

1983

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Recommended Citation

Bishko, Lucretia Ramsey (1983) "A French Would-Be Settler on Lafayette's Florida Township," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 62 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol62/iss1/5>

A FRENCH WOULD-BE SETTLER ON LAFAYETTE'S FLORIDA TOWNSHIP

by LUCRETIA RAMSEY BISHKO

LEWIS A. Pellerin, thirty-seven years old, a native of Normandy, sailed up the Mississippi to New Orleans in late March 1833. After taking part in the July Revolution of 1830 in France, he had suffered severe financial losses and was emigrating, together with his wife and two children, to the New World in search of a better fortune.¹

His ultimate destination was Tallahassee, for just northeast of this capital of the territory of Florida, in Leon County, lay the township given General Lafayette by the American people in 1825.² Pellerin's purpose was to procure a section or two in this six-mile square tract. Three of the thirty-six sections were already occupied by Frenchmen who had been attracted by Lafayette's efforts to colonize his princely gift with Europeans employing white labor. They had taken in France, through entrepreneurs, the preliminary steps required of purchasers. Four sections were otherwise assigned, so that there were, in the spring of 1833, twenty-nine sections from which a prospective buyer could make a choice.

Pellerin's case differed from that of his fellow-countrymen because he came armed only with letters from General Lafayette and his son, and had to deal, in his stubborn attempts to become a settler on the township, not with European middlemen but with the general's resident agent. Fortunately, the history of

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1. Lewis A. Pellerin to André Marchais, June 5, November 25, 1833; Pellerin to George W. Lafayette, June 28, 1834, Arthur H. and Mary Marden Dean Collection of Lafayette, Department of Rare Books, Cornell University Library, hereinafter cited as DCL.
2. Kathryn T. Abbey, "The Story of the Lafayette Lands in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, X (January 1932), 115-32, used for the French settlement newspaper articles which were "liable to considerable error." Since 1963 the Dean Collection has been available.

Pellerin's long struggle is well documented by a series of letters in the Dean Collection at Cornell University. These letters, and other documents in the collection, throw a great deal of light on the attitude of the persons involved, the manner in which Lafayette's American agents carried out their mandate to sell the land, and some of the reasons for the failure of the general's colonization project.

On the basis of this documentation, Lewis A. Pellerin seems to have been well-connected and personable. When he first contemplated emigrating to the United States in 1832, he had under consideration an advantageous offer from Joseph Bonaparte, the former king of Spain, who was then residing in the United States. He may have intended to employ Pellerin on one of his New Jersey farms.³ Then Pellerin was introduced to General Lafayette and his son George Washington Lafayette, by André Marchais, who had been one of Lafayette's many aides-de-camp in the National Guard and appeared at crucial moments of the 1830 Revolution at the general's side.⁴ Lafayette, who had already taken a kindly interest in the case of another former aide-de-camp also harmed by the events of 1830, received Pellerin so benignly that he decided to emigrate to Florida instead of accepting any offer from Joseph Bonaparte.

Lafayette's kindness, however, went no further than the provision of letters to American acquaintances, including one to John Stuart Skinner, Baltimore's postmaster, a trusted friend whom the general had appointed in 1830 as his United States agent for the sale of the Leon County township.⁵ George Washington Lafayette, hoping to receive a report on how matters stood in Florida, urged Pellerin to travel by way of Baltimore, and gave him a sealed letter for Skinner. But Pellerin, to save money, sailed directly to New Orleans, and thus lost an opportunity to

3. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, March 20, 1837, DCL; Gabriel Girod de l'Ain, *Joseph Bonaparte, le roi malgré lui* (Paris, 1970), 429.

4. Charles de Rémusat, *Mémoires de ma vie*, Charles H. Pouthas, ed., 5 vols. (Paris, 1959), II, 212, note 3; Jean-Louis Bory, *La Révolution de Juillet* (Paris, 1972), 377, 588.

5. For John Stuart Skinner, see "Memoir of John S. Skinner," *American Farmer*, 4th ser. VII (April 1852), 325-26. Text of the power of attorney, *ibid.*, 1st ser., XII (February 25, 1831), 399. Date is given as November 28, 1830, by Louis Gotteschalk, P. S. Pestiau, and L. J. Pike, *Lafayette: A Guide to the Letters, Documents and Manuscripts in the United States* (Ithaca, 1975), 241.

present the letter in person and make Skinner's acquaintance.⁶

When Pellerin's ship, after a voyage of seventy days, finally arrived at the Gulf port, the newcomer was greeted by a French acquaintance. Pellerin never discloses the man's Christian name; he calls him merely Jacminot, which seems to be a simplified, Americanized spelling of the French surname borne by a Colonel Jacqueminot, prominent in the Revolution of 1830.⁷ This gentleman scarcely gave the new arrival time to go through customs and do some errands with which G. W. Lafayette had entrusted him before he hurried the Pellerins off to Tallahassee.

Pellerin and Jacminot reached the territorial capital about the beginning of April 1833. With letters of introduction that Pellerin carried from Achille Murat, Florida's resident prince (who at the time of writing was in Europe) and Major Guillaume Tell Poussin, late of United States Topographical Engineers, the new arrivals were hospitably received by prominent Floridians.⁸ From Tallahassee Pellerin mailed G. W. Lafayette's letter to Skinner at Baltimore with an accompanying note, but as of June 5 no reply had reached him.

Pellerin and Jacminot spent the month of April inspecting the country around Tallahassee. They found only a few settlers on the Lafayette township. Two old squatters, Edmund Doyle and John Carruthers, had been allowed to buy the quarter-sections near the capital where they had been living.⁹ Sections 8, 10, and 26 were occupied by the three French immigrants—Isidore Gerardin, a certain Adam, and Count Theodore Charles La-Porte— who had all previously entered into purchase agreements

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6. Letter mentioned in Pellerin to Marchais, June 5, November 25, 1833, and Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 5, 1833, DCL. See also G. W. Lafayette to Pellerin, March 8, 1834, Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 28, 1834, DCL.
 7. The Florida Jacminot seems to be the Claude de Jacminot of Jefferson County who subscribed for thirty-one shares of Union Bank stock in 1834, and borrowed \$3,100 on 560 acres of land, U.S. Congress, "Condition of the State Banks," 26th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Exec. doc. 111 (Washington, 1841), IV, 329. On the Jean-François Jacqueminot, who in 1830 succeeded Lafayette as chief of staff of the National Guard of Paris, see G. Vapereau, *Dictionnaire de contemporains* (Paris, 1858), 932-33.
 8. On Achille Murat, see A. J. Hanna, *A Prince in Their Midst* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1946). Poussin held a commission in the United States Army from 1827 to 1832, when he resigned in order to go back to France. He had acted as aide to General Simon Bernard who recommended John S. Skinner for the post of Lafayette's agent.
 9. See "Note sur nos affaires de Floride à la date du 23 Juin 1846," DCL.

in France through the mediation of two Swiss land speculators, Rey and Rosset.¹⁰ Pellerin's idea was to take up some of the land still vacant in the general's tract, but Jacminot disagreed. He did not want to clear a plot of virgin forest, and he was skeptical of the advantages they might expect from Lafayette. Pellerin's letter of introduction, Jacminot argued, resembled those Lafayette had written for many others. Jacminot also pointed out that if they bought land within the township, they would have to occupy it without a title while lengthy negotiations were carried on with the distant Skinner. Pellerin could not oppose Jacminot, and together they bought a plantation elsewhere with a sown crop. They sent the contract, made out in both their names, to the owner in Charleston, and took possession by May 1, 1833.

Pellerin began work at once. His opinion of his associate had never been high, and he had in fact been warned by Jacminot's relatives of his egotistical and ungenerous nature. Even so, he could never have foreseen that Jacminot would act as he did. After a few days Jacminot's manner unaccountably changed, and he told Pellerin abruptly that their association must cease, insisting "buy me out, or leave." Since Pellerin did not have resources with which to pay for the plantation himself, he told Jacminot, "Your conduct inspires me with contempt." He then left, believing that he could live for practically nothing in Florida by selling some of his belongings. Though Jacminot had warned him that it would be useless to take him into court, since he had made no commitment in writing, Pellerin thought that he should follow the advice of prominent Floridians and sue Jacminot for damages.¹¹

His first step, however, was to return to Tallahassee and call on Robert W. Williams, a Leon County planter whom Skinner had appointed as subagent in the spring of 1832. Williams immediately followed Skinner's instructions to interview the three settlers, and in October 1832 he advertised the parts of the township that were available for purchase. Three bids reached him while Pellerin was still enroute to the United States, and another

10. Robert Williams to John Skinner, March 21, 1832, DCL. Adam may be the Raone Adam who obtained an attachment against Count Laporte in 1834, Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 1, 1834.

11. The foregoing account, unless otherwise noted, is based on Pellerin to Marchais, June 4, 1833, DCL.

in April 1833. All had been sent via Skinner to Lafayette.¹²

If Pellerin, as soon as he learned there was a resident agent in Tallahassee, had introduced himself to Williams and had given him G. W. Lafayette's letter to mail to Skinner, the newcomer might have impressed both agents early in the proceedings as a prospective purchaser who had Lafayette connections. But since he had not been provided with a letter addressed to Williams, it was as an ordinary buyer that he approached the subagent.

Williams brought out a plan of the township and the surveyors' description of the sections. He admitted that the latter was not very exact. But instead of urging Pellerin to buy Lafayette land, as might have been expected, Williams surprisingly informed him that there were other tracts in the vicinity which were just as good and lower in price. Pellerin was astonished, but he later attributed it to Williams's having land of his own to sell. In the course of the conversation there was further cause for surprise. Williams mentioned that he had recently sent off to Skinner, for transmission to France, an offer of less than \$3.00 an acre for the available parts of the township. Williams thought that price was too low. Then Pellerin observed that Williams must have advised the general not to accept the offer. On the contrary, Williams said that he preferred that Lafayette make up his own mind. Pellerin then indicated that he thought that as Lafayette's representative, it was Williams's duty to tender the advice that Lafayette's interests made necessary. This remark seems to have brought the interview, and Pellerin's first attempt to buy township land, to a close.¹³

One may surmise that the reason why Williams did not urge Pellerin to buy some of the Lafayette acres was because he and Skinner were waiting to be told, as soon as the general had consulted with his financial advisors, which of the bids they were to accept. For them to make a sale at this juncture would only complicate the final settlement of the major transaction. At the time, however, Pellerin accepted the local rumor that Williams belonged to a cabal of speculators and was shunting buyers away from Lafayette's land to other properties, hoping that by delay-

12. Skinner to Lafayette, February 27, 1832; Williams to Skinner, March 21, 1832, DCL; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, October 2, 1832; Williams to Skinner, March 20, April 14, 1833, DCL.

13. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 5, 1833, DCL.

ing matters the township would fall into his possession or that of his associates.¹⁴

Convinced that Williams was disloyal and Skinner useless, Pellerin conceived a new idea. Why not contrive to be appointed in their place, through André Marchais's influence with the Lafayettes? With this in mind, he wrote his friend on June 5, recounting his adventures since he left France. In a separate letter he described his encounter with Williams. After reading this communication, he urged Marchais to pass it on to George W. Lafayette. When Marchais approached the general on Pellerin's behalf, he could assure him that the Tallahassee newcomer was a person characterized by fidelity, zeal, and accuracy. Two possible objections to the appointment were cast aside. It would not be a deprivation for Skinner, since, so Pellerin thought, his salary as postmaster of Baltimore was ample and he did not need the commission he presumably was earning. Nor would Americans mind that a Frenchman had been substituted. Colonel James Gadsden, a former army engineer turned Florida planter and aspirant to Congress, had assured Pellerin that everyone would be grateful to Lafayette for enriching the country with a family as honest and industrious as the Pellerins. Gadsden had indeed written an open letter to a former United States Army officer, Guillaume Tell Poussin, which Pellerin was also inclosing with his own letter to Marchais. Pellerin hoped that Marchais would attempt to persuade Poussin to see Lafayette.¹⁵

Even if this ambitious campaign to be appointed agent succeeded, Pellerin realized that it would be some time before he would begin earning commissions. Therefore, he broached to Marchais in this same letter a new plan— his second attempt— to acquire a plantation in the township. Marchais was asked to obtain from Lafayette authorization for Pellerin to take possession of two sections to which he would be given title. Pellerin would have the property appraised by experts, and turn over that amount in bonds payable in eight years. No mortgage would then be necessary, since he would be able to borrow from the territorial bank then about to open in Tallahassee.¹⁶ Further-

14. Pellerin to Marchais, June 5, 1833, DCL.

15. *Ibid.*

16. The Union Bank of Florida, incorporated February 13, 1833, opened its books for capital stock subscriptions April 10, 1833, but began business

more, Pellerin felt that this proposal was in harmony with Lafayette's own intentions as expressed in the letter the general had given him for Skinner. Would Marchais attempt to have such authorization reach Tallahassee before the year's end, and, to avoid trouble, would he send it directly to Pellerin? Pellerin assured Marchais that he had familiarized himself with the methods of Florida agriculture, and that he would be taught by an expert how to make sugar and distill rum, so that he could do a good job once he had procured the land. If appointed agent, he would send all income from land sales in the form of cotton to a mercantile house in Le Havre, which could then sell it and turn the proceeds over to Lafayette.¹⁷

Pellerin's letter for G. W. Lafayette was rather short. He reports what he had learned while in New Orleans about the general's affairs in Louisiana, notes that he has never received a reply from Skinner, and describes his contentious interview with Williams. He includes items of common knowledge in Tallahassee, stating that the three Frenchmen already settled there were hard at work and, given time, would probably meet with success.¹⁸

After Pellerin had dispatched this letter to Marchais with its two enclosures, he called once more on Williams to inform him that he had authorized his friend in Paris to apply to Lafayette for the concession of two sections. He found the agent's house shut up and uninhabited, and he learned from his brother that he had left for the North without designating anyone to act in his stead. No one could write to him, since it was uncertain where he would be at any given time, and he was not expected back until January 1834.¹⁹ If Pellerin had known that the purpose of Williams's trip was to confer with Skinner over the imminent sale of the whole tract, he could have addressed a letter to the Baltimore post office in the hope that it would reach the two agents and notify them of his claim. But, doubtless hoping that he would receive news of his own appointment as agent, he bided his time until Williams returned to Tallahassee.

on January 16, 1835. See U.S. Congress, 26th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Exec. doc. 111, IV, 278-79.

17. Pellerin to Marchais, June 5, 1833, DCL.

18. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 5, 1833, DCL.

19. Pellerin to Marchais, November 25, 1833, DCL.

This took place much earlier than expected, about November 10. As soon as Pellerin learned of it, he called on Williams. He was surprised to be told that in May Lafayette had accepted one of the first three bids offered for the unsold remainder of the township. Nevertheless, Pellerin made his own request, promising to select within three days the sections he desired. But Williams, as Pellerin was to write write to Marchais on November 25, "objected that, since the General had made no reservation in my favor, and since my name was never even mentioned in his instructions, he could not do what I wanted. He added that the sale of the remainder of the land had been settled in the month of August, when he, Robert Williams, had been in Baltimore; and that the syndicate in question had nothing more to do except to carry out the formality of presenting the required surety. He offered however to present my request to this company before handing over the contract, and to support it with what he knew of the good will that the General entertained for me according to his letter to Mr. Skinner of which I informed him, in order to obtain for me the reservation of at least one section, in lieu of two. The buyers have refused. I did not flatter myself that it could be otherwise."²⁰ Pellerin's third proposal then had met with rejection.

It was shortly afterwards, on November 18, that the sale of 28¾ sections of the township to William B. Nuttall, Hector W. Braden, and William P. Craig was consummated. Williams reported to Skinner that he had managed to sell the lands for \$10,000 more than he had hoped and also to procure a slightly larger reserve than the minimum of one and one-half sections that Lafayette had prescribed. Section 34 had been reserved as well, and this, Williams wrote to Skinner in December, "I propose you and myself shall take at the average price at which the whole was sold."²¹

Skinner, when he sent this second letter on to G. W. Lafayette, added a statement which disposes of Pellerin's assumption that the postmaster of Baltimore was earning a commission: "As I never thought of accepting any consideration for my agency,

20. Ibid.

21. Williams to Skinner, November 20, December 7, 1833, DCL. Section 32, and three-quarters of section 31, were reserved for Lafayette, and section 34 for his agents.

except the delightful consciousness of having served the best of men; I shall propose to Col. Williams to relinquish to him all interest in the section. If it be of any value beyond the average price, that difference will not be deemed by the General as more than an adequate commission to Col Williams."²²

These private and confidential features of the reservation of section 34 were, of course, not known in Tallahassee, but the fact itself was soon divulged to Pellerin by one of the buyers, Hector Braden. Braden may also have been the informant who told him that the syndicate had quickly sold fourteen sections at a considerable profit.

Pellerin, who had not yet received any letter from Marchais about his appointment, came to the conclusion, since he was not named in the agents' instructions, that the Lafayettes had altogether forgotten him.²³ In his discouragement he wrote once more, on November 25, to Marchais, bringing him up to date on what had happened since his last letter. He complained that he had no money or credit with which to set up in business, there were no merchants in Tallahassee for whom he could clerk, and there were no scholars to whom he could teach French. Soon he would have no belongings left to sell. If only he had been appointed agent; he could have sold the land for 200,000 francs (\$40,000) more, and earned a commission of more than 40,000 francs (\$8,000). (On the other hand, the reservation of section 34, located four miles from town and one mile from the easternmost section that was retained by Lafayette, appeared to Pellerin to be a favorable omen for an immediate fourth effort. If the general would sell him section 34, he could redress his "forgetfulness." Pellerin therefore requested Marchais to propose to Lafayette that he be allowed to purchase this plot on the same terms as those granted to Nuttall, Braden, and Craig, that is, \$2.70 an acre— payable in ten years, with interest at seven per

22. Skinner to G. W. Lafayette, undated, DCL, beginning, "Here my dear friend is an extract [sic]." In drawing up a balance sheet in 1855, Williams charged Lafayette's estate for his services at the rate of \$500 a year for twenty-three years, i.e., \$11,500 "Estate of Genl. Lafayette in account with Robt. W. Williams," DCL.

23. This may not have been the case, for Lafayette added a postscript to one version of his letter of thanks written in English to Williams on November 4, 1833, DCL: "There is a young Gentleman, one of the combatants of July, who is gone with a letter from me to settle to Florida, and whom I particularly recommend to you."

cent. He was unable to furnish a surety, but the general, he hoped, might agree to hold a mortgage on the land. As for a commission on the sale, he argued that the general's agents "do not need it and it would be much better that I should profit by it." Payment of any such fees to the Americans could be avoided if Marchais were to procure for him a blank power of attorney, drawn up by Lafayette's notary, containing the conditions of the sale, and signed by the general. Pellerin would have this registered, and when a contract of sale was signed, he would send Lafayette his bonds, payable in Paris and not to Williams in Tallahassee,

Pellerin knew that once he had section 34 in his possession, he would need a partner with capital in order to exploit it. Even though he begged his friend to tell no one but the Lafayettes how desperate his situation was, he still hoped to provide some information about Florida which might induce their mutual friend Forestier to join him there. With Forestier's capital and his land, Pellerin imagined that the two of them could reap "a nice little fortune" in a few years.²⁴

Pellerin's grumbles and schemes, which must have reached Marchais early in 1834, were brought by him to G. W. Lafayette's attention, but the general's son did not respond until March 8, for he was himself beset with a number of personal problems. A relative by marriage had died, a grandchild was sick, and his father had contracted a severe illness after taking part in the lengthy obsequies for the député François Charles Dulong, mortally wounded in a duel in which G. W. Lafayette had acted as second.

No wonder that when the younger Lafayette wrote to Pellerin he began brusquely as he pointed out some misconceptions on his correspondent's part. When he went on to convey his father's consideration of Pellerin's request for section 34, he used an expression which was to cause him much trouble in the future, since his eager correspondent was to seize upon it and construe it to mean consent even though a definite refusal followed: "My father would have been willing to do what you now desire, if this were in his power, but the 34th section, which you believe to be free, is not so, and my father can do nothing now but

24. This, and the three preceding paragraphs, are based on Pellerin to Marchais, November 25, 1833, DCL.

what he has already done, after your departure— this is, to write to his representatives that he desires very much that you could make the arrangements that suit you, and to request them to serve you as friends and helpers with the buyers, since they can do no more as his official agents."²⁵

Lafayette kept his word, for the promised letter was enclosed in his son's. Pellerin handed it over to Williams at once. He inferred that it was favorable in tone, for Williams's first response was to suggest that if Pellerin could buy a section from the syndicate he would assist him by becoming his surety in Lafayette's name. But he also pointed out that the syndicate could not give a valid title, since the whole tract they had bought was mortgaged to Lafayette. This fact effectively nullified Williams's offer. Notwithstanding, Pellerin inquired about the price the syndicate was asking, but found it so high that he decided that dealing with them would be impossible.²⁶

For the fifth time, an attempt to gain a foothold in Lafayette's township had proved unsuccessful. Still another expedient, however, occurred to Pellerin, why not acquire one of the three sections occupied by the French settlers, since these properties had been excluded from the sale to the syndicate? It was of course useless to think of buying up the claims of Count Laporte to section 26, for Laporte, bankrupt and in debt, and on the verge of returning to France, had sold these to an American.²⁷ Adam was still occupying section 10, although he was about to dispose of it to a buyer whom Williams was willing to substitute for him in his contract.²⁸

On the other hand, Pellerin knew the situation of the third settler, Isidore Gerardin. After two years of hard work on the part of himself and his four sons, Gerardin had so many debts that he had been forced "to go to Tallahassee to carry on his profession of watchmaker." There were several reasons for this indebtedness. In the first place, he had at great expense brought with him from France several workmen who deserted their jobs

25. G. W. Lafayette to Pellerin, March 8, 1834, DCL.

26. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 28, 1834, DCL.

27. Williams to Skinner, January 1, 16, 1834; Hardy B. Croom to G. W. Lafayette, as given in "Résumé de l'histoire de nos affaires de Floride," 26-27, DCL. Williams gave Croom title to section 26 before December 10, 1837, Williams to G. W. Lafayette, December 10, 1837, DCL.

28. Williams to Skinner, December 27, 1833, DCL.

as soon as they were able to work effectively.²⁹ Secondly, Robert Williams, on assuming the subagency, decided he would sell land only by whole sections. Unfortunately, Gerardin had already selected and begun to cultivate only two quarter-sections that he thought he could afford. Due to this unexpected ruling, Gerardin now owed Lafayette for a whole section, a larger down payment, and greater amounts of interest than he had planned to pay.³⁰ Then, as Pellerin was to write G. W. Lafayette on June 28, 1834, "M. Gerardin, who had received some services from M. de Laporte when he arrived here, agreed later to become his surety. M. de Laporte when he departed from Florida left many debts behind, and M. Gerardin finds himself sued before the courts for the payment of the sums which he had guaranteed and which are considerable in proportion to his means."³¹

If Pellerin had been on good terms with Williams, he might have felt free to ask to be allowed to replace Gerardin as purchaser. Had he made this request, he would have found Williams receptive. Pellerin and Gerardin, however, adopted a less straightforward course. First, Gerardin agreed to cede Pellerin his rights to section 8, and Pellerin promised to pay an allowance for "the small clearing that he had made and for a log cabin he had built." Then the two parties, who depended for proper financial arrangements leading to a title upon the Lafayettes' generosity and on Pellerin's supposed influence with them, wrote separate letters on June 28, 1834. What they hoped to gain was cancellation of the sale to Gerardin, forgiveness of the unpaid interest due, approval of their agreement, and a lower price per acre than that which Gerardin had originally promised to pay.

When Pellerin wrote to G. W. Lafayette, he readily admitted that he should have gained permission before acting, but offered as excuse his need to "undertake something useful after

29. Isidore Gerardin to Lafayette, July 30, 1832, June 28, 1834, DCL. Gerardin signed himself Isid. Gerardin; the name is incorrectly transcribed as "Isadore Inardine" by Abbey, *Lafayette Lands*, 130, note 53.

30. Williams to Skinner, May 28, 1832; Gerardin to Lafayette, July 1, 1832 (in a duplicate of July 30). DCL.

31. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 28, 1834, DCL. Gerardin's affairs may not have been so precarious as these letters suggest, for after his death his jewelry business was being administered by a Frederick Gerardin, Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 26, 1836, November 18, 1837. Also, he once owned one lot and part of another in Tallahassee, both of which were sold at marshal's sales. *Tallahassee Floridian*, October 24, December 12, 1840.

eighteen months of lost time." He went on to assert that Lafayette had already told him, on March 8, that his father would have sold him section 34 at \$2.70 an acre, if it had been free. Now he hoped that he could buy section 8 at the same price, with interest at seven per cent for ten years beginning in January 1835. Although in the past he had tried to avoid dealing with Williams, he now expressed a willingness to make his interest notes payable either to the agent or directly to Paris, and ventured to ask M. Lafayette to give Williams his instructions "as soon as possible, and in such a way that I may not experience any difficulty with him."³²

Gerardin, also on June 28, unaware that Lafayette had died on May 20, addressed him directly. He assured the general that all Pellerin had written was true, and went on to explain that it was not for want of trying that his family's labors had resulted in failure. His misfortunes were due rather to his expensive importation of the workmen who ran off, and for this he blamed the statements made by the middlemen Rey and Rosset that induced him to come to Florida. "Doubtless," he remarked, "they were themselves deceived by the information that was furnished them."³³ In this oblique allusion, just as in Pellerin's "eighteen months of lost time," an undercurrent of accusation against Lafayette can be detected. No rumor of this arrangement between Pellerin and Gerardin seems to have reached Williams, for that fall he reported to Skinner that Gerardin was still holding on, although without paying the interest due, and that he thought section 8 would have to be resold.³⁴

Following the agreement, Pellerin, serious about fulfilling his promise to pay Gerardin \$660 in installments during 1835, went to New Orleans to find work, leaving his wife and children behind in Florida. By July 1835, he had handed over \$400. He intended, after he had discharged his obligation, to rejoin his family and "finally to enjoy, if possible, some tranquillity on the piece of land" whose title he was still awaiting. In New Orleans he often met with Louis T. Caire, a notary, and it may have been Caire's advice which inspired Pellerin to approach G. W. Lafayette once

32. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, June 28, 1834, DCL.

33. Gerardin to Lafayette, June 28, 1834, DCL.

34. Williams to Skinner, October 11, 1834, DCL.

more, for his sixth attempt.³⁵

On July 25, 1835, writing from New Orleans, he complained to G. W. Lafayette that he had received no answer to either his letter of June 28, 1834, or the letter of condolence that followed when General Lafayette's death became known. He laid the blame on Williams for all his disappointments and for threatening Gerardin with prosecution and dispossession. He went on to detail a way by which he could gain some advantage from what he termed the "consent formally expressed" in G. W. Lafayette's letter of March 8, 1834. All M. de Lafayette had to do was to obtain his co-heirs' approval, make out a special power of attorney either in blank or authorizing some trusted friend to sell section 8 to Pellerin for \$2.70 an acre on the terms he had formerly specified, and send this document to him or to Louis T. Caire, who as a solicitor would proceed to draw up the contract of sale. Pellerin furthermore emphasizes that, "by this private transaction, there will be no need for intervention of any foreign agent, and I confess to you that this will give me much pleasure, for the passage of time has only heightened my regrets that Mr. Robert Williams was ever chosen to be your agent, and my repugnance to having anything to do with him." It was very important, the letter continues, that G. W. Lafayette should send this power of attorney before the year's end, and Pellerin excuses his impatience on the grounds that he had passed three years in waiting and fruitless efforts in a foreign land with a family to support.³⁶

By the spring of 1837, Pellerin's patience was exhausted, and he resorted to an extreme measure in what must have been his final effort. In March he traveled to Tallahassee to see Williams, but was informed by the agent that he had received no mail from G. W. Lafayette, that he intended to write him, and that it was necessary to await the arrival of his instructions.

A few days after he returned to New Orleans, Pellerin received a letter in English from an unnamed friend in Tallahassee to whom he had entrusted his interests. He learned, "R. Williams talks quite *big* about the lands; he said at first he would sell them [at] the first offer, without regard to any agreement with Gerardin or yourself. He complained that you had not paid any

35. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, July 25, 1835, DCL.

36. *Ibid.*

interest; said he was writing to Mr. Geo. Lafayette, but would say nothing to your advantage. That he would not obey instructions from Mr. Geo. Lafayette, but from all the heirs etc.”

On the receipt of this alarming news, Pellerin wrote to Williams reminding him that he had recently declared his willingness to pay all that the agent deemed suitable. He now repeated this offer in writing. Still no answer came. Frustrated by Williams's delaying action and G. W. Lafayette's failure to grant a title to section 8 or even to pay attention to criticisms of the agent, Pellerin, still in New Orleans, wrote again to M. de Lafayette on March 20, 1837. His accusations became more perceptible as he recalled the conversations with both the general and his son that led him to turn down the profitable offer from Joseph Bonaparte, the omission of his name from the instructions regarding the sale of the township, and the losses which he believed had resulted from his not being appointed agent. Williams was also charged with wanting Gerardin's section for himself, and it was to “your agents' highly colored description” that Pellerin attributed Gerardin's precarious position.

It was evidently Williams's intention to sell section 8 to the first bidder, as expressed in his talk with the Frenchman's representative, that most disturbed Pellerin. Such an action he considered impossible on the basis of documents he had shown Caire, and to prevent it he was willing to pay the higher price of \$3.50 an acre originally agreed upon with Gerardin. In desperation, he ended his letter with this plea: “During the four years I have been in America, I have experienced nothing but disappointments, which all depend on the omission [from the 1833 instructions] mentioned at the beginning of my letter. I spent the first two years in a cabin, living with my family like savages, always awaiting favorable news from you; and now I am still waiting. At a glance you can judge how all this must have been and must be painful for me. Permit me then to pray you to put an end to it without more delay, by sending to whomever you will the powers and the necessary instructions so that at last a title may be given me— it doesn't matter under which of the two conditions; you can take your choice. It would be too cruel to keep me waiting any longer, and I do not think that I have done anything to incur your ill will.”³⁷

37. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, March 20, 1837, DCL.

With these somber words the series of letters we have been using comes to an end. The story thus far has been told mainly from Pellerin's point of view. To redress the balance one can draw upon the accounts left by both Robert W. Williams and George Washington Lafayette.

Williams's detailed statement, going back to the beginning of his agency, is best given in his own words. Reporting to his principal on December 23, 1837, he explained: "The section (no 8) which was occupied by Mr. Gerardine was sold to him conditionally at \$3 ½ per acre, payable in six years, with interest at the rate of six per cent per annum, to be paid annually. Agreement was made in 1832— not one cent of principal or interest has ever been paid. It was my understanding with all the settlers, and I certainly would have had none other, that a violation of this part (the annual payment of the interest) would be considered a forfeiture of the contract. Mr. Gerrardine, after occupying the land 2 or 3 years, abandoned it, and is now dead. Before his death Mr. Pellerine represented himself as the assignee of Gerrardine. I however do not consider Mr. Gerrardine as having any claim to transfer having forfeited it by a violation of the convention with me. Waiving, however, this consideration, Mr. Pellerine has neglected to avail himself of the terms of the contract made with Mr. Gerrardine when informed by me that he could do so, but has acted in utter disregard of them. He left here about 12 or 18 months ago [i.e., in July or December 1836], and did reside the last I heard of him in New Orleans. He represents himself as a favorite of the Lafayette family and said he was in correspondence with Mr. George W. Lafayette from whom he expects *great favour*. What the favours may be in regard to this section of land I am not apprised unless it be to ask for a 'diminution of price and more advantageous terms.' I was offered, last March [1837], \$12 per acre for this land, but lest I should get another '*Laporte case*' on my hands I declined doing anything until the claims of Mr. Pellerine if any he has upon the Heirs of Genl Lafayette should be arranged. Next May the agreement originally made with Mr. Gerrardine will have expired by its own limitation, by that time I hope to know your pleasure, and if I am not otherwise instructed I will then offer the land to the highest bidder or pursue such other course as I may think

most conducive to the interest of my constituents."³⁸

George W. Lafayette's own explanation was composed much later, in the draft of a letter he wrote Williams on February 25, 1843: "M. Pellerin had been recommended to my father by one of our mutual friends, and my father told him that he would facilitate as much as possible the means of establishing himself in Florida; he promised him nothing more, and did not make any special engagement with him as to such and such a section, or as to such and such a price. After my sisters and I unhappily became proprietors of the Florida lands, M. Pellerin wrote me at the moment when he was negotiating with M. Gerardin, begging me to allow him quite large advantages. I replied to him that I was not the sole proprietor, that I would lay his request before my co-heirs, communicating to them my personal dispositions in his favor. I made him no other promise. I have had it to regret later that M. Pellerin persisted in believing that my father, and I after him, had made some precise and special engagements with him. And the manner in which he expressed his persistence in this conviction, in the last letter which I received from him, broke off our correspondence, which was becoming futile since I could not hope to convince him of his error."³⁹

So much for the other side of the case.

At the end of 1837, the situation was still unresolved. By then Pellerin had finished paying Gerardin for his rights to section 8 together with improvements.⁴⁰ Williams, who had already sold to Americans the other two of the sections that had been occupied by the French settlers, was convinced that Gerardin had forfeited his rights to section 8, and was planning to dispose of it in 1838. Pellerin on the contrary was maintaining that Williams could not sell section 8 to anyone but himself.

A further factor in this impasse must have been interposed by the death of Gerardin, as reported by both Pellerin and Williams. This must have raised questions of inheritance, for the four sons who had helped to improve section 8 may have believed that they had some claim to consideration. A Frederick Gerardin, presumably one of the four, is found serving as administrator of Isidore Gerardin's estate in 1837, 1838, and 1840 under the supervision

38. Williams to G. W. Lafayette, December 23, 1837, DCL.

39. G. W. Lafayette to Williams, February 25, 1843, DCL.

40. Pellerin to G. W. Lafayette, March 20, 1837, DCL.

of the Leon County court.⁴¹ Also the Francis Gerardin, who in 1834 had offered for sale or rent 640 acres four miles north of Tallahassee, was probably the same F. Gerardin who, on April 4, 1840, advertised section 8 for sale.⁴² From this latter newspaper notice it might be inferred that section 8 was then in the possession of one or all of the surviving Gerardins.

Pellerin himself seems to have given up his long campaign after G. W. Lafayette disdained all communication with him. He evidently fell back upon the earlier idea of suing Jacminot, as can be deduced from the fact that he brought a suit in chancery against his former partner. To satisfy the court's judgment, land owned by Jacminot was scheduled to be sold in 1838 at a marshal's sale in Monticello, Jefferson County. In 1845 a legal notice shows that Pellerin was living in some other state; apparently he had renounced his idea of a plantation in Leon County.⁴³

Lafayette's idealistic project of colonizing his township with planters using white labor got off to a bad start when only three Frenchmen undertook actual settlement in Leon County. It suffered major setbacks when the imported European workmen deserted, and when two of the three occupied sections were sold to American buyers. The death of Isidore Gerardin removed the last of the original French settlers from the scene, and when Lewis A. Pellerin took up residence elsewhere, all his efforts to become the Lafayette township's fourth immigrant settler ended in defeat.

41. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 18, 1837, June 23, December 1, 1838, February 9, 1839, October 24, December 12, 1840.

42. *Ibid.*, March 16, 1834, April 4, 1840.

43. Jacminot's land was located in Township 2, Range 3, East and South, and Range 4, East and South, Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 17, 1838. Twenty of Jacminot's Union Bank shares were to be sold at auction for non-payment of interest, *Tallahassee Floridian*, March 13, 1841, April 2, 1842. On Pellerin's out-of-state residence, see *Tallahassee Floridian*, December 13, 1845. In his 1855 balance sheet, entitled "Estate of Genl. Lafayette in account with Robt. W. Williams," DCL. Williams credited the estate with the receipt of \$2,500 from "land claimed by Gardine," without identifying the source of this sum.