

## TOUCHING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Many curious documents are found as we go through the loose courthouse records. Perhaps, the most curious of all, so far, was found recently among records recovered over the summer from other repositories. This is a small document printed in French and dated the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, 1793. It also bears the date "l'an 2. de la Republique", that is "Year Two of the Republic". This is an important clue. For this is the way the French counted years following the outbreak of revolution and the creation of the French Republic. It tells us we are looking at an actual document from the France of the French Revolution.

At the time this document was distributed in Cherbourg, there was a great fear in France that England might attempt to overthrow the Republic and help reestablish the monarchy in France. In this event, Cherbourg, as one of the principal ports of France, would be on the front-line, lying as it did directly across the English Channel. Cherbourg's citizens began constructing forts around the city to defend the harbor from potential English attack this same month.

The document we found implores the citizenry of Cherbourg to provide great coats and shoes for those defending the city. It was the middle of a cold winter after all. Other great events were happening that same January. In Paris, Louis XVI went on trial for his life and on January 21st, he lost his life to the guillotine. On the first of February, France declared war of Britain and Holland. Several months later a sea battle did take place within sight of the city between the British warship *H.M.S. Crescent* and the French vessel *Reunion*, with the French ship being captured. The wars started in 1793 between France and Britain would continue until Napoleon's finale defeat at Waterloo in 1815!

The great mystery about this document is how a document of the French Revolution ended up in the courthouse in Jonesborough over two hundred years ago. That remains a mystery for the moment.

Below is a copy of the original document, as found in the archives, followed by a rough translation:

*You must have received, Brothers & Friends, a decree of the Republican Society of Cherbourg, inferred by the Patriots Gorsas & Carra, by which she invites all the Popular Societies, the Judicial Administrative Bodies to provide at least one coat & two pairs of shoes to our brave defenders; this invitation could have been warmly welcomed by François'. The Society of our brothers and friends at Cherbourg, however, thought that my intervention would add to the prompt success of this honorable mark of fancy; and in spite of the intimate persuasion, or I flee, that it suffices for my fellow-citizens to participate in this good deed of calling me, I acquit myself of a duty that, in vain, modesty forbids me to retreat, and I add my vow to that of our worthy brothers and friends of the Republican Society of Cherbourg, of which I want to share the patriotic offering. Give me cordial greetings.*

ROLAND.

Paris, le 4 Janvier 1793, l'an 2<sup>e</sup> de la République.

*Vous avez dû recevoir, Frères & Amis, un arrêté de la Société républicaine de Cherbourg, inséré dans les patriotes Gorsas & Carra, par lequel elle invite « toutes les Sociétés populaires, « les Corps administratifs & judiciaires à fournir « au moins une capote & deux paires de souliers « à nos braves défenseurs : « & cette invitation n'a pu qu'être ardemment accueillie par des coeurs François. Cependant la société de nos frères & amis de Cherbourg ayant peuplé que mon intervention ajouterait au prompt succès de cette généreuse proposition, je dois céder à cette marque trop honorable de confiance ; & malgré la persuasion intime où je suis qu'il suffit à mes concitoyens pour participer à cette bonne action d'y être appelés, je m'acquitte d'un devoir qu'en vain la modestie me défend de remplir, & je joins mon vœu à celui de nos dignes frères & amis de la Société républicaine de Cherbourg, dont je veux partager l'offrande patriotique. Agréez mes cordiales salutations.*

ROLAND.

# # #