-distance commerce was essential to the economic well-being of the Vincennes *habitants*, they also relied heavily upon locally-produced goods and services. The long journey to the Illinois country from either Canada or New Orleans made imported goods expensive. The high cost of imported manufactures and the limited income of most French villagers demanded that the people living there meet many of their own needs. Necessity taught villagers how to make many of the items they needed, such as the two-wheeled carts (the only vehicles used in Vincennes), canoes and *pirogues*, barrels, stools and benches, and tools.

With hundreds of people living in Vincennes, there was a natural demand for skilled artisans such as carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, coopers, and gunsmiths. Concrete information concerning early craftsmen in Vincennes is in short supply, since government officials and visitors did not often comment upon local people busy at common daily work. Few records survive which document the economic transactions of village craftsmen, in part because such records were not always committed to paper. Though little is known about the lives of individual artisans, there is enough evidence in surviving documents to demonstrate the existence and importance of skilled artisans in colonial Vincennes.

In 1769 the Illinois priest Father Gibault commented that although there were only eighty farmers in Vincennes, there were "many people of all trades" who lived there.¹ Many of the trades and tradesmen which operated in Vincennes have been "lost," but existing sources confirm the presence of the following types of craftsmen in Vincennes during the last half of the eighteenth century: carpenters, brick masons, a silversmith,

¹Gibault to Briand, October 1769, in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter (eds.) Trade and Politics, 1767-1769, IIIHC, 16:609-11.

flour millers, leather tanners, a tailor, and a shoemaker. The presence of locally-produced wine means that there were wine-makers in Vincennes, and the great number of pirogues and birchbark canoes used by local fur traders indicates that there were local persons who specialized in the building of water craft. It is unlikely that a village the size of Vincennes would have been without the essential services of many other artisans, such as a cooper, gunsmith, cartwright, sawyer, shingler, tool-maker, tailor, or saddler. The fact that the presence of all these craftsmen has been documented in other Illinois villages suggests that the people of Vincennes enjoyed the services of at least some of these skilled artisans.¹

Heavy demand for certain types of work kept some skilled workers busy at their trade much of the time, but others planted and harvested crops and, when time allowed, they dabbled in the fur trade. In addition to farming, fur trading, and craftwork, there were other ways of making a living in Vincennes. Merchants owned and operated stores assisted by clerks. Tavern owners often doubled as innkeepers. Rarely was the town without a surgeon (doctor), and often there was more than one.²

One of the most important public employees in Vincennes was the royal notary. Traditional French law (*Coutumes de Paris*) was quite specific on the need for a notary to draw and sign wills, property deeds, commercial agreements, marriage contracts, and other legal documents. Documents prepared without the notary and proper witnesses were automatically suspect at law. When agreements were contracted in the proper legal manner, there was much less possibility of future legal

¹Ekberg, *Ste. Genevieve*, 162; Belting, *Kaskaskia*, 61-63; Briggs, "Forgotten Colony," 302. For a listing of craftsmen working in Vincennes, see appendix.

²For a list of physicians who practiced in early Vincennes, see *Somes, Vincennes*, 177.

battles. In Vincennes, one man performed the services of notary for over twenty years from 1763 until his death in 1786. Etienne Philibert dit Orleans (Orleans being his nickname) was born in Orleans, France, and he came to Vincennes as a soldier some time prior to 1750. He decided to make his permanent home in Vincennes and was granted a tract of land by the local commandant, the Sieur de St. Ange. Philibert not only fulfilled the standard notarial responsibilities, but during the frequent periods when the town had no resident priest, he served as church warden. During his long tenure, he baptized over three hundred children in the parish and performed many funerals and civil marriages. The esteem in which Philibert was held is attested to by the fact that when he died at the age of seventy-seven, "nearly the whole parish of both sexes and of all ages was present at his solemn service."¹

The many craftsmen, merchants, farmers, and fur traders who worked in colonial Vincennes readily identified themselves with their primary occupation, but few of them had the luxury of performing one job only. Though enjoying many advantages of urban life, these French *habitants* nonetheless lived on a distant frontier where mere existence demanded the kind of self-sufficiency which is associated with people of any frontier. The high price of imported goods which were hauled hundreds of miles from the nearest commercial centers meant that people only bought what they could not make themselves or acquire through trade from their French or Indian neighbors. Any discussion of "making a living" on the Illinois French frontier must therefore acknowledge the

¹For discussion of importance of notaries see McDermott, Frenchmen, 89-93. For information on Philibert, see Some, Vincennes, 93. Earliest entry in VPR showing Philibert as witness to wedding on April 20, 1750; entry for death April 26, 1786.

importance of daily subsistence activities as well as the small-scale commercial exchange of products produced in Vincennes or at nearby French or Indian villages.

Small-scale exchange of surpluses was common in Upper Louisiana long before the French arrived. Indian tribes exchanged surplus crops, wild plants, extra fish and game, bear oil, maple sugar, and other products on a regular basis. The French learned many techniques for harvesting the bounties of nature from neighboring Indians, and they developed other skills on their own. Like the Indians, they met many of their needs hunting and gathering in the prairies and forests surrounding Vincennes. The forests around Vincennes contained countless species of edible and nutritious nuts such as chestnuts, hickories, acorns, and pecans. From spring to fall the prairies and forests yielded a variety of fruit free for the picking. In spring there were raspberries, mulberries, may apples, and tiny, sweet wild strawberries; in summer blackberries and wild plums; and in fall, paw paw, persimmon, crab apple, wild cherry, and wild grapes. Between the fruit that the French grew in their orchards and the wild fruit and nuts they gathered, many *habitants* had enough surplus to save for winter or to sell or trade.¹

The high cost of imported cane sugar led many villagers to produce their own maple sugar, another skill learned from the Indians. The people of Vincennes used maple molasses as a sweetener in vegetables or baked goods and as a glaze for fish and meat. Sometimes they mixed the sugar with bear's grease to store it for later use as a basting for roast venison or

¹For Indians trading surpluses, see Usner, Indians, Settlers, Slaves, 165. For wild fruits and nuts in Illinois country see John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 11-12. For French use of local products in diet see Caruso, Mississippi Valley, 368.

duck. Maple syrup was used for medicinal purposes as well. A Frenchman, Jean Bernard Bossu, who traveled through the Mississippi Valley in the 1760's commented that "the French who are settled at the Illinois have learnt from the Indians to make this syrup, which is an exceeding good remedy for colds, and rheumatisms." The French eventually learned to purify the sap, thus making a more refined, light-colored sugar. Like wheat, pork, and other valuable commodities, maple sugar was considered legal tender for purchases or the repayment of debts.¹

Sugar-making was an activity enjoyed by men and women, old and young. The running of the sap, coming when it did in late February or early March, was a sign that spring was just around the corner. That in itself was cause for celebration. Working together at the sugar camps was a festive occasion where the hard work was made less difficult by singing favorite songs and frequently tasting the partially rendered sap. Children were excited to taste the sugar candy which was made by pouring the boiling sap on the snow where it quickly hardened into a chewy treat.²

Like maple sugar, almost any item which an individual Frenchman or woman prepared for home use might also be traded or sold for profit to another villager, local merchant, or neighboring Indian. It is therefore impossible to separate "subsistence" activities from the additional work

¹For Bossu quote see Jean Bernard Bossu, Travels through that Part of North America Formerly Called Louisiana, 2 vols. (London: T. Davis, 1771), 1:188; Faragher, Sugar Creek, 15-16; Baker, French Folklife, 17; William Darby, "The Emigrant's Guide," in Lindley, Indiana, 196. For Vincennes residents running sugar camps see Land Claims Vincennes District, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1983), 27 and 34; "Explanatory Memorial from Post Vincennes and the Illinois Country to Congress," February 28, 1788 in Carter, Clarence (ed.), The Territorial Papers of the United States, 26 vols., (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934), 2:92.

²ibid.

villagers engaged in to produce surplus goods to sell. For some villagers, the profits from the small-scale production of surplus goods were an important supplement to family incomes. Items which the people of Vincennes produced for their own subsistence and to trade with others included: wine and beer, moccasins, wild bee honey, bear oil, furniture, two-wheeled carts, pirogues and canoes, smoked or salted meat, rawhide and tanned leather, clothing items, fish and wild game, fruits and vegetables from their gardens, and grains and other crops from their fields.

For most of the people in Vincennes, making a living meant being a jack-of-all-trades and working at a wide variety of subsistence and commercial activities. Many men planted some wheat or corn in the spring and harvested it in the fall. In the meantime, they spent a good amount of time hunting, fishing, plying a trade if they had one, and of course socializing with their friends and family. When winter came, many men took to the woods to trap furs which were a key source of the prosperity of the Vincennes townspeople. While furs and hides were exported to Canada and agricultural surpluses were shipped to New Orleans, local and regional exchanges of surplus goods remained an important part of the Illinois economy.

The Illinois French were criticized by the British and later by Americans because of the great amount of time they spent "wandering" in the woods. The propensity of French men to spend a good part of their lives hunting, gathering, fishing, and trapping furs made them appear as "lazy" as their Indian neighbors. Coming from settled areas where "hard" work was synonymous with intensive agricultural labor, Anglo newcomers were quick to criticize the French for the minimal efforts they devoted to

farming. However, with ready profits from the fur trade and natural resources yielding much of what they needed, most of the Vincennes *habitants* thought it unwise to devote all of their efforts to agriculture. Crops could be lost to drought, heavy rains, or flooding. Mauding Indians or whites could seize agricultural exports during the trip to New Orleans. The people of Vincennes did not need to devote their lives exclusively to farming, and most of them apparently did not want to do so. Their mixed economy and diversified work patterns made perfect sense to them. It was only outsiders from England's colonies who failed to appreciate the logic of an economy where income came from a patchwork of activities, and where "wandering" in the woods produced many of the necessities of everyday life.

CHAPTER 3

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

A significant difference between French and English colonial settlements in North America was religion. The religious beliefs of the people of Vincennes differed little from those of their Catholic relatives in Canada and France. The care of the French government to send only Roman Catholics to the colonies resulted in the growth of homogeneous religious communities even in the distant Illinois country. The French Catholics believed that their faith required only that they adhere to a revealed set of doctrines rather than to strive for a Protestant goal of a personal understanding of the scriptures. Catholics presumed an absolute truth which one could accept or reject, but which could not be altered by personal experience. Though Vincennes colonists shared the basic religious beliefs of Catholics in Canada and France, the distinctive geographic and political situation of the Illinois French altered the religious life of the region's inhabitants.¹

Unlike most people in Canada and France, the French people of Vincennes had no priest residing among them for much of the town's early history. Often neglected by priests, the *habitants* grew ignorant of many of the detailed tenets of their faith. Many of them grew quite lax in their

¹The most informative accounts of religious life in early Vincennes are in Thomas McAvoy, The Catholic Church in Indiana, 1789-1834 and Joseph Donnelly, Pierre Gibault, Missionary, 1737-1802. A good general history of religion in the Illinois country appears in Ekberg's Ste. Genevieve, 379-415.

observance of church law. The people's ignorance of church law and the "ungodly" behavior which developed among them seemed serious problems to the priests who briefly visited Vincennes. St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, a log construction which stood in the center of town near the Wabash River, was a fitting visual symbol for the state of religion in Vincennes. The church was often neglected and in a state of disrepair, but at irregular intervals a priest stayed long enough in the village to inspire residents to rebuild the church and make it "respectable." Like the faith of the townspeople, the church weathered the periods of priestly neglect and remained a constant and important feature in the daily life of Vincennes.¹

For thoroughly different reasons, priests and parishioners agreed that living without a priest in the village presented significant problems. Priests worried most about the widespread ignorance of church law, the *habitants'* sinful behavior, and the lack of obedience to priests who occasionally tried to change that behavior. The people, understandably, were little concerned with such matters. The neglect they felt from the frequent absence of priests disturbed them for other reasons. Without a priest among them, the familiar rites and rituals, so essential to the Catholic faith, could not be performed. Salvation itself, they believed, demanded that the faithful partake of the sacraments which could only be administered by a priest. With no priest, one could not confess sins or be forgiven. Dying without a priest to provide consolation and administer the last rites meant eternal damnation. Marriages and baptisms required a priest. With no priest to teach children the catechism, young people were ignorant of even the basic teachings of Roman Catholicism. After the

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 35-135; Donnelly, Gibault, 86-130.

departure of priests who stayed a few months or years, people acutely felt the loss of the respected men of the cloth who served as pastors, judges, educators, and counselors.¹

The simple fact was that there were never enough priests available to adequately serve all of the Illinois country. During the French period, six Jesuit priests were stationed in the Illinois country. These six men traveled extensively, ministering at many Indian missions and the French settlements of Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Ste. Genevieve, Ouiatenon, and Vincennes. Only one of the priests, Father Sebastian Meurin, ever established his residence in Vincennes, and then only from 1749 to 1753. Two other priests, L. Vivier and Julien Devernai, occasionally visited Vincennes where they officiated over marriages and baptisms. In 1762 the French government, motivated by complex political and economic concerns, closed all Jesuit educational institutions and ordered the extinction of the Society of Jesus.² As a result all of the Jesuit priests in the Illinois country were ordered back to France. Only the elderly Father Meurin was allowed to remain among his flock. The Superior Council of Louisiana allowed him to return to the Illinois country under the conditions that he accept the Superior of the Capuchin Order in New Orleans as his religious master and that he must also reside in Ste. Genevieve which had just passed de jure into Spanish territory. Even a robust young man could not have adequately served the entire Illinois

¹A letter from the inhabitants to the Bishop Pontbriand of Quebec begging them to send a priest clearly tells why the people desire a priest among them. Gibault to Bishop Briand, April 22, 1769. Original in Archives at Archbishop's Palace, Quebec, Canada as printed in Sister Mary Salesia Godecker, Simon Bruté, First Bishop of Vincennes, (St. Meinrad, Indiana: St. Meinrad Historical Essays, 1931), 158-59.

²Reasons for the suppression of the Society of Jesus are discussed in Donnelly, Gibault, 22-25.

country, and Meurin was frail and often in poor health. For several years Vincennes was virtually neglected.¹

In April of 1767 the Vincennes habitants wrote to Bishop Briand of Quebec complaining that they had not seen a priest for nearly five years and pleading for the Bishop to send them a missionary.

We can give you only a very faint idea of the misfortunes which the lack of religion brings upon us since we have been deprived of priests who formerly cared for this parish. [Among these] is the sad state and wretched disorder which too much license can cause among children who have no fear of their own fathers, living in ignorance and abandoning themselves to everything sensual that youth is capable of. . . with these are joined the thousand other bad consequences that come to people who are without faith because deprived of opportunities to perform their Christian duties. . . we hope that you will heed the plea of loyal citizens of your diocese, and that you will heed our plea for a priest who will set us aright and speedily bring us back to God.²

Bishop Briand responded to this and similar pleas he had received from the Illinois villages by sending thirty-one-year-old Father Pierre Gibault to the Illinois country. Gibault departed from Montreal on July 1, 1768 with some fur traders, his seventeen-year-old sister, Marie-Louise, and his widowed mother, Marie Joseph. He decided to settle in Kaskaskia, the most populous Illinois village, and was not able to visit Vincennes until

¹Meurin was fifty-seven, old by eighteenth-century standards, when threatened with expulsion. For visits of Meurin, Devermai, and Vivier, see entries in Vincennes Parish Records (VPR). For religious history of the Illinois country see Donnelly, Gibault, 86-130; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 378-415; McAvoy, Catholic Church, 54-55.

²Ste. Marie et al. to Briand, April 22, 1767 in IIIHC 16: 555-56. The letter was signed first by the post commandant, Ste. Marie, followed by sixteen other signatures. Another petition to Briand was sent on April 22, 1769 beseeching the Bishop to send a priest. See Inhabitants of Vincennes to Bishop Pontbriand, April 22, 1769, original in Archives at Archbishop's Palace, Quebec, Canada as printed in Godecker, Brut , 158-60.

the autumn of 1769. The journey between Kaskaskia and Vincennes was two hundred miles overland, and to protect himself from marauding Indians Gibault took ten men with him. He also carried a gun and two pistols.¹ The people of Vincennes were overcome with emotion when the long-awaited priest rode into their village. Gibault described the scene in a letter to Bishop Briand:

After nearly seven years that it has been deprived of priests everything is lax, and free thinking and irreverence has come in; nevertheless, upon my arrival all the people came in crowds to receive me at the shore of the Wabash river. Some threw themselves on their knees without being able to speak, others spoke only with sobs: some cried, 'My father, save us, we are at the edge of hell;' others said, 'God has not forsaken us yet, for it is he who sends you to us to make us repent of our sins.' Some said, "Oh sir, why did you not come a month ago? Then my poor wife, my dear father, my dear mother, my poor child would not have died without the Sacrament."²

Gibault stayed at Vincennes for two months during which time he gave official church sanction to all of the baptisms and marriages which had been performed by lay churchwardens or civil officials since the last Jesuit priest departed in 1763. The priest also prompted the villagers to repair and enlarge their log church which had gradually worsened in condition since Father Meurin supervised its construction in 1749.³

¹Donnelly, Gibault, 39-42. In a letter to Bishop Briand in March of 1770 Gibault wrote, "I want to inform you that when I go on a journey I am always armed with my gun and two pistols, with the intention of preventing my being attacked. . ." Two years later he gave up that practice. See IIIHC 16: 621-22. The Indians who attacked were "from the countries of the lower Mississippi." Though a danger to travelers, these Indians did not threaten the Illinois villages. See Gibault to Briand, June 20, 1772 in Archives of the Archdiocese of Quebec as reprinted in Donnelly, Gibault, 53-54.

²Gibault to Bishop Briand of Quebec, October [?], 1769 in IIIHC 16: 612.

³Donnelly, Gibault, 53.

From 1769 until 1785 Gibault resided in Kaskaskia, but visited Vincennes approximately every two years.¹ During his one- or two-month visits he was quite busy with weddings and baptisms, holding mass, hearing confessions, teaching catechism, and settling village disputes. Gibault traveled extensively ministering not only to the people in the Illinois villages (including the smaller villages of Prairie du Rocher, St. Anne, and St. Philippe), but also at the distant posts of Peoria, St. Joseph, Miami, Ouiatenon, and even Michilimackinac. During the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark sought Gibault's assistance in his efforts to establish American domination of the Illinois country. Gibault's cooperation in persuading the villagers in Kaskaskia and Vincennes to join the American cause earned him the epithet, "The Patriot Priest."²

Gibault moved his residence to Vincennes in 1785. Over twenty years had passed since a priest had called Vincennes home. Unfortunately, Gibault's commitments at other posts did not allow him to act as a truly "full-time" priest to the residents of Vincennes. And that is exactly what Gibault believed the town needed. According to Gibault his parishioners were ignorant of the doctrines of the Church and of the ceremonies.

¹The Vincennes Parish Records show that Gibault was at Vincennes in February 1771, January 1773, February 1775 and June 1777. See also Donnelly, Gibault, 53.

²Historians disagree about the importance of Gibault's role in rallying the people of the Illinois country to support the Americans. After the Revolution, Father Gibault was admonished for his support of the Americans by Bishop Briand (serving in Quebec by the good graces of the British government). Gibault protested that he did not ally with Clark or persuade Illinois villages to do the same. Perhaps trying to regain the favor of Bishop Briand, Gibault asserted that he traveled to Vincennes with Clark's men merely to take advantage of the safety provided by the armed expedition to travel to Vincennes where Gibault had not ministered for some time. For Gibault's association with Clark and a discussion of factors which may have motivated Gibault to support the Americans see Donnelly, Gibault, 63-85. See also Jacob Dunn, "Father Gibault: The Patriot Priest of the Northwest," in Illinois Historical Society Transactions, (1905), 20.

Through neglect, the townspeople had been "brought up like savages in the midst of whom they live."¹ Despite his protestations, some of the local traders continued to trade liquor to the Indians. From the priest's perspective, the lack of civil government, the privations of American soldiers upon the inhabitants during the American Revolution, and long years without religious guidance had taken its toll upon the community. "Everybody is in poverty, which engenders theft and rapine. Wantonness and drunkenness pass here as elegance and amusements quite in style. . . . No commandant, no troops, no prison, no hangman, always as in small places a crowd of relatives or allies who sustain each other: in a word absolute impunity for these and ill-luck for the stranger."²

Gibault worked hard to revitalize the spiritual beliefs and practices of his flock, and within a few months his congregation could follow the prayers of the mass, and the children could recite the catechism. He persevered in attempts (often unsuccessfully) to curb the sale of liquor to Indians and the licentious behavior of some of the town's inhabitants. From the beginning of Gibault's years in Vincennes the people of other Illinois villages begged him to take up residence among them. So worried were the Vincennes *habitants* that Gibault might leave them that they built a new, enlarged log church to prove their worthiness soon after he arrived in 1785. Against the wishes of his Vincennes parishioners, Gibault moved back to Kaskaskia in 1789.³

After Gibault's departure, the town was without a resident priest for three years until the arrival of Father Joseph Flaget in 1792. Arriving

¹Gibault to Bishop d'Eglise of Quebec, June 6, 1786 in IIIHC 5: 534-35.

²Gibault to Bishop of Quebec, June 6, 1786 in IIIHC 5: 42-43.

³McAvoy, Catholic Church, 58. Gibault later crossed the Mississippi to serve in New Madrid where he died in 1804.

a few days before Christmas, Flaget made needed repairs on the church and put things in order in preparation for the Christmas service. The spiritual condition of the village was quickly revealed to him when only twelve of the seven hundred villagers took communion on Christmas.¹ Flaget stayed for three years during which time he opened a school for children where he taught the "basic rudiments" as well as the catechism and church prayers. He offered some sort of vocational training to young adults, which he believed provided more economic security than the fur trade. Just when he felt he was beginning to have a positive effect on the behavior and faith of at least some of the villagers, Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore (the first Catholic bishop of the United States) transferred him to Havana, Cuba, to establish a new college. Flaget left Vincennes in April of 1795. He was quickly replaced by Father Jean Francois Rivet who lived in Vincennes until his death in 1804. Although the Vincennes villagers enjoyed much priestly attention from 1785-89 and from 1792-1804, the townspeople waited another fourteen years before new priests, Fathers Blanc and Jeanjean, were sent to them in 1818. Thus, for the fifty-five years between 1763 and 1818 the people of Vincennes had a priest living among them a total of only sixteen years.²

The many years without a full-time resident priest profoundly affected village life in Vincennes. One of the negative consequences was a decline in the literacy rate over the course of the eighteenth century. The village had no schools, so children were either taught in the home or by a resident missionary, though many received no education at all. Nearly all

¹Ibid., 66-67.

²Ibid., 58-65, 69, 79-80, 102, and 136. Fathers Flaget, Rivet, Blanc, and Jeanjean were all Sulpician priests who left France during the turbulence of the French Revolution.

of the priests who lived in Vincennes organized classes to teach the catechism and the basic rudiments of reading and writing. The problem was that most priests did not stay in town long enough to make much progress. Even those who did remain for several years made little headway due to their overwhelming responsibilities in Vincennes and at other towns, Indian missions and outposts. The relatively slow population growth in Vincennes also prevented any growth in literacy since there was no substantial influx of better educated immigrants arriving to raise the education level of the population. The result was that by the end of the century only a small percentage of the townspeople were literate.¹

The signatures of witnesses to marriages and baptisms in the early parish registers serve as an indicator of the educational decline in Vincennes. At mid-century more people could sign their name and could write with better penmanship than they could fifty years later. Though illiteracy may have caused occasional problems for certain individuals, most had little trouble getting through life without these skills. The widespread illiteracy in Vincennes was comparable to the situation in rural France where roughly three-quarters of the population could not read or write. This stood in contrast to colonial New England where the literacy rate ran as high as sixty percent owing to the Puritan commitment to teaching congregations to read the bible.²

¹Ibid., 29-30, 50, and 90. In 1795 only three of the fourteen people elected to serve as church trustees could sign their names. These were Pierre Gamelin, Toussaint Dubois, and Pierre Mallet. In the courts organized by the United States government in the 1790s, some of the elite local French who served as judges signed with their marks on documents prepared by literate clerks or other judges.

²For declining penmanship and decrease in number of villagers who could sign their names, see Vincennes Parish Records. For discussion of literacy rates in Illinois country as they compared to rural France and colonial New England, see Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 273-74.

The high illiteracy rate did not necessarily mean that the people of Vincennes had little regard for education. When priests operated schools, many parents sent their children. In 1818 when the first school was established for the French in Vincennes, parents urged the priest who opened the school, Father Jeanjean, to accept their daughters as well as their sons. There were indeed many villagers who saw little need for education, but others appear to have taken full advantage of educational opportunities when they were available. Priests regularly decried the "ignorance" of the townspeople and were joined by the people themselves in lamenting the negative consequences of a lack of instruction. Neither the priests nor the more pious villagers were as concerned about the low literacy rate as they were with the negative consequences of a general decline in people's knowledge of the basic tenets of their faith.¹

Priests who ministered to the people of Vincennes from the 1770's through the 1790's believed that years of priestly neglect and the subsequent ignorance of religion which prevailed had led to a deplorable state of moral and social disorder in Vincennes. Children did not show the proper respect for their parents, parishioners did not obey priests, and "lawlessness" prevailed. While some of the disorder may have been caused by the absence of religious authority figures, there were other serious political and economic factors which contributed to the moral decline and "lawlessness" in Vincennes.

¹ For Jeanjean opening first school, see letter from Father Blanc to [?], June 22, 1818 in Archives of Archdiocese of St. Louis. A letter from the Vincennes inhabitants to Bishop Briand in 1767 sets forth a lengthy list of the "misfortunes" which plagued the village after being deprived of a priest for seven years. While they do not mention a lack of general education being a problem, they go on at length concerning the grave problems of moral decline, undisciplined children, and "wretched disorder." Ste. Marie et al. to Briand, April 22, 1767 in IIHC 16: 555-56.

After France lost her North American territories in 1763, the British government failed to establish effective forms of civil government in the Illinois country. During the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark and his officers confiscated foodstuffs, horses, and other supplies and killed many of the inhabitants' hogs and cattle to feed the troops. This impoverished hundreds of the Illinois French. After the American Revolution the United States government delayed the establishment of effective civil government until after the turn of the century. The arrival of Americans in and around Vincennes, beginning in the 1780's, impaired the workings of self-government among the previously homogeneous French population of the village. American settlement in the lands north of the Ohio River also instigated Indian wars which disrupted the fur trade and further aggravated the economic position of Vincennes residents.¹

In the face of social and economic dislocation, the inhabitants longed for order and stability. Often unable to understand or control the forces of change which so deeply affected their lives, some people in Vincennes believed that full-time priests and a rejuvenation of religious principles and attitudes would restore much-needed order to the community. Thus, apart from the particular religious functions they provided, priests were valued for the social stability they fostered. Coming from a French tradition where the authority of the church and state went hand in hand,

¹For Americans seizing French food, domestic animals, and supplies during American Revolution, see Petition of Inhabitants of Vincennes, June 30, 1781 in UHC 8:30-33. For friction between French and American settlers in Vincennes, see Leonard C. Helderman, "John Filson's Narrative of His Defeat on the Wabash, 1786" in The Filson Club History Quarterly 12 (1938): 193. See also Small to Clark, July 22, 1786 and LeGras to Clark, July 22, 1786, both in Leonard C. Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash: Vincennes Letters of 1786," Indiana Magazine of History 34 [1938]: 457-67. For Indian wars resulting from American expansion, see Reginald Horsman, Expansion and American Indian Policy 1783-1812, (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1967).

villagers respected the authority of priests every bit as much as they would a civil or military leader.

While all *habitants* respected priests and appreciated having them on hand to settle disputes, administer the sacraments, and provide basic religious instruction to children, many townspeople refused to allow priests to dictate their lifestyle. Like communities in all times and places, the level of religious enthusiasm and commitment among the people varied greatly. Some villagers yearned for law and order and a suppression of irreverent behavior; others reveled in the freedom to live as they pleased. Many people would not tolerate priestly criticism of their lifestyle. Frustrated as they sometimes were with priests who attempted to curtail drinking, dancing, trading liquor to the Indians, and other sins, even the least pious *habitants* understood the need for a priest. Most were grateful when a priest was available to officiate at mass on holy days, especially Easter and Christmas. Nearly all recognized the necessity of having priests legitimize weddings and baptisms. Though some villagers only entered the church on holidays, when they were baptized, and when they married, they were mindful of the necessity of priests and the church on those occasions.

When a priest arrived after a long period with no priest, villagers flocked to the church to schedule baptisms and marriages. It was common for a child to be baptized the day before, the same day, or the day after the "legitimate" marriage of the parents. The absence of a priest was undoubtedly felt most acutely when a couple wanted to marry, a child was born, or a villager died. While baptisms could either be delayed until a priest arrived or be performed by the lay churchwarden, no one could take the place of a priest when death loomed near. The *habitants* found it

difficult to watch friends and family members die without the spiritual comfort and final forgiveness of sins that only a priest could give.¹

While baptisms could wait and death did not wait, marriages fell somewhere in between. The laws of the church required that a priest officiate at weddings, but waiting for a priest to arrive could mean months or even years. The Vincennes parish records reveal that many couples were not willing to indefinitely postpone their marriages. A few traveled to other Illinois villages to be married in the presence of a priest. Some couples were wed under the civil authority of the local notary or churchwarden. Others gathered in church among family and friends and announced in a loud voice their intention to be married. The public declarations of the intent to live as man and wife and the civil marriages performed by notaries or church officials were intended only as temporary measures. All were expected to have their unions officially blessed by a priest whenever one appeared.²

Local priests sympathized with the plight of Illinois villagers who had no priest to marry them. The laws of the church prevented priests from condoning unions made without the blessing of the church, but most priests resigned themselves to the "necessary evil" of sanctioning civil marriages after the fact.³

¹Inhabitants of Vincennes to Bishop Pontbriand, April 22, 1769, as reprinted in Godecker, Bruté, 158-60.

²Meurin was the first to complain of the inability of the Vincennes inhabitants to have their marriages blessed, thus forcing them to live in sin as their marriages were without church sanction. Meurin to Bishop Briand, March 23, 1767 in IIHC 11: 526-27. Phillibert, the notary, who performed baptisms and other religious functions in the absence of a priest, complained of the "great scandal" of marriages contracted outside of the church. See "A Plea from Vincennes," April 6, 1767 in IIHC 11: 555-56.

³"A Plea from Vincennes," April 6, 1767 in IIHC 11: 555-56.

Only the weddings performed by priests were logged in the parish record books of St. Xavier Church in Vincennes. This conveys the fact that in the eyes of the church, people were not truly joined as wedded couples until a priest sanctioned the union. The St. Xavier church records clearly detail the common practice of having priests perform "official" marriages for couples who had already "unofficially" married, were living together, and who often had children. An example of an "unofficial" union being sanctioned by a priest is the union of Nicholas Chapart and Cecelia Lacoste. According to an entry in the parish records dated July 19, 1784

the said spouses received the sacrament of marriage according to the prescribed form after having renewed their mutual consent which they gave two and a half years ago before Mr. Philibert called Orleans [the notary] and Nicholas Ballargeon, and Francis Bosseron [military commandant] to serve as a preliminary to a better form, and awaiting the occasion to have the said marriage ratified in presence of an approved priest, and of several witnesses, as it is ordained by our mother the holy Church.¹

The presence of members of the town elite or local military officers made "unofficial" marriages seem more ceremonious. When John Bte Vaudrie married Marie Claire Chapard, the lack of a priest did not stop them from having a big church wedding. When the union was finally blessed some time later by Father Gibault, the priest recorded that the couple had already been married "in the church in presence of their nearest relatives and their most considered friends , of the principal tradesmen, inhabitants, officers of militia, notary, layclerk, and guardian of this church. . . ." When

¹VPR, 34.

Father Gibault blessed their union on June 20, 1785, he also baptized a son and a daughter.¹

While most couples sought a priest's blessing on their marriage soon after his arrival, some couples did not bother to seek out the priest's official stamp of approval. In 1796 Father Rivet wrote to his superior that he was refusing the sacraments to couples who did not come to have their unions blessed as the law of the church required. This punishment brought most before him, but a few had lost faith so entirely as to not care whether or not they received the sacraments. While priests interpreted couples' unwillingness to appear for an official blessing of their marriage as a sign of a lack of faith or even sinfulness, the people themselves had a different perspective. After having a civil marriage, often in the church itself surrounded by many members of the community who later attended a wedding feast and celebration, and then after having lived together for years and perhaps having a child or two, some couples saw no need for a priest to legitimize their union. Receiving no on-going religious instruction or sermons, most people were guided as much by their own conscience and common sense as they were the distant canons of the Catholic church.

Two villagers who lived together as husband and wife without official church recognition of their marriage were Therèse Goder and Joseph Barois. Both individuals came from respected Vincennes families. Seven months after their son, Joseph, was born, a missionary priest arrived in town. They dutifully arranged for Father Olivier to baptize Joseph. The priest performed the baptism, but recorded his disapproval of the couple illegitimate marriage in the baptismal record. Olivier stated that Joseph

¹Marriage dated June 20, 1785, in VPR, 38.

was born of the "adulterous marriage" of his parents, Therèse and Joseph (father). In this case, the parents were careful to assure the salvation of their child by having him baptized, but they ignored Olivier's condemnation of their union as being "adulterous."¹

While the strictures of the church demanded marriage-by-priest and no divorce, the remote geographic situation of Vincennes and the long periods without priests resulted not only in unconventional weddings, but also in other practices which were deemed totally unacceptable by church officials. One visiting priest, Donatien Olivier, believed that the lack of a priest to perform marriages and inculcate an obedience to church laws contributed to serious moral problems in the community. It seemed that some couples did not feel their unions had been permanently cemented prior to the blessing of a priest. Olivier believed infidelity was more of a problem among couples who had not been joined by the church. If husbands and wives were unhappy living together and their marriage had not yet been blessed, some of them simply separated. Olivier reported that these same people did not hesitate to consort with other individuals of like situation, and even reappeared in front of the civil officers to remarry. On one occasion Olivier himself was approached to bless such a marriage. Apart from the blatant immorality of this behavior, Olivier was concerned about the effect of separations and remarriages upon the children.²

¹For priests frustrated with irregularities in marriages, see McAvoy, Catholic Church, 86. For Rivet's frustrations, see Rivet to Carroll, June 1, 1798, Archdiocesan Archives in Baltimore, as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 88. For "adulterous marriage" of Barois and Godere see VPR, 55. The parish records show numerous instances of priests baptizing illegitimate children or those born of adulterous marriages.

²This information was transmitted in a letter from Olivier to Bishop Carroll on March 2, 1807 as discussed in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 112. Father Rivet complained of the same problems in 1796. Rivet to Bishop Carroll, January 11, 1796, 8BC5 in Archdiocesan Archives of Baltimore as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 86.

Even after years of neglect, the townspeople were nonetheless well aware that the Roman Catholic church did not permit divorce or remarriage. Yet that very neglect created circumstances which prompted some couples to end unhappy relationships by declaring their unions had never been officially sanctioned by the church in the first place. This left them at liberty to leave one spouse and take up with another. While it is impossible to know how often couples separated or remarried, what is clear is that some villagers took advantage of the confusion concerning the status of their "halfway," civil marriages to end unhappy unions.¹

Another way to terminate an unhappy marriage was simply to disappear. This option, not often taken, was one which was much more difficult for women than for men. Men heavily involved in the fur trade probably had the easiest time re-establishing themselves in a different location, but tradesmen could also slip away and apply their skills in Detroit, New Orleans, or Canada where many of them still had relatives and friends. In 1786, Father Gibault spoke of the many "ingrate Canadians" who abandoned their wives in the Illinois country. He said that during his nearly twenty years in the Illinois country, he had received "over thirty letters from wives or their pastors seeking to find their husbands without success." At the time, Gibault was residing with one such woman in Vincennes who hoped that Gibault might help her locate her husband.²

While it was more difficult for women to abandon their husbands, it was possible. In 1807 Therèse Arnoux, a French woman from the Illinois village of Cahokia, succeeded in escaping from an unhappy marriage by

¹Father Rivet admitted that such "evil" habits were not in every family, but were common enough to cause general scandal. McAvoy, Catholic Church, 86.

²Gibault to Bishop of Quebec, June 6, 1786 as quoted in Donnelly, Gibault, 113.

leaving town. Her disappearance prompted her husband, Francois Arnoux, to look to the courts for assistance. An advertisement appeared in the July 25, 1807 edition of the *Vincennes Western Sun* newspaper announcing that Therèse had run off and that the authorities were looking for her. Francois Arnoux intended to sue his wife for libel and for divorce. It is unclear whether or not Therèse was aware that her husband intended to divorce her. If she believed that divorce was an option, it is likely she would not have made the difficult decision to flee from her home and re-establish herself elsewhere. What is clear is that Therèse, and perhaps other women as well, had the determination and courage to run away from home in order to escape from intolerable marriages.¹

From the standpoint of priests who served Vincennes the relatively rare cases of separations, remarriages, and runaway spouses were not as serious as the general immoral behavior of the majority of people living in Vincennes. The correspondence between priests who visited or lived in Vincennes and their superiors is replete with descriptions of the sinful behavior of the townfolk. The sacred laws of abstinence and fasting were "absolutely abandoned and even unknown."² Priests were especially irritated by the variety of ways the townspeople entertained themselves, especially when those activities occurred on Sundays and other religious holidays. Priests were appalled at the people's addiction to dancing, drinking, horse-racing, cock-fighting, card-playing, and gambling. In spite

¹Vincennes Western Sun, July 25, 1807. At this date, Vincennes was the only one of the Illinois villages which printed a local newspaper.

²Rivet to Carroll, Oct. 26, 1795 as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 86.

of protestations, villagers resisted priests' efforts to curtail the pasttimes that brought them so much pleasure.¹

The activity which illicited constant complaints from Father Rivet were the frequent "dancing parties" to which the people were "addicted." Rivet's frustration, born of his own failure to effect a decrease in the frequency of public dances, is evident in his letter to Bishop Carroll in 1796:

Nocturnal dances are here an unbridled passion. Rich and poor, old and young, even women enceinte, run thither with desperate madness to spend all the night. They even bring children at the breast. Indeed the custom goes so far that the priest is no longer allowed to open his mouth on the subject. Nor are they satisfied with spending the night at it; the holy days of Sunday and of the Feasts are at times wholly spent at dances.²

In spite of the respect which most habitants showed the local priest, they would not allow him to ruin their fun.

Father Gibault, while occasionally condemning the actions of his flock, was far less critical of the Vincennes villagers than later priests. This is perhaps because Gibault enjoyed many of the social pleasures that other priests fought to eradicate. Gibault's biographer, Joseph Donnelly, described Gibault as having an "easy familiarity" with his parishioners. Unlike other priests who learned their ecclesiastical manners and traditions in the rigid environment of French seminaries, Gibault was a Canadian who spent only two years in a Quebec seminary before being sent to the Illinois country. This helps to explain the difference between

¹Meurin to Bishop Briand, March 23, 1767 in IIIHC 11: 523; McAvoy, Catholic Church, 52, 87-89, 95.

²Rivet to Carroll, May 2, 1796, 8BD1 in Archdiocese Archives of Baltimore as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 88.

the reserve and social distance which marked the relations between most priests and the people, and the very different relationship between Gibault and his flock. Father Meurin, who served contemporaneously with Gibault in the Illinois country, did not approve of the way Gibault went hunting and fishing with the young men of the village, nor of the way he engaged in athletic contests with them. Meurin condemned Gibault's behavior in a letter to the Bishop of Quebec in 1776:

He [Gibault] took to participating in games with the young men, proving his skill, agility, strength, etc. He became too familiar with the ladies, pleased at arousing jealousies among them, visiting and conversing lengthily . . . [also, he is give to] late hours, card playing, celebrating and the like. He showed inebriates that he could drink as much or more than they.¹

It is quite possible that Meurin exaggerated Gibault's actions, but his accusations are supported by the testimony of some of Gibault's more "pious" church members who also disapproved of his actions. Sharing a background and lifestyle which was similar to the *habitants* after only a brief training for the priesthood, it is no wonder that Gibault was more tolerant of the people of Vincennes. But even Gibault recognized that Vincennes suffered from priestly neglect. He regretted that the years without regular religious instruction had resulted in an ignorance that allowed the people to be brought up like "savages."²

Though Gibault was generally more accepting of his parishioners' lifestyle, he was as frustrated as other priests with the people's

¹Meurin to Briand, May 23, 1776 in Archives of the Archdiocese of Quebec as printed in Donnelly, *Gibault*, 59-60.

²For more on Gibault's "easy" relationship with the people see Donnelly, *Gibault*, 60-61. For Gibault's alcohol consumption, see Ekberg, *Ste. Genevieve*, 400. According to Ekberg, Gibault's liquor bills in New Madrid showed he was drinking a quart of spirits per day in the late-1790's.

unwillingness to contribute to his support. People not used to supporting a priest (under the French regime the government picked up the tab for missionaries) often refused to contribute to the priest's support, regardless of whether the priest was just visiting or residing permanently among them. The poverty many townspeople during and after the American Revolution made it difficult for parishioners to give even a small amount. With only a few of the parishioners willing and able to tithe, priests often went without many comforts and even such essentials as food and firewood. While the shortage of priests required them to travel extensively, neither their home parishes nor the parishes they visited accepted the responsibility of supporting priests who did not devote full-time efforts to their spiritual or temporal needs. Tithing requires a high degree of religious enthusiasm mixed with financial discipline, a combination which was rare in Vincennes. Priests generally did not stay in town long enough to cultivate the level of dedication and obedience which was necessary to convince parishioners of the necessity of tithing.¹

According to priests who served in Vincennes, priestly neglect contributed to a loss of religious zeal, an indifference to church laws (with which they were not familiar), an unwillingness to tithe, a lack of obedience towards men of the cloth, and a general decay in morals and "civilized" behavior. While this description of the Vincennes *habitants* is an honest appraisal from the priests' point of view, priests in all historic periods and geographic locations have made similar judgements of their parishioners. Quite simply, common men and women are not driven by

¹McAvoy, *Catholic Church*, 54, 59, 92, 113-16. During the winter of 1796, Father Rivet was forced to live with some of his wealthier parishioners because he had no money to buy firewood to heat his own house.

the same commitment to a higher authority as are the men who devote their lives to God. The priorities of making a living, caring for children, and enjoying life often stand in the way of leading an exemplary religious life. In addition, there were several factors in Vincennes which created an environment of moral decline and social and economic disorder, an environment which provided fertile ground for "ungodly" behavior. These factors include the long periods which passed without a priest residing in town, a lack of strong civil government, the long distances between Vincennes and more populous, commercially-developed cities, and the extreme poverty of many people in the years following the American Revolution. Though the letters and reports of priests tell much about religious life in early Vincennes, it is important to remember that the priests' perceptions reveal as much about the priests themselves as they do about the way religion functioned in the village. It is equally important to consider religious life in Vincennes from the people's point of view.¹

The illiteracy of the vast majority of the Vincennes *habitants* makes it difficult to know how much common people thought about religious matters, how they felt about being deprived of priests or what they thought of the priests who did work among them. The voices of the village elite can occasionally be heard through the petitions they sent to bishops pleading for a priest to perform the sacraments, teach the children religion and discipline, and restore social order. That the more prosperous, elite members of the village looked to the church to assist in controlling the undisciplined, unruly members of their community is not surprising. Throughout history the highest ranks in many societies have relied on

¹Meurin to Bishop Briand, March 23, 1767 in IIIHC 11: 523.

institutionalized religion to help them protect property, concentrate power among the "better" sort, and improve the morals of the lower classes. Though the distance between rich and poor in Vincennes was not great, there were clearly leading families which exerted much influence over town decisions, held both appointed and elected military and civil offices, and enjoyed a lifestyle well above that of most villagers. It is understandable that these recognized community leaders would be the most concerned with the existence of "lawlessness," immorality, and social vices in their midst. They would therefore be the most disappointed when there was no priest available to serve Vincennes.

The vast majority of Vincennes villagers were undeniably lax in their religious duties, but even after years of neglect most did not abandon their faith altogether. Though they experienced a declining comprehension of the dogmas of the church because their traditions were oral, they kept alive the beliefs, rituals, and practices which were meaningful to them. Newly-arrived priests commented on the "ignorance" and vices of the people, but they also remarked on the people's great desire to have a priest among them. Whereas people either disregarded or were ignorant of church regulations with regard to the observance of the feasts, of fasts, and abstinence, they continued to have their children baptized and their marriages blessed by a priest. Many scoffed at priests' attempts to curb excessive dancing, drinking, and gambling, but this did not keep them from appearing before the priest to ask forgiveness for those actions which they perceived were sinful. Though few were devout in their outward religious lives, many relied on the benefits of prayer during troubled times. When harvests were threatened, kinfolk were sick or dying, or other misfortunes

occurred, the people prayed for the intercession of the saints on their behalf.

In these and other ways, the people of Vincennes carried on the tradition of Roman Catholicism which they carried with them from France and Canada. The geographic remoteness of the Illinois country and the shortage of priests to serve there, however, meant that Catholicism developed differently on the American frontier than it did in France or Canada. Such differences were imperceptible to colonial English or American visitors. To English-speaking Protestants, the people of Vincennes were merely Catholics. This made them distinctly different from English colonists in the east or from the Americans who eventually settled among them.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN IN EARLY VINCENNES

English and American travelers in the Illinois country often noted the favorable conditions enjoyed by independently-minded French women who were "by no means prone to consider themselves in the light of goods and chattels of their liege-lords."¹ John Cleves Symmes, father-in-law to the first governor of the Indiana Territory, summed up the dismay travelers from the English-settled colonies felt on observing French frontier women. Symmes was shocked by gender relations in Vincennes where men were "the greatest slaves to their wives in the world."

According to Symmes:

They [men] milk the cows--cook for the family--fetch & carry and in a word do every thing that is done in doors & out, washing their linnen excepted, while the women spend their time walking about, sitting at their doors, or nursing their children from morning to night, and if one might judge from the contrast I am led to suppose that through the night the men are obliged to observe an humble distance.²

Mere survival required Vincennes women to do much more than Symmes describes, and it is likely that he exaggerates the extent to which women dominated their husbands. Yet there are likely seeds of truth in what Symmes perceived, as is given credence by the comments of other

¹Edmund Flagg, The Far West: or, A Tour beyond the Mountains, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, 27 (1906): 53-4.

²Bond, Jr., (ed.), John Cleves Symmes, 290.

visitors. An examination of the demographic situation, the French legal system and inheritance laws, and the distinct economic system in the Illinois country suggest that the women in Vincennes and the other Illinois villages exerted considerable influence over decisions which affected themselves, their families, and their communities.

Very little has been written about women in the Illinois country, and nothing has been written on Indiana's earliest white female population, the women of Vincennes. Frontier history has generally followed Anglo-Americans as they moved westward across the continent. Just as it is important to study the unique experiences of the French, Spanish, and Native American peoples before, during, and after they encountered pioneers from the eastern United States, so it is important to learn of the differences and similarities between women in the old French and Spanish settlements as compared to the American women who eventually settled in or near their towns.

Part of the difficulty in reconstructing women's lives in Vincennes and the rest of the Illinois country is the scarcity of sources pertaining to women. Most of the primary documents which exist for the 1750-1820 period were written by males for other males. Such documents include the letters of military officials, fur traders, priests, and early United States government officials. Only rarely do these sources reveal information concerning the lives of women. Another difficulty in studying Vincennes women is that census information on this village is meager before 1800. While British and Spanish officials recorded census information for some of the other Illinois villages, such information was rarely collected for Vincennes. Another twist of fate which complicates the study of women in Vincennes is the fact that a Vincennes notary, Bouvier, "whose bad conduct

obliged him to depart secretly" either destroyed the documents in his possession or took them with him sometime prior to 1774. Thus a large number of marriage contracts, wills, estate inventories, land grants, and other legal documents in his possession were lost.¹

Though information on Vincennes is more difficult to access than information pertaining to other Illinois settlements whose notarial records were preserved intact, a representative sample of such documents can be found in the private papers of early Vincennes families. The collected papers of several of Vincennes' early families, the Knox County court records which date from 1796, and the Vincennes Parish Records which date from 1749 are all useful primary documents.² A small body of secondary works has been published on women in the Illinois villages of St. Anne (near Fort de Chartres) and St. Genevieve.³ These studies are

¹Ste Marie to General Haldimand, May 3, 1774 in Dunn, Documents Relating to the French Settlements, 423. In the letter Ste Marie also states that some documents were destroyed by rats. In his article "French Settlers and Settlements in the Illinois Country in the Eighteenth Century," in The French, the Indians, and George Rogers Clark in the Illinois Country, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1977), John Francis McDermott commented on the difficulty of studying Vincennes due to the problem of missing primary materials (wills, records of public sales, marriage contracts, military correspondence, etc.) which were not preserved in local archives. It is true that such documents are not numerous or as easily accessed as those in other Illinois villages which preserved their colonial records intact. Valuable documents, however, do still survive in the collected papers of early Vincennes citizens which are found in the Indiana State Library and the library of the Indiana Historical Society.

²The Knox County Court Files, housed in the Knox County Courthouse in Vincennes, contain original court records dating to the 1790's. Knox County Court records are also on microfilm at the Indiana Historical Society and the Archives Division of the Indiana State Library. The original copies of the Parish Records of St. Xavier Catholic Church, 1749-1913 are in the Old Cathedral Library in Vincennes, Indiana. Microfilm available at the Genealogy Division of the Indiana State Library. These records, though incomplete for some years, yield valuable information for the study of women, slaves, Indians, etc.

³Susan Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide? Women in St. Genevieve, 1750-1805," in The William and Mary Quarterly 44 (1987), 775-789; Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," and Briggs, "The Enhanced Status of Women in French Colonial Illinois," in Clarence A. Glasrud, ed., The Quiet Heritage/Le Heritage Tranquil (Moorhead, Minn., 1987).

valuable to an understanding of Vincennes women since life was so similar for all of the people in the Illinois country. In addition to the close proximity of the villages which allowed considerable mobility between the towns, they also shared the same climate, economy, and political and diplomatic developments. A last category of information yielding occasional glimpses into the lives of Vincennes women are the letters, journals, and books of American and English "adventurers" who traveled in the western country (still east of the Mississippi) during the 1750-1820 period.

Throughout the eighteenth century, there were considerably more men than women living in the Illinois villages. This sexual imbalance worked to the advantage of Illinois women in many ways, much as it did during the early years of settlement in the colonial Chesapeake region (Maryland and Virginia).¹ In the early modern period when the family rather than the individual was the basic unit of society, the goal of every individual was to marry and establish a household. Survival was difficult for adults who did not have a spouse to share in the work of maintaining a household, and for this reason widows and widowers usually remarried as soon as possible after the death of a spouse. Children lived at home until they could marry and establish their own households, even though for Illinois men this frequently did not occur until their mid- to late-twenties and sometimes later.² In a region where there were often twice as many

¹Linda E. Speth, "More Than Her 'Thirds': Wives and Widows in Colonial Virginia," in Linda E. Speth and Alison Duncan Hirsh, Women, Family, and Community in Colonial America: Two Perspectives, (New York, 1983); Lois Green Carr, "Inheritance in the Colonial Chesapeake," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (eds.), Women in the Age of the American Revolution, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1989).

²Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 778

males as females, finding a wife was not always easy. The relative shortage of women to men naturally gave women great bargaining power with which to better their condition.¹

While a pronounced sexual imbalance has been established in the Illinois villages of St. Genevieve and St. Anne (near Fort de Chartres), it is more difficult to pinpoint the exact male-female ratio in Vincennes due to the lack of census information. Prior to 1800, there was no census indicating the number of females in various age groups in Vincennes. Except for the census of 1787, census totals listed only the total number of "inhabitants." The census of 1787, the first to record the number of females in each household, listed 520 men and 353 women. Unfortunately, the ages of females were not recorded. Thus, when two females are listed as living with a man, one cannot tell if they are two daughters or one daughter and a wife. Since the age of every male in the household was recorded, it is possible to deduce that there were 282 men over eighteen years old living in Vincennes, and at least 179 of these men did not have a wife. Since some of the females listed with male household heads were probably daughters (wife deceased), the number of single men without wives may have been even greater. By 1800 the sex ratio had begun to even out, but even then there were 780 males and only 675 females.

¹In "The Forgotten Colony," 126, Briggs states that in 1752 there were nearly two men for every woman in Ste. Anne's Parish (near Fort de Chartres). In St. Genevieve, the percentage of white women to men fluctuated from 25 in 1752 to 43 in 1800. See Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 778.

Vincennes Census in 1787¹

| | |
|-------------------------------------------|-----|
| Males | 520 |
| Females | 353 |
| Males Over 18 | 282 |
| Males Over 18 Not Living with a female | 179 |

Vincennes Population in 1800²

| | Males | Females |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| Town of Vincennes | 373 | 333 |
| Neighborhood of Vincennes | 407 | 342 |
| Total | <u>780</u> | <u>675</u> |

With the information which can be drawn from existing sources pertaining to Vincennes, as well as the more detailed information which has been analyzed for St. Genevieve and St. Anne (due to better census information), it is clear that men far outnumbered women in the Illinois country during most of the eighteenth century. The biggest reason for this is that in the early decades of settlement (1730's - 1760's) the number of men who moved from Canada, Detroit, or elsewhere to the Illinois country far surpassed the number of women. With a shortage of white women, men sometimes took Indian wives who usually resided with their husbands and raised their children in French villages. In time the male/female ratio in the Illinois country began to draw closer, more as a result of natural increase than to any sizeable immigration of women to the Illinois country. During the British regime in the 1760's, a large number of men were drawn to Vincennes because no British government

¹Continental Congress Papers, item 48, 167-173.

²Census Return of Indiana Territory in Woolen et al., (eds.), Executive Journal of Indiana Territory, 3:83.

or troops were stationed there. While some of the 168 "strangers" who were counted in the 1767 may have been voyageurs or transient men who later left Vincennes, it is probable that some of these men stayed, thus further increasing the male to female population ratio.¹

Since there were considerably fewer French women than men in the Illinois country, it should not be surprising that women married much younger than men. In neighboring St. Genevieve, women began to wed at age fourteen, and most married between the ages of 15 and 21. Men began to wed at age eighteen, but the age at first marriage for men more typically ranged widely between 20 and 36. Most men delayed marriage until they were in their mid-twenties. Since husbands were often many years older than their wives, wives often outlived their husbands. The age discrepancy between married partners, along with the sexual imbalance between women and men, combined to produce a large number of widows and a higher rate of second and third marriages for women than for men.²

Not only did the shortage of women improve widows' prospects for remarriage, the inheritance laws operating in the Illinois country often provided widows with a generous inheritance which made her an even more desirable candidate for a second marriage. The French legal system which survived throughout the eighteenth century in the French colonies in America was known as the *coutume de Paris*.³ According to the

¹Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 778. The influx of "strangers" to Vincennes is covered in Chapter 2. The Census of 1767 is found in IIHC, 11: 469-70.

²Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 779.

³This was a set of principles derived from the ancient tribal law which was pervasive throughout western and northern France, combined with other (sometimes contradictory) principles derived from Roman "written law" as practiced in southern France. This collection of French "customary" laws was set forth in written form by François Bourjon in 1770 in his Le Droit Commun de la France et la Coutume de Paris.

coutume, the surviving spouse received half of the estate upon the death of the other, and the remaining half was divided equally among the couple's children regardless of sex. If there were no children, the surviving partner enjoyed the couple's property for life. In addition to the widow's portion of the couple's accumulated property (the *communauté*), the widow also received a *douaire* (dower) and a *préciput*, sums of money which the wife was to receive if her husband died. These sums were stipulated in the marriage contracts which were widely used in Canada and the Illinois country. Widows also had clear claim to the property she brought to the marriage. If a woman's children were minors, she usually controlled all of the couple's property until her children came of age. At that time, the children's portion of the inheritance was divided equally among all children, with no discrimination against female offspring.¹

The fate of widows in the Illinois country differed markedly from her sisters along the American seaboard colonies. According to English inheritance laws, a widow inherited one-third of the family's personal property and the use of one-third of her husband's land for her lifetime. This was supposed to provide for a widow's maintenance while ensuring that the family's land itself eventually passed intact to a son (or sons). A widow could not sell her portion of the land, since it ultimately belonged to her children. These laws enabled a man to prevent his property from passing to his children's step-father, should his widow remarry, or to later children his widow might bear by a subsequent father. While children received equal shares of the family inheritance, English daughters

¹Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 782-83. For a detailed description of the use marriage contracts and inheritance laws in the Illinois country see Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," 148-158

generally received only moveable property while sons received land. In cases where a husband's debts exceeded the value of his estate, the courts required widows to sell off land and property to settle debts, leaving a woman with little more than her personal effects.¹

One key difference between the experiences of women in the American colonies and those who lived in the Illinois country was that in the Illinois country women received one-half, rather than one-third of her husband's estate and that land was hers to keep or dispose of, not to merely use until the land could be passed to children. Another key difference is that French women could, and did, retain control of their own property even while their husbands were alive. While an Englishwoman's claim to property automatically was transferred to her husband upon marriage, this was not necessarily the case in France or her colonies. Marriage contracts were widely used in Canada and the Illinois country, and one of the things clearly established in these documents was whether or not a woman's property would remain her own or become part of the couple's community property. A husband could not sell his wife's property without her permission. For example, on April 7, 1797, the wife of wealthy merchant Toussaint Dubois was interviewed by the court to gain her consent for a land transaction her husband intended to make. It appears that part of the lands he planned to sell were his wife's dower lands. The court would not let the transaction proceed without first

¹For detailed accounts of inheritance laws in the seaboard colonies, see the following articles in Hoffman and Albert (eds.), Women in the Age of the American Revolution: Lois Green Carr, "Inheritance in the Colonial Chesapeake," Daniel Scott Smith, "Inheritance and the Social History of Early American Women," David Narrett, "Men's Wills and Women's Property Rights in Colonial New York," and Carole Shammas, "Early American Women and Control over Capital."

interviewing Madame Dubois and confirming her willingness to part with the land in question.¹

In the Illinois country widows faced with debts also had more legal protection than did her eastern counterparts. While a woman could be forced to sell the community property to settle the debts, creditors could not claim the dower property she had brought to the marriage. In case of excessive debts, French law allowed a woman to renounce the community property while still keeping any dower land as well as her personal effects. The right of women to renounce the community property was to counterbalance the limitations marriage placed upon them in terms of managing the family fortunes. If a husband lost the family's resources, the woman did not risk losing everything when he died.²

One Vincennes woman who took advantage of the ability to renounce the community property was Françoise Richardville, the wife of the wealthy merchant François Bosseron. Although the Bosserons were one of the leading families in Vincennes (socially and economically), François Bosseron owed large amounts of money to creditors when he died in 1791. Part of his financial difficulties stemmed from the large amount of credit and loans Bosseron extended to George Rogers Clark and his officers, loans which were not repaid by the Virginia government or the Continental Congress. Fearing that she might lose all her property to her husband's many creditors, and having a large family to support, Widow Bosseron petitioned the Vincennes court to settle her husband's estate according to

¹Legal document establishing that Madame Dubois had been interviewed on April 7, 1797 in Lasselie Papers. For other examples of women selling land in Lasselie Papers see Marie Pagé selling one hundred acres to William Johnson and on April 15, 1791, Widow Bazinet selling 400 acres to Francis Vigo.

²Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 781-82.

French laws and the local customs. Her situation was made difficult by the fact that there was no notary present, and only such an officer had traditionally held the power to "mettre une veuve dans ses droits," or give to a widow what she rightfully was due.¹ In absence of a notary, Widow Bosseron wrote a petition to the Vincennes court. The court, unfamiliar with the details of French law, sought clarification from the local priest, Father Flaget. His response assured the court that Widow Bosseron could indeed "Renounce to the Community" and still demand not only all that she had brought to the marriage, but also her douaire of 1500 livres and her preciput of 700 livres, which was set forth in her marriage contract. She could chose whether she wanted the 700 livres to be paid in money or in furniture. In addition she could "take her things, pearls, Linen, gowns, and all the furniture of her Room."²

While women's legal position in the Illinois country was definitely inferior to that of men, the old French customary law gave women greater protection than did English law. Under English law, the identity of women merged into that of her husband when she married. William Blackstone clearly explained the legal subordination of wives in his Commentaries on the Laws of England:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.³

¹Widow Bosseron's petition to the Court of Common Pleas, February 9, 1792, Lasselle Papers.

²Flaget to Bird, 1792, in Lasselle Papers.

³As quoted in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 7.

English women's *couverture* was given expression by the loss of their names when married. Mary Brown became either Mrs. John Brown, or more likely, John Brown his wife. Colonial English women could not acquire property, sign a contract, or write a will.¹ By contrast, Illinois women wrote wills, controlled their own property, and retained their maiden names, first name and family name, throughout their lives. When American lawyers and record-keepers settled in Vincennes in the 1790's, they often did not refer to French women by their maiden names in legal documents. Thus "Françoise Richarville, widow of Bosseron" becomes merely Widow Bosseron with "widow" capitalized, as if the woman's only important identity was as the relict of Bosseron. Nonetheless, the French character and history of Vincennes guaranteed that French women there would continue to live their lives according to French law and custom well into the nineteenth century.²

The will of Françoise Outlas, written in 1793, clearly expresses the ability of Vincennes women to make important decisions affecting themselves and their families. Françoise settled early in Vincennes. She married the wealthy merchant/trader, Joseph Antoine Drouet de Richardville in 1756. After the death of her husband in 1764, she waited until 1773 before remarrying another of Vincennes wealthiest citizens, Ambroise Dagenet (or Dageney). With the substantial wealth Françoise

¹Ulrich, 7.

²In the Vincennes Parish Records where the baptisms list both the mother and father, the mother is always listed by her maiden name well into the 1800's reflecting a continuation of French customs. For an example of women losing their names in the American legal system see Knox County Court Records, Circuit Court, March Term 1815. "Louis Duprès & Therese his wife" file a slander complaint against "Jean Bte Drouet dit Richarville and Victoire his wife, in custody. . ." It is the women who have had the dispute, but they appear in court under the protective wing of their husbands. Their maiden names, which were undoubtedly well-known and used in the French community, were not included on the legal brief.

inherited from her first marriage, it is likely that she remained single by choice for nearly a decade, enjoying the independence that her status as a wealthy head of household brought. Françoise was a literate woman who took an active role in community affairs. Until her death she was known in the community and on legal documents by her maiden name, though she occasionally signed her name "Veuve [Widow] Dagenet" near the end of her life.¹ After Ambroise died, Françoise drew up her own will to make sure that upon her own death her estate would be divided according to her specific wishes. Rather than leave her land and property to her son and/or daughter, both of whom were very wealthy, she left hundreds of acres of land and nearly all of her considerable property to her daughter's four children. She appointed her daughter, Marguerite, the sole executor of the estate. Marguerite would receive all of the "Rents, Issues and Profits" from the estate to support and educate her two daughters and two sons. The estate was to be kept intact until one of the children should marry or "attain the age at which by the Custom of Paris either of them may take upon him or herself the management of his or her Estate." At that point the whole estate was to be divided equally among Marguerite's four children. If fate should leave Marguerite "unprovided for" (not likely since she was married to one of the wealthiest men in town, Paul Gamelin), the children would be required to contribute to her support in the annual amount of six hundred livres. If all the children died, Marguerite inherited all. To her son Amboise Dagenet, who had moved to Kaskaskia, she left only "one compleat Bed, one Silver Spoon and one Silver Fork and two Heifers of eighteen months old each." One can only speculate why she left

¹Francoise Outlas to Ambroise Dagenet, December 12, 1791 in Lasselle Papers.

so little to her son, but what is clear is that she was a woman accustomed to making decisions and exercising authority. Françoise lived seven more years after making out her will, dying in 1800.¹

Françoise's will reveals not only her own strong character and independence, but also her desire that her daughter and her granddaughters also have the ability to act independently. She could have put her estate in the hands of a nearby male relative until her grandchildren were older (possibly Marguerite's husband), and she could have appointed her son and daughter co-executors of her will. Françoise did neither. Her decision to appoint Marguerite as sole executor of the will as well as the decision to allow Marguerite to manage the estate shows great confidence in Marguerite's good sense and ability to make sound financial decisions while managing the estate. Françoise's concern that all of the grandchildren, including the two females, receive an education,

The ability to think and act independently was something that served women well when their husbands were away on business or after their husbands died. In the absence or death of a husband, a wife or widow was expected to fulfill all the responsibilities associated with her position as the head of the household. This position gave women much authority in the family and the community. In the early modern period, the basic element of each community was not the individual, but rather the household which included all residents and the household assets. The head of each household exercised the ultimate authority within the household and also vis-a-vis the community. The household head was

¹Will of Françoise Outlas dated April 23, 1793 in Laselle Papers. The inventory attached to the will reveals that she owned considerable property, animals, and household goods.

usually a male, but in case of his absence or death, his wife was expected to move into this position and to assume the responsibilities and the authority the position entailed. The ability of the family to survive and prosper depended on the household head, male or female. Because village politics often sought input from each family in the village on important issues, the voices of female household heads were heard at village meetings. Although these women (usually widows) could not officially vote, their votes often were "unofficially" cast through the vehicle of their oldest son, even if he was not old enough to legitimately cast a vote. It was better to bend the rules on voting age than to deny a household a say in an important matter.¹

Several widows acting as household heads benefitted in equal measure as their male counterparts when the United States Congress, frustrated with the difficulty in sorting out land claims in Vincennes, offered to give each household head living in Vincennes in 1783 four hundred acres of land (commonly referred to as the "donation lands"). Of the 207 individuals who had their claims approved, thirty-one were widows. Unfortunately, a surveyor did not arrive until 1804 and the land grants were not completely confirmed until 1807. By then, most people had lost faith in ever receiving the land or they sold their claims out of economic necessity. The widows, as well as most of the the male claimants, had sold their land to speculators (Vincennes French merchants as well as American politicians) for a fraction of what the land was worth. Still, the income gained from selling the claims was welcomed by the widows who received original land grants because of their positions as legitimate heads

¹Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," 128-29.

of households. The thirty-one widows who received the grants had the authority to decide whether or not to keep the land as well as the responsibility of seeking the best terms if they did decide to sell.¹

The ability of a Vincennes widow to serve effectively as household head was directly affected by her experiences prior to her husband's death. While a substantial portion of every woman's life was spent on the gender-specific duties of caring for a home and family, women frequently shouldered the responsibilities of "deputy husbands" while their husbands were alive as well as after husbands died.² Performing traditionally masculine tasks and taking care of business usually conducted by men was often necessary in a society where nearly all men spent time away from home to hunt, trap furs, or trade with Indians. Hunting, trapping, and trading within the Illinois region often took men away for a few days or a few weeks, but more distant trips lasting several months were not at all uncommon. Wealthy merchants or their representatives regularly left for long periods to conduct business in New Orleans, Detroit, Philadelphia, and in the other Illinois villages. Men from the common ranks traveled with them to act as boatmen, hunters, and laborers (unloading and loading goods upon reaching the destination). So common were trips to New Orleans that people said they were merely "going to town."³ While they were away, husbands expected their wives to act in their stead, to do whatever was necessary to keep the family farm and/or business afloat.

¹Land Claims, Vincennes District: A Report and documents from the Commissioner of the General Land Office, in relation to Land Claims in the Vincennes Land District in the State of Indiana, 1835, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1983).

²Laurel Thatcher Ulrich describes colonial English women's responsibilities as "deputy husbands" in Good Wives.

³Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 784-85.

As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explains in Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750, early modern society had gender expectations which normally assigned women to domestic duties in their houses and yards, but there were no sharp barriers separating male and females "spheres" that became increasingly prevalent during the nineteenth century. According to Ulrich, almost any task was deemed suitable for a woman "as long as it furthered the good of her family and was acceptable to her husband."¹

What distinguished the experiences of women in Vincennes from the experiences of women in the eastern American colonies or in Europe was the frequency and duration of their husbands' absences. New England men were primarily farmers and artisans, as were most men in Europe. Both occupations kept men close to home. By contrast, few men in the Illinois country made a living just by farming or craftwork. The key to security and prosperity in the Illinois country was to diversify. A whole year's grain production could be swept overboard or stolen by Indians on its way to New Orleans. A prolonged drought could prevent crops from ever maturing to harvest. Changing colonial administrations could complicate relations with local Indians and/or change the rules of trade. An unfriendly administration in New Orleans could make it very difficult to market goods through that port. To cushion themselves against unexpected circumstances, the inhabitants of Vincennes realized that diversification was the key to survival. Hunting, trapping, and fur trading brought in regular income, while the income from marketing crops came but once a year. Therefore, most women learned to manage on their own

¹Ulrich, Good Wives, 37-38.

while husbands hunted, trapped, and traded within the region. Wives of merchants, voyageurs, or large-scale traders were in charge of their households for months at a time when their husbands traveled to far-off destinations to conduct business. ¹

There is considerable evidence to suggest that women in the Illinois country were no strangers to a wide variety of commercial transactions. They were present at public auctions, bidding and buying goods along with the village men. Women regularly assisted their husbands with various tasks associated with the fur trade. In 1803 Catharine La Bonneau collected fifty skins from Zakarie Cicot and delivered them to Hyacinthe Lasselle, the wealthy Vincennes trader. In her own hand she made out the receipt to Cicot acknowledging having received the skins.² A note in the collected papers of Francis Vigo, wealthy merchant and fur trader, directed his wife to "give James Drury as much of your Bleu [blue] Broad Cloth as he thinks necessary to make a coat and overhalls."³ On September 5, 1833, Hyacinthe Lasselle wrote to his daughter Nancy asking her to "send papers which we prepared for Detroit." Nancy had obviously worked with her father, one of the largest fur traders and merchants in the Illinois country, to prepare commercial papers concerning their financial dealings with traders in Detroit. Hyacinthe expected that Nancy would know just what papers he had in mind.⁴

The disappearance of notary records in Vincennes has unfortunately wiped away many traces of women participating in commercial activities.

¹Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 784-85.

²The note acknowledging the receipt of the skins from Cicot is dated April 16, 1803 in Lasselle Papers.

³Note dated July 27, 1798 in Folder 2 of Collected Papers of Francis Vigo, WHSL, Indiana Historical Society.

⁴Hyacinthe Lasselle to daughter Nancy, September 5, 1833 in Lasselle Papers.

It is useful therefore to look to the neighboring Illinois villages to see what part women played in commercial transactions. According to Susan Boyle's in-depth study on St. Genevieve, French women in the Illinois country developed a sound understanding of their husbands' trades. Wives and widows in the Mississippi Valley settlements "exercised considerable power and came to be excellent administrators of their families' rural and commercial property." Women leased and rented property, lent and borrowed money, bought and sold slaves, had shares in mills or boats, became executors of their husbands' estates, managed the affairs of absent male tenants, and traded real estate with special zeal.¹ Wives, and especially widows had considerable freedom to participate in a wide variety of economic activities. Such women showed a thorough understanding of the legal system and the region's economy.²

While the twentieth-century woman may look approvingly on the ability of Vincennes women to exercise power and authority as deputy husbands, participate in commercial activities, or act as household heads upon the death of their husbands, it is important to remember that not all eighteenth-century women living in Vincennes enthusiastically embraced these roles and responsibilities. Some women looked upon their "deputy husband" responsibilities as unwanted disruptions of their daily work patterns and avoided them whenever possible. Many did not have the

¹Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 787-88.

²For women, especially widows, actively working to preserve and increase wealth see Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 787-88; Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," 168-74. Canadian studies reveal that women in New France were similarly well-equipped to assist with their husbands' business activities and to administer their families' rural and commercial property in case of the absence or death of their husbands. See Barbara Diefendorf, "Widowhood and Remarriage," Journal of Family History, 7 (1982), 379-395 and Jan Noel, "Les femmes favorisées: Women in New France," Atlantis 6 (1981), 80-98.

confidence, skills, or financial resources to manage a household effectively on their own when their husbands died, and these women were fortunate to live in a demographic situation which enabled widows to remarry quickly. While it is important to appreciate the the variety of ways that women participated in traditionally "male" activities, it is equally as important to understand the activities which Vincennes women considered "normal" and which defined the largest part of their existence. Regardless of the extent to which women shared in the decisions and activities associated with their husbands' work, the daily routine for most women was filled primarily with the specialized tasks of housekeeping and childcare.

The daily work of women throughout the Illinois country changed little during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Most of a woman's time was spent on the wide variety of duties which were necessary to keep a family clothed and fed. Only a few women from the wealthiest families enjoyed some respite from their domestic responsibilities by hiring black or Indian domestic servants (usually female Indians from the local Piankashaw tribe) since Vincennes had much fewer slaves than did several of the other Illinois settlements.¹ Though the many tasks that were necessary to put meals on the table consumed

¹The term used in Vincennes for Indian domestic servants was *panis*. The Census of 1767 reported 10 slaves and 17 "savage domestics" in a Vincennes population of 232 inhabitants and 168 "strangers." See "Census of Illinois, 1767" in IIHC 11: 469-70. The census for the Indiana Territory in 1800 reported only eight slaves in Vincennes and fifteen in the neighborhood of Vincennes. See Woolen et al., (ed.), Executive Journal, 83. The small number stands in contrast to other Illinois villages. The 1767 census for Kaskaskia reported 142 negro men, 81 negro women, and 80 negro boys (total of 303) in a white population of 600. No Indian servants were reported. In St. Genevieve, there were 276 black or mulatto slaves in a population of 676 whites in 1773, and in 1787 there were 256 slaves and 670 whites. See Ekberg, Colonial St. Genevieve, 202.

much time and energy, women in Vincennes were fortunate to have considerable resources at hand with which to prepare delicious and varied meals for their families. In the gardens situated next to their houses, women cultivated a wide variety of vegetables for use in her kitchen -- cabbages, beans, carrots, peas, turnips, and parsnips. Cucumbers were eaten with salt, served raw in cream, or cooked in milk. Pumpkins were roasted and served with sugar or boiled and their pulp used for pies or in bread. Few meals were taken without raw onion served on bread. The small orchards near the house provided apples, peaches, pears, cherries, currants, and melons. According to the English traveler John Bradbury, the French paid great attention to their gardening, and the apples and peaches were particularly fine. Strawberries and other berries grew wild around Vincennes. Fruit was served raw, in pies, or as fruit preserves. Small round cheeses were sometimes served, and milk was readily available from the cows which most families owned.¹

The people of Vincennes ate numerous types of fresh meats that were boiled, roasted, fricasseed, or stewed. Domestic hogs, cattle, and chickens were plentiful, though less so after American soldiers began seizing domestic animals with impunity during the 1780's and 1790's. Smoked hams were a regional specialty, and those not needed for local consumption were shipped downriver to New Orleans. A variety of fish was readily available from the nearby Wabash River. With wild game being plentiful in the nearby woods, residents did not rely exclusively on domestic animals or fish. While it is impossible to determine exactly what

¹Bradbury, Travels in the Interior, 264; Belting, Kaskaskia, 46-7; Thomas Hutchins, A Topographical Description of Virginia, Pennsylvania, . . . (London, 1778), 23-29.

proportion of their meat intake was wild game, it is clear that the people of Vincennes regularly varied their diet with deer, elk, bear, rabbit, turkey, prairie hen, and duck.¹

The considerable quantity of apples and grains which were produced at Vincennes enabled the people to make their own cider and beer. They also made their own wine from thin-skinned black grapes which grew wild. An elite Frenchman, the ex-governor of Guadeloupe, Victor Collet, considered the wine "agreeable to the taste, but cannot long be preserved." Wealthy families enjoyed expensive French wines which arrived via New Orleans. Those who could afford it drank tea and coffee which could be purchased from local merchants. At local taverns much taffia [a liquor made from molasses] and whiskey ("Wouiskey") was consumed.²

Breadmaking was a regular and time-consuming task for women in Vincennes. There were three flour mills in Vincennes as early as 1767 which enabled local residents to grind their wheat into flour.³ Bread was the inhabitants' key source of carbohydrates since maize and potatoes evidently were not part of the people's diet. Although there were bakers who supplied biscuit to the local troops and the voyageurs, most women baked their own bread. Butter churns were unknown in the Illinois county, so butter was prepared by beating sour cream with a fork or shaking it in a jar. Foods were sweetened primarily with the syrup or sugar made from tapping the maple trees which grew near the village.

¹Belting, Kaskaskia, 46-7. For a detailed account of the cuisine in the Illinois country, see Ekberg's chapter on "Daily Life" in Colonial Ste. Genevieve, 298-310.

²Collot, "A Journey in North America," 271. Thomas Hutchins, an American geographer, also commented on the Vincennes inhabitants "well-tasted Red-Wine." See Hutchins, A Topographical Description, 23-30. Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 311-12; Belting, Kaskaskia, 46-47.

³See Census of Illinois, 1767 in IIHC 11: 469-70.

Salt was readily available from the salt springs located near some of the other Illinois villages. The locally grown wheat, barley, oats, and rice provided staple foods year round. The preparation of three meals a day required considerable energy from women who of necessity cultivated their gardens, milked cows, picked domestic fruit from their gardens, gathered wild fruits and nuts, baked bread, and then prepared a variety of dishes for each meal. In preparation for the winter months, women salted and dried meat, dried fruits, and made cider, wine and taffia. All of this work paid off, for the French in the Illinois country regularly sat down to meals which were far superior to those prepared by American frontier women. Travelers often commented on the wonderful gardens, wide variety of crops, and delicious meals to be found in Vincennes.¹

Laundering clothes was another of the necessary tasks performed by Vincennes women. Clothes were dipped into the Wabash River, scrubbed on the beach, and pounded with short-handled paddles. Laundry soap was usually homemade from woodash and lye, yet death inventories reveal that wealthy French women in the Illinois country occasionally used commercial, imported soap from France. French women's interest in their appearance is evident from the numerous pressing irons also found in estate inventories.² With the proximity of a fort nearby, Vincennes women could earn money by doing laundry or mending clothes for the soldiers and officers. The proximity of these military men also provided a

¹Bradbury, Travels in the Interior, 261-64; Belting, Kaskaskia, 46-7; Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 298-311.

²Belting, Kaskaskia, 47; Volney, A View of the Soil, 332. For comments on soap and pressing irons see Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," 318-19. The inventory attached to the living will of Françoise Outlas near the end of her life listed "three smoothing irons." Living will of Françoise Outlas dated April 23, 1793 in Lasselle Papers.

ready market for surplus wheat, garden produce, or locally produced beverages.

The attention Vincennes women paid to keeping their homes neat and clean was noticed by visitors to the town. John Filson remarked in 1785 that the homes of the French "in general are Convenient and Clean within as there is perhaps no people in the world more friendly and Cleanly than the french."¹ The English Quaker Morris Birkbeck passed through Vincennes in 1817 commented that he saw "a spirit of cleanliness, and even neatness in their houses and manner of living." This was in stark contrast to his appraisal of frontier Americans. According to Birkbeck, "Cleanliness in houses, and too often in person, is neglected to a degree which is very revolting to an Englishman."²

Estate inventories provide many clues to the work performed by early Vincennes women by listing the types of tools and household objects women used each day. The property inventory of Françoise Outlas which was attached to her living will is an excellent example. The large quantity of furniture, bed curtains, table cloths, silver forks and spoons, and the five feather beds Françoise owned clearly set her apart from the common people of Vincennes. Her household was also exceptional in that Françoise owned a slave woman, Ceré, who assisted in the domestic chores. Yet some of the items listed in the inventory were work-related items which would have been deemed necessities in most households. For cooking at the fireplace or in her oven (likely used mostly for bread), Françoise owned many iron pots, pans, and skillets. She also owned one pair of

¹John Filson, "Two Westward Journeys of John Filson," in Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 9: 328.

²Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey, 100-102.

andirons, one pair of iron tongs, a fire shovel and two pot hooks to help maintain a fire and move the hot iron pots and pans. Her two hoes and a spade were used to keep the weeds out of the garden. The "kneading trough" was necessary for preparing bread dough. Making candles was another task women performed, and Françoise owned "eight Tin Candle moulds" for that purpose. The "three water buckets and yoke" were used to carry water from the nearest source, a job that was probably undertaken several times a day. Françoise's "four milch Cows" had to be milked each day and someone had to gather the eggs from the "twenty four Hens." Additional items which are signs of Françoise's wealth are: coffee mills, tea pots, crystal salt cellars and a pepper mill, a silver soup ladle, a large quantity of pewter, earthen, Delph and Queensware dishes, and "13 volumes old books" as well as the Old and New Testament.

There was one big difference between the work load of colonial French women and their counterparts in the American colonies. French women did not -- indeed could not -- produce their own cloth. The French government forbade colonial women from producing cloth so that cloth producers in France could profit from sales to the colonies. Illinois French women did not spin or weave, a fact born out by the fact that there were no spinning wheels or looms listing on death inventories in the Illinois country.¹ This meant that the clothes worn by the people of Vincennes were made from imported French cloth such as calico, cotton, limbourg, taffeta, Brittany linen, French wool and satin. Obviously the very expensive fabrics would have been used sparsely and only by those who

¹Travelers and historians of the Illinois Country agree that domestic industries were nonexistent. See Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana, 134, 136-37; Alvord, The Illinois Country, 217; Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide," 783.

could afford them, but the everyday attire of all the people was of a quality considerably above what visitors expected to find in the remote Illinois villages. Although Vincennes women did not produce their own cloth, the people of the village did raise some cotton. Just what they used the cotton for remains a mystery.¹

Illinois women attempted to keep up with the latest Paris styles, but fashion news traveled slowly from Paris to New Orleans to Vincennes.² While men often combined European and Indian clothing styles made from both European cloth and animal skins, Vincennes women dressed only in garments fashioned from European cloth except for the moccasins which were common footwear. The appearance of the Illinois French women provided a marked contrast to that of the American frontier women who regularly dressed in homespun garments. The American John Reynolds commented that the French women "always had something neat and tasty for Church and the Ballroom."³

The cost of shipping fabric from Europe and then up the Mississippi made all fabric rather expensive throughout most of the eighteenth century. Fabric cost declined, however, after 1795 when Pinckney's Treaty opened the navigation of the Mississippi to the United States, England, France and Spain. Traders brought cloth and other merchandise to Vincennes in increasing quantities, and the competition among traders lowered prices. While French women never spun cloth as did their American sisters, most of them spent considerable time fashioning the

¹For travelers commenting on Vincennes people raising cotton, see Bradbury, Travels, 264 and Volney, "A View of the Soil," excerpts in Lindley, (ed.), Indiana, 18.

²William Forrest Sprague, Women and the West: A Short Social History, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1940), 18.

³John Reynolds, My Own Time, 71.

cloth into finished garments. Wealthy families bought some finished garments direct from France or dressmakers in New Orleans, but most women could not have afforded the high cost of such apparel.¹

The fact that Vincennes women did not engage in such typical female activities as spinning, weaving, and knitting caused Anglo-Americans and even some French visitors to think them lazy. The Frenchman Constantin Volney set to paper what the American settlers in Vincennes told him concerning the French:

They are a kind, hospitable, sociable set, but then for idleness and ignorance, they beat the Indians themselves. They know nothing at all of civil or domestic affairs: their women neither sow, nor spin, nor make butter, but pass their time in gossiping and tattle, while all at home is dirt and disorder. The men take to nothing but hunting, fishing, roaming in the woods, and loitering in the sun.²

Clearly, at least some Americans did not share the positive opinions of others concerning the cleanliness of French homes or the wonderful meals French women prepared. The observation that Vincennes women spent considerable time "in gossiping and tattle" cannot, however, be easily discounted since this observation was recorded by other westward travelers. While there is no doubt that mere survival forced women to do much more than gossip, there must also be a reason travelers recorded this phenomena when they usually devoted very few words to the topic of women. The very "social" character of the French and the high priority they put on enjoying life likely created an environment where "gossiping" was deemed an important and accepted activity (similar to the male

¹Caruso, The Mississippi Valley Frontier, 364. While items of finished clothing were imported to the Illinois villages, much larger quantities of various types of fabric stocked merchants' shelves.

²Volney, "A View," in Lindley, Indiana, 21.

equivalent -- "loitering in the sun"!)). An additional reason for such comments, however, may relate to the unusual situation of long-established villages located deep in the American midwestern frontier offering the opportunity for women to socialize. Perhaps visitors who had just passed through miles of the American frontier, or had been living on the frontier, were not used to seeing women "frivolously" chatting with each other. Gossiping on a regular basis was simply not an option for American frontier women who lived on farms miles away from the nearest neighbors. For such American families, socializing only happened on special occasions when families and friends came together for weddings, barnraisings, or other celebrations. For the French, living in compact villages, daily interaction with friends and families was not only a possibility, but rather a necessity. The fact that the daily schedule of Vincennes women did not include the time-consuming tasks of cloth production -- carding, spinning, and weaving -- may also have contributed to the increased opportunities of Vincennes women for socializing.

The lack of domestic cloth production meant that Vincennes families had to budget resources to pay for clothes, but this was not a serious problem prior to the American Revolution when the people of Vincennes were generally prosperous enough to afford imported fabrics and/or finished clothing items. With the financial decline experienced by many people in Vincennes during and after the revolution, however, it became more difficult for families to afford imported fabric, even though the price declined after 1795. The inability of French women to produce fabric put pressure on their often meager incomes. When a new priest, Father Flaget, came to Vincennes in December of 1792, he saw a French people in desperate need of "uplifting," not only spiritual, but social and economic as

well. While he tried to persuade the men of the town to abandon hunting and fur trading and apply themselves strictly to farming and the trades, he urged women to learn to spin and weave. He had looms made to assist with this process. It is not known how successful he was in this endeavor. Flaget only stayed in Vincennes for two and a half years, and had limited resources to buy spinning wheels, looms, and distaffs. With limited time to teach whatever fabric-producing skills he may have possessed, it is doubtful whether he caused a revolution in home production among the French women of Vincennes.¹

Women in Vincennes were not so isolated from the rest of the world as to escape the patriarchal hierarchical system which so often subordinated women to men. Yet a variety of factors combined to create an environment where Illinois women enjoyed more power and status with fewer social restraints than was common in most European societies during the eighteenth century. The French legal system worked to women's advantage by recognizing women's ownership of property and by offering a variety of mechanisms to protect that property. French laws gave women more generous inheritances than American women generally received. The demographic shortage of women enabled them to be more selective of their husbands and made it easier for them to remarry when their husbands died. The dependence of most families on trapping, trading, and hunting meant that women learned to think and act independently during their husband's absences. Women realized the necessity of familiarizing themselves with their family's assets and liabilities, and their husbands learned to seek their wives' advice on

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 67.

important matters. The influence that women exercised in their families and in their communities was evident even to those just visiting the Illinois country. Amos Stoddard, the first United States civil commandant of the area made this appraisal of Illinois French women:

The women have more influence over their husbands than is common in most other countries. Perhaps this arises in part from the example of the parent state; in part from the respect, which the men entertain for their wives; and perhaps still more from the almost exclusive right, which the women have to the property, in consequence of marriage contracts. . . Even in most instances of purchases and sales, the women are consulted; and they not unfrequently assume the management of property.¹

Stoddard was clearly surprised at the influence Illinois women exercised in family decisions and the amount of respect their husbands paid them. Stoddard's comments taken with the other types of evidence reveal that the French women in Vincennes and the other Illinois settlements were used to their voices being heard. Their daily activities may not have differed considerably from women along the Atlantic seaboard or the American frontier communities, but the unique legal, social, and economic circumstances which marked life in the Illinois country allowed women a familial authority and level of independent thought and action which surpassed that experienced by most of their sisters in America or Europe.

¹Amos Stoddard, Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana, (Philadelphia, 1812), 323 and 328.

PART II
VINCENNES AND THE CLASH OF EMPIRES
1730-1820

Though Vincennes was located far from the centers of European empires, the town was nevertheless very much involved in imperial struggles. For several decades during the mid-eighteenth century, France and Great Britain struggled for control of the vast region bordered by the Great Lakes, the Ohio River, and the Mississippi River. Each of these two powers tried to dominate the region by first establishing trade relations with regional Indian tribes. While French and British government officials coveted the profits which flowed from the Indian trade, the interaction with Indians brought more than economic profit. Trade relations were a pre-condition for the development of political and military alliances, and Indian military support was essential for controlling the west. The considerable expense of stationing and provisioning regular troops at western posts meant that both France and Great Britain relied on Indian allies to help control territory. Vincennes and other Illinois forts existed to mark and to protect France's claim to that region.

The competition between France and Great Britain for control of the West culminated in the French and Indian War (1756-63). At the war's end a defeated France ceded to Britain all of Canada and the Louisiana territory east of the Mississippi River. The people of Vincennes were naturally fearful of the changes which they might experience under British

rule. The postwar financial difficulties of an over-extended Great Britain, however, left her unable to effectively assume control of the West. Consequently, although France lost her political control of the interior of North America in 1763, French cultural and economic strength in the West remained strong for several decades. Life in Vincennes was not dramatically affected by its change in imperial status.

When war broke out between Great Britain and her American colonies, Vincennes villagers once again faced an uncertain future. During the American Revolution the people of Vincennes--like their Indian neighbors--were expected to choose sides in a struggle which was not their own. Alliances were formed for practical reasons of self-preservation rather than out of any feeling of loyalty to either Great Britain or the United States. In the Treaty of Paris which followed the American victory, Britain gave up her claims to the western lands. While British domination had hardly affected daily life, local government, Indian relations, and the economic well-being of the French in Vincennes, the coming of Americans brought major changes in all of these areas.

Unlike the French or the British, the Americans did not seek merely to profit from the Indian trade or to nominally control the west. Americans wanted to own the land, to "civilize" the savage peoples (French and Indian alike) who lived there, and to build towns and establish familiar Anglo-American political and cultural institutions in the west. Along with the political organization of the territory came new laws, regulations, and taxes which were unpopular with the old French living in Vincennes and other colonial French settlements in the Illinois Country. Another unwelcome development was the increased tension between the French and Indians in the late eighteenth century as the French, now

citizens of the United States, found it progressively difficult to sustain long-time friendships with Indians and at the same time prove their allegiance to the United States.

The selection of Vincennes in 1800 as the capitol of the Indiana Territory (consisting of all of the Northwest Territory except Ohio) triggered rapid changes as American lawmakers, land surveyors, merchants, and entrepreneurs began a steady process of "Americanizing" the old French town. In spite of the successful efforts of Americans to create a familiar cultural, political, and economic environment in Vincennes, the perseverance of French culture and the propensity of many Anglo-American newcomers to settle on farms outside of Vincennes meant that the town preserved its essential character of a French colonial village well into the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 5

FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN FIGHT TO CONTROL THE WEST, 1732-1763

The trans-Appalachian West was an area where for decades the French and the British struggled for control as each tried to dominate and establish trade relations with the Indians who lived there. Indian trade was vital to both powers and more than economic profit was at stake. Indian military support was also needed and Indians were unlikely to ally without preexisting trade relations. Central in this struggle was the town of Vincennes.

Vincennes was founded in 1732 by François Marie Bissot, the Sieur de Vincennes. Vincennes began his career as a military man and diplomat among the Miami Indians. In this he followed his father, Jean Baptiste Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, who was appointed military commander among the Miami Indians in 1696 with headquarters at Post Miamis, near present-day Fort Wayne, Indiana. For more than twenty years, Jean Baptiste Bissot was one of the most influential French agents in the west. The Miami Indians, among whom he lived, respected and trusted him.¹ In 1718 his eighteen-year-old French-born son, François Marie Bissot, joined

¹Jean-Baptiste Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, was born in Quebec in 1688. He was educated at the Seminary of Quebec and then spent some time in France. He served in the "Compagnies Franches de la Marine" (Independent Compagnies of the Marine). These compagnies, comprised of French and Canadian soldiers, served as the king's troops in Canada beginning in the 1680's. Anson, The Miami Indians, 34-5; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 76n.

him at the Miami post as a cadet in the French Marines. When the elder Vincennes died the following winter, his son took over his duties and responsibilities. The younger Vincennes proved himself as capable as his father, and in time he became the most important Frenchman among the Miami.¹

The diplomatic goals of the Vincenneses, father and son, were clearly set forth by the Governor of New France, Phillippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil. They were to encourage the tribes to use French trade goods and dissuade them from developing economic and political ties to the British and their trade goods. The Vincenneses were to keep peace between the Miami and the Ottawas, who served as middle men between other Great Lakes tribes and the French merchants in Montreal and Quebec. In an attempt to achieve the first goal, de Vaudreuil ordered the elder Vincennes to persuade the various bands of the Miami tribe which had drifted both south and east from Lake Michigan to return closer to the Fort Chicago and St. Joseph River areas. Here they would be more likely to continue their trade with the French and serve as allies when needed.²

The Vincennes fort and trading post, which were constructed in 1732, were also established to encourage trade with local Indians and to guard the lower Wabash and Ohio River valleys from English intrusion. Post Vincennes was one of several French forts built in the American west in response to broad political and economic forces which shaped events

¹Anson, Miami Indians, Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 68-71. Reuben G. Thwaites, (ed.), "The French Regime in Wisconsin, 1634-1727" in Wisconsin Historical Collections, 16 (1902): 443. Thwaites contends that the younger Vincennes was actually the nephew of Jean Baptiste Bissot named François Margane Bissot. For more information on the Vincennes (father and son) see Pierre-Georges Roy, Sieur de Vincennes Identified, in Indiana Historical Society Publications, 7: 1-130.

²Anson, Miami Indians, 34-5.

during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Though the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley regions were far from Paris, London, Quebec and large colonial cities in the American colonies, decisions which were made in those large cities significantly affected the lives of the Indians, Indian agents, and French settlers who lived in the interior.

By the second decade of the eighteenth century, the French were worried about British trade competition among tribes who had traditionally traded only with the French. This concern was well-founded. Attempts by the French government to regulate the fur trade more strictly during the late seventeenth century had driven many tribes into the British trading orbit. In 1696 the French temporarily discontinued their *cong * system, which enabled licensed traders to take an approved amount of goods to designated sites to trade with specified tribes. The reason for the discontinuance of this policy was that in spite of efforts to carefully supervise and regulate the fur trade, many unlicensed traders (*coureurs du bois*) continued to trade illegally. This decreased the government's profits and drew potentially productive French settlers away from towns to the woods where they plied the fur trade. Another explanation given by the home government for the cessation of the *cong * system was the need to suppress the large amount of spirituous liquor which was illegally distributed by *coureurs du bois* to the Indians. Missionaries constantly complained of such abuses.¹

The *cong * system was replaced with a new "Concentration Policy" whereby tribes would bring their furs to Montreal or Detroit where trade could be carefully supervised by French commanders or other government

¹ibid., 39; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 69-70; M. Edouard Richard, "Report on Paris Archives," *Report on Canadian Archives*, (1904), Appendix K, 27.

officials. Smaller forts (which also served as trading posts) would be abandoned. It was hoped that this new policy would also end illegal trading and the distribution of liquor. The policy did not bring about the desired changes. Many *coureurs du bois* refused to abandon their independent lifestyle and leave the interior. They continued to trade with the Indians, buying supplies and selling their furs to Spanish or English traders.¹ Indians situated at a distance from the handful of "official" trading sites disliked having to travel long distances to sell furs and acquire trade goods. The Concentration Policy particularly angered the Ottawa, Miami, and Illinois Indians. These tribes had served as middlemen between the French and more distant tribes under the *cong e* system, but now their role as middlemen and the profits it brought were no more.²

Several tribes began trading with English traders who penetrated west of the Appalachian mountains as early as 1700. Traders from Carolina and Virginia had reached the Mississippi and were operating among the Arkansas Indians, and other traders were gradually working their ways down the Ohio, Cumberland, and Tennessee rivers towards the Mississippi.³ With fewer French military/trading establishments situated among the tribes, Indians were freer to trade with the English or their Shawnee, Delaware, or Iroquois middlemen without fearing repercussions from the French. In addition to the convenience of trading with the English, Indians had other reasons to look increasingly to the British as trade partners. The excellent quality of English cloth and higher prices

¹W. J. Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983, original edition in 1969), 126-28.

²Anson, Miami Indians, 33; Phillips, "Vincennes In French Colonial Policy," 312.

³Phillips, "Vincennes In French Colonial Policy, 311 and 317.

paid for beaver pelts were other incentives. The Six Nations of the Iroquois had traditionally served as a barrier to western tribes who desired to trade with the British at Albany. During the first decade of the eighteenth century the Iroquois permitted the Ottawa, Huron, and Miami tribes to pass through their lands on their way to trade in Albany. The French realized that they were unlikely to form military alliances with tribes that traded with the English. The ability of western tribes to trade freely with Albany or with British agents in the west might easily lead to a loss of French control in the west. It did not take the French government long to realize the errors of its ways. In an attempt to reassert French dominance among the tribes, the *congé* system was reinstated in 1715. Governor-General Vaudreuil was authorized to re-garrison abandoned forts and to build new ones wherever necessary to protect French claims and counter British expansion.¹

In 1717 a new French outpost, Fort Ouiatenon, was built among the Weas (a band of the Miami) on the Wabash River in what is now the northwestern part of Indiana. By 1722 a fort was constructed at the main Miami village, Kekionga. It was initially called Fort St. Phillippe but was later known as Fort Miamis.² While the French reestablished their presence among the tribes south of the Great Lakes, Governor Vaudreuil

¹Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 132-35 maintains that although French beaver prices were lower than the English, they paid higher prices for other furs such as fox, bear, otter, martin, and weasel. Still, beaver was the mainstay of the trade causing several tribes to look to Albany. Thwaites, French Regime, I: 211-13 includes a letter from Father Jean Mermet to Cadillac at Detroit dated April 19, 1702 warning Cadillac that twelve Miamis planned to go to the English to obtain trade goods and that the tribe intrigued against the French. Documents which chronicle the efforts of the Canadian government to control the Ohio River and its environs during the years 1700-1724 are printed in Roy, Vincennes Identified. Transcripts of these documents are in the Dominion Archives, Ottawa, Canada.

²Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 71-72; Anson, Miami Indians, 34-35.

continued his entreaties to the Miami bands to move nearer to Fort St. Joseph, near the southeast tip of Lake Michigan. The Miamis steadfastly refused to move. They knew that if they did as the French requested, they would face increased danger of warfare with the Foxes and other northern tribes. They also did not want to be far from their hunting grounds. The French commandants among the Miami did not persist in their demands because they knew what their superiors in Quebec and Paris did not: the Miamis were wise to remain where they were.¹

The Miamis already had done a fair amount of moving during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Pressure from invading Iroquois war parties beginning in 1649 had pushed some Miami bands westward and other bands northward into present-day Michigan and Wisconsin. By the last decade of the seventeenth century, Iroquois hegemony had begun to decline, and some tribes drifted back into present-day southern Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.² The French encouraged this movement because of the need for friendly Indians to trap and trade in the rich fur region between the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. Though the French pressured tribes to keep their permanent

¹Vaudreuil to Dumont, August 26, 1720, in Krauskoff (ed.), Quiatanon Documents, Indiana Historical Society Publications 18, No. 2 (1955): 165-168; Vaudreuil to the Council, October 22, 1720, in *ibid.*, 168-169; Anson, Miami Indians, 34-5. According to Anson (page 13), "There were six Miami bands at the time of the earliest French contact: Atchatchakangouens, Kilatikas, Mengakonkias, Pepicokias, Weas, and Piankashaws. The first three became so intermingled in historic times that the names were discarded for the general term Miami. The Weas and Piankashaws were often mistaken for separate tribes."

²For greater detail on the Iroquois, see Francis Jennings, The Ambiguous Iroquois Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from Its Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1774 (New York, 1984); Daniel Richter, The Ordeal of the Long House: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization, (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); Daniel Richter and James Merrell, eds., Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800 (Syracuse, N.Y., 1987).

villages near the French posts along the Great Lakes, the Miami followed a path that served their own interests, a path that led some bands to locate their villages in areas more remote from the French.¹

By 1725 the French Consolidation Policy of 1696 had led the Miamis to establish villages in present day Indiana and western Ohio while increasing numbers of Chippewa, Potawatomi, and Ottawa crowded the Detroit area. While some bands of the Miami migrated to the headwaters of the Maumee River (where Kekionga and Fort Miami eventually were built), others settled along the Miami River. The Wea band settled in villages along the middle section of the Wabash River, and the Piankeshaws settled even further south on the lower Wabash. Indians who settled furthest from the Great Lakes were the first to realize that the French need not be their only source for goods. English merchants were eager to extend their influence westward into previously French-dominated territory².

To prevent English expansion into the lower Wabash and Ohio River territory, the French recognized the need for a military presence in that region.³ By the early 1700's, the English had already acquired considerable influence among the Chickasaw, Natchez, and Cherokee tribes south of the Ohio. Chickasaw attacks on the Piankeshaw and Wea (on the

¹Anson, Miami Indians, 6-11.

²ibid., 9.

³Recognizing the strategic importance of the Illinois Country (the area between Canada and Louisiana), officials in France, Canada, and Louisiana stressed the need for additional fortifications to be built along the Ohio and Wabash Rivers throughout the first three decades of the eighteenth century. The search for valuable minerals and quick riches was being abandoned and replaced by plans to expand the fur trade and make the Illinois district "the granary and the breeding ground of cattle for the army and the civilian population of the whole province." Alvord, The Illinois Country, 170. A shortage of manpower and money had prevented the French from establishing additional fortifications in the Illinois Country. For numerous letters and memoirs focusing on the strategic importance of the Ohio and Wabash country, see Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 316-322.

middle and lower Wabash) caused these tribes to urge the French to help provide protection. The French realized that unless appropriate action was taken, the English might easily dominate the middle section of the French empire in America. At stake was not only prestige and profits, but also the communication link between the governments in Quebec and New Orleans. By 1726 the Louisiana government, which claimed jurisdiction over the Illinois country planned to fortify the Wabash and Ohio valleys by building a fort somewhere on the lower Wabash. The officer named to command the fort was Lieutenant François Marie Bissot, Sieur de Vincennes, who had gained a reputation in the Illinois Country for his capable performance as Indian agent and military commander.¹

When the Louisiana government began negotiations with Vincennes for the possible establishment of a fort on the lower Wabash in 1727, Vincennes was serving at Fort Ouiatenon on the upper Wabash in the pay of the Canadian government. Before the new fort was ever begun, Vincennes began receiving pay from Louisiana on top of his regular salary from Canada.² In return he was to persuade the Miami to assist the French in ousting the British from the southern part of the Wabash country. In 1729 Vincennes resigned his Canadian commission and in 1730 led a group of Indians from the Ouiatenon area to the future site of

¹ Anson, Miami Indians, 36. Bienville's correspondence reveals his high opinion of Vincennes. In a "Liste apostille des officiers--à la Louisiane" in 1734 Vincennes was described as ". . . vigoureux, actif, intelligent pour le gouvernement des sauvages Miamis par qui il a été adopté depuis quinze ans." [". . . brave, active, knows the government of the Miamis who adopted him fifteen years ago."] "Etat des officiers entretenus à la Louisiane, Paris, 6 mars., 1730" in Archives Nationales, Colonies (in Library of Congress) D2 C50, p. 89 as quoted in Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy."

²By October, 1727, the Compagnie of the Indies, then in control of the Louisiana colony, approved the payment of 300 livres in addition to Vincennes' regular salary. Compagnie de Indes à Perier et de la Chaise, Paris 27 Oct., 1727 in Archives National Colonies, C13 A1, 93.

the new post on the lower Wabash. In so doing, Vincennes left the jurisdiction of the northern colony of Canada and moved into the jurisdiction of the District of Illinois in the colony of Louisiana.¹

By 1733 Vincennes had completed the fort, but was frustrated by shortages of trade goods and of soldiers. He reported that the Wabash tribes, dissatisfied because the French were not supplying them with needed munitions and merchandise, turned to the English. In a letter to the French department of the Marine he reported,

The Indians, Illinois as well as Miamis and others, are more insolent than they have ever been, and that since the Foxes have been overthrown. The little experience I have acquired in the twenty years I have been with them, makes me fear some bad return from these nations, especially mine, which sees an establishment that I have begun and which there has appeared no desire to continue in the past three years. The only thing that can come in the meantime, Monsieur, is the loss to us of all the tribes, both of the lakes and of other places.²

¹The governor of Canada, the Marquis de Beauharnois, wrote in 1730 that "The Ouyatonons have been led into the government of Louisiana by Sr. de Vincennes, who is entirely separated from this government." Archives du Canada, Correspondence générale. F52, from Roy, Vincennes Identified, 90. The boundary between Canada and Louisiana was never well-defined but ran somewhere between Ouiatenon and Vincennes. Though the Canadian government initially disputed Louisiana's claim to the Illinois Country, Louisiana eventually solidified its claim to the middle section of the French empire in North America which included the settlement of Vincennes on the lower Wabash. Fort Chartres was the seat of government of the Illinois District. Traders at Vincennes carried on a significant amount of trade with both Montreal (and other northern posts) and New Orleans. Gayle Thornbrough and Dorothy Riker, Readings in Indiana History. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1956, reprinted in 1991), 11-12.

²Letter of Sieur de Vincennes to the Department of the Marine in France, March 7, 1733, in Jacob P. Dunn, The Mission to the Ouabache (Indiana Historical Society Publications 3, no.4 (1902): 303-4. The reason that the tribes were becoming more insolent was because the Indians were no longer in need of French protection after the French crushed the power of the Foxes in the Fox War of 1730. Some tribes began to look upon the French as intruders who were potentially capable of punishing other tribes in the same manner as they had done to the Foxes. One priest serving among the Illinois settlements wrote in 1732 that "The Indians are intriguing with the Osages and Kansas to aid them against the French; the chiefs are

In another correspondence he addressed the serious shortage of trade goods which crippled his ability to deal with local tribes. "In this post we lack everything. I am obliged to borrow from travellers and to give the little that I have myself to take care of all the affairs which come up daily." More trade goods and troops were essential. To protect French interests, make his position more secure, and to restore some authority among the "insolent" tribes, Vincennes asked for thirty men with an officer.¹

Vincennes' need for additional soldiers was intensified in 1733 when war broke out between the French and the Chickasaws. The Chickasaw War was an outgrowth of hostilities between the Natchez Indians and the French. When the Natchez massacred the French garrison at Fort Rosalie (Natchez) in 1729, Louisiana governor Jean-Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville used force to nearly wipe out the Natchez tribe, and the survivors took refuge among the Chickasaw. When the French demanded that the Chickasaw turn over the Natchez refugees, French officials received the negative reply they expected. This gave them the needed excuse to mount a full scale war against the troublesome Chickasaws.²

friendly, but they cannot control their youths." April 25, 1733, in Archives Nationales, Colonies, C13 A, 17: 288 in Alvord, The Illinois Country, 171.

¹Vincennes to the Department of the Marine in France, March 7, 1733 in Roy, Vincennes Identified, 91-93, from Archives National Colonies, C13 A17, 260; Vincennes to the Department of the Marine in France, March 21, 1733, in Roy, Vincennes Identified, 93-94. In a letter from Louisiana governor Bienville to ordonnateur Salmon on May 20, 1733, Bienville reported that "le Sr. de Vincennes qui commande aux miamis, marque que les sauvages établis sur Ouabache, ne sont pas plus Tranquilles que les Illinois, quil n'est point en Etat de les faire revenir et qu'il n'a point de Marchandises pors les y Engager, que sa harnison d'ailleurs est trop faible pour Contenir ces nations." [*Vincennes who commands the Miamis notices that the savages established on the Wabash are no more peaceful than the Illinois, that he is not in a position to make them return [from trading with the English] and that he doesn't have enough merchandise to trade with them, that his garrison, moreover is too weak to control these nations.* Archives Coloniale, C13 A16, 110 in Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 325.

²Usner, Jr., Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 81-85; Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 329-30. For general background to the Chickasaw wars, see Richard

Settled in forty villages on the upper Mississippi, the Chickasaws attacked and stole from French traders along the Mississippi. Relations with the Chickasaws were further aggravated by that tribe's close associations with English traders. Chickasaws regularly raided French trading parties on the Mississippi, French settlements in the Illinois, and villages of French-allied Illinois tribes. Several northern tribes (Hurons, Iroquois from the Canadian missions, some Miami and Illinois) actively retaliated against the Chickasaw and other hostile southern tribes.¹ Post Vincennes, with its garrison increased to forty soldiers, served as a base for numerous Indian war parties setting out for enemy territory. A full-scale war against the Chickasaw was seen as a necessity by the French in Canada and Louisiana who considered the Chickasaw a perpetual threat to safe trade and the reliable flow of communication throughout the upper Mississippi and the Illinois country.

In 1733 the Sieur de Vincennes wrote to the French Department of the Marine that "all the nations of Canada and the lakes start this spring to go there [Chickasaw territory]. Both nations here have gone, even their chiefs. Not a single man remained in all these villages."² The French

White, The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 52-61; Arrell Gibson, The Chickasaws (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 39-57.

¹Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 329-30; Philips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 327. Bienville's delay in mounting a large-scale attack upon the Chickasaw's prompted urgent calls for action from the French government. Minister to Bienville, September 2, 1734, in Archives Nationales, Colonies, C13 B, 61: 655 ff in Alvord, The Illinois Country, 177. According to Alvord, it took little prompting for the French to persuade northern tribes to attack the Indians of the south. He asserts that an enduring feud between northern and southern Indians had existed long before Europeans came to the region.

²Sieur de Vincennes to the Department of the Marine in France, March 21, 1733, in Roy, Vincennes Identified, 93-94.

encouraged such expeditions by northern Indians until they themselves were able to gather the men and supplies to launch an effective attack upon the Chickasaws.¹

During the winter of 1735, Louisiana governor Bienville formulated a plan to crush the power of the Chickasaws and rid the Mississippi of British traders. His goal was to trap the Chickasaws between forces of French and Indians who would march northward from Louisiana and southward from the Illinois country and Canada. Bienville himself would lead the southern army while the northern army would be commanded by Pierre d'Artaguiette, commandant for the Illinois country serving at Fort de Chartres. Vincennes was to join d'Artaguiette with as many French and Indians as he could persuade to join him. The combined forces were to rendezvous in mid-March at Prud'homme Bluffs (near present-day Memphis).²

A delay in the arrival of supplies convinced Bienville to delay the expedition. He sent word to d'Artaguiette that he should wait until late April to begin his march from the Illinois country. D'Artaguiette, however, failed to receive the message and set out on February 20 with the assembled forces. By the end of the month he arrived at Prud'homme

¹In 1735 Louisiana Governor Bienville hoped to raise a force of five hundred men from the southern province and three hundred from the Illinois country. This force would be comprised of French regulars stationed at the various forts in Louisiana and the Illinois, along with many militia (voyageurs and colonists) and Indian allies. Bienville to the French minister, February 10, 1736 in Mississippi Provincial Archives, I: 293; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 86-7.

²Reports of the campaign may be found in the following: Bienville to minister, April 1, 1736, in Archives Nationales, Colonies, C13A, 21:164, ff; June 28, 1736, *ibid.*, 207 ff; account of escaped prisoner Drouet de Richardville in Caroline and Eleanor Dunn, Indiana's First War, 8 No. 2 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Publications, 1924); Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 329-31.

Bluffs and was joined shortly thereafter by Vincennes.¹ They built a fort of stones and then sent scouts to locate Bienville and the southern army which they expected to be nearby. A courier finally arrived informing them that Bienville would not be able to join them until the end of April. The provisions that d'Artaquiette and his Indian allies had brought with them were insufficient to support them until Bienville arrived. At a council of French officers and Indian chiefs, the chiefs maintained that it would be impossible to wait for so long a period in enemy territory without adequate supplies.²

Renewed hope came when scouts reported finding an isolated Chickasaw camp near by. A successful attack upon the camp might provide enough provisions to sustain d'Artaquiette and his forces until Bienville arrived. What the French did not know was that British traders had informed the Chickasaws of the movements of d'Artaquiette's army. When the French and their Indian allies attacked the camp, a force of four or five hundred Chickasaw suddenly emerged from behind a hill. Taken by surprise, d'Artaquiette's men were easily overcome. Most were killed or captured. Only the outbreak of a terrible storm enabled a small number of the beaten army to escape. Among those captured were d'Artaquiette, Vincennes, and a Jesuit priest, Father Antoine Sénat. All of these men, along with most of the other prisoners, were tortured and burned that same day.³

¹The forces of d'Artaquiette and Vincennes were reported at 21 soldiers, 85 habitants, 38 Iroquois, 28 Arkansas, 100 Illinois, 60 Miamis. *Relations des Guerre de la Louisiane, 1729-1736* in Archives Nationale, Colonies C13 B1 in Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 330.

²Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 87; Alvord, *The Illinois Country*, 178.

³Ibid. The fate of the prisoners was reported by a prisoner who later escaped in "Rapport par le Sr de Rickarville sur la guerre contré les Chicachas" in Archives Nationale, Colonies, C13 C4, 202 in Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy."

From letters found on the prisoners, the Chickasaws learned of Bienville's scheduled attack. The Indians were prepared when Bienville's forces finally attacked on May 26. The defeated French retreated to Mobile. It was here that Bienville learned of the fate of d'Artaguiette and his army.¹

Though the outcome of the expedition resulted in political disgrace for Bienville, the military disaster was most acutely felt by the survivors in the French villages of the Illinois country. The people of Vincennes had lost their commandant, most of the garrison's soldiers, and many male heads of families. The Sieur de Vincennes himself left behind a wife and two young daughters. The Indians who had allied with the French mourned their own losses, as well as the loss of their French "father," Vincennes.²

Bienville, thwarted in his attempts to curb the Chickasaws, soon re-garrisoned the Illinois forts.³ In 1737 Louis Bellerive, Sieur de St. Ange, son of a previous long-time commandant of Fort de Chartres, was sent from a post on the Missouri River to act as the new commandant at Post

Rickarville reported that he was held prisoner by the Chickasaw for eighteen months when he and another Frenchman escaped with the help of some British traders. He fled first to Georgia and later returned to Canada.

¹Bienville led another army against the Chickasaw in 1739-40. This expedition was more successful, forcing the Chickasaw to sue for peace. Within a few months, however, the Chickasaw resumed their attacks on the French and northern tribes. Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 84-5; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 91.

²The Miami and other northern tribes continued to send war parties against the Chickasaw to avenge those who died in the 1736 expedition. A letter from the commandant at Ouiatenon reported that the savages of his post were heading south "to avenge their father for the insult which had been done him and at the same time to [avenge] the blood of their brothers which had been shed." Extracts of letters of René Godefroy, Sieur de Linctot, and Philippe d'Amours, Sieur de la Morandière, to Beauharnois, July 25, 1738, C1 A69:107 in Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 90.

³A convoy of two hundred French, Indians, and Negro slaves accompanied the soldiers sent to replace those who died in the Choctaw expedition. Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 88-89; Charles Hanna, The Wilderness Trail, (New York, The Knickerbocker Press, 1911), 324-33.

Vincennes. He served there nearly a quarter of a century, from 1737 to 1764. During that time, the French in the Illinois country acutely felt the effects of the heightened struggle between France and England for control of the Ohio Valley.¹ Though most of the key military confrontations with the British occurred further north and east of the Illinois country, the Illinois French played an integral role in the struggle. They provided much of the food for French military expeditions and for troops stationed at Detroit and other forts in the Great Lakes region. When many of the tribes in the area shifted loyalty to the British during the 1740's, Illinois traders and villagers suffered from attacks by hostile Indians. When the French began effectively pushing the British out of the western country during the 1750's, the Illinois French contributed manpower to some of the crucial campaigns.²

Tension in the Ohio Valley escalated in 1744 when France and Great Britain were once again at war after thirty years of "official" truce. During King George's War (1744-48), France's ability to preserve her North American empire was threatened by British attacks on French shipping. British seizures decreased the already inadequate supply of Indian trade goods available to French traders and commandants. Without the trade goods and munitions which the Indians needed, it was nearly impossible

¹White, The Middle Ground, 198 -99; Anson, Miami Indians, 43; Pease and Jenison (eds.), Illinois on the Eve, IIIHC 29: 32-39, 42-47, 54, 432-35, 507-09; Alvord, The Illinois Country, 188-89.

²Makarty to Minister, February 1, 1752, in Archives Nationales, Colonies, C13A, 36:307 ff in Alvord, The Illinois Country, 238; for Indian violence against the French see Vaudreuil to Maurepas, September 19, 1747, IIIHC 29: 32-34; Bigot to Maurepas, October 19, 1748, IIIHC 29: 75. See also White, The Middle Ground, 198-99.

for the French to retain the loyalty of the tribes and prevent them from trading with the British.¹

The British took full advantage of the inability of the French to provide trade goods for the western tribes. South of the Ohio River, British traders from the Carolinas and Virginia sent their annual trains of pack horses westward. The expansion of British trade from Pennsylvania into the upper Ohio, led by George Croghan and Conrad Weiser, alarmed French officials. Croghan and Weiser used careful diplomacy and an abundance of trade goods to lure Indians of the Ohio and Wabash valleys and the southern lakes region away from the French. Rumors of Indian conspiracies against the French, real and imagined, spread throughout the Illinois Country and Great Lakes region.²

Charles dela Boische, Marquis de Beauharnois, the governor-general of Canada since 1726, expressed concern over the consequences of trade good shortages in a letter to the French minister in 1745:

" . . . whatever attachment they [the Indians] may entertain towards the French. . . 'tis impossible for me to flatter myself with continuing them in it when the posts will be stript of every necessary, as I expect they will be entirely next year.³

Beauharnois was not exaggerating the seriousness of the situation. In spite of long-term attachments to the French, traditional Indian allies now traded with the British. The Indians rejected the French even when supplies were available because of the high prices. They had little patience when the French blamed market forces or the current war, for

¹Caldwell, The French in the Mississippi Valley, 86.

²Alvord, The Illinois Country, 186-88.

³Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, edited by Edmund B. O'Callahan and B. Fernow (15 volumes, Albany, 1853-87), 10: 21; Harold Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada, (Yale University Press, 1962), 114-118.

prices had begun to rise before the war. This was due in part to King Louis XV's decision to cut the costs of maintaining various military posts in the interior of New France. He farmed out many of the posts (Niagara, Miami, Ouiatenon, and Green Bay) to lessees in 1744. Attempting to recoup the cost of their lease and make quick profits, these lessees (often the highest military officer stationed at the fort) raised prices for goods. To the Indians, the increase seemed to stem from French greed. When British attacks on French shipping created shortages at the posts during King George's War, the prices of available goods rose even higher. Warriors resented the shortages and high prices, especially when the French expected them to sacrifice their lives fighting in an imperial war against the British. The French no longer seemed to be acting in good faith, and the bonds of friendship which had linked many tribes to their French "father" quickly began to dissolve.¹

The boasts of British traders about the fall of Louisbourg in 1745 only aggravated the Indians' loss of respect for the French. If a motley crew of Yankees could capture the "French Gibraltar of North America" and the British navy could prevent French ships from reaching Canada, how could the tribes expect much assistance from their traditional ally? The British emphatically drove home that point while at the same time increasing the quantity of presents to the Indians in an attempt to win their allegiance. Both the British and the French realized by now that the

¹For a more in-depth discussion of causes for the breakdown in the French/Indian alliance, see White, The Middle Ground, 198-208. For leases see Beauharnois to Minister, Oct. 9, 1744, WHC 17:442-43; Beauharnois to Minister, Oct. 25, 1744, WHC 17:445-46; Galissonière to Minister, Oct. 23, 1748, WHC 17:503. For complaints about lessees, supply shortages and high prices, see Speeches of Ouyatanons, July 8, 1742, WHC 17:381; La Galissonière & Hocquart to Minister, Oct. 7, 1747, WHC 17:470-72.

Indians were likely to ally with whichever European power exhibited the greater military and commercial strength.¹

By 1747, the military and commercial weakness of the French, combined with the Indians' new commercial ties with the British drove many tribes into open rebellion against the French. French traders on Lake Superior were murdered by Chippewas and Ottawas. Five traders were murdered at Sandusky by Wyandots and Ottawas. Even some of the Miami Indians deserted the French after nearly a century of alliance. Influenced by some disaffected Hurons, a small party of Miami attacked the French at Fort Miami in 1747, seizing provisions and valuable property, burning some of the buildings, and taking eight whites as prisoners. Though commandant Longueuil at Detroit quickly sent troops to reestablish order, the example of violence against the French heightened fears throughout the western posts. The commandant at Fort de Chartres, the Sieur de Bertet, abandoned the fort in 1747 and moved his garrison to the nearby village of Kaskaskia. There he concentrated the population of other nearby villages in an attempt to make their position more secure. Although the Illinois Indians had not yet become hostile, their friendship toward the French was becoming strained.²

Following the Indian attack on Fort Miami in 1747, a Piankeshaw Chief, La Demoiselle, moved his village from the main body of the Miami at Kekionga and established a new village called Pickawillany. This settlement was much further east (along the Great Miami River) where

¹George Rawlyk, "'The Rising French Empire' in the Ohio Valley and Old Northwest," in John B. Elliott, (ed.), Contest for Empire, 1500-1775, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1975), 47.

²White, The Middle Ground, 198-99; Anson, Miami Indians, 43; Pease and Jenison (eds.), Illinois on the Eve, ILLHC, 29: 32-39, 42-47, 54; Alvord, The Illinois Country, 188-189.

British goods would be easily accessible. Pickawillany became a thriving trading center as English traders brought goods to the area from the Ohio River by pack-horse trains or canoe. Before long British goods were filtering westward to the Wabash and Illinois tribes. On July 20, 1748 the Miami at Pickawillany formed a political alliance with the English. At a council in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the English agreed to transport goods to the western tribes in exchange for promises of protection by friendly tribes¹ If other Miami Indians followed the lead of La Demoiselle, the Illinois tribes would likely be the next to sever ties with the French. If this happened the communication link between Canada and Louisiana would be endangered along with France's continued participation in the Ohio Valley fur trade.

The 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle ended King George's War in Europe, but it did not ease the rising tensions in the Ohio Valley. From that time until the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1756, France and England continued to compete for dominance in the Ohio Valley. The Canadian governor, Comte de la Galissonnière, aggressively asserted French dominance in the region south of the Great Lakes. He was determined to establish a firm claim to the Allegheny and upper Ohio rivers as the eastern boundary of French possessions.² Since the area was full of tribes who had established economic (and sometimes political) ties to the British,

¹This council was attended by George Croghan, Conrad Weiser, and three Miami chiefs from Pickawillany. La Demoiselle, however, did not attend. In addition to the Miami, other tribes represented were Oneida, Seneca, Mohawk, and Shawnee. Anson, Miami Indians, 44

²La Galissonnière was convinced of the strategic importance of the Illinois-Ohio country. He argued for the necessity of fortifying the region with military posts, more military commanders, troops and settlers. In so doing, the French would no longer need to rely on the Indians to maintain control of the region. See Guy Frégault, Le Grand Marquis: Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil et la Louisiane (Montreal: Fides, 1952), 129-30; La Galissonnière to Maurepas, September 1, 1748, WHC, 17: 493-97.

La Galissonière in 1749 sent a military force to reestablish French hegemony in the region. Captain Pierre-Joseph Céloron, the commandant at Detroit, led an expedition of two hundred Frenchmen and thirty Indians to win back the allegiance of the recreant Indians. He was also to pillage and expel all British traders and break up the hotbed of British intrigue at Pickawillany.¹

Céloron's expedition was a complete failure and did more to reveal French weakness than French strength. Though the French had counted on the support of the Detroit Indians, the promised support disappeared before the expedition got under way. The lack of strength in numbers doomed the expedition before it started. The small body of French were in no position to make demands or threats to the Ohio Indians since the warriors on the upper Ohio alone numbered eight hundred. Neither could the French hope to permanently banish the British traders. Though most British traders temporarily fled when the French approached, they returned as soon as Céloron moved on. Indian promises to expel these traders from their villages were vague and noncommittal. Céloron reported to his superiors that "the tribes of those localities are very badly disposed toward the French and entirely devoted to the English." If violence were used to win them back, he feared they would seek assistance from the British and the western tribes thus worsening the situation.²

Since force did not seem to be a practical remedy to the dwindling of French influence, French officials pursued a policy of conciliation.

¹For a report of the Céloron expedition, see Galissonière to Rouillé, June 26, 1749, IIIHC 29: 97. The journal of Céloron is printed in WHC, 18: 36 ff.

²Ibid. Quote in Céloron's journal, WHC 18: 57.

Beginning in 1750 both Governor de Vaudreuil of Louisiana and Governor de La Galissonière of Canada abandoned threats and took steps to rebuild trust and friendship with the tribes. The Canadian governor dropped plans to punish those Indians who had killed Frenchmen during the recent war. Expenditures for providing gifts to tribal leaders were increased. The policy of leasing posts to the highest bidder was ended at each post where high prices had driven discontented Indians to the British. Higher prices were offered for Indian furs, and the Canadian governor promised to intervene when Indians felt that traders had cheated them. New forts were built at Toronto, Sault Sainte Marie, and the Petit Rapide of the Niagara in order to offer competitive prices to those Indians who were heading to Oswego to trade with the British. In addition, some French officials were authorized to offer the Indians brandy.¹ All this went far in restoring the loyalties of tribes along the Great Lakes. Tribes along the Wabash and Ohio, however, remained rebellious.²

The year 1751 found the French still trying in vain to persuade the large numbers of Miami who had migrated eastward to return to their old home at Kekionga. Officials realized that if the British influence on the Ohio was not destroyed, the Wea and Piankashaw Indians would soon join the English. Reports of the dangerous situation in the Wabash and Illinois country were sent to the governors of Louisiana and Canada by the new commandant at Fort de Chartres, M. de Macarty Mactigue.³ British goods

¹White, Middle Ground, 209-211. For importance of brandy as motivator for Indians to trade with English, see Conrad Weiser's journal in Thwaites, (ed.) Early Western Travels 1: 41.

²For continued rebelliousness of Wabash and Ohio tribes, see White, Middle Ground, 213-14.

³Macarty was born in France, the son of Irish refugees. He had served both the Canadian and Louisiana governments before being assigned to the Illinois

and influence had reached the Wabash valley, and increasing numbers of Miami defected to the British. Rebel Miami stirred the Wea and Piankashaw to revolt against the French. In December of 1751, a Piankashaw Indian who went to the home of Toussaint la Framboise on the lower Wabash to trade warned the Frenchman that some of his tribe, along with other Miami Indians, were planning to attack Post Vincennes. Later that night two voyageurs were murdered by some Piankashaw after having shared a meal together. Later in December these same Indians murdered two slaves who were working at Post Vincennes. The Piankashaw then approached the Illinois to tell of a planned attack by the British and eleven tribes. The Illinois, still faithful to the French, reported the news to Macarty who quickly warned other commandants of this threat.¹

Much of the anti-French agitation emanated from Pickawillany, instigated by the leader of the rebel Miamis, La Demoiselle. Pickawillany had grown to a trading center of at least four hundred warriors and dozens of English traders. Nearby Indians along the Wabash and further west spoke of La Demoiselle's efforts to persuade them to attack the French. English traders used Pickawillany as a home base for trading expeditions into western Ohio in the Wabash River valley. In 1750, the French made several unsuccessful attempts to destroy Pickawillany. These attempts only angered the Miami there, and by 1751 an undeclared war existed between the French and the defected Miami bands.²

country at Fort de Chartres in 1750. William McCarthy, "The Chevalier Macarty Mactigue," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, 61 (1968): 41-57.

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 108-09. Macarty to Vaudreuil, January 20 and March 18, 1753, in Pease and Jenison (eds.) Illinois on the Eve, 29: 432-35, 507-09.

²White, Middle Ground, 221-22. Anson, Miami Indians, 46-51; George Rawlyk, "The 'Rising French Empire,'" 50-54. For war belts being sent from Pickawillany to

The solution to the problem of Pickawillany came from two unexpected sources. The first was a smallpox epidemic that greatly weakened the Miami and other tribes south of the Great Lakes. The second came in the form of Charles Langlade, a mixed-blood French-Indian trader of Michilimackinac who took matters into his own hands. He was not in the French military service, but he was determined to march against Pickawillany to restore French prestige in the West. He gathered a force of two hundred and forty Ottawa and Chippewa warriors and gained permission from the Detroit commander to attack Pickawillany. On June 21, 1752 when most of the warriors were absent, Langlade's forces made a surprise attack and captured the town. One British trader and fourteen Indians were killed. With Langlade's consent, the Ottawa and Chippewa warriors boiled and ate La Demoiselle while his followers stood watching. Five English traders were captured and their goods, worth three thousand pounds sterling, were confiscated. As a result of the turn of events, some of the rebel Miami decided to abandon their British alliance and return to Kekionga.¹

The fall of Pickawillany marked a turning point for the French in the Ohio and Illinois region. Weakened by smallpox and impressed by the effectiveness of the attack on Pickawillany, many Indians returned to their old homes and to their alliances with the French. A reluctance on the part of English colonial governments to provide military protection and

Illinois tribes, see Raymond to La Jonquière, January 5, 1750, IIIHC 29: 149, 154-56. For La Demoiselle gaining support among some of the Wea and Piankashaw, see Report of Chaperon, May 1750, IIIHC 29: 194.

¹For French accounts of the attack on Pickawillany, see Duquesne to the French minister, October 25, 1752, in WHC 18: 128-131; Longueuil to Rouillé, August 18, 1752 in IIIHC 29: 652-53. For an English account see William Trent, Journal of Captain William Trent From Logstown to Pickawillany, A.D. 1752 (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1971), 86-88.

fortifications for the Ohio tribes narrowed their options. By 1753 a steady stream of Indian leaders began making the trek to Canada to ask forgiveness for their wavering loyalty from the new governor of New France, Michel-Ange de Menneville, Sieur de Duquesne.¹

Though the French had driven the British from the Ohio Valley and at least temporarily had ended Indian uprisings in the West, French officials realized they could no longer count on friendly relations with the Indians and a handful of small forts to securely hold the vast Ohio-Illinois territory. Governor Duquesne felt certain that the only way to enforce French claims to the Ohio-Illinois country was to build several French forts at strategic sites to keep out British intruders. Orders from the French Minister of Marine, Antoine-Louis Rouillé, directed Duquesne to occupy the Ohio Valley in force in order to bar English access to that region and beyond. He was not to provoke hostilities with any tribes in the area, but neither was he to rely heavily on Indians to achieve French goals.²

In 1753 an army of two thousand men (300 Troupes de la Marine and 1,700 Canadian militia) marched into the region south of Lake Erie and advanced into the upper Ohio Valley. They built roads, expelled British traders, and erected new military posts at Presque Isle (near present-day Erie, Pennsylvania) and Fort Le Boeuf on French Creek. A small fortification called Venango was erected at the outlet of French Creek into the Allegheny River. The French met no opposition from local Indians who were, however, both concerned and impressed by this unusual show of force from the French in the Ohio Valley. In 1754 the French strengthened

¹White, The Middle Ground, 231-32; David Edmunds, The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 47-48.

²Rawlyk, "The Rising French Empire," 54-55; Rouillé to Duquesne, May 15, 1752, WHC, 18: 118-22; Rouillé to Duquesne, July 9, 1752, IIIHC 29: 648-51.

their position on the Ohio when Fort Machault was built at Venango. That same year French forces captured the partially-completed fort which the Virginians constructed at the forks of the Ohio. The fort was aptly named Fort Duquesne.¹

Before the Virginia Assembly had received news of the loss of Fort Duquesne, they had dispatched George Washington and one hundred men to assist in the completion of the fort and to force the French to withdraw from the area. Washington heard of the fort's surrender before he arrived there. He set up camp not far from the fort and, with the assistance of some friendly Indians, attacked a French party, killing some and capturing others. Expecting retaliation from Fort Duquesne, he quickly erected Fort Necessity. When the expected attack occurred in July of 1754, Washington, far outnumbered, was forced to surrender.²

Rising hostilities in the area led colonists to send representatives to Albany, New York in 1754. The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate defense plans among the colonies and their Indian allies. The representatives agreed upon a limited defensive confederation against the French (the Albany Plan of Union), but the proposal was not ratified by a single colony. Although the leaders at Albany were able to set aside differences in order to combat a common problem, the widespread self-interest and jealousy which prevailed among the colonies prevented united action against the French and their Indian allies.³

¹Eccles, The Canadian Frontier, 160-62; White, The Middle Ground, 232-33; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 114-15.

²Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 119-20.

³For reasons why Americans rejected even a loose union which would provide for their common defense, see Jack Greene, Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1986), 157-165.

While colonial governments refused to cooperate in defensive action against the French, Indians continued to solicit support. Since the fall of Pickawillany in 1752, Indians who had settled in the Ohio valley had tried in vain to persuade the colonial governments of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York to provide the military support needed to secure the Indians' geographic position in Ohio and sustain their ties with the English. Although the large grant of land made by the crown to Virginia's Ohio Company in 1748 gave many wealthy and influential colonials a stake in the future of western lands, none of the colonial governments was willing to pay the bill for securing the area from the French. The result of this inaction, combined with the military occupation of the Ohio Valley by the French in 1753 and 1754, gave Indians little choice but to reestablish ties with the French. Some tribes willingly shifted their alliance back to the French as a result of France's ability to reestablish its prestige and power. The respect which was lost in the 1740's was regained in the early 1750's by the French when they built new forts, defeated Washington's troops, and supplied increased amounts of trade goods to the Indians in the Ohio Valley.¹

After Washington's 1754 defeat at Fort Necessity, the British government took matters into its own hands and sent General Edward Braddock to reassert English control of the Ohio Valley. Even after Braddock's 1755 defeat, officials in London and Paris still hoped to use diplomatic means to sort out conflicting claims to the territory. When this effort proved unsuccessful, tensions over the Ohio Valley fused with other

¹Rawlyk, "The Rising French Empire," 51.

imperial differences, and on May 18, 1756, England declared war on France.

In spite of the large numbers of western and Great Lakes Indians who fought with the French during the French and Indian War, France was not able to maintain her hold on her North American colonies. With the fall of forts Frontenac, Niagara, Louisbourg, Ticonderoga and the city of Quebec in 1759 and the capitulation of Montreal in 1760, the entire province of Canada was surrendered to the British. By the terms of the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, France ceded to England not only Canada but all of Louisiana east of the Mississippi, except for New Orleans. French lands west of the Mississippi and New Orleans were given to Spain, in part to make up for Spain's loss of Florida which was ceded to England.

The main theater of the Seven Years' War (or French and Indian War) in America was in the north and east; the British never invaded the Illinois Country. The governor of New France, however, relied heavily on the Illinois district (Vincennes included) for supplies and manpower which were transported to French forts in the east. Although still officially part of Louisiana, the Illinois country was controlled by Governor Duquesne during the war years. As early as 1755 Duquesne asked Commander Macarty at Fort de Chartres to send "120,000 hundredweight of flour and 40,000 of pork" to Fort Duquesne. Macarty gathered as much of this as he could from among the various Illinois settlements and sent a convoy with these supplies to Duquesne the following spring.¹ Other expeditions transporting men and supplies to the Ohio forts were sent from the Illinois until the 1758 fall of Fort Duquesne to the English. Volunteers from

¹ Alvord, The Illinois Country, 233 and 238.

Vincennes helped defend forts Duquesne and Venango, but the Vincennes commandant, St. Ange, remained at his post throughout the war.¹

At the end of the war, St. Ange was ordered to leave Vincennes and take over command at Fort de Chartres until the British arrived to relieve him and his forty-man garrison. Before departing for Fort de Chartres, St. Ange delivered a farewell address to the people of Vincennes with whom he had lived for nearly a quarter of a century:

By virtue of the order of M. de Neyon, Major Commandant of the Illinois country, to name a person to attend to the police, and to maintain good order among the citizens of this post, as also of the voyageurs and the Indians--I. . . have named M. Deroite de Richardville, performing the functions of captain of militia, jointly with Sr. le Caindre, soldier of the troops. Their first care should be to maintain good feeling among the Indians to prevent disorder so long as they are in charge. Whenever complaint shall be made to them against any one they will proceed to call an assembly of the more notable of the citizens of the place, where the matter shall be decided by a plurality of votes.

Messieurs Deroite de Richardville and de Caindre can not watch too carefully that the citizens keep up their fences, it being to the public interest that the cattle should not pass from the commons to the grain fields. They will check as far as they are able the disorders which occur too frequently, occasioned by drinking. Whenever any news shall come to them . . . of importance to the good of the service they will take care to apprise me of it . . . in all cases which I have not been able to foresee, I depend on their good management and their devotion to the public welfare.

Given at Post Vincennes the 18th of May, 1764.²

Although British occupation of the Great Lakes posts was accomplished by 1761, Vincennes and the Illinois settlements did not

¹Somes, Old Vincennes, 47.

²Dunn, (ed.), Documents, 408.

lower their French flags until several years later. It wasn't until October 10, 1765, that St. Ange formally surrendered Fort de Chartres and the Illinois country to the British.¹ St. Ange and his French garrison at Fort de Chartres were relieved of their command by Captain Thomas Stirling and a hundred men of the Forty-second or Black Watch regiment on October 10, 1765.²

Though located on the periphery of the French empire in America, Vincennes and other towns like it in the Illinois country and Great Lakes region were strategically important to the eighteenth-century imperial struggle between France and England. Although France lost her political control of the interior of North America at the end of the French and Indian War, French cultural and economic strength in the west remained strong for several decades. For the people of Vincennes, the departure of St. Ange was a clear symbol of the end of French rule. Without an experienced leader they faced an uncertain future ruled by Great Britain. Out of necessity the Vincennes *habitants* dealt with the day-to-day challenges of civil administration, economic pursuits, and Indian relations while they waited for British representatives to arrive.

¹The delay in occupying the Fort de Chartres was caused by Pontiac's rebellion which began in 1763 and was not crushed until 1765. Alvord, The Illinois Country, 260-63.

²Alvord, The Illinois Country, 264; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 155.

CHAPTER 6
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE DURING THE BRITISH YEARS
1763-1778

From an international standpoint, the loss of the French empire in North America at the end of the Seven Years' War was an event with far-reaching consequences. According to the terms of the 1763 Treaty of Paris France ceded to Britain all of Canada and the Louisiana territory east of the Mississippi Rivers. Frenchmen in America had to adapt to the idea and realities of being British subjects. Trade in the West was open to the British. Indians no longer had two European powers to play off against the other in matters of trade and diplomacy. With the French no longer claiming the lands west of the Appalachians, American colonists began pushing westward provoking violent reactions from the Indians whose lands they were invading. The British government, already deeply in debt from the high cost of the Seven Years' War, was faced with mounting costs of stationing troops throughout the West and administering Indian affairs. Efforts to force American colonists to share in these expenses only exacerbated the growing conflicts between Parliament and the colonists. While conflict was also evident in the Illinois country due to British hegemony, for Vincennes and other French settlements the period brought as much continuity as it did change.

Though the Illinois country was a region on the outer boundaries of both the English and the Spanish empires, the French maintained a cultural

and economic dominance for several decades after the French officially "lost" this territory. British officials and traders continually bemoaned the hold the French retained over the trade in the Great Lakes and Illinois country, and French traders reaped the largest part of profits from the fur trade.¹ The day-to-day patterns of earning a living in Vincennes were virtually unaffected by the British takeover. Settlers still divided their time between farming, hunting, large and small-scale trading, raising livestock, and cultivating their gardens. In the fourteen years of British rule, the people of Vincennes rarely saw British officials who stayed in their town only long enough to take a census or perhaps gather supplies to continue on a journey to other destinations. They did see a few new faces as British traders, Indian agents, and representatives of large eastern trading companies occasionally came to their town on business.²

The biggest changes that occurred in Vincennes were due to a rapid increase in population after 1765, the loss of a local priest, and the failure of the British government to establish civil government. These factors contributed to a breakdown in discipline and social order. Traditionally in the small village of Vincennes citizens had relied on consensus politics as well as the resident French commandant, priest, and local elite to resolve conflicts and maintain order. With the influx of large numbers of outsiders, which occurred at the same time that the Jesuit priests were expelled from the western mission posts, traditional ways of achieving

¹Sosin, "French Settlements," 200; Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire," 82-83; Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 96-7.

²For arrival of Abbott, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 178-79. Lieutenant John Rumsey was in Vincennes in 1766 to take a census. He stayed long enough to repair the fort and rename it Fort Sackville. See Somes, Old Vincennes, 56. For efforts of the firm of Baynton, Wharton and Morgan to establish trade in Vincennes and other western posts, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 166-67.

order and stability were challenged. Competition for resources and the natural increase in conflicts as large numbers of newcomers settled in Vincennes strengthened the citizens' call for the establishment of a civil government. On the other hand, the general lack of British presence in Vincennes meant that the people did not experience the disruptions that might have occurred if the British had been able to establish a strong political and economic (and thus social) presence in Vincennes. The newcomers were for the most part French--people who spoke the same language, were used to a similar government, shared the same religious faith, and in many cases were probably related to the people already living in Vincennes. Although the sheer numbers of new arrivals strained the traditional style of self-government, the similarities between the established citizens and the newcomers must have tempered the amount of friction which occurred.

Although the British did not establish a strong presence in Vincennes or in any of the Illinois settlements in the years between the Seven Years War and the American Revolution, when it lost the territory to the United States, the inhabitants of the Illinois country certainly feared the worse as the Seven Years' War drew to a close. After the capitulation of Quebec in 1759 and Montreal in 1760, but before the news of the 1763 Treaty of Paris (in which France abandoned her claims to Canada and that part of Louisiana lying east of the Mississippi), the Illinois French harbored hopes that their king would send fresh troops to reclaim Canada. At the very least they expected him to retain his claim to all of Louisiana which included the Illinois country.¹ French habitants and traders throughout

¹The widespread rumor among French *habitants* and western Indians that the French king would return to take back his American territory played an important

the Illinois country found it difficult to imagine that their king would abandon them to the British. They were forced to accept the inevitable as they watched the French troops and administration at Fort de Chartres pack up, leaving behind only a skeleton crew to man the fort. Uncertain and fearful of life under British rule, many French inhabitants from settlements on the east bank of the Mississippi simply moved across the river into Spanish territory.¹

Western Indian tribes who had been long-time allies of the French were equally dismayed to think that their French "father" had abandoned his responsibilities to them. Most importantly, Indians worried about their ability to prevent Anglo-American expansion without the assistance of French troops and French-supplied arms and ammunition.² During 1761

role in the Indian uprisings of 1763-65. For many years historians accepted Francis Parkman's interpretation (The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada, 4th ed. 2 vols. (Boston, [1851, reprinted 1905]) that the French settlers spread the rumor of the return of a large French army in order to sustain the Indians' hostilities against the British. According to Parkman the French were motivated by vengeance and a desire to maintain their trade profits among the Indians without British competition. The correspondence of British officials definitely reveals that the British were convinced of a French conspiracy driving the Indian attacks. Gregory Dowd, however, believes that the rumor was not an attempt by the French to manipulate Indians but rather that the idea of a French return "reflected an Indian attempt to manipulate France, to bring back, through war and ceremony, the French counterweight to Anglo-American expansion." See Dowd, "The French King Wakes Up in Detroit: 'Pontiac's War' in Rumor and History," in Ethnohistory 34 (1990): 254-78. Francis Jennings locates the impetus for the uprisings in the central council of the Six Nations at Onondaga. See Francis Jennings, Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies & Tribes in the Seven Years War in America, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 438-442.

¹Spanish commandant Pedro Piernas reported that many families had left the settlements on the east side of the Mississippi River to settle in Spanish territory at St. Genevieve and St. Louis in Report of Pedro Piernas, October 31, 1769, in WHC, 18: 307; Charles Balesi, The Time of the French in the Heart of North America, 1673-1818, (Chicago: Alliance Française, 1992), 279-80. So many French *habitants* had departed that the British garrison could not find sufficient food supplies. General Gage was shocked when they requested provisions be sent from the Atlantic Coast since he knew well the reputation of the Illinois for being the breadbasket of Louisiana. Winstanley Briggs, "The Forgotten Colony," 341.

²White, The Middle Ground, 278.

and 1762 Indian frustrations with the British intensified. In an effort to encourage Indian self-sufficiency and also to cut down the costs of administering the western lands, British commander-in-chief Jeffery Amherst drastically cut the funds available for providing gifts to the Indians. This course of action immediately alienated Indians who were used to the generous gifts previously given by the French and English. The British policy of frugality was particularly ill-timed from the Indians' standpoint. Several years of fighting in an imperial war had prevented many tribes from caring for their crops. They needed tools, clothing, and powder for hunting. Whereas the French had often extended credit to Indians to buy supplies and ammunition before hunting, the British would extend no such credit. Indians who approached British posts in hopes of receiving assistance were naturally angry and bitter when the British refused their requests. In a letter to Indian Superintendant William Johnson, Indian agent George Croghan reported that the Indians asked "ye reason that we allways was Calling them to Council During ye War & Giveing them presents & Now Take No Notice of them." The Indians said that "ye French was butt a poor pople butt they always Cloathed any Indians that was poor or Naked when they Come to see them."¹

What Amherst failed to realize was the symbolic importance of gift-giving in native cultures. Objects served to substantiate messages and agreements between Indian societies, while the act of exchange itself

¹George Croghan to William Johnson, May 10, 1762, in James Sullivan et al. (eds.), The Papers of Sir William Johnson, 13 vols + index, (Albany: State University of New York, 1921-63), 3: 732-34; Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1992), 122-23; Wilbur R. Jacobs, "Gift-Giving and Pontiac's Uprising," in Wilbur R. Jacobs, Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 75-82; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 138-141.

forged a bond of friendship. The mere process of exchanging gifts created a climate of peace and good will. Men like Indian agents Croghan and Johnson, as well as commanders at isolated forts, understood the importance of gift-giving and foresaw the serious repercussions from Amherst's attempts to reduce or eliminate gifts (he called them "bribes") to the Indians. Men close to the Indians knew that such a policy would alienate Indians at a time when Britain's control of the west was not secure and depended heavily on native goodwill.¹

The cessation of gifts and credit was only one of many reasons for increasing anger among the tribes. British military officials were less considerate of Indian feelings than their French counterparts who generally had treated the Indians courteously and avoided wounding their self-respect. The friendship that so often marked the relationships between French traders and Indians seemed a virtual impossibility to reconstruct because of the excessive greed of the British traders.² In addition to frustrations with British military officers and traders, Indians also felt threatened by land speculators and settlers. Native lands were not safe from white encroachment even after "official" agreements guaranteed Indian possession. All of these factors contributed to the rising hostilities of the western tribes towards the British. Indian complaints to post commanders and Indian agents did not bring relief. By the fall of 1762, British traders on the Ohio and Indian agents George Croghan and William Johnson fully expected war. Johnson tried to convince General

¹Ibid.; Michael McConnell, A Country Between: The Upper Ohio Valley and Its Peoples, 1724-1774, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 163-64.

²For one of the best descriptions of Indian frustrations with the British during the years before the Indian attacks associated with Pontiac's War, see McConnell, Country Between, 159-181; David Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 75-76.

Amherst to change his policies towards the Indians. Amherst flatly refused, and informed Johnson that henceforth there would be a total cessation of supplying provisions to the Indians. The general was ready to suppress, but not to prevent, a revolt. War belts circulated throughout the west, and the Indians prepared for war.¹

The war began in the spring of 1763 when British posts in the west were attacked by Indians of many different nations. From the Senecas in New York to the Chippewas in Minnesota and the Indians of Illinois, angry warriors attempted to destroy British posts and drive the British from their lands. The first attack was launched against Detroit by members of the "Three Fires," the Ottawas, Potawatomis, and Hurons and led by the charismatic leader, Pontiac. The siege of Detroit lasted from May until October. The attack, along with the ensuing attacks by other tribes, have been collectively referred to as "Pontiac's War" or the "Conspiracy of Pontiac." Recent historians have ceased describing the uprisings as a pan-Indian movement led by one man. A more reasonable interpretation is that although many tribes shared the same frustrations with the British, the Indian war of 1763 was a response to local conflicts at Detroit and throughout the Great Lakes and Illinois-Ohio country. At the root of the frustrations, however, was a conviction that British expansion posed a serious threat to the Indians' way of life. Indians believed that to survive they needed to reassert their hegemony over their lands by driving out the British who claimed sovereignty over Indian lands.²

¹Amherst to Bouquet, February 16, 1763 in Michigan Pioneer Historical Collections, 19: 178; Jacobs, "Gift-Giving," 79-81; White, Middle Ground, 285-87.

²McConnell, Country Between, 183-90; Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 81-92.

The Indian uprisings of 1763 forced British garrisons to abandon or surrender posts at Michilimackinac, Sandusky, Le Boeuf, Presque Isle, Venango, St. Joseph, Miamis and Ouiatenon. British troops were able to fend off attacks on Fort Niagara, Detroit and Fort Pitt. Hundreds of panic-stricken British frontier settlers fled eastward or took refuge in British posts and blockhouses. More than two thousand settlers were killed. Fort de Chartres and Vincennes were still in French hands and therefore escaped Indian attacks.¹

Though the British had been driven from most of the posts west of Niagara, their ability to hold onto the three largest forts throughout the summer of 1763 led to their ultimate victory. In the early fall of 1763 Pontiac and many of his followers lifted their sieges on Detroit and Fort Pitt. Four months of laying seige without capturing the forts had created much weariness among the warriors who were anxious to return to their families and hunting grounds. The arrival of Colonel Henry Bouquet and overwhelming numbers of British troops hastened their dispersal. The Indians' ability to sustain hostilities was also thwarted by an outbreak of smallpox among the Ohio Indians resulting from the purposeful dissemination of the disease via smallpox-infested blankets given to the Indians by British officers at Fort Pitt. In October of 1763 Pontiac received word from a messenger sent from Fort de Chartres that France and

¹For more on Pontiac's War see three articles by Wilbur R. Jacobs, "Gift-Giving and Pontiac's Uprising," "Pontiac's War -- a Conspiracy?" and "1763 - Year of Decision on the Indian Frontier," all in Jacobs, Dispossessing the American Indian, 75-103; Howard Peckham, Pontiac and the Indian Uprising, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1947); Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 81-90; chapter in White, The Middle Ground entitled "Pontiac and the restoration of the middle ground," 269-314; McConnell, Country Between, 182-90. For the spiritual nature of the Indians' militancy, see Gregory Evans Dowd, A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 23-36.

England had made peace. This forced Pontiac to give up his lingering hopes that the French would join the Indians' rebellion against the British. Admitting temporary defeat, Pontiac and his followers retreated. This, however, did not guarantee that the British could take possession of--or begin to trade in--the western lands. Pontiac continued to court allies and to stir the western tribes against the British until the summer of 1765.¹ At no time during the British rule of the Ohio-Illinois country could British traders move freely among the western tribes without the risk of having their goods stolen or even losing their lives.²

In the spring of 1764 the British tried unsuccessfully to send an expedition up the Mississippi River to the Illinois country to take possession of Fort de Chartres and the surrounding territory. The troops were attacked by hostile Indians and forced to retreat. General Thomas Gage, who had replaced Amherst as commander-in-chief, immediately planned another expedition. In the summer of 1764 British Captain Thomas Morris, with a small party of friendly Indians and two Frenchmen, tried to reach the Illinois country by travelling down the Wabash River.

¹Anson, The Miamis, 65-74; Jacobs, Dispossessing the American Indian; Edmunds, The Potawatomis.

²For accounts of Indian violence against British traders in the years after Pontiac's War, see Edmunds, The Potawatomis, 96-98; Dowd, Spirited Resistance, 36; Balesi, 284-86. For English sure to lose goods or life attempting to trade at Vincennes, see George Morgan's letter of December 10, 1767 in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter, (eds.) Trade and Politics, 1767-1769, IIIHC, 16: 131. In 1769 Indian Agent Johnson reported that the Indians of the Illinois and Ohio country had "killed several people, attacked & plundered several Traders boats, & in short blocked up the communication of the Ohio. . . none but Frenchmen can go into their country to the Westward, & the Indians positively & publickly declare to all people that they will suffer no others into their country. . ." Sir William Johnson to colonial secretary, August 26, 1769 in New York Colonial Documents 8: 184-85. A party of Kickapoos attacked the village at Fort de Chartres on April 16, 1769, killing and scalping a soldier and his wife while they slept. They managed to escape without being apprehended. The British at Chartres lived in fear of a full-scale attack. See letter of George Butricke (quartermaster at Fort de Chartres), June 27, 1769 in WHC, 18: 296-97.

The party was stopped by Pontiac and some of his followers. Morris was certain he would have been killed if not for the intervention of one of the Frenchmen. After a brief stop at Fort Miami -- where he again escaped death through the intervention of Pacan, a Miami chief -- Morris returned to the British stronghold at Detroit.¹

The British finally succeeded in replacing the French at Fort de Chartres in August of 1765. By that time British Indian agent George Croghan had met with the Illinois and Wabash tribes and had obtained a tentative willingness on the part of most tribes to cease hostilities towards the British. At a council at Fort Ouiatenon, even Pontiac had promised to make no further resistance to the British. Most tribes had accepted the fact that the French king was not going to assist them in driving the British away. While continuing to assert their sovereignty to their own lands, most tribes in the Wabash-Illinois country professed to the British their willingness to establish diplomatic and trade relations. When Croghan sent word of his successful negotiations among the tribes back to Fort Pitt, Captain Thomas Stirling and one hundred men of the 42nd Regiment began their journey down the Ohio on August 24, 1765. They arrived at Fort de Chartres forty-seven days later on October 10.² The next day French commandant St. Ange and his garrison officially turned the fort over to the

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 144-45 and 151; Journal of Thomas Morris in Thwaites (ed.), Early Western Travels, 1: 301-328.

²For Croghan negotiating with Pontiac and members of western tribes and tribes asserting that the French had no right to cede their lands to the British, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 154. For Stirling taking Fort de Chartres, see Alvord, The Illinois Country, 264; Lawrence Henry Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution, vol. 9, Thunder-Clouds Gather in the West, 1763-1766, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961): 420-21; WHC, 18: 275-76; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 155.

British and then crossed the Mississippi to the fast growing French settlement in St. Louis.¹

Like Fort de Chartres, the fort at Vincennes housed no British troops and therefore was one of the few that escaped destruction during the Indian uprisings of 1763-64. The French settlers and traders at Vincennes and throughout the Illinois country generally were not menaced by local Indians. In the correspondence of St. Ange, the French commandant at Fort de Chartres, he speaks of the Indians' frequent visits to ask for food, supplies, and ammunition which continued until he was relieved of duty by the British in 1765. In spite of the small amount of goods he was able to provide, the Indians remained on friendly terms. St. Ange complained to his superior in New Orleans:

The twenty-sixth of the past month the chiefs of the Miami, Kickapoo, Mascoutens, Wea, and Piankashaw arrived here with their band. They commenced by assuring me of their fidelity and of their attachment to the French nation, and they beseeched me to have pity upon them, saying that they were entirely destitute and did not find at their home those necessities as formerly, and that if I did not pity them, their wives and children would all die.²

¹St. Louis was founded in 1764 and grew quickly due to the influx of French settlers who fled to the western side of the Mississippi because they feared British rule. Though the western banks now belonged officially to Spain, Spanish officials did not take possession of the towns on the west bank of the Mississippi until 1768. When the Spanish took possession, many French settlers returned to the Illinois country, where conditions of trade were more favorable. St. Ange lived in St. Louis until his death in 1774. He was held in high esteem by the French who requested that he administer their civil government. When Spanish officials arrived in 1769, St. Ange was made a captain of infantry in the Spanish military service. Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 153-55. For more on St. Ange, see *WHC*, 16: 443.

²St. Ange to M. Dabbadie, July 15, 1764 in Alvord & Carter, *Critical Period*, 357-59. For Indians requesting food and supplies see also St. Ange to Dabbadie, November 9, 1764 in *ibid.*, 290. In the Nov. 9 letter St. Ange writes "In view of their sad condition I could not keep from giving them something, being persuaded that your intention is not to abandon them entirely; I gave them a little powder and shall do the same on all occasions as you order me."

Though his superiors had ordered him to cease doling out gifts, St. Ange continued to give small amounts of food and supplies to the Indians. He attempted to convince the Indians that if they would stop attacking the British, trade and prosperity would return. According to St. Ange, they replied that they "preferred dying to making peace with the English." They were "very much offended" when St. Ange spoke of peace with the English, but remained friendly towards St. Ange and the people of nearby communities.¹

When hostilities subsided in 1765, British military personnel, traders, and Indian agents began visiting Vincennes and writing correspondents about conditions there. During his 1765 peacemaking expedition among the western tribes, George Croghan estimated the number of French families at Post Vincent as being between eighty and ninety. He described the surrounding country as "one of the finest Situations that can be found[.] [T]he Country is level and clear and the Soil very rich producing Wheat and Tobacco[.] I think the latter preferable to that of Maryland or Virginia." He thought that Vincennes could be a place

¹Though the British were convinced of the French conspiracy to provoke the Indians to attack the British (and such attempts may well have occurred in Montreal or elsewhere), the surviving correspondence concerning the Illinois country during these years does not mention an official attempt to encourage Indian rebellion. A letter from Lieutenant Ross, stationed at Fort de Chartres, praised St. Ange for taking no part in stirring the Indians' animosity against the British and expressed a belief that the French traders acted independently to stir the Indians' hatred of the British in order to maintain their trade dominance. See letter from Lieutenant Ross, May 25, 1765 in IIIHC 10: 481-83. By 1764, many of the French inhabitants in the west were ready for peace with the British, but some individuals from Detroit, as well as Vincennes and the Illinois settlements, continued to resist British occupation. They used their influence among Indians to excacerbate the Indians' distrust and anger against the British. They also supplied Indians with powder, ball, and trade goods to enable them to refrain from trade with the British. See White, Middle Ground, 296-97.

"of great consequence for [the Indian] trade" since it was in the midst of fine hunting country.¹

The French at Vincennes and other Illinois settlements traded with the western Indians during and after Pontiac's War. New Orleans served as both the main supplier and market for Vincennes and the Illinois French. Though the French lost their monopoly of western Indian trade in 1760 with the fall of Canada, they continued to dominate that trade throughout the 1760s and 1770's. The French trade continued because the high cost of maintaining British garrisons throughout the western posts prevented General Gage from garrisoning such small posts as Ouiatenon, Fort Miami, and Vincennes. The lack of a strong British presence in many parts of the west meant that the French continued to dominate the fur trade and glean the profits which the British so desperately needed.²

After many years of high military expenditures during the Seven Years' War, the British coffers did not have funds available to maintain troops in the west and pay for the presents necessary to keep Indian tribes content. Low trade profits and high expenses in the west forced the British Parliament to create new sources of revenue to sustain the western posts. In 1765 Parliament passed the Stamp Act to defray the cost of defense and administration in the west. When the Stamp Act went into effect on November 1, 1765, violent protests from American colonists caused Parliament to repeal it the following year. This left the government without adequate revenue to stabilize the frontier, garrison the Northwest,

¹Croghan's Journal, June 15, 1765 in Alvord and Carter, The New Regime, 1765-67, IIHC 11: 31-32.

²For French (and even some British) traders channeling their trade through New Orleans where profits were higher see Charles M. Thomas, "Successful and Unsuccessful Merchants in the Illinois Country," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 30 (1937-38): 429-440; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 158-59.

and regulate Indian trade. Throughout the 1760's and early 1770's Parliament tried a variety of tax measures to force the Americans to contribute to the high costs of defending and administering the west. The Americans' persistent refusal to pay the taxes greatly hindered the effectiveness of the British government to establish a strong military presence in the west, to create a system of civil government for the French in the west, and to take steps which might have channeled more trade profits into British pockets. At the same time, the increasing hostilities of the Americans toward British policies by the early 1770's forced General Gage to pull his already overextended garrisons from the western posts to maintain order in the eastern cities.¹

The inability of the British to establish a strong military and trading presence in the Wabash and Illinois country eased the transition for French settlers as they adjusted to British rule. For the people of Vincennes and other French settlements, day-to-day life was not greatly affected by their new status as British subjects. The British did not even take formal possession of Vincennes until 1768, and then did not bother to man the fort, which was allowed to rot away. In spite of the urgings of some British officials to establish a garrison and trading post at Vincennes to funnel profits from the fur trade into British rather than French pockets, no action was taken.² In an article addressing the west as that region

¹Jack Sosin, The Revolutionary Frontier, (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 13-15; Gipson, Thunderclouds Gather 9: 200-205, 246-81; Jack Sosin, "Britain and the Ohio Valley" in Elliott, (ed.), Contest for Empire, 62-63; Jack Sosin, Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760-1775, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 79-92. For the violent reaction of Americans to the Stamp Act, see Pauline Maier, From Resistance to Revolution, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 51-76.

²Insufficient finances prevented the establishment of a garrison and trading post at Vincennes, even though George Croghan recommended the need for a post on the Wabash "from whence the five nations who are settled on that river may be

changed masters, Jay Gitlin asserted that "Despite the change it brought in imperial control from France to England, there was surprising continuity in the cis-Mississippi frontier. Patterns of accommodation between Indian and French communities shifted, expanded, and reacted, but they were not fundamentally altered until the next century."¹

The continuity the French experienced in the fur trade was matched by the familiar patterns of daily work on farms. The French found ready markets for their agricultural goods at New Orleans and among the British troops stationed in the west. When Lieutenant Fraser stopped in Vincennes on a journey to the western Indian Nations in 1766, he was impressed by the "considerable quantity of Wheat and Tobacco" the French farmers raised, as well as their "good stock of cattle." Fraser recognized the importance of the French as suppliers of agricultural goods to British troops in the west. Fraser disliked the French and stated in a 1766 report that "we would be as well quit of them [the French] , but the Troops in that country unfortunately depend on them in a great measure for their provisions. . ." ² Fraser's animosities towards the French appear to be motivated by the difficulty the British had establishing trade relations with the Indians who preferred to continue trading with the French when possible. Fraser reported that the trade of the country was "extremely considerable" but that the French held "astonishing sway over the Indians" and therefore British traders would never have "a real peace while they

supplied with British goods." Report of Croghan, Detroit, January 18, 1767, in William Johnson Papers 13: 412. Edward Cole, Commissary at Fort de Chartres also expressed the need for British troops and a trading post at Vincennes in order to keep the French from making all profits from the Indian trade. Edward Cole to George Croghan, December 19, 1767 in Alvord and Carter, Trade and Politics, 147-48.

¹Jat Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire" 75.

²Report of Lieutenant Fraser in Jacob Piatt Dunn, Documents, 410-413.

are rivals with the French in Trade." Fraser, like most of his countrymen, blamed the French for the 1763-64 Indian uprisings, and complained that the French gave the Indians "ammunition and every other thing necessary to carry it on." With these sentiments it is not surprising that Fraser described the French as "transported convicts" who were "cruel and treacherous to each other & consequently so to strangers." He applied similar descriptions to the Indians, calling them "cruel, treacherous, and cowardly" and "great drunkards." Nothing could equal the Indians' passion for drunkenness, according to Fraser, except the French Inhabitants who were "for the greatest part drunk every day while they can get Drink to buy in the Colony."¹

It is difficult to reconcile Fraser's description of these French drunkards with the high agricultural productivity of the *habitants* of Vincennes and the other French settlements in the Illinois. It is likely that the British, like the Americans who followed, saw only laziness in the French settlers who spent so little time in their fields. In spite of the fact that the French of Vincennes raised enough crops to feed themselves with additional amounts left over for export, they spent too much time at other activities (both work and play) to be considered hard-working. The diversification of economic activities which made good sense to the French was not appreciated by Fraser or his countrymen. Nonetheless, the daily routine of Vincennes residents who tended their fields and gardens, cared for livestock, hunted and fished, and worked in the fur trade was not greatly disturbed when Vincennes passed from French to British authority in 1763.

¹Ibid.

In addition to a continuity in the economic activities of the French in Vincennes while under British authority, there was also continuity in the civil government of that settlement. It would be more accurate to say that there was continuity due to the ongoing lack of imperial government in Vincennes. The people there retained the style of self-government which was forced upon them at St. Ange's departure. From 1763 until 1774, the British government made no official provision for the government of Vincennes or the other Illinois settlements. The only "official" British presence in the Illinois Country was the commander of the regular troops stationed at Fort de Chartres, and he was too far away for the people of Vincennes to rely upon.¹

The Illinois settlements did not fall into any of the four colonies which were created by the provisions of the Proclamation of 1763: Quebec, East Florida, West Florida, and Grenada. The region between the Appalachian divide and the Mississippi River was reserved for the Indian tribes, and any settlers living west of the Appalachians were ordered to move east of the boundary line. This part of the proclamation was extremely unpopular with eastern land speculators and settlers who hoped to move west onto cheap land, but the British government deemed the policy essential in order to keep peace with the Indians and to protect and expand the fur trade.² British officials hoped that the Illinois French

¹Lawrence Henry Gipson, The British Empire before the American Revolution, vol. 11, The Rumbling of the Coming Storm, 1766-1770 (1965): 421-22; Barnart and Riker, Indiana, 148.

²The government hoped to strictly regulate the fur trade by allowing licensed traders to operate only at specifically designated garrisoned posts where British agents and officers could oversee their dealings with the Indians. The expense of regulating Indian affairs along with the high cost of garrisoning troops in the west contributed to the failure of the post war Indian policy. For the background of the Proclamation of 1763, see Gipson, Thunderclouds Gather, Chapter 3 and Sosin,

would resettle in Quebec or other more easily-controlled parts of English North America. The lack of a policy specifically relating to the Illinois French may have been due to an ignorance concerning the extent of French settlement in that area. By 1764 General Gage set forth a proclamation concerning the French inhabitants of the Illinois country. The French were guaranteed the right to worship in the Catholic church, to move out of English territory if they chose, or to remain where they were with full rights as British subjects. In return they were expected to pledge their loyalty to the King of England. No provisions were made for civil government.¹

With no British officials present, Vincennes governed itself. Disputes were submitted to a committee consisting of the local elite and/or the military commandant, as was suggested by St. Ange when he left. St. Ange's appointed commander, the Sieur de Richardville, was the commandant until he died in April of 1765. Until the Americans installed their own military commander in 1778, the position of commandant changed only twice when the local populace elected Nicolas Chappart (who served from 1765 until he died in 1770) and then Jean Baptist Racine dit Ste. Marie². The fact that these two men held their community-appointed post for such long periods suggests a fair level of internal stability among the inhabitants of Vincennes. Self-government, however, became strained by a large immigration of outsiders (mostly French from Canada and other

Whitehall and the Wilderness, chapters 2 and 3. For the full text of the Proclamation see Alvord and Carter (eds.), The Critical Period, 39-45.

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 148-49.

²Somes, Old Vincennes, 54-55. Nicolas Chappart was a German from John Law's German colonies on the Mississippi River. He and his wife Maria had arrived in Vincennes at least by the year 1750 when parish records show the death of an infant son in Vincennes in 1750. His name originally was spelled "Niklaus Schappard" though he is usually found in the records as Chappart or Shappard.

western settlements) to Vincennes that was well underway by 1765. The census of 1767 listed 232 men, women, and children, but it also included a separate category for "strangers" whose number was listed as 168. This category for strangers was not included in the census of the largest Illinois village, Kaskaskia, or the smaller French villages along the Mississippi.¹

Evidence of the rapid population growth is also given by Father Pierre Gibault, who was sent by Bishop Briand from Canada to the Illinois country in 1768. During his first visit to Vincennes in 1770, he commented that "there are only eighty men who sow, but there are many people of all trades, and many young people who are taking up residence every day. There are in all from seven to eight hundred persons who desire to have a priest."² Leaving room for error or exaggeration on the part of the Gibault's estimate, a population anywhere near even seven hundred is a significant increase from the 400 persons (habitants plus strangers) counted in the 1767 census. This rapid population increase of "outsiders" undoubtedly contributed to a sense of social disorder in Vincennes which caused many of the established settlers to actively pressure the British government for the establishment of civil government as well as the appointment of a full-time priest.³

British officials were aware of and concerned about the rapid population increase in Vincennes. In 1769 General Gage proposed to his

¹Census of Illinois, 1767 in IIHC 11: 469-470.

²Gibault to Briand, October 1769 in Alvord and Carter (eds.), Trade and Politics, 609-611.

³Meurin to Bishop Briand, March 23, 1767, in IIHC 11: 520-22; Phillibert to Briand, April 6, 1767, *ibid.*, 555-56; Ste. Marie et al. to Briand, April 22, 1769 in IIHC 14: 522-23; Alvord, The Illinois Country, 266.

superiors that a garrison be established at Vincennes to regulate the "unlawful" elements who were settling there.

This. . . Settlement has increased within a very Short time, in a Manner that is Surprizing. I find that Strollers and Vagabonds from Canada, Detroit, Illinois, and other Places, have assembled there, to live a lazy kind of Indian life, or take shelter there from Justice.¹

A few months later Gage wrote that Vincennes should have a detachment of troops "to keep the Inhabitants within bounds." Gage believed that Vincennes and other interior settlements "must not be Suffered to increase with the fugitive French and Canadians, who go thither to get Shelter from Creditors, or escape from Justice, for their Crimes."² With British troops absent in the vast territory between Fort de Chartres and Detroit, the French living in Vincennes conducted trade or pursued other activities free from British military or legal authority. Even some of the French and Spanish traders from the west bank of the Mississippi headed towards Vincennes to free themselves from the unpopular Spanish rule.³ There is no way of knowing with certainty how many of the Vincennes "strangers" truly were criminals fleeing justice, but it seems likely that many of these new arrivals may simply have been drawn to an area that was, in their minds and in practical terms, still "French." If Gage was correct in his statement that the "unlawful elements" were coming from the Illinois settlements, Detroit, and Canada then the "strangers" were predominantly

¹Gage to Lord Hillsborough, January 6, 1769, in Alvord and Carter (eds.), Trade and Politics, 485.

²Gage to Wilkins, March 24, 1769, in Clarence and Alvord, Trade and Politics, 590-510.

³Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 171; Gage to Lord Hillsborough, October 1, 1771, in Clarence E. Carter (ed.), The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775 (2 volumes, Yale University Press, 1931, 1933), 1: 310.

French. The inavailability of sources make it impossible to ascertain how many of the "strangers" were criminals and how many were simply traders, voyageurs, and/or settlers seeking out a home virtually free from British supervision.

General Gage's concern over the area was heightened in 1770 when he received reports from the commandant at Fort de Chartres and an Indian agent which accused the French at Vincennes of inciting the Wabash tribes against the British. Gage concluded that either some effective government was needed in Vincennes to control the population, or the town should be evacuated. Johnson agreed with Gage's assessment, but pointed out the difficulty of executing either of these solutions. Stirring the animosities of French and especially their Indian friends in the west would be a dangerous course of action.¹

Gage realized the importance of establishing a regular civil government for the people of the Illinois not only to preserve order but also as one means of cultivating their allegiance to Great Britain. The British ministry, however, simply could not consider adding to the administrative costs of the west. Annual receipts for expenditures to the Indian department and to provision western troops came in hundreds of thousands of pounds over the amounts which Parliament had appropriated. The American colonists steadfastly refused to offset these expenses by accepting their responsibility to pay the various new taxes which Parliament had created for the purpose of protecting western lands and provisioning western troops.² Attempting to cut expenditures, in

¹Gage to Johnson, Oct. 1, 1771 in William Johnson Papers, 7: 76; Johnson to Gage, Aug. 30, 1769, *ibid.*, 7: 150; Sosin, "The French Settlements," 202-02.

²Sosin, "French Settlements," 197-99; Ian Christie and Benjamin Labaric, Empire or Independence, 1760-1766, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976), 31.

1768 the British government transferred control of commercial relations with the tribes back to the colonies and ordered the abandonment of several posts on the lower Mississippi River. Only Detroit, Niagara, Michilimackinac, Fort de Chartres, and Fort Pitt were maintained. By 1771 heavy expenses and the call of eastern governors for additional troops to quell the growing anger of colonists toward British rule contributed to the decision to abandon Fort de Chartres and Fort Pitt. Seven companies of the 18th Regiment were withdrawn in 1772. Only a small detachment of fifty men was left at Kaskaskia.¹

At the same time that the British government abandoned its regulation of the trade with the Indians, it attempted to establish a more permanent line between white settlers and Indians. By the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the Iroquois nations and their allies recognized the Ohio River as the permanent boundary between white settlements and Indian lands. At the same time the Cherokee ceded claims to lands in the present state of West Virginia. With the western parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia opened to settlement, white settlers poured into the territory.

¹McConnell, A Country Between, 243-44; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 149-50. The decision to return Indian affairs to the individual colonies was an important departure from the policy which had been in place since 1763. A grand attempt was made by the British to strictly regulate the fur trade by providing the Indians with a uniform trade under imperial regulation. The original plan was based on recommendations of Indian agents who best knew how to keep peace with the Indians. The 1763 regulations stipulated that traders could only trade at stipulated posts under the watchful eye of Indian agents and military personnel. With fair prices established and enforced and the distribution of liquor regulated or outlawed, it was hoped that violence between Indians and traders would no longer be a problem. In spite of this serious attempt to prevent white expansion into Indian lands, establish fair prices for goods, and curtail the worse abuses among English traders, the high cost of administering the Indian department and the troops in the west doomed this plan to failure. The Indians themselves contributed indirectly to the program's failure by encouraging traders to bypass official trading posts in order to come directly to Indian villages. It was inconvenient for Indians to travel long distances to trade, and experienced traders were all too willing to risk personal danger and/or any repercussions from breaking trade regulations to gain profits.

Within a few years Indians denied the validity of the cessions and frontier hostilities escalated into declared war by 1774.¹

The reduction of military strength in the Illinois country intensified the problem of maintaining order among Indians or the French inhabitants. General Gage and other officials were convinced that the French, who traded in every Indian village, stirred the animosity of Indians towards the British.² General Gage and his superiors were most concerned about the rapid increase of the "Nest of Villains" in Vincennes. Late in 1771 Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to Gage that the "Settlement forming at the Post of St. Vincent" was "of the most dangerous Tendency" which would keep the Indians from developing loyalty or trade with the British. Hillsborough directed Commander-in-Chief Gage to issue a proclamation ordering the inhabitants of Vincennes to disperse. The proclamation was issued on April 8, 1772.³

. . . a great number of persons have established themselves, particularly on the river Ouabache, where they lead a wandering life, without government, and without laws, interrupting the free course of trade, destroying the game, and causing infinite disturbance in the country, which occasions a considerable injury to the affairs of the King, as well as to those of the Indians; His Majesty has been pleased to order. . . to all those who have established themselves on the lands upon the Ouabache, whether at St. Vincent or elsewhere, to quit those countries instantly and without delay, and to retire, at their choice, into some one of the colonies of His Majesty, where they will be received and treated as the other subjects of His Majesty.⁴

¹Barnhart and Riker, 168-69.

²Gage to Hillsborough, October 1, in Carter, ed., Gage Correspondence 1: 212.

³Gage to Hillsborough, May 14, 1770, *ibid.*, 1: 275; Lord Hillsborough to Gage, December 4, 1771 and July 1, 1772 in *ibid.*, 2: 137-38, 145.

⁴Printed in Watts, (ed.), "Some Vincennes Documents."

This proclamation was evidently conveyed to the people of Vincennes by Captain Hugh Lord, the British commandant at Kaskaskia. The alarmed inhabitants of Vincennes had no reason to doubt that the British order would be enforced. On July 21st the leading citizens of the town penned a short reply to Captain Lord. They professed their willingness to "give to His Majesty at every opportunity proof of our fidelity and of our obedience," but respectfully stated their belief that the king must not be aware of the "titles of concession" they had to their lands. They informed Captain Lord of their intention to send two delegates to General Gage to present their case so that he could render them justice.¹

Lord forwarded a copy of letter he had received from the Vincennes inhabitants to Gage who was stationed in New York. Captain Lord's correspondence did not reach Gage until December. In January Gage forwarded the letter to the new Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Dartmouth, saying that the delegates had not yet appeared.² Dartmouth was responsible for formulating a plan of government for the people of the interior, who continued to pressure Parliament to establish some form of civil government. In March of 1773, Gage reported having received two letters (dated September 18, 1772) from Vincennes signed by many "established" (as opposed to newly-arrived) citizens.³ In one letter they convincingly refuted the notion that they were "wanderers" or

¹The letter to Captain Hugh Lord dated July 21, 1772, is printed with English translation in Watts, ed., "Some Vincennes Documents," 205-6.

²Gage to Dartmouth, January 6, 1773, in Carter, Gage Correspondence 1: 343.

³Gage to Dartmouth, January 6, 1773, Gage Correspondence 1: 343 as quoted in Watts, (ed.), "Some Vincennes Documents," 202. The letter and memorial were dated September 18, 1772. Gage makes no mention of how they were transmitted. He does not mention receiving delegates. It is interesting to note the length of time (September to March) which it took for the letter to travel from Vincennes to New York.

"vagabonds," and presented themselves instead as peaceful agricultural settlers.

We have received with as much respect as surprise the proclamation which Your Excellency has ordered to be issued to us. . . we would have obeyed without delay if it had been possible, and if we had not recognized that the matter would apply to vagabonds and not to peaceful agricultural settlers, holding possessions based upon sacred titles, and that our very obedience would be injurious to His Majesty and contrary to his interests. Furthermore, Your Excellency, you can understand better than anyone the absolute impossibility in which we find ourselves of transporting afar our wives and children without other resources than a vain hope of being received as other subjects, which would indeed cause us to deserve the title of vagabonds. . . ¹

In the other letter, the Vincennes settlers refuted every charge made against them. They blamed the false accusations on the "greed of those who wish to encroach upon our inheritance, and who, in order to succeed, have sought to blacken our conduct." This likely refers to rival French or British traders. They pointed out that their seventy-year-old settlement was established by an officer of the French King, and that the land which they cultivated was purchased under titles given by their French commandants. The settlers emphasized the importance of the right of property stating that their titles were "as sacred as they are inviolable under a government, the unshakable foundation of which is seated upon justice and equity." Since their grants had been made to them as French subjects prior to the 1763 Treaty of Paris and before the Proclamation of 1763 which restricted settlement in the western lands, they were not

¹The letter from the Vincennes inhabitants to General Gage dated September 18th, 1772 is printed with English translation in Watts, (ed.), "Some Vincennes Documents," 206-07.

affected by Gage's proclamation. Their letter concludes with a plea for Gage to send troops to revive trade, establish order, and lessen their dependence on the local tribes. Throughout the long letter the Vincennes citizens make repeated reference to their love, respect, and loyalty to the English King and their confidence that General Gage would see justice done by withdrawing the proclamation ordering them to abandon their homes. The letter was as eloquent as it was persuasive.¹

Gage forwarded copies of both letters to Lord Dartmouth along with his own comments. He indicated that he no longer considered at least some of the people of Vincennes as "lawless Banditti" but rather as loyal British subjects who held their land by right of title. He informed Dartmouth that he had instructed the inhabitants of Vincennes to send him a list of all the settlers, the date of each land grant, the name of the official who confirmed and granted the land, and the location of the register.² Dartmouth replied that the British government would carefully consider the validity of the Vincennes land claims and that while proof of their claims was being researched, the settlers would not be molested as long as they behaved as faithful subjects of the king.³

¹Memorial of the Settlers at Post Vincenne to General Gage, September 18, 1772, in *ibid.*, 208-212.

²Gage to Dartmouth, April 7, 1773 in Carter, Gage Correspondence 1: 347-48. The problem of establishing clear proof of land titles was that the governor of Louisiana had been the person who approved and confirmed titles granted by the commandants of various posts. The Louisiana registers were in New Orleans, now in Spanish hands. Although most titles were approved, occasionally commandants overstepped their authority and therefore some titles had been rejected. While registers at Quebec had validated the claims of the inhabitants at Detroit, the validation of titles granted in the Illinois country depended on Spain's cooperation in letting French officials peruse the land registers. Sosin, "French Settlements," 204-05.

³Dartmouth to Haldimand, June 2, 1773 as quoted in Sosin, "French Settlements," 205.

In the spring of 1773 General Gage returned to England on leave and his responsibilities in America were taken over by General Frederick Haldimand. Haldimand was sympathetic to the plight of the citizens of Vincennes and encouraged them to compile carefully all possible proof of their land titles.¹ The task of sorting out the validity of land claims was plagued by a wide variety of problems, but the clear claims of some of the Vincennes inhabitants persuaded the British to abandon their attempt to evacuate the town of Vincennes. By September of 1773 Gage reported to Haldimand that Dartmouth was willing to allow the French in the Illinois country and at Vincennes to remain where they were "whether they hold their Possessions by good or bad Title."² That decision undoubtedly brought great relief to the people of Vincennes, but the absence of civil government in the Illinois country remained a problem for both the people of Vincennes and the British ministry.

The lack of an established civil government was not the only factor which contributed to social disorder in Vincennes during the British years. These years were also marked by the absence of religious leaders who traditionally provided at least some discipline and control over the morals of the village. In 1763 the Jesuits were expelled from America, and their departure from the western missionary posts left the French inhabitants of the Wabash and Illinois country without the direction of spiritual leaders. Only the elderly priest, Father Sebastien Meurin, remained. His poor health, failing sight, and declining mental faculties made it impossible to meet the spiritual needs of habitants on both sides of the Mississippi.³

¹Phillips, "Vincennes in French Colonial Policy," 337.

²Gage to Haldimand, September 14, 1773 as quoted in Sosin, "French Settlements," 206.

³Alvord, The Illinois Country, 268-69; Donnelly, Pierre Gibault, 29.

For several years Meurin's requests for additional priests to serve the Illinois French went unheeded. Without regular pastoral vigilance, the people of the Illinois villages were "insensibly losing piety" and "abandoning themselves to vices." Meurin spread himself thinly among the settlements along the Mississippi, but his poor health prevented him from traveling to Vincennes. That community, therefore, was totally without pastoral care from 1763 until the arrival of Father Pierre Gibault in 1769. Meurin wrote to the bishop in Quebec in 1767 that Vincennes had a greater need for a missionary than did the Illinois settlements. "Disorder has always been great there, but it has increased in the last three years."¹

In April of 1767 the lay church warden at Vincennes, Phillibert, sent a pathetic plea to the prelate at Quebec, begging Bishop Briand to send a missionary.

. . . since the departure of the reverend Jesuit father who has been retired from this parish, I have the sorrow to see growing up numbers of small children who are of an age to make their first communion and who are unfortunately deprived, as well as many honest traders, of the sacraments, since there is no resource in this region. I have the disagreeable sight of many marriages contracted, without the power to make the parties have recourse to our mother holy church; this can cause only a great scandal.²

When two years passed and still no priest had arrived, sixteen members of the townsfolk again petitioned Bishop Briand to address their desperate situation. Their petition described the "sad state and wretched disorder" which was a result of a breakdown in civil and religious authority. The

¹Meurin to Bishop Briand, March 23, 1767, in IIHC 11: 520-22; Donnelly, Gibault, 29-30.

²Phillibert to Briand, April 6, 1767, IIHC 11: 555-56.

chaotic social conditions in Vincennes were not nearly so problematic prior to 1765 when the presence of civil and religious leaders tempered the behavior of Vincennes citizens.¹

The people's requests for the establishment of civil government reveal their understanding of how the fulfillment of that request would alleviate some of their problems. What they may not fully have realized is the extent to which the large numbers of recent immigrants made it difficult to maintain the effectiveness of traditional means of preserving social order. Living on the outskirts of the French empire, Vincennes had been relatively free to develop its own self-regulated, participatory early modern village society. For the preservation of social order, the people of Vincennes depended not only on the resident military commandant and the parish priest, but also on consensus politics and the advice of the local elites to preserve order, stability, and traditional social values.² Self-imposed social and political regulations were relatively effective during years of slow population growth (prior to 1765). The people of Vincennes were less able to preserve discipline and morality when large numbers of outsiders began settling in Vincennes after 1765.

The Vincennes villagers' belief that a priest would help restore order was clearly demonstrated by the outpouring of emotion exhibited by

¹Ste. Marie et al. to Briand, April 22, 1769 in IIHC, 14:522-23. The letter was signed first by Ste. Marie, Commandant.

²Winstanley Briggs, "Le Pays des Illinois," 55-56. Briggs asserts that the people in the Illinois French settlements, like those in early New England, created "self-generated, self-regulated, participatory early modern village society" based on their views concerning the "ideal" village society. Because the experience of manorial village life was similar in England and northern France, the colonists from both regions faced similar problems with similar hopes and ambitions. When given the opportunity to set up their own versions of village life as they felt it ought to be in New England and French-Illinois (life was too regulated in Canada to do so), these versions turned out to be similar. Both were left alone by official society long enough to develop their own "improved" village societies.

the villagers when Father Gibault finally arrived in 1769. Unfortunately, Gibault stayed only two months before returning to his home in Kaskaskia. Like Meurin, Gibault was responsible for ministering to inhabitants throughout the Illinois country, so he was only able to visit Vincennes every two years.¹ Gibault's infrequent visits did little to ameliorate the social disorder which plagued Vincennes during the British period.

The British government attempted to bring government and order to the western lands with the Quebec Act of 1774. This act finally extended civil government to the French settlements in the Illinois country by annexing the area north of the Ohio River to the Province of Quebec. The act also guaranteed to the French the free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion (granted to the inhabitants of the Illinois Country by General Gage's proclamation in 1763). French laws and customs in civil cases were to be observed throughout the newly expanded colony of Quebec.²

Although the French inhabitants of the interior had been demanding a civil government for years, the decision to annex the Ohio and Illinois country to Quebec was motivated by more than an attempt to appease the French. The Quebec Act was a result of numerous and complex problems experienced by the British government as they tried to effectively regulate the fur trade and maintain friendly relations with the Indians. By 1774 the attempts to raise revenue in the colonies to support western troops and administer Indian relations had failed. The growing disturbances in the eastern colonies had forced the withdrawal of troops from the west.

¹Gibault to Briand, March 1770 in IIIHC, 16: 612. Vincennes, Indiana, Old Cathedral Archives: Parish of St. Francis Xavier Records, 1770-1831. Gibault was at Vincennes in February 1771, January 1773, February 1775, and June 1777.

²Thornbrough and Riker, Readings in Indiana History, 28-29; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 174.

Frontiersman and land speculators repeatedly violated the 1763 Proclamation and the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, both of which had attempted to protect the Indians from unwanted encroachments upon their lands. The attempt to establish royal control of a well-regulated Indian trade had failed, and the colonial assemblies proved unable to establish a uniform system of trade or to enforce the trade regulations of individual colonies. Private self-interest prevailed over a government commitment to the general good, and the result was colonial mismanagement and chaos in Indian-white affairs. By 1773 many of the western tribes were so angry that a widespread Indian war seemed likely. The Quebec Act took responsibility for managing Indian trade and diplomacy in the west away from the American colonies and placed it instead in the hands of the government of Quebec. With limited funds and troops and the failure of other solutions, the Quebec Act was a final attempt to ensure stability in the western lands.¹

The American colonists interpreted the Quebec Act as a punitive measure similar to the Coercive (or Intolerable) Acts of 1774 which were passed in response to the Boston Tea Party. In the Quebec Act, the Americans saw yet another example of the self-interested, tyrannical actions of the British government which obviously cared little for the well-being of the American colonies. In a stroke Parliament had instituted French law and Catholicism in Quebec and placed the western lands under the control of the Quebec government. To the Americans, this action seemed to go hand-in-hand with the closing of the Boston Harbor and the other measures included in the Coercive Acts. Though the Quebec Act and

¹Sosin, "French Settlements," 207-08; Sosin, "Britain and the Ohio Valley, 1760-1775," in Elliott, (ed.), Contest for Empire, 70.

the Intolerable Acts were all passed in the early spring of 1774, the timing was only coincidental. The Quebec Act was the culmination of a decade of experimentation on the part of British ministry who attempted to overcome the challenges presented to them by the vast territories gained at the end of the Seven Years' War. The Quebec Act was simply an attempt to "insure the stability and security of the interior by granting to the inhabitants a form of government following the traditions and circumstances of the French inhabitants."¹

The outline for government of the Illinois-Ohio country was provided in instructions sent to Quebec Governor Guy Carleton in January of 1775.² A lieutenant governor or superintendent was to be appointed for each of the Illinois villages, Vincennes, Mackinac, and Detroit. Criminal and civil courts were to be established in the aforementioned places. A natural-born born [English] subject would preside as judge in each of the courts, assisted by a French assistant who would act only in an advisory capacity. Appeals from the district courts could be taken to the governor and council, and from there to the king in council if necessary. In spite of royal intentions to provide government for all the French communities in the western territory, no British official was ever sent to the Illinois communities. Henry Hamilton was sent to Detroit, Arent de Peyster to Michilimackinac, and Edward Abbott to Vincennes.³

Abbott arrived in Vincennes in May of 1777. In the fourteen years which had passed since Vincennes had passed into British hands, no British

¹Sosin, "French Settlements, 208; Alvord, The Illinois Country, 303.

²Carleton's instructions regarding the government of the new territory which was annexed to Quebec in the Quebec Act of 1774 are printed in Adam Short and Arthur Doughty (eds.), Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 2: 594-614.

³Alvord, The Illinois Country, 309; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 175-76.

official had been stationed there, and no official government had been established. Abbott was impressed with the reception he received from the people of Vincennes. In a letter to Quebec Governor Guy Carleton, he commended the townspeople for "the respectfull reception I met with and for their readiness in obeying the orders I thought necessary to issue." In the same letter he mentions the social disorder which was prevalant in Vincennes. "Since the Conquest of Canada, no person bearing His Majesty's Commission has been to take possession; from this your Excellency may easily imagine what anarchy reigns."¹ Without a garrison and with limited financial resources, Abbott depended greatly on the goodwill of the Vincennes residents. His position was also compromised by the general ill-disposition of many Indian tribes towards the British. He could expect little aid from his own government who had its hands full trying to put down the rebellion of the thirteen seabord colonies.²

The British presence in Vincennes was shortlived. Abbott abandoned the post in February of 1778 in frustration because of his inability to conduct Indian relations without being supplied with trade goods by his government. He left the fort and the town in the hands of the Vincennes militia. The nine months that Abbott spent in Vincennes marked the only official British governmental presence there since 1763 when France ceded her North Amerian holdings to Great Britain at the end of the French and Indian War. The British had done little to earn the respect, friendship, or loyalty of the French in Vincennes. They should not have been surprised

¹Lieutenant Governor Edward Abbott to Sir Guy Carleton, May 26, 1777 in Dunn, Documents, 440-42. Abbott set out from Detroit in April of 1777 with no troops. He was escorted by thirty five Frenchmen and several Indians, three of whom were Piankashaw chiefs. Barhart and Riker, Indiana, 178-79.

²For Abbott's frustrations over lack of supplies see Abbott to Carleton, April 25, 1778 in Michigan Historical Collections, 9: 488.

at the lack of commitment to the British cause displayed by the people of Vincennes during the American Revolution.¹

Great Britain's acute financial difficulties following the Seven Years War and the mounting conflicts between the British government and its American colonies were the two major contributing factors to British failure to control the west. A shortage of funds prevented England from establishing a strong military presence among the western Indians or from sending British officials to govern French villages in the Illinois country. The inability of the British government to establish civil government along with its failure to regulate and profit from the fur trade meant that the people of Vincennes continued to govern themselves and profit from the fur trade. Though subject to new regulations and laws created by distant British lawmakers, in practical terms the political and economic life of the Vincennes inhabitants during the British years was marked by as much continuity as change.

¹August Derleth, Vincennes: Portal to the West, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 31.

CHAPTER 7

SHIFTING LOYALTIES: THE PEOPLE OF VINCENNES AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1778-1783

Five months after the British Lieutenant Governor Edward Abbott's departure in July of 1778, the people of Vincennes were persuaded by American George Rogers Clark to pledge their allegiance to the "Republic of Virginia" and to support the American fight for independence. Their support of the United States was short-lived. By December of that same year Vincennes had been re-captured by a British army led by lieutenant governor Henry Hamilton, the British commandant at Detroit. Again, the citizens of Vincennes assembled in the town church to take a loyalty oath to the British. A few months later, in February of 1779, George Rogers Clark and his army made their historic mid-winter march from Kaskaskia to Vincennes and forced Hamilton's surrender. Once again, the people of Vincennes gathered to re-pledge their loyalty to Clark and the Americans.¹

The French citizens of Vincennes and other Illinois settlements were caught in the middle of the struggle between Great Britain and her American colonies. As a result of their lack of commitment, the Vincennes *habitants* have been portrayed by historians as backwoods simpletons

¹For primary accounts of the taking and retaking of Vincennes see James, (ed.), George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781, vol. 1, and John D. Barnhart, Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with the Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton (Crawfordsville, IN, 1951). For secondary accounts see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 181-229; Donnelly, Gibault, 63-85.

who nonchalantly shifted loyalties to whichever imperial army was in the neighborhood. Residents appear ignorant and spineless, lacking commitment and the political acumen to accurately assess their situation and make well-reasoned decisions. In most accounts of the revolution in Vincennes, no attempt is made to explain why the French there acted as they did. For example, Dale Van Every commented that the French population at Vincennes "accepted the return of the English as cheerfully as they had recently accepted the intrusion of the Americans. The French militia as readily turned their coats again." No further explanation is offered concerning the motivation of the French.¹

If the Illinois French demonstrated weak commitments to the alliances they formed with both the British and Americans, it is because they perceived few practical reasons for making real sacrifices born of true loyalty to either side. Apart from the nine months which Lieutenant Governor Abbott spent at Vincennes which ended in February of 1778, there was no British military officer or troops stationed at Vincennes and no administrators of civil government. The failure of the British to establish a strong political or military presence in the Illinois country meant that the French *habitants* and traders had no reason to feel other than the Frenchmen they were in spite of their official status as British subjects. Trade connections to the British-controlled posts throughout the Great Lakes and Canada may have motivated some merchants and traders to support Great Britain in the interest of maintaining trade. Though most

¹See Dale Van Every's "Clark in Kentucky and the Illinois Country," in David Skaggs, The Old Northwest in the American Revolution, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977), 183-84.

of the people in Vincennes had no strong pro-British sympathies, they also had few reasons to commit themselves to an American victory.¹

Most of the French *habitants* had been taught from childhood to hate New Englanders (the *Bostonais*) who, since early in Canada's history, had constantly threatened the French by raiding their villages, inciting the Indians to massacre Frenchmen, and showing contempt for the Catholic religion. Hatred of New Englanders was easily extended to all British North Americans. Canadian perceptions of Americans as vicious anti-Catholic enemies still prevailed among the French. Many of the Illinois French had parents or grandparents who had personally experienced the attacks of New Englanders.² Another reason for the French to be wary of the Americans was the knowledge that the American colonists' land greed had already caused, and would continue to cause, Indian wars as native tribes attempted to preserve their lands. Indian wars not only disrupted trade, but also posed additional risks, since Frenchmen sometimes got caught in the crossfire between Indians and American settlers.

With few substantial reasons to commit themselves to either the Americans or the British, the people of Vincennes during the Revolutionary War were much more devoted to their own interests than to those of the warring Anglo powers. Henry Hamilton observed in 1778 "as to their attachments, it is difficult to presume -- [self] Interest I believe is the

¹For the French failure to develop bonds of friendship with the British see Jay Gitlin, "Old Wine in New Bottles: French Merchants and The Emergence of The American West, 1795-1835" in Proceedings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Meetings of the French Colonial Historical Society, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), 41-2.

²Donnelly, Gibault, 67, 77.

grand Monarch with them. . ."1 Given their economic circumstances, it is difficult to imagine the people of Vincennes sacrificing their own well-being to advance the interests of either the Americans or the British. Nonetheless, the allegiance of the French settlers in the midwest appeared critical to the imperial designs of both Great Britain and the United States, and both sides attempted to persuade the people of Vincennes and other western French communities to support their goals.²

At the onset of the American Revolution, both the British and the Americans realized the strategic value of the West and the necessity of winning the support of residents there. If the British could persuade the western Indians to attack the Americans, the Continental army would have to divert military forces from the east to protect American settlers west of the Appalachian divide. Likewise, if the Americans could eliminate British power in the west and persuade the western Indians to remain neutral or join the American cause, the Americans could concentrate their military strength on the British in the East. Both sides recognized the significant influence of the local French over the western tribes, and both understood that their ability to control events in the west depended ultimately on the Indians and their French allies.³

The British had little trouble finding Indians who would attack American frontier settlements in the upper Ohio Valley and Kentucky. Unlike previous imperial struggles, where France and Great Britain

¹Letters of Lieut. Governor Hamilton to General Haldimand written en route to Vincennes, December 4, 1778 in Seineke, The George Rogers Clark Adventure, 331. This comment was directed at the French living at Ouiatenon, just north of Vincennes. It applied, however, to all the French in the Illinois country, for none had substantial reasons for supporting the Americans or the British.

²White, Middle Ground, 396-98.

³Otis Rice, "The Ohio Valley in the American Revolution," in David Curtis Skaggs (ed.), The Old Northwest, 140-41; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 182-83.

competed for dominance in the Indian trade, access to land was now the primary issue. Americans wanted unlimited Indian land in the West. American land greed threatened the Indians' very existence. Neither imperial nor colonial agents and officials successfully protected Indian lands from the voracious land hunger of colonial squatters and speculators. Imperial proclamations and treaties establishing official red-white boundary lines did not prevent American colonists from expanding into Indian territory. In retaliation, Ohio Indians, especially the Shawnee, conducted sporadic raids against the American frontier settlements long before the British actively encouraged such actions.¹

By 1777 the British commander at Detroit, Henry Hamilton, had received official permission from his superiors in England to use Indian auxiliaries to attack American frontier settlers. By July of 1777 Hamilton had dispatched fifteen war parties, comprised primarily of Shawnees and Mingos along with some of the French villagers of Detroit². Hamilton tried to prevent the worst features of Indian warfare against frontier families, but his successful efforts in encouraging and organizing Indian attacks soon earned him the title of "Hair-Buyer." The results were devastating for American settlers and the year 1777 became known as the "bloody year" on the American frontier.³

Although Americans realized the importance of curtailing the Indian attacks before the British could persuade the Wabash and Illinois tribes to join their cause, George Washington and the Continental Congress could not

¹Anson, Miami Indians, 80-81; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 183.

²White, Middle Ground, 367.

³Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 184. Hamilton's responsibility for inciting Indians to barbarism is discussed at length in Barnhart, Hamilton and Clark, 21-36.

spare the money or the troops to launch a western campaign. To gain revenge for and relief from the Indian raids, George Rogers Clark, a major in the Kentucky militia, devised his own plan. He would first seize control of the unprotected French-populated villages in Illinois and at Vincennes. With the assistance of the French settlers and friendly Indians, Clark's small army would then march against the British at Detroit, thus ending British influence in the West. Patrick Henry, the Governor of Virginia openly gave Clark the authority to mobilize the Kentucky militia to protect the Kentucky settlements, and he secretly endorsed Clark's plan to march against the Illinois settlements and Detroit.¹ Clark's campaign and the British counter-campaign brought the American Revolution to the Illinois country. Both the native tribes and the long-established French traders and *habitants* had to survive the storm.

While much has been written concerning the financial and military contributions of the King of France to American military action in the East, French participation in the western struggle for dominance in America has received little attention. One reason for this is that the French settlers along the Great Lakes and in the Illinois country were not united in their sympathies and therefore the story of their participation in the war is complex and sometimes difficult to follow. In almost every military campaign in the west there were French officers and militiamen who fought with the Americans and also with the British. The French at Detroit,

¹In 1776 Kentucky had become a county of Virginia. In 1777 Clark asked for and received permission from Virginia Governor Patrick Henry to protect the Kentucky settlements. While the public orders authorized Clark to enlist three hundred and fifty men to defend Kentucky, secret orders gave Clark permission to attack the French settlements on the Mississippi and Wabash rivers. Temple Bodley, George Rogers Clark: His Life and Public Services (Boston and New York, 1926), 43-48. Letters of instruction are printed in James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 33-36.

Michilimackinac, and other northern posts provided food and supplies to British troops, while the French in the Illinois settlements, including Vincennes, provided essential supplies to the Americans.¹ Frenchmen from the Detroit area accompanied and sometimes led the Indians who raided, pillaged, and murdered American settlers in Kentucky and along the western frontier of other states.² Frenchmen also died at the hands of these marauding Indians who were armed and encouraged by the British. Both the British and the Americans realized that it would be impossible to control the west without the support of the French inhabitants and the resident Indian tribes over which the French still had great influence. The result was that both the French and the Indians were drawn into a struggle that was not their own.

¹Charles Beaubien, the French trader at the Miami village of Kekionga, served the British as interpreter and Indian agent. He participated as a warrior in Shawnee raids on Kentucky and offered his services to the British during the Revolutionary War. WHC, 8: 394-95; Anson, Miami Indians, 84; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 181. Charles Langlade provisioned and led Indian expeditions against the Americans. He had served as British commandant at Michilimackinac in 1763 and was commissioned to lead Indian expeditions in the Great Lakes region and in Canada during the Revolutionary War. See WHC, 8: 253, 355-57, 369, 371, 393. Jean Baptiste Céleron represented British interests at Fort Ouiatenon, and an ex-French Officer, the Sieur de Rocheblave, faithfully served the British as governor of Kaskaskia.

²White, Middle Ground, 273. Gitlin, "Old Wine," 40. The "loyalty" of the French to the British at Detroit and Michilimackinac is due to the fact that in those areas the British presence had been much more strongly felt since the end of the French and Indian War. Where British officers, soldiers, and merchants were numerous, some French citizens developed a deeper sense of loyalty to the British based on economic and social ties. The strong military presence may have been the strongest factor in securing the "loyalty" of Detroit's French citizens, but the strong British presence also created opportunities for Frenchmen to secure political favors, gain military experience in militias, and establish beneficial economic ties with British merchants or military officials. While some citizens may have had good reasons for developing friendships with the British, other citizens undoubtedly received less favorable treatment from the British. These individuals privately continued to despise the British soldiers and king who had seized French lands in North America after the last war. Such sentiments, however, could not be openly expressed if a Frenchman expected to live peacefully and prosper in an area firmly dominated by the British.

Although Vincennes had been virtually ignored by the British after the French and Indian War, the small town became a strategic center of action during the American Revolution. After George Rogers Clark and his small army of 175 men succeeded in capturing and gaining the support of Kaskaskia and the other Illinois settlements in July of 1778, Clark won over the people of Vincennes without even setting foot near the town. Father Pierre Gibault, the Illinois priest who made regular (though infrequent) visits to his Vincennes flock, advised Clark that a military campaign to Vincennes was not necessary. He volunteered to travel to Vincennes himself and assured Clark that he could "bring the place over to the American Interest." Although Gibault took full responsibility for the plan, he requested that another person "be charged with the temporal part of the Embassy." Clark approved Gibault's choice of the highly regarded Doctor Jean Baptiste Lafont to serve as the "temporal" representative.¹

On July 14, 1778, Gibault, Laffont and a few townsmen from Kaskaskia set out on horseback for Vincennes which was one hundred fifty miles to the northeast. Gibault carried with him a proclamation from Clark to the people of Vincennes as well as private letters from Kaskaskians to friends and families at Vincennes urging them to follow the example of Kaskaskia. Three days after leaving Kaskaskia, the party arrived in Vincennes. The people were gathered together to hear Clark's proclamation. The general tone Clark conveyed in the proclamation was that of a concerned friend, one who was willing to help the town of Vincennes throw off the "yoke of British oppression." He expressed confidence that the Vincennes French would embrace the blessings of

¹James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 238.

liberty which the Americans offered them. Clark made no threats in the public proclamation, but he had previously warned Laffont that if the people refused to join the Americans "they may expect to feel the miseries of a war." Clark told Laffont that a vast American force waited at the Falls of the Ohio prepared to march against the Illinois settlements if necessary. It is likely that Laffont shared this information with individuals in Vincennes who hesitated to forge an American alliance. The townspeople spent a couple days discussing the situation and their options. Father Gibault, Doctor Laffont, and the letters from Kaskaskia all persuaded them to support the Americans. It took only a few days to reach a decision. On July 20 they gathered at the local church to transfer their loyalty from King George III to Virginia. One hundred and eighty householders signed the oath of allegiance.¹

The French *habitants* had sound reasons for transferring their loyalty to America. The news that the King of France, Louis XVI, had recently forged an alliance with the Americans against the British was perhaps the most important factor.² While the people of Vincennes had no deep attachments to the British or the Americans, they remained loyal to the French king. The news of a French alliance with America, along with the alliance just formed between the Illinois French and the Americans, went far in persuading the Vincennes citizens to sign Clark's oath. The people of Vincennes, like their neighbors in the Illinois country, were also

¹Fintan Walker, The Catholic Church in the Meeting of Two Frontiers: The Southern Illinois Country (1763-1793) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1935), 88; Donnelly, Gibault, p. 71-73. For Clark's threat to Laffont see James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 52-59.

²Clark received word of the French alliance with the American colonies just before he and his army set off to capture Kaskaskia in May of 1778. Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 194.

motivated by Clark's assertion that a vast American force waited at the Falls of the Ohio. If the settlements refused to voluntarily support the Americans, Clark would use force. Although Clark's reserve force was miniscule, the threat of being attacked was a convincing argument for the French to pledge fealty to the Americans.¹

While there were good reasons for the Vincennes French to side with the Americans, there were few reasons for them to remain loyal to the British who had done little to cultivate loyalty. In spite of numerous requests by French citizens for the British to establish effective civil government, the British had never done so. The occasional interaction with British traders, Indian agents, or military officials was not enough for the French to build strong relations based on respect or friendship. The French in Vincennes got along well with British Lieutenant-Governor Abbott, but Abbott was not there long enough to forge a strong attachment among the French to the British cause. The long-standing enmity and continual war between France and Great Britain since 1689 and the religious differences between the Catholic French and Protestant English also provided much of the basis for the ongoing antagonism between the two.

The Vincennes French had indeed pledged oaths of loyalty to Great Britain, but in real terms these oaths meant little. In exchange for their loyalty oath they gained the "protection" of the crown, but with so few British troops among so many Indians this protection was worthless.² In

¹Van Every, "George Rogers Clark," 179-80; Donnelly, Gibault, 72. Gitlin "Old Wine," 42.

²Only 500 British regulars were stationed in the vast territories west of Montreal at the beginning of the American Revolution. Skaggs, The Old Northwest, 131.

fact, the French enjoyed friendly relations with most tribes, and hence did not need British protection.

The only practical reason the French may have had to maintain their British alliance was an economic one. French traders at Vincennes had developed trading connections among the British merchants in Detroit and Canada. Abandoning the British alliance may have adversely affected local trade and profits. On the other hand, the fact that French merchants in Detroit and Canada and French traders in the Illinois had competed with rising numbers of British merchants and traders since 1763 probably caused resentment among the French for the unwanted competition. The Illinois French perhaps believed that ousting the British traders from their region would increase profits. Even those who had traditionally relied on British merchants in Detroit and Canada could choose alternative trade partners. Unlike the French traders situated close to the Great Lakes, whose only practical trade outlets were Detroit and Canada, the Illinois merchants could continue to trade with their long-established markets in New Orleans and the Spanish settlements on the western side of the Mississippi. Lack of access to British markets in Detroit and Canada was a problem that might be alleviated by increased access to American traders who had already begun operating in the Illinois country.¹

While broad political and economic considerations played an important part in determining the choices made by the people in Vincennes during the American Revolution, even more important was the web of local friendships and alliances. The territory between the Great Lakes and the Ohio River was a small world in the sense that the people--French, British,

¹For American traders in the Illinois settlements and at Vincennes see Thomas, "Successful and Unsuccessful Merchants in the Illinois Country," 429-440.

Indian, métis (mixed bloods) and a small number of American traders--knew one another personally. Though the posts and villages were separated by miles of wilderness, there was enough mobility to foster considerable familiarity among the region's inhabitants. Within this region there were only a handful of British regulars who were professional soldiers. Face-to-face interactions which produced various expectations, loyalties, or hatred had a considerable impact on events that transpired in the west during the American Revolution.¹

Both the Indians and the French were unreliable allies. The conflict between the Americans and the British meant little to them. They might take up arms, but only when the fighting served their own purposes. They fought to defend their homes and families, to seek revenge or booty, to earn some military pay, or to experience a short-term "adventure" on a campaign where their participation lasted only as long as the excitement endured. The French militias and Indian warriors were amateur soldiers in that they lacked discipline and commitment to either side of the Anglos' struggle. Thus they were undependable and often frustrated the American and British officers who relied heavily upon these non-soldiers to achieve their goals.²

The events which unfolded at Vincennes during the Revolution clearly demonstrate the unreliability of both the French and the Indians as imperial allies. When British commander Hamilton learned of George Rogers Clark's occupation of the Illinois villages (it can hardly be called a conquest), he began making plans to march southward and re-establish British dominance of the Illinois country. He embarked from Detroit on

¹White, Middle Ground, 378.

²ibid.

October 7, 1778 with an army of approximately 180 men, of whom only thirty-three were British regulars. Most of his volunteer militia were French inhabitants of Detroit. Hamilton was joined by seventy Indians from the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi tribes.¹ Additional Indians, many of them young braves seeking adventure, joined Hamilton along the march from Detroit to Vincennes.²

Fearing a British attempt to reoccupy Vincennes, Clark had sent Captain Leonard Helm and a few soldiers to man the fort. Although the Vincennes militia was to assist the Americans, the total defensive force at the Vincennes fort when Hamilton made his surprise attack on December 17, 1778 was less than thirty men. When Governor Hamilton and his sizeable army marched to the gates of the fort, the lack of discipline of the Indians and the unreliability of the French in Vincennes became readily apparent. The French militia, who were supposed to help Helm guard the fort, deserted at the first sight of the British. Though they may have favored the American cause, their commitment was not deep enough to risk their lives. Helm was left with three militiamen, one Virginian, and one civilian to face Hamilton's army. He surrendered with as much honor as the situation allowed. In spite of the sentries Hamilton had posted at the gate to the fort and to the commandant's house, Hamilton could not restrain the Indians from entering the fort. He and his troops looked on helplessly as the Indians gathered up horses and ransacked the fort and

¹The number of troops varies slightly in different accounts. Hamilton to Haldimand, September 16-17, September 22-October 3, 1778, in Michigan Historical Collections, 9: 477, 484-85, 487; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 197-201.

²The Miami tribal council had not yet given official support to the British. Nonetheless, some warriors from Kekionga and the Wea villages joined Hamilton's army. Anson, Miami Indians, 87-89.

the commandant's house. Hamilton did manage to persuade the Indians to return Captain Helm's personal property.¹

Faced with Hamilton's superior military force, the people of Vincennes gathered at the church to take the loyalty oath Hamilton presented to them. The oath required the French to admit that in pledging loyalty to the Americans, the French had "forgotten their duty to God and man." It went on to say "We ask pardon of God and hope for forgiveness from our legitimate sovereign, the king of England. . ." Two hundred and fifty men signed the oath after first kissing a silver crucifix at the foot of the altar. Once more the town of Vincennes had shifted its allegiance from one imperial power to another without a shot being fired.²

In spite of the signatures on the loyalty oath, it was clear that the Vincennes villagers did not wholeheartedly support the British. Hamilton suspected that before the ink had dried on the oath, the signers "immediately after turned their thoughts to the accomplishment of their treacherous designs." A few escaped from the village at the first opportunity.³ More of the French left as Hamilton's blatant disdain for the Vincennes *habitants* became apparent. According to Hamilton, "to enumerate the Vices of the Inhabitants would be to give a long catalogue" since the people were "not in possession of a single virtue."⁴ In order to

¹For descriptions of the British taking Vincennes see Leonard to Clark, December 17, 1778 in James (ed.) Clark Papers, 1: 89; Hamilton's journal in Barnhart, Hamilton and Clark, 146-49; Bessie Conkwright, "Captain Leonard Helm," Indiana History Bulletin, 10 (1932-33): 417-421. Hamilton reported the population of Vincennes at 621, of whom 217 were fit to bear arms. At the time of the attack, several men were away hunting buffalo. James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 182.

²The text of Hamilton's loyalty oath is printed in James (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 183.

³For Hamilton's distrust of villagers, see Barnhart, Hamilton and Clark, 151. For escapes see James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1:84.

⁴James, (ed.) Clark Papers, 1:184.

attack some of the sources of the people's vices, Hamilton ordered the confiscation of all the spirituous liquors in the village and he destroyed two billiard tables which he perceived as a "source of immorality & dissipation."¹ Hamilton also called upon the local inhabitants to square logs for two blockhouses as he strengthened the fort's defenses.² This was Vincennes' first experience with an effective British military presence, and the townspeople were dismayed at the way they were treated. Hamilton effectively reversed whatever friendly feelings his predecessor, Abbott, may have developed among them.

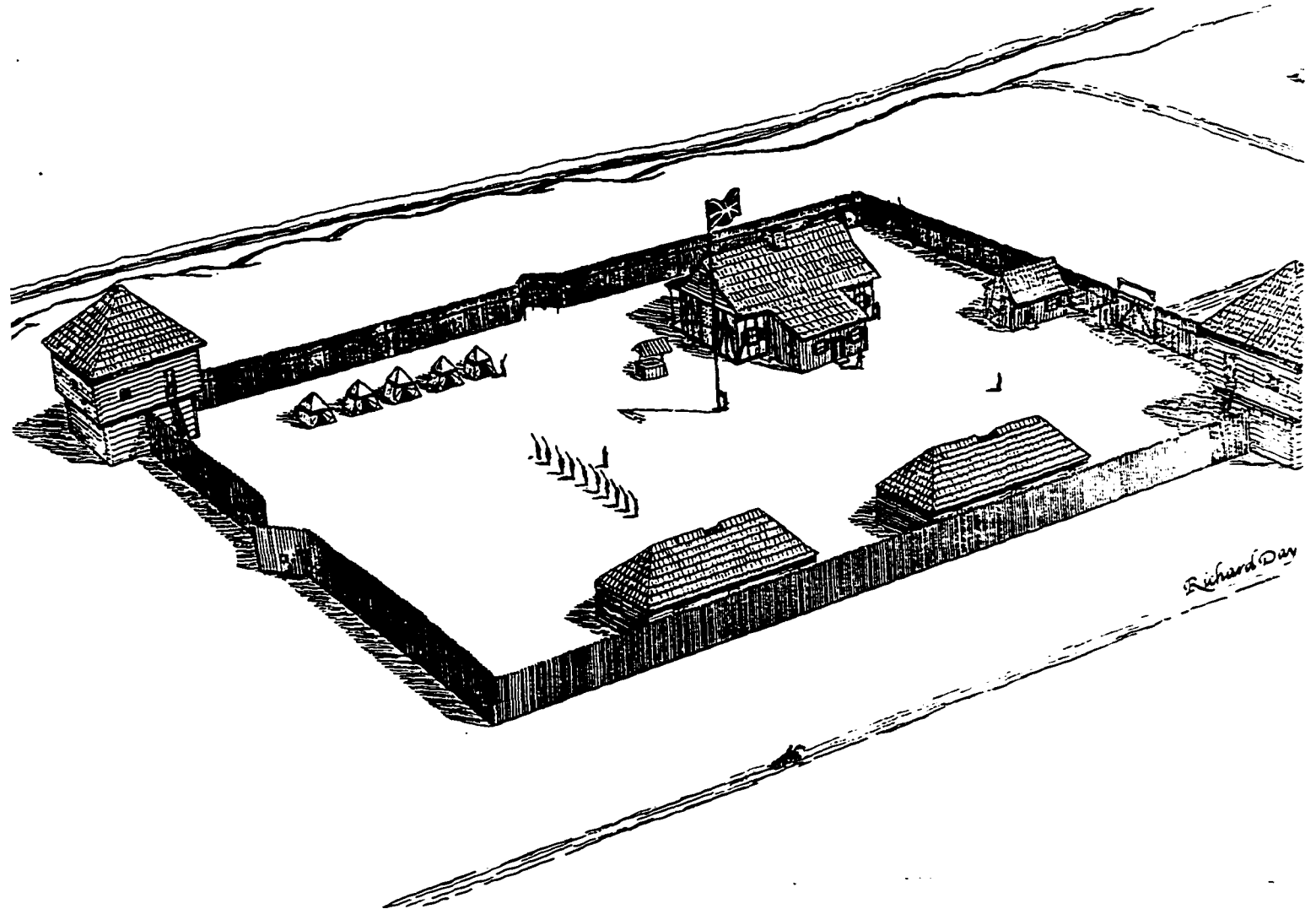
Hamilton wintered at Vincennes and was dismayed when his French and Indian allies began to desert him. The French militia from Detroit had only enlisted for the campaign to recapture Vincennes and had no intentions of spending the whole winter away from home. They demanded to return home and Hamilton dismissed them. By the end of January, seventy-five militiamen had departed. Their exodus was accompanied by that of many Indians, bored from inaction who wanted to return to their families. Hamilton planned to wait for spring to rebuild his numerical strength. This would cut the costs of provisioning a large force during the winter months. By the end of January Hamilton had become increasingly dependent upon his remaining French volunteers from Detroit and the local Vincennes militia (whom he despised and who despised him), to provide for the town's defense.³

¹Hamilton to Haldimand, December 30, 1778, in Haldimand Papers as quoted in Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 202.

²Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 203.

³Hamilton's Report in James, (ed.), Clark Papers 1: 182; White, Middle Ground, 374-75.

Fort Sackville
View of the Vincennes Fort In 1779 After It Was Strengthened by
British Governor Henry Hamilton¹



Drawing by Richard Day. Property of the National Parks Service.

¹Richard Day's drawing matches Hamilton's description of the fort which appears in John D. Barnhart, Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with the Unpublished Journal of Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton, (Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1951), 158, 162, 171-72, 175, 177.

When George Rogers Clark and his patriot army made their surprise winter attack against Hamilton at Vincennes, it was primarily the French and Indians who decided the outcome. Nearly half of Clark's 170-man army were French volunteers from the Illinois country, and many of them had family and friends in Vincennes. As Clark neared Vincennes, the Indian chief Young Tobacco volunteered the services of about a hundred Kickapoo and Piankashaw Indians, but Clark declined. He wanted to prove to the Indians of the Illinois and Wabash country that the Americans with their French allies could accomplish their task without assistance from the tribes. Fortunately for Clark, his rebuff did not cause the local Indians to transfer their support to Hamilton.¹

Hamilton's position inside Fort Sackville was not an enviable one. He had misjudged Clark and had been taken off guard when the unexpected attack came on February 24, 1779. His eighty-man garrison would have had a difficult time holding the fort against Clark's larger force even with the committed support of the Vincennes French militia. But Hamilton certainly did not have that support. The townspeople aided Clark (being overjoyed to see so many of their friends and relatives marching with him). The French militiamen inside the fort declared "it was hard they should fight against their own Friends and relations who they could see had joined the Americans."² While Hamilton might have managed to overcome Clark's forces with the help of Indian "friends," this proved impossible. The Indians abandoned him when it became obvious that Clark

¹For Clark's accounts of the expedition, see his letter to Mason, November 19, 1779 in James, (ed.) Clark Papers 1: 144 and his journal, February 24, 1779, in *ibid.*, 1: 167; White, Middle Ground, 375.

²For quote see Bowman's Journal, Feb. 23, 1779, James, (ed.), Clark Papers 1:159. For Hamilton's account of the attack and surrender see Barnhart, Hamilton and Clark, 74-76, 177-186.

would win. Clearly, in the distant outpost at Vincennes, imperial goals depended on upon the local aspirations and motivations of the French villagers and the regional Indian tribes. They might take part in imperial struggles, but only on their own terms and for their own purposes. Since neither the Americans nor the British had enough troops and supplies to achieve their goals in the west, local politics influenced imperial outcomes. Without local support, Hamilton surrendered unconditionally on the morning after Clark's attack. Hamilton and the other British officers were sent as prisoners of war to Williamsburg, but the French troops from Detroit were all paroled and allowed to return to their homes. They expressed their appreciation for their release by "huzzaing for the Congress" as they marched for home.¹

Nothing better demonstrates the complex patterns of friendships, hatreds, and loyalties which existed among the French, British, Americans, and Indians in the western country than an incident which occurred just outside of Fort Sackville before Hamilton surrendered to Clark. As the two men prepared surrender terms, an Indian war party galloped out of the woods on its return from a raid on Kentucky. Their gunfires and whooping signaled their satisfaction with having taken American prisoners and scalps. Clark and his men were delighted to seize and punish the returning Indians, some of whom had earlier attacked Clark's men and their fellow Kentuckians.²

Five of the Indians were shot down and seven others were seized. Clark ordered the seven to be tomahawked in full view of the British

¹Clark to Mason, November 19, 1779, James (ed.), Clark Papers 1: 146.

²James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 144-45, 161-62, 288-89; Hamilton's report in *ibid.*, 188-90.

garrison. They were forced to sit in a circle with their heads bowed as they awaited the fatal blow. The execution was delayed, however, when it was discovered that two of the Indians were actually Detroit Frenchmen who had been painted like Indians. One of these men was recognized by his father, a French lieutenant who had marched with Clark from the Illinois country. The other man had relatives living in Vincennes. Clark grudgingly spared the lives of these men. Then one of Clark's men, a Captain Richard McCarty, recognized that one of the Indians was Pontiac's eighteen-year-old son. McCarty pleaded for the young Indian's life saying that he owed his own life to Pontiac who had once saved him from certain death. Clark reluctantly pardoned the Indian. The other four Indians were brutally murdered and thrown into the nearby Wabash River.

Clark exhibited mercy to the three men to cement the attachments he had formed with the French of the Illinois country and in Vincennes. He undoubtedly realized, better than Hamilton ever did, that his success in the west depended on the friendship and goodwill of the French in that area. Clark's murdering of the remaining four Indians was not only an act of vengeance, but also meant to illustrate that Hamilton was unable to protect his Indian allies. Clark needed to gain the support of western Indians, without whom he could never hope to maintain the foothold he had established in the west.¹

In spite of Clark's initial successes in the Illinois country, he was never able to mount an attack on Detroit. His only real chance at taking Detroit was immediately after the capture of Vincennes. Clark could not continue a march to Detroit, however, because so many of his men were ill

¹Ibid.

due to exposure after marching through waist-deep icy water during the march from Kaskaskia. Clark hoped to receive reinforcements from Kentucky or Virginia later in the summer, but the necessary troops and supplies never materialized. They could not be spared from the eastern arena of the war.¹

Although forces beyond his control crippled Clark's chances of taking Detroit, his own actions and those of his men contributed to a decrease in the only military resources which might have enabled Clark to achieve his goal -- the French and Indians. Clark's relations with the Indians were poor due to a shortage of trade goods and presents. Clark also shared most Americans' innate distrust and hatred of Indians. Burning for revenge against the Indians who had ravaged their backcountry settlements, American frontiersmen attacked Indians wherever they found them, and they often did not differentiate between friendly and hostile Indians. Captain Leonard Helm, who Clark had left in charge at Fort Patrick Henry (the new name for the Vincennes fort), wrote Clark in May of 1779 that "If their is not a stop put to Kiling Indian friends we must Expect to have all foes." Although some of the Illinois-Wabash Indians had initially agreed to support Clark, both out of fear and because their French friends had done so, they grew increasingly disenchanted with the Americans.²

The French in Vincennes and the other Illinois villages where Clark's men were garrisoned had their own reasons for resenting the Americans. This could hardly have been avoided since the Americans were an army of occupation who, lacking food and supplies, took what it needed from the

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 209.

²Helm to Clark, May 9, 1779, James, (ed.) Clark Papers 1: 317. For Clark and his men hating Indians see White, Middle Ground, 368-69.

local people. Chief among the complaints of the French *habitants* was that Clark's officers impressed fuel, food, clothing, cattle, and anything else they needed from the local citizens.¹ Initially the citizens had accepted the promissary notes or paper currency issued by the Continental Congress or the Virginia government. When those holding the notes tried to redeem them they discovered that they were practically worthless since both the Continental Congress and Virginia were nearly bankrupt. Neither was payment in paper money acceptable since it depreciated rapidly, a problem that was exacerbated by counterfeiting, some of it done by the British. Beaver pelts, tobacco and Spanish piastres continued to be the most reliable forms of payment in the Illinois country during the revolution, just as they had been before.²

Adding to the financial problems of Clark and the Illinois French was the fact that Clark and his men had no official military orders from the Virginia government after the campaigns to capture the French towns. Even the order to march on the Illinois country was a secret order from Virginia Governor Patrick Henry. Therefore, no appropriations had been made by either the Virginia legislature or the Continental Congress for Clark's troops. Clark relied heavily on loans from Oliver Pollock, Virginia's agent in New Orleans, and on extensive credit from several wealthy Vincennes merchants, including Francis Vigo and François Bosseron, to keep his troops supplied. Merchants in the other Illinois towns made

¹Petition of Inhabitants of Vincennes, June 30, 1781, in James, (ed.), Clark Papers 1: 430-33; James, Clark Papers, 1: 123-27, 155-57, 166-68; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 217. The U.S. War Office recognized that the high western expenditures were a result of the "licentious practices and abuse of power" exercised by officers who mistakenly believed they were at liberty to "order and dispose of the stores at their posts as they should think best." William Davies to Clark, April 10, 1782 in James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 2: 56-7.

²Donnelly, Gibault, 88.

similar sacrifices in hopes that their loans of money and supplies would earn them good will and eventually be repaid.¹

Although the Americans had no satisfactory way to reimburse the French merchants, they could not defend the newly-won French settlements without supplies. When many of the French refused to sell goods for the Americans' paper money, the American soldiers seized the goods without permission. The people of Vincennes complained that the Americans

bought all our goods, our horses, our provisions with the pretended money; and when we could not furnish them with any more they had the audacity to go armed into the public mills and into the granaries of different houses to take away by force flour or grain destined for our food.²

The French who resisted were accused as traitors or even thrown in prison for their lack of cooperation. A Spanish merchant who had settled in Vincennes, Laurenz Bazadone, was astonished when militia officer John Rice Jones seized his entire store of imported wines and liquors and distributed it to the American militia. Bazadone filed a claim with the state of Virginia for his lost inventory worth \$4,000.00. Unfortunately, Virginia felt no obligation to repay either Bazadone or other citizens who

¹For loans made to Clark by Oliver Pollock see James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 178, 180, 195, 199, 200, 312. For Bosseron supplying Clark and his men see *ibid.*, 1: 274-75, 377-79. For Vigo supplying Clark and his men see *ibid.*, 1: 274-75. Many of these men received little or no reimbursement. The Virginia government believed that these loans were "transferred" to the national government when Virginia ceded her western lands, while the national government declared that Virginia was responsible for the loans.

²"Memorial of the Inhabitants of Vincennes to the French Minister, Luzerne." August 22, 1780, in James, (ed.), Clark Papers 1: 438-49.

experienced similar misfortunes.¹ Such actions fueled the anger and bitterness which was building in Vincennes against the Americans.²

Additional economic distress occurred in the late summer of 1779 when John Todd, the county lieutenant of the newly formed County of Illinois, placed an embargo on all exports for sixty days. No goods could be exported until Todd was sure his troops had all needed supplies. Rather than ship their agricultural goods to New Orleans where they would receive hard currency in return, the French were forced to sell it to the Americans for depreciated Continental currency or worthless notes.³ One of Vincennes' most prominent citizens, Colonel Jean Marie Philippe LeGras, undertook the difficult journey to Williamsburg to personally present to Virginia authorities his claims and those of other Vincennes residents who had suffered considerable losses as a result of the depredations and appropriations of Clark's troops.⁴

John Todd was sympathetic to the French. He clearly recognized that the Americans' demands on French property compromised the freedom that Clark had guaranteed would be one of the benefits of living under the

¹J.Somes, Old Vincennes, 84-5.

²Lieutenant J.M.P. LeGras to Governor of Virginia, May 22, 1780, in John Todd's Record Book printed in Edward Mason (ed.), Early Chicago and Illinois, (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., 1890), 328-29. For tensions between people of Kaskasia and American soldiers, see Montgomery to Clark, October 5, 1779 in Clarence Alvord and Clarence Carter (eds.), Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790, IIIHC 5: 129 and Alvord, The Illinois Country, 345-47.

³Mason, Early Chicago, 306. Virginia Governor Patrick Henry appointed John Todd as county lieutenant of the newly created County of Illinois, established on December 9, 1778. It include all the area north and west of the Ohio River. As early as Aug. 3, 1779 Todd asked permission to resign, and by November he had left the Illinois. Alvord, The Illinois Country, 346.

⁴Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 217. J.M.P. Le Gras served as a Justice of the Peace in Vincennes and also as a Lieutenant Colonel of the Vincennes militia. He was one of Vincennes' most prominent citizens. For his commisions see Mason, Early Chicago, 294. For Todd leaving Le Gras in charge of post when he was away from Vincennes, see Todd to Legras, July 20, 1779 in Lasselle Papers.

American government. In a letter to Vincennes merchant and respected town leader Colonel J.M.P. LeGras, which vested LeGras with authority as commandant at Vincennes during Todd's absence, Todd acknowledged that "some instances will unavoidably happen where perfect liberty cannot be enjoyed where an army is to be maintained." He nonetheless urged LeGras to do his best to keep the peace between the American soldiers and the French residents.¹ Virginia's new governor, Thomas Jefferson, also acknowledged the problem of indebtedness to the Vincennes villagers. In a letter to Todd in March of 1780 he stated that he believed the Continental Congress would pay its debts in that area as soon as it had the money.² Unfortunately, many citizens were never repaid. Richard McCarty, who had lived among the French of the Illinois country before Clark seized the territory, expressed his own frustrations and the disgust the French felt towards the Americans in a letter to Governor Jefferson:

. . . we are become the Hated Beasts of a whole people by Pressing horses, Boats, &c &c, Killing cattle &c &c, for which no valuable consideration is given: even many not a certificate, which is hear looked on as next to nothing.³

The Vincennes French and their Illinois neighbors felt trapped in a situation beyond their control. In addition to appropriations of supplies by Americans, they could no longer buy goods from Canada. Even travel to New Orleans was now dangerous because Indians friendly to the British (Cherokees and Chickasaws) were attacking traders on the Ohio and

¹Todd to Legras, July 20, 1779, Lasselle Papers.

²Thomas Jefferson to Colonel Todd, March 19, 1780 in Mason, (ed.), Early Chicago, 357.

³Rich'd McCarty to John Todd, enclosed with Todd's letter to Governor Jefferson, January 24, 1781, in Mason, Early Chicago, 336-37.

Mississippi Rivers.¹ The inability to get new provisions led to inflated prices on existing stock. By May of 1779 prices were from three to five times as high as they had been just two months earlier.²

The French inhabitants' inability to make their usual profits from trade contributed to an impoverishment worsened by the widespread impressment of flour, livestock, and other supplies. When American soldiers shot the "cattle in the fields and our pigs in the streets and in the yards," they threatened not only the immediate food source of the people of Vincennes, but also the future survival of residents who relied on the animals for breeding purposes.³ It was only natural that the French prayed for relief from the circumstances that caused such turmoil in their lives.

For a brief period in the summer of 1780 the French believed there was hope of ridding their country not only of the British, but perhaps of the Americans as well. This new "hope" came from Augustin de la Balme, a French officer who had come to America with the Marquis de La Fayette. La Balme's appearance in the Illinois country remains somewhat of a mystery. It is possible that he was sent by the French minister, La Luzerne, to organize the Illinois French to march against the British in Detroit. While France's goal may have been to assist the Americans, it may also have been a tentative first step for France to regain the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. The official connection between La Balme and the

¹For inability to trade with New Orleans see Legras to Clark, February 15, 1782 in James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 2: 38 and Clark to Benjamin Harrison, June 26, 1783 in *ibid.*, 2: 243.

²Clark to Benjamin Harrison, June 26, 1783, in Clark Papers 2: 243; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 216; Alvord, Illinois Country, 342.

³"Memorial of the Inhabitants of Vincennes to the French Minister, Luzerne," August 22, 1780, in James, (ed.) Clark Papers 2: 438-49.

French government, however, remains unclear. It is quite possible that La Balme was acting on his own, without any official orders. Regardless of his official position, as a French officer he was hailed as something of a savior among the people of Vincennes, Cahokia, and Kaskaskia.¹

La Balme arrived in Vincennes in July of 1780 and immediately attempted to persuade the local French to march with him against Detroit. He visited the other Illinois towns to stir up support for his mission. He believed that with the assistance of friendly Indians the French could take Detroit, aided undoubtedly by the Detroit French whom he believed would abandon the British at the first opportunity. American assistance was not necessary. La Balme assured local tribes that French troops would arrive in the spring to consolidate French power in the West. Although warmly received by the French throughout the Illinois country, La Balme did not rally the support he expected. When he set out on his expedition in October, he had less than one hundred Frenchmen. Before reaching Detroit, La Balme's small army made the mistake of raiding the stores of a couple of British trading houses at the main Miami village, Kekionga. The angered Miami Indians attacked La Balme's camp late that night, killing La Balme and most of his men.²

While La Balme's influence in the western arena of the war was shortlived and of no great significance in military terms, the incident is important for the way it contributes to an understanding of the views and aspirations of the Illinois French during the Revolution. The position of the Illinois French in 1780 is shown in a memorial from the inhabitants of

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 222.

²Anson, Miami Indians, 91; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 222-23; Alvord, Illinois Country, 350-51.

Vincennes to the French Minister, La Luzerne, requesting his assistance for the proposed expedition against Detroit.¹ Only seventeen signatures were attached to the memorial. While several of the names are those of prominent citizens (Pierre Gamelin, Phillibert, and Joseph André), many equally important men did not sign, including two of the town's richest and most influential citizens, François Bosseron and Colonel J.M.P. Le Gras. Though these men agreed with the section of the memorial that dealt with Vincennes' wartime difficulties, they were not willing to sign a document which in essence asked for French assistance in freeing the Illinois and Ohio country from being dominated by any outside imperial power (British, American, or French). Those who did sign the memorial emulated the Americans in their striving for independence. The signers believed that no government was as capable of governing the western region as the French who lived there. They knew that a distant government could not be trusted to act in the interest of the local inhabitants -- French or Indian. The signers of the memorial wanted, above all, to influence their own destiny.²

The memorial begins innocuously enough with a request for ammunition and gifts needed to win Indian support for the march on Detroit. The signers believed many Indians would join the French, and that their "friends in Detroit hope each day to see us arrive among them to deliver them from a slavery which is becoming more and more unbearable." The Vincennes citizens did not depend on the United States to "break the yoke that oppresses us." In fact, the presence of Americans

¹"Memorial of the Inhabitants of Vincennes to the French Minister, Luzerne," August 22, 1780, in James, (ed.), Clark Papers 1: 438-49.

²ibid.

increased turmoil because "the Indians can not bear them and their aversion towards them seems unbreakable." Neither did the French want more Americans in the west, "where English blood is already too abundant."¹

The Vincennes French expressed a genuine concern for the future of their Indian friends. They did not "wish the Indians who have a common cause with us to be dominated; they abandon the cultivation of their fields to us, and on our side we wish to help them in their need by our works, our industry, and our commerce with them."² Increasingly the French were hard-pressed to grow enough food for themselves as British-allied tribes from further north raided villagers working in their fields. With little food for themselves, the French could not continue to trade their food to local Indians who depended for survival on French agricultural products. The French had long enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Indians, but the continuance of that relationship was threatened by the presence of both the British and the Americans.

The most objectionable part of the petition to those who refused to sign it was the section which essentially revealed a plan for independence.

When we shall have expelled our tyrants and France shall have recognized our absolute independence, her allies shall be ours; and, since we have nothing more in our hearts than to show proof, not doubtful, of the respectful and tender affection which we have kept for the King of France, our former ruler, and since we place ourselves entirely under his protection, his wishes shall always be our rule. . .

. . . aided by the assistance which we ask now from the King, our common father, to give to us as the events may require, we

¹ibid., 440.

²ibid., 441.

hope in a short time to become a power and count among the European nations established on this vast continent.¹

The petitioners express their continued self-identification as Frenchmen and a wish to be closely allied with the powerful government of France. Although many of the Vincennes French desired a return to the "golden era" they experienced under the French regime, they now clearly hope to rule themselves free from direct interference from the French government. It appears they wanted the military and economic benefits which came with being part of the French empire without paying the political price. In reality, the considerable expense and effort to re-establish French control of the west would only have been made to advance the economic and diplomatic interests of France. The Vincennes petitioners were naive to believe that France would sacrifice her own interests to serve as a benevolent ally of the Illinois French.

The petitioners also felt it necessary to explain why they preferred independence to being annexed to the new United States. They explained how Clark's troops came to them on behalf of the French as well as Congress. With France and the United States as allies, the people of Vincennes "helped capture the English; we restrained the Indians who wished to resist; and finally; we gave up all for a people who claimed to be allied with France."² Their faith in Americans was misplaced, as shown by their next statement that explains why many of the people of Vincennes now despised Americans. They told of the worthless paper money they were forced to accept and of the way the Americans seized horses, boats, flour, grain, and other foodstuffs. They were shocked that Americans shot

¹ibid., 441-42.

²ibid., 443.

their cattle and hogs and "struck on the cheek" anyone who tried to stop them. They were equally dismayed with the way the Americans treated the Indians and the way the French suffered when Indians retaliated against American aggression. According to the French:

. . . the Virginians have entirely ruined us, and have brought war on us with several lake tribes, from which about twenty unfortunate inhabitants are already victims. They have left us without means of defense by taking away the arms and ammunition which they sent to their forts, so that the Indians of the Wabash who are faithful to us and are our bulwark, tribes to which we can no longer furnish anything, are obliged to hunt with the bow. They have caused more than one hundred young men to leave us, who have gone to find resources in another place. They have forced us to abandon the cultivation of our fields, partly through fear of being killed by parties who come there to surprise us as a fox, and they have been the cause of the death of a great and intrepid Indian chief who was killed in avenging our people, an irreparable loss which we mourn as well as the tribes attached to us. . . . Ho Virginians! . . . if it is thus you wish to enrich us, to free us, to make us happy, leave us to the rigor of our fate! If it is thus, finally, that you act with your friends, what treatment do you have for your enemies!

It is clear in this memorial that the men who marched with La Balme believed they were marching in their own interests. They did not act to drive the British out of Detroit for Americans. It is likely that La Balme may have emboldened the citizens to condemn the Americans' mistreatment of them in such harsh terms. After La Balme's appearance in the Illinois country, French inhabitants of the villages grew more outspoken towards the injustices they experienced from the Americans. The citizens of all the villages sent a memorial to the governor of Virginia on June 30, 1781 saying they had decided to receive no more troops in their villages except those that might be sent by the king of France. In this

memorial they set forth an almost identical list of grievances against the military as had been enumerated in the memorial to La Luzerne. Unlike the first memorial to France, the second to Virginia did not mention the citizens' desire to remain independent from the United States. Therefore, many people who were reluctant to sign the first memorial did sign the second. Uncertain about the future fate of the Illinois settlements, some Vincennes residents did not choose to alienate the American government which might one day rule over them.¹

François Bosseron and J.M.P. Le Gras were among the signers of the second memorial. Both of these men had extended loans and large amounts of supplies to the Clark and his officers. Signing the first memorial would have amounted to treason against the United States and would have ended their chances of being repaid by Congress or the Virginia Assembly. In addition, Bosseron, and possibly Le Gras, had already established trading ties with Americans in Williamsburg. While it is impossible to know with any certainty just how the common people of Vincennes envisioned their future if Americans won the war, it is clear that some resourceful merchants were already adapting to that prospect. While most of the Vincennes French were embittered by the turmoil that accompanied the arrival of American troops, not all were ready to turn their backs on the possible benefits which might be derived from being annexed to the United States once the war ended.²

¹The memorial is printed in James, (ed.), Clark Papers, 1: 430-33. For all French inhabitants in Illinois becoming more outspoken after appearance of La Balme, see Alvord, Illinois Country, 351.

²For Bosseron trading out of Williamsburg, see Montathan and Vauchère to Bosseron, March 9, 1780 in Lassel Papers. For other Illinois merchants establishing commercial relations with Albany, New York, Louisville, and Pittsburgh, see Gitlin, "Old Wine," 46.

The French inhabitants of Vincennes had little cause to maintain a loyal commitment to either the Americans or the British during the American Revolution. Both the Americans and the British had long hated the Canadians who likewise distrusted the Anglos. The Illinois French who had emigrated from Canada were still referred to by the English and Americans as "Canadians." A long history of warfare between France and England as well as the religious differences between the French and English made it hard for the French to perceive either the English or the Americans as true allies. Although the British had nominally ruled over the Illinois country since 1763, the failure of the British to establish a strong military or political presence in the area prevented the growth there of genuine pro-British sympathies. The willingness of the French to support the Americans was motivated in large part by the news that France had joined the Americans in their fight to separate from Great Britain. Nothing that had happened in the forty years since the founding of Vincennes had changed the people's self-identification as Frenchmen. While a few of the Vincennes villagers dreamed of a future as an independent ally of France, most realized that either Great Britain or the new United States would govern the Illinois country at the war's end. With no firm commitment to either side, the French inhabitants wavered in their loyalty between the United States and Great Britain, always acting in ways that revealed their one true goal -- to weather the storm the best they could.

CHAPTER 8
FRENCH-INDIAN RELATIONS IN
POST-REVOLUTIONARY VINCENNES
1783-1795

When the American Revolution finally ended, the French *habitants* in Vincennes welcomed peace. Unsure of the security of their land claims and their future as new citizens of the United States, the French cultivated a friendly relationship with the United States government. The first Americans to settle in or near Vincennes after the war were cordially welcomed by the French villagers. At the same time, however, the French inhabitants maintained their friendly ties to regional Indian tribes. Physical security and economic well-being depended significantly upon maintaining peace with neighboring Indians and the smooth operation of the fur trade. The violent frontier clashes that characterized relations between Americans and Indians made it difficult for the French to maintain friendly relations with both the Indians and the Americans. Attempting to remain neutral, the French served as intermediaries between Americans and Indians. The neutral status of Vincennes French inhabitants enabled them to serve important functions as interpreters, mediators, messengers, and advisors.¹

¹For events in Vincennes and efforts of the French to remain neutral and serve as intermediaries, see White, Middle Ground, 421-53. For general works covering the unrest and violence on the western frontier after the American Revolution see A.L. Burt, The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940) and Horsman, Expansion and American Indian Policy.

As violence erupted on the post-revolutionary frontier, friendships and close attachments between the local French and the Indians were severely strained. Prior to the coming of Americans, western inhabitants had co-existed in a kind of "middle ground," an environment characterized by cooperation and mutual acceptance among the Indians, French, and British and Spanish traders. The existence of a western "middle ground" was described in considerable detail by Richard White in his book The Middle Ground: Indians Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815. According to White, "Vincennes, perhaps more than any other site in the Ohio Valley, captured the social, ethnic, and political diversity of the *pays d'en haut* [western country] in the 1780's." White uses Vincennes as a key example in describing the disintegration of the "middle ground," a process which began shortly after the arrival of the first Americans. Deeply instilled American attitudes and ambitions made it impossible for them to occupy a place on the middle ground or to permit the French and Indians to preserve their friendly relations and mutually beneficial economic interactions.¹

Local Indians were well aware of American antipathy to Native Americans. French cooperation with American farmers and soldiers stationed in Vincennes drew the ire of neighboring tribes. For the first time ever, Indians stole horses and cattle from the villagers. There were even cases of small bands of Indians (often from distant Miami tribes) murdering French men, women, and children who lived across the river from the main village. Occasionally French pirogues were plundered and goods confiscated. These occurrences, though rare, ended the feeling of

¹For breakdown of middle ground in Vincennes, see White, Middle Ground, 443-448.

physical security the French had always enjoyed. It became increasingly difficult to trust their Indian friends and trading partners. What is remarkable, however, is that in spite of developments which greatly strained relations between the French and their Indians neighbors during the 1780's and 1790's, friendship and trust did not entirely disappear in the violent red-white confrontations of the post-revolutionary decades.

Throughout the long years of frontier attacks and counter-attacks which lasted from the end of the Revolution until the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, never once did the Indians attack Vincennes. Never once did the combined French-American militia in Vincennes face the Indians in battle. Both of these situations very nearly came to pass, but the fact that they did not is due in large part to the genuine feelings of goodwill--born of years of peaceful association--between French and Indian inhabitants of the Wabash country.

The post-revolutionary outbreak of violence between Americans and western Indians was a natural consequence of the peace terms that ended the American Revolution. In the Treaty of Paris, signed in Paris in 1783, the British government offered Americans generous peace terms, among them the cession of land claims to the trans-Appalachian western lands. The western boundary of the United States, therefore, was extended to the Mississippi River. Neither the United States nor Great Britain was in firm control of the West at the war's end, and Americans were surprised and pleased at the British government's willingness to cede such a vast territory to the United States. The treaty, however, made no mention of the many Indian tribes who inhabited the land between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi. Regardless of the outcome of the struggle between Great Britain and the United States, the Indians assumed that

they would emerge from the conflict firmly in control of their own lands. They were shocked to learn that the United States government viewed them as defeated nations with no right to their lands because several tribes fought with the British during the war. With both Americans and Indians determined to inhabit and control the western lands, armed conflict was unavoidable.¹

Contrary to Americans' beliefs, the Indians of the Northwest were not "defeated" nations. The Shawnee of western Ohio had been at war with the Americans since 1774, and they showed no signs of easing their fierce resistance in the years after 1783. Also ready to use force to protect their lands were the Mingo (Ohio Seneca), and the great northern tribes of Ottawa and Chippewa, some of whom hunted south of Lake Erie and lived in northwestern Ohio. Postwar organized resistance among the tribes was a distinct possibility due to the efforts of Joseph Brant, an English-educated Mohawk Indian who had great influence among the Iroquois League of Nations. Brant, who allied with the British during the Revolution, was prepared to use his skill as an orator and organizer, combined with British support, to unite the tribes against American western expansion. Indians further west along the Wabash River, such as the Miami, the Wea, the Piankashaw, and the Potawatomi posed their own threat to American

¹Horsman, Expansion, 10-15, 31-33; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 237-42. The British government's motivation for ceding the western lands has been long debated by historians. While contemporary historians may disagree on the relative importance of various diplomatic and economic reasons for the cession, most believe that George Rogers Clark's western victories had very little influence on England's decision to cede the western lands to the United States. For information on the Treaty of Paris, see Richard B. Morris, The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence, (New York, 1965); Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert, (eds.), Peace and the Peacemakers: The Treaty of 1783, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986); and William C. Stinchcombe, The American Revolution and the French Alliance, (Syracuse, 1969).

settlement, whether or not they joined with Brant and other eastern Indians. While the Indians acted independently to protect their lands from Americans, they were encouraged in this endeavor by the British. Indians remained in direct contact with the British who refused to abandon posts at Mackinac, Detroit, and Niagara after the Revolution despite the terms of the Treaty of Paris. Indians depended on the British for trade goods and turned to them often for advice.¹

The American threat to Indian lands came from both the United States government and illegal backwoods settlers. Indians fought at both the national and local levels to protect their land from white encroachment. Various tribal leaders met informally and in treaty councils with representatives of the United States government. With neither side willing to abandon claims to western lands, these meetings were doomed to failure before they began. An even more immediate threat to Indian land and security, however, was posed by the numerous backcountry settlers who crossed north of the Ohio without government permission to settle on land claimed by both the United States government and the Indians. By the spring of 1785 there were approximately twenty-two hundred families living north of the Ohio. These settlers had no right to the land on which they lived since, according to the Land Ordinance of 1785, the government would not sell public lands until Indian claims were purchased by the government and the lands were surveyed.²

¹Reginald Horsman, The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783-1815, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 33-36.

²For description of tension between backcountry settlers and Indians see also White, Middle Ground, 417-420. Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 251.

The inability of the national government to enforce its prohibition against settlement on Indian lands contributed significantly to the disorder and violence in the West. Under the Articles of Confederation, the government had no national executive officer, no power to tax its citizens for desperately-needed revenues, and thus little power to enforce the laws that it made. Federal troops, reduced to less than one hundred after the Revolution, had only increased to seven hundred by 1784. Burdened by foreign and domestic debts incurred during the Revolution and insufficient sources of income, the government simply could not afford to pay for a larger army. Secretary of War Henry Knox reported to Congress in 1786 that such a small number of troops were "utterly incompetent" to protect settlers from Indian attacks or to protect Indians from being attacked by backcountry settlers living on both sides of the Ohio. The national government's inability to control events on the frontier heightened congressional members' fears of a full-scale Indian war.¹

Arthur St. Clair, the governor of the Northwest Territory, fully realized the threat of illegal backcountry settlers to peaceful relations between the United States and the Indian nations of the west. St. Clair pointed out to Secretary of War Henry Knox:

Though we hear much of the Injuries and depredations that are committed by the Indians upon the Whites, there is too much reason to believe that at least equal if not greater Injuries are done to the Indians by the frontier settlers of which we hear very little."²

¹ibid.

²St. Clair to the Secretary at War, Jan. 27, 1788, Clarence Carter (ed.), The Territorial Papers of the United States, (Washington, 1934-), 2: 89.

St. Clair was not alone in his frustrations with the extralegal actions of frontier settlers. Indian agents and military officials stationed in the west often referred to the frontiersmen who ignored land laws and thwarted national Indian policy as "lawless banditti," "vagabonds," and "white savages." There could be no hope of peace with the Indians or future westward settlement without breaking the endless cycle of attacks and counterattacks, of hatred and revenge, between Indians and American frontier settlers.¹

The escalating tension between Indians and Americans (frontier settlers and the government) dramatically affected French-Indian relations in Vincennes. Immediately after the arrival of the first American settlers, villagers began to experience the same kind of fear and violence that plagued the entire Wabash country in the post-revolutionary years.²

Prior to the arrival of American settlers, this violence was unknown. The American John Filson, who visited Vincennes in 1785, commented that the Vincennes French villagers "by a long acquaintance with their indian neighbors have Contracted a friendship and acquaintance [with the Indians] which time will never be able to irradicate. . ." The relationship between the French and the Piankashaws, Weas, Kickapoos, Mascoutens, Delawares, Shawnees, and Miamis who lived near the Wabash and its tributaries was based on friendship and trust born of familiarity and economic interdependence. With a substantial portion of the Vincennes population involved in the fur trade, the majority of villagers had

¹White, Middle Ground, 419; Burt, The United States, 101, 104-6.

²For a good account of the Indian wars which accompanied American expansion in the decades after the American Revolution, see Horsman, The Frontier: Expansion; Randolph C. Downes, Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795, (Pittsburgh, 1940).

frequent, face-to-face encounters with Indians. Trade brought many Indians right into the town of Vincennes, where they had regular social interactions with the French. Some French traders built their homes in Indian villages, thus developing close relations with specific tribes. Marriages between French men and Indian women produced familial connections between red and white inhabitants of the Illinois-Wabash country. Marriage joined more than just man and wife; it created an alliance between the extended families of the newly married couple. The new kinship relations enabled both families to call on their relatives for aid and protection. Frequent social interaction, economic interdependence, and marriage ties were all components of the mutual concern and friendship which existed between Vincennes villagers and their Indian neighbors.¹

In the years following the American Revolution, the long-standing amity between the French and Indian inhabitants of the Wabash country was greatly strained by the arrival of American settlers. Some of the men who had served with George Rogers Clark and other pioneering families from Kentucky set up farms near Vincennes. These Americans were drawn to Vincennes by the fertile soil and the services and supplies available in the town itself. At first the local French welcomed the American newcomers, giving every family who came to live among them a lot in town and "a plantation of four hundred acres."² By 1787 there were

¹White, Middle Ground, 69; McAvoy, 27-29. For good analysis of French-Indian intermarriage in the Great Lakes region see Jacqueline Peterson, "Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Metis," Ethnohistory 25 (1978): 41-68.

²Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 2: 58-61, 66-67; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 255. For French welcoming Americans, see "Petition of American Settlers to Congress", original in Draper Mss. 53J31, reprinted in Helderman, (ed.) "Danger on the Wabash," 457-8.

103 American males, with a total population of approximately four hundred. Unfortunately for the French *habitants*, some of these Americans provoked and angered local Indians.¹

The Americans who settled in or near Vincennes did so without permission from the United States government. All along the frontier American settlers were unlawfully establishing themselves on land they did not own. The areas of heaviest settlement were in southeastern Ohio and further west along the Muskingum, Scioto, and Miami rivers. Indians resented this illegal settlement upon their lands, and they also resented the efforts of the United States government which, while not encouraging white squatters, nevertheless tried to gain title to Indian lands by forcing them to give up their claims. Indians wanted to keep the Ohio River as a permanent boundary between white and Indian lands, but neither American frontier settlers nor the United States government were willing to acknowledge such a boundary. The debt-ridden Confederation Congress hoped to solve some of its severe financial problems by selling western lands; pioneer immigrants desperate for land eagerly flooded the backcountry with little concern about securing a rightful claim to the land.²

¹Census for 1787 in "Report of Continental Congress in 1787", IIIHC 5:449. That same year Harmar reported 400 Americans had settled near Vincennes. For Harmar's population estimate, see Harmar to the Secretary of War, Aug. 7, 1787, Letter Book B, Letter lxxviii, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, as quoted in McAvoy, *Catholic Church*, 43.

²Horsman, The Frontier, 33; White, Middle Ground, 417-18. For the friction between Indians and Americans who settled without government permission in Vincennes, see introduction to Gayle Thornbrough, Outpost on the Wabash, 1787-1791: Letters of Brigadier General Josiah Harmar and Major John Francis Hamtramck and Other Letters and Documents Selected from the Harmar Papers in the William L. Clements Library, (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Historical Society Publications, 1957), 12:7-20.

Indian attacks on Americans who settled unlawfully on Indian lands brought repercussions from the American army and from frontiersmen who launched their own punitive raids into Indian territory. On the frontier there was often little difference between "official" raids by the frontier militia and the "unofficial" raids of the same frontiersmen who banded together in independent parties to attack Indian villages. The participants were the same, and so were the goals. The French people in Vincennes became alarmed as they watched raiding parties from Kentucky attacking Indian villages, and Indians taking their vengeance upon Kentucky frontier communities. Both sides frequently stopped in Vincennes for supplies. The Americans living in Vincennes naturally supported the efforts of the raiding Kentuckians, and this frustrated the local French. Friction between French and American settlers escalated in 1785 when French magistrates outlawed the sale of liquor to Indians because it "debauched the Indians" and "confused the town." The liquor trade provoked violence among the region's inhabitants, with drunken murders being the outcome all too often. Both the French and the English profitted from the liquor trade with Indians. Those who persisted in the trade and were caught, however, paid heavy fines.¹

In 1786, events in Vincennes and the west in general were moving towards a crisis. As distrust and anger mounted between the Indians and the Americans in Vincennes, the tension between the French and American

¹Beverly Bond, Jr., (ed.), "Two Westward Journeys of John Filson, 1785," in The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 9 (1923):327-29. The "unhappy contentions" between the French and Americans were also described by Filson in Helderman, "John Filson's Narrative of His Defeat on the Wabash, 1786," 193. Father Gibault also spoke of the "accursed trade in eau de vie" and the virtual anarchy of the village at this time. Clarence Alvord, "Father Gibault and Vincennes," American Historical Review 16 (1909): 544-557.

settlers escalated as well. On June 21, 1786 a band of Indians attacked some Americans who were working in their fields, critically wounding two men. One of the Americans in the group who escaped injury was Daniel Sullivan, a man despised by the Indians, the French, and later by American military officers as well for his quick temper, hatred of Indians, and lack of respect for lawful authority. On the streets of Vincennes Sullivan routinely paraded with several Wea scalps on a stick, and he conspired with the Illinois Piankashaw to steal French horses and sell them to the Spanish.¹ It therefore came as no surprise to the Vincennes townspeople that the Indians would choose Sullivan as a target for their anger and vengeance. After the Indian attack, Sullivan and several of his friends retaliated by marching into Vincennes, seizing the first Indian they encountered, and murdering him. They cared little that the Indian was in town receiving medical care from the French and had done no wrong. They scalped the Indian and dragged his body "like a pig at the tail of a horse" through the streets of Vincennes. The French villagers were outraged. They gathered up the remaining Indians in town, stood guard over them through the night, and escorted them safely to the woods the next day. Some of the

¹Sullivan's hatred of Indians is curious in light of the fact that when he was nine years old he was captured by the Delaware, adopted into the tribe, and spent the next nine years living as a Delaware Indian. When Sullivan accompanied some tribesmen on a trading expedition to Pittsburgh in 1772, relatives recognized him and "bought" him from the tribe. Sullivan had difficulty adapting to "civilized" society, and he spent the rest of his life on the frontier. His mistreatment of Indians finally caught up with him, for in 1790 he was attacked and killed by Indians only 67 miles from Vincennes. For an account of Sullivan's life see Richard Day, "Daniel Sullivan, Frontiersman and Adventurer," in Selected Papers from the 1991 and 1992 George Rogers Clark Trans-Appalachian Frontier History Conference, (Vincennes: Eastern National Park and Monument Service and Vincennes University, 1994), 61-75.

French worried that since this atrocity had been committed in their midst, the Indians might hold them at least partially responsible.¹

After months of mounting anger over the Americans' bad treatment of local--often friendly--Indians, the French decided to end the cycle of violence by forcing most of the Americans to leave Vincennes. John Small, an American who was generally respected by the French, described the French response to the actions of Sullivan and his men:

Next Day we weare called together by Co. Legrass² Who Was Very much Exasperated Against us for the putting the savage to Death in consequence of which the Heads of the French Inhabitants Gave us a piece of writeing ordering Every American that can not produce a passport to leave this place Bagg and Baggage Immediately.³

Even though Daniel Sullivan was able to produce a pass, the French ordered that he and his family depart at their "own Risk and Peril without delay." The disgust of the French towards the Americans was revealed in a letter Sullivan wrote the following week to George Rogers Clark who was living in Kentucky and working as an Indian commissioner for the national government. Sullivan explained that the "authority of the [French] Citizens" in Vincennes had openly declared that the Americans were "no part of their Society" and were issued another order to depart. In open

¹For accounts of these events, see Helderman, "Filson's Defeat," 195; Leonard C. Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition of George Rogers Clark, 1786-87," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 25 (1938): 318; John Small to Clark, June 23, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 459-61.

²Jean Marie Phillipe Le Gras, a native of Montreal, was Commandant and the principal French inhabitant. He was an educated man with much influence among the villagers and was highly regarded by American military officers who arrived in 1787. He died in 1788 at the age of 54. Lasselle Papers.

³John Small to Clark, June 23, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 459-61.

defiance of the French order, the Americans--including Sullivan--made no preparations to leave.¹

In spite of the potentially explosive situation between the Americans and Indians, the Vincennes *habitants* refused to ban Indians from the town. The livelihood of the French as well as the Indians depended upon their continued interaction. So far neighboring Indians had not threatened or harmed the local French, though many Indians were becoming increasingly frustrated with the French for allowing the Americans to remain in their village. The Americans watched in disbelief and anger as the French escorted Indians into town--some of whom the Americans were sure were their enemies. For the Americans who could no longer work their fields or travel without being attacked, the presence of hostile Indians threatened both their livelihood and their lives.²

Even before the French-American conflict came to a head, the Americans in Vincennes had written many letters to George Rogers Clark describing how their safety and security had grown more precarious since Clark had withdrawn the last American troops in August of 1781. Clark's military successes during the Revolution gained him the respect of frontier American settlers, many of whom looked to him for leadership against

¹The "passport" mentioned in this quote refers to some type of written permission from the American government which authorized traders or other persons to live or work in the Indian country. Most American inhabitants in Vincennes would not have had such passports since the area had not officially been surveyed or open to American settlement. Sullivan to Clark, June 28, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 461. In his letter Sullivan also commented that the French said they "knew not whether the place belong'd to the United States or to Britain &c." With the British still occupying Detroit and Michilimackinac and with no American troops occupying Vincennes since the Revolution, it is quite possible that the French may have entertained the possibility of British re-occupation. It is also possible that Sullivan's strong anti-French sentiments caused him to fabricate this statement merely to raise suspicion against the French and to spur Georges Rogers Clark to action.

²Small to Clark, June 23, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 459-60.

hostile Indians in the postwar years. Letters to Clark from Americans in Vincennes told of Indian attacks, the inability to work their fields, Americans being driven from their farms to the village to avoid Indian attacks, the antagonism between themselves and the French, and the breakdown of local order and government. By June of 1786 the Americans in Vincennes reported to Clark that twenty Americans had already been killed or wounded by Indians. Without Clark's immediate assistance, the Americans declared they would all perish.¹

Though rumors of an Indian attack on the Americans at Vincennes had been circulating since early spring of 1786, the murder of the innocent Indian heightened American fears. From their Indian friends, the French learned that several tribes were indeed planning an attack on the American settlers. Warned by the French of the impending attack, the American settlers spent every night crowded together in the small fort in town. They did not dare go to their fields during the day. Convinced of imminent doom, they wrote to George Rogers Clark that "Danger and Distruction stears Every american heer in the face."²

When the expected attack materialized, it was only the intervention of the French that saved the Americans from certain death. On the night of July 13, 1786, a Frenchmen arrived in Vincennes saying that he had been

¹Letters from the American inhabitants to George Rogers Clark on March 16, June 12, June 23, June 28, and July 22 are reprinted in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 456-63. Government in Vincennes had faltered but had not completely disintegrated. The French court, consisting of three magistrates headed by J.M.P. LeGras, was ruling under the authority given them by American Lieutenant Governor John Todd in 1778 when the town was still under the jurisdiction of Virginia. Virginia authority expired in 1781, and Virginia ceded her claims to the west to the United States in 1784, but as of 1786 the United States had not established a government in Vincennes. Therefore the French court which John Todd had created continued to operate in default of American authority.

²John Small to Clark, June 23, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger," 459-60.

sent by a large army of Indians to warn the French inhabitants of an impending attack on the American settlers. Representatives from the various tribes waited across the river to meet with LeGras and other French leaders, since the Indians did not want to enter the town before communicating with the French. Fifteen leagues away, four hundred and fifty Indians were gathered intending to "exterminate all the Americans who might be in these lands, and to avenge the treacheries which they were undergoing each day and the inhumanity which they have but recently exercised on one of them. . ." The Indians assured the French that their goal was only to rid the town of the Americans. French villagers would not be harmed.¹

In spite of the animosity between the French and Americans in Vincennes, the French unanimously agreed that they would not permit the Indians to harm the American settlers. Several prominent French citizens, led by militia Major François Bosseron, prepared to go to the Indians the next day and persuade them to turn back. Despite the precariousness of the situation, the Americans were greatly relieved--and a bit surprised--by the determination of the French to protect them. After Bosseron and his party departed to meet the Indians on July 14, Colonel LeGras readied the town for an attack should his comrades fail in their mission.²

Major Bosseron met the Indian forces three miles north of the village at a place called Petit Rocher (Little Rock). Indians of various tribes arrived in forty-seven canoes at three o'clock in the afternoon. When they spotted the Frenchmen waiting for them, they debarked, shook hands, and

¹LeGras to Clark, July 22, 1786 in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 462-65." Original letter in Papers of the Continental Congress, no. 150, vol. II.

²ibid.

sat down for serious discussion. The French told how their women and children were weeping from fear and reminded the Indians that the French "do not like for blood to be shed on these lands." The Indians responded that they were accustomed to listening to the French and to having them tell the truth, but the young men were eager to take vengeance on the Americans. The Indians war chiefs re-iterated that the French had nothing to fear. Several chiefs desired to speak with the French "chief," Colonel LeGras, and they were taken to town to meet with him. LeGras spent most of the night trying to "bring them to my viewpoint and intimidate their spirits." The next day LeGras and other French villagers returned with the Indian chiefs to Petit Rocher to continue talks. At long last the French persuaded them to cancel their attack, but only after Colonel LeGras gave them a great quantity of trade goods and fifty jugs of liquor (which were not distributed until the Indians were ten leagues from town). The Indians were frustrated with the turn of events, and promised the French that they would return in the autumn. At that time they would "know how to make gates for entering without asking." Before they departed, the Indians gained some satisfaction from destroying Sullivan's crops and firing their guns at his house.¹

Both the Americans and French in Vincennes were relieved when the Indians departed, though they kept a careful watch for several days afterwards. The Americans knew that without French intervention they would all be dead. One American, John Filson, believed that the actions of the French were motivated in large part by self-preservation since a good portion of the town would likely have been destroyed had the Indians

¹ibid.

attacked. In view of the domestic broils which had marked French-American relations in Vincennes during the previous year, however, Filson described the action of the French as being "one of the most striking instances of true greatness of Soul, and Sympathy with Suffering mortals, that any age or history produces. . ."1

The town had been spared temporarily, but the French paid dearly. During the two days of negotiation, small groups of Indians raided the outskirts of the village, destroying a considerable number of cattle, hogs, and work oxen. They also took several horses. Though the Americans lost some animals, the French (who owned more domestic animals) sustained by far the greatest damage. Colonel LeGras suffered the greatest personal loss. He knew that there was little chance that the American government would ever reimburse him for the small fortune in trade goods and liquor which he sacrificed to help persuade the Indians to depart.²

In spite of these losses, the cost to both French and Americans was minimal when compared to what would have transpired if the Indians had attacked the town. Grateful to be spared, everyone in town knew it was only a matter of time before the Indians returned. Even while the French were negotiating with the Indians at Petit Rocher, French hunters brought word that some Americans had attacked a band of Piankashaws and another band of Miamis, both of whom had consistently proven their friendship towards Americans in word and deed. Americans, it seemed,

¹Helderman, "Filson's Defeat," 197-98.

²In the letter from LeGras to Clark recounting the French-Indian encounter, LeGras made no mention of the Indians killing domestic animals. It was the American John Small who reported to Clark that the French had sustained by far the greatest losses from the Indian raids. Small was well-liked by the French, and LeGras commended him to Clark for his good conduct towards the French. Small to Clark, July 22, 1786 and LeGras to Clark, July 22, 1786, both in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 461-67. For Filson's comments, see Helderman, "Filson's Defeat," 197-98.

either could not or would not make distinctions between friendly and unfriendly Indians. The French, in close communication with many tribes, easily made such distinctions. They were bewildered at the apparent disregard of Americans for their Indian allies. The local French sentiments were clearly expressed by LeGras when he wrote to Clark:

I do not know and cannot understand through what motive the Americans seek only to surprise and even betray those who are peaceful and their allies, which affords a pretext to all nations to band together and form numerous parties to attack entire villages.¹

When Governor Patrick Henry of Virginia learned of the desperate conditions in the Wabash country and of the unwillingness of Congress to send aid, he instructed the officers of the Kentucky militia to take necessary action for their own defense. George Rogers Clark, war hero and Indian commissioner for the confederation of states, was the obvious choice to lead the expedition against the Wabash tribes. It is important to keep in mind that decisions concerning western Indian affairs were clearly the domain of the Confederation Congress, and the expedition launched from Kentucky was undertaken without the expressed consent of the national government. Two thousand men were expected to gather at Clarksville on September 12, 1786, but only twelve hundred showed up. On September 17 Clark's army moved towards Vincennes. Supplies and provisions were sent by boat while the main army marched overland. Though it took seven days for a journey that could easily have been made in three, provisions for the men were delayed even longer due to low water in the Wabash River. Discipline problems caused Clark to quarter his men across the river from Vincennes (out of concern for the local

¹LeGras to Clark, July 22, 1786, in Helderman, "Danger on the Wabash," 466.

population) while he waited fifteen days for supplies. When the boats arrived, Clark learned that the beef had spoiled en route and was thrown overboard. Clark's men wanted to return home, and only reluctantly agreed to continue on their march against the Indians. After two days march, when the troops were only a day from the main Indian towns, half of Clark's men mutinied and started for home. Clark, bitter and disillusioned, returned to Vincennes with the remainder of his men.¹

In an attempt to camouflage his weakened situation, Clark sent word among the Wabash tribes that he had postponed his attack in order to give the Indians one more chance to avoid destruction. He invited them to a grand council in Clarksville in November. If they refused to attend, Clark would move against the Indian villages. Clark's invitation was endorsed by Colonel LeGras, who sent a message saying that the Americans had turned back only at the earnest solicitation of himself and other French friends. LeGras urged the Indians to make peace with the Americans. As much as LeGras valued the friendship of local tribes, he was willing to lie to them in the hopes of ending the blood feud between Indians and Americans. LeGras likely felt a genuine concern for the welfare of both the Indians and the Americans, but he was more concerned about the safety and well-being of the Vincennes villagers who were caught in the crossfire.²

Several Indian chiefs agreed to meet with Clark, but preferred to wait until spring. In addition, the Indians preferred to hold the council at Vincennes rather than Clarksville which was inhabited only by Americans.

¹Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition," 325-28; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 258-59.

²Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 259.

The Indians perceived Vincennes as neutral ground and trusted that their French friends would provide support and security. Upon hearing the Indians' response, Clark dismissed most of his army, keeping only a garrison of 250 men to protect Vincennes.¹

Though the villagers welcomed the protection provided by Clark's troops, they resented the way Clark impressed food, fuel, and any supplies he needed for his men. Unable to halt what the French considered as "unlawful" seizure of their property, the French inhabitants petitioned Congress to send regular troops to restore order and drive Clark's "lawless banditti" from Vincennes. These petitions were accompanied by similar pleas from other Illinois villages who urged Congress to drive American squatters from their midst. They hoped that this would placate regional Indian tribes and that peace would return to the Wabash-Illinois country.²

On April 24, 1787 the Continental Congress finally passed a resolution that troops be sent to drive squatters from public lands and to protect the region's inhabitants from lawless frontiersmen. Secretary of War Henry Knox ordered Colonel Josiah Harmar to march to Vincennes and dispossess Clark's men who had terrorized the town in a "lawless and unauthorized" manner. When Harmar and over three hundred regular soldiers of the American army arrived in Vincennes in July of 1787, they found that most of the 250 men had left the town during the previous winter. Before marching into town, Colonel Harmar sent a message to the townspeople saying that his soldiers were not "a set of Villians, but

¹Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition," 328-29; Clark to Wabash Indians and Replies, Oct. 1786, George Rogers Clark Papers, 11J108-117 Draper Mss as quoted in White, Middle Ground, 426.

²F. Clever Bald, "Colonel John Francis Hamtramck," Indiana Magazine of History, 44 [1948]: 340; Helderman, "The Northwest Expedition," 329-31.

regulars and sent by the grand Council of the Empire, in order to preserve good faith with them and to protect the legal inhabitants." After years of being neglected by the United States government, the people of Vincennes gave Harmar and his men a warm welcome, believing that Congress had finally responded to their many petitions. Vincennes had not been forgotten entirely. Hopes ran high that the regular troops would restore order and security. Both the French and the Indians made a distinction between the disruptive backcountry American settlers in Vincennes and the regular troops led by Harmar. The latter were referred to as the "real" Americans.¹

Colonel Harmar immediately held parleys with delegations from the Piankashaw and Wea tribes. Impressed with the discipline and military bearing of the troops and wanting access to trade goods in Vincennes, local Indians professed their friendship towards the United States. Colonel Harmar decided to maintain a garrison at Vincennes to establish a legitimate American presence in the area, to protect the French from lawless frontiersmen, and to defend local Americans from hostile Indians. Federal troops were also necessary to suppress unauthorized retaliatory raids into Indian country (such as Clark's 1786 expedition), and to cultivate friendly relations with the Piankashaw, Wea, Kickapoo and more distant Miami tribes. Harmar selected Major John Hamtramck to serve as commandant, and instructed him to commence building a larger, stronger fort. Leaving ninety-five soldiers at Vincennes, Harmar and the remainder of his army left Vincennes on October 2.²

¹ibid; Harmar to Colonel Le Gras and Major Bosseron, June 19, 1787, Harmar's Letter Book B, Clements Library, University of Michigan.

²Bald, "Hamtramck," 340-41; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 264-66; White, Middle Ground, 428-29.

Hamtramck and his men immediately started building a new fort about one quarter of a mile upriver from the existing but dilapidated Fort Patrick Henry (also previously known as Fort Sackville and Fort St. Vincent). The fort was named Fort Knox in honor of Secretary of War Henry Knox. Major Hamtramck kept the soldiers under strict discipline and quickly earned the respect of the Vincennes citizens. His wise direction of both military and civil affairs brought renewed order and stability to the town.¹

The French villagers could not have asked for an officer better-suited to rule over them. The thirty-year-old officer Hamtramck had been born and raised in Quebec by a Canadian mother and a father who had migrated to Quebec from Luxembourg.² Hamtramck was therefore familiar with the culture, language, religion, and laws of the local people in Vincennes. His appearance was not particularly impressive: only five feet five inches tall, he was described by one who knew him well to have looked in the saddle like a frog on horseback. But the same person who gave this description also complimented Hamtramck's ability of "inspiring the men with self-confidence." In spite of the fact that he was a "most rigid disciplinarian, the troops all loved him, for he was kindhearted, generous, and brave." Hamtramck's exceptional leadership qualities earned him the respect of the local French villagers as well as his own soldiers. He tried his best to prevent his soldiers from bothering the local

¹Bald, "Hamtramck," 343-44; John Barnart and Donald Carmony, Indiana: From Frontier to Industrial Commonwealth. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1954), 80.

²In 1775 when he was nineteen years old, Hamtramck joined General Montgomery's army marching on Montreal. He served first as commissary and then was commissioned captain, winning the confidence of Colonel James Livingston and other New York officers who recommended him to the Provincial Congress. Bald, "Hamtramck," 336-7.

people, and his efforts resulted in the only decent relations which had ever existed between French inhabitants and American soldiers in Vincennes. In response to many villagers' complaints about the unsatisfactory court system in Vincennes, Hamtramck reorganized the local court system and created a new code of laws which the townspeople readily accepted.¹

Hamtramck's concern for the welfare of the French villagers was strengthened when he married a local French woman, Marie Josepte Edeline Perrot. Three years after Hamtramck's arrival in Vincennes, the villagers praised him for the "just and humane attention" he had paid "to the rights and feelings of every individual craving his interposition." They expressed their desire that he remain among them, since no other American officer had shown such respect for them and for their customs.²

During Hamtramck's six years at Vincennes, his relations with neighboring tribes were cordial. He met on a regular basis with the chiefs of tribes who lived closest to Vincennes, and developed a level of understanding and familiarity that can only come from frequent face-to-face encounters. Though there was never a wide-scale attack on Vincennes, Hamtramck could not prevent Indians, especially those from more distant tribes, from raiding Kentucky settlements. Angry young warriors from local "friendly" tribes also joined such expeditions in defiance of the wishes of their chiefs. Though Indians did not attack Vincennes, they regularly

¹For Hamtramck reorganizing court system, see Hamtramck to Harmar, April 13, 1788, in Thornbrough, Outpost, 71. With no background as a lawyer or legislator, Hamtramck commented to Harmar that he expected that the code of laws he had created "will make you laugh." Hamtramck was grateful that "there is not one amongst them that can find fault with it [the new code of laws]."

²For marriage to Vincennes woman, see Bald, "Hamtramck," 344. For Vincennes villagers praising Hamtramck, see Antoine Gamelin and Other Vincennes Citizens to Acting Governor Sargent, July 23, 1790 in Carter, Territorial Papers of the United States, 2: 292.

attacked American supply boats as they returned from collecting provisions at the mouth of the Wabash. When Indians ambushed the supply boats, both provisions and American lives were lost. One attack in July of 1788 killed ten soldiers, wounded eight others, and forced the remaining eighteen men to flee to Kaskaskia.¹

Though some supplies were lost to the Indians, the soldiers at Fort Knox also suffered from supply shortages caused by the inability of the United States army to send adequate provisions. Living on reduced rations, the soldiers were often sickly, and there was seldom medicine on hand to speed their recovery. Along with the soldiers' other problems, their pay was often in arrears which prevented them from purchasing food in the village. Even when they had the money they complained of the high prices charged by Vincennes merchants. Few of the soldiers were willing to reenlist when their time ran out, and consequently at times the garrison was dangerously small.²

Inadequate supplies, sickness, and marauding Indians were not Hamtramck's only concerns. Raiding Kentuckians caused some of his most serious problems. On August 31, 1788 a group of sixty Kentuckians led by Patrick Brown made an unauthorized raid north of the Ohio River. Early in the day they killed nine Indians who belonged to tribes which had

¹Bald, "Hamtramck," 342; Hamtramck to Harmar, August 12, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 105-06. For report of Indian attack on Hamtramck's soldiers who were returning to Vincennes with supplies see Lieut. William Peters to Hamtramck, August 23, 1788 and Hamtramck to Harmar, August 12, 1788, both in Thornbrough, Outpost, 105-6, 109. Harmar believed that the Indians always knew when supply boats were coming because as soon as news reached Vincennes that the supply boats were waiting at the mouth of the Wabash, the French inhabitants shared this information with local Indians.

²Hamtramck to Harmar, April 13, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 70; "Return of Stores Wanting for the use of the Sick at Post Vincennes, April 13, 1788, enclosure in letter from Hamtramck to Harmar, August 12, 1788, Thornbrough, Outpost, 75; Hamtramck to Harmar, July 14, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 90.

professed their alliance to the United States. Several of them belonged to a tribe of Miami whose chief, Pacane, was at that very moment on a mission for the Americans at the main Miami village (present-day Fort Wayne, Indiana). Pacane had agreed to inform the Americans of the results of a recent Indian conference the British had held at Detroit. Hamtramck realized that none of his efforts at peace-keeping could produce lasting results when American vigilantes killed Indians indiscriminately--even those who had proven their friendship towards the American government.¹

Hamtramck and his small garrison were unable to control Brown and his men or force them to return to Kentucky. The ineffectiveness of the federal presence in Vincennes was made even more clear when Hamtramck could not even force the Kentuckians to return several horses they had stolen from the local people. Most of Hamtramck's soldiers were sick in bed, and only nine men were fit for duty. Though he later commented that he could probably have counted on support from the French militia, he declared "the American militia would not have fought them [Brown and his men] if I had been able to have marched fifty men." Clearly, the Americans living in Vincennes supported the actions of men like Brown. Unlike Hamtramck and the French, they did not appreciate the necessity of maintaining alliances with friendly Indians. Though Hamtramck was not able to force the Kentuckians to end their raid and return home, the French villagers blocked their entry into Vincennes. Brown was so infuriated that he threatened to return and march on the town itself.²

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, August 31, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 114-117.

²ibid.; White, Middle Ground, 430-31.

Hamtramck was humiliated by his inability to intimidate the lawless Kentuckians. He was also worried that the Indians might seek vengeance for the Indians Brown murdered, and if this happened innocent villagers might suffer. The following day Hamtramck called upon all the Indians from nearby villages to assemble in Vincennes so that he could explain the situation. He assured them that the United States government did not sanction the actions of the Brown and his fellow Kentuckians. He expressed his sincere condolences for the nine Indians who were killed. Secretly he worried about the reactions of Pacane and other Indians who had friends and relatives among the Indians who were murdered. In spite of Hamtramck's explanations, many of the Wabash Indians no longer discriminated between the "real Americans" stationed at Vincennes (Hamtramck and his men) and the Kentuckians, or Big Knives. Many of the Piankashaws and Indians from the Vermilion River moved further west to live among the Kaskaskias, with whom many had intermarried. This exodus was one small sign of the changing world along the Wabash as some of the Indians who had shared a common world with the French found it necessary to physically depart from that world.¹

Just over a month after Brown's raid, relatives of the Indians who had been murdered attacked a French farm across the river from Vincennes during the night, killing two women and a baby. The following May Indians attacked another French family who lived across the river, killing a man and scalping his wife and child. A short time later four French pirogues were attacked a short distance from Vincennes. Four Frenchmen were killed, three mortally wounded, one taken prisoner, and

¹Ibid.

several escaped to Vincennes. By October of that year, the Indians' wrath struck at family members of one of Vincennes foremost leaders, François Bosseron. This prominent trader was well-known among regional Indians with whom he had traded peacefully for decades. In spite of his social and economic attachments to the tribes, two of Bosseron's sons, Charles and Jean Baptiste, were murdered by Indians in October of 1789. It is unclear whether the Indians were aware that Bosseron was the father of the young boys they killed. Bosseron's family may have become a target for Indian anger and vengeance because of Bosseron's position as Major of the local French militia and his cooperation with Major Hamtramck and the American soldiers. Indian attacks upon French villagers prompted Hamtramck to write that "The discrimination of French & English is done with; the Negroes are the only ones who have a chance of their lives (I suppose because they sell well)."¹

Hamtramck's statement was only partially true. Indian attacks upon French settlers certainly proved that some Indians viewed the French as traitors because of their close association with American settlers and military men. On the other hand, most Indians continued to discriminate between Americans and French which is what made it possible for many French traders to continue moving among the tribes with relative safety. The reality of the situation was that it was becoming increasingly difficult for everyone in the western country to know who was friend and who was foe. Indians generally continued to regard the French as their friends, but

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, October 13, 1788 and Hamtramck to Maj. John P. Wyllys, May 27, 1789, both in Thornbrough, Outpost, 124, 169-70. For death of Bosseron's sons, see Father Gibault to François Bosseron, Receipt for Funeral of Charles and Jean Bte Bosseron, October 10, 1789 in Lasselle Papers and James McNulty to François Bosseron, March 15, 1790 in Lasselle Papers. McNulty wrote that he was "sorry to hear of your loss by the hands of savage ennemie."

the close interaction between the French and Americans in Vincennes made some Indians view the French with suspicion and even contempt. Hamtramck's reliance on French militiamen to haul firewood to the fort, carry messages to other frontier forts, help protect supply boats, and perform other necessary chores undoubtedly made it particularly difficult for some Indians to distinguish between French friends and American enemies. When Indians murdered Frenchmen, the French became increasingly wary and suspicious of at least some of their traditional Indian "friends." Unlike the Americans, however, the French did not let their anger at some Indians destroy their respect and trust of others.¹

Indians who tried to comprehend American actions and policies were equally confused about which Americans, if any, could be trusted. Tribes near Vincennes did not feel threatened by Hamtramck or his men, but raiding parties from Kentucky burned Indian villages and crops and killed their people with impunity. Unauthorized Kentucky raiders attacked Indians regardless of their status as friends or foes making it nearly impossible for any tribes to maintain a healthy attitude towards Americans. Hamtramck's inability to control renegade Kentuckians said little for the strength of the United States government. The unwavering commitment of the American government to western expansion and the unfair treaty practices which were used to acquire Indian lands were reasons enough for Indians to question the intentions of any and all Americans.²

¹For French assisting Hamtramck see Winthrop Sargent to President, Sept. 8, 1794, in Carter, Territorial Papers, 3: 328.

²Horsman, The Frontier, 35-6.

American military leaders such as Hamtramck who genuinely tried to differentiate between friendly and unfriendly Indians faced a difficult challenge as well. The nature of tribal politics, where no one person or even group of persons exercised complete control over tribal members, made it impossible for Americans to label an entire tribe as friend or foe. Indian leaders who sincerely desired peace and friendship with the American government were often unable to prevent their angry young warriors from joining raiding parties. One old Wea chief, Quiquapoughquée (Crooked Legs), unable to restrain his young warriors, abandoned the warlike part of his tribe. Crooked Legs brought his like-minded followers, a band with about eighty warriors, to settle near Vincennes where they would enjoy the protection of the American garrison. Most tribes did not separate this way, however, with the result that American leaders were hard pressed to determine if a particular tribe should be considered friend or foe. When a chief and part of the tribe professed friendship while members of the same tribe raided Kentucky farms and murdered American families, it was hard to continue treating that tribe as a friend of the United States. Hamtramck and other American leaders were critical of the chiefs who could not control young warriors, which was ironic since American leaders were equally as powerless to stop frontiersmen from unlawfully raiding Indian territory.¹

¹When a delegation of Wea Indians came to Hamtramck in June of 1791 saying that they wanted peace and the protection of the American troops, Hamtramck replied that he was tired of "receiving repeatedly messages from the Indians of the Wabash" who professed an "unfeigned friendship and attachments for the United States when at the same time some of their warriors were killing our women and children." He complained that the Indians acted more like children than men, and the United States would no longer be deceived by "such perfidious promises." Hamtramck to Harmar, June 15, 1791 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 283. For examples of Indian chiefs' professed inability to restrain their young men from warring on Americans, see "Gamelin's Journal," in Thornbrough and Riker, Readings, 64;

The apparent duplicity of many tribes was an indication Indians were trying to navigate the murky waters of frontier politics in a manner best suited to their own self-preservation. For example, some tribes near Vincennes who were subgroups of the Miami desired friendly relations and trading privileges in Vincennes. At the same time they had good reasons to maintain their traditional attachments to the more powerful Miami tribe to the north, a tribe that was steadfast in its rejection of American overtures of friendship. Though the smaller and less powerful tribes near Vincennes wanted to avoid conflict with Major Hamtramck and the United States government, as subgroups of the Miami they were committed to resisting fiercely any American attempts to purchase or settle western lands. Hamtramck was aware of the divided loyalties of the local tribes. In a letter written in 1788 he declared that "the nations of the Wabash are well enuff disposed to be our friends but they are menaced by the upper Indians [Miami, Shawnee, Potawatomi] who have ordered them to cease all communication with us. . ." ¹

Indians who declared their "attachment" to the United States while maintaining alliances to regional tribes who were "enemies" of that same government acted exactly in the same manner as the local French. They tried to maintain congenial relations to two opposing parties in the hopes of surviving the period of red-white violence with as little cost to their people as possible. People on the frontier--Indian, French, and Americans as well--could not afford the luxury of steadfast "loyalty" to any particular group or government. Survival came first. More important than

Hamtramck to Harmar, Aug. 12, 1788, in Thornbrough, Outpost, 105-6; White, Middle Ground, 432.

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, January 1, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 60-61.

maintaining pledges of loyalty were issues such as personal safety, acquiring necessary trade items, having a market for furs and agricultural goods, and protecting personal property and land. It was the pursuit of these goals that caused both the Indians and the French to continue to trade with the British in spite of American demands to stop. It was the pursuit of these goals that drove many French, American, and Indians across the Mississippi River into Spanish territory in hopes of living safer and more profitable lives. And it was the pursuit of these same goals that motivated people in the West to "shift" loyalties regularly in order to meet the needs of their families and their communities.¹

Many French and Americans in Vincennes grew tired of living in fear and economic hardship. By 1791 nearly 250 people had left their homes in Vincennes to move across the Mississippi, hoping that the move would bring them peace and renewed prosperity. One of those who left was Antoine Gamelin, an important figure in the Vincennes community. He had served the community as a magistrate, a notary, and church warden, holding Sunday services and baptizing infants in the absence of a priest. As a wealthy trader, Gamelin had established good relations with many regional Indians. His familiarity and friendships with the tribes caused the United States government to select him as a goodwill ambassador and messenger on more than one occasion. The departure of Gamelin and

¹Hamtramck threatened local Indians to cease trading with British or they would no longer be allowed to trade at Vincennes. Hamtramck to Harmar, Jan. 1, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 61. For French merchants continuing to trade with British, see George Sharp to Paul Gamelin, July 7, 1789 in Lassel Papers, Box 1; Adhemar St. Martin to Paul Gamelin, June 20, 1788 and Adhemar St. Martin to Paul Gamelin, Aug. 18, 1789, both in Christopher Coleman (ed.), "Letters from Eighteenth-Century Indiana Merchants," Indiana Magazine of History 5 (1909): 154, 156-158. For removal to Spanish territory, see "Report of Governor St. Clair to the Secretary of State," Feb. 10, 1791, Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 330; Hamtramck to Harmar, April 14, 1791, in Outpost, 281; White, Middle Ground, 431.

others like him was sorely felt by those who stayed in Vincennes. With similar emigration from Kaskaskia and other Illinois villages, Governor St. Clair reported that the "loss of People is severly felt."¹

Violent conditions in the Wabash country certainly served to "push" settlers from the area, but Spain also offered attractive incentives to draw immigrants to Spanish territory. These incentives included free land, exemption from taxation, a free market at New Orleans, and even private religious freedom, though the only public worship tolerated was Roman Catholicism. In return, settlers had only to pledge their allegiance to Spain and to promise to take up arms to protect the territory should the need arise.²

For the people who remained in Vincennes, local conditions worsened, and the French found it increasingly more difficult to maintain their neutral position between Americans and Indians. Still, they tried. French traders kept Indians informed of American plans and intentions, but at the same time they related pertinent information about the tribes to Americans leaders such as Hamtramck. The French *habitants* knew that only by demonstrating their good will towards the United States could they hope to secure legal title to their land, enjoy the safety afforded by American troops, and receive good treatment in the future from the United States. The necessity of giving support and cooperation to Hamtramck and

¹For exodus from Vincennes to Spanish territory, see Hamtramck to Winthrop Sargent, April 12, 1791 in Carter, (ed.) Territorial Papers, 3: 356; Thornbrough, Outpost, 201n; Report of Governor St. Clair to the Secretary of State, Feb. 10, 1791 in Carter, (ed.) Territorial Papers, 2:329-30. When the Spanish commandant, Manuel Perez, sent an invitation to the people of Vincennes offering them inducements to settle on the Spanish side, the Indian who delivered the invitation "sold" it to Hamtramck for a bottle of rum. Hamtramck to Harmar, Oct. 13, 1788, Outpost, 125.

²For Spanish incentives to prospective settlers, see "Proclamations of the Spanish Governor of Louisiana and West Florida," September 2, 1789 in Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 213-15.

other Americans at Vincennes did not bode well for continuing friendly ties with the Indians. Though ties of trade, family, and friendship between French settlers and Indian neighbors were never completely severed, they became quite unraveled due to outside pressures.¹

In 1787 the French inhabitants of Vincennes described to members of the Continental Congress how their attachment to Americans had negatively affected relations with area tribes:

. . .our attachment to the cause of America, and active zeal for its welfare, has subjected us to the enmity of those Indians who had, time immemorial, called us their fathers and friends; that we have, in repeated instances, exhausted our remaining substance, to make large presents to the Indians in order to stop their war-parties: That we are become as obnoxious to them as the Americans themselves, and have frequently endangered our lives, because we have refused to deliver up these our friends [Americans settlers] to their savage fury. These are facts to which all the Americans settled among us can bear witness.²

This letter exaggerates the situation, for the French had not become as "obnoxious" to the Indians as the Americans were. Still, there was much truth to the French statement. Each time they intervened on behalf of the Americans, French-Indian relations suffered.

The uneasy Indian relations and the interruption of much trade due to the increasingly hostile environment in the west aggravated the economic situation of the Vincennes French. The American military during and after the Revolution had confiscated domestic animals, horses, flour,

¹A letter from British trader William Park in 1786 described how the French tried to act as arbitrators between the Americans and the Indians who were constantly fighting. Letter of Park from Miamis, May 17, 1786 in Michigan Historical Collections, 24: 29-31.

²"Petition of the Inhabitants of Post Vincennes to Congress," July 26, 1787 in Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 58-60.

and other supplies which caused considerable financial hardships for many villagers. Indian hostilities made the transportation of trade goods from Detroit to Vincennes a risky venture. To make matters worse, the French inhabitants--now American subjects--were forbidden to trade at Spanish ports, including New Orleans. In 1784 Spain closed New Orleans to American shipping in order to curb American settlement in the west. The Spanish government believed that this policy would reduce the threat that an expanding United States posed to Spanish possessions in North America. Through generous incentives Spain tried to lure western settlers to Spanish territory, but those who did not immigrate were treated as foreign enemies. French traders from Vincennes and the other Illinois villages situated on the eastern banks of the Mississippi risked having their boats seized by Spanish authorities if they attempted to transport goods to New Orleans or other southern villages on either bank of the Mississippi. Between the hostile, British-backed Indians to the north, and a hostile Spanish presence to the West and south at New Orleans, the people of Vincennes languished in the middle.¹

Relief from economic problems seemed far off, since it seemed unlikely that Spain would open the Mississippi or that red-white hostilities in the Wabash country would soon end. Rather than having any hope for relief, the people of Vincennes faced more danger with every passing year

¹For an example of a one French trader having \$1,000 worth of goods seized by Spanish officials while carrying them southward to trade with southern Indians, see Joseph St. Marie to Governor Sargent, July 22, 1790 in Carter,(ed.), Territorial Papers, 2: 288-90. When St. Marie traveled to New Orleans to protest the seizure of his property, he was told that both sides of the Mississippi River belonged to Spain. If St. Marie did not depart immediately, he was threatened with being sold as a slave in the mines of Brazil. For incentives offered by Spanish to French and Americans, see "Proclamation of the Spanish Governor of Spain, Louisiana and West Florida, September 2, 1789, in Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 213-14.

as the anger of both Indians and Americans mounted. The increased number of Indian attacks on Vincennes villagers during 1789 was part of a broader wave of Indian aggression all along the frontier. Major Hamtramck repeatedly warned the Indians that if they did not cease their attacks they would be "severely chastised," but he had "neither the means or power since no body but the governor can establish a peace with them."

In 1789 the responsibility of treating with Indians had passed from the weak and ineffective Confederation Congress to the more powerful government as established by the Constitution. With a president who was empowered as the country's commander-in-chief and a Congress with the power to tax, it seemed possible that increased government efficiency and better military funding might improve conditions on the frontier.

President Washington sent the governor of the Northwest Territory, Arthur St. Clair, to the Wabash valley to learn for himself whether or not the western tribes might be persuaded to cease hostilities and make peace with the United States. At the suggestion of the President, St. Clair requested that Hamtramck appoint a suitable French messenger to carry a letter from the governor to the Wabash and Miami Indians. The letter stated the United States wanted peace or "the United States will be constrained to punish them with severity."¹

The man chosen to deliver the governor's message was Pierre Gamelin, a prominent Vincennes trader. After receiving a friendly

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, June 15, 1789 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 176-77, 224n. For President's orders and comments to St. Clair, see President Washington to Governor St. Clair, October 6, 1789 in Thornbrough and Riker, Readings, 56-57. Though the president was ready to use force to stop the Indian attacks on American settlers, he made it clear to St. Clair that "a war with the Wabash Indians ought to be avoided by all means consistently with the security of the frontier inhabitants, the security of the troops, and the national dignity. . ."

welcome at the first tribe he visited on the Vermilion River, his life was threatened by a personal enemy and he returned to Vincennes.

Hamtramck then chose Antoine Gamelin to complete the mission. He was well received by the tribes he visited--Wea, Shawnee, Potawatomi--but they were evasive in their replies to the governor's query, saying that they could not give a firm answer without discussing the matter with the Miami. At the main Miami village of Kekionga, Gamelin presented the governor's speech to a large body of Shawnee, Delaware, and Miami Indians. The Miami in turn declared they could not give an answer to the message without consulting other tribes and the British commandant at Detroit. The Shawnee leader Blue Jacket met privately with Gamelin and said he was pleased with the speech, but he too refused to give an answer until he had consulted his British "father" at Detroit. Blue Jacket tried to persuade Gamelin to go with the Indians to Detroit to meet with the British commandant, but Gamelin refused. His mission was to meet with the Indians, not the British.¹

Blue Jacket shared some of his misgivings concerning peace with the Americans. "From all quarters, we receive speeches from the Americans, and not one is alike. We suppose that they intend to deceive us. . ." Blue Jacket went on to say that unless the Americans "kept this side [of the Ohio] clear" that there was no chance of the Americans being reconciled with the Shawnee, Iroquois, Wyandots, and perhaps many others.²

Though Gamelin himself received a warm welcome among all the tribes he visited and most said they were satisfied with St. Clair's speech,

¹"Gamelin's Journal of Journey to Wabash and Miami Nations" in Thornbrough and Riker, *Readings*, 58-64. Original in American State Papers, Indian Affairs (2 vols. Washington, D.C. 1832), 1:93-94. Antoine was probably Pierre's brother.

²Ibid.

none would give a firm commitment to cease hostilities and make peace with the United States. It was Gamelin's report of his mission, combined with continuing Indian attacks on the Ohio and its tributaries (mostly attributed to the Miami), that caused St. Clair to abandon hopes for peace and to begin making plans for war.¹

In 1790 the new federal government authorized St. Clair to use military force to subdue the Indians northwest of the Ohio. St. Clair put General Josiah Harmer in charge of the expedition. The plan was for a two pronged attack against the Indian villages in what is now northern Indiana. The west wing of the attack would be led by Major Hamtramck and his small garrison accompanied by 300 militia from Virginia and Pennsylvania and 200 local French militia. Hamtramck was to lead his force against the Vermilion, Wea, or Eel River towns, all located west of the main Miami village. It was hoped that the Miami would ride to assist the Indian villages under attack, and while they were gone Harmer and a force of 300 regulars and 1200 militia would burn Miami Town.²

Hamtramck marched from Vincennes in September of 1790, but when he arrived at the Indian villages he found them deserted (possibly informed of the attack by some of the very French men who marched with Hamtramck's army!). Hamtramck lacked the provisions to move forward to the other Wea towns. The Kentucky militia refused to accept half rations, and the French were anxious to return to harvest their corn crop. Hamtramck reluctantly returned to Vincennes. It seemed he had accomplished nothing at all. He later learned that a force of six hundred warriors were ready to attack him if he had moved farther up the Wabash.

¹Harmer to Hamtramck, July 15, 1790 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 236-37, 224n.

²Horsman, The Frontier, 40; Thornbrough and Riker, Readings, 67n.

Hamtramck was also told that "the reason why the Indians did not attack me on my return [to Vincennes] was that they suspected the French I had with me had been forced to march, and that they would not kill them." In a letter to General Harmar he stated that if that was true, he was glad of it since he "had not the greatest opinion of their [French militia] fighting."¹

If the French could not be counted on to fight valiantly against the Indians, it was likely that their questionable fighting ability was due as much to the fact that they did not want to kill Indians as it was to a lack of ability. In spite of the fact that French villagers were now marching with the American army against the Indian towns, it was not without mixed feelings and a weak commitment to the venture.

While Hamtramck's expedition accomplished nothing, Harmar's fared much worse. Rather than impressing the Indians with a show of American military strength, Harmar succeeded only in demonstrating to the Indians the ineptitude of the American army. Harmar burned several Indian villages near present-day Fort Wayne, including the main Miami village, but two separate skirmishes with the Indians resulted in the death of 180 Americans, seventy-three of whom were federal troops. Fearing the loss of more men, Harmar retreated to Fort Washington (now Cincinnati). Rather than intimidating the Indians, the expedition had the effect of advertising the incapacity of the American army and rousing the Indians even further against the United States.²

The Indians, victorious after their confrontation with Harmar's troops, were in no mood for peace and the people of Vincennes braced

¹Harmar to Hamtramck, July 15, 1790 and Hamtramck to Harmar, November 28, 1790, both in Thornbrough, *Outpost*, 236-7, 267; Horsman, *The Frontier*, 40.

²Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 283-84. For Harmar's account of the expedition, see Harmar to Hamtramck, November 29, 1790 in Thornbrough, *Outpost*, 268-69.

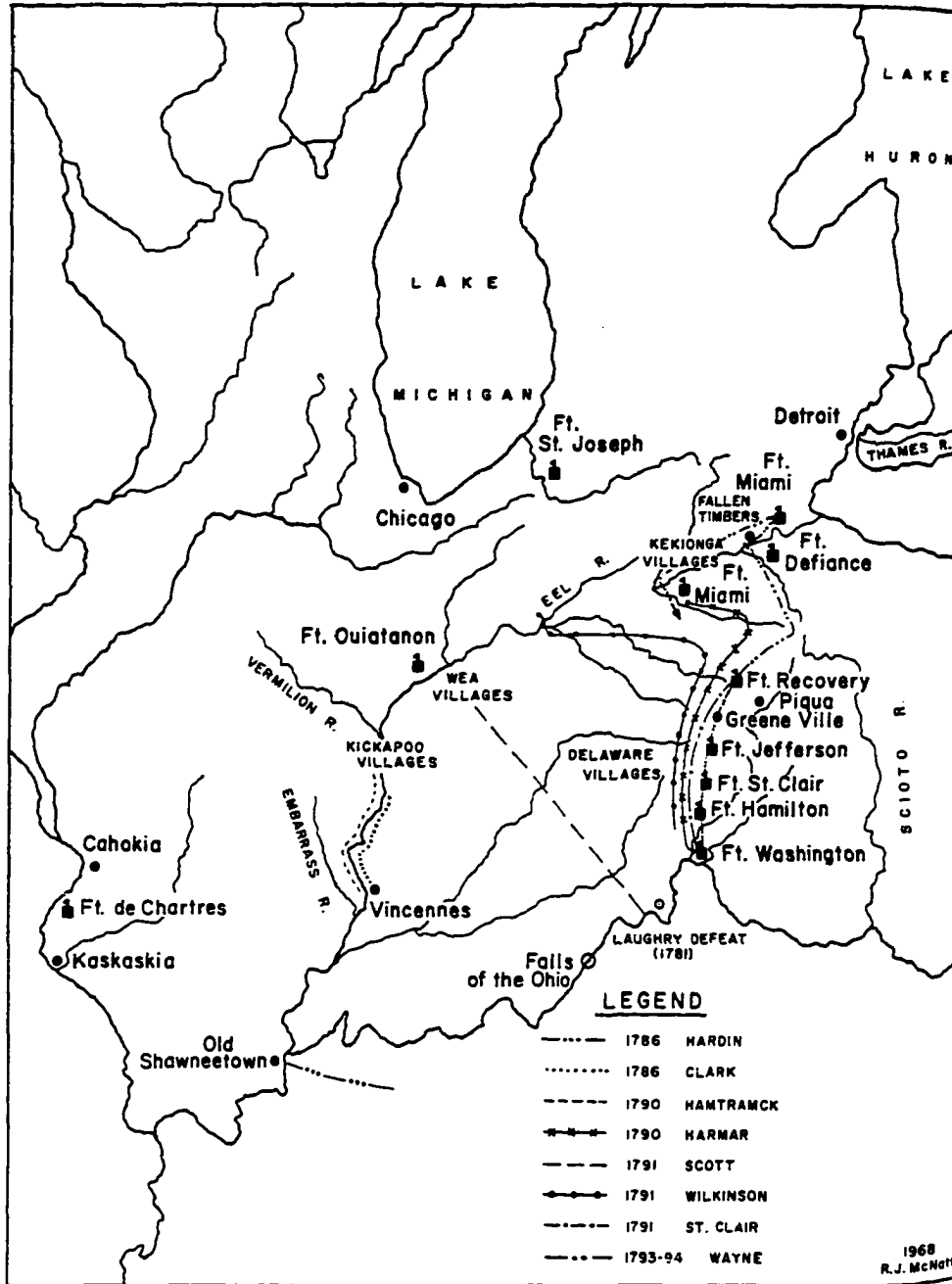
themselves for continued assaults. Along with other problems, there was an acute food shortage in and around Vincennes in 1790 owing to an early frost the previous fall [1789] which had totally destroyed the harvests of Vincennes and other Illinois French villages. With the village facing starvation, Hamtramck urgently requested that the American government send corn to prevent the people from starving to death. Food shortages in the village and irregular shipments of provisions to Fort Knox meant that the soldiers also had very little food. In November of 1790 Hamtramck reported that the garrison was completely without meat or flour, and his men had killed some of the villagers' cattle "to the great injury of the citizens and to my great mortification."¹

In 1791 both Indians and Americans continued their destructive attacks. Both sides destroyed crops, burnt homes, took scalps, and mercilessly tortured unlucky prisoners. The neutrality of the French sometimes spared them from the worst depredations, but on several occasions the French suffered because of their close association with one side or another. After burning the Indian village of Kethtipecanunk, the American officer in charge of the expedition reported that many of the inhabitants of the village were French "and lived in a state of civilization." Along with the crops, homes and property of the Indians, Americans burned the household goods, peltry, crops and houses of the French, "many of them well finished."²

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, March 17, 1790 and Hamtramck to Harmar, November 28, 1790, both in Thornbrough, Outpost, 223, 266-67.

²General Scott to Secretary of War Knox: Destruction of Ouiatanon, June 28, 1791, in Thornbrough and Riker, Readings, 65-68.

American Campaigns Against the Miami Confederacy 1783-1794



Map from Bert Anson, *The Miami Indians*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 102.

After the failure of Harmar's 1790 campaign, Secretary of War Henry Knox planned yet another assault against the western tribes. In the early summer of 1791 militia forces attacked Indian villages along the Wabash to keep those tribes from launching continued offensive attacks against the American frontier settlers. Meanwhile Governor St. Clair, now fifty-seven years old, made plans to lead a 3,000-man army in a decisive blow against the enemy. St. Clair's army assembled at Fort Washington and set out on September 17, 1791, more than two months after the scheduled departure date. Poor military training, insufficient provisions, bad weather, and low morale among the soldiers contributed to the disaster that befell St. Clair's army. On the night of November 3 St. Clair's forces set up camp on the cold, wet ground near the banks of the upper Wabash River. When an Indian force of one thousand warriors made a surprise morning attack, the Americans suffered tragic losses. Six hundred Americans were killed and another three hundred were wounded or missing. It was the worst defeat ever inflicted upon the United States by the Indians.¹

After St. Clair's defeat the United States once again attempted to make peace with the western tribes. Brigadier General Rufus Putnam invited the Wabash tribes to council with him at Vincennes in September of 1792. Six hundred and eighty-six Indians from several different tribes gathered in Vincennes, the only "neutral" meeting place in the Wabash country due to the presence of the town's large French population. When Putnam assured the Indians that the United States wanted no more of their land, a treaty which was signed by the assembled tribes that guaranteed Indian possession. It declared that "no part shall ever be

¹Horsman, The Frontier, 40; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 292-93.

taken from them, but by a fair purchase" and that the Indians "had a right to sell, and a right to refuse to sell." The treaty was rejected by the United States Senate since the United States' right of preemption was not guaranteed.¹

While Putnam's treaty had temporarily stabilized the lower Wabash region, the United States government had yet to reach peaceful agreements with many of the powerful western tribes. With the Indians holding the upper hand after defeating the United States army on several occasions, they insisted on the Ohio River serving as the boundary between Indian and white lands. When American negotiators met with western tribes in 1793 at the mouth of the Detroit River, the Indians explained that many of them had already been driven from their hunting grounds in the east. "We can retreat no farther, because the country behind hardly affords food for its present inhabitants." The Indians demanded that all Americans living north of the Ohio move back to the other side. The United States government, on the other hand, would not consider the Ohio as a boundary since it had already sold large tracts of land in southeastern Ohio which it believed had been rightfully purchased from the Indians in previous treaties. Few Americans were willing to give up on the future possession of rich farmlands in the west. Again, the two sides were at an impasse.²

Both sides prepared for war. Having learned some important lessons from past failures, Congress appointed General Anthony Wayne to carefully train a reorganized American army and to make preparations for a final assault against the western tribes. Major Hamtramck was promoted

¹Horsman, Expansion, 93-4.

²American State Papers, Indian Affairs, 1:356-57 as quoted in Horsman, The Frontier, 45.

to lieutenant colonel and called from Vincennes to take charge of a regiment of Wayne's army. General Wayne met the confederated tribes at the battle of Fallen Timbers on August 20, 1794, and administered a crushing defeat. In the wake of Wayne's victory, representatives of twelve tribes gathered in August of 1795 and signed the Treaty of Greenville which ceded what is now southern and eastern Ohio and a strip of southeastern Indiana, to the United States. The Indians also recognized American possession of sixteen posts or "reservations" within Indian territory, one of them being the village of Vincennes. Of the twelve interpreters or intermediaries serving at the treaty negotiations between the Americans and the Indians at Greenville, it is not surprising that nine of them were French-Canadians.¹

The Indian defeat at Greenville marked a turning point for the people of Vincennes and for the entire Old Northwest. In the short run, the French villagers in Vincennes rejoiced at the coming of peace-- the resumption of trade, the availability of goods at reasonable prices, freedom to travel safely, and the hoped-for return of friendly relations between them and their Indian neighbors. In the long-run however, the cessation of Indian hostilities set in motion a wave of westward settlement which dramatically affected the lives of Vincennes' French *habitants*. The numbers of Americans settling north of the Ohio increased markedly, often before the government gained clear title to the land from the Indians. Vincennes, however, was firmly possessed by the United States after the treaty of Greenville, so American pioneers considered it a particularly

¹Horsman, The Frontier, 48-9; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 300-304; Thornbrough, Readings, 82.

"safe" place to settle. Population growth in and around Vincennes was rapid, and the "Americanization" of the town was soon underway.

The years of turmoil during and after the American Revolution took a considerable toll on the French *habitants* at Vincennes. American soldiers impressed crops and domestic animals, and raiding Indians had stolen cattle and horses. A decade after the Revolution villagers still had not been repaid for the considerable supplies and loans they extended to Clark and his officers. The Kentucky militia under George Rogers Clark had helped themselves to what little the villagers retained after the Revolution. Hostility between the Indians and Americans in the post-war years created an unsafe environment for hunting, trapping, or trading--the economic mainstays of the the French and Indians. Economic problems worsened when Spanish policy shut off New Orleans as a commercial outlet. The danger of transporting goods to the Wabash country slowed the entry of merchandise to a trickle, making any item which managed to find its way to the shelves of Vincennes merchants very costly.

In addition to economic problems, the deterioration of long-time close relations between the French and Indians caused an additional measure of psychological stress. Escalating animosity between Americans and Indians not only created tension and bitterness between many Indians and the French, but it also made Vincennes an unsafe place to live. Prior to the coming of Americans, there is no evidence that Vincennes people feared an Indian attack, let alone experienced one. Good relations with neighboring Indians allowed the French to live with a feeling of security which ended abruptly when the first Americans settled nearby. Though the only actual Indian attack on Vincennes was diffused by the French leaders of Vincennes, rumors of attacks circulated with enough frequency

to keep the villagers perpetually fearful of losing their property and their lives. The French were not the only group of people preoccupied with personal safety during the post-war years, for both Indians and frontier Americans lived with the fear of imminent attacks. This environment of fear and violence which colored the frontier after the American Revolution was not part of Vincennes village life prior to the arrival of Americans.¹

Though the French highly valued their social and economic relations with their Indians neighbors and were unwilling to abandon those ties, they were also in no position to make enemies of the United States government. Their response was to try to remain on good terms with both sides. The Vincennes villagers did their best to act as a buffer between the two opposing enemies. Their neutral position often enabled the French to serve as arbitrators, messengers, interpreters, and peacekeepers between the Americans and regional Indian tribes. As red-white tensions heightened, however, the French found it increasingly difficult to stay neutral. Indians attacked French pirogues and even killed French villagers because of their close attachments to Americans. Americans accused the French of being traitors when the habitants interacted with "the enemy."

Within a decade after the arrival in Vincennes of the first Americans who accompanied George Rogers Clark in 1778, an existence marked by peace and plenty was transformed into one of fear, poverty, and violence. Rather than remain in a near-hopeless situation, many of the people in Vincennes and other Illinois villages (both French and American) simply

¹For rumors of attacks see Hamtramck to Wyllys, May 27, 1789; Hamtramck to Harmar, January 28, 1791 and Hamtramck to Harmar, May 9, 1791, all in Thornbrough, Outpost, 169-70, 276, 282. For people of Vincennes being immune to Indian attacks see McAvoy, Catholic Church, 40, and Hamtramck to Wyllys, May 26, 1789, Harmar Papers 10, WLCL as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 40.

packed up their belongings and moved across the river into Spanish territory. The "escape hatch" provided by the Spanish territory west of the Mississippi would not last much longer, but in the years following the American Revolution it was still a viable alternative for those Frenchmen who had lost all hope for a tolerable life under the American government. For those who remained in Vincennes, the coming decades brought difficult challenges as well as opportunities for social and economic advancement.¹

¹In a report from Governor St. Clair to the Secretary of State, the governor himself describes in detail how the French settlers of the Wabash-Illinois territory were plagued by "great distress ever since it fell under the american Dominion." St. Clair to Secretary of State, Feb. 10, 1791, in Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 323-24. The misfortunes the French experienced were also described by the French themselves in a Petition to Congress from Post Vincennes, July 26, 1787, in Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 58-60.

CHAPTER 9

AMERICAN LAWS AND LAWMAKERS

The establishment of American government in Vincennes and other western settlements was slow and ineffective in the twenty years following the American Revolution. The energy of the United States government was focused on its own serious financial difficulties, domestic turmoils in the east, the attempt to establish favorable trade connections with foreign powers in order to spur economic development, and creating an Indian policy that would open western lands without inciting a full-scale Indian war. Yet the French people in Vincennes and the other Illinois settlements knew little of most of these problems. To them it often seemed that the United States government had completely forgotten them. They did not know whether the lack of governmental response to the needs of the western settlers was because the United States government was unable or unwilling to act.

By the early 1800's, however, government representatives from the federal government finally began to arrive in Vincennes. Lawyers, judges, land surveyors, tax collectors, and even the governor of the Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison, settled in Vincennes and soon began to transform the political landscape of town. It was no easy task to create and enforce new laws for the vast Indiana territory, to maintain friendly relations with Indians who were increasingly pressured to sell their lands, and to govern a French population who often did not understand or simply

did not like many of the new regulations, taxes, and laws which so dramatically changed their lives. The establishment of government in Vincennes (and the west in general) was an arduous and complicated process both for the American officials who spearheaded the effort and for the French inhabitants who struggled to cope with the new political environment.¹

Though historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century described the United States' westward expansion as "manifest destiny," the actual process of extending American control over western lands and the people who lived there was slow, difficult, and uncertain in the decades after the American Revolution.² The blessings of democracy which George Rogers Clark promised the Vincennes villagers during the war were only empty, worthless promises in the years that followed. The fact that Congress seemed to ignore them and their problems inspired little confidence in the American government. The only "blessings" the French experienced under the new republic were increasing threats from angry Indians, a decline in the fur trade, and growing poverty among many of the region's inhabitants. It is ironic that although the Americans were the source of the difficulties experienced by the French, the local French had

¹For information on the establishment of American government in the Northwest Territory, see Beverley W. Bond, Jr., The Civilization of the Old Northwest. A Study of Political, Social, and Economic Development, 1788-1812, (New York, 1934). For government in Vincennes, see Barnhart and Riker, 272-79, 314-369; Knox County Court Records, (KCCR), Knox County Court House Archives Library, Vincennes, Indiana; Francis Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, 1801-1809 (Springfield: Illinois Historical Collections, Volume 21, 1930, reprinted by the Indiana Historical Bureau, 1931); Clarence Carter, (ed.), The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volumes 2 and 3.

²White, The Middle Ground, 416-21.

no choice but to look to the United States government to quell the Indian uprisings and reestablish order and stability in the west.

The hardships caused by the Indian wars and the lack of effective government in Vincennes made villagers yearn for a stronger American presence. At the same time, however, the French inhabitants realized that if the local American presence was strong enough to ensure physical safety on the frontier and to foster economic development, the cost to the French would be a loss of autonomy over their village, their economic activities, and possibly even their daily lives. Nonetheless, mere survival required such sacrifices.¹

While the French inhabitants of the Illinois country worried about what changes might be in store if the United States did effectively take control of the West, they had little reason to be optimistic that such control was forthcoming. Political developments in the West during the last half of the eighteenth century had taught them that imperial governments often did not succeed in establishing a strong governmental presence in the backcountry. Many inhabitants of the Illinois country had lived under the rule of France and Great Britain, and they had watched as the flags of both of these powerful countries were permanently lowered at western posts. There was absolutely no reason to think that the newly-created United States of America, wrought by serious financial problems and in many ways much less powerful than France or England, could establish permanent authority over the trans-Appalachian West. In addition, the continued presence of the British in the Great Lakes region, the

¹For evidence that the French sought relief for their sufferings through the establishment of American government and troops, see Colonel J.M.P. LeGras to Harmar, June 26, 1787, and Barthélemi Tardiveau to Harmar, August 6, 1787, in Thornbrough, Outpost, 24-5; also Thornbrough's introduction to Outpost, 8-16.

determination of many Indian tribes to own and control their lands, and the growing Spanish presence on the western banks of the Mississippi River less than two hundred miles from Vincennes created a situation which made all inhabitants of the western country view the political future of the west with uncertainty.¹

Though uncertain about future political development in the western country, the area's French inhabitants had learned from experience to adapt to changing political situations. For whatever length of time the Illinois French settlements might fall under the jurisdiction of the government of the United States, it was to that government that the French must look for the reestablishment of peaceful Indian relations, the confirmation of French land claims, and the establishment of effective civil government.

One of the chief concerns of the people of Vincennes was to gain Congressional recognition of their lands. Beginning in 1787 the inhabitants of Vincennes, Cahokia, and Kaskaskia began the task of seeking official legal titles to their land holdings. In Vincennes, the effort to petition Congress for clear land titles was spearheaded by two of the town's respected leaders, J.M.P. LeGras and Pierre Gamelin. In a petition dated July 26, 1787, the Vincennes French asked Congress not only to confirm their present land titles, but also to grant an additional five hundred acres to every male inhabitant. They also asked for an additional section of land, equal to the total of the five-hundred-acre grants, to be ceded to the

¹For accounts of the challenges faced by the United States government as it tried to extend its power over the trans-Appalachian west, see Horsman, Expansion and American Indian Policy 1783-1812; A.L. Burt, The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812.

"district as a community to be applied to public uses--such as building Courthouses, Jails, churches, bridges, repairing roads, &c." The total amount requested by the French inhabitants was thirty square miles or 520,000 acres.¹

In their petition to Congress, the French set forth many convincing arguments to support their request. They reminded Congress of their claim to a tract of land "two hundred and ten miles by seventy-two" (about eight million acres) which was long ago given them by the Piankashaw Indians. They rightly stated that French rights to this territory had long been recognized by their various Indian allies and the British, and that this claim was "as much (or indeed more) talked of among the Americans as among ourselves." Trusting in the benevolence and justice of Congress, the French surrendered their charter to the United States. In return, they hoped Congress would give them the much-smaller section of 520,000 acres of land they requested.²

If Congress hesitated to make grants to Vincennes citizens based on this grant, there were other compelling reasons to favor the petitioners' request. The French reminded Congress of their loyalty during the American Revolution and the hardships they had suffered during and after the war. "If, to principles of common justice, it were necessary to add motives of compassion," they wrote, "we might tell the Honorable Congress a long tale of uninterrupted distresses, oppressions, and calamities, heaped upon us with as unremitting and wanton a tyranny as borne by us with unparalleled patience." Once a happy and wealthy people, they had fallen

¹"Petition of the Inhabitants of Post Vincennes," July 26, 1787, in Carter, (ed.) Territorial Papers, 2:59.

²ibid.

prey to the "unquenchable rapacity of those [George Rogers Clark and his men] whom we had received as friends." In addition, the French attachment to the United States subjected them to the enmity of Indians who "since time immemorial, called us their fathers and friends." They had exhausted their remaining resources to "make large presents to the Indians in order to stop their war-parties" and further alienated the Indians by refusing to hand over Americans whom the Indians deemed guilty of violent crimes.¹

The French knew Congress would wonder why the local people desired large tracts of land when, in the past, they had been content with small agricultural plots. In their petition the French inhabitants explained that in the past their attachment to the Indian trade had prevented them from engaging in widescale agriculture. They therefore did not take advantage of the willingness of their sovereigns and governors to grant large tracts of land. It did not make sense for them to lay claim to land which they did not intend to develop. Immediately after the arrival of the first Americans, however, the French quickly realized the value of the land around them. Only after the Americans arrived did the French develop both the need and the desire to expand their meager land holdings.² In a second petition to Congress from the Illinois French settlers, dated September 15, 1787, the French demonstrated a realization of the negative effect American settlement would have on their fur trade. They knew that in the future, economic survival would be difficult without land.

¹ibid., 60.

²ibid., 59.

Soon, the industrious Americans will convert our forests into flourishing plantations: their furrows will reach to the fences of our gardens: our peltry-trade, already much decayed, must be entirely annihilated by the rapid march of husbandry, the retreat of the Indian nations, & the flight of the wild game. . . we do not wish to check, but to be permitted to partake with our neighbours & friends, the advantages of encouraged activity & industry.¹

Realizing that if Congress was willing to make the grants being requested that few of the French citizens could afford to have the land surveyed or to pay taxes on the land, another petition was sent to Congress asking that the surveyors' fees be paid by Congress and that the land be exempted from taxation "for as long as it will please Congress to order it." They asked this because of the extreme poverty of many inhabitants which was caused by Americans seizing French animals and supplies during the Revolution and the decline in the fur trade during the post-Revolutionary Indian wars.²

The petitions of the Illinois French arrived at the Confederation Congress at a time when members were embroiled in discussions over the new Constitution. The French petitioners were fully aware that if the Confederation Congress did not grant their request, or simply postponed a decision, the whole process of petitioning for land might have to begin anew under a future Congress if the Constitution was ratified. The people of Vincennes and the other Illinois villages were fortunate that Congress realized the importance of the western French inhabitants to American security interests in the West. Both Spain and Great Britain remained

¹"Petition to Congress from the Illinois Country," Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 2: 72-3.

²"Explanatory Memorial from Post Vincennes and the Illinois Country," February 28, 1788, in Carter, Territorial Papers, 2: 92-94.

contenders for profits and power in the western country. The lack of government and the economic hardships in Vincennes and the other French villages since the Revolution had caused many French inhabitants to leave their homes and move across the Mississippi River to Spanish territory or to New Orleans. It was no secret that Spain actively recruited new settlers to strengthen her position vis-a-vis her new American neighbor. If the United States was to protect her western interests against both Spanish and British aggression, it was necessary to maintain the loyalty of the people living there.¹

On August 29, 1788, Congress passed a resolution "that measures be taken" to confirm the titles and possessions of Vincennes' French inhabitants. Initially, Congress declared that the cost of surveying lands which had been granted to the French under previous government would be born by the inhabitants themselves. This ruling was eventually repealed by another congressional act in 1793. Concerning the French request for five hundred additional acres to every male inhabitant regardless of age, Congress gave four hundred acres to every head of family. The surveying of these donation lands would be paid "at the public expence." The request for setting aside a portion of land equal to the amount donated to individuals to be used for public purposes was ignored. However, the old Vincennes Commons, which was used by the community as a common ground for grazing cattle, was given to the village in a later act. No exemption from taxation was allowed.²

Though most western lands could not be given away or sold until Indian title was cleared, this was not a problem in Vincennes because of

¹Leonard Lux, Donation Lands, 443-444.

²ibid., 446.

the large cession of land which the Piankashaws had long ago made to the French.¹ Thus, the people of Vincennes were relieved that they had retained possession of old lands and were generally satisfied with the 400-acre donation tracts Congress had allowed. On the same day that Congress passed the resolution concerning lands in Vincennes, it instructed General Arthur St. Clair, the newly-appointed governor of the Northwest Territory, to travel to the Illinois country to confirm land claims and make the donations to the French inhabitants. The urgent business of dealing with Indian uprisings and the responsibilities of governing the vast Northwest Territory delayed the governor's trip to the Illinois villages nearly a year and a half. Though St. Clair made a brief visit to Kaskaskia in March of 1790, his visit was cut short because of the impending Indian war. He sent Winthrop Sargent, the Secretary of the Territory, to Vincennes to carry out Congress' resolutions.²

After six weeks in Vincennes, Sargent reported that 143 persons had proved themselves household heads on or before 1783. A tract of land had been laid out for them east of the village. The task of confirming the French in their possessions was made difficult because only one person in twenty could produce documentation proving their title. Though the French had never had a problem with their casual distribution of land, Sargent and land officials who followed him were perplexed by the lack of official land deeds and the extremely vague descriptions of land locations. Examples of the way that the French described their old possessions are as follows:

¹The Indians recognized the legitimacy of this claim at the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 and in a later treaty at Fort Wayne in 1803. Lux, Donation Lands, 47.

²Lux, Donation Lands, 447-49; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 277-78.

Francis Mallet. A piece of land, two acres in front and usual depth, by the meadow of the Big Marsh. A lot one hundred and fifty by one hundred and twenty feet situated above the fort.

Honore Danis. A lot of twenty-five toises, on which is his house. Two acres of land in front by the usual depth, near the little river; one side to St. Aubin, and the other to Bourger.¹

The problem of loose and inefficient record-keeping was compounded by some cases of fraud and forgery. In addition, the settlement of land claims was complicated by land grants which were made by the Vincennes Court, operating under the authority vested in it by Lieutenant John Todd of Virginia during the Revolution. From 1778 until Sargent arrived to check the practice in 1790, J.M.P. LeGras and other members of the Court had granted 400 acres to any American immigrant who had applied for land. They had also granted each other sizeable tracts. When Sargent asked the Court by what authority its members presumed to make land grants, they replied ". . . the commandants have always appeared to be vested with the powers to give lands."² While Sargent considered these grants as having been illegally made, he urged Congress to consider upholding some of the Court grants which were "under considerable cultivation and improvement" and which had been developed "at much expense." Congress eventually confirmed possession of land which had been cultivated and improved.³

¹These examples are typical of descriptions of the 234 farms and town lots that Sargent confirmed in 1790. Lux, Donation Lands, 450.

²American State Papers, Public Lands, 1:16 as quoted in Lux, Donation Lands, 440.

³Lux, Donation Lands, 453n. In response to reports from both Sargent and St. Clair, Congress passed an act on March 3, 1791, which confirmed old titles and granted four hundred acres to household heads who were living at Vincennes or any other settlements in the Illinois country on or before 1783. Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 2: 339-42.

Sargent was forced to leave Vincennes and return to the Ohio country in 1791 and he did not return until 1797. The process of confirming individuals in their claims was complicated by governmental uncertainty concerning just who had the power to grant patents for the lands. Not until 1807 did Congress pass an act which set a procedure for issuing patents for lands donated by Congress. During these years investigations in Vincennes continued in an effort to clarify and sort out claims. The lands were surveyed and resurveyed, the local people were questioned and requestioned, commissioners examined and re-examined the situation, and still no resolution was reached.¹

As year after year passed and the problem of the donation lands dragged on, the French villagers began to lose hope that they would ever see the 400 acres they had been promised. A report from John Badollet, the register of public lands who arrived in Vincennes in 1804, to Congress in 1806 revealed that the vast majority of the donation tracts were no longer in the hands of the original French claimants or their heirs. Land speculators, most of them American, had bought the French land claims. Only seven of the 246 heads of families who qualified to receive donation lands were still in possession of their claims. Concerning the land owned by the French prior to the arrival of Americans (lands granted during the French or British period), 313 of the 415 tracts which were confirmed were also sold prior to 1804. All other Frenchmen had sold their claims to Americans or to a small number of wealthy French residents. Among the Americans who profited from speculating in the donation claims were Henry Vanderburgh, William McIntosh, and the governor of the Indiana

¹Lux, Donation Lands, 440, 452-58; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 278-79.

Territory, William Henry Harrison. No one, however, purchased more claims than the Italian-born French trader, Colonel Francis Vigo. Vigo purchased the rights to at least 101 of the 400-acre donation tracts. He, like other speculators, paid about \$50.00 for each 400-acre tract.¹

Long before the donation land situation was settled, speculators began selling the claims to the 400-acre donation plots to American newcomers at a handsome profit. French land became a source of land for American settlers long before the government opened land sales in the area. Only the small farms long cultivated by the French in the prairies near the town remained in French hands by the time Congress made a final confirmation of donation lands in Vincennes on March 3, 1807.²

The wholesale transfer of land from the local French to Americans and a handful of prosperous French individuals is the story of lost opportunity for the majority of French people in Vincennes. Although the petitions sent from Vincennes residents to Congress in 1787 and 1788 demonstrated an understanding of the future importance of agriculture, it is likely that only the prominent citizens in Vincennes (undoubtedly those who penned the petition) fully realized the value and importance of land in the new American economic system. The Vincennes French were often ridiculed by Americans for their willingness to part with their land claims for a fraction of their worth. The unfortunate truth was that economic ruin left many of the French villagers with little choice.

¹Lux, Donation Lands, 470-72. Notes and documents relating to Vigo's land transactions are among his papers in the Harrison House, Vincennes, Indiana. Deeds and conveyances, made out on small slips of paper, are also among the Vigo Papers, WSML.

²Lux, Donation Lands, 469-75. "An Act Confirming Land Claims in Vincennes District," March 3, 1807 in Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 7:433-35.

The poverty of many townspeople drove many to sell their land claims for whatever they could get. The desperate need for food, clothing, and other necessities were more important than the possibility that at some future date Congress might convey the land it promised. Some villagers placed little value on the donations because of a lack of confidence in the United States to survive or to maintain control of the west. Others sold their 400-acre claims because they had no intention of adapting to a completely agricultural lifestyle. Most of the donation tracts were located so far from Vincennes that the villagers would have had to move from town in order to farm their new lands, much of which was covered with heavy forests. For most of the French in Vincennes, leaving friends and relatives and giving up the benefits of town living was simply out of the question. Thus, in spite of congressional willingness to compensate the French for their sufferings during the period of American conquest, most Frenchmen never possessed the land which was granted. Instead, the existence of a large tract of land, free of Indian possession and promised to the French, merely spurred American immigration to the area where land could be purchased prior to government land sales. In 1787, General Josiah Harmar reported that approximately 400 Americans were living in the vicinity of Vincennes. He estimated that the French population at that time was about 900.¹

The slowness and inefficiency which hampered efforts to settle French land claims was characteristic of the United States government's inability to cope with problems in the west during the 1780's and 1790's. The process of extending American rule over the inhabitants of the west

¹Somes, Old Vincennes, 97-8; Lux, Donation Lands, 439, 474.

made little progress in the decade after Congress passed the Ordinance of 1787, or Northwest Ordinance, which established guidelines for governing the Northwest Territory. Indian problems occupied most of the time and energy of the first governor of the Northwest Territory, Arthur St. Clair and his second-in-command, Secretary Winthrop Sargent. The French were often frustrated by the slow response of the national government to their problems, but during the late-1780's and 1790's the people of Vincennes began to experience the gradual effects of the establishment of American law and government. Progress remained slow, however, and these years served as a kind of "training period," for the French to adapt to new American laws and lawmakers.

In 1787 Major John Hamtramck was sent to Vincennes to provide military protection for the inhabitants and to foster good relations with local tribes. Local inhabitants, French and American alike, hoped that he would improve the functioning of local government. The legal framework under which the government was operating at the time had been organized in 1779 by Lieutenant John Todd of Virginia when he was stationed at Vincennes during the American Revolution. That government had been authorized for two years only and therefore was, from a legal standpoint, long since defunct.¹

Despite frustrations with the local court system, there were no American officials in the Illinois who could legally alter the situation from 1779 until 1787 when Hamtramck arrived. In a letter written by Hamtramck soon after his arrival in Vincennes, he commented that "Our civil administration has been and is in great confusion. Many people are

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 214-15.

displeased with the magistrates." He hoped that Congress would soon establish some mode of government "for I never saw so injudicious administration."¹

The people of Vincennes complained that the court which had operated in Vincennes since Todd's departure was dominated by the LeGras and Gamelin families. J.M.P. LeGras and Pierre Gamelin apparently charged fees for their services which were considerably higher than the inhabitants wanted to pay.² To remedy the situation, Major Hamtramck drew up a set of regulations for a new judicial system. He dissolved the previous court and ordered five new justices to be elected by the people. Elections were held in May of 1788, and neither LeGras nor Gamelin were among the three Americans and two French who were elected as new magistrates.³ Hamtramck also established a scale of reasonable fees for legal services and court costs. Though most of Hamtramck's regulations were not noticeably different from previous practices, Hamtramck did make one important change in the way court costs were collected. In his "Regulations for the Court of Post Vincennes," Hamtramck described the French custom whereby "the court made the one who was the most able pay the fees of the court whether he lost or no." This made little sense to Hamtramck who promptly remedied the situation by proclaiming that "All expences of the court to be paid by the person that is cast [i.e. the person who loses the case]."⁴

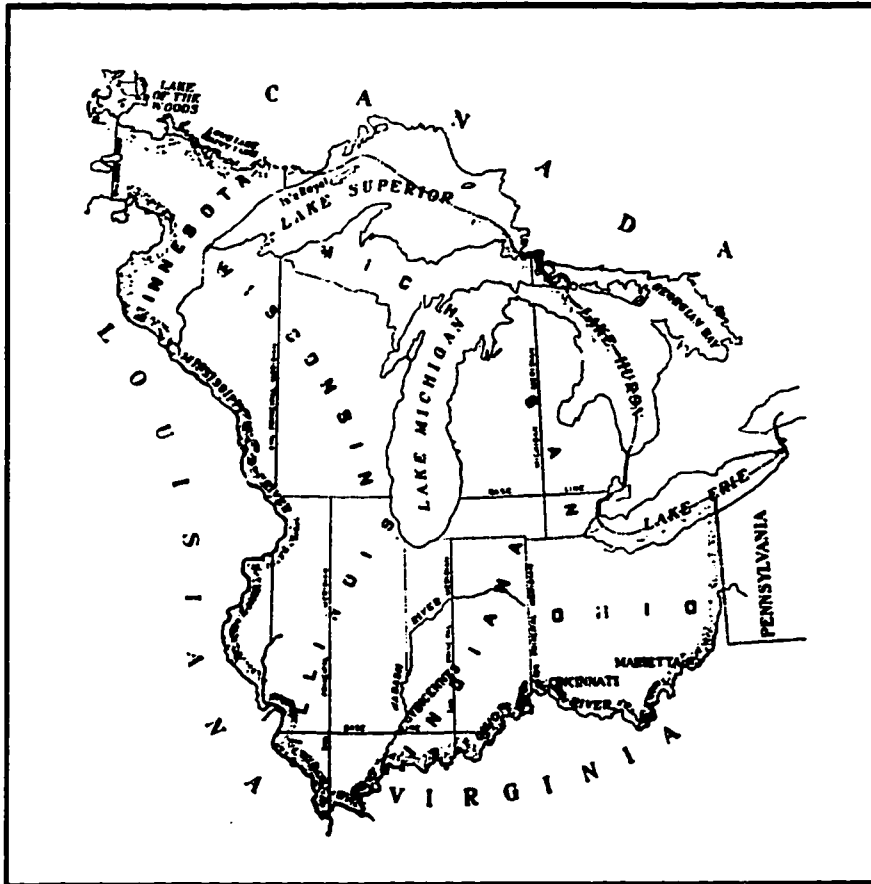
¹Hamtramck to Harmar, November 3, 1787, in Thornbrough, (ed.), Outpost, 44.

²Hamtramck to Harmar, Nov. 3, 1787 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 45.

³Hamtramck to Harmar, May 21, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 79.

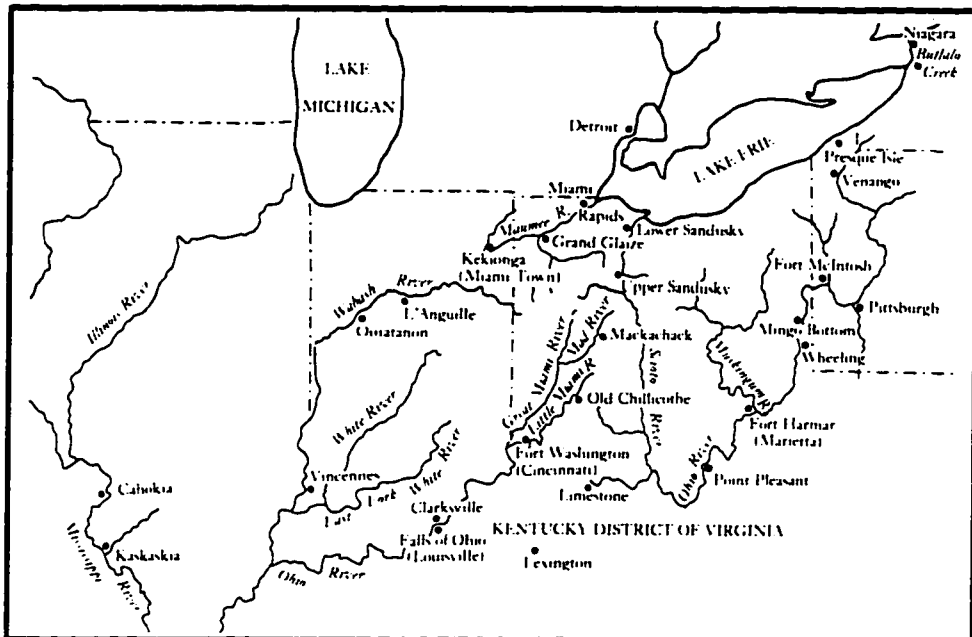
⁴"Regulations for the Court of Post Vincennes," April 5, 1788 in Thornbrough, Outpost, 74-5.

The Northwest Territory



Map from John Barnhart and Dorothy Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & The Indiana Historical Society, 1971).

The Old Northwest Region, 1783-90



Map from Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

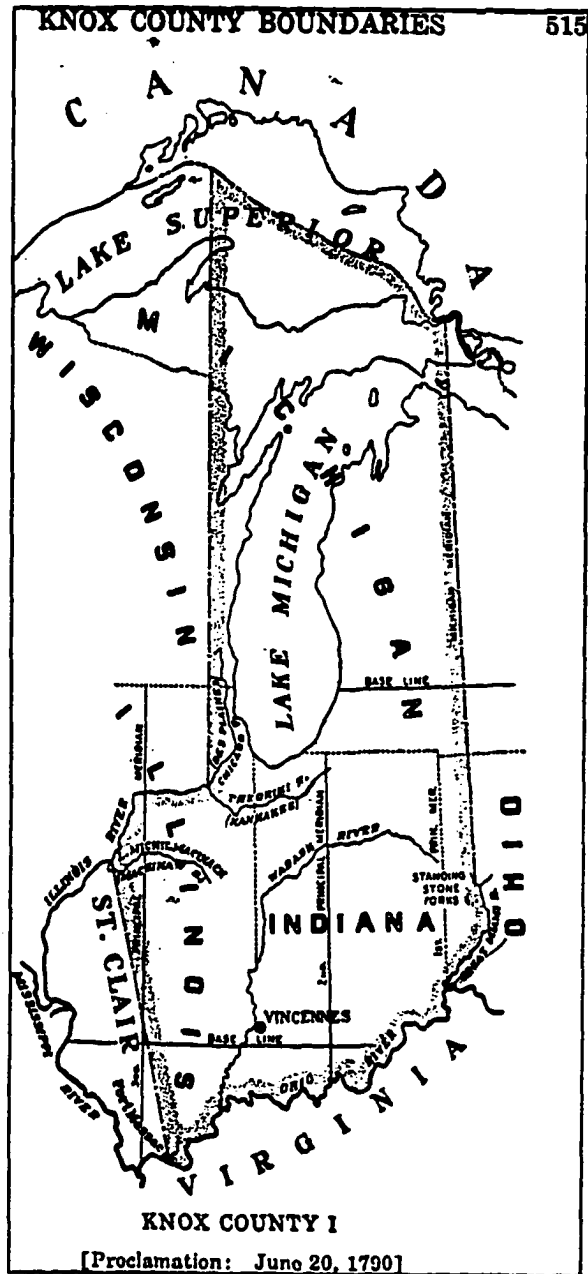
Though Hamtramck had stabilized the political situation in Vincennes, the people were eager to meet the man who was appointed as their governor. By 1788 the inhabitants of Vincennes and the other Illinois villages were well aware of the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, and they hoped that Governor St. Clair, with support from the United States government, could resolve the Indian problems and bring economic prosperity to their region. On several occasions reports reached Vincennes that St. Clair would soon visit, but they proved to be only rumors. In August of 1789, Hamtramck wrote to General Harmar, "If his Excellency does not come this year. . . most people will go away to the Spaniards, for they begin to think that there is no such Man as a Governor."¹ Finally, in March of 1790, Governor St. Clair traveled to Kaskaskia and shortly thereafter Winthrop Sargent, as acting-governor, traveled to Vincennes to reorganize local government. This relieved Hamtramck from the responsibilities of overseeing civil government.²

During the two months that Sargent stayed in Vincennes in the summer of 1790, he organized Knox County with Vincennes as the county seat. The county was much larger than the entire present state of Indiana. Sargent appointed militia officers and county officials, selecting both French and Americans. Francis Vigo, the Italian-born local trader who had provided critical aid to George Rogers Clark, was named major of the militia. All five captains of the militia were French, and three of four lieutenants were French as well. Sargent organized two different court systems. The court of common pleas heard civil cases, and the court of

¹Hamtramck to Harmar, August 14, 1789 in Harmar Papers, Clements Library as quoted in Bald, "Hamtramck," 343.

²Bald, "Hamtramck," 344; Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 274.

Knox County, Organized in 1790



In July of 1790 Knox County was established. It extended from present day Ohio halfway across Illinois, and from the Ohio River to the Canadian border. Map appeared in Richard Day, *Vincennes: A Pictorial History*, (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, Inc., 1988).

quarter sessions tried criminal cases and acted as the local administrative body. Since few of the local people qualified for the office of judge, the same men were often appointed to serve in both courts. The first judges of the court of common pleas were Pierre Gamelin, Louis Edeline, and James Johnson. Serving as judges in the court of general quarter sessions were Antoine and Paul Gamelin, and Francis Bosseron.¹

In addition to hearing civil and criminal court cases, county courts also exerted control over the local economy by granting licenses and special monopoly privileges and by setting rates for taverns, ferries, and other economic activities. Other services provided by county government included the care of paupers, registration of stock markings, and maintaining public order. This created a demand for an increasing number of bureaucrats which included a sheriff, court clerk, recorder, coroner, treasurer, and auditor. Revenue was needed to support these officials and make improvements in public facilities. The demand for taxes created a new group of government functionaries such as appraisers, collectors and listers. Though tax collectors were unpopular in America throughout its history, these men were particularly despised in French Illinois where the people had never before been required to pay taxes.²

In addition to setting up county governments, appointing suitable local officials, and organizing militias, St. Clair and the three territorial judges were responsible for creating a code of laws for the Northwest

¹Carter, Territorial Papers, 3:316; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 274. The original commission that Francis Bosseron received from Winthrop Sargent is among the Lasselie Papers. See "Francis Bussero's Commission for Justice," July 5, 1790. The records of the early Knox County courts are in the Knox County Courthouse Records Library at Vincennes. The majority of cases presented to the court of common pleas were for the collection of debts.

²Malcolm J. Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, (New York, 1978), 119.

Territory. According to congressional instructions, they were permitted only to borrow existing laws from other state constitutions. In reality, this was not always practical and thus the directive was often ignored. Within a few months of St. Clair's arrival in Marietta, the first law code for the territory was completed. The Code of 1788 created the structure for county governments and set forth the laws which would bring order, stability, and "civilization" to the frontier.¹

The section on crimes and punishments was the longest and most detailed part of the Code of 1788. It addressed crimes most feared on the frontier: treason, murder, manslaughter, arson, burglary, and "Riots and unlawful Assemblies." Lesser offenses included perjury, forgery, and assault and battery. Since prisons were almost nonexistent and frontier inhabitants had no desire to support prisoners for long periods, punishment for crimes included death (for treason and murder), public flogging, confinement in the stocks, and fines. In addition to laws which protected people and property, St. Clair and his three territorial judges also passed laws which were necessary to create a moral society in the west. Fines, whippings, and time in the stocks were punishments for disobedient children or servants, drunkards, and those who broke the Sabbath. It was against the law to use "Improper and Profane Language," defined as "idle, vain and obscene conversation, profane cursing and swearing." And to further restrain frontier inhabitants, gambling of any kind was outlawed, including betting "at cards, dice-tables, tennis-bowls, or other games."

¹Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 71-3. For St. Clair and his judges ignoring Congressional directive, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 276; Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, cvi-cviii. Governor St. Clair made the comment in 1794 that the Judges did not have copies of the laws of the various states, and he had only those of Pennsylvania.

Tavern keepers could not even keep "any billiard, faro, E.O hazard, or other gaming tables," by which money or property might be "betted, won or lost." Though the transgressions named were closely tied to the realities of life on the frontier, the values supported by these laws were clearly those of established society--or at least the more genteel elements of eastern "civilized" society. Fortunately for the frontier inhabitants, these laws were almost never enforced.¹

Court records from Vincennes which are now housed at the Knox County Courthouse Records Library make it clear that the French inhabitants were less violent and more law-abiding than their American neighbors. The French appeared in court most often to collect debts, file charges of slander, or to enforce the terms of a business agreement, but rarely did the French commit violent crimes. The strong communal ethos of the French *habitants* in Vincennes and the other Illinois villages, evident in the way they settled in nuclear villages and worked side-by-side tilling land in common fields, created strong bonds between the villagers and a high degree of social cohesion. Though individual traders experienced much freedom during their travels, when they returned to midwestern villages, they experienced the same pressures as the other habitants to subordinate personal freedom to the collective good. This produced a French population which was much more law-abiding and less violent than the American settlers. Of the twenty-one murders which appear in the General Court Records of the Indiana Territory from 1791 to 1816, only

¹Theodore Calvin Pease, (ed.), The Laws of the Northwest Territory, 1788-1800 (Springfield, 1925)13-21, 31; Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 74-5.

one French man, Laurence Bazadone, was even accused of a murder. Cases of violent assault involving a French citizen were also rare.¹

The following examples demonstrate the types of offenses which were common among the French. On August 2, 1796, René Godier was hauled into court because of repeatedly disturbing the peace and behaving badly towards his wife. Joseph Bayard was fined \$50 for selling wine contrary to the laws of the state on August 2, 1797. A man and woman (though un-named they were likely French) were brought to court on February 4, 1800 under an "indictness for lewdness." Though accused of "lewdness and fornication," a jury found the couple not guilty. It is likely that they were living together without having been officially married because the town was so often without a priest.²

In Vincennes and all other French communities in the west, violent criminal activity increased considerably with the coming of Americans. Cases of assault and battery, rare among the French, were quite common among Americans. For example, on November 7, 1797 Gideon Pendleton, lawyer and tax collector, accused Robert Buntin of beating him on the streets of Vincennes without provocation. A short time later Pendleton himself was accused of being a horse thief. Court records indicate that Americans were also much more prone to stealing than were the French.³

¹General Court Records of the Indiana Territory, 1791-1816, Indiana State Library, Genealogy Division. For low crime rate and communal mindedness of the Illinois French, see Ekberg, "Agriculture, *Mentalités*, and Violence on the Illinois Frontier," 108-12.

²Minute Book of the Court of General Quarter Sessions, 1796-1800, KCCR. In the absence of a priest, some couples made a public declaration of their intent to live as a married couple in church, a practice which was condoned by the local populace. To priests who arrived later, or perhaps to American officials, these couples were not considered man and wife.

³Minute Book of the Court of General Quarter Sessions, 1796-1800, KCCR. For Pendleton being accused as a horse thief, see July 26, 1797.

The difference in French and American character and violent behavior applied to women as well as men. Few court cases in early Vincennes involved women, but when they did, it was usually a dispute between two French women, two American women, or a woman and her spouse. As the following examples demonstrate, French women might attack each other with words, but American women attacked each other with anything they could put their hands on.

In 1814 Therese Desprès and her husband accused Victoire Drouet dit Richardville of calling Therese a "Putain verreux et un volleuses des Cochons" which was translated in the official plea as "a worm-eaten whore and a Hog thief." Therese and her lawyer claimed that Victoire knew that in truth Therese was a "chaste & virtuous women and a good, true and honest citizen of the United States." According to the accusation, Victoire had contrived

in her depraved heart and wickedly and maliciously intending to defame, slander, and injure the said Therese and to deprive her of the Love and confidence of her husband, the respect and affection of her children, and her good name, credit & reputation. . . and to bring her into scandal, contempt and reproach among all her neighbors & friends. . . ¹

This case is typical of those among the French. When provoked to anger, they expressed that anger with words rather than physical violence. Whenever possible, they preferred to settle their differences outside of the legal sysem altogether. In contrast, Americans--male and female--were more likely to end their disputes with physical violence and were quick to turn to the courts to resolve differences. In June of 1815 two American women were involved in a violent confrontation on the streets of

¹File 1347, Box 20 and File 1473-2, Box 23, KCCR.

Vincennes. Dicie Spradley accused Patsey Scott of attacking her with "fists, hands, feet, leaves, and sticks." Patsey proceeded to "beat, wound, and maltreat" Dicie so that "her life was dispaired of. . ." Dicie's life was not so endangered, however, to prevent her from appearing in court with her lawyer a short while after the incident occurred.¹

Like Europeans throughout the Mississippi Valley, the local French inhabitants generally regarded Americans as hot-headed ruffians who had little regard for the law.² It is likely, however, that with judges, a sheriff, and American troops stationed in Vincennes, the people there were not as vulnerable to lawlessness and disorder as was often the case in other frontier towns. This cut down on criminal offenses within the French and American populations in Vincennes as well as between French and American inhabitants.

The presence of courts in Vincennes certainly gave the local inhabitants easier access to the legal system than was possible for people who lived several hundred miles away. The intricate blueprint for society that St. Clair carefully laid out in his long and complex legal codes in 1788 and 1795 did not, however, work as smoothly in reality as it did on paper. For example, the first Knox county court nominated eighteen men over four years to the post of tax collector before collecting any revenue from county levies.³ The vastness of the Northwest Territory and the long distances between the sparse frontier settlements posed one of the most serious problems for St. Clair and later territorial governors. It was difficult to disseminate a uniform body of law throughout such a broad

¹Ibid., File 1489, Box 23.

²Ekberg, "Agriculture, *Mentalités*, and Violence," 114.

³Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 119.

area, to enforce the collection of taxes, and equally as difficult to convene courts in one spot which were supposed to meet the needs of a widely dispersed populace. Prior to the Treaty of Greenville (1795), large numbers of hostile Indians made travel unsafe, retarded immigration, and thwarted St. Clair's attempts to bring order to the frontier. In the spring of 1792, Major Hamtramck at Vincennes wrote to Secretary of War Henry Knox that "Civil Law is an admirable institution any where except on a frontier situated in the center of an Indian Country and in a time of War."¹

In addition to St. Clair's other problems, his efforts at bringing law and government to the West were complicated by the presence of the French villages which were scattered along the Great Lakes and in the Illinois country. Differences in language and legal institutions made it difficult for the French inhabitants to understand or accept the new American laws and legal procedures. The French worried that the introduction of lawyers and trials by jury would make judicial decisions time-consuming and costly. Louis Fortin, a Vincennes merchant, expressed French concerns over the coming of American law when he wrote that the Americans would "bring with them, in a free and peaceful country, the discord and disunion of families through lawsuits and taxation. Lawyers, sheriffs, and constables will com crowding in here." He went on to say that the American lawyers, dressed in their "shabby motheaten black suits" and carrying "a little green satchel filled with useless old papers" would not be welcome among the French.²

¹Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 77-80; For Hamtramck's quote, see Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 2:381.

²Louis Fortin to Antoine Marechal, July 25, 1803, Lasselle Papers.

Governor St. Clair hardly knew where to begin the task of imposing American government over a foreign population. Other American lawmakers also worried about how to accomplish such a difficult task. During his first trip to the west in 1790 Judge John Cleves Symmes, one of the first judges of the Northwest Territory, wrote:

We have an arduous task before us to form the government & put the laws in operation here--from appearances the people will not relish a free government, they say our laws are too complex, not to be understood, and tedious in their operation--the command or order of the Military commandant is better law and speedier justice for them & what they prefer to all the legal systems found in Littleton and Blackstone. it is a language which they say they can understand, it is cheap and expeditious & they wish for no other. . .¹

Though Cleves and St. Clair both knew that it would take time for the French to adapt to American laws, the initial problem was to make the laws known to them. Aside from the problem of having all laws translated into French, Governor St. Clair simply did not know how to make any of the western inhabitants aware of the laws which governed them. The laws were read in the courts, but few attended. Often the magistrates themselves were unfamiliar with laws since Secretary Winthrop was too busy to make enough copies to distribute to the judges in all the counties. St. Clair recognized the need to print territorial laws in English and French and have them widely disseminated, but the Governor had neither the time nor money to accomplish such a task.² St. Clair was never able to

¹John Cleves Symmes to Robert Morris, June 22, 1790, in Bond, John Cleves Symmes, 290.

²Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, cxiii. Indiana Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison also complained of the problems which arise because there is no one to print laws and the citizens do not know the laws. Harrison to Secretary of War, July 15, 1790 in Lasselle Papers.

surmount the problems which were created by the vast size of the territory and the cultural diversity of the French villages. Thus, the Northwest Ordinance was never very effective in Vincennes or the rest of the Illinois country.¹

One indicator of the gradual shift to American government in Vincennes during the 1790's was the language used on official government documents over the course of this decade. Early in the 1790's, almost all official documents were written in French. After 1795, an increasing number of them were in English.² By 1801, nearly all were in English. Fortunately, there were men like Henry Vanderburgh, John Rice Jones, Pierre Gamelin and Antoine Marechal who were quite proficient in French and in English. Their services as a translator or interpreter were regularly sought by local residents (French and American), lawyers, surveyors, land officers, and other officials.³ When a French villager appeared in court, drew up a will, bought or sold land, or was involved in any type of legal action, an interpreter or translator was necessary. There were a few wealthy traders in town who had learned to read and write in English by the 1790's, but their number was small.⁴

¹Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 80; Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, ccxxiii-ccxxv.

²For the transition of government documents (land deeds, licenses, estate inventories) written in French to English, see Lasselle Papers for the decade of the 1790's.

³The Lasselle Papers contains a bill of accounts for services Antoine Marechal performed for General William Johnston (local judge) and shows entries for translating French marriage contracts, a "Receipt Certificate of Ducharme in favour of the Deceased Mrs. Bosseron," and other documents. Other documents in the Lasselle Papers for the period 1790-1805 show Vanderburgh and Gamelin translating documents from one language to another. The Vincennes lawyer John Rice Jones, a Welshman, was fluent in both French and Spanish. He often translated documents and represented French clients in legal affairs. Mason, (ed.), Early Chicago, 248-49.

⁴Correspondence in the Lasselle Papers shows that by 1790, several local traders were receiving letters in English.

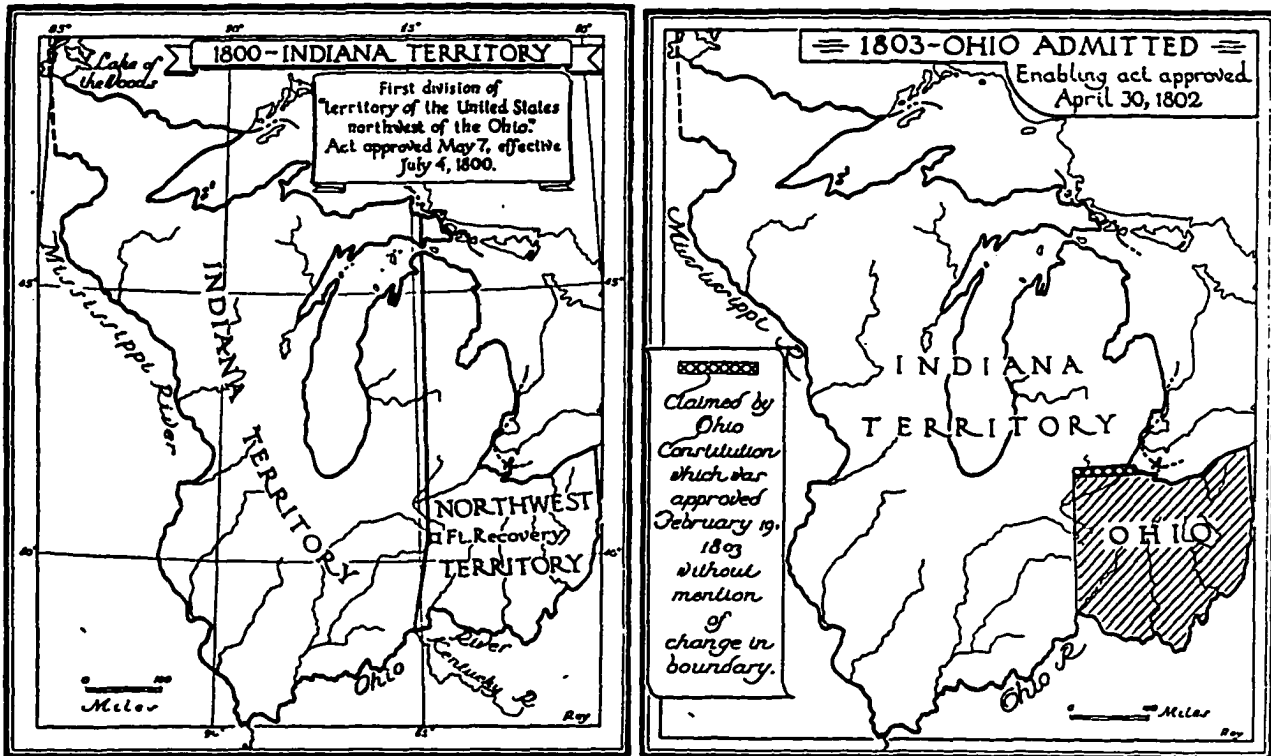
The slow rate of change in civil government which occurred in Vincennes during the 1790's stood in stark contrast to the very rapid changes which took place during the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1801 Vincennes became one of the main centers for government in the west when it was designated as the capitol of the Indiana Territory (which included all of the Northwest Territory except Ohio). From that year onward, a steady stream of American judges, surveyors, land registrars, Indian agents, and even Governor William Henry Harrison himself took up residence in Vincennes. The local French inhabitants had no choice but to begin learning the new laws and government procedures which were still quite foreign to them.

Whereas the French figured prominently among the government appointments made in the early 1790's, few of the local French held positions of authority after 1800.¹ There are several reasons for the declining political role played by the French in Vincennes. Of prime importance was the rapid influx of Americans, the death of several key French leaders in Vincennes, and the arrival of Governor William Henry Harrison and a large entourage of American governmental officials.

Motivated by the practical difficulties of governing so vast a territory as covered by the Northwest Territory and by the near-readiness of Ohio's population for statehood, Congress passed a bill to divide the Northwest Territory on May 7, 1800. Ohio would remain a territory for only three additional years before becoming a state in 1803. After the congressional division, the lands which were separated from Ohio became known as the Indiana Territory. The new territory contained a population numbering

¹Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, ccxix-ccxx.

Maps Showing Boundaries of Indiana Territory in 1800 and 1803



Maps from Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period*.

less than 6,000 people. Vincennes was designated as the capitol, and President John Adams chose twenty-seven-year-old William Henry Harrison as governor. Harrison had served as an officer in the western Indian wars, had been secretary of the Northwest Territory, and at the time of his appointment was the delegate from that territory to Congress. For territorial judges Adams chose Henry Vanderburgh, a native of New York who had moved to Vincennes in 1787, John Griffin of Virginia, and William Clarke who was then serving as attorney for the United States in Kentucky. All of these men were familiar with frontier society, but

Vanderburgh had a particularly good understanding of the local French population as a result of his marriage to a local French woman.¹

Whereas two-thirds of the Vincennes population was French at the time Sargent appointed county officials in 1790, the rapid influx of American settlers to Vincennes after 1795 decreased the percentage of villagers who were French by the early years of the nineteenth century. Vincennes was attracting not only American farmers and government officials, but also a variety of artisans, merchants, lawyers, and even a printer.² Harrison had little trouble finding Americans to fill governmental positions. This being the case, it made little sense to fill bureaucratic positions with local Frenchmen who were not familiar with the language or laws of the Americans. Of the nine men who were appointed in 1800 to serve as judges for Knox County, only Pierre Gamelin was a local French inhabitant. There was, however, another Frenchman on the bench, Antoine Marechal. A wealthy lesser nobleman, Marechal fled the French Revolution and settled in Vincennes in the late 1790's. He played a prominent economic and political role in Vincennes over the subsequent decades. Aside from Marechal and Gamelin, no other Frenchmen were appointed to government positions for Knox County.³

¹William Wesley Woollen, Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana, (Indianapolis, 1883), 11-14; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 317.

²Elihu Stout began publishing the first newspaper in Vincennes in 1804 called The Indiana Gazette. The printing office was destroyed by fire in 1806, but a year later Stout was back in business. The new name he chose for his newspaper was The Western Sun. In the pages of The Western Sun there are advertisements and references in news columns which demonstrate the presence of American lawyers, artisans, merchants, and land speculators.

³"Journal of the Proceedings of the Executive Government of the Indiana Territory," in William Woollen et al (eds.), Executive Journal of Indiana Territory, 1800-1816, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Publications, 1900), 91 and 91n; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 317-18, 318n.

Another important factor in the declining political position of the French in Vincennes is the fact that several of the town's leading citizens died just as the agents of American government began arriving. The man who had for several decades been recognized as "chief" of the town by local Indians and French townspeople alike was Jean Marie Philippe LeGras. LeGras' leadership had been invaluable in leading the villagers through the difficult years during and after the Revolution. LeGras led the delegation to welcome the first British officer to Vincennes in 1777. During the Revolution, he was appointed a judge and militia officer by Lieutenant John Todd of Virginia. After the Revolution he traveled to Williamsburg to pressure the Virginia government to repay the Vincennes French for the losses they had sustained at the hands of George Rogers Clark and his men. On several occasions after the war LeGras wrote petitions to Congress to focus the members' attention on the problems of his people. LeGras was skilled in local politics and had actively communicated with representatives of the American government. The willingness of American leaders to profit from the experience and regional influence of LeGras was never tested since LeGras died in 1788, two years before Winthrop Sargent arrived in Vincennes. The deep respect of the townspeople, French and American, for LeGras was evident by the multitude who attended his funeral.¹

The second most influential leader in Vincennes was Francois Bosseron, and he too died in 1791. Pierre Gamelin, appointed by Governor Harrison as one of the first judges of Knox County, also died in 1804.²

¹For background on LeGras, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 178, 217n; for LeGras' funeral see Vincennes Parish Records.

²Pierre Gamelin's death reported in Indiana Gazette, October 16, 1804.

Thus, Vincennes' most capable leaders, the men most able to play a key role in local politics under the American government, died before having a chance to effectively represent French interests in the new order.

The French in Vincennes, however, were not entirely without leadership. Francis Vigo, the Italian merchant who settled in Vincennes in 1783, quickly established himself as a community leader and was considered by the townpeople as one of their own. He held several military commissions under the United States government, and was one of the largest merchants and landholders in the Northwest Territory. When the first American regulars were stationed under Hamtramck at Vincennes, Vigo provided supplies for the troops when they were without food, medicine, and other supplies. Hamtramck was deeply appreciative when Vigo "was good enuff to pay the men." When Governor Harrison first arrived in Vincennes, Vigo made a positive impression by offering to the Governor his newly-built two-story frame house to serve as Harrison's residence until he could build a home of his own. Harrison declined the generous offer, but he did occupy one of the ground-floor rooms for a few months. As a respected leader among both the French and Americans, Vigo's influence was felt until his death in 1836.¹

Another man who was an outspoken advocate of French interests in Vincennes was William McIntosh. A native of Ireland, McIntosh was no friend to Governor Harrison, and it is likely that McIntosh used the support and influence of local French citizens to advance his own political and

¹Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 321; Somes, Old Vincennes, 125-27; Dorothy Riker, "Francis Vigo," Indiana Magazine of History, [March, 1930] 26:12-20; Hamtramck to Harmar, April 13, 1788, in Outpost, 70.

economic interests. Nonetheless, on several occasions he aligned himself with the French villagers and took an active interest in their problems.¹

In 1807 McIntosh wrote to President Jefferson to assure him of the loyalty of the local French in response to recent comments which questioned their fidelity to the United States. McIntosh reported that Governor Harrison recently had called the Vincennes French to a meeting in the center of Town, ostensibly to ask their opinions on "National objects." His purpose was actually to tell them of the Chesapeake affair and to warn them that if war was a result, Great Britain might try to regain the loyalty of the Indians and the French. He asked that the French report to him news of any British emissaries trying to prejudice the Indians against the United States, and expressed his "Apprehension that attempts might be made to weaken their attachment to the American Government." McIntosh believed that these words in effect questioned the French inhabitants' "Fidelity and attachment to the United States." According to McIntosh, the French inhabitants were appalled by Harrison's lack of faith in them. American soldiers had plundered their belongings, seized their livestock, and nearly halted the fur trade which impoverished the vast majority of townspeople. They expected praise for their support and suffering--not suspicions of disloyalty.²

¹For evidence of feud between McIntosh and Harrison, see The Western Sun, April 7, 1810 and William McIntosh to the President, March 30, 1808 in Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 7:536-37. McIntosh made considerable profits buying and selling French claims to the Congressional donation lands. The September 21, 1804 issue of The Western Sun contains an advertisement by McIntosh to sell six different 400-acre tracts of donation land "at a low price."

²Harrison to Jefferson, October 10, 1807, in Logan Esarey, (ed.), Governors Messages and Letters. Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison, (2 vols., Indiana Historical Collections, VII, IX, Indianapolis, 1922), 7: 262-63. William McIntosh to the President, December 15, 1807 in Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 7:503.

In their letters to the president, McIntosh and Harrison gave two very different interpretations of the event. Harrison said he merely asked the French to "take the subject into consideration & adopt some mode of expressing their sentiments." His request was received with apparent pleasure. It was only after they had spoken with McIntosh, "who is as inveterate a tory as any of his nation," that they perceived Harrison's comments as having been accusatory. According to McIntosh, the French were angry at the governor's insinuations of disloyalty, and they asked McIntosh to draft a letter to the president telling him of their frustrations with Harrison. Both Harrison and the president received a copy of a series of resolutions the French passed concerning their "sincere, strong, and permanent" attachment to the United States. The French villagers were anxious to receive "a declaration of the Sentiments entertained of them, which alone, under existing circumstances will relieve them from the most painful embarrassment."¹

President Jefferson responded by assuring the French inhabitants of his sincere appreciation for the sacrifices they had made in support of the United States of America. He had never questioned their loyalty, and neither had Harrison. Three months later McIntosh thanked the president for answering his letter, and assured him that the minds of the French

¹ibid; "Resolutions of Loyalty by the French," September 20, 1807 in Esarey, (ed.), Harrison Letters. In response to the governor's request that the French respond to what he said during his meeting with them, the French met at Mr. McCandless' Tavern on September 18 and passed a series of resolutions. Laurent Bazadone was elected President of the proceedings, and William McIntosh was Secretary. The resolutions indicate that the French were surprised and angry at having their loyalty questioned. What is not clear is whether they felt this after Harrison's speech, or after McIntosh convinced them that Harrison had insulted them. One of the resolutions chastises Harrison for the way he openly accused McIntosh of disloyalty. The French assert that McIntosh never attempted to weaken, but only to strengthen their "zeal in the common cause of our Country."

inhabitants had been set at ease. He did take the opportunity, however, to once again speak out against Governor Harrison's administration, saying that Harrison's treatment of the local French population formed "obstacles to a perfect understanding" that were not likely to be surmounted. According to McIntosh, the French were joined by many Americans in opposition to many of Harrison's policies.¹

There is no doubt that McIntosh used the French frustrations to advance his own complaints against Harrison. The French people themselves, however, had reasons of their own to be resentful of Harrison, if only for his role in enforcing the many new laws and regulations which brought difficult changes to their lives. Whereas American officials believed they were bringing the "blessings" of democratic government to the French villages, for the French inhabitants, the changes brought by the new government were mixed blessings. The French inhabitants of Vincennes no longer feared Indian attacks as they had in the 1780's, the transportation of furs, food, and other goods in and out of Vincennes increased in the safer environment of the late 1790's, and French demands for the establishment of civil government had indeed been answered. Unfortunately, these improvements came only at a substantial cost.

The new taxes, court costs, and legal fees which supported American government in Vincennes imposed a considerable hardship the local French inhabitants who clearly could not afford these costs. Though a select group of elite weathered the difficult decades of the late 1770's through the 1790's with at least some of their wealth intact, the vast

¹William McIntosh to the President, March 30, 1808 in Carter, (ed.), Territorial Papers, 7:536-37; Jefferson to McIntosh, January 30, 1808 in Esarey, (ed.), Harrison Letters, 282-83.

majority of the townspeople were truly impoverished by 1790. Yet many of the townspeople could remember a time, prior to the coming of the first Americans, when the local people lived in comfort, able to easily afford life's necessities. Now, not only did the French find it extremely difficult to afford the most basic needs, but the American government required them to pay taxes on their land, houses, horses and cattle, and even their beloved billiard tables. Every merchant, Indian trader, ferry operator, or tavern owner had to buy a license in order to conduct business. Failure to do so meant paying a fine and then being forced to pay for the license anyway. Vincennes' French residents, most of whom were very poor, labored under the weight of county taxes.¹

If a resident failed to pay taxes, his or her land or property was sold to pay the taxes. A notice in the January 27, 1808 issue of the *Western Sun* read:

NOTICE

Will be sold on the tenth day of March next, at the court house in Vincennes, for the nonpayment of taxes . . . the following tracts of land in Knox county, or so much thereof as will pay the taxes due thereon. . . The sale to continue from day to day until all is sold, or the taxes due thereon, and costs are paid, viz."²

The names of over a hundred people (French and Americans) accompanied this notice, along with a brief description of the size and location of the land they owned. Though some of these people undoubtedly paid the taxes in time to retain title to their land, others did not. The fear of losing one's land for nonpayment of taxes was something that the French had

¹Philbrick, cxix, 601; McAvoy, Catholic Church, 104-05.

²The Western Sun, January 27, 1808.

never before experienced, and this must have caused both bewilderment and discontent among many of the French townspeople.

The elaborate schedule of fees which were charged by "officers of justice" posed an additional burden to French villagers. Frustration with high court costs had been widespread among Vincennes residents even under their own locally-elected magistrates during the years 1779-1787, but those fees seemed small compared to the new American system. In 1803 Governor Harrison and his territorial judges passed a law which described the precise amount to be charged for every individual act performed by lawyers, clerks, the attorney general, sheriffs, surveyors, and judges. The list of fees for work tasks performed by each official is extremely lengthy, since the purpose of the law was to regulate every fee charged by every official. In theory, this was meant to protect citizens from being over-charged. In practice, however, the total costs for settling even simple civil disagreements was considerably higher than villagers, French as well as American, wanted to pay. The difference between the Americans and the French was that the Americans were at least familiar with the American legal system and its accompanying costs.¹

For the local French, the "blessings" of democracy included high court costs, burdensome taxes, a loss in local political autonomy, and complicated laws that they did not understand. While Americans considered trial by jury to be one of the most valuable features of the American legal system, to the French jury trials were time-consuming and expensive, and no better at dispensing justice than bringing a case before a local commandant or set of judges for review. While Americans were quick to believe that

¹For law which regulated legal fees in the Indiana Territory in 1803, see Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, 46-59.

the local French had no capacity for self government, this was not entirely the case. In the nearby village of Cahokia from 1779 until 1790, the French population elected judges, the courts functioned regularly, and the court's decisions were effectively enforced. The ability of the village of Cahokia to govern itself with much success, while Vincennes and Kaskaskia experienced many problems in local government during the same period, is due in large part to the fact that very few Americans settled in Cahokia prior to 1790. The large numbers of Americans who immigrated to Vincennes and Kaskaskia often refused to comply with the decisions of local French magistrates, and in time local French citizens followed the American example.¹

The success of self-government in Cahokia and the ability of the people of Vincennes to govern themselves in the years prior to the arrival of Americans undermined American assumptions that the French had no understanding of self-government. It is true that they were happy with the rule of French commandants during the French period. Much of this is due to the respected character of the men who held this position. But it is equally true that during the periods when there was no outside governmental presence, the people governed themselves. Certainly both the French and the Americans had their own notions of "liberty" and "freedom," but they were not the same.

There was not much liberty or democracy built into the government of the Northwest Territory, nor its successor, the Indiana Territory. The governor and territorial judges were appointed, not elected, and the people had no voice at all in decisions which affected them. The governor, aided

¹Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, ccxx-ccxxi.

by his judges, wielded near-dictatorial powers. There was little that the people could do to remedy unpopular government policies. This situation, however, was only temporary. As the population increased, the people were allowed a territorial assembly, and eventually they could apply for statehood. Only then did they enjoy the benefits of democratic government.¹

When Indiana Territorial Governor Harrison judged that the population was ready for a move to the next grade of government, he proclaimed that on January 3, 1805, an election would be held to elect nine representatives to the territorial assembly. In practical terms, this "upgrade" in government was only slightly more democratic than the preceding government. The Governor still retained his appointive power and his general executive authority. He could convene and dismiss the Assembly at will, and he could veto any legislative measure approved by the legislature. Still, the people's representatives could help form new laws, as long as such laws were approved by the Governor.²

The people of the Indiana Territory, French and American, became embroiled over the political repercussions which would accompany the transition to the second grade of government. The pages of the *Indiana Gazette* were used as a battle ground for those supporting and opposing Harrison's decision.³ Some feared the new government would be even more expensive; others doubted there were sufficient men who were capable of effectively serving in the legislature. Trusting Harrison's

¹Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, 67-8.

²Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 345-46.

³For the local debate over the transition in government see The Indiana Gazette for August 7, 14, 21, 28, September 11, 18, 1804.

assurances that their situation would improve if they supported his efforts to move the Indiana Territory into the second grade of government (which enabled voters to elect a legislature), many of the Vincennes French supported him only to realize later they had been deceived.¹

A large contingent of French residents gathered at the home of Madame Pagé and drafted seven resolutions which were printed in the August 22, 1807 issue of The Western Sun. These resolutions clearly express the anger of the French citizens, and their sense of being "duped" by politicians who had no intention of keeping the campaign promises they made. According to the local French:

. . . for some time past the French inhabitants of Vincennes have felt with deep regret and chagrin, that the men to whom they candidly and fully confided their political trusts, have not only failed to realize the promises and assurances which we too credulously relied upon.²

They had voted for the change of government because they believed that the burdens under which they labored, "would not only be alleviated, but almost entirely discontinued." Instead their burdens continued to mount and, too late, they realized that their situation was likely to worsen. They announced a decision to withdraw their political support from all those representatives who had promoted the second grade of government. Among the other French grievances was a specific mention of the way land speculators had duped the townspeople out of their lands. Their document does not state exactly what changes they expected from the government,

¹McAvoy, 132-33; The Western Sun, Aug. 22, 1807.

²ibid.

but it is likely that they hoped for greater protection and for changes which would relieve their grave economic situation.¹

One the resolutions set forth by the French was a statement of their united opposition to a proposed law which would divide the Vincennes commons and dispose of it in lots. Local Americans wanted to use the proceeds to help fund a public school to be called Vincennes University. The French rightly felt their well-being threatened and insisted that their representatives to the territorial legislature oppose the proposed law. The attempt of the local government to divide and sell Vincennes commons surely came as a shock and an insult to the entire French community. Since the earliest days of French settlement, the commons served both as a common grazing ground for the inhabitants' livestock and as a social gathering spot for horseraces, athletic contests, dances and other celebrations. A congressional act in 1791 had officially granted to the people of Vincennes the 5,400 acres of fenced-in land they had long used as a town common. It was to be used by the inhabitants "until otherwise disposed of by law." To dissolve this "sacred" ground demonstrated both a lack of concern for the traditions of the French villagers as well as the American determination to maximize land use for their own purposes. Fierce French resistance to American efforts to dissolve their commons paid off--at least for a while. Not until 1818 was the Vincennes Commons divided and sold.²

The resolutions made by those who gathered at Madame Pagé's home are perhaps the best single primary source for ascertaining the

¹ibid.

²Somes, Vincennes, 146-47; Lux, Donation Lands, 455. For commons being sold under an act of April 20, 1818, see *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 3:469 as quoted in Lux, 455n.

political frustrations of the Vincennes French during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Adapting to the political and legal world of the Americans was hard, particularly for a group of people who had experienced an almost total lack of outside interference in village affairs for several decades. The French resolutions published in The Western Sun not only tell of French dissatisfaction with the American government, but they also show that the French community refused to allow Americans to ignore their interests. They obviously believed that collective action might bring results. The fact that the French called a meeting, attended the meeting in significant numbers, collectively formulated a list of grievances, and then published their resolutions in the local newspaper demonstrates a determination to work for desired change as well as an assumption that the French voice in Vincennes was an important one. Those sections of the resolutions which dealt with French disappointment upon learning that American politicians would not keep their promises indicates that politicians valued, or perhaps even needed, French votes and support to win elections. If French support was not needed, politicians would not have made such promises in the first place.

The grievances voiced by the French in the resolutions of 1807 reveal a combination of anger, disappointment, and bitterness that accompanied the French villagers' declining political power and their loss of local autonomy. Congressional donation lands had yet to be settled and already American speculators (joined by a few local French) had cheated the townspeople out of the fair value of their land. American politicians made promises they did not keep. Key American leaders, including Governor Harrison, wanted to sell their commons to fund an American school or university. In spite of the declining political power of the French,

however, they continued to work through official and unofficial channels to influence decisions which affected them. Petitions were sent to Congress to urge a settlement on donation lands. Letters were sent to President Jefferson informing him of Governor Harrison's lack of faith in the local French, and the president replied with words of thanks and praise for past and present French support. When faced with serious threats to their well-being, the French protested unpopular policies and laws, and the French elite regularly socialized with Governor Harrison, giving them regular, though unofficial, access to the highest authority in the territory.

Most of the time the French *habitants* in Vincennes fit the general American perception of the western French population as a peaceful, easily-governed people. Only on rare occasions did they feel sufficiently threatened to unite for common action, and few played important roles in local or territorial government. Even so, these people did have a political voice and, when necessary, they knew how to use it. If they could not stop the vast political changes taking place around them, they could at least actively participate in the shape and timing of the changes which most directly affected them.

The 1790's was a decade of transition in Vincennes as French legal customs, French magistrates, and French civil law were gradually replaced with American laws and procedures, American lawyers, judges, sheriffs, and other officials, and an American judicial system based on English common law (modified by colonial practice). Whereas it was common for local elite villagers to be selected as judges or other government officers during the 1790's, few French were included in the administration of government after 1800.

Changes in government and law took place abruptly on paper, but the actual process of extending American government over the Northwest Territory occurred much more gradually. The selection of Vincennes as the capitol of the Indiana Territory, however, meant that the rate of change in Vincennes was faster than change which occurred on the geographic fringes of the territory. But even there, government-building was slow. In the introduction to The Laws of the Indiana Territory, 1801-1809, Francis Philbrick states that territorial laws "most fundamental and most painfully drafted were very indifferently observed." The laws "were commands to live in a certain way that was an unfamiliar way, awkwardly and slowly learned."¹ This statement applied to American frontier settlers, but it was assuredly more true of the western French inhabitants.

The changes in law and government were some of the most difficult changes experienced by the Vincennes French after 1800. The benefits of increased stability in the west and the regular functioning of civil government were often taken for granted as the French dealt with the daily frustrations of burdensome taxes, the regulation of the fur trade, and confusing new laws. While the French were slowly adjusting to the new American legal and political environment, they also experienced significant social and economic changes (both positive and negative) as increasing numbers of Americans settled in and around their village. While American visitors were quick to notice the unusual "French-ness" of Vincennes well into the nineteenth century, to the long-time French residents in Vincennes, their village looked and felt increasingly like an American frontier town.

¹Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, ccxxiii.

CHAPTER 10

BECOMING AN AMERICAN TOWN: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN VINCENNES, 1790-1820

The turn of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the disintegration of the tightly knit French community in Vincennes that had survived more or less intact until the 1790's. Prior to 1800 change occurred only gradually as Americans settled in Vincennes, but in the first decade of the nineteenth century the Americanization of Vincennes progressed at a remarkably fast pace. In 1800 there were 1,533 people living in Vincennes and the surrounding neighborhood and only 2,517 in the whole of Knox County. By 1810 the population of Knox county, now much smaller in geographic size, had grown to 7,945 and there were 24,520 people living in the four counties which comprised the Indiana Territory.¹ By 1810 the sizeable American population in Vincennes had established many of the social, legal, political, and economic institutions with which they were familiar. In spite of the town's increasing American "flavor," however, the unique history of Vincennes as a long-established French colonial village caused it to retain its distinctly French character until well into the nineteenth century.²

¹Census Report of 1800 and 1810 in Woollen et al., (eds.), Executive Journal of the Indiana Territory, 83-5.

²Describing the French colonial town of St. Genevieve on the western bank of the Mississippi River, Carl Ekberg states, "Only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century did the French-speaking population and the French language

The village which Americans encountered when they began arriving in Vincennes in significant numbers during the 1790's was substantially different than other frontier towns or established east-coast cities.

American newcomers experienced many circumstances with which they were not familiar: a population who spoke French and Indian dialects but little or no English; Indians who lived near the town and mixed freely in the streets and shops with the French habitants, aristocratic émigrés from the French Revolution socializing with illiterate trappers and boatmen; a people who--except for a handful of elite--did not share the Americans' craze for land acquisition; and a Catholic population who spent Sundays horseracing, dancing, and playing cards or billiards without the least amount of guilt or remorse!

The earliest Americans to settle in Vincennes had no choice but to adapt to life in a seemingly "foreign" place. If they wanted to marry in a church, the Catholic church was the only one in town. If they wanted their marriage sanctioned by a religious authority, the Catholic priest was their only choice. The predominant language in Vincennes was French, and those who did not speak French found it hard to communicate with French merchants, artisans, or others with whom they might do business. The sight of Frenchmen and Indians fraternizing in taverns or on the streets of Vincennes infuriated the American settlers, but the Americans could do nothing to end the social and economic interactions between the French and Indians. Though living in such an unfamiliar environment was difficult for the earliest American settlers, there were several distinct

lose their positions of preponderance, and French creole architecture become subordinate to Anglo-American and German styles." Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 486.

advantages which drew farmers, land speculators and entrepreneurs to the village of Vincennes.

Perhaps the greatest incentive for Americans to settle in Vincennes or in the other French villages in the Illinois country was the fact that these places provided a variety of amenities that were not otherwise available on the far-western frontier. Chief among these was the accessibility of land long before the American government offered land for sale. Many of the earliest Americans to settle in or near Vincennes were men who had marched with George Rogers Clark during the American Revolution. After the war Americans who settled in Vincennes requested and were given 400-acre tracts of land by local French magistrates. Between 1779 and 1783 these French magistrates made grants totaling 26,000 acres of land, and from 1783 until 1787, when General Josiah Harmar checked the practice, 22,000 more acres were granted. During the long years of Congressional inaction in delivering the 400-acre donation tracts to French family heads who lived in Vincennes on or before 1783, both French and American speculators frantically bought and sold claims to the French "donation lands" before government land offices were ever established in the area. In these ways, land was available at Vincennes at a time when the United States government was struggling with Indian nations for rights to the trans-Appalachian lands north of the Ohio River.¹

In addition to land availability, Vincennes was a relatively safe place to settle because of the friendly relations between the French residents and their Indian neighbors. Although the presence of Americans quickly

¹Lux, Donation Lands, 438-39; 443-47, 474. American settlement in Vincennes began in earnest in 1784. By 1787 there were 400 Americans living in or near Vincennes at a time when the French population was about 900. By 1800, the combined French-American population was 1,533.

angered local Indians, the Americans depended upon the French to keep them informed of the Indians' intentions and to join with them for defense when necessary. After the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, the safe harbor of Vincennes was not as beneficial as it previously had been, but the Americans again depended upon the French to aid them through the turbulent years surrounding the War of 1812.

Another advantage enjoyed by American settlers in Vincennes was the variety of goods and services available in Vincennes. In the merchants' shops Americans could buy food, cloth, tools, ammunition and hunting supplies, and other essential items. They could drink, socialize, and play billiards at one of several local taverns. At harvest time, American farmers could haul their corn or wheat to already-existing mills and sip some locally-produced beer or wine while they waited for their grain to be turned to flour. American newcomers could sell their agricultural products to Vincennes residents or merchants, or they could hire a resident French boatmen to transport the crops to New Orleans. With a long history of buying and selling in New Orleans, the French were a valuable source of business information to American settlers. Those Americans who could afford to pay French boatmen to transport crops benefited from the years of experience the French had acquired navigating up and down the Mississippi River. With trade routes and business connections already established, convenient shops for buying food and other supplies, a limited amount of cleared land offered for sale, and the existence of taverns, inns, and mills, the Americans who settled in Vincennes could hardly be called "pioneers." Much of the hard work of pioneering had already been done for them.

Although Americans who immigrated to Vincennes in the 1780's and 1790's were not pioneers in the most strict sense of the word, they certainly pioneered the effort to establish an American presence in the west long before the "frontier of national expansion that moved from east to west roughly from the 1750's to the end of the nineteenth century" had reached the upper-Mississippi Valley.¹ Arriving deep in the frontier at such an early date, Americans encountered a town and a region that was different from anything they had experienced. The distinct history of Vincennes and the other Illinois villages, existing as they did on the outskirts of many empires, had much to do with the unique society that developed there. In a book chapter entitled "On the Boundaries of Empire: Connecting the West to Its Imperial Past," Jay Gitlin described the "multinational social landscape" of the cis-Mississippi frontier during the eighteenth century. Shaped and shared by many nations, Gitlin asserted that this frontier's most distinguishing feature was its heterogeneity. Such a description accurately describes the social environment in Vincennes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²

In 1787 Joseph Buell, a native of Connecticut, wrote that although the principal inhabitants of Vincennes were French, the town was actually "a mixture of all nations."³ This assessment was repeated by the English traveler, Morris Birkbeck, who passed through Vincennes in 1817. Birkbeck's comments pointed to the considerable amount of racial and

¹Gitlin, "On the Boundaries of Empire," 87.

²Ibid., 78.

³Diary of Joseph Buell in Pioneer History: Being an Account of the First Examinations of the Ohio Valley, and the Early Settlement of the Northwest Territory. (Cincinnati, 1848). Excerpts reprinted in McCord, Travel Accounts, 32.

cultural diversity in Vincennes which distinguished it from other American towns:

Vincennes exhibits a motley assemblage of inhabitants as well as visitors. The inhabitants are Americans, French, Canadians, Negroes; the visitors, among whom our party is conspicuous as English (who are seldom seen in these parts), Americans from various states, and Indians of various nations. . . The Indians are encamped in considerable numbers round the town, and are continually riding in . . . many of the people here speak a variety of the Indian languages.¹

Two years later, in 1819, Richard Lee Mason of Maryland wrote that Vincennes was home not only to French, Americans, and Indians but also "persons from the four corners of the earth."² These comments not only document the considerable racial and cultural diversity which was characteristic of Vincennes, but they also hint that Americans were neither familiar with nor entirely comfortable with the "motley assemblage" of people that formed the community of Vincennes.

Though visitors referred specifically to the presence of French-Canadians and Indians in Vincennes, they gave only general descriptions of other residents who came from the "four corners of the earth." Though this was a slight exaggeration, their observations accurately chronicled the diverse population of the town. During the 1790's the town saw the arrival of some members of France's lower nobility who had fled the turbulence of the French Revolution. Their education, native French language, and business acumen helped them to quickly establish

¹Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey, 94 and 96.

²Richard Lee Mason, "Narrative of Richard Lee Mason in the Pioneer West [1819]" as reprinted in McCord, Travel Accounts, 101.

themselves as part of the Vincennes elite.¹ Two of these men, Antoine Marechal and Louis Fortin forged an official partnership before ever leaving France to establish a tannery once they had settled on the American frontier. Fortin and Marechal arrived in Vincennes around 1797, and within a few years both men had married local French women from the prominent Bosseron family. They became successful businessmen, adding land speculation to their other economic activities. Fortin eventually moved to New Orleans to profit from the larger French population there. Marechal was one of the leading merchants in Vincennes, initially establishing himself as a business partner with the successful merchant, Toussaint Dubois. His wealth allowed him to make frequent loans to local inhabitants, French and American. Marechal was appointed as one of the first Justices in the Indiana Territory in 1800. By 1815 he had clearly earned the respect of the local people when they elected him as one of the commissioners for St. Xavier Catholic Church.²

Another Frenchman who made the journey from France to Vincennes along with Fortin and Marechal was Claude Coupin. Coupin moved to

¹These men were among the "French 500" who left France believing that they had purchased land in Ohio from New York and Massachusetts speculators who had formed the "Scioto Company." When they arrived they found that the company's option to buy five million acres had lapsed because of insufficient funds. The land titles of the French were worthless. Congress generously agreed to give them land near Gallipolis, Ohio where most of them settled. A few traveled on to Vincennes hoping to prosper in an established French-speaking frontier community. For more information on the "French 500" see Claude Coupin Papers, M416, WSML.

²A document establishing the co-partnership of Marechal and Fortin is dated January 3, 1801 in Lassel Papers. Land deeds in the Lassel Papers reveal that Fortin and Marechal bought hundreds of acres of the "donation lands" from the local French. Marriage between Louis Fortin and Suzanne Bosseron occurred on January 3, 1801, Vincennes Parish Records. For Marechal's partnership with Dubois, see correspondence and bills in Lassel Papers beginning in the year 1798. The Lassel Papers also contain a large number of loan notes from residents who borrowed money from Marchal. For Marchal as judge, see Woollen et al (eds.), Executive Journal of Indiana Territory, 92. For Marechal as church commissioner see VPR, 72-74.

Vincennes in 1796, where he lived until his death in 1802. He was a merchant and silversmith who occasionally worked as an auctioneer. His name appears often as a witness to legal documents, and for a reason which remains unclear, his signature was always accompanied by a small drawing resembling a flute or fife.¹

In addition to the "new" French residents in Vincennes, there were also men of Scottish and Irish background who migrated from Montreal to Vincennes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Already familiar with the fur trade business and speaking both French and English, these men readily established social ties in the French and American communities and in a short time were profiting as merchants and traders. One Scotsman from Montreal, William McIntosh, became a political spokesman and close friend of the French community. The Irish-born William Prince became one of the most prominent members of the community, serving as one of Governor Harrison's judges in 1804, as a top-level Indian agent, and later as the auditor of the Indiana territory.²

In addition to the French, Indians, Scottish and Irish people who lived in and around Vincennes, there was also a small population of black slaves who lived and worked in Vincennes and an even smaller population of free blacks. While the number of slaves in Vincennes was quite small during the French and British period, this number increased with the influx of Americans. In spite of the fact that slavery was outlawed in the Northwest Territory, Americans emigrants from the southern states

¹Claude Coupin Collection, M416, WSML. There are also several legal documents for the years 1797-1802 in the Lasselle Papers signed by Coupin as a witness.

²For Prince, see Barnhart and Riker, *Indiana*, 343, 421. Robert McCay, a native of Montreal, had established himself as a merchant in Vincennes as early as 1786. He married Marrie Laffont, daughter of the French merchant and surgeon Jean Baptiste Laffont.

regularly brought their slaves with them and found legal loopholes which enabled to keep their slaves as long-term "servants."

The unfamiliar social environment which Americans encountered in Vincennes was merely a temporary source of discomfort for Americans who lost little time in establishing familiar political, social, and cultural institutions. These efforts commenced in earnest during the first decade of the nineteenth century. One of the first developments which heralded the new American culture in Vincennes was the appearance of the Indiana Gazette, the first newspaper in the Indiana Territory. Elihu Stout transported a printing press and type from Kentucky to Vincennes--not an easy journey for such a cumbersome piece of equipment carried on horseback--and began publishing his weekly newspaper in 1804. The price of a subscription was \$2.00, "payable half yearly in advance." Stout's printing office burned down in 1806, but a year later Stout was back in business after changing the name of his newspaper to The Western Sun. The newspaper not only kept residents informed of national and international events, but it also provided a convenient vehicle for the expression of public political views. This was a particularly useful tool for western Americans who, from the outset of the nonrepresentative stage of Indiana territorial government, sought to make the government responsive to the people and to move quickly towards establishing a representative state government.¹

Frontier citizens in Vincennes and the surrounding territory benefited from the advertisement opportunities provided by Stout's newspaper. Merchants advertised the arrival of new inventory, land

¹Barnart and Riker, Indiana, 323. Early copies of the Indiana Gazette and The Western Sun are on file at the Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

owners advertised land for sale, slaveowners (mostly in Kentucky) offered rewards for runaway slaves, and entrepreneurs announced the opening of inns, ferries, and dram houses. Government officials published territorial laws, lists of individuals whose lands would be sold for nonpayment of taxes, and lists of those who had not picked up mail from the postmaster. In his own newspaper Elihu Stout advertised his need for a journeyman who would be paid \$30.00 plus board.¹

Since the vast majority of French inhabitants could not read English, the majority of subscribers were Americans. However, some elite French residents, such as Hyacinthe Laselle, subscribed to the paper, and others took advantage of the advertisement opportunities it offered. In the July 22, 1807 issue Toussaint Dubois ran the following announcement:

I Have put my Notes and accounts in the hands of *Genl. Johnston, Esq.* for the settlement and collection--Those indebted to me will please to remember that he is a *practicing attorney*" [original in italics].²

On February 18, 1809 Hyacinthe Lasselle advertised his intent to sell 400 acres of donation lands. For several successive weeks in the summer of 1807 readers were requested to be on the lookout for a certain Therèse Arnoux, "alias Canadian" who was ordered to appear at the Cahokia circuit court in October. Therèse was to answer charges of libel filed by her husband, François Arnoux, also "alias Canadien." François had sued for a divorce which could not be granted until his wife returned. For Frenchmen like Arnoux, Dubois, and Lasselle as well as the Americans who lived in

¹For Stout needing a journeyman, see The Western Sun, Feb. 9, 1808. For runaway slaves, see for example Nov. 17, 1807; Nov. 25, 1807; Dec. 9, 1807; Jan. 6, 1808. Many of the rewards for runaway slaves were placed by owners in Kentucky.

²July 22, 1807, The Western Sun.

Vincennes and the surrounding territory, the publication of The Western Sun was a revolution in regional communication.¹

Two years after Stout began publishing the Indiana Gazette, a group of several prominent citizens in Vincennes gathered at the tavern of John Hay to discuss the creation of the first circulating library in the Indiana territory. Governor William Henry Harrison presided over the meeting which took place on July 20, 1806. A library company was formed, a constitution adopted, and directors chosen. According to the founders of the library, their reasons for creating it emanated "from the most benevolent and patriotic motives," and though initially the holdings were small, the directors believed that it would "grow with its country's growth, increase with its strength." In time it would become a "copious and permanent source of improvement and information." Two years after its formation the library boasted of 210 volumes. By March of 1809 it contained 248 volumes, all of them housed at Governor Harrison's mansion. Most of the holdings were indeed volumes of "improvement and information" rather than entertainment with titles such as Varlow's Husbandry, Knox's Essays, Politicks for the People, and Gutherie's Grammar. Only a few of the books were written in French, such as Literature, Horace, and Introduction to the History of Denmark. The literate ladies of the town may have been more interested in books such as Ladies Companion, Daughter of Adoption, and Beggar Girl.²

¹For Lasselle selling land, see The Western Sun, Feb. 18, 1809. The first summons for the return of Therèse Arnoux appeared on July 25, 1807.

²An announcement of the establishment of the Vincennes Library along with a list of its initial holdings appeared in The Western Sun on April 6, 1808. For later holdings see March 23, 1809. The Minutes of the Library Company are printed in the Indiana Magazine of History, Vols. 61-63 (1965-1967).

It was the prominent American citizens of the town who were the driving force behind the library. Such men included Governor Harrison, Judge Henry Vanderburgh, and Judge Benjamin Parke. The only non-American members on the library board were John Badollet, the Swiss-born register of public lands, and Francis Vigo, the Spanish-born French merchant who had assisted George Rogers Clark against the British during the Revolution. John Badollet, a native of Switzerland who came to Vincennes in 1804 as the register of the land office, also played a key role in the creation of the library. It was these same men who were concerned about providing education for Vincennes residents. In 1801 Governor Harrison organized the Jefferson Academy in Vincennes and appointed Father Jean Marie Rivet, the local Catholic priest, as the first headmaster of the school. Though sent to Vincennes primarily for the purposes of educating and "civilizing" the local Indians, Rivet also kept quite busy as a teacher to the local French and Americans. He also tried to revitalize the religious life of the French residents. Unfortunately, Rivet died on February 4, 1804, leaving Vincennes temporarily without a teacher or a priest.¹

The same year as Rivet's death (1804) the people of Vincennes learned that Congress had finally responded to appeals they had made in 1801 and 1802 to appropriate a township of land in the Vincennes land district for use and support of a seminary of learning. A Congressional act in 1804 allocated a township of land (23,040 acres) in what is now Gibson County, Indiana, to the Vincennes Academy. When the First General Assembly of the Indiana Territory met in 1806, it incorporated and

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 100-101.

appointed trustees for a new educational institution known as Vincennes University. All but one of the six trustees of the Jefferson Academy became members of the new university's board of trustees. The land which had been assigned to the Jefferson Academy was transferred to the University.¹

The importance of education to the Americans in Vincennes was clearly expressed in the preamble to the charter of Vincennes University which asserted that ". . . learning has been found the ablest advocate of genuine liberty, the best supporter of rational religion, and the source of the only solid and imperishable glory which nations can acquire."² The charter also stated that because the most humble American citizen could be "elected to the highest public office" and all citizens were expected to exercise the right to elect and reject its government representatives, "the knowledge which is requisite for a magistrate and elector, should be widely diffused." The charter was rather progressive for its day with provisions to extend educational opportunities to Indians and females. Indian students were to be boarded, clothed, and educated without cost. Although no hard evidence can offer verification, local tradition in Vincennes maintains that the only Indian to attend the University was Princess Rosebud, the granddaughter of the local Piankashaw chief, Son of Tobacco.³

By 1811 an impressive brick building to house Vincennes University was completed, but when the "university" opened its doors that same year

¹Chelsea Lawlis, Vincennes University in Transition: The Making of a Comprehensive Community College, (Vincennes University, 1992), xvi-xvii.

²Philbrick, Laws of the Indiana Territory, 178-84.

³ibid.; Lawlis, Vincennes University, xvi-xvii.

it was no more than a grammar school. Children were instructed by the Presbyterian minister Rev. Samuel T. Scott. Though the town elite were grateful to finally have a teacher to educate local children, many of the lower class American inhabitants did not take advantage of the opportunity. As late as 1817 the number of students enrolled in the school was quite small. Even after the opening of the school, many well-to-do families continued to educate their children by hiring private tutors.¹

There is no doubt that the large number of educated government men who settled in Vincennes were more concerned about providing educational opportunities for local youth than were the town's French inhabitants. From the small enrollment in Reverend Scott's school, however, it appears that the lower-class Americans were either not concerned with educating their children or practical considerations prohibited them from releasing children from work on the farm. Still, the presence of Americans raised the overall literacy rate of Vincennes, since even the "common" Americans were, as a group, more literate than the local French, many of whom could not sign their names.

When Constantin Volney visited Vincennes in 1796, he commented on the difference between the "enlightened" Americans and the local French whose "ignorance, indeed, was profound." Although Volney was impressed that the local dialect was "pretty good French" rather than the "vulgar or provincial brogue" he expected, he estimated that scarcely six of nine of the French could read or write. By comparison, Volney believed that nine-tenths of the Americans could do both.² It is impossible to

¹Lawlis, Vincennes University, xvii. For Scott's small number of students, see Samuel Brown, The Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory, excerpts reprinted in Lindley, Indiana, 137.

²Excerpts from Volney's "A View of the Soil. . ." in Lindley, Indiana, 21.

ascertain the exact literacy rate among the French or Americans at Vincennes, but Volney definitely overestimated the literacy rate of both the French and the Americans. In the neighboring French village of Ste. Genevieve fully three quarters of the population could neither read nor write. From the number of Vincennes residents who could not sign their name on official documents--land deeds, loan notes, court affidavits, witnesses at baptisms and weddings--it is likely that the literacy rate in Vincennes was similar to that in Ste. Genevieve. This is comparable to the literacy rate in rural eighteenth-century France.¹

Though a large number of French residents in Vincennes were not literate, several of the town's prominent families had always valued education and made sure their children learned to read and write. When priests stayed in Vincennes long enough to open schools, French children did attend. In a largely illiterate environment the ability to read and write significantly increased the social status of those who possessed those skills. The coming of Americans undoubtedly spurred elite French families to have their children educated in the English language and American ways. They realized that to maintain their social influence and to compete economically, an "American" education was necessary. To read the local newspaper, understand the new American laws, to conduct business with Americans, or even to interact with the many U.S. government officials who operated in Vincennes, an education was imperative. Hyacinthe Lasselle was one of the local French leaders who sought to perpetuate his

¹In his Catholic Church in Indiana, McAvoy tells of two church documents from the Vincennes parish in 1796 where, in one case, only three parish members out of fourteen could sign their name. In the other case, eleven of eleven signers could write their name. McAvoy, Catholic Church, 90-91. Ekberg, Ste. Genevieve, 273-74; 467.

family's social and economic status by hiring an American, David Ruby, to teach his children.¹

Unfortunately, even those who wanted their children educated had trouble finding someone to teach them. Long periods passed without a local priest, and most of the educated men in town were busy merchants who did not have the time (or likely the desire) to teach. The lack of teachers which kept the literacy rate low among the French during the eighteenth century also persisted during the early nineteenth century. The difficulty of locating qualified teachers is evident in the fact that in spite of the many educated Americans in Vincennes, Governor Harrison chose the French Catholic priest, Father Rivet, as a private tutor for his four-year-old son, John Cleves Symmes Harrison. Other American judges in Vincennes paid Rivet to instruct their sons as well, and until his death in 1804, Rivet was the only instructor at the Jefferson Academy.²

Even after Vincennes became the capitol of the Indiana Territory and a host of judges, land surveyors, land registrars, lawyers, and merchants moved to Vincennes, the shortage of teachers persisted. Those who traveled hundreds of miles across the frontier to settle in Vincennes came for a purpose. That purpose varied from buying cheap land for farming or land speculation, serving as a government official, setting up a law practice, or pursuing some other profitable venture. Newcomers did not come to Vincennes to collect a meager salary as a school teacher. This explains the reliance of residents upon priests and later ministers to

¹Receipt showing amount paid by Lasselle to David Ruby (\$6. 2/3) dated November 11, 1813 in Laselle Papers. For other midwestern French realizing the importance of an American education, see Russell Bidlack, The Yankee Meets the Frenchman: River Raisin, 1817-1830, (Ann Arbor, 1965), 6.

²McAvoy, Catholic Church, 100-102.

educate their children. For the first two decades of the nineteenth century, however, the town was usually without a resident priest or pastor, and consequently without a regular teacher.

Though Vincennes often lacked capable and willing teachers, the coming of Americans nonetheless did raise the general commitment of the town to provide a basic education for its citizens. The commitment of General Harrison and other local representatives of the United States government to build new democratic states in the west, populated by an informed, educated populace accounts for the very early establishment of a newspaper and library in Vincennes, and the allotment of public funds to build Vincennes University. To facilitate the flow of information between Vincennes and the eastern states, the first post office in the Indiana Territory was opened in Vincennes in 1800. Thus at an early date the people in Vincennes received regular news of national and international events. In good weather there was a regular weekly service between Vincennes and Louisville, and the government agreed to share the cost of maintaining the road over which the mail was carried. In the first year, the entire postage received by the government was \$85.49, while the cost to the government for operating the service was \$600.00.¹

These changes significantly altered the cultural atmosphere in Vincennes, though more so for the elite (French and American) than the common people who were less likely to read newspapers, borrow library books, or write letters. Though these changes did not drastically alter the day-to-day existence for the town's French residents, they did contribute to the larger process of "Americanization" which was gradually changing

¹Howard Peckham, "Mail Service in the Indiana Territory," Indiana Magazine of History, 47 (1951, 155-64.

the contours of the old French village. Another development which altered the cultural atmosphere in Vincennes was the breakdown of the homogenous Catholic religious community.

The arrival of American Protestants to Vincennes marked the first time that most of the French *habitants* encountered Christians who were not Roman Catholics. While the mixing of Catholics and Protestants in Europe and America often created an explosive, or at least tension-filled social atmosphere, this did not occur in Vincennes. What is striking about religious life in Vincennes from about 1790 to at least 1820 is the total lack of religious friction. In view of the widespread anti-Catholicism which was prevalent throughout the United States in the early nineteenth century, the cooperation and friendly relations between American Protestants and French Catholics in Vincennes was exceptional. This friendly atmosphere existed, at least in part, because of the waning of religious fervor among local Catholics, and the relaxed religious attitudes of most frontier American settlers. The shortage of both priests and ministers on the frontier contributed significantly to relaxed religious outlook of both Catholics and Protestants.¹

The lack of religious tension between French and American settlers was also common in Louisiana. In an article entitled "Creoles and Anglo-Americans in Old Louisiana--A Study in Cultural Conflicts," Lewis Newton suggested that the harshness of life on the frontier and the shortage of ministers lessened the dependence of Americans upon the institutional church. This made them more inclined to "follow the bent of their economic or social interests without regard to religious considerations."

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 117-18, 128, 141.

Frontier Americans were either so lacking in their religious commitment or so easy-going in their attitudes towards Catholicism that when it suited their convenience American settlers took an active part in the Catholic church.¹

With no regular minister in town until after 1820, Americans often turned to the Catholic priests for weddings, baptisms, and even Sunday sermons. The names of Americans, often of Scottish or Irish descent, are among the baptismal and marriage records of St. Xavier Catholic Church beginning in the 1780's. For example on February 3, 1786 Pierre Waldren, who was already a Roman Catholic, had his wife Martha and their six children baptized into the Roman Catholic church. The mother and children, according to the baptismal entry, had previously claimed no religion. As was usually the case, the sponsors for the Americans who were baptized were local French men and women. On April 18 of 1786, a Canadian of Scottish descent, Robert McCay, married a local French woman, Marie Laffont, the daughter of the surgeon and merchant, Jean Baptiste Laffont. It was a large wedding at St. Xavier's which was attended by many prominent citizens, both French and American. The names of the witnesses who signed reveals the social mixing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds: Robert McCay and William McIntosh, Paul Gamelin and François Bosseron, George Sharp and Willam Park. Non-French names appear in the parish records with increasing frequency after 1800.²

Since St. Xavier Catholic Church was the only church in town until a Methodist church was built in 1831, couples who wanted to have their

¹Lewis Newton, "Creoles and Anglo-Americans in Old Louisiana--A Study in Cultural Conflicts, The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly 14 [1933]: 35-37.

²VPR.

wedding in a church prior to 1831 had only one choice. Quite often "mixed" marriages, where one person was Catholic and the other Protestant, were performed at St. Xavier. The only other option couples had, if they objected to being married in a Catholic church by a priest, was to wait until a Protestant minister visited Vincennes. This did not happen often, since frontier preachers served a widely dispersed population. When an "itinerant" or circuit-riding preacher did come to town, the same people turned out to hear him regardless of his religious affiliation. Most of the circuit riders were Methodists or Baptists, as were many of the American settlers, particularly those from the south.¹

Though the shortage of ministers to serve the population of the United States became particularly acute as settlers rapidly spread westward after 1795, the lack of priests to serve the western French population had been a chronic problem throughout the French history of the region. When the area was annexed to the United States, the situation did not improve. Throughout the nineteenth century, there were never enough priests to serve the Catholic inhabitants of Detroit, New Orleans, the Illinois Country, and American settlements in Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1808 a Catholic episcopal see was established for the western territory at Bardstown, Kentucky. The choice of Bardstown, rather than Vincennes, for the first Catholic episcopate in the West was significant for the development of Catholicism in and around Vincennes. The permanent church organization of the Middle West was to be American in origin and spirit, in spite of the numerous French Catholics living there. In 1810

¹Isaac Reed, Return to Indiana (1822), excerpts in Lindley, Indiana, 483 and 498; David Thomas, Travels through the western country [1819], excerpts in Lindley, Indiana, 105; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 366.

Father Flaget, a former pastor of Vincennes, was appointed as bishop at Bardstown. His main responsibility, as dictated by Bishop Carroll in Baltimore, was to minister to American Catholics who migrated to Kentucky and Tennessee from Maryland, the first home of the Catholic Church in the English colonies. With an acute shortage of priests in the West, the Catholic community at Vincennes was often neglected, as it had been for much of the town's existence. When Father Rivet died in 1804, the town had no resident priest until 1818, and then for only a few years. From 1804 to 1818 the people of Vincennes received only occasional visits from Father Olivier who lived in Prairie du Rocher (near present-day St. Louis) or other missionary priests.¹

When Bishop Flaget visited Vincennes in 1814, he commented on the lack of tension between Protestants and Catholics saying that there was "no strained feeling between religious groups" and that the non-Catholics came in large numbers to the Catholic services. Americans wanted to hear sermons in their own tongue and begged Flaget to give them English sermons. According to Flaget, "They [Americans] are filled with the best disposition. Nothing would be easier than to baptize and educate their children in the Catholic religion, and lead back a great number of the adults to their old faith. . ." Unfortunately, Flaget was only visiting, and he had no priest available to send to Vincennes.²

When two other native-French priests, Father Jeanjean and Father Blanc, were stationed for a short period in Vincennes beginning in 1818, they too found the Americans very appreciative of their efforts. Deprived

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 122-23; Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 322.

²Flaget to David in David to Bruté, Oct. 10, 1814 as cited in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 128.

of their own ministers, the non-Catholic American settlers were anxious to hear the word of God, even if it came from French priests who were unable to speak fluent English. According to these priests, the Americans "observe scrupulously the Holy Day, and insisted on the cessation of all work." They found the French considerably less faithful of the Sunday observance. In spite of whatever prejudices the Americans may have had against Catholicism, they listened intently to the sermons of Jeanjean and Blanc. Their regular attendance of the French sermons is particularly remarkable in view of the fact that a Presbyterian minister, Reverend Samuel Scott, traveled the three miles from his home to Vincennes every three weeks to conduct services. According to Father Blanc, Reverend Scott showed him the same respect that he received from other American settlers.¹

The friendly attitude of Americans towards French priests was shared by William Henry Harrison during his years as governor. Governor Harrison established a friendship with Father Rivet, frequently inviting Rivet to the governor's mansion for social visits. Though Harrison respected Rivet as a person, the governor also used the relationship for political ends. Harrison believed that with the Indians' continuing respect for French priests, Rivet could help persuade local Indians to remain on friendly terms with the United States government. Harrison arranged for Father Rivet to receive a small salary from the United States government for his efforts among the Indians. After Rivet died in 1804, Harrison attempted to obtain a government subsidy to support another Catholic

¹McAvoy, Catholic Church, 141.

priest. Though no priest was assigned to Vincennes, Harrison continued to use visiting priests as friendly ambassadors to local tribes.¹

The virtual absence of religious prejudice against French Catholics sheds light on the development of social relations between French and Americans in Vincennes. One of the most important questions concerning Vincennes' transition from a French colonial village to an American frontier town is "What place, socially and economically, did the French occupy in the increasingly American environment?" Knowing that the French were not treated as social outcasts because of their Catholic religion is one important part of the answer to that question.

The harmonious relations between the French and Americans after the turn of the century in Vincennes was furthered by friendly intermixing of important social and economic leaders in both communities. The wealthy and prominent members of both cultural groups were likely to speak each other's language, interact for business purposes, and attend the same social functions. One of the most important factors which cemented relations between the elite French and American families in Vincennes was the intermarriage between American men and French women. Judge Henry Vanderburgh (originally from New York) married Françoise Cornoyer and General W. Johnston married Josette Trembley. Dr. Elijah Tisdale married Frances Bosseron, the daughter of wealthy and respected town leader, Francis Bosseron. Another of Bosseron's daughters, Suzanne, married the

¹When Indian problems escalated in 1808 as the Prophet and his brother Tecumseh resisted further white encroachment on Indian lands, Harrison asked the Bishop Badin, the first bishop for the west stationed in Bardstown, Kentucky, to visit the Indians. Badin believed that "The partiality of the savage for the French and for Priests induced him [Harrison] to make the proposal." Wishing to be useful to his country, Badin wrote that he would have obeyed Harrison's request if not for his commitments in Kentucky. Badin to Carroll, June 15, 1808, Archdiocesan Archives of Baltimore, as quoted in McAvoy, Catholic Church, 117-18.

recent French immigrant, Louis Fortin. Her sister Rosalie married Fortin's friend and business partner, Antoine Marchal, who was also an educated, well-to-do immigrant from France. Young French women from prominent local families also found suitable husbands among the Scottish or Irish merchants who settled in Vincennes. For example in 1786 Marie Lafont married Robert McCay, a Scotsman from Montreal. Therèse Trembley married one of the region's most important government Indian agents, the Irish-born William Prince. Prince also served as a judge in Vincennes, auditor of the Indiana Territory, state senator, and he was eventually elected as a U.S. senator in 1823.¹ In a rare case of a French man marrying an American woman, the Sardinian-born Frenchman, Francis Vigo, married Elizabeth Shannon.²

The intermarriage between French and Americans in Vincennes demonstrates that there was minimal ethnic prejudice against the French in Vincennes--at least among those of the "better sort." Though Americans and recent European immigrants often described the local French as

¹For mention of marriage between Vanderburgh and Cornoyer, see Dec. 3, 1809, VPR. For General W. Johnston and Trembley, see Dec. 3, 1809. Born in Virginia, General W. Johnston was prominent in law and public life, and he was elected as a representative to the Indiana Territorial Assembly in 1807. Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 351. For Lafont-McCay marriage see April 18, 1786, VPR. For evidence of Trembley and Prince marriage, see baptism of their child, Jeanne Celeste, on September 7, 1811, VPR. For background on William Prince, see Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 343, 421 and Somes, Old Vincennes, 178-79. Fortin-Bosseron wedding on January 3, 1801, VPR. For other marriages of the Bosseron women, see document in Lasselle Papers which lists the spouses and children of all the children of Françoise and Francis Bosseron. Though rare, there were a few instances of lower class marriages among the French and American or Irish newcomers. For examples, see marriage of Samuel Rolus and Jeanne Campeau on Oct. 1, 1810; Joseph Oneill (native of Quebec) and Victoire Delisle, Dec. 25, 1809.

²Somes, Old Vincennes, 127. By the time he died in 1836, Vigo had lost most of his large fortune. In his last years he was determined to collect from the U.S. government the \$8,016.00 which he had loaned to George Rogers Clark during the American Revolution. He died never seeing the money. In 1875, the federal government paid the debt to his estate, plus \$41,282.60 in interest.

backwards, ignorant, lazy, and poor, this description was aimed at the lower classes. It did not include successful French businessmen who often loaned considerable amounts of money to Americans and French alike. The negative description did not apply to local French women who married prominent American men, or to the French men and women who were regularly chosen as god-parents for offspring of French-American unions. Often mixing at social functions, the well-to-do French and Americans in Vincennes did not experience the same kind of ethnic separation that was common among the lower classes. The reason for this is that the successful French families in Vincennes had developed a strong work ethic, comfortable lifestyle, and broader world view than many of their French neighbors--all of which made them seem less "foreign" to the Americans who settled among them. Though prominent French families were much more readily accepted by the Americans, the French as a whole were not persecuted or ostracized because of their Catholic religion or different ethnic background. The lack of persecution does not necessarily mean that Americans warmly embraced the French, particularly those among the lower classes. It did, however, create a neutral environment in which the French lived free of fear and were able to prosper free of ethnic prejudice.

The same work ethic and ability to succeed which enabled certain Frenchmen to enter the Americans' social world also enabled these same individuals to preserve and expand their wealth as Americans filled up the territory in and around Vincennes. As Jay Gitlin pointed out in his "Old Wine in New Bottles: French Merchants and The Emergence of The American Midwest, 1795-1835," French merchants were in a unique position to profit from the United States government's need to dispossess the Indians. Merchants who cooperated with the government by

pressuring Indians to cede lands stood to profit in three ways. Some managed to have land set aside for themselves in treaty negotiations. Most profited by providing annuity goods specified in treaties. Another way to profit was by receiving money directly from the government in payment of individual Indian debts. The money paid to merchants was then subtracted from the amount the government was obligated by treaty to pay into the tribal funds. This system made it easy for merchants to overcharge Indians for goods or to charge the government for goods the Indians never received.¹

The economic development of the Middle West from 1800 to 1860 was greatly facilitated by the presence of French merchants who had key credit connections, close ties to regional Indian tribes, and a commitment to local development. The process of acquiring Indian lands and opening western lands to American settlement would have undoubtedly been more problematic and prolonged without French assistance. The wealthy French traders in the Middle West were as determined as their American counterparts to earn personal gain from the rapid settlement and economic development of the region.²

At first glance it would appear that the French ruthlessly betrayed their Indian friends by working as agents for the Americans and encouraging Indians to cede lands. The reality of the situation is that the west during the opening decades of the nineteenth century was a complicated, fast-changing place where loyalties shifted and overlapped. Indians and French alike were forced to make choices concerning the best way to cope with Americans. The "survival philosophies" which developed

¹Jay Gitlin, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 46.

²ibid., 37, 48-9; Anson, Miami Indians, 145.

differed considerably from one person to another. The determination to survive caused both the French and the Indians to act in ways that sometimes appear inconsistent, inconsiderate, and self-serving. Indians disagreed over whether to cede lands, whether or not to adopt white customs and habits, whether to avoid war with Americans at all costs, or whether to resist white encroachment by joining with Tecumseh and the Prophet. It was not only the French but friendly Indians as well who kept Governor Harrison informed of events that transpired in Indian villages. Some Indian chiefs (often those of mixed Indian-French ancestry) profited handsomely from treaties that sold tribal lands while others criticized them for their willingness to part with those lands. One of wealthiest of these chiefs was the Miami chief Jean Baptiste Richardville (or Peshewah) who was recognized as the richest man in Indiana before his death.¹

With Indians so divided in thoughts and actions, the French cannot be criticized too severely as "traitors" when they, too, were acting in ways which assured their own survival. Even after many Frenchmen fought with the Americans during the War of 1812, Indians generally preferred French rather than American traders. The familiar French traders were usually perceived as benefactors by the tribes with whom they were licensed to trade. According to Burt Anson in his book The Miami Indians,

The Indians understood and depended upon them [traders] and requested specific men for their villages. While individual

¹Anson, Miami Indians, 178, 187. Richardville was born in 1761, the son of a French trader, Joseph Drouet de Richardville and a Miami woman, Tecumwah. When Joseph left Indiana in the 1780's to settle permanently in Three Rivers, Quebec, Jean-Baptiste stayed with his mother who later married Charles Beaubien, the most important trader at Kekionga. Tecumwah apparently exerted much influence on Miami policy for years. For additional information on Richardville, see Donald Chaput, "The Family of Drouet de Richerville: Merchants, Soldiers, and Chiefs of Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 74 [June, 1978]: 112-14.

traders differed, many of them married into the tribe, sent their children to the best schools available, and later, with their families, emigrated west with the Indians.¹

While some French traders moved west to pursue their familiar lifestyle of trapping and trading far from the interference of American lawmakers and settlers, others preferred to adapt to the changing environment around them. Although the fur trade overshadowed all other business pursuits in the eighteenth century, by the early nineteenth century some French merchants were quite ready to lessen their dependence on the fur trade when regional development offered opportunities to diversify their investments and increase profits. Commercial ties with eastern American cities, as well as Pittsburgh and Louisville, broadened economic opportunities, although the French maintained old business ties to Montreal and particularly to New Orleans. Land speculation provided another source of potential profits to those who had money to invest.²

The anticipation of a future massive emigration of Americans to the west caused Frenchmen such as Francis Vigo, Antoine Marechal, Hyacinthe Lasselle, and Louis Fortin to buy up as much land as they could afford. Before the turn of the century Vigo alone had purchased over one hundred of the 400-acre tracts of congressional donation land. He also opened a ferry across the Wabash to add to the income he made from land speculation, farming, and trading. The development of the regional economy was as important to the French as it was to Americans. The life of Hyacinthe Lasselle provides the best example of a Vincennes French merchant whose flexibility and foresight enabled him to attain financial

¹Anson, Miami Indians, 186.

²Gitlin, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 46-9.

success and social prominence as the political and economic landscape in the midwest changed during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹

Lasselle was born at Miami village Kekionga at Fort Wayne (in northern Indiana) in 1777. He was sent to Montreal for an education and later returned to Indiana to work in the fur trade business with his older brothers, Jacques and François. In 1804 Hyacinthe settled in Vincennes and soon became one of the leading traders and most respected citizens in town. The large number of loan notes still existing in the Lasselle Papers indicate that both French and American residents in Vincennes often turned to him for large and small loans. Lasselle's inn was recognized as the finest in the town, and the Lasselle Ball Room, as it was called, was the site of many patriotic bashes. Hyacinthe was well on his way to becoming an honored American patriot and pioneer. During the War of 1812 Hyacinthe served as lieutenant of the Indiana Rangers and was of great use as an interpreter and Indian scout. After the war in 1816 Lasselle and some other merchants, French and Anglo-American, formed the Terre Haute Land Company. His determination to profit from the economic development of America continued when, in 1833, Lasselle purchased shares in the Wabash and Erie Canal. He later moved his family to Logansport, Indiana, the county seat of the newly created Cass County. The Lasselles and other elite French families like them in Vincennes and other French villages continued to play an important role in the economic development of the midwest up to 1860.²

¹ For evidence of French traders buying up claims to donation lands, see deeds in the Lasselle Papers and the Francis Vigo Papers, WSML.

²Gitlin, "Old Wine in New Bottles," 50; Lasselle Papers. In 1813, a banquet at Lasselle's Tavern was held to celebrate the completion of the Vincennes courthouse. Somes, Old Vincennes, 143.

While prominent members among the French and American communities in Vincennes gathered at balls, Fourth-of-July celebrations, weddings, the lower classes of French and Americans did not often mix socially in the period 1790-1820 because of the language barrier. Account books of local taverns show that French customers usually played billiards and drank with their French friends. Americans did the same.¹ In 1832 when local government officials temporarily decided to crack down on gambling, the long list of offenders who were charged with the "criminal" offense of playing "lew" (a favorite card game among the French), were overwhelmingly French. Though lower-class French and Americans came increasingly into contact as the nineteenth century wore on, in the early decades they routinely drank, socialized, and played cards with members of their own cultural and linguistic group.²

Another indicator of the social distance which generally separated the lower and middle classes of French and American inhabitants is the rarity of court cases between French and Americans. Regardless of whether a court case involved assault and battery, slander, debt, or other offenses, the vast majority of civil and criminal cases in Vincennes between 1790 and 1820 concerned either Americans or French citizens, but not both.³

The church records of the St. Xavier Catholic Church also contain clues to the social relations between lower-class French and Americans in Vincennes. These records reveal that there were relatively few marriages

¹Account books and lists of billiard games are preserved in Christian Graeter Collection, A124, Indiana Historical Society, WSML. See also account books in Lasselle Papers.

²Knox County Court Files, Boxes 71, 72, and 73, KCCR.

³Records of the Court of General Quarter Sessions, KCCR.

between French and Americans of this class prior to 1820. French church members regularly are listed as god-parents to American children who were baptized, however, which indicates a certain amount of trust and goodwill between some members of the two different groups. Language and cultural barriers prevented frequent social mingling between the common people, and this in turn kept the number of mixed French-American marriages low for several decades after Americans settled in and around Vincennes.¹

The social separation of the lower-class French from Americans served to perpetuate the distinctive culture and lifestyle of the French *habitants* and traders. Clinging to cultural traditions and depending upon small-scale hunting, trapping, trading, and farming to earn a living, most of the French continued to appear poor, lazy, and ignorant to American newcomers. Their proximity to Americans did not cause the majority of Frenchmen to embrace American ways. While a small group of wealthy merchants and traders blended readily with their American counterparts and had the skills and resources to profit in the new American environment, most of the people in Vincennes had neither the resources, skills, or ambition to prosper from the extension of American sovereignty over Vincennes.

The vast majority of French *habitants* had no money for land speculation or long term investment. The coming of Americans severely disrupted their way of life, much as it did for their Indian neighbors. The days of living comfortably from hunting, trapping, trading, and small-scale agriculture were long gone. The turbulent years during and after the

¹VPR.

American Revolution had created widespread poverty among the French in Vincennes, and the town's economic condition only grew worse during the period of Indian attacks during the 1780's and early 1790's. The United States government's long delay in delivering the 400 acres of donation lands (to compensate the French for past suffering inflicted by Americans) and the economic distress of many French families caused the vast majority to sell their claims to the donation lands for a fraction of their worth. The money was quickly spent on necessities, and without much land, the French attempted to live as they had in the past: trapping, trading, working in their gardens, and cultivating a few acres of farmland. Unfortunately, profits from small-scale trapping and trading declined as the American government bought up Indian land and resold it to American settlers. Like the Indians, the French could no longer wander at will to hunt and trap.¹

John Badollet, the native of Switzerland who came to the United States in the 1780's and settled in Vincennes in 1805 as the recorder of the land office, had this to say of the local French inhabitants:

Their former opulence having disappeared with the Indian trade by which they subsisted, they live cooped up in this village. . .with a few exceptions, in a great state of poverty, hauling their firewood from a distance of three or four miles, raising a little corn in the neighbourhood of Vincennes & following boating for employment. . . ."²

¹McAvoy, The Catholic Church, 104-06.

²Badollet to Gallatin, January 1, 1806, in Gayle Thornbrough, (ed.), The Correspondence of John Badollet and Albert Gallatin, 1804-1836, (Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society, 1963), 57. During college Badollet was a close friend of Albert Gallatin. As Secretary of the Treasury under President Thomas Jefferson, Gallatin was responsible for the survey and sale of public land. Gallatin appointed Badollet as the register of the newly created land office in Vincennes in 1804. In her introduction Thornbrough provides a thorough background of Badollet and the close friendship between he and Gallatin.

Badollet, unlike many others who provided similar descriptions of the French, emphasized that not all the French fit this description by adding, "To these general observations honourable exceptions can be mentioned." There were indeed exceptions, individuals who were socially respected and economically successful, but their numbers were relatively few.¹ Badollet believed that in spite of the fact that most of the French in Vincennes were "poor and ignorant beyond conception," they still exhibited "something mild in their manners." This was in contrast to the Americans who "when placed under the same circumstances of ignorance and poverty, shew more sense or perhaps cunning attended with a savageness of manners truly repelling." From the frequency of contemporary comments concerning the polite, gentle, hospitable character of the French as compared to Americans, there is no doubt that the character difference between French and Americans was stark and impossible to overlook.²

Badollet also noted another key difference between American and French settlers. Americans lived on individual farms, but the French doggedly refused to leave their village. The idea of living outside of town on a farm "excites in them as much abhorrence as if they were dropped here from the middle of Paris." Living on individual farmsteads was

¹ibid., 58. The American John Cleves Symmes believed that although the poverty of the local people was due in great part to the way that they had been preyed upon and plundered by various groups of Americans, it was also their "awkward way of farming" that kept them "always poor & in want of the substantial of life. . ." Symmes also described the French as "a civil people," but also very ignorant, though he admitted that he could not be certain since he was unable to talk with them. Bond, (ed.) The Correspondence of John Cleves Symmes, 289.

²For comments on positive French personality, see Flint, A Condensed Geography. . .," in Lindley, Travel Accounts, 444; David Thomas in Lindley, Travel Accounts, 67; Bidlack, "The Yankee," 9. In 1817 the Quaker Morris Birkbeck wrote that the Vincennes French exhibited a "strain of politeness, which marks the origin of this settlement in a way which is very flattering to the French." Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey, 101.

generally considered as the American way, and Americans believed it was the modern, progressive way. Most of the French in Vincennes, however, continued to follow the old ways, even though it meant economic decline and being considered "ignorant" and "backwards" by their American neighbors.¹ Rather than enclosing individual farms, they tilled long strips of land in the communal open-fields just outside the village. Most were slow to adopt the "modern" farming techniques brought by Americans. John Bradbury, an English botanist who traveled through the west in the years 1809-1811, had this to say of the French in the upper Mississippi Valley:

The French . . . are very indolent, and so much attached to the manners of their ancestors, and even their practices in husbandry, that although they see their American neighbors, by the application of improved implements and methods, able to cultivate double the quantity of ground in the same time, nothing can induce them to abandon their old practices. . .²

In spite of their "want of industry," Bradbury noticed an "appearance of comfort and independence" in the French villages due to fertile soil which required little labor, the *habitants'* fine gardens and orchards, and the horses, cows, hogs which many French settlers owned.³

The tenacity of the French in clinging to traditional ways was observed by Victor Collot, a Frenchman who journeyed in the west near the end of the eighteenth century. Collot wrote that the French simply refused to "change any practice which is evidently wrong," or to adopt new and more efficient farming techniques. Their response was merely, "It is

¹Thornbrough, Correspondence of Badellet, 57. For stark differences in French and American settlement patterns and agricultural systems see Ekberg, "Agriculture, *Mentalités*, and Violence on the Frontier," 106-9.

²John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior, 263-64.

³*ibid.*

the custom, our fathers did so, I have done well, my children will do the same."¹ Maintaining as much of the familiar in their daily lives undoubtedly helped the French cope with the changing world around them. In both their social lives and their economic pursuits, many of the French inhabitants maintained familiar habits throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, they gradually adapted to the increasingly American social and economic environment around them.

Although profits from small-scale trapping and trading waned over the early decades of the nineteenth century, the rapid influx of Americans provided economic opportunities for at least some members of the non-elite French and Americans in Vincennes. Some idea of the economic opportunities which accompanied demographic growth can be gleaned from a list of businesses which were established in Vincennes by 1818:

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|---|------------------------------------------------|
| 18 | Merchandise stores | 1 | Apothecary |
| 6 | Taverns | 2 | Printing Offices |
| 4 | Groceries | 4 | Blacksmiths' shops |
| 2 | Gunsmith shops | 3 | Shoemakers' shops |
| 3 | Saddlers' shops | 4 | Tailors' shops |
| 2 | Cabinet Makers | 3 | Hat Factories |
| 1 | Silversmith | 1 | Tin factory |
| 1 | Chair Maker | 1 | Tobacconist |
| 1 | Tannery | 2 | Market houses and a livery stable ² |

With the growth in population, commerce and industry in Vincennes, opportunities for more diverse types of work were available. French men worked as day laborers, carpenters or masons, or trade apprentices. For

¹Collot, A Journey in North America, 286. For other evidence of French being slow to adapt to new farming techniques, see Bidlack, The Yankee Meets the Frenchman, 6.

²Thomas, Travels through the western country, excerpts in Lindley, Indiana, 102.

those who chose to pursue familiar work, the increasing amount of commerce flowing through Vincennes created a demand for experienced French boatmen to transport goods to and from New Orleans and Eastern cities. With a long history as full- and part-time *voyageurs*, the local French had the navigational expertise, familiarity with water routes, and established contacts in commercial cities to continue working successfully as the west's "transportation experts." Since the French generally spent only a small portion of their time working their small farms, they had more freedom to travel than most of the west's early American settlers.¹

The French inhabitants' distinctive background and skills also made them valuable to the United States government as interpreters, Indian agents, and guides. French traders were also paid to deliver annuity goods to Indians.² In nearly all of Governor Harrison's meetings and interactions with western tribes he hired Frenchmen to assist him. The French were much more knowledgeable than Americans with western geography, Indian languages, and Indian customs. The Indians generally trusted the French far more than Americans, and Harrison took advantage of this trust in his dealings with regional Indian tribes. With the help of French interpreters and agents, Harrison pursued an aggressive policy of land acquisition, and in a series of treaties from 1803 to 1809, he acquired the southern third of Indiana.

¹In a letter to his mother in 1832, Calvin Fletcher mentioned that \$10,000 worth of Indian goods which had recently arrived from New York were being transported in pirogues by French boatmen to a treaty with the Potawatomi Indians on the Eel River. Calvin Fletcher to mother in Proctorsville, Vermont, October 21, 1832, in Gayle Thornbrough, (ed.), The Diary of Calvin Fletcher, 1817-1838, Vol. 1, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972), 183. When the English botanist John Bradbury traveled through the west, the various crews that transported him and his gear were often French. See John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior, 156-73, 191-92. Thornbrough, The Correspondence of John Badollet, 57.

²Anson, Miami Indians, 145.

Governor Harrison's most trusted French agent was Joseph Barron, described by Harrison as being the only white person he had ever met who "speaks the languages of all the Tribes residing within this territory." Barron became so closely identified with Harrison that the Indians opposed to white settlement soon hated Barron as much as Governor Harrison. Barron's name is attached to every treaty of importance negotiated by Harrison. During the War of 1812 the Indians issued a "wanted poster" of Barron carved on a piece of bark. In spite of this notoriety, Barron resumed work as an Indian trader after the war. As late as 1838 he was still trading with the Potawatomie Indians who lived south of the town of Logansport. His career as an Indian agent for the United States government lasted more than twenty years.¹

Other Frenchmen were equally as important as liasons between western tribes and the United States government. As Governor Harrison's chief of scouts (or head "spy") Toussaint Dubois, a wealthy Vincennes trader, was expected to observe Indian activities and to keep the Governor informed of potentially hostile Indians. In 1811 when Harrison led an army north from Vincennes to Prophetstown to "neutralize" what Harrison deemed a hostile gathering of Indians around the Prophet and his brother Tecumseh, the Governor sent Dubois ahead to the Indian village in hopes of arranging a conference with the Prophet. The Indians, however, rejected

¹Charles Laselle, "The Old Indian Traders of Indiana," in The Indiana Magazine of History, 2 [1906], 6-9. This article contains a list of many traders, French and American, who were licensed by William Henry Harrison in 1801-1802 and another list of traders who were licensed after the end of the War of 1812. For additional information on Joseph Barron, see Esaray, Harrison: Messages and Letters, 1:395; Day, Vincennes: A Pictorial History, 34; Somes, Old Vincennes, 156.

the offer and attacked Harrison's troops before dawn on the morning of November 7, 1811.¹

During and after the War of 1812, the government continued to depend on the French to assist with its Indian relations. Pierre Laplante, Michel Brouillette, and other Vincennes traders who worked as interpreters and Indian agents for the United States government continued to do so until the majority of Indians were removed further west during the 1830's.²

The French participation in the Battle of Tippecanoe in particular and the western military campaigns during the War of 1812 marked an important turning point in the relations between the French and Indians, and between the French and Americans. When forced to side with the Indians or the Americans, the French in Vincennes cast their lot with the Americans. As the threat of another Indian war increased, the loyalty of the French to the American cause, however, was anything but certain. The close relations between the French and the Indians made it difficult for American leaders to believe that the French would fight their long-time friends and trading partners. Describing his lack of trust in many of the French interpreters and agents who worked for the United States government, Governor Harrison wrote to Secretary of War William Eustis in 1810 that "Nine tenths of them prefer the interests of the Indians to

¹For Dubois, see Day, Vincennes: A Pictorial History, 34 and Barnhart and Riker, Indiana, 390n.

²The papers of William Prince, the main government Indian agent at Vincennes and Fort Harrison, contain receipts and records which document the extent to which the government relied on French traders as interpreters, agents, and transporters of annuity goods for the years 1813-1823. Miscellaneous Papers of William Prince, SC-1224, WSML.

that of their employers." He named Joseph Barron as the only clear exception.¹

Harrison had good reasons to question the loyalty of the French. While his French spies reported to him on the worrisome growth of followers around the Prophet and Tecumseh at Prophetstown, Harrison knew for certain that the Prophet had his own French spies in Vincennes reporting every move the Governor made. Many of the French, like the Indian tribes who professed friendship to the United States, tried to maintain a favorable position with both Harrison and the Shawnee brothers, Tecumseh and the Prophet. As red-white relations deteriorated, some Indians advised the French to separate themselves from the Americans at Vincennes and move across the Mississippi or at least to the other side of the Wabash. In so doing they would not suffer in case of an Indian attack on the Americans at Vincennes.² At Detroit, St. Louis, and other towns with large French populations, American leaders worried about the allegiance of the French inhabitants. The War of 1812 once again posed a threat to French-Indian relations, but it also provided an opportunity for the French in western communities to establish credibility among their American neighbors.³

¹Esaray, Harrison: Messages and Letters, 1: 395.

²Brouillette to Harrison, June 30, 1810 and Harrison to Secretary of War, June 14, 1810, Harrison to Secretary of War, July 4, 1810, all in Esaray, Harrison: Messages and Letters, 1: 424, 436-37, 438-40.

³Gitlin, "Old Wine," 44-45. Dennis Au, "'Best Troops in the World,': The Michigan Territorial Militia in the Detroit River Theater During the War of 1812" in Robert Holden, (ed.), Selected Papers from the 1991 and 1992 George Rogers Clark Trans-Appalachian Frontier History Conferences, (Vincennes, 1994), 105-120. Governor William Hull of the Michigan Territory worried about the dependability of the French-Canadians who comprised four-fifths of the population. Though the French seemed friendly to the United States government, he thought their close connection to the region's Indians might prevent them from supporting the

Torn between friendships and loyalties to both the Americans and Indians, the French in Vincennes faced difficult choices. Social and economic attachments to regional Indian tribes were long-standing and important, but by 1810, the people of Vincennes had been living with their American neighbors for over twenty years. French and Americans had intermarried, borrowed money from each other, served on juries together, and sat across the aisle from each other at church. French merchants had begun importing manufactured goods from eastern cities. The strong governmental presence in Vincennes indicated that the United States sovereignty over the West was permanent. When Governor Harrison called out the militia to defend the lives and property of western white inhabitants from Indian raids, French citizens had little choice but to respond. Their commitment to Harrison's military goals could not have been as strong as the Americans with whom they served, but their future as American citizens depended on their cooperation and support of the United States government.

When Harrison marched to Prophetstown in 1811 with his one-thousand-man army, a sizeable contingent of the 415 soldiers in the Indiana militia were French.¹ In 1812, the Vincennes French who served in the Indiana militia were formed into two all-French companies which served under French captains Pierre André and Francis Boyer (spelled "Boye" on the roster). Nearly all of the 106 French names which appear on

American cause. Contrary to his fears, during the War of 1812 the French soldiers were loyal, dependable, and stood as firm as any in battle.

¹Esarey, (ed.), Harrison's Messages and Letters, 1: 592-94. Harrison's army was comprised of 345 soldiers of the Fourth Regiment (federal troops), 415 members of the Indiana militia, 120 dragoons or mounted militia, and 13 scouts and spies. Among the mounted militia and riflemen were a number of Kentucky volunteers. *Ibid.*, 1: 597-98.

the roster for these two companies were spelled incorrectly. "Dagenet" became "Dashney," and "Cartier" became "Kirkee." Serving as an American soldier was an "Americanizing" process in more ways than one. Though the French and American civilians were grouped in separate militia companies in 1812, by 1815 French and Americans served together in units of mounted riflemen, both led by French captains.¹

The participation of the French in the War of 1812 was not a deciding factor in the outcome of the war, but it did prove to the American settlers in the west as well as to the United States government that the French were indeed trustworthy, dependable citizens. The war also ended any hopes the British might have had of reclaiming lands in the Old Northwest or of controlling the area's Indians and the fur trade. After the war the Indians were forced to admit military defeat, and pressure for Indian lands cessions began immediately. Thousands of Americans migrated westward, and soon Vincennes and the other French communities in the west were surrounded by American towns and American farms.

In spite of the increasing numbers of Americans who settled in and around Vincennes, the town retained a distinctly French flavor throughout the 1820's and 1830's. Over time the French inhabitants gradually learned the English language and came to appreciate the superior agricultural methods practiced by their American neighbors. Though the process of becoming American brought uncomfortable political and economic changes, it also brought new opportunities. Compared to other non-Anglo minorities which the Americans encountered as they migrated westward,

¹ Rosters from 1812 show 44 French men in Pierre André's company and 62 in Francis Boyer's Company. Charles Franklin, Indiana: War of 1812 Soldiers, (Indianapolis: Ye Olde Genealogy Shoppe, 1984), 48-49. For mixed companies of mounted riflemen, see 73-4.

the French fared exceptionally well. Wealthy members of the French community readily formed social, economic, and marital ties with prominent Americans, and they experienced no obstacles to participating in land speculation, developing new commercial ties with eastern cities, and investing in regional improvements. Leading French families encouraged their children to learn English as well as French, and sometimes sent their children to American schools.¹

The French lower classes were slower to socialize with Americans, and in the short run they suffered economically as the fur trade declined. However, they eventually learned new skills or took advantage of economic opportunities using old skills so that in a couple of decades, the financial situation of many of them had improved.² Surviving and adapting to new situations was something at which the French in Vincennes were quite experienced and which served them well during the early decades of the American presence in Vincennes. At the same time, the French inhabitants' strong sense of community, Catholic faith, songs and other folk traditions, and familiar cultural practices--all of which perpetuated the difference between the French and their American neighbors--gave the French a sense of stability and continuity during the rapid changes which occurred during the first half of the nineteenth

¹For education, see receipt showing amount paid by Lasselle to David Ruby (\$6. 2/3) dated November 11, 1813 in Lasselle Papers; Bidlack, "The Yankee," 9; Gitlin, "Old Wine," 4.

²In 1828 William Flint wrote that the poverty which plagued the French in the past "is all reversed now. Most of the inhabitants have an air of ease and affluence. . ." Timothy Flint, "A condensed geography," 452. Flint may have exaggerated the people's affluence, however, since priests who visited or lived in Vincennes in the late 1820's and 1830's stated that many of the parishioners had little wealth. McAvoy, Catholic Church, 168, 205-06.

century. Pride in their distinct French heritage endured even as French men and women moved increasingly in a non-French environment.¹

No one profited more from the coming of Americans to Vincennes than did Hyacinthe Lasselle, and few moved so quickly into American social and economic circles. Yet Lasselle's interest in preserving his French culture and supporting French cultural institutions was apparent when, in 1830, he subscribed to a new national newspaper, Le Courier des Etats Unis. Like other French men and women who lived all along the western frontier, Lasselle continued to value his French heritage and culture at the same time that he strove to make the changes which assured him social acceptance and economic success as an American citizen.²

¹Lewis, "Creoles and Anglo-Americans," 32. For pride of Vincennes French and the persistence of French-Canadian culture, see Dr. Samuel Judah, A Journal of Travel from New York to Indiana in 1827, excerpts in McCord, Travel Accounts, 134.

²Subscription notice, August 26, 1830, Lasselle Papers. Lewis, "Creoles and Anglo-Americans," 32.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of the French inhabitants in Vincennes and the other Illinois villages were quite different from colonists in England's American seaboard colonies or from the American pioneers (Anglo-Americans and others) who settled the Midwest during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Common perceptions of colonial America include the French only as the "other," or as temporary occupants of small western enclaves whose minimal importance disappears altogether once the "real" actors in the drama of western settlement--the Americans--arrive. This not only minimalizes the importance of peoples, events and developments in the eighteenth-century West in a general sense, but such a lack of serious consideration also blocks the insights which can be gleaned from comparing French and English colonial experiences in America.

Though the French in Vincennes shared some of the hardships and characteristics of later pioneers, the society they created was unique. It was shaped by tradition, local circumstances, and their collective idea of what a society should be. The Illinois villages, situated as they were on the furthest edge of the French and British empires and virtually unmolested by outside imperial interference until the late eighteenth century, enjoyed more freedom to develop according to villagers' own preferences than most other places in French or English North America. The world they created, then, was only minimally regulated by distant

governments and operated, to a considerable degree, in a manner consistent with the collective wishes of the people who lived there.

The most unique and defining characteristics of the society created by the inhabitants of Vincennes and the other Illinois villages included the following:

French villagers enjoyed friendly relations with neighboring Indians.

From the beginning the French developed close social and economic ties with their Indian neighbors. Though official French and British policies regulating the fur trade affected local French-Indian relations, the daily face-to-face interaction, intermarriages between French traders and Indian women, and the practice of French traders living in Indian villages at least part of the time created a trust and understanding between the two groups that was not seriously threatened until the arrival of United States soldiers and settlers in the 1780's. A shortage of French priests in the Illinois country probably helped to preserve friendly relations since Indians were rarely threatened by priestly pressure to change their religion or lifestyle. The feeling of security Vincennes French villagers enjoyed for many decades, in spite of being surrounded by Indian tribes, had few parallels in the history of English-Indian relations.

Middle western French settlement patterns reflected and reinforced the social cohesiveness and community-mindedness of the habitants.

Illinois French villagers lived in nuclear villages where frequent social interaction with other townspeople was central to daily life. Outsiders often commented on the attachment of the French to village life and their obstinate refusal to settle on lands far from the village. This attachment to village life persisted into the nineteenth century. The

French recoiled at the thought of being isolated from their neighbors as was so common with Americans who favored a dispersed settlement pattern. The sociability of the French is evident in the operation of consensual village politics (even when a commandant was present) and the cooperative efforts which were required for French farmers to work in common fields and to enforce communal fencing laws vital to open-field agriculture. It is also evident in the lack of interpersonal violence and the low crime rate in Vincennes prior to the arrival of American settlers. Whereas the villagers' social cohesion was undoubtedly influenced by the hierarchical nature of French political and religious institutions, it was also a result of geographic isolation of the villages. Mere survival demanded cooperation and the willingness to respect and uphold collective group decisions, particularly during the periods when there was no higher authority present (such as a priest or commandant) to settle differences.

The people of Vincennes made a living by working at a wide variety of commercial and subsistence activities.

Only a few of the Vincennes habitants made a living strictly by farming. Most French settlers avoided financial uncertainty, persistent labor, and monotony of widescale agriculture. Approximately half of the inhabitants farmed some land, producing enough crops to feed the other half who tilled no land at all. Nearly all inhabitants, however, profited in some manner from the fur trade. During the French period government convoys operating on the Mississippi guaranteed villagers regular supplies of goods from New Orleans as well as protection for their crops and other exports. Aside from the furs which usually were sent to Canada, the people of Vincennes depended on New Orleans for most of their commercial

transactions. Though European manufactured goods were readily available, their high cost forced most habitants to become self-sufficient and capable of producing much of what they needed. The regional exchange of surplus items between French habitants and Indians provided other essential goods such as maple sugar, bear oil, furniture, tanned leather. Hunting, fishing, and gathering natural resources from nearby woods, streams, and prairies also yielded valuable food and other necessities. The mixed economy of the French stood in contrast to their American neighbors' dedication to agriculture. The relatively small emphasis the French placed on agriculture and their propensity to "wander" in the woods caused American settlers to label the majority of French inhabitants as lazy and backwards.

While the defining characteristics of life in Vincennes did not significantly change during the British period, the coming of Americans set in motion a series of events which profoundly altered life for Vincennes villagers and their Indian neighbors. With the arrival of George Rogers Clark's troops during the American Revolution and the arrival of other American soldiers as well as settlers in the postwar years, life in Vincennes grew increasingly difficult. Soldiers seized what they needed from the French and in return offered worthless paper money or nothing at all. French loans made to Clark were not repaid. Escalating violence between American frontier settlers and Indians after the war seriously affected French-Indian relations in and around Vincennes and both the French and the Indians suffered from the disruptions in the fur trade. Though Indians generally continued to discriminate between French and American settlers, some French settlers lost their property and/or lives to Indian attackers, and everyone in Vincennes lived in constant fear. This

atmosphere of fear and violence, widespread poverty, and social and political instability caused by the tension between French villagers and their Indian-hating American neighbors was the bleakest period in the history of Vincennes.

When frontier violence ended in 1795 with the Treaty of Greenville, the subsequent period of peace brought relief from physical danger and gradual economic recovery for some villagers. But the French faced new challenges as Vincennes and the surrounding territory was flooded with American settlers and government officials. These new neighbors were English-speaking Protestants whose political and cultural background, work ethic, and personal characteristics were quite different from the French people of Vincennes. Within a few years the rapid influx of American settlers began to break down the cultural homogeneity of the old French town. American businessmen opened new stores and taverns. Protestant circuit-riding ministers occasionally gave sermons in town. Schools, a library, and a newspaper were signs of a growing American cultural presence. Local political autonomy quickly disintegrated as American judges, lawyers, governors, and other officials transformed the political landscape of the town. The establishment of strong civil government was long desired by the local inhabitants who were often without it, but many of the French were frustrated by the imposition of taxes, unfamiliar laws and regulations, and particularly by restrictions on their fur trading activities. They could no longer trade with Indian tribes of their own choice; American officials decided which traders were assigned to particular tribes. Within a few decades, the removal of many Indian tribes forced French traders to either move with the Indians or develop

new ways of earning a living. Fortunately, the rapid settlement and development of the Midwest also provided new economic opportunities.

In spite of the differences between the French and Americans in Vincennes, the social tensions which characterized French-American relations during the 1780's and early 1790's began to improve by the early nineteenth century. There were naturally some issues over which the two groups disagreed and occasional arguments between French and American individuals, but the clash of cultures in Vincennes did not produce violence or even serious social discord. The generally good relations between the French and Americans is evident not only by what is written in existing sources, but also by what does not appear in contemporary sources. Whereas the local French people had repeatedly demonstrated their ability and determination to express their discontent with various situations by petitioning distant European governments (during the French and British periods) and then the United States Congress, such petitions were almost non-existent after 1800. Access to a political "ear" in the person of Governor Harrison likely enabled the French to voice their political concerns locally without needing to address Congress. While it is safe to assume that the French were not always happy with Harrison's decisions, their frustration with Harrison or the policies of the United States government was rarely strong enough to cause the French to seek redress from Congress. The few petitions sent to Congress during the period dealt with the confirmation of French land titles, particularly the congressional donation lands. In the same way that the lack of French petitions from Vincennes is one indicator of peaceful relations between Americans and French, Governor Harrison's noticeable lack of mention about problems with the local French inhabitants in his

official correspondence also indicates that whatever problems may have existed were not serious.¹

There appear to be four key reasons why conflict between the French and Americans at Vincennes was minimal. The first, and perhaps most important reason, was that the elite leaders of both groups quickly developed close social ties and held a similar commitment to regional economic development. Intermarriage cemented the bonds between the two groups. The second reason for minimal conflict was the relatively infrequent social contact between lower-class French and Americans which reduced tension. A third factor which allowed for congenial relations was the virtual lack of competition for land. During the 1790's the French freely gave Americans land, and in later decades the commitment of the French to continue living in the nuclear village minimized conflicts over land possession since Americans were content to settle on homesteads several miles from town. Lastly, the United States government needed French traders to assist in Indian relations, and the French were generally willing to cooperate. The relationship between the United States government and the French interpreters, agents, and guides was mutually beneficial and encouraged cooperation and accommodation.

The pace of American settlement in and around Vincennes which began in earnest during the first decade of the nineteenth century grew rapidly during the following decades. Even when the Americans in Vincennes outnumbered the French, the French presence in Vincennes was

¹Logan Esarey, (ed.), Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison, 1800-1811, Vol. 1, (New York: Arno Press, 1975). Almost without exception, the only time Harrison refers to the French is to bemoan the practice of traders (French and American) giving or selling liquor to Indians or to discuss the activities and worthiness of several Frenchmen acting as Indian agents, guides, or interpreters.

still quite visible in the oldest section of the town near the Wabash River known as "Frenchtown." Though many French villagers sold off their land to American speculators, most clung to their lots in the village, thus perpetuating the existence of a densely populated French section of town. Within this French neighborhood, the French remained a closely-knit group which preserved many cultural traditions until after the Civil War.

Today, few of the descendents of the French in Vincennes know much about the history and traditions of their French ancestors. Only a generation ago, however, this was not true. In the 1930's when fieldworkers assigned to the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration interviewed local French descendents to record information on the French "folklore" of Vincennes, a handful of men and women in their seventies and eighties still remembered much about the traditions of their French ancestors.¹ Their recollections were preserved by the government fieldworkers, thus preserving cultural traditions, stories and legends, and even a vocabulary of the distinctive patois of the local French. Today a few local residents are quite knowledgeable about the town's French past, and an interest in the town's unique history is what led community leaders to organize the annual "Vincennes Rendezvous" where eighteenth-century life is recreated by participants portraying Indians and Indian traders as well as French and British soldiers, civilians, musicians, and artisans.

While the Vincennes Rendezvous was a fun event for me as a teenager, now when I travel there it feels somewhat like a pilgrimage. At

¹Information collected by the fieldworkers was compiled into a manuscript entitled "The Creole 'French' Pioneers at Old Post Vincennes." The manuscript is deposited at the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University.

dusk when historical reenactors sit around their fires dressed in authentic French clothing, smoking their clay pipes and singing old French songs, it is easy to look out across the Wabash River and conjure up images of life in the old French village. St. Xavier Catholic church stands where it always has, though the present structure (built in 1826) is much larger and more modern than it once was. The church archives preserve the records of baptisms, marriages, and burials dating to 1749. In a graveyard beside the church, in less than a square acre of land, are buried nearly 2,000 bodies of French soldiers, Indians, *voyageurs*, priests, and *habitants*. Many of these people I have come to know well in the course of my research and writing. Most of the original markers have disappeared, but newer markers identify the resting place of early town leaders.

The streets of Vincennes which are located closest to the Wabash River are named after both French and Americans who played important parts in Vincennes' early history. These street names include Vigo, Dubois, St. Clair, Busseron (changed from Bosseron), and Dubois. Visitors to Vincennes can walk through Governor William Henry Harrison's mansion, restored to its original conditions by the local Francis Vigo chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. A short distance from Harrison's home stands a small frame building which is a replica of The Western Sun office of Elihu Stout, complete with a period printing press. Close by stands the Indiana Territory Capitol, a small building which was used by Governor Harrison and members of the legislative assembly in 1811. Held together by wooden pegs, this original structure was saved from destruction several times and after several previous moves it now is part of the Old Vincennes State Historic Site (as is the Western Sun Printing Shop).

More prominent and outstanding than any other historical markers in Vincennes, however, is the George Rogers Clark Memorial which is situated near the Wabash River in what was once the old French village. The monument was built in classic Greek style, with the granite exterior of the building encircled by sixteen Doric columns supporting a massive round roof. Inside seven large murals depict Clark's role in capturing Fort Knox from the British and in opening the west to American settlement. A larger-than-life bronze statue of Clark stands inside the monument, while smaller statues of Francis Vigo and Father Pierre Gibault are located outside on the surrounding grounds.¹

It is not surprising that the George Rogers Clark Monument is the most visible and prominent historical structure in Vincennes. It looms as a blatant symbol of the importance that United States citizens place on George Rogers Clark, on all American frontiersmen, and on the "Conquest of the West"-- a phrase which is inscribed in huge letters around the top rim of the Clark Monument. It was Congress who, in the mid-1920's, created the George Rogers Clark Sesquicentennial Commission and assigned it the task of constructing an impressive memorial to commemorate the contributions of Clark and other frontiersmen. Clearly, for most Americans, in the 1920's and today, the "real" history of the West did not begin until American settlers made their "conquest" of the region.

It is hoped that this study and the small number of others like it will bring into sharper focus the experiences of French-Canadian settlers who

¹The monument and the surrounding historical park is administered by the National Parks Service. For additional information on the historic sites in Vincennes, see Robert Holden and Richard Day, A Guide to Historic Vincennes, (Vincennes: Vincennes Historic Sites Committee, 1990).

created a distinctive society in villages throughout the Great-Lakes and Mississippi Valley frontier decades before the region was open to American settlement. Western development in the decades after the American Revolution was influenced to a considerable degree by the existence of Vincennes and the other French villages which offered many of the amenities of town life, close ties to distant trade centers, good relations with neighboring Indians, and a French population who knew much about western geography, local plant and animal life as well as other natural resources, and Indian languages and customs. The frontier history of the West during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century simply is not complete without the inclusion of the French pioneers and their impact on the subsequent social, political, and economic development of the Midwest.

Appendix

Craftsmen, Merchants, and Professional Men
in Early Vincennes

| Name | Occupation | Source | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------|
| Sr. Pierre Gosselin | Master carpenter | Baptismal record, Jan. 24, 1773 | VPR |
| Louis Brouillet | Carpenter | Land Sale Deed, March 1, 1791 | LP |
| Antoine Petit | Carpenter | Bill for services, Aug. 2, 1802 | CAC |
| Claude Coupin | silversmith auctioneer CAC | auctioneer license, March 4, 1799 bio sketch | CAC |
| Antoine Onelle | silversmith, jeweler | Day, Vincennes, p. 24 (1802) | |
| Nicholas Fortin | tanner | Indenture agreement, (1801) | LP |
| Joseph Laffeu | shoemaker | Court case, (Sept. 17, 1800) | VCR |
| Unnamed (3) | flour millers | 1767 census; IIIHC, 11:469 | |
| Pierre Roux | cabinet maker | Day, Vincennes, p. 25 (1793-1815) | |
| Unnamed | tailor | George Croghan's Journal | McC |
| Etienne Phillibert | notary | signature at baptisms, 1763-178 | VPR |
| Olivier Santier | surgeon | death record, Sept. 13, 1781 | VPR |
| Merchants (partial list) | | | |
| Julien Trotier Desrivieres | | Death record, Dec. 6, 1750 (12) | VPR |
| Francis Vigo | | correspondence and records, 1783-1836 | VIGO |
| Francois Bosseron | | Account books, other records 1770s-1791 | LP |
| Paul Gamelin | | Marriage record June 6, 1785 (38) | VPR |
| Pierre Gamelin | | 1786 | |
| Pierre Cournoyer | | Baptismal record, June 1 1785 (38) | VPR |
| Laurence Bazadone | | 1802 (LP) | LP |
| Ambroise Dagenet | | 1783-84 business documents | LP |
| Joseph André | | 1785 business documents | LP |
| Antoine Marechal | | Business documents, 1800-1813 | LP |
| Hyacinthe Lasselle | | Business records 1800-1830 | LP |

Abbreviations used in the chart above:

- CAC - Claude Antoine Coupin Papers, WSML
Day - Richard Day, Vincennes: A Pictorial History
IIIHC - Illinois Historical Collections
LP - Lasselle Papers
McC - Shirley McCord, Travel Accounts of Indiana, 1769-1961
VPR - St. Xavier Catholic Church, Parish Records, Vincennes, Indiana
VCR - Minute Book of the Court of General Quarter Sessions, 1796-1800, Vincennes Court Records Library, Vincennes, Indiana
VIGO - Joseph Maria Francesco Vigo Papers, WSML
WSML - William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana

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Hyacinthe and Charles B. Lasselle Collection, 1713-1904, Indiana Division.

Indiana Gazette.

The Western Sun.

William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan

Josiah Harmar Papers

Knox County Court House Archives Library, Vincennes, Indiana

Knox County Court Records.

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Vincennes, Indiana

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Dissertation Abstract

**Vincennes: From French Colonial Village to American Frontier Town,
1730-1820****by Denise Marie Wilson**

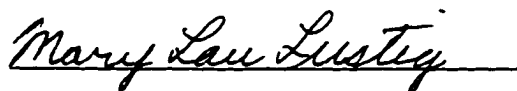
This dissertation explores the social, political, and economic transitions which occurred among the French-Canadian inhabitants of Vincennes (in present-day southern Indiana) as the colonial French village became an American frontier town. Few studies in recent decades have explored the colonial history of the Middle West, and even fewer make the chronological transition from the Colonial Period to the Early National Period. This study investigates the changes experienced by the French when they became British subjects (in 1763) and American citizens (in 1783). It also contributes to a fuller understanding of midwestern history by showing how the normal process of pioneer settlement was altered when Americans encountered long-established French towns and villages with already-constructed houses, churches, taverns, mills, merchants' shops, cultivated farmland, and a population who enjoyed friendly relations with local Indian tribes.

The first section of the dissertation describes what life was like in colonial Vincennes with chapters on daily life, making a living, religion, and the particular experiences of women. The cultural distinctness and unique experiences of midwestern French colonists offer a valuable comparison to English colonists in America.

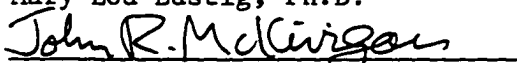
The middle section chronicles political and military developments in Vincennes and the West as the region was caught up in eighteenth-century imperial struggles, first between France and Great Britain and later between Great Britain and the United States. While the British Period was marked by much continuity in Vincennes due to the failure of the British government to establish firm political or military control, the Vincennes villagers faced many challenges and economic hardships during and after the American Revolution.

The most significant part of the study is the last section which describes the rapid changes which occurred in Vincennes in the decades after the American Revolution (1785-1820). Topics covered in the last section include: Indian relations, French adaptation to American laws, French efforts to secure land claims, the French role in local/regional government; and the social and economic transformations which occurred from 1790 to 1820 as the French village took on increasing characteristics of an American frontier town.

APPROVAL OF EXAMING COMMITTEE



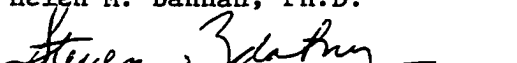
Mary Lou Lustig, Ph.D.



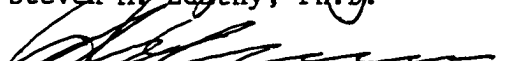
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April 30, 1997

Date