

## Lesson Forty

# George Rogers Clark

### LESSON IDEA

To tell the story of one a great American frontiersmen and to learn how his courage and leadership helped to safeguard the western flank of the colonies during the Revolutionary War.

### PREPARATION

Read "During The Week" and have a copy of *Quest Of A Hemisphere* on hand.

**S**HRIEKING WAR WHOOPS, flashing tomahawks, and sweeping destruction brought the War for Independence home to every man, woman, and child living on the western frontier of America in 1776. They were not forced to defend themselves against smartly uniformed soldiers, but against savages who would murder the smallest child or most helpless woman without hesitation. Neither age nor gender mattered when the scalps were presented for payment at Fort Detroit. Henry Hamilton, the fort's commandant and dutiful English servant, paid handsome rewards for such trophies.

Hamilton sought to hound American settlers along the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash river valleys. At his direction, homes were burned, cattle were slaughtered, homes were destroyed, and entire families were murdered. Preferring to avoid the dirty work himself, he instead sought help from Indians willing to participate in the barbarism.

It was a strategy both uncivilized and cowardly, yet quite successful. What persuaded the Indians who carried out the raids and massacres to do so? [Explain that the settlers, as they pushed further west, cleared trees, built cabins, and planted crops on hunting grounds that the Indians believed belonged to them.]

What did the British hope to gain by exploiting and encouraging this savagery? [Ask each family member to express an opinion.] England at the time was a haughty and self-righteous world power determined to maintain her rule over the 13 colonies, which occupied only a narrow strip of land east of the Allegheny Mountains. If the colonies could be contained within that area, then

the rich and unexplored wilderness to the west would be England's to exploit. British agents could strip valuable resources from the continent, deliver it to British ships at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and then reap enormous profits by selling the raw materials to other countries. Only a Herculean effort by American frontiersmen kept this British scheme from reaching fruition.

One such frontier hero was George Rogers Clark of Virginia, a schoolmate of James Madison and personal friend of Thomas Jefferson. At the age of 19, Clark had followed the wilderness trails west in a search for cheap and plentiful land. When he found the acres that pleased him, he settled into the life of a farmer and log cabin pioneer.

Clark was, however, more soldier than settler. In 1774, when troops from Virginia passed near his cabin on their way to fight the Indian tribes that were raiding frontier settlements, he left his farm to join them. It was during the ensuing war that Clark established his reputation as an Indian fighter. And it was in the wake of the war that victorious Virginia gained rights to the wilderness lands that now include Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana.

In 1775 Clark moved into Kentucky, where famed frontiersman Daniel Boone had helped to organize a settlement called Boone's Fort. Within a year Clark earned the rank of major in the militia. The Boone's Fort pioneers, as angry with Britain's high-handed colonial policies as were the New England patriots, realized they might soon be forced to fight the British as well as the Indians. Indeed, only a few weeks prior to the battles at Lexington and Concord, the Kentucky settlers appointed a committee to draft resolutions of independence and frame rules for self-government as a new province.

But England did not choose to fight openly in the West. She preferred instead Hamilton's strategy of enticing Indians to terrorize, kill, plunder, and scalp. At Boone's Fort, Clark began planning countermeasures. The solution, he believed, was

