

# The Rich History of origin park

Origin Park preserves and celebrates a landscape shaped by natural forces and human activity over thousands of years. Its mission is to **connect the community** to this rich heritage, fostering **understanding, stewardship, and engagement** with the region's **natural, cultural, and historical significance**. By **protecting these lands** and providing opportunities for **education, recreation, and exploration**, Origin Park ensures that the **stories of this place** continue to inspire and enrich present and future generations.



## The Natural Phenomenon: The Receding Glaciers

The receding **glaciers** were a powerful natural force that shaped our region's **landscape**, uncovering ancient **fossil beds** that continue to fascinate scientists and visitors alike. As these glaciers withdrew, they left behind the mighty Ohio River, with the **Falls of the Ohio** emerging as the river's only major obstacle. Origin Park's rich history is rooted in this natural event, giving the area its remarkable historical and geological significance. Today, Origin Park is dedicated to exploring and **preserving the history** that unfolded where the glaciers once receded.

## Prehistoric Periods and Indigenous Peoples

Pre-Historic Period	Woodland Period	Mississippian Period	Shawnee, Miami, Iroquois, Cherokee, Delaware, Chickasaw and Quapaw
13,000 or more Years Ago.	1000 BC to 1000 AD	800 to 1600 AD	1500s to 1700s
Arrival of the Paleo- Indians. The land here provided vital resources that helped sustain the Indigenous People.	This period is characterized by the construction of mounds and the creation of finely crafted pottery and tools.	The Mississippians built mounds, had complex societies, urban like settlements, cultivated crops and had trade networks.	With the arrival of the European settlers these Indigenous Nations lost land and resources. This led to conflict and disruption of their culture and their traditional ways of life

Indigenous nations such as the **Shawnee, Miami, Iroquois, Cherokee, Delaware, Chickasaw, and Quapaw** called this region home between the **1500s and 1700s**. However, with the arrival of European settlers, these Indigenous nations faced land loss, resource depletion, and cultural upheaval that disrupted their traditional ways of life.

## The Buffalo Trace and Migration Routes

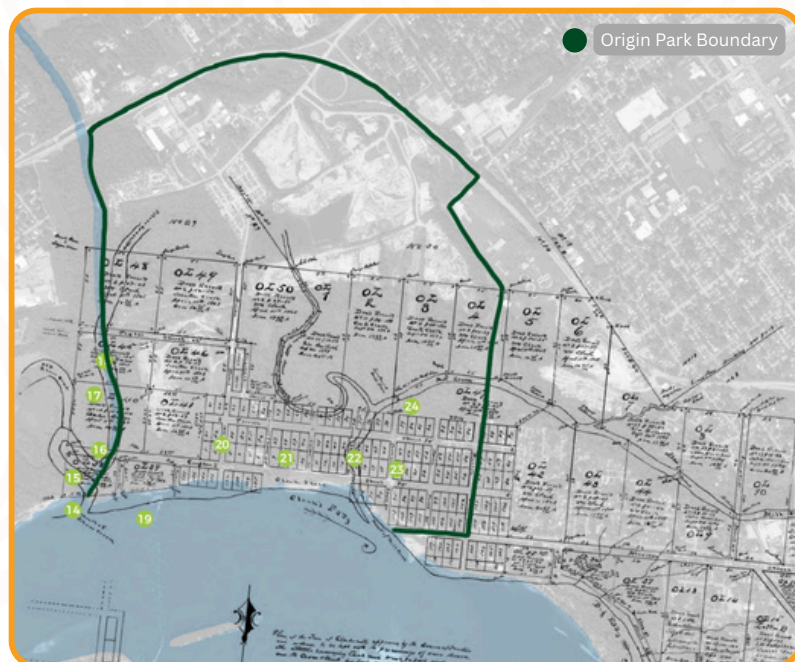


*Image: Map of the Buffalo Trace, a route first worn by bison and later followed by Indigenous peoples, military, and explorers, crossing at the Falls of the Ohio.*

While the region's Indigenous timeline is fascinating, it's also important to remember the buffalo that once roamed these same lands. One major migration path, known as the **Buffalo Trace** or Vincennes Trace, Clark Trace, and Harrison's Road was carved by herds of bison traveling seasonally between the **Illinois prairies and Kentucky salt licks**, crossing directly through what is now Origin Park. The **Falls of the Ohio** provided a natural low point in the river, making it a **key crossing**. During dry seasons, buffalo crossed Silver Creek near the present Ohio Greenway bridge, while in high water they used what's now Emery Crossing.

## George Rogers Clark and the Founding of Clarksville

After recapturing Fort Sackville in Vincennes, **George Rogers Clark** became a **Revolutionary War hero**, earning the rank of Brigadier General and the nickname "Conqueror of the Old Northwest." In recognition of his service, Clark and his men were granted **150,000 acres of land**, with 1,000 acres reserved for the establishment of the **Town of Clarksville**, the first settlement in the **Northwest Territory**. Clark laid out the town in 1783, though his chosen site was prone to flooding. Much of today's Origin Park sits within this original town area. Town lots measured half an acre, while larger "Out Lots" surrounded the settlement.



*Image: Map overlay illustrating the original land grant awarded to George Rogers Clark and his men, shown in relation to the present-day geography of Origin Park and the Town of Clarksville.*

# Guinea Bottoms

Part of the **original Clarksville** area, some of which is within the Origin Park footprint, became known as **Guinea Bottoms**. Around 1802, **George Rogers Clark** brought **enslaved people** to Clarksville, and small cabins soon dotted the lowlands of his property, forming a settlement of African American families. Guinea Bottoms is believed to have been the **first African American community** in Indiana and the Northwest Territory. Although slavery was illegal in the region, some residents were **enslaved illegally** or lived under indentured servitude contracts that differed little from slavery. Some inhabitants were freed people, while others had been emancipated in Kentucky before entering Indiana as indentured servants. After Clark left for Louisville due to declining health, many residents of Guinea Bottoms moved away, and the settlement gradually disappeared.



*Image:  
The McGee cabin, located on the George Rogers Clark Homesite, represents a typical early 19th-century servants' cabin. It commemorates Venus and Ben McGee, an African American couple brought to Indiana by George Rogers Clark.*

## The Underground Railroad

The cities and towns clustered around the Falls of the Ohio provided many opportunities for **Freedom Seekers** to pass from **South to North** in the Antebellum period. The most well-documented **Underground Railroad** sites are in Jeffersonville and New Albany, where the **boat landings** were often where people were caught. New Albany's **Town Clock Church** was a major station in the Underground Railroad network and by 1830, Jeffersonville was the **largest** Underground Railroad route for fugitives crossing the Ohio River at Louisville.

In between, just below the Falls, the **Ohio River** is at its **lowest point**. This is where the **American bison** crossed on their migrations. It is not known how many **Freedom Seekers** crossed here to the shores of what is now Origin Park. This was a **marshy backwater** between the creeks where **Clark's initial settlement** had failed, and where **no one was watching**. No one except, perhaps, the residents of **Guinea Bottoms**, the small enclave established for **indentured and free African Americans** by General George Rogers Clark. It is likely that these people supported the **passage to freedom**, along with later Clarksville abolitionists like Dr. Nathaniel and Sarah Field.

# The Lewis and Clark Expedition

**Clarksville** holds a special place in **national history** as the launching point of the **Lewis and Clark Expedition**. **William Clark**, who moved to Clarksville in **1802** to live with his brother George, received a letter from **Meriwether Lewis** inviting him to co-lead the **Corps of Discovery**. Clark recruited **seven skilled woodsmen**, later joined by two more brought by Lewis collectively known as “**the nine young men from Kentucky**.” In **October 1803**, Lewis arrived in Clarksville to finalize preparations, and from their base at **Clark’s farm**, where the captains trained and outfitted their crew. On **October 26, 1803**, they launched near the mouth of **Mill Creek**, an area that now runs through present-day Origin Park, with a keelboat, two smaller boats, supplies, **York** (Clark’s enslaved man), and Lewis’s dog **Seaman**. Nearly three years later, on **November 5, 1806**, they returned triumphantly to the same spot after reaching the **Pacific Ocean**.

## Early Ferry Systems

The area’s **first ferry service**, known as the **Origin Ferry**, operated between Shippingport, Clarksville, and Gut Ford from **1779 to 1816**, run by John Carson and Richard Ashton, with the **Clarksville landing** located in what is now Origin Park. Several other ferries soon followed.

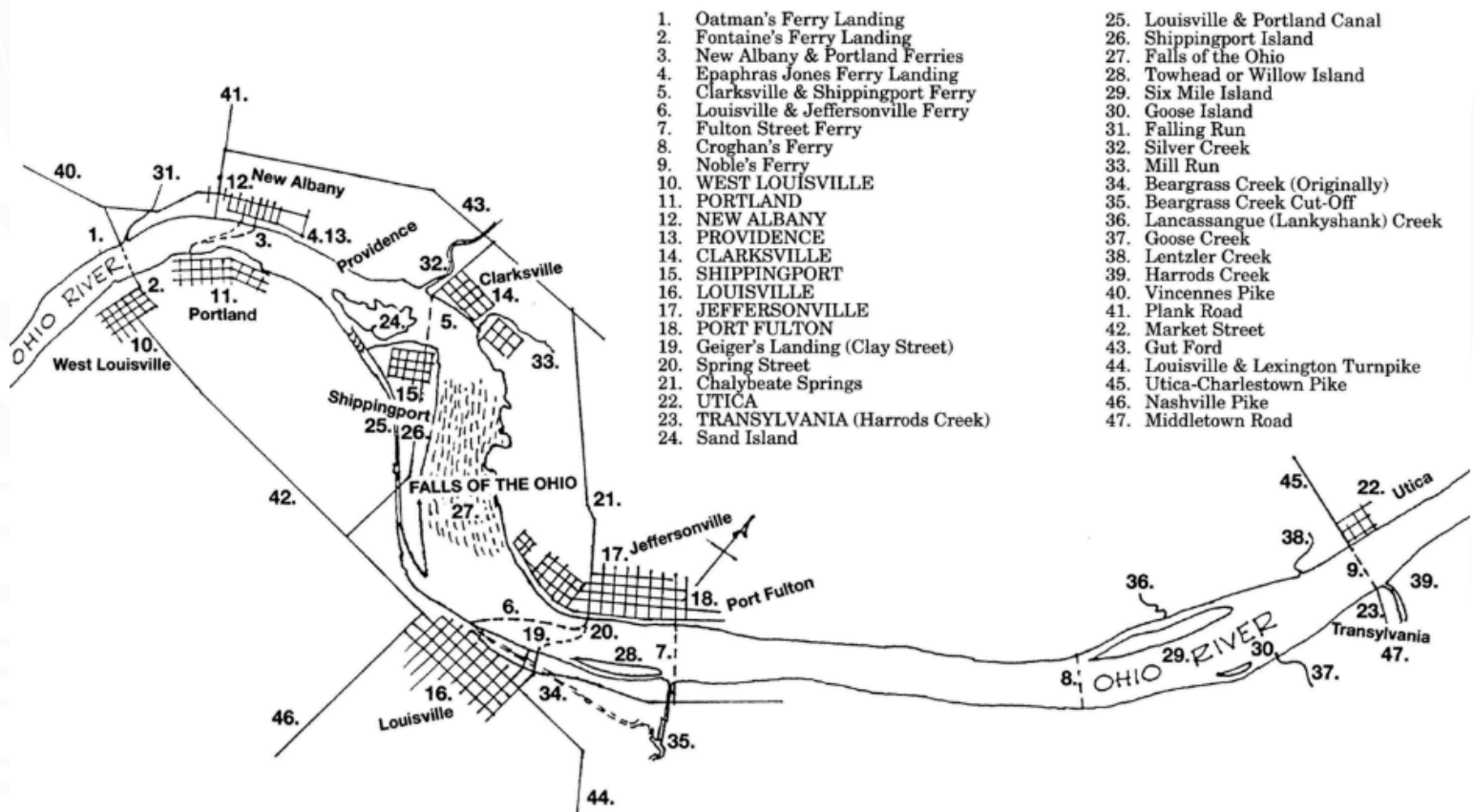


Image: Map showing the Origin Ferry route between Shippingport, Clarksville, and Gut Ford, with the Clarksville landing in today's Origin Park.

## The Dueling Grounds

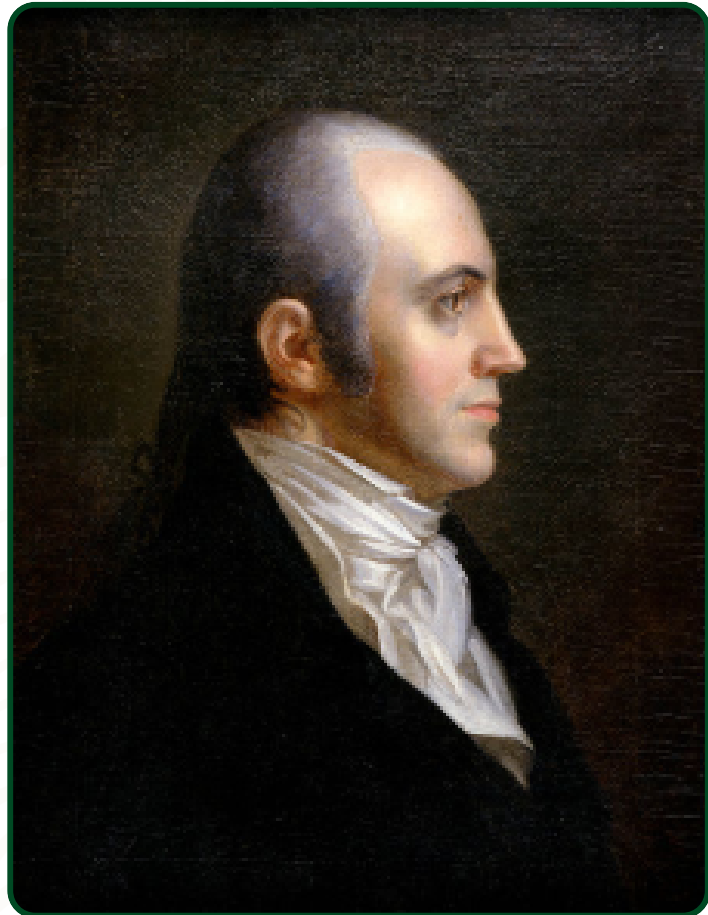
During the early 1800s, **dueling** became a notorious feature of local culture.

**Kentucky aristocrats** crossed into **Indiana** where dueling was not yet outlawed to settle disputes on the grounds near **Silver Creek**. The first recorded duel, in **December 1805**, involved Major Thomas Bodley and Dr. Louis Marshall, brother of Chief Justice John Marshall. In **1809**, **Henry Clay** dueled his cousin Humphrey Marshall after heated political disputes, sustaining a leg wound but surviving. Other duels followed, including **Nathaniel Hart** and **Samuel Watson's** in **1812** and **Cassius M. Clay's** in **1841**. Eventually, Indiana's governor threatened to extradite participants for prosecution, effectively ending the practice.



*Image: Photo of Silver Creek joining the Ohio River, near the ferry site historically used for reaching Indiana's dueling grounds.*

## Aaron Burr's Conspiracy



**Aaron Burr's** controversial story also ties into the Falls of the Ohio. Once a celebrated **Revolutionary War hero** and **Vice President**, Burr's fortunes fell after his fatal duel with **Alexander Hamilton**. Seeking a new venture, he traveled west in **1805**, allegedly plotting to create an **independent nation** from parts of the Louisiana Territory and Spanish lands. He drew in several locals, including **Davis Floyd**, through activities centered near the mouth of **Silver Creek** at Loop Island where boats were reportedly built for his expedition. Before the plan could unfold, **President Jefferson** ordered Burr's arrest for **treason**. Though acquitted, Burr's reputation never recovered. Floyd, also arrested, was fined and briefly jailed but continued to serve in public office.

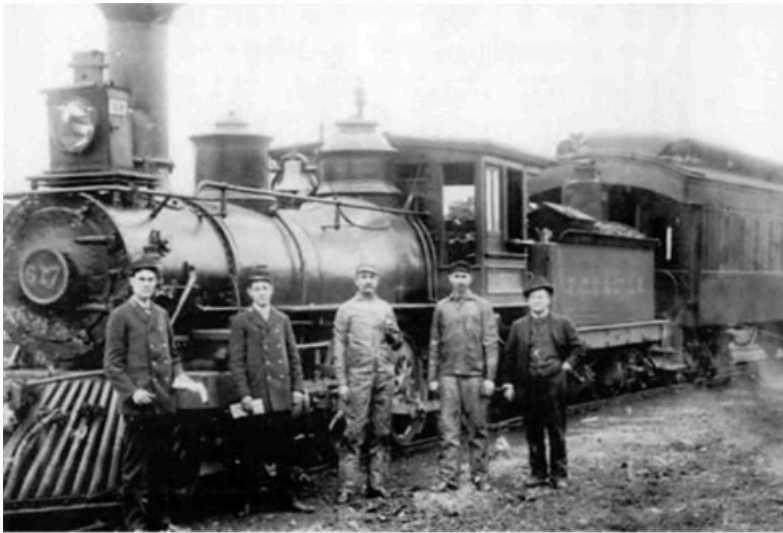
## Mills Along the Ohio River

From the late **1700s** through the **1800s**, **mills** were a defining feature of life along the Ohio River and its tributaries. **General George Rogers Clark** built one of Indiana's first mills, a **grist and sawmill**, on **Mill Creek in 1784**. Along the Origin Park riverfront, at least **two mills operated**, with seven more along Silver Creek to Blackiston Mill.



*Image: Photograph of historic millstones used to grind grain and power early milling operations.*

## Bridges and the Rise of Modern Transportation



The advent of **railroads** and **bridges** revolutionized regional transportation. In 1865, the small “**Dinky**” **commuter train** began operating between New Albany, Clarksville, and Jeffersonville, making **interurban travel** widely accessible. In **1870**, a **bridge** connecting Louisville to Ashland Park in Clarksville extended commuter service across the river. The **electric Interurban Railway** arrived in **1903**, linking Louisville with surrounding towns and passing directly through what is now Origin Park, until the rise of the **automobile** made it obsolete. When the **first automobile bridge** opened in **October 1929**, **interurban service** ended by **1932**, ushering in a new era of **transportation**.

## A Future Built on History

The **history** of Origin Park is central to its **mission**, grounding our work in the **stories of the land**, its **people**, and its **natural features**. By **preserving this remarkable landscape**, the park will offer visitors a chance to **engage deeply** with its **ecological** and **cultural significance**. Through carefully designed **programming and interpretive signage**, we will bring these **stories** to life, honoring the **generations who came before** while inspiring **present** and **future communities** to **explore, learn, and care** for this **special place**.