

PARDEE HALL, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,  
AND THE MOST GLORIOUS DAY IN THE HISTORY OF  
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

By Jeffrey Ruthizer '62

At a ceremony on November 30, 2000 officiated over by College President Arthur Rothkopf, a bronze plaque was unveiled. It was a gift from my wife and myself honoring the visit by the 19th President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, to Lafayette College on November 30, 1880. It was the only visit then or since by a sitting president of the United States to the Lafayette College campus. My wife Monica and I participated in that ceremony, with both Rothkopf and myself making remarks. The unveiling took place at the front entrance to Pardee Hall where Hayes had stood and spoken 120 years earlier.

Up to that point in the College's history, this unique and significant visit, which I had studied a bit, had largely gone unnoticed by the entire Lafayette community. But I felt it was far too important an occasion to be relegated to the dustbin of history. So I decided to make this gift in honor of that day's events. As I over the years continued examining the circumstances of that occasion, my curiosity was constantly piqued.

Why did the President of the United States travel to Lafayette College that day, and what happened?

On that 1880 day now nearly 140 years ago, probably the most glorious day in the history of the College, Hayes came to dedicate the newly reconstructed Pardee Hall. It had been built in 1873 but had been destroyed except for its exterior stone walls by a calamitous, accidental fire the previous year. The original building had been named after its chief benefactor and college trustee - Ario Pardee Sr. Pardee had also financed the reconstructed building that Hayes would rededicate that day. Present with Hayes on that occasion were

a number of prominent Lafayette alumni of national and state political and judicial distinction, including at least one congressman, the Assistant Postmaster General Abraham Hazen, Class of 1863, several justices of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the Pennsylvania Governor Edward Hoyt, Class of 1849 and Hayes' recent appointee as Secretary of War, Alexander Ramsey, Class of 1836.

But most interesting to me was the presence of another person of great prominence - a figure of even greater fame and popularity than the President's. And that was the Commanding General of the US Army, General William Tecumseh Sherman, famed throughout the land and a great hero - at least to the northern part of the country. Sherman was acclaimed for his numerous Civil War battles but particularly for his victorious 1864 March to the Sea campaign from Atlanta to Savannah that served as the near final death blow to the Confederate States of America.

For decades after the Civil War ended and continuing to modern times, Sherman was considered after only Ulysses S. Grant himself as the second most important Union general of the War. And after President Grant appointed him in 1869 to be Commanding General of the Army, he became responsible for the massive efforts of federal troops occupying the South during Reconstruction. Hayes ended Reconstruction in 1877 - a year after his assuming the presidency. For years Sherman had also been deeply engaged out West with his many generals and cavalymen in the ongoing wars against the Native American tribes while opening up the frontier.

But what was Sherman doing at Lafayette that November 1880 day? Was it a slow day in the nation's capitol?

The President's special train from Washington with Sherman and the official party on board arrived that late November morning, after a five or six hour trip, at the Pennsylvania Railroad depot in Phillipsburg, NJ. Transferring to horse drawn carriages, the Presidential party travelled across the Delaware River on the mid 19th century wooden, covered bridge connecting New Jersey to the city of Easton, then population 11,000, on the Pennsylvania side. Despite the previous day's light

snow affecting the city's probably still unpaved, dirt and manure ridden roadways, huge crowds of thousands of local citizens enthusiastically gathered in downtown Easton in cold weather. They had arrived on foot and horseback and by carriage from the surrounding countryside to greet the President on this, the first visit by any President of the United States to that city. The cheers were loud as the mounted police and military escorted the presidential carriages as they proceeded down Northampton Street, made the turn into Third Street and then continued up College Hill to the campus where he was warmly greeted by Lafayette President William Cattell and others in the official welcoming party.

In front of Pardee Hall where the dedication ceremony was to take place and where the President would be delivering his rededication address was another assembled crowd. Consisting of many hundreds of townspeople, local, state and federal dignitaries, newspaper reporters, Lafayette students, college officials and faculty, they all awaited the arrival of the President of the United States and the one person infinitely more famous who many wanted to see - General Sherman.

Hayes had been President for only three years after his victory in the famous contested Presidential election of 1876. Before that he had been a relatively minor Civil War general and little known Ohio politician who became a congressman, rising to be Ohio's governor before his election to the presidency. But Sherman was Sherman, and his name had been on everybody's lips and in newspaper headlines - north and south - since his earliest heroic days during the Civil War nearly 20 years prior.

Such was Sherman's fame that in 1871 he had famously pledged about running for President during Grant's troubled presidency: "...I say that I have never been and never will be a candidate for President....if nominated I should peremptorily decline and even if unanimously elected I should decline to serve..." His fame was to continue even after he retired as Commanding General when Sherman repeated his same "not serving" theme in the 1884

presidential campaign when others again had sought him out to run for the nation's highest office.

It's very difficult to determine from college records, with high dropout rates, approximately what the student population was at that time, but it appears to have been in the range of 300-350. It's safe to assume that with classes suspended that day while the College prepared for this visit, most of the enrolled student body would not have missed the occasion. The faculty, numbering around 24, were also in attendance. Among its faculty, the College had one very prominent teacher who had achieved both national and international renown - Francis Andrew March, professor of English Language and Philology. March was the first professor of the English in the entire United States college and university system, and he was about to deliver the keynote address that day.

March's son, Peyton Conway March, was a Lafayette freshman and undoubtedly in the audience that day to see Hayes and Sherman and to hear his father speak. Young March, the second of the five March boys to attend Lafayette College, was then 16 years old and would himself go on to great military fame. Exactly like Sherman, he would during another war nearly forty years later become the commanding general of the United States Army.

How is this coincidence possible? Did the confluence that November 1880 day of both Sherman and young March figure into this later duality in top army command? For me, it was just too much of a coincidence that these stars had aligned that day on the Lafayette College campus. It was an intriguing mystery that had to be more deeply investigated and solved.

It begins though with an initial inquiry of how President Hayes - busy running a country - got to Lafayette College that November day in the first place. He had come to re-dedicate Pardee Hall, but what brought him there? Why Lafayette and what was the reason he came? No printed report I discovered in my examination of this mystery rendered any clues.

My conclusion is that it had to be some Lafayette College connections close to the president that were afoot in official Washington. And there are several leading suspects on the Washington scene who may have had some suasion over him. Assistant Postmaster General, Abraham Hazen was a member of the Class of 1863 but left - probably for Civil War duty like so many enrolled at the time. He did not get his degree until 1877 - probably after the time he was appointed by Hayes to be Assistant Postmaster General. A Pennsylvanian with strong political connections and quite possibly a crony of the President, he tagged along that day as part of the official party.

A second suspect is Secretary of War Alexander Ramsey, another born Pennsylvanian with strong ties to both Washington and Lafayette College. He was enrolled in the College's very first class - the class of 1836 - but did not graduate and went into Pennsylvania politics. Elected a congressman, he moved out to the Minnesota territory and became the state's second governor before resigning to become one of its first senators and then Hayes's Secretary of War. As the Civil War ended, the College in 1865 had awarded Ramsay his belated degree - probably in honor of his devoted governmental service as a US senator and former governor. Ramsay also had Hayes' ear and journeyed that day with him up from Washington.

College President Cattell, having awarded belated Lafayette degrees to both Ramsay and Hazen, was undoubtedly familiar with their influential government positions before he extended the written invitation to Hayes. His brother, Alexander Cattell, former Republican US Senator from New Jersey a few years earlier, may have been called upon by his brother the College president to influence fellow Republican Hayes while working in tandem with Hazen and Ramsay to achieve a common goal.

The third leading candidate possibly explaining Hayes' decision to visit Lafayette was the 88 year old Chairman of the Board of Trustees, former Maj. General Robert Patterson. Patterson is an interesting character in this unfolding drama. An Irish immigrant as a young man, he fought in the War of 1812 and later in the Mexican War where he

achieved some fame. He then became a Pennsylvania cotton goods manufacturer. Coming back to military duty for a brief time in the early days of the Civil War, on the strength of his Mexican War service he got himself appointed a Union major general. However, some bad military decisions he made around the time of the First Battle of Bull Run led to his being mustered out of the army by Lincoln's war department after only three months of service. Returning to his Pennsylvania cotton mills, he became wealthier by building more factories while remaining active in Pennsylvania politics for the rest of his life. Quite possibly he may have known Hayes both during the Civil War when Hayes had been a minor general himself and after when Hayes entered post war Republican party politics and was finally elected president in 1876.

But much earlier as a young immigrant living in Philadelphia, Patterson was part of the original group involved in the College's founding following the Marquis' Philadelphia visit during his 1824 victory tour of the United States. Elected to the first Board of Trustees when the College got its charter in 1826, he served for a decade before resigning. 45 years later in 1876 he was invited to rejoin the board and become its chair. Presiding as chairman during the time of Hayes' 1880 visit, he died the following year - succeeded by Ario Pardee Sr. It is perplexing to try to determine exactly what role Patterson, with his military, industrialist and Republican Party political background, may have played in getting Hayes up to Lafayette that November 1880 day, and the facts remain sketchy. But he was certainly standing alongside Cattell to welcome Sherman and the President when their carriages pulled up in front of Pardee, and he played a major part in the day's festivities.

One of the three - Patterson, Ramsey or Hazen - all Lafayette men as either former students or trustees - must have had enough political muscle - individually or perhaps collectively - to convince Hayes to accept Cattell's invitation. Quite possibly as suggested earlier, there was some assistance from Cattell's former senator, brother. And while history will never know the real answer as to how Hayes was convinced, one or more of these people made Hayes an offer he could not refuse, and the others piled on.

So with that puzzle now reasonably solved, we pretty much know how Hayes got to Lafayette that November 1880 day to rededicate Pardee Hall. But we're still searching for the reason that got Sherman there.

Once President Hayes addressed the audience and rededicated the building that cold morning, the distinguished Professor March delivered his long keynote speech, followed by several others. The assembled crowd, probably consisting of some veterans who fought in his armies, maybe some in their old, ill-fitting uniforms, shouted out for Sherman - undoubtedly resplendent in his dress uniform - to speak, caring less about what March had just said in his lofty oratorical tones and style of the day. They wanted to hear Sherman, but the General declined.

After the outdoor ceremony, a smaller part of the assembled crowd by invitation only moved inside from the cold weather and examined the massive building's new facilities and construction. Pardee Hall at the time was considered to be one of the largest and finest college buildings in the United States. Since elevators were invented in Germany only that same year of 1880, and Pardee had been built without any, President Hayes and the invited guests had to walk up five flights of stairs to the top floor where a luncheon was served. Generations of older Lafayette students know well that tiring climb.

Hayes, Pardee, Cattell, Patterson, Francis Andrew March and General Sherman sat at the head table, with many eyes in the room surely on Sherman. After the lunch was completed there were more speeches, and this time Sherman was asked to speak and he complied. His address though relatively short and about the future must have been rousing and captivating to the audience. After all, this was "War is hell" Sherman.

So the question remains -why was Sherman there in the first place? What brought him to the Lafayette campus?

Although difficult to prove, I am convinced by simple logic that Sherman heard in the halls of Washington - possibly from the invited

Secretary of War Ramsey himself, - probably sitting in an office near his in the same War building, or at a regular Hayes cabinet meeting - that the President was planning to travel up to Lafayette College in Easton that last day of November 1880. Possibly too, he read it in a newspaper account. When Sherman specifically learned that Hayes was going there to rededicate an important college building called Pardee Hall, named after an Ario Pardee, Sherman must have immediately snapped to attention because he surely recognized the name "Ario Pardee."

Undoubtedly recalling that he had 16 years before during the War a valuable brigade commander colonel from Pennsylvania named Ario Pardee in his 100,000 strong army that had destroyed Atlanta and swept through Georgia before taking the city of Savannah in December 1864, he must have made inquiries to learn more. The general had to find out who was this Pardee after whom the building was named. There couldn't be many Pennsylvanians, reasoned Sherman, by the name of Ario Pardee.

The answer came back that it was Ario Pardee, Sr., a wealthy coal magnate who had originally donated the funds to build and then reconstruct the building that Hayes was scheduled to rededicate. And he was the father of his former brigade officer, Colonel Ario Pardee Jr. Learning this, Sherman undoubtedly decided to join President Hayes on his journey and reunite with his old war comrade. Quite possibly by wire or letter, he made inquiries to learn whether Pardee would be in attendance with his father.

While this is speculation, there is no other reasonable explanation. Why else would the top military official of the United States Government, the Commanding General of the US Army, take valuable time away from his busy military duties in Washington to accompany the President and endure a railroad journey of many hours to attend a non military ceremony at a relatively unknown Pennsylvania college - with no importance or connection to him - over 200 miles away. While Reconstruction was over in the South, the wars on the Plains and in the West with the Native Americans tribes were still raging. It was only four years after Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn. So Sherman



surely had lots to occupy his time in Washington and could ill afford time away from his duties in the nation's capitol, especially on this kind of a mission.

Adding to the charm of this adventure, it is interesting to speculate whether at the time of his visit Sherman had connected the name of Lafayette College with his old Confederate foe, General "Stonewall" Jackson. Did Sherman know at the time, or learn subsequently, that the daughter of Lafayette's first President, George Junkin, had been married to this famous Confederate General Jackson as his first wife? The two generals had met only once on the battlefields of the Civil War - during the First Battle of Bull Run, the early 1861 battle where "Stonewall" first got his name. If he had learned about this Lafayette College "Stonewall" Jackson connection, I think Sherman would have found it very amusing. It's also entertaining to consider the notion that Sherman remembered General Patterson's disgrace just before Bull Run when he was cashiered out of the Union army.

Lafayette trustee Ario Pardee Sr. was there, and while there is no documentation I can discover, surely his son Ario Jr was also in attendance. He would have come for the dual purpose of not only seeing his father acclaimed by the President of the United States and honored by the College but also to see his old commander - General Sherman. Pardee Jr., who also fought with great bravery at both Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, lived in the region, and while a graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and not Lafayette, he was deeply familiar with his father's intense involvement with the College. Sherman's embrace of his old war comrade Pardee when they surely reunited that morning in front of Pardee Hall must have been joyful and tearful, as were most Civil War reunions of returning comrades. If only photographs existed.

Since Professor Francis Andrew March was giving the keynote address that day after Hayes was introduced by Cattell, it is quite probable that the Professor introduced his freshman son Peyton to Sherman. Possibly shaking hands with the General and most certainly looking directly at him, he was undoubtedly deeply excited like everyone else in the crowd to be in the General's enveloping

presence. Perhaps Professor March took his son along to the luncheon on Pardee's fifth floor. If so, he would have been moved by the General's rousing speech about the future belonging to the young men of the next generation.

How often in American history can it be said that one future Army Chief of Staff was in the presence of another while growing up? It would take Peyton March another 38 years to achieve Sherman's high position and rank. While slightly different in exact title from Sherman's, it was the same position - the commanding general of America's Army. When he did get promoted into that position by President Woodrow Wilson in the last year of the First World War, he would go on to lead this nation's army along with its French and British allies to a decisive victory. He never achieved equal fame in the eyes of the American public and historians as Sherman had, and his subordinate Pershing had, because he was not a fighting general. His being in Sherman's presence that day, I am convinced, was the spark that lit his future military career.

So there is a very good chance there would have been no General Peyton Conway March as Chief of Staff to lead the United States Army to final victory in World War One without this 16 year old Lafayette College student having been there that November 30, 1880 seeing Sherman. After graduating from Lafayette in 1884, he chose like Sherman to attend West Point. It would be another four years, graduating in 1888, 44 years after Sherman, and then going on to make the army his career.

What is bizarre about this story is that it is one of those accidents of history that if Sherman had not heard and recognized in the corridors of Washington the name Pardee and not journeyed to Easton that day with Hayes, there is a very strong likelihood there would have been no future soldier Peyton March. And if Colonel Pardee Jr. had not served as a brigade commander under Sherman during the 1864 Atlanta campaign and not been a familiar name to him, there is no name Sherman would have heard and recognized that would have galvanized his visit to Lafayette.

So at the end of the day, there is a direct line springing forth on the Lafayette College campus both before and after that November 30, 1880 date, as this is being written in 2020 nearly 140 years ago. That line extends from Ario Pardee Sr. to Colonel Ario Pardee Jr. to US Army Commanding General General William Tecumseh Sherman to President Rutherford B. Hayes, back to General Sherman and finally from Professor Francis Andrew March onto his 16 year old, Lafayette freshman son and later United States Army Chief of Staff General Peyton Conway March.

Peyton Conway March was born to Lafayette College's famous Professor Francis Andrew March and his wife, a descendent of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, in Easton, Pennsylvania. It was ironically in the same 1864 year and December month that Sherman captured Savannah 16 years earlier. In fact his birth was six days after Sherman, then 44 years old, took the peaceful surrender of that city and presented it as a Christmas gift to President Lincoln. March would go on to great fame and international honor as the Army's senior military commander in the final year of World War One, the major year for American fighting.

Appointed in the spring of 1918, he oversaw battlefield commander General John "Black Jack" Pershing and the American Army's final victory over the Germans. After the war ended, he supervised the massive demobilization of troops, received much international acclaim and honor including among many medals from allied nations the French Legion of Honor, and brought home from Europe the million American boys. Perhaps most importantly, he is given credit for restructuring the post war US Army for its future role in the world and defining the role of Chief of Staff well into the 20th Century and up to the time of General George Marshall in World War Two. Retiring as Chief of Staff in 1921, he was succeeded by General Pershing, his former subordinate, and lived on to age 90 before dying in 1955.

I cannot help but add as a historical footnote that on July 4, 1917, as the United States had shortly before entered the war, at Lafayette's gravesite in the highly walled Picpus Cemetery in Paris, France, with the American flag flying proudly overhead, Col. Charles Stanton, an

aide to Pershing, made a speech. While celebrating the anniversary of our independence from Britain in 1776 - with Pershing and other American officers and French officials present - and before a large French crowd, Stanton delivered a 20 minute speech he wrote that was approved by Pershing. It ended with the now immortal phrase so often misattributed to Pershing himself - "Lafayette, we are here." By all accounts, the French crowd went nuts.

Pershing and first contingent of American troops had just landed in western France to begin their intense training and deployment months later on the western front and marched through the streets of Paris to huge cheers. The French population was deeply moved by America's help. And with good reason, because if the United States had not intervened, France and the United Kingdom surely would not have defeated Germany.

Stanton, a nephew of Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, served as a disbursing officer in Pershing's Quartermaster Corps and wrote this July 4, 1917 address at Pershing's request. As an additional possible coincidence worthy of citing, Stanton had earlier in his military career served in the Philippines campaign during the Spanish -American War at the end of the 19th century and quite likely knew another young American officer serving there at that time by the name of Lt. Peyton Conway March.

My wife Monica and I visited that same Picpus cemetery and very moving gravesite in 1990 on a trip to France. We stood in awe at Lafayette's grave - the same awe we felt decades later when we visited his ancestral home at Chavaniac in the Auvergne region of France. What we learned much to our amazement at the cemetery was that behind those high walls the American flag had flown every day above Lafayette's grave during the four year German occupation of Paris after France's 1940 surrender while World War Two was still raging. The German army occupying the city never knew that the flag of its sworn enemy was flown at full mast, and the French caretaker of the cemetery made sure it never came down.

Stanton, Pershing, Peyton March, William Tecumseh Sherman and Lafayette himself would have been proud to have known that the American flag flew high over this gravesite for those four years while America was at war with a bitter enemy. Similarly proud would be Generals George Patton, Omar Bradley and Dwight Eisenhower when they probably learned the legend of the Lafayette flag incident after their American armies victoriously entered Paris in late August 1944. Patton, I am certain, would have made it a point to visit Lafayette's Paris gravesite, following Pershing's example nearly 30 years before, and surely would said some highly suitable Patton words of his own choosing while proudly standing under the unfurled American flag over that hero's grave.

General March's funeral with full military honors for a General of his Chief of Staff rank and high stature took place in April 1955 in Washington and at Arlington National Cemetery. Many military and civilian dignitaries attended, including Vice President Richard Nixon representing the President of the United States Dwight Eisenhower, who himself as a young Army officer knew March during and after his World War One days, the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Secretaries of Defense, Army, Navy and Air Force, and many generals.

There were 1200 troops and several military bands that participated in the ceremonial burial procession as it slowly moved through the streets of Washington and across the Potomac River into Arlington, where a smaller number of troops, officers, dignitaries and family proceeded to March's gravesite. It is notable that representatives of March's fraternity at Lafayette College where he was a member 70 years before in 1880, Delta Kappa Epsilon, still in 2020 a fraternity at the college, were also invited to the gravesite at the family's request.

Although I can find no evidence and it is therefore pure speculation, I am convinced that retired five star General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, the leader of Allied Forces in the war against Japan, and the Korean War until relieved, would have wanted to attend March's funeral. Still alive in 1955 and back in the US a few years after the Korean War incident that led to his firing by President Truman, he was

himself a former Army Chief of Staff under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930's. There is no contemporary report I can find of the distinguished guests who attended, or who were the honorary pallbearers, but MacArthur could very possibly have been one of them, or attended anonymously.

From his service in the First World War as chief of staff of the famed 42nd "Rainbow" Division and later during his military career even after March had retired in 1921, MacArthur knew March. So it is fair to assume he would have wanted to be at March's Arlington service out of respect for the man and the Chief of Staff position both had held. Moreover, young Lt. Peyton March had been a military aide in the Philippines to MacArthur's father, himself a five star general, General Arthur MacArthur, after the Spanish-American War. So it is another reason to strongly believe that MacArthur would have wanted to journey to Arlington to pay honor at March's funeral.

As an added personal footnote, in around the year 1980 I myself had the great honor to sit next to General MacArthur's widow, Jean MacArthur, on a flight from New York to Memphis, and the image of the famous General himself danced in my head. It would be an understatement to say that she was treated like royalty that day by American Airlines and every passenger on board. Decades later my wife and I stood next to the pier on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay in the Philippines from which had left the PT boat that carried MacArthur, Jean and their young son on the first leg of their dangerous escape to Australia. He had been ordered by FDR but very unhappy to leave his troops behind and go to Australia to build his new army. Looking at that pier brought back thoughts of meeting Mrs. MacArthur on that American Airlines flight many years before.

Five years after March's death, Lafayette College would gain the distinction of having a second Army Chief of Staff among its graduates. George Decker, Class of '24 became Chief of Staff in 1960 upon his appointment by President Eisenhower in the closing months of that president's term in office. Decker had come out of the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at Lafayette and thereupon served a long military career. During the last year of the Second World

War he served as a fighting general in the Pacific under Douglas MacArthur. After the war, what followed were promotions in rank and assignments to major commands in Europe and Asia. To be selected Army Chief of Staff by the former five star general and Supreme Allied Commander in Europe Eisenhower himself, who knew a little about good generalship and leadership, was a particularly great honor for Decker.

1960 was the very earliest days of what became the Vietnam conflict. The war escalated greatly during the remainder of that decade and would finally end in April of 1975 with the fall of Saigon. Decker continued to serve under newly inaugurated President John Kennedy, helping him develop the beginnings of his Vietnam War strategy until his two-year term ended in late 1962 when Kennedy replaced him with another general. With that, Decker retired from the army. It is said by some historians that had JFK not been assassinated in November of 1963, he never would have allowed the United States to have gotten bogged down in Vietnam, as LBJ did.

Lafayette College stood out at the time of Decker's appointment and perhaps still today in 2020 as the only college or university in America other than West Point that can boast of two graduates who achieved Army Chief of Staff rank - Decker and Peyton March. Decker, who was to die in 1980, once gave an address I attended in the early 1970's, a decade after his retirement, to the New York Lafayette Alumni Club where he spoke about the Vietnam conflict then still raging. I recall asking him a question about MacArthur's later leaked advice to JFK in the early 1960's not to get bogged down in a land war in Asia, but I do not recall Decker's response.

Decker is also buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

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Delray Beach, Florida,  
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