



Sept

230th anniversary of British surrender the right time to honor Lafayette

By Todd Prough

Editor's note: Todd Prough lives in the Merrimack Valley and has worked for the U.S. Department of Justice for 15 years. He is an amateur historian who researched the Marquis de Lafayette and his role in the United States' war for independence from England. Decades ago, Haverhill erected a statue honoring Lafayette.

George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson — their names are synonymous with the American Revolution.

Many New Englanders played pivotal roles in the war for independence, among them Henry Knox, Paul Revere, Ethan Allen, Israel Putnam, John Stark, and even the much-reviled Benedict Arnold.

However, colonists were not the only ones who joined the struggle for their freedom. They received direct military assistance from foreigners like the German Baron von Steuben, known as the Drillmaster of Valley Forge; Tadeusz Kosciuszko, the artillerist from Poland; and probably the best known, the Frenchman the Marquis de Lafayette.

Lafayette was born Sept. 6, 1757, in south-central France. Part of a wealthy military family, he joined the King's Musketeers at the age of 14. By late 1775, he had heard tales of the defiant Americans and their resistance at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill and elsewhere. Filled with a sense of liberty and the glory and excitement that would come with fighting for that ideal, Lafayette determined to travel to America to aid the rebel cause. In April 1777, using his own money to buy and prepare a ship and a crew, Lafayette set sail for America.

By the time Lafayette landed in South Carolina in June 1777, the Americans had expelled the British

Welcome to our online comments feature. To join the discussion, you must first register with Disqus and verify your email address. Once you do, your comments will post automatically. We welcome your thoughts and your opinions, including unpopular ones. We ask only that you keep the conversation civil and clean. We reserve the right to remove comments that are obscene, racist or abusive and statements that are false or unverifiable. Repeat offenders will be blocked. You may flag objectionable comments for review by a moderator.

Like

Add New Comment

Type your comment here.

Post as ...

Showing 0 comments

Sort by Newest first

Subscribe by email

Subscribe by RSS

Trackback URL <http://disqus.com/forums/>

comments powered by DISQUS

from Boston, suffered the demoralizing blow of losing New York, and had successful forays into New Jersey at Trenton and Princeton. In July, Lafayette met with Congress in Philadelphia and received his commission as a major general in the Continental Army. Shortly thereafter, he met with Washington, with whom he forged a loyal and admiring relationship, and joined Washington's military staff.

Lafayette's idealism was confronted with the harsh realities of war during the Battle of Brandywine in September 1777. Washington's attempt to protect Philadelphia was met with swift British resistance near the Brandywine River. The Continentals were outmaneuvered by the British, and during the ensuing retreat, Lafayette was shot through the leg. However, as evidence of his bravery, he refused to leave the battlefield until he could oversee the safe removal of his troops. At the age of 20, his blood had been spilled for the American cause.

Lafayette continued to serve nobly. In addition to his skills on the battlefield, Washington also depended on Lafayette in the diplomatic arena. In early 1779, Lafayette returned to France to lobby King Louis XVI for financial and military aid for the Americans, including the use of the French Navy. In 1780, Lafayette's success brought him back to America. Five thousand French troops and a naval squadron eventually followed him and joined forces with Washington's army.

Upon his return to the colonies, Lafayette commanded troops in Virginia where, in mid-1781, he grappled with his nemesis from Brandywine, Lord Charles Cornwallis. By September 1781, Lafayette had Cornwallis' army cornered at Yorktown, a narrow strip of land jutting into the Chesapeake Bay. Washington soon arrived with a fresh contingent of French troops to block any land exits and the French fleet appeared in the Chesapeake, thereby cutting off a water escape. Caught in the vice of troops and naval vessels, Cornwallis was forced to surrender on October 19, 1781, thereby effectively ending the war.

After the war, Lafayette departed for France from Boston on board a ship fittingly named *The Alliance*. Back in France, Lafayette worked with Jefferson and others to strengthen French-American relations. In 1824, Lafayette accepted President James Monroe's invitation to visit the United States. He arrived in August with much fanfare to begin a grand 13-month tour of the then-24 states with his son George Washington Lafayette, his valet and his private secretary, Auguste Levasseur. A recent translation of Levasseur's journal by New Englander Alan Hoffman provides a rich detailing of Lafayette's visit. Lafayette did not limit his excursion to urban centers or old battlefields to memorialize past deeds. Rather, he journeyed to areas in order to reciprocate the love and admiration he received from the American people, including those in the Merrimack Valley.

On Aug. 31, 1824, after spending several days in Boston giving speeches, attending parades, and visiting with John Adams, Lafayette and his entourage embarked for northern New England via the hallowed ground at Lexington and Concord. North of Boston, they stopped briefly at Marblehead where they heard speeches from schoolchildren expressing their admiration for the general. They continued on to Salem where Lafayette's arrival was announced by booming cannons and clanging bells. According to Levasseur, "The streets were entirely filled with a throng which rushed headlong upon his passage, and which heaped benedictions upon him. We traversed the whole City at a walking pace in order to pass beneath a great number of triumphal arches which were decorated with emblems and inscriptions." After dining, imbibing, and cheering France, Lafayette's group departed for Newburyport where they planned to rest for the night. Despite arriving in Newburyport late in the evening, Lafayette was again greeted by throngs of well-wishers as he made his way to Tracy's Inn, where the group would stay the night. For those who had a role in the Revolution or who had felt its immediate impact, the significance of and admiration for Lafayette was easily understood. He was an individual who dismissed his provincial interests, left his motherland and wife and child, bargained with his fortune, and risked his life to fight for freedom. Americans paid tribute by christening counties, cities, streets, schools and parks in his name, including Fayetteville, North Carolina; Lafayette College in Pennsylvania; and Lafayette Park, just north of the White House. Additionally, Lafayette admiration societies sprung up around the country to promote the ideals and memory of the general.

One such group, known as the Lafayette Society, was formed in Haverhill. In the early 1900s, plans were made to build a fitting memorial to the general. As a result, Sargent Square was renamed Lafayette Square and donations were sought to construct a monument in Lafayette's honor. That goal was achieved on Sept. 17, 1932. Contemporary accounts described a three-mile long parade with bands, military companies, and city, state, and federal luminaries. The procession wound from Monument Square, past Bradford Common, across the Merrimack River, and ended at a review stand in Lafayette Square that was packed with 5,000 spectators surrounding a flag draped shrine. According to the Haverhill Gazette, city father James Boiselle laid the cornerstone to the monument and proclaimed, "May this memorial bear to all coming generations the message of devotion to liberty, and of sympathy and friendship between the beloved country of our forefathers, France, and the beloved country of our adoption, America.

For decades, because of its prominence in the heart of Lafayette Square, motorists and passersby were forced to look upon the statute of Lafayette, sitting atop his horse, facing east towards his beloved France, with his hat aloft in a gesture of warm regard, with either acknowledgement of who he was and the value of his sacrifices or in wonderment of what the rider must have accomplished to merit such a tribute in the middle of a city intersection. However in recent years, with the removal of the traffic rotary in Lafayette Square, the statute has been relegated to the sidewalk, out of the direct view of the cars and pedestrians whisking by daily. The figure of a man dressed in 18th century military garb sitting atop a horse seems slightly anachronistic wedged in front of a convenience store.

As we approach the 230th anniversary of the British surrender at Yorktown in October, now may be the time to pull Lafayette from the periphery of our esteem back into the focus, where he certainly earned his place. Honoring Lafayette not only honors the man who fought for freedom, but also the idea of freedom — that freedom is not free, that it transcends geography, citizenship, language, and other characteristics that may otherwise work to keep people or nations apart.



OPEN A PREMIER INTERNATIONAL CURRENT ACCOUNT TODAY.

4% Interest (1% AER) for the first 3 months

Lloyds TSB | International

hgazette.com, Haverhill, MA 181 Merrimack St. Haverhill, MA 01831