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# On The Edges of Empire and Revolution: The Entangled History of Armand Gabriel Duplantier

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On the Edges of Empire and Revolution, The Entangled History of Armand Gabriele Duplantier

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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Department of History  
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ARMAND GABRILE DUPLANTIER

by  
Fiona Finnigan  
A Research Paper Submitted in Partial  
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for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the field of History

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## ON THE EDGES OF EMPIRE AND REVOLUTION: THE ENTANGLED HISTORY OF ARMAND GABRIEL DUPLANTIER

History, like any other discipline has its genera and its specializations. These subdivisions are necessary: with out them history becomes the clearly impractical endeavor of studying all of the things, in all the of places, at all of the times. Subdivisions are thus needed. Traditionally, professional historians have based these divisions on chronological and geographic boundaries that are associated with the political borders of empires and nation states. This has tended to create a historical world of centers and peripheries, where events happen and decisions are made at the center which then radiate outward. This conception has the advantage of being relatively tidy but, like many tidy things, it tends to obscure the complicated realities of life on the edges of empires.

There are many ways that history can become tangled and untidy. Family is one of those ways. Family connections can span great distances and multiple generations, and often do so regardless of national or imperial borders. This paper seeks to tell the story of one such man who's family connections caught him in the entanglements of empire and revolution. Because of his family, Armand Gabrielle Allard Duplantier's life was deeply interwoven with the events of the French Revolution that happened hundreds of miles and a kingdom away in France, even though he lived in the Spanish colony of Louisiana, and never set foot on French soil during the course of the French Revolution. These entanglements were legal, financial, and deeply personal. Duplantier's experiences in Spanish Louisiana during the French Revolution speak to the ways in which the center is perhaps closer to the periphery than one might first suspect, and family bonds can often make history more tangled than tidy.

The French Revolution is well researched. However, this writing, while vast and varied in its topics of interest, often remains focused within the geographic boundaries of France. More recently, scholarship of the Atlantic World has expanded the French Revolution and its ideology to those locations bordering the Atlantic Ocean. This research has expanded the French Revolution, its ideology and its calls for liberty and revolution, beyond the borders of France. However, it tends to focus on the Caribbean, particularly the Haiti Revolution. These works do not, however, give much consideration to New Orleans or Louisiana. Janet Polansky's *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* continues in this tradition, focusing on the dissemination of revolutionary ideology through out the Atlantic World during the seventeenth century. Her chapter about correspondence throughout the Atlantic World in the age of revolutions is particularly relevant to my research because my focus is on letters written by Armand Allard Duplantier, living in Louisiana, to his family in France.

Colonial Louisiana also has a well established historiography. Though the name Louisiana was given to a much larger territory encompassing most of the Mississippi river basin, my research is concerned only with New Orleans and the surrounding country side. Much of the scholarship of colonial New Orleans focuses on the struggles of building a colony in a geographically inhospitable location with little support from the mother country, and the negotiation and creation of identity on the part of people living in a colony that changed hands between three different countries in less than one hundred years.

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's well known work *African's in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* was particularly useful

for my research. Although it primarily considers the experiences of Afro-Creoles in colonial Louisiana, the experiences of Afro-Creole slaves and slave masters are closely intertwined. Her descriptions of the Mina Slave Conspiracy and the Pointe Coupée Slave Conspiracy in particular were relevant because they provide additional information and a different point of view to the descriptions of both of these events in Armand Duplantier's letters.

Dianne Guenin-Lelle's *The Story of French New Orleans: History of a Creole City* recounts the formation of a distinct Creole identity, separate from empires that claimed to rule it. Shannon Lee Dawdy's *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* traces the ways in which colonists took the ideas, resources, and situations given to them by the metropole and used them in unexpected, and sometimes unwelcome ways, creating a kind of rogue colonialism. These works provide context for the social, political, and economic conditions of the colonial Spanish Louisiana that Armand Duplantier lived in and wrote letters to his family back in France about. However, these works give little emphasis to the role the French Revolution played in colonial Louisiana.

The French Revolution has some influence in the historiography of colonial New Orleans by way of the Atlantic World scholarship, which is typically focused on the Haitian Revolution and similar slave revolts influenced by the ideology of freedom and revolution spread by the French Revolution. This scholarship is not typically concerned with the events of the French Revolution as they happened in mainland France. Here, my research differs from much of the other scholarship of colonial Louisiana. Duplantier's letters are written to family members still residing in France. Thus, the events of the French Revolution as it played out in France are of great concern to him, despite being

separated from France both geographically by the ocean and politically by living in a Spanish colony.

New Orleans is a relatively new city as far as old American cities go. It was founded in 1718 with the rather limited goal of providing a military garrison and perhaps a trading post at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Early New Orleans was a difficult place to live, plagued by shortages of everything, disease, and Indian attacks. It received very little attention or support from France, and what little interest the French crown took in the colony mostly came in the form of using it as a place to send criminals and other undesirables from mainland France.

Tired of maintaining an expensive and unproductive colony, Louis XV gave all of the lands west of the Mississippi, including New Orleans, to Spain as part of the secret treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762, a mere forty-four years after the founding of the city, as repayment for the Spanish king Carlos III's support in the Seven Years War. The colony had failed to produce valuable sugar or other cash crops; its major agricultural products were rice, which was consumed locally, tobacco, and indigo. No gold, silver, or other valuable metals or minerals were found in the Mississippi mud.

Spanish rule saw an expansion of the plantation economy and an increase in both wealth and the number of enslaved persons in the colony, as well as attempts to improve the civic image of New Orleans, curtail smuggling, and increase immigration to Louisiana.

Armand Gabrielle Duplantier was born in Voiron, France, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1753 to Joseph Guy Allard du Plantier and Jeanne Gabrielle Trénonay Allard du Plantier. He came to America in 1778 as part of the Foix Regiment sent to support the American



Revolution, during which time he served as the aide de camp to the Marquise de Lafayette. Two years later, in 1780, he was mustered out of service and found himself young, unmarried, and far from his home in France. His uncle, Clause Trénonay invited Duplantier to come to his plantation in Pointe Coupée Parish, near Baton Rouge. It would prove to be a difficult journey, taking more than one attempt to reach Pointe Coupée. He first attempted to travel by sea, but was turned back by events related to the siege of Charleston. He made the journey over land, traveling to Fort Pitt, which is now Pittsburg, then down the Ohio River. His first expedition was turned back by the threat of capture by the Shawnee, who were allies of the British. His second attempt, however, reached Vincennes and from there he followed the Mississippi river south. Duplantier finally arrived at Pointe Coupee in 1781. He married his uncle's step daughter, Augustine Gérard and settled down to manage a small plantation, growing mostly indigo.<sup>1</sup>

Jean- Claude Trénonay de Chanfrey was born to a family minor nobility in Moirans, France. 1775 he joined his uncle, Claude René Trénonay de Chanfrey in the then French colony of Louisiana, where the elder Trénonay had originally come to cultivate lands in Iberville Parish given to his first cousin in 1717. The elder Trénonay died in Pointe Coupée parish in 1770, and Jean- Claude, who was known simply as Claude, made his home on a plantation near by. He was a successful planter and land-speculator, but accusations of cruelty made him unpopular with both his fellow planters and the Spanish government of Louisiana. In 1771 he married Marie Augustine Allain,

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<sup>1</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, August March 18, 1781, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

widow Gérard. She died in 1777, leaving him with only a stepdaughter, Marie Augustine Gérard, whom he married off to his nephew, Armand Gabriel Allard Duplantier.<sup>2</sup>

Duplantier lived quietly with his new wife in Louisiana until, in 1792, Claude Trénonay was shot and killed by one of his slaves as part of a planned slave uprising known as the Mina Conspiracy, after the Mina ethnic group who composed most of the conspirators. In a letter to his father describing the incident, Duplantier writes “ It is with pain that I inform you of the unfortunate death of my uncle. He was assassinated by one of his Negroes on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July by a musket shot that he [the negro] fired at him through the window of his dining room at the moment when he was finishing his supper.”<sup>3</sup> After the sudden death of his uncle, Duplantier found himself not only in charge of Trénonay’s much larger plantation, but also in charge of dealing with the complicated legal matters of his uncle’s estate, which dragged on for many years.

Trénonay’s shooting was not an isolated incident. Rather, it was part of a larger planned slave uprising known as the Mina Conspiracy. The history of enslaved persons in colonial Louisiana is characterized by long periods during which there were few, if any new slaves arriving from Africa, and shorter periods during which new, African, slaves were brought to the colony. These periods of isolation allowed for a strong creole identity to emerge among Louisiana’s enslaved population just as it did among its free people. Spanish rule saw an increase in the number of new slaves brought to Louisiana, and slave masters devised a system of hierarchies to aid them in controlling slaves. Mixed blood

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<sup>2</sup>Biographical note, Jean-Claude Trénonay de Chanfrey, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

<sup>3</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, August 2, 1792, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “je vous aprends avec peine La mort malheureuse de mon oncle, il a été assaciné par un de ses nègres le 12. de julliet d’un coup de fusil qu’il lui a tiré par La fenêtre de sa salle a mangé au moment ou il finissoit de souper.”

creole slaves ranked the highest, followed by black creole slaves, and finally African slaves. Slave masters also encouraged conflict amongst slaves by tolerating organized ethnic-language communities. The Mina slaves were one such ethnic-language community.<sup>4</sup>

After Trénonay's shooting, word was sent to Valentin Leblanc, *comandante* of Pointe Coupee that the Mina slaves were about to rise up and kill their masters, and they planned to meet with the Bambara nation at New Roads in False River on July 6<sup>th</sup> to discuss their plans of attack. However, the uprising did not take place because of bad weather and because the slaves from False River were not properly notified about where the meeting was to take place. The Mina conspiracy was revealed a month before the first major slave revolt in St. Dominique.<sup>5</sup>

Duplantier's letter, describing the, for him, very personal event of his uncle's death reveals one of the many points at which the family connections cause the experiences of a single person to become entangled with much larger events. While the Mina Conspiracy was hardly a world historical event, it is quite possible that it was influenced by revolutionary ideas brought by Jacobins to Louisiana from France by way of French colonies in the Caribbean such as St. Dominique.

Trénonay's death would also create personal legal troubles for Duplantier for years to come because a will was not found at Trénonay's home in Louisiana. Duplantier therefore needed documents, particularly letters giving him power of attorney, from France. Obtaining these documents proved to be difficult, to say the least. The French Revolution and ensuing war with Spain added even more difficulties to the already

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<sup>4</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 318-319.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

difficult prospect of sending and receiving documents across an ocean. The troubles of the Trénonay estate became another way in which the life of one man, though the bonds of his family, became tangled in world historical events.

Though Duplantier did not know it at the time, Claude Trénonay's death would lead to legal troubles surrounding the partitioning of his estate that would take Duplantier years to solve. In the same letter in which he informed his father of the death of his uncle, Duplantier wrote that he was sent for immediately after the shooting, which he described as a "tragic accident" because he was the only family that Trénonay had in Louisiana to witness the process. He also wrote that no will was found, that he had asked that a Mr. Ricard de Rieutord, a friend of Trénonay's, be named to represent the absent heirs, and asked his father to "assure my relations that I will neglect nothing in my attempt to conserve their property and to prevent charging even the least expense." Duplantier then wrote that the will should be found in the office of the late lawyer Billion in Voiron "that [Trénonay] made in sixty-five or sixty-six.", and that if his relatives wanted to entrust him with their powers of attorney and their orders he promised to "do everything in my power to send their fortunes to them." Finally, in a sentence added to the end of the letter, perhaps as an after thought, Duplantier added that " In case there is no will the law here demands that the heirs send my grandfather's marriage license and the baptismal certificate of the inheriting brothers and sisters without which they will not receive their fortunes."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, August 2, 1792, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "se malheureux accident"; "vous pouvés assurer mes parents que je ne néligerés rien pour tacher de conserver leurs biens et empecher que lon face Le moins de frais possible"; "qu'il a fait en soixante cinq ou 66"; "i mes parens veule me charger de Leurs pouvoir et de leurs ordres je ferés tout ce qui dependras de moi pour leurs faire passer leurs bien".

No doubt Duplantier believed the matter of Claude Trénonay's estate would be easily solved. His letter in 1792 was full of confidence, detailing the legal steps that needed to be taken. Unfortunately, Trénonay's unexpected death would be compounded with another, equally unexpected event: France declaring war on Spain. The next year, in 1793, Duplantier wrote to his father, Joseph Allard Duplantier, that on arrival in New Orleans he learned that all ships headed to France had been stopped. Despite this setback, it seemed that Duplantier believed, or at least hoped, that both the war and the matter of the estate would be resolved quickly, writing that he planned to have the indigo from Trénonay's plantation stored in barrels in a warehouse in New Orleans, awaiting orders from his relatives, and that "Some of them have written here since my uncle's death to Messers. Mather and Poydras to know the state of the succession, asking them if they would like to take on their power of attorney."<sup>7</sup>

Armand Duplantier's father, Guy Joseph Allard Duplantier, known more simply as Joseph Allard Duplantier, was born April 13<sup>th</sup> 1721 in Grenoble. He was a member of the Parliament in Grenoble, and was elected as one of the deputies to the Estates General for the Dauphiné region, though he does not seem to have played any notable role in the Assembly. He married Jeanne Gabrielle Trénonay de Chanfrey, Claude Trénonay's sister in 1747. They had three children, Guy Antoine Joseph, Edwige, and Gabriel Armand. Joseph Duplantier died February 11, 1801 in Voiron.

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<sup>7</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, May 5, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "quelqu'un deux ont écrits ici depuis La mort de mon oncle a M<sup>rs</sup> de matter et poydras pour savoir L'état de La succession, en Leurs demandant s'il voudrois se charger de Leurs procuration,".

The inquiries into the state of the succession, sent to Messers Mather and Poydras, two prominent New Orleans businessmen and plantation owners, would be among the last news that Duplantier would receive of any of his family in France for four, almost five, years. A few weeks later, Duplantier again wrote to his father that he had received a letter of attorney from a Mme. Guimard, but that “ I did not learn any of your news from that because they do not speak of you any more than if you never existed.”<sup>8</sup> This, which Duplantier mentioned in a letter dated May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1793, would be the last letter that he would receive from any member of his family until September 1797.<sup>9</sup>

The fate of Duplantier’s letters is not entirely clear. Only the letters that Armand Duplantier sent to his family in France remain, their return letters have not been preserved. It is therefore quite possible that Duplantier received no response from his family because few or none of his letters ever made it to Voiron, France. This seems to be the conclusion that Duplantier himself came to when he finally received word from his brother, Guy Allard Duplantier, in 1797. In a letter dated from September of that month he wrote “ I see from your letter that you have not received any of the letters that I wrote to you during the war, between France and Spain.”<sup>10</sup> The letters, however, did make it to Voiron at some point, as they were donated to Louisiana State University after they were

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<sup>8</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, May 25, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “je n’ais su pour cela aucune de vos nouvelles car on ne parle pas plus de vous autre que si vous n’avies jamais existé,” .

<sup>9</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, September 9, 1797, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

<sup>10</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, September 5, 1797, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “je vois par ta Lettre que vous n’avés reçu aucune des lettres que je vous ais écrite, pendant La guerre, de La france avec Lespagne.”.

discovered in the Duplantier family chateau by decedents of Guy Allard Duplantier.<sup>11</sup>

Sending and receiving letters could be difficult and uncertain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century event when there were no wars to complicate things. In a time before national, let alone international post systems, correspondence was often given to travelers or taken as merchandise by merchants known to be going in the direction of the recipient. The delivery of these letters could also take quite some time; correspondence might arrive at its intended destination months after it was posted.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the letters simply sat somewhere, in a censors office, or in the desk of a business partner, until the war between France and Spain was over. All we know for certain is that they did eventually make it to their intended recipients in Voiron, France.

Additionally, it is not particularly surprising that Duplantier did not receive any letters from his family in France until 1797 given the events that were going on in France at the time. In the spring of 1792, about the time that Claude Trénonay was shot and killed, the French Legislative assembly declared war with Austria in an attempt to bring the splintered factions of Revolutionary France together against one common enemy. The declaration of war heralded a series of events that would lead to the period known as the Terror. By the summer the war effort was not going well. In June, Prussia had also declared war on France, and in August the Marquise de Lafayette, hero of the Revolution and leader of the Revolutionary armies, had defected to Austria. In

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<sup>11</sup> The Duplantier family and title still exist; the head of the family and title holder now lives in Louisiana, hence why the papers were donated to LSU.

<sup>12</sup> Janet Polasky, *Revolution Without Borders, The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (London, Yale University Press, 2015), 195.

September, fear that the advancing Austrian and Prussian armies would release prisoners lead to the September Massacres, in which mass numbers of prisoners were executed.<sup>13</sup>

By the Spring of 1793, the Revolutionaries had tried and executed Louis XVI, and declared war on England, Holland, and Spain. In April of 1793 the infamous Committee of Public Safety was formed and by that summer the Terror was in full swing.<sup>14</sup> It was not a good time to be a minor noble with liberal constitutional monarchist political leanings. Any one, or combination, of these events might have made Duplantier's relatives in France unable or unwilling to corresponded with a family member far way in hostile territory.

The Terror continued until the summer of 1794, when its primary leaders were arrested and executed. France had declared peace with Spain by the summer of 1795, though French armies, their luck having turned since the summer of 1792, were still marching through much of Europe, and by the summer of 1796, France and Spain had declared an alliance.<sup>15</sup> Given these events, it is not surprising that Duplantier did not receive any news from his family in France for four, almost five years. The years from 1792 to 1797 were eventful ones for France.

However and whenever Duplantier's letters finally arrived in France, the difficulties surrounding their delivery point to another of the ways that the events of the French Revolution had a direct impact on Duplantier's life. Whether Duplantier didn't receive any correspondence from his relative because his letters never made it to France or because their replies never made it back to Louisiana, the lack of communication made

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<sup>13</sup> Peter McPhee, *Liberty of Death, The French Revolution* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016), 160-164.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-297.



settling the issue of Trénonay's estate far more difficult than it might have been otherwise. With neither Trénonay's will, nor his relatives' power of attorney, Duplantier wasn't able to do much with the estate beyond maintain its operations as they had been and wait for news from France.

Unfortunately for Duplantier, even simply trying to maintain operation of his uncle's plantation was influenced by the Revolution and ensuing war between France and Spain. The main crop grown on both Duplantier's own plantation and on Trénonay's former land was indigo; indigo and tobacco were the primary cash crops in Louisiana during the Eighteenth Century.<sup>16</sup> The French Revolution had a devastating effect on Louisiana economy. Most of the indigo grown there was sold to France by way of the French West Indies, and the war disrupted trade and shipping, causing the price of indigo to plummet.<sup>17</sup> The decreased value of indigo, even after the war between Spain and France had ended, was, not surprisingly, an issue that concerned Duplantier. In 1795 he wrote to his brother that "The indigo, despite the peace is worth nothing here. They tell us that it is the same in Europe. Write to me exactly what the price of it is, my intention being to send some."<sup>18</sup>

The plummeting price of indigo was not the only way larger world events sparked by the French Revolution affected Duplantier. Though he was far from the center of conflict in France, the revolution generated a great deal of conflict in the French colonies in the Caribbean, the most important of which was the Haitian Revolution. This conflict

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<sup>16</sup> Garnie William McGinty, *A History of Louisiana* (New York, The Exposition Press, 1949), 51-52.

<sup>17</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 318.

<sup>18</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, January 10, 1795, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "Les indigos, malgré La paix ne vale pas ici Lon nous dit que s'est de mesme en europe, marque moi exactement ce qu'il en est, mon intention etant d'en envoyer."

also made its way to Louisiana, most notably in the form of the Pointe Coupée Slave Conspiracy, in which a number of slave planned to rise up, kill their masters and abolish slavery. The conspiracy was planned from the estate of Julien Poydras, a prominent creole planter and business man. The plan was to set fire to a building on the Poydras estate, and when masters from neighboring estates rushed to put out the fire, they would be killed. The slaves would then take weapons and ammunition from Poydras' estate and wipe out the remaining masters and any creole slaves who refused to become involved in the plot.<sup>19</sup> Pointe Coupée Slave Conspiracy was another unwelcome occurrence created by events beyond his control. In January of 1795, Armand Duplantier writes to his brother Guy Duplantier about the Pointe Coupée conspiracy, relating the good fortune that he had sold the slaves from his uncle's plantation, thus preventing them from rising up in the planned conspiracy.<sup>20</sup>

Legal entanglements, economic hardships, and slave conspiracies were not the only ways in which Armand Duplantier was directly affected by events in far off France. The Revolutions greatest impacts were deeply personal. The port of New Orleans was closed to ships coming or going to France after war was declared between revolutionary France and monarchial Spain. Duplantier would receive no word from his family, all who remained in France, for four, almost five years. With the sudden death of his uncle in 1792, his wife and children were the only family Duplantier had in Louisiana. One can only imagine his increasing distress as the years went by and he received no word from his family and no rely to his letters. In January of 1795 he wrote to his brother that "For more than three years I have not received a single word from any of my relatives. I do not

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<sup>19</sup> Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 344.

<sup>20</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, January 10, 1795, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

know what has become of you in all of this tumult.”<sup>21</sup> While in June of 1796 he wrote to his sister, Eduvige, that “It has been nearly four years since I have received any news from anyone. I do not know what to think. Have they forgotten me, or, have I had, without wanting it the misfortune of losing their love... Has some accident happened to them, since the revolution[?]”<sup>22</sup>

While many of his letters concern the difficulties associated with the Trénonay estate, Duplantier’s greatest concern is clearly for his family. In many of the letters Duplantier wrote also have greetings for people other than the letter’s addressee. For example, in 1793 Duplantier asks his brother Guy to “Assure my Aunt Allard of my respectful attachment”, while in a 1796 letter to his father, he writes “Recall me, I beg you, to the memory of all my relations telling them the most honest and tender things for me. Do not forget me to my old friends and especially our old pastor Fr. Perrin.”<sup>23</sup> In another letter, Duplantier asks his brother to “tell little Barbeto that I still love her with all my heart. Embrace her very tenderly for me.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, “je recevres un peu plus souvent de vos chere nouvelles depuis plus de trois ans je n’ai reçu un seul mot d’aucun de mes parens, je ne sai Ce que vous êtes devenus dans tout Ce tumult.”

<sup>22</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Eduvige Duplantier, January June 18, 1796, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “voila pres de quatre ans que je n’ai reçu aucune nouvelles de personne; m’ont il oublié, ou, aurais je, sans le vouloir eü Le malheur de perdre leur amitié, ce seroit pour moi La plus grande peine, et je ne crois pas Lavoir merité; Leurs seroit il arrivé quelque accident, de puis La revolution.”

<sup>23</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, January February 15, 1796, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “rapellé moi je vous prie au souvenir de tous mes parens en Leurs disant Les choses Les plus honnêtes et Les plus tendre pour moi, ne m’oubliez aupres de mes anciens amis surtout notre ancien curé M<sup>r</sup> perrin.”; Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, May 25, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “assure ma tante allard de mon respectueux attachement.”

<sup>24</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, May 25, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “dis a la petite baubeto [barbeto?] que je L’aime toujours de tout mon cœur embrasse La bien tendrement pour moi.”

Duplantier also wrote about his wife, Augustine, and children quite often. In the same letter to his father in which he wrote about the unexpected death of his uncle, Duplantier also writes ‘My wife is doing well at this time. Since I established a plantation in Baton Rouge her health has been restored. She has made me the gift of another beautiful little boy who is now fifteen months old, who is a little sick which prevents him from weaning, this being also the season for disease. The two others are doing well and promise to be very vigorous.’<sup>25</sup> In another letter to his brother, Duplantier described his oldest son as “a little Hercules”, and assures his brother that he “would have found him so funny and so foolish that he would have amused you [torn] you a little savage raised in the woods with all of his wills[torn] never contradicted and of the most ebullient character.”<sup>26</sup> Clearly, Duplantier’s family was important to him. His letters were not merely sent to his family, they were also largely about his family. While business and legal matters featured regularly and prominently in his letters, much of what he wrote is of a far more personal nature. His letters were far more than simple business correspondence with people who Duplantier happened to be related to. Often discussion of his wife and children, and greetings to various family members accounted for half or more of the letter in his correspondence.

Duplantier had good reason to be worried about the safety of his family living in Voiron. The nearest major city to Voiron was Grenoble, some sixteen miles away. There

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<sup>25</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, August 2, 1792, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “ma femme actuellement se porte assés biens, depuis que jais établi une habitation au baton rouge sa santé sest rétabli, elle ma fait cadaux d’un autre jolis petit garçon qui as actuellement quinze mois, qui ait un peu malade ce qui Lempêche de le sevrer, se moment ici étant aussi La saison des maladies, Les deux autres se porte bien et promete d’être tres vigoureux.”

<sup>26</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, May 25, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. “s’est un petit hercule, . . . , je suis sur que vous Lauriés trouvé si drole et si foux quil vous aurait amusé [torn] toi un petit sauvage élevé dans Le bois a toute ses volontées [torn] jamais Lon a contredit et du caractere Le plus bouillant.”

were few major incidents of terror or violence in Grenoble during the French Revolution. However, Voiron was also only fifty miles from Lyon, a city in which major incidents of terror and violence did occur during the Revolution. Before 1793 Lyon was the second largest city in France, and the center of the French silk industry. 50,000 of Lyon's 120,000 inhabitants worked in the silk industry. Much like Duplantier, though on a larger scale, the city was hit particularly hard by the economic disruptions caused by the French Revolution and resulting war. The people of Lyon, particularly those involved in the silk industry, were thus not particularly in favor of the war politics of the National Convention. In May of 1793 the Lyonnais revolted against their Jacobin municipal government. In July, the Convention declared Lyon to be in a state of rebellion and sent armed troops to pacify the city. The troops arrived in August and laid siege to the city, which lasted for two months.<sup>27</sup>

Given the prominence of his family, both with him in Louisiana, and far way in France, in Duplantier's letters, it is unsurprising that he wrote often about plans to return to France with his wife and children. However, because of the dangerous climate caused by the war and the revolution, Duplantier was unable to travel to France nor was he able to send any of his children to France for their education as planned. In 1793 he wrote to his father about his plans both to sell his plantation in Louisiana and return to France in "three or four years" and to send his eldest son to France for schooling.<sup>28</sup> The same year, Duplantier wrote to his brother Guy that "My son who joins me is very angry about not being able to go over and tease you a bit. He is a true devil, a little savage in all his

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<sup>27</sup> Chantal Thomas, David F. Bell, "Terror in Lyon," *Substance* 27, no. 86: 33-42 University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, February 2, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

nature. I don't dare say that Gariot, upon seeing him said that he was the image of Eduvige ... I am very upset that after having made all the preparations; having given his mother the grief of seeing him leave I was not able to succeed."<sup>29</sup> Three years later, in 1796, Duplantier wrote to his father that he would like to send his two oldest sons to France, but doesn't dare do so without having heard from his father.<sup>30</sup> By 1799 he still had not succeeded in acquiring a proper education for any of his sons, writing to his sister, Eduvige, that "I have three sons two of whom are as big as I am, and who unfortunately have not had the opportunity to receive an education... if there were peace, I would take them to France."<sup>31</sup> Nor had Duplantier succeeded in his desire to return to his family in France. He wrote that "I would be the happiest of men if with my little fortune I could reunite with my family, in the bosom of my great age, I like to think that I would have again one day the pleasure of embracing you."<sup>32</sup> This wish would never come to pass.

The matter of Claude Trénonay's estate would also dog Duplantier for the rest of his life. Trénonay's will, left with the lawyer in Billon in "sixty-five or sixty-six" was

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<sup>29</sup>Armand Allard Duplantier to Guy Allard Duplantier, May 25, 1793, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "mon fils qui se joint a moi et bien fâché de n'avoir pu passer pour aller vous faire un peu enrager, s'est un vrai diable un petit sauvage dans toute sa nature. je n'ose pas dire que gariot a dit en Le voyant que s'étoit Le portrais d'éduvige il me semble aussi qu'il lui ressemble un peu,. s'est un petit hercule, je suis bien fâché apres avoir fait tous mes préparatif avoir donné a sa mere le chagrin de Le voir partir de n'avoir pu reussir."

<sup>30</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, January April 15, 1796, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

<sup>31</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Eduvige Duplantier, July 27, 1799, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "j'ai trois garçons dont deux sont aussi grand que moi, et qui malheureusement n'ont pas eu l'occasion de recevoir de l'éducation,... si La paix ce faisoit, je les conduiroit en france,"

<sup>32</sup>Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, July 28, 1799, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. "je serois Le plus heureux des hommes si avec ma petite fortune je pouvoir me réunir a ma famille, au seins de mes parens, C'est mon plus, s'est mon plus grand désir. si cette paix tant désiré pouvoit ce faire, malgré votre grant age, je me flate que jaurais encore une fois Le plaisir de vous embrasser."

finally found and sent to Duplantier in Louisiana in 1799.<sup>33</sup> The legal and financial difficulties associated with Trénonay's estate left Duplantier in debt for the rest of his life. In 1799 Duplantier's wife, Augustine, died of Yellow fever. They had seven children together, four of whom survived to adulthood. He remarried three years later to Constance Joyce Rochon. They had five more children together. However, Duplantier's debts continued to be a problem. The United States government refused to recognize Spanish land grants, thus he was unable to sell any of the land he owned before the Louisiana Purchase. In 1814, due to his mounting debt, Duplantier's wife petitioned the courts for a separation of property. Armand Allard Duplantier spent the rest of his life in Louisiana, dying in 1827, deeply in debt.<sup>34</sup>

Armand Duplantier is buried in Highland Cemetery in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Though Armand Duplantier never succeeded in his dream of returning home to his family in France, and died deeply in debt, the Duplantier family name lives on. Armand Duplantier's children found more success in Louisiana than their father did. They became successful plantation owners, growing sugar rather than indigo, as well as lawyers and judges, following in the tradition of their grandfather, Joseph Allard Duplantier. Eventually, even the family name and title came to join Armand Duplantier in Louisiana, where the current holder of the Duplantier title and head of the family now lives.

Often we think of history events as being separated by the boundaries of nations and empires, or divided by wars and revolutions, but for the individuals who lived through that history, the dividing lines are often far less clear. As Armand Allard

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<sup>33</sup> Armand Allard Duplantier to Joseph Allard Duplantier, July 28, 1799, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

<sup>34</sup> Biographical note, Armand Gabriele Allard Duplantier, Duplantier Papers, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

Duplantier's letters show, one man, living at the edge of empires and revolutions can find his life deeply entangled in much larger geo-political events, even when those events are happening an ocean away. Whether because of legal inheritance matters, economic hardships, or personal family matters, the disruption of correspondence between warring France and Spain reveals the deep connections that stretched between nations and across oceans. These connections were not political ties connecting together citizens to a nation or subjects to a monarch. Rather, they are family ties connecting children, parents, and siblings. These relationships provide us with another way to consider the ways that people and events are connected beyond the borders of nations and empires, and remind us that, like anything that has to do with people, history is often more tangled than tidy.



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