

Lafayette-Durfee House

A chapter of Colonial history is recorded in the yellow frame house at 94 Cherry St. The Lafayette-Durfee house has been undergoing a transformation since 1973 — a renewal, not of moder-

nization, but of restoration to its original 1750 look.

The project was initiated by Miss Caroline Durfee, a direct descendant of the Colonial squire, Thomas Durfee,

who inherited from his father, Benjamin Durfee, a large landed estate extending from the Taunton River to North Watuppa Pond.

The Durfee name, lined significantly to the

economic and cultural growth of the city, has French roots in the historic house of D'Urfe. In the Loire district near Lyons stands the chateau built by the French ambassador to Italy, Claude D'Urfe, in the 16th century. It has been restored as a historic site by the French government.

By 1970, the Colonial homestead had gone through so many generations of relocating, remodeling and resurfacing, that only its basic structure and contours were intact.

The house had been divided into four apartments. Fireplaces had been concealed. The original central chimney was diminished in size. A wooden porch replaced the old stone entrance. Though many of their panes and frames were very old, the windows were obscured by that contemporary catch-all, aluminum storm windows. A glass-paneled door and sidelights had been installed under the original lintel. The entire exterior was encased in a layer of crab asbestos shingles, under which was a layer of wood shingling. The original clapboards were gone.

As the national Bicentennial approached, Miss Durfee was particularly aware of the significance of the old farmhouse as a direct link to the nation's beginnings.

When he was 19, the dashing Marquis de Lafayette, an international patriot, volunteered to serve without pay in the army of Gen. Washington. At 20, as a major general in the Continental Army, he carried corre-



French Consul General Alain Grenier is greeted at the Lafayette-Durfee House by leaders of the foundation that has restored it. In Colonial attire, from left, are Miss Caroline Durfee, Miss Mary T. Carvalho, and Wilfred J. Michaud. The visit occurred in May, 1976.

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spondence between Washington and the French admiral D'Estaing.

The British had about 7,000 men under arms in the southern part of Rhode Island; they had captured Newport, and posed serious threat to the revolutionary forces.

Lafayette established his headquarters in the home of Abraham Brown of Tiverton, on the east side of Main Road between Stone Bridge and Tiverton Four Corners. Known through the centuries as Tiverton's "Lafayette House," it still stands at 3118 Main Road, and is presently owned by Vincent Rose.

"I can never forget the front door, the old brass pull, the door stones and old handmade oak shingles with wonderful licens on them," wrote Polly Oliver, great-great granddaughter of Abraham Brown, in 1932.

In 1778, the young French general made several missions to Boston via this city. He was entertained by Thomas Durfee, a representative from Free-town to the General Court; and his son, Maj. Joseph Durfee, commander of the revolutionary contingent in the skirmish that came to be known as the Battle of Fall River.

After the war Col. Joseph Durfee settled down to establish the city's first cotton mill and join in the founding of the first Congregational Church. Thomas Durfee was in reduced circumstances, having mortgaged his entire land-holdings to support the General Congress.

Back home in France, Lafayette sent a present to Mrs. Thomas Durfee — a pair of French hounds as a token of appreciation for the family's hospitality.

The Durfee homestead was originally located on North Main Street, on the site where the Superior Court House now stands. It was in the Durfee Family until the 1830s, when it passed to the Rodman family.

In 1835 Samuel Rodman left it to his son Benjamin; and Benjamin, in turn, to his son Samuel W. Rodman. When Main Street was straightened in 1838, the house was moved to make way for the horse car tracks.

In 1847, Rev. and Mrs. John Anthony moved into the house; in 1859, David N. Anthony purchased it from the Rodmans. Ownership passed in 1875 to Charles Lewin, who moved it to its present site on lower Cherry Street. In 1936 new owners converted it into apartments; in 1973, Miss Durfee reclaimed it and established the historical foundation.

The Lafayette-Durfee Historical Foundation employed contractor Vaughn Baasch of Westport, a restoration specialist, to install historically correct clapboard siding, and a new porch with stone steps. The entire structure was braced and strengthened. Indoors, apartment partitions were removed to disclose the design of the original interior. In 1976, a time capsule with contemporary documents and souvenirs was enclosed in the base of a chimney in the cellar. Fireplaces

were rebuilt with authentic English peanut brick from the house itself.

The restoration work was assisted by two grants of \$5,000 each from the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission, and a participation loan from four local banks — Union Savings, Fall River Five Cent Savings, B.M.C. Durfee Trust Co. and Fall River Trust Co.

The first floor, including parlor, dining room, burning room and keeping room, is open to visitors during the city's 175th anniversary celebration, and, throughout the year, is open to group and student tours by appointment.

The furnishings to date are "somewhat sparse, but authentic in period," noted Mrs. Florence Brigham, foundation secretary and curator of the Fall River Historical Society, from which many

of the artifacts are on loan. A horsehide chair is the only piece of furniture known to have been owned by Thomas Durfee. In addition there are early spinning wheels, cooking vessels, tables, cradles, chests, beds, quilts, crockery and candle-stands.

Barnard G. Theroux, who represented the city's French community in the restoration project, is the current president of the foundation. Other foundation leaders, along with Miss Durfee and Mrs. Brigham, include vice presidents Rev. Dr. Richard F. Wilcox and Roland J. Masse; attorney Robert A. Bogle, treasurer; Miss Mary Carvalho, assistant treasurer; and board members Mrs. Roy C. Atheran, Miss Rhoda Ivers, Mrs. James Salvo, Mrs. Ludger Dalbec and Mrs. Romeo Charest.



Pipe in hand, Roland Masse portrays a Colonial squire contemplating the view from a window of the Lafayette-Durfee House. The spinning wheel is typical of the restored homestead's early American furnishings.



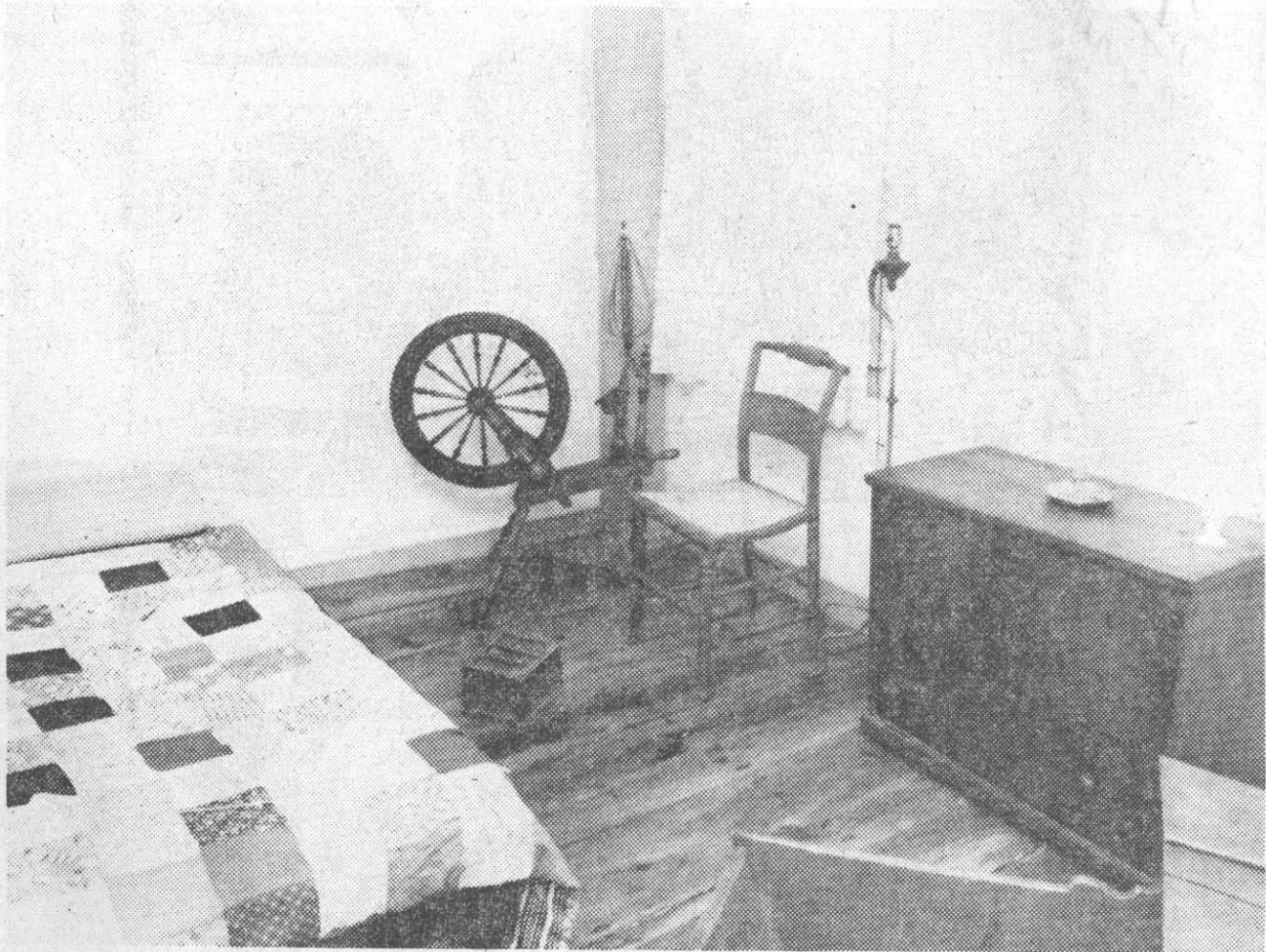
Family life revolved around the keeping room in the typical colonial farmhouse. The large fireplace with built-in ovens was a source of warmth and nourishment. The hand that rocks the cradle is that of Diane Theroux, a contemporary hostess in Colonial attire.



In the dining room, Paul Desmarais prepares to conduct a tour of visitors through the homestead where Maj. Joseph Durfee entertained Gen. Lafayette during Revolutionary War maneuvers of 1778. The fireplace was rebuilt along original lines.



The parlor of the Lafayette-Durfee House contains a horsehide rocker, foreground, which belonged to Colonial statesman Thomas Durfee. Chances are that all of his 13 children were rocked in it, as they prepared for life in revolutionary Fall River. The wallpaper has a floral design of Lafayette's time.



The borning room, where many early scions of the Durfee family first saw the light of day, is on the first floor of the Lafayette-Durfee House. The quilt was crafted by the Campfire Girls as a Bicentennial project. Spinning wheel, chest, cradle and chair reflect early American homestyles.