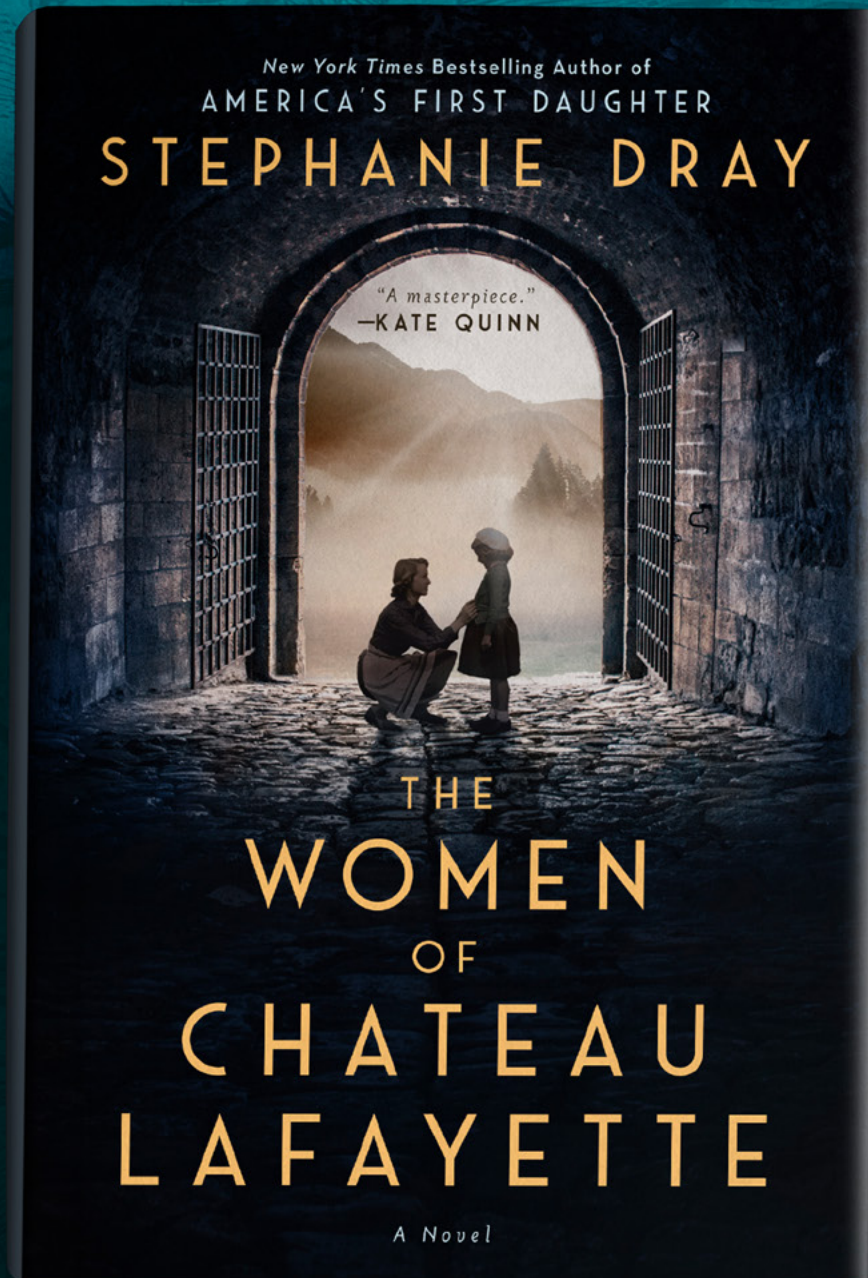


Book Club Kit



DEAR READER,

Having written novels about Patsy Jefferson in *America's First Daughter*, and Betsy Schuyler in *My Dear Hamilton*, I next wanted to introduce readers to Adrienne Lafayette, our French Founding Mother, the Marquis de Lafayette's true partner in two revolutions, and a hero in her own right. But I also wanted to make a more modern connection, showing how other courageous women picked up the torch. How the Lafayette legacy of humanitarian reform doesn't belong to a forgotten age of powdered wigs, but has been relevant in every century since, including our own.

In this novel, you will read about Lafayette's birthplace and the women who did most to make it a beacon of liberty in three of history's darkest hours. His remarkable wife Adrienne, during the French Revolution. The American starlet and decorated war-heroine who purchased, renovated and repurposed Lafayette's chateau to house displaced and refugee children during World War One. And a French school teacher turned forger who helps Jewish children find sanctuary from the Nazis during World War II.

The most amazing and shocking bits are all true: saved Jewish children, secret tunnels, false identities, wartime love affairs, cloak-and-dagger resistance, buried swords, stolen statues, hidden historical relics and more. Writing it was a stark reminder that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary acts, and I hope readers will take as much inspiration from the women of Château Lafayette as I did.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dray

A conversation with **STEPHANIE DRAY**

You're known for writing about some of the most well-known "Founding Mothers" of the US. How did you begin writing *The Women of Chateau Lafayette*? Was the chateau's history what you first discovered, or was it any of the featured protagonists' stories?

Whereas Patsy Jefferson (*America's First Daughter*) and Eliza Hamilton (*My Dear Hamilton*) are prominent Founding Mothers, Adrienne Lafayette is our little-known French Founding Mother, and my desire to tell her incredible story of courage and sacrifice was the starting point of this novel. Adrienne gave everything to the cause of democratic and enlightened ideals—even, ultimately, her life. But her legacy lived on at the Chateau de Chavaniac in the heart of what some call Deepest France. And when I discovered the extraordinary women who helped protect that castle and keep that legacy alive, I realized there was a much broader story to explore—one I was desperate to share with my readers.

So much of this story is steeped in rich, yet not widely known, history. What sort of research did you do for this book?

In addition to visiting the chateau itself in 2017, I did a tremendous amount of reading—including painfully trying to understand French texts and get them translated. I also hit the jackpot at the New York Historical Society where I rifled through twenty-six unsorted boxes of Beatrice Chanler's papers and photographs—it's actually there that I discovered a photo of the secret tunnels at the castle. And the clues, of course, that would turn my whole book upside down and force me to rewrite.

During the course of your research, you discovered something quite shocking—can you elaborate on that?

To be honest, I found two shocking things, and didn't know that either was shocking at the time I found it! When I had first drafted the novel, I believed Beatrice to be a privileged society maven whose troubled marriage somehow weathered the triumphs and tragedies of a world war. But that's before I found

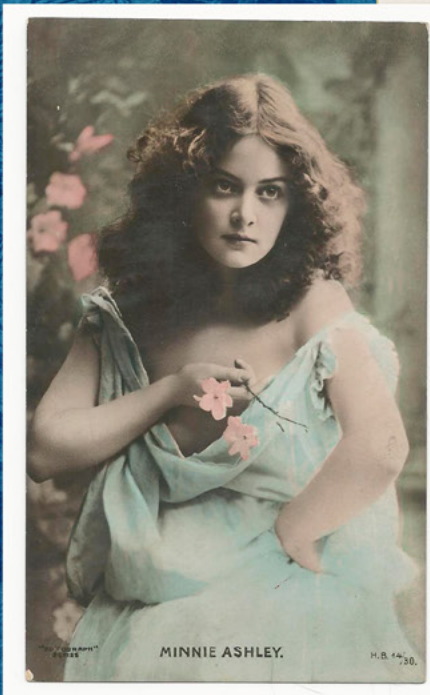


Adrienne & Gilbert
LAFAYETTE





Beatrice
CHANLER



a mysterious package of unaddressed love letters. After some detective work, I came to believe that I'd unwittingly uncovered Beatrice's century-old secret affair with a French officer—and, with the help of her grandson, another document I found at the historical society led us to the discovery that Beatrice wasn't even who she said she was. She wasn't just a rich society maven; she had a secret identity that made her a more extraordinary heroine than anyone knew.

While the majority of the book is set in France, this is a wildly American story as well. Why do you consider Adrienne a Founding Mother of not one but two democracies—the United States and France—and what was her impact on the American Revolution?

When Lafayette left France to fight for the American Revolution, he did so against the wishes of his king. And while Adrienne's aristocratic family was stumbling over themselves to all but disown Lafayette at the powerful court in Versailles, she had every reason to count herself abandoned and deceived. Instead, this teenaged pregnant wife did all she could to defend her husband's actions and reputation. What's more, she took an active hand in managing his financial assets, which were spent lavishly in support of the American cause. And in her role as hostess and her husband's veritable ambassador in Paris, she embarked on a remarkable diplomatic campaign, helping luminaries like Ben Franklin, John Laurens, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and more. It's possible that without Adrienne's quiet but unbending support, France may never have come around to Lafayette's point of view or given the colonies the alliance and money they needed to win their independence.

This is a sweeping novel that covers three women's storylines. Yet each woman feels incredibly relatable and distinct. How were you able to balance telling the women's intimate stories, while not losing sight of their significant historical value?

That's always the challenge for a historical fiction author—to know what to put in and what to leave out. My heroines said and did and experienced so much more than I could put on the page. Fortunately, I have an amazing editor and a group of writer-sister friends who help me kill my darlings. History isn't just a bunch of dates—it's made by people, their struggles, their choices, their failures, and their triumphs. That's what I try to capture.

In a book centered around strong women, one of the through-lines of this novel is Lafayette and, of course, his ancestral homeland. How do you think he would react to the stories of the chateau long after his death?

Unlike many of our Founding Fathers, Lafayette supported women's rights, particularly with respect to education and divorce. Late in life, he befriended and became the political patron of Frances Wright, noted feminist and abolitionist. He encouraged her writing and thought her ideas were so important that he insisted she accompany him on his travels, and introduced her to Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson. So there's no question in my mind that Lafayette would have taken pride and satisfaction in the women who defended his legacy and birthplace, and that he would have celebrated their courage. I suspect he would be as deeply moved as I was to know all that has been done in his name.

***The Women of Chateau Lafayette* features cameos from many well-known historical figures—including Theodore Roosevelt, Benjamin Franklin, Marie Antoinette, and more. Which of them was your favorite to write?**

I love this question! I thought I was going to most love writing about the witty and wily Ben Franklin, because I had the chance to include many of his funny quotes in the book. But it was actually Theodore Roosevelt who gave me the greatest pleasure, because of his historic involvement with the Lafayette Fund and his famous quote that gave my novel its theme: never be neutral between right and wrong.

THE MUSICAL WORLD OF MINNIE ASHLEY

Those of you who have read *The Women of Chateau Lafayette* will know why I'm so interested in the world of the stage of the late 19th and early 20th century. For everyone else it will be a spoiler, so let me just say that a fabulous reader who has requested to remain anonymous has revived old music scores, bringing to life songs not heard in perhaps a hundred years, and I'm so honored to share some with you.

Click [this link](#) to hear the opening Flower Song from *Prince Pro Tem*. Enjoy!



STEPHANIE DRAY &
MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE



CHAVANIAC

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Which heroine's story did you enjoy reading the most? Which one inspired you the most or made you the most emotional? Which heroine do you most identify with?
2. Of Adrienne's many acts of courage, which one stands out in your memory the most? What do you think you would have done in her place?
3. In what ways can Adrienne be considered our French Founding Mother? And in what ways was Adrienne weaker or stronger than her war hero husband?
4. Beatrice Chanler was the wife of a millionaire. She could have stayed out of both world wars if she'd wanted to. Why did she fling herself into the war relief effort? And why did she feel so obligated to help children?
5. How would you describe Beatrice's relationship with her husband Willie Astor Chanler? What do you think was at the heart of the attraction? What about with Maxime? Do you agree with the choices Beatrice made? And in what ways did Beatrice's friendship with Emily become more important than her romantic relationships?

6. It takes Marthe a long time to translate her frustration, anger, and disgust at the Vichy regime into concrete action. That mirrors the experience of the French people's slow boiling fury at the situation that existed before the French Revolution. When is a person finally moved to act? And are younger people, like Marthe, quicker and more willing to take those risks?
7. How does Marthe change, grow and mature over the course of the book? Particularly with regard to why she should care about world events over which she felt she had so little control or influence? What about her determination to look out for me, myself and I?
8. What moment in Marthe's narrative stands out most strongly in your memory? And what message do you take from her story?
9. Lafayette's biographer, Laura Auricchio, wrote, "He lived in treacherous times and made imperfect choices. He failed at more ventures than most of us will ever attempt and succeeded at efforts that stymied countless men, but he never abandoned the belief that he could change the world, and he never despaired of success. Of all his accomplishments, these might be the most extraordinary." The spirit of this thought is summed up by his motto, *Cur Non*, meaning why not? This idea was embraced by all the women in this novel. Is this motto still relevant today? If so, how might it help you in whatever you're facing?
10. In the novel, lavish settings like Versailles before the French Revolutions, or posh galas in New York are juxtaposed against the deprivation of war-torn France. How did this impact your emotions and experience as you were reading?
11. Did the novel make you curious to learn more about the history? Did you look anything up? If so, what and why?
12. Are there any historical lessons that you learned from the women in this book that you think apply to current events? How can we learn from history?

Dine like LAFAYETTE

IN MARCH, STEPHANIE WILL BE A GUEST ON *THE TASTING HISTORY WITH MAX MILLER*.

The recipe comes from the 1739 *Nouveau traité de la cuisine* by Menon. The menus used in this book seem to have been the basis for those used at Lafayette's wedding. One of the last courses included a dish called Canneton de Roüen à l'échalote.

Translation: **Roüen Duckling with Shallots:** Take the whitest duckling you can find, cook it over a low fire wrapped in paper. Take finely chopped shallots, put them in a good essence, serve on the duckling with orange juice.

Canneton de Roüen à l'échalote.

Prenez un canneton le plus blanc que vous pouvez, faites-le cuire à la broche à petit feu envelopé de papier. Ayez des échalotes que vous hachez très-fines, mettez-les dans une bonne essence, servez sur le canneton avec un jus d'orange.

Max Miller has had a passion for history since he was a kid pouring over his mother's Encyclopedia Britannica and watching history documentaries with his dad. His love of cooking is far more recent, when five years ago, he was inspired by binging *The Great British Bake Off*. He brought the two loves together while working in Marketing for Walt Disney Studios, where he treated his coworkers to an array of historic breads and cakes, always accompanied with a little history lesson. It was one of those coworkers who gave him the idea to film his work and put it on YouTube, and so, when he was furloughed from Disney, *Tasting History with Max Miller* was born. Cooking and filming out of his tiny kitchen in Los Angeles, California, he shares recipes spanning from Ancient Rome to Ming China to Victorian England, reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers each week.

