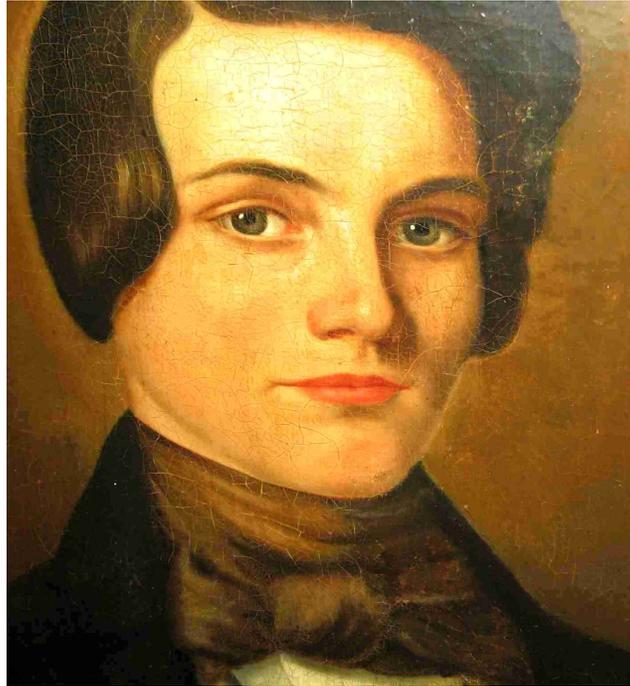


# FLORIAN



**The Life, Letters, Loves,  
Art, Ancestors, Family and Descendants  
of  
Jean-Baptiste FLORIAN Jolly de Pontcadeuc  
(1767-1811)**

Compiled by

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- **Art of the Florians**
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## **Section 2: Letters from Other Family Members, 1801-1856**

1. From Magdeleine Florian Joli de Pontcadeuc in France, sister of Jean-Baptiste Florian, to Marguerite Marie LeDet de Segrais in England, 15 November 1801
2. Letter to Jean-Baptiste Florian and his wife Marguerette in England, apparently from the uncle of Jean Baptiste, Francois Vincent Jolly, in France, February 7, 1802
3. Letter likely from François Marie Guillaume Duault, brother-in-law of Jean-Baptiste Florian, in Paris, to Jean Baptiste in London, June 8, 1803.
4. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, and her four daughters, to her husband Jean Baptiste Florian, December 17, 1808
5. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais in London, to her husband, Jean-Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans, April 28, 1809
6. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais in London, to her husband, Jean-Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans, May 3, 1809
7. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais in London, to her husband Jean-Baptiste Florian, in Louisiana, June 20, 1809
8. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais in Westmead, Britain, to her husband Jean Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans, June 27, 1809
9. Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais in New Orleans to her husband Jean Baptiste Florian in Natchitoches, Louisiana, November 10, 1809
10. Letter from Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais in Paris to his sister Marguerite Le Det de Segrais in New Orleans, early 1810
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12. Letter from Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais in London to his brother in law Jean Baptiste Florian in New Orleans, October 16, 1810
13. Letter from an anonymous member of a Masonic Society to Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, November 23, 1811, both in New Orleans
14. Letter from Marguerite Le Det de Segrais to the Masonic member, about December 1811, both in New Orleans
15. Letter from Marguerite Le Det de Segrais in New Orleans to M. Cheriot in New York, December 1811
16. Letter from Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais in Paris to his sister Marguerite Le Det de Segrais in New Orleans, March 6, 1816
17. Letter from Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais in Calcutta, India to his sister Marguerite Le Det de Segrais in New Orleans, September 18, 1816
18. Letter from Laura Eugenie Florian Bowers in New Orleans to her sisters Azelia and Virginia in New York, June 26, 1822
19. Letter from Louis Florient Thierry Dufugeray in St. Malo, France to Azelie Florian in Mobile, Alabama, October 10, 1842
20. Narrative on Shipwreck and Escape in the Dry Tortugas by Emma Talcott Norman, grand-daughter of Jean Baptiste and Marguerite, probably written shortly after July 1856

## **Note on the Life of Jean Baptiste FLORIAN**

Jean Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc had a remarkable if sadly short life. He was born in 1767 to an aristocratic family in Brittany as the cloud of the French Revolution loomed over French society. He was educated in France and England, and retained ties to England almost all his life. His education was interrupted by the Revolution, and he and his wife Marguerite Marie le Det de Segray (or Segrais), also an aristocrat, were almost guillotined. He escaped the mob in June 1793 by climbing out the upper back window of his chateau, clambering down by an almost-too-short ladder. Marguerite escaped by disguising herself as a peasant, carrying her babies to the coast in panniers on a donkey.

Arriving penniless in England, they sought assistance from the famous Palmerston family and set up a school for young ladies in Kent. Jean Baptiste taught at the school and wrote some amazing books, including one partially titled *A Complete System of Human Knowledge* and also the *Outline of the History of Britain*. He and his entire family including his wife and four daughters were artists and avid art collectors. He was a historian, mathematician, linguist, composer, artist, writer and polymath. But he was not content in Britain, and tried to overthrow the reign of terror in France by participating in the ill-fated Quiberon expedition and invasion of France in 1795. He was granted English citizenship by order of the King in 1806, and a contemporaneous copy of the large naturalization document still survives.

Still not content, Florian decided to seek fortune and safety in America, specifically Louisiana, with its many French émigrés. He departed from Falmouth for Halifax and New York in 1808, and his letters from America present a fascinating and charming picture of life in the US in 1808-1809. He floated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, meeting up with his brother in law and new business partner, and joining the Masonic Lodge of New Orleans. Finally he was reunited with his beloved Marguerite and their four daughters, only to be torn apart by his sad death from yellow fever only two years later, in 1811. He was only 44 years old, but he had packed so much creativity and adventure into one life that it seems like he had lived almost a dozen.

The letters of Jean Baptiste describing America were so interesting that they were purchased from a descendant by the Library of Congress, where they remain today. Other family letters still exist in France and in translation and in original form in Mobile, Alabama, where the four daughters of Jean Baptiste and Marguerite moved in the 1830s. The art and the art collection (one of the earliest major collections in the South) of the Florian family were dispersed over the years, but remnants still remain in the Mobile Public Library and the Mobile Museum of Art.

The story of Jean Baptiste Florian and Marguerite de Segray and their family is so powerful that 200 years later, their numerous relatives and descendants in America and

France still correspond, keep track of the many Florian descendants, and can still visit the family chateau and point to the window out of which escaped one of the most remarkable men of his time.

I am proud to claim Jean Baptiste and Marguerite as my great, great, great, great grandparents.

Llewellyn M. Toulmin

## Descendant Surnames of Jean Baptiste Florian

Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc and his wife Marguerite had four daughters, so their chosen American surname of “Florian” did not carry on as a last name through the succeeding generations. However, a considerable number of their descendants have been identified, and the families listed include the following surnames, generally residing in Mobile and southern Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast of the United States, as listed below. The details of the descendants and ancestors of the Florians are presented in genealogical files on this website.

Abeel	Hardy
Adams	Harrison
Allen	Hemphill
Arthur	Higgs
Barnard	Hodges
Bates	Hunter
Berg	Keyser
Blake	Ladd
Broome	Lambert
Bowers	McNeil
Bozone	Malone
Burford	Matthews
Chalker	Maupin
Chandler	Meadows
Cook	Muller
Cooper	Norman
Crosby	Orum
Danley	Potter
Davis	Redden
Dawkins	Sager
Dawson	Shelton
DeNeefe	Short
Ewing	Sibley
Fraser	Sims
Frieden	Stimson
Fox	Talcott
Gaillard	Toulmin
Gomila	Treat
Greer	Turner
Gunnison	Ward
Hamner	Williams
Hanna	Wright

## Published Writings of Jean Baptiste Florian

The integrated on-line catalog of the British Library yields four works by Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc:

- J. B. Florian, *An Essay on an Analytical Course of Studies: Containing a Complete System of Human Knowledge* (London, printed for the author by A. Paris, 1796) (also held at Princeton, University of Chicago, and Yale)
- J.B. Florian Jolly, *An Elementary Course of the Sciences and Philosophy, Contained in a Series of Lectures Upon the Principal Branches of Elementary Mathematics, Mechanics, Astronomy and Cosmography* (London, J. Stockdale, 1806, 2 volumes), 343 pp. (also held at Central State U., Wilberforce, OH and the College of William and Mary, VA)
- J. B. (Jolly B.) Florian, *A Guide to the Study of the History of Britain, in A Series of Questions upon Goldsmith's Abridgement* (London: E. Newbery, 1790; and London, 1814, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition) pp. 80
- J. B. (Jolly B.) Florian, *A Guide to the Study of the History of England; in a Series of Questions; for the Use of Schools and Young People in General: A New Edition, Corrected and Improved*, by John Gordon (London: John Souter, 1836)

In addition, the WorldCat integrated world wide catalog yields:

- Florian de Pontcadeux, "*An original air with variations for the piano forte*" (London: Printed for the author and sold at Clementi and Co., 1809) 13 pp.

## Art of the Florians

The Florian family included numerous artists, including the following nine who have been clearly identified:

1. Jean Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc
2. Margareurite Marie Le Det de Segray (wife of Jean Baptiste)

Their daughters (in order of birth):

3. Laura Eugenie Florian (Bowers)
4. Virginia Josephine Florian (Russell)
5. Elisabeth Florian (Talcott)
6. Azelia Felicite Florian
  
7. Pierre Renee Le Det de Segray (brother of Marguerite)
  
8. Emma Talcott (Norman) (daughter of Elisabeth Florian (Talcott))
  
9. Laura Margaret Bowers (daughter of Laura Eugenie Florian)

The family worked mainly in oil paint, watercolors and chalk. Some of their creations survive in the Mobile Museum of Art and the Mobile Public Library.

Also at these two locations are the remains of a truly remarkable art collection, possibly one of the earliest major collections in Alabama and perhaps the South. According to information in what is now called the Sims Collection (Estelle Sims was a Florian descendant), the original collection of art of Jean Baptiste and his wife and daughters, consisted of 400 items. (!) These included paintings, drawings, lithographs, water colors, engravings, vases, etc. These count only the items brought to America or created in America, not the many others left behind in France when the family fled the French Revolution.

It appears that on occasion after fleeing France, Jean Baptiste was able to go back to France to salvage some of the art that he and his wife had amassed in their chateaus in France. While in the US, the family ordered items from France, and added to their sizeable collection.

According to information at the Mobile Public Library, written by historian Herndon Smith, at the auction of 1926 the contents of the Sims family home, authorized by the will of Florian descendant Estelle Short Higgs Sims, the majority of the Florian family items were sold and scattered.

In 1930, with the death of Daniel Sims, husband of Estelle, the remainder of the Florian family collection was donated to the Mobile Public Library, and became known as the

Estelle Sims Collection. This consisted of some original works created by the Florian family artists, and 32 drawings from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries of Italian and French masters and engravings. The Sims Collection consisted of 262 items, including the following: 8 original works by Jean Baptiste; 15 by his wife; 3 by her brother; 11 by the eldest daughter (Laura); 68 by the second daughter (Virginia); 3 by her third daughter (Elisabeth); 8 by pupils and friends; and 32 by Italian and French masters. Portraits of the two youngest daughters, (Elisabeth and Azelia) remained in the Sims Collection.

In the 1960s the Collection was displayed at the Library, and articles appeared in the *Mobile Press Register* about Jean Baptiste and his wife (by now having been “promoted” to the “Count and Countess” de Pontcadeuc).

With the establishment of the Mobile Museum of Art, many of the best items in the Sims Collection were transferred to the new Museum. At the Library and Museum, the Collection now resides in the vaults, and is unknown to all except a handful of Mobilians.

## **Note on the Title Count and Countess And Saving the Life of the King**

Articles in the 1960s and many current descendants describe Jean Baptiste and his wife as “the Count and Countess.” This is almost certainly an error. Research on both sides of the Atlantic reveals the following:

- The original letters do not refer anywhere to the title Count or Countess for the Florians.
- While the family had a coat of arms, there are no listings for Jean Baptiste or his ancestors as Counts or other members of the upper noble class.
- Some of the ancestors of Jean Baptiste were referred to formally as “Squire”(Ecuyer) “Maitre” (Master) or “Honorable Man” (H.H. or Honorable Homme), but these are titles of minor nobility, in a unique titled French class above the gentry but below the equivalent of an English Knight.
- In 1747 Jean Baptiste’s grandfather purchased the office of Secretary Advisor to the House and Crown of France, a post which he bought for 55,000 livres, and which conveyed hereditary nobility. But again, this was a minor nobility, not equivalent to a Knight, Baron, Marquis, Earl or Duke.
- One ancestor is referred to as “Sieur de la Dauphinoise” and Jean Baptiste was described in his marriage certificate as the “high and mighty lord of the Pontcadeuc” but these titles actually referred to ownership of parcels of land, not to noble titles such as Count or Duke. And the reference to “Dauphinoise” does not likely refer to the French Dauphine (son of the King), but rather to a particular parcel of land.

However, it is fair to say that before the Revolution, the Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc and Le Det de Segray families were well off and highly influential. For example, the uncle of Marguerite, Nicolas Joseph Beugeard (1755-1818), was Secretary to Queen Marie Antoinette for 25 years, his marriage register was personally signed by the King and Queen, who were present at his wedding, he was apparently made a Chevalier (Knight) like his father before him, and he is mentioned in the Benjamin Franklin papers as an official of the state of Brittany, and someone who was aiding the American cause.

Finally, Nicolas is reported in the letters below to have saved the life of Louis XVI, King of France, on the fateful day of 10 August 1792, likely at the Tuileries Palace. On that day, the monarchy ended when the King was forced to leave the palace and walk between files of guards through a mob of revolutionaries. He never exercised power again. Nicolas took a dagger thrust in his arm that was meant for the King, and it is likely that this happened as the King was walking through the mob. This fascinating and important incident, an attempted assassination, has apparently been lost to history until now.

Returning to the question of nobility, it is thus fair to say that the Florian and de Segray families were members of the landed minor nobility, were wealthy, cultured, artistic and influential, but were not members of the upper nobility and did not qualify for the title Count or Countess.

## Note on Translation and Holdings

Words in italics are unknown or unclear French words. Underlined blanks are words which are missing or illegible. Notes in brackets are editorial comments.

The Mobile Public Library, Genealogy and Local History Division, only retains the English translations of the Florian letters. These are contained in four volumes. Many of these translations are typed, but many are handwritten, and this handwriting is hard to read. The Library of Congress (LoC), Manuscript Division, retains the original letters describing America, in French, and many of the English translations. It appears that LoC also has some letters that were never translated into English.

The letters below were compiled from the Mobile and LoC English translations. On occasion there are two English translations, usually one typed and the other hand-written, apparently done on occasion by two different translators. Naturally, there are conflicts in translation. My approach has been to choose the most logical and smoothest translation. On rare occasions I was able to examine the original letter and identify mis-translations or missing words, usually of relatives whose names were familiar to me. The resulting translation is still by no means perfect.

No other libraries appear to have any original or translated letters of the Florians. The manuscript *Flight of a Suspect* refers to old family letters that were sent to France early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, around the time that the Library of Congress purchased the Florian letters describing his American travels.

In February 2008 I interviewed Mr. Edward Ladd, Director of the Mobile Carnival Museum, Mobile, Alabama. Mr. Ladd is a Florian descendant, and stated that he had “a box of letters” in his possession. It turned out that these were over 150 items, including translations of letters among Florian relatives, ranging from 1774 to 1917, and also some original letters from Florian descendants and relatives in French and English, silhouettes of four Florian daughters and relatives, a tiny possible miniature of Mrs. Gilbert E. Russell, nee Florian, a naturalization paper from King George III to Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly and others, giving them citizenship in the United Kingdom, and numerous other items. Mr. Ladd also had two miniatures, of two brothers-in-law of Jean-Baptiste Florian (brothers of Marguerite Marie le Det de Segrais), who wrote some of the letters and are mentioned in many. All these items are in the process of being studied and organized.

There are two relatively recent letters in the Ladd material regarding the fate of the originals of the bulk of the Florian letters. One is from the Library of Congress in 1916, indicating an interest in buying the American letters of Jean-Baptiste Florian. (And the Library did in fact buy the best of the letters, which are now in the Manuscript Reading Room of the Library of Congress.) The other is a letter to a private person, perhaps a dealer, indicating possible interest in purchasing some of the letters. Hence there may be more letters, and certainly more originals, out there somewhere....

The portrait on the cover of this manuscript is reported by a Florian descendant to be a portrait of Jean Baptiste Florian as a young man.

Most of the Florian letters state where they are located, and in what language they remain. If no location is mentioned, then it can be assumed that the letters from Florian to his family are in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division; and the other letters are in the four volumes at the Genealogy and Local History Division, Mobile, Alabama Public Library.

## **Note on Monetary Exchange Value**

In the letters from the period of about 1808-1811, the following exchange values are noted:

1 gourd = \$1.625 US dollars

1 piaster = \$1.25 US dollars

1 US dollar = 0.216 British pounds, or about 4 shillings<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The website <http://eh.net/hmit/exchangerates/> gives this exchange rate for 1808. The letters are not the source of this rate.

# **THE FLORIAN LETTERS**

## **Section 1**

**Letters from Jean-Baptiste FLORIAN  
Jolly de Pontcadeuc to his Family and Associates,  
1808-1809**

## Letter 1.<sup>2</sup>

[Letter translated, not original, in English, handwritten, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, Alabama; from Jean Baptiste to his wife, Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segray (1770-1817) at their school in Essex. He is apparently in hiding from a lawsuit and creditors, on the Isle of Wight or in Cornwall.]



“Gogo,” Marguerite Le Det de Segray, wife of Jean Baptiste Florian

To: Mrs. Florian, Assembly House, Laytonstone, Essex

**August 4, 1808**

I flatter myself, my dear Gogo [a term of endearment for his wife], that your interview with Joseph [Marie Le Det de Segray, 1777—aft. 1827, brother of Marguerite] will dissipate or at least soften the grief which my letter has caused you, and that your good sense will overcome your sensibilities. A little reflection will convince you that,

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this numbering scheme was not in the original letters, but is used here for the convenience of modern readers, to correspond to the Table of Contents.

independent even of the risks that I run I remaining in England, the resolution which I have taken is the only one which seems fit for me. And that I should not hesitate upon my prompt departure for New Orleans.

The Assurers have paid for the detention of the "Polly." Joseph has made a good venture and the freight is again on his vessel for another [venture] which promises to be more profitable. There is every hope that he will be able to make some others equally as advantageous.

It is therefore evident that he cannot reasonably leave Europe at present, and that it is for me to go and begin our establishment with the funds actually in our hands, and which there is every reason to believe will be greatly augmented.

Do you desire me to remain here? And what for? Lose still another year which is so precious at my age, and when it is so necessary to provide in some way for our children? Expending during all this time, and diminishing my resources?

You will understand that one must have lost all reason to do such a thing. The only question is, would it be proper for you all to go with me at present? How would that do? There are no vessels sailing directly from England to New Orleans, and to take passage for all of our family upon a vessel other than that of Joseph's would be very expensive and disagreeable for us.

Besides, consider the advantages that you will have in remaining in England until next spring or the following autumn. Our children will achieve an education in a manner that will leave nothing to desire. If events turn out favorably in France, you could go directly there instead of making the voyage to America. And I, with our habitation under way and producing, would be able to join you with a fortune made and assured.

Or better, if events are not favorable for our return to France, from here, next year, you will all come to Louisiana where you will find a habitation ready for you, all prepared and comfortable. Otherwise, you would have to live all of one year in New Orleans in a rented house, at considerable expense, and largely deprived of my society. For during all that time, I would be busy on our habitation, getting it into a state for your reception. I cannot doubt, my tender friend, that you will feel the truth and justice of all this, and that you have not the force and courage to approve of it.

I hope therefore that you will be able to make good arrangements with Mrs. Clauson, when you make known to her my resolution, that you will agree with her the manner in which you will remain at Assembly House with our daughters.

I wish that Laura and Virginia [2 of the 4 daughters of Jean Baptiste and Marguerite] should take a very active part in the school, in teaching French, Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography and History, while you yourself teach French and Painting, as you are now doing. And Laura, if it is possible, [should] serve as a substitute to Madame Bartolozzi as music teacher one day each week, in place of Mr. Jansen. In fact, the part you take in

the education, with the compensation for [?] your boarding school for all, and the instructions of the little ones, you should have, together with our help from the Government, your private painting lessons and on the harp (and Joseph will remit to you besides), all the money you should want from time to time.

Arrange all this sooner or later. I count on leaving at the end of this month or at the beginning of September or soon after, because it will be necessary to go by way of New York, there being no opportunity for New Orleans direct.



Charles-Alexandre, Vicompte de Calonne, 1734--1802 (from wikipedia)

I have never had the funds of Calonne in my hands for one instant. But I used my name for the sake of appearances, in order that the creditors of his father might pass their claims over to V. Carson and Co. And by that I am put under suspicion, according to the law, although not according to Justice. But Justice and the law are very different things.<sup>3</sup> I have responded to Theophilus Richards.

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<sup>3</sup> *Flight of a Suspect* gives the translation of this letter and its underlying meaning as follows: Florian's words in that work: "I have never for an instant had the Calonne funds in my hands, but I lent my name to make it seem as though I had so that his father's creditors couldn't reclaim them from V. Corson & Co., and by that, I got myself into it according to the law, though not according to justice, but justice and the law are two very different things." Comments from the author of *Flight of a Suspect*: We know that Calonne, the former minister of Louis XVI, died in 1802, shortly after his return to France, leaving only debts as an inheritance, although during his emigration he gained a very rich marriage, but he squandered that fortune. His son must have had trouble with his father's creditors, and Florian, in an attempt to come to his aid, took in his own name several of Calonne's securities to prevent them from falling into the inheritance's liquidation and from being reclaimed by the creditors. Calonne seemed to want to abuse the situation by reclaiming the reimbursement of these sums from Florian. [Note that Charles-Alexandre de Calonne lived from 1734 to 30 October 1802, according to wikipedia.]

As to Carson, Joseph will talk to him. Send to Joseph a receipt from Carson for the money which he advanced him. It is in the drawer to my table in the parlor. Give him also the Memoranda which Mr. Drouin had made of my affairs of the succession of my father, in order that he can make another copy to carry to France. The Memoire, I believe, is with the bundle of papers of unimportant affairs of the family. They surely are located in the drawer of the table.

I kiss the two [?] daughters every day and love them greatly. The greatest thing would be to embrace you very tenderly, I wish I could. Adieu my Gogo, give my address to Joseph and tell him to write me the result of his interview with Carson.

Have you arranged with Miss Blundell how you shall make out her bill for last year?

J.B. Florian Jolly

## Letter 2.

[Letter translated, not original, in English, handwritten, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL; from Jean Baptiste to his wife]

**Exeter [England], Tuesday 4 p.m., September 8, 1808**

To Mrs. Florian, Assembly House Boarding School, Laytonstone, Essex

If you have not, my Gogo, yet received the letter for me from Mssrs. Farrer, or if you find on reading that which is here enclosed for Mr. Falkner, that it responds well to what he says, send it by post, together with copies of the first two letters from Carson. Do not send yet the originals because they are addressed to “Florian Jolly,” and I do not wish these Gentlemen to know yet the last name. Besides, it is always so much of delay, and you can send the originals some days after, when they are demanded.

I leave the date of my letter to Mr. Faulkner blank. Fill in the date on which you send it, or the preceding day. If my letter does not respond to some questions in the one you get from Farrar, you can send it as if it had left before I had received the letter from them. And then you can reply two or three days after: “Mr. F[lorian]’s compliments to Mssrs. Farrer and Co., [he] begs leave to refer them to a letter he wrote a few days ago to Mr. Faulkner and also to Mr. Carson for any elucidation of this business.”

The essential thing is to gain time. The wind is from the west and I fear being detained some time in the port. I burn to be on the vessel. Each actual minute is so much out of the space of time which must separate us. I count each day that slides by, as one day the less to be far from one another, and one more toward the time of our reunion.

Adieu my Gogo. I embrace you and the children as I love you – that’s all I can say. I will not leave here until tomorrow in the night for Falmouth. I will arrive Thursday.

J.B. Florian Jolly

### Letter 3.

[Letter translated, not original, in English, handwritten, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL; from Jean Baptiste]

**Falmouth [England], Friday Evening, September 9<sup>th</sup> [?], 1808**

To Mrs. Florian, at Mrs. Clauson's Seminary, Laytonstone, Essex

The wind is good for setting the sails and if it continues we will probably leave on Sunday. Separated from you and my children, it is of little importance whether it is 100 or 1500 miles, and the sooner I am out of this country, the more we will be at ease about the affairs of the colony. Nevertheless, only regard me as having left when you shall be two or three days without receiving news from me, as we will perhaps be called on board at any instant. It is possible that I may not write you at the moment of leaving, but you may know that I will write you Sunday evening if I am still here. That is to say, in case you do not receive any other letter from me, two or three days after this, you may consider me as enroute.

I have been on board the vessel and chosen my bed. It is small but most comfortable. The only thing that vexes me is that my cussed guns have not yet arrived, and if not here [by] Monday morning I will perhaps be obliged to leave them in the hands of Messrs. Fox (the American Consul) to be sent to me by the next vessel.

What you say about Laura [Eugenie Florian Bowers, 1791-1857, eldest daughter of Jean Baptiste and Florian<sup>4</sup>] does not please me. I fear very much that this is only a denial [refuge]. Time changes these sentiments very little.

I have been obliged here to purchase a mattress, pillows, rugs and bed-clothes. This they tell me is not necessary. Nevertheless, I furnished it all.

But I would advise you never to come to Falmouth to embark. There is nothing more frightful than the County of Cornwall. Foothills, rocks, wild heath, up and down hill without end, making not more than 4 or 5 miles per hour. In fact, it is a hundred times worse than Lower Brittany. If you listen to me, you will embark at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight. It is the best place. It is in the middle of the English Channel, and the same wind which serves us for leaving here puts us en route for Cowes, and out of the English Channel in 24 hours.

I hope to learn before leaving that Joseph is ready to leave. I had wished very much to see Peter here, but am despairing of it now.

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<sup>4</sup> The four Florian daughters and their ages at this point, are Laura (18), Virginia (15), Elisabeth (14) and Azelie (12).

In case you receive from Messrs. Farrer Crowford and Falkner those bickering letters, you remember that you have two principal points to sustain [make]. The first is after the letters from Carson, it is evident to all men of honor that I never had possession or disposition of the Money of the Colony. Second, that if the Captain of the Colony has the infamy to take advantage of what I signed, to get out of the embarrassment, it would simply result that I would be forced to abandon all that I possess, and they have never given me one sou.

You can say in conversation, as of no importance, with these gentlemen, you know that instead of having the Captain of the Colony at my disposal, I was obliged to borrow from Messrs. Villegille Carson & Co. [And] that at the time of their failure I was obliged to pay to their assignees about 450 pounds, and was forced to sell my home and furniture. [And] that this left nothing in the world to support my wife and four daughters except what you and I earn. That you are actually reduced to be a teacher in the house where you were formerly the mistress. That for me, I am gone to look after a situation that has been offered to me.

Take great care to keep all my books of accounts and the correspondence in a secure manner, that nothing of my affairs with my brothers-in-law, either on your side or mine, may ever be known.

I think you may reply to these gentlemen, if they demand the originals of those letters, something like this:

“Madame Florian presents her compliments to Messrs. and has the honor to import that Mr. Florian is not now at Laytonstone, but he has requested me to send the originals of those letters to Messrs. Crawford, Falkner & Farrer, therefore they are not in his hands. Madame Florian would be pleased, at the same time, to have some words of conversation with some of these gentlemen relative to this affair.”

Adieu, my Gogo. The time approaches. Let this idea console you – many, many tender kisses for you and my children. Speak always of me to those [girls?] as if I was in London.

Compliments Etc.

J Florian Jolly

## **Letter 4.**

[Letter translated, not original, in English, handwritten, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL, from Jean Baptiste to his wife]

**Falmouth, Sunday morning, 7 o'clock, September 11, 1808**

To: Mrs. Florian, At Mrs. Clauson's Seminary, Laytonstone, Essex

The signal is given – we shall most likely sail this morning. The weather is fine and the wind tolerably fair, little better than northwest, however, so that we may still put back if it turns to the west. I expect every minute to be sent for along with the other passengers; we are only seven or eight in all, so that we are extremely well accommodated.

I have got the guns, and am quite ready to start at a moment's notice.

I told Messrs. Fox to return all the letters that came for me after my departure to Capt. Ledet, New York Coffee House.

My heart is too full, I can say no more. Adieu, my dearest, best part of my existence. A few months longer and instead of a farewell it shall be a happy welcome to our asylum.

[Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc]

## Letter 5.

**Halifax [Nova Scotia], 4 October 1808**

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife Marguerite, she is apparently in England, probably at Epping Forest, Essex, about 7 miles from London, or at an apartment in London]

Here I am, arrived safe and sound after three quarters of my voyage, my Gogo, after a passage of three weeks. We left Falmouth [England] Tuesday, September 13 [1808] at two hours after mid-day, and arrived in this port yesterday, Tuesday, at three hours [after mid-day?].<sup>5</sup> We have had good weather constantly, or at least so say the captain and the other passengers. As for me, I would have thought that we had terrible periods of alternating calm and storm. They were able to laugh at my expense, and yet I didn't half reveal my fears. I am warning you about this so that when you get to sea you will remember that all wind which isn't a head wind, is good when it blows.

Our little society is most agreeable. It consists of Mr. Berthure, a New York businessman; Mr. Chipwell, a young man from Guernsey, settled in Virginia; Captain Pinkham, of the island of Nantucket, who has just completed two excellent whaling trips in southern seas for Mr. Mather, and who knows all the Mathers very well. One Captain Burke, a little man puffed up with vanity, and a Mr. Hollyday, a Methodist minister from Manchester, who is the laughing stock of all the others. I pass as a native of Louisiana, which I prefer, being among native born Englishmen, \_\_\_\_\_ good federalists and enemies of the French. We are well fed aboard, on the whole as well as possible on a ship.

We arrived at the Grand Banks of the new world last Thursday, the sixteenth day after our departure from Falmouth. We saw 12 to 15 boats anchored, fishing for codfish. We came up near one boat [p 2] in order to send someone aboard to get some codfish, sending a rowboat to it, and we ourselves began to fish. In less than two hours we had caught 15 codfish with two lines, the only lines we had aboard. A dozen codfish and two halibut were produced from the fisherman, and we feasted on them the rest of the trip. They made an excellent fish stew, which the Americans call "chowder." In an iron cooking pot they put some pieces of pork. Cut and browned, the fresh codfish is sliced into strips. Water and a pint of port are added, and it is simmered for 20 minutes to half an hour, with the addition of pepper, salt and a bouquet of herbs, when they are available.

The coast doesn't look very pleasant, when you get your first view of the land on entering the harbor, but as one goes father in the view increasingly improves. In any case, it in no way resembles the coasts of France and England, even though everywhere you see trees, greenery and rocks. But these are all differently distributed and mixed up. I don't mean to say that the coast of England is more agreeable to the eye; on the contrary I know of

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<sup>5</sup> Attempts to trace the name of the vessel that Jean-Baptiste sailed on have so far been fruitless.

nothing more hideous than the coast of Cornwall. But there is something weird about this coast.

The town is fairly passable and provides a nice view of the port. The churches and fortifications produce a nice effect. It is raining today, but if it is nice tomorrow, Mr. Chipwell and I have teamed up together to hunt and see the country. I'll tell you about it before closing this letter. We are not supposed to leave for New York until Friday or Saturday. It is a trip of eight to 10 days.

Thursday, the 8<sup>th</sup>, at three o'clock.

I'm back from my excursion. Nothing is more frightful than the surroundings of Halifax – not a garden, not a meadow, [ p 3] not a bird. We tramped for four hours with the rifle without seeing a single sparrow. Over rocks, boulders, through swamps, crossing birch forests, pines, thickets of juniper berries, \_\_\_\_\_, willows, and some little plants with \_\_\_\_\_ seeds like there are in the garden at Laytonstone,<sup>6</sup> and so we returned \_\_\_\_\_. Nevertheless, they have here delicious \_\_\_\_\_ and wonderful wild duck – infinitely superior to what one eats in England or even in France. We had these things to eat in the last two days, and truly one cannot find anything better.

I wanted to write to Laura [Laura Eugenie Florian, later Bowers (1791-1857), the oldest daughter of Jean-Baptiste], but I fear I won't have the time. We will leave, probably, early tomorrow. We are going aboard to sleep. I forgot to mention that this morning at the market I saw some Indians, meaning natives or savages, and two of their canoes. They are not very charming \_\_\_\_\_. They were wearing a hat made of skins, and had big ugly strands of hair hanging down on each side of their faces, dark, dull of visage, and with a mouth that never ended.

A thousand and thousand kisses to my four daughters. Also hug Joseph and Peter [the brothers of the wife of Jean-Baptiste, Joseph Marie Le Det de Segrais and Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais] for me with all your heart, as I give them a hearty hand shake. Adieu, my beloved. Remember me to all my friends, etc., etc., etc.

I am sending this through the port, and will write Laura another time.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Baptiste Florian owned and ran an academy at Laytonstone, Epping Forest, about seven miles east of London.



Joseph Marie Le Det de Segrais



Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais

## Letter 6.

New York, October 25, 1808

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais; she is apparently in England, probably at Epping Forest, Essex, about seven miles from London]

Here it is eleven days since I arrived, my good friend, after a voyage of eight days from Halifax. I hope that you have received the letter that I wrote you from that city, by which I informed you of our good trip from Falmouth. It took us only three weeks to make that trip and we had really nice weather almost always. Joseph's friends<sup>7</sup> have given me the finest welcome here, especially Mrs. Wilkes and Mrs. Louis Symond. I am staying in the home of Mrs. Sanson, who is the best woman in the world. I have seen a lot of General Moreau.<sup>8</sup> He came to get me last Sunday in his *curricule* [a small light two wheeled chariot with two matching horses] to take me to Mrs. Symond's. Tell our good friend Mrs. Drouin that he is very upset at her news. He talked to me with an open heart and I believe that the good man would love to be employed in case of attempts in our country in favor of the legitimate sovereign. He hasn't changed since I knew him at Rennes. That was 23 years ago.

The devil which has never ceased to persecute me has caused me here a disappointment which was bound to overtake me. You know that I left London with a letter for Mrs. Cheriote from our friend Joseph, to hold at my disposal. The money which he recovered from A\_\_\_\_\_. Joseph must be unaware of these affairs, because Mrs. Cheriote last January \_\_\_\_\_ more than 14 thousand piasters, and since he received only 9500 in payment, it follows that Joseph owes her more than 4 or 5000 piasters. It's bound to be that he has constantly made bad deals, because there is the result of five years of work. You see my dear friend, that this terribly threatens our plans with total ruin.

[p 2] I find myself here with 80 piasters in my pocket and I was barely able to get 60 from Mrs. Chariote to help me get to New Orleans. God knows where I will go and what I will do when I arrive. The key question will be the means and the good will of Emmanuel. [Emmanuel Marie Le Det de Segrais, the brother-in-law of the writer, was already in New Orleans.] They tell me here that a habitation [estate or plantation] will produce in annual revenue a fourth and even a third of what one pays for it, and that on buying one, on terms, one can with assiduity pay it off in five years and have at the end of that time 5 to 6000 piasters in revenue. But will Emmanuel \_\_\_\_\_ put up the surety for me? I'll tell you the news when I have some. In the meantime, I tell you with

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph is almost certainly Joseph Marie Le Det de Segrais, the brother-in-law of the writer, Jean-Baptiste Florian. However, it is possible that Joseph refers to the father of the writer, Joseph Marie Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc, or to an unrelated person.

<sup>8</sup> Général Victor Moreau (1763-1813), leader of the student revolt at Rennes in January-February 1789, (probably with Jean-Baptiste Florian). Moreau was a famous general during the revolution but was an enemy of Napoleon. He conspired with Pichegru and perhaps Cadoudal to overthrow Napoleon, but was exiled by Napoleon about 1804.

sorrow, my tender friend, that I can't promise you any help and that it becomes necessary for you to work for yourself and our children. I am heartbroken on realizing that I leave you four daughters, or at least three, to support. Never doubt that I will dedicate myself for you and give you all my care and industry, to gain everything possible for you to make it come about. But what can I hope for, what can I promise you in the situation at this time? I have nothing and am still in the dark as to whether I shall find a way to make something. You must consult with your brothers about the possibility of realizing our old projects and our re-uniting ourselves in New Orleans. It doesn't seem that this depends absolutely on what they will be making a year from now. Make it known to Joseph what I am saying here and tell him that Mrs. Chariot is writing to him at Mrs. Powers' address, so he will be able to get her letters.

I must also warn you that the boat which Peter has bought is an old relic, all rotten; so don't take the risk of going on board it. As for him, the best thing that he can do is to get rid of it as quickly as possible, if he doesn't want to drink *lavoue* [?].

[ p 3] Notwithstanding all this, I feel better than I ever have. I met here Mr. Carau who arrived from New Orleans and who is going to return by land. Emmanuel directed him to make a barge to navigate on the Red River, where he has established a store.<sup>9</sup> We shall leave together Friday, bound for Pittsburgh, and as soon as the barge is built, that gentleman will load and outfit it and we will descend the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. This will take us two months, at least, but there I'll profit by getting to see the interior and learning something of the commerce of the country, a knowledge which may be useful in New Orleans. Mr. Carau doesn't speak a word of English, and I will serve as his interpreter in all his dealings.

I wrote Laura a long letter, notably about what I have seen in this country. Tell her to do likewise [write]. Since it will take a long time to get to New Orleans, I wrote to Mrs. Kirkland by the mails, sending her Miss Ravencamp's letter, and in that same boat mail, under the cover of an envelope to Emmanuel, the letter which Mrs. Davidson entrusted me for that country. I have high hopes that with these recommendations and Emmanuel's friends I will always find enough to live. But that is not enough. I would like to assure you \_\_\_\_\_ and for us to be re-united. Talents are extremely rare in this country. I don't know if they pay well in New Orleans. I'll give you news when I have news. In the meantime, consult well among you and see what is the most convenient for you to do at the present time.

A thousand and a thousand kisses to my little dear ones. I hope that Virginia [Virginia Josephine Florian, later Russell (1793-1881), his second daughter] soon will be at a stage to do as her sister, and will no longer be a burden to you. Take heart and have courage,

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<sup>9</sup> Although there is a Red River in eastern Kentucky, it seems very likely that this reference is to the large Red River which rises in northern Texas and western Oklahoma, and which flows east to the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya in central Louisiana. In 1806 the Freeman-Custis expedition found that much of the Red River in Louisiana northwest of Natchitoches was un-navigable due to the "Great Raft", a 100-mile-long log jam, probably over a thousand years old. This jam was not cleared until 1839, by which time it had increased to 160 miles long! Probably the store referred to here was in the lower reaches of the river.

my dear children. As for me, I am in high spirits more than ever and am determined to surmount all obstacles. I wrap you in my arms and hug you to my heart, Mother, children and friends. If only we can be reunited, although the wind and sea seem to always be against us. I desire it more than I can hope, at least right now. Remember me to all my friends.

## Letter 7.

**Philadelphia, October 30, 1808**

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to Laura Eugenie Florian, later Bowers (1791-1857), the first daughter of Jean-Baptiste; she is apparently in England]

Just on leaving New York, I received through Mr. Hope a letter from your uncle, dated September 23, who informed me that your mother and sisters were well and that she had received just recently a letter from you, my dear little one, in which you expressed a desire to return to her. I would think badly of you, dear child, if you preferred the society of strangers, however pleasant they might be, to that of your mother and sisters.

But alas, my dear Laura, we are not in a position which permits us to obey the impulses of our hearts. I have already told you in the preceding letters and I repeat it again: the future is too uncertain for us to be able to flatter ourselves that we will be in the state of never having to work, one and all. If I could undertake something, which is extremely doubtful, and even if I could succeed, which is even more doubtful, it would yet be many years of assiduous work on my part before my mother, your sisters, and I should begin to gather the fruit of such work. Until such time, you should not count on anyone except yourself to live and maintain yourself. Virginia [the second daughter of Jean-Baptiste, 15 years old at this time] is barely able to earn her bread. Your two young sisters won't be able to for a long time. So it is up to you, my dear little one, to help your mother and share with her the cares and expenses of rearing them. Your mother and I have always devoted all that we have been able and sacrificed all that we possessed to give you an education which would ensure you a decent existence for the rest of your life. You should, my children, return to us what we have done for you, if such becomes necessary.

Reflect very seriously, my Laura, that it is time that you begin to earn sufficient so as not \_\_\_\_\_, and from time to time you can, you should take upon yourself the upkeep of one of your sisters until [ p 2] they are no longer in a state of \_\_\_\_\_ and to work not only for them, but that they should join with you and contribute all together to solace your mother and to spare her work which becomes more and more painful for her. If I have the good luck to succeed, then we may find it possible to be all reunited one day in such a way that it will no longer be necessary for you to work in order to live. You will enjoy your leisure more than if you had not been obliged to work. So, my child, let the idea sink in well that at this time you occupy yourself with diligence and energy. You are preparing yourself for a most happy future. If fortune smiles on us, or on the contrary, you are putting yourself in a shelter against misfortune. Have joy in your work (which for a heart like yours should not be difficult) and contribute to the good fortune and the \_\_\_\_\_ of a mother who loves you tenderly and to whom you owe everything.

I pointed out in my last letter that I was going to leave New York for New Orleans. Friday morning I embarked on a fairly big two-masted ship, \_\_\_\_\_, and we crossed the North River, or rather, from the port, to catch the coach from Philadelphia on the

Jersey coast. A northeast wind was blowing, very dry, but very cold and very violent, as it is here almost always at this season of the year. We often shipped water on board. Nevertheless, there was no real danger, but our passengers demonstrated that they were only fresh water sailors. The boss, a negro who looked as if he ate small children, swore, hollered and behaved like one possessed. But a sailor, a white man, whose fright made him even whiter, trembled like a leaf and could scarcely talk. A passenger type, who maneuvered to make his way, behaved most capably, gave orders everywhere and declared that as for him, he did not care if it blew half as hard again. Despite the fears and the bravado, we crossed in little time without accident.

We found a coach waiting for us. It consisted as do almost all public vehicles, and even private vehicles in this country, of a long horse-drawn vehicle, open all the way around and closeable only with leather curtains, across which run three benches, on each of which three persons can squeeze in. The coachman, with one or two passengers, is seated on the fourth bench which forms the front of the carriage, because here they see no point in a carriage which has a seat for the coachman, as in Europe. Very often, the negro who is caring for his master and all his family finds himself seated almost among them, but at least the coachman's seat is always bouncing from the bumps of the coach and is covered by a top deck. Here on the side you will see a drawing of mine.



Sketch by Jean Baptiste of the coach, in the original letter

Your uncle Peter [Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais, brother-in-law of the writer], who knows design better than I, can make you a more correct model. The bonnet, or better said, the hat of the lady in the back is just a sample of the huge hats that are worn in New York. Notice that there is no side of the coach, but that one enters from the front. Many private carriages have a back door.

We crossed the state of New Jersey which looks very much like the environs of New York, that is, rough and savage, with rocks, swamps and no pleasant cultivation. We passed through several little towns, pretty enough, especially Newark, Brunswick, and Elisabethtown. We slept at Princeton, and had lunch \_\_\_\_\_, the next morning (yesterday, Saturday) at Trenton. After Princeton, the countryside began to lose its harshness. One sees fewer woods, and more planted fields. Finally, after having crossed the Delaware at Trenton, on a wooden bridge suspended by arches instead of being raised from beneath, as is usual, we met a countryside more fertile, more laughing. Soon the road follows the banks of that superb Delaware, larger than the Thames at Wollwick, and whose pure waters bathe a beach of sand and pebbles scattered here and there with pines, with weeping willows, poplars and sycamores.

You go through Bristol, a quite pretty place, and then begin to see small buildings climbing up the river banks. Then in two hours, we arrived in Philadelphia. Several miles before entering it, everything announces the approach of a big city: country houses, villages huddled together, carriages, vehicles, bell towers, and masts of vessels which one can make out in the distance. You enter on the north side, which is the oldest and dirtiest part of the city. But as soon as you get on the High Street and move southwards on the road, you are astounded at the beauty of the buildings, at the regularity of the streets, and the air of opulence which exists everywhere. New York is a city of little shopkeepers in comparison to this one. The population, they say, is about the same in both cities, about 90 to 100 thousand souls. But whatever the number of people, it [p 3] appears ten times greater in Philadelphia than in New York. Almost all the houses which I saw along the roadside had lightning rods, which seems to say that storms cause frequent accidents. They pointed out to us on the descent of the narrow hill where four horses which were pulling a coach from New York, two or three years ago, were killed by a lightning bolt. The women of Philadelphia appear more robust and healthier than those of New York. They are larger and stouter. One finds some of the prettiest and many of the ugliest. In this regard, Philadelphia is more like towns in England. I passed the entrance of two or three churches, where society strolled in great numbers, and that is where I made my judgment. The theater doesn't open until next Wednesday and by then I will be on the road to Pittsburgh.

What most strikes the voyager from England is the beauty of the season. We are touching the month of November, and during the 17 days I have been in this country I have seen it rain only two times, and that wasn't but for a few hours. The weather is perfectly serene. The sun sparkles in a clear sky without a cloud wisp to diminish the clearness. The nights are cold and you can see a bit of frost in the morning, but the days after 8 o'clock in the morning until 5 or 6 are most agreeable. Also, the people don't get up early. At eight o'clock the businessmen have breakfasted and go to their offices. They eat dinner generally at 2 o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ at the latest. They don't stay up much. Americans up to now don't turn the day into night and the night into day as in London. The more I see of this country the more I am convinced that only the most prejudiced would prefer England, or even most of France. As for the climate, sun and produce, one has here all the abundance that man can desire – fruit of the finest perfection, at least a hundred different kinds of pears, each one better than the other. Further, there is the

ordinary breakfast in New York, tea, coffee, meats of various sorts, omelets of fresh eggs. Here they give us divine griddle cakes made of corn. Your mother, who loved them so in Brittany, couldn't help but agree that these here are better. The rye bread is not as tasty as that of New York, but the butter is much better.

I will leave Tuesday morning for Lancaster, which is 60 miles from here. I plan to rest there a day and take the coach which leaves Thursday for Pittsburgh. I'll write you from that city before leaving. Several persons just left last week to go there and make the voyage to New Orleans. I'll probably rejoin them before they embark. On the Ohio, it is not yet the season to start down. Perhaps we can give them passage on the barge. One isn't unhappy to have companions along a route of 2100 miles and which will last at least six weeks. Send this letter, as well as the preceding ones, to your mother.

[p 4] I will continue to keep a journal of my voyage, because I presume that your mother will not remain at Laytonstone after Christmas, and since I hope that you will stay on with Mrs. Davison, it's better that I address my letters there, and that you read right away those that I send you in your name. If I write to your mother's address, it will be about personal matters, so you be careful to send them along to her immediately without opening the letters, which will be addressed in care of you. Give my regards and respects to Mr. and Mrs. Davison. Hug your mother and your sisters tenderly in my memory when you see them. Love them always and for your part hold for them a friendship as tender as they hold for you.

## Letter 8.

[Lancaster, PA] November 2, 1808

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to Laura Eugenie Florian, later Bowers (1791-1857), the first daughter of Jean-Baptiste; she is apparently in England]

I left Philadelphia yesterday morning at 5 o'clock, as I told you in my last letter, my dear Laura. I arrived at Lancaster about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, a distance of 62 miles. We stopped almost two hours en route to eat, so you see that one travels by public carrier as fast as in England. The road is a bit rough, being made of a very hard rock which they break up with an iron club into pieces as thick as one's fist.

The country is beautifully cultivated. The only woods one sees are those needed for consumption. They don't burn anything else. In all the country and even in Philadelphia they use coal very little. As far as the eye can see on both sides of the road one sees farmhouses well built of stone or brick. Orchards of apples and peaches, fields of wheat, of corn, of clover. The country is cut by valleys and hills of medium height \_\_\_\_\_ and three or four pretty streams not very deep in which flow limpid waters over a bed of pebbles. It is in the middle of this rich and flourishing countryside that Lancaster is situated, a pretty market town which contains 800 inhabitants. Almost all of them have a store or stand, and the majority are of German origin, as are the farmers everywhere around. The signs on the stores and the printed advertisements, are always in English and German, and the inscriptions on the gravestones frequently are in the first language only. I was struck by the number of apothecary shops and arms factories. One would say that here more than elsewhere men like to take care of their existence and destroy that of others.

They give balls here frequently during the winter. They print an Almanac \_\_\_\_\_. Lancaster is the capital of the province. The houses are very well built of brick, the streets wide and straight as an arrow, cutting each other at right angles. The inn where we are staying concedes nothing to those of England. The \_\_\_\_\_ is less abundant than in Philadelphia and New York, as well as the fish and game, the poultry and fats meats excellent. It costs much less to live here. Our dinner yesterday only cost half a piaster per head (about 2-3 Sterling) and still we had between four of us a half bottle of very good Madiera wine and a quart of French cognac. I have had occasion to admire the sobriety of Americans. Two of the invited persons contented themselves with two small glasses and we left at least three glasses in the half bottle of wine, and almost half of the cognac. Thus they are constrained by themselves to drink to their own advantage. I had already noticed the same thing in Philadelphia, as ordinary at the hotel of Mr. Arch and Mr. Call, director of the bank, where I dined Monday. It is not thus in New York, where English mores prevail very much.

They make a beautiful wool cloth here, almost as \_\_\_\_\_ and as velvety as that which the English call Angora [?], and a beautiful grey, but it is very expensive. They asked me one piaster – 70 cents [p 2] (about seven shillings and six pence). Factories rise up on

every side. Already there are well established factories making hats, glass, buckshot [?], gun powder and foundries for all kinds of iron. In the mountains there are immense mines of this metal, of a quality equal to that of Sweden. They make some very good coarse cloth and a factory to manufacture fine materials has been established. They spin linen [?], which is grown extensively in this country, wool, and cotton. But manpower is rather lacking. At present labor is excessively expensive. On the other hand, everything that is made by machine succeeds in the highest degree. There is one cotton spinning mill near Boston, another near Providence, and one near Pittsburgh. The farmers manufacture ordinary wool cloth themselves, \_\_\_\_\_ cotton \_\_\_\_\_ in various colors, which very much resemble Scotch plaids, and are very attractive. It is amazing how much in the United States they employ machinery to supplement manpower. There are machines to saw wood and make shingles which serve to cover houses. Others to plane boards and polish them, much better than the best carpenter could do it. Every year they come out with a new invention.

Sunday, November 6 [1808], Somerset-town

We rested almost all the day, since the coaches almost never run on Sunday. Moreover, this appears to be the only part of religious precept observed by the inhabitants of many of these parts. In this one where we are, even though it is a \_\_\_\_\_ town where the magistrates meet and hold court, there is hardly a church. A Dutch \_\_\_\_\_ has made a \_\_\_\_\_ in the courthouse, employing that language, and exclusively for a Dutch congregation settled in the neighborhood.

We left Lancaster Wednesday about 5 o'clock in the evening. We spent the night 12 miles from there, and the following day, Thursday, we went to Chambersburg, a city situated 95 miles from Lancaster. From there the country begins to be less cultivated. The houses for the most part are constructed of logs roughly squared off. They call them log houses.

Friday we took to the road very early in the morning, about 3 o'clock, so we were up most of the night, that is, about three o'clock, and at daybreak we began to climb the hills called the sideling hills. It is the chain of mountains east of the Alleghany chain. We rode almost all day long over the diabolical roads, being obliged to lock two wheels at 100 paces [?]. The hills, while so [?] very high, are the most disagreeable to travel that one could ever meet. They are all so \_\_\_\_\_, and the valleys which separate them are so narrow that only a bullet could get through them. From one side to the other, these valleys are about 300 to 500 feet deep, perpendicular, ordinarily watered by a very rapid stream. One also sees a quite pretty river which runs \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

[ p 3] Just as churches are rare, so are cemeteries, and one sees on each farm a small plot of land surrounded by a fence and planted with a few trees, where they bury the members of the family who die. Sentimental travelers could stop here to describe the funeral of a venerable old man whose remains, \_\_\_\_\_ by his weeping children, goes to rest with his ancestors. \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ the family \_\_\_\_\_ grouped around the coffin, the somber and silent grief of the sons, the brothers, the spouse, you \_\_\_\_\_ the

sobbing of the women \_\_\_\_\_ the tears which run down their cheeks. You would see the children \_\_\_\_\_ not yet old enough to feel the pains which \_\_\_\_\_, with unquiet eyes, mouth \_\_\_\_\_ and immobile \_\_\_\_\_ of the afflicted of the parents. You \_\_\_\_\_ them around the tomb, and the noise \_\_\_\_\_ of the first earth which falls on the coffin, to be covered forever, which would make you tremble, and this heart-rending tableau would fill your eyes.

But listen to the worried traveler who in the middle of these savage scenes, thinks with regret about the roads \_\_\_\_\_ and the good inns of civilized Europe. It will occur to you that a bad *rabonguis* is barely able to defend a corner of the earth and a few trees from the incursions of cattle. What is there \_\_\_\_\_, with no religious ceremony, is that the son buries the body of his father and \_\_\_\_\_ probably in the same \_\_\_\_\_ with regret and memories. Don't believe either one or the other. It is by necessity and not by choice that each family has its own cemetery on the property without pomp and without ceremony. Men are about the same everywhere: the good son and the tender mother, the faithful spouse dropping tears on the body which they wish with their hands to give \_\_\_\_\_ . In working to \_\_\_\_\_ the land which surrounds the cemetery so simple, they turn their eyes \_\_\_\_\_ and *portent au jour* \_\_\_\_\_, cold, hard *interesses* they plough the enclosure with as much indifference as \_\_\_\_\_ in Europe \_\_\_\_\_ of tombs of *ses* \_\_\_\_\_ to go to church, where you see them more often occupied with their \_\_\_\_\_ than with words.

[p 4] \_\_\_\_\_ qu'on \_\_\_\_\_ 5 or 6 times along the way. \_\_\_\_\_ we traversed several times, which was not at all deep, but it seemed to me that it was swelling a lot in the \_\_\_\_\_. One could judge by the levels marked by the water along the banks.

Saturday we left at the same time as the day before, and we traveled towards the Alleghanies during the middle of the day. The mountains (if they deserve the word) \_\_\_\_\_ present a very different look from that of the sidelings. It's a country that rises gradually, by gentle waves, and which one ascends and descends without \_\_\_\_\_. One can see that they are snow covered. They tell us that it's quite usual to find ice on the highest place during the month of January and that they have 3 inches of snow this past September. All I know from experience is that the sun yesterday, November 6, was beautiful, the atmosphere laden with mist in the valleys, and even several degrees above the horizon, but very strong on our heads, the air most soft, and the heat such that when walking we had to take off our jackets. In fact we could hardly bear them in the carriage.

In the morning there was a pretty hard frost, but no sign of snow or ice. All in all, it appears that this is the most beautiful season of this climate. They call it Indian Summer. We saw 4 or 5 workers \_\_\_\_\_ busy working on the road. This gives hope that within 10 years or so it will be a bit passable.<sup>10</sup> As for the present, you have to walk to make the steep grades and even more so the descents, if you don't want to be shaken to pieces in a way that is not known in France or in England. Nevertheless, the only serious risk is that

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Baptiste has a sense of humor!

of fatigue. The coaches are good, the horses powerful and docile, and the drivers very expert.

There is little change in the manner of living since Lancaster. At breakfast and supper \_\_\_\_\_ fried chicken, excellent griddle cakes made of dark meal, good butter, cream, black and white toasted bread, and excellent coffee. For dinner, the same food plus turkey, \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. The host where we spent the day yesterday bought 10 pheasants [?] for a piaster and a quarter, about six pence [?] sterling. Everywhere there is excellent cider. On the road we had to pay a sixth of a piaster, about 3 pence sterling, for a bottle.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to calculate a consistent exchange rate from these letters up to this point, probably due to mis-translations and problems in reading the narrow, difficult writing. At one point it appears that 1 piaster equals 7 shillings and 6 pence in British sterling, which also equals 70 US cents. But here a sixth of a piaster equals 3 pence, which means that 1 piaster equals about 18 pence, or 1 shilling and 6 pence. The website <http://eh.net/hmit/exchangerates/> states that in 1808 one US dollar was worth 0.216 British pounds, or about 4 shillings. This site does not provide an historical series for 1808 for the piaster.

## Letter 9.

Pittsburg[h], Sunday, November 15, 1808

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife Marguerite; she is still in England]

I arrived last Tuesday, my dear Gogo, a bit tired, \_\_\_\_\_ but nevertheless much less than I would have thought after the diabolical roads which we have traveled. It seems to me that one can do anything when one makes the effort. I left Philadelphia Tuesday morning, November 1, at 5 o'clock and \_\_\_\_\_ we spent the night at Lancaster, a distance of 62 miles. The road was a bit rough but fairly pretty. The town is quite attractive and contains 7 or 8 thousand inhabitants. The countryside [was] well cultivated after Philadelphia and generally inhabited by persons of German origin. I left Lancaster about 5 o'clock in the evening, by the mail coach that goes to Pittsburgh. We put up for the night after 12 miles and the next day, Thursday, reached Chambersburg, a town situated 75 miles from Lancaster and about halfway between Philadelphia and Pittsburg. Up to this point the road is nice enough and as you can see, one goes as fast as on the ordinary roads of Europe. But the scenery begins to change soon. Friday we took to the road again between three and four o'clock in the morning, as one does all the time on this coach, and from the break of day we commenced to climb the first chain of mountains (there are three which one crosses in succession) – Sideling Hills, whose slopes are cut off at the foot and the heights a rooster's comb. We made about 30 or 40 miles that day without stopping for dinner. The mountains are covered with oaks, with chestnuts, and pines from which they extract much resin (tar). The floor of the forests is covered with mountain laurel with large leaves.

The next day, Saturday, we crossed the Alleghany Mountains, where the ground rises in gentle contours. One climbs and goes down almost without noticing that they are covered in snow. They tell us that it snowed this past September and that ordinarily ice would remain until the month of June. That may be, but I know from experience that on November 5 the sun was hot on our heads, the atmosphere full of wisps of clouds in the valleys and even a few degrees above the horizon, the air very mild and the heat such that we could not bear to keep on our jackets in the coach, open on every side. Sunday (November 6) we rested all day at Somerset-town, and Monday we crossed the third chain of mountains, called Laurel Hill. In the Alleghanies, rhododendron replaces mountain laurel. Here azaleas, wild roses and spindle trees [*le fasain a bonnet de pretres*] are found in abundance. The ground is soft, and the ruts so deep that the roads are even worse than among the rocks of the Sideling Hills.

Sleeping accommodations on the road are pretty bad [p 2], but one lives well. For breakfast and supper one has grilled beef, venison, chicken, turkey, pheasant, partridge roasted over the grill, excellent griddle cakes of dark buckwheat flour, very white bread, honey, apples and raisins cooked in their juice, good butter, cream and excellent coffee. Very good cider, Madeira wine, and strong liquors. But be it because of economy or because of sobriety, it seems to me that they resort very little to drink while traveling. The expense, after all, is not extraordinary. One can count on spending from one piaster

to a piaster and a half per day on lodging, drink and food. [It cost] 25 piasters for the coach from New York to Pittsburg[h] and they made me pay besides 8 piasters for my luggage, which weighs about 80 pounds. My entire trip from New York to here, including three days in Philadelphia, has cost me 52 piasters.

I am impatiently awaiting the arrival of Mr. Carau. He should have arrived here as quickly as I. I haven't heard a thing. If he is delayed in arriving, I will leave with 4 or 5 other persons, almost all of them French, who are going like me to New Orleans. There are many of them settled in this city, who are doing very well. It (Pittsburg) is situated perfectly for trade with the interior, at the point where two navigable rivers come together uniting to form the great Ohio River, which after a course of 1,100 miles flows into the Mississippi and receives en route other lovely rivers by which one can penetrate deep into the interior. All the country around Pittsburg for 30 miles abounds in coal mines, and in iron of superior quality. Also all kinds of factories are being built here. It will soon be the Birmingham of the United States. One \_\_\_\_\_ raise along the Monongahela and even more along the Ohio a lot of hemp and they manufacture \_\_\_\_\_, cloth, and almost as much cotton bagging as Louisiana needs. Hemp is sold on the spot where it is grown for 100 piasters the ton, but the factories buy it all up.

Kentucky, which extends along the banks of the Ohio, is a veritable land of milk and honey. You can get a dozen partridges for a shilling, turkeys weighing 15 to 16 pounds for a quarter of a gourde, and all the rest in proportion. There has been established here a company (group) of Swiss who have vineyards and they have already made a wine which can compare to that of France. But the advantages which the country can offer does not approach those that one finds in countries where they cultivate cotton. A quantity of people went down the Mississippi with two or three thousand piasters, some 5 or 6 years ago, and today they have estates (habitations) worth 50 or 60 thousand.

[Left margin note]

They are talking in Congress on non-intercourse with Europe. God will it that all of you can come to the United States before this takes place. With your \_\_\_\_ and those of your daughters you will always find the means to earn your bread, perhaps less well than in England, but at least we will all be together.

[p 3; Continuation of narrative regarding successful planting in Louisiana]

Here is the way one begins: one buys an un-cleared piece of ground, *l'au point* payable over a long period of time. You get 6, 8, or 10 negroes, half of them full grown men, the other half women and children, who cost on average 400 piasters each. You put them to work clearing (the land) and building a hut. In addition you have to buy foodstuffs for the first year, oxen to do the work, cows, poultry, pigs, and from the first harvest of cotton you will reap almost 300 piasters per head for each negro, and the second (year) your initial expenses are covered, and your annual profits after that are at least two thirds of the capital you have advanced. To start thusly you only need 5 [?] or 5000 piasters, and even less \_\_\_\_ - one is due credit from New Orleans, and at the end of two or three

years, one finds himself with a return of 3 to 4000 piasters, from which each year one withdraws to buy new negroes and the clear the land afresh. With a capital of 5000 piasters one can do something else: that is to buy an estate (habitation) costing 20 to 30 thousand piasters on terms, and immediately to put there an additional 10 to 12 negroes [blot on paper]. On this land one adds the produce of 3 to 4000 [blot on paper]. One is then at the stage of paying the capital (debt) from the revenue, within 5 or 6 years, but for this one needs to find backers (*repondans*) and inspire confidence. If Peter and Joseph are in a mood to gain between them a thousand or 1200 pounds Sterling, and if they wish to join forces with me, then next winter (that is, about one year hence) we can realize one of these two projects.

As for anything else, I don't know what Emmanuel [brother of Marguerite, already in New Orleans] will be disposed to do. I hope that at least he will be able to find work for me to earn my living. I cannot hope for more. I will not tell him in any case of what Mr. Cherist has told me about Joseph's business. \_\_\_\_\_ tomorrow to learn that he has not wished to give me an account of collections and that it is a deal that only Joseph can straighten out with him. But I ask you as a favor that you get your brother to tell me positively, at the earliest opportunity, and in triplicate, if he will find himself in a position for that, what his plans are, his means, those of Peter, in sum, if he can do something, when, and in what manner. If he hesitates to commit himself in writing, you, or Laura, or Virginia can write me what he says, without naming anyone, without a signature. But in the name of God, please no mystery or reserve. So you see, my good friends, in what a bad and unhappy situation we are involved. As for anything more, everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

[Left side margin notes:]

November 20 [1808]. \_\_\_\_\_ Carau Point. Soon it will be 15 days since I \_\_\_\_\_ here \_\_\_\_\_ *entens point parler* [intend to speak?]. As a consequence, I leave tomorrow [for?] Natchez on a great flatboat with an entire family \_\_\_\_\_ to reach New Orleans easily. Adieu, and until soon, I hope.

[p 4 of main letter:] I would not have left England, and what would I have done? I am barely able to make a living. Without speaking of the vexations which I could scare up about the affairs of the Colonist. At least here I have some chance. There are so many who have begun with nothing. I am well, I am of good heart, have the same strength and spirit, and wait with energy and patience for happier days. Embrace most tenderly our \_\_\_\_\_ and your two brothers when you see them. I don't dare stop thinking about the time when I will be able to do as much.

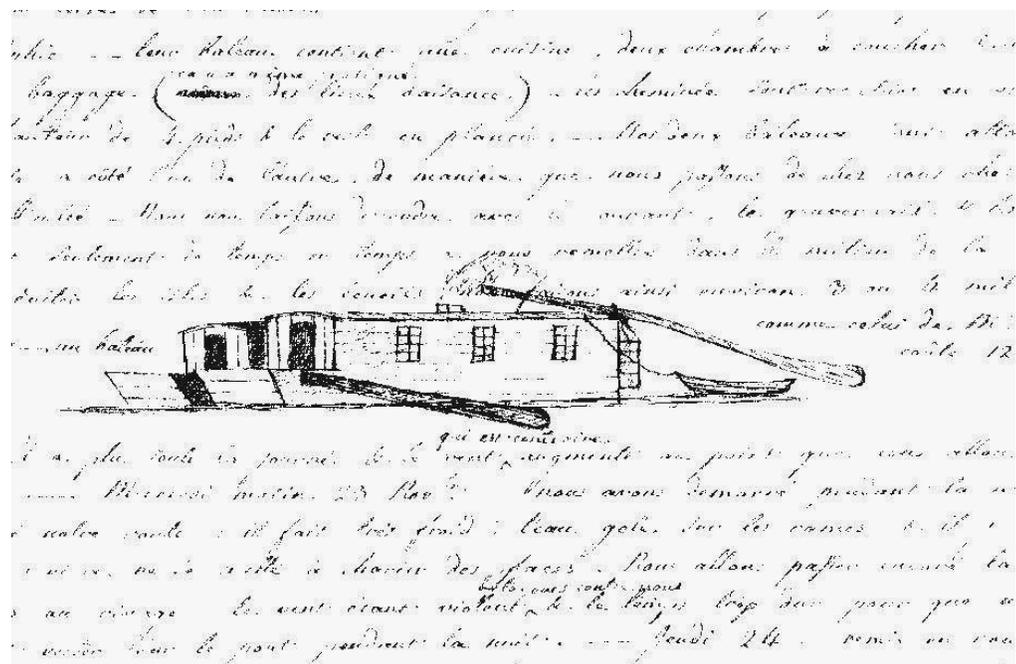
I must inform you with chagrin that I have just broken one of my dentures eating an apple. If you see M. le \_\_\_\_\_, tell him, and warn him that I will send it to you so he can make me another free, as soon as I get a chance to send it [?] from New Orleans.

## Letter 10.

[Tuesday, November 22 through December 4, 1808, on the Ohio River]

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife and four daughters, apparently in England]

We left Pittsburgh today, Tuesday, November 22 [1808] at 10 o'clock in the morning. We number in all 22 persons, distributed between two large flatboats, with a wooden floor, which with reason they call "Noah's Ark." One of these boats is loaded with cargo. I am lodged with the proprietor, Campbell Wilkins, son of General Wilkins, who has a store at Natchez.<sup>12</sup>



Sketch of "Noah's Ark" in the original letter from Jean Baptiste

We have a crew of four men-servants and a young brother who is being sent to New Orleans to learn French, who in part has been placed under my care to take him there and to place him with a French family. In the other boat is Mr. Linton, a planter from the outskirts of Natchez, with his wife, a young and rather attractive Virginian, whom he married just 6 weeks ago; the wife of his overseer; slaves; and crewmen who are to go with us as far as Limestone only.

<sup>12</sup> It seems likely that this reference is to Brigadier General John Wilkins (1761-1816) of the Allegheny Militia. He served in the army, mostly in western Pennsylvania, until 1802, when he became a full time merchant in Pittsburgh. For a time late in his career he was appointed as Quartermaster [General] of the US Army. He became the first president of the first bank in Pittsburgh. Perhaps the son referred to here is James Campbell Wilkins (1786-1849), according to poorly sourced trees on ancestry.com.

Mr. and Mrs. Linton, with all the rest of their group, came by land from Baltimore to Pittsburgh, almost the same road as the one from Philadelphia. Their boat contains a kitchen, two bedrooms, and another (room) for baggage (that is convenient as well as a toilet). The chimneys are made of brick up to four feet in height and the rest of wood. Our two boats are attached together, one against the other, so we can go from ours to theirs without difficulty. We are letting ourselves descend with the current. The rudder and the oars are used only from time to time to get us back in the middle of the river, or to avoid islands and whirlpools. In this way we make about 3 or 4 miles per hour. A boat like Mr. Linton's costs 120 dollars.

It rained all day and the wind, which is contrary, is rising to the point that we shall go ashore.

Wednesday morning, November 23 [1808]. We cast off during the night and continue our trip. It is very cold. Water freezes on the oars and it is feared that the river will freeze up or have ice floes. We are again going to tie up to the river bank for the night, the wind being strong and always against us, and the weather too cold for our people to stay on the bridge during the night.

Thursday, [November] the 24<sup>th</sup> [1808]. En route again by day. Arrived about midday at Wheeling, the first town of any importance since Pittsburgh. The distance by water 96 miles. Weather cold but fine. We will travel all night.

Friday, [November] 25<sup>th</sup> [1808]. We didn't stop at all, and about noon we arrived in front of Marietta, 172 miles from Pittsburgh, which makes 76 miles of traveling in 24 hours. They untied the canoe (rowboat) to go buy milk and provisions from the small farms scattered along the banks of the river. We bought 19 chickens for a half a piaster [and] a deer killed during the night which weighs about 100 pounds, for two piasters. Cabbages and onions are much more expensive in comparison. These latter are sold for one piaster a bushel (peck) [?]. Butter is scarce and (when one finds it) not less than 18 cents per pound.

This evening, at nightfall, we are opposite Blannerhasset's Island. This island, which at most contains 3 to 400 acres, is in the middle of the Ohio River, about 200 miles from Pittsburgh and consequently far from any company (because Wheeling and Marietta are more truly market places, containing barely 150 homes each and inhabited by storekeepers and little merchants). It is in the retreat that an Irishman with wife and children are established. Being well off, each of them has many friends, [are] great lovers of music, [have] a taste for all the arts, but are infatuated with romantic ideas. He has spent 50 thousand piasters to embellish this island, which, after all, lacks views, landscapes and everything that could make it an agreeable retreat. He educates his children in the fashion of Jean Jacques [Rousseau] and they say that his oldest son is

already so naughty [p 2], that he gives all the indications that he will one day go to the gallows.<sup>13</sup>

Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> [November, 1808]. We haven't stopped. The weather is calm and beautiful, rather mild for the season. This morning we saw people going to meet the market and we arranged to buy several provisions from them. We went to a farm maintained by a Dutch family. Everything breathed prosperity and cleanliness. The milk was exquisite. They sold us excellent hams of fallow deer. Every day the rowboat is sent to the land to look for wood. Today this almost involved us in a rather serious quarrel. Our men took some wood that had been cut up on the side of the river bank. The owner showed up with a carbine and I saw in an instant what was about to be enkindled. A piaster re-established peace.

In the afternoon we passed in front of Gallipolis, a settlement originally established by Frenchmen. Very little of it is left. They abandoned both sides of the Ohio to go settle in Illinois.

Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> [November, 1808; continuation of the same letter]. This morning we purchased a wild turkey from a peasant for a quarter of a piaster, and his passage with us as far as the mouth of the Scioto. This river waters some magnificent country in the state of Ohio and boats go up more than 200 miles from the confluence. Two little towns, Portsmouth and Alexandria, are situated on each side of the mouth. It was here that for the first time we enjoyed a pretty view of the river. Up to now, it has been constantly hemmed in between chains of hills which stretch out for a mile from the river bank, covered with trees as are the lowlands which at times form narrow bands between the hills and the river. The latter appears as but an expanse of water, a bit rapid, flowing between forests denuded of foliage and [where] the earth is covered with dry leaves [which] saddens the glance with its somber monotony. Near the mouth of the Scioto one begins to see hills farther away rising behind one another, in different colors. For the first time one has a perspective.

Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> [November 1808]. We wanted to stop at Limestone. The night was dark and for fear of missing it we landed in some fashion or other and not without risk between trees whose feet were bathed by the current. Fortunately, at daylight we found ourselves a mile above the town but on the opposite side. We were barely able to land,

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<sup>13</sup> Blennerhasset's Island undoubtedly refers to the island of Harman Blennerhasset, who emigrated from Ireland to the US in 1796, and who created a small Eden on his island in the Ohio River, with a huge mansion, library, musical instruments, and fine food. He played a major role in the conspiracy trial of former Vice President Aaron Burr, because Burr visited the island in 1805, and discussed his plans to seize Spanish and perhaps other western territory. Blennerhasset later wrote a letter to Burr agreeing to support Burr's ambitious plans. In the fall of 1806 US officials including President Jefferson became aware of the conspiracy and sent the state militia to seize the island and Blennerhasset. The militia sacked the mansion and seized eleven "invasion" craft, while Blennerhasset fled. Blennerhasset claimed that these were craft for settlers, not invaders. Blennerhasset was later tried, but like Burr, escaped conviction. He moved to Canada and died in Guernsey in poverty in 1831. He reportedly sold the island in 1807, before Jean-Baptiste arrived, so perhaps J-B did not actually go ashore and meet him, but heard stories about him. Sadly, the mansion burned in 1811. However, it has been re-created as a state park, and can be visited during the summer.

because the current was so rapid and our Noah's Arks so difficult to manage that it is impossible to cross from one side to another without being diverted at least a mile. Mrs. Linton being sick, we stopped for 24 hours in Limestone. They went to get a doctor for her in Washington, another small town, 4 miles further in the interior.

Whereas you are [huddled near] the corner of your fireplace, in fog, we are enjoying here the purest sky and a temperature as mild as that of May in England. If the vegetation were not so dead, one would think it spring, but earth and sky don't correspond at this time. It is impossible to see Nature more hibernal. Not a sprig of grass, not a green leaf, of any sort.

Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> [November 1808]. We left Limestone at noon. The weather is still mild and lovelier than yesterday. The evening is superb and the sky is more beautiful than any I have ever seen in Europe in its setting sun of Autumn. The clouds [p 3] are alight with the most vivid reds and greys, and are scattered over a heaven of the most beautiful azure over our heads and taking on, towards the horizon, mixed hues of yellow, orange, and tender green. The Ohio reflects them on the tranquil surface of its waters, which spreads like a carpet about three quarters of a mile wide and fifteen miles long. Tuesday morning, 7 a.m. We are passing in front of Cincinnati, a fairly considerable town of 4 or 500 homes, a bank, and many factories. Cincinnati is 524 miles from Pittsburgh, following the turns of the river. At two o'clock in the afternoon we passed the mouth of the great Miami River. It is about 200 yards wide and they go up it by boat for more than 100 miles. It connects by portage of land of 5 miles, with another Miami River which empties into Lake Erie. We will pass during the night in front of Big Bone Lick Creek, the place where one finds in abundance the teeth and tusks of those enormous animals which they call Mammoths.

Thursday [31 November 1808] 8 o'clock. We are in front of Port William, a little river village at the mouth of the Kentucky River, distance from Pittsburgh of 628 miles. Thus we have made 104 miles since 7 o'clock yesterday morning and that without perceiving the least motion. The Kentucky River is not as large as the Miami, but it is navigable by boat as far as 200 miles above its confluence with the Ohio. The weather is still beautiful and mild enough. The farther we advance the less we shall feel winter. We shall arrive during the night at Louisville, situated on the rapids, in the waterfalls of the Ohio. We are supposed to stop there and I will mail this letter from there. This will be the last chance that I shall have to write you before reaching Natchez or New Orleans. Louisville is situated about 700 miles from Pittsburgh, and from there to the mouth of the \_\_\_\_\_ we still have more than 400 miles.

I would like now, my dear friends, to speak two words about my quarters aboard, which may be useful to either on the sea or on this river, if you take the same route some day in the future. I had made a folding seat of very heavy coarse cloth, and a light pallet on which I put a bear skin, well sewed, which cost me 2 piasters at Pittsburgh. For the cover, I purchased a Buffalo skin, prepared by Indians (and which they call here a Buffalo Robe) which cost me 6 piasters. When it's cold, I cover myself, the hair on the inside, otherwise, I use the other side, which is as soft and supple as a deerskin. We drink

chocolate morning and night, and I urge you to amply provide yourself with it, before crossing the ocean. You can drink it very well without milk, which you can't do in the case of tea or coffee. Besides, it is very nourishing and healthful. We have raw apples and above all dried apples which we put in every sauce with meat etc. At Pittsburgh they sell dried apples for a piaster a bushel. They are simply apples picked before they are completely ripe, peeled, cut into quarters, threaded in long strips, and put in the sun to dry. They keep very well thus prepared and are much better than dried in the oven.

Louisville, December 4 [1808]

We have just passed the waterfalls of the Ohio and we are here to take on a cargo of cloth and rope. There are several factories, especially of cloth for baling cotton. In my forthcoming letters from Natchez and New Orleans I'll give you some additional information about navigation on the Ohio. In any case, if you come by this means before I can [p 4] get other letters to you, I advise you, first, to contact Mr. Anthony Bealen at Pittsburgh, who will do everything for you and procure for you everything you will need. Second, build a barge with a keel or a flatboat at Brownsville instead of at Pittsburgh. It will be better and cost less. Third, take on cargo at Natchez rather than to speculate yourself. Fourth, at Natchez, transport cotton bales destined for New Orleans in return for payment. This will pay for your barge and expenses on the way, at least.

Adieu, good friends, a thousand and a thousand kisses to your mother and to you four little ones. One thousand best regards to both brothers. I love you and cherish you from the bottom of my heart.

## Letter 11.

Natchez, 4 January, 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian. To Mr. Hy Cheriot, Merchant, of New York]

Monsieur,

The little time that I probably shall have here barely permits me to scrawl a letter in haste. I beg you to be so kind as to pass this on to my wife, after having read it. Maybe you will find some interest in the details which this contains.

The voyage on the Mississippi is much less pleasant than that of the Ohio. It offers little danger, but the monotony of the scenery and the length of it make it most boring. The banks of this river don't have the faintest resemblance to the picture which our friend Chateaubriand drew.<sup>14</sup> Instead of mountains and prairies, you see on each side of the river, an uninterrupted, indistinguishable succession of lowlands covered with forests and only diversified by occasional sand banks. Nevertheless, I much prefer this manner of travel to New Orleans to that by sea.

Here is what I recommend in particular to those who would like to adopt my mode of travel: Get to Pittsburgh towards the end or even the middle of October. In the spring the voyage on the rivers is much more pleasant, but the roads in the mountains are a hundred times worse than at the end of the summer. Buy a flatboat (Kentucky boat) which one has made at Brownsville for \$1.66 or 12 shillings, 6 pence per foot. These boats are 13 feet wide. Given 40 feet in length, one can divide the boat into three sections. The one in front is for the rowers (oarsmen) and for the kitchen. You have to take great care that the roof is well sealed, and for this, it should be covered with a double thickness, at least, of well-jointed boards. It is a very good idea to provide oneself with extra oars, two [?] cables – one for the front and one for the back (the sternpost), and a supply of new rope, which one can re-sell for 50 percent of the investment if you do not use it.

One cannot do without a 15 to 20 foot skiff, and an Indian canoe, because one is liable to lose one or the other, and if one only has one of these, it is not possible to rescue the one that the current takes away. Besides this, one should be provided with axes to cut wood, several boards for repair in case of accident, saws, nails, hammers, augers, chisels, and hemp oakum to caulk with. All of these precautions are of the very greatest necessity.

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<sup>14</sup> Francoise Rene de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) published various travelogues, plays and novels, some of which stated or implied that he had visited Louisiana and floated down the Mississippi. However, some scholars have identified errors – in the same way that Jean-Baptiste Florian did – and now believe that Chateaubriand did not in fact visit the American south. Note that Chateaubriand was born in St. Malo and Jean-Baptiste or his wife may have known him. Chateaubriand's father was a ship owner at St. Malo, as was Pierre Beaugeard, grandfather of Jean-Baptiste's wife, as was her uncle Nicolas.

One dare not take less than two hired oarsmen and a hired pilot, and it is well to take two other men such as one finds everywhere who row for their passage. On many occasions one must put two oarsmen on each oar, beside the one who steers.

As one travels day and night on the Ohio, it will prove advantageous to divide the crew into two watches, but they must be carefully watched to make sure that they do not fall asleep. One provides these crewmen with [p2] biscuits and salted meats, and they are allowed a certain quantity of whiskey, and often sugar and coffee.

For your own use you provide fresh meat, fowl, etc. But it is necessary to warn the crew in advance that they will not be allowed these delicacies, otherwise they will expect it. Also it will be most convenient for the crew to provide cooking, and cleaning of the boat. If one doesn't have one, you should endeavor to get a negress to do the cooking and wash the clothes.

A boat that is not loaded is too light and doesn't float as quickly with the current as a boat sunken down 18 inches or 2 feet. The wind is pretty strong on the water, and if there are waves or a swell it is subject to roll and even to capsize. Thus it would be advisable to take some merchandise that is heavy and takes up little room, such as all iron products, tools, chains, shoes for negroes, white linen cloth (country linen), whiskey and cider in barrels, or porter in bottles. All of this is sold here, and in New Orleans, for 50 to 75 percent profit over the purchase price in Pittsburgh.

You have to count on 15 to 20 days of navigation on the Ohio, and during that time you daily find farms on one side of the river or the other where you can procure milk, eggs, cabbage, etc. But on the Mississippi you don't have the same resources. During the 3 or 4 weeks it takes to get to New Orleans you sometimes, even many times, see no vestige of houses. But if you are equipped with rifles (guns), as it is always wise to be, for your own safety, you can shoot many ducks and above all wild pigeons. We were able to do so during the final 8 days of our trip. It is probable that within a very few years, the banks of the Mississippi will offer greater resources. New inhabitants are continually settling, but their first works barely suffice to meet their own most pressing needs, and it is only approximately 600 miles below the mouth of the Ohio that some semblance of comfort among the colonials is evident.

At that location, cotton becomes the principal object of cultivation. The quick fortunes that have been made since the Union was formed lure the inhabitants of the East and draw them in throngs. Land sells from 2 to 10 gourdes [or dollars?] per acre. Negroes cost 4 to 500 gourdes [dollars?] per head, on average. A good Negro can cultivate up to ten acres of cotton, without taking account of his food, but could harvest only 2 or 3 [acres of cotton]. And then, one must give him the help of three or four women and children who, after the fields have been harvested, can be used to take the cotton to the gin [seeders?]. Each acre of land produces annually 12 to 1500 pounds of raw cotton, which produces from 3 to 400 pounds of cotton ready for baling. As a result, a colonial who owns 12 to 15 Negroes and Negresses, in good working condition, can cultivate 50 acres of land in cotton and produce annually 20 thousand pounds [?], which at the price

of 20 to 22 cents per pound, as it has been selling for the past two years, makes him a profit [revenue?] of 4000 Gourdes [dollars?], for a capital of 8 thousand gourdes [dollars?] at most.<sup>15</sup> Clothes for the Negroes cost about 10 [?] gourdes [dollars?] per year each, and they supply their food and help to gather the cotton.

[p. 3] The embargo has been suspended, the profits are enormous, but after all the furor with which everyone has put into this cultivation, one is much inclined to believe that the markets will soon become glutted and that the price of cotton must necessarily fall a great deal.

It is not the same with sugar. The advantage which one has in the river bottoms, is in cultivating cane with less manpower and less expense than in the Islands; and one can sell the production in the United States without paying duty, ensuring permanent profit. It is generally believed that one man must make very heavy investments to establish a sugar refinery, and that is true. But it constitutes a system extremely favorable to those who can begin with small means. In the canton of Atacapas, on the Bayou Teche, they buy land for 150 gourdes [dollars?] a front acre by 40 acres deep, which will bring a return of at least 4 gourdes per acre. This land is what they call here prairies, that is to say, without forests, so that one can immediately put it to the plow, and the beginner who doesn't yet have the means to make his own sugar, sells the cane as it stands for 100 gourdes [dollars?] per acre, to the man who has a cane mill. By this means he again secures 20 percent more per acre, which the cotton planter doesn't do in the best of times, and he doesn't have the work of harvesting.

The center of Atacapas isn't but five days from New Orleans. It is regarded as the healthiest part of the colony. The population is almost entirely French, for which reason many Americans are kept away. They were very brave [?] to invite the French to settle there. It is a fact that in the vicinity of the sea, coffee doesn't do well. What prevents its cultivation around New Orleans is not so much the cold of winter as the humidity of the soil [sun?]. But you find terrain at an elevation of 50 to 60 feet over the bayous where orange groves flourish.

In sum, from what I have picked up from conversations with several people, mostly French as well as Americans, who have traveled all over this canton and wish to establish themselves there, with a very ordinary amount of assiduity and intelligence, one can within two or three years pay back all advances (loans) and find oneself the owner of a flourishing plantation (habitation). Let us say 4 or 5 years instead of 2 or three, I know of no speculation which is so advantageous and above all so certain, with fewer troubles and risks.

Oh that one day I will be re-united with all who are dear to me, wife, children, brothers-in-law, on the happy soil of Atapacas. A thousand and thousand tender embraces, from the bottom of my heart to each of you whom this letter reaches.

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<sup>15</sup> From these statements it appears that the exchange rate is about 1 gourde to the dollar: 20,000 pounds of cotton times 20 cents a pound equals \$4000, which is also 4000 Gourdes. Unfortunately, one translation gives all the figures as being presented in gourdes, while another says they are in dollars.

To my great astonishment I have found here snow and a cold which I haven't felt in several years. Judging from this sample, you will have a frightful winter in New York. I hope you won't suffer as much as I have despite a fire made of nine great pieces of wood arranged in piles, three in the front, three in the rear, and three on top. In spite of all this I find myself in better health with more force and energy than I have felt for a long time. It may be because I need it more than ever before.

Kindly accept the assurance of the sentiments which I am, Monsieur,

Your very humble servant,

J.F. Jolly

## Letter 12.

New Orleans, January 23, 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife and four daughters, still in England]

Here I am arrived at the end of my voyage, my dear and tender friends, after a rather long road. On the rivers, we were extremely set back by bad weather and storms which many times forced our boat to remain anchored beside the banks. Despite these inconveniences, I invite you all to take the same route if you come by New York or Philadelphia. I won't talk any more about the details of my voyage on the Mississippi. As a matter of fact, they would not be at all interesting. I wrote to Mr. [Mrs.?] Cheriot a letter which I asked to transmit to you,<sup>16</sup> and there is nothing for me to add relative to the navigation of the river.

I will get to my reception here in the city and the outskirts right away. I disembarked on the levee yesterday afternoon about two o'clock. Last Friday I enquired about the dwelling of Emmanuel [Emmanuel Marie de Segrais, brother of the wife of Jean-Baptiste] and within a little while found myself embraced in his arms. Our joy was mutual and with those [same] sentiments he expressed the desire to have here his beloved sister and the rest of his family, and this expression added to my joy to see him [?]. I had expected him to be larger and slenderer, according to the report from Joseph [Joseph Marie de Segrais, another brother-in-law], and through such erroneous thinking I almost did not recognize him, except for his striking resemblance to our dear Marguerite (because you should no longer call her Gogo; I will tell you why further on), and with your uncle Beugeard.<sup>17</sup> He is only an inch or two taller than me, and he is strongly and vigorously built.

That very day he talked to me about his business at Natchitoches (and not at Ouashita, as I had thought). He told me that the business was doing very well, and that the man whom he had put in charge had many talents, but a disposition so devilish that he had become disagreeable equally to the inhabitants and to the \_\_\_\_\_. I proposed to him that if the man resigned, as he has all the appearance of doing, to put me in his place, and which we both hope will take place soon. I say "we hope," although for me this hope involves everything I hate most in the world – the life of bookkeeping, shop and commerce. I would have liked, a million times more, to go with 2 or 3 Negroes into the depth of the forest, or on the least inhabited bayou, to build a cabin and clear a few acres of ground. I am so perfectly convinced, as I remarked in my letter from Natchez, that of all the speculations it is the most sure and the most profitable. But in the situation in which I find myself, I don't have the choice to make. All Emmanuel's means are tied up in

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<sup>16</sup> The letter mentioned here may well be the letter written from Natchez on 4 January 1809, which is transcribed above.

<sup>17</sup> Marguerite is the wife of Jean-Baptiste Florian. "Uncle Beugeard" is almost certainly Nicolas-Joseph Beugeard, born in 1755, died in 1818. It is this uncle who was secretary to Queen Marie Antoinette, ship owner, and the person who saved the life of the King, as related elsewhere in these letters.

commerce and it seems to me also that all his views and ideas are directed entirely toward that, and he would never be inclined to become a planter.

I await with great impatience a reply from some of you, my dear friends, to my first letter from New York. I hope again that they will bring me something consoling and that we can again resume our old plans. Moreover, I see with great pleasure that there is no doubt that a school, on a plan such as you, beloved, and my dear children are maintaining, would succeed here beyond all expectation. The taste for art is growing. For the last year or two Madam Labat has been teaching piano and harp, at two piasters a lesson. She often gives concerts for money. She has 20 to 30 female students. They say she is good, I haven't heard her. I saw in a newspaper that she had played the famous piece by Starfelt [?], called L'Orage.[The Storm]. Laura would be able to do this as well. Also they like singing [p 2] *reommend* very particularly to Laura. Above all, and your sisters, to \_\_\_\_\_ as fine as you can in the right manner of singing. They don't do it here. But they know enough to understand price and taste. Emmanuel has a very nice voice and sings with expression. You will do very well to bring with you plenty of music to sell, but choose pieces that you would like to teach to your students in your pension, and try to buy them when you come across them. There is a store in London where they sell it at very low prices, in the passageway of the Great Turnstile, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Bringing together that talent that you have with that of your daughters, everyone will be in hurry to bring students to you. Everybody is clamoring for nice schools, and the young ladies lament that they have received it [a good education]. Besides, you will enjoy along with nice profits the most pleasant existence of society.

I went yesterday to a public ball. They are numerous. They danced 10 quadrilles at a time. They assured me however that frequently there are double that many. All the same, there are two public balls or galas, a subscription ball, a public concert, and 3 or 4 society balls a week. Theater (spectacals) every day. The do little French Opera Comique very nicely. I did not dance at all, and became bored in the role of observer. In general, I don't find the women pretty. I've seen only a very small number that deserve that word, and not yet one that I could call beautiful. They dance so-so. The prettiest woman of the country, to my way of thinking, are Miss Le Blanc and her young sister Mrs. Lyndgrace [?]: grace, the best taste, a delicate and playful spirit – in sum, everything that pleases. It's a pity that Miss B is 27 years old and beginning to fade. On seeing her you would wish that you could see her eternally the same.

I haven't seen the mother of Miss Ravencamp at all. She lives at Bayou Sara, about 50 leagues above New Orleans. If I had known that when I was in Natchez, I would have stopped at her place when coming down the river. Bayou Sara is a very lovely country – high ground, hills, streams for turning windmills [waterwheels?]. From there until below Baton Rouge you see superb views, but that country still belongs to the Spaniards. I was very much surprised to see that nation possesses a stretch of land of about 50 leagues along the banks of the Mississippi, from near Fort Adams to Bayou Marchac, or Bienville River (see the description of Louisiana).

I have sent to Mrs. Kirkland letters from Miss Ravencamp and Mrs. Davison. Mrs. Kirkland is still in Jamaica, according to what Mrs. Clay told me. She is expected at any time.

They are talking today of universal peace. This news, so they say, was brought from New York by a gentleman who has leased his building at the Balise [p 3] and has just come into town. I don't believe it. On the contrary, I dread the effects of the Non-Intercourse Bill. I hope nevertheless that if you cannot come directly, either by New York or Philadelphia, that you can embark on an English ship for Havana or Pensacola. There are schooners every day from Pensacola to here.

I wanted to describe the country and the city to you. I have talked of nothing but women and balls. The country is not pretty. It is too flat and too low, but the city is nice enough – well built and even pretty homes. The young men are almost all very ugly, do you hear that my daughters? Of course, many strangers are coming here, but those that I have seen haven't appeared better looking to me.

The climate is most pleasant in the winter. We have gone three days without fire. Yesterday the wind turned to the North and this morning I lit two or three pieces of wood as thick as one's fist, which warmed me as much as I needed.

I hoped on finding on my arrival here letters from one of you. We have had news from London dated October 15. [about 3.5 months ago]. Would you have omitted writing me by the monthly packet? My dear friends, don't neglect me. All of my happiness is in thinking of you. You would be most ungrateful if you forget me. But I am not afraid of this, nor should I be afraid. I address my letter in the plural. You are all my heart, wife, and dear daughters, brothers whom I love tenderly. You are never separated from my thoughts, from my memories. I unite you al\_\_\_\_\_ my dreams for the future. These may be nothing more than dreams, but they please me too much to renounce them. A thousand and thousand kisses to all of you. On embracing one another, dream of the happiness of embracing you in my arms, to be pressed close to you. Adieu, adieu.

P.S. Couessin is leaving with the intention of going to London. I am giving him this letter with a small box containing the teeth which he will have remade new, by M. Lefaleur. I am addressing this box to Marguerite (you must know my child, that a Gogo, in this country, is simply a "behind." They say for example that Mademoiselle So and So has a big behind, etc.). I will attach to the box a note for M. Lefaleur which you can read.

## Letter 13.

**[Undated letter from about early February, 1809. Written almost certainly from New Orleans**

From Jean Baptiste Florian to his wife and daughters, still in England.  
This letter is in handwritten translated form in the Mobile Public Library, but not at the Library of Congress.]

\_\_\_\_\_ for New York with the aim of sending it [her?] back to England. \_\_\_\_\_ inform of my arrival at New York. \_\_\_\_\_ Friday, January 20<sup>th</sup>. [this date seems to refer to his approximate arrival date in New Orleans] after quite a long trip, slightly wearisome towards the end, but without incident or fatigue.

The letters which I wrote you from Pittsburgh, Louisville and Natchez will have brought you up to date on the details of my trip. In spite of the little annoyances to which one is subject, I would still prefer to make it [this trip] again, rather than take a sea voyage. Hence I urge you strongly to take the same route with your brothers and our dear little girls, as hard as it is for you to leave from Pittsburgh in the right season. That is, from the beginning of November to the end of April or even the 15<sup>th</sup> of May. I have already given you all the necessary details for that, moreover, Mr. Becker at Pittsburgh, will give you instructions and help you obtain everything that you will need.

Of course, I do not know whether all this may reach you entirely too late. Mr. Clay, correspondent of Mr. Kirkland, has just told me that M. K. [?] of England that you were all going to leave for New York at the first opportunity.

How does it happen, my good friends, that neither Emmanuel nor I have received any letters from you, while we have some from London through the end of October? Really, that is unpardonable. If your brothers are not to blame, who has been keeping you from giving the letters to Mr. Danson to have them sent at the first opportunity? Why do Laura and Virginia not write to me? Ah! Our children! You deserve my scolding, you. If you knew the suffering your silence has caused me, you would not be so negligent.

By the way, Mr. Kirkland told Mr. Clay that our Miss Ravencamp has 20 thousand pounds sterling, "Jamaica currency," [the latter phrase in English], which would be from 55 to 60 thousand piasters.<sup>18</sup> Mr. Davison could tell you if that is true, myself, I am a bit doubtful. But in case she should have only half of that, I would strongly advise our dear brother Peter to use all his eloquence on her, etc.... He would have, I believe, a very nice wife and a nice fortune, too. Not to disparage the other good qualities.

I expect to leave in 5 or 6 days to make a big trip to the Atacapa, the Opelousas, and Natchetoches. From there I will come back down the other side of the river to see Bayou Sara, where I will see Mrs. Kirkland who lives there, at about 50 leagues from here. I

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<sup>18</sup> This would be a very large fortune today, certainly the equivalent of millions of dollars in 2009.

will see all the country from there to Baton Rouge, which is really superb. It is the most beautiful along the river. This tour will last about two or three months. To make it I have bought \_\_\_\_\_

[p 2, first two lines illegible] I will have things [?] for 20 or 30 inhabitants. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ the one to the other as it is done here.

Tell your brothers that I have sold the largest of the two rifles I brought with me for 140 piasters. This gun cost me 17 pounds, 18 shillings and no pence – which hardly amounts to 78 piasters; thus that makes a nice profit.

I have also sold for 30 piasters the gold chain which I had bought for 2 and a half guineas, if I am right, at Murwell's [?] at a sale which we all attended \_\_\_\_\_. 2 ½ guineas is only 12 piasters, thus I gained 18 piasters [on the deal]. It does not seem to me that one could speculate on all these articles, but it should be done, however, in small quantities – for example, at the most, one or two dozen gold chains, of the latest style—three or four dozen seals and watch keys—the same number of pretty shirt pins, in gold only—2 or 3 dozen earrings, especially those that the colored women prefer to wear, i.e. everything that has the brightest colors.

As to the guns, you would have to send to Mr. Theophilus Richards in Birmingham a copy of the note or the other part where I give the necessary comments on the changes to be made in the order he has already filled for me. If your brothers did not think it necessary to bring as many objects as are mentioned in the note, I would advise them to always have 2 or three first class rifles and 2 or three second class—a dozen single shot rifles and a gross of double-barreled guns [?] as his note states. This latter article will sell very well, especially the inferior quality ones, which would sell very well here for 4, 5 and 6 piasters apiece. They must take into account that there will be a duty of 17.5 percent to be paid on all that, thus, let them figure accordingly.

As to the jewelry, it can be passed without declaring it. [!]

Emmanuel is becoming more dear to me every day, not only for the friendship he shows me, but especially for his attachment to his sister. [Marguerite, the wife of Jean-Baptiste, the writer.]

He has a sincerity and a warmth which nothing can surpass. His activity, his exactitude in business, make him esteemed everywhere. We embrace you, the two of us, a thousand thousand times, dear friends, lovely children whom I idolize, dear brothers. When will I be able to press you all against my heart – a thousand tokens of friendship to all those who are still interested in me in England – Mr. Drouin most of all [*a la tete*] and then all the etc., etc.

P.S. According to the advice which I have just obtained, it would be better not to bring English jewelry. The gold in it is too low a quality, and French jewelry craftsmen criticize it with all their might.

The end.

The measurements above are English measurements and must be given to the manufacturer as such.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> There are no measurements in this letter. Hence perhaps there was a note enclosed in the letter, as is possibly indicated in the section on the guns.

## Letter 14.

New Orleans, February 11, 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife and four daughters, still in England]

I don't know to what to attribute your silence, my dear friends. I am addressing you in the plural, because I don't know to which of you this letter will be delivered, and whether it will even reach you at all. Mr. Clay, Mr. Kirkland's correspondent, told me two or three days ago that in letters written in October, it was announced to Mr. Kirkland from London that Miss Ravencamp with my wife and my daughters were going to leave by the first boat for New York. There has been news from London here up through November 5. How is it then that neither Emmanuel nor I have received a single letter from any of you? You have no idea of the worry this causes me. It would seem that all the family must have left before the October packet, but look, it has already arrived. Is the boat ready to leave France or has some misfortune happened to it? Truthfully, I tremble to think about it. It should have arrived in New York two months ago, and we have letters from that city from the end of December, but not a one from Cheriot. If you had written me by the October packet, I would long ago have received your letters.

As regards to Miss Ravencamp, it is well that you know that according to the report of her tutor, Mr. Kirkland, she has 20 thousand pounds sterling, Jamaica currency, which makes 55 to 60 thousand gourdes. This, my dear friends, is for your guidance, if there is still time. It seems to me that Peter<sup>20</sup> could surrender and make an approach to her. The young lady is very attractive, and 60 thousand gourdes gives her new charms. In any case, it would be appropriate to verify the fact through Mrs. Davison, who should know what's what.

I expect to leave next week to make a trip through Atacapas, \_\_\_\_\_ Natchitoches. From there, I will go back down the Red River and will cross over to the left bank of the river in the Spanish sector, which begins above Bayou Sara, and extends the length of the river as far as Bayou Manchac, taking in thus, Baton Rouge, Montesano, and the country known as "Feliciana," which really is one of the prettiest in the world, from what I saw of it when coming down the river. This section has the advantage of never having been under the embargo, and though communication with Pensacola is long, it nevertheless is very regular, since the confirmation of the embargo in the United States, so that there they sell cotton at 15 cents, whereas here they barely get 12. Land is not expensive. Negroes are being imported into the United States, and one can calculate that they are netting 6 thousand [p 2] of unginned cotton, at 4 cents a pound, per head of Negroes \_\_\_\_\_ 400 gourdes, on the average. They are working to make the [communication ?] \_\_\_\_\_ lakes by Bayou Manchac even easier and as \_\_\_\_\_ English vessels leave in great numbers for Pensacola, it appears that cotton will climb (in price) and sell as usual for 5 cents the pound unginned, or 20 to 22 cents unginned.

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<sup>20</sup> "Peter" almost certainly refers to Pierre Renee de Segrain, brother-in-law to Jean-Baptiste. Alas for Jean-Baptiste's matchmaking, Pierre never married Miss Ravencamp or anyone else, and died a bachelor in Paris, after living for several years in Calcutta, India.

They tell me that the country of Atacapas and Opalousas is even prettier, and has the advantage of being completely peopled by Frenchmen. What enchants me here is that far from not daring to call oneself French, as in that abomination England, [here] it is considered a distinction and a recommendation.

At the present time we are having weather like that of May or June in England. Everything breathes pleasure and it would just be up to me to participate in it, if I had a taste for dancing and the theater. But I perceive that this has passed me by precipitately.

I have sold my large rifle, similar to the one which I left to Joseph, for \$140, and if I had wanted, perhaps could have gotten \$150. It cost me 17 shillings, 8 pence, which left me \$78. That is a nice profit. It is an article on which one may speculate without fear and they will sell objects for which I gave a note at 80 to 100 percent profit above the purchase price, which, deducting freight costs, would leave anyway a net profit of 50 to 60 percent. Thus I invite you to have made the assortment such as I have told Mr. Theophilus Richards at Birmingham. It was he who made the four rifles which I had before my departure, of which Joseph has one. Observe to him that he must be sure the touch-holes be pure gold or platina, for those of my gun appear too soft for pure platina and I fear that there is some alloy.

Emmanuel has been suffering from Rheumatism for several days. This may prevent my leaving as soon as I had hoped for my tour. Goodbye my dear friends. I await news from you with an impatience which I cannot express. A thousand million kisses to all the dear little ones and their dear mother. Alas that this is not worth anything, but you will understand.

## Letter 15.

**New Orleans, February 12, 1809**

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife and four daughters, and brothers-in-law, still in England. This (largely duplicate) letter is apparently not in the files of the Mobile Public Library, but only at the Library of Congress]

I am sending you, my dear ones, a duplicate of the note of which you will receive the other copy, via Havana. I sold my large rifle for \$140 and I could have gotten 150 if I had waited longer. It cost me, as did the one I left with Joseph, 17 shillings, 8 pence, which leaves me a profit of \$78. You will see that's a nice profit. You can count that, if you obtain good ones, at a good price of course, that there will be a profit of about 100 percent over the cost price. Single shot [?] rifles sell from 20 to 30 piasters each, the ammunition [batteries?] from 8 to 9 piasters the piece. Of course one must deduct freight and 17 and ½ percent for customs. But at retail one is more sure and enough \_\_\_\_\_, especially if one has these objects before the month of November.

I cannot conceive why neither Emmanuel nor I have received any letters from any of you. The packet for October arrived in New York a long time ago. We have had here news from London from November 5 to the last part of December. Despite this, we have heard nothing from you, nothing from Cheriot. I don't know what to imagine. If I am to believe what was told to me by Mr. Clay, correspondent for Mr. Kirkland, they wrote to the latter from London in October, that Miss Ravencamp with my wife and daughters were going to leave for New York at the first occasion. \_\_\_\_\_ Have they been en route since that time? And if so, what could have made them so late in arriving? In truth, I am in a fever. But why didn't one of you write me by the October packet? If you knew all that this silence has made me suffer, and the anxieties into which your departure plunges me, you would never be so negligent. Above all, it is to my wife and daughters that I direct this reproach. They certainly have more leisure than you two.

In regard to Miss Ravencamp, you should know that according to the report of her tutor, Mr. Kirkland, she has 20 thousand pounds sterling, Jamaica currency, which makes \$55 to 60,000. \_\_\_\_\_ This, my dear friends, is for your guidance. It seems to me that Peter would do very well to court her. She is very nice, and such a fortune is worth while looking into. Nevertheless, it would be a good idea to verify the matter. Mrs. Davison, who handles Mr. Kirkland's affairs, could tell you what is what.

\_\_\_\_\_ with you. I would not have believed that you could be so lazy. I wrote to you via Havana day before yesterday, and by your friend Couessin 15 days ago. He is bound for New York and thence to England, and takes with him a part of my dentures to have repaired. They \_\_\_\_\_ [broke?] in my mouth without any effort.

Goodbye, my villainous lazy ones.

## Letter 16.

New Orleans, March 3, 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, still in England]

Finally, after a long wait, my dearest one, I have just received a moment ago your letter of last October 4, in which my dear and sweet children also each sent me a word. This letter must have been at sea a long time, because it appears from the postmark that it did not leave New York until February 7. I presume that you were late in mailing it in London and that it didn't leave until the November packet. Just eight days ago we received here letters from London dated December 13, so you can judge how desolated I was not to receive one from you. I hope that my letters don't suffer the same delays. It is for this reason that I have written to you from everywhere that I've stopped, and in duplicate, so I flatter myself that you will receive some of them.

That which you tell me about the progress of Virginia [Virginia Josephine Florian (1767-1881) his second daughter] and Eliza [Elizabeth Florian (1795—aft. 1831), his third daughter] enchants me. Embrace them a thousand times very tenderly again for me, and do the same to that little imp of Azelia [Azelia Felicite Florian (1797—1860), his fourth daughter], to induce her to follow the good example of her sisters.

You are doing right to learn to paint on velvet. Learn also to paint on varnished tables and wood boxes. All these talents will be very useful to you here for teaching. I have told you in the preceding letters that there is every reason to hope to succeed in beginning a school here. These talents will be preciousy received. Try also to brush up on the harp and to know several pretty pieces very well to play before people. And let Laura improve her singing and dancing, in order to teach in the school. All of this is lacking here. There are here some teachers of the kind and the ability of those in St. Malo, but everyone loves [real] talent and wants it [here].

My trip to Atacapas has been delayed several days, Emmanuel having been confined to his room by rheumatism. His agent was obliged to leave and I am minding the store. I don't know what effect the climate [here] will have on me in the future. Up to the present I have been well and doing better than I ever would have thought. People don't believe that I [p 2] am 40 years old, and guess that I am only 25. You can thus judge that I am in good shape. Really, the climate is delicious here at this season. During the ten weeks that I have been here there haven't been three bad days in succession, and good weather lasts for entire weeks without interruption. I can compare it only to the month of June in England and even in our country. People wear nauquin [nankin?—a thin, colored cotton fabric]. In the evenings everyone sits by their doors or on the gallery. The moon gleams in a sky without clouds or mists. There is nothing to disturb the serenity.

We have been eating asparagus for 15 days, and if they [the inhabitants of New Orleans] wanted to take the trouble to cultivate gardens, they would now have green peas and strawberries. But you have no idea of the indolence and the negligence of the Creoles.

They think only of the pleasures of society, and have no time for those who have a taste for cultivating their flowers, shrubs and fruit trees. Do you remember when we used to go cut asparagus at La Barre, and put them in my handkerchief? You have no idea of the happiness it gives me to recall such little pleasures. It seems to me that it is such deeply felt shared little things that assure love for the rest of life. When together we watched the sunset and the last rays reflected in the damp sands of the big beach, and without saying a word, we clasped hands? When we would go sit down in the woods by the little beach, and together read the translation of that English work on the Picturesque? Do you remember all that? As for me, I will never forget it, and I would not take mountains of gold for the memory. Would that my daughters have such simple tastes, so easy to satisfy, and find husbands who possess them as well, and share their pleasures!

With you and my children I would not need but a little corner of earth in this country, not very close to the city, but on the higher ground, 40 leagues farther out. There are some charming places on the river.

Don't forget to bring with you all the onions, seeds, and roots possible, and all imaginable plants, flowers, shrubs, even those that in England only grow in hothouses. Here everything will grow right in the ground. If you could bring geranium plants they would last here all year, as would China roses, white and dark red, like we used to have at the Assembly House near the door and the window of the parlor. I am sure they would always be in bloom in this country. The nurserymen have a way of packing [p 3] trees and flowers in baskets so that they can cross the ocean. Try to bring chestnuts, hazelnuts, walnuts and fresh almonds. You can get the latter from almond trees that they use in England as ornamentals. Also bring Indian chestnuts and other seeds of large trees, a lot of seeds of melons (Larch), which are unknown here. In sum, bring everything, because everything is valuable in a country where they neglect everything.

If some ship comes here directly, you must send me \_\_\_\_\_, and then bring with you as much more whether you come \_\_\_\_\_ or New York. Also bring a good supply of ruled paper for copying music, a \_\_\_\_\_ *des wique* and several copper pens with 4 teeth, which are expressly made for ruling paper. That paper here costs six English pence per page. Also plenty of music to sell. I have already told you that you can procure it very cheaply at some shops, especially in the passage of the Great Turn Style [Turnstile?, England] which goes from Holborn in Lincoln Inn Fields.

I repeat, in regard to flowers, [bring] plenty of Crocus of all colors, Snowdrops, iris, Jacobea and Guernsey lilies, poppies, Oriental poppy, Chinese pinks, hyacinths, \_\_\_\_\_, etc. But above all, rare plants and shrubs and hothouse plants because here they are not acquainted at all with those which in England are called American shrubs, and you could make plenty of money every year by providing onions, roots and seeds, when the public sees the flowers and fruits in our garden. Some sort of nursery would succeed here very well. Also bring plenty of alfalfa seeds, large \_\_\_\_\_ (Burnet grass), and *sainfoin* –1 or 2 bushels of each. [Margin note:] Berries of mountain ash [?], seeds of the little apples (Siberian crabs) etc. [End margin note]

Give my regards to all our friends, Mr. Wood, the Ogles, Mr. Drouin, Miss Blundell, Miss Finch, but above all to Miss Collinton, whose first name I forget.

Scold Laura for me. She hasn't written me. At least, I haven't yet received a letter from her. Nevertheless, I embrace her as well as you, and my Virginie, my Eliza, my Azelia, your two brothers – all very tightly and tenderly.

Also bring some Spanish onions to plant and produce seed. Here they have only miserable little onions.

## Letter 17.

New Orleans, March 5, 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, still in England]

[On the cover:]

Single

M. Florian  
Care of Simpson & Davison  
Merchts.  
London

This letter, my dearly beloved, will be only a duplicate in some ways of the one I wrote you the day before yesterday, but for fear that the other may be lost in the mail I am writing you again by a ship which is leaving for New York. I told you that after a long wait I had finally received your letter of last October 4. I see by the postmark that it only left New York on February 7, and quite surely if it came by the October packet boat it should have arrived a long time before that date: but if I judge from the color it must have remained at least a month, being smoked on M. Cheriot's mantelpiece. That gentleman may be a very fine man, but I like neither his person nor his manners, & I beg of you from now on to address your letters to Duplanty, [in English] at M. Duplanty, Merchant, New York [end English] who will send them on to me. Duplanty is a very estimable fellow and highly regarded, who knows more about business than that Mysterious Cheriot, whatever the latter may say, & I would count much more upon his help than the other's.

I told you and I repeat with great pleasure how delighted I am with what you told me of the progress made by Virginie [Virginia, his first daughter] and Eliza [his third daughter]. Embrace them most tenderly for me, and do the same to that little sprite Azelie [his fourth daughter], to get her to follow the good example of her sisters.

You do well to learn painting upon velvet; learn also to paint and varnish tables and work boxes as does Miss Soley. I believe they call that [in English] "to Japan" [end English; "Japonnaise"?]. All these talents will be welcomed very avidly here. I have already told you that there is all hope of enrolling students for a school in this place, so try to increase your skill on the harp and to have some pieces well prepared to play before people. Also Laura should get very good at singing & even dancing to teach the young girls in the school. There are a few teachers here, but they are at most on the same level as those at St. Malo, & to make a success we would have to offer everything ourselves in the school.

My trip to the Atacapas has been delayed for a few days, our dear brother Emmanuel having been kept to his room by an attack of rheumatism. His clerk is obliged to travel out and I am keeping the store. I do not know what effect the climate will have on me in the future: up till now I stand it quite well and am in better health than I ever have been.

People can't believe that I am over 40 & they claim that I am only 25: thus you can judge how healthy I look. For the rest, the climate is really delightful at this season—in the six weeks I have been here there have not been three bad days in succession, and the good weather lasts for weeks without a break. You can compare it to a good month of June in England or even in our France... People wear trousers of nankeen [Chinese cotton cloth], dimity [a lightweight sheer cotton fabric] or even linen. In the evening they sit on at their doors on the streets, the stylish people on their balconies; the moon shines in a cloudless sky, without fogs; there is no evening mist to fear. Violets have an exquisite aroma all winter. We have been eating asparagus for two weeks, & if we wanted to take the trouble to raise gardens we would have peas and strawberries right now.

I strongly urge you to bring a large quantity of all kinds of seeds, including legumes, garden plants, flowers & shrubs & even tall trees, as well as onions and roots – all the plants they raise in hothouses would grow very well here outdoors. The geraniums would last all year, as well as the China rose bushes, rose-colored and poppy-red such as we had at the Assembly House near the door & the window in the parlor. You should [also bring] [in English] crocus, snowdrops [end English], all kinds of iris, Jacobea and Guernsey Lilly, tuberose, jonquils, etc., also chestnuts, nuts, fresh almonds, even Indian chestnut—seeds of Meleza (larch tree), service tree (mountain ash) – all of those would produce flowers or berries – seeds of Siberia Crabs [this last phrase in English], etc., etc., etc. You could bring cuttings from trees, shrubs and rare plants which do not propagate by seeds—The nurserymen have a way of packing these cuttings in such a way that they can be sent overseas without spoiling.

I would also like to have seeds of Luzerne, grands pimpernelle (Burnet Grass), & sainfoin [a type of forage], 1 or 2 *boisseaux*<sup>21</sup> of each – they have nothing at all in this land, they do not even know the bushes they call in England “American Shrubs” – I do not doubt that when, in a garden, they had flowers and fruit or ornamental shrubs [here] such as they have in England, people sold the seeds or just threw them away. Anyway, a nursery would be a very good speculation here & would need only a small expense to start. About the fresh almonds, you could get some from the almond trees they have in England as ornaments [ornamental trees?]. Is a ship is coming right here, send me all you can of these seeds, cuttings, etc., & then afterwards bring another assortment yourself, whether you come straight here or go to New York. Bring also a few of those fine Spanish onions for planting and to keep for seeds—they only have nasty, crummy little onions here.

Give Laura a little scolding for not writing to me by the same packet boat as you did. As for the affair about her uncle, judging by the turn which the other affairs have taken in this land, he is very fortunate that she did not consent. The poor fellow must be crazy to want to get married without a penny of which he is certain. With great impatience, besides, I am waiting to know what the amiable M. Cheriot has planned for him, & how he is doing in England, as well as Peter.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Am on-line translation service translates this as “bushel,” while a note in the earlier transcription indicates that this means “12 ½ liters.”

<sup>22</sup> It is not entirely clear who the “poor fellow” is. Since he is apparently the uncle of Laura, and is not Peter (Pierre), then it is most likely Joseph Marie de Segrais, the brother-in-law of the writer, Jean-Baptiste

We have had news from England, of the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, for more than a week, so you can judge the negligence of which M. Cheriote is guilty in sending on my letters.

A thousand kisses to you, to Laura, to Virginie, to Eliza, to Azelie! I love to write their names separately: this prolongs the image of their presence – I see you all, I press you in my arms one after the other; Laura has one arm around my neck on one side, Virginie does the same on the other, Eliza and Azalie climb on my knees, you look at us admiringly for an instant & you come to press us all to your heart---All that exists, I feel it, I experience all its emotions—why cannot I dream thus until my hope is realized!!

Affectionate greetings to your brothers, greetings, etc. to all our friends.

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Florian. This seems consistent with the earlier reference to Joseph making bad business deals and having poor judgment.

## Letter 18.

**Cote des Allemands [the German Coast, Louisiana], 23 March 1809**

[from the typed version, Volume I of the Mobile Public Library version, the Library of Congress typed version, and especially the handwritten translation]

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, four daughters and brothers-in-law, still in England]

You see by the date of this letter that I have already begun my tour, my tender friend, and I hasten to let you know what I have been able to find of interest to you. I left New Orleans last Thursday, mounted on my pretty little Creole horse, in the company of Mr. Charbonnet, one of the brothers of Madame Plique. The first night we reached the home of one of his aunts, 8 leagues above the city. On the way we dined at the home of Mr. Cabaret, an educated and friendly man.

The day after we went to dine at the home of Mr. Trouard, parish judge, about 12 leagues from the city. I received many kind words and invitations from him to stay overnight at his house. I stayed there two days, and Monday morning went to do the same thing at the home of Mrs. Dain [or Pain or Sain], another aunt of Charbonnet, the best woman in the world. The family is large, because she has many nieces and nephews staying with her as long as they like. She has only one daughter, a child of 6 or 7, as spoiled as a little heiress who is to be very rich.

Here I came across one of my comrades of Quiberon,<sup>23</sup> who overwhelmed me with kindness, Doctor Le Beau, an excellent little Breton and a very good physician. He married a sister of Mrs. Plique and is living at Mrs. Sain's [?] with all his children. He is doing well in business and just now has urged me to beg you to give his best regards to Mme. The Countess of Sommeri [?], and to bring him news of her when you come.

They took me to dine at a neighbor's, and talked about our project to establish a school for young ladies. Everybody is just delighted, and they can hardly wait for you to arrive. You can count on all the young ladies around here at 300 piasters, that is, about 65 guineas per year, and the expenses are much less than in London. In a word, enthusiasm is at the point where they are pushing me to get started without delay, and they promise me 7 or 8 young people as students immediately. I am going to think seriously about it. There is quite a respectable academy here run by a Mr. Lefort. He has 40 scholars at \$300, which equals 12,000 piasters per year,<sup>24</sup> of which he pockets at least half, and is highly esteemed.

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<sup>23</sup> In 1795 Quiberon in Brittany was the site of a failed French royalist invasion, backed by the British, who were trying to restore the monarchy after the Revolution, and which Jean Baptiste participated in, as described later in the letters. This battle should not be confused with the Battle of Quiberon Bay, in 1759, which involved the British Navy successfully attacking a French fleet which had been planning to land 20,000 troops in Scotland.

<sup>24</sup> This confirms that 1 piaster equals about 1 US dollar at the time.

[p 2] Madame Sain [Dai?] will entrust her daughter to you as soon as you arrive, and she begs you expressly to bring a piano. I suggest that you bring one of the new makes, or a small one, but in any case the price paid here should not exceed 250-300 piasters, that is, 50 to 60 guineas.<sup>25</sup> And you must figure in the shipping, also. A large piano would be considered too expensive, so something which would cost you about 30 guineas in London, or even less, would suit perfectly.

The manners of the inhabitants [here] greatly resemble those of our country gentlemen—lots of hospitality, a table loaded with food, large apartments [rooms], but often neither paneling nor carpets, nor wallpaper, nor doors which shut, nor windows. They have silver-plate, horses, carriages, and rowboats (“pirogues”), and they go to the city to attend the Carnival.<sup>26</sup> They have a ball in the country every Sunday, but the young ladies go all week without stockings, and always wear pretty little embroidered slippers. But they don’t even have shoe polish for their shoes. Their houses are full of Negresses, mulatto women, and little Negro boys to serve at the table and do the housework, yet their houses are all dirty and you get served *a la diable* [in the worst way]. In a word, here, even more than in France, they don’t know what it is to be “comfortable,”<sup>27</sup> but they enjoy themselves whole-heartedly.

The land is too flat to be pretty, but it is rich. You breathe in only the perfume of orange blossoms; the chimneys are covered with clusters of violets and roses, a strange combination which is found hardly anywhere else but in this climate. You see magnificent orchards of the most beautiful varieties of peaches, fig trees with white fruit, excellent plums, some pears, a few apples but many pomegranates, and almost no apricot trees. People go fishing in the canals where they catch shrimp [and crawfish?] by the basketful. On the banks of a stream they cast a net a few times and in one “heave” [in English] they fill a pirogue full of very nice fish.

I shall return this evening to the other bank [of the river] where I left my horse, and go in small stages to Bayou Sara, where I shall see Mr. Kirkland. I shall return by Pointe Coupee, & as I am supplied with a number of letters of recommendation, I shall see what the attitude of the inhabitants is, and will be able to judge what is the most suitable place to set up an educational establishment. If I can start one right away, I shall do it and try to arrange that your place be on the same piece of land, otherwise I would start my own

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<sup>25</sup> 50 guineas is 52.5 pounds (using decimal denomination instead of pounds, shillings and pence). Since 52.5 pounds equals about 250 piasters, then one pound equals about 4.76 piasters – or about 4.76 US dollars. This is reasonably close to the 4.63dollars per pound (one dollar to 0.216 pounds) reported by a financial website, discussed in an earlier footnote.

<sup>26</sup> The biggest dispute on the Gulf Coast is “who had the earliest Mardi Gras /Carnival?” New Orleans residents creatively put their date at 1699, before New Orleans was even founded, saying that it was celebrated at Mardi Gras Island, south of the city, by an early explorer. Mobile claims its first Mardi Gras in 1704, just after that city was founded. Of course, that was at OLD Mobile, 26 miles above the present city, now an almost inaccessible industrial site and archaeological dig. I like ‘em both.

<sup>27</sup> This word is in English in the original.

academy only provisionally.<sup>28</sup> I should like, to sum up, to re-unite all [our family], and have an extensive concession of some size where our brothers could spend their time raising cotton or sugar while you and I would have our academy [next door?].

I have already told you how unhappy I am with Mr. Cheriot's carelessness. Henceforth address my letters to Mr. Duplanty, \_\_\_\_\_, Merchant, New York. You can be sure that he will get them to me.

Above all, do not forget to bring fruit seeds, nuts, kernels, onions, roots, etc. – everything you can imagine.

I am dying to receive news of you all—to know what you are doing, when you are leaving, and how and by what route you are coming. I hope at least to have everything ready to receive you when you arrive. If I have the good fortune to be able to start a school, then at that point my girls will understand the value of their talents, and I hope they will hasten to perfect themselves in all subjects! They must be able to help you teach everything, and to be good teachers.

By the way, marriage is absolutely forbidden by the legislature of Orleans<sup>29</sup> between an uncle and his niece, thus it is very fortunate that the event [?] didn't come off.<sup>30</sup> It is the same everywhere in the United States.

Dear Mother<sup>31</sup>, dear daughters, dear brothers, I embrace you and love you all from the bottom of my heart.

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<sup>28</sup> It appears from the somewhat conflicting translations that J-B was contemplating having two institutions, one run by his wife and one by him, next to each other. But this makes little sense. More likely is that this sentence is addressed to his brothers-in-law, as is the next sentence, and means that J-B wants the academy to be co-located with the brothers' plantation.

<sup>29</sup> This territory does not refer to New Orleans, but rather to a larger area of US territory within the Louisiana Purchase.

<sup>30</sup> Oho! It appears that the cryptic comment earlier about daughter Laura Eugenie Florian meant that her UNCLE, Joseph Marie de Segrain, proposed to Laura and was turned down! Such a marriage would have been illegal in Louisiana – but apparently not in England, where they were both living?! Joseph was born in 1777, and hence was 14 years older than Laura, born in 1791. Laura later married a man seven years her senior, George Phillips Bowers, thus created the line that would lead down to the Toulmins. Thank you, Laura, for being so wise, and so law abiding, at such a young age!

<sup>31</sup> This reference to "Mother" is certainly to the wife of Jean-Baptiste, since his actual mother died at least 16 years earlier.

## Letter 19.

**Montesano [West Florida, Spanish Territory, now Louisiana, a few miles north of Baton Rouge] 30 March 1809**

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, still in England. Addressed on the outside to:]

25 Dorset Street  
Portman Square [London]  
M. Florian

Here I am, my dearly beloved, in a place upon which we had cast our thoughts while in Europe, and I can assure you that it surpasses all that we had imagined about it in at least several ways. Montesano is one league above Baton Rouge, in the territory that belongs to the Spanish. The terrain forms a rather extensive plain, elevated about 40 to 60 feet above the Mississippi, commanding a magnificent view both up and down the river. The woods are full of Magnolias as tall as oaks, of *liquidambars* [sweetgums], of flowering laurels, of tulip trees, & of an infinite number of other charming flowering trees and shrubs. Iris of all varieties grow wild; the “snowdrops” [in English] here are a foot high & in enormous clusters – but what is better than all that is the good air and the salubrious climate in these higher lands. Here it is much cooler than in New Orleans, and they assure me that one is tormented much less by the mosquitoes, etc.

The owner of Montesano is Mr. William Herries, brother of a Mr. Herries, Colonel of the Horse Volunteers of Westminster [England?]. The latter was a banker in France and has as his wife a Frenchwoman of about 40 years old, exceedingly pleasant, who is in addition the “steward, housekeeper, foreman, and book-keeper” [the preceding in English] – in a word, her husband’s right arm, and the mainstay of all his undertakings.

Mr. Herries is the intimate friend of the Baron de Grandpre, Governor of Baton Rouge and of all the territory that belongs to Spain in this region, as far as Pensacola. He has obtained the privilege [official permission?] of establishing a city here, and it appears quite likely that he will succeed in doing so,<sup>32</sup> if he can succeed in putting into practice his various plans for the improvement of the country. Among other plans he wants to establish at Montesano a college and an education establishment for young ladies, and these two institutions are the “hobbyhorses” [in English] of Governor Grandpre. By a happy chance Mr. Herries had bought in London my book *Analytical Course of Studies* [in English], and admired it a great deal. He is, in a word, full of enthusiasm for me, you, and our institutions, and absolutely wants us to get established here. He will make us a present of a piece of land of our choice, for our houses, gardens, etc., will furnish the materials and workers to build them, and claims to be sure of a very considerable number of boy and girl students. I have told him that our plan was to re-unite us with my two

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<sup>32</sup> In fact, no such city was ever built. In 1810 Americans led a revolt against Spanish rule, attacked New Orleans, and declared the “Republic of West Florida.” A month later, President Madison ordered the Governor of Orleans (Louisiana) to annex the new Republic, and plans for a Spanish city of Montesano evaporated forever.

brothers-in-law, Peter and Joseph, and that they should have a home and some land. He himself possesses 2500 arpents of land<sup>33</sup> and he would cede us a part on a long term lease, at a low price, in an area very suitable for cotton. Such are his proposals. I look on them as somewhat those of an impetuous man, and of a man given to big schemes. Nevertheless, reducing them to a realistic size, and [p 2] examining them without exaggeration, it seems to me that here is the most central spot in all the colony, 40 leagues above New Orleans, 10 leagues below Point Coupee and Bayou Sara, very populous places and the richest in the area, and where there is a total lack of means to give the most meager instruction to the children. We could be sure of all possible support from the Governor. And, what is most essential, Mr. Herries would take care of all the advance payments, and while waiting for the establishment to be built, he offers us bed and board at his home.

The land is very fine around here, especially on the Comite and Amite Rivers 2 to 3 leagues from here. One could obtain a concession free from the Government, as encouragement, or at worst one could buy as much land as one wants, at 4 piasters per square arpent, with payment over 1, 2, 3 or 4 years, which is very reasonable.

From the Amite River you go by Lake Maurepas and Lake Ponchartrain to New Orleans in 26 [36?] hours, or two days, at the most. Mr. Herries hopes to obtain from the government at Pensacola, through the good offices of Baron de Grandpre, free entry (without paying duties) of all that you will be bringing to set up our establishments, such as books, instruments, etc. In any case, the duties at Pensacola are only six percent, whereas in the United States they are 26 percent, and perhaps even the merchandise and other objects made in England will be totally forbidden.

I strongly desire, therefore, that you come directly to Pensacola, and even more so since the sister of Madame Herries, Mrs. Skipwith [Skipworth?] is coming here by that route from England, with all her family, next autumn, and you could come together. It would be good for Joseph to obtain from M. de Fastet [Tallet?] a shipment to Pensacola or even Havana, and that he bring all of you with him. Or he could find freight shipment to Vera Cruz or any port in the Gulf of Mexico. He could arrange to touch at Pensacola and have you come ashore with your things. If Joseph and Peter no longer have a ship [?] to command, then just let them come with you by this route.

Mr. Herries is convinced that by establishing a brewery here, one could make a fortune quickly. If Joseph or Peter were tempted to try it, they would find that he [Mr. Herries] would give a piece of land and have the necessary buildings constructed. But he [Joseph] should try to bring along a man who is good at making "malt" [in English]. The bring beer here from the North, that is, from New York, Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, to New Orleans and all this area, where the Americans drink a lot of it.

[Margin notes on page 2, in English:]

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<sup>33</sup> An arpent is roughly an acre.

Bring along also a few bushels of Scotch barley, if you land at Pensacola. [In French:] Think also about Jerusalem artichokes.

[Page 3 of the main letter:]

The hop plant grows wild in the woods [here] and only needs to be collected, and the land is just right for the cultivation of barley [rye?]. Mr. Skipwith was for a long time a general agent for the United States in France. I am enclosing a note from Mr. Herries so that you can get acquainted with him, and confer and arrange to come on the same ship.

I urge you again to bring along all the seeds, nuts, kernels, roots, and fruit seeds that you can. In order to keep them in good condition, you must put them in galvanized containers, “canisters” [in English], etc., otherwise the rats and mice will devour them during the voyage. Also bring seeds of Lucerne [alfalfa?] seeds, *sainfoin* [?] “Barnet grass, Rye grass, Clover” [in English], at least a boisseau [12.5 liters] of each, “in barrels” [in English] as well as “broad beans and horse beans” [in English], which are unknown here.

It seems to me that Peter and Joseph could by one means or another, with the help of M. de Tastet, sail under the Spanish flag. That could be very advantageous for them if they find a good means of shipping freight to this region. It is an idea which I am suggesting, but it is up to them to use any way they please.

[Margin note:]

Do not fail to bring several pianofortes if you come by Pensacola, they sell for double the price here.

[End margin note]

Mr. Herries is highly educated and pleasant, and is a man who has seen a lot of the world and has no prejudices. He has two sons<sup>34</sup> of 16 and 18 years, to whom I will start to teach mathematics. Baron de Grandpre has many children, especially daughters. Quite possibly I will stay at Mr. Herries while waiting for you, and start our academy in advance.

Address me still care of Duplanty at New York, or, if there should be some English ships bound for Pensacola before your departure, address me in duplicate at M. LeDet, Merchant, New Orleans, and to Mr. William Herries, Esquire, Montesano, West Florida.

I hope, or rather I see with some certainty, that in one way or another we will succeed in making use of our know-how in this land, and if it is not at Montesano then it will be near the city. Three leagues from New Orleans<sup>35</sup> there is a boarding school for young people run by Mr. Lefort. He has 40 to 50 students at 300 piasters per year, and can pocket 5 to

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<sup>34</sup> One translation says sons, one says daughters!

<sup>35</sup> One translation says Orleans, one says New Orleans.

6,000 piasters every year in profit. Let this serve to convince my dear little girls of the benefits of talent and education. This is the surest resource against all the misfortunes of life.

Embrace them all tenderly, and above all do all you can to come here as quickly as possible. I still have not been able to go to Bayou Sara. I will go the first day I can.

A thousand greetings to all our friends.

## Letter 20.

Montesano [West Florida, Spanish Territory, now Louisiana] 30 April 1809

[From Jean-Baptiste Florian to his wife, still in England. Addressed on the outside to:]

M. Florian  
In care of Messrs. Simpson and Danson, Merchants  
London

Forwarded New York

\_\_\_\_\_ 18, 1809

Yours very \_\_\_\_\_

R. O. Duplanty

I hope, my beloved, that all my letters are reaching you, but I greatly fear that they are reaching you only after a long delay, due to the negligence and ill-will of Mr. Cheriot, to whom I was in the habit of sending them. Would you believe that he has forwarded to me only your first letter since the beginning of October, and it was only 15 days ago that I received the letters from Peter, Joseph and Laura, dated the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October. Not a single more recent one has reached me, although ships arrive every day from New York to New Orleans, and although mail arrives regularly each week. There is something mysterious beneath this behavior of his. So send all your letters to me in care of Duplanty, Merchant at New York, who will send them to Emmanuel.

I hope nevertheless that you won't have much to write me after receiving this, and that you are getting ready to set out with your brothers and dear little girls to rejoin me.

I have told you that I was at the home of Mr. William Herries, brother of Colonel Herries of the Westminster Horse Volunteers [this latter phrase in English], who is coming to set up a steam engine on the banks of the Mississippi River, where this land is situated. He wants to found a city here, and wants for us to establish ourselves here, where he wants me to run a college and you and a colleague to run a boarding school for young ladies. He will give us every possible assistance, paying in advance for the site and the materials for the building. In the meantime he is giving me the lower floor of his house and a small building next to it, to lodge students whom I may procure any day.

Fifteen days ago I sent some advertisements to Emmanuel to put in the papers published in New Orleans. I am awaiting the results.

You can judge the profit they make here, in charging 300 piasters a year for board, which makes almost 70 pounds sterling<sup>36</sup> -- and you can buy a young steer here, [p 2] ready to slaughter, weighing more than 400 pounds, for only 10 to 12 piasters. This makes meat cost, at the most, threepence halfpenny per pound, and other things are in proportion. A

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<sup>36</sup> This is an exchange rate of 4.29 piasters to the pound.

good milk cow with her calf costs 12 to 15 piasters, and all this is worth more here than in New Orleans. There is really no comparison.

As for the country and the climate, I find them more and more agreeable. You always see the sun shining in a clear sky, the nights are cool, and there are so few mosquitos in these higher lands that one could sleep all night without a mosquito net.

The magnolias are in flower at this time, and scent the atmosphere. For several days we have been eating mulberries. It is quite odd that the mulberry, so late in blooming in Europe, is here very early. There is no doubt about the natural riches of this region. The woods are full of Muscadelles [grapevines], which produces very good roots [grapes?], as thick as the end of your little finger, and need only to be cultivated to outdo those in Europe. The aromatic trees, the gum resin, the Patina [prima?] Christi from which they extract castor oil, medicinal plants of a quality that is most efficacious, are found everywhere. How can people stay dragging on in misery, deprived of dignity, in Europe and especially in England, as so many of our friends are doing, when they can come settle in a country where living costs so little, where with a little work they can make a fortune, and where one finds, in the climate, the soil, circumstances and society, everything that makes life agreeable!

I have already told you that the father, mother and sister of Madame Herries and her husband, Mr. Skipwith, former consul-general of the United States in France, are supposed to come this fall from England to come here, and I sent you their address, so that you can see about coming with them. Mr. Herries recommends strongly that you all come to Pensacola, Havana, or Mobile, from which points you could easily come on here, and you would have by this route the advantage of bringing in everything you carry with you at a duty rate of only six percent. Besides, you won't be able to bring in anything into ports of the United States.

Here we are only 30 miles from Bayou Sara. A pretty little town is being established there. You get there by horse in 8 to 10 hours. I haven't yet gone to see Mr. Kirkland, for I am always waiting on more recent news to take to him. I will go soon and take with me the printed advertisements for distribution in the neighborhood. There are two or three hundred rich residents at Bayou Sara and at Thompson's Creek, in that region rightly called Feliciana, and they are waiting impatiently for us to set ourselves up, so I'm told, having no other way of educating their children than to send them to Philadelphia or Baltimore.

Give a thousand regards to all our friends, French and English. If they knew the beauty and bountifulness of this country, they would come here in droves with you. Embrace all my four dear little ones, yourself, and all your brothers, with all the tenderness of a father, husband and brother. Oh, when will I have the good fortune that is due me in having you all reunited with me!

I again urge you strongly not to forget to bring with you all manner of seeds, nuts, kernels, onions and roots, of fruit, flowers, vegetables, etc., etc., and especially of alfalfa,

rye-grass, clover, *sainfoin*, [Lucerne grass or clover] as well as bloodwort and Burnet grass, which do very well in a hot country.

If you could bring along some birds in pairs, such as *pinsons* [chaffinches], linnets, goldfinches, green finches, blackbirds [magpies?], and singing thrush, that would be a fine present to make to this country to destroy the numerous insects.

## Letter 21.

[Letter translated, not original, in English, handwritten, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL]

**Natchitoches [Louisiana] 6 December 1809**

[Apparently to both Marguerite Marie LeDet de Segrais and her brother Emmanuel, but addressed to:]

To: E.M. Ledet, Esq., New Orleans

I did not expect to write you a second time from here, my good friend, by the post, but all circumstances have combined to prevent me from leaving sooner. The weather has been so unfavorable up to the present that it has been impossible for me to leave by land or water, nor have I been able to load the barge. I hope, however, that by Sunday or Monday I will be en route.

I count upon bringing to you, my dear Emanuel, twenty bales of cotton, and two or three thousand rolls of tobacco, of which two thousand are on commission. We embarked all of the Tobacco from the German side, because they send the two thousand surplus rolls to be sold on their account by Ledet, and they value them at four Dutch shillings.

I can draw upon you, my dear friend, by letter of exchange for \$86.03 at one month's sight, to the order of an old thief of an inhabitant here who passed the Cotton through his gin last Spring, and who insisted on having the Cash. Ah! My friend, there was the devil to pay before bringing this gentleman to reason. He demands his pay, but never pays anything himself, so you see what a devil he is. I have much to tell you about him.

The post has arrived sooner than usual and is leaving at once, so I only have time to embrace you and all those I love. You say that I do not see to things, that I only count the minutes till I am en route, that I fret like a child, and damn this place like a man. You draw but a feeble picture of my situation. Ah! Soon! Ah! Soon, my best loved, my dear little ones. Ah! Soon!

J.B. Florian

## **Section 2**

### **Letters From Other Family Members, 1801-1856**

**Including Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrain (wife of Jean Baptiste)  
and Their Four Daughters, and  
Pierre Rene Le Det de Segrain (brother of Marguerite)  
and Others**

## Letter 1.

[Letter from Magdeleine Florian Joli de Pontcadeuc (1771-1858), sister of Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly, to Jean-Baptiste's wife Marguerite Marie LeDet de Segrais; original and translation in possession of Edward Ladd, Mobile, AL.]

**15 November 1801**

[From:] Beaumont le Roger, Department De Seure

[To:] Assembly House, Boarding School, Layton Stone, Essex, England

I cannot tell you, my good friend, all the pleasure I experienced on receiving your letter. It is the first I have received since your departure and have only had news of you through my sisters. I reproach myself for having kept the same silence, but in the depth of my retreat I did not know how to reach you with my letters. Nothing could be more interesting than all the details which you gave me. I have therefore, the hope of seeing you, my very dear friend. With what joy I would embrace you and all your good and beautiful little daughters. I thank you for having made me acquainted with them. Never fear, my dear Gogo, with ever tiring me with the most minute details of all which concerns you. They interest me and as I am persuaded that you partake of the same sentiments I am going to speak of myself with the same details.

I have but one son, my very good friend. I don't know if my family will ever be more numerous. I do not think so, neither do I desire it. He is 2 and ½ years old and although I have had enough trouble in raising him, he enjoys at present the best of health and is very large and advanced for his age. He is a good child, less from the regularity of his traits than by his great freshness and his little lively airs and determination. I have never yet seem him show the least sign of fear. His supreme happiness is to be with the horses and the dogs, to see his father drive or be with the driver of the cart, who always puts him in the cart or on one of the horses.

His determined character does not interfere with the goodness of his heart. I only have to say that I am chagrined, when he comes and embraces me. He caresses me until I am consoled, promises many times never to do any more mischief. He has a little temper but I have never yet seem him pout more than two minutes. To tell you how I love him, my good friend, you know it is not possible to describe it in language; but you have the heart of a mother and I leave you to be the judge. I take great care not to spoil one so naturally happy and help him form a good disposition.

But I should leave the subject of my son, where I speak with all the prejudice of a too tender mother, I should return to our situation. With some of our means, I built a little villa in Normandy, about 8 leagues from Reux and 10 from Rouen, where my husband is and where part of his family lives. The country is so commercial and the Normans so active that we have as much business between the two towns which I named, as if we were at the port. And we find at any time of the day the opportunity to go to either to finish any little errands. The little town where I live resembles Parame [Brittany] a little,

as much for the grandeur as for the beauty. I live in a pretty house in the country scarcely half a league from town, and the distance is so short that I pass all my evenings there, returning home about ten. The society is not extensive. They are limited to two or three houses, but if I had chosen them myself I could not desire them to be more agreeable or congenial to my character. We meet every day and we often play or dance as best suits our taste.

The marriage of Fauchette [nickname of Françoise Jolly de Pontcadeuc (1775-1844), sister of Jean Baptiste; she married Louis Florient Thierry (1776-1838)] which took place with me [in attendance?] has been celebrated by all our little society and I took great pleasure in it. Even my husband agrees with that sentiment, and if fortune comes to us soon, we will have nothing else to desire. He is now pursuing an undertaking, and if it succeeds, he will go to the fete of peace in Paris, and also do some business there. From there he will go to Orleans and Lyons. Then he will return here to continue our work, which consists of buying linen cloths, different kinds of yarn, linen threads, and cotton .... of all kinds and ..... that is manufactured in the country; but not by the peasants, who do not make this kind of goods. We then have the goods bleached at the bleaching fields in our town, and ship them to different places where we have correspondents, for our own account, or for theirs.

We cannot complain about our beginnings [in this business]. The first year we nearly covered our expenses, and our charges were considerable, due to the trips my husband was obliged to make, rather than what we had to do here. Here we arranged for a warehouse, bought a horse and press, etc. I flatter myself, my good friend, that at the end of the next year we will be able to put something aside.

How I long to see you, my very good friend, established in a like manner, and with the same hopes that we have at this time. You know my heart and will be sponsor [?] for that of my husband. The thing that distresses me is our isolation, for we have but few acquaintances in our business and no protection.

I cannot tell you anything of my sisters. Fauchette has certainly told you all about her husband and her household. You know all about Eugenie [Eugenie Marie Florian de Pontcadeuc (1768—aft 1843), sister of Jean Baptiste], and there only remains enough of this paper for me to assure you that nothing equals the tenderness which I have for you all.

Magdalaine

## Letter 2.

St. Servan, at the Citoyennes Baré, Basse Roulais – Number 131 [France]

February 7, 1802

[Letter to Jean-Baptiste Florian and his wife Marguerette Marie Le Det de Segrais, apparently from the uncle of Jean Baptiste, Francois Vincent Jolly (4 March 1728—29 January 1814), priest and missionary.]

I arrived here, my dear nephew, a few days ago, coming from Portugal where I sat out the Tempest. I found your poor father in a state of great suffering. The shocks he has received have ruined his health. He received the letter from your dear wife \_\_\_\_\_ which gave him much pleasure; he also received the \_\_\_\_\_ dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 180[?]. These are the only letters he has received from you for a long time. In reading your letter, he was quite surprised to see that you do not speak about the 1200 \_\_\_\_ he told you to draw upon him.

The citizen Forson come one evening, one time, but he was in such a state of suffering that he was unable to speak to him.

Your father desires you, my dear nephew, that you draw on him for *two* thousand pounds, helping him to complete them with 800 \_\_\_\_\_, which added to the 1200 which he told you to draw upon him, are the 2000 remaining of the 8000 pounds which you have always claimed he owed you.

Since Fauchette and Felicite, your two sisters, harry him constantly, saying that they have lost on their *assignats*<sup>37</sup> and that they are owing you. Your father begs you to settle this affair, and my sister and I will help him by quieting his mind, for it is high time that his children stop tormenting him and let him die in peace.

It is to you, my dear niece, that I now address myself, for you and your four little girls are very dear to us, and we desire very ardently to see you here. In your letter, which came to my brother without any date on it, you state that your husband had drawn a *letter de change* [letter of exchange; similar to a bank cheque] of 1200 \_\_\_\_ on his account, which was not \_\_\_\_\_. That is why your husband must draw on him \_\_\_\_\_ in duplicate, the first one will become, needless to say, the one for 1200 which your husband was obliged to draw, on the *letter de change* which he will draw will be good only for two thousand pounds.

We are lodging, my brother and I, with the *Citoyennes* [Revolutionary term for women] Bare, where we board, and where we are living very peacefully, which is just right for old men. We embrace you very tenderly and we love you with all our hearts.

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<sup>37</sup> The translator has inserted a note here that this is “paper money issued during the Revolution.”

Your affectionate uncle,

Jolly Patre [this means “Father Jolly” as in the priest Jolly]

### Letter 3.

[Letter translated, not original, in English, typed, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL]

[This letter is signed "Duault." This is likely François Marie Guillaume Duault (1757-1833), husband of Eugénie Marie Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc, and the brother-in-law of Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc. Duault is apparently bemoaning the death and disarrangement of the affairs of the father of Jean-Baptiste, namely Joseph Marie Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc, born 1731 and died 25 April 1803, especially the monies that came to Joseph through his wife, Françoise Anne Félicité le Bonhomme de Fontaine, 1746-1778.]

**Paris, June 8, 1803**

To M. Florian  
Care M.M. Lavillegille, Carson & Company  
Mincing Lane, London

The embarrassment into which we are thrown, my dear Florian, by the inaccuracy of the accounts which were left by Monsieur Jolly, and the ignorance of the daughters of their own personal affairs, obliges us to have recourse to you to request some information.

First, the oldest son, did he not receive the 10000 pounds mentioned in his marriage contract? Was not that sum given him as a dot [inheritance, dowry or gift in lieu of money left in a will] by his father? Must it be counted in the succession? Is it as a whole or in part to be deducted from those who follow in succession, La Fontaine and Le Gentil?

Second, At the time it was talked of auctioning off Le Marais [Ed. :the principal family chateau] for the portion of the eldest son, Madame Duchatelier gave her brother a note for 15,000 [pounds?] which she had lent him. Was that sum part of her dot? Madame Duchartelier has always told me that her dot had been taken back by her father after the death of her husband. In that case, whence comes this 15,000? She desires, my friend, that you enter into the above matters in detail so as to enable her to rectify her ideas. For having signed always whatever her father presented without knowing why, she may be in error.

Third, a sum of 80,000 [pounds?] of which 60,000 apportioned to the three children had been placed with Bonaban the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1791 and the reimbursement was made in April 1791 with the interest. We see by the account that Madame Vie. Duchartelier was to have received 8106 [pounds] 19 s[hillings] as well as that which she had returned to her in the succession of La Fontaine and Le Gentil, and that by paying the Soldier's Pension of her father's he accounted to her for 106 [pounds] 19 s[hillings], and gave her 8000 to for her interest of the 12,000 placed with Bonaban. In short, that she has not had the interest on more than 4000. But Madame Duchartelier, whether having forgotten or

ignorant of the renunciation which her father had gotten her to make, was greatly astonished today to have an account for that sum.

I beg of you my friend to enlighten us on the above questions. I write in haste, and I finish in the same way in order to catch the courier.

Love to all,

Duault

[P.S.] I enclose a note from the Librarian De Bray addressed to M. Vood.



The house of Joseph Marie Jolly de Pontcadeuc, near St. Malo, Brittany, France

## Letter 4.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, 1770-1817, and later from her four daughters, to her husband Jean Baptiste Florian, traveling in the US.]

**December 17, 1808?** 1809? [The translator has marked this as 1809, but from the context and reference to Jean-Baptiste arriving in Halifax, which occurred in early October 1808, it seems that this is 1808.]

I cannot tell you, my good friend, the pleasure the news of your arrival at Halifax has given. The success of your first voyage has given me hope for the rest, and I await your arrival at New York with much impatience, but less disquiet than I had before receiving your letter.

I thank you for the details you gave me on the land and the savages who live there. The portrait you have drawn for me really made the children laugh. The details you gave me on cod fishing interested me quite a bit.

Laura received your letter first, and she brought it to me. Just imagine seeing her get out of the car [hackney cab?] and calling to me from a distance when she saw me, "A letter from Papa! A letter from Papa!" I forgot for an instant that you were not out of all danger. I assure you, my good friend, that it was the first moment of happiness which I have experienced since your departure. I count them now since you left me. I still have eight months until my departure.<sup>38</sup> You can judge the fear I will have, by the fear that you had to cast off [in order to undertake the voyage]. But fear will have no effect. I shall come to join you, though I must follow you to the Antipodes. Had you not left first, I would certainly never have had enough courage to make the trip.

Our children are still doing well. Laura spent two weeks with me. She left two days ago for Farenham with the Dawson family, which she will spend three months. I would never have let her go back there, as there is no piano there, but Mrs. Dawson is as kind to her as if she was her daughter. She promised me to be attentive, and I hope she will lose less [skill] than she did during her trip to Brighton, during which she did nothing worthwhile. I blame her less, however, than Mrs. Dawson, who has no energy, and who does not have enough knowledge or talents to appreciate Laura's. On her return, I shall be established in London, and if I can have her with me, I will put her to work again.

Virginia has gotten taller and grown prettier, and she was greatly admired at the concert which took place last week. She has drawn a charming head, a fresh baby face. In general everyone is pleased with her.

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<sup>38</sup> This would make the departure of Marguerite and the daughters about August, 1809, if it is correct that this letter is dated December 1808.

Eliza talks only about her pretty face, her dance and her music. Mr. de Bards today counted the mistakes she has made in French since de Bards has been teaching her. She has only made 22 mistakes. Mrs. Malthas wants to have her spend her vacation in London with her daughters. I will take her next Tuesday, but I am allowing it only under protest. I am afraid she will be spoiled, and really that would be too bad.

Azelie is in good health, and is making progress. Our four daughters took the prize [or “were the hit of the evening”] at the concert. I have made arrangements with Madame de Villiers –I am going to live there [beginning?] the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month. She has taken an elegantly furnished home in Baker Street, Portman Square North. It is a nice place and almost in the country. I will try to get the teacher at a low rate. Miss Ravencamp is coming with me. Madame de Villiers wishes to try to set up a school for 12 young ladies at 100 pounds sterling. My brothers are living at the de Bardas, so we are almost neighbors. You can’t imagine how attentive Joseph is. I am waiting impatiently to be in London to see them more often; however, I regret Laytonstone, or rather the inhabitants of Assembly House. Mrs. Hutchinson has left for Northumberland. She had only regrets in parting from me, and her departure caused me much sorrow. Miss Herbert has finally married E. Repton. Mr. Drouin [?] comes to see me every Sunday. He always speaks of you with much interest. Mr. Wood told me a hundred things to tell you from him. He wishes you more luck in your efforts than you had in your travels around Halifax. His mouth watered when I told him of the ducks, partridge, etc. on which you feasted.

I had occasion to write to your sisters, and I believe there will soon be another one [?]. When you write to me you can address your letter to Madame de Villiers, at number 39.

I would write to Emmanuel but I prefer to entrust you with all my good wishes. Do not fail to write me often. I fear lest the little communication now existing between this country and America may delay the news I ought to get from you.

The affairs in Spain are very hopeless. It was the last hope for the family of Bourbons. In spite of the prophesies of the Abbé de Clorivière,<sup>39</sup> it will not be ended this year. When we are re-united in the woods, we will not worry ourselves about what happens among the great powers on this continent.

My God, why am I not already there? How I would press you against my heart. I cannot say anything more. I always feel depressed when I think of the distance separating us from one another, and the uncertainty of when we will be re-united.

Adieu, I love you more than my life.

[Marguerite]

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<sup>39</sup> The Abbé de Clorivière was a famous Jesuit, and was a parish priest at Paramé before the Revolution. He performed the marriage ceremonies for the daughters of Pierre Beugeard; see the manuscript “La Famille Beugeard de St. Malo,” by Hughes de Boiry Buchepot.

[Continuation of the letter, written by second daughter Virginia Josephine Florian, now 16.]

My dear Papa,

Your letter made us very happy. We shall be even more more so, when we know that you have arrived in New Orleans. We are going next week to London. I am very sorry that Laura [the eldest daughter] is in the country. [It would be nice?] to be closer to her. I will try to take her place beside Mama, and I assure you, dear Papa, that my greatest desire is to contribute to the happiness of both of you. I am, my dear Papa, your affectionate and obedient

Virginia Florian



Miniature of Virginie Florian Russell  
Done in 1830 in New Orleans by Mr. Claque

[Continuation of the letter, written by Elizabeth Florian, the third daughter, now 14.]

You cannot imagine, my dear Papa, the pleasure which the news of your arrival in New Orleans has caused us.<sup>40</sup> I suppose that you are at present in the woods of New Orleans very busy building our house. Madame Mather has invited us to spend the vacation with her in London. Mama has consented, only on the condition that I do not waste my time. Embrace my uncle Emmanuel for me, and believe me, my dear Papa, that I am

Your obedient and affectionate,

Eliza

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<sup>40</sup> It appears from this note that the first part of this letter was written when only news from Halifax had arrived regarding Jean-Baptiste, but that by the time the letter was mailed, news had come from New Orleans of his arrival there in about February 1809, so perhaps the letter was held until it could be mailed to a specific address (?). The dates are confusing.



Elizabeth Florian Talcott, later in life

[Continuation of the letter, written by Azelie Felicite Florian, the fourth daughter, now 12 years old.]

My dear Papa,

The face of the Indian whose portrait you sent us frightened us all. If all the inhabitants of America look like that them, I would rather be an old maid than have a husband like that one. I hope however that in New Orleans there are more acceptable ones, and I will take so much care before coming that I would be neither a wallflower nor an old maid, I hope.

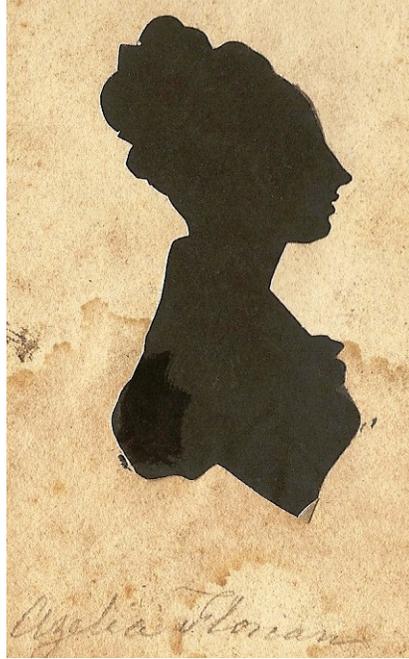
We had lots of fun recently—we had a ball. I was to play the castanets, but I was so awkward that I couldn't use them. We will also have a big masquerade for the "breaking up."<sup>41</sup>

Adieu, my dear Papa, believe me to be always your obedient and affectionate

Azelie

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<sup>41</sup> This phrase, written in English, may refer to an end-of-term school party.



Azelia Florian, later in life

## Letter 5.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, in London, to her husband, Jean-Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans]

April 28, 1809

No. 9

How can it be, my very good friend, that you do not hear from us? I number all my letters very exactly, and you can see clearly by the number on this one that I have been very careful to write you. I know that Joseph has done so more often than me, since he has profited by occasion [?] I did not know about. I judge the misgivings you must suffer by the pleasure we have in reading your journal. I read and re-read your letters. I would like to share the discomforts of this long voyage on the Mississippi. If we had been with you, you would not have noticed the long time it took. We beg you not to worry any more about us, we are all well, and awaiting with the greatest impatience the moment of departure to rejoin the one who is so necessary for our happiness. If I can ever attain the goal of my journey, should you try your fortune at the Antipodes or in the Arctic,<sup>42</sup> I will never again consent to be separated from you.

We are using all means to put our school on a good footing. I have withdrawn Laura from Mrs. Dawson's. Unfortunately she wasted her time there. She is lazy and they were not able to make anything of her talents. The children [of Mrs. Dawson?] are ignorant, the mother unconcerned. They spent the whole winter in the country, where Laura had only an old harpsichord to practice on. I would have placed her in another family, but I fear her carelessness and lack of social graces. I am having her taught singing – as well as Virginia—by Roselli. They all take lessons from Madame Bartolozzi and Mr. Ropi [Popi?]. She is also continuing Italian, although I fear it will not be very useful to them over there. Virginia has made much progress in drawing. Laura is going to start again. I am also going to start her on the harp, with the best teacher I am able to obtain.

I was hoping to be able to send you about two hundred pounds; instead I spent the greater part of it on putting our children in a condition to shine in society. I believe I am fulfilling your intentions, and if we succeed, we will rejoice.

We arise in the morning and work until midnight. I have placed Eliza with Lady Kensington. She had left for Wales with all her family a week before my receipt of the first letter from Miss O. If I had received that earlier, I would have kept Eliza with me, but the lack of certainty of what will happen to us, and the desire for economies, had committed me to place her. She had already spent 3 months with Madame Mathis, but without a salary, and she was not happy. They gave her 3 guineas and her laundry. I hope she will not lose any of her talents. Lady Kensington has promised to watch after

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<sup>42</sup> The phrase used is “the frigid zone.”

her herself. Also there is an English governess of very good breeding, who seems to be quite pleasant.

I wrote to you on April 15<sup>th</sup> in reply to your letters from Natchez and from 3 others which arrived at the same time from New Orleans. The last letter was from the 13<sup>th</sup>. All your daughters wrote a few lines, and I received, when I was about to seal the package, a letter from Eliza which told me how Lord and Lady Kensington<sup>43</sup> were very nice to her. She described her trip to me, etc. I thought I could not do better than to send it to you. I flatter myself that you have received it, and that you are pleased with the details she gives. I have received no [other] news, since Lady Kensington is to return to London in July. I shall be pleased to have her back [?].

We have received news from our dear Peter.<sup>44</sup> He had a happy trip. He saw your sisters, my aunt, and my uncle B, and they all are well. All retain the greatest friendship for us, especially my good aunts, and our dear Eugenia and her husband.

Peter received 1800 [pounds] for me, and I hope he will receive still more. I will not give you the details contained in his letter, as I imagine he will advise you of them. Thus our hopes of Peter being successful in business seem to be coming true; perhaps J. [Joseph, her other brother?] is also not without hope. It is time that he received some compensation for his losses. They have played a lot of dirty tricks on him. If you could see the attention he gives us, you would know he deserves all our gratitude. He certainly deserves more, but I sorely fear that we will never be able to give it to him.

What you told me about our dear Emmanuel affected me keenly. I hope that the reception he gave you will make me cherish him even more, if I could do so more than I do, but I loved him formerly like my son, neither time nor absence has changed my feelings.<sup>45</sup> Give him my best regards, I should tell that myself, but I do not have time.

No one here believes in the fortune that Miss P. is to have. She is incorrigibly lazy. I finally got her guardian to get her a piano so she could do more practicing. She is making no progress in music, which drives me wild. She is to start singing tomorrow, but she has no voice. If she really has 20 thousand pounds she will get along quite well without all that [music training], but for myself I want to be proud of my instruction. She is like an old, hard-mouthed horse. Despite that, she is the best girl in the world when she is not obliged to apply herself.

Madame Henry is a big hypocrite who did not want Miss O. to have anyone but women as teachers, and who advised her to leave any room as soon as a man ["a hat"] entered it, no matter who was under the hat, young or old. I am waiting impatiently for the description of all that you must do, when you are near Miss O.

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<sup>43</sup> It seems likely that this refers to William Edwardes, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Kensington, 1777-1852, Member of Parliament for Haverfordwest from 1802 to 1818 in the House of Commons. Since his baronetcy was an Irish peerage, he like his father could not serve in the House of Lords. See their entries in Wikipedia.

<sup>44</sup> Brother of Marguerite.

<sup>45</sup> Emmanuel is the brother of Marguerite, living in New Orleans. At this point he is 28 and she is about 39.

I have seen the Couissin girls, they do not know yet if they should wait for their brother. He sent me your letter from New York, I suppose. If I do not receive the box before my departure, I will see Mrs. G. and forewarn them. I would like Coussin to come [on the journey], he could advise me on what I should take with me.

My piano has lost much of its tone, and our harp is horrible. I don't know whether I should take it, and in addition Tomkinson is giving me nothing for the picture and for the engravings. Bass is always out or too sick to talk business when I go to see him. He will certainly have to give me a good deal. The father of Miss Dubois is still not to be seen.

I have had Laura's \_\_\_\_\_ engraved. The expenses were considerable, but they are already more than covered, and I am again hoping to make something of it. I have painted a screen for Sarah Collinson, and she has sent 8 pounds sterling. Madame Lichigaray has also done all she could to help us. The poor woman has just lost her daughter, Mrs. Coleman. I have not seen our good friend Madame Drouin since I left Laytonstone.<sup>46</sup> I know that she is well. Neither have I seen the Parsons, but they are very friendly towards us, and have proved it many times.

Tell Emmanuel that the youngest Desjardin<sup>47</sup> is a prisoner here. Mr. Caron has taken him into his home. He is coming to dine with us on Sunday. Our uncle Morin<sup>48</sup> and two of the de Pagers [?] have also been prisoners here for four years. The two latter are in a hulk, and in the greatest distress.<sup>49</sup> So there are more unfortunate people than us. Deprived of liberty for four years and separated from their families. Joseph will try to render them all the service that he can.

I still have a thousand things to tell you, but the children have the rest of my paper, and are making enough noise with their uncle to daze a better head than mine. My heart is more sound than my head, in spite of that it is quite weak when I think of the moment when I shall press you against it.

When I arrive, even your Miss O, I ask but that. [Unclear translation.]

I embrace you a thousand, thousand times in my imagination. Soon I hope to do it in reality, as well as my dear Emmanuel.

Thy Marguerite

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<sup>46</sup> Laytonstone was a school in Epping Forest, about seven miles from London, that Jean Baptiste and Marguerite ran. A very faint, small sketch of it survives in the Sims Collection, in the Mobile Public Library. It appears to be a substantial building.

<sup>47</sup> This likely refers to Joseph Fichet des Jardins, born 1780 or François Fichet des Jardins, born 1783, both second cousins of Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais.

<sup>48</sup> Probably René Nicolas Morin (1755-1822), cousin of Marguerite.

<sup>49</sup> At this period, prisoners of war were often kept in old de-commissioned wooden naval sailing ships, called "prison hulks." These were death traps and many prisoners died of disease and lack of proper food and water.

## Letter 6.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais (1770-1817), in London, to her husband, Jean-Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans]

**3 May 1809**

[To] Florian Jolly, Esq.

This, my dear friend, will be only a repetition of two letters which I wrote to you on the the 15<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April, in response to yours, one from Natchez and the other from New Orleans, in which you complain of our silence, a reproach which I did not deserve, for I assure you that to my knowledge I missed writing to you only one time, when I could [have]. The reason was the “Virginia sickness,” which was causing great uneasiness, which I did not want to have you share.

I know that Joseph has profited [?] on several occasions, to send you news of us, when he did not have time to let us know. [i.e., did not have time to send us copies?] I tremble lest all our letter may be lost, and you may still be anxious. In the name of God, my beloved, do not worry any more. Be assured that we are all well, and that I am taking care of my children as the apple of my eye, and I am preparing them as best I know [how], to build the establishment which you have in mind.

I have taken Laura<sup>50</sup> back home, to set her to work again. I am having them taught piano and singing [by?] Paseli, [and?] Dante in Italian. I am going to have an instructor on the harp for Laura.<sup>51</sup> Virginia is coming along wonderfully at drawing, still with a pencil. I regret having placed Eliza with Lady Kensington, but she had left by the time I received your letters. I sent you in a letter on the 15<sup>th</sup> a letter she wrote me from Wales, where the family lives. There is an English governess [there?] who has many talent; they have promised me that Eliza shall neglect none of hers. They give [here? her?] 30 guineas in salary and her laundering.<sup>52</sup>

I had tried to place Virginia but have not succeeded.

I will have Eliza return in July by L.K., who is coming to London.

I have taken an apartment in Dorset Street [London?], it is more expensive than at Mme. Flanson’s or Mme. de Villers, but in neither of those two houses could I do what I wished for my children, especially at the latter, where they completely wasted their time. Now they do not waste a moment.

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<sup>50</sup> The four Florian daughters and their ages at this point, are Laura (18), Virginia (15), Elisabeth (14) and Azelie (12).

<sup>51</sup> At this time, harp playing in the home was just as popular as piano.

<sup>52</sup> It is not clear here from the two translations if Eliza is given 30 guineas in salary [?], has to pay 30 guineas, or if this perhaps refers to something else.

I took [the girls?] to a grand ball given by the de Bardas [family?] in the Argyle Rooms.<sup>53</sup> They were much admired, especially Azelie, who had a circle around her, like Laura used to have formerly at the Sidney Garden.

I struck a good bargain with Mr. Ball.<sup>54</sup> He is giving me my choice of his six little pianos, those with a key and a drawer for the music, which he is selling at 36 guineas, for my little piano and 10 guineas in return. It will be the screw [?] type that we need in America. I believe that Miss Ravencamp will have her own [piano?] at Tomisons, who will give me six guineas to pick it out. He has advised me to keep my grand piano, to which he will do everything necessary when we are at the point of departure.

We flatter ourselves that good relations will be established between our two countries; then we will perhaps be able to go directly to where it is much more pleasant, since we would have gone rather to you, and since we could take along many more things with us, which we could not do if we made the same voyage as you did.<sup>55</sup>

We received good news from Peter. He saw your two young sisters, who were deeply touched by the misfortune we have experienced.<sup>56</sup> They have promised to return us the money we deposited. He also saw Desportes, who returned books and porcelain he had from us. We have some hope of getting some things from Onsink [?]. He [Peter] then saw my aunts and my uncle B.<sup>57</sup> He was received as if he had been their son. He assures me that they hold for me the most tender friendship, and are very desirous of our return.

From there, Peter [went?] to Eugenie and her husband<sup>58</sup>, who are all ready to do what they can for us. They handed over 1800 pounds to send to us.<sup>59</sup> That is again something,

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<sup>53</sup> This likely refers to the old Argyle Rooms at Argyle and Regent Streets, London, a location for entertainments, balls, magic shows, concerts and masquerades.

<sup>54</sup> One translation gives this as “at the Ball” instead of “with M. Ball”

<sup>55</sup> It appears from this rather convoluted paragraph that Marguerite is explaining why she is probably going to go directly to New Orleans by ship, rather than take the complex New York-Pittsburgh-Ohio River-Mississippi route used by her husband. Jean-Baptiste had urged her in his early letters to take that latter route.

<sup>56</sup> This is one of the first mentions in the letters about the siblings of Jean-Baptiste, as opposed to the oft-mentioned siblings of Marguerite. Genealogical sources that we have list four sisters and no brothers for Jean-Baptiste; all the sisters were younger than their brother, and all survived him by many years. Unfortunately, this letter does not make entirely clear which sisters are referred to, although the two youngest ones were Eugenie and Magdeleine.

<sup>57</sup> This is very likely Marguerite’s uncle on her mother’s side, Nicolas-Joseph Beaugeard (1755-1818), and she is using his last name for the initial “B.” Nicolas had a sister Jeanne Melanie Beaugeard, but she died in 1784. Marguerite had five “aunts” on her mother’s side, one of whom was certainly dead by this time. She had no aunts on her father’s side. All of the people mentioned in connection with the trip of Peter to France are almost certainly living in France, probably at their ancestral homes in Brittany near St. Malo. Peter is clearly trying to recover property and money belonging to Jean-Baptiste and Marguerite (and himself?) which was lost in the turmoil of the French Revolution and Reign of Terror.

<sup>58</sup> This is almost certainly Eugenie Florian Jolly (or Joli) de Pontcadeuc (1768—aft. 1843), the sister of Jean-Baptiste Florian. She married Francois Marie Guillaume Duault (1757-1833). She apparently remained in France and survived the Terror.

<sup>59</sup> This was a very large sum of money, enough to pay for the building of 80-foot barges on the Ohio, which J-B floated down on, or enough to educate 27 young women for a year at a good finishing school in Louisiana, to use items that J-B mentioned earlier. Thus this might be roughly the equivalent of \$270,000

and I flatter myself that we will receive still more. What causes me the most pleasure is knowing that we are still loved, and that they are all ready to render us any service (good turn) which their situation permits.

It seems to me, however, that your sisters have mis-understood the bill of liquidation of which I sent several copies, since they want to consult a lawyer, while they had only their conscience to consult.<sup>60</sup>

I had hoped to bring you 2 or 3,000 pounds sterling, but the lessons I give the children and the difference of having Laura at the D's is eating away furiously at my little funds.<sup>61</sup> However, if we found a good [educational] establishment it will not be money mis-spent. Besides I have done my best, and I hope that you will approve especially for [my] having rescued Laura from her situation. You cannot imagine how much of her talents she has lost. I am going to try to have her regain at least [the amount of her talents] she has lost.

I received last night a letter from our good friend Droine. He wants to know all that you actually saw. Tomorrow I will send him all the details he is asking for.

Conupin has not arrived yet, and his sisters are not sure that he is coming. I received by packet the letter you had given him for me. I would certainly like him to come before our departure, so he can guide me on what I should take along. I am very undecided [as to] whether I should take my old harp. Are they are expensive in New Orleans, or should I ship one from France?<sup>62</sup>

I shall leave it to Joseph if he is here to give the order for the guns. He believes that trade is going to pick up, which will be very advantageous for us.

I am late in receiving details on the trip you were going to make in the countryside. The moment I receive one of your letters, I am happy, but the good feeling does not last, as so many things could have happened since it was written, my good friend. I do not want to be separated from you, I suffer from misgivings so far from you. If you have chosen a spot to settle down in, I hope that you have given attention to its healthiness. I form a thousand conjectures. I suppose that the children and I will be at New Orleans and you will be in the [interior?] – please do not have us cross the waters of the Atlantic to go to a spot where we cannot see each other sometimes. [And I hope] the very dear Emmanuel [brother of Marguerite, in New Orleans] has gotten rid of his rheumatism. I love him with all my heart, for him, and for the reception he gave you. Tell him for me all the most tender things you can find to say, and you will be telling him only a small part of what I feel for him. His nieces are very anxious to know [see?] him. Azelie begs her uncle not to call her “*petite grenorille*” [little frog] – nevertheless she talks like one.

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to \$600,000 today. (This assumes that today the education of a young woman at a finishing school would now cost about \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year.)

<sup>60</sup> It seems likely that Jean-Baptiste and his wife are handing over the family estate in Brittany to his sisters, and are asking for a reasonable monetary settlement in return.

<sup>61</sup> During this period, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy would make about 216 pounds per year in salary (not including any prize money). A senior captain would make a bit more than twice as much.

<sup>62</sup> This latter sentence is confusing in its translation.

They should not all fear being tongue-tied [stammering with shyness?], since they were not that way the other day when they had only their uncle with all four of them. Miss P. was with us, and she also danced all evening. I believe that “she has struck” [the latter in English] as concerns the best of the adventure, since the man is the former gallant of Miss Glepoy.<sup>63</sup>

My brother did not come to pick up my letter in time, so if it doesn't reach you, it will be a day fresher than Joss's [Joseph's? yours?].

I have finally found a woman harp teacher, Mrs. Macnamara, whom you should remember hearing speak at Mugnie and at Chez Marin [?]. Madame Bart recommended her to me as a very fine [teacher]. I expect her this morning.

May good God protect you and grant you health, the best of all blessings! I think only of you, everything I plan for focuses on what we will do and see in New Orleans. The idea of my arriving there makes me shiver with pleasure. Five or six months more at the most, and I shall have the happiness of pressing you to my heart.<sup>64</sup>

Your Marguerite and  
my Gr. g [?]

[P.S.] Laura is taking lessons on the harp and her sisters were being silly enough not to want to start.

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<sup>63</sup> This sentence is unclear and not well translated. It may refer to the naval term “striking (lowering) the colors” – in other words, Miss P has surrendered to the advances of the former gallant of Miss Glepoy.

<sup>64</sup> If indeed Marguerite and her children were able to arrive in New Orleans six months after this letter, then that would be about November 1809.

## Letter 7.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, 1770-1817, in England, to her husband Jean-Baptiste Florian, in Louisiana. This letter is present in its best form in the handwritten and typed English translations in the Edward Ladd collection in Mobile, AL.]

**London, June 20, 1809**

To Florian Jolly, Esq.  
c/o Emanuel Ledet, New Orleans

I flatter myself that you have now received so many of our letters that you no longer have reason to suppose negligence on our part. I assure you, my beloved, that the anxiety expressed to me about us made me rail against Mr. Cheriot, who has often told Joseph that he was sending to you the letters he received from us. We even expected, after what he had told us, that one of our letters had been able to reach you in Philadelphia. You may be the judge of his remissness! We hope that our last letters reached you without fail, as Joseph addressed them directly to New Orleans.

We have been more fortunate than you, as we received very exact news about you. [Your] last letters are of March 3 and 5 [1809], which I received at the same time. I cannot hope to describe to you the pleasure they have brought me; nevertheless, I shall not be really happy until we are all re-united. You know what a coward I am, and the nearer we approach the date of our departure, the more the crossing frightens me, especially now that it has been decided that Joseph will not accompany us. He has written to Peter to hasten his [Peter's] return. No matter what happens, I hope to leave in the month of August or September [1809].

Joseph tells you doubtless that he will go to Jamaica; with great plans for succeeding (may things be different than they were formerly). He certainly deserves the best of fates. I hope also that Peter's voyage will bring some success. He will have the pleasure, at least for us, of obtaining news of your sisters.<sup>65</sup>

I told you in my last letters that I had written to your sisters, and sent them several copies of the plan for dividing [?] the property, in order to arouse their friendship into doing something for you. The result is two very kind letters from your dear Eugenie; they have all been deeply touched by the misfortune we have undergone. Eugenie especially and her husband will do all they can for us—they have already sent Peter a sum of money they had available, which, with what Peter has received for us at Lemo, makes 70 pounds sterling I have received.

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<sup>65</sup> Apparently Peter is off on a voyage to France.

Your sisters had promised to reimburse us the money which was buried, and they have through their lawyers returned the papers fixed up by our friend Drouin for you, and they will abide by his decision.

Despecher [Despeches?] has handed over the effects he had in his possession, which are almost reduced to nothing. He offered 100 [pounds?], and that because I had written him a very touching letter to recall to him the friendship which used to formerly exist between you two.

I have at the same time tried to move friend Omdink [Amsink?] concerning his debt related to Le Gentil, who has been dead some time.<sup>66</sup> I had some hope that he would pay, and send the sum at the value of the “assignment” [the amount accorded by the French Revolutionary Government] at the time of the loan. I should have also received something from Roussel, but he is destitute.

The news which Eugenie [Eugenie Marie Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc, 1768—after 1843] gives me on the present state of her family is not bright. Her husband’s income has diminished, instead of increasing. They now have another little girl named Inez. This makes three for them, and they are reduced to the barest necessities. Eugenie’s only luxury was her apartment, she wanted to give it up to come to your relief. I wrote her again this morning to ask her to do no such thing. Magdaleine [Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc] is still the same loyal person and loves us as heretofore. Her husband [Honoré Cyprien Boulan] has been in bad health for several years. They fear for his life, and his illness has almost destroyed his business.

Fauchette is living on a heath, which her husband is clearing, which he bought by money received from the sale of the Marais.<sup>67</sup> It is said to be a poor purchase. They have four children, and no money.<sup>68</sup>

Felicite is better provided for in that respect, but she is paying dearly for it. Her husband, [Pierre Marie] Fromy Du Puy, is stingy and bad tempered.<sup>69</sup> The poor woman is desolate at being separated from all her family, especially Fauchette, who was everything to her. She lives in our villa six months of the year, and the rest of the time she passes alone with her two little girls at the Marais, which her husband has purchased.

[p 2] What you tell me of your memories, my friend, has moved me deeply. Not one of the incidents you recall is erased from my memory. It seems to me that I am again on the sandy shore with you, served by the good Catherine and our little Laura, for they were

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<sup>66</sup> The grandmother of Jean-Baptist Florian was Magdeleine Le Gentil de la Riviere. But she died in 1781. Her father Joseph-Denis Le Gentil died in 1755. Hence this recent death likely refers to a great uncle of Jean-Baptiste. There is at least one known such person, Joseph Alain Le Gentil, but unfortunately we do not know his dates.

<sup>67</sup> The Marais was the ancestral home of the Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc family, in St. Malo.

<sup>68</sup> Fauchette is the nickname of Françoise Jolly de Pontcadeuc, sister of Jean-Baptiste. In 1801 she married Louis Florent Thierry, ancestor of the wife of Hughes de Boiry Buchepot; it was he who assisted tremendously in producing this collection.

<sup>69</sup> On 1 August 1803 Félicité Jolly de Pontcadeuc married Pierre Marie Fromy du Puy (1759-1856).

there also. The scenes so often repeated at Laytonstone have moved me even more.<sup>70</sup> The dear children who are so necessary to our happiness bind us still closer to each other, and it seems to me that, were we to lose them, we would never more be able to enjoy those beautiful sunsets.

I was obliged to lay aside my pen!!<sup>71</sup>

I will return to things more gay. My children, for I keep coming back to them, are in good health. Laura is with me. She sings, she plays the piano or the harp all day long, and I hope it is not in vain. She is unfailingly gay, and she has done so much, that she has dispelled the cloud of unhappiness which surrounded me since your departure and since so many cares have come over me.

True, I know that you have arrived safely, and that if we do the same we have hopes of seeing those happy days again.

Virginia also feels [resents?] the effects of the influence which Laura spreads through the house. I am also very pleased with the progress she is making.

Azelie is also making a lot of progress at the piano. I leave it to them to describe the balls to which I have taken them lately, going in my charge. I did not believe that I should deprive them of a pleasure which nothing could replace for them, and my pleasure was to enjoy their success, of which they had a good deal. Laura is 18 years old and Virginia 16, and it seems to me that it was a good chance to introduce them into good society.

I often receive letters from Eliza, who writes as if she were twenty years old. She has learned to ride horseback, and she takes ten mile rides without getting tired. They always treat her well and they do not let her waste her time.

By the way, I almost forgot to tell you that Eugenie wanted to have one of your daughters [live with her], but I could not agree, especially since I did not have your consent. I was quite happy, I admit, to have such a good excuse to give.<sup>72</sup>

I have bought Madame Abbot's [Abbess'?] harp for 55 guineas. It has an excellent tone. I told you of the good deal I am going to make with Ball for our piano, in which he will give me one of his finest in exchange, plus ten guineas in addition.

I am noting down all the requests you have made to me for guns, shrubs, seed, etc., and we will do our best. The money available will guide us. Be assured that all my wishes are only for our reunion in New Orleans.

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<sup>70</sup> It seems very likely that the memories referred to here are described in the letter of March 3, 1809, under the section of letters from Jean-Baptiste.

<sup>71</sup> Marguerite was apparently overcome with emotion here, and had to stop writing.

<sup>72</sup> This is clearly Eugenie Florian Jolly Duault (1768—after 1843), still in France, sister of Jean-Baptiste Florian and aunt of the four Florian girls.

Now I must scold you for not terminating your correspondence with Cordon [Corson?]. You have not written a note to Joseph since your departure, nor to Mr. Drouin, nor to Mr. Wood, and yet you have to write to that wretched scoundrel, whom you know you should despise, and who has treated you lately in a shameful way. Escape, I beg you, from his clutches. He has done only harm to you, and his influence has always brought you misfortune. I re-read with indignation the other day, the letters he wrote me at Rumsey during your absence and during the absence of your cousin. Good God, how he lied!! And how with his spurious advice and under the veil of friendship, he could abuse the ignorance and weakness of a woman! If you wish to please me greatly, you will cease any relationship or communication with him. He is not worthy of your confidence – just think, he has not one principle of morality. He is now the victim of the traps he set for his associates. He has taken you enough into his confidence, so that you should know to trust him in nothing. You had nothing from him, but he obtained your secrets. Lately he was able to cheat Joseph out of 80 pounds sterling. He really is the plague of my life. I regret that you did not take with you some of his letters which I had before you left. Perusing them would have strengthened your weakness -- pardon the term, but it is too true for me to erase it – in getting involved with him. Pardon these things I have written if I am wrong.<sup>73</sup>

Let us speak of something else, this pains me. Why do you tell me nothing of Emmanuel? It seems to me that he must be very sick to be confined to bed for a whole month. So make him some of those embrocations<sup>74</sup> which do so much good, of equal parts of camphor, ether and laudanum. When I get there I shall cure him myself, and if I do not succeed it will not be for lack of trying. Tell him so for me, and assure him at the same time of my love.

It is not certain that Coussin [Couessin?] will come here, I believe. I think his sisters are very mysterious. Tell Emanuel that I have had news of Lemo and from Voltaire: all of them are well, our good aunts and our uncle Beaugeard love us, and love us with all their hearts.

Adieu my beloved, just a few months and we will not have to wait to prove our tenderness. Azelia and the others are in the midst of their supper, but Joseph has come to take my letter. The children have given an account of themselves [below]. Adieu, once more, my good friend. I clasp you very tenderly in my arms for myself and Eliza and Azelia.

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<sup>73</sup> It seems likely that this vigorous paragraph refers to the Calonne affair, described in “Flight of a Suspect” and in one of the Florian letters (4 August 1808). In this convoluted affair, apparently Jean-Baptiste put some of Calonne’s assets into his name, but never really had possession of them. Then the son of Calonne demanded their value, after Calonne died. The firm of V. Corson was apparently a middleman in this transaction. Charles-Alexandre de Calonne was formerly the minister of finance for Louis XIV, and was very unpopular and apparently corrupt. One of the reasons that Jean-Baptiste fled to America is apparently because he feared debtors prison, for the son of Calonne seems to have sent bailiffs after Jean-Baptiste, for his supposed debts to Calonne’s estate.

<sup>74</sup> A lotion or liniment that relieves muscle or joint pain.

Your Marguerite

[Continuation of the letter, written by Laura, the eldest daughter, 18 years old.]

I was extremely mortified, my dear Papa, to learn by your last letter of March 3 that you had not received any of my letters, although I have written you many times. Mama will doubtless have told you that I am no longer with Madame Davidson, and that I live entirely with Mama at home now. She has been kind enough to engage Mr. Roselli for Virginia and for me as a singing teacher. I also take lessons in the harp from Mrs. Macnamara. Thus I hope that when we are in New Orleans, we shall be ready to teach. We continually practice a great deal.

We were recently at a ball at the Argyle Rooms, where we were invited by the Count de Barbe [Barole?].<sup>75</sup> We were not without partners one single time, which makes us hope that in New Orleans you will not be embarrassed by us. We had a very good time there, but I will leave the details to Azelie, who is determined to be the first to tell you all about it.

We have all been worried about Uncle Emanuel's rheumatism, but we hope that one month in May in the fine climate of Louisiana will have entirely cured him of his suffering. Give him all the tenderest affection you can from me, and[ know] that he is a thousand times more dear to us for the fine way he received you.

Doubtless Mamma must have told you of the news we have received from our aunt Duault.<sup>76</sup> She wanted one of us to come and live with her. My God, if you had been here instead of in America, how I should have loved to go to that country, to again see all my aunts, and perhaps all the places you tell Mama about, where you passed such happy moments. Believe me that our tastes and our pleasures are as simple as yours.<sup>77</sup> Without you we find pleasure in nothing. We need to see you, to know your opinion in all things, and we regret all the days that we must spend far from you.

How happy Eliza would be if she could add a little message of her own, at the end of this letter. But she always charges us in hers to give you and Emmanuel a thousand and a thousand kisses, and assurances without number of love and respect. I can only repeat to you the same assurances on my part. You must know, my dear Papa, the infinite tenderness of your daughter who loves you from the bottom of her heart.

Laura

[Continuation of the letter, written by Virginia, now 16 years old.]

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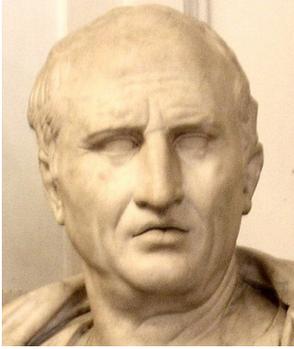
<sup>75</sup> There is a Francoise, Marquis de Barbe-Marbois (1745—1837) who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase with the United States. However, it seems unlikely that he would have been in London at the time.

<sup>76</sup> This is Eugenie Florian Jolly Duault, sister of Jean-Baptiste Florian; still in France.

<sup>77</sup> Here Laura is apparently reacting to a passage of the letter of March 3, in which Jean-Baptiste bemoans the expensive taste of his daughters.

My dear Papa,

My sisters have told you of the pleasure they had at the balls, my dear Papa, and although I had a very good time there, I must tell you that Mama was kind enough to take me to the exhibitions at Somerset House, where there were many beautiful things to see. I certainly wish I had a Cicero like you to show me the most interesting things they have there.<sup>78</sup> I was not able to discover the two scenes from history and mythology by Miss Jackson. There were two fine pictures by Wilkie, and another painter whose name I do not know, who paints in the same genre, and who is also very good. They say there are much better pictures done in water colors; Mama is going to take us to see them.



Cicero

Adieu, my dear Papa. Believe forever in my love as your dutiful daughter,

Virginia Florian

[P.S.] Embrace my uncle for me.

[Continuation of the letter, apparently written by Azelie, fourth daughter, now aged 12.]

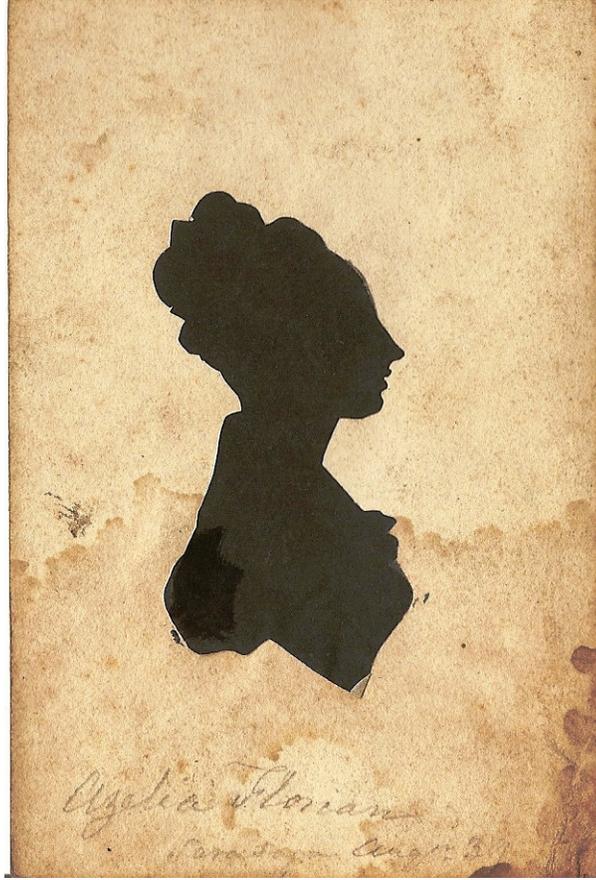
My dear Papa,

It is fortunate for me that I was the first to choose as the subject for my letter, the pleasure we had at the Argyle Rooms, because my sisters always tell you everything, and they never leave me anything to say, and as the littlest I always write last.

The Rooms are very beautiful. The room where we danced is surrounded by box seats and has a stage, because amateurs sometimes give plays there. There is also a beautiful large room where they play cards and chess, and another [room] for refreshments. We all had a lot of partners, and I assure you that I did not lack for beaux and was not embarrassed. As there were many émigrés, we danced one or two French quadrilles during the evening, and at one or two o'clock in the morning we had supper there. [!]

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<sup>78</sup> This is an interesting comparison. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) was a Roman statesman, philosopher, political theorist, humanist, orator, prose stylist and a great writer of letters.



Azelie (Azelia) Florian, later in life, at Saratoga, NY  
probably in August 1839

## Letter 8.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, 1770-1817, to her husband Jean Baptiste Florian in New Orleans. This letter is in handwritten translation only, from the Mobile Public Library volumes.]

**Westmead [England] June 27 [1809]**  
[also dated:] July 5, 1809

No. 13

[To:] Florian Jolly, Esq.  
Care M. Ledet  
New Orleans

It is in the middle of the most discordant concert that I am trying to collect my ideas, so I may converse with you. The pianoforte is [being played] in this room, Laura [is] at the cabinet harp in the next room, and Miss R. is practicing her poor piano over my head. Nevertheless, I am not complaining. My dear friend, I hear all that as a preparation for our departure. A few days ago I received your letter of March 30.<sup>79</sup> I assure you that it caused me to shed many tears of joy. I am so happy to know that you are spending your first summer far away from the city, and also at knowing that you are with a circle of people who can appreciate your knowledge. Hope for our future is somewhat revived in my heart. You know very well that I cannot take credit for things as easily as you can, but I think it is always very important to have made friendships, and I am very satisfied with Mr. and Mrs. Atre, for the welcome they are giving you. Thank them for me for that, and for the letter of introduction which they sent me for Mrs. Skipwith. Unhappily [the letter] availed me nothing, as the lady did not even come to England.

I will try to make all your purchases, as far as my purse will permit me. My expenses here are enormous, although I keep nothing for myself. I dare not tell you how much the children's teachers cost me a week. I feel certain that it is "good grain sown on good soil" and that the harvest will re-pay us for the money spent now.

I am happy about the trouble they go to, Joseph has not yet left, and I do not know when he will. I am still exceedingly apprehensive – if I were sure I that Peter had arrived in time. We hope that soon ships will come [from?] New Orleans. Mrs. Anson has written to Liverpool to learn if there were any arrivals. There are none at all yet. I am feverishly eager. Joseph [?] would not want us to leave before the middle of August, and he assures me that Peter will have returned by then.

I have some bad news to tell you. I am afraid I cannot bring you any guns. The [customs? wartime?] orders are carried out very strictly. Joseph says I would most certainly run a risk in taking you one [a gun]. I will see however when my passage is

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<sup>79</sup> This is letter 15 in Section 1 above, which describes Montesano, West Florida, and how the Governor is keen to back the creation of a school in that vicinity.

arranged. I will try to get his protection to get one into France. However, do not count on it.

I told you, my beloved, that I had received several letters from our dear Eugenie, and that she had given me some money, her share, and what was hidden. She was waiting for my certified receipt of that, [before] sending me her share and that of Madelon for what remains for you from the successions.<sup>80</sup> I hope that you received the full details that I sent you on that, in a timely manner.

You have never acknowledged receiving any of my letters except one. You have never written to Joseph, he was really hurt by that, and with reason. He deserved different treatment from you. Excuse, I beg you, my beloved, the reproaches that I am casting at you. They are dictated by the gratitude I owe to this worthy young man. I do not know what I would have done without him.

In your last letter, you said nothing to me about Emmanuel. You told me in your first letter from New Orleans that he was confined to bed with rheumatism. I am uneasy at your silence. I fear that you are no longer on good terms with him.

I fear that you will not be able to read what I write. I wanted to send Eliza's letter and avoid the double postage. You see by what she says that she is happy. I keep trying to find an occasion to have her return. I leave it to the children to give the details on the new friends we have made.

I hope to profit by [our acquaintance with] the Pio family. They have promised me to give some harp lessons to Laura, and I will teach geography in exchange. I am now giving lessons to the Spurier [?] girls, cousins of the Rangers. I go there twice a week and they pay me 14 shillings a lesson. It is not much, but I have been so depressed at doing nothing but spending without making anything, that I am quite happy. It really is too bad that I did not know them sooner, they are so satisfied with my way of teaching that I am sure they would have recommended me to others.

If I could leave my bad luck in England, I would gladly bequeath it, with pleasure, to our former partners at [of?] Woodford.

When shall we all be re-united on our little spot of land, for I no longer dare to call it a home? I will no longer think about all our former griefs. A few months more, and my heart will be at ease. Until then, I can only be unhappy at being separated from you, and you will judge the worries I have experienced since your departure by the color of my

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<sup>80</sup> From this poorly translated sentence it appears that someone, likely Jean-Baptiste's sister Magdaleine (mis-transcribed as "Madelon"?) is trying to send funds – during wartime! – across the Channel to pay for the liquidation of parts of the estate, and perhaps to send funds for the "succession" of the estate to Jean-Baptiste, after the death of his father on 25 April 1803, six years earlier. The "hidden" reference may be to money hidden during the French Revolution and Terror, when assets were being seized by the new authorities and the mob.

hair, which is almost all white. You will also judge by this scribbling the effect the discordant music has had on my ears.

I embrace you with all my soul. [Marguerite]

And me also, Laura

[From Laura Eugenie Florian, later Bowers (1791-1857), the first daughter of Jean-Baptiste, as a continuation of the above letter]

Your last letter gave us much pleasure, my dear Papa, and gave us still more desire to make progress in everything, before leaving this country. Lately we have had the advantage of hearing a lot of good music. We have also become acquainted with a great virtuoso, Madame Pio, an Italian lady who has just arrived from Lisbon with her four daughters. They are all full of talent and play the harp in a superior way. And especially the second [daughter] plays like an angel, almost as well as her mother. How I should love to take a few lessons from her, but it is impossible, she charges a guinea [per lesson?].

Today we have just heard a little boy who plays miraculously, but he is not perfect like Miss Pio. You can imagine that this makes us want to be as good. Today we are going to a concert given by Madame Macnamara, my harp teacher. We are to hear the greatest musicians in London.

My uncle Joseph has not yet left. I assure you that we would like him to stay to accompany us. Give all my best regards to my uncle Emmanuel, and be assured of the unshakeable love of your

Laura

[From Virginia Josephine Florian, later Russell, 1793-1881, second daughter, to her father Jean-Baptiste Florian, as part of the continuing letter]

How we envy, my very dear Papa, your fine climate. Instead of giving you a description, as you did for us, we are shaking with cold, and we think with pleasure that this summer here will be the last winter we will spend in England.

I wish I could boast about my progress in music, but I leave that to Laura. I am not lazy, however. I draw as much as I can. I am now making a figure in all colors, in the manner of Bartolozzi. I hope that you will be pleased by it, although it will not be as well done as I should like it, but I am doing my best, and I think of you all the time I am drawing, and of the pleasure I will have when I embrace you. Believe me always, my dear Papa, your devoted and affectionate daughter.

Virginie

[From Azelie Felicite Florian, fourth daughter, 1797 to after 1860, to her father, as part of the continuing letter]

As Mama has gone to give her lessons, and since there is little space to write in, I don't want to miss the opportunity to put in a little word about me. I am completely jealous of Constanzina, the third daughter of Madame Pio, who, although she is only eight years old, plays the harp very well. But she is very friendly and I love her a lot, as well as her little sister Virginia.

Embrace my uncle Emmanuel, and always love your child who loves you also with all her heart.

Azelie

June 27 [1809], Westmead [apparently in Wales]

[Also dated:] July ???

[Letter from Elisabeth Florian, third daughter, 1795--after 1830, to her father Jean-Baptiste, in New Orleans. This may be a separate letter, since it is numbered "No. 13," but there is a note saying "letter written between the lines of her mother's."]

My dear Papa,

In the last letter I received from Mama she told me to write you. That was quite a while ago, but it was not in my power to do it before now. She has doubtless told you that I was at Lord Kensington's in Wales. The whole family is very pleasant, and if it were not for the distance which separates me from my dear Mama, I would be very happy.

Mrs. Green, the English governess, is so good. Oh, I would certainly like you to know her! She is very unfortunate; two years ago she was quite wealthy, but her husband died suddenly, and consequently she did not have time to arrange her affairs [properly], and she was obliged to come here as a governess. She has three children, of whom the oldest is only six years old. I would lose a very good friend in her if she went away while I am here.

Lady Kensington also shows me a thousand kindnesses, and takes much interest in seeing that I do not neglect my studies. The last thing in the world she wants if for my Mama to lament on my return, that I have fallen behind in my music. She has eight children, of whom we have to teach four.

We went to spend a few days with the mother of Lord Kensington at Haverford West in Pembrokeshire.<sup>81</sup> It is a very pretty town and very lively then, because the militia was there. We also went to see Milford Haven, the port where one leaves for Ireland. In

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<sup>81</sup> Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Kensington represented Haverfordwest in the Commons, this is clearly his family that is being discussed.

some years this will be quite a large city, but at present it is very small, inhabited only by Americans and Irish.

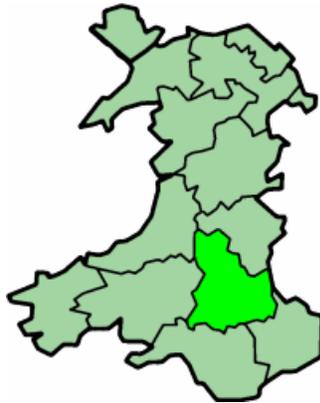
I have found this country very different from what I imagined. The South [of Wales?] is not quite as picturesque as the North, and much more cultivated. The location of Westmead is very pretty and in its climate and fertility resembles, from what I am told, the south of France.<sup>82</sup>

We never hear the harp here, as Mrs. Green had expected. There aren't any except in the North. You can see everywhere in the smallest towns [?] the ruins of great castles. The women's dress resembles that of the men, and at a distance you can't tell them apart. Next Monday we are going to Llandudodd Wells in the county of Brecknock.<sup>83</sup>

Maman tells me that my sisters are well occupied. I hope that she, as well as you, do not find that I have fallen behind. I very much do not want to meet that reproach.

Adieu, my dear Papa. I never stop thinking of the pleasure of seeing you again, and of our all being re-united. Be assured always of the love and respect given you by your affectionate daughter,

Eliza



**Brecknockshire, Wales**

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<sup>82</sup> Elisabeth was born in 1795 in England, and quite likely has never been to France, due to the Terror and the wars between England and Napoleonic France.

<sup>83</sup> This refers to what is now called Brecknockshire, in SE Wales. See the map.

## Letter 9.

[Letter from Marguerite Marie Ledet de Segrais in New Orleans to her husband Jean-Baptiste Florian, apparently in Natchitoches, Louisiana. In typed English translation from the Edward Ladd collection, no original is present.]

**New Orleans, La., November 10, 1809**

My very dear Love,

You will learn that we have arrived, I am sure, with as much pleasure as I have in announcing it. The children traveled well and embrace you with both arms. I will tell you later of the affection I have.

We arrived here Sunday last, November 4<sup>th</sup> after having traveled sixty four days. Madame Plique very kindly wished us to have us all at her house. She and her family urged us to come, but I sought the apartments of Emanuel where we will stay until you have decided what we shall do. You have no idea of the impatience with which we await you; come soon. Unfortunately we have been made to fear that your return from Natchitoches will be very long. Make every effort, my dear love, to come soon, and let me hear thy voice which I love more than life.

Margaret Florian

My dear Papa,

Why are we so long in receiving and embracing our Papa? We have been mortified at not finding you in New Orleans when we arrive. Hasten then and let us all be together. Your children await with the greatest impatience to embrace you with a fondness of heart that they all feel. We are fortunate while waiting for you to be in the house of a family who is most kind and who know you. Madame Plique and her children have done all that is most kind for us. She charges me to send much love on her part to you. Miss Ravencamp is with us, and awaits her brother who will accompany her to Bayou Sara.

We are all preparing for a Ball here Monday evening, but we unite our voices with Mama's in saying how much we long to see you and to recount all that has passed with you and our dear Uncle.

Goodbye, dear Papa, these words fail to express all that I feel and all that I desire, but hasten your return to those who love you, and think of you always -- Laura, Eliza, Azelia and Virginia.

Mama charges me to tell you she has brought many of the instruments which are very fine. I have not failed to write an exact journal of all we have done.

## Letter 10.

[Undated letter **from Peter** (Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrays) apparently in Paris, France, writing **to his sister, Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrays**, apparently in New Orleans, Louisiana.]

[**Early 1810? Letter**]<sup>84</sup>

[Upside down at the top of the letter]

I thank you, dear sister, for having taken the time to write me, although you have not received my letters. I am delighted to hear the news from you, for you must never doubt my tender affection. I wish you to be happy and wish that we were all re-united. That can perhaps come about one day, but it is not yet about to happen—at least I do not foresee it for myself. Tell me a little about your son-in-law and your children, whom I beg to embrace tenderly. For me, I am

Your devoted brother

Segrais

[Main body of the letter:]

I cannot understand, dear sister, why you have not received the letters I have written you quite regularly from London for a long time. It must be that my correspondent has played me a trick in holding them back, as well as those [letters] for Joseph, who also complains that I haven't written him. Thenceforth I shall use other channels. But in Paris when you don't have any correspondents in port cities, [then it is difficult] and you don't have the opportunity [to use those correspondents], so I found it simpler to send them to London where every day so many vessels leave for all countries.

You speak, dear sister, of returning to France, where you have nothing in the world to expect, [and] when we all think of returning to America. It would take volumes to tell you about all the troubles we are experiencing here. Some glimmerings of fine days have been visible, but in truth, they were only a vain promise of happy times. Everything presages the most terrible storm, and makes one fear that the enormous trials we are undergoing may be the prelude to even greater misfortune. In every way France is lost for the next ten years. I am thinking seriously of leaving it. I have the idea of taking a trip, first to Guadeloupe and then perhaps to visit you in the United States. [I also want to visit] New York, where I should like to live. Be patient, you figure in all my plans, as

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<sup>84</sup> From the context (Marguerite has possibly married off at least one of her daughters) it seems possible that the letter is after 1815, when Laura married. But Peter is not yet in Calcutta, where he arrived in September 1810. And he seems to refer to daughter Eliza as unmarried, when in fact she married in late 1812. Hence it seems most likely that this letter was written in early 1810.

you must certainly know. Several times Fortune has seemed to smile on me, but I have suffered each time unexpected reverses. (All this is between just the two of us.) But it requires only a moment to regain everything, with the connections that I have. Let us have faith in Providence, in which I have great confidence.

I see with much sorrow that you are very unhappy in New Orleans. I had heard everything good said about it. One must take care not to let one be deceived.

My uncle Beugeard is here, still in top form. I love him tenderly. He is leaving in three days for Avastill [?]. He is the secretary to Madame la Duchesse d'Angoulême,<sup>85</sup> but I fear he cannot work much [?] longer. Anyhow, that [position?] will always mean 6000 per year for him, and he will be able to live quietly with our Aunt [on that]. He is staying with me here. Duault and his family are really living a little too high in the clouds. His children are charming. His eldest daughter is pretty, nice, and very lovable. She is already grown up and ready to marry, and she needs only a good income [*des rentes*] to be perfect. Here she will remain unmarried all her life without that, as pretty as she is.

Your stay in New Orleans must have helped you [will help you?] to get your daughters married to good husbands. I see her [Aglæ] usually every day. She is a nice girl, but a little too unsophisticated – imagine this-- I can't get her to dress up even a little bit the way she should. She is the portrait of our good uncle in every way, except that she has no tobacco on the end of her nose. You can't imagine how lively my uncle is, despite his back being bent over double. He does his job, which he leaves only with great difficulty, with much zeal. I fear for the satisfaction of the Duchess, of which he boasts. One can do not more. I dared not hope, in view of his age, his infirmities, and his absorbed and sometimes astonished manner, that he would ever succeed [in his work], but on the contrary he thrives marvelously. His sister Miss de Luppé, is back in Paris with her daughter Miss de Boeil. They are still living in grand style, and in a way quite opposed to Aglæ [daughter of Nicolas Beugeard]. They are, however, very fine persons, and I see them frequently.

As for the Misses Olives, who call themselves the Mesdemoiselles de Cubières, they have had their heads completely turned by their mother's title of Marquess. Good old Aunt Olive and the mother of Madame Fourbequeuse [?] are hardly prepared for the so evident vanity of their grandchildren. Well, "autre tempe, autre moeurs [a different time, different manners]. I don't see them at all, moreover, and that is very good for my pocketbook.

Tomorrow I go to dine at the Duaults, and to show them your letter, and to chat about you, dear sister. Only there do I find good friends of yours in France, for the Du Puy and "Fauchette's husband" [the latter in English] have acted very badly towards you. It is all the more wrong, in that they are rich.

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<sup>85</sup> This duchess was the daughter of Louis XVI; this uncle (Nicolas-Joseph Beugeard (1755-1818)) was her secretary. Hughes de Boiry Buchepot states that the uncle began his service as secretary beginning on 1 January 1815, but this would contradict the estimated date of this letter.

Duault is the most perfect and fine man that I know, and the best father of the prettiest children one can find. You believe that he could help his family by [moving] to get established in New Orleans. I believe that that would be the most satisfactory thing for his daughters and his son. But he has a position paying 4 to 5000 francs a year, and he is along in years although he is still vigorous, and he knows nothing about business. They live here comfortably, move in good society, and when one is "*acoquine*" [captivated] by the soul of Paris, one would have great grief in leaving. I do not believe he could ever think of becoming an expatriate. He is quite happy here, and it is better to leave well enough alone. His sister is living with him, and their small means keep them going. It is the La Voltais and Le Douarain [daughters of Pierre Beaugeard, who lived in castle of La Voltais and castle of Lemo] who would have been suitable for this exporting of young girls. There are 5 or 6 in the old chateau of Lemo, and as many in that of La Voltais, and all that won't have one [?], and they change in a deplorable fashion, and end up dying of consumption.

Miss Eliza did not wish to run this risk, nor dear Laura either. I am anxious to get to India, to send them some Indian muslin for making those cute little hats which foretell some little nephews. I shall send some for your four daughters at the same time, although I have heard it said that Eliza plans to be in a Bernardin convent, and that she must take her vows incessantly.<sup>86</sup>

I embrace my dear little nieces, and I am going to make a little collection of drawings for Virginia. I shall try to write you again by Mr. Petry, a chance I shall not have again for perhaps a long time.

Thy dear brother,

Pierre

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<sup>86</sup> Since Eliza married David Talcott in New Orleans on 30 Nov 1812, it is likely that this letter was written before that date.

## Letter 11.

[Letter from **Pierre Renee Le Det de Segrais** in London, England, writing to his sister, **Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais**, in New Orleans, Louisiana.]

**London, August 11, 1810**

[To] **Madam Jolly de Pontcadeuc**

I cannot describe to you, dear sister, how chagrined and surprised I was to find the other day at the home of a respectable female dolt of this city, a thick packet of papers for Emmanuel, and a letter for you, from your sister-in-law, while everything I had sent you from Paris a year ago, before I had dreamed of coming here, should have reached you a long time ago. I have just sent it off to Liverpool, and I hope that the letter will reach you very soon.

I left home last February to come here. I passed the last days of the year at St. Malo with La Sandre, or rather with his wife, for he was not there. He has charming children. Our poor aunt des Jardins [probably Jeanne Morin, wife of Joseph Fichet des Jardins] is in the most unfortunate state, having lost absolutely everything. And as neither her husband's family nor her own are coming to her aid, she is in a deplorable situation. I am busy sending her several small sums. I hope that those who received so much kindness and care from her will also come to her aid.

Since the trip I made to Lemo<sup>87</sup>, where I was formerly, I have never gone back. At St. Malo I saw your sisters-in-law on my last trip, but when I found out that they and their husbands were refusing to return to Florian what they owed, I went only one time and treated them very coldly. Fanchon [Fauchette?] especially is much to be pitied, having a nasty watchdog [*mastif*] – pardon, that is a little captain's word – for a husband. But she is awfully weak. He is for the rest, very rich. But they live like "*grigoux*" [in misery] in our charming home town. It is just the way they live.

Madame Penelec and her daughters are nevertheless exceptions. Penelec is hobbling around as usual. He embraced me readily, and took me in his canoe [rowboat? ship?] in the shipyard -- all in all did the honors to an "illustrious traveler" like me. Gobarnet—our friend Gobarnet still is the head of the canoe [shipbuilding?] factory. We were in Salidor [a port near St. Servan, which is near St. Malo], which has become an imperial shipbuilding port, where they are going to build in '74.<sup>88</sup>

I believe, however, that Holland did not salute me, which is bad. I went by Parame, and saw your Barre.<sup>89</sup> It was winter, and everything was barren. Poor Barre, it looked quite

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<sup>87</sup> Probably the castle of Le Douarain de Lemo.

<sup>88</sup> It seems more likely from the nautical context that what is meant here is that "they are going to build a 74" – meaning that the shipyard is going to build a 74 gun ship-of-the-line, a very substantial warship.

<sup>89</sup> This means "La Barre," in the town of Parame, the chateau where Marguerite was born and spent her childhood.

sad, as did I, just a passerby on the way to Parame. I had a traveling companion, with urgent business, and did not stop, but came back immediately to Caen, from whence I had set out.

The Duaults are well. They are very worthy people whom I love tenderly. Mr. and Madame Boullan [she is the sister of Jean-Baptiste], whom I saw also in Paris, spoke to me about all of you, and of the affection of good parents.

I believe that Boullan will pay your husband. Having learned at Dal [Bal?] – what a hole! – that Amiens was not far, I intended to sleep there, and I sent by express this evening to announce that if he wished to make an appointment for me next day, in the morning, I would be pleased to be there. He was charming and promised to pay Florian. I asked him to send me the letters of credit [*de charges*] for 1000 [7000?] francs, for this purpose. It is agreed to pay this sum. As to delivery, that is something to work out with the \_\_\_\_\_ who is at the Isle of France. He cannot, he says, take that upon himself. He cultivates tobacco at his place near Dal, and makes a good income. I am quite pleased that he is giving us some [money?]. For a long while I believed that he would do nothing but talk about it, but there is nothing like speaking to people [in person], playing upon their sensibilities, their scruples, etc., etc.

Would you believe it, that it is only a week that I have known of your arrival in New Orleans? I \_\_\_\_\_ to be sympathetic in my letter to there, to describe how I was very uneasy and distressed, but the pleasure of getting news of you through Joseph, then by C\_\_pin has made me forget it all.

So I would talk to you, my dear Gogo (speaking to your own person and not to your “namesake”) [the latter in English] you understand. I tell you now that if you do not reply, I will cease all relations with you. It is shameful that neither you nor your husband have written me a line for a year and a half. But indeed you are too far away to scold you, and especially for me to beat or pinch you, which would settle you down. But I will tell you in confidence that I am in a good way to do some deals, and that I already have a small fortune, like a gentleman of Lower Brittany, and that with a few more little strokes of luck like that, and I will be able to offer you a nice little farm in the country, if you wish to come back. What would you say to La Barre, for example? But all that, I do not hide it from you, is a bit uncertain.

While waiting for better [times], I am sending you a beautiful grand piano. Then the same to Florian; not as pretty at 80 pounds, and a pretty little one at 40 pounds. I had ordered from Jones eight months ago two grand pianos and one small piano. But since he would have made me wait too long, and since I am going to have an “occasion” in a few days from now, yesterday while dining at his house with Ciriclon [?], I bought his finest one, which I wish you to keep for yourself while waiting for the others. I was tempted to send you some harps, also, but Pianos, Pianos first of all.

I owe a lot of money here and in France, which must be paid *primo*.

I am very sorry you are not here. If you were, you would never leave it any more, except for our own part of the country, when the nest egg would have amounted to a bit of something.

I went to see Madame Clawson, that good old lady \_\_\_\_ of the neighborhood who has her big awkward daughter with her. On seeing me enter, the garden[er] told Madame Clawson that her husband was coming – it seems that she was awaiting him. Madame Clawson in great excitement came to the door with open arms to embrace me, tears in her eyes. I was completely astounded, and my feelings not being as upset as hers, I was as calm as a marble statue, but she, recognizing her mistake, took three steps backwards and would have fallen on her back, her feet in the air, if the aforesaid big Miss and Miss Go \_\_\_\_ had not caught her in their arms. Tears, laughter, vapors, an attack of nerves were the consequences of this deception. After a half an hour she somewhat regained her composure, and I took to my heels, feeling like a fool, without their having offered me a glass of water, or offered to have me return to be taken for a husband to the said lady, which I can do very well without.

I go often to the Bush Tavern in my gig [?], for I have not been able to refuse myself that little present, which has naturally necessitated a horse to pull it, and a very distinguished bulldog. I also went to see the Reverend and Madame six miles from here. He is very annoyed with Florian, who has not written him. I offered him the consolation of my own case. All the ladies are very well.

The Count and Countess de Barda are always the same, and they love you, they say this and I very much believe them.

I also saw Miss Bartolori and other young ladies at the opera. I can't remember their names any more, which proves that they are not dead. I stayed three months at Tom's Coffee House. Madame Tom and the Misses Tom are all fine people. It is incredible the love they have for you and your daughters.

I have now taken an apartment near the bank, composed of a large \_\_\_\_\_, a little antechamber, a bedroom and parlor, where I dine and have breakfast. The good Madame de Froger writes me often. She is very well and her son also. I hope that Joseph may have been able to hold back some funds from the Guadeloupe \_\_\_\_\_, and will send them to me, for her. I certainly wish, alas, that we had not left, nor Joseph. I need to be caressed by my nieces. I would also like to have my dear Laura here to play me the variations (which were much admired at Paris). I should also like very much to pinch the fat cheeks of my good Virginia. The head she drew for me is now in a fine book in red Morocco leather and hence mounted, as well as the landscape by my favorite Eliza, who they say is quite stuck on a handsome cockney. You see that I know all the news. Embrace all your girls very lovingly for their uncle Peter, except Azelia, whom you are to whip for me for changing. These dear little girls, I love them with all my heart.

I have seen Mr. Dawson several times, and I went there to see Madame, who told me she would be very pleased to see me, but she was not to be found at home, having spent

almost all the summer in the country. You know that they live in Finsburg Square, where they have a very beautiful house. I am living at number 4 Token House Yard, it is behind the bank. Trilo works with me, and he was so unfortunate that he was very happy to find a place to work. But unfortunately he is not very knowledgeable. That scoundrel of a Carson is still at the same business, they say, looking for easy marks, and sometimes finding them. Apropos, we each have 1/16<sup>th</sup> of Persillot. That is indeed a tiny share of the property. So 1/16<sup>th</sup> of a house rented, I believe, for 50 ecus. What a fine return.

Your cousin Granclos [probably the Meslé de Granclos family] is finally possessed of a better income. He has the chateau and the grounds of the park. He has bought his sisters' and nephews' share, and he pays, by a very strict budget, the capital and the interest for them, and will be a very important landowner, with an income of 30 to 50 thousand pounds. He is also a "Grigoux" [lives like a miser], but his wife is a very pleasant woman.

This is quite a long letter, isn't it? But I wanted to tell you about everybody, while I was at it. I hope that you will write me a very long letter, also, with lots of details on your activities, and your hopes. I hope that your husband still retains some of his big plans of yore – leather that cannot be wet through [waterproof leather]. He will laugh when he remembers that.<sup>90</sup>

I would like for him to write something about Louisiana. Tell him from me that it is absolutely [essential] that he get seriously busy with it. I promise to have his work printed in Paris, where it will get a good sale. A description of the present state of the country, of the natives, [with] pictures, topographical descriptions, some amusing incidents, especially, all in the form of travel letters, instructing and diverting. Some learned notes on the mountains, the lakes, the ancient inhabitants, a touch of the unusual – in sum, a lot of interesting material. This will open for you an excellent door for returning to France, since you will only be known as Louisianians.<sup>91</sup>

I have not sent Emmanuel the papers for obtaining the funds at Charleston. I think that your husband will certainly be able to make this trip. Besides the commission, the expenses etc. [?] I have written to Emmanuel to give a little present to my nieces out of this money, also to my dear sister. I hope that this will be paid. One of my friends who was at Charleston three years ago to do business, would have received this money if he had the papers which I will send. I hope that you will get them. If you do, as I do not doubt, this will be a great help in going back to France, and to getting residence there. My only, my dearest hope, is seeing us all re-united. How happy I would be then, and how proud I would be then to have made some contribution.

Adieu, again, dear good sister. Embrace your husband and your daughters for me. Also brother Emmanuel, and believe me, I am your always devoted brother,

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<sup>90</sup> The reference to waterproof leather must have been a private joke.

<sup>91</sup> Quite possibly this phrase means that the Florian family will be viewed as Louisianans, rather than as old guard Royalists, and hence will be in less danger in the new France.

Peter

## Letter 12.

[Letter from Pierre Renee de Segrais in London to his brother-in-law, Jean Baptiste Florian, in New Orleans

This letter is in typewritten translation at the Mobile Public Library but apparently not at the Library of Congress. Unfortunately, the translation is sometimes garbled and stilted.]

**London, October 16, 1810**

My dear Florian:

The bearer of this letter is Mr. Remy David, nephew of the beautiful Madame Récamier.<sup>92</sup> I recommend him to you and my sister in a very special way. He is a very worthy young man and my very good friend.



Madame Récamier, by Francois Gerard

I am sending you herein a bill of lading for 2 grand pianos, a harp with benches and a trunk, in all six objects, which I have shipped on the vessel *United States*, addressed to Emmanuel but to be delivered to you. Here is the way they are to be given: “Grand piano, highly finished and ornamented, etc., etc.,” [the latter in English] with all sorts of little doodads, scrollwork, gilt, etc., for my dear sister Marguerite—lots of nice things in one

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<sup>92</sup> Madame Jeanne-Francoise Récamier (1777-1849) was called by some the most beautiful woman in the world. She married a banker 30 years her senior who may have been her father; she numbered among her admirers Chateaubriand, Prince Augustus of Prussia, Lucien Bonaparte and others. She was painted by many of the major artists of the day, including Fragonard and David.

present. \_\_\_\_\_ less decorated, 1 Erard harp—a real goody which I am sending you on account and for which you are debted in F having been credited in fr (about 1700 with Duault).<sup>93</sup>



Lastly a trunk, which contains 4 others, [?] which young ladies Florian will accept with the contents if they are kind enough to do me that honor.

Although the freight is entered as paid, it has not been, as I did not want to lose the total in case the vessel be taken or lost. For the rest, I have had the whole shipment insured against all risks, at 6 \_\_\_ per pound, so as to be able to be reimbursed in case of loss.

Now please be kind enough, Monsieur, Madame and Mademoiselles, to take in good part [to accept?] the abuse I am going to hurl at you. For more than a year since you left, you have not written a word to your brother, nor you saucy little girls, to your uncle, who

nevertheless loves you quite a bit. I know Monsieur le Docteur, that you will not be lacking in excuses. You have written me 10 letters which probably did not arrive. I swear I don't believe a word of it. "Sister had other fish to fry," [the latter in English], the young ladies on the Mississippi for example. But the dear little nieces who I hope do not know how to tell good lies, would not have the same excuse to make me like you do. And know well that they [will] answer to me at the Final Judgment before the Eternal Father, when he will demand an accounting of the sincere friendship I have vowed for them, and which they have not reciprocated.<sup>94</sup>

But about the Last Judgment, and to return to more immediate things which leads us by one thing after another to the Creation, is it really true that Emmanuel is married? Have written to Mme. Davison that "that that was going to do it" quite recently, and I cannot square that with the retreat he has beaten toward the Natchitoches, unless he had the intention of peopling the wilderness. What the devil does this change mean, I don't understand it at all.

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<sup>93</sup> Sebastian Erard (originally Erhard) was born in Strasbourg in 1752 and patented the first concert harp in June 1810, after eight years of obsessive work at his establishments in London and Paris. At this time, the harp was as popular as the piano, as an instrument in people's homes. Erard is considered a genius, and there is an international society devoted to him and his works. The harp referred to here could have been made in Paris, perhaps that is why the (somewhat garbled) sentence refers to Paris. The Florian harp could have been a concert harp, but it seems more likely that it was a lighter, smaller harp. The illustration is borrowe from C.L. Caulfield (clcaulfield.com) where a small drawing of the famous harp costs \$375.

<sup>94</sup> It is clear from this rather stern (or funny?) paragraph that Madame Florian and her four daughters have at last arrived in Louisiana

Adieu dear Friend! I hope that at last you will write me. Remy David, who is returning immediately, offers an excellent opportunity. You can give him seven thousand pounds in letter of [ex]change on Amersink who has promised me to accept them and pay. Have them in triplicate in seven amounts of 1000 each, care of Mr. Jacques Récamier<sup>95</sup> at Paris, payable in two months from sight, dated from New Orleans of course. You will write to Amersink at the same time, that you are really well connected.

I am quite worried about a package that I addressed through Liverpool to Emmanuel and which contains many pieces – to receive more than 80 thousand – in Charleston. I hope that he will put you in a position to recover these debts. If he has returned inland, this deal would be followed by several others of the same kind.

I have written to you also to tell you that I could perhaps advance you money for a sugar refinery. Write me on this point. Make an offer well and duly considered which I can submit to a capitalist.

Fortune seems to smile on me very affectionately and I cultivate her with alacrity. I have some idea of making a little trip in a few weeks to Paris, if I have the time. But I still have my office opened up and I would lease it to Trilo, who is my head minister [assistant?], to manage my business. Write me still to No. 4 Token House Yard here, and in Paris [at] No. 9 Rue de Gaillon, because I also have a little office there. I know that Duault and his family are well, but I have no direct news of them.

Adieu, I embrace you despite your mistakes, as well as my sister, and the four little devils.

Your always devoted brother,

Pierre

[Pierre Renee de Segrays]

[P.S.] I have had no letter from Joseph for a long time.

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<sup>95</sup> This is the husband of Madame Récamier, mentioned earlier. He was a wealthy banker.

## Letter 13.

[Letter from an anonymous member of a (Masonic) society, to Madame Florian, after the death of her husband, Jean-Baptiste Florian.]

[November 23, 1811, New Orleans]

Madame:

I am requested by a certain responsible Society of this city to which your husband belonged, alas, for only too short a time, to consecrate soon in a special session, your regrets, and ours, retracing on the hearts which, as that of yours, Madame, deplore the loss of the late deceased, Monsieur Florian Jolly, those qualities, which, as with you, have already rendered him so dear to us, and the salient epochs of the too short career of our worth Brother and Friend. I fear to add to your unhappiness, but am forced, in our desire to have recourse to you for accurate knowledge of the traits about which I must write, regarding the late deceased, not only as a Friend, Literateur and Citizen, but especially as a Son, Father and Husband.

If I may be permitted to add, Madame, that a request so delicate, and which may seem rash on my part, especially to anyone deprived of the honor of being known to you personally, must nevertheless find grace before you, and by his motive and by the mediation of a respectable friend, that you will forgive me at present, especially since it is impossible for me to believe that you suppose that I have made bold to make this request, from any other than the purest motive.

Accept the respectful homage, Madame, of your very humble and very obedient servant,

**ANONYMOUS**

New Orleans, November 23, 1811

To Madame Florian Jolly  
By Mr. Tricorn

Essential items of information:

From what family he descended  
With what family he was allied  
Place and date of birth  
Profession in Europe  
Events of which he was the victim, here and elsewhere  
The cause of his premature end.

It is their desire to have this information as soon as possible. The funeral oration is to be on the 15<sup>th</sup> December.

## Letter 14.

[Letter in response from Madame Florian to the Society, regarding the biography of her husband.]

Apparent date: **December 1811**

Monsieur,

I can only be flattered by the regrets and testimonial of your Respectable Society to which he, whom I mourn, is so justly entitled to have had the honor to be a member; and although this sad situation finds me deprived of all my faculties and leaves me very little mistress of myself, it appears to me that the sorrow with which I am burdened may find some relief in rendering justice to his virtues and in making them known.

But Monsieur, the more I feel the less I am capable of fulfilling the task that you have imposed. I will, however, make an effort and, although my heart suffers in recalling these facts, if they are interesting to the Society I shall do my best.

[Jean-Baptiste Florian Jolly de Pontcadeuc was] Born at St. Malo, oldest son of Monsieur Jolly, Lord of the Land of Pontcadeuc, a noble Breton. He received the best education. In early manhood he finished the studies necessary for entering the military Corps of Engineers, for which he was originally destined, but showing superior talents at that time, his father, and especially his respectable grandfather, Monsieur La Fontaine Le Bonhomme, wished him to enter upon a diplomatic career, and to that effect he studied law at the city of Rennes, and so was at the right hand of the Queen. I believe he had not yet taken all his degrees when the Revolution came, upsetting all his hopes.

After the last session of the States General, in our Province, when he showed his way of thinking, he was obliged to go to England, from whence he only returned to complete the ties which had been projected in our infancy. Our city was at that time rather tranquil, and we had enjoyed peace for some time in our household, although disorders surrounded us in all directions.

Finally Anarchy reached its height and the nobles were outlawed, and they were denounced, pursued, and arrested in their own homes. My husband would, without doubt, have been guillotined except for the courage of one of my brothers, who saved him from the hands of the henchmen of Robespierre. We returned to England where I had the good fortune to rejoin him.

## Letter 15.

[Letter written after the death of her husband Jean-Baptiste Florian, on 26 September 1811, by and from Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais, in New Orleans, to Mr. Cheriot, in New York]

### December 1811

[In the manuscript “Fuite d'un suspect” (*Flight of a Suspect*), there the copy of a draft of this letter in French, it was addressed to Lodge of New Orleans named “Loge des chevaliers du Temple” (Lodge Knight of the Temple). In other words, the Masons. Hughes de Boiry states and the translator of *Flight of a Suspect* state that it is clear from the phrases used that Jean-Baptiste was a Mason.]

To Mr. Cheriot  
Merchant  
New York

Monsieur,

I can only be deeply flattered by the regrets expressed by the respectable Masonic Society to which he, for whom I justly weep, had the honor to belong. And although the sad situation in which I now find myself numbs my faculties, and leaves me scarcely master of myself, it seems to me that the grief which crushes me will find some comfort in rendering justice to his qualities, and in making them known. But, Monsieur, the more keenly I feel, the less capable I am of fulfilling the task which you assign me. I will nevertheless make an effort, and although my heart suffers in recalling the events so close to it, I will give them as fast as I can.

[Marguerite now gives the biography of her late husband.]

Born at St. Malo, the oldest son of Monsieur Jolly, Seigneur de la Terre de Pontcadeuc<sup>96</sup> and a noble Breton, he received the best education. At a very early age he finished the necessary studies to enter into the military engineering corps, to which he had first been destined, but as he demonstrated superior talents, his father, and above all his grandfather, M. La Fontaine le Bonhomme, wished to have him follow a diplomatic career, and for this purpose he studied law at Rennes [capital of Brittany].

I believe that he had not taken all his degrees, when the Revolution came and crushed his hopes, after the last session of the *Etats* [financial assembly or overseers of the finances of Brittany; suppressed in the Revolution] in our province, in which he showed his way of thinking, he was obliged to leave for England, from when he returned only to form

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<sup>96</sup> Note that her husband is not referred to as the “Count” de Pontcadeuc, but as the “Lord of the Land of Pontcadeuc,” a lesser title, which was not considered part of the noble class, but above the gentry.

attachments which had been planned since our childhood; our city being then quiet, we enjoyed a peaceful home for some time, although the disorder surrounded us on all sides. Finally anarchy reached its height, and the nobles were proscribed, he himself was denounced, indicted and arrested in his own home. He would without doubt have been guillotined, without the heroic courage of one of my brothers, who saved him from the hands of Robespierre's henchmen.

He fled to England where I soon had the joy of rejoining him. In 1795 he was again exposed to new dangers in the unhappy expedition to Quiberon, where he served as Commissioner of War in the Army commanded by Monsieur the Comte d'Artois [brother of Louis XVI, who became the King Charles X]. He distinguished himself in every way, especially in the service which his post allowed him to assist his companions in misfortune, on the beach, at the fort, and in the complete disaster which was the result. He owed his safety again to a miracle, for, wishing to save a young relative, wounded and entrusted to his care, he spent so much time looking for him that he ran the greatest risk of losing his life. Exiled then for several months to the little island of Houat, with what had been saved of the army, they found themselves reduced, especially during the first days, to all the horrors of necessity. He was soon able to re-establish order, and did so much by his activity and his impartiality, that perhaps no-one with him lacked for necessities. His attentions were naturally directed towards the wounded; he even gave them the linens he was wearing, and managed to do without them for a long time.

Pardon me, Monsieur, for entering into such minute details. They show so well the beauty of his heart that I could not omit them. Believe me, however, that it was not from him that I learned the facts. He was as modest as he was generous, and [never] boasted of the good deeds he performed, even to his best friends.

Back again in England after having lost his men, his possessions, and above all the hope of seeing peace re-established in his home land, he decided to use his talents to build a good life for his family, and to devote himself totally to the education of youth. The well being of his daughters was his aim, denying himself all the luxuries of life, he spared nothing of what might bring out their talents, and make them that which he desired them to be.

He followed and he himself guided their training with unshakeable sweetness and patience. In his leisure moments he wrote, and as he did it with a truly surprising ease, in English as in his own language, he would doubtless have had more works published, if his excessive modesty had not often held him back. The field of literature to which he confined himself (although his genius was universal) was History and Mathematics, he having never any other idea than to make the work easier for his children and his students; and his friends had to pressure him a good deal to get him to publish.

If nature had lavished her most precious gifts on him, fate was not kind to him. Too honest a man to judge others unfavorably, he was always the victim of his over-confidence in others, as he had never made a promise which he did not fulfill. He easily consoled himself over his losses, and his natural gaiety was not troubled by them.

Enjoying more other fathers the love and talents of his children, which were the result of his endeavors; enjoying the society of a few intimate friends, and above all the friendship of my brothers, who for some time came to share our shabby life, he was [still] happy then.

It was only in Louisiana that he was truly unfortunate. I cannot depict to you, Monsieur, his despair at seeing himself reduced to not fulfilling his promises. He thought it a crime to have invested the fruits of the assiduous and painful labors of his daughters. I have seen him even in his moments of anguish invoke a fever to his aid. I can attribute his premature end only to the failures and the worries he experienced – at least if they were not the immediate cause, it was the continuation. Alas, if his mind had been at ease, the fever perhaps would not have made such rapid progress. His last moments, however, were very calm. He recognized his condition and had the courage to conceal it from his children, for fear of alarming them; they were all with him – do not ask me to tell you more.

There remains to tell you of my family. My father, M. Ledet Desegray, fled to New York in '92 [1792], at which place he died mourned by all those who had the good fortune to know him.

My grandfather Beugeard, Treasurer of the *Etats* of Brittany, was also a victim of fanaticism. He was also known in France for his immense fortune, for the use of which—judge this! – they called him “the Son of God, the Father of the Poor.” His son, my mother’s brother, was Secretary to the Queen [Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI]. He had the good fortune, on August tenth [1792], to save the life of the King, catching on his arm the dagger thrust which was intended for him (the King).<sup>97</sup> As long as they lived, he continued to render them what services he could; since their tragic death he has been living in Brittany.

Perhaps I should tell you that all my relatives were initiated into your mysteries.<sup>98</sup>

It meant very little to me, Monsieur, to have lost my position and the fortune that I could have hoped for in France. I regretted, it is true, my fate, since it separated me from my parents and relatives, but I did have consolation in the bosom of my family [by marriage], which many other émigrés did not have. Born under the same roof, raised with him to whom my destiny was bound by the dearest ties, I was able to be happy everywhere with him, as indulgent and tender a husband, as good a father, a good brother, good friend, and a good master.

His behavior was never other than good, and the emptiness which his loss has left me cannot be compared to anything I could have imagined until this moment, as you may

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<sup>97</sup> On 10 August 1792 a mob and some organized revolutionaries attacked the Tuileries and seized the King. This famous date marked the end of the monarchy in France. The King was forced to march out of the Palace through a gauntlet of revolutionary guards who were supposed to protect him from the mob. It is likely that this attempted assassination took place then. This incident is not reported in standard French histories, and may be a new footnote in history.

<sup>98</sup> It is clear that the reference here is to Masonic mysteries. French cousin-in-law Hughes de Boiry reports that Pierre Beugeard also was a Freemason in St Malo and in Rennes.

realize only too well by what I have just written. I do not have the strength to re-commence writing, nor the courage to re-read what I have written. I make so bold as to flatter myself, Monsieur, that your understanding will be able to supply what is lacking here-in. Make what use you find right of the facts to which I bear witness. I rely on your talents to make known his fine qualities, and I ask your discretion in not showing this letter to anyone.

Your very humble servant,

Madame Florian Jolly, Widow

## Letter 16.

[Letter from **Pierre Rene Le Det de Segrais to his sister, Marguerite Marie Le Det de Segrais.**]

[from] **Paris, 6 March 1816**

[The date on this letter could be 1810 or 1816. Since Peter refers to “sons-in-law” below it appears to be 1816, since Marguerite’s daughters were married after 1810. Thus this letter discussed an apparent second trip that Peter plans to take to Calcutta.]

Care of Messieurs Simpson and Dawson, Merchants, London

[To?] New Orleans

[Written at the top, upside down:]

I have had no news for a long time from Jos[eph] nor from Em[manuel]. I know only that they are very well. Write me in care of Mssrs. Palmer at Calcutta.

[Main body of the letter:]

My dear sister:

I have just now received your fine letter of December 10 [1815?]. I am replying by means of Mr. Petry, the French consul at New Orleans, whom I recommend to you highly, having in turn recommended you to his former friendship. He is a very fine man, most willing to oblige, and I am delighted that you have him as your consul in New Orleans. I hope he can be helpful to my nephews if they have any dealings with France, and I have told him of the whole family, and I urge you to introduce them to him.

All the good things you told me about New Orleans would have made me go there to get established, if I could have done it in the proper way. I had seriously planned to do so, and the pleasure of finding you there and of finally being re-united was a major reason behind the plan. But I was forced to yield to another, more advantageous plan. I have made a big decision, as you may have seen by a letter which I addressed to you in February, and which I put in the envelope which I addressed to your sons-in-law. In eight days I leave for Calcutta, which I shall establish myself with several French firms, who will send me ships there. I am leaving by the first boat from Ostende, the second will leave from France, and the third will follow. In short, I hope that I will once again find myself in a good situation, although the end of the trip may be rather distant from here and especially from you, dear sister, whom I would have been so happy to see again, and make happy.

For two months, while I have been arranging the trip and working to bring it about, I have been happy, for idleness weighed upon me heavily, and now I am again in my element, like a fish in the water.

I hope that it will be possible perhaps to do some business with Messieurs Bonure and Galeotti, to whom I have written. I am quite annoyed that one of them did not come to Paris, as I had expected. I believe that the trip could have been of some benefit to them, “but they know best I suppose.” [the latter in English.]

I hope that the good business situation in New Orleans will mean something to you personally. What charms me in your letter is what you tell me about the climate, which I had imagined unhealthy, and always caused me to be uneasy about all of you.

My uncle Beugeard, now serving as Secretary to Madame, the Duchess of Angouleme,<sup>99</sup> sends his kind regards, as does her daughter Aglaë.

My dear sister, Florian, whose letter I have just received, asks me to send you the enclosures. I am going to send him yours [your letter?] along with those of Joseph and Peter [?] of October 6 which Mr. Chenot [?] sent me. It is the second since her arrival here. Come then my dear sister and join us, we wait for you with open arms. I tenderly embrace my nieces and my brothers as well as you.

I am your

[Pierre]

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<sup>99</sup> A note in the translation states that the Duchess referred to here is possibly Marie Therese Charlotte (“Madame Royale”), relative of Louis XVI. A memo in the Mobile Public Library files by Susan Conover elaborates, and states that Marie Therese Charlotte, Duchess d’Angouleme (1778, Versailles, to 1851, Goritz) was the daughter of Louis XVI, and was married to her first cousin, Louis Antoine de Bourbon, Duc d’Angouleme (6 Aug 1775-3 Jun 1844). Marie was imprisoned for three years at the Temple after the death of her father, then was exchanged. She exercised considerable influence over her husband and over Louis XVIII. She was authoritarian and devout.

## Letter 17.

[Letter from **Peter Le Det de Segrais** in Bengal to his sister **Marguerite Le Det de Segrais**, in New Orleans, Louisiana]

**Calcutta, Sept. 18, 1816** (1810?)<sup>100</sup>

My dear sister,

Here I am arrived in Bengal and established as if I had lived here all my life. Although I have only been here for two weeks, I already have a furnished house, quite a lot of business under way, and I am delighted to have made this decision. I have learned that a ship is down the river and leaving for the US. I am hastening to write you these lines, and to send your son-in-law<sup>101</sup> the current prices in the market. At least it seems to me that we could succeed [here?], and I strongly desire to do so. But I must know first a little bit about how business is in New Orleans, and I hope that your son-in-laws [?] will have received news from Europe and written me.

I am writing to you in the greatest haste, but I hope that I will often have an occasion to write to you and to your dear little stupid daughters, although I detest them. I would certainly like to have Virginia to keep house, and I am sure that I would soon find her a nabob for a husband. But I think that she does not lack for gallant propositions of marriage in New Orleans. Anyway, if you can find one handy, I urge you to send me, duly receipted, “marked and numbered as” *per maigie*, “well conditioned and in the good ship \_\_\_\_\_, a young and pretty woman, warranted and insured.” [In English within the quotes.] At my age I should not lack for *Roufines*!

For the rest, the sea is delightful here, and you haven’t lived if you haven’t lived in India and especially Calcutta. I don’t have a large staff of servants (only 23), but I will soon be better served. One of them puts my coat on, another scratches me, another fans me, so I don’t even have the trouble of keeping well. This is only a little of the punishment one must take here. All this rests me considerably. However, I daily regret losing the use of my legs.

I came here on the first Dutch ship which appeared since the peace. I am awaiting daily my first consignment by the first French ship which will come, and which left from France. The first American ship to come here from France \_\_\_\_\_ and is coming up the river at the present time.

I have written to Joseph and urged him strongly to come here and join me, as well as Emmanuel. I should like them to agree to leave Mssers. Bowen & Forcoti [?] “to do business with this place” [the latter in English].

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<sup>100</sup> Note that from context this letter appears to be from 1816, but the translator thought it was from 1810.

<sup>101</sup> Marguerite does not have a son-in-law at this point, perhaps this is a mis-translation of “brother,” since Emmanuel is her brother and is also in New Orleans?

I don't have time on this occasion to send your daughters something from our city, but I shall not fail to soon have a chance to play them a little trick of that kind!

Your brother, for life,

P.L.S.

[P.S.]

Are Mesdames my nieces with you? Has Laura placed her little bonnets....? I have a little girl's head with a little masculine skull. [?] Miss Eliza, who used to give such advice to the others, to get them to mend the holes in their stockings, has she proved to the universe that hers "had been darned?" [the latter in English]

[In English:] But adieu, dearest, give a kiss to them all, even to Azelie, though I am sure I could not bear to do it if she was near me, as I have no doubt that she is a fright.

So write to Madame Duault, Rue des Marais, in Paris.

## Letter 18.

[Letter from Laura Eugenie Florian Bowers to her sisters in New York City, Azelia and Virginie. Letter is handwritten in English but is not original; the original is likely in French or possibly in English, but is not present.]

**New Orleans, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1822**

[To] Mrs. G. E. Russell and Co., New York  
[via?] Mr. Wm Bowers

Dear Sisters,

Well persuaded that I will not be considered as writing you too soon, I do not wish to let the Steamship leave without giving you news of us, notwithstanding the fact that Eliza has written you, who is much more skillful with the pen, and who besides is more in touch with all that goes on.

How have you stood the voyage? I have a great desire to receive your first letter, for I fear, after what Azelia wrote us of the Baleze, that she suffered from Sea-Sickness in all its riguer, which she felt before she even left the river.

I wish also to know what her first impression was on entering the City of New York. It is so gay, I feel sure that Azelia, at least, will find a good deal to her taste. But as to you, dear Virginie, who reflects twice before saying that such and such things please you, and who likes only that which you approve -- you will find, I am sure, that the idleness of the women, of those who promenade on Broadway (one of the causes, it is true, which renders the aspect of New York so gay) will only prove a great lack of education in consequence of the agreeable manner in which they occupy themselves.

Eliza has found the women of the North generally very well informed. As for me, I vow to you I have [found] them passably ignorant, for aside from having some few of the talents, their knowledge was superficial. In New York, at least, you will not have the unpleasantness of hearing improper pronunciation. Your ears will not be shocked by the idioms which comes in the States of the East. I am sure you will find that they talk much without saying anything of importance, and that the most important thing in their lives is to keep themselves a la mode.

My poor little George [this is George Phillips Bowers, Jr., born 24 August 1819, died 22 March 1887] has changed very much since your departure. I have given him the vermifuge [a medicine which expels intestinal worms], which has not done him any good, and I fear very much that the unlucky button which he swallowed has not had a great deal to do with his illness. However, I cannot say that he is actually sick. He does

not complain of anything, but his thinness and paleness is proof enough that all is not well with him. He went yesterday to spend a few days with Eliza [sister Elizabeth Florian Jolly Talcott, 1795—after 1831] to try a change of air. I assure you that I am very uneasy about him. My house is very quiet this morning. Laura and Henrietta go to school every day and Florian sleeps ordinarily two or three hours. My little Azelia also has a very quiet manner, so my mornings slip away very pleasantly. [These are references to the author's children: Laura Margaret Bowers (1816-1893), Henrietta Bowers (1817-1918), apparently to John Florian Bowers (1821-about 1823), and Azelia Florian Bowers (12 May 1822 to about May 1823, only about two months old at this point.) But my evenings are very dull.

My only company is Lambert Cooper, and he amounts to as much as not having any at all, for you know that he does not possess even one large idea. Mr. B. [Bowers] does not come home, ordinarily, until very late, and always very tired. He has also grown very thin. I find that his fatigue is too much (according to his habits), and that he is very much changed.

The Steamship will bring you probably a very exaggerated account of the sickness which they already have here, but as it is probable that you will verify for yourself from the papers from here by the lists of the internments, you will be able to judge for yourself the state of health of the City. Madame Sajary [?] has died from Typhus Fever after having passed a month with her family. She would have done much better, poor woman, to remain in France than to return here at an impropitious season. The heat is terrible since your departure. Not a drop of rain. So imagine the dust caused by the drought which we have experienced, especially in the suburbs, where one can do nothing without raising a cloud of dust.

How did you find your companions on the voyage? Joseph Gilbert I have no doubt was very agreeable the first days, but it is so very rare that you find fine young men like him, [who] make sacrifices of their own personal comfort to procure them for others, especially on board the ocean, for I regard egotism as the inheritance of the Americans, without wishing, however, to pay them a bad compliment.

A great many people leave on the Steamship, amongst whom are Madame West, Mrs. Takes [?] and Madame Grunewalde. I believe they are mutually content, Madame West to have tumbled upon the old lady, and she to have found a passage to the north. Wm Bowers also leaves by the same ship. I wish very much that he would take Lambert for a I fear very much that he would not survive through an epidemic. If he should really happen to get sick, I would be tempted to have him placed in one of the rooms in the courtyard, for (may the good God pardon me for being so wicked), I would be desolated in having a case of fever so near to my children.

However, it is necessary to hope for the best. But you will be very fortunate, my dear sisters, to be able to pass at least one tranquil summer, far from the Contagion which menaces us.

My little Azelia is growing to be very beautiful. She resembles George very much, especially since he is so thin. Poor George! It really pains us to see him so. I am sorry now not to have consented to make the voyage north this year. I am sure we would have found it a benefit to him.

I see by the paper that Lewis Mark has been named as consul to Holland or in Germany or in Flanders. I cannot recall which; but I think he takes his wife with him. I am sorry on your account, for you would have found in her a very agreeable acquaintance in a City which [does not have] the reputation of making strangers welcome.

Do not fail to especially to give us a long description of all the things you see, for you know my taste. Dead Nature does not possess great attraction for me, but Nature animated by living Summer speaks to me and interprets infinitely more.

Virginie, you tell of the good and bad qualities, etc. Azelia, catch the ridiculous which lose nothing in the repeating. You will say, dear Azelia, that from the older Sister I demand the nicest things. What would you? Each one to their taste. And although I do not love the caricatures, I love true nature, and you must admit that they are not very different. No, I am mistaken, it is not true nature which approaches the caricature, it is the pretensions and varieties of Mankind which gives them turnings and simulations which render them ridiculous. However (excuse me, my dear Sisters, for my gabble), is there a nation more imitated than the Italians? And according to Madame de Stail [?] they have not any pretensions. It must be believed, therefore, that the Italians are full of animation and imitation.

Dear Sisters, write us at length and often, and you, dear Virginie, do not be so stingy in what you may have to tell us, for the only fault that can be found with your letters is that they are too short. They are not more than a mouth full, and one wishes for a repast. The children charge [me] to embrace you tenderly. Give my compliments to Madame Russell and family. Say many tender things to your husband for me, dear Virginie, and believe me your friend and sister

Laura E. Bowers

## Letter 19.

[Letter to Azelia Florian, the youngest daughter of Jean-Baptiste, in Mobile, AL; from Louis Florent Thierry Dufugeray (1802-1887), in St. Malo. Dufugeray is the first cousin of Azelia. Letter is in English, typed and in handwritten translation, in the Edward Ladd collection, Mobile, AL. The original letter is not present; it was almost certainly in French.]

To: Miss Azelia Florian de Pontcadeuc  
Mobile, Alabama U.S.A.  
Via Havre

**St. Malo, October 10, 1842**

My dear Cousin,

Your pleasant letter has been received with eagerness by all the family, who request me to thank you for all the affection it contained, and also for the precious details of our relatives in the United States – details which are so much more highly prized in our eyes because they bind the family closer together, when our wide separation tends every day to eliminate those ties.

I have to also thank you on my own account for the information you had the kindness to send me about Jean Menard, for which his sister was very grateful.

Monsieur Dufugeray<sup>102</sup> is very appreciative of your gracious remembrance and asked me before his departure to express his gratitude. Having visited Asia and America he has lately decided to become acquainted with Africa and is now enroute to Algiers, where he goes to spend part of the winter, according to his annual habit of emigration. He was two years in Italy where he went to seek a refuge from the cold of Brittany. Last winter he spent with us, but notwithstanding his 75 years, eighteen months of repose is too much for him, so behold, he is again crossing the seas, and with only a servant to accompany him. He will return to us in the spring, and thanks to his nomad tastes, I would not be surprised to see him go to Mobile to make you that visit that he has promised. That time I shall be of the party, if he persists in the project which he has discussed so often.

Now, my dear Cousin, I will comply with your request, that I give you the biography of the family. Madame Duault, the eldest, still lives in Paris with the sister of her husband.

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<sup>102</sup> This name likely refers to M. Garnier du Fougeray, parliamentary administrator of the Chambre during the Restoration and ambassador to Constantinople, where he died in 1842. Garnier du Fougeray adopted Louis Florent Thierry (first cousin of Azelia) who then added the name Dufougeray to become Louis Florent Thierry Dufougeray.

Her eldest daughter<sup>103</sup> married Monsieur Q. Zeltner and is the mother of an only son, already sixteen or seventeen years old. The second daughter has not yet married.

Her son Armand Duault is Consul at Ancone on the Adriatic where he lives with his wife and three daughters.

Madame Boulan, having lost her two children and her fortune (as have the Duaults) has come for refuge to St. Malo, where she lives with my mother, my sister [Elvire Thierry], her husband (Monsieur [Bernard] Duhaut-Cilley) and three children, two of whom are daughters and one son.

In the same house, but keeping a home apart, live Monsieur Defougaray, myself, my wife, my two daughters and my one little boy. My brother [Hippolytte Thierry] is a Lieutenant on a Ship and is now at sea.

Poor Madame Dupuy left her husband. Her oldest son and her daughter – who is not married and probably never will be – live with her at St. Malo. Her second daughter is living near St. Brier where she has married a Monsieur [Auguste Jacques Marie] Ruellan and already has two daughters and two sons. The Dupuy family are the only ones who have any considerable fortune.

My mother is still living in moderate comfort. Madame Boulan and Madame Duault are entirely reunited, the first by the follies of her son, and the second by abuse of confidence.

So you see, my Cousin, the details are more extended than satisfactory, and do not correspond unfortunately with those which you gave me on your side. Please say to Madame Bowers since she is near you, that I have a tender recollection of a correspondence with her, which for lack of opportunity has been allowed to cease.

I have always contemplated a trip to the United States to renew the acquaintance, and so that my nieces should at least cease to be nearly strangers. The great obstacle to this is that there are three children who would have to be left behind. Otherwise, I should have been en route long ere this.

Thanks to the Revolution which did away with my duties as Consul to Egypt, I have no other occupation than that of rearing my little family and looking after my property, which has been reduced to a small matter.

Be so good, dear Cousin, as to be interpreter to your sisters, and believe in all the devotion of your obedient servant and cousin,

Thierry Dufougeray

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<sup>103</sup> This refers to Eugenie Duault, born 16 May 1799, who married Q. de Zeltner on 7 July 1825. The son referred to in the next sentence is Authur de Zeltner, born about March 1827. The “second daughter” referred to in the next sentence is Inez Duault, who apparently never married.

## Letter 20.

### Emma's Narrative

#### Probably shortly after July 1856

[Written by Emma Talcott Norman(1819-1890), daughter of Elizabeth Florian (1795—aft 1831) and Elizabeth's husband David Talcott (1783-1843; merchant), granddaughter of Jean-Baptiste Florian, and wife of John Moore Norman (1817-1882). There is no date on this manuscript, but from the context and the reference to a date of "Saturday (July) 26<sup>st</sup>" and "Monday...July 14<sup>th</sup>" it is possible to calculate that the voyage probably took place in 1856. The intended voyage was from New Orleans to Liverpool. The cast of characters includes Emma, her sons Edward Talcott Norman (1844--after 1869), Francis "Frank" Moore Norman (1847-1923), Frederick McBride Norman (1849-1898) and the unknown Margaret ("Peggy"), who may be Emma's sister-in-law or a friend, or perhaps an unknown daughter. Thus Emma was about 34 and her children about 5 to 10 years old at the time of the voyage. Her husband was not on board. Descendants of Emma's children include the families of Shelton, Redden and of course Norman. The original handwritten narrative is in the possession of Edward Bradford Ladd of Mobile, Alabama.<sup>104</sup>]

### The Narrative

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July at sunset we waved our last to poor desolate Papa,<sup>105</sup> and the tugboat puffed us down the old Mississippi. Then commenced discomfort, plenty of mosquitoes, and no mosquito bars. No sleep for anybody. Next night the Captain had a large one [mosquito bar] put up in the cabin for all. So Mrs. Curtiss, our only fellow passenger, Peggy, Frank and Fred all slept under the bar. Edward and I preferred the society of our tormentors.

We left the Wharf on Monday and on Wednesday morning the tow boat left us at the mouth of the Mississippi. In half an hour after that we were in the blue water and enjoying our first task of a little storm. I laughed at my fellow passengers for crying and enjoyed it myself very much. But I did not enjoy what the Captain told me where the storm was over, i.e. that he had a unusually poor crew and that if he had only known it before the tow boat left he would have sent to town for more men, for they did not know one end of the ship from the other. [A] pleasant prospect to cross the Atlantic with. A day or two after, he told me that he had been questioning his sailors, and found that two of them had never seen salt water before. They were from Ohio and were traveling for

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<sup>104</sup> Emma Talcott is the first cousin four times removed of Edward Bradford Ladd and of Llewellyn Toulmin, and the first cousin five times removed of Robert E. DeNeefe IV.

<sup>105</sup> Here "Papa" likely refers to her husband, since Emma's father David Talcott died in 1843 in Blakeley, Baldwin County, Alabama. The term could refer to her (unknown) father in law. Why Emma and her children are sailing off to Liverpool alone is not clear.

the benefit of their health. Another was a Russian soldier who did not know one rope from another and so on. There were only two or three who understood their ship's duty.

At one time we thought we had yellow fever on board. One man was sick, and the Captain pronounced it Yellow Jack. Another pleasant subject of contemplation. However, the sick man got well and it proved to be drink which accounted for his not being able to speak when spoken to, and not his dying condition as the Captain supposed.

A few days after this source of anxiety was over, the Captain began to complain a great deal. It seems he had had dysentery on him for two weeks before leaving New Orleans, and when we were out about a week he began to show how ill he was. He could hardly stand, would sit in his chair and pant for breath, and would lie in his berth the greater part of the day. All this time, he was not paying the slightest regard to his duty. I frightened him into doing so, but he was then so weak that when he went on deck to give his orders, he was too giddy to see anything. I consulted my Doctor's book and found his danger imminent. The Captain might die before we got to Liverpool. [The] Mate was not capable of taking his place. The Steward and I did all we could for him. I printed out recipes in my book. The Steward made him rice water and persuaded him to take it, but with all our care he did not improve. Our prospects were bad indeed.

But that was not all. The Captain told me that his sails got damp and mildewed in New Orleans and consequently rotten, and that with the poor set of men he had on board, he could not get them taken in quick enough when the wind blew strong, so that he was obliged to get them in every time there was a little wind, or they would be torn to pieces, which would lengthen our voyage. He bet with Mrs. Curtiss that he would beat all the ships we met. I told him to make no such bet, considering he had not a man who knew how to steer, and had to take in sail every time the wind blew.

You imagine possibly that with all this I must have been very much depressed, particularly as I had no one to confide in. My fellow passenger was too dull to comprehend all this. I did not dare alarm Peggy and the children of course. I kept all to myself.

But there is something in the effect of the blue waters, something exhilarating in that restless ocean, something so bracing in those sea breezes that fear and despair had no place. I was never in better spirits. The clumsiness of the sailors was only a subject of merriment, though our lives were in peril in consequence.

We were all pretty good sailors. Frank liked it the least of any. Every time he heard the word squall, and we had sometimes 3 a day, he was off in his berth. I was only seasick half an hour. Oh how we all enjoyed sitting on deck of an afternoon, chatting with our good-humoured Captain, gazing on the water and inhaling the sea breezes. I enjoyed the present in spite of my fearful anticipation of the future. But in a short while our destiny was changed.

On Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup> [unfortunately, this key date could perhaps be the 26<sup>th</sup> or the 28<sup>th</sup>] at about 1 o'clock, just after dinner, a fine day, we ladies were serving. The Captain was sitting in the cabin looking on his chart. I looked over his shoulder and asked him to show me where we were. "Indeed," says he, "I do not know." I pointed at the Florida reefs and said, "I hope we are at respectable distance from those reefs." He laughed and said "Thirty miles at least." The day before he had told me that we were between the Tortugas and Havana. Well, he rolled up his chart and put it in his berth, took out his specs, put them on, [and] opened his book. I sat down to my sewing. That instant our vessel rubbed, and in two minutes she was her whole length upon a shoal.

There we lay, hard and fast, thumping and bumping on the rocks that the Captain had declared were 30 miles north of us. He flew on deck. Peggy says he looked as pale as a ghost—well he might. There we were out of sight of land, and there we lay, thumping harder and harder every moment for seven hours. What did we do? Sat and listened to the ship strike. What else could we do? The Captain was in a perfect agony. I exerted myself to the utmost to comfort him, to sooth his mind and keep myself calm, that the poor dear children might not be frightened. Every now and then I would clasp my hands very tight across my heart, but betrayed no emotion by look or word. Nor Peggy either. When the ship would give an unusually hard crashing thump, Edward would clasp his hands and say, "Oh, Ma! Just hear that." Fred wanted to know if we were going to sink. I stilled all their fears, and told them they must be men.

A wrecking vessel soon made its appearance in the distance, and hoping then that our lives would be saved, I made up a small bundle of clothes knowing that the luggage must go, if the ship went to pieces. [I] dressed myself and the children in strong clean clothes, tied my money round my waist and so waited in patience. We all sat down to tea that evening as usual, but no one seemed much inclined to eat. At 8 o'clock a terrible squall came on, and after a few terrible crashes and scrapes, we were by a merciful providence driven off the rocks.

The ship swung round into deep water and the Captain called out, "She's off." Then we drove before the wind most beautifully. The lightning was incessant and the rain I thought would break every pane of glass in the cabin. The wind was so strong that the Captain's voice could not be heard. Half the sailors were so frightened they hid themselves. While reefing in a topsail the wind carried it off and in two hours our sails were all torn to pieces.

The Men then went to work pumping. In an hour or more the violence of the squall was over and would you believe it, we all went to bed and to sleep.

The next morning the first sound that greeted my ear was the pumping. Oh, that dismal, creaking noise. The flag was put up for a pilot. For through the spyglass from the masthead the Tortuga Lighthouse was visible. By breakfast time the Pilot was on board. And by dinner time, 1 o'clock, we were safely anchored in Tortugas harbour with 7 feet of water in the hold.

Our greatest source of anxiety while lying on the reef was what the fate of us poor defenseless women might be among the wreckers. The schooner was in sight the whole afternoon. We watched it anxiously, but as soon as the squall came up, she was driven back to Tortugas, we heard afterwards. That the wreckers would rob us I had not the least doubt. Our only fellow passenger Mrs. L, a tall, lanky, long-armed Irish would-be lady, was crying the whole afternoon, thinking that the wreckers were pirates.

The Pilot had some difficulty in bringing the ship into the harbour. There was a strong current towards the West, that threatened to carry us off to the Gulf. The Pilot was at the wheel, the Captain was at his side. I listened anxiously to their conversation, and I heard the Pilot say, "I am afraid I cannot do it, sir." But on his third attempt he succeeded, and at 1 o'clock Sunday P.M., just 24 hours after we struck, we were safe, for the ship lay in very shallow water on a soft bottom.

But what business had we on the reef? It was a calm, bright, sunshiny day—hardly wind enough to carry the ship along. The Mate and the sailors [were] all on deck. The shoal water so apparent that Peggy told me afterwards [that] my children were remarking the strange colour of the water. The man at the helm was near enough to hear [what] they were saying to each other about the white water.

But it was a kind Providence sent us on the reef to save us from something worse. We lay just 3 miles from the Island named Garden Key, one of the Dry Tortugas. The shoal on which we had struck was 18 miles east – one of the Wet Tortugas I suppose. It came near being a very wet one to us, although as we sat on the deck, a calm bright afternoon, listening to the ship thump, everything around us was so still, hardly a ripple on the water, we could not realize the danger. It was only as it grew dark and the wind began to rise that I clasped my hands a little tighter. My voice did falter a little as I said to the Steward (a most excellent young man) as he was lighting the lamps in the Cabin, "Well, Steward, it is a great comfort to feel that we have a Father in heaven who cares for us." "Yes, indeed, Madam," he said, "it is."

The only thing that frightened Peggy was lest some of the wreckers should fall in love with her. It affected her so much she put her money by mistake in a bundle of dirty clothes and threw all overboard.

Now for the prettiest little adventure of all – the going on shore business. That little Island a mile in circumference with its three storey brick house in which the Pilot had told us lived some very nice people who would treat us well, looked very tempting and altogether more agreeable than a leaky ship if she was anchored. So when dinner was over and all quiet I went to the Captain, who was sitting on deck bemoaning his hard lot, with his head between his hands (not being insured the loss to him was very great), and asked him what he was going to do with his lady passengers. He said he would send us on shore immediately if we wished it, but that there was no danger for the ship could not sink where she lay.

I told him I was not afraid, but as the weather was fine, and the whole afternoon before us, and the men were doing nothing, we might as well take advantage of the present. He ordered the boat down, and we got the baggage ready, and it was soon all on board. But there was no room for us, so it was agreed that the baggage should go first. The Steward stay[ed] to take care of it, and we [took] the next trip. It was dusk when the boat returned, but the sky looked bright, and I felt no fear and was the first one to go down into the boat. I suppose you know what it is to go down the side of a ship and drop into a boat dancing on the waves below. The carpenter was close behind me, so that I could only fall into his arms, which I had no idea of doing. Blubbering Mrs. Curtiss followed, the children were carried down, and we started.

We had not gone far before the boat began to rub, rub, rub, and Mrs. Curtiss to cry. I compressed my lips. We got into deep water again, and then rub again. All this time it was getting darker. The carpenter who was steering said, "It was hard enough to find the channel in the daytime, but I cannot now." I said to him indignantly, "What right had you to bring us out here if you did not know the way?" "I had to obey orders," said our sturdy scotchman. "No," said I, "You might have told the Captain." The Mate had told him, it seems, but the Captain thought they were all too lazy to go and come back, and did not listen.

"My only way now," said our steersman, "is to round that Island," pointing to an island a mile long and a mile off. "No," said I, "You do not know your way round that Island [any] more than I do. Just go back to the ship now as quick as you can."

"Very well," said he, "You would be a great deal better on the ship than rowing out here all night." "Pull away boys for the ship."

We rubbed our way back over the Coral. At one unusually hard rub, the Steersman told Joe at the other end of the boat to feel with his oar. "Oh," says Joe, "It's nothing but a rock." "Well," says the Carpenter, "What more would you have?" But in spite of Mrs. C's cries that the boat would split open and that there was a squall coming, we got back to the ship safe, and climbed her side in high glee. [We] heard the mate mutter "Bad pennies."

The boys enjoyed the row in spite of all. I had my arm tight round Fred the whole time. He soon got tired, put his legs on the bench and his head on my lap, and contemplated the stars.

We had a good appetite for supper that evening, after a row of 5 miles, and were in fine spirits. Now for an amusing dilemma. Our baggage [was] all on shore – no nightgowns for any body. [The] Captain said, "You must put on something." "I've no nightgown," [I said.] "Well," said he, as his whole face looked drollery itself, "What can I do for you?" "Lend me one of your shirts, to be sure, and pick out one with very little starch," [said I.] As he handed it to me he said, "Perhaps you would like to wear the breeches, too?" "No, thank you, I'll borrow neither them nor your toothbrush, but we'll call for your comb in the morning," [said I.]

So we all went to sleep, feeling as if the leaky ship was a strong castle after our romantic row over a bed of coral.

The next morning before breakfast a boat came from the shore, bringing back our Steward who had remained there waiting for us, and informed us that Captain Woodbury and Dr. Whitehurst would bring their boat for us. At 8 o'clock they came accordingly and the sight of two gentleman after anticipating getting among rough wreckers was indescribably agreeable, I assure you.

As they had a great deal to say to the Captain, he did not start for some time, but with umbrellas [we] did not suffer from the heat. I pointed out to Captain W. the route we had taken and told him the idea of going round the Island. He said if we had gone round that Island a strong current would have taken us off to the West!!

We landed at a good Wharf, walked up to the house under the shade of a grove of mangrove trees, [and] admired some beautiful yellow flowers with which the Island was carpeted, and the Cocoa Nut trees overshadowing the residence of the lighthouse keeper. And [we] were received very kindly by Mrs. Whitehurst.

I was especially fatigued and went to bed as soon as possible, but the boys started on an exploring expedition, pulled off their shoes, rolled up their pants, and walked round the Island, coming back loaded with shells. During the week we spent there, they were out the whole time, examining the fort, or rowing with Captain Woodbury to the adjacent Islands. They were never in want of amusement and never enjoyed themselves more.

The Captain took a fancy to them, as he has some in Carolina about the same age. [He] thought them remarkably good children. Mrs. Whitehurst has two boys under six – the eldest a little cripple – he was a pitiable object. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips who occupied the whole of the third story have two little girls. So the boys were well off for company.

As Captain Woodbury is keeping bachelor's hall for the present – his wife being in Carolina – he had his rooms vacant and took upon himself to entertain us, and greater kindness I never met with anywhere.

The three families have each their own kitchen and keep separate tables. In Mrs. Whitehurst I found a charming companion, and I can assure you the week passed away very agreeably. The Ship got her sails mended and men to pump her and went off to New York.

We left our little Paradise in a Government Schooner for Key West, at 6 in the evening, and got to Key West at 9 next morning. When rowing to the Schooner, Mrs. Curiss asked Captain W. if he thought the schooner would start before they got the sails up. I wish you could have seen the curl on the Captain's lip.

The climate and the aspect of Key West are truly tropical – one moment scorched with heat and the next delightfully fanned by a sea breeze. Every house on the Island is embowered with Cocoa Nut trees and surrounded by gardens filled with beautiful flowering shrubs. We spent a week very comfortably at the only Hotel.

I have not told you all that was said and done during the 7 hours we were on the reef. That would be impossible. I took the children into the Stateroom to talk to them, but what was deeply interesting to us at that time might not be so in the repetition.

Edward was for action. Whenever the sailors tired of pumping, he went to work with the assistance of Peggy and the Steward and Chambermaid.

The ludicrous always mingles with everything. In our distress we could not help laughing when the Stewardess asked if we were on the Banks of Newfoundland.