

The French Gamecock and America's War for Independence

by Vic Johnson

This narrative is about an unlikely band of conspirators united in a common cause. Their objective was the defeat of the British Army in North America.

If it had not been for their efforts, we would probably be speaking the King's English and drinking warm beer and tea with milk.

The following account underlines a statement attributed to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Stanton of the U.S. Expeditionary Forces of World War I. During a visit to Lafayette's grave in Paris by American soldiers, Stanton proclaimed, "Nous voila, Lafayette ("Lafayette, we are here!") as a tribute to the vital aid given by France to the Continental Army during the War of Independence.

The ambitious young Marquis de Lafayette (later known by some in the Continental Army as the "French Gamecock") became part of a conspiracy that included Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, Silas Deane and others, to bring ships, men and arms to America. It is one of those relatively unknown episodes in American history that made possible the ultimate stunning victory at Yorktown, where the French flotilla blocked the British fleet from the harbor and where 7,000 French troops joined nearly 9,000 American troops to bring about the surrender of Lord Cornwallis and the British Army.

To begin the story: Imagine it is late afternoon in December, 1776. You are in Jonathan's coffeehouse in Change Alley, Paris with a friend. The dim light in the room is heavy with stale tobacco smoke. Most of the tables are occupied by stock brokers, merchants and bankers engaged in quiet conversations. In one corner, a man sits alone.

Your friend cocks his head in the direction of the man and whispers, his name is Silas Deane, a lawyer and merchant, who recently arrived in France from the British colonies in America. They say he is here to drum up support for a rebellion.

"What? A rebellion? Really? News travels so slowly these days."

"Yes," says your friend, "the Americans have adopted a Declaration of Independence. Deane recently presented it to our foreign minister. The Americans have raised a Continental Army and..." He stops in mid-sentence.

Two men have entered the room and joined the American at his table. One of them is Beaumarchais, a well-known playwright; the other is Dr. Edward Bancroft, a British double agent. It becomes evident to you and your friend that Deane does not speak French and Beaumarchais does not speak English. Dr. Bancroft is their translator. From the tone of their conversation, Beaumarchais has good news.

Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais' talents ranged far beyond writing successful plays such as "The Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro". Beaumarchais was an astute businessman and became a gun smuggler during Europe's Seven Years War.

Secretly, Beaumarchais recently organized a phony trading enterprise, Rodrigus Hortalez and Co. He lobbied for a loan from the French government of one million livres. Half of that, converted to gold, would be sent to the Continental Congress. Congress would use the gold to back paper money. Beaumarchais then would buy gunpowder at a discount from the French armory with the other half-million livres. In return, the Americans agreed to ship to France the finest Virginia tobacco valued at one million livres. Beaumarchais planned to resell the tobacco for three times its value and the profit would be used to purchase uniforms, guns and lead to arm 25,000 American troops. All these negotiations would be accomplished without directly involving the French government.

After a long negotiation with Louis XIV, a third partner joins this conspiracy, Chevalier Charles d'Eon de Beaumont, a cross-dressing Captain of the Dragoons, spy, blackmailer and reputedly the best swordsman in France.

So, on this December afternoon, Beaumarchais tells Deane their plans are progressing. The Amphitrite, loaded with 500 tons of equipment, supplies and 130 men, has sailed from Le Havre for New England. Two other ships, the Seine and the Romaine, similarly loaded, would follow.

As news of the Declaration of Independence spread among the French military, many are inspired to join the Continental Army. Young men from titled families come in twos and threes to Deane's apartment seeking commissions. The Marquis de Lafayette arrives with three other graduates of the Academy Versailles, Baron Johan De Kalb, Viscount de Noailles and the Comte de Ségur.

Lafayette had joined the Freemasons. Through affiliation with other Masons, Lafayette learned American colonists and the British were at odds over trade and taxes. He also became an advocate for civil rights and the abolishment of slavery. Deane, also a Mason, would commission Lafayette a major general in the Continental Army.

After one failed attempt to reach America aboard the Amphitrite, Lafayette buys his own ship, La Victoire and, in defiance of an order from Louis XIV not to leave France, sails for Georgetown, South Carolina.

In Philadelphia, the Marquis realizes Congress sees him as just another "French glory seeker". However, Benjamin Franklin, a Mason and now in France as a co-commissioner of Franco-American diplomacy, intercedes with General Washington. Washington makes the young French officer his aide-de-camp.

Lafayette, the army's youngest general, has a brilliant career during the war. He serves the country with courage and honor and is wounded in the battle of Brandywine. In early September of 1781, Generals Lafayette, Anthony Wayne and Von Stuben manage to corner Cornwallis in Yorktown. The British army raises a white flag on Oct. 17.

Lafayette is the first person to be granted honorary American citizenship and will become the last surviving general of the Revolutionary War. Confirmed as a citizen soldier, Lafayette becomes a member of the Society of the Cincinnati. The Society was organized by officers of the Continental Army and, according to one historian, "formed the core of a trans-Atlantic republican conspiracy, aimed at preserving the American Republic and spreading republican ideals around the world, particularly back into Europe."

Upon his return to France, Lafayette is made a field marshal by the king. Citizens of Paris greet Lafayette as a conquering hero. He takes his old seat in the Chamber of Deputies. But France would not long remain at peace. Lafayette plays a part in the disastrous French Revolution. He later spends seven years in an Austrian prison.

Lafayette returns to the U.S. in 1824. The 66-year-old Marquis visits Washington, Philadelphia and many other cities, including the old French colonial town of Kaskaskia, once the capital of Illinois from 1818 until 1823.

The nation is preparing to celebrate on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The visit of this notable surviving soldier enlivened an interest in commemorating with monuments the heroes of the American Revolution. Lafayette memorabilia of every kind—plates, teacups, pitchers, gold medallions—are manufactured. Pictures of Lafayette and several biographies of the Marquis are published.

Writes Andrew Burstine in "Celebrating Fifty Years of Independence": "Everywhere he went, people fainted at his feet, newspapers carried stories... cannons roared and speeches were made and balls were held and everyone who was anyone came out to shake his hand."

The visit of this Revolutionary War hero becomes an emotionally charged event. It solidifies the spirit of American independence and patriotism at a time when European powers are again looking westward, perhaps with intentions of reclaiming lost territory.

(Note: The history of how France saved the American Revolution is told in detail in Joel Richard Paul's book, "Unlikely Allies".)

The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting local history. Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month, March to December. Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment. Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, find them on Facebook at [facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaisgrove) or phone 1-815-933-6452.

Show off your sweet side on Valentine's Day

(Family Features)—Treat family, friends and co-workers to something they will all love this Valentine's Day by making easy and impressive cookies. Start with your favorite roll-out cookie recipe or simply dress up store-bought ones by adding some simple details with icing.

From the cupids at Wilton, here are three ways to leave them smitten with sweets this Valentine's Day:

- **Desserts with dimension.** Triple your treats by stacking three decorated cookies in different sizes together and attach them with icing.

- **Complement with color.** A simple piping technique looks stunning when piped in different colors on your cookies.

- **Get to gifting.** Wrap your finished treats in a Valentine's Day treat bag or box.

For more fun and delicious Valentine's Day recipes, baking tips and inspiration, visit www.wilton.com.

Stackable Ombre Heart Cookies

Favorite roll-out cookie recipe

Royal icing (recipe on wilton.com)

Rose icing color

Heart micro mini icing decorations

Prepare and roll out cookie dough following recipe directions. Use three smallest cutters from four-piece heart nesting cookie cutter set to cut out shapes. Bake and cool cookies.

Divide royal icing into three equal portions and tint three shades of rose. Thin a portion of each shade following recipe directions. Use tip three and full-strength tinted icing to outline cookies. Use thinned tinted icing in cut decorating bag to fill in cookies; gently tap to smooth icing. Let dry overnight.

Use icing to attach cookies, stacking largest to smallest; place icing decoration on top.

Scalloped Heart Cookies
Favorite roll-out cookie recipe

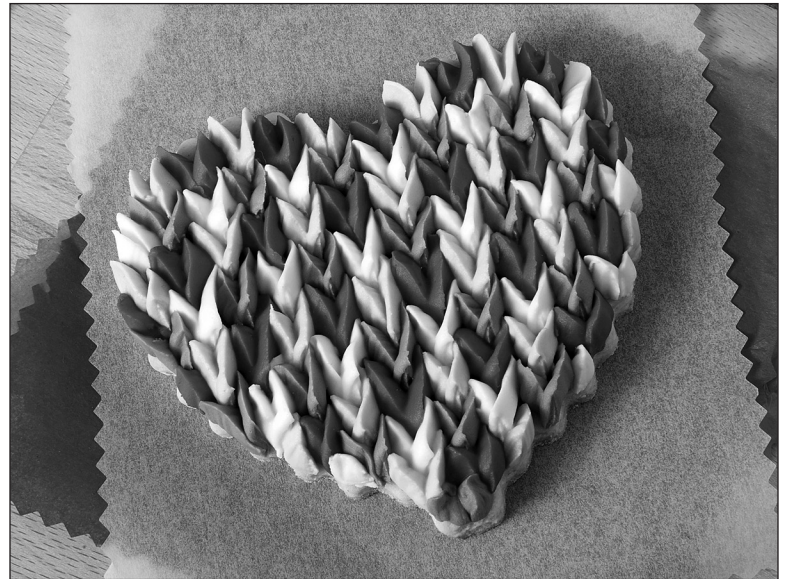
Ready-to-use white creamy decorator icing

Icing colors: burgundy, red-red and Christmas red

Prepare and roll out dough following recipe directions. Use largest cutter from the four-piece heart nesting cookie cutter set to cut out shape. Bake and cool cookies.

Divide icing into four equal portions. Tint one of each portion light burgundy, dark burgundy and combination of red-red/Christmas red. Reserve last portion white.

Starting from top edge of heart, use tip 102 and icing in dark burgundy, light burgundy, red and white to pipe V-shaped groups of two petals, one piped from left and one from right, to create row of petals in alternating colors. Repeat with second row between petals in first row. Continue to repeat pattern until cookies are covered.



Scalloped Heart Cookies



Stackable Ombre Heart Cookies