

Cornish

Lafayette and Human Rights

By Virginia Drye SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE TIMES

May 30, 2023

1 of 2



Speaker Alan Hoffman

Virginia Drye Photo/EAGLE TIMES STAFF

CORNISH, NH May 20, 2023--Earlier this month, on the top floor of the Cornish Town Hall, the Cornish Historical Society held its first meeting since the passing of its stalwart historian and former president, Laird Klingler. The new president, David Kruidenier, opened the meeting in memory of Klingler.

The featured speaker was Alan Hoffman, an author, president of the American Friends of Lafayette and president of the Massachusetts Lafayette Society. A lifelong admirer and historian of General Lafayette, Hoffman entitled his presentation “Lafayette and Human Rights.”

Lafayette may have been known for his participation in the American Revolution but, as Hoffman noted, Lafayette’s passion for liberating others did not end there, particularly in the realms of prison reform, abolition and revolution.



Lafayette took inspiration from the Declaration of Independence and wrote The Rights of Man and the Citizen during the French Revolution. When that Revolution got out of hand, he fled but was eventually imprisoned. Because of his mistreatment during almost a year of solitary confinement, Lafayette became a prison reformer and spoke out against solitary confinement and the death penalty.

Hoffman described Lafayette as the first international abolitionist, telling the story of how Lafayette treated every person as a friend, even when society did not approve of it. Once, during his tour in one of the Deep South states, a former slave walked in on one of the celebrations honoring his visit. He asked Lafayette if he remembered him (he did) and with an enthusiastic welcome, embraced the man. That former slave was the first person Lafayette had interacted with when he first came to America.

Even into old age, Lafayette helped revolutions around the world. Simply put, he was a humanitarian who didn’t want people to suffer under an unfair master. Hoffman went into great detail about Lafayette’s assistance in the 1830-1831 Polish Revolution and how Lafayette fundraised and advocated for the Polish people. In addition to Poland, France and America, Lafayette would assist revolutions in Spain and South America to help people become free.

In his presentation, Hoffman referenced New Hampshire and Vermont several times, including Lafayette's visit to Cornish and multiple neighboring communities in 1825. He shared the story of how Dartmouth students came down from Hanover to send him across the Connecticut River to the toll house in Windsor, Vermont.

May 20th marks the 188th anniversary of the death of "America's favorite Frenchman." Markers commemorating his visit can be found in Vermont at the Windsor House in Windsor, Woodstock Green in Woodstock and at the corner of Bridge St. and VT Route 14. In New Hampshire, they can be found in Cornish near the bridge Lafayette used to cross into Vermont, Opera House Square in downtown Claremont, on the Town Green near the gazebo in Newport, at the southwest corner of Old Warner Road and NH Route 114 in Bradford and in front of Town Hall in Warner, among multiple places in other areas of the state.