

# TXSSAR C.A.R. Essay Contest

## Meredith Burke

---

### George Rogers Clark – The Mighty Oak

George Rogers Clark, a loyal Patriot, played an integral role in the victory of the American Revolutionary War and expansion of the West. Specifically, General Clark fought on the northwest frontier and paved the way for settlers to expand across the Appalachian Mountains. A great military leader, General Clark fought and won many American victories, but still valued the lives of the soldiers under him. In his most famous, risky escapade, Clark epitomized what it truly means to be an American. Like Washington crossing the Delaware, Clark, in face of failure or defeat, never backed down but found a way to overcome.

During the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark succeeded in expanding America's borders and successfully defended attacks from the Indians. In the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the powerful Iroquois relinquished their territory in the Ohio country to settlers. Instead of peace, it led to mounting tensions and clashes between the settlers and Indians over disputed hunting rights. Simultaneously, the British armed Indians with guns to fight against the encroaching settlers. With backing from Virginia Governor Patrick Henry, Clark proactively attempted to dismantle the Kentucky Indian raids with the loss of minimal human life. On July 4, 1778, Clark captured Kaskaskia, Illinois (or Ohio Country) without firing a single shot. The French inhabitants at the fort surrendered peacefully and decided to ally with the colonists against the British. For the next several days, Clark succeeded in capturing all of the surrounding countryside, including Prairie du Rocher, a French settlement, and Cahokia, an Indian site. Instead of attacking by force, Clark negotiated peacefully and convinced the Indians and French to discontinue their allied relationship with the British.

Clark's most famous exploit demonstrated his courage and astuteness as a military officer. Previously, he had captured Fort Sackville in Vincennes (in present day-Indiana). Though the British recaptured the Fort, Clark did not back down. In February 1779, he and roughly 170 American and French volunteers endured an eighteen-day trek, which spanned 200 miles through freezing Illinois waters, in Clark's famous assault to take back the Fort.<sup>1</sup> Clark's unflinching loyalty and encouragement to his men was critical during the arduous trek and "gave them great spirits" when they were severely fatigued from hunger and unbearable weather.<sup>2</sup> Despite Clark's dangerous gamble, his mid-winter march was successful as he demonstrated selfless courage to protect America's vested land interests.

Clark is remembered and valued as a great American for his military, diplomatic and territorial successes. At his funeral, Judge John Rowan eulogized Clark and his valiant patriotic efforts: "The mighty oak of the forest has fallen, and now the scrub oaks sprout all around."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> George Rogers Clark, <http://www.nps.gov/gero/historyculture/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Bowman's Journal, <http://www.in.gov/history/2964.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, <http://www.nps.gov/gero/historyculture/clark.htm>

# TXSSAR C.A.R. Essay Contest

## Meredith Burke

---

Clark preserved and protected the future land of America. Through his efforts, the British formally gave up their territorial rights to a vast expanse of land west of the Appalachian Mountains, which later formed the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and the eastern portion of Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> He cleared the way for other Americans to settle in the west without threat from the British or Indians and established peace during a time of strife and turmoil. He is, indeed, a mighty oak, and Americans continue to benefit from the forested canopy which has sprouted from his fruitful service to our country.

---

<sup>4</sup> Clark, <http://www.nps.gov/gero/historyculture/index.htm>