



Lafayette's Farewell Tour: "The Guest of the Nation" Visits Montpelier

Hilarie M. Hicks, Senior Research Historian, James Madison's Montpelier

Montpelier, along with the Friends of Lafayette organization, recently celebrated the 200th anniversary of Lafayette's visit to Orange County and his reunion with his dear friend, James Madison. Following is a recounting of that friendship and the original, 1824-1825, visits.

"...taking part in the offerings of gratitude to a Champion of Liberty and national Benefactor whom every American Citizen delights to honour." James Madison, November 10, 1824¹

That "Champion of Liberty," as Madison called him, was Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de Lafayette (1757-1834), also known as the Marquis de Lafayette, or simply General Lafayette. Lafayette first came to America from his native France to support the cause of liberty during the American Revolution, joining George Washington's² staff at age 19. Lafayette endured the brutal winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge. He led a division of troops in the successful siege of Yorktown in 1781, the last major battle of the Revolutionary War, which forced the surrender of the British General Cornwallis. Returning to France, Lafayette continued to serve the cause of liberty during the French Revolution, famously gifting the key to the Bastille³ to his mentor Washington.

Four decades later, American pride was at a new height. The United States had won a second war for independence — the War of 1812 — during James Madison's presidency, and experienced an "Era of Good Feelings" under Madison's successor James Monroe. Americans revered the Revolutionary generation, even as fewer and fewer of the soldiers and statesmen of that era were still living. When Lafayette accepted President Monroe's invitation to return as the nation's guest in 1824, his thirteen-month tour⁴ through the (then) 24 states became an outpouring of affection and gratitude for the Frenchman who helped the United States achieve independence. The tour also gave Lafayette a chance to reunite with old friends, including James Madison. Lafayette visited the Madisons at Montpelier on two legs of his journey — in November 1824 and again in August 1825.

"As Amiable a Man as His Vanity Will Admit"

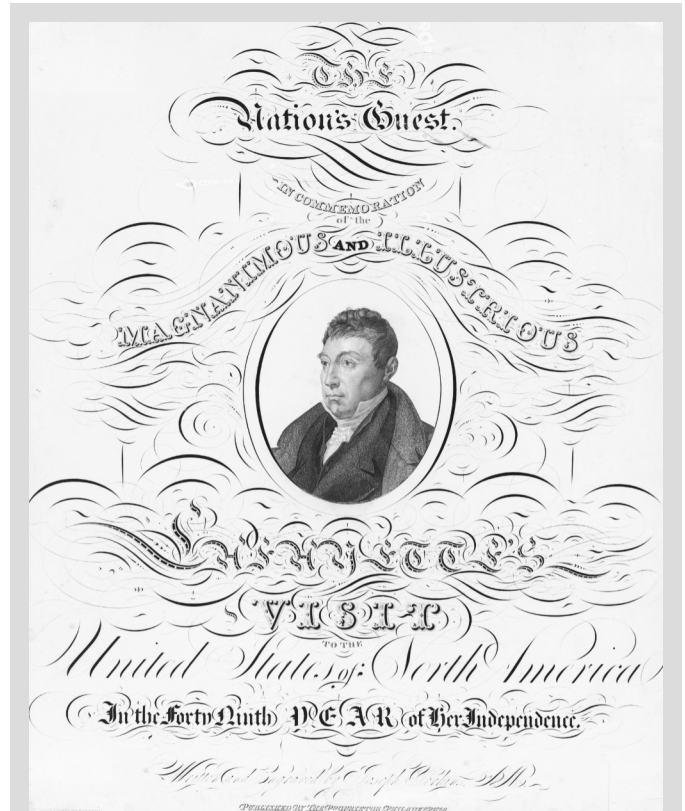
Madison's friendship with Lafayette had begun 40 years earlier, in September 1784. While in Baltimore, Madison had a

¹ James Madison to Robert Lewis, November 10, 1824, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 19, 2021, MRD-S 17536, Montpelier Research Database.

² <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/washington-amp-lafayette-162245867/>

³ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-key-bastille-ended-george-washingtons-possession-180959811/>

⁴ <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/lafayette-trail-mapping-general-lafayettes-farewell-tour-united-states-1824-1825>



This celebratory 1825 engraving (featuring a plethora of exuberant fonts) heralded "The Nation's Guest. In Commemoration of the Magnanimous and Illustrious LAFAYETTE'S Visit to the United States of North America in the Forty-Ninth Year of Her Independence." Joseph Perkins after Ary Scheffer, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

chance encounter with Lafayette, who was on his way to negotiate a treaty with the Iroquois at Fort Stanwix, New York, and invited Madison to travel with him. As Madison wrote to his father from Philadelphia, "I fell in with the Marquis & had his company thus far...He presses me much to fall into his plan, and I am not sure that I shall decline it. It will carry me farther than I had proposed, but I shall be rewarded by the pleasure of his company and the further opportunity of gratifying my curiosity."⁵

⁵ James Madison to James Madison Sr., September 6, 1784, James

See Lafayette on page 2.

Lafayette (*continued*)

Madison and Lafayette's month-long road trip (from September 3 to October 8) turned out to be a bonding experience. Soon afterwards, Madison wrote a frank assessment of the Marquis's character to his close friend Thomas Jefferson, using a cypher or code in case the letter was read by anyone else:

The time I have lately passed with the M. has given me a pretty thorough insight into his character. With great natural frankness of temper he unites much address with very considerable talents, a strong thirst of praise and popularity. In his politics he says his three hobby horses are the alliance between France and the United States, the union of the latter and the manumission of the slaves. The two former are the dearer to him as they are connected with his personal glory. The last does him real honor as it is a proof of his humanity. In a word I take him to be as amiable a man as his vanity will admit and as sincere an American as any Frenchman can be; one whose past services gratitude obliges us to acknowledge, and whose future friendship prudence requires us to cultivate.⁶

Madison saw Lafayette as both talented and glory-seeking, someone who deserved America's gratitude and someone whose friendship could be politically useful. (When Madison later edited his papers for publication during his retirement, he crossed out "a strong thirst of praise and popularity" and changed "as amiable a man as his vanity will admit" to "as amiable a man as can be imagined" — even altering the coded words in the hope that no one would realize his initial impression of Lafayette was somewhat mixed.)⁷

"My Friend, as My Heart Reckons But Few Men"

Lafayette was enthusiastic about the friendship he had established with Madison during their travels. He wrote effusively to Madison shortly before returning to France in December 1784,

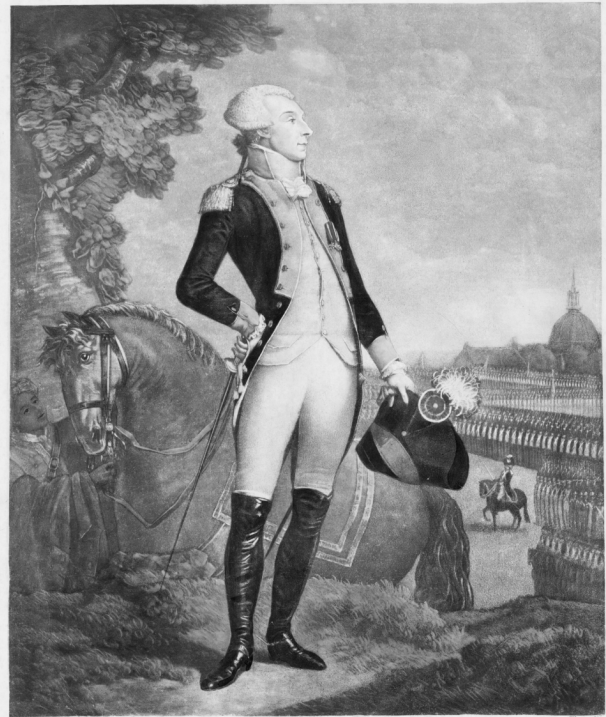
One of the Most pleasing Circumstances, not only of my Voyage, But also of my Life, Has Been to obtain as an intimate friend the Man who Before this last time, was only to me a valuable and Agreeable Acquaintance. Hitherto You Had Been my friend as the World Calls it— But now I Hope you are my friend as my Heart Reckons But few men—and once for all, I wanted to tell you that I know you, esteem you, and love you with all the warmth of my regard and affection.⁸

Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0060>, accessed November 18, 2021, MRD-S 10436, Montpelier Research Database.

⁶ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 17, 1784, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0064>, accessed November 18, 2021, MRD-S 10441, Montpelier Research Database.

⁷ Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 154-58.

⁸ Marquis de Lafayette Gilbert du Motier to James Madison, December



M. le M. de la Fayette Commandant General de la Garde Nationale Parisienne dedie aux citoyens la soldats, 1790. [United States: publisher not transcribed] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018697239/>. This 1790 mezzotint engraving of Lafayette captures some of the youthful vanity that Madison perceived when he first met Lafayette in 1784. Mezzotint by Philibert-Louis Debucourt, courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Although it would be 40 years before Madison and Lafayette saw each other again, their friendship continued. The two men corresponded steadily, exchanging at least 65 letters between 1785 and 1824.

The Nation's Guest Arrives

Lafayette arrived back in America on August 15, 1824, embarking on his return journey to France on September 7, 1825. As he traveled throughout the United States, communities welcomed the general with processions, artillery salutes, speeches, dinners, and balls. Young ladies strewed flowers or presented bouquets. Elderly veterans of the Revolution came out to shake his hand and share their war stories. Crowds waving handkerchiefs turned out in great numbers simply to catch a glimpse of the great man. Lafayette visited Washington's tomb at

15, 1784, with Postscript, December 17, 1784, private collection, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0100>, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 39173, Montpelier Research Database.

See **Lafayette** on page 3.

Lafayette (*continued*)

Mount Vernon, laid the cornerstone of the Bunker Hill monument, and participated in ceremonies marking the anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown.⁹

Lafayette's secretary, Auguste Levasseur, published an account of their travels, which sheds some light on their time at Montpelier.¹⁰ The Madisons' letters, as well as newspaper accounts of Lafayette's journey, offer further insights.

An Invitation to Montpelier

As soon as Madison heard that his old friend Lafayette had safely arrived in America in August 1824, he immediately extended an invitation to visit Montpelier, writing on August 21, 1824,

*I this instant learn, my dear friend, that you have safely reached the shores, where you will be hailed by every voice of a free people. That of no one, as you will believe, springs more from the heart than mine. May I not hope that the course of your movements will give me an opportunity of proving it, by the warmth of my embrace on my own threshold. Make me happy by a line to that effect when you can snatch a moment for a single one, from the eager gratulations pouring in upon you.*¹¹

If Lafayette responded directly to Madison's invitation, that letter does not survive. A letter from Lafayette to the United States Senator from Maryland, Samuel Smith, indicates that Lafayette was scheduling trips around his planned attendance at the October 19 Yorktown ceremonies. "The Monticello, and Montpelier visits, and then to the president's [Monroe's] County Seat I will be forced to differ [defer] until after the Yorktown anniversary."¹²

Embracing Old Friends at Monticello

Lafayette arrived at Monticello on November 4 to visit Thomas Jefferson. James Madison joined them there about sunset that evening, and attended a dinner in Lafayette's honor at the

⁹ *Memoirs of General Lafayette: with an account of his visit to America, and of his reception by the people of the United States; from his arrival, August 15th, to the celebration at Yorktown, October 19th, 1824* (Boston: E.G. House, 1824), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 39507, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁰ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0426>, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

¹¹ James Madison to Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, August 21, 1824, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0356>, accessed November 8, 2021, MRD-S 17461, Montpelier Research Database.

¹² Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette to Samuel Smith, September 21, 1824, Box 10, Samuel Smith Papers, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia, accessed November 8, 2021, MRD-S 39282, Montpelier Research Database.



Lafayette's appearance had changed significantly since Madison had seen him forty years earlier. Portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette, ca. 1822, attributed to Ary Scheffer, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of the John Hay Whitney Collection.

University of Virginia the next day.¹³ James reported to his wife Dolley from Monticello, "My old friend embraced me with great warmth. He is in fine health & spirits but so much increased in bulk & changed in aspect that I should not have known him."¹⁴

James also wrote Dolley what no hostess would want to hear — he still didn't know exactly when Lafayette would arrive at Montpelier or how many people would be in Lafayette's entourage!

The Genl. does not say yet how many days he stays here. ...It is probable he will not be with us till near or quite the middle of next week. He will have with him besides his son & Secy. the 2 Councillors, and such of the Company of

¹³ James Madison to Thomas W. Gilmer and Horace W. Bramham, November 3, 1824, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 22, 2021, MRD-S 17535, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁴ James Madison to Dolley Payne Todd Madison, November 5, 1824, Gratz Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0418>, accessed November 9, 2021, MRD-S 22014, Montpelier Research Database.

Lafayette (*continued*)

*Orange meeting & conducting him as may chuse to stop at Montpelier...I may learn more to day, but not in time to write you.*¹⁵

Plans and Preparations

Dolley initiated preparations nonetheless. Ailsey Payne, who was then an 18-year-old enslaved housemaid, later remembered “stirring times” as Ailsey and other domestic workers polished silver, put tablewares in order, and cleaned the house. The ice houses were filled with the meats that enslaved cooks would prepare for an elaborate dinner including mutton, beef, chickens, turkeys, ducks, and shoats. Ailsey particularly recalled that Dolley made sure the maids were well-dressed for the occasion, since their appearance reflected on Dolley. Otherwise, as Ailsey explained, Dolley would have “disqualified herself in her own house.”¹⁶

Lafayette’s plans had firmed up by the time he wrote from Monticello to Robert Lewis of Fredericksburg:

*We expect to leave here next Monday to dine in Montpelier and remain with my friend Mr. Madison until Friday when we contemplate to partake of an early dinner with the citizens of Orange County at their Court House, then to proceed as far as we can on the road to Fredericksburg there to arrive Saturday morning...*¹⁷

“Next Monday” meant that Lafayette would arrive at Montpelier on November 15, and stay until Friday, November 19.

The fluid nature of Lafayette’s schedule was sometimes frustrating to local residents who wanted to organize appropriate welcomes. When Madison alerted his neighbor, former governor James Barbour, that Lafayette would be coming the next day, Barbour replied in consternation, “Yours of this morning is the first intimation I have had of the General’s approach. The shortness of the interval, and our sparse situation present almost insuperable difficulties in making a suitable arrangement to meet him.”¹⁸

Barbour proposed meeting Lafayette’s carriage at the county line near Gordonsville. He would bring his carriage and asked

Madison to send his own carriage as well. Barbour also asked Madison to relay a message to his nephew, Captain Conway Macon, regarding the plans to meet Lafayette.

Guest of the Nation, Guest of Montpelier

Despite the short notice, Barbour was able to arrange a suitable escort for Lafayette. As the newspaper reported,

Although his approach was known only a few hours before its occurrence, and the weather was extremely inclement, many of the respectable citizens went out to do him honor. He, his suite, and a most numerous and respectable escort of the citizens of Albemarle, were met at Gordonsville, near the county line, by the Orange Committee of Arrangement, and an escort of mounted Volunteers, under the command of Capt. MACON.

Lafayette and his party transferred to the carriages provided by the Committee of Arrangement, presumably including Barbour’s and Madison’s carriages, and traveled on to Montpelier, “where they were affectionately received by Mr. MADISON.”¹⁹

As Ailsey Payne later remembered, there were “more horses and carriages [than] you could hardly count!”²⁰

Lafayette’s secretary, Auguste Levasseur, recorded his impressions of the Madisons and Montpelier in his journal:

*Mr. Madison is now seventy-four years of age; but his body, which has been but little impaired, contains a mind still young, and filled with a kind sensibility, which he showed in its full extent, when he expressed to General Lafayette the pleasure he felt in having him in his house.... Mrs. Madison also greatly contributes, by the accomplishments of her mind, and the elegance of her manners, to render doubly delightful the unaffected hospitality with which strangers are received at Montpelier.*²¹

Levasseur continued, “The four days we spent at Mr. Madison’s, were agreeably divided between walks about his fine estate, and the still more engaging conversations that we enjoyed in the evenings, on the great interests of America, which are known to be so dear to Lafayette.”²²

¹⁵ James Madison to Dolley Payne Todd Madison, November 5, 1824, Gratz Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, accessed November 9, 2021, MRD-S 22014, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁶ “Old Ailsey Payne at Montpelier” [newspaper clipping], [October, 1902], DuPont Scrapbook Collection, Montpelier Foundation, Orange, Virginia, <https://www.montpelier.org/the-naming-project-ailsey-payne/>, accessed November 22, 2021, MRD-S 23920, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁷ Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette to Robert Lewis, November 10, 1824, Colonial Records Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 8, 2021, MRD-S 23504, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁸ James Barbour to James Madison, November 14, 1824, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0424>, accessed November 22, 2021, MRD-S 17498, Montpelier Research Database.

¹⁹ [Lafayette Visits Orange], *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 1, 1824, 2, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 48187, Montpelier Research Database.

²⁰ “Old Ailsey Payne at Montpelier” [newspaper clipping], [October, 1902], DuPont Scrapbook Collection, Montpelier Foundation, Orange, Virginia, <https://www.montpelier.org/the-naming-project-ailsey-payne/>, accessed November 22, 2021, MRD-S 23920, Montpelier Research Database.

²¹ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/04-03-02-0426>, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

²² Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States*, (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White,

Lafayette (*continued*)

“A Dinner Prepared with Great Taste and Elegance”

Lafayette’s departure from Montpelier on Friday, November 19, was just as ceremonious as his arrival:

*...attended by Mr. MADISON, the Committee of Arrangement, Capt. MACON’S numerous escort, and many respectable citizens, [Lafayette] proceeded to Orange Court House. Groups of citizens, on foot and on horseback, were seen on the road. As the General approached, he was every where hailed with shouts of applause. On his arrival at the Court House, an extended line of citizens presented itself, along which he proceeded. When he alighted, he was received with acclamation.*²³

Levasseur noted that while greeting the people in line, “...the General received expressions of regret from several old revolutionary soldiers who had been prevented by age or distance, from being present at the celebration at Yorktown; who now consoled themselves with his expressions of friendship and remembrance by which they seemed greatly affected.”²⁴

After addresses and introductions, Madison accompanied Lafayette to a three o’clock dinner for 200 guests, hosted by James Barbour and “prepared with great taste and elegance.” Thirteen ceremonial toasts followed the dinner. The first was to Lafayette himself: “The Guest of the Nation; no where more welcome than in Virginia: She received his best services; he enjoys her best affections.”²⁵ Lafayette graciously responded with a toast to Orange County.

The ninth toast honored “Our countryman, JAMES MADISON: Pure in private as illustrious in public life; we love the man and venerate the statesman.” Madison too made a gracious reply, adding his own praise of Lafayette:

*...he has endeared himself by his persevering devotion to the great principles of our Revolution, and by his zeal, truly America, in maintaining our rights, our honor, and our interests, as a free and independent people. In his absence I could say much, which I cannot trust my feelings to utter in his presence. But, were he absent, I could not say more than would be due, nor more than I am sure would be echoed by every heart present.*²⁶

Levasseur noted that, “After the repast, we separated from Mr. Madison, who, notwithstanding his seventy-four years, (1829), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

²³ [Lafayette Visits Orange], *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 1, 1824, 2, accessed November 23, 2021, MRD-S 48187, Montpelier Research Database.

²⁴ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ [Lafayette Visits Orange], *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, December 1, 1824, 2, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 48187, Montpelier Research Database.

mounted his horse with activity, and returned to his peaceful home alone, through the woods.”²⁷

Lafayette’s party was accompanied out of town by Captain Macon’s escort, now swelled with a number of local residents. A short way down the road, they encountered a crowd gathered by a path in the woods where a “triumphal arch” had been erected at a site of Revolutionary War significance. As Levasseur explained,

We soon learned that this path which young ladies were scattering with flowers, and which the crowd entered with much interest, was the road opened by Lafayette on the 15th of June 1781, to effect a rapid march from the banks of the Rapidan to Michunk [Mechunk] creek, where Cornwallis was greatly surprised to find him in order of battle...^{28, 29}

A week later, Dolley recorded her impressions of the visit in a letter to her brother-in-law:

*We have lately had a visit from Genl. LaFayette & family of a few days—the former, you know, was an old friend of Mr M——s I was charmed with his society— & never witnessed so much enthusiasm as his appearance occasioned here and at our court house, where hundreds of both sexes collected together, to hail & welcome him— He has promised to spend some time with us again, before he leaves this country.*³⁰

Lafayette Returns to Montpelier

Just as Lafayette promised, he made one last trip to visit his Virginia friends in the final weeks of his stay in America. Levasseur wrote in his travel journal that in August 1825, “we again left the capital to make a last tour in Virginia. On this occasion we visited Albemarle, Culpepper, Fauquier, Warrenton and Buckland.” Lafayette’s mood seemed different on this final segment of the journey, as Levasseur observed: “Although in all these towns the progress of Lafayette was marked by popular festivals, he could not avoid feeling pained by the recollection that in a few days he was about to leave, perhaps for ever, a country which contained so many objects of his affection.”

²⁷ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

²⁸ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

²⁹ For more information on this path, today known as Marquis Road, see Jack Frazer’s article, “The Marquis Road,” in the Orange County Historical Society’s newsletter, *Record*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Fall 2020, pp 6-8.

³⁰ Dolley Payne Todd Madison to John George Jackson, November 27, 1824, Jackson Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, accessed November 22, 2021, MRD-S 34904, Montpelier Research Database.

Lafayette (*continued*)

James Monroe (who had recently been succeeded as president by John Quincy Adams) and James Madison “...re-joined us on the road to Monticello, whither the general went to take leave of his old friend Jefferson, whose enfeebled health kept him at present in a state of painful inaction.” Levasseur noted the sadness of Lafayette’s parting from these three statesmen and friends, “...for in this instance, the individuals who bade farewell, had all passed through a long career, and the immensity of the ocean would still add to the difficulties of a reunion.”³¹

In focusing his description on the poignant farewell at Monticello, however, Levasseur left out the specific details of Lafayette’s travel itinerary, which included two stops at Montpelier on August 15-18 and August 21-22. These details can be reconstructed from newspaper accounts and letters.

Tracing Lafayette’s August 1825 Route

According to an item reprinted from the Washington newspaper *National Intelligencer*, Lafayette left the capital city on August 6 to spend a few days with Monroe in northern Virginia. After returning to Washington, Lafayette’s plan was to “...proceed, by the way of Fredericksburgh, to visit, and take leave of, the Ex-Presidents Jefferson and Madison.”³²

A news item from Fredericksburg reported that Lafayette arrived there between midnight and one o’clock Sunday morning, August 14. He attended church services later that morning, and left town on Monday, August 15 “...for the purpose of paying farewell visits to Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison.” Hugh Tennant Mercer, whose father General Hugh Mercer had died in the American Revolution, was listed as one of the men who accompanied Lafayette from Fredericksburg to Montpelier.³³ Presumably Lafayette’s party arrived at Montpelier later in the day on Monday. Mercer later apologized to Madison “...at being obliged to leave so abruptly the easy & refined Hospitality of Montpelier, in my late Visit to you & Mrs Madison, & especially too as the pleasure of that Visit was so highly enhanced to me by the Society of Him, whom every Section of our Country has been emulous in honoring, but whom, alas! we shall, in all probability, never behold again!”³⁴

The days of Lafayette’s visit may have seemed very full to Dolley Madison, who wrote to a relative on Tuesday, August 16, “Genl. Fayette being retarded in his visit did not arrive with us til the day before yesterday.”³⁵

³¹ Auguste Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825: Or, Journal of Travels in the United States* (New York, NY: White, Gallaher and White, 1829), accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 23537, Montpelier Research Database.

³² [The President of the United States, and General Lafayette], *Natchez Weekly Democrat* (Natchez, Mississippi), September 12, 1825, 7, accessed November 17, 2021, MRD-S 48276, Montpelier Research Database.

³³ “Fredericksburg, (Va.) August 17,” *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), August 25, 1825, accessed November 16, 2021, MRD-S 48272, Montpelier Research Database.

³⁴ Hugh Mercer to James Madison, August 23, 1825, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 16, 2021, MRD-S 17626, Montpelier Research Database.

³⁵ Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Francis Smith Preston, August 16,



Lafayette likely saw a bust of himself in the Madisons’ art collection while visiting Montpelier. Lafayette’s bust appears to the right of the fireplace. Photo by Jennifer Powers, courtesy of Montpelier, a National Trust site. A bronze copy of this bust is also housed at the Orange County Historical Society’s Research Center in Orange.

The “day before yesterday” was Sunday, suggesting that Dolley thought her company had spent one more day at Montpelier than they actually had! In any case, Lafayette and his party were still at Montpelier when Dolley was writing on Tuesday, August 16. Lafayette’s son, George Washington Lafayette, also wrote a letter datelined “Montpelier, 16th Aug. 1825,” in which he regretted being unable to visit Richmond friends, “but our time is so very short, that truly it has become absolutely impossible. We are on our way to bid adieu to Mr. Jefferson, and it will require our best exertions to arrive at Washington city by the 25th of this month.”³⁶

Lafayette left Montpelier for Monticello on Thursday, August 18, where he stayed until Sunday, August 21. (Jefferson’s granddaughter reported on August 26 that “Gen. La Fayette left us on Sunday last, having arrived the Thursday evening before.”³⁷) The touching scene described by Levasseur, when Lafayette took his final leave of Jefferson, with Madison and Monroe also present

1825, Preston Family Papers, Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Richmond, Virginia, accessed November 15, 2021, MRD-S 34908, Montpelier Research Database.

³⁶ “Extract of a Letter from Mr. George W. Lafayette,” *Gettysburg Compiler* (Gettysburg, PA), September 7, 1825, 1, accessed November 16, 2021, MRD-S 48274, Montpelier Research Database.

³⁷ Cornelia J. Randolph to Ellen W. Randolph Coolidge, August 26, 1825, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge Correspondence, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, accessed November 16, 2021, MRD-S 38199, Montpelier Research Database.

Lafayette (*continued*)

at Monticello, must have taken place during those few days.

After leaving Monticello, Lafayette made one last stop at Montpelier on Sunday, August 21. Monroe was traveling with him. Later that day, Captain Philip Slaughter arrived at Montpelier with an invitation to a dinner in Lafayette's honor in Culpeper on Monday, August 22. Slaughter recorded in his journal:

*Major Gabriel Long and myself were deputed by the committee of arrangements of Culpeper to wait upon General La Fayette at Montpelier, the seat of ex-President Madison, in Orange, and invite him to dine at Culpeper Courthouse on 22d of August, 1825. We started from my house on the 21st, with two carriages, and remained at Montpelier that night. We left there with General La Fayette and suite, at 5½ A. M....*³⁸

"Lafayette Took His Final Leave of Us"

When Lafayette and his entourage departed Montpelier at daybreak on August 22, 1825, it was the last time that Madison ever saw him. Madison wrote to Frances Wright (a sometime traveling companion of Lafayette who had not made this part of the journey),

*General Lafayette took his final leave of us a few days ago ...He carries with him the unanimous blessings of the free nation which has adopted him. If equal honors have not been his portion in that which he had his birth, it is not because he did not deserve them: This hemisphere at least, & posterity in the other, will award what is due to the nobleness of his mind, and the grandeur of his career.*³⁹

As Lafayette had suspected, he would not see Thomas Jefferson again. Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, less than a year after Lafayette's visit. When Lafayette heard the news, he wrote to Madison, "Our Beloved Jefferson is No More, my dear friend, and While I Mingle My sorrows with Yours, I never more Sadly felt What Has been to me a Constant object of Regret, the painful distance there is Between our Respective places of Abode." Lafayette concluded his letter with this reflection: "My dear friend We are few Remaining of those old Revolutionary times. I am by Seas Separated from the Small band; But Until I Go to the departed ones My Heart is With You..."⁴⁰

Madison reflected the same sentiments in his reply to Lafayette: "You will never doubt that your happiness is very dear to me; and I feel the sentiment growing stronger as the loss of

³⁸ Quoted in Robert D. Ward, *General Lafayette in Virginia in 1824 and '25: An Account of His Triumphant Progress Through the State* (Richmond: West, Johnston & Co., 1881), 111-12, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9h423q0q>, accessed November 18, 2021.

³⁹ James Madison to Frances Wright Darusmont, September 1, 1825, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 16, 2021, MRD-S 17676, Montpelier Research Database.

⁴⁰ Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette to James Madison, August 28, 1826, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 18, 2021, MRD-S 37065, Montpelier Research Database.



Like many Americans, Nelly Madison would always remember Lafayette with gratitude for helping to win American independence. It was not an abstract ideal for her. Nelly well remembered the American Revolution and how British General Cornwallis had "instilled a great deal of terror" in Virginia (as she told another Montpelier visitor, the Baron de Montezun, in 1816).¹ Plaster medallion portrait of Nelly Madison by Pietro Cardelli, 1819. Photo by Rebecca Hagen, courtesy of Montpelier, a National Trust site.

¹ Baron de Montezun-Labarthe, "A Frenchman visits Norfolk, Fredericksburg and Orange County, 1816, Part II: A Frenchman visits President Madison, 1816," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (July 1945): 197-214, accessed November 30, 2021, MRD-S 109, Montpelier Research Database.

others dear to us both, shortens the list to which we belong."⁴¹

In the same letter, Madison sent regards from his 95-year-old mother Nelly Madison: "She forgets many things she says, but shall never forget General Lafayette the great & good friend of her Country."⁴²

⁴¹ James Madison to Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, November 1826, Dean Collection of Lafayette, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York, accessed November 29, 2021, MRD-S 22171, Montpelier Research Database.

⁴² James Madison to Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, November 1826, Dean Collection of Lafayette, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York, accessed November 29, 2021, MRD-S 22171, Montpelier Research Database.

Orange County Historical Society
130 Caroline Street
Orange, VA 22960

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Orange, VA
Permit No. 97

Lafayette (*continued*)

Revolution and Remembrance

As Madison observed, “the list to which we belong” — the list of people with personal recollections of the American Revolution — was growing ever shorter. Jefferson and John Adams died in 1826, the year after Lafayette’s tour. Monroe died in 1831, Lafayette in 1834, and Madison in 1836. In another 50 years after Madison’s death, an elderly Ailsey Payne — along with the once-young ladies who had presented bouquets to Lafayette — would tell stories of the Farewell Tour as if the tour itself was an event in a long-ago history.

Lafayette remained in American memory through the many places — towns, parks, and streets — named in his honor. Fayetteville, North Carolina was named in 1783, even before the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War. Other places were named or renamed during the years of the Farewell Tour, including Lafayette Square in New Orleans and Lafayette Square in Washington, DC (where Dolley Madison would later live as a widow).⁴³

The bicentennial of Lafayette’s Farewell Tour (2024-25) offers yet another opportunity to renew appreciation of Lafayette’s contributions to American independence and the cause of human freedom. For that reason, the Lafayette Trail project has set out to document, map, and mark the sites Lafayette visited in 1824 and 1825.⁴⁴ The Montpelier Foundation was pleased to receive a Lafayette Trail marker on November 15, 2021, exactly 197 years since James Madison first extended to General Lafayette “the warmth of my embrace on my own



This Lafayette Trail marker notes the dates of Lafayette’s first and final visits to Montpelier, as well as the topics of discussion that Lafayette’s secretary, Auguste Levasseur, recorded in his journal. Photo by Ryan C. Jones, courtesy of Montpelier, a National Trust site. A marker has also been placed outside the Historical Society’s Research Center, commemorating his visits to the Town of Orange on November 19, 1824, and on August 22, 1825.

threshold” at Montpelier. Look for the marker beside the historic train depot on your next visit to Montpelier!

A longer version of this article was originally published on Montpelier’s Digital Doorway website in December 2021: <https://www.montpelier.org/lafayettes-farewell-tour-the-guest-of-the-nation-visits-montpelier/>

⁴³ Laura Auricchio, “Why Has America Named So Many Places After a French Nobleman?” *What It Means to Be American: A National Conversation Hosted by the Smithsonian and Arizona State University*, <https://www.whatitmeanstobeamerican.org/encounters/how-lafayette-became-americas-favorite-fighting-frenchman/>, June 22, 2017, accessed November 30, 2021.

⁴⁴ <https://www.thelafayettettrail.org/>