

**NOTABLE HISTORY OF FAMOUS PIONEER**

**FRONTIER MILITARY HERO**

**George Rogers Clark Who Captured Vincennes and Kaskaskia From French in Early Days**

One hundred and fifty years ago, on July 4, 1778, George Rogers Clark, famous American frontier military leader, with a handful of sturdy western pioneers dressed much like Indians and armed with rifles and tomahawks, captured Fort Kaskaskia in the Illinois country. The capture of this important fort has been called one of the most epochal events in the history of the United States, for it paved the way for the conquest by Clark of the entire Northwest.

Much new light is thrown on the events leading up to the fall of Fort Kaskaskia and the conquest of the Northwest in a new book, "The Life of George Rogers Clark," by Dr. James Alton James, professor of American history at Northwestern university and dean of the graduate school. This new history of the conqueror of the Northwest was issued yesterday by the University of Chicago Press. It represents more than fifteen years of study and research on the part of Dean James, recognized as an authority on the events of the Revolutionary War west of the Alleghanies.

**Frontier Leader**

It was in 1775 that George Rogers Clark went to Kentucky as a surveyor for the Ohio company. His iron will, audacious courage and magnificent physique soon made him a leader among his frontier neighbors by whom he was sent in 1776 as a delegate to the Virginia legislature. In this capacity he was instrumental in bringing about the organization of Kentucky as a county of Virginia and also obtained from Governor Patrick Henry a supply of powder for the Kentucky settlers.

This powder arrived at a most critical time, for the Kentuckians, cooped up in three stockade forts, Boonesborough, Logan's Fort and Harrodsburg, were forced to defend themselves against a succession of Indian attacks organized by British officials at Detroit, through which they hoped to gain control of the whole west.

To Clark, who was commissioned a major, was entrusted the organization of the militia for defense. Associated with him as captains were Daniel Boone, James Herrod, John Todd, Jr., and Benjamin Logan, all of them noted as Indian fighters. Compulsory military service was inaugurated.

"Clark concluded," writes Dean James, "that the surest defense against savage forays would be to capture the Illinois posts and win the friendship of the French inhabitants. As a first step thereto, in April 1777, he sent Benjamin Linn and Samuel Moore as spies to Kaskaskia and Vincennes. What his designs were was a secret which he shared with no one."

After an absence of two months, Linn and Moore returned to Harrodsburg. They reported that there was no suspicion of an attack from Kentucky, that the fort at Kaskaskia was unguarded, and that while the French feared the American backwoodsman, whom they regarded as desperadoes, they were lukewarm in their attachment to the British flag.

**Plan of Campaign**

"Guided by this report," Dean James' history continues, "Clark, in a letter to Governor Patrick Henry, gave a concise statement of the situation in the Illinois country and submitted a plan of action notable for its aggressiveness. Kaskaskia, he asserted, was of the utmost importance, for from this center the British were able to keep control of the Indian tribes and send them against the Kentucky settlements; it furnished provisions for the garrison at Detroit, and controlled the navigation of the Mississippi and the Ohio, thus preventing the Americans from securing goods from the Spaniards with which to carry on Indian trade. He advocated sending a force to capture this post."

Clark was appointed a lieutenant-colonel and was authorized to raise, anywhere in Virginia, seven companies of militia, each to contain fifty men. He was advanced 1,200 pounds in depreciated continental currency and was given an order on General Hand, commanding officer at Fort Pitt, for the necessary boats, ammunition and supplies. By the strict interpretation of his open letter of instructions Clark was to go to the relief of Kentucky; but in his private instructions he was directed to capture Kaskaskia.

"Clark was the more eager to advance after he learned of the French alliance with the United States, news of which was brought to him by messenger from Pittsburgh," Dean James writes. "He counted on its effects over the Illinois inhabitants. On June 26, after a day given up to 'amusements' between the troops who were to go on the expedition and those who were to remain for the defense of Kentucky, the little army of 175 men set off. With cars double manned they descended the Ohio to the mouth of the Tennessee, where final preparations were made for the overland march to Kaskaskia.

"Dropping down the river ten miles to Fort Massac, an abandoned French stronghold where boats were secreted, the expedition struck off on its march of 120 miles through the wilderness toward the northwest. For the first fifty miles they made their way through the trackless forest with great effort. On the evening of July 4, they came to the Kaskaskia river, three miles above and on the opposite side from the village of Kaskaskia. Six days had been consumed in the march. For two days they had been without food, but these days of hunger and fatigue did not weaken the resolution to take the town or die in the effort.

"At dusk they marched silently down the river to a farmhouse a mile or so above the town. The family were made prisoners, and from them Clark learned that Rocheblave, the commandant, hearing rumors of a possible attack, had summoned the men to arms, but that his spies had returned without discovering any trace of an enemy and they were again off guard.

**Capture of Kaskaskia**

"Boats were procured, and within two hours Clark and his men had crossed the river. So quickly did they move that no alarm was given. One division of the troops surrounded the town while Clark with the other division pushed on to one of the fort gates which was found to be open. They advanced to the house of the commandant, Rocheblave, completely surprised, was found in an upper room and taken captive. Not a shot had been fired and within fifteen minutes every street was secured.

"Runners were sent through the town ordering the villagers, on pain of death, to keep close to their houses. By daylight all were disarmed and the villagers were in great confusion, for they had been told of the savage nature of the Americans. They were shocked when they beheld the unkempt appearance of their conquerors, whose clothes, because of the hard march, were dirty and ragged. But instead of employing extreme measures Clark was desirous of gaining

their allegiance for he was aware that with his small force it would be impossible to hold in subjection a town having a population of nearly one thousand."

**Belated Memorial**

One million dollars has been appropriated by congress for a belated memorial to George Rogers Clark. The old town of Kaskaskia is no more, and the memorial to the conqueror of the Northwest will be erected at Vincennes, which was captured by Clark shortly after the fall of Kaskaskia.

The primary object of this history and of numerous papers previously published by Dean James on George Rogers Clark, was to make accessible the documentary evidence by which the chief phases of the Revolution in the West might be interpreted. Much historical information is accessible concerning the Revolution in the East, but comparatively little has been written of the events in the West.

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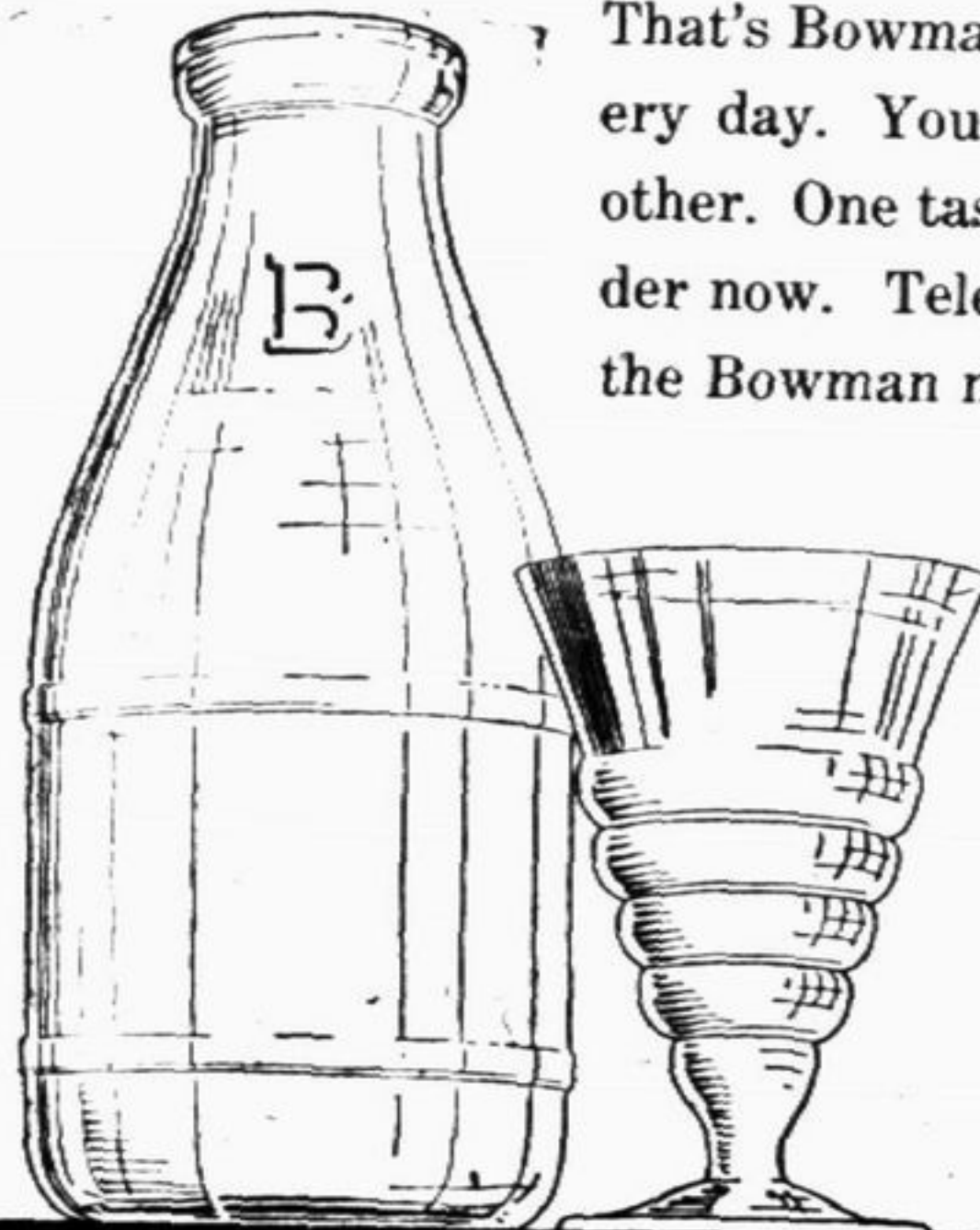
The Highland Park Press

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