

## **Backward Glances: The French Are coming!**

**Susan Thompson**

*Join us to honor them in the oval between Delancey Hall and Lobdell House, Friday, September 25, 11:30 am.*

*Ribbon cutting on the National Park Service exhibits marking North Salem's place on the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route and the two visits of the French Army to North Salem*

*The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route is a network of roads, waterways, campsites and buildings used by the American and French armies from Newport to Yorktown where the decisive battle took place. Many of the camps and buildings are gone, but the National Park Service is keeping them alive by creating wayside exhibits to celebrate them. North Salem is one of 15 sites in New York to receive these exhibits.*

Imagine this just as the sun is rising: thousands of colorfully-clad, highly disciplined soldiers, weighted down with 60- lb. packs, sweating in the July heat; horses straining to haul artillery and wagons up hills on terrible roads; drums beating; clouds of dust; the thunder of thousands of marching feet; wagons for butchers, medical care, bread; a rainbow of different colored uniforms and banners; animals on the hoof, a few tag-along women and children – all escorted into New York by Sheldon's Dragoons. Hollywood extravaganza? No. This was the French army under the command of le Comte de Rochambeau entering North Salem on Wallace Road July 2, 1781. At one point the column of soldiers, supplies, and animals stretched all the way from Connecticut down the New York to Vermont Post Road into Waccabuc and beyond. Upper (not North Salem until 1788) Salem residents, who until then had seen only poorly clad, often barefoot, local militia or an occasional Continental, must have been stunned by the spectacle.

On their way to join George Washington's army, the French followed routes that had been painstakingly surveyed and marked by Rochambeau's cartographer Alexandre Berthier and Washington's surveyor-general Robert Erksine. Washington had been planning for two years for the eventual movement of the French troops from Newport. Now the two armies planned to meet in Phillipsburg. Having spent the night before in Ridgebury, the French did not stop in North Salem but made their usual 12-15 miles per day march and camped that night in Bedford, dangerously close to the British.

Except for some of the 56 men and boys from Upper Salem who served on the patriot side – 35 of them under the command of Col. Thaddeus Crane, 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Westchester County Militia, some in the Continental Army -- Upper Salem residents wouldn't see the French again until their return from the victory at Yorktown in the fall of 1782. On that return march, after camping for a month in Cortlandt (today's Yorktown, NY), the army headed east, crossing the Croton River and entering Upper Salem at Dean's Bridge on October 22. They headed down today's Route 22 and then east at the 1775 Purdy Homestead (now the Farmer & the Fish Restaurant). They followed the Titicus River (no reservoir then!) to Delancey Hall. Berthier's map of the 39<sup>th</sup> camp at Salem shows the location of the camps off Delancey Road and near today's firehouse. The arrow points to Delancey Hall.

The French army camped in rows of white tents, the rows often stretching for miles. Officers usually stayed in homes or taverns, so it is likely that Rochambeau and his officers stayed in Delancey Hall, the grandest house in town in 1782.

