

Welcome to St. Clair's Defeat Revisited: A New View of the Conflict

This exhibit introduces you to the complex history of St. Clair's Defeat, on November 4, 1791, and its context and aftermath with respect to the nine Tribal Nations who orchestrated this great defeat of the U.S. Military. The exhibit's four themes and 12 sub-themes, design, and immersive qualities will visually and tangibly contextualize: 1) the lead-up to the battle; 2) the elegant crescent strategy utilized by the coalition of Native Tribes; 3) removal and demonization of Native peoples in the aftermath; and 4) the persistence of cultural traditions that descendant Tribes practice today.

Collaborative Exhibit Creation

Themes

Sub-Themes

Background

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Tensions Leading to War
- ▶ Northwest Indian War

Battle

- ▶ St. Clair's Defeat
- ▶ Tribal and Settler Weaponry and Artifacts
- ▶ Different Worldviews; Different Strategies

Aftermath

- ▶ Immediate Aftermath, Treaty of Greenville
- ▶ Treatment and Expulsion of Native Peoples
- ▶ Erasure of Memory / Loss of Identity

Persistence

- ▶ Effects Reverberate to the Present
- ▶ Recreating Lost Memories/ Filling in the Loss of Identity
- ▶ Tribes Today

A noteworthy and central feature of this exhibit is its method of creation. It was co-created with representatives from the Nations descended from the coalition that defeated St. Clair. These Tribal Humanities Scholars (THS, see list below) worked with the Project Team in five meetings, numerous interviews, and correspondence to craft, review, and edited panel text, honing the exact meaning and tone desired. The visual and organizational design features which augment the text were designed and selected with THS deciding how best to convey their story of St. Clair's defeat and its effect on their Nation.

Experience and Learning Outcomes

After viewing this exhibit, you will have:

- ▶ A better understanding of the context of the Northwest Indian War, specifically from the viewpoint of Native Nations protecting their homeland.
- ▶ An appreciation of the skill, strategy, and coordination of the Native peoples in orchestrating St. Clair's Defeat, and achieving an overwhelming victory.
- ▶ Reflections on the feelings invoked by the aftermath that Native tribes endured as a result of the Northwest Indian War, St. Clair's Defeat, and the loss of and forcible removal from their homelands.
- ▶ A new understanding of American Indian Nations today as living cultures and peoples, and an interest in the persistence of their culture, language, and social identity.

Online Exhibit Guide



Traveling Exhibit Web Site

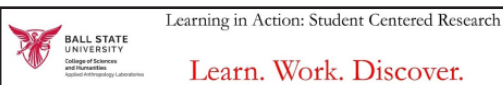


ONLINE EXHIBIT GUIDE

<https://bit.ly/StClairsDefeatRevisitedStoryMap>

TRAVELING EXHIBIT WEB SITE

<https://bit.ly/StClairsDefeatRevisited>



Acknowledgements

- Tribal Humanities Scholars as listed to the right
- Co-Principal Investigators - Christine Thompson and Dr. Kevin C. Nolan, Applied Anthropology Laboratories, Ball State University
- Exhibit Designer - Dr. Kristin Barry, College of Architecture, Ball State University
 - Ohio History Connection

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Tribal Humanities Scholars

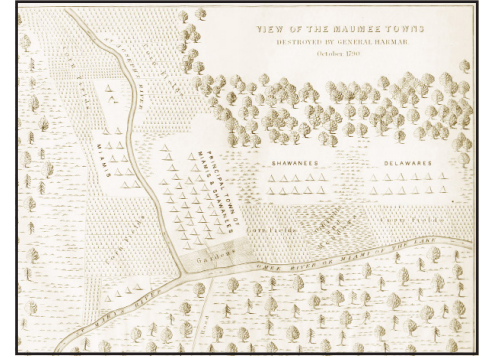
- Nekole Alligood (Delaware Nation)
- Matthew Bussler (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi)
- Chief Ethel Cook (Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma)
- Stacey Halfmoon (Caddo Nation)
- Rhonda Hayworth (Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma)
- Larry Heady (Delaware Tribe of Indians)
- Second Chief Norman Hildebrand (Wyandotte Nation)
- Diane Hunter (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma)
- William Tarrant (Seneca-Cayuga Nation)
- Tonya Tipton (Shawnee Tribe)
- Chief Glenna Wallace (Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma)



Background

For over 12,000 years, Native peoples flourished on the land making up Ohio and Indiana today. They managed waterways, transportation routes, and landscapes. This infrastructure supported and sustained tribal communities and trade centers for thousands of years across millions of acres. The Treaty of Paris in 1783, changed the dynamic of land tensions when Great Britain ceded its “claimed control” of native lands to the United States. Settlers continued to pour down the Ohio River into Indian Territory, threatening and randomly attacking tribal communities. Native people attacked the encroaching settlers to stop the invasion of their homes and lands.

In the fall of 1790, General Josiah Harmar’s U.S. military campaign targeted the Miami, Shawnee, and Delaware villages of Kiihkayonki (present day Fort Wayne, Indiana). They burned homes, destroyed crops and food supplies but the battle was considered a Native victory. A second U.S. campaign in 1791, led by Major General Arthur St. Clair, again targeted Kiihkayonki. Marching north from Fort Washington (present day Cincinnati, Ohio), the 1,400 U.S. troops built a chain of forts. Miami and Shawnee scouts monitored the army’s progress, and runners were sent to other tribes, asking them to assemble in Kiihkayonki.

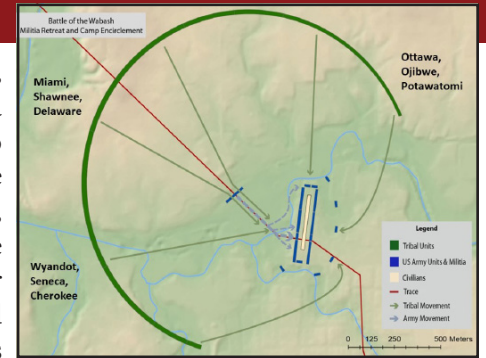


Map of Kekionga, before its destruction, 1790. Public domain, from military journal of Ebenezer Denny.

The Battle - St. Clair’s Defeat

On the evening of November 3, as St. Clair and his army camped on the Wabash River, 60 miles southeast of Kiihkayonki, 1,400 Native troops from nine tribes assembled on a high ridge just northwest of St. Clair’s encampment. The tribes positioned themselves into a huge crescent formation, out of sight of St. Clair’s army. At dawn the next morning, the Miami, Shawnee, and Delaware attacked St. Clair’s army. Simultaneously, the Wyandotte, Seneca, and Cherokee on the left and Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi on the right of the crescent surrounded St. Clair’s camp in less than 15 minutes. Despite the equal number of combatants, the U.S. casualties were enormous. Over 650 U.S. soldiers were killed and several hundred camp followers were killed or taken prisoner. Less than 50 Native troops were killed. This well-planned Native victory is often called the greatest defeat of the U.S. Army.

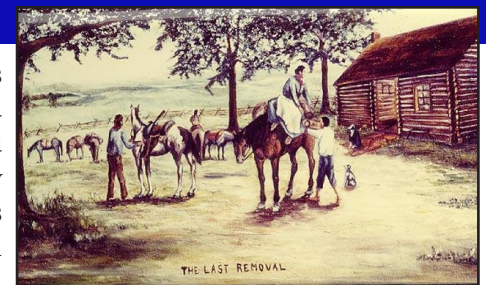
Image Credit: Applied Anthropology Laboratories, Ball State University



Using a crescent formation, the Native tribes inflicted enormous casualties on the U.S. Army, while limiting their own.

Aftermath

Unlike the U.S. military, Native peoples were fighting in their homeland and had families to feed, so they returned to their communities after their decisive victory. Promoted as a “treaty of peace”, the 1795 Treaty of Greenville proved to be only the first of many land cessions by Native peoples. Settlers flooded into the ceded land and even beyond treaty boundaries. The 1830 Indian Removal Act paved the way for the removal of Native peoples from their homelands. Removed tribes were forced to adapt to a vastly different ecosystem than in their homelands, and that greatly disrupted their ways of life and cultural practices. In the 19th through the 20th centuries, church and government funded boarding schools attempted to indoctrinate and assimilate Native children into “civilized” society. Decades of U.S. government policy systematically broke up families and dismantled the chain of storytelling used to pass on culture and history, including accomplishments like St. Clair’s defeat.



The Last Removal by Lenape artist Jacob Parks (1890-1949). This Delaware family prepares to leave their home in Kansas in 1867, after the government forced them to move to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma).

Persistence of Tribes Today

The nine tribes of the American Indian alliance that devastated St. Clair’s Army are now 39 federally recognized tribes located in multiple U.S. states. Native peoples are not “extinct” or simply part of history. Federal recognition and tribal sovereignty enabled the rebuilding of tribal government and socio-economic infrastructure to support individual tribes. The battleground of St. Clair’s defeat is located in present day Fort Recovery, Ohio. For years, the battlefield, like many Native sites in their ancestral homelands, was interpreted solely from a Euro-American perspective. We hope you come away from this exhibit with a greater understanding of the history of Native peoples and the vibrancy of tribes today.



Dancers at Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma Back to School Powwow, August 2023. Photo by Teresa Valencia, Ohio History Connection.