

Menotomy Minutes



NEWSLETTER OF THE ARLINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUMMER 2024



The Lafayette Tour: 200 years ago

By Richard A. Duffy

Note: For easy understanding by modern readers, current place names are used to describe the locations of events that took place 200 years ago, when Arlington was the independent town named West Cambridge.

A bicentennial observance

Revolutionary War Major General the Marquis de Lafayette was a French aristocrat who gave not only his personal battlefield services to the Continental Army of the newly formed United States of America, but who also was instrumental in bringing his native country into the Franco-American alliance that was decisive in the ultimate victory of the former British colonies.

For well-over a century afterwards, the mention of “Lafayette” would not have required even the brief description above, such was his contribution taught and understood as heroic by generations of American schoolchildren. But as learning U.S. history naturally came to encompass other major episodes, Lafayette receded into the background.

The acclaimed 2015 Broadway musical “Hamilton” suddenly brought Lafayette’s importance back into the literal spotlight, albeit with time-and-place modifications that were not historical but done for dramatic narrative purposes. Currently America encounters another opportunity to celebrate the contributions of Lafayette as it observes the 200th anniversary of his celebrated travel through the United States in 1824 and 1825.

“The Nation’s Guest”

President James Munroe and the United States Congress saw in Lafayette, the last living major general of the American Revolution, an embodiment of what we would call today “star power” to generate patriotism in the United States and enthusiasm for its upcoming fiftieth



(Continued on page 4)

One of a pair of kidskin gloves, 1824.

President's Corner

Greetings!

As summer winds down, I am thinking about all that we have accomplished so far in 2024, including our monthly program lectures, our exhibits, our tours of the Jason Russell House and grounds, and our summer Beer Garden. We are very proud of our staff, Sara, Melinda, and now Matt, and all that they do to oversee the Society's operations, but a very large share of the work is done by volunteers and members of the Society. Volunteers bring enthusiasm and energy to guide tours of the house and property, help with the intake and cataloging of artifacts in our collections, research background information, help with our events, and generally keep the Society ticking as we serve our mission to "preserve, interpret, and share Arlington's history".

This work is interesting, a great deal of fun, and has led to many volunteers taking on larger roles with the Society. This, in fact, is how I found myself in my current role: I originally volunteered to work with the Society's collection of antique

glass plate negatives (working with historic photo processes is a hobby of mine) and, well, one thing led to another, and I found myself helping out with everything from collections intake to museum renovation to grounds improvement. As we continue

I encourage anyone who has an interest in learning more about Arlington's history, working in a museum environment, and helping to share that knowledge with the public to reach out to us about the possibility of joining us and helping out

to recover from the effects on our operations during the pandemic, we would love to do more, including more open hours for touring, and additional volunteers would help us do just that. We're very proud of our tour guides, and the guide team does an excellent job of training new guides.

So, I encourage anyone who has an interest in learning more about Arlington's history, working in a museum environment, and helping to share that knowledge with the public to reach out to us about the possibility of joining us and helping out. You can learn more at our website: arlingtonhistorical.org under the "Support" tab.

~ Robert Brazile



Monument to
Fallen Crown Soldiers
Who died on April 19th, 1775
Dedication Ceremony
September 7, 2024
10AM
(Rain Date September 14th)
Old Burying Ground
Arlington, Massachusetts

A Farewell from Sara

I am writing my last contribution to this fantastic newsletter, because in June I began my curatorial position at Historic Newton. I was with the Arlington Historical Society for nearly 11 years and it was a tough decision to move, as I remain so excited about the Society's current trajectory and the many exciting plans in the works, but it will certainly be an interesting time for the fresh perspective and experience of the new director, Matt Beres.

I came to the Society with a short but strong background in small museum management, especially in curatorial work in grant writing, but no experience in historic preservation or working with a board. At the time there were some serious concerns about structural and preservation issues with the Jason Russell House, collections records mostly in paper form, and two exhibition spaces needing new content.

I had to give myself a crash course in historic preservation, but we have worked our way through the phased program of preservation projects on the JRH and participated in a ballistics study – where we found new bullet holes, among other things. Another project was to rework the “Assembly Room” that leads into the Jason Russell House. After years of researching, moving, deaccessioning, meeting, and planning, the new exhibition “Menotomy – Road to Revolution” now provides a more cohesive and informative preview to JRH Tours.

Today most of the collection is digitized and online, including consistent indexing of records as links, giving users a chance to deepen their learning. This material was recently “harvested” by Digital Commonwealth, to further our reach. In the non-virtual world, we accomplished HVAC upgrades and re-housing our most at-risk collection items into new hanging storage and high capacity rolling shelving units.

The most exciting project was the renovation of the Smith



Outgoing museum director Sara Lundberg receives a citation from the Massachusetts State Senate, presented by David Emer, legislative director and general counsel.

building into a changing exhibition space. Thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers who had sudden free time during the pandemic and some money secured for us from our dedicated board, we were able to fully update the space.

And along the way I led a rebranding effort, helped to re-launch this printed newsletter, got a graduate degree in museum studies, and even had a baby. Every accomplishment depended on help from my fellow staff member, Melinda Howard, and on volunteers who worked with me on so many things. I tried to save the more boring jobs for myself so that the volunteers had something exciting to work on, but so often they happily took on tedious tasks, dealt with my fast talking, my disorganized desk, and often my multi-tracked trains of thought. I am deeply grateful and enjoyed working with so many of you. I hope our paths cross again someday. ♦

Hello to Matt!



The Society is pleased to welcome Matt Beres as museum director. Matt started at the beginning of July and lost no time getting into the many projects that were already planned or even “mid-flight” as the Society approaches the significant milestone of the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution in 2025.

In addition to his new role, Matt serves as the curator of the Wilmington Town Museum at the Col. Joshua Harnden Tavern. With a strong commitment to preserving local history and a love for the outdoors, Matt brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the Society.

Originally from Waterbury, Conn., Matt graduated from Unity College in 2021 with a B.S. in parks and forest resources. He is now completing a master's degree in museum administration at Norwich University.

Matt's career includes roles with several state and local agencies. He has served as a state park ranger with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and as a historical tour guide at the Town of Concord Visitor Center, where he continues to work on weekends.

Please introduce yourself to Matt the next time you are at a Society event!

anniversary.

At the express invitation of the Federal government, Lafayette arrived in New York on August 15, 1824, and would make 170 stops over the course of ten months, travelling the length and breadth of the United States as far west as the 24th and most recently admitted state, Missouri.

On Saturday, August 25, Lafayette was welcomed to the town of Charlestown, then part of Middlesex County. Taking part in the procession were members of the local militia from Arlington, who joined with those of Cambridge and Waltham to create one of two battalions that formed a regiment of light infantry.

Two visits to Arlington

An unadvertised glimpse of Lafayette in Arlington occurred on Tuesday, August 28. It was literally a “drive-by,” with the general traveling from Charlestown, past the site of the 1774 Powder Alarm in Somerville. From there he continued via Broadway into Arlington Center, then turned on to Medford Street to reach his destination of former

Governor John Brooks’s home in Medford. Few roads existed that would have enabled a more direct route, and even fewer bridges for him to cross the Mystic River. Did the lucky few locals who were in the right place at the right time to observe Lafayette’s carriage know that it was him, or just that they had crossed paths with an important someone?

By contrast, Lafayette’s journey to Arlington on Thursday, September 2, was a public celebration. The general departed Boston in the early afternoon after taking leave of the governor and governor’s council. He traveled to Cambridge and from Harvard Square he continued west on Concord Avenue into what is now Belmont, then headed north on Pleasant Street. He is said to have made an unscheduled stop at the home of Col. Jeduthan Wellington, a Menotomy veteran of the Revolutionary War. There he was refreshed with a cider. The glass from which he drank instantly became a treasured relic which was donated in 1902 to the Arlington Historical Society.

Historical records of Lafayette’s short visit through Arlington describe different aspects of the experience. John



A reenactment of Lafayette’s visit, as imagined for the 1913 Arlington Pageant.

Foster wrote in "A Sketch of the Tour of General Lafayette" (1824) that "the citizens were assembled, in front of the [First Parish] meeting house to welcome him. Beautiful arches were thrown across the road, with suitable inscriptions."

In "The Memoirs of General Lafayette" (written about, but not by Lafayette himself in 1824), Boston publisher E. G. Hood recorded that in "West Cambridge [Arlington], the whole population of the town were assembled to honor the friend and guest of the nation, and to gratify their patriotic feelings by beholding this justly celebrated personage. Artillery corps stationed on the eminences [hillsides] adjoining the public road [Massachusetts Avenue] saluted him as he passed; and the country rung with loud huzzas and joyful acclamations" that effectively escorted him to the Lexington line, where he was met by troops to lead him to elaborate ceremonies held on the Battle Green, before he continued to Concord.

In the afterglow of Lafayette

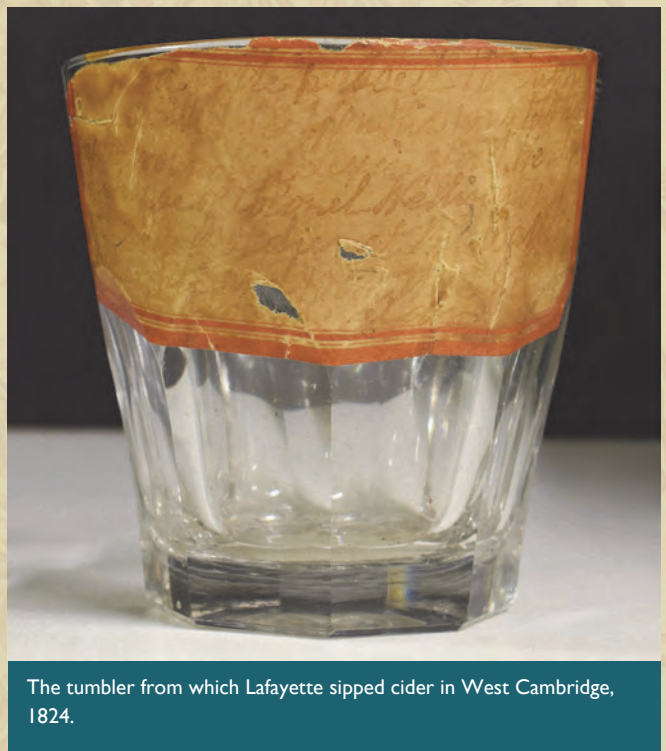
Lafayette returned to Massachusetts at the conclusion of his national tour. A renowned Freemason, he performed the ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill Monument on June 17, 1825. He departed with a box of soil from the excavation for the monument, and his body was laid to rest beneath it in the Picpus Cemetery of Paris, where an American flag always flies above his tomb.

Lafayette would be honored by many place names in the United States, with some variations deriving from an earlier spelling of his noble title as La Fayette. In East Arlington, the 1896 "Whittemore Park" subdivision included Lafayette Street, perhaps under the longstanding assumption that the general had made his 1824 ceremonial entrance from Cambridge on Massachusetts Avenue and had passed by this location. In Arlington Heights, Fayette Street was laid out in a 1911 subdivision. It is an indirect commemoration, as it relates to the town of Fayette, Maine, which was named to honor the general.

Perhaps the most poignant Arlington honor to Lafayette happened at the Jason Russell House. The general did not make a stop there, but his passage almost certainly would have been witnessed by Lydia Russell Teel, a daughter of Jason Russell's son, Noah. She made her home there with her husband, Thomas Hall Teel. Seven weeks after Lafayette's visit, Lydia gave birth to a son, christened Albert Lafayette Teel. ♦



The ace of spades with Lafayette's image, in a souvenir deck of playing cards, 1825.



The tumbler from which Lafayette sipped cider in West Cambridge, 1824.

Keys to Lafayette scarf symbols



By Richard Duffy

The souvenir Lafayette scarf is rich in iconography. Olive branches, a traditional symbol of peace, create an allover foliate pattern arranged to create openings that reveal two central decorative motifs.

The first, the medallion bearing the WELCOME LAFAYETTE inscription, is framed with a crown of laurel leaves, symbolizing victory, gathered at the bottom with a bow. Piercing the medallion is a liberty pole topped with a Phrygian cap, also referred to as the red cap of liberty or liberty cap. In the center of the medallion is a stylized badge of honor with a six-pointed star with a radiating surround.

The second motif is heavily charged with representative objects: a military drum with laid-down weapons of war beneath it. Above this rises an American eagle holding an olive branch in its beak, its spread wings supporting a staff resembling a branch from the Tree of Liberty, adorned with a garland of laurel leading the eye to the Phrygian cap.

The center ensemble of the second motif is flanked by thirteen-star American flags with crossed staffs. This is an unusual and perhaps erroneous depiction, given that the blue field with stars (also known as the union or the canton of the flag) is shown pointed down, and the tassels near the pinnacle of the staffs are extending from what ordinarily would be the bottom stripe of the flag. This last aspect indicates that the artist was working from the mind's eye rather than at an actual pair of flags as would have been arranged in a model; the misplaced tassel suggests that this was merely technical error rather than an image of either distress or disrespect. Indeed, prior to Flag Day on June 14, 1923, there were neither federal nor state guidelines for displaying the American flag, the promulgation of which evolved into the United State Flag Code

enacted by Congress in 1942.

Modern versions of the “Welcome Lafayette” scarf are advertised as being “authentic reproductions,” but as they depict a “corrected” image of the crossed flags, the claim is not genuine. Part of the charm of the 1824 original is how, despite imperfection, the exuberant design conveys the thrill that Lafayette’s return brought to the American people.



One of the finest souvenirs of Lafayette’s 1824 ceremonial passage through Arlington is an engaging silk scarf in the Society’s collection. Unfortunately, its fragility does not allow it to be displayed or even unfolded, to avoid the fibers “shattering.”

We are fortunate that a section of the scarf clearly reveals enough of the design elements and placement, such that Elisabeth Carr-Jones was able to painstakingly re-create through digitization how the scarf would have appeared with the full repeats of its pattern, as shown on page 6. ♦

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