

Lafayette's Spirit Alive at AFL's Annual Meeting in New Hampshire!

June 12-14, 2008

by Anne McCauley

Our member/N.H. resident Alan Hoffman, who recently wrote "Lafayette in America—1824 and 1825" (Levasseur's diary translated from French into English), led our group of thirty five people on foot and by bus across the state of New Hampshire, showing us artifacts of Lafayette's celebrations, speaking Lafayette's personal greetings at the state legislature hall, traveling on Lafayette's own route, dining in a Colonial tavern, walking in a Colonial village, and visiting a Masonic room, where Lafayette probably would have been invited-- gave us all a "reliving " of a very happy period of history for all Lafayette followers!

This truly unforgettable weekend for The American Friends of Lafayette began on Thursday evening at the Barley House restaurant in Concord with our member Carmino Ravosa singing and playing his electronic keyboard, before and after dinner, his original version of Lafayette's life in rhyme and with humor (every other line!). Our group laughed so much – a lovely start to the weekend! Carmino's wife Claire had baked Lafayette's favorite Pennsylvania rice cake, which was first served to Lafayette by a Mennonite lady while he was recovering from his leg injury at the battle of Brandywine. After we returned to the hotel Claire shared the cake and the recipe with us and we enjoyed it with fine wine that Benoit Gizard brought from his family vineyard in France!

On Friday morning Alan Hoffman led our group on a pleasant walk from our hotel in Concord to the beautiful Greek Revival New Hampshire State House, with its gold dome, which is the NH State capital building. After Gayle Randol found the stone engraved words on the outside of the building recording Lafayette's visit in 1824 and 1825, we went inside to the Legislative and Senate Halls, various exhibits, and the Governor's reception room.

In the Legislative room, Alan Hoffman read Lafayette's exact words of greeting to New Hampshire Americans as his traveling companions, his son George Washington Lafayette and his secretary sat in the audience. On the walls were life-sized portraits of President Washington and President Franklin Pierce, who was from New Hampshire. (This was our first introduction to President Pierce, who author Peter Wallner would discuss at dinner that evening.)

From the elegant N.H. State Capital and the NH Historical Society and Library in Concord, we traveled by coach to Durham, NH, the home of The University of New Hampshire, where we had lunch in the Colonial tavern room at the Three Chimneys Inn. We were honored by the presence of Francois Gauthier, French Consul General of New England, and Marion Ellis, a Durham resident and wife of David Ellis, President Emeritus of Lafayette College.

In the afternoon we toured Strawberry Banke village and museum in Portsmouth, NH. We walked the hot dusty streets of the village going in and out of stores and houses to discover for ourselves how people lived and worked in this typical American neighborhood from the late 17th to the mid-20th century. It was here that we all sat in an upstairs Masonic room in the Pitt Tavern, which was visited by Lafayette in 1824. Lafayette's and Washington's close bond was partly because they both were Masons.

Guided tours of the Warner House, and the mansion of Ichabod Goodwin, New Hampshire's Governor during the Civil War, showed us New Hampshire life at its elegant best. Marilyn Hoffman's book on fine antique furniture, which was available as a reference throughout the day, reinforced the fact that we had seen the best work of American Craftsmen.

We returned to Concord for dinner at The Common Man restaurant, following which Dr. Peter A. Wallner, Library Director of the New Hampshire Historical Society, and author of "Franklin Pierce: New Hampshire's Favorite Son," addressed our group about the life, politics, and personal tragedies of America's 14th president.

Our program concluded Saturday noon following our annual business meeting.

Thank you Carmino and Claire for your entertainment. Thank you Marilyn and Alan for your historical tour.