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EDITOR'S PICK

FEATURED

On the trail: Historical trail marking Lafayette's journey in development

Gil Pound Jan 29, 2019



Julien Icher, manager of The Lafayette Trail, stands with a Daughters of the American Revolution marker on Greene Street commemorating a ball held in celebration Marquis de Lafayette's visit to Milledgeville.



Nearly 200 years ago, French military officer and friend of the American Revolution Marquis de Lafayette spent three days in Milledgeville as part of his tour of the United States of America.

Now, with the bicentennial anniversary of Lafayette's famous trek through the states approaching in 2024, France has shown interest in creating a 24-state journey that would allow tourists and locals alike to follow in the historical figure's footsteps by highlighting his stops along the way with special

signage. The Lafayette Trail, as it's being called, would include Milledgeville, the city that served as Georgia's capital at the time of Lafayette's visit.

France native Julien Icher is the manager and researcher for The Lafayette Trail, and he spent last week in Georgia's Old Capital looking into historical leads and checking them against local records. Icher sat down with The Union-Recorder to discuss his work and explain why Lafayette's tour of the states is so historically significant.

"I try to raise awareness across so many American communities about what Lafayette did and how important his visit in 1824 is," Icher said. "I'm always amazed at the imprint he left in these communities, and Milledgeville is no exception."

Icher's involvement with the project started when he first came to America in 2015 as he was conducting a research project for his master's degree at The College of William & Mary in Virginia. He later joined The American Friends of Lafayette, a historical society dedicated to Lafayette's memory formed in Pennsylvania, and later met with the French consul for the states of New England at the organization's annual meeting. Icher sold the consul on the idea for The Lafayette Trail, and that set the project in motion. Through an endorsement of French President Emmanuel Macron, The Lafayette Trail has been expanded from just the New England states to include all 24 visited by Lafayette. Interspersed between the traveling and researching, Icher's stops also include visits with local elected representatives where he works on persuading them to consider adding signage to mark the trail.

"When I come to a new town like Milledgeville, what I want to do is cross-reference the data I already have by connecting with the local historical society, library, or museum and make connections with the legislature so we can move forward," said Icher.

Icher told The Union-Recorder he was scheduled to meet with elected officials in Atlanta this week.

Marquis de Lafayette first came to America in June 1777 to aid the states in their war for independence from Great Britain, and did so against the French monarchy's orders. Lafayette's status as a Mason helped give him an in with many American higher-ups, including then Gen. George Washington, who Lafayette would later name his son after. The French general combined his forces with Washington's in 1781 to lay siege to Yorktown, which would eventually lead to British General Lord Cornwallis' surrender.

Lafayette returned to France later in 1781, and his celebrity grew. In 1824 with the country's 50th anniversary approaching, President James Monroe and U.S. Congress extended Lafayette an

“I’ve found folks to be very responsive and very interested. People here are genuinely trying to help out,” he said. “I introduce myself, describe what I’m doing, and they want to help. I think it’s proof of friendship. I don’t know them and they don’t really know me, so it also tells me they value the commitment of the French. I feel very welcomed here in Milledgeville.”

For more information on The Lafayette Trail, visit www.thelafayettetrail.com.

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