LAFAYETTE IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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The visit of Marie Jean Paul Roch Yves Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, to America, nearly half a century after the distinguished service he rendered to the struggling young nation in its fight for independence, was notable in the history of that nation in the later years of its establishment, and it was an event in the career of the eminent Frenchman. The visit to America came after an invitation by resolution of the Congress of the United States, along with a personal letter of like import written by President James Monroe under date of February 24, 1824. In this letter Lafayette was asked to designate any French port to which a frigate would be sent to convey him to our shores. The invitation to visit the country was cordially accepted, but the tender of a vessel was declined, the voyage across the Atlantic being made on the Cadmus, an American merchantman, which sailed from Havre on July 12, 1824. Lafayette landed at New York on August 15. On this voyage and the tour of the country that followed he had the companionship of his son, George Washington Lafayette, and his private secretary, A. Levasseur. The secretary later wrote an account of the tour which was published in France and was translated and published in this country also.  

In the latter months of 1824 and much of the year following Lafayette visited many sections of the country, covering much of the territory

1 Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on October 26, 1917. Dr. Wiley is the author of Sim Greene and Tom the Tinker's Men (1906), a novel of the Whiskey Insurrection, and of a number of historical works, including Elizabeth and Her Neighbors (1936) and Monongahela: The River and Its Region (1937). Ed.  
2 P. C. Headley, The Life of General Lafayette, 356 (Boston, 1876); A. Levasseur, Lafayette in America, translated by John D. Godman, M.D., 19-15 (Philadelphia, 1829). The latter work also supplies some data for many of the statements following in addition to indicated citations from it. Another work that has brief references to many of the matters to be noted is J. Bennett Nolan's Lafayette in America, Day by Day (Baltimore, 1934).
from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. This pilgrimage led him through most of the principal cities of the Atlantic coast section, with stops of some days in each, the longest being in Washington. From there the journey was southward, with frequent stops in the South Atlantic states and then through the Gulf states to New Orleans. Thence the pilgrimage proceeded up the Mississippi River as far as St. Louis and up the Ohio to Wheeling, with side trips on the way. The tour witnessed a continuous ovation for the distinguished visitor; he was lauded in oratory, was honored by parading thousands, proceeded over ways strewn with flowers by youth and beauty, and had pleasing converse with many surviving comrades in arms of the Revolutionary days.  

After leaving Wheeling, the short journey across the Panhandle portion of the present state of West Virginia brought the party to the Pennsylvania line, and here begins that which is the chief theme of this paper. As elsewhere, Lafayette and his party were accompanied by an escort from the last place of stopping, along with the Governor of Ohio and his staff. At the state line the company was met by the welcoming committee from Washington, Pennsylvania. The first stop in this state was at West Alexander, where all were regaled with refreshments by the people of the place and its vicinity. An occurrence alleged to have been one of the features of Lafayette's stop at West Alexander will be referred to later. At Claysville there was a warm greeting and more refreshments. The stop for the night was made at Washington.  

In traveling over this part of the journey Lafayette and his immediate party occupied carriages. The cavalcade reached Washington between four and five o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, May 25. The escorting line included the military, General Lafayette with his son and secretary, the chairman of the local committee riding with the guest of honor, Revolutionary officers and soldiers, the local committee as Lafayette's suite, Governor Morris of Ohio, his aides and other visitors,  

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the Masonic fraternity, the clergy, physicians, officers of the court, members of the bar, officers of the corporation, members of Congress and Assembly, magistrates, and citizens generally. These were received at the square in front of the courthouse by a company of young ladies in patriotic array, representing the states, who sang a song arranged for the occasion, and a corps of small boys in uniform, who were announced as "the future defenders of our American liberty." As the march proceeded the representatives of the states waved flags, and other young ladies strewed the way with flowers.

Rain was falling as these things were enacted, but it did not in any degree dampen the ardor of the throng, and the line moved to Morris' Globe Hotel where a platform had been erected and the formal ceremonies of welcome proceeded. This welcome was warmly voiced in a speech by Judge Baird and the chief guest of honor responded fittingly. The same hotel entertained the distinguished visitors for the night, and a banquet was one of the features of the crowded program. But, notwithstanding these strenuous doings, the travelers were up and on their way at six o'clock the next morning.\footnote{Washington Examiner, May 28, 1825; Washington Reporter, May 30, June 6, 1825.}

The only break in the journey from Washington to Uniontown, as far as record has been found, was at Brownsville, where a stop was made for lunch. Lafayette was received on the west side of the Monongahela River by a delegation of citizens of the town and neighborhood and all were conveyed across the stream in a ferry-flat which was neatly carpeted and decorated with arches. Twenty-four young girls, arrayed in white, represented the states of the Union, and on arrival at the east shore they crowned their honored visitor with flowers. At the water's edge he was met by a company of veterans of the War of 1812, who, along with a great throng, escorted the party to the Brashear Inn. A generous meal was spread there and when it had been disposed of Lafayette addressed the crowd from the door of the inn. His reception was of great warmth and many crowded forward to clasp his hand. An effort was made to detain him longer than the time he had allotted himself, but Sheriff George Craft reminded him that a large number of citizens were awaiting his arrival at Uniontown. So, with announce-
ment that he was in the custody of the sheriff and could not tarry, he took his departure.\footnote{Levasseur, \textit{Lafayette in America}, 2:179. Most of the information on which the paragraph devoted to Brownsville is based was furnished the author by Jesse Coldren, A.M., of Brownsville. It was imparted to him a number of years ago by William Graham, who, as a boy of thirteen years, was a witness of the scenes he described. He retained vivid memories of these scenes through the years. His description of Lafayette's personal appearance was that he "had gotten heavy and his face was very red and beefy."}

At Brownsville Lafayette had entered the county which had been formed and named for him at the end of the Revolutionary War, and the warmth of his reception within it was especially notable. Travel of this day, Thursday, May 26, was all on the National Pike, completed only a few years before and already a busy artery of traffic. Arrival at Uniontown was late in the afternoon and the Lafayette entourage became part of a great parade which traversed the principal streets, under triumphal arches, and ended at the courthouse. At its front a lavishly decorated pavilion held the guests of honor and those chiefly active in welcoming them. Albert Gallatin, then a world figure, made the principal address, in which he referred to the emancipation of Spanish colonies on the continent to the south and the freeing of Greece, then engaging much of public thought. The great Frenchman, friend of human freedom and proponent of Greece's cause, replied suitably. Lafayette and party were ensconced in the Spottsylvania House for the night, where the usual banquet was a feature, while buildings throughout the town were brilliantly illuminated.

Early the next morning Mr. Gallatin conducted the Lafayette party to his fine home place, Friendship Hill, overlooking the Monongahela River near New Geneva, the village established and named by the statesman, with memories of his native Switzerland. The day and night were spent there with lavish hospitality dispensed by the host. Besides a board loaded with the best the land and the stream afforded, a contemporary chronicler tells that "Mr. Gallatin's best liquors were strewn in profusion on the tables." The house was thronged constantly with those who came to pay their respects, and little time or opportunity was left for the quiet interchange for which the principals may have wished. As Gallatin's biographer puts it: "There could be little sensible or con-
nected conversation in the midst of such excitement.” Early the next morning saw a return to Uniontown for one more day of honoring the nation’s guest there. An event of the day was a reception at Mrs. Walker’s hotel and it is recorded that “the evening was spent in gaiety and hilarity.” If Lafayette could return to Uniontown today he would be confronted with a statue of himself, standing on the grounds of the courthouse. It surmounted an earlier structure which was the seat of justice for Fayette County.7

An escort, military and civic, was provided for the morning of Sunday, May 29, to speed the travelers on their way. That day’s program was made the subject of intensive study by the present writer many years ago, and the results of that investigation were set forth in the newspaper of which he was then the editor. A number of persons who had been actors in the day’s doings, then still living, were interviewed and their reports set down. Some years later a similar study was made by another local historian and his findings were published in the same journal. Much that is in the paragraphs immediately following is derived from those publications.8

The road led past Rehoboth Presbyterian and Fell’s Methodist Episcopal churches, and the worshipping congregations were much perturbed by the firing at frequent intervals of a cannon by a company of artillery which was in the escorting contingent. The confusion was accentuated when a number of horses belonging to the worshippers, frightened by the disturbance, broke loose and dashed away, bringing abrupt termination of the services at one of the churches.

There remain no certain records that any stop on the way was made on this rather long Sunday morning pilgrimage, though it is presumed that George Washington’s Perryopolis would receive some attention in passing. Captain Gabriel Peterson was host of the Black Horse Tavern, a well known public house of the time, at an important road crossing,


8 Four or five eyewitnesses were interviewed. It was told that Lafayette was about six feet in height, of portly build, genial and kindly in disposition. His son was described as very tall and slender, with an unusually large nose, apparently in his mid-thirties as to age.
and some of his descendants tell of a family tradition that the company made a brief stop there and enjoyed the hospitality of the place. Certain it is that Captain Peterson, a gallant Revolutionary veteran, was in the company which escorted Lafayette from there and through a few days following.

But there remains abundant testimony of the midday stop in Elizabeth Town (the present Elizabeth). The place was reached in the early afternoon hours. The local military company, made up largely of adherents of the Presbyterian, Associate Reformed, and Covenanter faiths, could not be induced to parade on the Sabbath Day, but a citizens’ committee graciously received the visitors and entertained them hospitably. One enthusiastic citizen came forward with the suggestion that the only gesture they could make, commensurate with the importance of the occasion, was to burn the town! But more conservative counsel prevailed and the improvements in the place were allowed to stand for that and the succeeding days.

A fine dinner at Major John Walker’s hotel, prepared by ladies of the town, refreshed the party after the long and tiresome journey. Lafayette then received the throng of townspeople and many from other places, including a goodly number of Revolutionary War veterans. Each received a handshake and kind word. Later he addressed the crowd from the front steps of a neighboring house. Among the visitors was Louis Bollman, of Monongahela, brother of Dr. Justus Erich Bollman who had made an effort which nearly succeeded in rescuing Lafayette when he was a political prisoner of the King of Prussia, in the castle of Olmutz in Austria. Towards evening Lafayette and his party, with a committee from the point of departure, were taken in a canopied and decorated open boat, rowed by three stalwart young men, on the next stage of the journey. One of the eleven men who occupied the little vessel retained vivid memories of the passage more than half a century later, and was able, with the aid of other survivors of the time, to recite the list of them. Lafayette entertained his fellow voyagers with many interesting memories of his participation in the American Revolution and exciting experiences later in France. Many persons rowed out in
skiffs on the way and greeted the hero. The destination was the Braddock battlefield, then a farm with the fine country mansion of George Wallace, and there the travelers and some of those who accompanied them from the last stop rested for the night.9

A committee from Pittsburgh met the party on its arriving there. In the morning, Monday, May 30, came a military escort from the city, and this stage of the journey is thus described by Levasseur:

The road which led from Braddock's Field to Pittsburgh, although many miles long, was soon covered by a considerable crowd, in the midst of which the cavalcade slowly advanced towards the city. On the road we visited the United States Arsenal. The discharge of twenty-four guns announced the entrance of General Lafayette into that establishment, when Major Churchill and the officers under his command invited him to breakfast. The general was received on his entrance into the city by magistrates at the head of the people and the militia in the order of battle. I have had to describe so many triumphal entries into great and rich cities whilst narrating General Lafayette's incomparable journey through twenty-four states of the American Union, to avoid repetition I am obliged to pass over in silence a great many of receptions whose principal features were alike. It is for this reason I omit the account of his reception at the National Hotel in Pittsburgh; although that city yielded to no other in the United States in the splendor of her festivals and in her sentiments of patriotic gratitude.10

But the newspapers of the time recorded and preserved many details of the event and later historians have rescued others. The arsenal at which stop was made was on the bank of the Allegheny River, in the Lawrenceville of that time, now a populous district of the greater city. There the welcome to Pittsburgh was extended by Mayor John M. Snowden, who then entered the carriage with Lafayette and rode with him into the city after the general had reviewed the military escort as the line took up its march. It included, besides the various military commands, Revolutionary officers and soldiers in carriages, sons of Revolutionary soldiers riding alongside of Lafayette’s carriage which was

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9 Elizabeth Herald, May 30, 1879; September 24, October 1, 1897; Dr. John E. Shaffer in Elizabeth Herald, April 23, 1886; Pittsburgh Gazette, June 3, 1825; Pittsburgh Mercury, June 13, 1825. This author's Elizabeth and Her Neighbors, 241–243, gives further particulars of Lafayette's visit to Elizabeth.

10 Levasseur, Lafayette in America, 2:181, 182.
drawn by four white horses, police, councilmen, county and city officials, judges of the courts, clergymen, doctors, and many other citizens. A large number of children lined a portion of thronged Penn Street, bearing portraits of Lafayette and Washington and strewing the way with flowers.

Upon the arrival of the procession at the Mansion House, otherwise designated as Darlington’s Tavern, at Fifth and Wood Streets, the Honorable Charles Shaler delivered an address of welcome on behalf of the citizens and E. Gazzam spoke for Pittsburgh’s Associated Young Men and the school children. Lafayette responded fittingly and with feeling, after which he received the people. A stop of two days in Pittsburgh had every hour of daylight and until late at night crowded with the features of a cordial welcome given the nation’s guest. A banquet in the evening wound up the first day. Tuesday witnessed receptions in a number of homes, “an elegant dinner served at Col. Ramsey’s hotel” in the afternoon, and a round of visits to certain factories of the city where the visitors were interested spectators of iron and glass manufacturing processes. While in Pittsburgh Lafayette was joined by M. Syon, a young Frenchman who resided in Washington, D. C., and whom the general had invited to travel with him.11

Wednesday morning, June 1, saw the travelers again on their way, with an escort of their most recent entertainers, and the days that followed witnessed further honors heaped on the friend of the nation in its time of stress, at every stop within the state. The first such place of tarrying was Butler which was reached in the early afternoon hours. There was the inevitable welcoming parade, a luncheon at Mechling’s Inn, a reception of the inhabitants and a review of Revolutionary soldiers. It was four o’clock in the afternoon when Lafayette and his party were again on their way and one o’clock the following morning when they arrived at Mercer, where the Hackett House lodged them. Little

11 Charles W. Dahlinger, “General Lafayette’s Visit to Pittsburgh in 1825,” in Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, 8:129 (July, 1925); Thomas Clinton Pears, “Visit of Lafayette to the Old Glass Works of Bakewell, Pears and Co.,” in Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, 8:195 (October, 1925); Pittsburgh Mercury, June 1, 1825; Pittsburgh Gazette, June 3, 1825; Washington Reporter, June 13, 1825.
further is recorded concerning the stay in that place, for the party took
the road again the following morning and arrived at Meadville at one
in the afternoon.  

Arrival there was announced by the firing of cannon, and a throng
assembled at James Gibson’s hotel where Lafayette greeted the people
in turn with kindly words and cordial handshakes. A line of Revolu-
tionary soldiers was drawn up and did him honor. The party then repaired
to Samuel Torbet’s hotel where a fine luncheon had been prepared by
ladies of the town, to which ample justice was done. Lafayette was
urged to remain for a more formal dinner in the evening, but declined
regretfully because of important engagements in the near future.
Among other things, he greatly desired to reach Boston within two
weeks, for June 17 would bring the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of
Bunker Hill, which was to be celebrated by laying the corner stone of
the monument to be erected there. He accomplished this objective and
had part in the ceremonies of that occasion, but to do so necessitated a
hurried journey from the time he left Pittsburgh. But in the crowded
two hours of his stay in Meadville he took time for a hasty visit to Alle-
gheny College, then rounding out the tenth year of its existence. A sad
incident of the Meadville visit was the loss of a hand by an Irish volun-
teer artilleryman when a cannon was fired prematurely.  

The night stop was at Waterford, at whose historic Fort Le Boeuf,
nearly three-quarters of a century before, the youthful George Wash-
ington, bearing the message of Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, sought
in vain to stay the progress of the French military forces then sweeping
down from Canada. Greetings of the inhabitants and a banquet, with
the usual toasts and responses, wound up the day. On the following day,
Friday, June 3, Erie was reached, where the party tarried for some
hours. The distinguished visitor was formally welcomed in an address
by Burgess John C. Wallace, and the usual parade, reception, and ban-
quet marked the occasion. The feast was spread in the open, beneath

12 History of Mercer County, Pennsylvania, Brown, Runk & Co., publishers, 337 (Chi-
cago, 1888); Butler Sentinel, June 4, 1825.
13 Warner’s History of Crawford County, Pennsylvania, 381 (Chicago, 1881); Craw-
ford Messenger (Meadville), June 9, 1825.
sails that had been taken from British vessels captured by Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry on the occasion of his notable naval victory on Lake Erie, a dozen years before, in the War of 1812.

This was Lafayette's last day in western Pennsylvania, for he and his companions left Erie at about three o'clock in the afternoon and within a few hours were pursuing their eastward way through the state of New York. That state and New England showed him the same signal honors that had attended all his previous journeying of nearly four thousand miles. His second visits to the cities of the east coast continued the ovation which was maintained until he sailed, on September 9, 1825, from the mouth of the Potomac River, on the United States frigate Brandywine, with a great throng of distinguished persons waving a farewell.\(^{14}\)

An occurrence long told of in connection with Lafayette's tour has interested the present writer, who has sought to clear up some features of the story which were not in entire agreement. This later study of the subject, instead of elucidating has served to complicate it. Briefly, the matter as it first came to his attention in 1879, had reference to first aid said to have been rendered the French general when he was wounded in the battle of Brandywine and his meeting, many years afterwards, with the soldier who had thus favored him. Various persons living in Elizabeth in the year above named told the writer that they remembered the occurrence as an episode of Lafayette's visit to the place. The accounts agreed that Lafayette, when he met and recognized the old soldier, embraced and fervently kissed him. One substantial citizen, Richard C. Stephens, justice of the peace when he gave the testimony, had, as a sturdy youth in 1825, pulled a pair of oars in speeding the eminent guest down the Monongahela to Braddock's Field. He gave the Revolutionary soldier's name as Little and his place of residence as somewhere in Westmoreland County. But others who claimed to have been eyewitnesses of the occurrence, told Dr. John E. Shaffer, a few years later, that the soldier was John Lane, of the Elizabeth vicinity.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) John Miller, *A Twentieth Century History of Erie County, Pennsylvania*, 1:613 (Chicago, 1909); Levasseur, Lafayette in America, 2:256.

\(^{15}\) Elizabeth Herald, May 30, 1879; Dr. John E. Shaffer in Elizabeth Herald, April 23, 1886.
Another very similar story has been found, with a different locale and another name for one of the chief actors. The first stop of the Lafayette party after crossing the line from Virginia into Pennsylvania was at the village of West Alexander. As Forrest's Washington County history tells it, Robert Humphrey, founder of that place, who had borne the wounded general from the battlefront at Brandywine and cared for him until the arrival of a physician, was the first person to greet him on his arrival at West Alexander. The account continues: "Tradition tells that as soon as Lafayette saw Mr. Humphrey at West Alexander he rushed up and embraced him, and while there spent most of his time in Mr. Humphrey's company, kissing him on both cheeks and embracing him just before he started on his journey to Washington."16

Levasseur's account of this or a similar occurrence differs in some apparently essential particulars from both of the foregoing recitals. His book, in telling of the French general's meeting with a group of veteran soldiers of the Revolution while in Pittsburgh, says: "One of them, addressing his old general, asked him if he still remembered the young soldier who first offered to carry him on a litter when he was wounded at the battle of Brandywine. Lafayette, after having attentively surveyed him, threw himself into his arms, crying, 'No, I have not forgotten Wilson, and it is a great happiness to be permitted to embrace him today!' Wilson himself, who asked the question, was much affected and the incident penetrated the spectators in a most touching manner." A current newspaper account of the Pittsburgh visit of Lafayette mentions this incident, but says Wilson brought it about by asking him if he remembered the young man who assisted him over a fence immediately after he had received the wound, and the French general recognized him as such.17

The foregoing few paragraphs serve to illustrate conditions which sometimes face the careful historian in his efforts to sift records and traditions, in an honest endeavor to ascertain and preserve the facts. It is well established that stories verbally circulated are wont to make gains in the retelling. Likewise, daily in the courts of justice it is made plain

17 Levasseur, Lafayette in America, 2:182, 183; Pittsburgh Gazette, June 3, 1825.
that eyewitnesses often see identical objects and operations differently, and so detail them in their accounts. Here were three reported occurrences, having various points in common, yet widely separated in their alleged places of action and involving a man or men said to bear four different names. One account is attested by printed records of the time, though these are not identical in every particular. Another was told by alleged eyewitnesses known by this writer to have been of good reputation for truthfulness, though their accounts had some variation. Mr. Forrest, the Washington County historian, on being appealed to, said that the account of the meeting of Lafayette and the old soldier, given in his book, was based entirely on neighborhood tradition. Accounts of Lafayette's tour through the section, given by contemporary county newspapers with a considerable measure of detail, do not mention the alleged New Alexander occurrence.

If all the accounts as we have them were recitals of facts in the main, it becomes apparent that Lafayette received aid at a time when such assistance was greatly needed, at the hands of at least three different comrades, and, by an astonishing series of coincidences, they all turned up opportunely nearly fifty years later to afford him occasions for exercising his Gallic penchant for masculine osculation!