

**The 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Of The  
American Friends of Lafayette**

**June 8-10, 2006 in Troy, New York  
(By Janice Wolk)**



Unseasonably cool temperatures and heavy rains did not dampen the excitement and anticipation for the **American Friends of Lafayette's 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting** on June 8-10, 2006, which commemorated Lafayette's visit to the city on September 21, 1824.

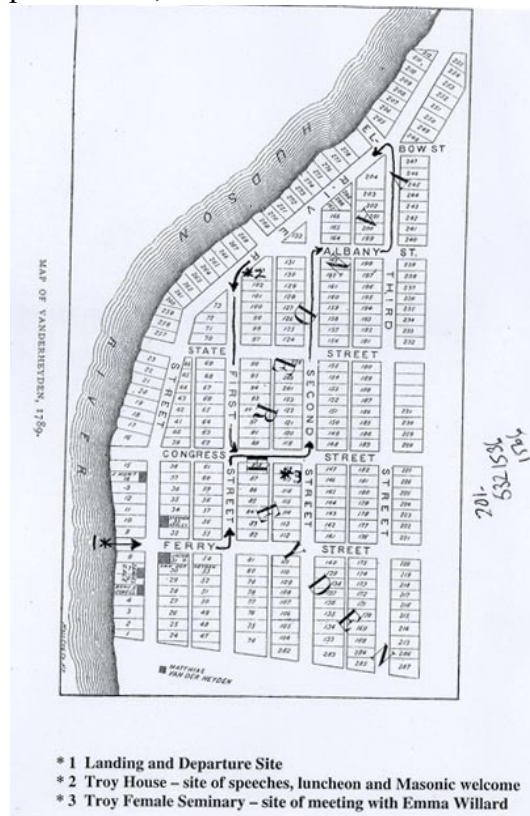
On Thursday evening, members who arrived earlier that day dined together at Fresno's of Troy, located conveniently across the street from the Franklin Inn and Suites, where the majority of the members stayed. Unfortunately, several were not able to attend, which caused the gathering to be quieter, more intimate, and in stark contrast to Lafayette's bustling visit!

On my own journey, I pondered an excerpt that Alan Hoffman, illustrious historian and member, had generously e-mailed from the book that he translated, Lafayette in America<sup>1</sup> by A. Levasseur, prior to our gathering. The passage from this volume, scribed by Lafayette's personal secretary during the Farewell tour, provided such a lively account of Lafayette's visit to this city in 1824 that it supplied additional fuel for my already lively imagination.

*"It wasn't yet noon when we arrived at the point where the canal connects with the Hudson River opposite Troy. At the sight of this City, which today contains nearly 8,000 inhabitants, and which by its commercial importance, holds the first rank after Albany in New York State, General Lafayette was astonished. "And what!" he shouted. "Is this City one which has just sprung from the ground by magic?" "No," answered someone who was at his side, smiling, "but it was created and populated in a few years by industry protected by liberty." The General then recounted how when he passed the Hudson at this point in 1778 with a corps of troops under his command, there were then only two or three poor cottages in one of which he procured, with difficulty, a cup of milk and a piece of cornbread... While he was giving us these interesting details, our galley descended into the river, as 12 boats decked with flags ferried us in their tow.<sup>1</sup>*

Indeed, as the New York State Thruway meandered through the lush blue Catskills and the sprawling fields gave way to hulking riverside industrial edifices, I envisioned Troy in the year 1778, when Lafayette first crossed its threshold as a fiery young general and then in 1824, when he arrived as a distinguished and accomplished statesman. I confess that I had never seen the city of Troy and was quite impressed with its dual nature – a big city with a small town-feel, that which retained much of its 19<sup>th</sup>-century character.

Friday was spent in the company of **Stacy Pomeroy Draper, Curator of the Rensselaer County Historical Society**, who took us on a walking tour that mirrored Lafayette's exact route on his visit to the city on September 18, 1824.



The tour was followed by a visit to the **Emma Willard School**, formerly the **Troy Female Seminary** founded by Emma (Hart) Willard in 1821, who dedicated her life to improving and furthering education for women. She remained head of the seminary until 1838, when it was given its current name. It was here that we enjoyed a delicious lunch on the school's beautiful campus in its spacious cafeteria/ballroom. After lunch, **Nancy Iannucci, Librarian and Archivist**, provided a tour of the library and archives, where we viewed interesting letters and artifacts concerning both Lafayette and Emma Willard.

The following citation from volume 1 of Edgar E. Brandon's 4-volume treatise paints a wonderful portrait of Lafayette's visit to the Troy Female Seminary in 1824.

*As soon as the company had partaken of the collation, the General proceeded to the Troy female seminary, where the ladies of Troy had assembled to greet him, and pay him their portion of the common gratitude. The enterprise of the ladies had procured the frame-work of an arbor to be constructed, reaching from the street across the small park, to the front of the Seminary building; and with their own hands they had covered with evergreens and decked it with flowers. On an arch at the entrance was the motto –*

*“AMERICA COMMANDS HER DAUGHTERS TO WELCOME HER DELIVERER,  
LA FAYETTE”*

*The ladies were drawn up in ranks on each side of the arbor; and as the General entered it, he was met by a committee of nine ladies, with Mrs. Albert Pawling at their head. The General was introduced to the committee by Col. Lane, and was*

*then addressed in the following very neat and appropriate manner by Mrs. Pawling:*

*Respected And Dear Sir,*

*The ladies of Troy rejoice in the opportunity of meeting the illustrious friend and early benefactor of their much-loved country – and through me, tender to you sir, their most affectionate respects and cordial welcome to this now peaceful and happy land.*

*The Ladies are also proud in being able to present, in the Pupils of the adjoining Seminary, a living testimony to the blessings conferred by that Independence, which you, sir, so essentially contributed to establish, and in which our sex enjoy a prominent share.*

*Permit me, sir, the pleasure of introducing you to the Principal and Assistant Teachers of the “Troy Female Seminary” – an institution which we consider an honor to our city and country.*

*In reply, the General expressed his happiness at such a cordial reception from the ladies of Troy; and was then conducted up the arbor to the front of the edifice, on the steps of which, the Principal of the Seminary, Mrs. Emma Willard, was waiting to receive him. The steps ascend from each side and on their front was an arch, surrounded by evergreens and flowers, bearing this well-adapted inscription:*

*”WE OWE OUR SCHOOLS TO FREEDOM; FREEDOM TO LA FAYETTE.”*

I was thrilled to be a part of this weekend that not only celebrated Lafayette’s momentous visit, but his lifelong commitment to the progress of women. I firmly believe that the strong feminine influences on the boy Lafayette had shaped him in such a positive way that they manifested in his adult life.

Friday, a wonderful dinner awaited us at the **Century House**, a beautiful restaurant located in Latham, NY. A highlight of the dinner was Stacy Draper’s wonderful slide presentation on Troy, Lafayette’s visit and impact on the city and its subsequent progress. I was quite honored to read a snippet from a poem entitled “*Lafayette at Schenectady*” by Harold A. Larrabee, and also a lovely and sentimental World War I-era commemorative poem about Lafayette.



On Saturday morning, the annual meeting was held the historic **Franklin Plaza**, courtesy of the **Franklin Inn and Suites**. This Franklin Plaza is an elegant former bank building that has been restored and is now used for special catered events and weddings. On our way to the designated meeting room, we stopped by the Monitor Room, which was preserved from the original building for its rich heritage. In this very room, the plans and financing were put in place to build the “Monitor,” the ironclad battleship that served the North in the Civil War. *We also saw the impressive overhead booth where armed personnel stood to guard the tellers back in the late 1800s!* During the annual meeting, topics of discussion included the Yorktown 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 2006, the Lafayette College Anniversary celebration in October 2007, and member appointments. Afterwards, as farewells were exchanged, it was agreed that we all share great anticipation for this eventful upcoming year, where there will be numerous opportunities to honor, celebrate, and remind everyone of the legendary Lafayette and of the remarkable contributions he made to this great nation.