

## Marquis de Lafayette (Gilbert du Motier)



One of the most celebrated heroes of the American Revolution was a Frenchman named Gilbert du Motier, better known as **Marquis de Lafayette** (1757-1834). His background can be traced to ancestors who served in the Crusades and alongside Joan of Arc. Illustrated above is a 120-year old cigar box, manufactured by J.M. Fortier of Montreal. It reveals a debonair **Lafayette**.

In 1775, at a chance meeting with the Duke of Gloucester, younger brother of British King George III, a young **Lafayette** became sympathetic to the seeds of revolution percolating in the British colonies across the Atlantic Ocean. He understood innately the frustration the thirteen colonies were experiencing in their ongoing attempts to secure “home rule,” an escalating matter dear to the young Frenchman who could see in the near future an insurgence in his own country where freedom was demanded from the French aristocracy controlling a disenfranchised public. **Lafayette** left for America in 1777 as the rebellion in the colonies was escalating. Made a Major General, he participated in battles alongside General George Washington whose Army was confronting British troops and their alliances on such battlefields at Brandywine, Monmouth and Valley Forge. His role at the Battle of Yorktown endeared him more than ever to George Washington. At one time, at Brandywine, when **Lafayette** was shot in the leg, George Washington commanded the doctor treating **Lafayette** to care for him “...as if he were my son.”

Following the American Revolution, **Lafayette** returned to France as a national hero. There he assisted in drafting the famous “Declaration of Human Rights,” the mantra that led, on July 14, 1789, to “The Storming of the Bastille,” a medieval fortress that became the notorious symbol of abuses by the monarchy. **Lafayette** also became a major player in restoring calm to a country torn apart by royal tyranny. In 1790, **Lafayette** sent the iron key of the famous Bastille fortress to George Washington as a reminder that France’s revolution was similar to the American Revolution. He felt that it was appropriate to re-inforce their friendship with a symbolic gift that demonstrated freedom from tyranny. To further **Lafayette**’s admiration of his mentor, he named his son Georges Washington Lafayette. He also sent his son to live for a spell with President George Washington.

**Lafayette**’s friendship with George Washington led him to urge his mentor to emancipate slavery. Upon his return to America, 1824-1825, he visited all twenty-four states. On his agenda was visiting the grave of George Washington. He did so by himself, an event of consolation. Upon dying, in Paris, 1834, **Lafayette** was buried beneath soil brought from Boston’s Bunker Hill.