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Made to Be Forgotten: The Chevalier DE Saint-Sauveur & the Franco-American Alliance

Katelynn Hatton

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MADE TO BE FORGOTTEN: THE CHEVALIER DE SAINT-SAUVEUR & THE
FRANCO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents.

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I am particularly cognizant of the many advantages I have had in life, and want to thank my grandparents and my Cho Chee Rau, for always encouraging me in my education. Stephanie Riley and Rebecca Turnmire were always there to talk through parts of my research with me. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who have been very patient in listening to me talk about "my little French guy that got beat up" and who have been a constant source of support, helping me to pursue what I love. This is for them.

ABSTRACT

In 1778, during the early days of the Franco-American alliance, a Boston mob killed the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur, a high-ranking French officer, jeopardizing the two countries' partnership just as soon as it began. American and French leadership alike quickly went to work in transforming the story of Saint-Sauveur's death from one of anti-Catholic sentiment into one that demonstrated the urgency for unity and cohesion. Through the promise of a monument, his death became a teachable moment, signifying the fragility of the alliance and the importance of cooperation on both martial and civic levels.

By the time of the Great War (1914-1918), when Boston elites finally constructed the promised monument, its purpose had in some ways transformed. No longer just meant to tell Bostonians that they should not oppose the French, the speakers at the monument's dedication expressed their hope that the obelisk could help show Bostonians not just to tolerate the French, but to love them. Still, it was not as much the accuracy of their story that they cared about, but the utility of it. The monument's construction and unveiling became a way for the Boston elite to reforge the city's memory of the alliance and demonstrate their dedication to fulfilling America's historical debt to France. Among an Irish populace that was particularly hostile to Britain, emphasizing the French was an integral part of the Brahmins' strategy to win support for the war effort.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Paris on May 30th, 1916, a crowd of American transplants and French people met in a small square in celebration of Decoration Day, or what the United States would later call Memorial Day. The well-wishers gathered around a statue of George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette shaking hands. Sculpted by none other than Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, creator of the Statue of Liberty, it was a firm and resolute symbol of the Franco-American alliance. There in the fittingly named Place des États-Unis, they celebrated those Americans who had volunteered to fight in the war at a time when their government refused to. Part true earnestness in honoring the American volunteers in the Lafayette Escadrille and French Foreign Legion and part a move to court the hesitant US government into an alliance, Decoration Day attendees laid flowers on the statue and gave speeches, recalling how the French had come to America's aid during the American Revolution.

There was one notable American volunteer that was absent, however: Alan Seeger. An American poet and member of the Foreign Legion, Seeger intended to read his own original piece at the ceremony, but could not take leave from his military service to join the celebration.¹ Still, we can imagine Seeger, a lanky and prematurely gray 28-year-old, whose expressionless and pensive demeanor gave off the vibe of a medieval

¹ Chris Dickson, *A Rendezvous with Death: Alan Seeger in Poetry, at War* (Wickford, RI: New Street Communications, 2017); Michael Hill, *War Poet, The Life of Alan Seeger and his Rendezvous with Death* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2017).

monk, sharing his poem with the crowd. Speaking about those American volunteers who had already died for France's cause in the Great War, Seeger mused, "some there were / Who, not unmindful of the antique debt, / Came back the generous path of Lafayette."²

Here, like many before him and many after him, Seeger seized upon the legacy of the American Revolution in order to substantiate his claim that Americans ought to support France in her hour of peril. Lafayette, and the French forces of the American Revolution more generally, had helped the Patriots create a new nation. Now, in the midst of the Great War 140 years later, the French were calling to collect.³ Cognizant of Americans' sense of honor in trying to repay that debt, Seeger concluded his poem, "Hail, brothers, and farewell; you are twice blest, brave hearts. / Double your glory is who perished thus, / For you have died for France and vindicated us."⁴ Little did Seeger know when he set his pen down, however, that less than two months later he would win his own double glory when he died on July 4th at the Battle of the Somme. Fittingly, the French people erected a monument to Seeger himself and his fellow dead of the Foreign Legion in 1923 at the other end of the same square.

As symbolic and poetic as it was, Seeger was not the first soldier to be killed for the Franco-American alliance. That distinction goes to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur, a

² Alan Seeger, "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France," *Poetry Foundation*.

³ Seeger was by no means alone in discussing this idea of America's duty to France, see *The Great Crusade: World War I and the Legacy of the American Revolution*, American Revolution Institute of the Society of Cincinnati, Washington, D.C.

⁴ Alan Seeger, "Ode in Memory of the American Volunteers Fallen for France"; For more information about those Americans that volunteered to serve in Europe prior to the US' official involvement, see David Hanna, *Rendezvous with Death: The Americans Who Joined the Foreign Legion in 1914 to Fight for France and for Civilization* (Washington, DC: Regener History, 2016); Charles Bracelen Flood, *First to Fly: The Story of the Lafayette Escadrille, The American Heroes Who Flew for France in World War I* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015); Arlen J. Hansen, *Gentlemen Volunteers: The Story of the American Ambulance Drivers in the First World War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011).

naval officer who died, age 28, in 1778.⁵ Like Seeger, the Chevalier also has a monument to his death far from home, and also like Seeger, Saint-Sauveur's death served as an a way to renew public memory of the Franco-American alliance during the Great War and convince the American people of their duty to France. Unlike Seeger, however, who died at the hands of the German enemy, Saint-Sauveur died at the hands of his supposed ally, America. What follows is an exploration of the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur's influence on the Franco-American alliance both in 1778 and in the first two decades of the 20th century. In making this 140-year journey, I will examine why a monument to a dead French officer sits in front of the Unitarian King's Chapel in the heart of Boston.⁶

In the past two centuries of this partnership, there have been periods of diplomatic strife between the United States and France, but the story of France's role in the American Revolution has often served as a unifying force in American public memory. Recently, historians have explored the French role in the American Revolution in ways that also extoll the merits of this harmonious partnership, celebrating France's contributions to the war effort as America's "first friend."⁷ There has been a tendency to recall the strength and importance of the Franco-American alliance through a nostalgic and often roseate lens at moments when it was most useful diplomatically. It is easy to

⁵ Not much more is known about the Chevalier, not even his full name. It is clear that prior to his military service he was the first chamberlain of Count d'Artois, the future King Charles X of France.

⁶ Christian McBurney, "Why did a Boston Mob Kill a French Officer?" *Journal of the American Revolution*, allthingsliberty.com, 23 October 2014.

⁷ T. Cole Jones, "'Displaying the Ensigns of Harmony': The French Army in Newport, Rhode Island, 1780–1781," *New England Quarterly* 85:3 (September 2012) 430-67; Lauren Auricchio, *The Marquis: Lafayette Reconsidered* (New York: Vintage, 2015); Larrie D. Ferriero, *Brothers at Arms: American Independence and the Men of France and Spain Who Saved It* (New York: Knopf, 2016); McBurney, *The Rhode Island Campaign: The First French and American Operation in the Revolutionary War* (New York: Westholme Publishing, 2011), 230; Tom Shachtman, *How the French Saved America: Soldiers, Sailors, Diplomats, Louis XVI, and the Success of a Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

celebrate the Marquis de Lafayette, the Statue of Liberty, or the allied victory in both world wars while dismissing events such the XYZ affair, Vichy France, or freedom fries as mere siblings' squabbles. Still, the fact remains that there is more to the Franco-American alliance than a perpetual love affair with Paris and a mutual fondness for liberty.⁸

In exploring the circumstances of Saint-Sauveur's death and the efforts to erect a monument in his honor, it is not my intention to hold the Franco-American alliance on a pedestal nor to lambast it, nor do I rest my case with the statement that historical people, events, and ideas are often more complex and complicated than they first seem. It is certainly true that the Chevalier's story is a complicated one. More than that, however, it demonstrates the ways in which politicians distorted truths and crafted their own memories of the Franco-American alliance in the wake of the Chevalier's death.⁹ There, they transformed his story from one of colonial Boston's Francophobic hatred to one of debt and integrity by dedicating a monument to his honor in Boston. In a sense, both in the wake of his death in 1778 and in 1917, Bostonian elites twisted the story of the Chevalier's death and legacy, teaching Americans the importance of the Franco-American alliance and bringing the two nations closer together.

In the two chapters that follow I will examine the impact of the Chevalier's death

⁸ David McCullough, *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011); Yasmin Sabina Khan, *Enlightening the World: The Creation of the Statue of Liberty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Adam Gopnik, *Paris to the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2000).

⁹ Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965). As Colbourn argues, it is not the true history that mattered in shaping historical actors' decisions as much as their understanding of the history, regardless of if it is true or not. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1991); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country: Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

and story on the larger Franco-American alliance in public memory. In chapter 2, I explore the controversy surrounding the Chevalier's death and the identity of his murderers. Here, the Franco-American leadership in Boston worked to subvert the truth and avoid allowing the poor officer's death to become an international incident that would break the alliance apart almost as soon as it had started. Then in chapter 3, I explore how Boston's elite renewed the campaign for a monument for Saint-Sauveur to demonstrate their allegiance and commitment to the alliance, reminding the citizenry of their duty to France.

For Bostonians, the idea or promise of the monument was more important than the edifice itself. It was the pomp and ceremony of unveiling it, rather than the obelisk's physical presence on the street, that Americans hoped would convince their fellow countrymen of the importance of the alliance and re-strengthen their diplomatic ties with France. As the Boston political order perceived, both during the American Revolution and in the coming of the Great War, the monument's purpose was as a piece of diplomatic theater, reforging the memory of the alliance during a time of political necessity.¹⁰ It was a nice thought that the monument would endure for decades, aging along with the alliance, but the Boston elites all but washed their hands of Saint-Sauveur as soon as the ceremony was over. When they pulled the curtain off in the unveiling, they had achieved their aims for the monument. Just like the disagreeable nature of the

¹⁰ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992). As Bodnar argues, public memorials do not necessarily reflect a true history as much as they reflect the values of the monument's creators. Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2015); Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1998); Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2010)

Chevalier's death, which the Bostonians hoped they might move past, the monument too was made to be forgotten.

CHAPTER 2

FAUX PAS IN REVOLUTIONARY BOSTON

On February 6, 1778, the French formally signed the Treaty of Alliance, partnering with the Americans in the Revolutionary War. Previously, many colonists had only thought of the French, and of Catholics more generally, as enemies or as untrustworthy papist agents. Even as news of the alliance and the first French fleet under Admiral Charles Henri Hector d'Estaing crossed the Atlantic, many Americans were not ready to accept them with open arms.

The French fleet first arrived at Newport, Rhode Island in August 1778, where American General James Sullivan hoped d'Estaing could distract the British navy while he took the city.¹¹ However, the situation soured when a storm surged in the bay and broke masts on two of d'Estaing's twelve ships of the line.¹² Despite urging from Sullivan, Nathanael Greene, and the marquis de Lafayette, d'Estaing refused to stay in Newport and continue with the battle. Instead, the Admiral diverted his entire fleet to Boston for repairs. In response, Sullivan and his officers send a letter of censure to both Washington and d'Estaing, stating that the fleet's flight was "derogatory to the Honor of

¹¹ For full accounts of the siege and the larger Rhode Island campaign, see Thomas Coffin Amory, *The Siege of Newport, August, 1778* (Newport: Newport Historical Publishing Co., 1884); William Stinchcombe, *American Revolution and the French Alliance* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969), 48-57; McBurney, *The Rhode Island Campaign: The First French and American Operation in the Revolutionary War* (New York: Westholme Publishing, 2011); Paul F. Dearden, *The Rhode Island Campaign of 1778: Inauspicious Dawn of Alliance* (Providence: Rhode Island Publications Society, 1980); John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 274-314.

¹² John Sullivan to George Washington, 21 August 1778, *Founders Online*.

France... & destructive in the highest Degree to the Welfare of the United States of America & highly injurious to the Alliance formed between the two Nations.” Moreover, the American officers challenged the French’s military prowess, stating that sailing to Boston for repairs was “unwarranted by Precedent & unsupported by Reason.”¹³ With tensions already this high, it seemed the only thing holding the Franco-American alliance together as the fleet docked in Boston was a hope and a prayer, but even that prayer was controversial.

Since the time of the Glorious Revolution, one historian has argued, anti-Catholic paranoia was an “ideological glue that held the Anglo-American empire together.”¹⁴ This glue was especially strong in Boston, which, like many other cities in the area, routinely celebrated Pope’s Day, a colonial equivalent of the English Bonfire Night. Pope’s Day was an annual occasion in which the lower classes, and sailors especially, aired their grievances against colonial elites, but it was also overtly anti-Catholic. Celebrants on Boston’s North and South ends competed to burn both the devil and the Pope in effigy, as well as occasionally the Stuart monarchs.¹⁵

Aside from the annual November 5th festivities, New Englanders were also wary of interacting with the French more generally. Although they were more than happy to smuggle goods for sale to French Caribbean colonies and part French merchants from

¹³ “Protest of Sullivan’s General Officers,” in Sullivan to Washington, 23 August 1778, *Founders Online*.

¹⁴ Owen Stanwood, *The Empire Reformed: English America in the Age of the Glorious Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 178.

¹⁵ Francis D. Cogliano, “Deliverance from Luxury: Pope’s Day, Conflict and Consensus in Colonial Boston, 1745-1765,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 15:2 (1993): 15–28; Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press 2001); Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

their gold, New Englanders in general still had strong memories of the Seven Years War.¹⁶ Regardless of the prior war, Americans, the vast majority of whom were deeply Protestant, were suspicious of French intentions. Who was to say the French would not turn their backs on the Americans once the British had lost, reestablishing a Catholic empire in North America?¹⁷ Many Bostonians probably had never even met a French person, but still had strong prejudices which the alliance would not break overnight.

When d'Estaing's fleet arrived in late August 1778, they were in dire need of provisions from their long journey across the Atlantic. The French bought the bulk of Boston's supply of flour to feed their ten thousand sailors, which exacerbated the city's wartime provisions scarcity. In a letter to her husband, Abigail Adams outlined how the fleet's arrival inflated prices in Boston, explaining that "the price of every article scarce before but now incredibly so.... The cry for Bread is such as I have never heard before." To make matters worse, she reported, many people in the area also had dysentery. Because of the food shortages and the diseases running rampant, Abigail confessed that "all things look gloomy and melancholy around me."¹⁸

It was in this gloomy and melancholy world that the French fleet established rudimentary ovens next to their ships to feed the troops, letting the smell of the baking biscuit waft through the Boston dockyard. The common Bostonians were already suffering from wartime shortages and were probably resentful of yet another foreign

¹⁶ Frederick Bernays Wiener, "The Rhode Island Merchants and the Sugar Act," *New England Quarterly* 3 (July 1930): 468-73; Jones, "Displaying the Ensigns of Harmony," *New England Quarterly* 85:3 (September 2012).

¹⁷ Thomas S. Kidd, "Recovering 'The French Convert': Views of the French and the Uses of Anti-Catholicism in Early America," *Book History* VII, 2004.

¹⁸ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 29 September 1778, *Founders Online*.

army occupying their city. On the evening of September 8, 1778 these tensions fomented a riot when people from the city tried to get bread from a fleet bakery and beat two French officers, one of whom was the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur.¹⁹ The Chevalier died on September 15 after complications from his injuries, which forced the alliance's leadership to find an explanation for the events on the dockyard and prevent further strife.

The French fleet's presence made New Englanders confront what they thought they knew about the French. When the riot broke out, everyone from the Boston city government, to the state legislature, to d'Estaing and even Washington quickly weighed in on how to respond. Why would the attack on this one French officer, a man whose full name never even appeared in historical records, be so important and alarming to the broader alliance? Dockyard brawls were common not only in Boston, but in almost all harbor cities at the time. The timing and the participants in the bakery brawl were what made it so disturbing because the riot, combined with the earlier events at Newport, seemed to demonstrate New England's deep-seated Francophobic roots, challenging the notion that a Franco-American alliance was even possible. If the court at Versailles learned that the Bostonians were so ungrateful for French aid in the war that they beat a high-ranking French officer to death over a few loaves of bread, then the Franco-American alliance would be over just weeks after it began.

At first, Boston's leadership tried to dismiss of the riot's importance, hoping that the alliance could just move past its problems (and prejudices) without much discussion. Bostonians downplayed the whole bread riot incident as unsolvable by not pointing the

¹⁹ "Untitled," *Independent Ledger* (Boston, MA), 14 September 1778; For more discussion of food rioting in Revolutionary America, see Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 51:1 (1994): 3-38. Whoever they might have been, the perpetrators of the Boston flour riot were never caught.

blame at any one particular person or group. In his correspondence with Washington and d’Estaing reporting news of the riot and also in his later memoirs, General William Heath wrote that the fight broke out between French and American sailors.²⁰ Moreover, when Washington heard the news of the assault, he agreed that the attackers were ordinary sailors, advising Heath that “All possible means should now be taken to cultivate harmony between the people and seamen,” and assure the French that no “insult was intended by the people of the town of Boston.”²¹ Heath explained to d’Estaing that the sailors involved in the bread riot might have been from the *Marlborough*, a privateer ship docked nearby with British deserters aboard, but the situation was too uncertain to make any strong claims.²² Rather than accept full responsibility, Heath suggested that sailors would be sailors and that brawls were not uncommon in any dockyard, let alone Boston’s. Heath then ordered for guards to be posted near the fleet’s bakery in order to prevent further confrontations, and the Massachusetts State Council restricted people from being out at night altogether, putting a curfew in place.²³ If it was not enough to ask the people of Boston to behave nicely, the State Council and Heath ensured good behavior by preventing people from getting into situations where a brawl or argument might occur.

²⁰ William Heath to Washington, 10 September 1778, *Founders Online*; Heath to Jean Baptiste Charles Henri Hector, comte d’Estaing, 9 September 1778, in *The Heath Papers*, vol. 2 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1904) 268; William Heath, *Heath’s Memoirs of the American War*, ed. Rufus Rockwell Wilson (New York: A Wessels Company, 1904) 206.

²¹ Washington, to Heath, 22 September 1778, *Founders Online*.

²² Fitz-Henry Smith, Jr., *The French at Boston During the American Revolution with Particular Reference to the French Fleets and the Fortifications in the Harbor* (Boston, T.R. Marvin & Son, 1913) 37.

²³ Smith, *The French at Boston*, 43-44; Benjamin David Vine, “For the Peace of the Town: Boston’s Politics in the American Revolution, 1776-1787,” (PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 2018) 167-68.

D’Estaing was an active partner in diplomatic deception, and in order to resolve tensions in the aftermath of the bread riot, the admiral ironically escalated matters in his reply to Heath, crafting a new story instead of just omitting the true one. He went further and proposed an alternative history, suggesting that instead of hungry American sailors, British saboteurs had started the riot. The *Marlborough* held captured British soldiers on board, and d’Estaing used them as scapegoats, arguing that they were undoubtedly the ones to incite the riot in order to create diplomatic strife. Then, conveniently, these agents provocateurs fled the scene, never to be seen again. If the court at Versailles learned the truth, then d’Estaing might get orders to return home, dashing his chances of upgrading his prospects through military prowess. In a letter to Heath after the riot, d’Estaing wrote, “our common enemies will learn that neither unforeseen misfortunes nor their plots” could ever challenge the strength of the Franco-American alliance.²⁴ While his cover-up assured the Americans that the French would not seek retribution, it also helped him control his own men and prevent further strife or resentment.

In contrast to Heath’s initial response after the bread riot that sailors would be sailors, Saint-Sauveur’s death meant that the alliance’s leadership then resolved to keep the true story of the dockyard riot a secret. General Nathanael Greene’s communication with Washington after Saint-Sauveur died echoed d’Estaing’s diplomatic and vague alternative story that removed Americans from the riot’s narrative entirely. In the new version of events, Greene explained that “British officers in the neighbourhood of this place are endeavorg to sow the seeds of discord.”²⁵ In just a matter of days the story had

²⁴ D’Estaing to Heath, 10 September 1778, in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Series 7, Volume 4, Trans. Amanda Shearer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1904) 269-70.

²⁵ Nathanael Greene to Washington, 16 September 1778, *Founders Online*.

transformed from a benign misunderstanding, to the possibility of British interference, to an all-out conspiracy. By placing the blame on these shadowy British agents as d’Estaing had suggested, Greene and the American leadership tried to tell the French that true Bostonians had nothing but respect for their French counterparts.²⁶ Still, some French officers at the time did write that Americans, not British agents, carried out the riot.²⁷

While d’Estaing was trying to quell unrest in his officer corps, Greene and his counterparts were trying to quell further unrest in the whole city. Greene’s story said that Americans would never dare risk upsetting the French, let alone engage in a nighttime brawl with their new allies. The French troops, whether they believed the story or simply accepted the excuse, also moved on from Saint-Sauveur’s death. Glad that the French were satisfied, Greene assured Washington that the news of Tory saboteurs “fills [the French] with double resentment against the British.”²⁸ By absolving Americans of any wrongdoing on paper, the city’s leadership strengthened the alliance through a shared hatred of a common enemy while also educating Bostonians as to proper behavior.

For all the justified outrage the Franco-American leadership felt at Saint-Sauveur’s death, his funeral was not a grand affair. While there were no further major

²⁶ Still, historians today generally agree that it was Bostonians, not foreign saboteurs, who started the riot and killed Saint-Sauveur. See: Smith, *The French at Boston*, 36; Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance*, 58-9; Michael Donnay, “The ‘French-Bread Riot’ of 8 September 1778: The French Fleet and Boston’s Food Supply,” paper presented at McMullen Naval History Symposium, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 17 September 2015, 20; McBurney, “Why did a Boston Mob Kill a French Officer?” *Journal of the American Revolution*; Officer in the Late Army, *A Complete History of the Marquis de Lafayette, Major-general in the American Army in the War of the Revolution: Embracing an Account of His Tour Through the United States, to the Time of His Departure, September, 1825* (Hartford: S. Andrus & Sons: 1846) 71; Victomte Amblard-Marie-Raymond-Amédéede Noailles, *Marins et Soldats Français en Amérique Pendant la Guerre de L’indépendance des États-Unis (1778-1783)* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier Perrin et Cie, 1903) 46.

²⁷ “Extract of a letter from Comte de Breugnon, Oct. 10, 1778,” in B.F. Stevens, ed., *Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America 1773-1783* (London: Whittingham & Co., 1895), 23.

²⁸ Greene to Washington, 16 September 1778, *Founders Online*.

acts of aggression against the French, the French were still fearful of Bostonian antagonisms. They decided against a public ceremony and funeral for Saint-Sauveur, opting instead for a private, nighttime ceremony in the Stranger's Tomb at King's Chapel.²⁹ After the funeral, there was no marker for Saint-Sauveur's grave, and no record of his internment.³⁰ Moreover, though King's Chapel was a church, it was certainly not the Catholic one Saint-Sauveur might have hoped for. Even more, the chapel's loyalist congregation had fled the church in 1776, meaning that Bostonians had placed the officer in what was essentially the pauper's tomb of an abandoned church.³¹

Prior to the funeral, at the urging of Heath, Greene and Washington, the Massachusetts Bay Assembly voted soon after the Chevalier's death to "attend in Procession the Corps of the deceased to the Place of Interment" and "provide a monumental Stone to be placed in the burial Ground where his Remains shall be deposited, with such inscription as his Excellency the Count d'Estaing shall order."³² The resolve seemed to assume that he would be placed in a burial ground, but made no specific provision on where he would be buried or what the stone would look like. There was not even any clear knowledge of whether Saint-Sauveur would be buried in Boston

²⁹ The records do not state who, whether French or American, chose the Chevalier's burial site. For standard eighteenth century funerary practices in New England, see Steven C. Bullock and Sheila McIntyre, "The Handsome Tokens of a Funeral: Glove-Giving and the Large Funeral in Eighteenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 69: 2 (2012) 305-46; When compared to the burial of Juan de Miralles, a high-ranking Catholic diplomat, Saint-Sauveur's death is still unusual. See Helen Matzke McCadden, "Juan De Miralles and the American Revolution," *The Americas* 29:3 (1973) 359-75.

³⁰ Smith, *The French at Boston*, 41. According to Smith's sources, the funeral was carried out at the behest of the Chevalier's last wishes, but still the location and timing of the funeral seem purposefully designed to attract as little attention from the surrounding city as possible.

³¹ *A Register of Marriages for Kings Chapel at Boston in England*, Kings Chapel Records, Vol. 41, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³² "Exhibit 6: Massachusetts Archives, Vol. 219, pg. 217" in Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1906, Chapter 104, Massachusetts State Archives.

or home in France. Moreover, the two records mentioning Saint-Sauveur's interment that survive are French in origin, as if the Americans never even bothered to write it down.³³

Nevertheless, at the state government's behest, d'Estaing drafted an inscription.

Instead of dwelling on how the Bostonians had treated the French fleet unfairly, d'Estaing tried to help the Americans understand the French perspective on the alliance using the memorial. Just as memorials to American war dead such as Bostonian Joseph Warren helped to cement American identity and unity, d'Estaing hoped the Chevalier's monument might unite the French and Americans.³⁴ In his monument inscription, d'Estaing declared, "After having had the glory of risking his life for the United States, [Saint-Sauveur] became in the performance of his duty the victim of a tumult caused by the evil minded."³⁵ D'Estaing's purposely cryptic statement allowed the plaque to have multiple meanings. Either it cursed the British for inciting the riot, or it was a subtle jab that admonished the anti-French sentiment prevalent amongst American Bostonians. D'Estaing allowed for the possibility that Saint-Sauveur came to the New World to fight for the American cause, only for those very Americans to be his downfall. Further down on the plaque design, he wrote, "Dying with the same devotion to America, the ties of duty and sympathy which bind his compatriots to the City of Boston have thus been drawn tighter. May all efforts to separate France and American end thus."³⁶ From one

³³ Fitz-Henry Smith Jr., *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur; the History of the Monument and the Votes to Erect it, and an Account of the Ceremonies at the Dedication, May 24, 1917* (Boston: The Bostonian Society, 1918) 6.

³⁴ Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

³⁵ Qtd. In Smith, *The French at Boston*, 43.

³⁶ Qtd. In Smith, *The French at Boston*, 43.

perspective, the plaque condemned British saboteurs for instigating the riot and causing strife in the alliance. Alternatively, it was also a reminder that any further anti-French sentiment was irrational. He also distributed copies of his proposed inscription to the French fleet so that they would be aware of the Americans' peaceful gesture, using the memorial as a symbol to quell any further Franco-American disagreements and strengthen diplomatic ties in a time of war.³⁷

Much as d'Estaing saw the Chevalier's death as a teachable moment for the alliance, Bostonians used the Saint-Sauveur incident to remind their neighbors who the true enemy was. Although the French fleet's arrival in 1778 exacerbated the food shortage, and many townsfolk felt uneasy having a Catholic fleet moored on their dockyards, the *Independent Ledger* reminded Bostonians that their grievances with the British eight years prior had been much worse. The newspaper contrasted the bread riot to the Boston Massacre, explaining that the British, "coming from what we formerly regarded as our *mother country*... in a wanton and butcherly way fired upon the inhabitants of Boston without any just provocation." In contrast, the French, "our allies and protectors, when assaulted themselves by unknown ruffians, have left their protection and satisfaction entirely within the hands of the civilian magistrate."³⁸ Using such a comparison, the newspaper urged Bostonians to remember who their real friends were. The French fleet treated the Bostonians with civility, and the press, by foregrounding the Chevalier's death, reminded the city that their allies deserved the same civility and respect in return.

³⁷ Smith, *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur*, 8-9.

³⁸ "Untitled," *Independent Ledger* (Boston, MA), 14 September 1778.

As the fleet prepared to sail for the West Indies, the American leadership in Boston was concerned that the French might not leave soon enough. The French had plans to leave in early November, but November 5 was Pope's Day. Knowing that the French would be incensed to see their new allies burning effigies of the pope in the streets of Boston, the Massachusetts State Council banned the holiday that year.³⁹ In the end, the fragile Franco-American alliance was able to avert yet another diplomatic incident when d'Estaing's fleet left Boston on November 4, just one day before the festivities were supposed to start.

As d'Estaing's fleet embarked for warmer waters later that month, Patriot leadership knew that they did not need to follow through on the promised monument once the tension inside the nascent alliance had faded. Americans promised that their new alliance was now unshakable, but it seems more likely that, rather than change their sentiment, the riot taught the Bostonians a lesson in diplomacy. The Bostonians simply had learned to quiet their criticism of the French and restrict their behavior in the streets for the sake of the larger alliance. As d'Estaing and his men sailed away, so did the sense of urgency General Heath, Greene and their men felt in trying to assuage hurt feelings and convince townspeople of the importance of cooperating with the French. When the fleet left for the West Indies in November of 1778, it became clear that Massachusetts's promise of erecting a monument was an empty one, with no one in the legislature seeming to ever discuss the matter again.⁴⁰ Teaching Bostonians to hide their anti-Catholic sentiment when Frenchmen were not around was like learning the language of a

³⁹ "Order of the State Council to Justices of the Peace and Selectmen of Boston," 4 November 1778, Boston Town Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library.

⁴⁰ "State of Massachusetts Bay in the House of Representatives, Sept 16 1778," Massachusetts Archives, Vol. 219, p. 217; Smith, *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur*, 6-9

country one never intended to travel to. Saint-Sauveur's hushed and unpublicized burial, along with the fact that the Americans forgot about the monument indicates that the Americans were somewhat disingenuous in their promises. For the Massachusetts state officials, who saw the monument as a way to appease the French officer's sense of honor and to remind Bostonians to behave themselves, the mere promise of a monument was more than enough to keep the Franco-American alliance out of peril.

CHAPTER 3

SAINT-SAUVEUR'S RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH

In October 1886, French and Americans assembled for the dedication of the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbor. Although many people today conceive of the monument as a symbol of American and France's mutual love of liberty or America's commitment to be a land of immigrants, the pretext behind the Statue was more complicated. New York, let alone America, was not the designers' first choice for their statue's location, and though onlookers molded the state into a symbol of the old alliance, some of the involved Frenchmen had other ideas in mind. Some hoped the statue would spur investment in the uncompleted Panama Canal, others saw it as a symbol of "colonial domination." Whatever their motives were, one historian has argued that though the statue's dedication demonstrated a moment of contact between the French and Americans, it was a false or at least disingenuous one.⁴¹ Similarly, as demonstrated in the following chapter, though early twentieth Bostonians celebrated the Chevalier monument as a symbol of America's commitment to France, it also had the added benefit of spurring America to war.

After d'Estaing's fleet sailed for warmer shores in autumn of 1778, the next time that Boston reinvestigated the matter of a monument for the Chevalier was in 1905, when area historically-minded fraternal organizations brought the matter before the

⁴¹ Francesca Lidia Viano, *Sentinel: The Unlikely Origins of the Statue of Liberty* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Massachusetts state legislature. The French Society for the Sons of the American Revolution initiated the renewed interest in Saint-Sauveur and his monument. A chapter of about thirty men centered in Paris, the French Society was made up of both American-born and French gentlemen who were descended from soldiers and sailors who had served in the American Revolution. The society's registrar, Colonel Charles Chaille Long, embarked on a project in 1902 to compile a list of all the French participants in the American Revolution, hoping to use genealogies to increase the society's membership.⁴²

Coming across d'Estaing's proposed plaque inscription in French archives a few years later, Long wrote to Albert Alonzo Folsom, a member of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), to enquire as to the location of the Chevalier's Memorial.⁴³ Long's request sent Folsom, a retired railroad magnate and prominent gentleman in many of Boston's historical societies, scrambling. Searching the many cemeteries in around Boston, Folsom was unable to find any such monument. Mortified that the early state legislature had reneged on its promise from so long ago, Folsom asked his state senator to approach the state legislature, demanding that "appropriate action be taken to carry into effect, at least in spirit," to finish what the colony had promised in 1778.⁴⁴

When the Folsom's petition went through the legislature, politicians with interests in local history and France sat on the monument committee, demonstrating that attention

⁴² Sons of the American Revolution, Louis Henry Cornish, and Alonzo Howard Clark, *A National Register of the Society, Sons of the American Revolution*, ed. Alonzo Howard Clark (New York: Press of A. H. Kellogg, 1902) 290.

⁴³ Sons of the American Revolution et al., *A National Register of the Society*, 486.

⁴⁴ Prentiss Cummings, "Petition," in Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1905, Chapter 72, Senate No. 336, Massachusetts State Archives.

to the initiative was still quite esoteric. Among those on the committee was Hugo Adelard Dubuque, “a leading representative of French-Canadians in New England” and a member of the militantly French nationalist and anti-Dreyfusard *Ligue des Patriotes*.⁴⁵ Also there were two members of the state’s chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution and an officer of the state’s chapter of the (similar sounding but distinct) Sons of the Revolution, two elite historical societies.⁴⁶ In 1905, the men on the legislative committee combed through archives, trying to find any reference to the Chevalier and d’Estaing’s time in Boston. Ultimately, the committee resolved that the state fulfill the General Court of Massachusetts Bay’s promise and erect a monument in King’s Chapel courtyard, given that one of the chapel’s tombs was the Chevalier’s last known resting place, at the cost of \$3,000. In the accompanying report of the committee, they argued that the state was culpable in Saint-Sauveur’s death because it had “failed in its primal duty to keep the public peace.” Goaded perhaps by a sense of duty or honor, they concluded simply that “in war and in peace, Massachusetts keeps her promises.”⁴⁷

Although the majority of the committee was enthusiastic about the monument initiative, it was still difficult for the resolve to gain traction outside of this small historically minded audience. Among the general populace, most common Bostonians did not really have an opinion of the French; there were limited historical memories of the

⁴⁵ “Personal References,” pg. 77-78, in Alanson Borden, *Our Country and its People; a Descriptive and Biographical Record of Bristol County, Massachusetts* (Boston: Boston History Company, 1899)

⁴⁶ Along with Albert Alonzo Folsom, the other member of the SAR was Moses Greley Parker. Sons of the American Revolution et al., *A National Register of the Society*, 524; Committee member Richard Henry Winslow Dwight was an officer of the comparable Sons of the Revolution. Charles Sedgewick Rackemann, “Richard Henry Winslow Dwight,” in Henry Edwards Scott, ed., *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1921) 88.

⁴⁷ “General Report,” in Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1905, Chapter 72, Senate No. 336, Massachusetts State Archives

Revolutionary alliance or many celebrations of French culture. Instead, if they associated the French with anything at all in 1905 and 1906, they probably conceived of French-Canadians, who came to New England in droves to work in the region's many textile mills and factories.⁴⁸ Even many of Boston's elite Brahmin families were not particularly interested in French culture. It wasn't until 1911 that the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston first exhibited French impressionist painter Claude Monet's works.⁴⁹ Other Brahmins considered Boston socialite and art patron Isabella Stewart Gardner a renegade for her support of classical French compositions when German compositions were in vogue on Beacon Hill.⁵⁰

As the committee's resolution went through the legislature the following year, it seems that many politicians, like the people at large, were less enthusiastic about keeping reviving the public memory of France's assistance and celebrating their French connections. The Joint Committee on Ways and Means cut the funding recommendation in half, down to \$1,500.⁵¹ In June 1906, when the entire resolve finally passed in both chambers, legislators authorized the monument but did not appropriate money in the budget for its construction. The lack of appropriations indicated that though the majority of the committee thought the matter was important, the entire initiative was not a

⁴⁸ Egbert C. Smyth, "The French-Canadians in New England," *American Antiquarian Society*, Proceedings 7 (October 1891): 316-336; Yves Roby, *The Franco Americans of New England: Dreams and Realities* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Patrick Lacroix, "Americanization by Catholic Means: French Canadian Nationalism and Transnationalism, 1889-1901," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 16:3 (2017): 284-301.

⁴⁹ Christopher Volpe, *A Legacy of Beauty: Painting in the Boston School Tradition* (Portsmouth, NH: Blue Tree, 2006) 2.

⁵⁰ Brad A. Rohrer, "Isabella Stewart Gardner, Fenway Court, and Life on Display: French Music in Turn-of-the-Century Boston," MA thesis, Florida State University, 2014.

⁵¹ "Joint Committee on Ways and Means Report," Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1906, Chapter 104, Senate No. 429, Massachusetts State Archives.

particularly high priority for the legislature as a whole.⁵² Although the lack of funding was frustrating, Folsom and his connections in the Sons of the American Revolution could have easily brought the matter before the legislature yet again the following year; however, when Folsom fell ill and died in 1907, no one else stepped up to lead the charge for the monument and the bill foundered. With no war or pressing concern, Americans did not feel compelled to celebrate or even acknowledge the old Franco-American alliance of 1778. Rather than the monument being a patriotic and diplomatic public relations opportunity, the legislature saw it as the SAR's pet project and were not impelled to follow through on the matter.

Especially telling was the 1906 minority opinion of the Senate monument committee, which was written by none other than Arthur T. Lyman, the senior warden at King's Chapel, where the state was proposing the obelisk be placed. Lyman, although part of a distinguished Bostonian family, seemed less interested in sharing the Chevalier's history. He argued that the Chevalier's murder had little to do with the Franco-American alliance. Instead, Saint-Sauveur had died in "merely a street fight without any political character."⁵³ Furthermore, as he saw it, the colony's concerns over maintaining the alliance after the Chevalier's death were an overreaction. Rather than seeing d'Estaing as an equal partner is smoothing over tensions for the sake of diplomacy, Lyman took the count's words at face value, stating that the fleet had no ill feelings toward the Americans. Lyman, whom the sitting Minister of King's Chapel would later praise in his memoirs as "the gentlest of tyrants" and the "ideal... manager

⁵² Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1906, Chapter 104, Senate No. 429, Massachusetts State Archives.

⁵³ Arthur T. Lyman, "D: Views of the Minority," Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1906, Chapter 104, Senate No. 429, Massachusetts State Archives.

of church interest,” argued that if d’Estaing was willing to sail off without seeing the monument through to its completion, then he must not have been too concerned about the entire affair.⁵⁴ Lyman concluded by stating that it was perhaps “the unimportance of the matter... caused the erection of a monument to be forgotten or given up, and it seems quite unnecessary at this late day to stir up this unimportant incident, or... to put up a monument which the Colonial Government in a moment of excitement and apprehension had agreed to erect.”⁵⁵

Why might Arthur Lyman, a man from a distinguished Brahmin family who ran in the same elite circles as his fellow committee members, oppose the monument so strongly? It seems that there was more to his dismissal than simply taking d’Estaing at his word that the fleet had forgiven the colonial Bostonians. Although Lyman was a warden for King’s Chapel, he might have seen the monument as opposing church interests. Perhaps, Lyman simply was not interested in what he might have seen as the church’s prehistory, given that King’s had been a Unitarian congregation since 1785.

Alternatively, maybe he thought that renewed discussion of the Chevalier’s death might cast a shadow on the church’s history of the American Revolution, when it stood largely unused after its loyalist Anglican congregation fled the city in 1776.⁵⁶ Moreover, even though Saint-Sauveur was buried at the chapel, he was not a member of the church. All

⁵⁴ Howard Nicholson Brown, *King’s Chapel in My Time: 1895-1923* (Boston: Press of George H. Ellis Co., 1927) 21, Box VI.5 Folder 33, King’s Chapel Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁵ Lyman, “D: Views of the Minority,” Massachusetts State Archives.

⁵⁶ Henry Caner, “March 10th 1776,” in *A Register of Marriages for Kings Chapel at Boston in England*, Vol. 41, King’s Chapel Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society. The last surviving record at King’s Chapel before 1799 is this one from 1776, which states, “An unnatural Rebellion of the Colonies against his Majesties Government obliged the Loyal Part of his Subjects to evacuate their Dwellings of Substance, or to take refuge in Halifax London or elsewhere, By which means the public worship at King’s Chapel became suspended, and is like to remain so, till it shall please God in the Course of his Providence to change the Hearts of the Rebels, or give Success to his Majesties armed for suppressing the Rebellion.”

other monuments in the church at that time were to church members, and perhaps Lyman was resentful of the idea of the state government appropriating his church's front portico for their monument, just as the Massachusetts Bay Council had seemingly appropriated the chapel's tomb for the Chevalier's burial.⁵⁷

Lyman's views were of the minority, but it is nevertheless telling that some people so closely related to the monument effort still felt that the entire initiative was an overreaction or an unnecessary distraction. There was no impetus to ensure that those who supported the monument saw it through to its completion, with the committee dropping the matter during the summer legislative break only to forget about it. Although they disagreed with Lyman, through their inaction they supported his perspective. It is perhaps fitting that it was only ten years later when Lyman died that Boston experienced another "moment of excitement and apprehension."⁵⁸

In 1915, a year after the Great War started, Boston's local historians again became interested in the Franco-American monument, even though there was still no clear sign that the United States would ever formally join the war. The state legislature considered the Chevalier's case again when Fitz-Henry Smith, a noted maritime lawyer and state representative, submitted a petition. Among the many candidates capable of petitioning for a monument, Smith was perhaps the best suited man in all of Boston. Not only was he a lawyer, but Smith was also a historian and an active member of the Bostonian Society, a local historical organization full of elites from Boston Brahmin families that regularly supported similar initiatives. Moreover, Smith had written a book

⁵⁷ Howard Nicholson Brown, *King's Chapel in My Time: 1895-1923* (Boston: Press of George H Elis Co., 1927) Pg 21. Box VI.5 Folder 33, King's Chapel Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁸ Brown, *King's Chapel in My Time*, 21.

in 1913 titled *The French at Boston During the American Revolution*, which examined the activities of d’Estaing’s 1778 fleet in Boston at length. In it, Smith devoted considerable space to the Chevalier’s death, arguing that it was Americans, not the British, who had killed him.⁵⁹

As the monument proposal went through the committee rounds for the second time, legislators stalled the bill again over the matter of appropriations, not feeling any patriotic or diplomatic obligation to see the colony’s promise through. Even in May 1916, the appointed architect and Bostonian Society member A. W. Longfellow wrote to the J. Randolph Coolidge, the new King’s Chapel representative on the legislative committee, that “The idea of a monument seems to be out of the question on account of cost.”

Longfellow, who had previously designed such buildings as Cambridge’s City Hall and Harvard’s Brattle Theatre, suggested that the best the legislature might approve would be a tasteful plaque inlaid on the left exterior wall of the church near the rear.⁶⁰ The state house finally passed an appropriations bill later that year in June 1916, allowing for a memorial obelisk to be placed at the front of King’s Chapel’s courtyard facing Tremont Street. They suggested that the monument’s design suggest that it was of the period of the Chevalier’s death, as if it had been completed in 1778 as originally promised. When Smith had initially petitioned for the monument, the legislature initially recommended just \$500, only to compromise and finally officially appropriate \$1000, just one third of what they had proposed eleven years earlier.⁶¹ Still, construction stalled in December of

⁵⁹ Smith, *The French at Boston During the American Revolution*, 36.

⁶⁰ A W Longfellow to J Randolph Coolidge Jr, Esq. April 22, 1916. Correspondence 1916, Box VI.5, folder 18, King’s Chapel Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁶¹ Massachusetts General Court, Resolves of 1916, Chapter 151, No. 1176, Massachusetts State Archives.

that year when construction workers cracked the granite base as they were installing the monument, and it was possible that at this point the committee lobbied the state for an additional \$400 for repairs.⁶²

As the bill made its way through the legislature that year, Boston, Massachusetts, and the United States in general were going through dramatic changes as the possibility of war approached. The growing tensions of becoming a wartime city would come to define the Saint-Sauveur monument as a tangible connection between the Franco-American alliance of 1778 and the Allies of the Great War. Indeed, had the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur been there to witness the monument's unveiling in 1917, many of the ideas that were swirling around the city would have felt familiar to him. Here were Bostonians that, while not under siege themselves, were anxious and burdened by escalating military tensions. Many working-class Bostonians of the 20th century, much like their 18th century counterparts, still held animosity in their hearts for the British, not because of a memory of colonial taxes, but because they were from Irish immigrant families.⁶³ In fact, over 9,000 protesters assembled in Boston in the summer of 1916 to show their support for the victims of Ireland's Easter Rising, in which the British Army crushed rebels and civilians that had tried to establish an independent Irish Republic. So incensed were these people with the British that many protesters in the assembled crowd reportedly cheered at

⁶² Henry Wheeler, "17 December 1916," in *Votes and Proceedings of the Wardens and Vestry of King's Chapel Boston*, Vol. 37, Vestry Records 1867-1917, King's Chapel Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁶³ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995); Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley, 1874-1965* (Boston: De Capo Press, 1992)

the prospect of Germany routing the Allies.⁶⁴ It was partly this virulently anti-British portion of Boston's populace that made state and local officials so focused on emphasizing the Franco-American alliance specifically as the United States joined the war.

Moreover, much like the witnesses of the deadly bread riot of 1778, Bostonians in the 1910s were also acquainted with the violent culture of the Boston dockyards. Even though the Revolutionary-Era monument proposal sanctioned dockyard violence, Bostonians had not yet learned their lesson. In 1915, over 20,000 Italian immigrants paraded to Boston's Commonwealth Pier to see off 1,400 Italian Reservists, eager to sail to Europe and help their home country when it joined the Allies in the war. The peaceful parade broke out into a riot when the Italians encountered two interned German liners.⁶⁵ Although this riot was not deadly, it nevertheless indicates that twentieth century Bostonians were no strangers to mob violence.

In a sharp contrast to their icy disinterest in France in 1905, the Bostonians of the early Great War period were more accepting of French culture, buying into the idea that Americans owed France a debt from the American Revolution. Newspapers regularly made reference to the symbolic debt and ran many announcements urging readers to subscribe to French war relief charities. Throughout 1916, the Boston chapter of the Women's Lafayette War Relief Fund advertised their regular benefit concerts and donation drives "to relieve the sufferings and hardships of the French soldiers in the

⁶⁴ Anatole Sykley, "City at War: Boston During the World War I Years, 1914-1918." *Over the Top: Magazine of the World War I Centennial* (May 2009).

⁶⁵ "Italian Reservists Sail After Rioting," *Washington Times* 16 August 1915, pg 2.

trenches.”⁶⁶ Similarly, the Boston chapter of the American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans urged readers to donate their money or time and alleviate the “debt America has long owed the French people.” Although the Great War was still not America’s to fight, Bostonians still ought to “make some return for the SERVICES and SACRIFICES of the FRANCE of LAFAYETTE and ROCHAMBEAU at the time of the American Revolution WHEN AMERICA NEEDED HELP.”⁶⁷ It was only in this new pro-French climate with ideas about wartime honor and historical debt that there was enough momentum to propel the Chevalier’s long-promised monument into existence.

As the possibility of American intervention became a reality in late 1916 and early 1917, many of Boston’s most popular newspapers followed national trends in denigrating the Germans. Much as Boston journalists had embarked on a public relations campaign after Saint-Sauveur’s death to explain to Americans that the British were their true enemy, they did the same in 1916-17, only this time focusing their derision on the Germans. Although journalists acknowledged some shortcomings of the Allies, they reminded their readers that the Central Powers were much worse. Like the anti-British rhetoric of 1778, the anti-German rhetoric of this era also isolated one recent incident to remind readers that the US could do worse than allying with the French. In the weeks leading to June 5th, 1917, the official registration day for the draft, the press took the opportunity to remind their readers to remember how German U-boats sunk the *Lusitania*, a British passenger ship with more than 128 Americans on board just two years earlier. The week of the monument’s dedication, *Evening Transcript* reprinted

⁶⁶ “For the Lafayette Fund,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 2 January, 1916, pg. 45.

⁶⁷ “American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans,” *Boston Daily Globe* 26 November 1916, pg. 60.

excerpts of fiery and patriotic sermons from the American Unitarian Association's (AMA) meeting, held, in part, in King's Chapel. Reverend Samuel Eliot preached about the necessity of declaring war against Germany, "aggressive autocracy that tears up treaties as mere scraps of paper, that tramples on the weak, that inflicts upon the innocent the miseries of invasion and devastation."⁶⁸ Germany, one speaker declared, had "deep damnation seated in the principles by which it acts." It was only in such an immoral and autocratic society as Germany that government leaders would approve of the attack on the *Lusitania*, where "the indiscriminate murder of women and children upon the seas is right because the king wills it and the chancellor demands it."⁶⁹

Instead of celebrating the controversial British, newspapers and speakers, attentive to their ethnically Irish demographic, focused on the French instead. The AMA speakers also took time to praise the upstanding aspects of French morality and culture. Whereas Germany was a temple of unquestioning and self-serving autocracy, one speaker noted that France's national motto, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité," was indeed practically a reality in their corner of Europe, and moreover that the French deserved credit for their role during the Revolution.⁷⁰ Another journalist, in an article titled, "Vive La France," explained that unlike Germany, France had always been courteous in their diplomacy. He explained, somewhat erroneously, that Great Britain had offered the new United States to France at the end of the Revolution, but instead France was the first nation to recognize

⁶⁸ "Find Liberty Under Law," *Evening Transcript* (Boston, MA), 22 May 1917, pg 8.

⁶⁹ "Why War is Justified: Rev. William L. Sullivan Speaks at Patriotic Mass Meeting in Symphony Hall," *Evening Transcript*, 21 May 1917, pg 8.

⁷⁰ "America, Hope of the World," *Evening Transcript*, 24 May 1917, pg 2.

American independence and affirm their alliance.⁷¹ Over a century apart, in both cases, the press reminded readers that France was a worthy ally by juxtaposing French magnanimity and virtues against those of the enemy's past abuses against Bostonians and Americans more generally.

Finally, in May 1917, as war loomed closer, a month after America's official declaration of war and two weeks before draft day, Massachusetts displayed the memorial in the early days of a new Franco-American alliance. Bostonians saw the monument dedication as a way to commemorate publicly their patriotism and zeal for France in the weeks and months ahead. Perhaps most telling that Bostonians directly tied the Chevalier's obelisk to their current military crisis was the state auditor's report for 1918, which filed the additional \$400 needed for repairs to the monument base in December of 1916 as specifically war expenses.⁷²

On May 24th, almost 140 years after they promised, the state of Massachusetts unveiled a monument to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur in an occasion replete with pomp and ceremony. Several leading politicians of the day, including Governor Samuel McCall, Lieutenant Governor Calvin Coolidge, Mayor James Michael Curley, and the legislative monument committee of 1916 assembled at the State House and paraded to King's Chapel for the unveiling.⁷³ Led by sailors from the *USS Virginia* and area militiamen, the parade procession carried French and American flags, as well as the flags

⁷¹ "Vive La France," *Boston Daily Globe*, 25 April 1917, pg 14.

⁷² Massachusetts General Court, Auditor's Report XXIV, January 1918, Massachusetts State Archives.

⁷³ Mayor Curley, perhaps more than any other man in Boston, was the epitome of a politician that drilled in on ways to win over his Irish voting base. See Beatty, *The Rascal King*.

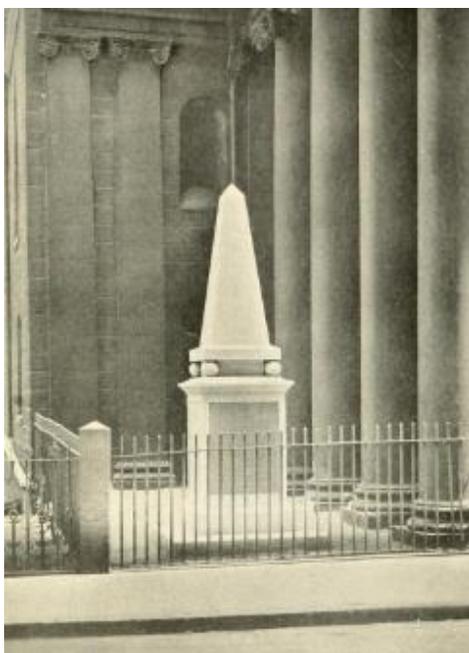


Figure 3.1 Saint-Sauveur Monument

of many local historical societies while buglers announced their march.⁷⁴ Although many local newspapers recounted the grand parade, in reality the route was the equivalent of two and a half city blocks.⁷⁵ Still, in crafting a ceremony that invited all Bostonians into what had been previously a Brahmin campaign for a monument, local politicians hoped to craft a collective memory of the importance of the Franco-American alliance, not just in the past, but also in the present. After the brief procession, the politicians took turns giving speeches and posing for photographs. As Governor McCall pulled the cover off the monument, he exclaimed that the monument “serves to mark the love we have for France,” while Courtenay Guild, the head of the building commission added the sentiment that their hard work “not only represents a memorial to a gallant officer but in

⁷⁴ Smith, *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur*, 16.

⁷⁵ “France and America Join,” *Evening Transcript*, 24 May 1917, pg 2; “Monument to French Patriot is Dedicated,” *Boston Morning Journal*, 25 May 1917, pg 4; “Unveil Shaft to Saint-Sauveur,” *Boston Herald*, 25 May 1917, pg 4; “Saint Sauveur Shaft Unveiled,” *Boston American*, 24 May 1917, pg 7; “Monument to French Officer Dedicated,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 25 May 1917, pg 4.

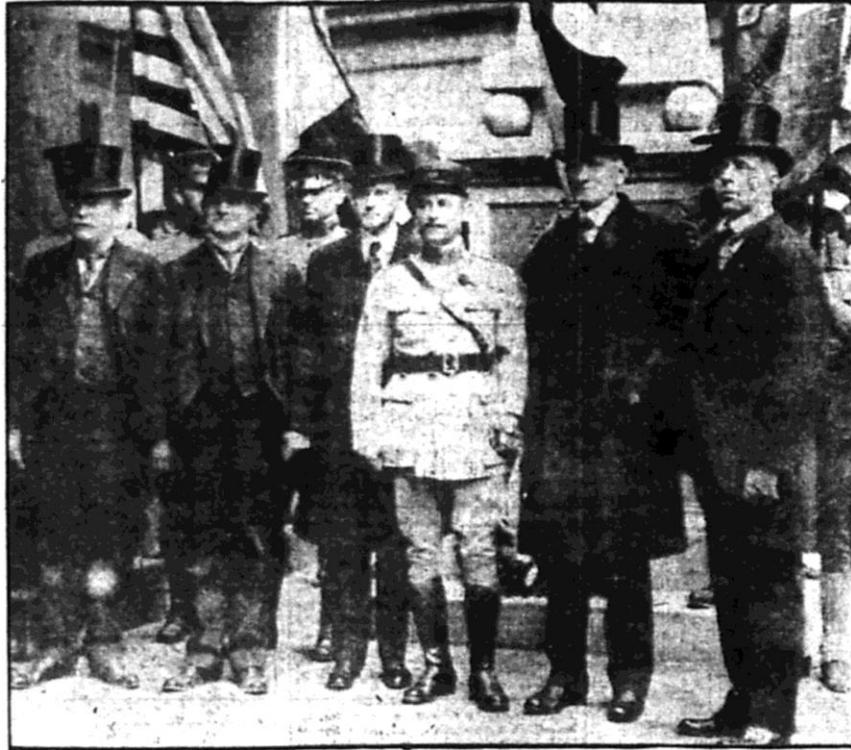


Figure 3.2 Speakers at the monument unveiling, from right to left: Representative Fitz-Henry Smith Jr., Governor Samuel McCall, Major Paul Azan, Lt. Governor Calvin Coolidge, and members of the monument committee.

the hearts and minds of the people typifies their admiration for what France is doing for the cause of civilization.”⁷⁶ Throughout the demonstration, the speakers repeatedly drew parallels between the Franco-American alliance of 1778 and 1917, ignoring the awkward reality of the Chevalier’s death.

As it came time to dedicate the monument outside King’s Chapel, Boston officials, when telling the assembled crowd the circumstances surrounding Saint-Sauveur’s death, again, just as they had done 138 years earlier, engaged in myth making. They crafted a new story about the Chevalier’s death that would work to their diplomatic advantage during the monument unveiling. Like a decades long game of telephone, the

⁷⁶ Qtd. in Smith, *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint Sauveur*, 17.

story of who had actually killed Saint-Sauveur morphed again. The first to speak about the Chevalier in particular was local historian, Bostonian Society member, and state representative Fitz-Henry Smith. He vaguely told the crowd that during the time of the bread riot, “there were British sympathizers and disoriented persons” in the dockyards. Still Smith himself knew the truth, that d’Estaing was the first to cover up the incident by blaming the British, as he argued in his book about the French fleet’s time in New England published four years earlier.⁷⁷ Whether Smith decided it would be prudent to remain vague or someone else at the ceremony recommended that he keep up the charade is unclear. Either way, it is evident that the Americans valued the monument in helping to remind people of the Franco-American alliance rather than remembering what had almost torn it apart in the past.

Although all these myths about the Chevalier’s murderers served to minimize division within the alliance, the final myth that a speaker proposed at the monument unveiling was perhaps the strangest one of all. Major Paul Azan, a French officer stationed at Harvard to help train the young men for the coming war, spoke in the absence of the French ambassador, who cancelled at the last minute. He spoke in French, but then a Harvard English professor then translated Azan’s remarks for the assembled crowd. The newest in a long history of lies, Azan’s fabrication suggested that Americans, and indeed Boston Patriots, had killed the Chevalier, but only “because by some blunder of their own, the mob fancied him to be British.”⁷⁸ Azan also pointed out that although they had been at war with the British during the Revolution, the three nations were all

⁷⁷ Smith, *The French at Boston*, 36-37.

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Memorial to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur*, 28.

fighting for good alongside each other in WWI. Azan's posturing of welcoming the British into the alliance reinforced the idea that the Americans and the French had already had a strong bond since the nation's founding. As Azan saw it, the alliance was older and stronger than America's with Britain, a message that would have proved particularly popular in an Irish Catholic enclave like Boston. In the end, regardless of who it was that killed the Chevalier, whether the murder was deliberate or accidental, what mattered less was the facts and more was how the monument and the story of it could help Americans create a sense of public memory of the historic alliance.

After the crowd dissipated and the flowers scattered around the plinth wilted, the monument faded into obscurity; however, the monument itself did not matter as much as the diplomatic value of its unveiling, as seen in the design of the monument itself. While certainly not intentional, the monument is designed in such a way that diminishes its visibility and accessibility. Situated under the King's Chapel front portico, it occupies an important space at the building's entrance. However, because of the tall wrought iron security fence surrounding the property's perimeter that was installed long before the monument, it is difficult to see clearly from the street, as visitors must hug the fence and peer through. Moreover, even if one were to enter the gate, the monument is so close to the street that it is hard to get a clear view of its front. Moreover, likely because of cost-saving measures, the monument's main inscription is entirely in French with no translation, meaning that the vast majority of Boston's population, both in 1917 and today, would have little understanding of the monument's importance if not aware of the unveiling ceremony. Consequently, the monument's importance ended as it was unveiled because the monument's design inhibited much further interaction. Though this failure of

design is unfortunate, it demonstrates yet again that the monument committee's priorities were on the patriotic act of acknowledging their historical debt, reviving the memory of the old alliance, and celebrating the French rather than on the physical edifice itself.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

June 1, 1917 was a splendid summer day to be outside, and Bostonians gathered on the Boston Common for a patriotic concert. There in the shadow of the gold-topped State House, the public waved flags and listened to the band's rendition of the "Star-Spangled Banner" during their noon lunch hour. It was the weekend before the official draft registration day and the Bostonians, full of patriotic fervor and anxious with anticipation for their involvement in the war, respectfully doffed their caps and sang along with the band. After a wave of applause, the band picked up again, now playing "La Marseillaise," the French national anthem, as the crowd respectfully kept their heads uncovered and listened with attention. Bostonians were Bostonians, however, and it was not long before the concert stopped short when a fight broke out and a mob formed.

The cause of the disturbance? It was not a flour shortage, but it did have to do with the French. According to a later newspaper report, over 100 members of the crowd seized one of the concert attendees when he donned his hat in the middle of "La Marseillaise." "Throw that man out of the crowd!" one officer shouted, as a few men grabbed him and began to beat him, trampling his hat. The jingoistic crowd then carried the offending man off to the police station, accompanied by mounted officers. On their route there, the mob paraded their victim up Tremont Street and would have turned right onto School Street, seeing the new monument to the Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur on their fervent march towards justice. The police detained the man, but after some investigation

released him when they found he had already signed up for service in the upcoming war, dismissing the entire incident as a misunderstanding.⁷⁹

One hundred and thirty-nine years after a French man was a victim of Boston's mob violence, an American man too became a victim when he failed to show the necessary respect to the French. Instead of acting out of a mixture of hunger, paranoia, and francophobia, the mob of 1917 acted out of a fervid support for France and the Franco-American alliance more broadly. It would have been inconceivable for the Pope's Day-loving Bostonians of d'Estaing's time to even witness such a French anthem being played. Now in the early days of American involvement in the Great War, Bostonians themselves played it openly and proudly. The Chevalier de Saint-Sauveur's story and monument had a role to play in that dramatic ideological transformation.

Even before Saint-Sauveur was in the tomb, Patriot leadership American and French alike quickly went to work in transforming the story of his death from one of anti-Catholic sentiment into one that demonstrated the urgency for unity and cohesion. Their lies and vagueness obscured the fact that Boston's citizens, the very people the Chevalier had crossed the ocean to protect, killed him. Instead, through the help of Heath, Greene, Washington, and d'Estaing, his death became a teachable moment, demonstrating the fragility of the alliance and the importance of cooperation on both martial and civic levels. In promising a monument, the Massachusetts Bay Council hoped to remind their citizens that public francophobic sentiment was unacceptable.

By the time of the Great War, the monument's purpose had in some ways transformed. No longer meant just to tell Bostonians that they should not oppose the

⁷⁹ "Volunteer is Victim of Mob Error: Crowd at Common Concert Pursued Victim to Police Station," *Boston Morning Journal* 2 June, 1917, pg. 4.

French, the speakers at the monument's dedication expressed their hope that the obelisk could help show Bostonians not just to tolerate the French, but to love them. Still it was not as much the accuracy of their story that they cared about, but the utility of it. The monument's construction and unveiling became a way for Boston elite to demonstrate their dedication to fulfilling America's historical debt to France and acknowledge the importance of the Franco-American alliance.

Ultimately, both in 1778 and 1917, Boston's leadership was able to thwart and prevent a potential international embarrassment by tweaking the story of the Chevalier's death and using it to their advantage in strengthening the Franco-American alliance rather than diminishing it. For the Revolutionary elite, a monument was not even necessary. All they had to do was pacify the town long enough for the French fleet to sail out to sea again—afterwards they forgot about the matter altogether. In 1917 the Boston elite did much of the same, concocting a story to win American support, only to forget about it soon after. The Chevalier, as a martyr for the cause, could finally go to rest having served his purpose.

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