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The French Gazette

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The French Gazette

An English translation by

Norman Desmarais
and
Carl Becker

Preface

When General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur Comte de Rochambeau arrived in Newport Rhode Island, on July 10, 1780 with over 5800 troops, many of the officers and men could not speak or read English. The French apparently brought a printing press with them, probably aboard Rochambeau's flagship, the *Languedoc*, or the *Neptune*, one of the transports. The naval officers established a newspaper, the *Gazette Française* or *French Gazette*, which was published at 641 Point Street (later Water St. and now Washington St.) in Newport. (The area occupied by Long Wharf was then known as the Point). The newspaper intended to translate various news items printed in American newspapers to keep the officers and men abreast of political events in this emerging nation.

The *Gazette Française* is the first known service newspaper published by an expeditionary force. It may well be considered a bibliographical ancestor of other service newspapers such as *Stars and Stripes*. The news items that the Gazette covers reveal what the French considered important. They also provide French commentary on American events, such as Benedict Arnold's Proclamation to the officers and soldiers of the Continental Army on the front page of the first issue. Comparing the Gazette to other newspapers also reveals what was censored or considered unimportant to our French allies.

The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, is the repository for the 8 extant issues (7 regular issues and a supplement) which were published between November 17, 1780 and January 2, 1781. Readex (a division of Newsbank) microfilmed these issues and recently digitized them for their collection Early American Newspapers, Series I (1690-1876) which is part of their Archive of Americana product. Howard M. Chapin produced a facsimile edition in 1926 (*Gazette Française: a Facsimile Reprint of a Newspaper Printed at Newport on the Printing Press of the French Fleet in American Waters*. New York: The Grolier Club, 1926). Chapin apparently used the American Antiquarian Society's issues (although he notes the Rhode Island Historical Society as the

source) because all versions of the Gazette have the same torn portion of the last page of the supplement.

The *Gazette Françoise* began publication four months after the arrival of the French fleet and published for less than two months. The final issue, the supplement, is dated January 2, 1781, even though the French remained in Newport another six months, leaving on June 18 on the famous march that would take them to Yorktown, Virginia. Were there other issues published that were never located? Issue 7 of the *Gazette Françoise* advertises a forthcoming almanac for the year 1781 and announces a change of publication schedule beginning on January 9, 1781, leading one to expect the publication of other issues in 1781.

Some issues carry advertisements from Mr. Jastram, a bilingual resident of Newport, for English lessons. The demand for private lessons was so great that Mr. Jastram had to resort to group lessons. By the end of the year, schoolmaster Phineas Salomon Lemonnier announced, in the supplement, his plans to open a French and English school. Did the officers and soldiers learn enough English to be able to read the local newspapers or did Newporters learn enough French to be able to communicate with them and to discuss the news and current events, thereby making the newspaper unnecessary?

The subscriber base for the newspaper may have dwindled to a level that no longer made it feasible to continue publication. However, the press may have fallen on hard times and may not have been able to obtain enough raw materials to continue production. The supplement offers “A good price ... for old rags good for making paper.” Possibly, the press could not produce enough paper to continue publication, hence its abrupt cessation.

Table of Contents

No. 1 Friday November 17, 1780

Proclamation of Brigadier-General Arnold to the officers and soldiers of the Continental Army

The French frigate *Hermionne* captures a ship from Portugal with 14 cannons

Chevalier de la Luzerne arrives in Philadelphia after meeting with the heads of the two allied armies.

cancellation of public credit notes

President Huntington elected the new President of Congress

General Greene resigns as Quartermaster General to take command of the army of the South.

Count d'Estaing appointed supreme commander of all the naval and military forces

Chillicothe and Piqua destroyed

No. 2 Friday November 24, 1780

British squadron captures Kemps Landing, Great Bridge, and Hampton.

Cornwallis evacuates Charlotte pursued by a detachment of light troops

British destroy all the houses around Georgetown except for three

The savages & the British are defeated in Georgia & South Carolina

Colonel Clarke captures Augusta.

The French and Spanish fleets join forces

The brig *Amsterdam* captures a British ship which is sold in Gothenburg, Sweden. She captures another ship loaded with provisions and dry goods

The combined fleet of Russia, Sweden, Denmark, & Holland convoy munitions to France.

League of Armed Neutrality

Letter of Lord Cornwallis to Lieutenant-Colonel Nisbet Balfour, commander at Ninety-Six instructing him to punish the rebels

Holland prepares for war

French fleet arrives at Sunbury, Georgia after capturing the British warship *Vigilant* and two frigates at Charleston

An American detachment captures Georgetown, South Carolina.

500 from Tarleton's Legion killed or wounded.

900 Tories advance to Old Moravian Town to join the British, pillaging several inhabitants.

Prisoner exchange

New York delegate to Congress brings a motion to authorize the Commander-in-chief of military forces to force a delinquent state to supply its quota of provisions,

A storm-battered ship destined for London is captured in Canfo Harbour, Nova Scotia

No. 3 Friday November 30, 1780 [December 1, 1780]

Roman Chapel near St. James Place ransacked and destroyed

Weakness of Russian navy

Reports of the prizes and the number of prisoners captured by Admiral Cordova's fleet

British corsair captures a Russian merchant ship in the Channel

Congress resolves to erect a monument to Major General Baron de Kalb in Annapolis, Maryland

French frigate *Andromaque* captures the British frigate *Unicorn*

Whigs imprisoned by Benedict Arnold in New York are liberated.

Hurricane in the Caribbean

Prisoner Exchange

Resolution of Congress regarding the three militiamen who arrested the adjutant general of the British army (Major John André)

No. 4 Friday December 8, 1780

Lord Cornwallis retires toward Charlestown

British fleet removes livestock and other provisions at Hampton & Suffolk, Virginia.

Chillicothe and Piqua destroyed

Count d'Estaing arrives in Cadiz to lead the combined naval forces

Portugal declares neutrality; Spain threatens war against Portugal

British squadron prepares to go in search of a French squadron in the Channel

Mutiny Bill passes the House of Commons and expected to pass the House of Peers; public response

Attack on the fort at St. Georges Manor

General amnesty offered to all the naval officers and sailors who deserted

British squadron pursues the *Invincible* and the Frigate *Venus*

The *Languedoc* & the *Augusta* chase 3 British ships crossing on the coast of Brittany to intercept the French fleet from Nantes & Bordeaux

Proclamation of Congress for a day of prayer and public thanksgiving.

No. 5 Friday December 15, 1780

Translation of an address to the people by the author of Common Sense.

Effects of the hurricane in the West Indies

Death of Admiral Charles-Louis de Ternai

No. 6 Friday December 22, 1780

Report of the losses from the hurricane at Jamaica & Barbados.

Congressional resolution establishing the composition of the regular army of the United States

Proclamation of the King revoking the current Parliament and calling for another.

The French frigate *Capricieuse* defeated by *Prudence* and *Unicorn*

The French frigate *Nimphe* sunk and her captain, Lord Durumain, killed in a bloody battle

Admiral Arbuthnot returns to New York and Admiral Graves assumes command of the British fleet in Gardner Bay

Count d'Estaing besieges Gibraltar

Ports of Portugal open to all vessels of the United States of America

Major General Sumter defeats Major Wemys's forces at Hillsborough

No. 7 Saturday December 30, 1780

England determined to continue the war

Benedict Arnold's force of 4000 currently anchored off New Haven

Another enemy party opposed by General Stark's brigade & the Westchester militia at Bedford

British troops prepare to set sail for America

President Laurens committed to the Tower of London

King George learns about French reinforcements in America

French king intends to complete regiments serving in America

French ships destined for America get double copper sheeting; composition of the second division of Count de Rochambeau's army

Illicit trade with the enemy

Spanish fleet from Havanna captures a British fleet from Jamaica

The Congress of Neutral Powers meet at Petersburg

Portugal forbids the sale of ships captured by the English and expels all British ships currently there.

Portrait of General Washington

Lieutenant Colonel Welles captured

Report of the Court of Inquiry held at West Point against Colonel Warick, first aide-de-camp of Major General Arnold

Supplement to the Gazette of December 30, 1780, Tuesday January 2, 1781

The Crisis Extraordinary by the author of Common Sense

Colonel Ethen Allen falsely reported to have deserted to the Loyalists

ladies of Philadelphia agree to make shirts for all the soldiers. Mrs. Washington & the wives of the general officers help