

## Early French Influences In Northern Tier Counties

By Elsie Murray, Ph.D.  
Director Tioga Point Museum,  
Athens, Pa.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)  
**Adventure With John Paul Jones**  
Through the pages of the 1951 brochure there stalks also Captain Denis Cottineau of the "Pallas," joint adventurer with Paul Jones and his "Bonhomme Richard" in the famous raid in our behalf in British waters in 1779. A fellow exile, Saint-Memin, has preserved for us Cottineau's handsome Breton profile, displayed in the Corcoran gallery in Washington with those of nearly 200 of his countrymen and of early Americans, made at the time of the trial of Aaron Burr in Richmond.

Another naval captain, Aristide du Petit-Thouars, deflected from his carefully planned voyage in search of La Perouse (lost with all his scientific equipment in the Solomon Islands), we find marooned also in northern Pennsylvania, struggling with only one sound hand to clear a land grant in the hills where Dushore now stands (county of Sullivan). Aristide, lured back to ward off British threats against his homeland, died fighting Nelson in the Mediterranean in 1798.

Often overlooked by half-prized writers on Azilum history is the fact that all three, Noailles, Cottineau and Du Petit-Thouars, had served with distinction in our War of Independence; and while over here had savored the true meaning of liberty and the republican life.

### The Financier

In these pages, though never in person at Azilum, one comes upon the Swiss banker, Jacques Necker, ex-minister of finance for France, and reputed the wealthiest man in Europe; along with him, his headstrong literary daughter, Madame de Staël. The latter, busy manipulating the strings of an underground in Switzerland during the Terror, never crossed the Atlantic to occupy the wooded height in present Orwell Township, County of Bradford, on which for ten years her father paid the taxes. Her title reverted to another distinguished visitor, son of the well-known French manufacturer, Jacques Le Ray de Chaumont, who had befriended Benjamin Franklin and backed John Paul Jones in our Revolutionary conflict.

James Le Ray, turned American citizen, and his son and grandson, paid for surveys, roads, taxes, contributed to the building of schools and churches, and visited his investments personally, in the early years of the 19th century; travelling through dangerous narrows, over villainous roads. Employing as land agent, a Sheshequin man notorious locally for his dogged support of Connecticut claims, the Le Rays derived insufficient revenue from their Pennsylvania tract of 80,000 acres to stave off bankruptcy (incurred primarily because of unpaid claims on our Congress). Other investments, solicited by our Gouverneur Morris and backed by Nicholas Biddle of the Bank of the U. S., were in northern New York State on the Black River, in the very region traversed or skirted by Champlain nearly 200 years before. Claims for reimbursement for water and mining rights that have enriched Americans in this area over a term of years are now being pressed by the French heirs of the Le Rays. Jacques Le Ray, Senior is said never to have been paid by Congress for his loan of a home in Paris to Franklin, or the powder and ammunition with which he early supplied the Continental Army. Today his heirs seek redress.

### Some Pioneers Remained

While the titled or politically ambitious exiles who backed or visited Azilum or bought stock in the Company eventually returned to France, or related to older French settlements such as Charleston, Savan-

nah, or New Orleans, a number of families remained (Homets, Le Fevres, La Portes, joined later by Prevosts, Piollets, Delpueches, and others). Intermarrying with local American stock, they built roads, mills, frame houses and inns; pushed work on canals and railroads, and in legislature and congress worked for the laying out of other Northern Tier counties to the west. Their descendants are scattered up and down the Susquehanna Valley, and westward over the entire U. S. French names—Du Thouars (Dushore), La Porte, Homet's Ferry—are sprinkled over the countryside. Fleur-de-lis reminiscent of their homeland decorate local residences and churches.

Fantastic and misleading webs of romance have been woven about the colony by ill-informed or prejudiced countryfolk, city reporters, and aspiring novelists. A simple but relatively accurate story, "New World or Old?" based on the letters of a group who settled first at Greene in New York State, coming down the Chenango to the colony at Azilum later when disputes over their land title arose, was published in 1945 by the author of the recent brochure, above mentioned.

While there is ample evidence that it was in the original plan to provide in this remote area a refuge, possibly permanent, for Marie Antoinette, widow of the French king Louis XVI, and their children, the princess and the 8-year-old Dauphin, it is of course historic fact that Marie left prison only for the guillotine.

It is further exceedingly doubtful that the Dauphin ever reached America or Azilum, though a hundred years ago, after a visit from King Louis Philippe's son, a half-breed missionary among the Oneidas, Eleazar Williams, for a time put up a claim that kept many guessing. As for the Queen's jewels, among them the stone later known (ironically) as the Hope Diamond, there is even less likelihood that any were brought to America by Azilum refugees. Most of the exiles escaped across the border in the final crash of the monarchy with their lives alone—and the clothes on their backs.

### La Grande Maison

La Grande Maison, the Queen's House—for the King was guillotined in January 1793 before Azilum was started, and only those for whom French history is a blank have ever called it the King's Mansion—was an 80-foot two-to three-story planed-log structure, just off the block of town lots and facing the river. Here the colony manager, ex-judge Antoine Omer Talon for a few years played host to distinguished exiles. About 1801 the great house was placed in charge of Barthélemy La Porte, to whom Talon was indebted for effecting his rescue from pursuing Revolutionists in 1792. In 1839, Barthélemy's son, Congressman John La Porte, built a spacious summer home just off from the Great House, of similar proportions but on a lesser scale. Fearing fire, he had the old log structure razed, using some of the timbers and probably some of the woodwork and the glass of its numerous windows.

### The La Porte House

The La Porte house with its great fireplaces, brick oven, swinging crane and H-hinges, now for several decades owned by the Hagerman family, has of late been opened by Mrs. Mark Hagerman as a show place. A cluster of farmhouses, with lines of trees marking the old avenues, a white-steeped church and graveyard, known locally as "Frenchtown," in the township of Asylum, mark the site of the village laid out across the river from the main highway in 1793.

The records show it was designed as the river port of a million-acre area reaching back into the hills, and reported by its early surveyors to contain iron and other minerals.

Valued in the last century for its semibituminous coal mines, at Barclay and Lopez, and its lumber, it is notable today chiefly for its vacation camps and hotels, its trout streams and game, and its green woodlands and laurel and rhododendron thickets.

### Many Owners

These back country holdings, organized by Robert Morris in 1794 as the Asylum Company, have known many masters. Following the business troubles that converged on Morris and his partner John Nicholson (as the French armies and Napoleon swung out over Europe, laying embargoes on Atlantic ports, and disrupting world finance) passed from one set of creditors to another. A remnant came in the middle of the last century to the Meilters, Secku and his son Michael. The elder Meilert, a German emigrant who had served Napoleon, and was affiliated by marriage with the banker Rothschild, gave the land in the adjacent county of Sullivan (erected in 1847) for a county-seat, and named it for his friend the state surveyor John La Porte.

Dogged by Connecticut claimants long after Federal and State laws had adjusted their legal claims, Michael, whose fine old residence dominates La Porte on its high plateau near Lake Mokoma, died, it is alleged, of injuries received at the hands of agents of the old Susquehanna Company. A poster of the period in the Bingham Land office at Wellsboro offers a reward for the apprehension of the assailants who stole his trunk and burned his papers.

### Tioga Point Museum

Thirty miles up the river at Athens, Tioga Point Museum, founded largely through the efforts of a La Porte descendant, houses loan collections of letters, accounts, maps, portraits and personal possessions of the French refugees and the Asylum Company. Highly treasured is a sketch of the Queen's house, and its ground floor plan, which we owe to the elder La Porte's granddaughter, Elizabeth La Porte (Mrs. Charles F. Welles, Jr.), who was born and brought up in it. Fairly recently, through the kindness of Gilbert Chinard, of Princeton, and the comte de Leusse of Paris, a replica of a sketch made in 1798 of the entire village, including the house, has been added to the collection. A plan to reproduce a six-foot model of the village based on the 18th century map preserved by the La Portes and now on display at the Bradford County Historical Society's rooms in Towanda, with details added from accounts in old deeds and records, has been advanced by the Tioga Point Museum, seconded by Mrs. Mark Hagerman.

### Authorities Given

Records in the State Archives at Harrisburg, in the Wyoming Historical Society at Wilkes-Barre, in the Locust Street rooms of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and in the American Philosophical Society (near Independence Hall), in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, in the New York Public Library and Historical Society, in the White Library of Cornell University, and in French Archives corroborate many of the details of the story as given out by the Tioga Point Historical Society, and by the Wyoming Historical Society in Craft's "Day at Asylum" (1902). They do not, of course, confirm the gross distortions launched by

## THESE WOMEN!

By d'Alessio



"I want about this many books!"

## Mr. and Mrs. Ruggles Are Honored On Anniversary

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ruggles of Meeker were guests of honor at a dinner given on their fifty-fourth wedding anniversary recently.

Present were: Mr. and Mrs. Wayne King, Theodore Lyle, Pvt. Richard King of Meeker; Mr. and Mrs. Roy King and son, Harveys Lake; Mr. and Mrs. Donald King and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Wadas and sons, Wilkes-Barre; Mr. and Mrs. Jack Ruggles and sons, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Drabick and sons of Lehman; and the Ruggleses.

## Return To Lakehurst

John MacDonald has returned to his air base at Lakehurst, N. J., after visiting his family in the Back Mountain Area.

John who has returned to the States after spending two years in overseas, part of the time in North Africa, the last part in London, brought home an English bride, the former Violet Whatley. The couple now resides at Lakehurst, N. J., near John's air base.

various writers of fiction.

Highway markers along the Sullivan Route, of a fair degree of accuracy, call the attention of passing tourists to what sentimentalists delight to dub a "ghost town." Widespread interest is evoked, in part by the hauntingly beautiful bird's eye view of the site from the mountain opposite, with cloud shadows drifting over its grain fields, and distant blue ridges framing the picture. Though slightly off the main highway, if developed by the State this might easily become one of the major attractions of Pennsylvania.

—Tioga Point Museum, Athens, Pa.

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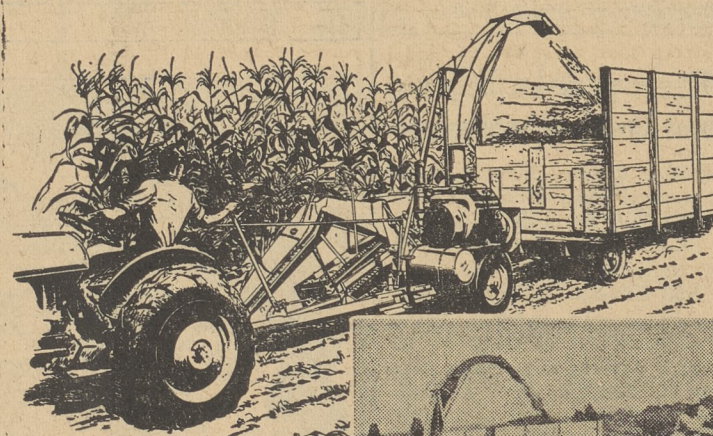
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## Camp Onawandah Closes Six Weeks Season

Camp Onawandah closed for the season August 19 after a six weeks session. Girl Scouts from the Back Mountain who attended were:

From Dallas, Grace Bachman, Beverly and Bessie Barstow, Karen Culver, Margo Davenport, Marian Dixon, Jean Carol Dodson, Gwen Weaver, Nancy Valentine, Marjorie and Barbara Smith, Barbara Raph, Beverly Major, Sally and Elsie Hislop.

Shavertown, Alta and Margaret Lou Hall, Sandra Yeisley, Marie Wahlgren, Beverly Kintzer; Trucksville, Penny Williams, Sylvia Trewerb, Judith Nesbitt, Louise Perrin; Harveys Lake, Barbara Ann Rood, Mary McHose, and Gail Payne.

Helen Sellers, Director, says that only one day was too chilly for swimming, and that there was very little bad weather. Waterfront sports were more enthusiastically received than usual.

More campers stayed for longer periods, with 223 registered. Last year the camp was open for only five weeks.

Counselors from Shavertown were Mrs. Calvin Hall, whose husband directs Boy Scout work; Judy Powell, and Janet Shaver.

## CHOREMASTER

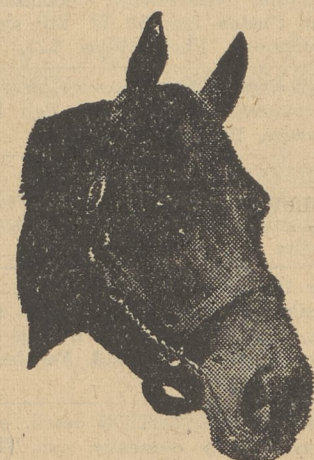


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'42 PLYMOUTH 2 Dr. Equipped	\$495	'50 FORD (Deluxe) Coach, Heater	\$1345
'42 CHEV. Aero Radio-Heater	\$545	'50 STUDE Champ 2 Dr. Equipped	\$1350
'46 DODGE Custom 4 Dr. Sedan	\$675	'50 NASH (Super) 2 Dr. Equipped	\$1395
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