

History

Chavaniac-Lafayette,

The history of a small village in Auvergne that became a place of historical importance.

Situated within the confines of the Monts de Velay, in the plains of Chaliergue, Chavanhac was successively known as Chanvaniac (Xth Century), Javaniac (XIIth Century), Cavanhac (XVth Century) and then as Chavaniac. Of Gallo-Roman origin and located in the Canton of Paulhaguet, the village is dominated by the ancient volcano of Bracou (850 m) and Mont Lata (986 m).

In the neighbouring hamlets traces of earlier times are still visible such as the chapel and the métier à ferrer (a construction to shoe cattle) of Boisseuges or the Lidenne, the fountains of Vernelle and Anglard, le four banal (village oven) at Soulages and at the entry of Chavaniac le lavoir (washing place) and stream.

In the centre, the square was the scene of multiple activities with the markets, fairs, feasts and ceremonies that reflected the past agricultural life, arts and crafts, commercial and social life..

But what strikes the visitor most is the castle where the French and American flags fly side by side on the square tower. Built in the XIVth Century, burnt down at the end of the XVIIth Century, this ancient large house was reconstructed in 1701, restored by the architect Vaudoyer in 1790-1791 and a second time in the XXth century. Above the massive front gate one notices a white stone originating from the Bastille, representing a Phrygian cap. In front a large park with trees, embellished with a rose garden and ponds, reveals the hills of Meride, le Puy de Sancy and the Puy de Dome.

In this family home was born on September 6th, 1757, Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roche-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de la Fayette, baptized the next morning in the church of St.Froch of the parish. Lafayette, then fatherless, was raised by his aunts and grandmother and, in the absence of his mother at the court, educated by a tutor who respected his adventurous personality. Often escaping in the park he enjoyed a free and protected childhood, joining the games of the small farmers on the earth roads. At nine, he would be the « lord of the village », wanting to chase the bête du Gévaudan (the local were-wolf).

During his studies in Paris he sorely missed his Auvergne and his freedom. At the age of 13 Lafayette who always dreamt of wearing a uniform, joined the Compagnie des Mousquetaires du Roi (The King's musketeers). After his marriage at the age of 16, with Adrienne de Noailles aged 14 years, he maintained familiar and generous relations with the inhabitants of Chavaniac. During difficult periods with famine menacing the countryside he distributed wheat from his granaries in the villages. Later he encouraged his wife and daughters to establish a school for weaving.

Evolution of Chavaniac:

At the request of the inhabitants and with the approval of the Prefect, Chavagnac, before 1881 resorting under St. George D'Aurac, becomes an independent village.

Chavagnac is endowed with a Mairie (Town Hall) and is named Chavaniac-La Fayette.

The Municipal Council is established when in the year 1881, on the 16th January at three in the afternoon the members of the municipal council meet in the town hall. Mr. Edmond de La Fayette, senator and grand-son of General LaFayette, having gained all the votes, is unanimously proclaimed mayor. Mr. Leyreloup, whose name is inscribed in the fountain, is proclaimed deputy.

Lafayette Monument

The castle remains with Lafayette till the death in 1890 of Edmond de Lafayette, the last direct heir. The inhabitants contribute to erect a monument in the honour of the family. This is the statue of Liberty currently situated in the square. The castle, associated with the glory of Lafayette has a history that retained the humanitarian spirit of the hero that would lead to major changes in the life of the village.

History of the Preventorium

At the instigation of John Moffat, Scottish millionaire, naturalized American, Maecenas and with support of Beatrice Chandler, wife of the Governor of the State of New-York, an association is created named « La French héros Lafayette Mémorial » that in 1917 purchases in 1917 the domain of the Lafayette family then for sale and undertakes its restoration. This place is dedicated to Lafayette and receives first Parisian children evacuated in 1917 and 1918, refugees from Europe and war-orphans for which a college is created. Madame Le Verrier actively participated in this humanitarian work.

From 1918 the birthplace of Lafayette will shelter the first pupils: boys of 4 to 14 years of age, who are provided with a solid moral and school education: craft trades, agriculture and a scholarship for the best performing enabling them to work in American companies.

From 1920 onwards the establishment receives children with fragile health and transforms itself into a « preventorium » which requires specific rooms; a solarium for cures of fresh air and sun, a lazaret for temporary isolation of newly arrived children to prevent contagion of children already admitted.

Ancillary facilities complete the home and sporting facilities (tennis, swimming pool), schools for girls and boys and a 70 hectare farm for self-sufficiency.

The objective of the complex is to focus on activities in the open air, both sports and manual, to encourage schooling, to offer a natural and open environment conducive for the physical and intellectual environment of the child that otherwise is undergoing heavy medical treatment.

The preventorium is the first building to be electrified which then in turn benefited the whole village. In addition the introduction of running water put the village well ahead of its time. The more than 100 staff working in this complex receiving up to 320 children is recruited among the local population. On the other hand the parents visiting their children (coming

from all over France) received by the medical director are harboured in the local hotels creating an economic stimulus.

In this, till then essentially rural, village composed of farmers and craftsmen (shoemaker, cobbler, barber, black-smith) there exists a cattle-iron company that will later be converted to an electrical equipment firm.

Various shops appear: bakeries, haberdashery, grocer, butcher, delicatessen, fruit and vegetables, cafes, taxis, wine merchants, souvenirs, Sunday hawkers.

In parallel public services develop such as a primary school, post, town hall.

Thousands of children of all nationalities justify the international reputation of this care facility that will function till 1974 when penicillin replaced the sun-cure and other treatment of infectious diseases. The old facilities of the « Prevent » will shelter a health centre accommodating some sixty children till the ITEP actually closes down in July 2009

Translated JWH

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