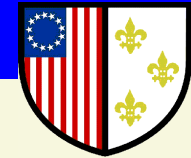
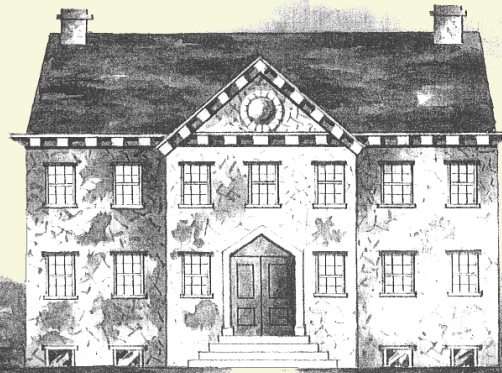


Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route



A French Legion Kept Watch Here

During the American Revolution Lauzun's Legion spent the winter and spring of 1782-1783 in Wilmington to help guard Philadelphia and Baltimore from British attack. The troops were housed in the Wilmington Academy, located where the Grand Opera House stands today. The Legion protected the region, enriched the town, and gave



courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware

Racing South to Yorktown

In 1780 King Louis XVI of France sent troops under General Rochambeau to help the U.S. win independence from England. After a winter in Newport, Rhode Island, Rochambeau's forces joined General Washington's Continental Army north of New York City. British fortifications there were strong, but a British army under General Cornwallis had a weak position at Yorktown, Virginia. The allied generals planned a rapid march south and asked French Admiral de Grasse to bring his Caribbean fleet to help in the attack.

On September 2-9, 1781, some 2,500 Continental troops and 4,000 French troops marched, rode, and rowed through Delaware (see map). The French camped near Second Street in Wilmington and Water St. in Newport. The Americans camped at



Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library

Wilmington is Host to 600 French Soldiers

In November 1781, immediately after the victory at Yorktown, Delaware celebrated as Washington and his troops returned north. In August 1782 Rochambeau and his troops passed through Delaware going north to Boston. But in October of 1782 -- a full year after the siege at Yorktown -- the British army still occupied New York City and Charleston, South Carolina.

Lauzun's Legion of Foreign Volunteers was sent to Wilmington, from where it could rapidly move to defend the U.S. capital city of Philadelphia or the French siege artillery, which had been left at Baltimore. From December 1782 to May 1783 some 280 hussars (mounted infantry -- see figure at left) plus 100 grenadiers, 100 chasseurs (light infantry)



This sign was provided by the Delaware State Society Daughters of the American Revolution and the National Society Sons of the American Revolution.



The Legion's Economic and Social Legacy

The French helped the local economy recover from the war taxes by paying for their food and lodging using silver coins -- "real money". The French paid local carpenters to build a stable for 280 horses behind the academy and held military drills several times a week. The officers stayed with local families and attended meetings of the local Masonic lodge.

The Philadelphia paper reported on the trial of a band of thieves who stole 10,000 French crowns (silver coins) from the Legion's treasure room while an accomplice kept the guards busy playing cards. After a servant girl reported overhearing the thieves brag about the crime the sheriff arrested them and recovered most of the coins.

Good will and silver coins were not all that remained in Delaware when the Legion sailed out of Wilmington for France in May of 1783. Four of the Legion's soldiers died here, twenty-nine deserted here, and thirty-eight completed their terms of service here and did not re-enlist.

One of those who remained was Dr. Joseph Capelle, from Flanders, serving as assistant surgeon with the Legion. He married Mary Pearce from Baltimore, raised a family in Wilmington, and was an incorporator of the Delaware Medical Society. He is buried in the Old Swedes Church

