

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON-ROCHAMBEAU REVOLUTIONARY ROUTE

When Allan Forbes and Paul F. 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." [\[1\]](#) Thirty years later, the sites were still not marked and it was only in response to the establishment of the Interstate Rochambeau Commission that the General Assembly took up the issue again in the mid-1950s.

That commission was the brainchild of Charles Parmer (1898-1958), a Virginia radio commentator who took it upon himself to resurrect the memory of French participation and to identify the route taken by Rochambeau and his troops in 1781/82. In the spring of 1951, Parmer, a descendant of a French soldier, began prodding state governments and patriotic societies for funds. [\[2\]](#) In 1952, the Colonial Dames of Virginia endorsed his proposal for a uniform marking of Washington's and Rochambeau's 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." [\[3\]](#)

On April 16, 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." [\[4\]](#) But interest in the project seems to have waned as fast as it had arisen. Parmer's Commission was continued until 1958, but only Connecticut seems to have carried out the task of identifying and marking the route. In its January 1957 session, the General Assembly passed House Bill No. 2005, "An Act concerning erecting Markers to designate the Sites of Camps occupied by the French troops under Rochambeau." Approved on June 4, 1957, it appropriated \$ 1,500 to cover expenses and instructed the State Highway Commissioner to "erect roadside signs" in cooperation with Parmer's "Interstate Rochambeau Commission" and "local historical societies or fraternal community groups." Pursuant to this legislation, the State Highway Commission placed a total of 27 signs at or near known campsites of Rochambeau's army across the state. [\[5\]](#)

Parmer was less successful in New York. Correspondence between New York State Historian Albert Corey and Parmer between March and September 1953 shows that Parmer tried hard to get New York involved in his commission, but for lack of money the initiative never got off the ground. By 11 February, Parmer had contacted Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who forwarded the letter to Corey, who in turn wrote to Stephen P. Thomas, Director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences on 2 September 1953, that he had taken "the matter up with the appropriate authorities here. While the project was recognized as being an excellent one and worthy of encouragement, we could find no money available for that purpose." Corey indicated that he "would certainly be willing to serve on a state committee" for the Interstate Rochambeau Commission "if one were organized." There the matter rested. [6] The committee never constituted itself, New York never appointed a Rochambeau Route Commissioner, and no signs were put up. Parmer died in the fall of 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 Rochambeau Memorial Bridge in October 1958. [7] The project died with him as well and his efforts were soon forgotten. [8]

Fifteen years later, in 1972, Anne S. K. Brown and Howard C. Rice, Jr., published the authoritative and groundbreaking study *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*. Volume 2 of the work contains 204 pages of itineraries and texts followed by 177 contemporary maps, charts, and views of the routes taken by Rochambeau's army on the American mainland as well as in the Caribbean. These maps identified and definitely established the route of the main body of the French forces.

During preparations for the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, Representative Hamilton Fish of New York introduced on April 16, 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 identified in the Brown and Rice work as "The Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Route." On November 14, 1975, the United States Department of the Interior as the supervisory body of the National Park Service (NPS) informed Representative James A. Haley, Chair of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, that the department had no objections to the resolution. It recommended, however, that the word "National" not be used since the route was neither part of the NPS nor met the criteria of integrity required by the NPS.

The Sub-Committee on National Parks and Recreation held hearings on the resolution and the correspondence from the Department of the Interior dated November 17, 1975, and sent a favorable report to Haley, whose committee took up the resolution on January 27, 1976. 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 February 17, 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.

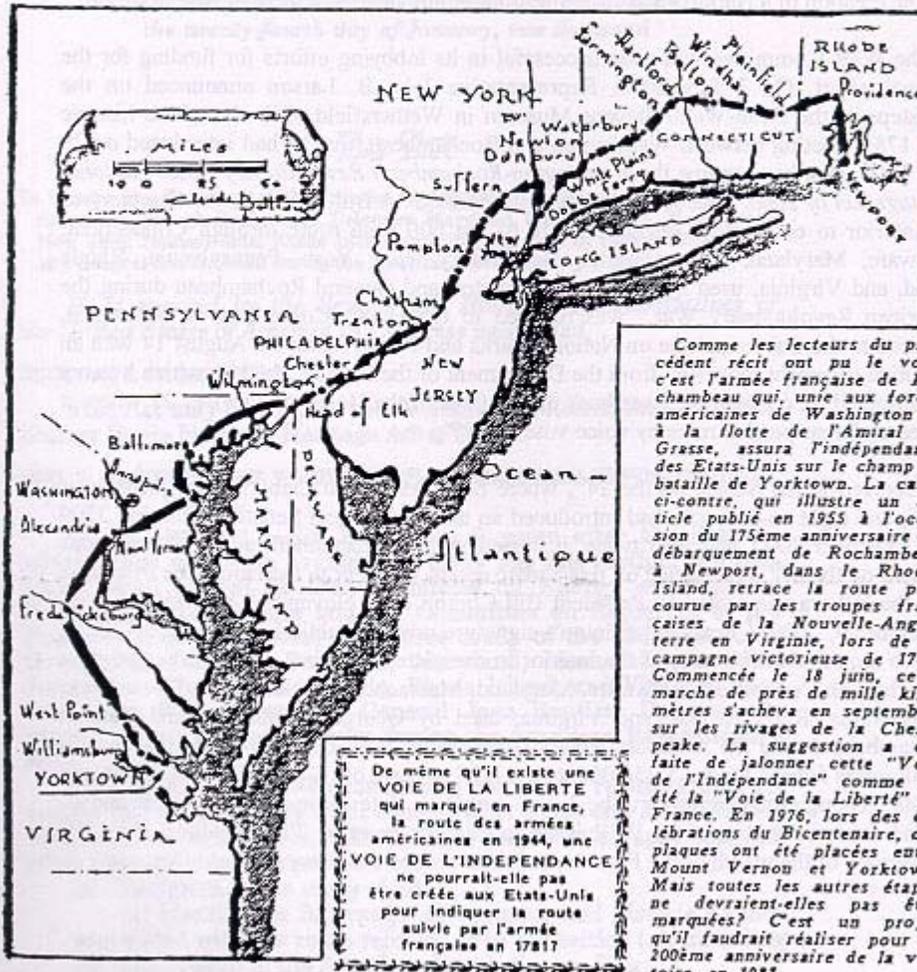
More than five months later, on July 21, 1976, the Department of the Interior informed Senator Henry M. Jackson, chair of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, that it had no objection to House Concurrent Resolution 225. Following a hearing by the Senate's Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation on August 2, 1976, Jackson's committee recommended on August 5, that the Senate pass the resolution as well. [\[9\]](#) The resolution was passed by the Senate on August 25, 1976.

Joint House-Senate Resolution 225 had asked that the states "through appropriate signing, call attention to the route," but failed to appropriate funds to pay for signs outside Colonial National Historical Park in Yorktown, Virginia. Because of this lack of federal funds, a private "Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Route Committee" established itself in Yorktown, New York, and set up its own signs. But few of them seem to have survived. [\[10\]](#) But even without federal funds or markers, hundreds of re-enactors traced the route from Newport to Yorktown from October 9-16, 1981, to commemorate the bicentennial of the siege. [\[11\]](#)

Almost twenty years passed before another effort to identify, mark, and protect the route began in Connecticut. In 1995, the Inter Community Historic Resources Committee began its work of identifying and classifying known campsites according to their state of preservation and the danger of potentially destructive development. The Committee set itself the goal in October 1995 of having Rochambeau's route, already recognized as the "Washington-Rochambeau Historic Route" by the United States Congress, listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the "Revolutionary Road." Concurrently it asked State Representative Pamela Z. Sawyer to introduce legislation in the General Assembly to allocate the funds for the historical, archeological, and architectural research required for that registration. After three years, and with the help of 26 co-signers, the state legislature in the spring of 1998 appropriated \$ 30,000 for the first of three annual phases to document the route through Connecticut as the first step toward having the entire route from Newport to Yorktown listed in the National Register.

UN PROJET POUR LE BICENTENAIRE DE LA VICTOIRE (1981)

## Une "Voie de la Liberté" en France Une "Voie de l'Indépendance" aux USA



Concurrently in June 1998, a commemorative initiative of the National Park Service began as an effort of Revolutionary War-related parks in its Northeast and Southeast regions to use the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution to enhance public understanding of events from 1775 to 1783. In collaboration with, but organizationally separate from this initiative, 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 a Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route committee. Chaired by Dr. Jacques Bossiere, the W3R functions as a working committee that is part of a broader initiative to commemorate the 225<sup>th</sup> 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, Representative John B. Larson announced on the doorsteps of the Dean-Webb-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, CT, site of the historic May 1781 meeting between Washington and Rochambeau, 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 August 14 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 October 23 where it passed under suspended rules by voice vote at 3:17 p.m.

Received in the Senate on the 24<sup>th</sup>, where Senators Joseph Lieberman, Christopher Dodd, and eight co-sponsors had introduced an almost identical Senate Resolution 3209 on 17 October 2000, and read twice, it passed without amendment and by Unanimous Consent on the 27<sup>th</sup>. A message on this Senate action was sent to the House the following day; the bill was presented to President Bill Clinton on 2 November, who signed it on November 9, 2000. [\[12\]](#) President Clinton's signature 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 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." Unlike previous legislation, this bill allocates federal funds, \$ 250,000, to the NPS to carry out a feasibility study to begin in 2002. Though much remains to be done -- only two states have completed their above-ground resource studies -- the W3R is on schedule to meet its 2006 deadline, the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the march of the Franco-American armies to victory in Yorktown.

One Hundred Sixth Congress  
of the  
United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Monday,  
the twenty-fourth day of January, two thousand*

An Act

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.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of  
the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the "Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Heritage Act of 2000".

**SEC. 2. STUDY OF THE WASHINGTON-ROCHAMBEAU REVOLUTIONARY ROUTE.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 2 years after the date on which funds are made available to carry out this section, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives, 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 Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau during the American Revolutionary War.

(b) **CONSULTATION.**—In conducting the study required by subsection (a), the Secretary shall consult with State and local historic associations and societies, State historic preservation agencies, and other appropriate organizations.

(c) **CONTENTS.**—The study shall—

- (1) identify the full range of resources and historic themes associated with the route referred to in subsection (a), including its relationship to the American Revolutionary War;
- (2) identify alternatives for National Park Service involvement with preservation and interpretation of the route referred to in subsection (a) and

(3) include cost estimates for any necessary acquisition, development, interpretation, operation, and maintenance associated with the alternatives identified pursuant to paragraph (2).

*John Boehner*  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

*Strom Thurmond*

Vice President of the United States and  
President of the Senate pro Tempore

APPROVED

NOV - 9 2000

*William Jefferson*

[1] Allan Forbes and Paul F. Cadman, *France and New England* 3 vols., (Boston, 1925) Vol. 1, p. 131.

[2] I am grateful to Albert D. McJoynt of Mt. Vernon, Virginia, for providing me copies of correspondence and newspaper clippings he had acquired from Parmer's widow.

[3] The origins of Parmer's activities are outlined in his *Report of the Rochambeau Commission to the Governor and the general Assembly of Virginia* Senate Document No. 19 (Richmond, 1953).

[4] Parmer apparently never contacted Massachusetts for cooperation. The list of states involved is taken from his *Report of the Rochambeau Commission*, p. 10.

[\[5\]](#) The legislative history of this bill can be followed via *Stenographer's Notes of Public Hearings before the Joint Standing Committee on Roads and Bridges* (1957), p. 165, (February 26, 1957); Connecticut General Assembly, House, *Proceedings 1957* Vol. 7, Part 3, p. 1436, (April 23, 1957), Part 5, pp. 2819/20, (May 27, 1957); Connecticut General Assembly, Senate, *Proceedings 1957* (May 28, 1957), p. 3557, and Secretary of State, *Special Acts passed by the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut at the January Session, 1957* (Hartford, 1957), No. 552, (June 4, 1957).

[\[6\]](#) I am grateful to Dr. Joseph Meany for providing me copies of this correspondence from his files in the New York State Historian's Office.

[\[7\]](#) United States 85<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, House Resolution H.R. 572, January 3, 1957, and Senate Bill S. 768, January 22 (legislative day, January 3), 1957.

[\[8\]](#) In September 1973, Mrs. Parmer was still asking French government officials to forward her the insignia of *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* which her husband had been awarded posthumously in May 1959.

[\[9\]](#) See United States. Congress. House. Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Report No. 94-799, *Recognizing the Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Route*, and United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Report No. 94-1145, *The Washington-Rochambeau Historic Route* (Washington, DC, 1976).

[\[10\]](#) I have been unable to identify or make contact with any member of that committee, which seems to have disbanded at an unknown date though its markers in Connecticut are still maintained.

[\[11\]](#) The "Rochambeau. A Reenactment of His Historic March from Newport to Yorktown" project was sponsored by the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation and directed by the Office of the Adjutant General of the state. I am grateful to Roy P. Najecki for sharing his folder of press releases and marching orders relative to that march with me. There also seems to have been some support in France for such a project: see the attached page from the *Revue economique française* Vol. 104, No. 2, (1982).

[\[12\]](#) Concurrently First Lady and Senator-elect Hilary Rodham Clinton designated the W3R a *Millennium Trail*, making properties along the route eligible for federal TEA 21 funds through each state's Department of Transportation.

[BACK TO TOP](#)