

# Keynote Presentation to the July 4, 2010, Meeting of the Washington Campground Association

by Mrs. Charles G.L. de Barcza, chairman of the Board  
of the National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association, Inc.

Mrs. de Barcza is also a member of the Washington Campground Association, the Daughters of the Cincinnati, the Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the National Society of Southern Dames of America, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She is a descendant of John Hancock (first signer of the *Declaration of Independence*) and of John Handy, who was twice asked to read the *Declaration of Independence* from the steps of the Newport RI Courthouse -- once in July 1776, nine days after it was adopted in Philadelphia, and again in July 1826, for the Golden Jubilee of Independence Day.

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## GOOD MORNING

Members of the Board of Washington Campground, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: As a Life member of Washington Campground Association, it is a pleasure to be with you today.

The Declaration of Independence was adopted by Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, and circulated as the first shot across the bow against England. Two hundred and thirty-four years later, we are here today to commemorate that great event, but how was it managed? How were our ancestors able to free themselves from the strangling grip of the greatest, most powerful nation of its time?

Two men played the greatest part in the victory, but so much could have gone wrong.

The first, Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, le Comte de Rochambeau, was born in Vendôme, France. A third son, he was slated to be a priest until the death of his older brother. He took up the sword living up to the family motto, *Vivre en Preux y Mourir* – To Live and Die as a Gallant Knight. He was trained for war and distinguished himself in the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War.

George Washington was a Virginian gentleman – a planter who, when asked to lead the Continental Army at first demurred, saying he was not qualified for such an honor.

So what forces were at work to join these two men?

Another young Frenchman, Le Comte de LaFayette, had come to our shores in search of adventure, glory and the pursuit of freedom of ideas. He began to realize that, without significant help, the Continental forces were doomed. Being a nobleman in favor at court, he returned to France and pled the case to assist the cause. King Louis XVI, who did not love the English ultimately came through in spades. He ordered Gen. Rochambeau to the colonies with 5,500 men and most importantly, sent arms and specie... hard currency...money. Spain was a silent partner.

But there were still significant problems. Washington did not fully trust the French, having fought against them on behalf of the English in the French and Indian War. On the other hand, the English had refused to sell him an officership. Just think where we would have been if that had happened.

After the arrival of Gen. Rochambeau and the French army in Rhode Island, there were several meetings between the two generals over a period of more than a year. Gen. Washington was still smarting from his defeat at the hands of Generals Clinton & Cornwallis in Long Island and wanted to attack Gen. Clinton in New York. Gen. Rochambeau, who had expressly been put under the leadership of Gen. Washington by King Louis XVI did not agree, but felt obliged to follow his orders. That did not prevent him from continuing to argue for a southern offensive against Gen. Cornwallis, who was being backed into the sea at Gloucester by LaFayette.

After a thorough assessment of Clinton's forces in New York and getting the news that Admiral de Grasse was sailing the French Navy into Chesapeake Bay from Santa Domingo with the permission of the Spanish who were largely dependent on the French Navy for protection, and Gen. Washington's growing respect for and trust in Gen. Rochambeau, the die was cast, and the march south was "on".

So – What did this really mean? Imagine having a couple of houseguests who need to be fed, housed, entertained. Now close your eyes and imagine - think in larger numbers – a combined army of over 12,000 men; horses; 4,000 oxen to pull the hundreds of carts and wagons over inferior roads, or no roads at all.

Do you see them coming? Do you hear them marching? Are you ready for them?

Think of the tiny villages through which this army marched. Even though the French were able to pay for food and supplies, it had to be comparable to a plague of locusts devastating every garden and farm. Just imagine feeding over 12,000 guests dinner, then breakfast in the morning!

The 600 mile march was accomplished in little over one month...without the enemy catching on. Rumors were flying! "They are going to attack New York"! "Only half of the French Navy would come from the Caribbean"!

The miracle was that providence shone on these people. Everything happened just right. Cornwallis, plugged up in Gloucester across the water from Yorktown, with no place to go, no avenue of escape, was forced to surrender.

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Now there is an organization – Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route – US that is working diligently to protect the history of this magnificent march to victory. I invite each and every one of you to become a member.

## **THE WASHINGTON-ROCHAMBEAU REVOLUTIONARY ROUTE NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL**

When Forbes and Cadman published their *France and New England* in 1925, they indicated that an "effort has been made to get the State Park Commission of Connecticut to mark all the nineteen camp sites in that State and it is hoped that some time this will be done." Thirty years later, the sites were still not marked and it was only in response to the establishment of an Interstate Rochambeau Commission that the General Assembly took up the issue again in 1956.

That commission was the brainchild of Charles Parmer, who took it upon himself to resurrect the memory of French participation, and to identify the route taken by French troops. In the Spring of 1951, Parmer began prodding state governments and patriotic societies for funds. In 1952, the Colonial Dames of Virginia endorsed his proposal for a uniform marking of the route and on 16 January 1953, Virginia

Governor John S. Battle appointed Parmer to head a *Rochambeau Commission*. Its purpose was "to arrange with other States for the uniform marking of the route taken in 1781 by General Rochambeau and his French forces and to arrange for a joint celebration of the anniversary of the Rochambeau Victory March.

On 16 April 1953, Parmer called for a meeting of interested parties at Mount Vernon. The event was widely reported in the press; even President Dwight D. Eisenhower and French Foreign minister Georges Bidault sent congratulatory telegrams. Parmer was elected General Chairman of the Interstate Rochambeau Commission of the United States and by the Fall of 1953, "Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut had appointed Commissions or Representatives to work with Virginia." New York, New Jersey and Maryland had "leaders of patriotic groups making plans to do the marking with State permission"

But interest in the project seems to have waned as fast as it had arisen. Parmer died in 1958 shortly after the dedication of the Fourteenth Street Bridge (I-395 between the Jefferson Memorial and the Pentagon) over the Potomac in Washington, DC, as the Rochambeau Memorial Bridge in October 1958. With him the project also died.

During preparations for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, Representative Hamilton Fish of New York introduced on 16 April 1975, House of Representatives Concurrent Resolution 225. It called upon federal, state, county, and local governments to recognize the route taken by Rochambeau's forces as "The Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Route". The Sub-Committee on National Parks and Recreation held hearings on the resolution and the correspondence from the Department of the Interior dated 17 November 1975, and sent a favorable report to Representative James A. Haley, Chair of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.

In its report to the full House, Haley's committee recommended passage of the resolution creating the "Washington-Rochambeau Historic Route" albeit outside the National Park System. On 17 February 1976, the resolution declaring the recognition of the route "as one of the more useful and enduring educational patriotic accomplishments to come from the bicentennial of the American War for Independence" passed without objection as amended, and was referred to the United States Senate the following day. The Senate passed the resolution on 25 August 1976.

Almost twenty years passed before another effort was made to identify, mark, and protect the route. Almost 50 local and regional historians and historically interested individuals from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut met at Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh, New York, on 16 December 1999, to organize the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route committee.

W3R was born there at the suggestion of Col. James Johnson, who felt the whole name was a mouthful. Chaired by Dr. Jacques Bossière, the W3R functioned as a working committee that was part of a broader initiative to commemorate the 225th Anniversary of the American Revolution. Its goals were, and are, the identification and preservation of the route itself and of historic sites along the route on a state level, and the creation of a National Historic Trail to promote inter-state heritage preservation.

The W3R Committee was soon successful in its lobbying efforts for funding for the national effort. On 3 July 2000, on the doorsteps of the Dean-Webb-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, CT, site of the historic May 1781 meeting between Washington and Rochambeau, Representative John B. Larson announced that he had introduced on 29 June 2000, what has become the *Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Heritage Act of 2000*.

That same day, his bill, entitled "A Bill to require the Secretary of the Interior to complete a resource study of the 600 mile route through Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia, used by George Washington and General Rochambeau during the American Revolutionary War," was referred to the House Committee on Resources. Referred to the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands on 14 August with an executive comment requested from the Department of the Interior, the bill, which by now had attracted 42 co-sponsors, was back on the floor of the House on 23 October where it passed under suspended rules by voice vote at 3:17 PM.

Received in the Senate on 24 October 2000, where Senators Joseph Lieberman, Christopher Dodd, and eight co-sponsors had introduced an almost identical Senate Resolution 3209 on 17 October 2000, it passed without amendment and by Unanimous Consent on 27 October 2000. A message on this Senate action was sent to the House the following day; the bill was approved on 9 November 2000. President Clinton's signature on 4 December 2000 created Public Law No. 106-473, an "Act to require the Secretary of the Interior to complete a resource study of the 600-mile route Unlike previous legislation, this bill allocated federal funds to the NPS to carry out a feasibility study that began in late 2001.

Much Congressional maneuvering delayed the passage of legislation to recognize the route as an official trail, but the United States House of Representatives on 25 March 2009 passed H.R. 146, "[T]o designate certain land as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, to authorize certain programs and activities in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes." House Speaker Representative Nancy Pelosi signed the bill on Monday, 30 March 2009. Later that day President Barack Obama signed HR 146, the "Omnibus Public Land Management Act" into Public Law No. 111-11. Section 5204 of this law establishes the "Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail" as the 29<sup>th</sup> National Historic Trail within the National Park System.

During the past year, we have had numerous meetings with the National Park Service, and finally, Joe DiBello was named the NPS Superintendent of The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail.

There is much to do: I want to see the membership base increased; the development of user-friendly route maps for cars and bicycles; access to self tours via car GPS and cell phones; road signs alerting the public to significant W3R sites throughout the nine states and DC.

Do consider joining W3R-NJ or W3R-US. We need you and we need your help.

Thank you very much.

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