Marquis de Lafayette and his Time in Orange County

From Frank Walker's *Echoes of Orange:*

Marquis de Lafayette, a French hero of the American Revolutionary War, was his inherited title but his name was Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Montier given to him at the time of his birth on September 6, 1757. Two years later his father was killed by the British during the Seven Years War and his mother died when he was 13 years old. Lafayette was set to inherit an enormous fortune at the age of 25. In the meantime, he joined the French army at 14 and at 16 married the daughter of a wealthy French nobleman.[1]

In December 1776 Lafayette heard of possible war between the Americans and the British after America declared their independence. He offered his military services to Silas Deane, an American agent in Paris and signed an agreement to fight IF the US Continental Congress would make him a Major General. He volunteered to serve without pay and agreed to supply his own horses. His offer of help was accepted, and he became the youngest person in American military history to hold the permanent rank of Major General.[2]

Lafayette began his service as a staff officer to General George Washington and commanded troops in the field for a short time before he returned to France to lobby the French government to support America in its war effort, namely supplying ships, troops and money. Lafayette returned to America in March 1780. During the winter of 1780-81, the British had one army occupying New York City while a second army under British General Cornwallis operated out of the Carolinas in the South.

Even though the British had not been in Virginia since 1777, they knew that "Virginia, the largest and most prosperous of the colonies, was a significant source of men and materials for the colonial army, and the decision was made to neutralize and punish it."[3] The British sent the American traitor, Benedict Arnold, southward to the Tidewater area of Virginia to tie down Virginia's manpower and to destroy military supplies. British General William Phillips was sent to Virginia with more troops, and the local Virginia militias were powerless to stop them. The Americans needed help.

As Washington was busy with the British up north in New York and New Jersey, he dispatched Major General Lafayette with a detachment of infantry to deal with the growing threat in Virginia. His troops were from the northern colonies and as they approached Virginia, they began deserting. Lafayette stopped in Maryland and arranged for a personal loan to clothe them more comfortably for the Southern summer weather. As British generals Arnold and Phillips marched from the Tidewater towards Richmond, Lafayette engaged and defeated them south of the

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[1] Frank S. Walker, Jr., *Echoes of Orange* (Orange Virginia: Orange County Historical Society, 2013), 35.
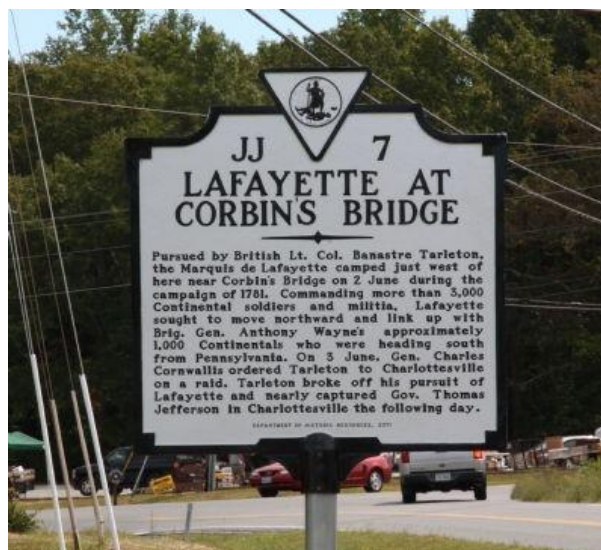[2] *Ibid.*, 36.
[3] *Ibid*., 37.

James River. Lord Cornwallis, who had been fighting in the Carolinas, arrived with part of his troops to support Arnold and Phillips in their drive westward.[4]

Now heavily outnumbered and wanting to avoid a battle with the crafty Cornwallis, Lafayette began a slow, strategic retreat towards the Orange-Culpeper-Fredericksburg area where he waited anxiously for reinforcements from General "Mad" Anthony Wayne and his Pennsylvania Line. Enroute Lafayette's men chopped down trees, burned bridges and ambushed British patrols whenever they could. Lafayette was by then the overall commander of the Virginia theater. While he waited for Wayne, he sent a flurry of messages to Washington (describing his situation), to Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson (for more militia, cavalry and wagons), and to other commanders (to move supplies and strategic resources out of the reach of Cornwallis).

During the last week of May 1781, Lafayette was near the border of today's Spotsylvania and Caroline counties. As he withdrew, he protected the supplies and industries at Fredericksburg, especially the iron works and musket factory. General Wayne sent him a message that he would ford the Rappahannock River into Culpeper County, then march to the Rapidan River. Wayne's troops were critical in the effort to halt the British advance. By then Fredericksburg had largely been stripped and evacuated anyway so Lafayette withdrew from that town and headed to eastern Orange County to meet up with General Wayne. In pursuit of him was British Lt. Colonel Banastre Tarleton. The night of June 2, Lafayette's troops camped near Corbin's Bridge.

Highway Marker JJ-7 stands near the intersection of the Brock Road (Route 613) and Catharpin Road (Route 612) near Todds Tavern in Spotsylvania County.[5]

-Photo Courtesy of the Historical Marker Database

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[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

The inscription reads: *Pursued by British Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, the Marquis de Lafayette camped just west of here near Corbin's Bridge on 2 June during the campaign of 1781. Commanding more than 3,000 Continental soldiers and militia, Lafayette sought to move northward and link up with Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne's approximately 1,000 Continentals who were heading south from Pennsylvania. On 3 June, Gen. Charles Cornwallis ordered Tarleton to Charlottesville on a raid. Tarleton broke off his pursuit of Lafayette and nearly captured Gov. Thomas Jefferson in Charlottesville the following day.*[6]

--Photo Courtesy of Historical Marker Database

Catharpin Road Bridge over the Po River
At or near the location of Corbin's Bridge, about 2½ miles west of the marker[7]

Leaving Spotsylvania, Lafayette's troops arrived in eastern Orange County on June 3 and camped overnight on a hill near Ellwood. Located on land owned by William Jones, Lafayette and his troops were entertained by Mr. Williams in his residence that stood on the property.[8]

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[6] Photographer Unknown. "Lafayette at Corbin's Bridge". *Historical Marker Database,* Google, Accessed April 25, 2021, *https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=59533*
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Walker, 38-39.

Highway marker OC-22 just east of Routes 3/20 intersection provides more detail:

-Photo Courtesy of Waymarking.Com

The inscription: *In the campaign of 1781, the Marquis de Lafayette marched through the Wilderness to rendezvous with Brig. Gen. "Mad Anthony" Wayne. On 3 June 1781, Lafayette's army camped south of the Wilderness Bridge across Wilderness Run from Ellwood. The next day, Lafayette reconnoitered Ely's Ford while the army crossed Germanna Ford to reach Culpeper Church. Afterward Lafayette marching south, recrossed the Rapidian River. During his Grand American Tour, Lafayette retraced his campaign and visited the Wilderness twice. In November 1824, Lafayette attended a reception at the Wilderness Tavern, and in August 1825 he breakfasted at Ellwood.*[9]
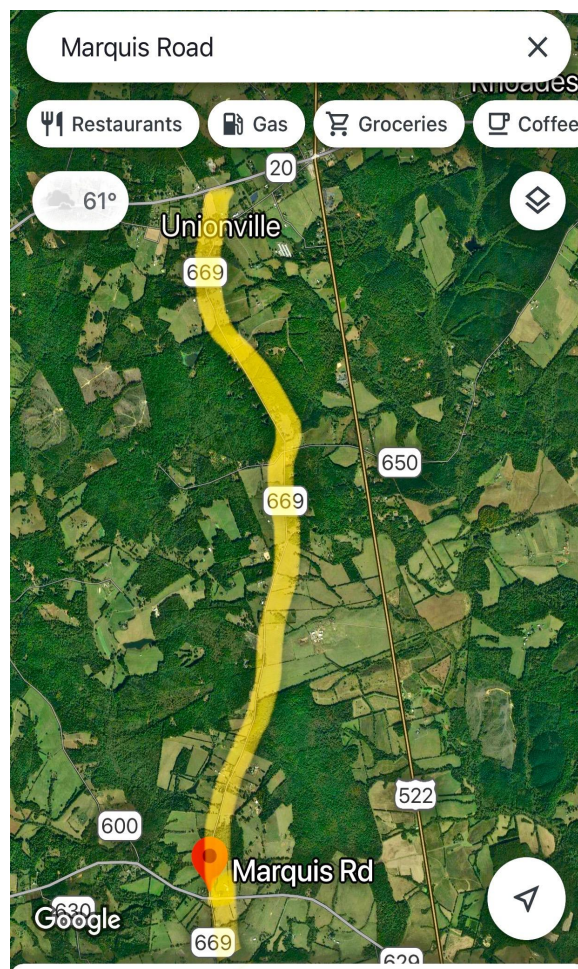
After spending the night of June 3 in Orange County, Lafayette and his army crossed the Rapidan River at Germanna [Route 3] and headed into Culpeper County. Cornwallis stopped in Louisa County at Cook's Ford on the North Anna River. Realizing he could not stop Lafayette from reaching Wayne, Cornwallis instead sent out raiding parties, including one that briefly terrorized the residents of the St. Just (today's Route 660) near Mine Run. Another raiding party led by Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton attempted to capture Governor Thomas Jefferson and members of the state legislature in Charlottesville who instead were warned by Jack Jouett in his dangerous night ride. Jefferson and legislators, who had fled to Charlottesville from Richmond, now had to escape to Staunton. A few legislators were captured including Daniel Boone who had been representing the Kentucky Territory of Virginia. General Wayne had been

[9] Photographer Unknown. "The Campaign of 1781 Lafayette's Maneuvers". *Wayfaring.com,* Google, Accessed April 25, 2021, *https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/wm7B78_The_Campaign_of_1781_Lafayettes_Maneuvers_Wilderness_VA*

delayed by high water, but this time Lafayette had decided not to wait for him. Having personally been in Orange County for several days, Lafayette ordered his troops to re-cross the Rapidan from Culpeper into Orange at Raccoon Ford and bivouac around Rhoadesville the nights of June 8-9, 1781.[10] Raccoon Ford is near the county boundary where State Highway 522 crosses over the Rapidan River between Culpeper and Unionville/Rhoadesville communities.

For years the people of Rhodesville called their settlement "Lafayette". In the late 1870s, the Orange-Fredericksburg railroad station located there was called Lafayette Station until 1926. Lafayette also had the road between Rhoadesville and North Anna widened to permit his men and wagons to move more easily towards Louisa. That county road, Route 669, continues to be called Maquis Road.[11]

Marquis Road, Unionville

-Photo courtesy of Linda Carlon

Marquis Road intersects Highway 20 southwest of the Unionville intersection (Highways 20 & 522) and was the route of Lafayette's June 9 march through Orange County to Louisa. A

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[10] Walker, 40.
[11] *Ibid.*, 41.

highway marker of the "Campaign of 1781" is situated at the Rhoadesville intersection of Lafayette Drive (Route 741) and the intersection of Black Walnut Run Road (Route 602). Lafayette Drive is a section of the original Orange Turnpike.

-Photo by the Historical Marker Database[12]

Leaving Louisa County, Cornwallis began retreating to the Williamsburg-Yorktown area to position his troops at a supply base where they could quickly go wherever they were directed by Sir Henry Clinton, Britain's overall commander in New York. As Lafayette pushed towards Cornwallis, he made it look like he was forcing Cornwallis's retreat to attract supplies and militia reinforcements. Further, Lafayette alerted Colonial and French forces in New York to come help him capture Cornwallis. Finally on October 21, 1781 British General Charles Cornwallis surrendered his army of 8,000 men to George Washington at Yorktown ending the Revolutionary War.[13]

After peace treaties were formally signed in 1783, Lafayette returned to France. At the request of George Washington, in the early Fall of 1784 Lafayette made his first return visit to America. On this trip in November, he addressed the Virginia legislature, but there is no indication that he

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[12] Photographer Unknown. "Campaign of 1781 Historical Marker". *Historical Marker Database*, Google, Accessed April 24, 2021, *https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=5454*
[13] Walker, 41.

made a visit to Orange County. An international hero, he left for France in December and promised to return. However, the French Revolution broke out and he and his wife were imprisoned. By the 1820s he was heavily in debt but not forgotten by Americans. In February 1824 President James Monroe invited Lafayette for a visit as a guest of the American people. By this time he was 66 years old and eager to go back to America.

He arrived in New York on August 16, 1824 accompanied by his son, George Washington Lafayette.[14] By then his financial problems were widely known and all tolls, coaches, boats, horses, etc., were free to him and his party. Eventually Congress voted to give him $200,000 and a 24,000 acre township. Lafayette Park in Tallahassee, Florida, is part of that land.

Lafayette came to Orange County twice during this second visit to America. On October 18, 1824 he attended an observance of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown. There were numerous appearances, galas and receptions along the Chesapeake Bay and up the James River to Richmond and Petersburg.[15]

On November 3 Lafayette left Richmond and headed for Albemarle and Orange counties to reunite with his old friends Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Jefferson hosted Lafayette and Madison for over a week at Monticello where "the three old revolutionaries were able to spend precious hours reminiscing and reflecting."[16] On November 15, Lafayette and Madison headed for Montpelier and Orange County as the guests of Dolley and James for the next four days. It is reported that the anti-slavery advocate, Lafayette, went on long walks exploring Montpelier land. It has been assumed that he probably walked by the cabin of three retired slave women: Granny Milly, age 104; her daughter and her granddaughter, age 70. He also met a number of other neighbors at Dolley's dinner parties.[17]

Lafayette's visit with Madison ended on November 19 when a party arrived at Montpelier to escort him to the Spotsylvania county line on his way to Fredericksburg. Madison, then age 74, accompanied Lafayette on horseback to the village of Orange. When they arrived, Madison, Lafayette, and his party were greeted by a double line of citizens which slowed the procession. Eventually they arrived before James Barbour, a former governor, a current Senator and Orange County planter. Barbour made a speech and flowers were presented to Lafayette. Local legend had it that a banquet was held in Lafayette's honor at the Peliso house, originally an inn built by Paul Verdier. A custom at dinners honoring Lafayette, the dessert course included 13 toasts, one for each of the 13 Revolutionary colonies.[18]

After the banquet, Lafayette and Madison said their good-byes and Lafayette headed for Fredericksburg as Madison returned home. By the time Lafayette reached Rhoadesville, it was getting dark. People who waited for him carried torches for a brief procession down Marquis

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[14] *Ibid.*, 41-42.
[15] *Ibid.*, 43.
[16] *Ibid.*, 44.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*, 44-45.

Road which was not much more than an overgrown path. It is unknown where he spent the night. The next morning at the Wilderness Tavern, Lafayette met his escort party to Fredericksburg and his time in Orange was over.[19]

By the summer of 1825, Lafayette's official tour of America was mostly over, but it would still be several weeks before the *Brandywine* would take him home to France. Before his ship sailed, however, Lafayette decided to return to Virginia for a final time, especially to Monticello and Montpelier. He and a small group left Washington DC on August 6. This time his itinerary was not widely publicized and his whereabouts for the next nine days are not well known.

On August 15 he had breakfast with William Jones and others in the entrance hall of Ellwood, the residence on Wilderness Run that Jones had built on the site of the original house that Lafayette first visited in 1781. Reports said that he traveled from the east (probably from Fredericksburg). Afterwards, Lafayette left for Montpelier where he stayed until August 18 before he proceeded to Monticello in a gentle rain arriving there late in the day. The next day he and Jefferson attended a banquet in Charlottesville in his honor. On August 21 the General returned to Montpelier in Orange County for a third and final time.[20]

Either on his way to Monticello or on his return to Montpelier, Lafayette stopped at Nathaniel Gordon's Tavern in Gordonsville. It was widely reported in the town that when well-wishers gathered outside to pay their respects, he went outside on the porch and spoke to them.

Lafayette left Orange on August 22, 1825 to attend an afternoon reception at Greenwood, just outside Culpeper followed by a banquet later that evening in the town. He was accompanied by Madison. On August 23 Lafayette was celebrated in Warrenton and by August 25 he was back in Washington DC. He visited Mount Vernon for a final time on August 29-30 where it seems that his travels in America were finally over.
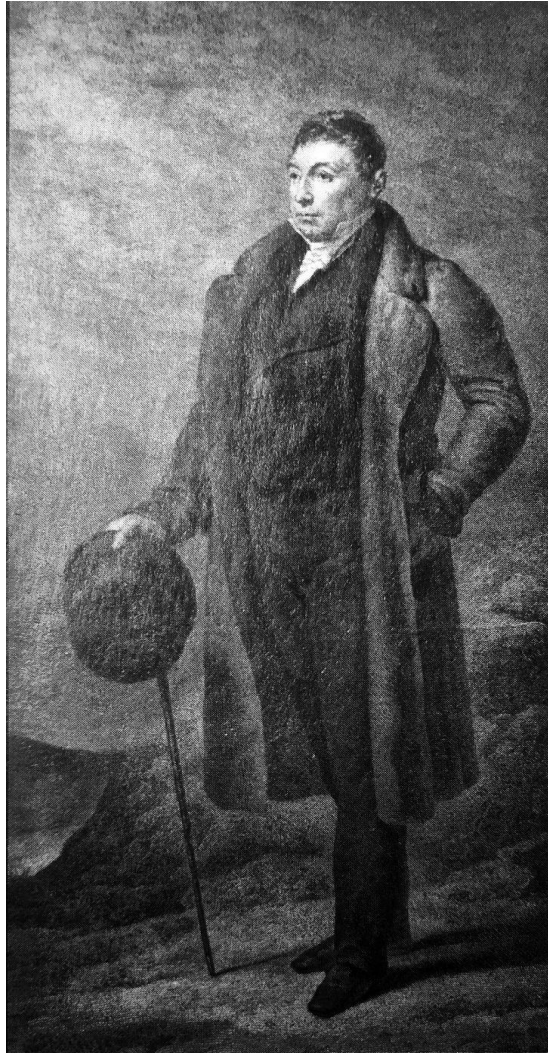
As Frank Walker so eloquently stated:
> On 8 September 1825, the <u>Brandywine</u> sailed out of the Chesapeake Bay,
> carrying Lafayette back to France. This time there was no serious expectation of a
> return, and there was none On 20 May 1834, this most interesting man and fierce
> American patriot died, and he was buried in Paris. Several barrels of earth from
> Boston's Bunker Hill battlefield that he had brought back on the <u>Brandywine</u> were
> emptied into his grave, thus honoring his wish to be buried in American soil. An
> American flag was raised over the grave, and one has flown there ever since,
> including during the German occupation of France during World War II. Lafayette
> is gone from life, but for as long as people care to hear about a man's love for his
> adopted country and about America's struggle for independence, he will live on in
> memory forever. [21]

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[19] *Ibid.*, 45.
[20] *Ibid.*, 46.
[21] *Ibid.* 47.

The Marquis de Lafayette:[22]

The Marquis at Age 67. *This is the Lafayette America saw upon his return in 1824. By then he had endured political and financial reversals as well as the loss of his beloved wife. His spirit and stamina, however, remained undiminished. Library of Congress image.*

The photo is on file at the Library of Congress but was published by Frank S. Walker, Jr., in this book, *Remembering: A History of Orange County, Virginia*.

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[22] I*bid*, 45.