The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, and Boscobel Present

"French Marches through the Hudson River Valley, 1781-1782"

An Exhibit of Paintings by David R. Wagner Celebrating the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route in New York

French Army Encampment At East Hartford
October-November 1782

May 20 - September 20, 2009

Boscobel House & Gardens
1601 Route 9D
Garrison, NY 10524

For more information, please see
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http://www.boscobel.org/main.html
http://www.davidwagner.com/revolutionaryrouteseries.htm

Cover Image: Courtesy of David Wagner, New England Historical Artist
http://www.davidwagner.com/revolutionaryrouteseries.htm
In the early morning hours of May 14, 1781, a Tory unit, the Westchester Refugees, under the command of Col. James DeLancey was under orders to take Colonel Christopher Greene dead or alive. With 60 horse and 200 troops, they assaulted Greene’s camp and the Davenport House being used as headquarters. Before Greene could dress and leave his bedroom, he was cut to pieces by the Tory forces. In the resulting Battle of Pine’s Bridge, Greene’s 1st Rhode Island Regiment put up fierce resistance but was unable to prevent the Tory Loyalists from taking the mortally-wounded Greene on the road back to their headquarters. The Black Regiment pursued and managed to wrest the dying Greene back from the Loyalists. The Rhode Islanders suffered 44 killed, wounded, and captured during the battle.

The Artist, David R. Wagner

David R. Wagner, a lifelong resident of Scotland, Connecticut, attended the Black Hills Teachers College and the University of Connecticut and received a degree in History from Eastern Connecticut State College. A self-taught and versatile artist, Mr. Wagner’s media include acrylic on canvas paintings and pen & ink illustrations. His subjects include portraits, still lifes, landscapes, Native American scenes, and representations of historical events, most notably his historical series depicting the activities of the French and Continental Armies during the American Revolution and a collection of 102 paintings depicting the history of the Eastern Woodland peoples, commissioned by the Mohegan Tribe in Uncasville, Connecticut. The finished collection will cover all nine states and the District of Columbia traversed by Washington and Rochambeau during their campaigns, and will number well over 100 paintings (ongoing).

The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route

General George Washington and the Continental Army and Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau and his French Expeditionary Corps took part in the French-American campaign in 1781 first to lay siege to General Sir Henry Clinton’s army in New York City and later to surround the main Southern British army under General Charles Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, and the return marches in 1782.

The Franco-American journey was an amazing feat of endurance and military achievement. Elements of the French Army marched and then sailed to their destiny at Yorktown from June until September 1781. The Continental Army also made the march and then voyage from Philipsburg, New York, to the York River. It was at Philipsburg, on August 14, that Generals Washington and Rochambeau learned that the fleet of French Admiral François Joseph Paul, Comte de Grasse, was sailing to the Chesapeake Bay. In 1782 the French Army retraced its steps back to Boston, Massachusetts, to board ships for the Caribbean; the Continental Army returned for its final encampment at Newburgh and New Windsor, New York. The French Expeditionary Corps used thirty-eight camps in its march to Virginia and fifty-four for the return. Of these, there were eight camps in New York in 1781 and five in 1782.

This Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area’s initiative for a National Historic Trail officially started in this generation—after earlier failures even during the Bicentennial—at Washington’s Headquarters in Newburgh on December 16, 1999. With the support of key members of the New York Congressional delegation, led by Congressman Maurice Hinchey, then Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College, Congress passed the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail Designation Act, which was signed by President Barack Obama on March 30, 2009. As a result, the Hudson River Valley will be a part of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail.
On July 12, 1781 some 200 French troops from five regiments with some American militia, originally left with the fleet at Newport as the main army began its march south, took part in the first actual contact with British forces at Fort Franklin on Lloyd’s Point in Huntington, Long Island, New York. Operating from the frigates, the Romulus, the Gentille, and the Ariel, and the cutter, Prudence, the force was to burn supplies stored there, as defenders were thought to be few—about fifty. However, the fort was heavily armed and a number of cannons started to shell the French units preparing for the assault. Although the French far outnumbered the British, it was decided only to make a token exchange and then withdraw. It appears it was to be a feint, in that Washington’s plan was to convince the British in New York that the combined French-American forces would next strike there. Washington and Rochambeau were already in the process of moving south to engage Cornwallis at Yorktown.
Soissonnais Regiment, July 16, 1781

A small detachment of a sergeant and twelve soldiers of the Soissonnais Regiment prevented the British from landing from two frigates to burn the stores at Tarrytown, New York. The 2nd Continental Light Dragoons under Colonel Elisha Sheldon arrived to support the French with two eighteen-pounder cannons to force the ships out of range.

Moving Across New Jersey
August 25, 1781

Shown here is the Lauzun Legion together with the Rhode Island Regiment as they guarded Washington’s 2nd Division from the Hudson south to Yorktown. This occurred along present-day Route 202 in what is now Oakland, New Jersey. The house is the Van Allen House, which served as Washington’s headquarters on July 14 &15, 1777. The 2nd Division comprised over 500 wagons of supplies needed to sustain other armies.
On October 21, 1782, the night before leaving Crompond, the Comte de Rochambeau was approached by a local sheriff who presented a warrant for his arrest. The complaint against Rochambeau originated when French troops under Rochambeau’s command, on their way to Yorktown a year earlier, had cut wood and damaged fences on land belonging to Captain Samuel Delevan, an American militia captain; they had also ironically improved his millrace. The sheriff explained that he was aware of what the General had done for his country, but that he must do his duty. He then placed his hand on Rochambeau’s shoulder and said, “You are my prisoner.” Rochambeau, surrounded by 5,000 French troops, replied “Take me if you can.”

The painting is based on well defined French maps and records, looking west with Hartford seen across the Connecticut River to the center of the painting.
Each of the four regiments had a train of artillery composed of about a dozen cannons of various sizes. This was a part of the total of nearly fifty pieces for the whole army. The artillery shown here is arriving in the early morning at one of the encampments. It always arrived either very late or very early in the morning because of very bad roads and breakdown of the gun carriages. In addition to the soldiers who operated the guns, it carried about fifteen foresters and engineers who cut branches, downed trees, and filled potholes. Every few miles the axles had to be packed with grease, mostly lard, for lubrication.

Lauzun’s Legion was the only horse unit under the army of General Rochambeau to serve in America, and arrived with the fleet in July 1780 at Newport. It consisted of 230 mounted Huzzars and 300 light infantry troops. Due to the lack of forage for the horses in and around Newport, arrangements were made to have the Legion spend the winter of 1780-81 in Lebanon, Connecticut, some 60 miles from Newport. They left Newport on November 10, 1780, for Lebanon. Upon their arrival, barracks were constructed and the troops settled in for the winter. Lauzun, a French nobleman, called Lebanon “The Siberia of North America” and preferred the atmosphere and activities around Newport. The Legion moved out in force on June 21, 1781, and would join the main army in Philipsburg, New York on July 2, 1781. It took part in the defeat of British forces at Yorktown on October 17, 1781.