

conceivable saint who might offer me more protection in battle.” The Lafayette knights before him did marry hurriedly and sired offspring before leaving for battle; had they not, the family would have died out centuries earlier.

By the time he was twelve, Lafayette was an orphan, his father having died in the battle of Minden in Prussia and his mother of an illness in Paris. Lafayette thus became one of the wealthiest aristocrats in France. “Burning with desire to be in uniform,” he entered the Black Musketeers, the tallest, most handsome, and most charming young men in France, at the Palace of Versailles as a second lieutenant. Among his fellow warriors were three of the King’s grandsons, each of whom would eventually inherit the French throne.

Just before Lafayette’s fifteenth birthday, the general of the King’s armies picked him to marry his daughter Adrienne; she was twelve years old. The general’s wife, however, refused to allow her daughter, without a sign of womanly maturity, to marry. Time, and an introduction to Lafayette, changed the woman’s opinion, however, and she “cherished him ever after as the most beloved of sons.” At the time, Romantic marriage was practically unheard-of in European aristocracy, so the bride and groom had no say in the arrangement; Adrienne’s father and Lafayette’s uncle drew up the contract. It would be two years before the marriage was consummated.

In the autumn of 1775, at the age of eighteen, Lafayette decided that the American Revolution embodied all the principles he believed in, and that he would go to America to fight for liberty. He found that two of his fellow musketeers were as eager as he. The three pledged to sail together, fight together, and, if necessary, die together.

Against the wishes of his politically powerful and greatly angered father-in-law, Lafayette boarded the ship *Victoire* at Bordeaux in the spring of 1777 and gave the order to set sail. Lafayette had chartered, armed, provisioned and staffed the ship with his own money. On board with him were twelve volunteer French officers. He left behind his child bride with one child, pregnant with a second; this weighed heavy on Lafayette.

Fifty-four days after setting sail, Lafayette’s ship reached the coast of South Carolina, where he rested

briefly in Charleston, outfitting his company. On June 25th he set out on the long overland road to Philadelphia.

When Lafayette arrived in Philadelphia, he was preceded by many French adventurers whose arrogance, incompetence, and badgering of the members of Congress for high ranks and salaries had earned them scorn and hatred. George Washington called them men of “unbounded pride and ambition.” The then-President of Congress, John Hancock, was in no mood to consider issuing any more commissions to the French—men who couldn’t even speak the language of the soldiers but who expected to take precedence over field generals of the Continental Army, and, in some cases, even to oversee the commander-in-chief, George Washington himself. Lafayette was patient but adamant. He wrote Hancock, “After the sacrifices I have made for this cause I have the right to exact two favors: one is to serve at my own expense—the other is, to serve at first as a volunteer.” He further pledged his life, his fortune, and his sacred honor to American independence.

With British troops ready to swoop in and annihilate Philadelphia, Congress was nearly bankrupt and desperately in need of money and military aid, Hancock saw that Lafayette’s name, wealth, and ties to the French court just might serve the American cause. In a private interview a deal was worked out. On July 31, 1777, Congress passed this resolution:

Whereas the Marquis de La Fayette, out of his great zeal to the cause of liberty, in which the United States are engaged, has left his family and connections, and at his own expense come over to offer his services to the United States without pension or particular allowance, and is anxious to rescue his life in our cause—Resolved, That his service be accepted, and that in consideration of his zeal, illustrious family and connections he have the rank and commission of Major General in the Army of the United States.

Two hours later, Lafayette, still only nineteen, received the resolution and the sash of an American major general.

(Coming next newsletter: Lafayette meets Washington)

—Paul Sheehan

Mystery of the Missing Cheese

When faced with the mystery of disappearing cheese, a group of Lafayette men solved a case of theft through their wits and determination. This is the story, as reported by the Contra Costa Gazette, in June 1870.

Some weeks ago, Messrs. S. Hough and Son, whose dairy farm is situated on one of the branches of the San Pablo Creek, about three miles from Lafayette, missed a hundred and ten pound cheese from their cheese house. From certain indications they came to the conclusion that it had been taken by someone familiar enough with the place and the arrangement of the cheese, for "seasoning", to know how to pick out the best one in the house; and suspected a man who had been employed by them, and who, with a partner, was busy in the Briones Valley, where they have been cutting wood for sale, (possibly without knowledge or leave of the proprietors). Accordingly they got Mr. Frank Hammett, of Lafayette, to make a reconnaissance of the premises, disguised as a traveling laborer seeking work. In this character he time his call so as to secure an invitation to lunch with woodmen in their rural retreat, and, as he expected, was liberally treated to cheese, readily identified by the Herkimer flavor. On Mr. Hammett's report a search warrant was applied for and issues by Justice Slitz, with which the Constable and Mr. Hough visited the woodmen's hut on a prospecting expedition which was rewarded by recovery of the cheese, minus consumption of several days by the appetites of the too temporary custodians, and their guest. A warrant for arrest was then issued, but the chief culprit managed to make himself scared before it could be server and there was not, as we understand, sufficient evidence to warrant conviction of the other. The Messrs. Hough, however, supposed they had created a sufficient scare to protect their cheese house from further immediate depredations and rested in this sense of security for a few days; when a visit to the cheese house one morning revealed the fact that another, and the next best seasoned, one hundred and ten pounder, had vanished during

the night. Having little hope of being able to follow the track of the pilferer this time, they concluded to profit by the experience of the losses by adopting some measures that will probably make it warm for the future comers on like errand, - and while cold cheese goes off in 110 lb licks without saying "by your "leave," people may be warned to keep a good look out for their red hot stoves.

(From the Dorothy Mutnick Collection -CCHS History Center

—Ruth Dyer

Lafayette's First Inhabitants

Over six hundred years ago Lafayette had shoulder-high grasses, rolling hills and creeks crisscrossing through small valleys. The landscape was covered with oak, laurel, buckeye, and willow trees. Quail, ducks and geese made their homes by the water. Herds of deer, elk, antelope, wildcats, and grizzly bears were found nearby.

Long before the early settlers came from the East and Midwest to begin new lives in Lafayette, there were indigenous peoples living in this area. The Saclan Native Americans were a tribelet of the Miwok people who populated the area from the Marin County coast to Yosemite in the Sierra Nevada.

The Saclans were a short, stocky people with long, dark hair. In warm weather, the men wore no clothes, and the women wore skirts made from grass. During the colder months, they wore fur skins and covered their bodies in mud for warmth.

The Saclans were a peaceful people, living in willow and grass thatched huts near the many creeks. They ate berries, acorn meal, insects and reptiles. They hunted wild game with arrows and spears, and netted fish from the creeks.

With the advent of the Spanish and then the Mexicans into our region, the Saclans disappeared. Many died

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as a result of diseases brought by the early explorers. Others left the area wishing not to be missionized by the Catholic fathers. Our area was left without people until early settlers such as Elam and Margaret Brown arrived in the mid-1800's.

Although no indigenous peoples still exist here, traces of them have been found. Bits of bone, arrows and other artifacts have been unearthed in scattered locations throughout Lafayette, mainly in nearby creeks, giving us information about Lafayette's earliest residents.

—*Mary McCosker*

Old Betsy Update

Last spring Old Betsy was invited to appear at the celebration "100 Years at Shadelands," put on by the Walnut Creek Historical Society at the Shadelands Ranch Historical Museum. On the drive out to the Ygnacio Valley Road location, Old Betsy's engine began to make some warning sounds. When we arrived at Shadelands, other old car exhibitors heard these and came running, suggesting that it might not be wise to try driving back to Lafayette after the event was over. Fortunately, one of those exhibitors volunteered the use of a trailer for towing us back home. This event solidified the decision that Old Betsy's engine needed to be completely rebuilt.

Early in May, Lee Volquardsen, the "expert" on the job, and I took the engine apart and ordered replacement parts in preparation for the rebuilding process. We then replaced the pistons, rings and rods along with some other parts—no quick job, because neither Lee nor I had lots of spare time. We were also hampered by the need to get the correct parts from suppliers. Although their catalogues showed that the parts we wanted were available, the parts that were actually available were not the right size and needed to be modified to fit Betsy's old engine.

All the correct parts arrived in due course, however, the engine was reassembled with every part in its proper place, and Betsy was ready for a test run. At first the engine was so "tight" that we had to tow Betsy to get started. The engine did start, though, and sounds much better: just about the way an old

Model T should sound. We are still working on "running in" time to get Old Betsy back to regular running condition.

I have previously reported that my Model T service manual includes "time studies" for typical repair jobs. Without going into details, the time study for engine and transmission overhaul suggests that the complete job, including removal of the engine and transmission from the vehicle, disassembling and reassembling, and installation back into the chassis, could be done in about thirteen hours; and that "with the exception of removing and installing the engine, in which two men are used, all of the above operations are performed by one man". Although Lee and I did the best job we could do, I assure you that we must have taken about three times as long as the manual's estimate, even though we didn't take the engine out of the vehicle. It has been a labor of love, and Lee has fully earned his angel wings for the time and effort he has put into this job.

As a final note, LHS has used all the available funds in the "fire engine" account. It is time now to rebuild that account. Your help will be appreciated!

—*George Wasson*

Update on the New Lafayette Library

Before the Lafayette City Council meeting on July 14, 2003, the Lafayette Historical Society, among other community groups, reviewed several suggested library floor plans. Wade Kellefer, the architect, subsequently presented the plans to the City Council and took extensive notes on each group's ideas, recommendations, changes, and requests. He intends to incorporate these recommendations in the next phase of his plans. An Merideth, Director of Lafayette Community Development, recently informed me that Mr. Kellefer has been working on the plans and things should really start to happen this fall.

The members of the Lafayette Historical Society review group feel that almost all our requests will be met within the limits of the space available. Old Betsy, our fire engine, will be well displayed on the library's lower garage level, behind a glass

front facing Golden Gate Way. We will also have a storage area for the extensive LHS archives and a work area for research and study by members and library visitors.

Donations for the construction of the new library are being accepted by the Lafayette Community Foundation at P. O. Box 221, Lafayette, CA 94549-0221. To date, donations designated for the Lafayette Historical Society History Room have been generous. This will help ensure that LHS gets the space needed for Old Betsy as well as for the research/study and storage areas. We will also have equipment that will allow us to properly archive and curate more than 155 years of Lafayette history.

NOTE LATE UPDATE: The library building committee met with the architect again on September 9, 2003. The architect had made the many changes requested by the committee at the last meeting. He presented a new model of the building which was very well received by the committee. A few additional ideas were suggested and discussed and will be included for the next meeting with the architect. We are very pleased with the space and location allocated to the Lafayette Historical Society for our work room, storage, and the “OLD BETSY” display area.

If you have any questions, please contact Marechal Duncan at 925/283-6812.

LHS Joins Lafayette Chamber of Commerce

On the evening of August 7, 2003, my wife and I, representing the Lafayette Historical Society, attended a social at the Veterans Hall for all new member of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Jay Lifson, president of the Chamber, and several Ambassadors were also present to welcome the new members. New members introduced themselves and gave a short pitch for their businesses. I

summarized Lafayette’s 155-plus years of history and our role in the surrounding community. I also mentioned the LHS search for new members, which I will continue to do at Monthly Mixers and meetings.

Becoming a member of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce is an important step in increasing the awareness of our Society in the citizens of our community. Our many thanks to Ann Denny and her staff for listing LHS in their Business and Community Directory.

The Lafayette Sun — Early Issues

The Lafayette Historical Society now possesses issues of the Lafayette Sun dating from the 1940s through the 1980s. These bound copies of the local newspaper will eventually reside in the Lafayette Historical Society’s space in the new library. In the meantime, interested historians may have access to the papers by contacting Mary McCosker at 284-5376.

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