



Bergen County, Where America Begins

THE NATION'S GUEST - LAFAYETTE

By Kevin W. Wright

The heartfelt welcome extended to Marquis de Lafayette upon his return to the United States in 1824-25 was testimony to his unique status as the last living Major-General of the American Revolution. As the young Republic anticipated the Fiftieth Anniversary of its Independence in 1826, all those who had commanded its Revolutionary arms had faded into history, save one --- the dashing, young French nobleman and volunteer, Major-General Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette.



General Lafayette's life after his return from America had been eventful, to say the least. He became General of the Garde Nationale on the day following the fall of the Bastille in July 1789. Two years later, he prepared to defend France against Austrian invasion, but was forced to flee into Belgium after an unsuccessful attempt at suppressing the bloodthirsty Jacobins. His wife Adrienne and daughter Anastasie, were arrested in their chateau at Chavaniac; their possessions and estates were confiscated. Only the intervention of Gouverneur Morris saved Adrienne from the guillotine, but her grandmother, mother and sister were executed. Lafayette was captured and imprisoned in the Moravian fortress at Olmutz, where he languished for five years. With American help, his son, George Washington Lafayette, was sent to New York. In October 1795, Emperor Francis II permitted Adrienne to join her husband in prison. The political situation changed dramatically when the French Army of Italy, led by Napoleon, decisively defeated the Austrians at Lodi in Lombardy on May 10, 1796. With Bonaparte poised to march on Vienna, the Austrians sued for peace; Lafayette and family were liberated on September 19, 1797. He was

allowed to return to his chateau at La Grange two years later.

By letter posted Paris, May 10, 1824, Lafayette, then sixty-six years of age, accepted the invitation of Congress to visit the United States as the Nation's Guest. He landed at Castle Garden on Manhattan to a tumultuous welcome on August 16, 1824. On this occasion, a regiment of New York militia took the name of the Garde Nationale, which Lafayette commanded after the storming of the Bastille. Subsequently, other State militias adopted the name of the National Guard in his honor (and are so known unto this day). After arriving in his adopted country, Lafayette first toured New England, stopping in Boston to lay the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill Monument, and then visiting New Hampshire. He next traveled south and west. On October 19, 1824, he was at Yorktown for the forty-third anniversary of the British surrender. On December 9, 1824, he visited the United States Senate, and the House of Representatives

on the following day. In the spring of 1825 he journeyed to Louisiana, then northward along the Mississippi, reaching Cincinnati in May 1825. He returned to New York City in July 1825.

Contemporary newspapers reported temperatures exceeding 100 degrees on July 13, 1825; the city and its environs were prostrate with heat and drought as the Nation's Guest prepared to take his final leave of Manhattan. According to an account published by the Newark Sentinel on July 19, 1825, it was early on the morning of Thursday, July 14th, 1825, that General Lafayette was escorted by military parade from his lodgings on Broadway, New York City, to the Hoboken ferry, where he crossed the Hudson River into New Jersey. He proceeded to Hackensack, "where he was received with a thousand welcomes by the patriotic citizens of that village." After breakfast, he journeyed to Paterson, passing Zabriskie's Mills (Arcola), Wagaraw and the Goffle. Reaching Paterson by noon, he was "received with all the congratulations that could arise from hearts of freemen." After dining at James McNally's Hotel on Main Street, he departed for Morristown, passing through Totowa Bridge and Godwin's Tavern (known as the Passaic Hotel in 1825), Little Falls, Parsippany and Whippany. He reached Morristown at about 6 o'clock in the evening. The date of his journey to Hackensack, Paterson and Morristown is confirmed by publication of Dr. Lewis Condict's Address to Lafayette, delivered on July 14, 1825, and subsequently published in the Morris Town Palladium. The next morning, he continued on his way to Newark. After a reception at the White House, hosted by President John Quincy Adams on September 7, 1825, Lafayette departed for France from the wharf at Alexandria, Virginia, aboard the newly commissioned frigate Brandywine, taking a final gaze at Mount Vernon as he sailed out the Potomac River.

Perhaps the only lasting memorial of Lafayette's visit to Bergen County resides in the name of Lodi Township, formed from New Barbadoes Township in 1825 and officially organized on March 1, 1826. The name, perhaps suggested by Lafayette himself, honors the Austrian defeat by Napoleon at Lodi in Lombardy, Italy, on May 10, 1796, which triggered Lafayette's release from an Austrian prison.

The following eyewitness account of Lafayette's visit to Hackensack appeared in the NEW JERSEY REPUBLICAN, August 7, 1873. Its author, Reverend J. B. Hague, was then pastor at the Spring Valley Chapel.

Lafayette's Visit to Hackensack.

BY AN EYE WITNESS

MR. EDITOR, In compliance with your request, I proceed to give you the recollections of my boyhood in regard to the visit of Lafayette to Hackensack. It was my intention to be very exact, as to dates and circumstances; but I find that this will require more time and labor than I can possibly spare, so I have concluded to do as you desire, and give you simply the recollections of a boy, with all their defects and inaccuracies. Yet, there will be but few mistakes, and these of but little importance. Such as they may prove to be, they can be easily corrected by some of your readers and correspondents who are older than myself, and who are doubtless able to supply what in these respects is lacking in this communication.

You and your readers must remember that this is now almost half a century since I witnessed the scene which I am about to describe. When eighteen hundred and seventy-four shall come, full fifty years will have gone by since the "friend of Washington" passed through our then little village. There was but one street --- that now called "Main." All to the westward of this line was pretty much farm land, in the shape of orchards and woods and cultivated fields.



I can set before you only that which would be likely to strike the eye and the ear of a boy - a boy - well, as I am not very accurate, I shall not say of how many years, for that would be to let you know how far he now exceeds the half century that has passed away since the hearty welcome was given to the noble

Frenchman who visited us. Do gentlemen, as well as ladies, grow reticent with coming years on the subject of their age?

It was understood that General Lafayette was to pass through Hackensack on his way to Paterson, that one special object of his visit here was to see the tomb of General Poor, which you will find in the southwest corner of the old church yard. It was also understood that our guest would take breakfast in this village, and arrangements for his reception were therefore made so as to be complete at a comparatively early hour --- say nine or ten o'clock, a. m. I have forgotten who were the committee of arrangements for the occasion, who made the address of welcome, and who presided, generally, over the doings of the day. I cannot even trust myself with the precise month of the year. It was July according to the best of my recollection. A boy would not be accurate about such matters, but it was as beautiful a summer's morning as Heaven ever sent us. I can remember that. Will it rain? Will it be clear? These questions were anxiously asked by every boy and girl in the village, and in the places around us. It was a beautiful day, and the sun shone out his warm welcome --- no warmer than came from the hearts of the people. There was no sham about that, and this representative government never represented the feelings and wishes of the American people more perfectly than when it invited the French patriot, after an absence of forty years, to visit the country for whose freedom he had fought in the days of his youth. The day was clear and bright, and a very large concourse of people, men, women, boys and girls, were gathered together to welcome Lafayette. Not only from this village itself, but largely from the country around they came; for every one who could do so wanted to see the nation's guest, and give the cheer and wave the handkerchief of welcome.



The General was to enter the village on the Hoboken road, at the southern end of the town, where "Earle's Corner" used to be, and to take breakfast at one of the hotels near at hand. With this understanding all the arrangements were made. The grand reception was to take place in that quarter, and here, therefore, the people did their best in the way of preparation.

Although it was fifty years ago, the thing was creditably done, I can assure you. The little village did honor to its distinguished visitor. In proportion to her size and means, Hackensack came in no way behind her neighbors in the manifestation of her admiration and gratitude towards Lafayette.

There was flung across Main street, just where Essex street now joins it, a large and beautiful arch, adorned with evergreens, and banners, and flags, and pennants, and streamers, on some of which were seen, in conspicuous size and color, the words "Yorktown," "Brandywine," and everywhere, "Welcome Lafayette." Another arch at the upper end of the village, but not so elaborately constructed, spanned the street, and displayed its welcome to the General as he left the place.

All were promptly assembled at the appointed hour on and around the "green." There was, of course, some delay, as there always is on such occasions, but on the whole, the time was well kept. Watches were placed in the steeple of the old church to observe when the long expected carriage and four would make its appearance on the "Sand Hill," a mile away. A stroke on the bell was to be the signal for this.

And here are the arrangement and grouping of the people on this occasion. Both sides of the road, north of the triumphal arch, were occupied with long lines of people, old and young, reaching far up the street. On the west side were placed the ladies, and, in front of them, the girls, all dressed in white. On the east side of the street were the men, and, in front of them, the boys, dressed, of course, something "promiscuously," but as well as they knew how. The girls held flowers, while to us boys were given branches of laurel. A small band of music was stationed at the eastern column of the arch, led by Mr. Terhune --- a gentleman at that time well known for his excellent playing on the clarinet. If the music of

this band of fifty years ago was not so very loud, it was at least very sweet. The old bronze cannon of the town, associated with many a "training" and Fourth of July, was taken from its house opposite to the old church, and placed where its voice could be heard --- and it had a good voice, when properly charged.

I wish that I knew what group of maidens were stationed opposite to me on that day, just for the satisfaction of my curiosity. If they are yet alive, the half century of time has surely touched the hair that might have been brown or dark on that summer's day, and has made it as gray as my own.

We are all ready and waiting with great expectation. The bell tells us that, in a few minutes more, that carriage, so long looked for, will be whirling around "Earle's corner," and we shall soon see one of the heroes of the Revolution, and one of its greatest. How slowly the moments go, but they pass away. The barouche and four comes around the sharp turn of the road quite rapidly, and brings the General very suddenly in sight of the multitude awaiting him. We can see that there is something of a surprise. The carriage is stopped at once, almost opposite Earle's building.

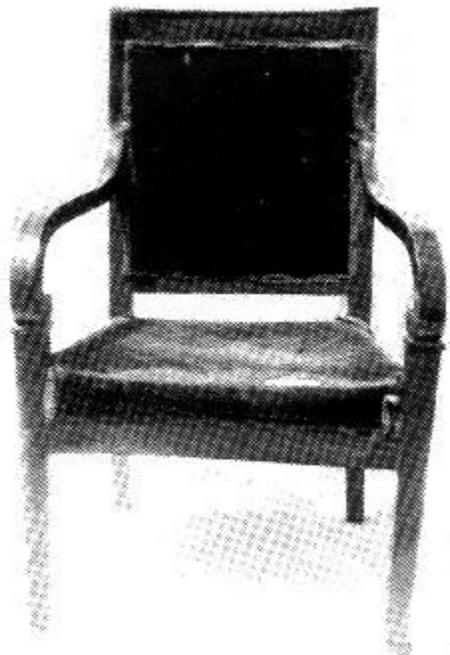
The General gets out, takes off his hat, lays it in the barouche, and, taking the arm of the gentleman whose name I cannot remember, proceeds bareheaded, to cross the little bridge over the creek, and to pass under the arch, and between the dense lines of people.

How was he dressed? Like the American citizens of that day. If I remember aright and, if not, some of my lady friends will correct me, he had on a black coat, light vest, and much worn at that time, yellow nankeen pantaloons.

He steps slowly. We all had a long and full view of the man. What a noble form, and what a grand head and face! Its nationality was unmistakable. I have never forgotten it. It is fresh in my memory to-day --- as fresh as anything that is there. If I could paint, I could reproduce it perfectly.

The band played, the cannon fired, the men cheered, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs; and, as the hero moved along, the boys cast their laurels under his feet, and the girls their flowers.

The General, as he passed between the long lines of people, bowed, Frenchman-like, mostly to the ladies on the west side of the street, bestowing an occasional recognition on us of the other sex. It was all right.



Passing on to the hotel, the address was made; the breakfast was partaken of, and, in an hour or two, the General left the little village as rapidly as he entered it, driving under the upper arch, and being saluted by the cannon, which had been transferred thither for that purpose.

These are my recollections of that scene, never to be forgotten. "The time is long past, and the scene is afar," but it will go from me only when everything else does. One thing is certain. The little village of Hackensack was not found wanting in her part of the welcome extended to the "Nation's Guest."

Probably the like will not be seen again. For it cannot be often that a nation's history will afford such a combination of circumstances as those under which Lafayette visited the United States. The welcome was genuine and without exception. East, West, North and South participated in it most sincerely. The people's hearts were in the matter. They inscribed on almost everything the honored name. The merchant wrote it on his goods, the public edifice was called after it, and everywhere, among the high and low, the rich and the poor, the cherished name met your gaze. The building now occupied by the Young Men's Christian

Association was erected just after this visit, and while its memory was yet fresh, and it was accordingly named "Lafayette Academy."

Having thus fulfilled my promise, I now beg, Mr. Editor, to take my leave, hoping that some of your readers may supply what I have not been able to furnish.

J. B. HAGUE.

In response to Reverend Hague's article, the REPUBLICAN included the following communication on September 4, 1873:

Lafayette's Visit to Hackensack.

THE FIRST ACCOUNT AMENDED.

Mr. Editor, Having received through the politeness of W. H. Berry & sons, the enclosed communication, I send it to your for publication in the REPUBLICAN. It will be seen that Mr. Terhune corrects some of the mistakes as to date, into which I had fallen, and supplies some interesting details which I was unable to furnish. I take this opportunity of returning to him my thanks for his very interesting letter, and do not doubt that it will prove highly acceptable to your readers.

The Levi Haywood referred to as making the address, was the principal of the Washington Academy - so called at that time. He was an excellent classical scholar, and assisted in preparing for college, several young men of this place. The other two gentlemen spoken of as members of the Committee of Arrangements, were well known residents of the village, whose names still remain. Some of the "oldest inhabitants" will be able to recall readily, the "portly form of Wm. Halsey, Esq.," as it might have been seen here, about the time when court was held.

J. B. HAGUE.

MR. TERHUNE'S LETTER.

Rev. J. B. HAGUE --- Dear Sir: In a recent number of the N. J. REPUBLICAN, I was highly pleased with an account of the arrival and reception of Gen. Lafayette at Hackensack. You say in your communication, in the month of July, as far as your memory serves you. It was in the month of June, but that is of no great consequence. You say also, that in eighteen hundred and seventy-four, it will be fifty years since his arrival in New York, which is not exactly true. It was in the month of August, 1824, that I was on the Battery, and saw the steamer come up the bay and harbor, and land the Gen. and his suite at Castle Garden. It was in the summer of '25 when he came to Hackensack in the month of June. Mr. Levi Haywood made the address on this occasion, of which I was an ear witness.



The General's reply was very brief, but very much to the purpose. He said, "I recognize this place, for," pointing to the church yard, right opposite "there lies buried one of my brave generals."

Almost immediately after, he went to the church yard accompanied by the committee among whom Robert Campbell, Esq., and Archibald Campbell, Esq., were quite conspicuous. I also remember seeing the portly form of William Halsey, Esq., of Newark, among them.

They all stood uncovered for a few moments looking at the slab which covers the remains. "That" said he, "was one of my Generals." It was about the first of November, when General Washington retreated from Fort Lee, and crossed the Hackensack river at New Bridge, and it was here, that General Poor died of a fever, then prevailing in camp.

Our band of music, of which you make honorable mention in your communication, did their very best on that occasion. I was its leader, and we played the beautiful and very appropriate tune, "See! the Conquering Hero Comes." Of this tune, we had a rehearsal for two hours, previously to the arrival of the General.

His son, Washington Lafayette, and a French officer were at each side of him, as they walked together to the old tavern, where a most splendid collation was spread for the occasion.

NICHOLAS P. TERHUNE.

About the Photos, in the order they appear: **1.** Lafayette, 1818, a French portrait **2.** Redware platter c. 1825, thought to be from New England, in magazine picture was found. Note: We have very similar slipware in our collections, made along the Hackensack in River Edge. **3.** "General Lafayette's Departure from Mount Vernon 1784" **4.** Blue Velvet Upholstered Mahogany Arm Chair used by Lafayette in 1825 and donated by Mrs. Zabriskie of Hackensack in 1961. Now on display in Steuben House parlor. **5.** Lafayette, a 19 year old General.