

Celebration of the Marquis de Lafayette (1824-1825)

1. Enoch Wood & Sons (English) Staffordshire Dinner and Salad Plates (1825-1830).
These depict Lafayette's boat, the Cadmus, docking in New York at Castle Gardens (August 15, 1824). Pottery, leather, glass, paper, wooden articles and earthenware, such as these, were produced by the thousands to commemorate Lafayette's triumphant return to the US.

Lafayette arrived in the US in 1824, about ten years after Americans conclusively defeated the British in the War of 1812. Having rejected President Monroe's invitation to accept passage to America on a US warship specifically designated for this purpose, Lafayette and his party of three, including his son, George Washington Lafayette, engaged a French merchant vessel, The Cadmus, for the crossing. It arrived in lower New York Harbor in mid-August to a thunderous salute of cannons, gunfire and church bells. Thirty thousand onlookers greeted him.

When descending the gangplank, forty elderly Revolutionary War veterans that had served under him stood at attention (to the best of their ability) in their tattered, belted and ill-fitting uniforms with medals pinned to their collars. In proud voices, each veteran proudly stated their name, company and the battle they fought in with the Marquis. The reception so moved Lafayette that after reaching the last man in the line he burst into tears and sought solace in the arms of his son.

The one-mile trek to New York's City Hall, usually a twenty-minute walk, took two hours in the Mayor's open carriage after proceeding through crowds estimated at 50,000 or more.

Many have suggested that Lafayette's enthusiastic participation in the American Revolution was attributable to his utter disdain for the British after their defeat of the French in The Seven Year's War. A cannonball in The Battle of Minden took his father's life when Lafayette was two years of age. That provided him with a crucible that resulted in his early and active involvement in the American War for Independence.

On route to Bunker Hill in June 1825, Lafayette stopped for an overnight in Worthington on June 13th. He was greeted by forty mounted riders, including Colonel William A. Rice, a decorated veteran who served in the War of 1812.

2. Lithograph 1830 by Joseph Lemercier of Lafayette

This depicts Lafayette's short-lived celebration as a returning hero to Paris after the monarchy briefly relinquished power that year.

Lafayette's status as the patrician statesmen of France was not appreciated by all in his native country. Here, he returns to Paris following the July 12th election that repudiated the right of the (Bourbon) King Charles to reign as monarch. Lafayette's elation that the King had relinquished the crown prompted his hasty return to Paris, where he was welcomed with cries of Vive Lafayette! Vive Liberte! He was celebrated as a "hero in two worlds": America and France. His efforts in America were well known by the French who also sought the formation of a republic without leadership by birthright.

The adulation lasted but a day. King Charles, in a hollow royalist gesture, stepped aside and then appointed his Bourbon cousin, the Duc d' Orleans, as the monarch's representative. This led to further bloodshed and revolt throughout France. Lafayette's hope that his country would embrace democracy was dashed and the violence in France continued for several more years.

3. Colored lithograph based on work by Dutch artist Ary Scheffer, probably 1818.

Scheffer, a Dutchman, left Amsterdam for France where he pursued his career as a painter but also as one who shared Lafayette's politics. An anti-monarchist, Scheffer went so far as to participate in a plot to overthrow King Louis XVIII. In the 18th century, portraiture was the only means by which the physical likeness of a hero could be remembered other than sculpture. During Lafayette's farewell tour, 20 portraits were commissioned of him, a remarkable number considering that Jefferson was only painted 26 times in his lifetime. In addition to Scheffer, Lafayette was painted by Samuel F.B. Morse, Sully (3x), Ingham, Peticolas and Peale, and these paintings gave rise to numerous lithographs, colored and black-and-white, which were commonly hung in 19th century homes throughout the US, especially after the 1824-1825 tour.

This colored print depicts Lafayette in his uniform with a gold-embroidered collar and emerald green coat with fur trimming. Prints such as these were commonly displayed in colonial homes along with the Washingtons, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

4. The Life of Gen Gilbert Motier de Lafayette by Eben R Mack 1859

Almost forty years after his triumphant return to America, Lafayette's pivotal role in the formation of the United States was widely acknowledged. It brought him increasing national recognition and plaudits from other countries seeking similar liberties and freedom from domination by monarchs. Biographies such as this work lavishly chronicled the roles he played in both the American and French revolutions.

By 1860, the US was increasingly bedeviled by its own unresolved disease, slavery. Its presence in the new territories was becoming a burning issue. Widespread opposition to slavery in the North was countered with the fear in the agrarian South that abolition would cause an unprecedented loss of prosperity.

The subtitle of Mack's book characterizes Lafayette as "compatriot and friend of Washington, champion of American independence and of the rights and liberties of mankind." This last encomium was a quality not universally shared by Lafayette's American peers. Washington wrote to Lafayette, and said the scheme you propose to encourage the emancipation of the black people of this country from the state of bondage in which they are held, is striking evidence of the benevolence of your heart." But, while alive, neither Jefferson nor Washington ever freed their slaves and while Washington finally acceded and freed them in his final will, his wish was countermanded by his wife Martha, who noted that "the slaves were property that she brought to the marriage." A few decades after Lafayette's return this issue would plunge the nation into another revolution, one where the enemies were our own American brothers and sisters.

5. The Marquis de Lafayette /Bright Sword for Freedom, Random House 1958

This novel, written for children as a history of Lafayette, was issued with the accompanying signed letter from Hodding Carter, a journalist who wrote for the Greenville Delta-Democrat. Carter died in 1972. The letter movingly recalls the phrase, "Lafayette, we are here," which was uttered by Lieutenant Colonel Charles E. Stanton when he visited Lafayette's grave in Picpus cemetery in Paris in 1917 during World War I. The phrase recalled the debt America owes Lafayette in leading our nation's struggle for liberty.

The author, Hodding Carter, a multi-generational son of the South, left Louisiana as an unrepentant white supremacist to attend Bowdoin College and Columbia University School for Journalism. Upon returning to the South, he had radically altered his position on race. Winning the Pulitzer Prize for "Go for Broke," a piece on the Japanese Internment Camps, Carter's world view was forever changed by his education and his interest in Lafayette. He wrote that his study of Lafayette's life was based on his "admiration for one of the finest men in all of history, a true defender of the rights of man and a staunch foe of oppression everywhere."

6. Lafayette Inspired Materials

Lafayette's visit to America, intended to last four months, extended to almost 13 months and included all 24 American states, which he visited on horseback, coach or by boat. The reception everywhere is described as "rapturous" and "jubilant," a "pageant of love and admiration." There are over 600 villages, towns, counties, colleges, mountains, lakes, rivers and landmarks named in Lafayette's honor. The items below are only a sample of items attesting to his legacy:

- Junior League Cookbook from Lafayette Louisiana
- Framed Bumper Sticker asking, "Have you tasted Lafayette?" from Lafayette, Louisiana Cajun Food Festival
- Will Abstracts, Lafayette County, Mississippi

7. W&M Co. German Porcelain Cream Pitcher with hand-painted Bunker Hill Monument scene app.1860

The pitcher with the image of the Bunker Hill Monument was issued about forty years after the monument's completion. Lafayette's purpose in visiting the site was to lay the cornerstone but also to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Two hundred thousand people lined his route. The procession included eight open carriages, each carrying five veterans of the Battle of Bunker Hill and seven thousand troops in parade dress. Lafayette followed in an open carriage drawn by six white horses. Another 15,000 stood in the bleachers. After a rousing chorus of "Old Hundred," tears streamed down Lafayette's face.

Daniel Webster, the golden-tongued orator from Massachusetts, proclaimed:

"You are connected with both hemispheres and with two generations. Heaven saw fit to ordain that the electric spark

of liberty should be conducted, through you from the New World to the Old; and we, who are now here to perform this

duty of patriotism, have all of us long ago received it in charge from our fathers to cherish your name and your virtues."

Webster may have been eclipsed by John Quincy Adams who, at Lafayette's farewell said:

We shall look upon you as always belonging to us, during the whole of our life, as belonging to our children after us.

You are ours by more than patriotic self-devotion with which you flew to the aid of our fathers at the crisis of our fate;

ours by that unshaken gratitude for your services which is a precious portion of our inheritance; ours by that tie of love,

stronger than death, which has linked your name for endless ages of time with the name of Washington.