The Splendid Fools: Philadelphia Origins of Alabama's Vine and Olive Colony

"The received New England opinion, that European immigrants bring only their vices with them, cannot certainly be applied to the French," observed William Lee in a letter to Thomas Jefferson late in October 1816. "They are undoubtedly the most virtuous nation in Europe. The middling and lower classes are sober, amiable, and industrious. The vulgar vices of swearing, drinking, fighting, and petty larceny are unknown among them. There is a degree of civilization and good manners in their social intercourse, which is very pleasing, and, when contrasted with their neighbors, highly honorable to them. You must have observed an essential difference between them and all other immigrants. They never interfere improperly in affairs that do not concern them. If you will examine the conduct of the respectable French merchants, artists, and manufacturers settled in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York, you will scarcely find an instance of their meddling in our party disputes, or making a bustle at an election. If they have acquired rights they exercise them with a moderation and decency, which seems to say: 'This people have received us among them. We must not abuse their indulgence.' We ought to cherish such men, and I am happy to find public opinion is growing up in their favor."

The writer of these laudatory sentiments had for the moment forgotten why he was in New York and not in Bordeaux, where he had served the United States as its commercial agent or consul for fifteen years. Lee was actively pro-Bonaparte and anti-English, opinions which he expressed in his book, Les États-Unis et L'Angleterre, published in France after the Restoration. In spite of a chapter

1 Mary Lee Mann, A Yankee Jeffersonian, Selections from the Diary and Letters of William Lee of Massachusetts Written from 1796 to 1840 (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 182.
added endorsing the new Bourbon regime, Lee was harassed by the
Anglo-Royalist faction at Bordeaux, Frenchmen all, and his presence
became untenable. He was granted leave of absence by President
Madison and sailed for the United States with his family in the
summer of 1816. 2

Lee was of the opinion that the United States would benefit by
encouraging Europeans with manufacturing skills and equipment to
settle in America. While consul at Bordeaux, he facilitated the immi-
gration of as many French, Swiss, and German manufacturers as
possible. They were daily making applications for passages to the
United States. One week he sent out a dyer; the next, a whole family
which carried with it ten or twelve looms for manufacturing cotton
and woolen hose, pantaloons, undervests and petticoats. When he
sailed for the United States he was accompanied by sixty manu-
facturers, fifteen of whom traveled at his expense. To stop this drain
on his resources it was urgent that he find employment for the im-
migrants. After visiting Philadelphia, Lee set up an oil cloth factory
in New York and in Manhattanville another plant with thirty
stocking knit looms. 3

In November Lee informed President Madison about these estab-
lishments, enclosing a specimen of oil cloth. “I am engaged,” he
added, “in establishing a Deaf and Dumb School, and I have formed
a company composed of French immigrants for the purpose of
making a settlement in the western country, and, as this project is
in some forwardness, my residence in a sea port is necessary in order
to assist the persons we expect from France on their way to Pro-

2 Ibid., 157, 159 passim. William Lee was born at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Dec. 31, 1772.
Originally a Bostonian, his father remained loyal to England when Massachusetts broke
away. The son, on the other hand, responded to the influence of his Bostonian relatives and
grew up to be a strongly patriotic American and equally anti-British. With the aid of a cousin
he attended Phillips Academy at Andover. At eighteen he became a commission merchant
at Boston in association with Messrs. Lyman and Williams. Four years later, in 1794, he was
married to Susan Palfrey, daughter of a former aid-de-camp to George Washington and a
paymaster general of the Continental Army. In 1796 and 1797, Lee was in Bordeaux in the
mercantile business, after which he returned to Boston. In 1801 he arrived at Bordeaux with
his family as the representative of the United States and also as a commission merchant in
the firm of Perrot and Lee, and later associated with William Johnston. When Joel Barlow
was the American minister at Paris in 1811, Lee was acting secretary of the legation there.
Ibid., 2, 53, 117, 299.

3 Ibid., 175-177, 183.
scripolis. Large subscriptions and a hundred subscribers have already been procured, and M. Pényières, the celebrated ex-legislator, experimental agriculturalist and naturalist, has been dispatched to the Ohio and Mississippi in search of a tract of land in a climate which will produce, among other things, the vine and olive. "Proscripolis" was Lee's version of "Demopolis," the town the French immigrants in fact established a year later in Alabama.

When Lee said he had formed the society of French immigrants, he was not strictly accurate, although he was undoubtedly a major founding father. Lee was in Philadelphia for probably less than a week in August 1816, trying to settle on the best place to create employment for the people who had arrived in America with him. There he encountered old friends. General Count Clauzel was a temporary Philadelphian and would later spend some years in Alabama. He and Lee had taken part in an abortive plot in 1815 to save Napoleon from the English and send him across the Atlantic for asylum in the United States. Marshal Grouchy, whom many blamed for the defeat at Waterloo, warmly welcomed Lee to Philadelphia. Other military men present were General Charles Lefebvre-Desnoëttes and Henri Lallemand. They readily joined with Lee to found a colony and, with the exception of Grouchy, set off independently to search for a site.

As well as receiving famous military figures, the United States was a refuge for regicides and other politicians. The regicides had voted in the National Assembly for the death of Louis XVI, and Louis XVIII forced them into exile. Jean-Augustin Pényières was one of them, but the most prominent regicide in Philadelphia that summer was Garnier de Saintes.

Jacques Garnier, as he more simply began life in 1754, was more distinguished by erratic energy and occasional eloquence than by other qualities and was, therefore, considered suited for the law. His early professional years were spent in the Charente-Inférieure, of which La Rochelle was the chief city. The declining years of the

4 Ibid., 183-184.
ancien régime did not offer him much in the way of a theater of action, but as the Bourbons fell, raising the curtain on a new and active scene, Garnier entered the limelight. Early in the First Republic the electors of the Charente-Inférieure sent him to Paris as a deputy to the National Convention. There he displayed his eloquence, which together with his republican emotions carried him to extreme positions. He voted for the death of his King “without appeal and without reprieve,” intoning: “The people, when betrayed, do not judge their kings; they hurl a bolt of lightning and exterminate them.” During the Terror he cast his bolts in the name of the Republic in the *departement* of La Manche and at Le Mans and La Flèche. He was president of the Jacobins, but not for long, for he had the talent of following events closely and swiftly changing to the winning side of each coup. When the Empire’s turn came, he forgot that he was a republican but, of course, was not unique in that. The Emperor named him chevalier of the Legion of Honor and appointed him president of the criminal tribunal at Saintes, a city in the flat coastal Saintonge between La Rochelle and Bordeaux. Since the Republic had left him hungry for distinction, he attached to his own the name of Saintes as well as the title of chevalier. During the Hundred Days he was once more a member of the Chamber of Deputies, where he again found his tongue, which led him to eccentric extremes. Louis XVIII quite naturally remembered Garnier’s earlier indiscretion in voting for the King’s death, and in a few months the orator found himself in Philadelphia.  

In the latter part of August, shortly after Lee’s visit to Philadelphia, *L’Abeille Américaine*, the city’s French weekly, printed a letter signed simply by “a subscriber,” possibly—to judge by the language—Garnier de Saintes. The letter was addressed to the French inhabitants of the United States. It asked them why they did not take themselves by the hand and “go together to a mild region to found a new Thébaïde?” The writer proposed to open a subscription for two purposes: “(1) to learn the number of families who would like to go together to a new settlement and the amount

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of property that each would expect to acquire and (2) to designate by majority vote three persons who would be charged with exploring the country and choosing the place best suited to the new colony." The colonists, "on becoming the founders of a second Pennsylvania, would open an assured asylum to victims of the most beautiful of causes, now at the mercy of the most cowardly of all their enemies." The writer's only motive for not signing the letter was "of not influencing any individual and of leaving the initiative to whoever would like to take it."

The response was immediate. The subscribers decided to organize the Colonial Society of French Emigrants, of which Garnier de Saintes was elected president; William Lee, vice-president; Dr. Joseph Martin du Columbier, treasurer; Nicolas-Simon Parmantier, secretary; and Louis-Marie Dirat, registrar. It was originally thought, owing to the opinion of the president, that the colony would be located along the Ohio river or possibly the Mississippi. Garnier left directly for Louisville, Kentucky, to see the territory around the Ohio for himself. The Society appointed Périères as its commissioner to explore "the southwestern part of the United States in order to choose an area suitable to become an asylum for the numerous French emigrants whose hopes are with us and for those of all other nations who would like to join us."

With the president in the West and the vice-president living in New York City, the treasurer presided when the Society met in Philadelphia about the twentieth of October. After reading the minutes of the preceding meeting, Dr. Martin congratulated the assembly on the diligence with which each of the members continued

8 Edouard de Montulé (Edward D. Seeber, ed.), Travels in America, 1816-1817 (Bloomington, Ind., 1951), 122-124.
9 L'Abelle Américaine, IV, 204. Jean-Augustin Périères was born in 1762 to a well-to-do family of the Corrèze, from which he was a deputy to the national legislative Assembly and then in the Convention. Although he voted for the death of Louis XVI, he was opposed to the death penalty thereafter. He was against the territorial expansion of France and spoke out against the extremes of the Terror, which he himself managed to survive. He was successively a member of the Council of Five Hundred, the Tribunat, the legislative corps, and the chamber of representatives. Dr. Hoefer (ed.), Nouvelle Biographie Générale depuis les Temps les Plus Reculés jusqu'à Nos Jours (Paris, 1862), XXXIX, 524-525.
to attend the meetings and on the unanimity which reigned in all their deliberations, which, as he said, was the happiest augury for the success of the enterprise. He then shared a number of letters he had received from friends in Europe who wished to join in the venture.

Joseph Lakanal, another banished regicide and an intellectual with great prestige among the French, writing from his residence in Kentucky across the Ohio river from Vevay, Indiana, had recently sent a letter to Parmantier, who read it to the assembly. "I beg you, my honorable friend," wrote Lakanal, "to inscribe me on the list of future citizens of Demopolis. If the size of the letters are any sign of the desire I feel to appear on that honorable list, I beg you to write my name in capitals."10 The tradition has always been that Pierre-François Réal was the person who originally proposed the name Démostolis.11 If that is correct, it seems likely that Réal and the others discussed the name when all were in Philadelphia in the summer of 1816 and that from the beginning it was the intention of the Society to found a town to be called Demopolis.

10 L'Abeille Américaine, IV, 203. Joseph Lakanal was born on July 14, 1762, at Serres (Ariège) to a bourgeois family. Under the influence of an uncle who would eventually become a bishop he entered the seminary of St. Magloire to prepare himself for the priesthood, but decided against ordination. Instead, he entered the teaching profession. Although elected to the Convention, in which he voted for the death of Louis XVI, he was only briefly in politics. He was a founder of the Museum of Natural History, the creator of the Ecole Normale, of the Bureau des Longitudes, and of the School of Oriental Languages, the organizer of the Institut (academy of moral and political sciences), and during the Revolution the benefactor and savior of many intellectuals. Although he made no discoveries and authored no books, his other services to the French nation established his distinguished reputation. Michaud, op. cit., XXII, 592–593. For Lakanal's career in America and later see John Charles Dawson, Lakanal the Regicide: A Biographical and Historical Study of the Career of Joseph Lakanal (University, Ala., 1948).

11 Anne Bozeman Lyon, "The Bonapartists in Alabama," The Gulf States Historical Magazine, March, 1903, 329. Pierre-François Réal was born near Paris on Mar. 28, 1757, the son of a gamekeeper. During the Revolution he made a name for himself as an orator and a criminal lawyer. During the Empire he was one of four Counselors of State under Fouché in charge of the national police. In 1808 he was created Count. During the Hundred Days he was chief commissioner of police. His successor under Louis XVIII was his friend Count Elie Decazes, who was unable to prevent his exile but who subsequently, as prime minister, was able to obtain his pardon in 1818, although Réal was still in the United States as late as the summer of 1822. On his return to France he did not enter public life. He died in Paris on May 7, 1834. Michaud, op. cit., XXXV, 281–285; Hoefer, op. cit., XLI, 790–792; Réal to Henri Lallemand, New York City, June 21, 1822, Girard Family Papers (photocopies at the Library of the American Philosophical Society).
After voting to thank Lakanal for enriching it with his membership, the Society was addressed by Pénéries, "one of the treasurers of the last people's Chamber of Representatives," who informed the group that his departure was imminent. The assembly renewed its assurances to its commissioner-explorer of its unanimous good wishes for his trip. It instructed him "to correspond as frequently as possible with the permanent office at Philadelphia, with Mr. Lee at Washington City, with our Mr. Lakanal at Vevay, and the Generals Lefebvre [-Desnoëttes] and [Henri] Lallemand, who are going to visit the same country."

The following motions were passed: "(1) that funds be immediately raised, in accordance with the by-laws, to defray the expenses of the trip, as well as other expenses that must result from the execution of the foregoing deliberations in regard to the planned settlement; (2) that Mr. W. Lee, vice-president of the Society, be asked to search the documents which may be procured from the Land Office at Washington City, with the object of designating the place where the Society will be able to apply for the grant, and to receive letters from its commissioner Mr. Pénéries, whose trip will necessarily be too long to make known its results before 4 March next, the day the present Congress adjourns; (3) that Senator Garnier de Saintes, president of the Society, Messrs. J. Martin, Parmantier, and Dirat, composing the permanent office, meet in committee whenever necessary in order to confer with Mr. Lee with the object of putting in writing and presenting to the Congress of the United States a petition in the collective name of the Society to obtain a grant of land sufficient for a settlement as extensive as the one planned, the success of which depends entirely on the terms that the government of this happy land will wish to accord the unfortunate who are searching for a home that can only be found where law, justice, and liberty reign; (4) that an extract of the present motion be delivered to the appropriate people and be published in the public papers as soon as Mr. Lee leaves for the capital of the Union."

On the twenty-fourth of October Pénéries wrote from Philadelphia to Pierre-Samuel du Pont de Nemours at his residence and gun-

12 L'Abéille Américaine, IV, 204–205.
powder factory on the Brandywine, addressing him as "very venerable and very dear patriarch" and asking for his blessing. "I will need as much wisdom as courage for this enterprise," he wrote. He mentioned, as though in passing, that he had no powder to defend himself against wild beasts but did not ask du Pont to send him any. "I shall leave without doubt tomorrow; if in the long course of my trip I encounter anything worthy of your meditations, I will make it my agreeable duty to communicate it to you." 13

Three weeks later an "Interesting Note for the French" appeared in the *Abeille Américaine*. "A number of French, among whom may be found some of the most enlightened men of the century, have formed at Philadelphia a company under the name of the Colonial Society with the object of forming a settlement on the Ohio or the Mississippi rivers. Around one hundred persons are already members of the company, which is composed of naturalists, agriculturists, manufacturers, artists and artisans. Commissioners have been named to visit the western country and to make a choice of an extent of land sufficient to the purpose of the enterprise, in an agreeable climate, where the vine and the olive could grow alongside cotton. All the French who would like to become members of the association may obtain all the necessary information from the undersigned. He resides at No. 5, Broad Way, New-York. W. Lee, vice-president. One may also apply to Mr. Parmantier, secretary of the Society, Philadelphia." 14

*Niles' Weekly Register* of Baltimore printed a shorter notice a few days later. Its editor was of the opinion that "their plan seems well digested and supported, and will probably succeed." Two years later he had changed his mind. In a long, withering article on the folly of immigrant colonies, in which he spread his scorn equally on all, the editor began as follows: "Among the splendid fooleries which have at times amused a portion of the American people, as well as their representative in congress, was that of granting, on most favorable terms to certain emigrants from France, a large tract of land in the Alabama territory, to encourage the cultivation of the vine and olive, passed the 3rd of March, 1817." 15

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13 Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, document W 2. 4328. Pénières wrote no more letters to du Pont de Nemours, who died in 1817.
14 *L'Abeille Américaine*, IV, 80.
15 *Niles' Weekly Register*, XI, 208; XIV, 593.
Even at the beginning not everyone thought the plan well conceived. Local chauvinists objected to the Frenchmen’s going so far afield. Pennsylvania was, after all, a commodious commonwealth with plenty of undeveloped land and at least one considerable city. But the French argument was that Pennsylvania offered opportunity only to laborers or capitalists. The French in question were born in cities and were educated to be employed in literature or the military, few having been educated for labor, and they lacked the capital for manufacturing or commerce. At a more favorable latitude than Pennsylvania, they could with small capital form an agricultural community that could with work and time yield them a good life. Lakanal was an inspiration to them. On the twenty-fifth of October he had written from the banks of the Ohio to a friend in Philadelphia: “I am happy for the first time in thirty years; I am happy because my good fortune is composed of few and simple elements—domestic peace, complete security, country work, and reading.” One of the Society described for the *Abeille Américaine* the following idyllic scene: “There, after hard but healthy work, each father of a family will return to his modest home. Its greatest ornament will be the smiles of its cherished company, happiness which suits the cottage as much as the palace. We shall have some good books, a little music and dancing, the company of friends equally needing one another, and hunting for outdoor recreation; and in the midst of these benefits, which will not cost a single tear, our existence will flow on exempt from those painful cares inevitable in cities, and will end with the certainty of having rendered our dues to all.”

No one seemed to notice the fact that it does not necessarily follow that city men educated for literature and warfare and not for labor, manufacturing, and commerce are by some romantic law of nature innately equipped to cultivate cotton, grapes, and olives.

In the first week of December 1816 some twenty members of the Colonial Society passed through Pittsburgh on their way to explore for a location. The Pittsburgh *Mercury* noted that “among them were a number of gentlemen of high rank and distinction, both civil and military” and announced with pleasure “that the greatest

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16 *L’Abeille Américaine*, IV, 105–108. The writer, who signed himself “G. & Co.,” was responding to an article in the Philadelphia *Weekly Aurora*, probably of Nov. 18, 1816.
friendship and harmony existed among them." It is difficult to imagine who these luminaries might have been. By December the French with well-known names were either around Philadelphia and further east or else much further west than Pittsburgh. General Lefebvre-Desnoëttes had already traveled through Lexington and St. Louis on his way to New Orleans. Generals Clauzel and Henri Lallemand were expected to join him. Lakanal, weary of happiness, joined Pénéhès in his explorations, and the two of them also went to New Orleans. With a sweeping geographic gesture, Lakanal wrote that he and his companion pushed their "investigations almost to the headwaters of the Missouri, towards the Rocky mountains. It was there that Pénéhès, constantly botanizing, constantly picking up from the ground little shining pebbles, suddenly cried out: 'I've got an opal!' I snatched it quickly from his hand, crying: 'I'll keep it for Madame Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire—for the "better half" of my best friend.' 'Just as you say,' replied Pénéhès." Lakanal had the knack of endearing himself throughout the republican world, but at a distance.

Lee, who had accepted an appointment as accountant at the War Department, left New York in December and saw in the New Year at Philadelphia. On the second day of 1817 the Colonial Society met once again, this time with Lee presiding in the absence of Garnier de Saintes. After a mutually laudatory exchange between the Society and its vice-president, the secretary read the minutes of the preceding meeting, which were approved. He presented letters that had been sent him by some of the members of the Society currently in the Ohio valley, "notably one from our president, dated Loui-Ville 19 December last, and a very well written notice by an inhabitant of Lexington regarding the lands situated between the Mississippi and Tombigbee rivers between the 32nd and 35th degrees of latitude." The latter letter was probably from Dr. Samuel

17 Niles' Weekly Register, XI, 296.
18 Warren, op. cit., 190-191. Warren, drawing on faulty sources, confuses Henri Lallemand with his brother Charles Lallemand in the early stages of his treatment. It was Henri Lallemand who arrived in the United States in 1816 and Charles Lallemand who "escaped from France to London and finally made his way to the United States on April 24, 1817."
19 Dawson, op. cit., 104.
20 Mann, op. cit., 185.
Brown, the Kentucky gentleman whom tradition grants the honor of having been the first to suggest the location that the Society adopted. In the discussion that followed the reading of the letters a general consensus was reached that the greatest advantages would accrue to a settlement made at the 33rd or the 34th degrees of latitude, in a healthy country, enjoying a temperate climate, and which one could reach by land or by sea at little expense, not far from the great settlements of Tennessee and New Orleans, on a navigable river; in short, the Tombigbee.

The following resolutions were adopted: "(1) that in execution of the arrangements made in the meeting of — October last, the Society's vice-president, Mr. Lee, will be invited in concert with Mr. J. Martin, treasurer, Mr. Dirat, registrar, and Mr. Parmantier, secretary, to present to the Congress of the United States the request of the Society collectively for a grant of land to be chosen between the 32nd and 35th degrees of latitude, on one or the other banks of the Tumbigbee river, or anywhere else not already taken, at the most advantageous conditions, and that claim be laid to the petitioners' location as soon as all the necessary arrangements with government are made in order to put into full and prompt action the intentions of the present motion; (2) that in as much as no society may lay claim to permanent happiness if it is not ruled by wise laws that flow from the same spirit that has brought forth the beneficent laws of this great republican society of which we at present make ourselves part, the Sage of Monticello shall be written requesting him to draw up the foundations of a social pact for the local regulation of our association, so that we may leave to the centuries a monument of felicity to which a meeting of true friends of liberty may attain, putting in common all their abilities which are needed to make a compact for the protection and advancement of each of the members individually while at the same time living in the most perfect independence in regard to the exercise of their

political rights, the disposition of their property, their industry, and the most unlimited expression of their opinion.\textsuperscript{22}

On the thirteenth of the month Thomas Jefferson received from Martin and Parmantier the letter that was the result of the second resolution. Three days later he replied directly to Lee. His answer was a beautiful example of the tact of a great gentleman and the rightness of a great mind. He declined the task of formulating laws for the settlement on two main grounds. He pointed out that a people's laws flow from their own habits, feelings, and mental resources. No stranger could propose appropriate regulations. But more basic was the problem of fitting a colonial code of law into a political system already in force. The colony was too small to become a state. "If it is to be a county of a state, it cannot be governed by its own laws, but must be subject to those of the state of which it is a part. If merely a voluntary association, the submission of its members will be merely voluntary also; as no act of coercion would be permitted by the general law."\textsuperscript{23} In other words, the colony would have to make do with the laws of the United States.

Lee must have foreseen the sort of response the Society would get, as he was no stranger to American government. What was really sought was the blessing of the former President, whose international reputation was heroic and whose domestic influence was not negligible. Such an endorsement would have been extremely helpful in the task then confronting the Society—lobbying in Congress. The day after the meeting in Philadelphia, Lee went straight to Washington, where, as he promised the assembly, he would energetically busy himself with the interests of the Society. Parmantier joined Lee in the capital, and lobbying began in earnest.

On the twenty-first of February the Senate passed a bill to set aside four townships in the Mississippi territory and to authorize the Secretary of the Treasury to contract for their sale at two dollars an acre with fourteen years to pay to "late emigrants from France, who have associated together for the purpose of forming a settlement in the United States."\textsuperscript{24} It remained for the House of Representatives

\textsuperscript{22} L'Abeille Américaine, IV, 205–207.
\textsuperscript{23} Mann, op. cit., 282–283.
to concur before Congress adjourned. Parmantier, when he had arrived in Washington, set himself the task of putting himself in the good graces of the Speaker of the House, Henry Clay. It was a matter of one accomplished publicist capturing the attention of another. Parmantier introduced himself to Clay on the pretext of speaking to him about a letter Clay had written Lakanal, who had sent a copy to Parmantier. Clay was cordial but in no way committed himself. Three days after the bill passed the Senate, Parmantier tried his luck with Clay once again, knowing that in the interim Lakanal had written to the Speaker. Clay acknowledged having received the letter but was reticent to talk about it. He was as noncommittal as ever. That same evening at about eleven o’clock the two men ran into each other at a social gathering. During the day Parmantier had received a copy of the same letter that Clay had, and Parmantier told him so. “In that case,” Clay said, “oblige me by translating it for me. I am ashamed to confess it, but I have lost my French, and I cannot read the letter.” At nine o’clock the next morning Parmantier carried to Clay a translation, and, as Parmantier wrote Lakanal, Clay “was able to digest at ease the most flattering letter he has ever received in his life.” Clay smiled and said, “You deserve for me to use my influence. You didn’t go to bed then? You are worthy of Mr. Lakanal’s friendship. I will do all I can for a friend of his.”

The Act of Congress became law when the President signed it. As his pen scratched its path across the page, the Colonial Society of French Emigrants entered a new phase. Even its name underwent permutations, and it was variously but recognizably called the Society for the Cultivation of the Vine and the Olive or the Tombeckbee Association or, as the allotment certificates would eventually have it, the French Emigrants Association. The certificates, which were first issued in December 1817, were, like the sphinx or the griffin, ill-digested combinations of heterogeneous parts. The heavy paper had two watermarks representing the obverse and reverse of a Napoleonic medal, the obverse on the upper part of the page portraying the profile of Napoleon in Roman style and the

words, "Napoléon Empereur des Français et Roi d’Italie," and the reverse below, the imperial eagle beneath the imperial crown. The certificate itself was an etching. On top, superimposed on the watermark, appeared the representation of a pastoral community, the sun rising (or setting) beyond mountains, and the name, "Aigleville," below, above all of which swooped a strange bird with the body of a dove and the face of an eagle, an olive branch in its martial beak and a vine slip in its clumsy talons. Near the bird’s tail a banner floated proclaiming the sentiment, "Mihi cura futuris": the future is my care. And what a care the future was!

Few of the founders had much of a future in Alabama. Jean-Augustin Périères, the Society’s commissioner-explorer, had the sadness of seeing his son, J.-B.-Emile Périères, join the disastrous adventure in Texas known as Champ d’Asile. The young man survived the debacle and was in New Orleans as late as 1821. The elder Périères settled his allotment but soon moved on to Florida, where he died in 1823 while an agent for the Seminoles. Colonel Nicolas-Simon Parmantier, who was in the vanguard of settlers, leading the first group to the White Bluff, now Demopolis, stayed no longer than Périères. Louis-Marie Dirat remained in Philadelphia and in 1818 was one of the principal representatives of the Society there. The next year he was pardoned by the King, and he and his wife, who had helped support them in exile as a dressmaker, returned to France.

26 A large number of the certificates can be found in the Patent Certificate files of the Tombeckbee Association Lands, Land Entry Files, Bureau of Land Management, Record Group 49, at the National Archives facility at Suitland, Md. (hereinafter cited as NA/TAL, PC file), for example: file 147, Paschal Luciani’s certificate; file 151, Isaac Butaud’s certificate; file 235, Jean Bernard Burguès’ certificate. The certificate of Jean Marie Chapron is at the State Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala., and is pictured in Smith, op. cit., 108.


never to have gone to Alabama either, although his son Prosper, who had an iron foundry at Philadelphia, visited the colony in the summer of 1818, when he sold an anchor to General Clauzel. Dr. Martin lived into his eighties at Philadelphia. William Lee followed a career in government and had little to do with the Society after it became apparent early in 1817 that Lakanal, the Lallemands, the Jeannets, and other prominent exiles had it in mind to pervert the colony into a military adventure.

In the summer of 1817 while Demopolis was being born, the new and modern town of Louisville was already established high above the Ohio river, its brick houses facing rectilinear streets, a model of tidiness. Tidy as well was the beech forest around about. The beech had shaded out other varieties, leaving an uncluttered floor with tall, clean trunks supporting a high, green ceiling. The descent from the town led to a riverside highway bordered by sycamores and lindens that shaded the traveler from the hot June sun. It was a half hour’s ferry ride across the river from Louisville to New Albany, Indiana, which also lay on ground much higher than the normal level of the water. The approach to the village traversed a flood plain covered with the debris of a recent overflow.

At the end of June a young French traveler, Edouard de Montulé, made the short trip from the Kentucky town to the Indiana village and sought out a rum and tobacco shop which occupied a dilapidated log house. At the door he was met by Aimé Audibert, a small, bright fourteen-year-old boy. Montulé had not come to buy but to introduce himself to the store’s proprietor, the famous French politician Garnier de Saintes.

By then well up in years, Garnier was still a man of considerable


Although a minority of the more than 350 grantees and their families went to Alabama, many did actually settle their allotments. A minority of these remained for more than a few years. The vine and the olive failed utterly. Today a few descendants of original settlers live in and about Demopolis and Greensboro, the large towns at the edge of the grant. No family has enjoyed continuous possession of its allotment.
energy. When Aimé admitted Montulé to the single room of the log house, the old man came forward to greet his guest with a spoon in one hand and a notebook in the other. He was in the midst of stirring beans and writing a Socratic dialogue. While conversing enthusiastically with Montulé, he casually killed two chickens, dressed them, put them on to fricassee, added to his beans, prepared a salad, and then found place in his stream of talk to invite Montulé to dine with him. Listening to his host’s conversation, Montulé gathered that Garnier, “although elderly, is not too fixed in his ideas,” still ready to jump, no doubt, to the winning side if he could only find it.

He had recently been visited by Basile Meslier, one of the agents of the French Emigrants Association. Meslier was passing through on his way from Philadelphia to Alabama. Montulé, too, had met and talked with Meslier in Louisville and had been infected with a mild enthusiasm for the colony. He had had time to think about it. Now with Garnier’s eloquence to impel him, Montulé signed up for a quarter share. “For that I gave him the sum of 75 francs that each shareholder advances to take care of the growing society’s initial expenses,” he wrote. “I am delighted with the idea of being a landowner in this country of America, a true haven for the unfortunate.”

None of the people who gathered together that summer day in New Albany was destined to reside in the new colony. The Audibert family had an allotment in Alabama but settled at New Madrid, Missouri, instead. Montulé returned to France. Garnier was joined

31 Nicolas-Basile Meslier was a jeweller and watchmaker in Philadelphia when he became one of the recruiting agents of the French association. He went directly from Louisville to Demopolis, where he was among the earliest settlers and was the first justice of the peace. He married Augustine Elizabeth Pfister, the daughter of Amand Pfister, another early and prominent colonist. Between 1825 and 1829 Meslier moved to Mobile, where he died in November 1849. Philadelphia Directory, 1817; Dawson, op. cit., 202; Smith, op. cit., 120–121; Mobile County, Ala., Wills, Book II, 247; NA/TAL, PC file 248, Demopolis, Oct. 25, 1825, Villar to Meslier; ibid., Suspended Allotments, file 10, Mobile County, Apr. 3, 1829, Lajonie to Labrousse; Burial Records of Mobile County, Alabama, 1820–1856 (at Mobile public library), I.

32 Montulé, op. cit.

33 Angélique Thibeau, widow of Louis-François Audibert and mother of Garnier’s young assistant, lived across the road from the famous exile with her daughter, who was probably Thérèse, later the wife of Alphonse de Laroderie. He had Vine and Olive grant 341 of 240 acres, and Mme. Audibert had grant 97 of 120 acres. Instead of going to Alabama, both
by his son Alphonse, and the two of them set out for Alabama in a pirogue and floated down the Ohio river in pursuit of the winning side. They lacked experience in the river and did not understand the dangers of the rapids. The pirogue capsized, and Garnier de Saintes, his arms flailing as they had that June day in excited talk, his son with him, sank to the ultimate loss which awaits all. The Socratic dialogue and Montulé’s subscription sank to their mutual oblivion.34

It is impossible to say who first thought of creating the Vine and Olive Colony. It owed a great debt to the early efforts of William Lee. It had many courageous pioneers, notably Périères, Parman- tier, and Lefebvre-Desnoëttes, and the titles of Progenitor and Founder of the little band of “splendid fools” belong equally to Jacques Garnier de Saintes.

Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico

KENT GARDIEN

families settled at New Madrid, Mo., also a French community, where on June 6, 1820, they sold their allotments to Vine and Olive grantee Joseph Barbaroux, who married a daughter of Joseph Martin Picquet, fils, of Philadelphia, another Vine and Olive grantee. In spite of having sold their grants to Barbaroux, who occupied them through assignees, patents were issued to the original grantees. Martin Picquet brought suit to void the patents, and a protracted legal contest ensued. Ibid.; NA/TAL, PC file 274, New Madrid County, Mo., Apr. 5, 1834, deposition of Angélique Audibert, and Marengo County, Ala., June 24, 1843, deposition of Adèle B. Fournier; Greene County, Ala., Deeds A, 182; Marengo County, Ala., Deeds A, 135; NA/TAL, PC file 243, New Orleans, La., Feb. 25, 1834, Barbaroux to Withers; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser, Mar. 2, 1821; NA/TAL, PC file 2; NA/TAL, Applications for Land, Affidavits, etc., Demopolis, June 7, 1837, exhibits of Martin Picquet.