

Cooper, Poe, Lafayette, And the Cincinnati

In a recent visit to the Society of the Cincinnati headquarters in Washington, D.C., this author was shown a directory of all of the known Revolutionary War officers who were qualified for membership in the Society. Among the names on the roster were David Poe and William Cooper.

David Poe was the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General of the Continental Army. He served for much of the Revolution as the Quartermaster General for the Marquis de Lafayette. David Poe was also the grandfather of the famous American republican writer and intelligence officer, Edgar Allen Poe.

When Lafayette returned to America in 1824-25, he sought out his old Revolutionary War friend, David Poe, during his visit to Baltimore. Although David Poe had died, Lafayette visited his gravesite with his widow. Weeks later, while visiting Richmond, Virginia, Lafayette met David Poe's grandson, Edgar.

After spending three years in the U.S. Army, Edgar Allen Poe entered West Point in June 1830. Gen. Winfield Scott was one of the officers who recommended Poe for the Academy. In Feb. 1831, Poe resigned from West Point, but not before receiving a letter of recommendation from the Commandant, Sylvanius Thayer, to be commissioned as an

officer in the Polish Army. An 1832 letter from the French patriot and writer Alexandre Dumas to a friend in Italy, reports: "It was about the year 1832. One day, an American presented himself at my house, with an introduction from... James Fenimore Cooper. Needless to say, I welcomed him with open arms. His name was Edgar Poe. From the outset, I realized that I had to deal with a remarkable man..."

William Cooper, another Revolutionary War officer qualified for membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, was the father of another famous American republican writer and intelligence officer, James Fenimore Cooper.

When Lafayette arrived in the U.S.A., the young Cooper was asked by the Frenchman to catalogue his observations of America during his year-and-a-half long visit. At the time, Cooper was part of a republican circle in New York City, known as the Bread and Cheese Club, which also included Washington Irving and Samuel Finley Breeze Morse. Morse, a painter, won the New York City competition to do the official portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette, commemorating the visit to America.

Within a year after Lafayette's return to France, Cooper and Morse travelled to Europe. In Paris in 1831-32, Cooper and Morse were leaders of the American Polish Committee, patronized by Lafayette, and supporting the republican revolution then under way in Poland. Poe, of course, according to the Dumas account, was there as part of the same effort.

—Jeffrey Steinberg