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VIRTUAL VISION QUEST

led by Wanda Patterson, Chair
American Indians Committee

Fielding Lewis NSDAR

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Marquis de Lafayette

The Creeks meet and greet the Marquis

As every NSDAR Daughter knows, we are celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Marquis de Lafayette's 14-month-long tour of the United States, 40 years after he volunteered to aid General George Washington and the Continental Army in separating America from England. During his 1824-25 visit, Lafayette was accompanied by his son George Washington Lafayette and the marquis' secretary, Auguste Lavasseur. Four years after the party returned to France, Lavasseur published his account of the tour, called LAFAYETTE IN AMERICA IN 1824 AND 1825: OR JOURNAL OF A VOYAGE TO THE UNITED STATES. His book sold well, as did other travel journals, which were popular in the early 1800's.

Fascinating to me were portions of Lavasseur's story of the party's encounter with Creek Indians as they crossed the Chattahoochee River from Creek land in Georgia to Creek territory in Alabama. I will share *verbatim* portions of the journal and Lafayette's encounter with the Creeks:

"It was on the banks of the Chatahouche (original spelling in the journal) that we met with the first assemblage of Indians, in honour of the general {{Lafayette}}. A great number of women and children were to be seen in the woods on the opposite bank, who uttered cries of joy on perceiving us. The warriors descended the side of a hill at a little distance and hastened to that part of the shore at which we were to disembark. The variety and singular richness of their costumes presented a most picturesque appearance. Mr. George Lafayette, who was the first that landed, was immediately surrounded by men, women, and children, who danced and leaped around him, touched his hands and clothes with an air of surprise and astonishment, that caused him almost as much embarrassment as pleasure. All at once, as if they wished to give their joy a grave and more solemn expression, they retired, and the men ranged themselves in front. He who appeared to be the chief of the tribe,

gave, by an acute and prolonged cry, the signal for a kind of salute, which was repeated by the whole troop, which again advanced toward the shore. At the moment the general prepared to step on shore, some of the most athletic seized the small carriage we had with us, and insisted that the general should seat himself in it, not willing, as they observed, that their father should step on the wet ground. The general was thus carried in a kind of palanquin a certain distance from the shore. When the Indian whom I have spoken of as the chief, approached him and said in English that all his brothers were happy in being visited by one who, in his affection for the inhabitants of America, had never made a distinction of blood or colour; that he was the honoured father of all the races of men dwelling on that continent. After the chief had finished his speech, the other Indians all advanced and placed their right arm on that of the general, in token of friendship. They would not permit him to leave the carriage, but dragging it along, they slowly ascended the hill they had previously left, and on which one of their largest villages was situated.

“During the progress I drew near to the Indian chief; I supposed that as he spoke English, that he had been educated in the United States, and this I found to be the case. He was about 28 years of age, of a middle height, but the symmetry of his limbs was perfect, his physiognomy noble, his expression mournful; when he was not speaking, he fixed his large black eyes, shaded by a heavy brow, steadfastly on the ground. When he told me that he was the eldest son of M’Intosh, I could not recall, without emotions of sorrow, the imprecations I had heard poured fourth against this chief on the preceding evening. (The Creeks had executed Chief William McIntosh a short time before Lafayette’s visit because the chief had violated a Creek agreement not to sell more land to the whites.” {The young man described as the Indian chief was Chilli, McIntosh’s son, who had replaced his father as chief of the Lower Creeks.}

Levasseur continues his description of the event:

“When we arrived at the brow of the hill we perceived the glitter of helmets and swords; troops were drawn up in line along the road. These men were not Indians; they were civilized men, sent by the state of Alabama to escort the general. The singular triumphal march to which he had been obliged to submit, now ceased. The Indians saw with some jealousy the American escort range themselves around the general.”

When Lafayette's party arrived at the Creek village, they discovered that the Indians had run ahead, stripped off their fine clothing, and prepared to engage in a mock fight {called "the ball play" by the Cherokees} for the general's entertainment. The exhibition was very much like modern-day lacrosse, employing long rackets to move a ball-like object down a large field seven times to "win" the contest. According to the author, Lafayette was much entertained by the mini-war. His description of the event ended with the appearance of a Creek hero:

"In the midst of the long combat, whilst all the players were bent around the ball, an Indian detached himself from the group to some distance, returned on a run, sprung into the air, and after making several somersets, threw himself on the shoulders of the other players, leaped into the circle, seized the ball, and for the seventh time cast it beyond the mark. This player was M'Intosh. {Chilli} The victory was obtained by the camp which he commanded; he advanced to receive our congratulations under a shower of applause from a part of the Indian women, whilst the wives of the vanquished appeared to be endeavouring to console them." Levasseur detailed another event which demonstrated the high regard in which General Lafayette was held by the Creeks:

"We several times met parties of them {Creeks}, and were greatly assisted by them in extricating ourselves from dangerous places in the road, for the storm had encumbered them, and swelled the streams. On one of these occasions, the general received a touching specimen of the veneration these sons of nature held him in. One of the torrents we were to cross had risen above the unnailed wooden bridge over which the carriage of the general was to proceed. What was our astonishment, on arriving at the stream, to find a score of Indians, who, holding each other by the hand, and breast deep in water, marked the situation of the bridge by a double line. We were well pleased at receiving this succour, and the only recompense demanded by the Indians, was to have the honour of taking the general by the hand, whom they called their white father; the envoy of the Great Spirit; the great warrior from France, who came in former days to free them from the tyranny of the English. M'Intosh, who interpreted their discourse to us, also expressed to them the general's and our own good wishes."

Continuing his tour of Creek territory before entering the state of Alabama, General Lafayette's party encountered another chief from the area who led a deputation of Creeks to compliment the general.

“His discourse, which appeared studied, was rather long, and was translated to us by an interpreter. He commenced by high eulogiums on the skill and courage the general had formerly displayed against the English; the most brilliant events of that war were recalled and recounted in a poetical and somewhat pompous strain. He terminated somewhat in these words: ‘Father, we had long since heard that you had returned to visit our forests and our cabins; you, whom the Great Spirit formerly sent over the great lake to destroy those enemies of man, the English, clothed in bloody raiment. Even the youngest amongst us will say to their descendants, that they have touched your hand and seen your figure; they will also behold you, for you are protected by the Great Spirit from the ravages of age – you may again defend us if we are attacked.’

“The general replied, through the interpreter, to these compliments of the Indians: he again counselled them to be prudent and temperate; recommended their living in harmony with the Americans, and to always consider them as their friends and brothers; he told them that he should always think of them, and would pray for the welfare of their families and the glory of their warriors.”

Concluding Levasseur’s account of Lafayette in Alabama, he described a final encounter with Chilli M’Intosh at a ball in Montgomery:

“We had the pleasure of seeing Chilli M’Intosh dance with several beautiful women, who certainly had little idea that they were dancing with a savage. The parting of M’Intosh with the general was a melancholy one. He appeared overwhelmed with sinister presentments. After having quitted the general and his son, he met me in the courtyard; he stopped, placed my right arm on his, and elevating his left hand toward heaven, ‘Farewell,’ said he, ‘always accompany our father and watch over him. I will pray to the Great Spirit also to watch over him, and give him a speedy and safe return to his children in France. His children are our brothers; he is our father. I hope that he will not forget us.’”

Chilli M’Intosh must have had a premonition about coming events which would befall the Creek Nation. Unlike the Cherokees, who submitted peacefully to removal in 1838, the Creeks did not go peacefully. Having been defrauded of their lands by both the government through treaties and by unscrupulous whites in Alabama, the Creeks were reduced to

extreme poverty. A reporter for the ARKANSAS ADVOCATE described the condition of many Creeks: "They beg their food from door to door.. It is really painful to me to see the wretched creatures wandering about the streets haggard and naked." The poverty-stricken Creeks were gathered and marched toward the Mississippi on their own Trail of Tears. Still, many Creeks tried to remain in their homeland. Finally in 1836 Secretary of War Lewis Cass ordered armed troops into Alabama to capture roving bands of holdouts. Handcuffs were made for sixteen hundred prisoners, who were shackled together and marched over 90 miles to Montgomery to meet steamboats to carry the wretched cargo to Mobile. There they would travel on boats up the Mississippi and eventually reach their new homes in the West. The MONTGOMERY ADVERTISER recounted the story of an elderly Creek who cut his own throat when he became too weak to totter. The article concluded, "To see a remnant of a once-mighty people fettered and chained together and forced to depart from the land of their fathers into a country unknown to them is sufficient to move the stoutest heart."

I was curious about what eventually happened to Chilli M'Intosh. He moved to Indian Territory voluntarily, and I discovered that in 1861 he and his younger brother signed a treaty with the Confederate States of America to officially ally the Creek Nation with the Confederacy. Chilli achieved the rank of colonel of the Second Regiment of Creek Mounted Volunteers. He and his troops saw action in several battles in Indian Territory, such as Pea Ridge and Honey Springs.

The following has nothing to do with the Creeks, but I stumbled on an article from an Alabama newspaper which detailed the menu items served at a banquet for General Lafayette at the plantation of Sam Dale in Clairborne, Alabama, during the general's tour of America. I was fascinated by the sumptuous meal fit for a marquis, which included the following exotic offerings listed on a menu card unearthed by the Sam Dale Historical Society:

Gumbo soup, catfish chowder, baked lake trout stuffed with pork, venison stew, roast wild turkey, barbequed bear meat, squirrel pie, Brunswick stew, Indian hominy boiled with hog jawl, rhubarb pie, dried apple tarts, peach cobbler, pear preserves, huckleberry jelly, honey in the comb, biscuits, johnnycakes, cakes made with honey, apple brandy, scuppernong wine, and metheglin made from honey.

Yummy!

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