

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH  
BOOK REVIEW

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**BROTHER LAFAYETTE:  
THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE'S TRAVELS IN AMERICA 1824-1825**

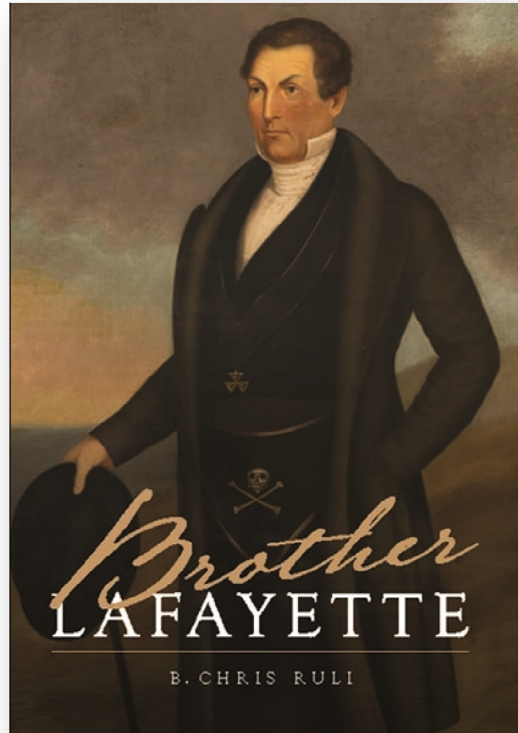
AUTHOR: B. CHRIS RULI

Reviewed by William J. Lorenz P.M., Research Fellow, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

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Author B. Chris Ruli is a brilliant historian, researcher, and author. His published work has been used by the Washington Post, the History Channel and several “history-focused” podcasts. He is currently executive director for the Scottish Rite Research Society and is the associate editor of the Scottish Rite publication, “*Heredom.*” Brother Ruli has also contributed to the Washington D.C. Historical Society and the Philalethes Society, receiving several awards for his publications.

In what may be considered to be an impossible task, author B. Chris Ruli does an outstanding presentation in 224 pages (including index and end notes), reviewing the Marquis de Lafayette’s fourth and last visitation to the United States, and his ten month travels through the then twenty-four states and Washington, D.C. With some exceptions, ***Brother Lafayette: The Marquis de Lafayette’s Travels in America*** actually covers only his official Masonic related visits and adds a number of “meetings” with friends and distinguished military veterans of the American Revolution, who happened to be Freemasons.



Author Ruli finds difficulty in the various accounts of Lafayette’s travels, when and where Lafayette became a Mason, dates on various activities and the interpretation of events from historian to historian. Ruli does an excellent job sorting out details to arrive at the truth when and where possible. In the book’s Foreword, Brother Adam Kendall (Editor – *Heredom*) lays out the importance and need of Brother Ruli’s, ***Brother Lafayette***. The lack of the Masonic connection found in general accounts of historians with respect to the Marquis, the need for correction of faulty recordings of Masonic historians, the appeal of Lafayette’s return to the public and the large

Masonic influence on American citizenry from the beginning of the American Revolution to present times, are just a few aspects of the Lafayette story that Brother Ruli addresses.

In his Introduction, Ruli states that the “book’s goal is to catalog every Masonic interaction between Lafayette and the fraternity,” noting that many events went unrecorded or records are lost. He also recognizes many previous historians and other resources he utilized in his presentation.

***Brother Lafayette*** is divided into twelve Chapters. The first two, “The Hero of Two Worlds” and “Lafayette and the Mystic Tie,” examine his life and Masonic career up to the time of his arrival in the United States for his final tour, in August, 1824.

Born September 6, 1757 into an aristocratic family that was heavily involved in the military, Lafayette at the age of 14, was commissioned in the French Army as a second lieutenant. On his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he became a Captain in the dragoons, immediately following his wedding. During discussions with others on the American conflict with England, Lafayette became excited, later stating, “At the first news of the quarrel my heart was enrolled in it.” At age 19 years, against his family’s and the French government’s wishes, he sailed to South Carolina, bringing rifles and ammunition, and soon joined the Continental Army in Philadelphia. Serving with “no fees” and his willingness to seek support from France, by act of Congress he was named a Major General. Soon after, George Washington traveled to Philadelphia and the two met, becoming close friends. Lafayette fought gallantly for the American cause in several skirmishes, and was wounded at the Battle of Brandywine. Most notable was the Battle of Yorktown, where Lafayette pinned Cornwallis by land, while the French fleet arrived in the Chesapeake River.

Although Lafayette was probably made a Mason in France at an early age, many stories have been told of his initiation. One erroneous story is that he was initiated by General George Washington possibly at Valley Forge. Another story states that his initiation took place in New Jersey in 1779, a time when the Marquis had taken leave to return to France. Others told stories of him being initiated in various military lodges. Of course, numerous stories of “Lafayette aprons” abound. Separating fact from fiction is a difficult process.

Interestingly, Brother Ruli finds that the Grand Secretary of Tennessee wrote in his 1825 official proceedings report, after Lafayette’s visit, that he had “been a longtime member of the order, having been initiated, young as he was, even before he entered the service of our country in the Revolutionary War.” Brother Ruli also discovers Lafayette’s membership in a history of French Freemasonry, 1688-1771. Other French documents seem to reinforce the assertion that Lafayette visited lodges as early as 1772, before leaving to support American independence. As for the Lafayette aprons, Brother Ruli devotes eight pages to these tales.

Chapter Three, “An American Welcome” offers a detailed account of Lafayette and his party’s arrival in New York at the invitation of President James Monroe. Cannons were fired from Fort Lafayette before reaching shore on August 15, 1824. Boats filled the bay waiting for his arrival. A party was held at Vice-President Daniel D. Tompkins’s home. A grand reception and parade in which “50,000 people flooded the city streets” began the next day. Lafayette met with the mayor and city officials,

attended lunches and dinners hosted by local groups, and had private meetings with surviving revolutionary veterans and old friends. The celebration lasted four days before he left for Massachusetts, there to meet with former president John Adams. Newspapers across the nation covered Lafayette's "every little detail," including speech transcripts, odes and songs written to honor his arrival, his responses, other correspondence and various invitations to events. This same would occur everywhere Lafayette would travel.

Very interestingly, just two weeks after his arrival in New York, he received the degrees of Royal Arch Masonry in Jerusalem Chapter on the morning of September 11, and later in the day, Morton Commandery's Knights Templar order. His son, George Washington Lafayette, would also receive the Chapter degrees the same morning. Brother Ruli details Lafayette receiving the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite degrees in the New York "Cerneau" Supreme Council on September 22 (often just a mention by other Masonic historians because of its perceived illegitimacy). He would later participate in a "treaty of Union" between the "Cerneau" Supreme Council and Supreme Councils of France and Brazil and was honored with the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree in that body. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, he attended the Grand Lodge of New Jersey.

Lafayette would attend many other Grand Lodges throughout his visit, along with blue lodges, Chapters, Commandries, the "Cerneau" Scottish Rite bodies, Masonic banquets and balls. Brother Ruli details 67 days largely devoted to Masonic events, sometimes including up to three Masonic activities in one day. Of particular interest to Lafayette were his visits within Virginia, the land of Washington.

Here Brother Ruli describes Lafayette's attendance at several Virginia lodges: Alexandria-Washington Lodge; Richmond Randolph Lodge with Chief Justice John Marshall presiding; his attendance at Fredericksburg Lodge (George Washington's home lodge) and that Sunday joining with the Lodge to attend local religious service. His presence at many lodges earned him honorary memberships, medals, and other complimentary presentations. But perhaps the most emotional experience was his visit to Washington's estate Mt. Vernon, where he received George Washington's sash and jewel.

This is not just a history book. It is that and much, much more. Author and Brother Chris Ruli carefully lays out a detailed and well researched Masonic history lesson that has been omitted from general history books, and a correcting of a history that was somewhat improvised by many Masonic authors and copied as fact. The book has been highly praised by S. Brent Morris, Chris Hodapp and Michael R. Poll, each of whom are outstanding researchers as well as Masonic authors. I join with them in their conclusion.

Recently published, *Brother Lafayette: The Marquis de Lafayette's Travels in America* is available from Macoy Publishing and other online booksellers.