From French nobility to American farmer: The d'Autremont family papers in the Schlesinger Library

Figure 4.1. "The State of New York, Compiled from the best Authorities, By Samuel Lewis." [Philadelphia: Mathew Carey], 1795. 39 x 51 cm. Detail below.

- Original lands on the Chenango River, Greene Township, New York (1792–1794)
- Asylum, Pennsylvania (approx. 1795–1800)
- In the Butternuts area, Morris Township, New York (approx. 1800–1805)
- On the Genesee River, Angelica Township, New York (1806)

From French Nobility to American Farmer: The d'Autremont Family Papers in the Schlesinger Library

Catherine T. C. Spaeth

In 1798, at the end of a letter to his mother living in the New York wilderness, Louis Paul d'Autremont, a Parisian aristocrat, pours out his affection for his family and promises to take care of her and his two younger brothers: "Adieu, my good and tender Mamma, the best and truest of my friends. Adieu, embrace my brothers, tell them how I love them, that I will always love them, and that I will do all in my power, if fortune favors me, to prove them my affection."[1] In a later letter (undated but probably written about 1800), Louis Paul writes again to his mother, "I ask you . . . in your letters to give me only news of your health. All other details are superfluous . . . . You can also tell me about my lands and the clearings you have made."[2] Mme. Marie Jeanne d'Ohet d'Autremont, his mother, returns the affectionate expressions in many replies to Louis Paul's letters over the course of the next decade. She also gives him an accounting of money spent, acres cleared, the progress of a house being built, fights with in-laws, runaway pigs, and other ups and downs of pioneer farming in south central New York in the first decade of the nineteenth century. While details about her health are few, she does not spare complaints about the family's pioneer situation, her deprivations, and her acrimonious relationship with her daughter-in-law. In 1807, she writes to her son: "I wish I could give you beautiful accounts, but I have nothing agreeable to communicate."[3]

These brief excerpts from the unpublished d'Autremont Family Papers housed in the Schlesinger Library introduce us to the events and relationships of the first generation

1 Louis Paul d'Autremont to Marie Jeanne d'Ohet d'Autremont, ca. 1798, d'Autremont Family Papers, 1764–1955 (inclusive), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, (78–79). Unpublished finding aid available at the library; collection digitized at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:RAD.SCHL:22713058> (accessed May 16, 2016). Cited hereafter as "d'Autremont Family Papers."

2 Louis Paul to Marie Jeanne d'Autremont, ca. 1800, d'Autremont Family Papers (80).

3 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, June 1, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (48).

Figures 4.2A and 4.2B. Louis Paul d'Autremont and his wife Caroline. Artist unknown, ca. 1805. Personal collection of Paul M. Andreson Jr.

of the d'Autremont family in North America.[4] They were aristocratic refugees from the French Revolution, forced to escape France to save their necks. Searching to rebuild their lives and fortunes, they fled to New York, where they adapted with difficulty yet doggedly to wilderness realities.

A family drama played out. A widowed mother and her three sons arrived as refugees in New York in the early 1790s. Then, in 1796, Louis Paul, the eldest son, returned to Paris while his mother and two brothers remained in backwoods New York for the rest of their lives. From Paris the young, male aristocrat attempted to superintend the labors of his mother and brothers who were living in America what he misunderstood to be the lives of peasants. Though divided by the Atlantic, the family remained closely tied together by such misunderstandings but also by hopes, dreams, economics, filial loyalty, land purchases, and much more. This list of emotionally-charged family experiences locates the d'Autremonts within a familiar American immigration experience, and yet, their tale is uncommon as well: it is decidedly transatlantic, an exception to the standard American myth of immigrants abandoning their Old World past for New World beliefs and practices. The tug between Louis Paul's

4 Though unpublished, the letters and the family experiences recounted in them have been cited by historians; see below, esp. p. 75, n. 5; p. 78, n. 9; p. 82, n. 22; and p. 100, n. 86.

attempts to raise his American family up what he considered the class ladder and his brothers' struggles to adapt to American pioneer realities is a constant theme in the distinctiveness of this family—a distinctiveness that emerges as the chronology of the d'Autremont adventure unfolds in the following pages.

The story begins in 1787, on the east side of the Chenango River, in present-day Chenango County, New York, where two men bought 15,360 acres from the state of New York and "received their patent on June 16, 1791"[5] (see figure 4.1). Malachi Treat, former surgeon on the American side in the Revolutionary War, and countryman William W. Morris bought the tract as an investment intending to resell it. They quickly contracted with a local Frenchman, Charles Felix Bué Boulogne, to be their land agent in France. Bilingual, Boulogne had served in the French forces during the American Revolution and had remained in the newly independent country after the war. As a land agent, he departed for France, where his objective would be to entice French aristocrats desperate to flee the violence of the French Revolution to capitalize on the vast supply of American wilderness owned by speculators and investors eager to sell.

Soon after Boulogne's arrival in Paris, the widow Mme. Marie Jeanne d'Ohet d'Autremont and her three sons, Louis Paul, Alexandre Hubert, and Auguste François Cecil, became one of the many French noble families taking a leap of faith and buying 300 acres of the Treat and Morris tract from Boulogne.[6] The d'Autremont family had never been to the United States, had no farming or rural background, and were without a father. They most likely relied on Boulogne's undoubtedly enticing descriptions of the prosperity and tranquility that awaited them on their soon-to-materialize charming country estate. A few months later, the family departed for the United States, and in the fall of 1792, they travelled to Greene, New York, to take up residence on their land—the start of their long, slow transformation from urban Parisian nobility to rural middle-class farmers and American citizens.[7]

5 Mildred English Cochrane, *From Raft to Railroad: A History of the Town of Greene, Chenango County, New York, 1792–1867 (*Ithaca, N.Y.: Cayuga Press, 1967), 209.

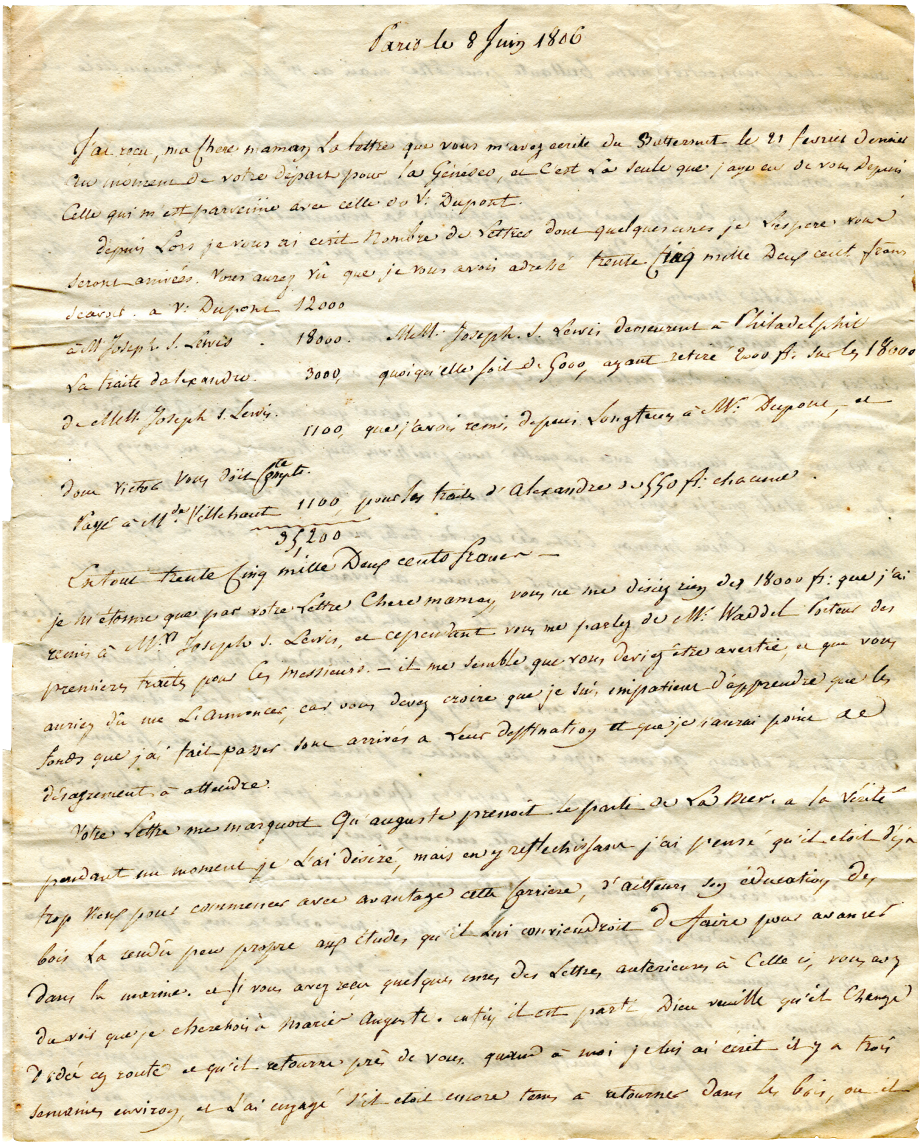
6 Deed of Sale from Malachi Treat and William W. Morris by their attorney Charles Felix Bué de Boulogne to Marie Jeanne d'Ohet widow of Hubert d'Autremont and Antoine Bartholémy Louis Lefèvre and his wife Marie Genevieve d'Ohet, September, 12, 1792. Tioga County, New York, Book 1 Deeds, p. 444, Tioga County Clerk's Office, Owego, N.Y.

7 Louis Paul became naturalized in May 1796. See Documentation Relating to Naturalization Petitions for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 1795–1930 (M1522), Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. Augustus was naturalized in 1809. See "Abstracts From Alien Declarations Of Intention To Become Citizens, And Other Naturalization Proceedings," *Tree Talks* 3, no. 4 (December, 1963): 110. I have not been able to find records of Alexandre's naturalization, although he lived in Angelica from 1805 until his death in 1851.

We can reconstruct their saga by means of the d'Autremont Family Papers in the Schlesinger Library—a set of some 200 pages of letters and a few other documents spanning the years 1764 to 1955. The most interesting papers, and those I shall concentrate on here, include an extensive correspondence of sixty letters between Mme. d'Autremont in New York and Louis Paul, her eldest son, in Paris. The collection also includes a few letters from Louis Paul to his two younger brothers, Alexandre and Auguste, and to Marie Claudine d'Ohet, Mme. d'Autremont's sister (and a Carmelite nun), who left Paris in 1807 to live with them in New York[8] (see figure 4.3).

Drama worthy of a soap opera pervades the letters. The land agent from whom they bought their land drowns in a Pennsylvania creek, while supposedly carrying all of their funds, deeds, and documents. Discontented and overworked women feud and fight bitterly. A Parisian-bred Carmelite nun suddenly appears on the d'Autremont farm. Young families grow large (Alexandre and Abigail bore ten children) while income does not. If reality television had been in existence in those years, the d'Autremont story would have riveted us—if not for its Horatio Alger determination then for its ongoing petty squabbles and amateur farming skills. But what they lacked in early success, the d'Autremonts made up in persistence and drive. Louis Paul believed strongly that if his mother and brothers could just spend properly and find the right pursuits and occupations, they would fulfill his vision of a peaceful, tranquil, and prosperous America for all of them.

8 Ideally, this article would be based on the actual manuscript letters in the original French, but that is not possible. The Schlesinger collection consists of typewritten, translated transcriptions, which, of course, is a limitation in working with the letters. However, I have searched for years, and all of the originals, but one, appear to have been lost. Because of the interposition of a translator and the uncertainty of whether the translations include all the letters the family wrote to each other, these are mediated texts, not original primary manuscripts. Given that the Schlesinger collection is a translated collection, we cannot be 100% certain that the letters represent accurately the original words or original meanings of the d'Autremont family. And yet, one original letter of June 8, 1806, from Louis Paul to his mother, has survived in a small collection of d'Autremont letters in the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware. It is the original of the June 8, 1806, letter contained in the Schlesinger collection. Comparing the French original to the English translation, I found the Schlesinger copy of that June 1806 letter to be an accurate translation, both in language and style. Finding that original manuscript letter in French inspires confidence that the Schlesinger collection letters are accurate translations of d'Autremont family correspondence. (D'Autremont Letters, Accession 547, Hagley Museum and Library.) As to the possibility that not all family letters survived—it is possible that some or even many letters have been lost, yet even with gaps of months between letters, many of Mme. d'Autremont's and Louis Paul's letters answer one another. The themes and family relationships are markedly consistent.



Paris le 8 Juin 1806

J'ai reçu, ma chère maman, la lettre que vous m'avez écrite du Butternut le 21 février dernier au moment de votre départ pour la Genesée, et c'est la seule que j'aye eu de vous depuis celle qui m'est parvenue avec celle de V. Dupont.

depuis lors je vous ai écrit nombre de lettres dont quelques unes je l'espère vous seront arrivées. Vous aurez vu que je vous avois adressé trente cinq mille deux cent francs savoir. a V. Dupont 12000

à Mr Joseph S. Lewis . 18000. Mess. Joseph S. Lewis demeurant à Philadelphie

la traite d'alexandre. 3000, quoiqu'elle soit de 5000 ayant retiré 2000 fr. sur les 18000

de Mess. Joseph S. Lewis. 1100, que j'avois remis depuis longtems à Mr Dupont, et

dont Victor vous doit compte.

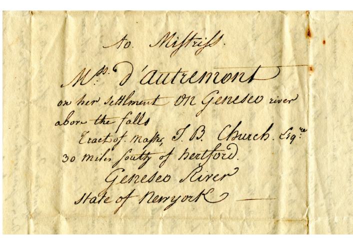
Payé à Mde Villehaut 1100, pour les traites d'alexandre de 550 fr. chacune.

35,200

En tout trente cinq mille deux cents francs —

je m'étonne que par votre lettre chère maman, vous ne me disiez rien des 18000 fr. que j'ai remis à Mrs Joseph S. Lewis, et cependant vous me parlez de Mr Waddel porteur des premières traites pour ces messieurs. — il me semble que vous deviez être avertie, et que vous auriez dû me l'annoncer, car vous devez croire que je suis impatient d'apprendre que les fonds que j'ai fait passer sont arrivés a leur destination et que je n'aurai point de désagrement a attendre.

Votre lettre me marquoit qu'auguste prenoit le parti de la mer, a la vérité pendant un moment je l'ai désiré, mais en y réfléchissant j'ai pensé qu'il étoit déjà trop vieux pour commencer avec avantage cette carrière, d'ailleurs son éducation, de bois la rendu peu propre aux études qu'il lui conviendroit de faire pour avancer dans la marine. et si vous avez reçu quelques unes des lettres antérieures à celle ci, vous avez du voir que je cherchois à marier auguste. enfin il est parti Dieu veuille qu'il change d'idée en route et qu'il retourne près de vous. quand à moi je lui ai écrit il y a trois semaines environ, et l'ai engagé s'il étoit encore tems a retourner dans les bois, ou il



To Mistriss
Mrs. d'autremont
on her settlement on Genesee river
above the falls
Tract of Massts J.B. Church Esqr
30 miles south of Hartford
Genesee River
State of Newyork

Figure 4.3. Letter from Louis Paul D'Aturemont to his mother "Mistress Mrs. d'Autremont . . .," June 8, 1806. 2 leaves. Hagley Museum and Library, Accession 547, d'Autremont Letters. Shown p. [1] and detail of p. [4], address.

The Schlesinger collection, unfortunately, includes no correspondence chronicling what must have been a heart-breaking departure from France, nor does it describe the family's initial distressing years in the United States. Mme. d'Autremont's husband had died several years before their departure, but it is puzzling that we read no mention at all of him in the correspondence beyond the date of his death.[9] Of their arrival in the new nation, little is known aside from their purchase of 300 acres of land. The d'Autremont acreage constituted a parcel Mme. d'Autremont, her sister, and her sister's husband bought for 5,400 *livres tournois,* and for which they paid in full. We learn only later of the misfortunes that befell the family shortly after their arrival when they could not obtain clear title to their land.[10]

Mme. d'Autremont and her sons fled France in 1792 at the start of the Reign of Terror along with Mme. d'Autremont's sister, Marie Geneviève, her husband, Louis Bartholomé Lefèvre, and their two children. They probably left at the same time as Jean-Claude Brevost and his wife, Anne Marie Buffet. Each of the three families bought acreage from the same tract of land owned by Morris and Treat.[11] They likely fled with other French refugees who had also bought land from the same tract near Greene on the Chenango River.[12] There is evidence that a small group of French émigrés planned

9 Mme. d'Autremont recorded in an undated document brief details of her husband's death on May 6, 1787, "at the age of 58 on Friday at half-past eleven in the morning." d'Autremont Family Papers (188). D'Autremont family lore and local history have it that Hubert d'Autremont was guillotined, but his death in 1787 was too early for him to have been a victim of The Terror. See Louise Welles Murray, *The Story of Some French Refugees and Their Azilum, 1793–1800* (Tioga Point Historical Society: Athens, Penn., 1903), 86. Mme. d'Autremont makes no mention of how he died or of what causes. The lack of any mention of a former husband and father is very puzzling for this widow and her three sons.

10 Equivalent to approximately U.S.$1,080 in 1790, thereby making their purchase about $1.80 per acre. See Markus A. Denzel, *Handbook of World Exchange Rates, 1590–1914* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

11 Deed of Sale from Malachi Treat and William W. Morris by their attorney Charles Felix Bué de Boulogne to Jean Claude Brevost and Anne Marie Buffet, his wife, September 12, 1792, Tioga County, New York, Book 1 Deeds, p. 448, Tioga County Clerk, Owego, New York.

12 Cochrane writes that the group of French émigrés who had bought Treat and Morris land through Boulogne included seventeen people, including James Le Ray de Chaumont, Simon Barnett, Alexandre du Vernet, and the d'Autremont group—although this is not confirmed through records. This area of south central New York was home to many French settlers in the 1790s. Such names as Franchot, De Villars, Juliand, Le Ray de Chaumont, and Duvernet are common to the area and were likely known to each other. Throughout Louis Paul's letters are references to Victor du Pont and his father Samuel du Pont, Paschal Franchot, and James Le Roy de Chaumont—all Frenchmen who immigrated to New York and

to develop a settlement in Greene (known today by local historians as Frenchtown). Conditions in that small settlement must have been primitive, because this group of five adults and seven children was among the first settlers in that area. They would have travelled by river as far north and west as was possible, "up the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers," and then overland to reach Greene. No roads had yet been cut in the area, and we can appreciate the remark of an early Greene historian writing in the 1850s who pictured the groups cutting their way through the brush and trees: "It is not certainly known how they were able to penetrate the then unbroken wilderness."[13]

And yet, they had hopeful plans to "live in a village and work the farm of their choice some distance away."[14] No physical remains of even a rudimentary village exist, and building one in line with their dreams would have been beyond their means and skills. Nevertheless, such romanticized visions of a European-style village with residents' farmland some ways off, a place where they could re-create an aristocratic life on a country estate, were typical of other French exile settlements of the era.[15] We can easily picture their disillusionment and discouragement after their first harsh winter. French exiles from their revolution fled to an America they expected would conform to a common Enlightenment vision romanticizing rural life as prosperous, tranquil, free, and happy. Writers such as Voltaire and Rousseau had depicted America as a new world radically different from the old, a place to escape the degraded institutions of Europe, a new world promising a life close to nature and full of unlimited possibilities. And the d'Autremonts literally bought into that vision, imagining a profitable and quaint farm just around the corner. In a letter to his mother, Louis Paul "recommend[s] . . . to put

remained in the United States. Local histories and current local historians have been helpful in tracing the details of the early d'Autremont years in New York. Town historians Elizabeth Ross, historian of the town of Greene; Leigh Eckmair, historian and archivist of the town of Butternut and the village of Gilbertsville; and Joan Lieb, research assistant in the Chenango County Historian's Office in Norwich have been generous with their knowledge and resources. Item 137 of the Schlesinger d'Autremont collection describes a legal case brought against William Morris to recover lands sold to the d'Autremonts, W. Brevost, M. Duvernet, and other Frenchmen named Bourneville, Silvestre, and Marguerite. See also Cochrane, 12.

13 Dr. William Purple in 1857, quoted in Cochrane, 33.

14 Ibid., 12. An 1863 map of Greene depicts, in the location of the current town center, a layout of a square divided into lots labeled "French Village."

15 Three well-known French settlements in what was then the western United States laid out (and started building) villages of this type, in which settlers would live on a village lot and farm additional acreage some distance away. See Simon Desjardins and Pierre Pharoux, *Castorland Journal: An Account of the Exploration and Settlement of Northern New York State by French Émigrés in the Years 1793 to 1797*, trans. and ed. John A. Gallucci (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jocelyne Moreau-Zanelli, *Gallipolis: Histoire d'un mirage américain au XVIIIè siècle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Welles Murray, *The Story of Some French Refugees and Their Azilum, 1793–1800* (see note 8).

some symmetry into your clearings and not do like the Yankees, cut down everything without distinction. I think you might leave in the meadow small groups of trees which would form pleasant resting places for the eye."[16] The disconnect between Louis Paul's "vision" and where the New York d'Autremonts' eyes and weary bones actually rested is telling and persistent.

Most French exiles, greatly disappointed after experiencing a few years of the realities of wilderness farming, abandoned their American projects and returned to France. The d'Autremont Family Papers, however, provide a rare look inside a family who, in some ways, fit this pattern of mythologizing America as a promised land of prosperity and tranquility but eventually—owing to years of living a frontier existence—deviated from the romanticized outlook, rejected repatriation to France, and stayed on as New York pioneer farmers. Only Louis Paul, from his distant Parisian setting, continued to express idealized views about America and to hold his mother and brothers to unrealistic expectations. (Striking a recurring note in his letters, Louis Paul chides his mother: "You do not appreciate the tranquility you enjoy. You cannot judge how all who live in this country [France] desire it."[17]) They, on the other side of the ocean, settled in to confront head-on the challenges of wilderness farming and to become the exception. The d'Autremont family broke the pattern of idealization-followed-by-disenchanted-abandonment typical of other French exiles' perceptions and experiences of the United States.[18]

From Greene to Asylum and Louis Paul to Paris

In 1791, the south-central area of New York was still very much a wilderness. Few Native Americans lived there, as most had been pushed out during the Revolution or had sold their land in negotiations with state governments or individuals.[19] A few

16 Louis Paul to his mother, January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (92).

17 Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1802, d'Autremont Family Papers (80).

18 See my 1992 PhD dissertation and related article on the perceptions of America and American culture held by French émigrés to the United States in the late eighteenth century: Catherine T. C. Spaeth, "Purgatory or Promised Land?: French Émigrés in Philadelphia and Their Perceptions of America during the 1790s" (University of Minnesota, 1992); and "America in the French Imagination: The French Settlers of Asylum, Pennsylvania, and Their Perceptions of 1790s America," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008): 247–274.

19 Major General John Sullivan's campaign during the summer of 1779 to weaken the British and their Iroquois allies and to stop their raids on local colonial settlers decimated forty Iroquois villages. According to Joseph Fischer's study of the Sullivan campaign, the American army was so destructive that not only did it destroy housing and food outright, but it also doomed Iroquois refugees and British soldiers at Fort Niagara to starvation and diseases such as scurvy during the brutal winter of 1779–1780. The Iroquois struck

towns had been established in Montgomery County, yet the federal census of 1790—two years before the d'Autremonts' arrival— listed only twelve heads of household in the town of Greene.[20]

Little is documented about the d'Autremonts and their difficulties during those first few years, and the Schlesinger collection correspondence begins only in the late 1790s. Historians speculate that they would have built a crude log cabin that first winter, where at least the three d'Autremonts and four Lefèvres (and possibly the Brevosts) lived, undoubtedly cold and crowded. Life must have been distressing and discouraging for them, and we can guess they asked themselves many times what they had got themselves into. Like other French exiles with idealized visions of the American frontier, they might have been utterly shocked not to have found what Gouverneur Morris, an American expatriate and diplomat in France during the 1790s, heard from many French about their expectations of conditions in rural America: "Purchasers [of American land] here are for the most part ignorant of geography. So far from thinking the forests a disadvantage, they are captivated with the idea of having their chateaux surrounded by magnificent trees. They naturally expect superb highways over the pathless deserts, and see with the mind's eye barges in every stream."[21]

The d'Autremonts did not stay long in Greene; they abandoned their 300 acres within two years of arriving. We do not know from their own words what motivated them to leave Greene, for the d'Autremont Family Papers begin after this early period in the United States. From other documents and histories, however, we learn about their predicament. At some point in the 1790s, clear title to their land became uncertain. Possibly they believed they lacked a legitimate title and did not know how to secure it. At the time, foreigners had to petition the New York legislature for permission to

back in the early 1780s and attempted valiantly and violently to push back settlers from their lands in New York. But then the war ended. Counting on the British to protect them as allies during treaty negotiations at the end of the war, the Iroquois found themselves and their interests abandoned. In the Treaty of Paris, the British ceded all lands south of Canada and east of the Mississippi to the United States. Much of that land had belonged to the Iroquois. See Joseph R. Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure: The Sullivan Campaign Against the Iroquois, July-September 1779 (*Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 3–4. Native Americans are only mentioned once in Mme. d'Autremont's letters, and their absence, while initially surprising, is illuminated by this explanation of how few Native Americans came to be living in western New York in the early 1800s. Her one mention of Native Americans comes in an 1807 letter to Louis Paul, in a passage discussing worsening relations among the English, Native Americans, and Americans in the years leading up to the War of 1812. She characterizes Native Americans as "savages" and "not polite people": d'Autremont Family Papers (68).

20 Cochrane, 9.

21 J. G. Rosengarten, *French Colonists and Exiles in the United States* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1907), 106–107.

own land, a procedure that may have been confusing or intimidating—if they were aware of it at all. They had paid Boulogne, who may or may not have, in turn, paid the purchase money to Treat and Morris. Something critical must have induced them to abandon 300 acres of land without having sold it to someone else. It seems very likely that ownership/title issues were involved.

In addition, conditions and the labor involved in clearing forests and planting crops in the New York wilderness may have been too overwhelming and beyond their skills. Clearing virgin forestland was expensive, and perhaps they were running out of money. Perhaps, too, they were lonely (and cold!) and they wanted the companionship of a more settled and populated colony. Some or all of these factors were probably in play. And their expectations must have clashed with the realities.

By spring 1795 they had moved to a newly established French colony—Asylum, Pennsylvania—a short hour's ride today but in those days, a several days' journey south along the Susquehanna River (see figure 4.1). It does not appear that the d'Autremonts bought land at Asylum, but they did continue to try their hand at farming. The Duc de la Rochfoucauld-Liancourt, himself a fellow exile, visited this French colony in north central Pennsylvania and noted in his *Travels through the United States of North America . . . in the Years 1795, 1796, 1797* that the d'Autremont family was living there, describing the previous and current professions of Louis Paul and Alexandre: "one was a notary, and the other a watch maker; but now they have become hewers of wood and tillers of the ground."[22]

Their original land agent, Boulogne, was also involved in establishing the now more famous French colony at Asylum, known for its plans to become a hidden refuge for Queen Marie Antoinette once she could be whisked out of France to safety. Boulogne may have suggested they move there, or they may have known about the colony from friends or from the French exile grapevine. Their stay at Asylum, however, proved no more successful than was their experience at Greene. A letter from Alexandre (the middle son), possibly to Boulogne, gives a clear picture of their miseries. This letter from July 1795 letter pleads for help and support:

> From the very beginning of this letter you'll say it is the crying bird[23] who writes to me. But could it be possible to look on our situation with indifference indebted as we are to you without forseeing when we will

22 Quoted in Rev. David Craft, "A Day at Asylum, Pa.," *Collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, for the Years 1902–1903* (Wilkes-Barre, Penn: K. B. Yordy, 1904), 74.

23 The French behind this awkward English expression probably was *pleurnicher*, which means to pretend to cry or cry (complain) without reason. *Pleurnicher* is a verb created from *pleurer-* to cry and *niche*—nest, i.e., to cry (like a bird) in its nest. The d'Autremonts were insisting on the validity of their complaints, which must have been numerous and continuous.

> be able to pay in such an horrid country as this were we dayly make an extravagant expense by the high price of all kind of provisions & all that without any benefit whatsoever even success to our work for after having spent much money for the portage of our effects on these lands we shall be obliged to transport them again to the town on account of the impossibility in which we are to live this winter in the woods for want of land in sufficient quantity sewed [*sic*] to provide even for our cattle.

Alexandre tries not be viewed as a chronic complainer, but the family is clearly suffering. Three years had passed since their arrival; they had paid dearly to transport their belongings to Asylum; and they were still not getting ahead.

The letter continues as a cry for help from someone on his last legs:

> Don't believe that my complaints & the resolution which my family hath taken of quitting for ever this Country are the resultat [*sic*]of inconstancy or levity of our minds. But come here very soon see & judge yourself of our situation. . . . If I was alone far from complaining of my situation I would laugh at it but I have a mother who begins to be old whom I cannot leave to herself therefore I pass my young days in an occupation which will never give me a penny's profit, all that I foresee for me is to be for ever ruined & remain in the impossibility of doing any thing if I continue to stay on lands that cost 30 Dollars per acre for clearing.[24]

They clearly depended on Boulogne, whether for translation, loans, moral support, help navigating American ways, or all of the above. From the suffering expressed in this letter, therefore, the d'Autremonts must have been crushed to learn of Boulogne's drowning just days after the letter was written. He drowned in LoyalSock Creek, then swollen from spring rains. He was not far from Asylum, possibly on his way from Philadelphia to join or visit them in Asylum. His death meant not just the loss of whatever support he provided them but also of any proof that they had paid for their lands on the Chenango River. The archives of the Tioga Point Museum, in Athens, Pennsylvania, contain a contemporary manuscript inventory of the effects found on Boulogne's recovered body. Included in the written inventory is a notation for "sundry papers in french not understud."[25] Those papers did not survive and may have been

24 Alexandre d'Autremont to unknown recipient, July 20, 1795, Tioga Point Museum, Athens, Penn., Azilum Collection, Box A123 2000.003.0023. This original letter was written in English, probably by Alexandre himself or a French compatriot not quite fluent in English.

25 "Inventory of cash and other things found on Mr. Charles Felix Bué de Bolougne when drowned in Loyalsoc," Azilum Collection, Tioga Point Museum, Box 2000.003.0019.

destroyed by those ignorant of their value. If the d'Autremonts had hoped to sort out the legality of their land ownership, Boulogne's death would have introduced another substantial complication.[26] A year later, in 1796, the family was still in Asylum, or nearby, as "Widow Dutremont" is listed that year among the taxable inhabitants of Wyalusing township.[27]

In 1796, however, Louis Paul, was no longer with his family in America. He left the United States at about that time, returning to Paris, reportedly as Prince Talleyrand's secretary. Talleyrand, also an exile in the United States at the time, visited Asylum in 1795, just before his return to France.[28] We have no confirmation from Louis Paul or his family about his reasons for leaving his mother and brothers in such dire straits, although his letters provide clues. In the first letter of Louis Paul in the Schlesinger collection, from about 1797, he writes to his mother to encourage Alexandre (by that time twenty-one years old): "Let him not be discouraged and I am persuaded that before long I will find a way to advance him. . . . Make him see in the future the hope of a better fate and his imagination will be kindled with the desire to accomplish something."[29] Soon after his departure, Louis Paul took on, or perhaps never relinquished, his role as head of the family—caring from abroad for his widowed mother and brothers, attending to their financial difficulties, sending them money, and working with them to rise "one day above mediocrity."[30] Based on the family's itinerant existence for over a decade and the tone of Alexandre's 1795 letter, it can be tempting to charge Louis Paul with an inability to stomach the harsh conditions and relentless work of frontier farming, and with escaping at first chance back to civilized city life in Paris. That may have been the case. It is also possible, however, that he and his mother realized that he could be more helpful to them financially in Paris than he would be clearing land in America. Again in this 1797 letter, Louis Paul is already taking advantage of his personal connections

26 Louis Paul d'Autremont, d'Autremont Family Papers (137–138). In an undated document (from about 1807), Louis Paul writes that "M. Morris swore that he had never received anything from the sale of his lands" from Boulogne: d'Autremont Family Papers (138). This document, inserted in the middle of Louis Paul's letters, recites "the case which is to be begun against William W. Morris to reclaim 600 acres of land or thereabouts situated on the Chenango River, Montgomery County, New York . . . [in which the] purchasers . . . demand that measures should be taken in order that they may enter into possession of their lands which have today a great value." Louis Paul may have been acting on behalf of his family and other Frenchmen who bought land from Morris and Treat via Boulogne.

27 Rev. David Craft, *History of Bradford County, Pennsylvania* (1878; repr., Towanda, Pa.: Bradford County Historical Society, 1992), 108.

28 Michel Poniatowski, *Talleyrand aux Etats-Unis, 1794–1796* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1976), 384.

29 Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1797, d'Autremont Family Papers (78).

30 Ibid.

to help his family recover their original American lands. Later in the same letter, Louis Paul informs his mother that Jean Marie Louis le Villain is departing France to take up his position as the new French consul to Maryland. Louis Paul describes him as "my friend," and assures his mother that "I charge him, dear Mamma, to render you all the services that his place and his position will permit."[31] Rather than abandoning his family, he has begun to advocate for them from France.

By the end of the 1790s, only a year or two after his return to France, he was sending money regularly to his mother and brothers. He reminded his mother that he had sent $300 (about $6,000 in today's money)[32] and also instructed her that $1,000 ($19,500 in current value) "carefully expended should suffice for the maintenance of the whole family." For how long, he does not say, but perhaps he worries that they spend too quickly, as he adds that "whereas without aim, without purpose, this sum can be expended without any real advantage to anybody." He also tells them that the "money I have sent you ought to have made you a little more independent. I wish you to be so entirely."[33] Later, in 1805, he writes that his mother should be sure to let his brothers know that "I do not wish them to believe that my fortune is such as to authorize them to spend without return or aimlessly the sums I shall send to them."[34] Louis Paul, although in Paris, continued as the head of the family, the driver and leader of the family finances and professional paths of his two brothers. He was intent on making his family independent through landownership and land investment. As soon as he returned to Paris, he started working to recover their original lands, and he made plans to invest in more land: already within a few years of his departure from the United States, Louis Paul asked Alexandre to travel to the Mohawk Valley to investigate purchasing from a French land company he calls the "chessanies Co." He says, "I could even arrange for a lot of 500 acres situated on the Black River. . . . Their situation is fine and ought some day to make them bring a high price."[35] That Louis Paul, so soon

31 In this letter, Louis Paul tells his mother, "My friend, Le Villain, who leaves for America as 'chancellier' of the consulate of the French Republic to the United States will remit this [letter] to you." Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1797, d'Autremont Family Papers (80). Le Villain died in the United States in 1800, so he would have been departing France in the late 1790s. Noted in Thomas W. Griffith, *Annals of Baltimore* (Baltimore: William Woody, 1833), 241–242.

32 Valuation from <https://www.measuringworth.com/> (accessed June 27, 2016). Described as "a service for calculating relative worth over time," the website is run by university economics faculty from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain. See the website under the Board of Advisors for individual faculty names and university affiliations.

33 Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1797, d'Autremont Family Papers (81).

34 Louis Paul to his mother, October 13, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (94).

35 Louis Paul's reference to "the chessanie Co." refers to the Compagnie de New York, a French land company that was trying to sell 600,000 acres in western New York. Pierre Chassanis was its director. The

after his return to France, was back planning investments in U.S. wilderness is a key component to understanding the close ties between the Old World and New World d'Autremonts: they were a transatlantic family intending to flourish together. In Louis Paul's words, "It is necessary for all to work together for the advantage of each one."[36]

Louis Paul was likely familiar with the ideas of the Physiocrats, preeminent French economists of the time, who had popularized an economic theory based on land as the only true basis of wealth.[37] In addition, owing to the d'Autremonts' association with liberal French aristocrats at Asylum, including one of Asylum's founders, Vicomte Louis de Noailles (an early political leader in the French Revolution) and Talleyrand, who wrote several essays on land speculation in the United States, it seems likely that Louis Paul would be determined to build up his landholdings both to own and improve his acreage and to speculate and increase his fortune.[38]

Land speculation in the United States, and in the northeastern United States in particular, was at its peak in the 1780s and 1790s. After the American Revolution, the United States was in debt to France and to investors and financiers of the War for Independence. Initially, the Continental Congress had issued its own currency, but because of excessive printing, the continental dollars dropped to one-tenth their face value by the end of the war. Investors and soldiers had to be paid. In the Northeast, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York battled over claims to western lands, all three states needing land to finance their debts.[39] The states' desperation and eagerness to sell land to finance Revolutionary War debts created a boon to speculators; currency was scarce but land was plentiful. After the Revolutionary War, "all the states were

company was building the Castorland colony on the Black River near Lake Ontario as part of their sales strategy. Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1797, d'Autremont Family Papers (81). John Gallucci's recent translation of the *Castorland Journal* is an excellent source for the history of Castorland and the Compagnie de New York's struggles and failure to succeed or produce profits. Louis Paul may have believed the initial prospectus, which promised a minimum profit of 1,400% on the per-acre cost (Gallucci, 316). By 1800, however, after six years of work, the Castorland colony had amassed a debt of "more than 300,000 *livres* . . . [and] had produced only one saw-mill, eighteen loghouses, and eighty-two acres of clearing": (Gallucci, xxviii)

36 Louis Paul to his mother, October 13, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (96).

37 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).

38 During his two-year exile in the U.S., Talleyrand wrote a "Memoir on Investments in Land in America." See *Talleyrand in America as a Financial Promoter 1794–96: Unpublished Letters and Memoirs,* trans. and ed. by Hans Huth and Wilma J. Pugh, 2 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), 2:110–115.

39 Aaron M. Sakolski, *The Great American Land Bubble*: *The Amazing Story of Land-grabbing, Speculations, and Booms from Colonial Days to the Present Time* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), 54–73.

in a bankrupt condition."[40] Yet they had access to vast acres of wilderness land—to compensate soldiers, to raise funds, and to increase their tax base. Investors such as Robert Morris, Nathanial Gorham, Oliver Phelps, Jeremiah Wadsworth, and other smaller investors and speculators, rushed in to buy large tracts of land that they planned to divide and sell at many times the price they paid the states.[41] Malachi Treat and William Morris were among those speculators.

Land companies formed both in America and in Europe bought millions of acres of forest, at first to sell to wealthy commodities investors. As the French Revolution turned murderous, however, landowners changed tactics, predicting a growing market to build and sell shares in settlements for the many thousands of French exiles, like the d'Autremonts, expected to be needing places of refuge.

In addition to his plans to buy land in western New York, Louis Paul even floated the idea for his family to consider moving to Louisiana. Nothing came of it, however, and he mentioned it only once.[42] Even after the d'Autremonts had settled in Angelica, New York, in 1805, the names of all three brothers can be found on land transaction deeds in their home county. Through the 1850s, the d'Autremont brothers continued to buy and sell land in the area, often to and from each other.[43] That the d'Autremonts suffered from this speculative market did not seem to deter them from trying to gain the upper hand and to become owners selling to others. Although their investments were small-scale, the d'Autremonts seemed to be acting in concert with prevailing Enlightenment belief in the value of owning land. They also were probably swept along in the real estate speculation frenzy of the era. Unfortunately for the d'Autremonts, neither American land speculators eager to sell land, state governments wanting to sell land to raise cash, nor terrified French aristocrats anxious to find a safe haven could have predicted the short-lived nature of what had seemed to be a perfect confluence of supply and demand. Throughout Louis Paul's letters he pushes and prods his brothers to economize, to clear land, to work together to improve their situations. As soon as he learns that they have bought land in Angelica, he writes, "Do not lose a minute in working the clearings necessary for your existence and that of the whole family."[44]

40 Aaron M. Sakolski, *Land Tenure and Land Taxation* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1957), 69.

41 Ibid., 69–70.

42 Louis Paul to Alexandre, ca. December 29, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (103).

43 See Allegany County, N.Y., Books A and B Deeds, Allegany County Clerk's Office, Angelica, N.Y.

44 Louis Paul to his mother, n.m., 22, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (107).

To Angelica (on the Genesee River) with Alexandre, Abigail, Children, and a Carmelite Nun

Louis Paul's letters show him to be a loving and attentive son and brother, funding his family, making connections with Americans and Frenchmen traveling between France and the U.S. to send money and give advice and help, while at the same time pushing them to work, to build independence for themselves, and to create for him "a fine place sheltered from events and in peace with ourselves."[45] An early letter establishes the tone and approach we read throughout the collection's correspondence regarding his relationship to his brothers' and mother's endeavors and what he wants for them and envisions for himself:

> You can also tell me about my lands and the clearings you have made. I wish them to amount to a hundred acres. This number, it seems to me, will be sufficient for the needs of a family. Have patience; do not think yourself unhappy because separated from me. . . . As to myself, I repeat it, I should be very happy to join you and share your tranquil retreat, but matters which are not yet finished hinder me; it is for my interest and the interest of the family.[46]

However, Louis Paul's plans for them and the realities of being foreigners in the New York wilderness did not always coincide. Between 1796, when Louis Paul returned to France, and 1805, when Mme. d'Autremont and her two sons finally bought land in Angelica, we have seen that the family moved several times. Some of the early letters from Mme. d'Autremont to Louis Paul are from those itinerant years, but much about their circumstances is omitted. They lived in the Butternuts in the early 1800s, an area near their original lands, but where is unknown, as is with whom (see figure 4.1). In 1806, on Mme. d'Autremont's journey to the new lands near Angelica, two of her letters were sent from "Butternut." She refers to staying with the Franchots, who lived near Gilbertsville.[47] She also mentions being visited by Mrs. Victor du Pont, who lived for a few years near them in Angelica.

45 Louis Paul to his mother, June 8, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (119).

46 Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1797, d'Autremont Family Papers (80).

47 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, February 3, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (32). Leigh Eckmair, current historian and archivist for the town of Butternut and the village of Gilbertsville, reports that in the early nineteenth century, "the Butternuts" meant a large area near present-day Gilbertsville or Morris, where several Frenchmen owned land: Pascal Franchot, James Le Ray de Chaumont, and Louis de Villers. Interview with Eckmair on February 17, 2014.

Did they move from friend to friend, wearing out their welcome at each place? Did they rent houses or work for other landowners? Did they merely subsist on the money Louis Paul sent them, waiting for his approval to buy land, or were they skittish about purchasing from Americans again? During that decade, Alexandre grew from age 20 to nearly 30, Auguste from age 13 to 23. Why hadn't they bought land earlier? How were they living? It does not seem as if they had occupations, although Alexandre must have been doing some kind of work, probably farming, as he was to become the primary farmer in Angelica. Auguste flirted with various jobs over the years, including seaman, distiller, tanner, and employee of the du Ponts in Delaware from 1813 to 1818, and then finally returning to Angelica to marry, buy land, and settle.[48]

In two letters from Mme. d'Autremont in 1805 and 1806, we learn that Alexandre had just bought 200 acres near Angelica "to make a farm for us," on the recommendation of Victor du Pont, who had also bought land there and was planning to open a store[49] (see figure 4.1). Victor du Pont was the younger brother of Éleuthère Irénée du Pont de Nemours, who started the du Pont gunpowder manufacture near Brandywine Creek (later Eleutherian Mills), Delaware. Louis Paul sent money through Victor when Victor ran a trading company in New York; the d'Autremont family seemed to follow Victor's lead when he bought land in Angelica and where he ran a store for three years.[50] In a letter from 1806, written as the family made its way to Angelica, Mme. d'Autremont clearly feels trepidation about the move: "To tell you that I don't worry would be a lie; also it grips my heart and gives me a pang which I cannot prevent in spite of reasoning with myself."[51] Perhaps moving in the winter worried her, or possibly she dreaded the prospect of living again in primitive wilderness conditions—a very familiar prospect by this time, the family having endured at least three previous moves to start over in unfamiliar places. But Mme. d'Autremont may have been reluctant for other reasons. As we learn from subsequent letters, she and her daughter-in-law, Abigail Dodge

48 Five letters from Louis Paul to Auguste are included in the d'Autremont Family Papers, between June 1809 and November 1826 (144–149) and (155–160).

49 See Gabrielle de la Fite de Pelleport du Pont de Nemours, "Our Transplantation to America: Dedicated to Our Children and our Children's Children," English translation of privately printed memoir, Hagley Museum and Library, Accession No. 1686, 38–43. Mme. du Pont (wife of Victor) never once mentions the d'Autremonts in her memoir even though Louis Paul indicates in his letters how much he relies on the advice and friendship of Victor du Pont and Pierre Samuel du Pont (father of the American du Ponts; he was back in Paris during the early 1800s) in making decisions about and for his mother and brothers.

50 The Hagley Museum and Library has in its collections some original manuscript letters from Louis Paul to Auguste—mostly from the 1810s—as well as many letters between the du Ponts and Auguste and the du Ponts and Louis Paul.

51 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, October 21, 1805, and February 3, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (30–35).

d'Autremont, fought constantly and bitterly, each defending her territory. Alexandre had married Abigail in about 1798, probably meeting her during their time at Asylum. In a letter from 1805, Mme. d'Autremont asks Louis Paul to "recommend me always in your letters that one should be considerate towards me. You could not do too much on that point."[52] While she is not forthcoming about who the "one" is, the identity soon becomes clear. On February 3, 1806, she wrote to Louis Paul: "I don't tell you of your brother's wife. I cannot tell you that she is very amiable. I am the one who has to suffer most of her disposition."[53] A month later, Mme. d'Autremont describes Abigail as having a "nasty disposition" and "his wife who always seems to think that I am one too many and . . . what is bad is still too good for me."[54] While we have only Mme. d'Autremont's version as the wronged party, the truth leaks out the sides of her complaints. Alexandre's wife bore ten children between 1800 and 1829. In 1806, in the midst of their move to Angelica, Abigail and Alexandre had three children and were expecting their fourth.

Mme. d'Autremont never expresses any sympathy for her daughter-in-law—who had babies and small children to tend to and had responsibility for making clothes, feeding her family *and* the workmen building their house and clearing their land, and for living with in-laws and workmen in crowded conditions. Mme. d'Autremont focuses solely on her own deprivations and the wrongs done to her. Her complaints and requests to Louis Paul to "[advise] your brothers to be considerate with me. You cannot say too much about this. . . . I would be so grateful if one had regards and kindness for me; and you alone could tell them."[55] In all her letters, she portrays herself as an aristocratic matriarch who has borne much and deserves respect and service. Unfortunately, living in the American wilderness does not afford her that privilege, and Abigail was unwilling to accord her that status.[56] In a letter dated March 11, 1807, Mme. d'Autremont tells Louis Paul that in their new house, they were to have two floors, the second floor with "four rooms upstairs: one for Auguste, one for Madamoiselle Dohet, one as a guest room, and one to accommodate the workmen."[57] Imagine all those people needing to be fed—and by a young woman with three small children and one on the way. Mme. d'Autremont does not seem to see herself as a partner with Alexandre and his wife in the work of pioneering or as the grandmother helping out.

In spring 1807, Mme. d'Autremont's sister, a Carmelite nun (the Mlle. d'Ohet mentioned above), moved to New York to live with the family, an addition that in

52 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, October 21, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (30).

53 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, February 3, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (35).

54 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, March 13, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (36–37).

55 Ibid.

56 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, March 11, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (38).

57 Ibid.

time intensified the quarrels, now with two older French women against the younger American in-law. In addition to providing company for her sister, Mlle. Marie Claudine d'Ohet sided with her sister against Abigail and seemed to inflame the tensions. Her own disappointed expectations may have played a part. Soon after Mlle d'Ohet's arrival, Mme. d'Autremont wrote to Louis Paul:

> My sister expected to see this country so splendid that to her everything seems awful. The house not finished, gaps and holes everywhere, the noise of the children which is frightful . . . and as a Carmelite nun she is not accustomed to that for she is very devout. The customs and ways of here seem to her quite astonishing. We have no priest, but she takes the place of one and I am saying the response.[58]

The arrival of Mme. d'Autremont's sister compounded the disagreeableness and complaining in the household. Alexandre, from whom we have only one letter, would have been understandably exhausted and exasperated from his responsibilities for clearing land, planting crops, building a house, and constantly having to broker peace among his wife, mother, and aunt. In September 1807, about six months after Mlle. d'Ohet's arrival, Alexandre wrote to Louis Paul, giving his views on the family arguments:

> Concerning our dear aunt, God confound her. . . . Cursed be all the nuns if they are like her. A sad present indeed that you made to us. . . . I am afraid we will not stay a long time together. . . . We already had three or four quarrels. The crown of it all is that she maintains that she is in her

58 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, May 5, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (46). In the early 1790s, the French revolutionary government nationalized Catholic Church property, abolished monastic vows, disbanded all religious orders, and forced nuns to leave their convents. They then encouraged monks and nuns to return to private life. Some of the more famous Carmelites from Compiègne refused to sign the required oath of loyalty to the government and were guillotined. When Napoleon took power in 1799, he reinstated Catholicism in France but under the authority of the state. Some "female religious orders . . . were provisionally re-established in 1807." See Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France 1780–1804* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2000), 38 and 231–233. Nothing about Mlle. D'Ohet's circumstances before her arrival in New York in 1807 is indicated in the d'Autremont letters. It appears to have been her own idea to join her sister, so perhaps she had failed to find satisfactory occupation outside of a convent and, with Louis Paul's help and encouragement, decided to sail for America. We learn from Louis Paul in a note to his family that "Mademoiselle Dohet . . . has decided to leave to go to rejoin our good Mamma to give her the care of a sister and a friend." Louis Paul to Mlle. Marie Claudine Dohet, December 15, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (132).

> house and I not in mine. All this causes only constant bickerings. . . . How could you ever think that this woman could ever live in harmony with my family? . . . Whatever I say about all this, I don't wish her any harm; so provided she shows herself a good person and leaves me alone in this work, I transfer to her my place in heaven.[59]

Mme. d'Autremont's descriptions of their disagreements and her complaints sometimes seem understandable enough (as when the children are noisy), but other times they seem to be the lather of a soap opera. In one incident Mme. d'Autremont complains to Louis Paul about a dispute over "some pig's meat."

> I had another quarrel since my sister's arrival. . . .We (my sister and I) make our own cooking in a rather incommodious way because we have no fireplace, yet being separated (from their side of the house). I required to be give some provisions such as some pig's meat. . . . We eat very little but I noticed that they took what was best, the worst being left for me. I went to the cellar and took about twelve pounds of pig's meat. . . . The next evening . . . Alexandre . . . came to me saying that he had something to say but if I got angry he would give up everything [and] . . . asked me if I had taken any meat. As I admitted it, he asked me why I did not tell him for his wife had gone to my room and had taken the meat away, pretending that I had taken the best pieces. You may well imagine what became of me upon hearing this, that this woman had allowed herself to come in my house and pry into my things. I was incensed.[60]

It is possible that lost or omitted letters would bring to light other perspectives or other circumstances. Given the narrative in the collection, however, it seems as if many of the fights between the two women resulted from living in close quarters, with small children underfoot, too much work, and not enough money to cover needs. They also seemed to consider Louis Paul their long-distance arbiter and mediator, possibly preventing them from resolving their differences themselves. Mme. d'Autremont frequently asks Louis Paul to intervene and take her side. Though we have no letters from Abigail, Mme. d'Autremont refers to at least one letter Abigail wrote to Louis Paul, apparently stating her case and asking him to act as mediator.

Within months of Alexandre's letter, the family had given up on getting along, and it bought for Mme. d'Autremont and her sister a "frame house . . . with 50 acres of land,

59 Alexandre d'Autremont to Louis Paul, September 7, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (163–164).

60 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, arrived in France on September 20, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (62).

of which ten are in pastures . . . also a distillery with two small stills." The house was located in Angelica near Victor du Pont and his family. Even during the move, Mme. d'Autremont's remains snippy. She wrote to Louis Paul that even though she will be several miles from Alexandre's help and protection, "I will take courage. I think it will spite that creature to see me in a pretty house."[61] The two sisters lived there together only a few years, until their deaths in 1809 and 1810.

Back in France, Louis Paul Takes a Wife

Louis Paul, during this time, continued to work for himself and his family, in their interests, as he says. One such "interest" was his search for a wife once he was back in France. In his letters, he clearly values the income a potential bride might bring. His first choice was a woman he says was called "Blanche et bonne." He calls her "dear Blanche," writing that she is "rich, that is, as rich as is necessary for happiness." Yet in a letter written sometime before May 1803, he is apprehensive about the decision to marry her, for, as it turned out, her family wanted him to "retire from business and to leave to love the care of my destiny."[62] Blanche's family may have turned him down, or he may have decided against marrying Blanche, possibly cognizant of his responsibilities to his American family and a need to be able to earn his own money for their support. The next letter describes Caroline, whom he did marry (see figures 4.2A and 4.2B). She was blond and tall, and when he writes "here is a very brief description of my future wife," the first of three qualities he describes is her "fortune": "now and in the future about 150,000 francs; good business connections; and a fine position if it suits me."[63] Her fortune was modest, but for Louis Paul, who describes himself as having been "brought up in the school of misfortune and adversity," this amount would give him a life with "nothing to trouble me but the usual little annoyances of daily life to which everyone is subjected."[64] Alas, his joy and relief at having found a rich wife was short-lived. In 1805 he wrote that "I have just met with two failures, one of which . . . takes away a great deal, perhaps everything. I say everything of my own for, as to my wife's property, not having our possessions in common, I have no right to what belongs to her. It is necessary then for me to begin again and make fresh ventures."[65] Louis Paul,

61 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, October 29, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (71–76).

62 Louis Paul to his mother, ca. 1803, d'Autremont Family Papers (83).

63 $30,000 in 1803 dollars and worth about $640,000 in today's dollars. See <https://www.measuringworth.com/> (accessed June 27, 2016).

64 Louis Paul to his mother, May 1, 1803, d'Autremont Family Papers (85).

65 Louis Paul to his mother, n.m., 13, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (87). Louis Paul was probably referring to legal rights to their own property that women gained during the French Revolution. Those rights were short-lived, however, as Napoleon revoked them in 1804.

mysteriously silent about the cause of his financial loss, writes only that "today I am almost entirely ruined, and with me many persons of Paris."[66] The reader can feel his disappointment and discouragement after such buoyed hopes two years earlier, when he thought he would finally get himself and his family above water financially.

While others may have been tempted to abandon far-off relatives to their own devices, Louis Paul persisted in looking for ways to earn money and thereby to continue sending funds to America. Though we learn little of the sources of Louis Paul's funds or of whatever work he had, in 1805 he does mention being owed 15,000 francs by the Portuguese government. We never learn, however, what he did for them. In October 1806, Louis Paul writes that "the French Government has granted me the position of *agent de change* [stockbroker] which I have solicited for three years."[67] Undoubtedly he found profit in this position, since he continued sending funds to New York.

His income and source of funds are, however, rare topics of conversation in Louis Paul's letters. Much more often, he focuses on the tasks of clearing and building as the necessary work that Alexandre must undertake on Louis Paul's land to reestablish Louis Paul's fortune and eventual tranquility, as well as to raise up his brothers to independence. In June 1806, Louis Paul writes to Alexandre that he has already sent them enough money to create "a good farm, beautiful woods, a good house; finally, all that constitutes a good and comfortable existence."[68] The land on the Genesee is Louis Paul's land, bought with his money: "with the profits that will come to me, with the improvements already made . . . the value of my farm [will increase] annually."[69] Ideas for improvements and income-generating schemes abound in his letters. He frequently chides his brother for not making more progress clearing land, and he offers suggestions for partnering with Victor du Pont in building and running a still for distilling whisky, teaching Auguste the tanning trade, growing flax from seed he sent from France, opening a store to sell merchandise to their hired workers, and other money-making ventures.

Despite what to a modern reader seems an attitude of a landlord over his tenants—he clarifies repeatedly in his letters that his brother Alexandre is working Louis Paul's lands, clearing them, making them into a retreat for himself—he never abandons them to their own devices. Over those years, Louis Paul has been sending thousands of francs, instructions for investments, advice, admonishment, and encouragement to his mother and siblings. In 1806, he writes to his mother, "Do not lose a minute in working

66 Louis Paul to his mother, October 7, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (129). See also the translation of an untitled French government document appointing Louis Paul as a stockbroker: d'Autremont Family Papers (28f).

67 Louis Paul to his mother, January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (91).

68 Louis Paul to Alexandre, June 8, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (120–121).

69 Ibid.

the clearings necessary for your existence and that of the whole family."[70] In the space of the ten years from 1796 to 1806, Louis Paul had sent the modern equivalent of $144,000 (35,200 French francs, or about $7,000 at the time) to his mother and brothers, yet they continued to live on the frontier, building their own house, clearing the land, and raising crops. They were not solitary farmers, however, in the way we often imagine someone we call a "frontier farmer." The funds sent by Louis Paul were used to hire workmen to help build the log house, clear the land, build fences, and start such side businesses as tanning and distilling.

He writes regularly about "his" investments, "his" lands, "his" farm, and he gives continuous advice about additional acreage to buy, where to buy it, how much to spend, and, later, how much land could be cleared each season and how much to pay the laborers. Still, this was clearly a family endeavor. In the parlance of the times, Louis Paul was the gentleman farmer with the funds, and he was trying to improve his younger brothers' status. Alexandre may have been working Louis Paul's lands, but the family goals were for Alexandre to make a profit for Louis Paul *and* to become a gentleman farmer himself.

Throughout Louis Paul's attempts to raise his family and himself back up to something resembling their former class rank, it is evident throughout the correspondence that his future and theirs are intertwined. The d'Autremonts break not only the common stereotype of late eighteenth-century French emigrants unwilling to undertake the backbreaking work and to exercise the long-term patience needed to succeed as pioneer farmers, but they also are an exception to Crevecoeur's famous formulation of a melting pot of immigrants. During all the years covered in the Schlesinger collection of family letters, and until Louis Paul's death in 1840, they are a transatlantic family, purposefully tied together to support the family fortune.

To understand how Louis Paul sees his position in the family, we can turn to the financial and monetary policies and world-views in both France and in the United States that may have affected and possibly frustrated the d'Autremont efforts without their realizing the larger economic forces and biases and conflicting financial systems in operation. In France in the early 1800s, although the revolution had been fought to unseat aristocratic privilege and to equalize wealth and opportunity, upper classes still controlled much of the wealth and dominated the economy. In fact, Louis Paul was part of an economic system and approach to land-ownership in which "landed aristocrats or wealthy bourgeois were usually the entrepreneurs of large-scale farming and they endeavored to finance their undertakings from their own capital. . . ."[71] This is exactly what Louis Paul attempts through his investments in farmable land, with his brothers

70 Louis Paul to his mother, n.m., 22, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (107).

71 Shepard Bancroft Clough and Charles Woolsey Cole, *Economic History of Europe: Business Organization and Finance, 1776–1850*, 3rd. ed. (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1966), 482.

serving both as his family members and as on-site laborers and with himself as the entrepreneur investor. As Louis Paul was receiving news of the purchase of land near Angelica, he clarifies his intentions:

> Make a good selection of lands, and with the funds that I will authorize you to draw for everything which will be useful for the aggrandizement and the amelioration of the establishment, you will become rich and happy, and in making your fortune you will have assured me a shelter from the storms of Europe.
>
> I shall share your trouble and your pleasures. I will follow you in all your labors, and you will not have a stroke of a hatchet given without my presence. . . . I repeat that it being my intention to push the clearing of my land to 200 acres, instead if I do not return to you, derive an advantage from them which we will determine according to the rate of interest of the country; but we will talk of this hereafter.[72]

Louis Paul seems sincerely concerned for his family's welfare, as is evidenced by the considerable sums of money he sends to them over the years. His motivations for sending money, of course, were not solely those of a benefactor. He has his own economic status to raise up, and his American family is a partner in that project. He worries about their welfare, their happiness and "tranquility," and their economic stability. He sends money to further all these aims. Yet he is clearly looking out for himself in these American endeavors.

Alexandre is working the land for him at the time, and because of Louis Paul's role in providing funds, he assures his brothers that "an honorable living for you, my brothers and myself enters into my plan and satisfies my heart."[73] His role gives him license to advise, suggest, admonish, and order them how to proceed and plan their productivity. Louis Paul is the family leader as well as the landlord prodding his tenant farmers to work harder, produce more. Loving in his letters, and accepting when they do not follow his advice or live up to his expectations, nonetheless he writes as if he knows precisely how much they are capable of and should produce. He says, "My project has always been to have a farm of 1000 or 1200 acres, and if it could be increased to 2000 or 3000 so much the better."[74] He then calculates that with the $2,500 he is currently sending, they can buy 200 acres and clear 100 acres, which will "be

72 Louis Paul to his mother, n.m., 13, 1805, and January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (88 and 93).

73 Louis Paul to his mother, January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (90–91).

74 Ibid.

more than enough for your alimentary needs . . . but I do not stop at the simple results I have just mentioned. You must immediately proceed with the clearing of 100 acres more."[75] But his brother and workmen had barely cleared thirty acres by the time of Mme. d'Autremont's letter of May 5, 1807 (a year and a few months after their move to Angelica).

The tug of war continues over the next two years in the correspondence as Louis Paul pushes for advancement of the work and a return on his investment. This is a topic he will return to again and again:

> Remember, dear Mama, that while I entrusted to my brothers the larger part of my fortune, I want to see it bear fruit and for this I must receive each year an interest for my funds or rather a return for each acre that is cleared.
>
> I want oxen, cows, sheep and horses, . . . establish a mill or a distillery if possible.
>
> I think a little store on your place would facilitate matters very much and render the clearing less expensive. . . . It seems to me that I can see Alexandre having thousands of trees felled for me. Put some symmetry into your clearings so as to derive some pleasure from the perspective or the nature of the land.
>
> I beg you not to lose any time and that everything be finished for . . . all lands in America . . . will increase in value.[76]

A year later, in August 1807, his mother responds to his urgency and need to realize profits with the disappointing realities of their efforts:

> I wrote to you that we have harvested about 60 bushels of corn on one acre. But this corn has to be sifted. Half of it is only good to fatten the pigs and the cattle (if one has any). Hay is still rare here and we cannot get any. . . .Winter is quite long. . . . On top of that is the chapter of the accidents, which is considerable. The cattle upset the fences; the pigs

75 Louis Paul to his mother, January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (90–91).

76 Louis Paul to his mother, October 17, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (98); Louis Paul to Alexandre, December 29, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (103–104); Louis Paul to his mother, n.m., 22, 1806, D'Autremont Family Papers (107); Louis Paul to his mother, June 8, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (118–119).

> by packs of thirty at one time upturned a whole field. At night we are obliged to keep the horses inside the stable, otherwise they knock down the fences. Spring wheat brought us only enough for sowing; the barley was not a success. We had made stacks in the open, then the rain, the birds, the squirrels which are here by the millions made their provisions for the winter. Our cabbages froze. . . . Our potatoes rotted. . . . Oats were used for the horses and seed. . . . I already wrote you about the flood and how the river ruined the fences and carried some away. . . . You tell me to make alley-ways between lots of five acres, but one cannot give time yet to niceties.[77]

The d'Autremont difficulties, shortage of funds, and inability to rise above Louis Paul's dreaded "mediocrity" are prominent in this exchange, with each branch out of touch with the other. Perhaps the American d'Autremonts had bad luck, or possibly their farming skills were a long time in the making. Or they could have been partly victimized, possibly taken advantage of for being foreigners,[78] or partly creators of their own difficulties, insisting on creating a landed gentry "farm" despite persistent difficulties and insufficient funds.

"It Is Not An Easy Thing To Have Simple Ideas in America"

Economics and rebuilding their fortunes were part of the plan. The d'Autremonts were nobles, and they had not come to America intending to live a meager pioneer existence. And, in the end, they seem to have achieved some measure of prosperity. Their letters indicate heroic attempts to rise above the "mediocrity" Louis Paul found so distasteful. But success did not come easily, nor cheaply.

As these letters demonstrate, the d'Autremont family does not exemplify the stories Americans often tell about the European immigrant experience of their family members who left the Old World of Europe once and for all to find economic betterment or religious freedom in the New World of North America. The d'Autremonts were exiles from the French Revolution and would have been glad to stay in France and live out their lives there. Unfortunately, like thousands of other Parisian aristocrats in the 1790s, they were in danger from the violence that had forced them and so many others

77 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, August 15, 1807, d'Autremont Family Papers (54–57).

78 Desjardins and Pharoux, the New York Company's American commissioners building the settlement at Castorland in northwestern New York, complain that they are charged high prices "due to our status as foreigners and ignorance of the language." Later, they note that "As foreigners, we were made to pay 6 pence a quart [for apple cider], whereas our boatmen, as Americans, only paid 3 pence." See Gallucci, 10 and 13.

across the Atlantic for safety. Our American historical sympathy is rarely with those who inherited their wealth or started out wealthy.

This family drama *is* in some ways a classical American immigrant story, with hopes and visions of a quick fortune, years of backbreaking labor on the frontier, naïve beliefs about American economy and society, inability to adjust to frontier life, and unresolvable quarrels between in-laws. In other ways, however, the story told in these letters turns our classic American myths upside down.

The French and the New York branches of the family remained tied together throughout the years of their correspondence, and beyond. Mme. d'Autremont died in 1809, and his mother's death elicits an uncharacteristic discouragement not seen in Louis Paul's earlier letters. In some of the last letters to Alexandre and Auguste (1811, 1814, and 1826), he reproves them for fighting and for their inability to cooperate with each other. To Alexandre, he writes, "I come back once more to the wish I had expressed to you so many times to see you join your efforts and intelligence with your brother. It is to that lack of cooperation that you may blame all your failures."[79]

In 1811, it seems that Alexandre has finally given up farming and has moved to town (probably into the house bought for his mother and aunt) to run a tavern. Louis Paul, learning of this move, predicts that his brothers will never achieve ownership of a large, profitable farm. In this moment of conceding the failure of his plans, he writes, "In all of the countries of the world only the peasants know how to draw a profit [from farming.]"[80] But the concession lasts only a few lines before he moves on to new plans for generating income: "I spoke to you at length of my undertaking in spinning flax and my project to establish it with you."[81] (Louis Paul had earlier sent plans for a "*machine a feu* . . . a special kind of boiler" that he wanted his brothers to have built, and he had discussed details of a "spinning mill," or a loom he had invented. He impatiently tells them, "You must at once have designs made to be sent to the patent office. Don't lose a minute.")[82] The correspondence ends before we know the outcome of either invention. Yet, in one of the last letters in the collection, written to Auguste, Louis Paul writes a somewhat cryptic yet revealing sentence: "My great American affair is progressing."[83] He may possibly mean one of the inventions mentioned above, or another money-making venture, but he may also simply refer to the land-ownership projects he had been supporting for years. In the previous paragraph, advising Auguste, he sums up his approach, and he also reveals his blind spots:

79 Louis Paul to Alexandre, April 17, 1811, d'Autremont Family Papers (152–154).

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.; Louis Paul to Auguste, October 29, 1814, d'Autremont Family Papers (155–157).

83 Louis Paul to Auguste, November 13, 1826, d'Autremont Family Papers (160).

> [I]t is not an easy thing to have simple ideas in America. They all love to jostle one another, thinking of nothing but making money, and life is spoiled by vain chimeras, by attempts of deluded ambition. If experience can do anything for a man, let it serve you in future, let it aid you in supporting you in your fate as an honest man should do. Fix upon a plan and follow it without deviation and you will soon be astonished at the peace you will enjoy and you will find that the best existence is as far removed from great fortune as it is from misery.[84]

Despite his repeated wishes to join them in their "retreat" and the "refuge" that he hoped they would be building for him, Louis Paul made only one trip to visit his brothers. He came to New York in 1836, four years before his death. We have only an extract of one letter dated after that trip (in September 1840), but it contains no mention of his visit to America or his evaluation of what his brothers had made of his financial contributions. We can hope he was satisfied.[85]

Further Research and Analysis

The d'Autremont Family Papers offer several points of entry for scholars. They may be interpreted as a commentary on refugee experiences in the early nineteenth century—a family forced to relocate and later separated because of the French Revolution. They managed to keep strong ties nevertheless and their strong connections are an important counterweight to the classic American immigrant story of leaving the Old World behind and casting off its ways. Theirs is a story of how a family divided by the Atlantic Ocean kept together for economic reasons and from family ties—a familial aspect of the Atlantic World approach to this period in American history. Their experiences also provide details about pioneer life and rural farming practices in early New York, although their experiences may result in expanding categories of what has been considered "typical."[86] Their letters put human faces on research into the short-lived heyday of land sales and land speculation of the time, particularly as foreigners with limited English skills trying to buy land, both for homesteading and for investment purposes. Despite the uncertain circumstances of their loss of their

84 Louis Paul to Auguste, November 13, 1826, d'Autremont Family Papers (160).

85 In addition to the letters analyzed here, there are other contemporary and near-contemporary documents in the collection that cover other family experiences and dynamics, but they do not contribute to the main focus of this study.

86 Thomas Rasmussen, *Ox Cart to Automobile: Social Change in Western New York* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2009), 44–52. Rasmussen uses Mme. d'Autremont's letters to Louis Paul as examples of how pioneer farmers lived in that period and location.

original land purchase, the d'Autremonts persisted valiantly both to find other avenues for survival and to reclaim those original 300 acres. One line of inquiry might follow Louis Paul's efforts through the American legal system to win back his mother's original purchase, which they were forced to sell at a real loss after their arrival.[87] Another might explore mother-son relationships in first-generation immigrants or the plight of a widow dependent on her sons. Or the converse: an eldest son and head of the family responsible for his widowed mother and younger brothers living an ocean away.

The story of the d'Autremont family is occasionally mentioned in books and articles on aristocratic refugees from France to the United States in the 1790s. In most accounts of the d'Autremonts and their larger group of French exiles, the story begins with the aristocrats losing their privileged status and then fleeing the increasing violence of the French Revolution. In 1791, the French revolutionary government passed a law seizing the property of nobility who had emigrated, making return to France extremely difficult once they had left. The guillotine made it all but impossible to stay. These fast-moving and alarming events as the Revolution escalated from moderate to radical to violent would have put pressure on families such as the d'Autremonts to leave the country.

Most histories of late-eighteenth-century French exiles to America end in the early 1800s, for, at that time, Napoleon granted a pardon to nobility who had fled the country during the 1790s, allowing them to return. Most accepted his offer; historical interest then wanes after the majority of them returned to France. Not all of them, however, gave up and returned. The d'Autremont family was among the few French exiles who remained in the New World, braving the elements, hard work, language obstacles, and other difficulties arising for foreigners unfamiliar with customs, laws, and language in a new land.

While the more political and economic story of French exiles to the United States may be familiar to those interested in or knowledgeable about this era of American history, the opportunity to look inside their family relationships is rare. A few memoirs and travel journals from French émigrés of the 1790s have been published. Most are memoirs intended for publication or are travel writings of the French (chiefly men) who stayed in the United States only until it was safe to return to France.[88] Other

87 The case of the d'Autremont lands was finally resolved in 1828 in favor of the d'Autremonts. See John VanSchaick Lansing Pruyn, *In the Court for the Trial of Impeachments and the Corrections of Errors, Esbon Corbin, plaintiff in error vs. James Jackson ex dem Peter B. Garnsey and others, defendant in error . . .* (Albany, N.Y.: Packard and Van Benthuysen, 1834). The "and others" were "Marie Jeane Dohet d'Autremont, and Antoine Bartholemy Louis Le Fevre and Marie Genevieve Dohet his wife."

88 Some of the most well-known are Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Moreau de Saint-Méry's American Voyage*, eds. Kenneth Roberts and Anna M. Roberts (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1947); Louis Philippe, king of France, *Diary of My Travels in America,* trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977); Henriette-Lucy, marquise de La Tour du Pin-Gouvernet, *Memoirs of Madame de la*

manuscripts and printed documents left by French exiles, moreover, are often in the original handwritten French (a challenge for many American historians) or, if in English, are scattered in local museums or historical societies, accessible to those who enjoy detective work. Recently, some of the difficulty in finding primary sources related to French exiles has eased owing to a resurgence of scholarly interest in early American history, combined with the emergence of a robust transatlantic theoretical approach to colonial and early modern studies. What sources may be archived in France have not yet been mined and could well provide material for many future PhD dissertations, scholarly articles, and monographs.[89]

Bringing these letters to a wider audience will add strong details to the growing knowledge by Atlantic-minded historians of important aspects of the early nineteenth-century transatlantic world. It is also a vivid example of how the fairly recent analytical construct of an Atlantic World helps clarify and interpret the d'Autremonts' experiences. The successes and failures of their journeys makes better sense in the context of a world of exchanges across the Atlantic basin, rather than a one-way immigrant journey from Old World to New. In their introduction to *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal,* Jack Greene and Philip Morgan describe Atlantic history as "a category of historical analysis . . . devised to help organize the study of . . . the growth of the Atlantic basin as a site for demographic, economic, social, cultural and other forms of exchange among and within the four continents surrounding the Atlantic Ocean." The movements and exchanges which occurred gave rise to "profound transformations . . . in all spheres of life."[90] The d'Autremonts were caught up in those transformations, yet also played their small part. This "angle of vision," as Greene and Morgan call the Atlantic history approach, is quite useful for understanding the d'Autremonts' experiences and difficulties.[91]

All in all, the d'Autremont Family Papers are a treasure for American historians. While an introductory essay has room to touch only on a few aspects of this aristocratic family turned pioneer farmers, the collection allows us an intimate and personal view of a family drama of initially reluctant immigrants whose dogged hard work was

Tour du Pin, trans. Felice Harcourt (New York: The McCall Publishing Company, 1969); François Alexandre Frédéric de la Rochefoucauld, duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America . . . in the Years 1795, 1796, 1797,* 2 vols. (London: R. Philips, 1799). The bibliography of sources in my PhD dissertation lists many others.

89 I am familiar with the work of two French historians who specialize in late eighteenth-century French exiles to North America: Jocelyne Moreau-Zanelli on Gallipolis and the Scioto Company; and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, on French migration to the United States before 1800. There are undoubtedly others.

90 Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds. *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

91 Ibid., 10.

inspired (and pushed!) by the eldest son in Paris convinced that the mythic American Dream was always right around the corner. As refugees, they toughed it out on the frontier, not always in the most admirable or successful ways, but they persevered and, ultimately, after years of drudgery and large transfers of cash from France, they may not have risen above what Louis Paul pejoratively called "mediocrity" but succeeded in becoming what we in the United States would see as solid middle-class Americans. The time is overdue to bring their story to a wider audience.

Appendix I: Finances and Investments

Much of the conversation between Louis Paul and his mother revolved around finances: the money he sent, how he wanted it invested, how she and her two younger sons were spending it, how Louis Paul wanted them to spend it, and whether they were producing the return he hoped for. Sometime between his departure in 1796 and June 1806, Louis Paul calculated that he sent 35,200 francs through friends and trading houses to his mother and brothers. Because he sent them by various means, and because letters from New York took months to reach Paris, he is constantly anxious to hear that his family received the funds and to hear an accounting of how the money is being spent. On June 8, 1806, Louis Paul writes to his mother detailing the amounts and the people through whom he had sent the funds and complaining that the most recent letter he had received from her was five months earlier; he is "impatient to learn that the funds I have sent have reached their destination and that no disappointment awaits me."[92] That letter from his mother is probably the one she wrote on February 3, 1806. If so, it would have added to, rather than eased, his anxiety. She tells him, "As everything leaks away here, we are not in the profits yet but in the expenses."[93] Two months later, Louis Paul turns up the heat and asks again about the money he has sent. By now, he has learned from his mother that some the funds have been received and much of them spent, and his anxiety has turned to irritation. He asks for an accounting, saying "I will not conceal from you, my good Mamma, that it seems to me that my money has been expended very rapidly for I recapitulated all the sums you have expended. I find . . . 19,200 francs."[94] Mme. d'Autremont responds to his anxiety during that spring of 1806: "You think, my dear, that we have spent much money. It is true, but as you mentioned Mr. Franchot's farm, don't you think he did not spend much? Labor is still higher here than anywhere else. . . . When the new road is completed, it will be much easier. We had to have a house and a barn."[95]

92 Louis Paul to his mother, June 8, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (117).

93 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, February 3, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (34).

94 Louis Paul to his mother, July 27, 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (125).

95 Marie Jeanne d'Autremont to Louis Paul, March 13, ca. 1806, d'Autremont Family Papers (36).

If all that money did get to the family members in New York (and it seems that it did), we want to know what the contemporary exchange rates were and estimate the current value of those dollars in order to understand more clearly what the amounts signify. Was Louis Paul rich? How much was he actually sending, in today's dollars? And where was it all being spent? Exchanges rates between French and American currency in the first decade of the nineteenth century are difficult to pinpoint, yet most sources indicate that one United States dollar was approximately equivalent to 5 French francs.[96] Hence 35,000 French francs were worth about U.S. $7,000 at the time. This is a significant amount of money and would have kept the New York branch well clothed and fed over the years. In 2015 dollars, that would amount to approximately $144,000—tangible evidence that Louis Paul was clearly committed to supporting his brothers and mother and making it possible for them, and himself, to stay afloat.[97] But the investments took a long time to pay off: more than one and possibly two decades passed before the d'Autremonts began to prosper.

First, unclear title to the Chenango lands dogged them for years, and caused them to lose quite a bit of money: they bought their land in 1791 for 2,700 *livres tournois,* or U.S.$540, and sold it at a loss in 1797 for U.S.$450 to fellow Frenchman Joseph Juliand.[98] Victor du Pont and his father, Samuel du Pont, were family friends and advisors to Louis Paul and his brothers. Given Victor's bankruptcy, numerous business ventures, and moves, this may not have been the wisest friendship. But Louis Paul appears to have respected the du Ponts and believed the Angelica purchase was sensible since it was in the same neighborhood where Victor du Pont was buying land and opening a

96 Denzel, *Handbook of World Exchange Rates,* reports that the French *franc* in 1803 was made of 4.50 grammes of fine silver. France used the double standard of gold and silver in valuing its currency, and, like many other European countries in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, also experimented with paper currency. Consequently, tracing exchange rates is a complicated endeavor. The United States dollar had 24.05 grams of silver, making the dollar equivalent to approximately 5 francs. In the *Castorland Journal*, Gallucci includes in appendix F (pages 346–347) an explanation of exchange rates referenced in the journal: in 1796, "one piaster (dollar) = 5 livres, 5 sous." In 1795 France changed its currency from the *livre tournois* to the franc, the franc being nearly identical in value to the *livre*. In the British North American colonies, the Spanish dollar (usually minted in Mexico) or *piastre/piastra/piaster* or piece of eight, was the main currency, and after the American Revolution, it still had the widest circulation, contained 24.43 grams of fine silver, and was used for "everyday circulation." Denzel, *lxiv*, 404. See also John. J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600–1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

97 <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/> (accessed June 27, 2016).

98 Deed of Sale from Mari Jane Dautremont [*sic*] by her attorney Alexandre Dautremont to Capt. Joseph Juliand and Peter B. Garnsey, attorney at law, December 1, 1797, Tioga County, N.Y., Book D Deeds, p. 530, Chenango County Clerk, Norwich, N.Y.

store. Louis Paul wrote to his mother, "The neighborhood of Victor du Pont will make up for everything else."[99]

The budding American financial system also affected the d'Autremonts' efforts and ability to prosper. Louis Paul may not have been aware of how financial policies and laws in the young United States were being developed and enacted to thwart the type of landed aristocracy the d'Autremonts were attempting to recreate. In the late 1780s and 1790s both the federal government and state legislatures were debating and discussing Alexander Hamilton's proposal for a national bank, as well as the best way to retire the Revolutionary War debt. No mention of politics comes up in the d'Autremonts' letters, and we may be able to assume they did not follow the debate or did not see the tie between it and their situation. There is a connection, however.

As the states and federal government debated these financial issues, there emerged a strong bias, particularly among Jeffersonian Republicans, against speculation and a "permanent monied class."[100] Looking back to their recent colonial experience as well as to philosophical beliefs in equality of opportunity, Republican factions urged hasty retirement of the debt in order to discourage speculators aiming to profit from investment in the debt and eventually to live "off the interest income, generation after generation. Those classes were prominent in allegedly corrupt European states but were unwelcome in the new United States."[101] To some, such people were considered "unproductive parasites."[102] Hamilton and the Federalists, however, considered them necessary for building an American capitalist system. In the end, "what emerged in the first decade of the nineteenth century was essentially a Jeffersonian-Hamiltonian hybrid. The nation possessed a maturing capital market . . . [but no] highly visible monied class . . . arose in American society.[103] The bias against inherited and consolidated wealth and the bias in favor of Jefferson's country of small landowners were strong threads of the political conversation during the d'Autremont's early years in Angelica. Alexandre and Auguste eventually became landowners, but on a relatively small scale, compared to the thousand-acre farm Louis Paul imagined.

I believe that late eighteenth-century French images of American culture were borne of and nurtured by Enlightenment writers about America, and that these pervasive images induced French men and women such as the d'Autremont family to construct America as an exception to Europe's Old World decadence and corruption. America existed, on one plane, as a place in the imagination, "not as a society of people

99 Louis Paul to his mother, January 4, 1805, d'Autremont Family Papers (92).

100 Edwin J. Perkins, *American Public Finance and Financial Services, 1700–1815* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 7.

101 Ibid., 7.

102 Ibid., 7.

103 Ibid., 8–9.

or of classes, not as a republic of citizens, nor as a country with customs and habits. It was, to them, a virgin land; a fertile, prosperous, tranquil environment; an empty, rural setting available to them and full of opportunities to build new lives."[104] This romanticized image of America proved remarkably durable for aristocratic French exiles to the United States, and Louis Paul's repeated insistence to his family that their lives are tranquil, better than his in Paris, and suited for wealth gives voice to that exceptionalist vision again and again.

Appendix 2: The Collection: Conditions, Source, and Translator

How the d'Autremont Family Papers came to the Schlesinger Library is a dramatic story in its own right. The Schlesinger Library archives indicate that the papers were donated by Suzanne d'Autremont Pratt in 1976. According to notes from the Schlesinger Library administrative files, Suzanne Pratt's "first husband was a late French banker named d'Autremont, and they brought the papers with them when they got out of France during World War II, and gave them to American cousins in Tucson."[105] Evidently, Suzanne Pratt knew Frank Freidel, a Harvard history professor and during those years chairman of the library's advisory committee. Professor Freidel brought the correspondence to the attention of Patricia King, the librarian, and arrangements were made for the donation of the typewritten copies of the d'Autremont papers. Freidel later wrote to King, "If you think this material is valuable, it might be possible to obtain the originals."[106] The location of the originals, however, remains unknown.

Evidence suggests that in the late nineteenth century, one of Alexandre's grandsons came into possession of the handwritten letters in French. Charles d'Autremont, born in 1851 in Angelica—near the original d'Autremont farms—developed an abiding interest in the history of his family. He undertook a move to Duluth, Minnesota, in 1881, and in the 1890s and early 1900s, he frequently corresponded with Louise Welles Murray, the early historian of the Asylum colony, and David Craft, the historian of Bradford County, Pennsylvania (where the Asylum colony was located). Among the three letters from this d'Autremont contained in the Schlesinger collection, one to Craft, dated 1897, mentions that he has "taken the trouble to translate and send typewritten copies of a number of his [i.e., Louis Paul's] letters" to Louise Welles Murray and would be happy to send copies to Craft as well.[107]

104 Spaeth, "America in the French Imagination," 254.

105 Sarah Hutcheon, research librarian at the Schlesinger Library, email message to author, November 22, 2013.

106 Ibid.

107 Charles d'Autremont to David Craft, December 28, 1897, d'Autremont Family Papers (8).

A description of the Schlesinger collection notes that a few of the typewritten letters were translated by "unknown persons," but that the majority were translated from the original by Mr. René Cheruy.[108] Cheruy taught French art and literature in the 1910s at the Loomis School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and then again after his service to France in World War I until his retirement in 1945.[109] It is possible that Charles D'Autremont engaged him to translate the letters, as Cheruy would have been a contemporary of Charles and possibly a friend of the extended d'Autremont family in New York during the period when Charles had the letters translated. Sadly, though, the trail of the original letters' whereabouts ends in the early 1900s. But it may be that those original letters passed from Charles d'Autremont in Duluth, Minn., to one of his descendants and reside in an attic trunk somewhere, patiently waiting to be discovered.

108 d'Autremont Family Papers (*iii).* I have located four additional sets of the d'Autremont Family Papers: in the Tioga Point Museum, the Hagley Museum and Library, the Angelica Free Library, Angelica, N.Y. (which includes extensive annotations and accompanying maps from Alan F. Stone, Angelica Town Historian, 1983); and in the privately held Paul M. Andresen Jr. Collection. All four sets contain the same letters and documents.

109 Oral history interview with Stanton L. Catlin, 1989 July 1–September 14, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Catlin reminisces about his time as a schoolboy at The Loomis School and calls Cheruy an "elderly professor" in 1930. See the obituary for René Cheruy in the *Tucson Daily Citizen,* May 26, 1964.

Contributors

The paper by Kenneth E. Carpenter stems from his work on a bibliography of Benjamin Franklin's "Way to Wealth," which is itself an offshoot of a larger descriptive and analytical bibliography of pre-1851 translations of economic literature among the European cultures. Mr. Carpenter began work on the bibliography during the 1970s when he was curator of the Kress Library of Business and Economics in Baker Library at the Harvard Business School. In his retirement from the Harvard Library he is moving it toward completion.

José María Castañé, an engineer and an economist, is a Spanish financial and industrial entrepreneur who spearheaded in the early eighties the private equity investment activity in Spain, an activity he has pursued until 2013. During the last 27 years, he has devoted part of his energies to collecting original documents pertaining to the world's political and military upheavals of the XXth century. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Museo del Prado and the Founder and Chairman of Fundación José María Castañé in Madrid, an institution to which he donated the collection of historic documents. The Fundación, together with him, has made a gift of the core of this collection, consisting in almost three thousand documents to Harvard, which now form part of Houghton Library of the Harvard Library.

Dr. Grigory Kessel is affiliated with the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Manchester and specializes in the study of the literary heritage of Syriac Christianity, with particular attention to its manuscript tradition. Besides manuscripts (most recently, with M. Bernabò, "A Syriac Four Gospel Book in Diyarbakır," *Convivium* 3, no. 1 [2016]: 172-203), his publications deal with Syriac medical ("Inventory of Galen's Extant Works in Syriac," in *Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq on His Galen Translations* [2016]) and monastic texts ("The Manuscript Heritage of Isaac of Nineveh: A Survey of Syriac Manuscripts," in *The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century* [2014]), as well as bibliographic research (*A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature* [2011]). Kessel is a participant in a number of cataloging projects, including the Sinai Palimpsest Project and those of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. At present he

is a Principal Investigator on the European Research Council Starting Grant Project, "Transmission of Classical Scientific and Philosophical Literature from Greek into Syriac and Arabic," and holds a Wellcome Trust Research Fellowship in Humanities for an editiorial project, "The 'Syriac Epidemics'—Reception and Transmission of Classical Medicine in the East."

Racha Kirakosian is Assistant Professor of German and the Study of Religion at Harvard University. She is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, U.K. At Harvard, she serves on the Committee of Medieval Studies, the Standing Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and the Digital Arts and Humanities Committee. Her recent publications include "Rhetorics of Sanctity: Christina of Hane in the Early Modern Period—with a Comparison to a Mary Magdalene Legend" in *Oxford German Studies* 43 (2014). Her forthcoming book is *Die Vita der Christina von Hane—Untersuchungen und Edition*.

Leslie A. Morris is Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts, Houghton Library, a position she assumed in September 2005; previously, she served as Curator of Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library (1992–2005). Her research interests center on nineteenth- and twentieth-century bookselling and collecting, and she has published and lectured often on booksellers A.S.W. Rosenbach and Bernard Alfred Quaritch, and collectors such as Robert Holford, Amy Lowell, William A. White, Harry Widener, and others.

Catherine T. C. Spaeth, PhD is an International Program Consultant for Seminars International, a provider for short-term study abroad programs. Her research focuses on French perspectives on American culture. She has published "America in the French Imagination: The French Settlers of Asylum, Pennsylvania, and Their Perceptions of 1790s America," in the *Canadian Review of American Studies*. She is currently co-editing the third edition of *The Guide to Successful Short-term Programs Abroad*.