

Chapter XXXII.

Lafayette
1825.

Beyond question Concord's greatest festal day was on the 22d of June 1825 when Gen. Lafayette made his visit to the capital of New Hampshire. Years after when the young men of that day had grown very old, they referred to the occasion as "the great day of the present century" *** the occurrences of which caused more general joy than any other in its history.

When it became known that the illustrious Lafayette planned to visit the nation to whose freedom he had dedicated his youth, the United States undertook the entire expense of his tour. Arriving in New York in the late summer of 1824, he was informed of plans to conduct him on a trip extending to each of the twenty-four states, in order that he might see how the young nation had grown and prospered. For thirteen months he would travel more than sixteen thousand miles, mostly by carriage, and his delight in the progress of the Republic was spontaneous and enthusiastic.

The year 1825 was the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Bunker Hill and Lafayette was to be the guest of honor on that occasion. Meantime he was to view the nation as a whole. After years of military stress, economic hardship and governmental experiment and uncertainty, the land was at peace and prosperous. Vast new territory had been acquired in the west and south and new states were adding to the national wealth. The controversy over slavery which the makers of the Federal Constitution had judged must be tolerated, had been quieted temporarily by the Missouri Compromise. Except for the bitterness of partisan politics, all was peaceful and the nation had amply justified its independence at home and abroad.

Arriving in New York, the General expressed his desire to make a brief trip to Boston to visit certain old friends of Revolutionary days; accordingly, he left at once travelling by carriage over the Post Road to that city. It is said that the first of the various toll gates stood ~~wide open~~

wide open for his passage and that the keeper standing at the door of the toll house, waved his hand and called-"Go ahead! The road is free. Gen. Lafayette travels this road today, and no man pays toll." From then until the day when he set sail in the U.S. Brandywine for his return to France, all was free to Lafayette, the "Nation's Guest."

Gen. Lafayette travelled modestly accompanied by his son, George Washington Lafayette, a secretary and one servant; at times a small group of French officers joined the party briefly. His itinerary carried him west to the frontier town of St. Louis and he visited the new states of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio, with festivities in Pennsylvania and New York on his return east. His interest never flagged, his health was perfect and the tour was a grand triumph from beginning to end.

A young lawyer named Amos A. Parker had come to Concord recently and on Jan. 6, 1823 he had issued the first copy of the Statesman from the south-west corner room on the ground floor of the Carrigain house- a news paper designed to be a political rival to Isaac Hill's powerful Patriot. In 1824 Gov. Morrill appointed the likely young publisher as his official aide and sent him to Boston to meet Gen. Lafayette during the latter's brief visit, inviting him to come to New Hampshire. It was on the 30th of August, 1824 that Parker was granted an interview and he was received with the gracious and tactful friendliness which characterized the General's manner throughout his long trip. Unfortunately for immediate hopes, the rigid itinerary already arranged made it impossible to accept the invitation at the time. The climax of the entire trip was to be the General's presence at the laying of the corner stone of Bunker Hill monument on June 17 of the following year and he promised to visit New Hampshire and Concord, in particular, as soon as possible after that event.

Observant Mr. Parker found the hero a dignified personage in his early sixties, grown portly in contrast to the slenderness of his youthful days in Revolutionary service. He was dressed "with simplicity" in nankin pants,

swansdown vest, blue broadcloth coat with gilt buttons, beaver hat and plain shoes. The young editor had excellent opportunity to see the enthusiasm of Boston over the "Guest" and doubtless he brought home to Gov. Morrill some suggestions for the New Hampshire festivities in prospect. He noted a very general wearing of ribbon badges stamped with the portrait herewith reproduced, and when Lafayette made his visit to Concord the following year similar badges were provided. Some of those badges are treasured in town to this day. The portrait used seems to be identical with the head of the full length painting of the hero which hangs beside that of his dear friend, George Washington, behind the Speaker's desk in the House of Representatives in the Capitol at Washington.

Great were the preparations for the festal day in June 1825. The exact date could not be known until less than a week before the General's arrival, but early in May the townspeople began furbishing up their houses and dooryards. Committees, both state and local, were planning for every hour of the Guest's stay and there was work for the young folk as well as their elders. On the corner of "Concord main street" and the "highway leading to Pow meetinghouse" (West St.) stood a building owned by Nathaniel Evans on land of Isaac Shute. A native of Peterborough, Evans married a daughter of Sherburne Wiggin, leased this corner of the old Shute farm in 1818 for a ten year period and kept general store there. It is more than likely that his family lived on the premises; at any rate as the great day approached the young folk gathered at Evans's to wind garlands for street decoration. Among them was Sarah Chickering who, in her later years used to tell the story of the great event to her son (George H. Silsby). When the lease of land ended Nathaniel Evans's building was moved to a small farm at the end of S. State St. and there it still stands at No. 116.

Provision was made for the transportation of Lafayette and his party from Boston into and through New Hampshire. Nathaniel Walker, a

well-known stagedriver, undertook this responsibility and held in readiness three conveyances with relays of horses for the trip. There was a barouche of honor, a four-horse coach for those who accompanied the General and a two-horse covered wagon for luggage. This entire outfit proceeded to Boston to be in readiness when the Bunker Hill celebration should end. With it travelled Amos A. Parker who was delegated by Gov. Morrill to conduct the General to Concord. Mr. Parker left us a lively account of his experiences.

It was a great day on the 17th of June at Bunker Hill. Daniel Webster gave the oration to the Revolutionary soldiers gathered from far and wide for this day of memory and re-union, and then the distinguished Guest was ready for the trip to Concord. But the governor of Massachusetts was loath to part with him and insisted upon conveying Lafayette to the state line at Methuen. Young Mr. Parker made the best of his chagrin and proceeded ahead of the official party to await their arrival at Methuen. He rode in solitary grandeur in the barouche prepared for the General. It was a low slung, open vehicle and its occupants were on a level with the crowds waiting along the roadsides. On the high driver's seat was "portly honest Walker" handling the reins over four horses each with a flag in its headstall.

Just outside Boston the barouche overtook a veteran from Vermont who, having stayed too long at Bunker Hill, had missed his coach and was starting northward on foot. Parker promptly took the old soldier in and gave him the seat of honor. The inevitable happened and the crowds waiting for the General to pass by assumed that it was the Guest riding in the grand equipage with the well-known Walker in the driver's seat. The old soldier was given an ovation and there were continual halts as Parker tried to explain. When Lafayette and the governor of Massachusetts finally arrived at Methuen and the General took his place in the barouche, Parker told him the story to his vast amusement and he gaily suggested

That, since Parker had already had so much experience in speechmaking along the route, he might continue as alternate for the rest of the journey.

When the 22d of June dawned, Concord was in festal array: flags billowed in the breeze, houses were decorated and their fences hung with garlands of flowers and evergreen and there were "roses everywhere". Very early that morning the General was receiving the legislative committee on arrangements in Pembroke where, near midnight of the 21st, he had found rest at a tavern. On that day he had travelled from Derry and stopped to visit with Maj. Caleb Stark to pay tribute to the memory of our gallant Gen. John Stark. Now, at seven in the morning, he was listening to an address of welcome from Hon. Ezekiel Webster of the N.H. Senate to which he made response "with the ease and elegance peculiar to himself."

The General rode to Concord in the barouche now drawn by six dapple gray horses. The proud driver on this day was Lyman Hawley of Salisbury, famous driver of the Hanover stage and part owner of the handsome horses. "To such a team it is said Lafayette has not been attached since his arrival in this country", declared the Patriot; and a much later reminiscence reads-"Hawley among stagemen was what a major-general is among military men. He had the air and manner of a gentleman, and dressed on that occasion with special care -white vest and white gloves included-his entire appearance was in harmony with the great occasion. That carriage, its occupant, the prancing horses, and he who managed them, composed a spectacle never forgotten by those who saw it."

Meanwhile the crowds were gathering along Concord Street: the town was gay with men in uniform, women in Sabbath attire, officials on horseback-all in excited expectancy. As usual in June, the legislature was in session and "an immense number of people gathered from the town and every part of the state." Down near Concord bridge, eight companies of light troops from Concord and nearby towns, waited to do escort duty, while

the artillery company had its cannon loaded and primed for the national salute. When the illustrious Guest arrived at the Pembroke-Concord line, he was met by a group of citizens on horseback, headed by Col. William A. Kent who welcomed the General in the name of the capital of New Hampshire. The Colonel had the modesty and good judgment to limit himself to a few brief sentences after which his group wheeled into line and led the way to Concord street.

It was nearing nine o'clock and thirty to forty thousand people waited impatiently along our main street. The militia at Concord bridge watched Glover's hill (now Black hill) until the horsemen appeared followed by the open barouche and the famous grays. The artillery caught the signal and their cannon boomed its salute of twenty-one guns. The main street heard and stood on tip-toe as the procession crossed the bridge led by "a band of Musick" whose drums and ear-piercing fifes with a clarinet or two, woke the echoes from our hillsides.

Up into the broad main street, where the Shutes and Downings lived, came the cavalcade, and Lewis Downing, Jr., toward the close of his long life, reminisced thus:

"My memory **** goes back still further with even more vividness, to the time when Gen. Lafayette visited Concord in June 1825, and though scarcely five years of age, I remember as though it were but yesterday, the grand procession moving past my father's house, and the great throng that surged along with it on the sidewalks and in the streets; the great arch, as it stood on the brow of the hill at the south end of Main St."

Other reminiscences recall that this "great arch", for which the garlands had been made by the young folks meeting at N. Evans's store, stood near the town pump which was on the sidewalk east of the first Downing shop. John Dakin told the writer that the pump remained for years after and that he often stopped there for a drink in his long ago boyhood days. As the procession passed under the arch the main street swelled

into one long, loud shout of welcome along the route to Pond hill; there the parade wheeled and countermarched to Hopkinton road where they turned to escort Gen. Lafayette to the home of Col. William A. Kent (site of South Church) where he was to be entertained during his Concord visit.

The Kent house was reputed to be the handsomest and most finely appointed home in town and the Colonel and his wife were known for their hospitality. And so it was a foregone conclusion that the Guest should tarry with them assured that his stay would be made comfortable and pleasant. Following his arrival at the house, he was allowed a period of rest to prepare for the day's festivities, after which he was escorted to the gate of the State House yard where State Senators Ezekiel Webster and Bowers waited to greet him before attending him to the assembled legislature in Representatives Hall. There the governor of the State, David L. Merrill, waited to welcome the General officially. The granite posts of the gate through which the Guest entered the State House yard now stand at the east entrance of the State Hospital grounds, properly enscribed.

In Representatives hall the order of the day called for precedence of its most touching feature—a reception to the veterans of the Revolutionary War—those "venerable men" whose ranks "time and the sword have thinned." In proportion to her population it was said that New Hampshire had a larger number of living veterans than any other state, and on this day they gathered in the rotunda of the State House more than two hundred strong. Their commander was Gen. Benjamin Pierce of Hillsborough who wore his old uniform as an officer in the Continental Army. Pierce had a proud record of service beginning when, as a lad of seventeen ploughing his father's field in Chelmsford, he heard the news of the Lexington fight. He ran for his gun and started on foot with other volunteers to meet the British but the red-coats were in hasty retreat upon their arrival. Young Pierce hurried to Cambridge, enlisted, fought at Bunker Hill and continued in service until the close of the war.

Gen. Pierce had marshalled his veterans in Doric hall and there Lafayette greeted each one personally. The Patriot reported-"He vented his feelings in one of those spontaneous and unpremeditated addresses for which he had a talent the most happy. Here was a scene more affecting and gratifying than has ever taken place in our state; tears of alternate joy and sorrow trickled down the cheeks of the veterans; and few of the spectators remained unmoved."

"Conspicuous among that brave number for his intrepidity in battle and for his wit and good humor at all times, was Lieut. Robert Wilkins of this town. He had been a favorite of La Fayette in the service, and to Wilkins's indescribable delight, he was remembered and recognized in the most endearing manner. 'Ah! is this you, my dear Bob Wilkes?' (The General could never pronounce the name properly). Wilkins's delight and enthusiasm knew no bounds. General Pierce tried in vain to restrain him from engrossing the time wanted by others, 'Don't hinder me, Ben Pierce; I must talk with my General'".

They found much to talk about indeed-this dignified French aristocrat and the old veteran from West Parish village. Wilkins had enlisted from Amherst and was at Bunker Hill where he was wounded by a shot in his left elbow. During the greater part of the year 1780 he served as quartermaster of a regiment in the division commanded by Lafayette and, because of his duties, came into somewhat intimate contact with the young Frenchman. While the British occupied the fort at "Powles' Hook" opposite New York City, they kept a large drove of cattle feeding under protection of their guns. Lafayette coveted such a prize and appointed Wilkins and another young officer to head a raiding party of one hundred men, jauntily assuring them that "not a hair of their heads should be touched." Strange to tell, the promise held true although the British opened fierce fire with chain shot which killed several of the cattle. Not a man was injured and the animals were driven triumphantly into the American camp.

During that same year at Toppan on the North river, the General presented "Bob Wilkes" with the entire suit of an officer. All details of such events the Lieutenant and his General gaily recalled on that June afternoon in our State House, while Gen. Pierce fidgetted and the long line of veterans waited with some impatience.

A public dinner to which all veterans were invited, was the next event of the day. No hall in town could accommodate "the vast assemblage" which sought admission, so the feast was served in the vacant lot north of the State House. Park St. had not then been opened and tradition says that the tables were spread in that vicinity. A large pavilion had been raised for shelter but that precaution was needless since the day was "unclouded and serene and the air balmy and salubrious." Four tables each two hundred feet long accommodated the six hundred or more people who crowded to the dinner, while ^{at} a table raised somewhat higher and facing the others, sat the Guest and the dignitaries of the State. An elm tree was planted near the spot where "the Guest of the Nation" sat and within recent years that tree was marked with a tablet.*

Dinner was served at three o'clock by John Park Gass, host of the nearby Columbian Hotel and it was declared "a sumptuous entertainment". In later years Col. Carrigain wrote - "Everybody knows, or ought to know, that our popular and facetious Landlord Gass has two pair of legs. At this time he put on his best pair, and actually performed wonders. He seemed to have the power of ubiquity; to be everywhere, and answer calls from every quarter at the same time. His dinner was most sumptuously provided, and in all respects fully equal to the great occasion." At this feast, young girls from the town families counted it an honor to help with the serving.

As was the custom at such dinners, a program of speeches and toasts followed and there were songs and cannon salutes interspersed. This was the critical period of the entire celebration - a time calling for tact and forbearance since New Hampshire shared in the bitter partisan dissensions

which afflicted the national politics of the time. All factions were represented in the crowd at this dinner but, according to Col. Carrigain, "the utmost decorum prevailed" and the day "was happily blessed with the total absence of every description of party spirit. All the guests without exception, felt like brothers and behaved like Christians and gentlemen." This was high tribute to the harmonizing effect of Lafayette's presence - a harmony characteristic of his appearance in every section of our country.

This great day has another historic association since it was ⁱⁿ a song written by Philip Carrigain for this occasion, that the name "Granite State" was first used. The first stanza of that song is as follows:

"North and south and east and west,
A cordial welcome have address'd;
Loud and warm the Nation's Guest,
Dear son of Liberty:
Whom tyrants curs'd when Heaven approv'd,
And millions long have mourned and loved,
He comes by fond entreaties mov'd,
The Granite State to see."

This tribute was sung by the assembly to the tune of "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled."

The first toast was given by Gov. Morrill - "Our Guest, Gen. Lafayette; the boast of free men, the friend of liberty and the dread of tyrants. May his memory be respected till swords shall be beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and yon orb of day shall cease to roll." Lafayette roused delighted enthusiasm by his own toast, given "in the soft though broken tones" peculiar to his manner of speaking: "To the never dying memory of Light Infantry Poor and of Yorktown Scammel", for thus he honored two "favorite sons" of New Hampshire who gave their lives in the Revolution.

As the hour of five drew nigh, Gen. Lafayette arose from the head table and proceeded to the steps of the State House whence he reviewed the eight companies of militia (representing towns within a radius of thirty miles) commanded by Brig. Gen. Bartlett of Nottingham. The Patriot boasted that those who had seen military parades in other states de-

clared that they had never beheld "better disciplined, better uniformed or better behaved troops," and Lafayette himself, complimented them generously. "Further," quoth the Patriot, "we sincerely hope that their march to and tarry in this place may not pass without beneficial effects on the arm of our nation's defence."

Upon returning to the hospitable Kent mansion, Lafayette met a few privileged people who were invited to the house informally. Who can doubt that one of these was Col. Kent's sister, Madam Evans, who lived just across the road in the old Farrington house (site of Wonolancet Club). She was especially interested to meet the famous man because he had been one of the heroes of her deceased husband, Rev. Israel Evans. Indeed, it is quite possible that the General may have been persuaded to call upon her in her home in order to see Mr. Evans's portrait. That he did see it is a matter of record, exclaiming "It is our worthy chaplain!", thus recalling ~~recalling~~ the trying months at Valley Forge forty and more years ago.

In the late twilight of the long June day, Gen. Lafayette was escorted once more to "the area of the State House" which was brilliantly illuminated, and there as darkness fell, thousands of eager people pressed to take his hand. Finally the Governor intervened and took the Guest to the home of a brother, Dr. Samuel Morrill, opposite the Town House, for a brief call and the customary "refreshment". Someone must surely have remembered to tell him that this house had been the home of "the worthy chaplain" until his death eighteen years before.

At nine o'clock—a late hour for this conservative town—an "Orator" was given at the Meeting-house in Lafayette's honor. All along the main street each window twinkled its light of welcome and the great church was bright with candles and crowded with expectancy. More than a week before this night, the Patriot had carried a notice addressed to members of the N.H. Musical Society, calling them to a rehearsal at the Town House in

preparation for this event. And weeks before that a provisional program had been published in the newspaper in order that the scattered membership might be thoroughly familiar with the music.

This concert was not an oratorio in the modern sense, but rather a program of selections from oratorios and other choral works. The program as published is here given as an example of the quality of music sung in central New Hampshire a century and more ago:

"Notice to the N.H. Musical Society

A part or all of the following music will probably be selected.

Solo.	Comfort ye &c.	Messiah
Chorus.	And the glory of the Lord	do
Solo.	Thou didst not leave &c.	do
Chorus	Lift up your heads &c.	do
Solo.	Father, thy word is past	H & H Coll
Recit.	But he shall rise victorious	do
Cho.	The multitude of angels &c.	do
Anthem	Holy Lord God of Hosts	do
Solo.	Arm, arm, ye brave	do
Cho.	We come &c.	do
Air & Ch.	Gently, Lord, O gently lead us	do
Anthem	Glory be to God on high	do
Solo	And God said Let there be light	Creation
Cho.	The Heavens are telling &c.	do
Duet & Cho.	By thee with bliss &c.	do
Duet	All things fair and bright	Shaw's coll
	Now the work of man's redemption	O.C. Vol. II
Cho.	Pharaoh's chosen captains	do
	Now elevate the sign in Judah	do
	To thee cherubim and seraphim &c	Messiah "

There was excellent choral singing in every town in those days and the N.H. Musical Society was of long standing with a reputation to sustain on this, its greatest occasion. It must have been rather wonderful to hear such soaring harmonies sung with joy in the presence of God and men, filling the spacious Meeting-house till its rafters rang. And yet it is to be hoped that, after his long and taxing day, Gen. Lafayette was not forced to listen to the entire program: more especially since, at its close, a levee was held at the Kent mansion where "the house and street and buildings around were so well illuminated that it was light as day in and around it." Guests thronged the house until late into the night.

Lafayette's powers of endurance must have been phenomenal. For nearly a year he had received this sort of entertaining throughout the states and still he was well, responsive and charming. After this crowded day in Concord, he rose early the following morning and at half-past six bade his host and hostess "au revoir" as he entered the ceremonial barouche behind the dancing grays. Since his destination was Dover, he crossed the river by the Federal bridge to take the First N.H. Turnpike on the East Side. At the farther end of the bridge his carriage and escort were halted by three old veterans who insisted upon speaking to the General. "We must, we will speak to our General again". One of the three was Hon. Obed Hall of Bartlett: "I was with you at the Brandywine, at Germantown at Monmouth and in Rhode Island." The second of the veterans, Lieut. Joshua Thompson, said: "I was with you in most of those engagements." And "I, too", exclaimed Capt. Jonathan Eastman, "had my tour of duty in the Revolution, and remember well when Cornwallis advertised the reward of a pint of rum for the French boy; and I remember afterwards at the capture of Cornwallis, 'twas said the young Lafayette, who was one of his captors, told him- 'You've got the French boy now.'"

This last moment interview was planned really for the benefit of Lieut. Thompson who was old and so feeble that it had been impossible for him to attend the festivities of the day before. He lived in a little house which then stood directly north of 299 Eastman St. A group of village by-standers watched this meeting and among them was a thirteen year old girl, Ruth Bradley Eastman (later Mrs. Daniels) with her father, Gen. Isaac Eastman. She never forgot the affection of Lafayette's greeting-his ready recognition of an old comrade in arms as he embraced the New Englander in his spontaneous French fashion. Lieut. Thompson was deeply moved. This was the last of many generous and charming courtesies shown to Concord folk by Gen. Lafayette during this historic visit.

Within a few days the General was in town again, but only briefly

on his return trip from Maine. He arrived about half-past nine in the morning and breakfasted at the Phenix Hotel. There was no ceremony but a few citizens and some legislators greeted him and he was taken to the State House and presented with a map of our state-probably one of the Carrigain maps. Then he was claimed by two aides of Gov. Van Ness who waited to escort him for his visit to Vermont. As the party drove out the Hopkinton road, Lafayette stopped for a short call at Col. Kent's house, "partaking of refreshments" there. As the little cavalcade approached Millville, Miss Mary Clark was waiting in front of her home (296-298 Pleasant St.) and she came forward to the barouche with a spray of roses which she presented to the General, "for which he very politely thanked her."

Thus the Lafayette visit passed into history. Here and there one still finds an echo of that great occasion: a family recalls that Great-aunt Rheuy Buswell was one of the waitresses at the out-door dinner; or, one may find on a library wall a picture of the famous man framed with one of the white ribbon badges worn at the time of his visit; or a friend brings forth from her treasures, the arm-band which her great-grandfather wore on the 22d of June, 1825—a length of true blue ribbon with old-fashioned picot edge, printed with a small portrait and inscribed "Welcome Lafayette."

Nine years later the hero died in his native land and Concord folk were mourning badges—a white satin ribbon with a medallion of the General against mourning draperies, inscribed: "Lafayette, Died May 21, 1834, Aged 76 Yrs." All America mourned his passing and among the many memorial services held, Boston's tribute at Faneuil Hall with its eulogy by Edward Everett was notable. A dirge was chanted beginning—

"Weep, Columbia, Weep! Thy friend has fallen—the friend of Freedom and of man. He that was great among the nations, mingles with the dead. His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth evermore."

Concord held a solemn memorial service with a eulogy by Hon. Nath.

aniel G.Upham.The hymn on that occasion was from the pen of"P.Carrigain,
Esq."

"His sun has set:the Nation's Guest,
No more will hear our mountain cheers:
But his dear mem'ry fills each breast,
Kept fresh and green by grateful tears."

It was in this year of Gen.Lafayette's death that Concord streets were
first given official names.Col.Kent was chairman of the committee in
charge and the new street cut through the old farm of Dea.George Abbot
was called Fayette St.

Once more Philip Carrigain wrote memorializing the visit of
Lafayette to Concord:

"How glorious was that day!
His war worn comrades winning
O'er hill and dale their way;
Their ranks by death fast thinning,
To him,their pride,
In battle tried,
To give their cordial greeting.
While Merrimack flows
From mountain snows,
None can forget that meeting."

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