

General Arthur St. Clair Soldier, Surveyor, Territorial Governor, and Freemason



Arthur St. Clair was born in the town of Thurso, in Caithness, Scotland, on March 23, 1736. After finishing his formal education he was indentured to Dr. William Hunter, of London, but not liking the study of medicine, he purchased his time and obtained an ensign's commission and came to America with Baron Jeffery Amherst in 1758, who was sent to America as a Major General to lead the Louisbourg Campaign in the last of the French and Indian Wars¹. They landed at Louisbourg in May of that year. He was then assigned to the command of Brigadier General James Wolfe, who had been selected to capture Quebec. He shared in all the labors and privations of the campaign which resulted in the defeat of the French and the passage of Canada under British rule.

At the close of the war he retired to Boston, Massachusetts, where he married Miss Phoebe Bayard, half sister of Governor James Bowdoin. In marrying Miss Bayard, he received the sum of 14,000 Pounds, this being a

¹Encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-AmhrstJ.html

legacy to his wife from her grandfather, James Bowdin.

In April 1762, he resigned his commission and moved to what is now Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. When Indian hostilities broke out, he took an active part against the savages.

In 1764 he, along with his wife Phoebe, moved to Bedford, Pennsylvania for a short time and then moved to Ligonier Valley, where he acquired a large tract of land, partly by purchase and partly by grant by the King for his services in the French war.

In 1769, while in command of Fort Ligonier, he actively engaged in improving his land, building a fine home and a mill, the future looked very good for the St. Clair's.

In April, 1770, he was appointed surveyor for the District of Cumberland.²

A month later the offices of Justice of the Court of Quarter Sessions and Common Pleas, and Member of Proprietary, or Governor's Council, for Cumberland County, were conferred on him. When Bedford County was created in 1771, Governor Penn made him a Justice of the Court, Recorder of Deeds, Clerk of the Orphan's Court, and notary of the Court of Common Pleas for that County.

When the Revolutionary War broke out he was commissioned a colonel, having supported the cause of the Colonies and was asked to go at once to Philadelphia. Although it was a great personal sacrifice, he abandoned his 700 acres of beautiful land and as it was afterwards proved, his fortune.

²Heritagepursuit.com/Hamilton/HamiltonChaptI.htm, pg. 5.

In July, 1776, he was made a Brigadier General and on the 19th of February was promoted to the rank of Major General. General St. Clair participated in the campaign of the Jerseys, a series of engagements in the American Revolutionary War between British forces under General Sir William Howe and an American army under General George Washington³, and shared in the horrors of Valley Forge. When Benedict Arnold's treason was discovered, General Washington directed St. Clair to take command of West Point, "and" remarks his biographer, "where it became his sad duty, as a member of the court, to try Major Andre, the victim of Arnold's treason, to declare that meritorious and virtuous officer had incurred the penalty of death."⁴

When the revolt of the Pennsylvania Line occurred at Morristown on January 1, 1781, St. Clair, who was at Philadelphia, hastened to the scene with Lafayette, and, by good advice, did much to quell the spirit of insubordination. Afterward he was sent to the army of the South, and was present at the surrender of Cornwallis. From there he was sent to the aid of General Greene in South Carolina with six regiments and ten pieces of artillery.

The war over, St. Clair returned to his family in Pennsylvania. In 1783 he was elected a member of the Council of Censors, a body provided for in the Constitution of 1776, and charged with the duty of inquiring whether the Constitution had been preserved inviolate, and he became a very active member of the council. He was also elected to the office of Vendue Master of Philadelphia, an honorable and lucrative position, through which the public revenues were received at that time, his transactions being with the controller.

In the meantime, he was chosen a delegate to Congress from

³[En.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_and_New_Jersey_campaign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_and_New_Jersey_campaign)

⁴Heritagepursuit.com/Hamilton/HamiltonChaptI.htm

Pennsylvania. On February 20, 1786 he attended that body and on Friday, February 2, 1787, he was elected its president. During this session the famous Ordinance of 1787, erecting the Northwest Territory, was passed. On the day the final vote was taken St. Clair was absent from the chair, but had always taken a deep interest in the measure. On October 5, 1787, Congress proceeded to elect officers for the new government. Arthur St. Clair was chosen governor. He did not want the office but his friends insisted that, aside from his capability, the salary might, in part, assist in reimbursing him for his financial sacrifices during the Revolution.

In July of 1789, a bill, which had been drafted by St. Clair for the government of the Northwest Territory, was introduced and passed both houses without opposition. This gave the sanction of Congress to all of the important provisions of the Ordinance of 1787.

While he was in New York, attending to these preliminary duties, and consulting with General Knox, Secretary of War, regarding some plan for the settlement of the Indian troubles, St. Clair had the extreme pleasure of assisting at the inauguration of his old friend, General George Washington, as the first President of the United States. His name at one time was freely canvassed in connection with the position of Vice-President and in July of 1789, while he was waiting for the new government, he was asked to stand for the governorship of Pennsylvania.

The greatest misfortune to befall this grand old soldier and governor, though a committee of Congress afterward absolved him from all blame, was his overwhelming defeat by the Indians on November 4, 1791, which cast a cloud over his name and fame during the balance of his life. Needless to say that it caused him to resign his commission of Major General and Commander-In-Chief, which honor had been conferred on him.

While engaged in the service of his country during the Revolution, his private affairs were entirely neglected. In the darkest hours, when the Pennsylvania line revolted, General Washington appealed to St. Clair for aid, and he contributed liberally of his own means to feed and clothe the starving

soldiers. When the war was over and he endeavored to get this refunded in a settlement of his accounts, but was refused payment because of some irregularity. However, the justness of the claim was admitted. He then appealed to the committee on claims in Congress, who reported that the money had been received and expended for the benefit of the United States, but payment was barred by the statute.

On another occasion, while acting as superintendent of Indian affairs, it became necessary, in order to carry out the instructions of the Secretary of War, to become responsible for supplies which exceeded the \$9,000 amount of the warrants furnished by the government. When St. Clair sent his accounts to the Treasury department they were disallowed, because the accompanying vouchers were not receipted. When this occurred, the contractor required St. Clair to give his personal bond for the payment of the vouchers. When he presented the vouchers to the Treasury for payment, the vouchers could not be paid because there was no appropriation for debts contracted under the confederation. St. Clair again applied to Congress, where again, payment was refused because of the statute of limitations!

St. Clair was forced to sell his property and a most valuable tract of land, on which there was a good mill, a large and well finished dwelling, and all of the necessary outhouses for a farm, besides a furnace for smelting iron ore, on which St. Clair had laid out about \$10,000 and which was rented at the time for \$2,400 per year, all of which was worth fully \$30,000, a large sum in those days, which would have made him and his family comfortable for the remaining years of his life, was sacrificed to pay a debt which was in no proper sense personal, but was due to the United States. All of this went under the hammer for \$1,000! All of his other property went in the same way and St. Clair, his wife and daughters and orphan grandchildren were reduced to poverty. This home, from which they were now driven, was built while St. Clair was governor of the Northwest Territory in about 1799 and was named by him "The Hermitage," in fond anticipation of the time when he should be relieved of the cares of state. In referring, afterward, to the executions which swept away this beautiful home and all his personal property, St. Clair said: "They left me a few books of my classical library and the bust of Paul Jones,

which he sent me from Europe, for which I was very grateful.”

Strenuous efforts were still made by eloquent friends to obtain justice for him at the hands of the government but a rancorous party feeling stood as a barrier, because he was a Federalist. That debt was never paid. Finally, there was wrung from Congress a pension of \$60.00 per month but not a dollar of it ever reached St. Clair, for a remorseless creditor seized upon it at the very door of the Treasury.

The loss of his home drove Arthur St. Clair, the one time soldier, surveyor, and Territorial Governor to a rude log house on the barren lands of Chestnut Ridge, about five miles from Ligonier, where the few remaining years of his life were spent in poverty. His favorite daughter, Mrs. Louisa Robb, shared his fortunes and cheered him in his closing days of gloom.

During the last four years of his life the family were frequently in great want. Pennsylvania, his adopted State, finding that he was in such reduced circumstances, settled an annuity of \$300.00 on him, and in 1817, increased it to \$600.00. In 1857, thirty-nine years after his death, Congress appropriated a considerable sum for his surviving heirs. How much more graceful, as well as appreciative, it would have been, had the money been appropriated when he was living. The lapse of years could hardly condone the shameful treatment he received at the hand of the Republic he helped to create.

On one of the closing days of August 1818, the venerable patriot undertook to go to Youngstown, three miles distant, for flour and other necessities. He bade good-bye to his Louisa and started off with his pony and wagon, in good spirits. The authorities had changed the State road so that it passed along the Loyalhanna creek, several miles north of the St. Clair residence, and the route to Youngstown was rough and dangerous. Pony and wagon moved along safely until within a mile of the village when, a wheel falling into a rut, the wagon was upset and the aged general was thrown with great force upon the rocky road. In the course of the day, he was discovered lying where he had fallen, insensible, and the pony standing quietly at a short distance, awaiting the command of his old master, faithful to the last. He was

carried tenderly back to the house but neither medical skill nor the tender care of loved ones could restore him and on the 31st of August 1818, death relieved him from his suffering in the eighty-third year of his age.

Thus passed away, after a long and eventful career, one of the heroes of the Revolution, the first Governor of the Northwest Territory, and the man who established Hamilton County and changed the name of “L’Osantiville,” to Cincinnati (The **General Society of the Cincinnati** is a historic association in the [United States](#) and [France](#) with limited and strict membership requirements).

The Cincinnati were integral in establishing many of America's first and largest cities to the west of the Appalachians, most notably [Cincinnati, Ohio](#) and [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania](#). The first governor of the [Northwest Territory](#), [Arthur St. Clair](#), was a member of the Society. He renamed a small settlement "Cincinnati" to honor the Society and to encourage Society members to settle there.

On a plain sandstone monument, in the old cemetery at Greensburg is this inscription: “The earthly remains of Major-General Arthur St. Clair are deposited beneath this humble monument, which is erected to supply the place of a nobler one due from his country.”

This was the tribute of the Masonic Order, to which he belonged and is the only one ever raised to perpetuate his name and memory.⁵

Arthur St. Clair was a petitioner for charter of Nova Caesarea Lodge #10 in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1791.⁶

Researched and Compiled by
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⁵This article was extracted from an article found on the internet www.heritagepursuit.com/Hamilton/HamiltonChap.I.htm entitled History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio.

⁶This information was extracted from material found on the internet, January 5, 2009, www.bessel.org/webindex.htm

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