Prairie Pages

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Illinois During the British Occupation

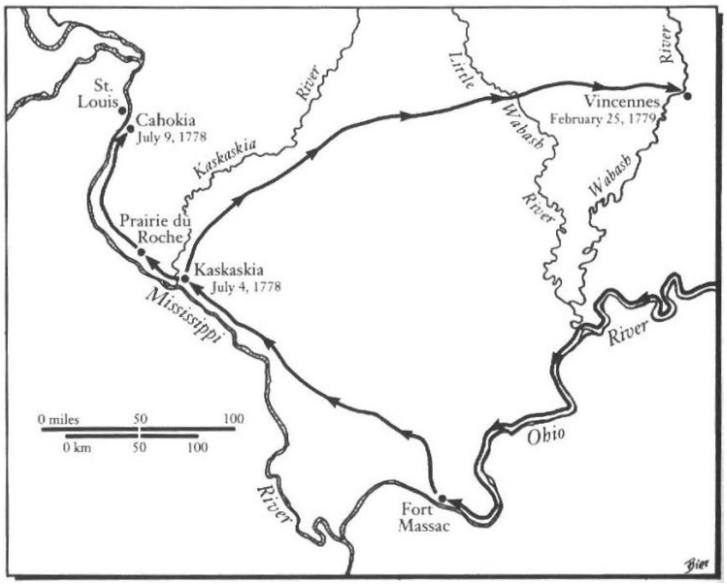
Glossary

French and Indian War—the war between France and Great Britain, with different Indian tribes helping both sides; they fought for nine years to control of colonies in the New World

Illinois During the British Occupation

The British took control of the Illinois country in 1765 after fighting against the French in the French and Indian War. Many of the French living in Illinois chose to move west, across the Mississippi River to St. Louis, or south to New Orleans. Still others returned to France, but some decided to stay and risk living under British rule. Due to flooding and poor condition of the structure, the British abandoned Fort de Chartres in 1771 and moved their government offices to Kaskaskia. The daily lives of the people in the area remained largely unchanged after

Front gate of Fort de Chartres. Courtesy Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.



Georges Rogers Clark's route to Kaskaskia and Fort Sackville. From *Illinois: Crossroads of a Continent*. Copyright 1993 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.

the British takeover until the beginning of the Americans' fight for independence from the British.

At the start of the Revolutionary War, most of the fighting between the Americans and the British took place on the eastern seaboard, within the thirteen colonies. Soon, battles were being fought on the frontier as well as on the coast. The frontier in 1776 included the present-day states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Michigan. In 1778, a young Kentuckian, George Rogers Clark, asked for help from the governor of Virginia to fight the British forces in the west. When he finally received the necessary supplies and the authority to form an army, Clark was able to muster fewer than 200 men. He trained his troops on an island in the Ohio River, near Louisville, Kentucky. There he planned his attack on British forts in Illinois.

When they were ready, Clark's troops traveled down the Ohio River to Fort Massac. There they hid their boats and marched to Fort Kaskaskia. Because the British forces expected

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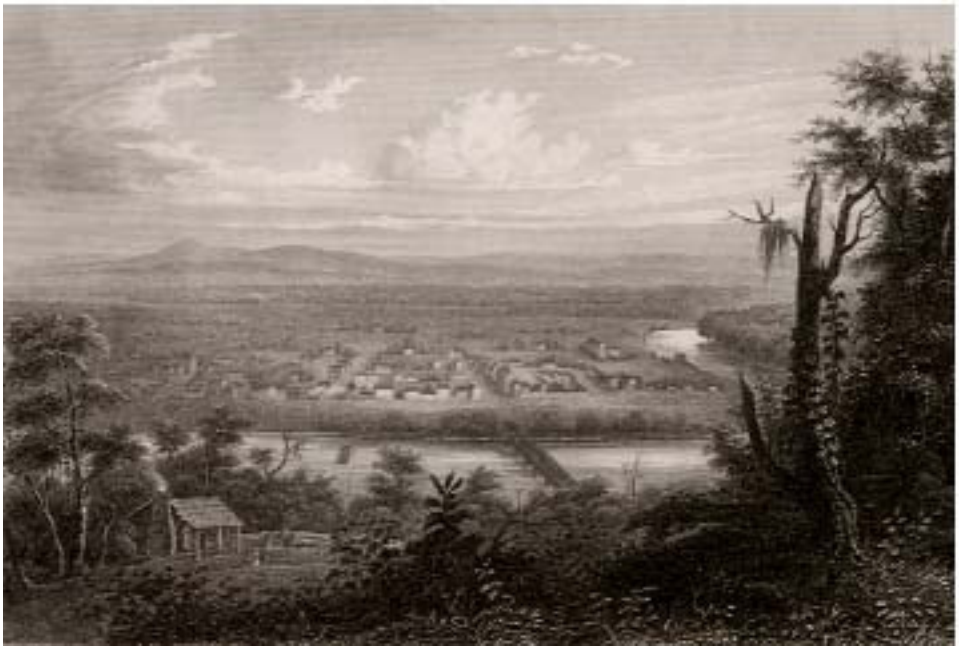
seaboard—land along the coast

muster—gather together a group of men to fight as soldiers



The Village of Kaskaskia. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

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term of enlistment—a set period of time that soldiers serve in the military

an attack to come from the Mississippi River, not by land, Clark and his men were able to surround the town of Kaskaskia. The surprise worked and the British surrendered to Clark on July 4, 1778, without a shot being fired.

Clark's next plan was to march against Fort Sackville on the Wabash River at Vincennes, Indiana. However, many of his men had gone home because their term of enlistment was up.

Clark Raids Fort Sackville, October 10, 1779, artist George I. Parrish Jr. Courtesy Illinois State Historical Society.

recruit—enlist men to serve as soldiers

Rather than give up the attack, Clark recruited more men. Almost half of them were French settlers and they were not trained soldiers. Clark set out with his small force at the worst possible time of year. They marched across Illinois in the middle of the winter to capture Fort Sackville. The journey from Fort Kaskaskia was extremely difficult and dangerous. The troops waded across icy mud and water that was sometimes up to their necks. Clark's freezing men surprised the fort's defenders. His

plan had worked again. The surprised and unprepared British soldiers surrendered. Illinois was completely under American control for the rest of the Revolutionary War, thanks to the courage and planning of George Rogers Clark and the men who followed his lead.

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