

Here at Cap Ferrat, in this superb Grand Hotel, we are celebrating this evening **the 4th of July 2011**. We are drinking champagne, good wine and enjoying delicious food with the members and the guest of the American Club of the Riviera.

If we had been in 1776 in America and the four following years, with the authors of the Declaration of Independence, it would have been quite different. Such a diner would have been impossible. If we had gathered to celebrate this day each one of us would have been chased by “red coats” and if captured, condemned for treason: charged guilty and hanged at the public city square.

Fear not my friends, times have changed and this is not the way we shall finish our diner!

Now if I told you That Bill Clinton sent me a letter from the White house you could say that I’m joking,. Indeed but at the same time not so much, because he did write to the Count de Chambrun in 1995 who was in those days my cousin René.

This is the letter.....

(Seal)

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 6, 1995

Monsieur le Comte de Chambrun

On behalf of the American people, thank you for making the papers of the Marquis de Lafayette available for study at the Library of Congress; I know that these historical treasures will give the world new insight into a great Revolutionary hero and the times he helped to shape. Your generosity strengthens the bonds of friendship and the shared commitment to freedom that France and America have enjoyed for two centuries.

Best wishes.... Etc

Bill Clinton (in manuscript)

In 1994 and early 1995 Mr Billington director of the library of Congress filmed in the chateau de Lagrange some 45 500 documents which belonged to Gilbert du Motier, marquis de la Fayette. Out of these 25 000 are available in the Library of Congress.

Such a volume is absolutely incredible: how has it been possible that these documents cover a span of 265 years with out having been dispersed or destroyed by fire, water or just plain accidents. The miracle finds its reasons: they are numbered hereafter...

- One Adrienne de Lafayette’s maid, Marie Joséphe Daustre, classifies all the letters and documents that she receives between 1765 and and her death in 1806.
- Two Lafayette is well organised and classifies all letters, documents and objects which have a meaning for him.
- Three Marie Joséphe Daustre marries Nicolas Beauchet and the two will take care during the revolutionary period and all the time when Lafayette is in prison of all his belongings with great discretion and efficiency
- Four Gilbert and Adrienne settle in Lagrange in 1800 with all their documents.

- Five When Gilbert dies in 1834 his grandson is wedded to a daughter of the Duc of Leinster. English: she hates the liberals, Lafayette and the French. They decide to stack all the containers of documents in some attic rooms along the “corridor of the polish”. (*Named as such because Lafayette greeted all the liberals of Poland, and else where in Europe: carbonari of Italy etc... He hid them there, hosted them and helped them in many ways*).
- Six His great grandson marries also an English woman also. Both are conservatives and anglophile.
- Seven My uncle Louis de Lasteyrie shows no interest for Lafayette and when he dies in 1955 my cousin René takes over Lagrange.
- Eight René opens the Corridor of the Polish – it’s the first time in 160 years and discovers the treasure beautifully preserved by the 15 feet thick walls heavily coated with lime and chalk.
The drawers of Lafayette’s library contain his seals, his cherished letters, books and even the sealed letters not answered because of his death.

Today we have all the letters of Lafayette to Adrienne. They are part of these 45.500 documents. I have chosen one in particular. It will be conclusive in the description we have of the childhood of Gilbert de la Fayette which I will brush quickly.

The 27th of September 1757, Gilbert is born in the chateau de Chavaniac. The baby is the only male of the family when his father dies at the battle of Minden when he is 22 months old. His father, his grandfather and great grandfather, his ancestors are soldiers who honour the family blood on the battlefields. Two marshals of France, one saves the kingdom in battle by killing the duke of Clarence who was about to capture the king, the other one assists Joan of Arc at the successful siege of Orléans.

The child is brought up by three women: his mother, his grand mother and an aunt. They look after him very well.

-When he is five years old a Jesuit will be hired until they are expelled from France. Then at the age of seven an abbey Fayon is in charge...

He loves his wooden sword and wants to hunt “la bête du gévaudan” with the children of Chavaniac. He has a great deception when he learns that the beast has been captured.

He studies well and is interested by everything he can learn

-At eleven years old he goes to a boarding school, the College du Plessis. He is a good student. He learns latin and is so good at it that 30 and while he is in prison for 6 years years he will use Latin to communicate. He is urged by the desire to wear a uniform.

-At 13 years of age he will enter in the Compagny of Musketeers that his grandfather commanded.

At the same age his mother dies. He will discover at the same time that he has a yearly revenue amongst the highest in France: 120 000 pds equivalent to four M. dollars of today (2011). A tutor manager of his fortune is hired. He wants to serve in the Royal Army and there he meets the top ranking families of the time. It won’t be long for the Duke of Noailles to decide that this eligible La Fayette should be wedded to one of his grand daughters, Adrienne de Noailles one of the daughters of the Duke d’Ayen.

-He is seventeen years old when he marries Adrienne who is fifteen on the 11th of April 1774.

The two will live an amazing life. For Adrienne Gilbert is her lifetime hero. Just before his marriage he becomes an officier of the Noailles Regiment based in Metz.

In the following two year Gilbert will discover the court of Versailles with his brother in law Louis de Noailles for whom he has open admiration. Louis is a charmer; elegant, intelligent, expert on wines, good food, good taste and also quite a woman seducer. Gilbert's education was simple, provincial and not at all fashionable.

He was having a hard time: The queen, Marie Antoinette in a private ball will ask him to dance. Every body will laugh and Gilbert is hurt. His character cannot allow underrating. His pride is to be at the top and in court his passage is a disappointment.

He tries hard to be like Louis and at a diner party with out Louis he drinks so much that a few friends accompany him back home and in the carriage they note that Gilbert repeated several times "do not forget to tell Noailles how I drank"

Then he imagines that if he had a mistress like all these court men, he would become part of "the happy few. Easy to say but more difficult to have! He finally decides to seduce a young and beautiful lady who is already the mistress of the brother of the King, the comte de Provence (future Louis XVIII). Her name is Aglaë de Hunolstein: she has no intention to let Gilbert become her lover her and he fails to do so. Gilbert is aggravated and meeting the count de Provence in a masked ball as he was quipping about his good memory he says to him "every body knows that memory stands for intelligence in a poor mind"

On the verge of a scandal, the Duke d'Ayen intervenes at the highest levels and at the same times tells to his son in law that he should regain his regiment. Gilbert goes back to Metz with happiness to achieve his career. He who is so touchy about his reputation considers proper and meet to become a military. The court is not for him: it was not comfortable for him. He is now 18 years old and Adrienne gives birth to Henriette and soon enough to a second daughter.

The duke of Gloucester arrived in Metz in august 1775. Gilbert and Noailles are invited at the diner given to the brother of George III by the prince de Broglie the commanding officier of Metz. They hear about the insurgents and their rebellion. They hear that George III is sending infantry and important military naval forces to strike them down. The king's brother does not agree too much in this policy and would prefer softer measures.

For Lafayette it strikes him like thunder to hear that over the sea in the "new world" people are fighting for their liberty. It appears to him as a rewarding task to help those who want their liberty. Noailles agrees with him. More over Gilbert finds a deep felt satisfaction to fight against those who killed his father.

Gilbert will secretly organise his leave for America and his offer to assist the Insurgents. He will buy a boat named the Victory in Bordeaux and load it with ammunition and gun powder, he gets in contact with other officers like Kalb.

He finally leaves the coast of Guipuscoa border province of the French basque country end of April 1778.

The Victory is not a fast boat, merely a commercial and sluggish embarcation. It will take 54 days to cross the Atlantic and arrive in Charleston. Gilbert has to accept this and he writes to Adrienne. He has plenty to say to be pardoned. He did not see her when in Paris.

He refused to go to Italy with his father in law. He has been issued a Letter of Cachet by which he should be imprisoned. The duc d'Ayen says to King Louis XVI that the only excuse of his son in law is "his young age and exuberant character" Mean while Gilbert crosses the atlantic at a snails pace.

He starts a letter for Adrienne end of May, and continues on the 7th of june 1777. It will be posted upon arrival in Charleston around the 20th of June

The 31 of May

"My heart,

.....

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"The 7th of June,

"I am still on the sad plain and it is with out comparison the most boring thing that one can endure. To cheer up I think about you, my friends, and the time when I will have the "pleasure to see you again. What a charming moment to expect when I will arrive to embrace you immediatly with out being announced! You will be perhaps with your children. I have precisely right now a delicious "pleasure to think about this. Do not think that this day is so far away; it will seem very long for me but in "fact not as long as you may imagine. I cannot decide on which day, which month I will be back...

Defender of this liberty which I adore, free more than any body else,

-by offering as a friend my services to this so interesting republic, I bring " along my honesty and my good will; no ambition and no interest at all:

-by working for my glory, I work for its happiness.

I hope that for my sake you shall become a good American; this is a sentiment for virtuous hearts.

The happiness of America is intimately bonded to the happiness of mankind. America will become the respected and safe haven of virtue, honesty, tolerance, equality and peaceful liberty...

"Good bye for now, night is arriving and I cannot see any more because I have forbidden any light on the vessel. You can see that I am careful. Hence good bye, if my hand is conducted by my heart, I do not need any light to tell you that I love you and that I will love you all my life".

Gilbert du Motier, marquis de la Fayette is precisely 19 years old, and 9 months...in June 1777. He will arrive one week later and it will take him merely a year to become the "Hero of two Worlds" according to Voltaire.

Thank you for your attention

The 4th of July 2011.

Jean François, marquis de Chambrun