

General Lafayette in Fredonia

An account of the circumstances surrounding **Lafayette's** visit which appeared in the *Censor* of 3 July 1872.

By Douglas H. Shepard, 2000

In the body of his article, newspaper editor **Frisbee** commented that "I am not able to give the names of our principal citizens who bore a part in the ceremonies, owing to a favor I extended to some person in lending a file of the *Censor* [for 1825], being required by his cutting out and purloining a whole half sheet of the paper that gave a full account of the reception." The *Censor* in 1825 had a small format. Each issue was made up of four pages, two leaves. In other words, a large sheet folded once. Half of that sheet, containing pages 1 and 2, was "purloined." The bound volume is now in the **Barker** Historical Museum containing only the 3rd and 4th pages of 9 June 1825.

**Frisbee's** 1872 account was answered by a letter from L[evi] R[isley] of Shady Brook, Iowa, commenting on some aspects of **Lafayette's** visit and the theft of the *Censor* article. Soon after **Frisbee's** article appeared, Miss Jane **Osborne** lent her copy of the report on **Lafayette's** visit to a rival newspaper, the *Advertiser & Union*, and it was published there during the week of 11 August 1872. Although no copy of that issue is now extant, the *Censor* ran a copy taken from the *Advertiser*, on 21 August 1872.

The *Censor* also ran **Frisbee's** reaction, in which he said "I made some effort to ascertain what became of it [the stolen half sheet], but got no satisfaction from the quarter where I had good reason to look for it; but it seems my suspicions were well founded, as it has been brought forth from an old scrap book by a member of the family to which the files were loaned [the *Osbornes*]."

This was followed on 28 August by a partial retraction. The *Censor* editor announced that he had examined "the copy furnished the *Advertiser* by Miss **Osborne**, and are satisfied that it was cut from some paper called the *Chautauqua Advertiser*," and that Mr. F. erred in his belief that it explained the fate of his lost article." The documents were shown to **Frisbee** who added: "After a more full examination of the 'mutilated parts' I am satisfied the account published in the *Advertiser & Union* from the 'scrap book' material was not the one abstracted from my files of the *Censor*, but from some other Chautauqua paper, so that the mystery as to what did become of it after the loaning remains unsolved. . . I am satisfied the one alluded to as the 'fair perpetrator' is not the one who did the deed." The *Censor* editor's reference to the *Chautauqua Advertiser* as the source for Miss **Osborne's** scrap book clipping uses the later name of the *Gazette*. It was common practice for the *Censor* and the *Gazette* to run items borrowed from each other at that time.

When **Frisbee** described the purloining of the half sheet from his volume of the *Censor*, he did not mention that some of the text towards the end of the account had continued on to page 3. When that lengthy fragment (some 120 lines) is compared to the scrap book version which ran in the *Advertiser* and was reprinted in the *Censor* in 1872, they are seen to be virtually identical. The minor differences can be attributed to a careless typesetter. The 1872 version corrects "Capt. **Fowle**" to "**Towle**," changes a "was" to "were," and omits the word "so" from the phrase "circumstances render it necessary that my stay with you should be so short."

It seems obvious that the scrap book version is a verbatim copy of what also appeared in the *Censor* of 9 June 1825. By comparing the number of column inches taken up by the page 3 copy with its equivalent in 1872, we can determine that the first part of the 1825 account must have taken up some three and a half columns on page 2. In 1825 the pages were normally five columns wide. Since the "purloiner" did not take page 3 with something over a column of text from the same article, it may be that he/she was after some other item on page 2.

Because it appeared in a Fredonia paper, the original version began with **Lafayette's** early morning arrival in Fredonia, carried through to his departure from Dunkirk for Buffalo, and only then tacked on an account, provided to the *Censor* by an unnamed participant, of **Lafayette's** arrival first in

Westfield and his progress on to Fredonia.

In addition to this earliest account, written immediately after **Lafayette** left Dunkirk by ship for Buffalo, there is also a typed version of what is entitled "Copy of contemporary account of **Lafayette's** visit to Fredonia written by the Hon. John **Crane**." It is dated "1885, June 1st.," that is, the date on which A. Z. **Madison**, Secretary of the Fredonia Historical Association, copied **Crane's** original, which was found among the papers of Charles F. **Matteson**. The specific date when **Crane** wrote his account is not given. John **Crane** was a prominent citizen of Fredonia, 34 years old at the time of **Lafayette's** visit.

Following **Frisbee's** article of 3 July, in the 10 July 1872 issue of the *Censor*, J. E. **Baldwin** added his "Recollections" of **Lafayette's** visit. **Baldwin** seems to have been a member of the local Militia at the time, since the focus of his article is on their part in the events. There is a Jesse E. **Baldwin**, born in 1796, who came here with his family in 1810. He would have been 29 in 1825.

Andrew **Young** issued his *History of Chautauqua County* in 1875 after several years of work on the subject. The record of **Lafayette's** visit was significant enough for him to include a separate section early in the volume to tell the story. The seven-page account begins with a brief biographical sketch of **Lafayette's** life and then describes his 1825 visit here, beginning with his reception in Westfield, then Fredonia, Dunkirk, and his departure. Although **Young** gives no sources, the text seems to be taken directly from the 1872 *Censor* reprinting, including the use of "were" in place of "was." However, **Young** did replace the word "so" as in the original. The text has been edited down somewhat from the 1872 version, perhaps to fit the space he was willing to make available.

In the 13 July 1892 issue of the *Censor* appeared an anecdote entitled "Alex and **Lafayette**" by Olive **Risley Seward**, the daughter of Hanson A. **Risley**. It is a thinly disguised version of the events as seen by "Alex" (Hanson **Risley's** middle name was Alexander) and no doubt told to his children. He died the year after this piece appeared. This account focuses on the preparation, particularly those the children were involved with, **Lafayette's** triumphant arrival, and the presentation of each citizen in line, including babes in arms. This account is the source of the story about the fine shawl handed on from one woman to another as she was to be received. In their 27 July 1892 issue, the *Censor* ran a letter from Miss **Seward** adding further comments. "I have heard the event [**LaFayette's** Reception], described all my life. . . . Father [Hanson **Risley**] was here [Washington DC] when I wrote the sketch and remembers every incident of the day distinctly. . . . The friend who went up the hill with Alex was his cousin Fidelie **Brigham**. Mr. D. J. **Matteson**, my cousin Kate **Matteson's** grandfather, was the master of ceremonies. . . . It was Mr. **Matteson**, the judge [Charles F. **Matteson**, D. J. **Matteson's** son, 9 years old in June 1825], who told me the story of my grandmother **Crosby's** plum-colored shawl and bonnet, and how he reflected on the strange vanity of women as one after another they came up in a copy of Mrs. **Crosby's** fashionable attire."

Hanson **Risley** must have been very impressed by the events of June 1825, since, later, when he was a student at the Fredonia Academy (1827-1835), he delivered a "Eulogy Upon General **Lafayette**" at an oral examination. It apparently was memorable enough for H. C. **Frisbee** to quote some parts of it in the account he wrote in the 3 July 1872 issue of the *Censor*, some 40 years later. (**Lafayette** in America in 1824 and 1825, the journal kept by **Lafayette's** secretary was translated into English and published in Philadelphia in November 1829. It is referred to in Hanson **Risley's** piece, which puts his "Eulogy" then as delivered somewhere between 1830 and 1835.)

In the 11 April 1900 issue of the *Censor* was printed an article copied from the *New York Journal*, referring to **Lafayette's** 1825 journey. The editor added the comment that Devillo **White**, then 9, witnessed **Lafayette's** arrival and remembered that Gen. Leverett **Barker** had "illuminated his mansion [the **Barker** Historical Museum] with a number of candles at each window pane." One part of a sash was scorched and **Barker** never permitted it to be painted over. It was in 1900 that a brass marker was put by the scorched portion to commemorate that reminder of **Lafayette's** visit.

Responding to that article, in the issue of 2 May, was Mrs. Lydia **Bradish**, who indicated that

Leverett **Barker** had not been alone. She described how her mother put candles in every window of their home on West Main Street. Lydia D. **Houghton** was ten years old in 1825. Years later, in the *Buffalo Evening News* of 5 May 1956, appeared a feature article entitled "When Fredonia Used Gas Jets to Honor Hero." Aside from erroneous statements about gaslight, it does add some details such as Mrs. David **Brown** lending her "boughten" carpet for the platform and that Sally Patrick **Crosby**, young wife of Dr. Orris **Crosby**, lent her "magnificent purple silk shawl" and a Tuscon [i.e., Tuscan] bonnet" with a white plume to other ladies in line. There is a reference to **Lafayette** commenting on the repeated appearance of the shawl and bonnet, but, since that is not mentioned in the original account of 1825, nor in his secretary's journal, it may be a later embellishment to the tale, like the story of the gas jets.

In July 1995 a hitherto unavailable collection of **Lafayette's** papers, including many documents relating to his 1824-25 trip, began to be microfilmed by the Library of Congress. The complete set of microfilm is available in the Manuscript Reading Room of the Library and may well offer additional information about **Lafayette's** triumphal tour.