

Washington-Rochambeau Activities in Pennsylvania

Hurricane Ernesto Dampens Our Events, But Not Our Spirit!

by Winchell S. Carroll, May, 2007

In early September, 1781 the French and American armies spent less than a week passing through Pennsylvania on their way to Yorktown. While their visit here was very short several significant things happened while they were here. Most significant was Congress reviewing the armies at the State House – better known to you at Independence Hall. In Marcus Hook, Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau learned that the French fleet under Admiral De Grasse had arrived in the Chesapeake Bay, had cleared out the British fleet and began the siege of Yorktown.

In early September, 1782 the French army together with elements of the American army returned to Pennsylvania. They were again reviewed by Congress in front of Independence Hall.

The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (W3R-PA) was organized and incorporated as a Pennsylvania non-profit Corporation in late 2004. We received our 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service in early 2005. We also received a permit to raise funds from Pennsylvania's Bureau of Charitable Organizations. Our mission is to remind all American's of the importance of the French Alliance to the ultimate American victory in the Revolution and to support the establishment of the Washington-Rochambeau National Historical Trail by soliciting the support of our Senators and Congressmen for the bills just re-introduced in Congress – S.686 and H.R. 1286. Five Compatriots are officers or directors of the W3R-PA. They include Win Carroll, Phil Anders, Jim Willis, Wayne Strasbaugh and Ed Greenawald.

The W3R-PA is one of 9 state organizations that are members of a confederation called W3R-USA. The W3R-USA's website is www.w3r-us.org, and we have a portion of that.

In 2005 and 2006 we raised about \$57,000 that paid our legal and accounting expenses associated with incorporation and for the following activities:

1. Design and installation a W3R exhibit in the Independence Visitor Center (IVC) at Independence National Historical Park (INHP) in Philadelphia. The exhibit was installed Independence Day Weekend.- the busiest of the year at INHP. An estimated 750,000 people saw the exhibit in 2006.
2. A press conference at Le Bec Fin, Philadelphia's most famous French 5-star restaurant. We discussed our plans for Labor Day Weekend.
3. Completed the 650 W3R-PA Resource Guide, developed by Robert Selig, Jr., PhD, as required by the 1999 federal legislation requiring the National Park Service to study the feasibility of the national historical trail.
4. We had great plans for Labor Day Weekend 2006 including:
 - a. On Thursday, August 30th, an American frigate was scheduled to arrive at Penn's Landing on the Delaware River to celebrate the 225th Anniversary of the armies coming through Philadelphia on their way to Yorktown. Unfortunately a hot war broke out between Israel and Lebanon in August and our ship was sent to the Mediterranean

- b. On Friday, August 31st, we held a very successful black tie dinner/dance and fund raiser in the Independence Ball Room at the IVC despite the arrival of Hurricane Ernesto. Ernesto brought with it the most rain in a 24 hour period in Philadelphia's history.
- c. We were not so fortunate with the two massive military parades we had planned at Independence Hall and the historic district in Chester. The parades were to include all Colonial elements of the Third U.S. Infantry (the Old Guard) plus 20 Revolutionary War fife and drum corps and re-enactment groups. We were forced to cancel the parades and a luncheon at the City Tavern to celebrate Washington and Rochambeau having lunch there on September 1, 1781.
- d. The America's March to Yorktown (AMTY) re-enactors who walked the route from Newport, RI to Yorktown, VA arrived in Bristol, PA on August 31st and exited Pennsylvania into Delaware on Tuesday, September 4th. Despite the storm they were greeted with formal receptions at Bristol, and in Philadelphia at the Frankford Historical Society, Schuylkill Banks Park and the Blue Bell Inn. Their last night in Pennsylvania was spent at Washington Park in Chester. Bristol, Schuylkill Banks Park and Washington Park were all camp sites for the armies in 1781. The visit of AMTY and the planning for the parades generated tremendous newspaper coverage – the most coverage of a history-related event since the moving of the Liberty Bell to its new home in 2003. Ernesto, however, washed out all of our planned television coverage.

As we move to 2007 we are in good shape to complete our tasks. On February 3rd the PASSAR approved a \$7,500 donation to the W3R-PA, Governor Rendell has pledged \$25,000 and we are working with our W3R-PA Board Member, Representative Larry Curry on another grant. Our tentative plans for 2007 include:

1. Keep the W3R exhibit at the IVC until at least Labor Day weekend. and then move it to Visitor Center at the Valley Forge National Historical Park where tens of thousands more visitors will see it.
2. Press Conference at Schuylkill Banks Park on Friday, April 13th, to announce our plans for 2007 and our distribution plans for the W3R-PA Resource Guide.
3. Make the Resource Guide available at the Valley Forge Historical Society's annual church service on May 6th commemorating the American army learning of the French Alliance.
4. Conduct a fund raiser during the period from July 15th to July 31st – the 225th anniversary of the first meeting between Rochambeau and Washington since Yorktown.
5. Labor Day Weekend – We have invited a U.S. Navy ship for a port visit, repeat the parades planned last year on Saturday, September 1st with a luncheon at the City Tavern and another fund raiser. All to celebrate the 225th anniversary of the French army returning to Philadelphia from Yorktown to be reviewed by Congress together with elements of the American army.
6. An educational symposium on W3R and the French Alliance at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in December to commemorate the 225th anniversary of Penn awarding honorary degrees to 5 French officers.

After 2007 we hope to work on installing W3R-US information kiosks along the W3R National Historic Trail and work with PennDot to mark the trail.

The W3R project has been challenging and interesting. We all have learned a great deal about the importance of the French Alliance and its impact on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.