

# Historically Speaking: Celebration Monday will mark Lafayette's 1824 visit to Norwich

Dayne Rugh, The Bulletin

It is no secret that the American Revolution would not have been won without our alliance with France, which came after our victory at Saratoga in October of 1777. The debt of gratitude is limitless, and undoubtedly one of France's greatest contributions to the war effort came in the form of Gilbert du



Mortier, better known to history as the Marquis de Lafayette. Recruited by Silas Deane at the end of 1776, the dashing 19-year-old Lafayette arrived in America in June of 1777 and was commissioned as a major general in the Continental Army. During his time in the war, Lafayette forged many long-lasting relationships and earned the esteem of Americans across the colonies. Washington regarded Lafayette as one of his closest confidants and a surrogate son in almost every respect.

Upon the war's end, Lafayette made trips between Europe and America and ultimately departed for France in 1785 where he would remain for almost 40 years. These years were particularly difficult for Lafayette as he became a political prisoner of the French Revolution, but was ultimately released by Napoleon. Lafayette remained out of the public eye for many years during the Napoleonic Era and the eventual restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1814. On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the American Revolution, President James Monroe in league with Congress invited Lafayette to return to America for a commemorative tour of the nation.

Lafayette was 66 years old when he returned in July of 1824, and for almost a year and half he traveled through all 24 states. To Americans, he was a quintessential hero, the last surviving major general from the American Revolution. He received a welcome worthy of an international celebrity. After departing Old Saybrook on Aug. 21, Lafayette visited New London and then on to Norwich. Surviving accounts recall that he was given a full military salute, and historian Frances Caulkins indicated that he shared emotional

reunions with those who remembered him. During his stay, Lafayette boarded overnight in the Merchant's Hotel, also known as the Kinney Hotel, after its proprietor Newcomb Kinney. The hotel was originally built in 1797 and was demolished in the 1980s. The present-day Main Street Parking Garage on Main Street in downtown Norwich stands where the hotel originally stood.

#### ADVERTISING

The Marquis de Lafayette's role in the Revolutionary War is widely appreciated and the importance of his return to America in 1824 remains largely unknown to the public. Join us Monday at 6 p.m. to hear Julien P. Icher, founder of The Lafayette Trail, speak about Lafayette's Farewell Tour, and the efforts carried out by the team of The Lafayette Trail, Inc. to memorialize Gen. Lafayette's fourth and last visit to the U.S., in particular the stops he made in Connecticut.

This program is sponsored by the Norwich Historical Society and The Lafayette Trail. This presentation is free and open to the public. The presentation will be hosted on the video conferencing platform Zoom. You must register in advance of the presentation. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Registration is limited to 100 people. Please find the registration link on the event page on the Norwich Historical Society's Facebook page or on the event page on the Norwich Historical Society's website. To learn more about the program, please contact Regan Miner, executive director of the Norwich Historical Society, at [info@norwichhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@norwichhistoricalsociety.org).

*Historically Speaking, which appears on Mondays, presents short historical stories. Dayne Rugh is the director of education for Slater Museum and is the president of the Society of the Founders of Norwich.*



# ‘Welcome Lafayette’: The Revolutionary War Hero’s 1824 Tour in Connecticut

By [Andrew Fowler](#) August 21 , 2023

[Hidden in the Oak](#)



*A bust portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette, who served as a major general in the Revolutionary War. (Photo: Library of Congress)*

Nearly half a century had elapsed since the American Revolution, yet the living memory of the nation’s birth had been fading or, sadly, dying.

To rekindle the spirit of 1776, President James Monroe (himself a veteran) and Congress invited the last living major general of the war, the Marquis de Lafayette, to visit the “adopted country of your early youth, which has always preserved the most grateful recollection of your important services,” in a [letter](#) dated Feb. 24, 1824.

Initially scheduled as a three-month journey, Lafayette’s tour **lasted 13 months** (from August 1824 to September 1825), visiting all 24 states with **more than 170 stops in New England** alone. “The Farewell Tour,” as it would later become, was “characterized by a fast pace as well as very frequent unscheduled stops that Lafayette made along the way,” according to [American Battlefield Trust](#).

At the beginning of the tour in late August 1824, the Revolutionary War hero was escorted along Connecticut’s coastal towns and cities, where he encountered the “eagerness of the citizens, to see and be introduced” to him, while being “thronged with multitudes” who “greeted him with reiterated acclamations,” as stated in his [memoirs](#). After a stay in Massachusetts, he returned for an adulatory ceremony in Hartford in early September before heading to New York to continue the rest of his American sojourn.

This is a story of the man known as a ‘the hero of the two worlds,’ and his adoring reception by the Connecticut people nearly 200 years ago during his seminal — and final — trip to the country he so loved.

## The Hero of the Two Worlds

Born into one of France’s oldest families on Sept. 6, 1757, Lafayette was ambitious and in search of “**military glory**” during his childhood and teenage years. When he heard of the American revolutionary cause from the Duke of Gloucester (who disparaged the colonists),

Lafayette **wrote** in his memoirs that “My heart was enlisted,” becoming an ardent believer in the ideals now enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.

After ignoring orders from King Louis XVI to stay in France, the 19-year-old arrived on America’s shores in 1777 eager to prove himself in battle, serving valiantly at the battles of Brandywine (during which he was wounded), Rhode Island and Monmouth, among others. At Yorktown, the final major battle of the Revolution, Lafayette thwarted raids along the James River and harassed Gen. Charles Cornwallis’ forces until the British surrender. Throughout the war, he developed a close friendship with George Washington — to the point where the two men viewed each other as an adopted father and son, respectively.

For his military service, Lafayette became a national hero in both the United States and France. However, his life turned chaotic after returning to his home country. When the French Revolution began in 1789, the major general was optimistic and eager to be a “**missionary of liberty**,” championing a constitutional monarchy. He not only served in the National Assembly as a representative of the nobility, but also drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen with assistance from Thomas Jefferson. Yet he abhorred how the revolution devolved into the Reign of Terror, risking his neck by openly criticizing the bloodthirsty, paranoid Jacobins. When his situation turned dire, he **fled the country** and was denounced as a traitor, only to be captured and imprisoned as a radical by the Austrian government (who was at war with revolutionary France).

Upon his release **five years** later, Lafayette returned to France, opposing the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and the monarchy’s restoration in the early 19th century.

In short, the invitation from America was welcome news — and he graciously accepted.

### ‘Every Demonstration of Respect and Gratitude’

Lafayette arrived in New York in mid-August 1824. Spending a few days in the city that included a welcoming parade and “**continuous celebration**,” the Revolutionary War hero — along with his son, George Washington Lafayette — set off for Providence, then to Boston, escorted by the Connecticut Troop of Horse under the command of Major Huggins and a “long file of carriages,” according to his secretary, Auguste Levasseur in his **account of the trip**. The tour made numerous, **frequent stops in Greenwich**, Stamford, Norwalk (which **marks** a site where Lafayette went to Cooke’s Hotel and met with Revolutionary War veterans under a “triumphal arch”) Westport, Fairfield and then Bridgeport — where he stayed at the Washington Hotel. In his memoirs, Lafayette **marveled** on how the “night was almost turned into day” remarking on the “brilliant and impressive” illumination of the buildings and houses eager to see him. Levasseur also noted their illuminated route throughout their time in Connecticut, writing:

*“...the fires lighted from place to place upon the tops of the hills, and around which were grouped families whom the desire of beholding their guest had kept watching; the somewhat wild sound of the trumpet of our escort, repeated several times by the woodland echoes, the sight of the sea which occasionally came into view on our right, and the distant and decreasing peal of*

*the bells which had announced our passage, all formed around us a picturesque and enchanting scene...*”

On Saturday morning, Aug. 21, the major general was greeted in New Haven by dignitaries and admirers — some of whom traveled forty miles to see him — with “prepared sincere, though simple offerings of respect to the man, ‘who fought not for honor or for pay;’ but in imitation of his political, American parent, was devoted, life and property, to the cause of our country’s freedom,” according to his **memoirs**.

After a public breakfast, Lafayette toured Yale — of which Levasseur **praised** — and visited Mrs. Faith Trumbull (widow of Jonathan Trumbull, who served as governor of Connecticut during the Revolution), and U.S. Senator David Daggett. By 3 p.m., Lafayette departed for New London, stopping at the residence of the “late Rev. Mr. Street, where he had been hospitably entertained forty-five years ago” to express his gratitude to the man’s descendants, according to the Connecticut Courant’s Aug. 31 report.

The next day, Lafayette dined with Richard McCurdy, a lawyer and gentleman farmer in Lyme, and then attended divine services. Accounts vary as to where this occurred with Levasseur **writing** that the major general went to two services in New Haven for “it was difficult to accept the offer of one without appearing to neglect the other,” while Lafayette’s memoirs and the Courant note he participated in services in New London. Regardless, all accounts record that Lafayette attended two with the New London Gazette reporting he went to the Presbyterian Meeting House and Episcopal St. James Church, officiated by Rev. McEwen and Rev. Judd, respectively.

Yet there was no rest for Lafayette that afternoon, as he paid more visits to honored citizens — such as Mrs. Faith Huntington, the widow of Jedediah Huntington, a general in the Continental Army — and other Revolutionary War companions who “were delighted to see again in their own free and happy country, a man who had devoted his earliest days and zealous efforts to secure its independence,” according to his **memoirs**. He then spent time in Norwich where “hundreds, and perhaps we may add thousands” attended a ceremony after which residents “congratulat[ed] themselves on the pleasure they had in seeing their Country’s Liberator,” according to the Courant’s Aug. 31 report.

### **‘A Pure Republic’**

Lafayette spent the final days of August and early September in Rhode Island, Massachusetts (where he visited John Adams) and New Hampshire, before returning to Connecticut on Sept. 3. He had intended to stay in Hartford that evening, but “the overwhelming large crowds that had gathered to greet him in Worcester had delayed him,” according to **Today in Connecticut History**. The inclement weather that evening also did not help.

Instead, the major general stayed at the Springs Hotel in Stafford Springs, much to the disappointment of Hartford’s “anxious and inquisitive” citizenry who swarmed the city streets to welcome him — and who were told around 1 a.m. that Lafayette would arrive in the morning, as noted in the Courant’s Sept. 7 edition.

But the initial dismay was short-lived as the Revolutionary War hero arrived around 10 a.m., Sept. 4 accompanied by a “**numerous escort of troops**” and greeted by “**demonstrations of veneration and love**,” such as ringing church bells, discharging artillery, acclamatory cheers and banners that stretched across entire streets (one was inscribed “Our Illustrious Citizen, La Fayette”). After breakfast with dignitaries like Gov. Roger Wolcott, Lafayette was taken to a platform outside the State House to review troops, though it was difficult for the military to parade for “every window was crowded with ladies waving their white handkerchiefs to the General,” according to the Sept. 7 Courant.

Nonetheless, the Courant noted that Lafayette surveyed the troops with an “attentive eye” and remarked the Governor’s Foot Guards, commanded by Major Olmsted was “equal in discipline and appearance to any company he had ever seen.” Additionally, Lafayette was greeted by **nearly a hundred** Revolutionary War veterans, more than any presented to him in prior stops, as his memoirs note; he even recognized one in a sentimental moment, according to the Courant.

Several remarks were made by Hartford Mayor Jonathan Brace and Gov. Wolcott, the latter who stated, “The principles which you have advocated in Council and defended in the Field, have been here [in Connecticut] triumphantly established, and by favor of Heaven we hope to transmit them unimpaired, to our last posterity,” according to the Courant. At this time, Lafayette also shared a few words of appreciation and gratitude:

*Sir — I feel very happy in viewing such resources of strength in New England, which resources should be cherished with union, as there is such a powerful opposition abroad to your free principles. I am delighted with the manifestation of feeling shown towards me; — Pleased with the moral habits and characters of the people of the State, exhibiting in action a pure Republic. I am also highly gratified with the fine appearance of your Military.*

In one of the day’s more striking instances, Lafayette was presented with the sash and pair of epaulets (an ornamental shoulder piece) he wore during the Battle of Brandywine, which were still stained with his blood. Meanwhile, at some point throughout the festivities, more than 800 children — including from the American School for the Deaf — gifted a gold medal to Lafayette enclosed with a **poem** that expressed their love for the general (with lines in French like ‘Nous vous aimons Lafayette’).

His stay in Hartford, like other places, was brief, and afterwards he boarded a steamboat bound for New York. However, the cannon salutes and acclamations when he approached Middletown “apprised Lafayette of the impatience with which he was expected by the people”; so he “hastened ashore to express his satisfaction, and it was not until seven in the evening that he returned,” **according** to his secretary, Levasseur.

This last stop in Middletown may have been the final visit to any Connecticut town or city during Lafayette’s tour of the United States, as no other instances were recorded in the Courant, Lafayette’s memoirs or Levasseur’s account.

## **The Farewell Tour**

Throughout his brief period in Connecticut, the state impressed Lafayette and his secretary Levasseur, who **wrote** that the state “contains within itself all the elements of prosperity.” They marveled at the ingenuity of its industry and inventions, as well as its public education, which Levasseur described as “the constant object of the care and attention of the people and government.”

Next year, this historically significant tour will celebrate its bicentennial, and several organizations are dedicated to commemorating its anniversary including **The Lafayette Trail** and **The American Friends of Lafayette**.

But why? What relevance does this final tour by a French-born, Revolutionary War hero have on a nation he helped found and loved? Like President Monroe, who believed the major general’s presence would reignite patriotic fervor by making the fading past present, we are also in need of recalling some of the best of our shared heritage. We need reminders of the heroic sacrifice of men — like Lafayette — who risked everything to found a country based on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

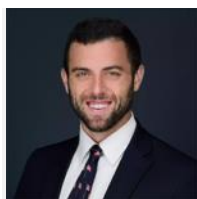
And while this nation has certainly fallen short of those principles time after time, nevertheless, the existence of those inalienable rights is the bedrock of true human equality — and a *good* ideal to strive toward. The affirmation of them in our nation’s founding document was, indeed, truly revolutionary.

By next year, let us hope there will be a revival of the spirit of 1776. As inheritors of that revolution, we cannot let those ideals fade away from the nation’s collective memory. If we do, it will be our undoing.

Till next time —

Your Yankee Doodle Dandy,  
Andy Fowler

*What neat history do you have in your town? Send it to yours truly and I may end up highlighting it in a future edition of ‘Hidden in the Oak.’ Please encourage others to follow and subscribe to our newsletters and podcast, ‘Y CT Matters.’*



#### **ANDREW FOWLER**

Andrew Fowler joined Yankee Institute in July 2022 after four years in the communications department for the Knights of Columbus international headquarters in New Haven. In that span, he managed the organization’s social media accounts and wrote for the company’s various publications, including COLUMBIA magazine, which is delivered to nearly two million members. Additionally, he is the curator of the Blessed Michael McGivney Pilgrimage Center’s online exhibit “K of C Baseball: An American Story,” that explores the intricate ties between the organization and the growth of the national pastime. He was also a production assistant for MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” and the 2016 Dinesh D’Souza film, “Hillary’s America.” Andrew currently serves on the Milford Board of Education. He is an avid runner and basketball fan, cinephile, and an aspiring musician and author. He graduated from the University of Connecticut in 2015