

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

A Visitor to Cincinnati in 1796

In May, 1796, James [Mc]Henry, the Secretary of War for the United States wrote to Arthur St. Clair their governor of the North-West Territory informing him that "certain emissaries of foreign governments were on their way to the West for the purpose of encouraging the people of those parts to secede from the Union, and form a separate connection with a foreign power." The persons whom he pointed out and described were Powers, De Collot, and Warin. Powers was described "as of Irish descent, about thirty five years of age a man of science, seemingly versatile, speaks French, Spanish, and English with equal fluency, and pronounces each like a native." "De Collot is a Frenchman, full six feet high, about forty years of age, and speaks English very well. Warin is also a Frenchman, was lately sub-engineer in the service of the United States, which he resigned for his present employment; speaks English tolerably, is about thirty years of age, about six feet high, black hair, ruddy complexion, and easy manners."

Gov. St. Clair then at Cincinnati was directed to watch; to seize them if detected in any overt act of crime, and to procure copies of their papers, and forward them to the president. Subsequent disclosures have shown that Secretary Henry confused two different plots which were progressing at the same time. Thomas Powers was a shrewd, experienced conspirator employed by the Spanish governor Baron de Carondelet, and sent by him to make, or rather to renew proposals to Gen. Wilkinson, Judge Sebastian and other prominent Kentuckians tending toward the separation of Kentucky from the Union, and the formation of an independent government under the protection of Spain; and promising to the state the free navigation of the Mississippi River and to the several individuals, addressed the sum of \$100,000 in hard cash. Several of these men had previously handled Spanish dollars, and had written to the Spanish governor long secret letters which when published in later years by the authority of the State of Louisiana, destroyed more than one fair and honored character.

But in 1796, Gen. Wilkinson was no longer a Lexington trader. He was the commander-in-chief of the American army, and he instructed Powers to report that the time for such negotiations was past; because Kentucky had obtained by the Treaty with Spain all that the people of that state have expected to gain by conspiring for a separate government under the protection of Spain, – the free navigation of the great River. Judge Sebastian however was not so cut, and his salary was smaller. He held long interviews with Powers, and afterwards went down the Mississippi to New Orleans to hold an interview with Baron de Carondelet. For some years thereafter he received his salary of \$666.66 as Judge of the highest court in Kentucky and a stipend of \$2000 a year from the Spanish authorities for services not clearly specified; but which served later to drive the judge from the bench. Powers did not get out of the region without interruption. One of General Wayne's officers met him on the Ohio, the great highway for Western travel, broke open his trunks, read his letters, and took away such as he thought might interest the authorities of the United States. The other two gentlemen that Henry described were Brig. Gen. Henry Victor Collet, and his adjutant, Gen. Warin who had been sent West by M. Adet

the French minister to survey the country and further French interests.

Callot was born as Chalons-sur-Marne, France in 1751. He served under Rochambeau in the Revolutionary War as Quartermaster-General's aid. He spent one winter at Newport with the French forces, marched through the seaboard states to Virginia, and took part in the campaign that ended with the surrender of Cornwallis in 1781, he returned to Providence that year, and sailed from Boston with the French army in the fall of 1782. The French Revolution came, Collot was sent by the Directory, to act as Governor of the island of Guadeloupe, one of the West Indies. He ruled there from March 1793 to April 1794: a little more than a year, during which time he was without money, without [marinee], without soldiers and without laws." At the end of the year and English fleet appeared off Base Terre, the capital of the island, and Collot did not choose to return to France, but sometime in 1794 he landed at Philadelphia. Immediately upon his appearance there he was arrested on the suit of a merchant whose vessel had been seized, carried into the port of Base Terre, and condemned as a lawful prize. While under bail to appear for trial for having approved of the condemnation and sale of the American vessel, Callot was employed by the French minister, Adet, to explore the interior of America. An account of this exploration in a thick quarto volume entitled "A Journey in North America" by Victor Callot, and its accompanying atlas of 36 copperplate maps, have furnished most of the information now possessed by us concerning the author and his work in America.

At the time of Callot's employment and mission from M. Adet, the American people were in the midst of one of those fierce, bitter political struggles called a presidential campaign. Washington had declined to serve for a third term, and Adams and Jefferson were leading candidates for the succession. Three years previous, M. Genet had landed at Charleston S.C. As the first Minister of the new revolutionary government of France. Without any of the customary formalities of presentation and recognition, he commenced to appeal to the sympathy of the American people in aid of their former allies. Gratitude and patriotism seemed to conspire to arouse popular enthusiasm for the representative of "Liberty, fraternity, and equality." Genet fitted out, equipped, and commissioned privateers to cruise against the enemies of France. When Federal courts refused to recognize their captures as lawful prizes, Genet extended the jurisdiction of the French consular courts to meet the case. He enlisted and armed soldiers, bought and exported arms, munitions of war, clothing, and food. He even issued proclamations defying the Federal authorities. Washington finally requested his recall, and M. Fouchet came over to take his place and continue his work. In less than a year he was so unfortunate as to have a dispatch captured which ruined his usefulness in America, and M. Adet succeeded. The French nation claimed that by treaty we were bound to aid them in their war with England. Every effort was made by the successive ministers to embroil us in their quarrels. Failing in this, their effort was directed toward weakening the party in power and strengthening the adverse party. On the other hand, the Republicans then in the minority took up the cause of France; they called one another "citizen;" they wore the French cockades; they organized societies in imitation of the French revolutionary clubs.

At this time the United States had less than one half its present area. The Mississippi was its western limit. On the western side of the Alleghenies was the newly-admitted state of

Kentucky south of the Ohio River, and the territory north-west of the Ohio on the opposite bank. Kentucky was comparatively well-settled throughout the central part of the state before the people of the other side of the river could plow, sow, or reap except under the protection of an armed force. Kentucky therefore was in need of a market for the surplus of her corn, hemp, tobacco, wheat, and whiskey before Ohio became a state. The natural outlet of this region was down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers; but the mouth of the Mississippi River and its entire western shore, was then held by the Spanish nation, the most arbitrary and exclusive of nations. By them the Kentuckians were excluded from the markets of the world.

Louisiana had been a French colony. Its inhabitants were still Frenchmen at heart, and all spoke the French language. In 1793, at the outbreak of the French Revolution, there were symptoms of a rebellion against Spanish authority. The people sang the Marseillaise and *Ca Ira*; but the governor held the forts, the prisons, and the guns; and with his little force of Spanish soldiers he kept the French in subjection. In 1794 the Society of French Jacobins established at Philadelphia issued a proclamation which was distributed at New Orleans calling upon the people to cease to be slaves of the government to which they were shamelessly sold. As this manifesto came from the locality where Genet was then residing, we may presume that he was an active cause. At about the same time he sent four ambassadors to Kentucky provided with blank commissions for distinguished Kentuckians who should be willing to enlist men to help to enfranchise Louisiana. This was before the Treaty with Spain was concluded and Genet was well aware of the discontent of the Kentuckians at the apparent neglect of the general government to enforce their claims to the free navigation of the Mississippi. French societies were soon organized in Kentucky, one of the largest being at Lexington. Gov. St. Clair became aware of the dangerous movement, and issued a proclamation enjoining the people to preserve a strict neutrality. The same newspaper that contained this proclamation also contained the proposals of George Rogers Clarke, Esq as Major-General-in-Chief of the armies of France for volunteers “for the reduction of the Spanish posts on the Mississippi for opening the trade of the said river, and for giving freedom to its inhabitants,” etc. He promised from 1000 to 3000 acres of unappropriated land, to each person or a cash payment of a dollar a day. But while the French army of Kentuckians were still within the state the news came of the signing of the Treaty with Spain which secured the long-contested right to float down the great River to its mouth. The leader of the French movement and distributor of French commissions announced to the society at Lexington Kentucky that “unforeseen events had stopped the march of 2000 brave Kentuckians to attack those who unjustly deprived them of their natural rights to the free navigation of the Mississippi River.” He concluded justly that the Kentuckians were more interested in their own affairs than in those of Louisiana and that they would not fight for that which they could not take without asking.

The treaty with Spain was accepted by the Kentuckians as the conclusion of all their difficulties; boat-loads of corn, whiskey, tobacco, hemp, and flour were soon floating down the current. But the Spanish officials were exacting, suspicious, and haughty. Taxes, duties, and restrictions hampered trade; and two years later the newly aroused discontent had reached a point which led M. Adet to send Collot and Warin as emissaries to spy out the land and to make report. The two generals, like a detachment of the Army of the

Grand-Duchess of Gerolstein, marched in fourteen days from Philadelphia across the state of Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh, following the well-beaten trail which in this year, 1796, was traveled by the thousands who were then flocking to the West. One thousand broad-horns passed Marietta the first year after the signing of the Treaty of Greenville and the settlement of the Indian difficulties. They reached Pittsburgh in April, having purchased at McKeesport on the Monongahela a keel-boat 40 feet long, 12 feet broad, and 4 feet deep for the sum of \$60. So many boats were used this year that it was difficult to buy one at Pittsburgh.

Collot gives a minute typographical and military description of the town of Pittsburgh. He describes its location, its business, the cost of freights from eastern cities, its iron mines just opened up on the Monongahela, the coal banks, etc. He also locates and describes each fort, redoubt, and points out such weaknesses as would be useful to a foe. The information was precisely of the kind that would be desirable by a French army of invasion. After completing his examination of Pittsburgh, Collot prepared to drift down the river. He hired five boatmen - three Canadians and two Americans. Just as they were about to cast off their cable, a young man followed by a lean dog and bearing a gun approached Collot and asked for passage as far as to the mouth of the Cumberland River. Collot consented, provided the man would take an oar and work his passage. The Hunter answered that he worked for himself and never for any other man; that he had lost his way while hunting some time before, and that he would contrive to return as he came - a free man. Collot had reason to admire his independence, a week later as the young hunter passed him floating on a raft which he had constructed. He was well supplied with venison, and had enough to trade with Collot for biscuit.

On the 6th June, 1796, Collot and companions began the survey of the Ohio River. Floating down in the keel-boat, Collot noted every turn, names every danger to navigation, and specifies how it is to be avoided. He notes the highlands, and their nearness or remoteness from the river, the breath of intervals and their vegetation. He measures the depth of water at every half-mile. With his canoe he examines every creek that empties into the Ohio, and notes its depth and current. He had Hutchins' map with him, and it is a white day when he discovers an island or a concealed creek that had escaped previous notice by mapmakers. About the middle of June and they landed at Marietta, where they found five hundred New England people, and a few French families lately come from Gallipolis. The old Fort with its four bastions was still standing; but the people were engaged in the cultivation of corn, rye, and hemp instead of hunting Indians. Gallipolis they found still inhabited by about ninety men and half as many women - the fragment of the crowd of wig-makers, coach-makers, confectioners, and small mechanics who had been victimized by Joel Barlow and the Scioto company. At the mouth of the Scioto they found several families lately removed from Kentucky. Thirty houses had been built within six months of the signing of the Treaty of Greenville. About 27 miles below this nascent town that is now Portsmouth they found half a dozen men at Vancesburg engaged in making salt. It took eight gallons of the water to make 1 pound of salt. The tanks, troughs, and reservoirs used in the business were all made from the bark of trees. The furnace consisted of several small castles, each bedded with stones and mud over its own fire. Limestone, now Maysville was the chief point below Marietta. This was the old landing place for those who entered Kentucky. The keel-boat was left in

charge of the boatman while Collot visited Lexington and Frankfort, – probably with a view to meeting the old friends of France and establishing new alliances. He returned by the same route and pursued his voyage. On stopping at Columbia he learned that the United States authorities had notice of this approach, and were on the lookout for him. Yet he stopped at Cincinnati and made the following notes.

“Cincinnati is situated on one of the finest spots in America: the ground on which this town is built rises gently from the banks of the river. On the opposite shore falls the Licking River, which waters a part of Kentucky, at its mouth a small town has been lately built called Newport, and which will be the depot for all goods coming down the Licking. The view of this town and the course of the river present the most pleasing perspective from Cincinnati. – Behind the town of Cincinnati and on a height is an old fort with four bastions built of wood which was abandoned and became useless after the treaty of peace made with the Indian; the frontier line having been carried very far back into the country. At the extremity of the town in the western part, is an Indian building having the form of a rotunda. Here the Indians held their councils, made their sacrifices, and celebrated their feasts. If we may judge from the size of the trees which have grown up since its construction, this senate-house must be very ancient. The town of Cincinnati which was begun only five years since, contains already 300 families: this sudden increase it owes to the abode of the army. The spot offers no advantages for commerce; and it is probable that when the Army shall have left this place, whatever industries it possesses will be carried to the little town of Newport which by means of the navigation of the Licking, offers every kind advantage for trade.” It would be difficult to tell what prevented his prophecy from its fulfillment; but Cincinnati did not move across the river. It may be of interest to the citizens of the city to hear what another observer set of Cincinnati this same summer. Mr. James Elliot, poet, “citizen of Guilford, Vermont, and late non-commissioned officer in the legion of the United States” was on his way home, having just been discharged from Wayne's army at the close of two years' service. He stopped at Cincinnati, Sunday, July 3rd 1796; and he says in his diary “The population of this town, the number and elegance of its houses, the extent and variety of its trade etc., have greatly increased since my first arrival in this country. It is to be lamented that idleness and dissipation are almost universal. It is the Sodom of the western country. Divine service is now performing; but the church is but thinly attended, while the taverns are thronged, and exhibit detestable scenes of riot and drunkenness. A man possessed of the least tincture of morality must wish his stay here as short as possible.” It is quite possible that Mr. Elliott's experience in filling with jingles the poetical corner of the country newspapers may have made him a little careless in the use of the figures of speech; but allowing for such slight difference of diction, this description sounds very much like some we have all heard and read in the past year.

Gen. Collot did not tarry long at the landing place in front of Cincinnati. He escaped the notice of general St. Clair and floated off downstream with his journal, maps, and papers intact. He landed at North Bend, and there saw quantities of small parquets of a green species with yellow necks. Audubon saw the same species at nearly the same place some years later; but it is probable that none are now seen there. Collot took his canoe and ascended Big Bone Lick to the place where the bones of the mammoth had been found. He dug for three days and found many bones, some of them too large to be carried away.

Collot found Louisville a village of 60 or 80 houses. He commends the beauty of its location, but thought that the newer town of Cassania consisting of two houses and a store on the north side of the river gave greater promise of growth and prosperity. While at Louisville, Collot met George Rogers Clarke who had held a French commission under Genet, and whose reputation then suffered greatly from his habit of intoxication. Below Louisville the river had been less carefully mapped. Collot found many islands and creeks that had not been previously laid down by explorers and map-makers. He procured an exact description of the route up the Wabash River and of the dangers that awaited the boatman; the rapids, the distances, the portage across to the waters of Manmee and the route to Detroit. Some fifteen years ago Mr. Francis Parkman, while exploring the French archives for original material for his vivid histories of the earlier dominion of the French in America, found in one of the Departments a very large incomplete map, drawn with the pen and colored, of the Strait of Detroit and the settlements upon it. The title of the map showed that it was "prepared to illustrate the journey of Gen. Collot in this part of the continent in 1796." It is possible that this map was procured by him at that time with the intention of placing it in his Atlas. Collot calls attention to the land at the head of the Wabash as "the key to the whole country watered by the Wabash, and the first which ought to be fortified if the North-Western states ever make a scism." Several similar remarks indicate that the general's trip was not solely in the interest of science.

Collot was not a mighty hunter. A short distance below the mouth of the Wabash they discovered a bear swimming in the river. Collot and one of the Canadians pursued in the canoe. Collot shot six times; their dog jumped from the canoe on the bear's back and was torn in pieces. The Canadian finally killed the bear with a stroke of the axe.

When Gen. Clarke held his commission in the French army, and the Kentuckians were gathering, mustering, and arming in 1794, the United States reoccupied Old Fort Massac, eleven miles below the mouth of the Cumberland River, and stationed a force there to hinder or prevent Americans and French from passing down the river to disturb the Spaniards in Louisiana. Collot found the fort still occupied by a hundred soldiers under command of Capt. Zebulon Pike, – the father of the more celebrated Zebulon Montgomery Pike, who lost his life in the invasion of Canada in 1812.

Collot stopped overnight at Ft. Massac, making a careful note of its capacity for offense or defense. In the morning, just as he was about to start, Capt. Pike came down with a file of soldiers and arrested him. Collot showed his maps and papers, endeavoring to prove that his trip was merely one of exploration. He declares that none of the officers at this frontier post could read French; but this is probably a slander. Capt. Pike proposed to send him and his papers to Philadelphia; but the surgeon of the post argued the hardship of Collot's case, and the old captain concluded to let him go on provided he go in charge of an officer so long as he remained within the territory belonging to "Uncle Sam." Capt. Taylor became a passenger upon the keel boat, and Collot resumed his journey. He called it 1010 miles from Pittsburgh to the mouth of the Ohio. Quite a close approximation to the true distance, considering the method of the survey, and the total lack of instruments of precision. He rowed and cordled up the Mississippi to St. Louis, when he passed out of the jurisdiction of the United States, and freed himself from the guardianship of Capt. Taylor. Here he found a people speaking mongrel-French: but

indolent, careless, drunken, and improvident as the Indians near by. The men were generally traders, hunters, or boatmen. They were superstitious and obstinate. They have forgotten the divisions of time and the names of the months. They follow blindly the customs of their fathers; but Collot says “they love France, and speak of their country with pride.” He spent six weeks visiting all the old French towns in the American bottom, on the Illinois River, and on the Mississippi itself. It is manifest from his Journal that he ascertained their feeling toward the new government lately erected in France, and that he prepared to make use of them for the furtherance of the schemes of the French minister.

At Chartres he found the old Fort Charles still standing, but in ruins. All the timbers had been removed; but the walls six feet thick and twenty feet high, and the four large buildings at the corners, – all built of freestone and raised on arches, were still standing to mark the military energy of an earlier period. At St. Louis Collot found a small redoubt built two years before to resist the expected attack of Gen. Clark and his Kentuckians and the French allies. In his wandering among the Canadian-French inhabitants, he somewhere fell upon a trace of another conspiracy somewhat similar to the one in which he himself played a late and inconspicuous part. Dr. John Connelly, the first owner of all the land on which the city of Louisville is now built, had been driven from the West into Canada for his adherence to the cause of the English. He planned with the governor of Canada an expedition which was to receive aid from the discontented inhabitants of Kentucky, and establish an independent Western government under the protection of England. Thus each one of the leading governments of Europe at that time, – France, Spain, and England, were plotting to use the Kentuckians for plucking their own chestnuts from the fire.

When Collot returned to St. Louis, he found that the Spanish minister to the United States M. de Jeardines, had requested Baron de Carondelet, the Governor-General of Louisiana to arrest him, and that the governor had given orders to that effect. He also learned that Secretary of State Pickering had also sent orders for his detention. The approach of winter rendered it inexpedient to attempt to return by way of Canada. Collot was then in a dilemma: he determined to go down the Mississippi River as he originally proposed. He exchanged his keel-boat for a pirogue made from a single tree hollowed out. He retained four Canadians, a Spaniard, and a hunter, which, with Warin and himself made eight persons in the party. He then altered his papers to adapt them for Spanish inspection, and floated down the stream. At Kaskaskia he learned that his letters coming from Philadelphia had been intercepted by the federal government, and that Judge St. Clair was circulating some uncomplimentary stories about the French in general, and about Gen. Collot in particular. The gentleman that he calls Judge St. Clair was probably Wm St. Clair, the clerk of the court, a relative of Arthur St. Clair. Collot called formerly on St. Clair, and in the presence of a justice of the peace procured a formal statement of the injurious stories which he promised to print in an appendix: but which were omitted, and therefore totally lost.

At the mouth of the White River Adjutant Warin had a trifling difficulty with a couple of Indians with respect to the proportion of his rum they were entitled to drink. The Indians argued with a club which disabled Adjutant Warin. Warin's hunter rejoined with a musket shot, breaking one Indian's arm. By this means the rum was saved; but Collot

suspected that the Indians were set on to murder him by the authorities of the United States. Collot and his companions passed several forts on the Mississippi, which he described with particularity; and on the 28th of October he reached a point six miles above New Orleans. Here they stopped with a French gentleman named Boré, celebrated for having been the first planter in Louisiana to cultivate sugarcane and manufacture sugar successfully. Early in the morning of the 27th the two travelers were informed that the governor's barge and arrived. The mayor of the city of New Orleans entered, and requested in the most polite terms the pleasure of their company; but after some interchange of polite phrases invitation was changed to an order and the two gentlemen were taken to New Orleans and lodged Ft. St. Charles under guard. Collot and Warin were separately examined. Then papers and maps were also examined and some were copied. After the governor had obtained all possible information, he released them from arrest, told them that the people were alarmed at their presence, and suggested that they depart at once to the mouth of the river, and there await an appointment to go to Philadelphia. To emphasize the suggestion, both were placed in the governor's galley, again under guard, rowed down the river, and landed at the residence of the chief pilot at the Belize. This house was a frail cottage built on the mud at the mouth of the great river, and infested with all manner of biting insects even in midwinter. Here they remained nearly two months before they were able to procure passage to Philadelphia where they arrived safely in January 1797. Warin died shortly afterward from the effects of the blow received at the hands of the Indians.

In the meantime, affairs had not stood still in the United States. The election of president which was pending when the pair of generals crossed the mountains on their westward trip, was over. Adet the French minister took an active part in the campaign, issuing several campaign documents full of buncombe, folly, and false sentiment. These documents became as famous in their day as the Reverend Burchard's three Rs; and were quite as ruinous to the person whom Adet intended to help. Jefferson was defeated, Adams was elected, and Adet resigned his ministry and returned to France. When Collot returned, he found no one to whom he could report. The scheme for a violent separation of the Western states from the Union failed. Collot returned to France. He lived long enough to see Louisiana again in the hands of the French, only to be sold in a few months to the United States. The sale was consummated in 1803 April; and Collot died at Paris July 1804. His plates were all engraved, and his Journal was ready for publication in French and in English at the time of his death. The notary of his estate sold the whole of both editions when it was finally issued in 1826 to a book-seller at Paris, who willfully destroyed all but 300 of the French and 100 of the English edition with the purpose of increasing the value of the remaining copies.

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