

# **National W3R-USA Association Conference**

## **Baltimore, Maryland - April 14, 2007**

Dear Board Members, Honorary Board Representatives, Regional Vice-Presidents and State Chairpersons, it is my last meeting as national chairman. I would like to share with you some thoughts which I consider important about the identity of our association.

Some people are not quite sure about the intent and purpose of our W3R Association. For them I would like to offer these comments: W3R is a short for Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route, as you well know. It was used for the first time in December 1999 in Newburgh, New York, by one of the people in attendance, and it became a rallying word ever since. It designates the whole physical route, over 600 miles which extends from Rhode Island to Virginia. No need to say that it is a source of great pride that our symbol and the seal which goes with it is known everywhere and used even by state and federal agencies. "W3R" is a spontaneous way to recognize that the Route belongs to every American. It is a family treasure! And it explains that governors and legislators are interested in working with us, not only to combat unscrupulous developers who are disfiguring what is left of the Route, but to reassert the historical importance of the Revolutionary War.

The original purpose of our first meeting in Newburgh, New York, the former headquarters of George Washington overlooking the Hudson River and now a museum, was not, as some people believe, to give a hand to the National Parks Service. Actually, a couple of National Park Service officers were invited to attend. They told us later that, coincidentally, they had been part of a national meeting several months earlier, in which they resolved to support new efforts to inform the public about the Revolutionary War. Our Association was exactly the kind of activities they were interested in. Our purpose was to invite all other states along the Route to join forces and to find inspiration in the remarkable achievements of the states of New York and Connecticut.

At stake was a will to go global; but this is not the place to list these achievements. There would have been no Route without New York and Saratoga, and Connecticut would not have become a W3R pilot state without a Governor's Commission on American and Francophone Cultural Affairs, which I had the honor to reorganize entirely at the time. It became like a springboard. Membership increased rapidly. The meetings took place in the Governor's chambers, in the Hartford capitol. Soon, it became a collective drive throughout the state, involving the traditional patriotic societies: The Society of Cincinnati, The Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), and others. A new inventory was made of monuments, markers, graves, historical buildings and, let's say it once more, in a renewed spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance.

However, I agree with Col. Gabriel, our Regional Vice-President for Eastern New England that we haven't done enough to utilize this enormous potential for goodwill throughout each one of our states. We should campaign vigorously to increase our membership in each and every state, to keep up to date lists of members and to keep them informed of our activities, and to solicit occasional contributions.

In Newburgh we started writing an agenda which would eventually be common to every W3R state. It was the work of some fifty experts lined up mostly by Col. Dr. James Johnson, then head of the Department of Military History at West Point Military Academy. All agreed that our W3R mission was to contact state agencies in every state in the field of education, history, transportation, etc., and to ask for their cooperation. It soon became obvious that we had all a mutual interest in working together. A new look at treasured memories of the past would generate a renewed touristic interest in the famous march of Franco-American troops throughout the states.

It is exactly what happened. Many events were scheduled by towns. History was reenacted, and several towns realized they had in their hands a potential touristic gold mine.

The new agenda included also a will to pursue a new project; the recognition by Congress of the Route as a National Historic Trail. As far as I know, it is in Connecticut that the project took shape for the first time, but it is in Newburgh that W3R and the National Park Service officers started thinking of a possible collaboration on that subject. Very quickly, it became obvious that the National Park Service would have the lion's share. They were a federal agency, part of the Ministry of the Interior, with an important budget and multiple connections in every one of our states. Our Association could help best in applying pressure on governors and legislators, and we did just that. As a result we are, after eight years, very close to victory. Eight years is a long time. I know that some members were disappointed by this slow process, but I believe that they would have been less disappointed if they had realized that the recognition of the "trail" by Congress was not the only "raison d'être" of W3R. If, in other words, they had had a better understanding of our own identity!

No doubt that in the future we will keep working with the National Park Service, but never, never in such a way that the good giant would swallow the little dwarf! A deeper sense of our own identity will help us to preserve it. A greater sense of identity means a deeper sense of independence. Yes, just enough independence to allow our state chairmen to play a key role within the states. This is most important. W3R's power is not dictated from the top. It belongs essentially to each state chairman, nine of them so far and ten in a few moments when we vote in favor of a tenth "state" rather a tenth state committee which name will be the W3R Atlantic Committee. As you guess, its purpose will be to preserve this part of the battle for independence which took place at sea; in the Chesapeake Bay, or in rivers.

I wish to thank all of you for your presence, and most of all for your dedication. Allow me to mention by name several of our members. First, our National Vice-Chair, Kim Burdick, who will become the National Chairperson. In 2003 she was instrumental in providing W3R with much needed by-laws, with the help of Professor Reed from the University of Delaware Law School. Also--the official historian of W3R--Dr. Robert Selig, for his many articles and scholarly publications. Thanks to him, each of our states is provided with a detailed survey of all events related to the Revolutionary War. Our gratitude goes also to Ralph Nelson, our Webmaster and Secretary of Correspondence, whose huge and patient work provided the public with first class information about W3R. And how could I forget the brilliant illustrator of our publications, painter David Wagner from New England; and also the four "marchers" who walked six hundred miles in October 2006, from Newport Rhode Island to Yorktown, Virginia, right on time for the celebration of the 225th anniversary of the famous battle. With them, it is only fair to mention the thousands of re-enactors wearing the uniform of the French regiments and of the Continental Army, a unique and splendid way to make history alive again.

Thanks for your attention

Jacques P. Bossiere  
National Chairman W3R USA  
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