



Alan R. Hoffman speaks to a packed house at the Chester Public Library last Tuesday. Photo by By Travis Lott

## Lafayette translator gives presentation at Chester Library

**BY TRAVIS LOTT**  
For The Herald Tribune

CHESTER – Historian, translator, and esteemed scholar Alan R. Hoffman visited the Chester Public Library last Tuesday, July 1, to speak about General Marquis De Lafayette's 1824-1825 final United States tour.

Hoffman is well known for translating "Lafayette In America" to English. The book was originally written in French by Lafayette's private secretary and published in 1829, and it is the best-known account of that specific period in American history, as well as the best-known account of Lafayette as he was.

Hoffman has been lecturing on Lafayette from the East Coast to the Midwest since 2006, following the trail that Lafayette made during his tour across America.

He is only four states

away from completing the trail of 24 states that Lafayette covered in his tour.

"So I decided, why don't I do Illinois since that's my 20th state?" Hoffman said.

Hoffman went on to say that, although Lafayette didn't directly come to Chester, that much of the historical landmarks he hit along his route across the young Illinois have since been washed away.

"I Googled Kaskaskia, and I think Google said it had 18 people, I figured I couldn't get this kind of crowd out there," Hoffman said. "So then, I looked on Wikipedia where it said Randolph County, so I Googled 'Randolph County Historical Society' – and that's how this got started."

Although much of the original Kaskaskia no longer exists as it did in the time of Lafayette,

several landmarks that would have been along his path remain as a part of Chester – such as the Pierre Menard Home.

Lafayette is one of the most important figures in American history, a figure who very few modern Americans can tell you much about.

He fought for the American revolution in his young years as a wealthy Frenchman, and was widely considered among American revolutionaries as "the best friend our young country ever had".

In the early days of the revolution, Lafayette believed in the cause of liberty which was spreading through the states and used his wealth to be named a "major general" in the continental army.

His campaign for America was very fruitful, entrapping the British General Cornwallis in 1781 with only 1,200 troops in his command.

"Lafayette's final tour was not only a unique event for our country, but for the entire world," Hoffman said.

It is so unique because Lafayette was never an American citizen. However, when he returned to the states in 1824 he was recognized as an American hero, receiving a grand hero's welcome absolutely everywhere he went.

American industry began putting Lafayette's likeness on everything from signs and buttons to women's clothing.

"An entire cottage industry was built around Lafayette in America," Hoffman said.

Hoffman brings to life a very important piece of American history that might otherwise be forgotten.

"We're very glad you're visiting here in our part of the state," Librarian Tammy Grah told Hoffman.