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"THAT THE FUTURE MAY LEARN FROM THE PAST"

### **Episode 374: Stephen Kling Jr., "The American Revolution in the West"**

**[00:00:00] Announcer:** You're listening to an Airwave Media Podcast.

**[00:00:04] Liz Covart:** *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios.

**[00:00:08] Stephen Kling Jr.:** I think initially people thought they wore buckskin and coonskin hats, and that was very far from the truth.

**[00:00:26] Liz Covart:** Hello and welcome to episode 374 of *Ben Franklin's World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I'm your host, Liz Covart.

We tend to think of the American Revolution and its War for Independence as the process that gave birth to the United States. And the American Revolution was certainly the United States' founding moment, but its War for Independence was also the fifth major war for European empire in North America. Now, the four wars that preceded the American Revolutionary War typically saw Great Britain and France fighting over territory in North America. First, there was King William's War, a nine-year war that took place between 1688 and 1672. Queen Anne's War, or the War of Spanish Succession, occurred between 1702 and 1713. Then there was the War of Austrian Succession, or King George's War, that took place between 1744 and 1748. And then there was the Seven Years' War, or French and Indian War, which resulted in warfare that redefined Europe's worldwide colonial landscape in Great Britain's favor. Now, the American Revolution and its War for Independence did result in the birth of the United States, but it also played out in a way that allowed Great Britain's European to regain some of the territory they lost during the Seven Years' War. And one place where we can see this dynamic play out very clearly is the American Revolution's western theater.

Stephen Kling Jr. is a practicing attorney and historian who has authored and coauthored several books and articles about the American Revolution in the West. His latest edited collection, *The American Revolutionary War in the West*, provided the research needed for the St. Charles County Heritage Museum in St. Peter's, Missouri, to create a museum exhibit called The American Revolutionary War in the West. Now, during our exploration of the Revolutionary War in the West, Stephen reveals the different European empires who claimed territory and control of the North American West, information about who lived in the early American West and what it

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was like to live there, and details about the Battle of St. Louis and the attack on Cahokia in May 1780. But first, season's greetings and happy New Year! The Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios team and I wish you and your loved ones the very best of this holiday season, and we wish you and your family a very happy new year. May 2024 be your best year yet. And with that, let's go meet our expert guide.

Joining us is the founder and president of THGC Publishing, a company that publishes both historical books and war games. He's a practicing attorney who has authored and coauthored several books and articles on the American Revolutionary War in the West, including *The Battle of St. Louis*, *the Attack on Cahokia*, and *the American Revolution in the West*, *Calvary in the Wilderness*, *James Colbert and his Chickasaw Legacy*, and, most recently, *The Revolutionary War in the West*. He is also the cocurator of the new American Revolutionary War in the West Museum Exhibit at the St. Charles County Heritage Museum in St. Peter's, Missouri. Welcome to *Ben Franklin's World*, Stephen Kling, Jr.

**[00:03:54] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Good morning.

**[00:03:56] Liz Covart:** Stephen, I'd like to start with the West and what we mean by and how we should define the West by the 1770s. So if we're early Americans and we're living just before the American Revolution starts, how are we thinking about the West? What geographic territory should we picture in our minds?

**[00:04:15] Stephen Kling Jr.:** I think most people would view the West at that time as everything west of the original thirteen colonies, that would go all the way to the Mississippi River and across the Mississippi River and to Spanish Louisiana, and I think some people would argue that that should include parts of Texas. There were so many different groups of people out in the West, it was a very diverse group. And part of that was due to the changing imperial landscape. So, for example, although the Native Americans preceded all the Europeans, prior to the Revolution, for a large extent, until the end of the Seven Years' War, the areas in the West were primarily French. When the French were in control, they actually spanned both sides of the Mississippi River, so modern day Missouri. On the eastern side, the British side, was roughly southern Illinois and southern Indiana. There were belts of settlements in Vincennes and Cahokia, Kaskaskia, Mobile, New Orleans, of course, and the British had some forts at Detroit and Michilimackinac.

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Although there were Indian trails, it was really the river network that provided the highways and the easiest method of transportation. So towns like Cahokia and Kaskaskia were either on or very near the Mississippi River. Fort De Chartres, the same thing. Vincennes, a little different. It was on the Wabash River, but that ran into the Ohio, which then again ran into the Mississippi. And then at the end of the Seven Years' War, the eastern side of the Mississippi got transferred to the British. There were some exchanges of territory further south with the Spanish and the British. And then the western side—which was French—of the Mississippi River, was transferred to Spain. So, a lot of big changes.

**[00:06:01] Liz Covart:** You mentioned at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, that the West went nominally from French control to Spanish control. What was that like for the settlers in these colonial towns to undergo such a change in imperial governance?

**[00:06:17] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Again, the Mississippi River was the dividing line. The eastern part went to the British, and that actually aided the future Spanish side because some of the French people were Catholic and the British were Protestant, so when they came in, some of them actually moved across the river to the Spanish side, particularly to towns like St. Louis, which were just starting. But the Spanish, when they took over, the French weren't exactly thrilled about it and there was a mini revolt down in New Orleans that had to be put down with the sending of several hundred soldiers to New Orleans and there were actually a few people that were put to death.

**[00:06:54] Liz Covart:** So if we call to mind our mental maps of what is now the United States and we think about the period of the 1770s, we can see the east of the Mississippi River is under British control, west of the Mississippi River is nominally under Spanish control, but really under Indigenous control on the eve of the revolution. And we're also talking about a period of American history that have just finished a lot of fighting, a nine-year period of war that didn't resolve all these European conflicts about control of the continent.

**[00:07:23] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Yes. So the Spanish were, I think, pretty astute in terms of they didn't come in and wholesale change a lot of things. They employed many of the French military men that decided to stay there. You'll see a lot of French names that were lieutenant governors and military officers in a new Spanish regular regiment that was raised in the Louisiana Territory. A lot of the French were still there and were still employed in the government, and that helped the new colony to run smoothly. The British devised a system right after the Seven Years' War for the creation of what they called Indian departments. There was a Northern Indian Department

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and a Southern Indian Department. And those departments were created to assist on managing trade with the local tribes, but as well as trying to keep them firmly allied with the British cause, should there be a future war.

**[00:08:15] Liz Covart:** Now, when we talk about the start of what would become the American War for Independence, scholars don't actually debate the start. They actually agree that the shot heard round the world fired at Lexington Green on April 19, 1775, marked the beginning of the military conflict between the revolutionaries and Great Britain. Stephen, when did the Revolutionary War in the West begin? How long of a delay was there between the shots fired in Massachusetts and those fired in the Illinois country and Mississippi River valley?

**[00:08:48] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Really looking at the year 1778. And two things happened at the beginning of 1778. One, that James Willing was commissioned as a captain in the United States Navy to take an expedition down the Ohio and Mississippi River to New Orleans, ostensibly to obtain the neutrality of British West Florida, but it turned out to be a plundering mission and resulted in more British troops being sent to West Florida. And then secondly, George Rogers Clark was authorized to undertake a secret mission down the Ohio River to capture what was called the British Illinois country at the time.

**[00:09:26] Liz Covart:** Those two developments with James Willing being commissioned a captain in the U.S. Navy to negotiate a truce with West Florida and with General George Rogers Clark being commissioned to go out and secretly capture the British Illinois country, that sounds very much like a land grab attempt. Whereas when we think about the American Revolutionary War in the East, we really do talk about how the revolution, the War for Independence, was a military conflict over power, taxes, and economic issues of trade. Was the Revolutionary War in the West part of these larger revolutionary discussions? Were colonists in the West fighting over the same issues as colonists in the East? Or was it really just kind of a defensive or offensive, depending on what side you were on, about land in the West?

**[00:10:13] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Some of those things, yes. But I don't think it was quite as broad as that. I mean, more of it was a territorial grab, a control of trade grab, things that were more economically motivated, at least ostensibly, all the good issues about independence and things were somewhat lost. But certainly the efforts out here either aided or detracted from the main events that were going on in the eastern colonies.



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**[00:10:39] Liz Covart:** Setting aside the fact that a majority of the people who are living in the western regions we're talking about were Indigenous, when it comes to the Euro-American settlement of the West, it seems that many of the settlers out there, especially west of the Mississippi River, were of French descent. Do we know what the French made of the revolution and these eastern revolutionaries attempts to incorporate their lands and territories that they claimed in their eastern land grab?

**[00:11:07] Stephen Kling Jr.:** It was interesting. The French actually fought on both sides. There were French that were fighting for the British, and some of them were officers in the Northern British Indian Department, and interpreters that were instrumental in keeping many of the tribes in the north allied to the British cause, they were also dependent on the British trade goods. But then the local French, I mean, Father Pierre Gibault was very instrumental in convincing the local French in the British Illinois country to swear allegiance to the American cause and support the Americans, both in terms of supplies, but also taking part in some of the military campaigns.

**[00:11:45] Liz Covart:** And what was the British imperial presence or the British military presence in the West by 1778? Were the British even guarding against possible American attacks by men like George Rogers Clark or James Willing?

**[00:11:59] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Well, we kind of got to look at it from the north and the south. So in the north, there were British garrisons at Fort De Chartres and Kaskaskia, but most of them had been withdrawn by 1775. So there were local commandants, some of them were French who were working for the British, but the British regular soldiers were withdrawn except for the forts at Detroit and Michilimackinac and a few other small posts where a few soldiers were scattered. So there weren't any regulars at the time George Rogers Clark came down and of course that aided his ability to capture the British Illinois country almost without bloodshed.

Further south, it's a little more complicated because the Willing expedition actually triggered the sending of several British regiments to western Florida, which the Spanish had to take on when they entered the war in 1779.

**[00:12:51] Liz Covart:** So it sounds like the British had soldiers stationed in West Florida, and we should be clear that West Florida is not the western half of the state of Florida we think of today, but British West Florida was the label given to the territory in what we today know as present-day Mississippi and Alabama. So the British had soldiers that they could pull from West

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Florida to advance their position in some of these campaigns from the south to the north. But when it came to these northern campaigns in the West, it seems like the revolutionaries went into places in the Old Northwest Territory pretty much unimpeded.

**[00:13:24] Stephen Kling Jr.:** To the extent of the British Illinois country, correct. I mean, there were British regulars stationed at Detroit and Michilimackinac who would take part in retaliatory expeditions later on. But certainly, yes, when Clark came down, the local French militia were not about to take part on the British side. They at best wanted to be neutral, and if not neutral, they were going to take up the American cause because Father Gibault and others encouraged them to do it.

**[00:13:50] Liz Covart:** We should really talk about the logistics of this western campaign and the Revolutionary War. When we talk about any war, we talk about troop numbers, we talk about the ability to send reinforcements, we even talk about the ability to supply armies. So when we're talking about this theater in the West, the Illinois and the Ohio countries, how many men are both armies out there fighting with and how were they reinforced and resupplied from the more significant garrisons in the East? Because they're actually pretty far from the East Coast garrisons.

**[00:14:23] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Well, the British in the north were resupplied from Montreal and Quebec through the Great Lakes area. They would reach Michilimackinac and Detroit. And so those were the primary supply debarking areas for the British in the north. In the south, Pensacola and Mobile received supplies from the East Coast or from Jamaica and then would send them across up the Mississippi River to the forts at Baton Rouge and Natchez, etc.

You're talking about in the north, just one hundred or so, maybe rising to two hundred later in the war, regulars, there were some loyalists. And then there were a large amount of Native Americans who were firmly allied to the British at the start of the war in the West. In the South, it's a little more complicated. Of course, the Spanish were involved, and the Spanish had reorganized colonial defense and had very large militias that were trained for offensive and defensive action, and they were used by the Spanish in the campaigns in the south, but again, we're talking fifteen hundred, one thousand men, augmented in one case, the siege of Pensacola, where there were several thousand, but that was highly unusual. In most cases, we were talking about campaigns involving one thousand men or less



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**[00:15:36] Liz Covart:** From those little troop numbers, it doesn't really sound like these campaigns in the West were very well supplied or very well manned.

**[00:15:44] Stephen Kling Jr.:** I'm not sure I totally agree with that. You know, I think that was the old-style beliefs, but I have spent an extensive amount of time going through the quartermaster books of George Rogers Clark, the receipts and vouchers that were sent for supplies from New Orleans up the Mississippi River, not only to Fort Pitt, ultimately on the Ohio but to St. Louis, where George Rogers Clark mentioned several times that the Continental store at St. Louis, where he could draw down uniform cloth, gunpowder, muskets, hats. I mean, the list goes on and on, and then you see in the quartermaster records that uniform cloth is always being issued, and special clothing for campaigns of moccasins and leggings were issued. So yes, supplies as in all wars are difficult and took priority based on where the ultimate higher commanders thought they should be but I think there's been a misunderstanding that the West was unsupplied when in fact there really was supplied for purposes of war pretty well.

**[00:16:47] Liz Covart:** Are there other misunderstandings about the Revolutionary War in the West that you've uncovered through your research?

**[00:16:52] Stephen Kling Jr.:** One of the books that I wrote was *Cavalry in the Wilderness*, and it was because an expert came up to me and said, "there were horses and cavalry in the West?" Yes, there were. St. Louis had a militia cavalry company, so did Natchitoches, and so did New Orleans. Those are Spanish, of course. In addition to Spanish regular cavalry, and on the east side, George Rogers Clark had the use of Rogers's Light Dragoons for many years during the war, and they were an active participant in a lot of the campaigns there, and were used to have mobile troops to help reinforce the various forts that George had during the war. So that was a misconception. A second one was the lack of uniforms. I think initially people thought they wore buckskin and coonskin hats, and that was very far from the truth. Almost all the units, even the Spanish militia, were uniformed. Fernando de Leyba brought 150 bales of uniform cloth up to him to St. Louis in 1779. So you can begin to see that things were a little different. And if you look at Leyba's personal inventory of items when he died, which is pages and pages of things in the book, you'll see that he had place settings, silver, things that you would not expect. So I think there is still quite a bit to learn about the war in the West and I think there'll be some more things to uncover as more people research it.

**[00:18:18] Liz Covart:** We've talked a little bit about the complexity of the politics and the diversity of the people who lived and worked in the West during the Revolutionary War. There

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were British, there were revolutionaries, there were Spanish, there were some French colonists, and of course, there were also a lot of Indigenous peoples. And we haven't yet talked about indigenous peoples, who sometimes played vital roles in determining the outcome of Revolutionary War battles and campaigns. So, Stephen, did Indigenous peoples take part in any of the battles in the western theater during the Revolutionary War?

**[00:18:50] Stephen Kling Jr.:** The answer is yes, and an emphatic yes. They were actually involved in almost every single battle or skirmish in the West on both sides. Again, to relate back to a question you asked earlier, another thing that I found that was fascinating was that the Kaskaskia actually fought with George Rogers Clark throughout the war on the American side. There were tribes that fought with the Spanish during the war. I actually did a map for the book tracing all of these battles where the Native Americans participated, and it was almost every single one.

**[00:19:24] Liz Covart:** And speaking of the Spanish, what about the role played by the Spanish? We know that before the French came into the American Revolution as allies of the new United States in 1778, that the French kind of turned a blind eye and possibly even welcomed American ships in French Caribbean ports and in the ports of France, and they also effectively dodged the British ambassador's questions about their aid to the United States. But the Spanish, they took a very different stance, which is they seem to be more strict about not allowing Americans to use their ports as points of supply. So what did the Spanish outward refusal to host American ships in Spain and their Caribbean ports mean for the port of New Orleans, which the Spanish did control.

**[00:20:11] Stephen Kling Jr.:** So the Spanish were a little more secretive in terms of it, but nonetheless, they supplied enormous amounts of war material and most of it came through New Orleans, though some of it was sent to the East Coast. So New Orleans throughout the war ships supplies up the Mississippi River, generally under Spanish flags, and up the Ohio River as far as Fort Pitt, but after George Rogers Clark conquered the British Illinois country a lot to St. Louis. And Oliver Pollack was the American agent stationed in New Orleans that would use a very complicated series of paper exchanges to accomplish it. And the governors of Louisiana, the Spanish governors, were instructed to have a blind eye and to secretly assist the American colonists wherever they could in terms of supplies. And the British knew about it, it wasn't a secret, but they were very reluctant to try to take possession of a boat that was flying a Spanish flag, and they were all instructed to fly Spanish flags, and so for the longest time, they just didn't want to provoke a war.

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**[00:21:17] Liz Covart:** Great Britain really did seem to be in a place where they did not want other European powers interfering in the revolution, and yet the European powers did meddle, and they did get involved, formally in 1778 and 1779—and if you're the Netherlands, 1780—so as you mentioned, the war in the West began in 1778, the year that France and the United States signed their Treaty of Amity and Commerce and became allies. And because of a series of treaties, Spain also joined the war on behalf of the French because they had a treaty alliance with France. So, what did the entry of France and Spain into the Revolutionary War mean for this war in the West?

**[00:22:02] Stephen Kling Jr.:** One thing I want to point out that you alluded to is Spain entered the war as an ally of France. It did not take the step that France did allying with the United States. And there were reasons for that. Spain has its own colonies and was very concerned about those colonists revolting, which they did later on anyway, but they certainly didn't want to be seen as directly aiding a revolution of colonists. But the complications for Spain were a little different. They wanted to recapture territory that they lost from the British and had provisions with their treaty with France, and of course, when it came to peace, this complicated relationship made it very difficult at the peace table to come to an ultimate conclusion, which is why the treaty negotiations took so long.

**[00:22:49] Liz Covart:** Now that we have some understanding of the political and social dynamics of the West, we should talk about specific battles, because it wouldn't be a proper military history episode if we didn't at least talk about some battles. But first, let's take a moment to thank our episode sponsor.

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Okay, let's talk about some battles. In his edited collection, *The American Revolutionary War in the West*, Stephen focuses on the Battle of St. Louis and the attack on Cahokia, which were planned as coordinated attacks by the British. Stephen, why did the British pick St. Louis and Cahokia as places where they would combine their forces and attack?

**[00:24:33] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Well, number one, St. Louis had grown significantly in its short tenure as a town. As I mentioned, a number of the people from Cahokia actually moved to St. Louis, bolstering its population. It was a major trade center. It was the lieutenant governorship administrative site for Spanish Upper Louisiana. And part of the inducement to some of the loyalists to join in the attack on St. Louis as they were promised exclusive trade rights down the Missouri River, which the Spanish prohibited them from doing. So there were a lot of reasons. And as we talked before, it was the locale where the Spanish were sending war supplies to George Rogers Clark. So there were a whole lot of reasons. And the French had established Cahokia very early on in the 1700s. It was a fairly prosperous town. It was hurt quite a bit by the establishment of St. Louis. And then when the British took over, some of the more devout religious people moved from Cahokia to St. Louis. It was a relatively easy move. It was right across the river. So it had taken a downturn in terms of economics, but there was still quite a few people there. There was a militia that George Rogers Clark organized and still conducted a fairly active trade. It was not as big as Cahokia and Vincennes. It was a little bit smaller, but it was still a sizable town and still a place that was worth protecting. The intelligence told them that St. Louis was guarded by twenty men and a few old brass cannons. That was true as far as it went, but it totally overlooked the militia that had been organized and trained at St. Louis, which were a major part of the defense when it was attacked.

**[00:26:14] Liz Covart:** What was the plan for these incursions on St. Louis and Cahokia, this battle and attack? And what were the British goals for this battle and how did the battle play out when it actually took place on the ground?

**[00:26:28] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Once Spain entered the war in June 1779, Lord George Germain sent out a series of letters. Letters were sent to General Campbell at Pensacola in the south and were sent to Governor Haldeman in the north. And the instructions were to, in its simplest form, is to capture the entire Mississippi River Valley. Retake the property that George Rogers Clark conquered, and also pick up Spanish Louisiana at the same time. The attack in the south was frustrated by the Spanish preemptive attack up the Mississippi River and capturing all the British forts there. So, it didn't happen.



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But in the north, it did. So, Frederick Haldeman sent the instructions to his lieutenant governors at Niagara, Detroit, and Michilimackinac. Niagara was really too far away to really enter into it. But the British governors at Detroit and Michilimackinac did put together plans to put into effect Lord George Jermaine's, what I call grand plan, to conquer the Mississippi river valley. And if you think of the terms of the geography—and I'm not sure Lord George Jermaine understood the vastness of the geography out here—it was a very ambitious plan. The details were left to the lieutenant commanders and Patrick Sinclair at Michilimackinac really took the major part in putting together a force of about a thousand men, which ultimately descended on St. Louis and Cahokia on May 26, 1780.

British attack force was organized at Prairie du Chien, which is the closest point on the Mississippi river, is a staging area, it was a popular trading area and a place that the Native Americans were very familiar with. Lieutenant Governor Patrick Sinclair sent out all his British Indian department interpreters and officers, many of whom were married to significant Native American women who had quite a degree of influence in their tribes, to gather up as many allies as they could. And they were very successful. They ultimately gathered about nine hundred Native American men at Prairie du Chien, plus fifty or sixty loyalists and traders, and then the British Indian department officers had to go along because some of the Native American tribes were actually enemies to try to keep the peace among them. It took a while for the supplies to be put together for that attack to be launched. Interestingly, as sparsely populated as the area was, both St. Louis and Cahokia received numerous warnings that attack was about to happen. In fact, they didn't believe it at first, and a lady named Madame Honoré, who her husband and two sons operated a trading post about 150 miles, she canoed down the river by herself, and she knew Fernando de Leyba and convinced Fernando de Leyba that an attack was really going to happen. And at that point, all the defenses started to be built, and they had six weeks to build defenses.

**[00:29:24] Liz Covart:** Now, the Battle of St. Louis and the attack on Cahokia were supposed to happen simultaneously. Stephen, would you tell us about the British planning for the attack on Cahokia and why it was planned to happen simultaneously with this larger assault on St. Louis?

**[00:29:40] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Those of us that live out this way know that they're very close. And in fact, one of the St. Louis reports talks about as the British were retreating from Cahokia, they were firing muskets and the musket balls would rattle on the roofs of some of the St. Louis homes. That gives you an idea how close they were across the river. So you certainly didn't want to give one warning of the attack where they'd have further time to prepare, at least that was the British thinking. So they divided up their forces, about 750 men attacked St. Louis, the other 250

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attacked Cahokia. Again, their intelligence had told them that Cahokia had no defenses, and of course at the time that was true. And there were very few of George Rogers Clark's soldiers there, but as they had six weeks warning by the time the attack happened, there were almost two hundred of George Rogers Clark's soldiers there, plus the Kaskaskia aiding them, and the local militia. They were very well prepared by the time the attack happened.

At Cahokia, from what we can tell from the records that survived, it doesn't look like the attack—and I call it an attack because it was smaller in scope and certainly didn't last as long—was broken off fairly quickly after the British, much to their surprise, realized how well defended Cahokia was. St. Louis was a different story. I mean, that battle went on for a couple hours. Patrick Sinclair said, and I think pretty accurately, St. Louis will be harder to hold later than it will be to conquer, and he did fail at conquering it too. In fact, some rather embarrassing letters were written by Patrick Sinclair trying to explain why the attack failed. They had actually ships waiting near Chicago, expecting to pick up all this plunder and prisoners and other things. That didn't end the idea of St. Louis coming under British control. The British actually planned to come back the next year.

**[00:31:34] Liz Covart:** Now what other attacks and actions took place that we should know about? It sounds like the Battle of St. Louis and the attack on Cahokia are perhaps the most famous military engagements and actions in the West, but there must have been other important actions and military engagements that we should know about.

**[00:31:52] Stephen Kling Jr.:** I'm going to try to answer this succinctly because I think much to the surprise of some of your listeners, there was a lot of action that happened. Shortly after the attacks at St. Louis and Cahokia were beaten off, the Spanish and the Americans got together and put together a pursuit force of 325 men, trying to recapture the 71 prisoners that had been taken during the actions at St. Louis and Cahokia. They were unsuccessful, but the cavalry troops chased them all the way to Chicago, only arriving a few days late, according to the British reports. The other infantrymen went up from Peoria, up the old Indian trails, to Saukenuk, which was the main village of the Sac and Fox, who participated in the British attack, and burned it to the ground.

That was the end of that expedition, but then, as I mentioned, the British planned to come back in 1781 and were stockpiling supplies at British Fort St. Joseph on the south of Lake Michigan, and in the dead of winter a number of Spanish militia aided by western Potawatomi marched up the Illinois River, captured all the supplies, destroyed the fort, and brought back British prisoners

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and the British garrison flag. Then you go to, we talked about the greater plan that was put together in connection with the attack on St. Louis. There was an expedition from Detroit that included British regulars, what I call the Bird Expedition because it was led by Henry Bird. And they were supposed to take Louisville, a town that had been established by Clark's men, and settlers were there. They got distracted because their Native American allies wanted to attack a few forts first, which were easier pickings at Ruddell Station and Martin Station, which they did successfully. But when they heard Clark was on the way, they retreated, so the Louisville attack really never happened.

And I'm just talking about things in the north. You go down a little bit farther south, the Spanish had a fort at Arkansas Post. That was attacked in 1783 by British loyalists and allied Chickasaw. So there was a lot going on. There was a rebellion at Natchez of the British loyalists. I mean, you can go on for quite a while. It didn't stay silent after Yorktown like a lot of things did in the East.

**[00:34:02] Liz Covart:** And what about the military tactics used in the West? When we read about the American War for Independence in the East, we know that George Washington was always hoping that the Continental Army would be able to go toe to toe with the British with linear tactics. And that's that eighteenth-century style of fighting where you can imagine rows upon rows of soldiers in different units where they're taking turns firing at each other row by row while they're facing each other and marching to each other across open fields. So, Stephen, did the war in the West also try to fight with these traditional linear tactics or did the war out West use different military tactics?

**[00:34:40] Stephen Kling Jr.:** For the most part, it was a different type of fighting. More raids and quick attacks and attacks on settlements. There were some formal sieges down south. The siege of Baton Rouge, the siege of Mobile, the siege of Pensacola where actually siege cannons were used by the Spanish. That's kind of a formal type of warfare. But leaving those aside, the rest of it were quick strikes, sometimes not necessarily meant to capture territory, but to weaken the other side by depriving them of supplies. So it was a very different type of warfare. I think a lot of people think this was all wilderness out here, and a lot of it was, but there were great prairies too. And I think many people would be surprised to know there were a lot of buffalo in Illinois at the time.

**[00:35:28] Liz Covart:** Now, Stephen's edited book, *The American Revolutionary War in the West*, it doesn't just talk about military engagements in the western theater. It also discusses the people involved in these battles and attacks. Stephen, would you tell us about the people who

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participated in the western theater? Perhaps you could even tell us about one or two of the people that you've been really fascinated by.

**[00:35:50] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Sure, there were a lot. And you're absolutely correct. There was a determined effort, both in the book and the resulting museum exhibit, to focus a lot on the people because I think historians more recently have become more interested in the everyday lives of people and how these greater events impacted them. And one of the fascinating things involving the Battle of St. Louis and the attack on Cahokia, where there were a lot of oral traditions and stories that were handed down, and it provided an opportunity for me and my frequent coauthor in Seville, Spain, Kristine Sjostrom, to dig in and find that those people really exist? And were those stories, if not absolutely true, because stories tend to be exaggerated, was there some basis of fact?

For example, one of the stories was about Madame Rigache, and the story went that after the American takeover of St. Louis, some of the local French were trying to make sure that people remembered their importance and the stories would get embellished that Madame Rigache actually single handedly saved St. Louis during the attack in May of 1780. But, there is some truth to the story. So, Madame Rigache supposedly grabbed her husband's militia coat, picked up a knife and a pistol, and ran to the main gate to urge the men on. I found she did exist. Her husband, Ignace, was in the militia. They lived a couple houses down from the main gate. And later on, she actually founded the first girls' school in St. Louis. So she was a real person. I'm not sure the story was quite as dramatic as it was made, but certainly she did play a part for that history to be remembered. There were other interesting people. There were a number of free Blacks that were living in St. Louis at the time. Actually, Jeannette Forchet was one of the first lot owners in St. Louis at the time, and her second husband was the town gunsmith, Peter Ignace de Valentin.

**[00:37:46] Liz Covart:** You mentioned it's really hard to find the stories of free Blacks, women, and Indigenous peoples when it comes to the American Revolution in the West. And you just told us that you were able to use oral histories and tried to trace those stories back into the historical record. So I wonder if you would tell us A little bit about how you were able to get at the truth or the kernels of truth within some of these oral stories so that you could tell a more complete history of the American Revolution in the West.

**[00:38:14] Stephen Kling Jr.:** In some cases, it was hard, and of course, as you well know, the stories about some of the African Americans and Native Americans are missing because they just

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were not recorded, unfortunately. But one of the things that I found fascinating in Gálvez's campaign was that he specifically asked for "tireurs ou chasseurs" to be sent by his local commandants. And I had to look around for what that meant, and what it meant was the free and enslaved Black sharpshooters. And there were 65 of them that accompanied Gálvez on his campaigns and were noted for how valuable they were. But again, you got to dig to find that sort of thing, and it doesn't get mentioned in many of the histories.

Things like a number of free Blacks that were at St. Louis at the time. We don't know for sure exactly how many there were. I think the best estimate is that there were 31. And we believe that some of them were in the militia, certainly some of them were armed during the attack, and some of them were traders. Part of the difficulty is they use French names, so you couldn't always tell. And then the French, when they would prepare militia lists, would convert the names from French to Spanish, so making the research doubly difficult in some cases. We felt it important to tell some of these lesser-known stories and some that we could certainly verify. And there are records there. They're just usually sidebars and things. For example, Cesar, who was a slave of one of George Rogers Clark's men, but we found out he was responsible for repairing a number of George Rogers Clark's forts. But you really got to dig to find that.

**[00:39:50] Liz Covart:** Earlier, we discussed how one of the misconceptions about the Revolutionary War in the West is how poorly supplied the troops were. But as we just discussed, they weren't poorly supplied. What about civilians and their access to supplies? You know, when we think about the War for Independence in the East, we can imagine Abigail Adams writing to John, who's in France, and saying, "Send the pins! Send the lace! I can get a lot of money for those items." So civilians in the East often lacked supplies because of the British naval blockade of their ports. So I wonder, what was supply like on the civilian side in the West? Did Western civilians also find themselves feeling the deprivations of war?

**[00:40:31] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Like in the East, to some extent, it depended on your wealth. If you could afford it, things were available in the West. And we were lucky that the French had a system of inventorying all of your property when you died. So there are lots of these lists. Madeleine Lepage at St. Louis could be described as a fashionista because she had so many clothes, many of them brought over from France. There were place settings, there were silver, again, mostly for the more well-to-do people, but things like muskets—and they were very inexpensive, especially Spanish, like escopeta muskets that were sturdy, they weren't the most accurate thing, but you could get them fairly cheaply. And if you look at these inventories, you come away surprised by the number of things that they had.

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Of course, we don't have inventories of everyone. We don't, and I don't expect some of the poorer people live that way. But like things here today, if you could afford it, you could probably get it. And there was lace. There were special ribbons that were sent to be used for the Indian peace medals that were given to the Native American chiefs and subchiefs, which usually signified their allegiance. I mean, there were a lot of things that you wouldn't expect. And the British the same way. The list of things that they gave as what they called presents, but they were basically to help keep the Native Americans firmly allied to their cause, talked in terms of things like needles and thread, eyeglasses, mirrors. Things that you wouldn't expect that people were dependent on out here.

**[00:42:07] Liz Covart:** A little bit ago, you said that the fighting didn't stop in the West with the Siege of Yorktown in October 1781. And that's the time, is after Yorktown, that a lot of the military engagements in the East end. So given that the war in the West started in 1778, when did the war in the West end, if not with Yorktown?

**[00:42:31] Stephen Kling Jr.:** No, it went on even past the preliminary treaty. Arkansas Post actually happened after the preliminary peace had been signed and word came a month or two later. And really at that point then, the information was transmitted up and down the Mississippi River. But there'd have been a timely exchange of information, the Battle at Arkansas Post would have never happened.

**[00:42:55] Liz Covart:** And coincidentally, the Battle of Arkansas Post happened on April 17, 1783, almost eight years to the day after the shot heard round the world was fired at Lexington Green on April 19, 1775. Now, Stephen, you've given us quite the overview of the American Revolutionary War in the West, and I wonder if you would tell us why you think we should talk about this western theater more than we actually do.

**[00:43:22] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Well, anyone who, you know, has studied the peace treaties know that the Americans came away with extensive additional territories. Going all the way, in most cases, not completely, to the Mississippi River, adding all that territory, and if that wouldn't have happened—and by the way, some of our allies were not exactly thrilled that we were adding that kind of territory to the American footprint—but that paved the way for western expansion, Louisiana Purchase, things like that, that wouldn't have happened. And it was pretty hard to argue against the Americans retaining at least the upper Mississippi River area because George Rogers Clark's men were in control of it. They were already there. So I think it's important to understand that that paved the way for the future growth of the United States.

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**[00:44:10] Liz Covart:** Let's get into the "Time Warp." This is a fun segment of the show where we ask you a hypothetical history question about what might have happened if something had occurred differently or if someone had acted differently.

Stephen, in your opinion, what might have happened if the British had taken proper precautions to protect its claimed western territories after 1763 with the end of the Seven Years' War? How do you think the American Revolution and its war might have turned out differently?

**[00:44:58] Stephen Kling Jr.:** Of course, questions like that are always speculative, so I'll provide my speculation. And I actually touched on some of this in a segment in the first book I wrote about the Battle of St. Louis. My thinking is that the forces that were in play likely would have resulted in a counterattack unless the British had sent substantial forces, because it was just too hard to garrison the Mississippi River. Even if they'd been successful at St. Louis, I think St. Louis probably ultimately would have been retaken and the local French, you know, they heard about France entering the war, and some of them were actually hopeful that they would end up French at the end of the war. So there were a lot of factors at play that I think would tend to say that the British may have had difficulty at least keeping control of all of the West. But had they been successful to do so, back to the prior question, I think it would have been very difficult for the Americans to have obtained that territory at the end of the war. And again, that might have frustrated the ability of western expansion later on in America's history.

**[00:46:08] Liz Covart:** Not many historians can say that their edited collections have served as the basis for a museum exhibit, but Stephen, your edited collection *The American Revolutionary War in the West* has served as the basis for a museum exhibit at the St. Charles County Heritage Museum in St. Peter's, Missouri. Would you tell us about this exhibit and what it was like for you and the museum's curators to turn your book into an exhibit?

**[00:46:32] Stephen Kling Jr.:** When the book was formulated it was written with an eye that it would form the basis of an extensive museum exhibit. Professor Carstens, Kristine Sjoström, and I and several others had talked about that and knew about things that we would like to include. So there were two really guiding factors. One, we wanted to write the book almost exclusively from original sources, which we did, a lot of the Spanish and Virginia archives and things were used to write the book. But secondly, we wanted to do it in a way that it could be a blueprint for the museum exhibit. And fortunately, that's exactly what happened. I found a great partner in the county of St. Charles, and they embraced the whole concept. The timing was good. They were looking for a new museum exhibit for their heritage museum. So, about a year and a half later,

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the museum exhibit opened, and if you go to it, it's an extensive exhibit that has 42 uniformed and costumed mannequins, over a hundred period artifacts, mostly weapons, but gorgets and Indian peace medals, and then a number of copies of documents that the Spanish archives graciously allowed us to reproduce in the exhibit, a number of original paintings that were commissioned for the exhibit, and it literally follows the chapters in the book almost verbatim. So it allowed almost all the authors to directly participate in the exhibit, which was also fun. And many of them, like Professor Carsten, let items from his digs at Fort Jefferson, those are on display. Kristine Sjostrom had a relative who had some spoons that were involved. Those are on display. The group at St. Charles County was fabulous. The curators there were very helpful. It was a mad rush of a month and a half to set it all up. It's, I think, a rather unique exhibit.

**[00:48:23] Liz Covart:** And how can we best plan our trips to the St. Charles County Heritage Museum to see the American Revolution in the West exhibit? And is this exhibit just something that exists at the Heritage Museum, or is this something we can also visit online?

**[00:48:37] Stephen Kling Jr.:** There is very little online at this point. There are some videos. There was a video done by HEC Media right before the opening of the exhibit where you see some of the items that are exhibited there. And that's a helpful tool, but as far as a virtual tour, there is not one. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, usually from 10:00 to 5:00 and 12:00 to 5:00 on Sunday. For sure, it will be there at least another year, probably two, and they can arrange for tours. You can go through the museum by yourself. There's audio touchscreens for people that prefer to get their information that way. There's text panels. If you only have a casual interest, you could walk through in thirty and forty-five minutes. If you have a detailed interest, we've had people there for four hours or more.

**[00:49:25] Liz Covart:** And where is the best place to look for more information about you, your work, and how we can pose our questions to you?

**[00:49:30] Stephen Kling Jr.:** I have a website, [www.thgcpublishing.com](http://www.thgcpublishing.com), and there's a link for email that can be sent to me.

**[00:49:42] Liz Covart:** Stephen Kling Jr., thank you for taking us through the American Revolution in the West.

**[00:49:47] Stephen Kling Jr.:** You're welcome.

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**[00:49:49] Liz Covart:** The American Revolution in the West wasn't just a fight between British redcoats and Continental soldiers. It was a fight between empires. From its very beginning, the western theater included the participation of Spanish soldiers, African American sharpshooters, French soldiers, English settlers, French settlers, Spanish settlers, and Indigenous warriors. It was also a theater of war that played an essential part in the future growth of the United States. As Stephen relayed, the military success of the American Revolutionary forces and their allies allowed the United States peace commissioners to demand large western land sessions from Great Britain. It also allowed the United States' European allies to reclaim parts of the territories that they had lost to Great Britain during the Seven Years' War. Now, these territory cessions by Great Britain not only changed the map of white colonial control in North America, but it also laid the groundwork for the United States' western expansion, a process of western movement by Americans that began not long after the signing and ratification of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Additionally, the Revolutionary War's western theater also helped bring an end to the United States' quest for independence. The opening of the western theater in 1778 coincided with the arrival of French and Spanish military aid to the revolutionaries. With the French and Spanish armies and navies involved in the fight, the United States' War for Independence expanded beyond the eastern seaboard of mainland North America. Instead of just fighting along the eastern seaboard and as far west as western New York and Pennsylvania, the war expanded to include the Old Northwest Territory, with its Great Lakes region, Ohio River valley, and Illinois country, East and West Florida—which saw fighting in the present-day states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana—and many islands in the Caribbean, Gibraltar, and as far east as India. The Revolutionary War in the West helped turn what was once a limited continental theater into a larger global theater of war, which Great Britain had to man and fight on many different fronts. And it's because of this global theater and Great Britain's calculations as to which of its colonies had to be protected at all costs that pushed the British Empire to sue for peace, a peace that recognized the United States' independence as a new nation.

For more information about Stephen, his books, and museum exhibit, plus notes, links, and a transcript for everything we talked about today, check out the show notes page, [benfranklinworld.com/374](http://benfranklinworld.com/374). Remember that friends tell friends about their favorite podcasts. So please be a good friend and tell your friends about *Ben Franklin's World*. Production assistance for this podcast comes from my colleagues at Colonial Williamsburg Innovation Studios, Joseph Adelman, Katie Schinabeck, Ashley Bouknight-Claybrooks, and Ian Tonat. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. This podcast is part of the Airwave Media Podcast Network. To discover and listen to their other podcasts, visit [airwavemedia.com](http://airwavemedia.com).

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Finally, what are the theaters of the Revolutionary War would you like to know about? I love suggestions for future episode topics, so please tell me, [liz@benfranklinworld.com](mailto:liz@benfranklinworld.com).

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