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DOCUMENTS

1. *Letter of Thomas Paine, 1793.*

AMONG the earliest groups of papers to be published from the Draper Manuscripts was that dealing with the activities of General George Rogers Clark and his compatriots of Western fame concerning a filibustering expedition to recover Louisiana for France. In the American Historical Association's *Report* for 1896 these documents, supplemented by others obtained from the French archives, were published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission of the Association, and in a succeeding number of the *American Historical Review*, III. 490-516, appeared Professor Frederick J. Turner's analysis of these documents under the title "The Origin of Genet's Projected Attack upon Louisiana and the Floridas". One document in the chain of evidence was lacking, which Professor Turner inferred from certain statements of Draper must have existed among his papers—a letter of Thomas Paine written from Passy, near Paris, February 17, 1793. This letter of Paine, misplaced chronologically, has now been found, and is herein published in order to complete the evidence on which Professor Turner's article was based, and also because in itself Paine's letter is intrinsically interesting.

Paine's letter proves conclusively that Clark approached the French authorities as early as the latter months of 1792, and that his proposals for revolutionizing Louisiana reached Paris and received favorable consideration, as Professor Turner in 1898 surmised, before the departure of Genet. It also shows that Jefferson had already been sounded concerning Clark's suitability as commander for the proposed expedition; and that the latter's newly acquired relationship to Dr. James O'Fallon was a point in his favor.

Not much has been known about the interesting Irish adventurer who was Paine's friend and Clark's brother-in-law at the time this letter was written. His son, John O'Fallon, the well-known St. Louis philanthropist, gave Draper a sketch of his father's life, which he had acquired partly from documents, partly from conversation with relatives—since the boy was but two years of age when his father died. James O'Fallon was born in 1749 in Roscommon, Connaught, where his family had lived for generations and claimed descent from Irish kings antedating the Christian era.¹ He received a liberal edu-

¹ See pedigree in Dr. O'Fallon's handwriting, Draper MSS. 4CC171.

cation, was a fine linguist, and was sent to Rome with the expectation that he would enter the Church. He, however, preferred to become a physician, and went to Edinburgh University for medical training. One of his Scottish professors urged him to visit British America, where the struggle for liberty was just beginning. He embarked, thereupon, at the age of twenty-five for the New World; and was cast away in a wreck on the coast of North Carolina, where he soon found friends among the colonial leaders. He is said to have fought a duel with a British sympathizer, and to have been so zealous in the cause of the colonies that he was for a time in prison.² He became both a pamphleteer and a soldier, being elected leader of a volunteer cavalry troop in his adopted state. He also served for a time in Georgia, whence he was sent to Philadelphia, where his medical training secured him a place as surgeon in the military hospitals. He had charge for a time of one in Connecticut, and in 1779 was stationed at Fishkill, New York.³

At the close of the Revolution he took up his residence at Charleston, where he became intimate with the families of men who had seen service in the Revolution. Land speculation appealed to a character such as his, and he himself claimed to have been the promoter of the famous (or infamous) South Carolina Yazoo Company, into which he drew the Moultries, Thomas Washington, Colonel Isaac Huger, and other well-known Carolinian Whigs.⁴ Having obtained from Georgia their grant of over fifty thousand acres on the Mississippi River below the Yazoo, and formed a company of twenty members, of which O'Fallon was made agent, he set out from Charleston to sell his lands and to induce settlers to colonize the region. The Spaniards of Louisiana claimed the region and O'Fallon entered into very questionable intrigues to obtain the consent of Spain for his projected settlement. Not only did he concert plans with James Wilkinson, the secret agent of Spain, for this purpose, but he sent a treasonable letter to Governor Estevan Miró at New Orleans, repudiating allegiance to the federal government, denouncing Washington, and suggesting that his colonists would "consent to be the slaves of Spain" for substantial privileges in land cessions.⁵

Such was the man who, after passing through the back parts of the older colonies and after attempting to obtain the co-operation of

² Draper MSS. 34J20; *North Carolina Colonial Records*, XII. 419-420, 422.

³ *Ibid.*, XIV. 49-50; Draper MSS. 34J22.

⁴ Charles H. Haskins, "The Yazoo Companies", in *Papers of the American Historical Association*, V. 395-437.

⁵ Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: Spanish Domination* (New York, 1853), III. 272-293.

Sevier⁶ and Blount in Tennessee, arrived in Kentucky in the spring of 1790. Of winning address and pleasing manners, well introduced by Revolutionary veterans, he made his way easily into the first circles of Kentucky society and by February, 1791, had secured the hand of Frances Clark, youngest sister of the General. O'Fallon was more than twice his wife's age, and as we have seen had had many-fold more experiences. In 1791 his Yazoo plans began to totter; even Wilkinson reported him to Governor Miró as "a man of light character, although he is not lacking in education and intelligence, because, at his time of life, being forty-five [forty-three] years old, and with many gray hairs, he allows his flightiness and puerile vanity to peep out".⁷

Unable to come to terms with Spain, O'Fallon next planned to overthrow its power, and herein were two instruments to his hand—the revolutionary zeal of the new French government, and the restless dissatisfaction of his eminent brother-in-law, chafing like most Westerners against the arbitrary action of the Spaniards at New Orleans. The rest of the story is well known—Clark's offer of his services to the French republic, O'Fallon's interest with Thomas Paine and the group that surrounded him in Paris,⁸ the appointment of Genet and his course in America.

By the time Paine's letter was received at Louisville, O'Fallon's relations with the Clark family were seriously strained. His wife had left him and returned with her children to her father's home, where she refused even to see her husband. Clark and O'Fallon had an altercation in a public house, and the entire Clark family repudiated all connection with the Irish adventurer they had earlier welcomed.⁹ The time and manner of his death are not known. His son told Draper that he died in June, 1793.¹⁰ Letters in his own handwriting, however, exist dated in November of that year; but no doubt he died soon thereafter, whether by disease or by his own hand does not appear. It is certain that by the time Paine's letter arrived at Louisville, O'Fallon and the Clark family were no longer on good terms. For this reason and because they were not in daily communi-

⁶ Letter of O'Fallon to John Sevier, Draper MSS. 5XX23.

⁷ Gayarré, *Spanish Domination*, p. 293.

⁸ Gilbert Imlay was interested in this plan, but while he may have known O'Fallon in the army, he had doubtless left Kentucky before O'Fallon's advent there. Ralph L. Rusk, "Adventures of Gilbert Imlay", in *Indiana University Studies*, no. 57 (March, 1923).

⁹ Draper MSS. 2M45-47.

¹⁰ Draper MSS. 34J24.

cation, O'Fallon sent a copy of the letter to Clark when it arrived, with the following note (unsigned):¹¹

Dr. Genl. I have, yesterday, received a Letter from Mr Thomas Paine, member of the national convention of France, in reply to mine, which accompanied your Pacquet to the then French Resident.¹² Much of it concerns you. I send you, beneath, a literal copy of the whole. When you chuse it, you may peruse the Letter itself. I remain Dr. Genl.
yr. very humble serv't

The letter from Paine is doubtless an original. Draper says that he obtained it from among Dr. O'Fallon's old papers; and that the copy sent to Clark was not with his papers. In all probability Clark never saw the original letter, which is as follows.¹³

LOUISE PHELPS KELLOGG.

PASSY, near Paris,
February the 17, 1793.

Dr. Sir

I had the pleasure of yr. favr. from Kentucky, wh. came in the french Resident's dispatches, with which the offers and propositions of Genl. G. R. Clarke, for an expedition against Louisiana, etc. had arrived, and were recd. by the Provisionary executive Council of the Republic with satisfaction.

I should have replied sooner; but waited a few days, that I may see what the Resident had reported, and after using my best exertions in behalf of your friend's design, to discover what was likely to be done, in the event of a Spanish war. I have only to inform you, at this early stage of the business, that the General's offers and propositions are actually under consideration; and a doubt exists not with myself, sho'd a Spanish war take place, but that every, or the greater part of his terms will be complied with. In my private opinion, a Spanish war is inevitable. You may, therefore, in all human probability, expect very soon to hear of the General's nomination to the post and command solicited by him. The knowledge which report hath brought me of his character, Mr. Jefferson's private sentiments respecting him, which the Resident has, as I understand, transmitted, and the reliance I have in yr. narrative, which confirms the whole, will excite every exertion on my part, to have the expedition promoted as you wish. In a week or two hence, a war against Spain will, in all likelihood, be declared. All we fear is, that the intrigues of certain personages in the American cabinet, who are the friends of Britain, and the votaries of Kings, may obstruct the General, in his plans of raising men, and procuring officers. The principal characters among the french inhabitants of Louisiana, have already petitioned this convention, for the reduction of that country from the vile servitude under which it actually groans.

This expedition, if successful, will probably promote every end of yr. Agency, the purposes of which Gouverneur Morris of New York, the

¹¹ Draper MSS. 12J59.

¹² The French resident at Philadelphia in 1792 was Col. J. B. Ternant, appointed by the king in the spring of 1791.

¹³ Draper MSS. 12J60.

present American Minister at Paris, has, long since, unfolded to me. I therefore submit it to yr. consideration, whether you ought not, in person, to accompany this expedition, to promote it with all yr. might, and even to act in it as a french officer. Such friendly exertions in favr. of the enterprize, will most certainly recommend you, and the Company you represent to the notice and grateful esteem of our magnanimous free nation. In the hoped for contingency, that the arms of the Republic shall prove victorious in this expedition, and dislodge the Spaniard from all the posts which he holds within the three Grants of Georgia; the lands, in the first instance, will be considered, by the Republic, as the conquest of a Spanish territory. In such case, I make not the least doubt, but that the Georgia Grants, the lowest down at least, will be confirmed to the companies that shall have been assistants in the expedition, by themselves or their Agents. This, My dear Sir, I only offer, as the sentiments of a private man. Sho'd the Georgia Grant, or Grants ever revert to the United States; it must be by treaty, or exchange; and then even, the actual possessors, under this Republic, will infallibly become confirmed in their rights, under some clause in the deed of cession.

Yr. instructive correspondence shall ever be pleasing to me. Give me every intelligence, and write often. Please to direct under cover of the Ambassador, Mr. Genets address. He is my sincere friend, and yr. name is already made known to him by me. He is to set out for America speedily. The rulers of this Republic hold him in very high estimation.

If as yet in the habits of writing; this, My Dear Doctor, is yr. precious time. Never was there a cause so deserving of yr. pen. I have tried the force of mine, and with some success. The first characters in Europe are in arms; some with the bayonet, some with the pen, and some with the two-edged Sword of Declamation, in favour of Liberty. The tyrants of the earth are leagued against France; but with little effect. Altho' single-handed and alone, she still stands unshaken, unsubdued, unsubdueable, and undaunted: for our brave men fight not, as the troops of other nations, like Slaves chained to the oar of compulsory power. They fight freely, and for concience sake. The nation will perish to a man, or be free. France can never fall; but by misapplying her own strength.

This being Sunday, and at my little retreat, a few miles from Paris, where I expect some American friends to dinner; I must defer what more I had to say. This letter is risqued by a private hand, who proceeds immediatly to New York, and is charged to have it conveyed to you with all the security possible. Fail not to write to me, and believe me to be, with unfeigned sincerity, and best wishes for yr. health and prosperity

Dear Sir

Your true friend and wellwisher

THOMS. PAINE

Doctor James o'Fallon

[*Addressed:*] Doctor James O Fallon Physician near Louisville in
Kentucky United States of America

[*Endorsed:*] Recd. from Citizen Ireville and forwarded by Yr. friend
F. Gilcrist Pittsburg.

Forwardd. by John Mahoney Cincinnati.