

How Was the W3R-US Organization Developed?



The vision of marking the 650-mile trail from Newport to Yorktown to honor the contributions of France to the American Revolution was noted in 1905 (the 125th anniversary of the march). In 1981 -- the bicentennial -- some re-enactors traced the entire route on foot and on horseback, while others made and wore uniforms representing the various French regiments and camped at most of the sites used by the French in 1781.

As the 225th anniversary of the march neared, a group in Connecticut (led by Jacques Bossiere and Serge Gabriel) began work to identify, protect, and place in historic context the documentary and physical evidence of the activities of Rochambeau's army as the most dramatic representation of eight years of French aid. This provided the basis for a proposal to have Congress designate the W3R as a National Historic Trail. In 1999 the CT group and the Society of the Cincinnati invited many history-oriented organizations from the states along the route to send representatives to a symposium of international scholars in Newburgh NY. James M. Johnson (of New York) developed a list of supporters from many states and encouraged them to take actions similar to those in CT. An electronic newsletter (published by Hans dePold of CT) helped inform this group of historic events along the route and contemporary preservation activities. In 2000 Rep. John Larsen and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (both of CT) introduced bills, which were passed by the U.S. Congress, directing the National Park Service to develop reports on the basis and feasibility of doing so.

By 2003 the organization needed a more formal structure, more explicit representation and participation from individuals in all the states, and a legal status to support the solicitation and expenditure of funds as a non-profit entity. Ralph Nelson and Kim Burdick (both of Delaware) led this reorganization. In 2004 Jacques Bossiere was elected chair and Kim Burdick vice chair of the W3R-US. Ralph Nelson developed a Web site to provide both members and the public with information on both the historical events and contemporary activities of the W3R-US. The new organization developed many W3R events, drew thousands of citizens and students to W3R activities, coordinated efforts to mark the trail, and helped finance, and drew attention to several multi-state march re-enactments.

As of March 2007 the National Park Service has recommended that Congress designate the W3R as a National Historic Trail, and bills to accomplish that are under consideration.