

AFTER THE DEATH OF GEORGE ROGERS CLARK

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On a bleak February day in 1818, after many years of helplessness, General George Rogers Clark died, at Locust Grove, the home of his brother-in-law and sister, Major and Mrs. William Croghan, near Louisville.

His death, although long expected, cast a spell of gloom over the entire community. The people could not help but feel a sense of loneliness and sadness. It was the loss of a leader, and a protector—the father of the settlement at the Falls, the savior of Kentucky, the conqueror of the Northwest—had gone from them.

A large concourse of people attended the funeral at Locust Grove, which was an impressive service. A touching oration was delivered by the talented and prominent jurist, Judge John Rowan, who was assisted by the clergyman, Mr. Banks. The peal of artillery announced the beginning of the procession to the burial ground near the house. Minute guns were fired during the ceremony and until the last bit of turf was thrown on the mound over the grave.

Many Kentucky newspapers were eloquent in their praise of the services and sacrifices of the gallant old warrior, who had reached his sixty-sixth year. A leading local paper, *The Western Courier* of Louisville, carried a long article announcing the death. The obituary was eloquent and eulogistic throughout. This excerpt is perhaps typical:

“Were we able to represent the hero as he really was, could we make known to his countrymen the dangers, the difficulties he underwent, as a sacrifice for the blessings we now enjoy, what a monument to unerring gratitude would raise to his memory! Could they in any degree be familiar with the scenes of heroism and generalship which characterized him on his military campaigns in the west, the finger of justice would point to him as second only in skill and value of achievement to our immortal Washington.”

But, alas, how soon do men forget! Neither monument nor headstone bearing his name was placed at General Clark's grave. For a half century his remains rested in the beautiful little family

cemetery at Locust Grove. A few descendants and friends of the Clark family feeling, however, that General Clark's remains should be reinterred in a more pretentious sepulcher, caused them to be removed, on October 27, 1869, to the beautiful Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville. There, marked by a modest stone, they rest today in the Clark lot, near the graves of his brothers, Jonathan and Edmund.

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Mulberry Hill, near Louisville, was built in 1784 for John Clark, father of George Rogers Clark. General Clark made his home here for about twenty years. This photograph was taken about 1890, at which time the house had been abandoned as a place of residence and was then being used for storing farm products. To the left can be seen a part of the old brick smoke-house which was near one end of the low brick row in which the slaves were quartered. What remained of the various houses was removed in 1917, when the ground became a part of Camp Zachary Taylor.

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dered why Kentucky has not raised a fitting memorial to his memory.

In 1888 when at Marietta, Ohio, the centennial of the acquisition of the Northwest Territory was at its height and a fervor of enthusiasm for the heroism of its conquerors was sweeping the nation, a bill, of much interest to Louisville and Kentucky, was introduced and passed in the United States Senate, in July, providing:

"That, in recognition of the eminent services of General George Rogers Clark in the occupation and conquest of the Northwestern Territory during the Revolutionary War, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby, appropriated out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, for the purpose of erecting in the city of Louisville, in the state of Kentucky, a monument to his memory, to be expended under the direction and control of the secretary of war. And said monument shall be located on a suitable site in said city; said site and the title thereto to be approved by the secretary of war."

This bill after passing the Senate went to the House, was referred to the Library Committee, reported back favorably on July 24th, and then referred to the committee of the whole. The Marietta celebration had adjourned a few days before, however, and the enthusiasm for Clark's exploits waned, while current problems pressed for solution. The good bill apparently has never been heard of since. During that same period hundreds of counties, north and south of the Ohio River, were erecting monuments costing fifty thousand dollars and upwards to the memory of those who served in the Federal or in the Confederate Army during the War between the States!

Even before General Clark's death, historians recognized the greatness of his character and the importance of his achievements. Judge Jacob Burnet, who visited him in December, 1799, at Locust Grove, relates in *Notes on The Early Settlement of the Northwest Territory* (1847), quoted by English, that, although health was much impaired, General Clark's "majestic person, strong features and dignified deportment gave evidence of an intelligent resolute mind." He had, according to Judge Burnet, "the appearance of a man born to command and fitted by nature for his destiny." This quality of personality was noted by many travelers who chanced to meet General Clark. "There was," the Judge avowed, "a gravity and solemnity in his demeanor,

resembling that which so eminently distinguished 'the venerated father of his country.' "

After touching upon the ingratitude of Clark's adopted state, Judge Burnet added: "The time will certainly come when the enlightened and magnanimous citizens of Louisville will remember the debt of gratitude they owe the memory of that distinguished man. He was the leader of the pioneers who made the first lodgment on the site now covered by their rich and splendid city. He was its protector during the years of its infancy and in



Locust Grove, about five miles northeast of Louisville, as it appears today. Before the roads were changed, this side, now the rear of the house, was the front. The front now faces Blankenbaker Lane. In this house, then the home of his sister Lucy and her husband Major William Croghan, General Clark died February 13, 1818, and was buried in the near-by Croghan burial ground. The old plantation bell is still to be seen at the eastern end of the ridge of the roof.

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Hon. Reuben T. Durrett, founder of The Filson Club. Of Clark, Mr. Durrett wrote in *The Centenary of Louisville* (1893):

"Louisvillians are justly proud to be of a city which can assign its origin to such a hero. . . . He was not only the founder of the city of Louisville, but his victorious arms conquered that vast territory out of which the great states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and that part of Minnesota on this side of the Mississippi, were made. . . . The time must come when a grateful people will recognize his glorious deeds by erecting to his memory a monument worthy of his fame."

The meritorious prediction of Mr. Durrett did not come to pass, however, during that historian's lifetime. He died in 1913, perhaps a bit pessimistic as to concrete manifestations on the part of the citizens of his beloved Louisville in matters historical.

The years passed. Even the first World War passed, and the early nineteen-twenties ushered in a period of prosperity such as the nation perhaps had not known in its entire history. Surely the time had come when a magnificent Memorial could be erected in Kentucky to the memory of the long-neglected General Clark! The matter was taken up in Washington, D. C., by at least one Kentucky Congressman. But numerous citizens of Indiana felt that a memorial should be erected to General Clark at Vincennes.

Indiana historical societies, commercial clubs, women's clubs, historians, promoters, politicians, and the Legislature got busy. They "put it over." About two millions of dollars were spent by Indiana and the National Government jointly for the inspiring memorial at Vincennes! Alas, Kentucky had failed her generous hero once more!

Now another effort is being made, maybe the last during our lifetime, to obtain a memorial to the memory of General Clark in Kentucky. The goal is \$100,000. The plan is very simple: The school children are to be asked to contribute five pennies, club members one dollar and certain others, particular friends of the movement, whatever modest gifts above one dollar they wish to make. And the schools are to be asked to present entertainments. No one will be asked to contribute much; so little, indeed, that, in spite of the fact that today we are being solicited at every turn to help worthy causes, no budget need be in the slightest thrown out of balance by a contribution to the Clark Memorial Fund.

Kentuckians really are proud of the achievements of George Rogers Clark, and they are proud of the man. They have waited



The grave of George Rogers Clark in Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville. He died in 1818, at Locust Grove, where he was buried. In 1869 his remains were reinterred in Cave Hill and the small marble marker then erected was replaced in 1936 by one of granite of the same size and bearing the same inscription: Gen. George Rogers Clark, Born, O. S. [Old Style] Nov. 9, 1752, Died, Feb. 13, 1818.



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long for the proper opportunity to express their gratitude for his glorious deeds. Now is their opportunity. The rich and the poor, children and adults—all can have the honor of participating in the contributions. Thousands will give. Thousands in years to come will be proud to have had a part in the erection of a fine memorial in Kentucky to General Clark. This time Kentucky should succeed in showing the world that she is proud that the sacred remains of George Rogers Clark rest beneath her lovely turf.

We hope that this may be a popular movement among the old and the young, the rich and the poor, and irrespective of sex. We hope that the fund may be raised by many small gifts but will not promise that larger or even large gifts will be rejected.¹

¹ All quotations used in this article are from William H. English's biography of Clark (1896), Volume 2, pages 888-912.