

Witness TO REVOLUTION | The Unlikely Travels of Washington's Tent

AUDIO TOUR »

Lafayette's Return 214

The Marquis de Lafayette, was just nineteen when he arrived in America and volunteered for service in Washington's army. He fought well during the war and developed a special bond with George Washington. By 1824, he had been through another Revolution, the French Revolution. He was also among the last living American Revolutionaries, and as a beloved hero, he returned to the United States for a grand tour as "the nation's guest." Americans enthusiastically turned out to parades and dinners to catch a glimpse of him, and they bought and made Lafayette memorabilia, like the plate, bust, cockade, and parade banner on display here.

Ten years before, during the War of 1812, Fort McHenry, which is outside Baltimore, had become an American shrine when it held out against a British bombardment and because its flag had inspired the lyrics of the "Star-Spangled Banner," by Francis Scott Key.

Now, in 1824, Washington's tent was there. Lafayette arrived at Fort McHenry on his tour on October 7. Approaching the fort, he was surprised to see the old marquee tents, and memories flooded over him. Aging Revolutionary veterans gathered to embrace their old comrade.

Among them was John Eager Howard, who had served valiantly as a Revolutionary officer. He held a piece of paper in his hands, the one displayed nearby, with his notes for his speech welcoming Lafayette under the tent.

"The few of your Brother soldiers of Maryland who remain after a lapse of 40 years, the sons of some of them who are now no more are assembled in the tent of Washington to greet you on your visit to the United States, and to assure you of their affectionate and sincere regard... this tent will call to your recollection many interesting incidents which occurred when you were associated in arms with Washington, the patriot and soldier, the savior of his country, the friend of your youth."

That evening, in Baltimore, presidential candidate John Quincy Adams offered a toast: "The Tears of Glory, Gratitude and Joy, in the Tent of Washington!"