

Did He Stop in Brighton?

In 1824-1825 Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de LaFayette, Marquis de LaFayette, returned to the United States at the invitation of President James Monroe and the U.S. Congress. Plans were underway for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 1826 so including the Revolutionary War ally was very important. Intending to visit only the thirteen original states, those plans changed as LaFayette visited all twenty-four states over his sixteen-month stay. Everywhere he went, large crowds greeted him and held ceremonies of remembrance.

LaFayette was at Yorktown, Virginia, in October of 1824 to commemorate British General Cornwallis' surrender before going on to visit with Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. Winter weather made travel difficult so he spent the winter in Washington and was there for the presidential election of 1824 when no candidate received a majority in the Electoral College and thus the race was decided by the United States House of Representatives, John Quincy Adams declared president.

In the spring of 1825, La Fayette resumed his tour in the southern and western states before traveling by steamboat up the Ohio River and making his way to the northeast. After viewing Niagara Falls, he traveled on the completed sections of the Erie Canal to Rochester. Rochester city historian, Blake McKelvey, described LaFayette's arrival in Rochester as follows: *"It was on June 7, 1825, that the 'Nation's Guest' arrived by canal boat, escorted by a flotilla of twelve flag-bedecked packets crowded with Rochesterians who had gone out to meet the venerable general. The village thronged with double its normal population as an estimated ten thousand lined the bridges over the canal and other points of vantage along the route, eager to take part in the joyful acclamation."* (The Water Power City, page 147)

From Rochester, LaFayette traveled to Canandaigua by horse-drawn carriage, a repair project on the Erie Canal east of Rochester preventing the party from continuing by water (Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series Vol. XIV p. 235). The route to Canandaigua would have included the present-day East Avenue and, because the carriage was said to have belonged to James Guernsey of South Main Street in Pittsford, probably a stop at the Guernsey house (Rochester Historical Society, Publication Fund Series Volume VIII page 129).

This account further states that on the journey from Rochester to Canandaigua, LaFayette was accompanied by Generals Ashbel W. Riley and Francis Brown. The latter statement is important because General Riley was the son of Lovina Wells Riley Stone, the third wife of Orringh Stone (of the Brighton historic site, Stone-Tolan house). In recent years, a historian has challenged the popularly-held belief that LaFayette made a stop at Orringh Stone's tavern on his way to Canandaigua on June 7, 1825. Two factors support LaFayette's visit: Harriet Stone, the daughter of Orringh Stone, was eighteen and living at the Stone house/tavern in 1825. Harriet remembered shaking the hand of LaFayette when he visited the house. And with General Riley escorting LaFayette, it is doubtful that he would have passed by his mother's house with such an important person in tow without stopping to introduce him.

The questions will undoubtedly continue but for now, and for the sake of the celebration of the Erie Canal Bicentennial and the upcoming Semiquincentennial of the Revolution, tradition will hold sway.

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6 June 2025