

"Two Hostile Nations": Arthur St. Clair's Policies and
Opinions regarding Indians in the Northwest Territory

by

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For my children,

Erik Iverson Shoemaker

and

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and their patience and support of this project.

ABSTRACT

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Arthur St. Clair was appointed by Congress as Governor of the Northwest Territory on July 13, 1787. At the time of his appointment he was serving as the President of Congress, and had been closely involved with the development of the Northwest Ordinance. Although he had been born in Scotland, and had served for several years in the British army, he chose to support the American cause for independence without hesitation. His Revolutionary War record was marred by the court-martial which he demanded to defend his retreat at the Battle of Ticonderoga, but he was exonerated of all crimes, and praised for his courage and strategy. St. Clair spent the remainder of the Revolution working closely with George Washington, which began a long association of mutual respect. After the war, he pursued political appointments at the state level, culminating in his election to Congress on February 20, 1786, and his elevation to the presidency of that assembly less than one year later.

St. Clair's experience with Indians was very minor before his appointment as Governor. Aside from fleeting encounters with them in frontier Pennsylvania, and awareness of them as allies of the British during the Revolution, he was totally unprepared for the overwhelming problems which would characterize the encounter of these "two hostile nations." Through treaty negotiations, unsuccessful peace talks and ultimately warfare, St. Clair was put in the position of orchestrating the acquisition of Indian land and the extinguishing of Indian rights.

St. Clair's official policy was always in direct accord with his federal instructions. He reflected exactly the image of the national government, and his letters to subordinates show his commitment to the welfare and growth of the United States. But it is in his addresses to the Territorial Legislature, and his interest and concern for the laws pertaining to the coexistence of white settlers and Native Americans, that the Governor's real contribution to the shaping of Indian policy becomes evident. Through his deeply felt Christian beliefs, his sense of honor, and his devotion to justice, Arthur St. Clair helped to shape a more humane policy toward Native Americans.

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CHAPTER ONE

"Upon the Altar of Patriotism"

A careful study of Arthur St. Clair's Indian policy in the Northwest Territory requires a brief glimpse into his life. The opinions and responses which St. Clair brought to the job of Territory Governor were those formed by extensive experience in military and civic situations. As he tried to enable a coexistence between the two "too often savage and hostile nations,"¹ he needed to draw upon all of his life's training.

Although there is some dispute about Arthur St. Clair's actual birth date,² he was probably born on April 3, 1734 in Northern Caithness, Scotland. His family was of aristocratic descent, but had only a modest income.³ Little is known of his actual childhood, but it would seem that the youthful St. Clair received an education commensurate with his noble standing, for he entered the University of Edinburgh at an early age to study medicine.

He preferred the military life, however, and after his mother's death in winter 1756-57, he gathered his financial resources and entered the foreign service.⁴ On May 13, 1757, he received a commission in the Royal American Regiment of Foot, also known as the Sixtieth. On April 17, 1759, he was commissioned as a lieutenant.⁵

His early military experiences primarily involved the struggle between the British and the French for land in the

New World. The siege of Quebec marked a temporary end to St. Clair's military career. He applied for a leave, and returned to Boston to marry Miss Phoebe Bayard, a niece of Governor Bowdoin.⁶ St. Clair received a dowry of fourteen thousand pounds, and as military activity had diminished considerably, he resigned his commission on April 16, 1762.⁷ There was no need for his military services at this time and his wife's dowry combined with his financial gains from military life allowed him a prosperous start as a civilian. There is further confusion over St. Clair's actual arrival in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The most widely used source states that St. Clair's cousin, General Thomas Gage, appointed him as commandant of Fort Ligonier in 1764, but other sources argue that he was in Bedford, Pennsylvania as late as 1769.⁸ It is conceivable that he was able to be in both places during this span of time because the duties at Fort Ligonier did not require his constant presence. At this point in St. Clair's life, he began to assume civic responsibilities. On April 5, 1770, he was appointed as Surveyor of the district of Cumberland in western Pennsylvania.⁹ This job of surveying land probably gave St. Clair a high profile and brought him to the attention of both state and local authorities. He was also appointed as a Common Pleas justice, and a member of the Governor's Council in May of the same year. By 1771, he was a Justice of Court, Recorder of Deeds, Clerk of Orphan's Court and Prothonotary for the Court of Common Pleas of that county.¹⁰

St. Clair's wife moved with him to Ligonier, where, over the course of the next nine years, they had seven children. The Fort at this time served as a haven for settlers during Indian uprisings, and also as a center to attain permits for land settlement. As commander of the post, St. Clair balanced leadership, military and communication skills which would serve him later in the American Revolution. Despite a successful career with the British Army, St. Clair made no secret of his allegiance to the cause of American independence. It is difficult to surmise what conflict, if any, troubled St. Clair in regard to this decision. His connection with the British Army had been officially severed for some time. Perhaps his professional involvement with the county fostered roots of patriotism. There was no doubt of his strong feelings when he wrote to James Wilson in 1775, shortly after being commissioned as a colonel in the American Army: "I hold that no man has a right to withhold his services when his country needs them. Be the sacrifice ever so great, it must be yielded upon the altar of patriotism."¹¹

Shortly after his enlistment, Arthur St. Clair raised a regiment, the Second Pennsylvania, and departed on March 12, 1776 for Canada. He planned to surprise the British at Three Rivers, but the Canadians deceived the Americans and there were no British troops at the reported location.¹² The British forced the American troops to retrace their steps through a "dismal swamp", and the commanding officers were taken as prisoners of war.¹³ As the next highest officer,

St. Clair assumed command. With a skilled maneuver, he managed to elude the British and save his small unit from destruction.¹⁴

At this point, St. Clair left the Northern Department and was reassigned to George Washington in New Jersey, where he spent the winter of 1776-77.¹⁵ This sojourn gave St. Clair a second opportunity to suggest a cunning plan of battle. In January 1777, a meeting of officers was held in St. Clair's quarters to discuss imminent defeat. St. Clair cleverly advised "the idea of turning the left of the enemy in the night, gaining a march upon him, and proceeding with all possible expedition to Brunswick . . . General Washington highly approved it."¹⁶ The plan worked. The British did not discover the missing troops until daylight, sparing the Americans certain defeat.

General Washington was also pleased with St. Clair's suggestion for winter quarters. "The establishment of winter quarters at Morristown [New Jersey] proved very fortunate."¹⁷ Despite an extremely hard winter, the army finally began to meld into a closer unit. Until this time, there had been almost no sense of unity. At the time of the American victory at Trenton, Arthur St. Clair was also recognized as a great contributor toward that end. This period in St. Clair's life was very important in laying the foundations for a lifetime relationship with George Washington.

On the wings of these successes, Washington commissioned

St. Clair to the rank of major-general on February 19, 1777. The following summer, St Clair was appointed to command the strategic post of Ticonderoga, New York. This remote outpost was the only obstacle to a British plan to divide and conquer the poorly organized American forces. Another section of the British Army under the direction of Colonel Barry St. Leger came around from the northwest, and the remaining forces under Sir William Howe were to move north from Philadelphia. Had this plan been successful, the war might have ended at this point.

St. Clair was allotted 2200 men, a significant number, but hardly sufficient or well enough outfitted to cause the British any real difficulty. In addition, the British, under the command of General John Burgoyne, moved south to occupy a hill overlooking the fort. Named Fort Defiance, its possession by the British spelled certain defeat for the Americans. St. Clair could choose either to retreat, or to allow his entire army to be captured. As he wrote to Major-General James Wilkinson, "I know I could save my character by sacrificing the Army; but were I to do so I should forfeit that which the world could not restore, and which it can not take away, the approbation of my own conscience."¹⁸ The British captured Fort Ticonderoga on July 7, 1777. Although almost half of St. Clair's men were lost as the British pursued the fleeing Americans, the Americans managed to free a floating bridge to slow the progress of the enemy fleet.

As St. Clair's diminished forces were retreating,

Burgoyne made a choice that proved to be fatal for the British army. He decided not to continue the chase and instead allowed his army a full month to rest. He did not count on the Americans' using this time to strengthen their own forces. One week after the British had captured Ticonderoga, St. Clair wrote to Congress, "By abandoning a post, I have eventually saved a state."¹⁹ As St. Clair had abandoned his northern position, and was soon to demand a court martial to defend his action, General Washington gave command of the Northern Department to Horatio Gates, with Benedict Arnold as his second in charge. This area encompassed all of St. Clair's previous command as well as a significantly expanded territory. It was such an advantage to the Americans that by August of 1777, the British were incredibly short of supplies. Burgoyne and his men had never attempted to live off of the land, but had counted on delivered supplies.

By August of 1777, Burgoyne was forced to contend with even greater problems. The other sections of his army were not in communication and not anywhere to be seen. He was perplexed as to the size and the commander of the American Army and puzzled by the absence of his Indian allies. By October, his 5700 men had effectively surrendered to Gates at Saratoga and departed for neutral ground.

While Gates was busy with Burgoyne, St. Clair had a tattered reputation to contend with. On August 20, 1777, he demanded a court martial to defend his conduct at

Ticonderoga. He had been accused of cowardice and poor judgment by many of his peers because of his retreat. His offensive strategy lay "in the friendship of Washington, which was open and faithful." ²⁰ Congress was slow to move the proceedings along, and Washington used his influence in St. Clair's behalf to hasten the process.

In September 1778, the court martial finally came to pass. By a unanimous vote, St. Clair was acquitted of all accusations "with the highest honor."²¹ The victory at Saratoga helped to mend the Major-General's image, for his actions were seen as making victory possible for Gates. Among the more gallant remarks in this vein were those of James Wilkinson. "I shall ever believe that St. Clair laid the foundation of our good fortune in the convention at Saratoga."²²

St. Clair's complete exoneration served to cement Washington's faith in him. He also made other influential contacts such as with the Marquis de Lafayette. His friendship with these two men continued for many years. In December of 1789, St. Clair received a letter from Paul Jones asking him to use his influence with these highly placed friends. "You mentioned to me at New York that you could obtain a letter in my favor from General Washington to the Marquis. Such a letter, if written with any force, might eventually, if not in the present moment, be very useful, and I should be very thankful to receive it."²³ This side of St. Clair, the side which sought glory and continually

strengthened political connections, became relevant and obvious in his later dealings with Native Americans.

After his exoneration, St. Clair rejoined General Washington and was with him for both the Battle of Brandywine Creek and the infamous winter at Valley Forge. He was apparently not active at Valley Forge, and the major importance of his presence there would be a further strengthening of his relationship with George Washington. The Commander in Chief then appointed St. Clair commander of the post at West Point for a brief time. Although Anthony Wayne was the hero of Stony Point, a strategic victory on the Hudson River, it was to St. Clair that Washington gave command of the Light Infantry. This was comprised of six battalions of eight companies each, and it moved in advance of the main army, which was a movement toward a more modern military system.

This was perhaps the beginning of a lifelong conflict with Anthony Wayne, as it was later Wayne who succeeded where St. Clair failed in the Northwest Territory. It is to St. Clair's credit, however, that at neither time was there public evidence of resentment. Significantly, it was St. Clair who probably settled a revolt among the Pennsylvania troops under Wayne during the winter of 1780-81. He divided the troops and promised that their grievances regarding lack of financial restitution and disputes over enlistment contracts would all be dealt with, thus restoring order at a very critical point in time.²⁴

St. Clair was not at the decisive battle of Yorktown until after everything was nearly resolved. As attention turned toward the Carolinas, he was dispatched with six regiments to join Nathanael Greene seven hundred miles away.²⁵ It was this sort of physical preparation which undoubtedly stood Arthur St. Clair in good stead for his strenuous years as Territory Governor.

The situation which met St. Clair upon his return to Ligonier after the Revolution was a dismal one. After nearly eight years of neglect, much of his hard work and financial investment lay in ruins.²⁶ His military reputation and sense of patriotism enhanced his popularity, however, and in 1783 he returned to civic responsibilities. He was named a member of the Board of Censors, a prestigious board organized under the Articles of the Confederation. As a member of this board, St. Clair appraised the conduct of elected officials, examining the way in which taxes were collected and spent and other matters of public interest.²⁷ Another important and financially rewarding appointment came shortly thereafter, when St. Clair was chosen as Vendue Master of Philadelphia. This position involved receiving and accounting for financial gain on properties sold to fill government coffers. This naturally increased St. Clair's visibility, and on February 20, 1786, he was elected by the state legislature as a Pennsylvania delegate to Congress.

Less than one year later, on February 2, 1787, he was elected President of Congress. Under the Articles of

Confederation, this was the highest office granted by the government. Although he had far less power than the Constitution would soon give to the President of the United States, and it was commonly understood to be a temporary position, it was still a high compliment to St. Clair. In a backlash response to the tyranny to Great Britain, the Articles of Confederation was merely a loose organization of states, with little central power. The role of president was most likely designed to assure orderly meetings and provide a position of superficial deference in times of disagreement. Nevertheless, as President of Congress, St. Clair was placed in a unique position. Although he could not know it at the time, his ardent support for the Ordinance of 1787 would have a bearing of a more personal nature. He was instrumental in shaping the guidelines for the Territory which he would be elected to govern. The Northwest Ordinance contained a territorial bill of rights for settlers, and provided a specific process for organizing and admitting states on an equal basis with the original thirteen. In the shadow of the American Revolution, much thought was given to eventual self-government.

St. Clair's role in the choosing the governor of the Northwest Territory was not documented. There is some speculation that he was selected because of his geographical tie to Pennsylvania, for there was an effort to balance other areas of the original thirteen states when choosing territorial judges. The only information noted was his

absence during the voting on July 13, 1787, when he was chosen. He was certainly motivated, as evidenced by his rapid rise to the presidency of Congress. His qualifications were perhaps less critically examined. Although his leadership abilities were well recognized from his Revolutionary War record, his frontier experiences were less extensive.

Even less scrutinized were his interactions with Native Americans. He had participated in a meeting early in the Revolutionary War to "induce [the Indians] to neutrality during our contest with Great Britain."²⁸ That he was aware of the potential conflict with western Indians is undeniable. Early in the war, St. Clair asked to organize a volunteer expedition to Detroit, to capture that fort from British control. Due to Benedict Arnold's needs in Quebec, a lack of ammunition prevented this plan from being carried out. American control over this strategic position would have prevented later British interference among the western Indian tribes. As this created severe problems in dealing with the western Indians, it is highly likely that without British interference, westward expansion would have been less difficult in this regard.²⁹ The relative security of St. Clair's popularity and reputation in high circles prepared him only partially for what lay ahead. It would be up to him to strike a balance between federal expectations and frontier realities. It would also be up to him to direct and delegate Indian policy in the Northwest Territory.

CHAPTER 1 END NOTES

1 William Henry Smith, The St. Clair Papers The Life
and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair 2 volumes
(Cincinnati: Robert Clark and Company, 1882).

Arthur St. Clair's address at Marietta, July 9, 1788
Volume II, p. 55.

2 Professor Patrick J. Furlong of Indiana University at
South Bend states that he has actually seen a record of
the christening which states April 3, 1734 as valid.
He regrets that this document does not reflect St.
Clair's mother's name, only the father and the
godparents.

3 Smith, St Clair Papers, Volume I, p. 2.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, 3.

6 Ibid, 5.

7 Ibid, 6.

8 Ibid, 7.

9 Ibid, 8.

10 Ibid, 9.

11 Ibid, 13. Although Smith lists this letter as penned
to James Wilson, Frazer Ells Wilson lists him as James
Wilkinson, the same Wilkinson who later played a lead
role in Anthony Wayne's campaign against the Indians.
If it was the same Wilkinson, their strong friendship

was probably a factor in St. Clair's defection to the colonial side of the Revolution.

12 Ibid, 17.

13 Ibid, 21.

14 Ibid, 23.

15 Ibid, 25.

16 Ibid, 36.

17 Ibid, 42.

18 Ibid, 64.

19 Ibid, 69.

20 Ibid, 93.

21 Ibid, 95.

22 Frazer Ells Wilson, Arthur St. Clair Rugged Ruler of the Old Northwest An Epic of the American Frontier (Richmond: Garret and Massie, 1944, 31.)

23 Paul Jones to Arthur St. Clair, December 20, 1789, in Smith, Volume II, 127. Although this letter is merely signed "Paul Jones", it is the right time frame and the right personality to be John Paul Jones, also a Scot, who was the famous (and infamous) naval officer of the American Revolution.

24 Wilson, 34.

25 Ibid, 35.

26 Smith, Volume I, 116.

27 Wilson, 35.

28 Smith, Volume I, 14-15.

29 Ibid, 15.

Chapter 2

"If a Peace can be established on Reasonable Terms. . ."

With the election for Territory Governor behind him, Arthur St. Clair set his sights to the west and prepared to greet the greatest challenge of his life- the direction and delegation of Indian policy. The Northwest Ordinance set specific guidelines for the governor in each of the three stages of territorial government. Although the completion of each stage diminished the power of the governor, he was granted a substantial amount of responsibility and executive privilege throughout the process.

In the first stage, the government consisted of a governor, a secretary and three judges. These candidates were to be appointed by Congress, (after 1788 they were to be appointed by the president), and each was granted a substantial amount of land in the territory. As there was no legislature in this initial phase, the laws were determined by this panel of five men, and based upon laws in the existing states. The appointment of civil magistrates, the direction of the militia and the guidance of Indian affairs was solely the responsibility of the governor.

The second stage of territorial government installed a legislative council and an elected legislature when the free male inhabitants of voting age numbered at least five thousand. Despite these innovations, the governor still remained a strong link to the national government. He could

call or adjourn the general assembly at will, and had absolute veto power over its legislation. The third stage was statehood, when a total population of 60,000 was reached. The power of the appointed governor then ended completely, for the state's voters would elect a governor of their own choosing.

The Northwest Ordinance was also specific in its mention of Indians: "The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians, their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent"¹ It sanctioned only good will and honor in the matter of securing land, but left a clever loophole. "In their property, rights and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress."² At Congress's discretion, good faith and honor could be set aside for the best interests of the United States. As land acquisition was always considered to be in the best interest of the Federal Government, these intentions were hollow at best. Further instructions from Congress were strong echoes of this philosophy.

On October 26, 1787, the Secretary of Congress, Charles Thompson, urged St. Clair to seek peace and harmony with the tribes of the Northwest Territory. He was not to alter the boundaries set by treaties unless it would be beneficial to the United States.³ He was to bring influential chiefs into a frame of mind which would coexist with United States goals, and "defeat all confederations and combinations among the

tribes."⁴ Most significantly, he was ordered not to "neglect any opportunity to extinguish Indian rights as far west as the Mississippi [River]."⁵ Congress made no secret of its strong desire for Indian land superseding any show of fair or humane treatment. It was anticipated that the Indian intellect would not question federal motive or method, and that honor was merely a convention of convenience.

Both through Secretary of War Henry Knox and direct communication, George Washington, after taking office in 1789, added his own instructions to those of Congress as he felt the situation indicated. Although he voiced concern over the effect of hostile Indian activity upon territorial residents, he urged St. Clair to determine whether the Indians were truly inclined toward war or peace. "If a peace can be established with the said Indians [Wabash and Illinois] on reasonable terms," he wrote from New York in 1789, "the interests of the United States dictate that it should be effected as soon as possible."⁶

It was apparent that while Washington applauded and wished for this type of settlement, he was also realistic about its likelihood. In the same letter, he authorized St. Clair to raise militia from Pennsylvania and Virginia. He left the number of militia called upon to the Governor's discretion, but placed upper limits of one thousand from Virginia and six hundred from Pennsylvania.⁷

Washington was clear in his message to St. Clair. Troop authorization was not the same as war authorization. "I would

have it observed forcibly" he continued, "that a war with the Wabash Indians ought to be avoided by all means consistently with the security of the frontier inhabitants, the security of the troops, and the national dignity."⁸ Preserving the national dignity was not the least important reason. If war was to be inevitable, justification was necessary, and Washington readily obliged in his closing instructions of that October letter. St. Clair was to make the peaceful intentions of the United States clear to the Indians, and only after that had failed would the United States seek action. "[If] they should continue their incursions, the United States will be constrained to punish them with severity."⁹

While St. Clair received instructions from Congress and President Washington, by far the most copious correspondence on the subject came from Secretary of War Henry Knox. His perspective was closely aligned with the federal government, yet he provided a sympathetic link to St. Clair on the frontier. "In the particular situation in which you are placed, the capricious conduct of the Indians must give you great anxiety,"¹⁰ he wrote in early 1789. Like Washington at this early stage, he assumed that St. Clair would attempt anything within the bounds of national dignity to avoid a war, but that if all failed, "the evils of it [would] be justly charged to the Indians."¹¹

It was difficult to negotiate peace on the frontier when small bands of Indians, angered by American intrusion onto

their lands, continued to murder and terrorize white settlements. Much of this activity centered around the Ohio River, and it was to these activities that Knox devoted a substantial amount of his correspondence in 1790. He blamed these "mischiefs" on the "Shawanese and the banditti from other tribes joined with them," and informed St. Clair that he had authorized General Josiah Harmar to consult him regarding a proper method of extermination.¹² Knox left the method to the discretion of these two Generals, passing along George Washington's vote of confidence and urging them to spare no effort or difficulty to accomplish the mission.¹³

Later in that summer, Knox apprised St. Clair of Washington's reactions to frontier Indian policy: "While the President regrets exceedingly the occasion, he approves of the measures you have taken for preventing those predatory incursions of the Wabash Indians which, for a considerable period past have been so calamitous to the frontiers lying along the Ohio."¹⁴ The measures referred to were further offers of peace which were intended to convey a sense of fairness and kindness. As the Wabash did not consider themselves to be the ones committing "predatory incursions," they refused.

With the token of peace efforts out of the way, the frontier government was advised to look toward a military solution. In the same letter, Knox advised St. Clair that it was "the earnest desire of the President that the operation be effectual, and produce in the Indians proper dispositions

for peace."¹⁵ Peace was still the promoted result, but only after convincing the Indians through whatever military means necessary.

St. Clair had approached President Washington before leaving for the Northwest Territory about constructing a military post far to the northwest of the Ohio River. It was his feeling that this show of power would impress the Indians into subjugation. Knox wrote to St. Clair in September, 1790 to advise him of the president's views on the subject. Washington was concerned especially with the positioning of the post. In addition to impressing the Indians "as much as Indians can be awed by the post," Knox wrote that the President felt it imperative to show a "respectable appearance to the British Troops at Detroit and Niagra [sic]."¹⁶

Although these British-held posts on the Great Lakes would have been superior choices, and by treaty rights belonged to the Americans, they had not been vacated. An alternate choice needed to be made. Knox concurred with the President's opinion that the best spot for this was the Miami Village on the Maumee River, but cautioned that "the measure would involve a much larger military establishment" and that such an establishment could only incite the Wabash toward war.¹⁷

Knox continued this letter with that perspective in mind, and proposed sudden military movements with the purpose of depriving the Indians of their crops and villages. He

realized that because of the Indian method of warfare "it [would] not be reconcilable to conclude that their force [would] be greatly reduced in the skirmishes they may have with Brigadier General Josiah Harmar or Major John F. Hamtramck."¹⁸ Knox recommended 1150 troops for the fight to establish the post, and a minimum of 750 men to operate the garrison after that. As this did not materialize, Knox did not specify whether these troops would be army or militia.

St. Clair's initial responses to these instructions were full of the actual activity on the frontier. He wrote to Knox in July 1788 from Fort Harmar to relay an account of Shawnee violence. In preparation for treaty consultations, a small party bearing goods for the Indians were attacked and several killed. "The attack, however, was a spirited one" reported the new Governor, "for they rushed between the guard and some huts that had been thrown up to cover the men and provisions, armed with spears chiefly."¹⁹ Already St. Clair was focused on possible war. He ordered the provisions moved, and communicated to the Secretary of War, "Should the [Indian] nations be resolved on war, and this be the first effect of that resolution, it will be soon followed by others of a more serious nature."²⁰ At this point, he seemed very aware of the potential threat.

Treaty negotiations continued in the face of these difficulties, and St. Clair attained some measure of success with the Indians in the eastern portion of his territory, notably the Delaware and Wyandot. These Indians basically

required reaffirmation of existing treaties, and although diplomacy was required, they proved no great obstacle when compared with their western counterparts. "It is impossible for me to judge what sum would induce them to extend the northern boundary of the last cession to the Mississippi" the frustrated St. Clair wrote to Knox.²¹ Although this view may have been unrealistic, it must be remembered that St. Clair had to answer to a consistently greedy federal government.

Nearly a year later, St. Clair had made little progress. The Miami were especially recalcitrant, for they had a strong base of support. "The confidence these [the Miami] have in their situation, the vicinity of many other nations, either under their influence or hostilely [sic] disposed toward the United States, and pernicious counsels of the British" made progress from St. Clair's vantage point very difficult.²² In addition, he worried that the Indians had no motivation for listening when their stealing garnered huge profit without compromising on land issues. He also feared that other Indians would see the benefit from this example and join in the depredations. He concluded, "It is much to be feared that the United States must prepare effectually to chastise them."²³

The relationship with the Native Americans when St. Clair came to power required close observation and delicate handling. As always, there had been the projection of peaceful intentions. As early as 1785, Josiah Harmar had written to Knox that the Wyandot and Delaware Indians wished

to treat with the Americans and that the "Shawanese [made] great professions of peace."²⁴ The news was not all good, however, nor were all Indians inclined to peacefully surrender their land for American interest. "The Cherokee are hostile, and have killed and scalped seven people near the mouth of the Scioto."²⁵ Letters such as this probably gave St. Clair a fairly accurate picture of the Indian situation.

Nevertheless, in early 1788, St. Clair complained to Knox about the lack of communication prior to his arrival. "The intelligence respecting the disposition of the Indians was not very satisfactory; indeed, it amounted to very little more than that they had been extremely anxious to see some person with authority from the United States to treat with them."²⁶ This meant that St. Clair had to forge a new relationship with the Indians as the new voice of authority in the Northwest Territory. Despite the reported eagerness of the Indians to make treaties, St. Clair expressed severe misgivings of such a likelihood: "Whether that uneasiness can be smoothed, I own, I think doubtful, for though we hear much of the injuries and depredations that are committed by the Indians upon the whites, there is too much reason to believe that at least equal if not greater injuries are done to the Indians by the frontier settlers, of which we hear very little."²⁷

This letter is of great significance, for it shows a man willing at least to visualize both sides of the issue. His

advocacy of treating the Indians on an equally human basis can be traced throughout his life, although it is not often as obvious as these words indicate. It should not be forgotten that although his objective was to create peace and expand the territory (hardly a harmonious possibility), it was the white settlers that St. Clair was forced to feel most responsible for. As an agent of the United States government, his position had almost parental implications, and unlike the Indians, the whites were citizens.

A letter to Knox six months later shows his need to support one side more strongly. "The western tribes have been so successful in their depredations on the Ohio River and their settlements are so distant, they imagine themselves perfectly safe," he fumed. "By these incursions they gratify at once their passions of avarice, and revenge, and their desire for spiritous liquor."²⁸ St. Clair's frustration and disapproval of this activity is apparent, but his mention of revenge is significant. The Indians were justified in their attacks, and both sides would have to cease hostile activity in order to make progress. "At this time," he concluded to Knox, ". . . even a hollow Peace, if better can not be secured, is very much to be hoped for."²⁹

Early in St. Clair's administration, he was able to appease a large contingent of Indians. Treaties were made with the Wyandot, Delaware and other friendly nations in eastern Ohio in 1789 which passed sovereignty from the British to the Americans and allowed them to acquire land

covering much of present-day Ohio. The Shawnese Indians ceded land further west the following year with the treaty of Fort Finney.³⁰ St. Clair wrote victoriously to Knox that this section of Indian business was finished and that the Indians had been "relinquished in proper form, for a valuable consideration, the lands formerly granted."³¹

Although the Indians did not get everything they wanted, they did not lose much that had been previously granted to them. St. Clair used the Indian alliance with Great Britain during the Revolution to explain to them their loss of country. He followed directions from a federal government that would not grant land already ceded but was willing to make compensation after a fashion.³² An important Indian leader, Joseph Brant of the Mohawk Tribe, was absent from these talks, and was able to persuade a significant number of Indians to join him.

The talks had been moved from a previous site at the base of the Muskingum falls due to the aforementioned violence against those bearing the goods for the Indians. Rumors at the time indicated that if St. Clair had met Brant at that place and refused the Mohawk's demands, he would have perished, but Brant scholars contend that such a "warlike stance" on the part of Brant was not accurate.³³ Originally named Thayendanagea, Brant had become a devout Christian, and had even translated the Book of Common Prayer into the Mohawk language.

Certainly, Brant's correspondence with St. Clair shows

only an educated and honorable surface. While it is possible that St. Clair would have met an unfortunate end at the falls of the Muskingum, it is not likely that such an action would have been Brant's first move. As an able leader to the Mohawk Nation, Brant had been closely allied with the British in both the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. He was skilled at diplomatic maneuvers and concerned only for the welfare of his people in a swiftly changing world.

Brant was anxious to show a united Iroquois confederacy to St. Clair, feeling that greater concessions would be made to a group that appeared more powerful. Although this confederacy was in reality only loosely held together, Brant nonetheless addressed his letters to St. Clair as from the head of the Iroquois Nation. "Meantime, we hope you to exercise patience, and not think the time long, as it is a business of importance, which we mean to settle seriously," he urged in 1788, "and hope to settle to our mutual satisfaction. I am happy at the idea of meeting you personally, to bring about this long-wished-for business."³⁴

Unfortunately for Brant, St. Clair was all too aware of the difficulties which the Indian leader faced in trying to unite several Indian factions. "Their general confederacy, if it exists at all," he wrote to Knox, "has not that efficacy which would enable the heads of it to direct its force to a point in the security of which many of the members

would not feel themselves much interested, when each had to fear for themselves separately."³⁵ As per his instructions from the United State, St. Clair had every intention of playing upon this weakness.³⁶

Although Brant removed himself to a more neutral position in Canada after this series of treaties, some scholars feel that such an important Indian presence continued to be felt in the Northwest Territory for several more years. A vivid eyewitness account given by Brant of St. Clair's defeat in 1791, combined with a lack of confirmed leadership during that battle has raised speculation regarding Brant's actual involvement.³⁷ His official dealings with Arthur St. Clair, however, were restricted to these early treaty negotiations.

St. Clair was undoubtedly aware of George Washington's opinion of Joseph Brant, and dealt with him accordingly. Washington wrote to New York Governor De Witt Clinton, "It gives me great pleasure to learn from you the friendly sentiments of Captain Brant, and with you I think they merit cultivation; but he has not been candid in his account of the conduct of General St. Clair, nor done justice in his representation of matters at Muskingam." Washington concluded by asserting that except "in a small degree," St. Clair was not negotiating for any more land than had previously been ceded.³⁸

St. Clair wrote to John Jay about his frustration with Brant during the treaty negotiations. Jay at this time was

secretary of foreign affairs under the Articles of Confederation. The Governor complained of the "tedious expectation," and stated, "It will not, however, be a very general meeting, as Brant, who is also a British pensioner at four hundred pounds sterling per annum, after coming within sixty miles of us, is gone back to Detroit, and has taken with him the whole of the Mohawks and a part of some other tribes."³⁹ Although St. Clair worried over Brant's influence on western tribes like the Shawnese, he claimed that Brant's absence would ultimately be the Mohawk's own misfortune, for St. Clair found it unlikely that Brant could continue to unify the Indians after such an action.⁴⁰

With Brant temporarily out of the picture, St. Clair was able to continue with those Indians who did wish to negotiate. By far the best account of these treaty negotiations is found in the journal of Ebenezer Denny, a young army officer assigned to St. Clair's forces. It was the first time that St. Clair and Denny would work together, and it laid the foundation of mutual respect and admiration. It would later be Denny's account of St. Clair's Indian campaign which would be invaluable evidence in his defense.

St. Clair wrote to Knox explaining his high regard for the young major. "He [Denny] has every quality that I could wish a young man to possess that meant to make the army his profession," he enthused. "There are however certain traits in his character as a man that are not generally known, that would endear him. Out of the small pittance he

receives, he has maintained two aged parents for a long time."⁴¹

Denny's journal entries provided a clear summation of the events surrounding the treaty negotiations. On December 13, 1788, about two hundred Indians arrived. They were primarily Delaware, Wyandot, Seneca, Tawa [Ottawa], Pottawatamie, Chippewa and Sac. Significantly, Denny reported that there were no Shawnese.⁴² A week later, there had been much talk, but no sound progress. There was great eloquence and perseverance on the part of both parties. Denny reported that St. Clair cleverly used the Wyandot's relationship to the Shawnese to explain the American relationship to the British. He regretfully used the threat of war, should the Indians choose not to agree with the "Thirteen Fires." Denny recorded that the old Wyandot chief wished for no more violence, and that the tribesmen would "do everything in their power to accommodate them for the sake of peace."⁴³ On January 11, 1789, the treaties were signed.

St. Clair himself revealed great tenacity when he reported the events to George Washington. "The claim of the Wyandot nation to the lands reserved to the Shawanese was strongly insisted upon by them, and to be made an article of the treaty- to this I would not consent; but to satisfy them, and that it might be kept in remembrance, it is inserted at the bottom of it, by way of a memorandum."⁴⁴ It is unlikely that the Wyandot were able to understand this fine distinction, and it shows St. Clair's determination to

follow federal instruction.

There was a separate article added later to this treaty "for removing all causes of controversy." It allowed Indians accused of murdering United States citizens to be tried according to the laws governing the state or territory where the crime was committed. For all of the discussion of peaceful coexistence, this article to the treaty only confirmed what had been expected all along. The Indians were to remain a separate and subservient nation. St. Clair made some attempt to soften this division in a proclamation announcing the treaty. "All citizens and subjects of the United States are hereby required to . . . abstain from every act of hostility, injury and injustice to the said nations, as they shall answer to the contrary at their peril."⁴⁵ This sounded threatening, but it would be some years before any attempt was made for specific laws regarding white treatment of Indians.

As important as these treaties were, they did not come close to solving the Indian situation. St. Clair was not optimistic about a quick resolution. "I think sir," he addressed the Secretary of War, "that a good deal of time may elapse before the great event of peace or war is decided upon."⁴⁶ In the same letter, he sought to justify the military solution which he was beginning to see as inevitable. Acknowledging the "embarrassment" that an Indian war could cause the United States, he ventured that it was "with nations as well as with individuals, the family

submitting to one injury usually invites a greater, and where the national honor or interest is concerned, I believe some embarrassments ought to be overlooked."⁴⁷ Several months later, he had revised this philosophy even further.

"But a war with the Western tribes, at least, seems inevitable," he counseled Knox.⁴⁸ To the President, his words were similar. He wrote of the "tedious and troublesome" treaty negotiations, and of the favorable result. The bad news had to be sifted in with the good, however. "There are. . . several nations on the Wabash, and the rivers which empty themselves into it, that are ill-disposed, and from whom there is reason to expect that a part of the. . . settlement forming on the Miami will meet annoyance."⁴⁹

As annoying as the Indian activity was, there was also a strong sense that the Indians would not have been so successful or so determined without interference. St. Clair voiced this concern early in his governorship in a letter to John Jay. The British presence was still strong, and showed no sign of changing. St. Clair reported to Jay that Detroit had been surrounded by guards, a movement not in keeping with the British agreement to relinquish their northwestern forts. "It is to be feared that the Indians, at the same time, will not want for assistance from the British," worried the Governor.⁵⁰

As federal policy slowly shifted toward war, Knox advised St. Clair to apprise the British of the purpose

behind the military action, and to assure both the British and the Indians who had signed peace treaties that there was no ill will intended. "It will be a point, therefore, of delicacy, that you should take measures by sending some officer or messenger, at a proper time, to assure the commanding officer of the real object of the expedition."⁵¹

From a national position, Knox was forced to approach the British in a conciliatory and amicable way. The men in the field had no such compunctions. St. Clair had written to Major John F. Hamtramck at Post Vincennes to get a candid opinion of Indian affairs. The major's response was blunt, and although Hamtramck feared that he was alone in his convictions, he merely confirmed the opinions of others. "Nothing can establish a peace with the Indians so long as the British keep possession of the upper forts; for they certainly are daily sowing the seed of discord betwixt the measures of our Government and the Indians."⁵²

Even as late as 1800, St. Clair wrote regarding his concern over British instigation of Indian actions. In a letter to Indian Agent William Wells, he voiced his concern. "There is little doubt that the British are at the bottom of the restlessness that prevails amongst many of the Indian tribes, and that they are encouraged by them," the Governor remarked.⁵³ It was widely known that the British had often given the Indians material goods and war supplies, but this interference was probably the most damaging assistance of all, and was felt in a wide radius from the center of British

control.

It was evident that St. Clair felt responsible for the whole territory, and not merely the white settlers. In an early address at Marietta, he eloquently advised the settlers of their responsibility in changing the hostile frontier.

"Endeavor to cultivate a good understanding with the natives," he urged, "without much familiarity; treat them on all occasions with kindness and the strictest regard to justice; run not into their customs and habits, which is but too frequent with those who settle near them, but endeavor to induce them to adopt yours." He concluded by reminding them that the settlers had no less a violent reputation than the Indians, and that the current action of the Native Americans was in large part due to this very reputation.⁵⁴

Stating the problem in such simple terms was probably all that St. Clair could do in that direction; the people in his territory could listen, but that was not sufficient for them to change their ways. Caught between such a defensive mentality and a federal government that preached peace but demanded results, St. Clair was required to shift his emphasis. "Their confederacy is broken," he advised Knox, "and. . . Brant has lost his influence."⁵⁵ To the President he relayed the problems of continuing hostility, and referred the matter to Washington's judgment.⁵⁶

Kentucky was a special concern in St. Clair's correspondence to the President. "It is not to be expected, sir, that the Kentucky people will or can submit patiently to

the cruelties and depredations of these savages." In defense of the Native Americans, he continued that the settlers were "in the habit of retaliation, perhaps, without attending precisely to the nations from which injuries [were] received."⁵⁷ He was primarily concerned with the United States' losing trust by treaty violation, but his words also expressed the realization of the difficulties faced by the Indian nations. Among these difficulties was the Indian need to have access to their hunting grounds, and most especially the areas which were thick with deer, a primary staple to Indian survival.⁵⁸

Despite St. Clair's sympathy for Native American difficulties, he knew where his responsibilities lay, and by 1790, the voluminous correspondence was largely military in nature. St. Clair had expressed previously the effectiveness of small, coordinated attacks rather than a major effort, for he had felt the united Indians too enormous a threat.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, he set his sights toward a massive ground attack. In the spring of 1790 he expressed to Knox the need for extensive planning and more adequate forces.⁶⁰

He complained that his suggestion for a post at the Miami village had not been accepted, and estimated an opposing Indian force to be fewer than 1100 men.⁶¹ He also expressed from the beginning the need for the commanding officers to have had considerable experience, naming especially Josiah Harmar and John Hamtramck as the kind of men required.⁶²

Knox and Washington certainly agreed with St. Clair on this point, but the military opinions were rather diverse in other areas. Josiah Harmar, who had basically been in charge of Indian affairs prior to St. Clair's arrival, wrote to Knox in 1787 to express his feelings that the situation did not at that time require additional militia from Virginia.⁶³ Less than a year later, he modified this approach. Mortified, he wrote to Knox to inform him of a violent attack upon a party of men carrying supplies. The party had been assigned by Major Hamtramck to deliver the provisions and of the thirty six men, ten were killed and eight were wounded. The attack occurred near the mouth of the Wabash River, a prime area for this type of depredation."⁶⁴ As time continued, Harmar was forced to agree with St. Clair's letter to him. "The situation of things appears to be unpromising with regard to the Indians and drawing fast to a crisis."⁶⁵

As always, Major Hamtramck's correspondence is of interest for its candor. He cautioned St. Clair that any attempt to establish peace on the part of the Indians would only be a deception. "The Indians never can be subdued by just going into their towns and burning their houses and their corn, and returning the next day," he warned, "for it is no hardship for the Indian to live without; they make themselves perfectly comfortable on meat alone; and as for houses, they can build them with as much facility as a bird does his nest."⁶⁶ For his part, St. Clair appreciated Hamtramck's time and experience and welcomed all

correspondence regarding Indian affairs. Even as late as 1793, after his own defeat but before Wayne's victory, he wrote that "to receive any observations you might think proper to communicate would be an esteemed favor."⁶⁷

As the letters flew among Knox, Hamtramck, Harmar, Washington and St. Clair, plans continued for St. Clair's massive campaign against the Indians. Scheduled for late summer or early autumn of 1791, it was the largest endeavor of its type to have been planned. George Washington recommissioned Arthur St. Clair at his wartime rank of Major-General. Above all else, he cautioned him to "Beware of Surprise" on the part of the Indians.⁶⁸ "Surprise" would prove to be a weak word indeed.

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Chapter 3

"The Unexpected Debacle"

To examine Arthur St. Clair's policies and opinions regarding Indians in the Northwest Territory, it is necessary to pay careful attention to his campaign against them in 1791. This battle has been crucial to any study of the Territory's first and only Governor, and has often been the basis of severe criticism. Although exonerated by a House of Representatives Committee for any personal fault in the failure of the campaign, Arthur St. Clair has remained a figure of controversy.¹

When St. Clair arrived in Marietta as Governor in 1788, his instructions from the Federal Government were quite clear. "In general, [he] was to use his discretion in an attempt to remove all causes of controversy with the Indians, and especially to secure an agreement upon a boundary line."² In 1790, the Secretary of War, Henry Knox, wrote to the new Governor cautioning him about indiscriminate actions against the Native Americans. "The vengeance of the Union is to be pointed against the perpetrators of the mischiefs, and not the friendly, or even neutral tribes. . . ."³ At the time Knox was writing to him, St. Clair had managed to finalize two separate treaties with various tribes in the Northwest Territory. The Iroquois agreed to uphold the boundaries previously set by the Treaty of Fort Stanwix by accepting a

payment of \$3000. The Delawares, Ottawas, Chippewas, Sacs, Wyandots and Potawatomes were paid \$6000 to observe the Treaty of Fort McIntosh. This line began at Lake Erie and continued to the Maumee, then to the Big Miami and across to the Cuyahoga. The line up the Cuyahoga completed the boundary. These arrangements left no room for the Shawnese or the Miamis, and it was these Indians who became "the center of resistance to American advance in the Ohio Country."⁴

Despite efforts toward peaceful, if uneven, solutions, it became more and more obvious that Indian/white relations were increasingly abrasive. Recent historians have accused the Governor of playing Indian factions against each other to create "obnoxious"⁵ treaties, and have also alleged that he misjudged their reactions by trying to "overawe them".⁶ In his article on Arthur St. Clair, Jeffrey Brown contends that such tactics only escalated hostility.⁷

In a footnote of his early biography of St. Clair, William Henry Smith cites the preamble to a meeting of the Ohio Company in 1790. "Whereas there is reason to believe that the campaign made against the Shawanese[sic] and other Indian Nations the last year is so far from humbling them and inducing them to sue for Peace, that, on the contrary, a general War will ensue ."⁸ This statement suggests that even a pretense of a peaceful settlement was premised on force in the minds of the fearful settlers.

While the settlers were leaning toward force to solve

the problems with their Native American neighbors, Federalist policy was trying to balance their previous directive with public reaction. In July 1790, Knox justified the changing current of feeling by professing that a peaceful solution was to be highly desired, but that if the Indians could not "acceed[sic] to so reasonable an invitation the punishment that must follow a continuation of hostilities will receive the approbation of all just men. . . ."9 The duality of this statement, and indeed of Federal Policy regarding the Indians was obvious. A "reasonable invitation" to be pushed off the land allowed room only for the opinion of one side, and "all just men" surely did not include the Native Americans. Within the context of this double edged sword, kindness was encouraged. In the summer of 1791, while troops were being prepared for St. Clair's campaign, Governor St. Clair instructed General James Wilkinson to spare all of the Indians who would "cease to resist" and that "all such captives should be treated with kindness."¹⁰

Perversely, he also directed General Wilkinson to take as many prisoners as possible in the preludial campaign to St. Clair's own, "particularly women and children."¹¹ How much of this was political subterfuge is difficult to gauge. Certainly the obstacle presented by Native Americans would be removed at any price, but the Federal Government encouraged kindness when dealing with prisoners.¹²

As a staunch Federalist, Arthur St. Clair naturally followed and delegated this policy. Although he echoed the

need for kindness, this desire did not stand in the way of a logical approach to land acquisition. He took great care to discourage Indian unity. "A jealousy subsisted between them which I was not willing to lessen by appearing to consider them as one people."¹³

Some scholars have accused the Governor of Machiavellian tendencies with this philosophy. Others have appraised it as merely logical.¹⁴ According to William Henry Smith, a nameless biographer of Joseph Brant admitted that under Governor St. Clair "there was an approximation to justice toward the Indians which had not previously been countenanced by Congress."¹⁵

In the months prior to his own campaign, General St. Clair provided ample guidance on the subject to his subordinate officers. In May, 1791, he wrote to Brigadier General Charles Scott from Fort Washington. "I request to impress the property of treating with great humanity such as may fall into the hands upon those under your command of all ranks and descriptions."¹⁶ The General continued with words which portrayed his own opinion and dovetailed with that of the Administration. "The dignity of the United States requires it; the character of the Nation demands it; the best consequences may be expected to result from it, and it is the positive orders of the president."¹⁷

Later that summer, the General advised along the same lines. "I beg you sir, to oblige the people under your command to refrain from scalping the dead. It is an act

which, though it does no harm to the dead carcass, debases the persons who commit it."¹⁸ It could be argued that his concern here was more for American image than Native American welfare, but he also inferred that the Indians were all to be treated as individuals and not just a "race of savages." In August of the same year, St. Clair wrote to Colonel John Campbell to use discretion in fearing all Indians. "Those Indians who have withdrawn themselves from those who are at war with us;[sic] have put themselves under the protection of the United States;[sic] and have been promised that protection as long as they behave themselves peaceably. Of course they are not to be molested."¹⁹

Many such instructions were written to officers commanding campaigns prior to St. Clair's own. It was their failures which led to the organization of a much larger force to be commanded by the Governor. The final disappointment was General Josiah Harmar's defeat in 1790. Commanding a force of approximately three hundred men, Harmar was soundly routed by the Miami War Chief Little Turtle.²⁰ Harmar and his troops managed to burn some of the Miami villages, but no permanent indentation was made on the Indian forces. Although surely discouraged by Harmar's defeat, St. Clair seemed fully to understand the situation. In an official report to the Secretary of War, Major Ebenezer Denny wrote of Harmar's loss, "Indeed, the Governor has been heard to say that much more was done than he had any right to expect."²¹ St. Clair's position was in some disagreement with others who

"Called forth censorious comments on General Harmar."²²

These criticisms wounded Harmar to the point that he resigned his commission after his court martial, despite his acquittal. By his own admission, Ebenezer Denny was "much affected by the determination of General Harmar"²³ and it was difficult for him to stay with St. Clair. His journal during the autumn campaign of 1791 is a valuable resource in the study of this era.

After Harmar's defeat, both Arthur St. Clair and the War Department realized that a much larger force of soldiers would be necessary to combat those Indians causing trouble on the frontier. In addition, these men needed to be trained in woodland warfare. The two interim campaigns, led by Brigadier General Charles Scott and Colonel James Wilkinson, were basically intended to stall while St. Clair organized his effort. Although they were partially successful in this aim, they "merely irritated the Indians by the ruthless destruction of their property."²⁴

As the Indians became more militant in their relationships with the white settlers, St. Clair "came to the reluctant conclusion that the use of military force was the only possible solution."²⁵ Denny, at this time a lieutenant, wrote to General Harmar in March 1791, "The Great People here have at length determined to carry on another campaign against the savages upon a more extensive plan than the last."²⁶

Correspondence began early in 1791 in preparation for

the major battle. The increase in regular armed forces from three hundred to three thousand men was authorized by Congress, and Arthur St. Clair was appointed Major-General by George Washington. His second in command was General Richard Butler. The original plan was to wage war in the summer, and with that in mind, a July deadline for troops was promised by the War Department.²⁷ Temporary enlisted troops, called levies, were hired for six-month periods. In a letter to Colonel William Darke, the President offered him the command of one of the levies and granted him the authority to recruit three captains, three lieutenants and three ensigns " for a term of six months after arriving at the place of rendezvous."²⁸

One of the major problems in recruiting men was getting enough from the regular forces. As late as May, St. Clair expressed to Knox the hope that he could avoid using the militia as it brought out "only the worst of men."²⁹ As opposed to the regular forces, the militia was the equivalent of a reserve force, and called out only in emergencies. Firmly believing these troops to be a cause of the previous failures, the Governor sought to rely heavily on Kentucky for regular troops. The recruiting did not go as smoothly as planned, and the promised number of regular troops failed to arrive in a timely fashion. As late as September, two months after the original deadline, Knox wrote to St. Clair that additional troops had just left Fort Pitt.³⁰

In light of this information, it was odd that Knox would

say of St. Clair, "But I flatter myself that he will not think it proper to require any militia excepting perhaps two or three hundred mounted volunteers."³¹ When troops did arrive, it was so sporadically that no real training could take place.³² It was not only impossible to teach the new arrivals, but also to form any type of synthesis among these soldiers.

The irregular arrival of troops was a major problem, but far from the only one. Knox's vow that "every article, no matter how minute, should be furnished" sounded promising, but unfortunately, careful attention to detail was not granted.³³ Powder was sent in frail and insecure casks, the musket paper was not of the correct sort, and such basic items as paper and thread failed to arrive at all. By August 6, 1791, St. Clair was visibly upset in a terse letter to contractor Israel Ludlow.³⁴ The waters of the Ohio River were too low, which caused additional difficulty in the dispatching of troops and materials.

Knox was outwardly cooperative, but understandably limited by time and distance. He passed responsibility with some annoyance back to St. Clair regarding the status of provisions in late August. "I have repeatedly written to you", he chided the Governor, "that if the contractor's arrangements. . . should be deficient, than such deficiency must be supplied by your orders."³⁵ Knox was also pressed by President Washington on one hand and St. Clair and Butler on the other. The pressures of impending autumn and winter were

felt by both the Federal Government and the commanding officers waiting at Fort Washington. St. Clair was understandably impatient by now, as his new Aide-de-Camp Denny observed.³⁶

Unfortunately for the new Major General, the problems prior to departure continued to haunt him as he advanced toward his goal. His ill health was a major disadvantage. Plagued by gout and intestinal discomforts, St. Clair was not able to function in his normal capacity. He admitted in a November 1st letter to Knox that he had been so ill that he could not provide much detail of events.³⁷ When an Indian ally, Piamingo, arrived to confer, the Commander in Chief could only welcome him; he was too weak to conduct official business.³⁸ Major Denny noted the decline in health in his diary entry for October 24th. "The Commander in Chief has been unwell for some time past, but today [was] scarcely able to accompany the Army."³⁹

With the Major General incapacitated, leadership became an additional problem. St. Clair complained to Knox about the punctuality of the commanding officers and the corps. The levies raised for six months were "more troublesome and far inferior to the Militia."⁴⁰ Despite orders to the contrary, they fired their weapons constantly around the camp. Denny complained that the officers were unable to control their men.⁴¹

Lack of organizational time had weakened the chain of command, and St. Clair's illness further eroded leadership.

In addition, the serious problem with the provisions undermined the motivation of the men and desertions escalated. At one point, St. Clair worried that the campaign would come to naught. "I have the greatest reason to fear a disappointment which may render the whole campaign abortive."⁴² On the last day of October, a substantial number of men deserted. To compound the problem, they threatened to forage the provisions which had not yet caught up to the Army. "The First Regiment was dispatched after them," recorded Denny, "not with the expectation of bringing them back, but with that idea, and to prevent future desertions and principally to protect the convoys."⁴³

As though this ill-fated cavalcade did not have enough difficulty, the weather proved to be disastrous. Storms, wind, rain and frost made trails impassably muddy and destroyed roadside forage for the pack horses. ⁴⁴ Hail and snow added to the misery.

These less than optimal conditions all contributed to the final disaster on the morning of November 4, 1791. On November 3, the men were exhausted and wet, and this "prevented the General from having some works of defense immediately erected."⁴⁵ It was still dark the next morning when the camp was totally surrounded by Miami Indians, organized by Little Turtle. ⁴⁶ According to Denny's journal, the Indians appeared undaunted by the Army's resistance, and chaos continued.⁴⁷ Recalling the decision to retreat, he reported, "Delay was Death: no preparation could be made;

numbers of brave men must be left a sacrifice--There was no alternative."⁴⁸ Because the untrained militia was stationed surrounding the regular Army, they retreated inward toward the Officers Corps, creating mass confusion. There simply was no time, as Denny stated, to organize any kind of retaliation. As instinct triumphed over the minimal training of the troops, self-preservation forced immediate retreat. There was no thought given to collecting provisions or equipment.

As hoped, the pursuit of the retreating Army by the Indians took second place to the rewards of a hastily abandoned campsite. For the Americans, six hundred thirty were left dead and two hundred eighty three were wounded and left behind in the flight. As the militia was so untrained, the losses to the Officers Corps were substantial.

Unquestionably, the Indians had earned a major victory. A mystery ingredient in their success may well have been the British. During the Harmar Expedition, it was known that British officers had "furnished arms and supplies" to the Indians.⁴⁹ Doubting that this action was merely that of a spontaneous individual, Knox nonetheless warned General Butler to check the reputation of the informant. A handwritten memo attested to the fact that this source could not be trusted, but the seed of doubt had been planted.⁵⁰ The British may well have had a role in St. Clair's defeat at the Maumee, but it was likely not ordered from higher levels. The feeling of the federal government was that such an effort

would not be worth the repercussions.

Contemporaries of Arthur St. Clair were shocked at the casualties of that early morning attack, but somehow not surprised at the outcome. Rufus Putnam was more concerned with the impact of the defeat upon the unchecked violence between Indians and whites on the Frontier. In retrospect, he wrote, "St. Clair had been defeated, with a great loss [sic] of men, and all his artillery and stores of every kind - The Indians began to believe them Selves invincible [sic], and they truly had great cause [sic] of triumph."⁵¹

Although General Harmar was back in Philadelphia by the time of the defeat, his prophetic words were brought forth via the pages of Major Denny's journal. "It was a matter of astonishment to him [Harmar] that the Commanding General, who was acknowledged to be perfectly competent, should think of hazarding, with such people, and under such circumstances, his reputation and life, and the lives of so many others."⁵² Harmar was by far the most qualified to level such a criticism, and as such his words deserve special consideration.

Written nearly fifty years after the fact, Jacob Burnet's notes provide a unique perspective of the St. Clair defeat. As a staunch Federalist, his objectivity was dubious, but he did represent the voice of at least one faction half a century later. He blamed undisciplined troops and shoddy provision management, thereby largely exonerating St. Clair.⁵³

The response of the federal government was not so clearly drawn. President Washington's correspondence with St. Clair after the defeat referred mostly to the Governor's proffered resignation as Major General. Anxious for the campaign to continue, Washington did not allow St. Clair the option of keeping his rank throughout the time frame needed for a possible court-martial. "You have manifested your intention of retiring, and the essential interests of the public require that your successor should be immediately appointed, in order to repair the frontiers."⁵⁴ Washington did not betray the public affection or respect which he felt for St. Clair, but neither did he ever consult him again regarding frontier Indian Policy.⁵⁵

The Secretary of War could not afford the civilized approach of his President, for the censure against St. Clair was broadly reflected in the War Department. Burnet recollected that Knox, "believing himself to be injured addressed a letter to Congress, complaining of the injustice done to him by that [investigative] Committee, but they affirmed their first report."⁵⁶ In his personal correspondence with St. Clair, Knox's Federalist support remained constant. "Be assured that however great the defeat, that both you and your reputation, and the reputation of the troops under your command, are unimpeached."⁵⁷

By far the most serious criticism of St. Clair after the fact was in a letter from General John Armstrong to

President Washington. Considered by many to be the leading authority on Indian warfare, he reminded Washington that "in vain, however, may we expect success against our present adversaries without taking a few lessons from them."⁵⁸ When laid next to Harmar's evaluation, a sobering picture appears, but Armstrong did give major credit for the disaster to the "neglect of the Quartermaster General."⁵⁹

Writing almost one hundred years after the fact, St. Clair's early biographer William Smith was generally sympathetic to St. Clair, laying the fault for the defeat as the Major General himself did, with undisciplined troops and mismanaged supplies. St. Clair decided to resurrect his tattered military dignity by requesting an immediate formal inquiry. Speaking of a "wish to rectify the Public opinion,"⁶⁰ he struggled to prove that Washington's faith had not been in vain. Along these lines, the Governor sought to set the stage for sympathy regarding his ill health during the campaign. "Yesterday, for the first time, I have been able to leave my room" he wrote to Knox on November 24, 1791, "but can neither eat, drink, nor sleep- it is exactly a month since I made the last meal- twice in that time I attempted it- and paid severely for it."⁶¹

To retain his stature, if not his rank, Governor St. Clair implicated the War Department for its negligence. The House of Representatives committee appointed to investigate the incident concurred with St. Clair. Testimonies from General Harmar and Major Ziegler further strengthened St.

Clair's case. Major Ziegler stated that he [remembered] well the uneasiness among the officers on hearing of Hodgdon's appointment of quartermaster of the army, as they were well acquainted with him and knew him to be totally unfit for such a business."⁶² Although obviously not with St. Clair on the expedition, General Harmar was at Fort Washington as the campaign was being organized. He was "of the opinion that the arrangements of Mr. Hodgdon, after he did arrive, were ill judged and defective."⁶³

The Governor claimed also to have been beaten by superior numbers, particularly owing to the desertions and the ensuing confusion and lack of discipline. Although ultimately responsible as Commander in Chief for troop discipline, St. Clair believed it to be an impossible acquisition under the circumstances. The time allowed for training had been impossibly shortened by the tardy arrival of armed forces.

Public reaction to St. Clair's defense at that time was basically supportive and forgiving. Winthrop Sargent, the acting Governor during St. Clair's long absences, provided evidence and warnings about enemies of St. Clair's reputation. At one point, St. Clair complained to Sargent about the prejudice of the House Committee, for which he credited a territorial judge. Although St. Clair did not name his adversary, it was presumed by the editors of the Territorial Papers to be Judge John Cleves Symmes. Grousing that the few in his favor were often absent from the

Committee meetings, he added "the rest were under the strongest prejudice for me, for which I believe I am indebted to our friend the J----, who was very intimate with some of them." ⁶⁴

Although there is no proof that this "friend" was Judge Symmes, it was a likely assumption based on prior conflicts. St. Clair cannot have worried long about this as he was not only exonerated for all fault, but also commended for his enthusiasm and courage. ⁶⁵

Twentieth-century reaction to the "unexpected Debacle" ⁶⁶ is far less flattering. Beverly Bond's assessment is among the more gentle as he concludes that "St. Clair's defeat was a forcible illustration of the results of weak military policy in the Western Country." ⁶⁷ Andrew Cayton, a more recent historian, sees St. Clair's defense as awkward in the light of the gradual movement from Federalism toward Republicanism. "The Federalists were not only defeated by the Indians, they were publicly humiliated." ⁶⁸ Although clearly accepting St. Clair's defense, Cayton sees the defeat as a staggering blow to the party of Washington and St. Clair. By doing so he infers that a victory at the Maumee would have partially changed the political landscape of the Ohio Country. A decisive victory would have added strength to the flagging support of the Federalists.

By far the most caustic in his portrayal of the 1791 events is Ray Allen Billington. Referring to St. Clair as "that incompetent" and the "crotchety old ruler," ⁶⁹

Billington clearly blames St. Clair for much of the outcome. He also ridicules the short time-frame of the retreat. "[The troops] reached Fort Jefferson in twenty-four hours, a distance which took ten days to cover on the outward march."⁷⁰

While Billington may have a point, he neglects to consider several items. The weather on the outbound journey detained troops for several days. They were loaded down with supplies and artillery, and they made regular stops for meals. Most importantly, the retreat was over ground which had been cleared by the outward march. He also does not give credence to the desire of the troops to put distance between themselves and the horror which they had experienced. St. Clair wrote to Knox that "the greatest part of the men [threw] away their arms and accouterments even after the pursuit. . . had ceased."⁷¹ There was obviously no food under these conditions until the security of Fort Jefferson had been reached.

William Smith detailed the frustration of clearing land for building in one of his footnotes. It was not an easy task under the best of conditions. After a week of heavy rains and cold temperatures, it could only have been more difficult.⁷²

In an article for the *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Jeffrey Brown concludes "given his flaws, he accomplished perhaps as much as the Nation could have hoped for."⁷³ Brown's approach is basically middle-of-the-road as he sifts the consensus of

twentieth century historians on the topic of Arthur St. Clair. As modern historians have the gift of hindsight, it is the combined criticism of two of St. Clair's peers which may provide the key to the disaster of 1791. General Harmar's own experience was similar enough to provide plenty of warning. His own investigation proved that manpower was not the only reason for the defeat. As General Armstrong pointed out after the fact, this had not been the first encounter with Indians and their fighting techniques.

Patrick J. Furlong takes a more sympathetic approach to St. Clair. Like most historians on the subject, he refuses to condone some of the bad judgment which accompanied the ill-fated campaign. He does, however, place a significant amount of blame on British interference, and proposes that Joseph Brant played an important but carefully discreet role in the defeat. Citing extensive British records, Furlong allows that the case for Brant's involvement can not presently be proven, but finds it thought-provoking that the Miami Chief Little Turtle, who afterward claimed the credit, is nowhere mentioned.⁷⁴

The question must be asked: as St. Clair watched the evolution of problems such as ill-trained troops, missing supplies, and most desperately the end of the optimal season for a successful campaign, why did he not postpone his attempt for six months? Smith addressed this question, but did not truly provide an answer. Armstrong concedes that perhaps St. Clair was too bound by the "military rule"⁷⁵

and thus was too bound by honor to consider postponing the mission. Certainly most of the letters and relayed messages from President Washington left no room for such a delay in his plans. St. Clair was consistently pushed to keep his campaign in a forward motion.

Perhaps the answer lies in a letter to the President which General St. Clair wrote in April, 1792. He admitted that the "desire for honest fame [was] always the strongest passion in [his] breast."⁷⁶ He then expressed the hope that he would retain the fame long after those who attempted to steal it from him were forgotten.

Arthur St. Clair tried to see the Indians as a form of humanity, and always to parallel his own responses to the wishes of the Federal Government. Ultimately, however, it was "necessary" to remove the Indians and the problem they presented. At this point, they became a stepping-stone to the coveted fame, and their disposal by military force became a way to achieve power. He eagerly sought the accolades of his countrymen within the framework of "public service." Had St. Clair's desire for peace among humanity exceeded his desire for glory, the substantial obstacles presented to his campaign would have allowed him adequate time to work out possible alternatives. Instead, the need for this elusive glory forced him to embark upon a campaign bearing serious marks of failure at the outset.

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Chapter 4
"A Poor Devil Banished to Another Planet"

With the notorious defeat of 1791 and its ramifications behind him, Arthur St. Clair turned to his remaining source of power: the governorship of the Northwest Territory. Despite his official capacity, he felt terribly out of the political and social mainstreams. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton the year after his defeat, he voiced his frustration and tried to strengthen his connections to the federal government. "In compassion to a poor devil banished to another planet," he wrote plaintively, "tell me what is doing in yours, if you can snatch a moment from the weighty cares of your office." As though the portrait of self-pity was unclear, he continued abjectly, "Whether you do so or not, I shall always find myself deeply interested in your fame and fortune."¹ Clearly, St. Clair realized that the glory he sought was no longer to be found on the frontier.

Although he was rarely consulted on an official basis by the government in Philadelphia regarding Indians, he did follow Richard Butler as Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He was appointed after Butler's death in the 1791 defeat, and as no mention was ever made of his replacement, it can be assumed that he retained this office until his gubernatorial powers ended in 1802. This honor entitled him to the knowledge of all encounters, arrangements of problems, but the significance decreased over time, and the honor seemed to be largely on paper. It was perhaps unusual to award this

office to the Territory Governor, but he had recently resigned his commission as major-general, and was at the time the most qualified person to handle official correspondence in this capacity. Both in this position and as Governor, he felt free to express his opinion regarding the Indian situation, and his correspondence reflects this interest.

A letter regarding the role of General Israel Chapin was a typical example. As the temporary agent to the Iroquois Nation, he received instructions regarding his responsibility to St. Clair. "You being therefore under him," ordered Knox, "will correspond with and inform him of all general occurrences within your agency."² Knox also ordered Chapin to inform the War Department of everything as well, perhaps indicating diminished trust in St. Clair, who had previously been the one to communicate anything of note to Knox.

St. Clair saw his authority over the Indian situation deteriorate even more in his correspondence with Timothy Pickering in 1795. As Secretary of State, Pickering informed him of changes made by Anthony Wayne's Indian campaign of 1794. Apologizing to St. Clair for leaving the Governor's letter unanswered for some time, he assumed that St. Clair was cognizant of all relevant details, and stated that, "On both sides, it was stipulated that notice should be given of any hostile enterprises."³ He added that recent talks with Great Britain had stipulated that the British agents would no longer be instigating hostile responses among the Indians.⁴ Finally, Pickering clearly placed all authority in Wayne's

hands: "Should his orders have arrived, or if, when they do arrive, they are to supersede the measures which may be taken consequent on this letter."⁵

St. Clair's reply to Pickering was formal and showed his exclusion from policy-making. Despite Wayne's having issued a proclamation forbidding hostile actions between Indians and whites (something St. Clair would have undoubtedly expected to be within the realm of his own responsibilities), the Territory Governor was unaware of Wayne's actions. "Your letter sir," he addressed Pickering, "was the first information I had of the agreement for a suspension of hostilities entered into by General Wayne and the hostile tribes of Indians."⁶

St. Clair undoubtedly felt some jealousy over Wayne's success in contrast to his failure, but his words regarding Wayne were always gracious. As Wayne set out in 1794, St. Clair wrote to Pickering that about one thousand Indians awaited the American troops, and that the weather was ideal. This latter was perhaps a subtle reminder to the national authorities that his own campaign had been plagued with miserable weather. Nonetheless, he devoutly hoped for a "peace. . .restored upon good terms."⁷

Continuing his public show of support, the Governor issued a proclamation to set aside a day of fasting and prayer prior to Wayne's departure, in the hopes that God would grant him success against the hostile Indians.⁸ He was also instrumental in helping Wayne to raise the army

and inform the public of progress in that direction.⁹ When he issued his proclamation, he did not know that nearly a month had already elapsed since Wayne's victory against the Indians at Fallen Timbers.

George Washington had chosen Wayne as St. Clair's successor against the Indians largely because of his reputation for daring and success. He had spent the intervening years since the American Revolution engaged in conflict with southern Indians, which gave him invaluable experience. After collecting and training three thousand men, Wayne moved toward the site of St. Clair's defeat. After trying one last time to establish peace, Wayne's cavalry and infantry attacked approximately one thousand Indians led by the Shawnee, Bluejacket, on August 20, 1794. The battle was brief and Wayne's losses were scant. Retreating Indians were for the first time denied entrance to British forts, and the defeat carved the way for the Greenville Treaty of 1795, which pushed the Indians even farther west.

General Wayne wrote to St. Clair from Greenville the next year to warn him about small bands of Kentuckians determined to prevent a friendly treaty between Indians and whites in the Northwest Territory. He feared that peace would either be delayed or rendered impossible if official policy demanded a suppression of the violence. "Your own best judgment and experience will best dictate to you the most proper means to effect this desirable business, and in

which I will most cheerfully cooperate," he appealed.¹⁰

St. Clair's reply was characteristic. He was appalled that anyone obstructing peace should possibly come from his territory (although the parties came across from Kentucky, there were often citizens from northwest of the Ohio River in their midst) and promised that if evidence could be substantiated, he would punish the guilty parties. Although he promised to cooperate in every way with Wayne, he could not prevent a bit of his wounded ego from showing itself. "As I have never, sir, had any information on the subject of the armistice that took place between you and the savages," he wrote pointedly, "nor any knowledge of it at all but from a newspaper, it is very difficult for me to know how to proceed in case of infraction, or to tell what is an infraction."¹¹ The complaint was logical, but the tone was more evidence of St. Clair's feeling cast aside.

A letter several weeks later from Wayne to St. Clair showed that Wayne was sensitive to this problem. In great detail, he elaborated on interactions between himself and the Cherokee chief, Big Spider. He also advised the Governor that Bluejacket had departed with a message to the Shawnee chiefs to end all aggression toward the United States, and that he fervently hoped that this would be the beginning of peace, unless "prevented by their own [Indian] misconduct."¹²

Minor depredations continued on both sides, for many whites simply could not accept or trust the peace agreements.

St. Clair ventured a suggestion to the Secretary of State as to how such activity could be diminished. Believing that "the minds of men little tinctured with justice or humanity, have a pretty strong sympathy with their pockets," he recommended that "a pretty heavy pecuniary fine [should] be set upon the murder of an Indian, and a proportional one for lesser injuries."¹³ As the perpetrators were so often not made responsible for these crimes, it was St. Clair's further recommendation that a levy upon the county where the crime was committed would put an end to the inability to find the criminals.¹⁴

This philosophy of treating crimes against the Indians as crimes against other humans, became more obvious in official proclamations and laws as the century drew to a close. A proclamation in 1795 required all persons living in or passing through the Territory to refrain from injuring any Indian and to guard the peace strictly.¹⁵ A later proclamation the same year condemned the murder of two Indians which occurred in front of several militia guards, and ordered a "search and pursuit, if need be, after the perpetrators thereof."¹⁶

By 1798 there were territorial laws to protect Indians from white encroachment on their lands. St. Clair wrote to General James Wilkinson to apprise him of the new laws and advised him that a "heavy penalty [would] be imposed upon every person who shall make a settlement on any land belonging to . . . any Indian tribe."¹⁷ As this law closely

resembled St. Clair's suggestions to the Secretary of State, it is likely that he influenced the making of such a law. It was important to convey this information to General Wilkinson, for it would be the military which would be called upon to enforce these new laws. The boundary for being outside of the United States proper was one mile, and it was the duty of the military personnel to remove them and "convey them to the civil authority."¹⁸ Land which had been formally awarded by treaty to the Indians was considered to be outside of land held by the United States, either as a state or a territory. As these laws were so reflective of St. Clair's philosophy, he was no doubt pleased to pass them on to Wilkinson.

St. Clair's years as governor had allowed him to develop an intimate relationship with and a keen interest in the laws of the Territory. Laws which concerned his own power were necessarily of great interest, but laws concerning Indians held a strong fascination. A letter from Territory lawyer Jacob Burnet to the Governor interpreted laws concerning Indians at the Governor's request. Writing to Burnet as a member of the Governor's council, St. Clair had enquired as to how to proceed under the law regarding a murder of Indians on United States land. The laws were clear in regard to these murders on Indian land, but Burnet concluded that "the offenders ought to be dealt with in the same manner as though they were charged with the murder of white people."¹⁹ St. Clair had several times expressed his concern that the

violence issued from both Indians and whites, but that the punishments were not equal. Finally, the Indians were being seen as human.

St. Clair's Territorial Address of 1800 confirmed his belief in the need for more equality. His concern was not only for peace, but for the establishment of general regulations. Invoking that such municipal laws had been created a duty by the Northwest Ordinance, St. Clair quoted a portion of the Ordinance which pertained to the Indians:

" 'In their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful laws, authorized by Congress, but laws founded in justice and humanity shall. . . be made.'"²⁰ For St. Clair, these words from the Northwest Ordinance echoed a deep personal belief that the Indians deserved humane treatment at the very least. Edward Tiffin's response as Speaker of the House expressed the same needs, but the emphasis was on the welfare of Territory inhabitants, not the rights of Indians.²¹

St. Clair's reference to the Northwest Ordinance gave a strong clue to his self-perception. He was ever conscious of his tether to the national government, and ever attempting to project to the inhabitants of the territory the policies and opinions of the United States. His letters to the Secretary of War were always deferential and subordinate. By 1799, the problem with the Shawnee Indians had still not been fully resolved. In reporting to Knox about the peaceful overtures of the Shawnee agent, William Wells, St. Clair assured that

"no pains will be spared on my part to develop them that I can bestow, and I have instructed Mr. Wells to be particularly attentive to their motions and the conduct of such white men as are among them."²² Clearly, St. Clair felt his position as the link between federal and local interests to be a strong one.

Knox often passed information to St. Clair with the expectation that he would delegate it as necessary and proper. This he often did, quoting the exact words of the Secretary of War and clarifying them with instructions of his own. In advising one such captain in this sort of arrangement, he wrote: "You will be pleased, sir, to attend to this circumstance, sign duplicate certificates of the delivery made by you to each [Indian] nation, and let them be countersigned. . .send one of each to the War Office, and the duplicates to me."²³ These deliveries were to be opened and inspected in front of the chiefs. St. Clair brooked no argument in assigning this overload, for he claimed it to be "acceptable to the Government."²⁴

It cannot be disputed that St. Clair strongly reflected federal policy. It was his job to do so. His position did, however, allow him to shape federal and territorial policy regarding Indians. For example, he issued proclamations without approval from Knox or Washington. In 1796, two Pottawatamies were murdered while in the custody of a sheriff in Illinois. St. Clair was outraged, and issued a Proclamation ordering the perpetrators to be taken into

custody. To his disgust, the murder was attributed to them, but they were not punished. In his "Report of the Official Proceedings in the Illinois Country", he stated that he then requested that the matter be heard again in front of the grand jury ("in a very pathetic charge from the judge") but again nothing happened to the criminals.²⁵ In this instance, St. Clair was unable to make the necessary changes, but the fact that he was so willing to try says a great deal for the strength of his convictions.

One of St. Clair's major concerns in dealing with the Indians was always to ascertain the exact facts of any case before determining a course of action. In a letter to James Wilkinson regarding a dispute over territory, he showed such a care for this kind of detail. "But you will be pleased to observe," he noted, "that the opinion is founded upon the presumption that upon which the settlement is formed are part of that allotted to the Chickasaw Indians by the treaty of Hopewell, in 1706." ²⁶ This kind of caution was imperative for correctly interpreting the laws, but it also showed that St. Clair was not like the majority who automatically accepted the word of a white over that of an Indian.

On at least one occasion, St. Clair was so concerned with the safety of Indians that he offered his own intervention. He wrote to Sheriff James Smith of Hamilton County regarding a murder that had taken place, and Indians that were being held in conjunction with the crime. The Indians were from the same tribe, but had nothing to do with

either the murder or the conflict surrounding them. Contending that their captivity was tantamount to private retribution, he commanded the sheriff, "But should it appear to you that they can not safely be sent from the town of Hamilton, you are to bring them here to me at Cincinnati."²⁷ St. Clair was obeying the law to the letter, but he perhaps was responsible for breathing a refreshing new spirit into the intent of the law. Certainly, his attitude was not common for the time.

St. Clair's later years as Governor of the Northwest Territory were colored by bitterness and frustration. A great deal of his own money had been put into the failed campaign of 1791, and although reimbursement was promised by Congress, none was forthcoming. In 1795, St. Clair wrote a pathetic letter to President Washington, complaining of the "wretched situation of [his] affairs."²⁸ He ought to have known better, for a similar letter during the Revolution had brought only a gentle but firm reminder from Washington about St. Clair's duty to his country.²⁹ Surely it was a desperate situation which drove St. Clair to this letter, for the tone was often whining and bitter. The Indian campaign, he complained, "has left me saddled with a debt of upwards of six -thousand dollars."³⁰ He sought approval from Washington for his actions in general regarding the Indians, and justified his notorious defeat. "The share I had in prosecuting the war, when it did supervene, although very unfortunate, I have no cause to be ashamed of, though the

consequences to me have been the same as if the sinister events of it had been produced by my misconduct."³¹ There is no record of Washington's ever having acknowledged this letter, nor was financial compensation ever granted to St. Clair.

The last records of Governor St. Clair's written opinions on Indians were found in his correspondence of 1800. They were moralistic and Christian in nature, and there is no doubt of his belief that the Indians to him were men, not a sub-human species. They were not United States citizens, but they did deserve the simple justices due to any form of humanity. In his Territorial Address of 1800, he angrily attacked the acquittal and release of known murderers of Indians. "Have we not reason to fear the displeasure of the Almighty," he argued, "who looks with an equal eye on all his creatures, and that the rage of the savage may be let loose to vindicate his broken laws?"³²

He pleaded for fair treatment of the Indians and compensation for the wrongs done to them. He called for justice and honesty, and commitment to promises given. "It has long been a disgrace to the people of the States bordering upon the Indians, both as men and as Christians, that, while they loudly complained of every injury or wrong received from them, and imperiously demanded satisfaction, they were daily offering to them injustice and wrongs of the most provoking character."³³

He claimed that the reason for the double standard was

clear, and ought not to be tolerated. "Because they [have] not received the light of the gospel, they might be abused, cheated, robbed, plundered and murdered at pleasure, and the perpetrators, because professed Christians, ought not to suffer for it. What kind of Christianity is this?"³⁴ To St. Clair, these actions were not at all compatible with Biblical teachings.

Arthur St. Clair's official policies were consistently a strong reflection of the President's. He constantly sought to obey and was scrupulous in delegating orders to his subordinates exactly as he had received them. His opinions were always couched in deferential language to the United States, and his actions were always those which he perceived to be in keeping with national expectations. When he spoke on behalf of Washington or Knox, his policies and opinions were perfect reflections. That he continued this loyalty in the face of broken promises and financial ruin which could easily be blamed on the government of the United States was admirable.

Nonetheless, to look at Arthur St. Clair as a mere reflection of federal policy is to examine only a two-dimensional figure. A comparison of the attitude toward Indians at the beginning and end of his term as governor provides strong evidence of his impact on both territorial and federal Indian policy. By the end of his leadership, Indians were being treated increasingly more like human beings and less like savages. Perhaps his own feelings of

"banishment" allowed him to see more clearly the predicament of the Native Americans. It can be argued that his own feelings changed somewhat during his years as governor. Certainly Territorial Law grew to incorporate specific regulations for white/Indian relationships and interactions.

Although it would appear that his public policies and personal opinions were not compatible, this proved little problem for St. Clair. He was duty-bound to protect and promote the interests of the United States. He would never have considered placing his own opinions before official policy. When he was able to incorporate his opinions into his official role, such as in the creation of laws and territorial addresses, however, his stance was clear. In subtle but far-reaching ways, the only governor of the Northwest Territory was responsible for shaping Indian policy at both federal and local levels, and in doing so he helped to make it a more humane policy.

CHAPTER FOUR END NOTES

- 1 St. Clair to Hamilton August 9, 1793, in Smith, Volume 2, P. 318.
- 2 Knox to Israel Chapin, April 28, 1792, in American State Papers 29, p. 231.
- 3 Timothy Pickering to St. Clair, March 25, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 338.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 St. Clair to Pickering, April 28, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 345.
- 7 St. Clair to Pickering, no date, 1794, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 322.
- 8 Official Proclamation, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 323.
- 9 Ibid, p. 322.
- 10 Wayne to St. Clair, June 11, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 376.
- 11 St. Clair to Wayne, June 11, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 376.
- 12 Wayne to St. Clair, August 19, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 387-388.
- 13 St. Clair to Timothy Pickering, as part of his official report on the Illinois Country, in 1796, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 397
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Official Proclamation, no date, 1795, (a footnote) in

- Smith, Volume 2, p. 344.
- 16 Official Proclamation, June 20, 1795, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 386.
- 17 St. Clair to Wilkinson, July 16, 1798, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 427.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Jacob Burnet to St. Clair, August 20, 1800, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 525-526.
- 20 Address of St. Clair to the Territorial Legislature, November 5, 1800, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 513.
- 21 Edward Tiffin, answer of the Legislature to St. Clair's Territorial Address, late 1800, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 513.
- 22 St. Clair to Knox, August 10, 1799, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 446.
- 23 St. Clair to Captain Sedgewick, October 6, 1799, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 463.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Official Report of the proceedings in the Illinois Country, no date, 1796, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 401.
- 26 St. Clair to Wilkinson, July 16, 1798, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 427.
- 27 St. Clair to James Smith, June 4, 1800, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 497.
- 28 St. Clair to George Washington, no date, 1795, from Philadelphia, in Smith, Volume 2, p. 390.
- 29 Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington: A

Biography , 7 volumes, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1948-57), p. 391.

30 Ibid, p. 392.

31 Ibid, p. 391.

32 St. Clair to Territorial Legislature, November 5, 1800,
in Smith, Volume 2, p. 503.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

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