

Letter 102

L. 15 to Mother Barat

SS. C. J. et M.

Saint Louis, August 31, 1818¹

Very Reverend Mother,

It is very hard to have no news from you and to be so out of touch when we have such need of your guidance. When we arrived here on the 24th, I hastened to write to you through Georgetown and since then to Mrs. de Rollin in care of the French consul in Washington. In spite of these letters and the five preceding ones from Havana on, I have so many things to tell you that sentiment is giving way to business and the details of our travels, so my letters are terribly dry; still I ought to be brief in order to say more.

If you have received my last letter of July 11 from New Orleans and the one from here at the end of August, you will have seen that our journey on the Mississippi took forty days, happily for all of us, for almost all the passengers were sick, some seriously so, as a result of the heat; we had only some discomfort.

The bishop's palace on the outside resembles a little barn in France, and the church is wooden with gaps between the logs; he is having one built at the expense of the people of Saint Louis, who are finding it burdensome. He was able to rent a house for us only in Saint Charles, a small town about twelve leagues away. The kind welcome we received from the parish priest in Sainte Genevieve when we passed through there and the urging of some young people of the city prompted me to ask you to send us there. The bishop was opposed for many reasons that I told you about, but he let me hope for a second foundation there later; he does not favor one in New Orleans. I rejected Florissant, for we would have to build there. The countryside is beautiful but not sufficiently populated. Saint Louis seems out of the question. For two years, that city has been growing at such a rate that land that formerly cost 20 francs is now worth 100; one person refused 120 francs for his land. A property with a house that would have fewer advantages for us than Paris could not be had for 50,000. The bishop rented for 2000 francs four poor little rooms to begin his school [in Saint Louis]; as they are not yet occupied, he offered them to us along with land on which to build. But a house no bigger than Cuignières² would cost at least 36,000 francs, and it would be necessary to rent in the meantime.

Mr. Pratte, the brother of the priest in Sainte Genevieve, who is housing and feeding us while we are house hunting, has no desire to keep a carriage to go to Saint Charles; he wanted to buy a house here for 40,000 francs and rent it to us; it is of the size that would cost 36,000 to build. I saw it; it is well located, quite new, but would need alterations that could be done only if we owned it. I proposed to him that we buy it, after asking the bishop's advice, for his house would not have enough ground for gardens.³ And the house to be bought would have sufficient land, and we would be able to arrange the terms.⁴ I realize we would have to act with great caution. Of the money the bishop received it seems only 7000 francs remain. I am relying on the kindness of the Ursulines to lend us money without interest; my hope remains with them and even with the kind merchant from Havana, to whom I shall write. And Mr. Pratte, who intends to send us his five daughters, one after the other, maybe will lend us something. I have called him our temporal father, and he well deserves the title. He has a well-stocked store with moderate prices, and he will give us as much credit as we need. His wife is the most esteemed person in the city; she has five daughters, excessively spoiled; they love us so much that they all want to leave their parents to come to the convent. When we go out, they are worried lest we are going away. Celeste especially, four or five times a day in season and out, begs her parents, who would like to wait to send her. These five attractive children have the happiest of dispositions and

¹ Original autograph, C-VII 2) c Duchesne to Barat, Box 2. Stamped: Paris, December 8, 1818. Cf. J. de Charry, II 1, L. 102, pp. 140-149; Hogg, pp. 95-104; Ch. Paisant, pp. 185-190.

² Small foundation made by the Amiens community in 1808 in a village on the Oise, located near Saint-Just en Chaussée. It was transferred to Beauvais in 1814.

³ The house he was proposing in Saint Louis.

⁴ Dates settled on for partial payments until the total had been paid.

charming voices. They are related to so many people in the city that there is a swarm of cousins, all delightfully well mannered, who have come to see us and would like to follow us. One of them did not sleep for joy the day we arrived. I attribute this enthusiasm to their good angels.

It is the same for the little colored girls; they look at us open-mouthed, and when Mother Octavie seated one beside her in church, the others all said, "How happy you must be!" You can see that all this youth is very appealing, as well as the Indians we often see. With the bishop's presence here and your intention in sending us, we would rather wait and be inconvenienced here than go elsewhere and be worse off.

We must not imagine a very large establishment here; for many years we can be only another Cuignières, nothing more. The houses resemble huts in the vineyard or workers' cottages. That will be a reason to divide to do more good in a wider area. If the inhabitants of Sainte Genevieve and Kaskaskia would want to give us lodging, I think those would be the two places to choose: the first because a few leagues away a seminary is going to open in an American congregation modeled on the primitive church;⁵ the second is the capital city of the State of Illinois, which entered the Union with this title.⁶ There are French Catholics there with no other school than the American Protestant one. The church is large, and one could build alongside it. I cannot give up the idea of New Orleans and the great good we might be able to do there. (Do not read aloud.) It would not be impossible for Father Martial to be the bishop there one day, and our good friends in that city [the Ursulines], who in a few years will have a payment of 300,000 francs, would do something for us, even at the risk of having fewer children. They foresee that, but it does not make them less generous. I do not know if they are aware of how much their education displeases some because they have kept former kinds of punishment (all that is for you alone, I beg you).

Here I am reaching out to many places without having a firm foothold, but desires cannot be curbed when there are so many needs. The Illinois, half civilized, are next to Kaskaskia; they have left the banks of the Illinois, pushed back by other nations. Several speak French, others English. The bishop says that language is as necessary as bread but at fifty, one cannot learn it. Think about that. But coadjutrix sisters can get along without it, and if you have not thought about sending us some, do not forget it, especially someone for the garden. A day's wages is 10 francs. Whites do not wish to be servants; neither do free Negroes. Manual labor is costly because there are so many houses to build and fields to cultivate that workers can earn as much as they want. (Do not read aloud.) Slaves say that the misfortune of their situation affects everything. In the house where we are, two Negresses have families but are not married; the third is a known thief. When she was accused of taking 50 francs, she said she thought it was only 15. Their children would like to come with us also and would be good, without their mothers.

Mr. Pratte just asked to see me; he is working to get us a house and a number of boarders to begin with. The parents themselves have set the fee for room and board, including laundry, at 225 *gourdes*, that is 1125 francs for us. If I have not learned the results of his research before the steamboat leaves for New Orleans, I will write to you through one of the eastern cities, and it may be that that letter will reach you before this one does. The bishop is not at all opposed to the Lancastrian method. He is annoyed that the brothers have not taken it up and says that he would not forbid it here at present.

His kindness does not keep him from being quite firm; he knows me already and sets me straight. He likes Eugenie and Octavie very much and so do the parents. He reproached me for preferring Eugenie; I had not noticed that, but told him, as I have told you, that I find she has more poise. However, I am not pleased about two things, although she is not insisting: 1) without saying anything to me, she proposed to the bishop that she be placed alone in a household where only English is spoken so that she would have to speak it; 2) now in Saint Louis according to your wishes and regarding Saint Charles as the tomb of this little offshoot of the Society, she is making minute comments that everything should be as it is in France (*that is impossible*); we have to make allowances; we are happy to be as close as possible. We will be obliged not to have beds exactly like yours, for we will have to fold them up during the day for lack of space etc. etc. Enclosure will be very different until we have enough money.

Here is how we will be able to arrive at that: the father of four or five young ladies, about whom I

⁵ It is probably a reference to "trustees," corporations that owned ecclesiastical properties, which formed the basic structure for Catholic churches in the States.

⁶ Illinois became a state of the United States that year, 1818.

have already spoken to you, wants to send them to Poitiers upon the advice of the Ursulines who began their education. The eldest wants to be a religious; he is opposed, but he ended by saying to the bishop: "All right, when she has spent time in France, if she persists, I will give her a nice piece of property in Florissant and she can found a convent." This man, Mr. Mullanphy, is very rich; he has nine million in *piastres* and lands; he is lord of almost the whole village of Florissant. We could then have a large house, safe and convenient; and the father would be flattered, like the master of the whole country, to have a fine establishment. His daughter is very promising. Bishops in the eastern cities where she has been have confidence in her ability to engage in good works. The bishop, who is her director, without knowing what we said to the father in New Orleans, wrote to tell her to ask to go to Poitiers and to join our Society there. Alert Mother Grosier if needed. The father will not allow her to go farther. It is very important to attract her strongly to our work; otherwise there may be a rupture in the future since, they say, she has everything necessary to be in charge. Make sure of her yourself, and it would be very pleasing to me to have her, or anyone else of your choice, in authority over me.⁷

There is a Mrs. De Perdroville here with two attractive and talented daughters. She wants to open a boarding school. Mr. de Perdroville was in Napoleon's suite. Although Mr. Pratte is connected with him, he wants to entrust his two eldest daughters to us at once and be in on the ground floor. He is returning just now, having been with the bishop and several fathers of families; he himself has turned them towards Florissant,⁸ saying that instead of 4,000 francs for this house in Saint Louis, it would take 8,000 to equip one in Florissant to house twenty-five children (The bishop says we will have Protestants and that they will stay).

Wherever we are, at least it does not seem doubtful that Saint Charles is the place and that we will soon have a number of children, but wealthy ones who insist on developing their talents. There is a piano teacher but no piano; that would be the most necessary thing for us, and the fees would pay us back quickly. Among other necessary items: six candelabra and a processional cross for the church; two seals, one for the school and one for us; a large cross and a smaller one in case of accidental loss; ribbons of merit, red for the fourth class, a medallion; samples of English penmanship, the only form taught here; supplies for flowers, cord and models for burses, silk, chenille, gold and silver thread, spangles and brilliants for embroidery, with prices for everything; embroidery patterns, needles of all kinds. By addressing packages to *Maison d'Institution* in Saint Louis, you can avoid customs duties. But the bill is absolutely necessary in order to avoid confiscation or delays.

As for textbooks for the classes, I don't know what to tell you or how we are going to manage. Everything must be in the two languages, and I believe, as does Father Barat, that books in English are more available and at better prices in Bordeaux than in Paris.

- 1) Grammars must be English-French instead of French-English, as English is more common.
- 2) Geography in English only, very detailed of the United States. If these are not available, for example, a large atlas, then we must go to Philadelphia for them at great cost.
- 3) Summaries of history; maybe a general summary in English for English speakers could be found; history of the United States in both languages.
- 4) Mythology workbooks and a short summary in English.
- 5) I would not like Father Loriguet's⁹ arithmetic; it is too confusing; besides, we cannot be sure that they use the same system here. We will prepare workbooks for the money and measures. I believe I have asked you for astronomies, the poem of Religion, and the school rule for the boarding school. The plan of studies will be very much changed because of English.

All these are very urgent as there are no books here, and the few that are available are very expensive, 10 or 12 francs each. I ask you with confidence for all these things, as I know that 4,000 francs remain with Mother Geoffroy, 400 of which I received from the Ursulines for the albs; they must be used to reimburse Mr. Jouve.

⁷ This plan was never carried out, and it seems that Miss Mullanphy did not persevere in the Society.

⁸ Mr. Pratte is no longer thinking about a boarding school in Saint Louis, but in Florissant.

⁹ Nicolas Loriguet, SJ, composed the first plan of studies for the houses of the Sacred Heart in 1804. He was also the author of numerous scholastic manuals, the use of which was required at that time in all the houses of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Octavie has gained in maturity in so many different circumstances. She was our interpreter on the steamboat, as everything was in English.

Eugenie is again showing some arrogance; under pretext of advice formerly received, she has dispensed herself from certain practices like acts before feasts etc., which the others are doing; she thinks herself excused from the ordinary prayer and from certain rules of conduct. Will you please see her letter to Mother Bigeu, and based on what she says there, advise her and me; she so loves faith that she seems to count it more important than the charity that opens hearts and increases fervor.

The two sisters are well; our health is good. All told, my four sisters have good will, love of their vocation and zeal.

I beg you to forgive the length of my letter and be my spokesperson to my fathers, mothers and sisters. How eager we are to have news of you!

The journal that I had Eugenie keep is paid for;¹⁰ it will come to you by way of your brother, our common father.

At your feet,

Philippine

[On the reverse}
To Mother
Mother Henriette Girard
To give to Mother Sophie
Rue des Postes, n° 40, care of Mr. Roussel
Paris

¹⁰ The cost of shipping has been paid.