

MANUSCRIPT 798

Cahusac, Jean Marie, 1779?-

Lettres de M<sup>r</sup> Cahusac, Americain, Juge de Paix a Fleurance.  
PN6132 .C2 MS 798

France

1806-1836

What is known about the life of Jean Marie Cahusac comes only from this codex, written probably by him, containing fair copies of about 90 of his letters. Cahusac was born in 1779 (or perhaps in 1780--see letter #61) and lived in a house on the Rue Saint Jean, in the precincts of Fleurance, on the king's highroad from Auch to Agen (see letter #52). Early in 1802 he emigrated to Guadeloupe, in the French West Indies, where he fell seriously ill; he had barely recovered when he was forced to take up arms against the Negroes, who rebelled when Napoleon's soldiers tried to restore slavery in Guadeloupe (letters ##4, 48, 61). Then, disillusioned in his expectations of making a quick fortune, he left Guadeloupe, spent three months in the Danish island of St. Thomas (#29), and eventually arrived in Connecticut, where he lived for about one year (1804-1805). In the latter half of 1805 he crossed the Alleghenies and sailed down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans (#61), where he remained for a few weeks. He then returned to New York (probably by sea), whence he sailed for Europe in July 1806, and arrived in Bordeaux after a 39-day voyage (#1). By 30 August 1806, the date of the first of these letters, Cahusac had returned to Fleurance, where he spent the rest of his life.

These travels during 1802-1806 formed the most striking and romantic episodes in Cahusac's life, and induced the citizens of the small community of Fleurance to refer to him, for ever afterwards, as "le Américain."

Three years after his return to Europe, Cahusac obtained the minor post of greffier (clerk of court) to the justice of the peace of the canton of Fleurance (appointed on 4 June 1809--see letters ## 10-11). Two years later he married Mlle. Morlan of St. Puy (#26), and they had at least three children (Amélie, Dorothee, and Appolloine). Cahusac's enthusiastic public activities on behalf of constitutionalism (## 20-21, 25), during the troubled period 1814-1815, led to his dismissal from the post of greffier towards the end of 1815 (## 61, 63), when the reaction set in after Waterloo. From 1815 to 1830 Cahusac held no official position, although he schemed to obtain the post of Juge de paix of Fleurance. The letters written during these years dealt only with family affairs, except for a petition (25 January 1820)--drawn up during the political excitement over constitutionalism in 1819-1820--which he addressed to the Marquis de La Fayette (#31). The copy (#33) of La Fayette's short formal reply (13 February 1830) is the most important single item in this codex.

With the "July Revolution" of 1830, when Louis-Philippe became "citizen king", the juge de paix for the canton of Fleurance, the Sieur Doat, resigned the position, and Cahusac

immediately attempted to succeed him, but only obtained his old job as greffier. The new incumbent was a certain M. Denjoy (possibly Henri Denjoy, who was mayor of Fleurance in 1860) who, after four years, resigned in favor of Cahusac. And so on 11 August 1834 Cahusac, who had waited for a quarter-of-a-century, performed his first official functions as juge de paix of Fleurance (#61). Cahusac's last letter in this codex is a copy (#94) of a message (7 July 1836) sent to King Louis-Philippe congratulating him on having escaped an assassination attempt. Cahusac was then about 57 years old. Whether he died shortly afterwards, or whether additional letters can be found in another register, are matters on which this codex is silent. It can only be said that Cahusac died sometime after, perhaps years after, 24 July 1836.

The most interesting information in these letters concerns a book written by Cahusac and entitled either Lettres philosophiques sur differents pays du nouveau monde or Lettres philosophique sur l'Amerique, and divided into four parts (see letter # 88): (1) a description of the "despotism" and "anarchy" of the West Indies; (2) a description of the United States and of the manners and institutions of the Americans, "a People I consider as the happiest on earth"(!); (3) an account of Cahusac's voyage to Louisiana and of the primitive and savage country he traversed; and (4) a somewhat irrelevant appendix describing a trip to the

Pyrenees. During February 1824 the MS was read by the curé M. Moméjean and the curé M. Percin, who criticized Cahusac's enthusiastic comments on American Protestantism (# 36).

Although it was Cahusac's firm intention to publish the book, it was still circulating among his friends in MS form (#88) ten years later, in 1834. A previous owner of this codex, who may have possessed special knowledge about Cahusac, has inserted various slips of paper in among the letters to mark the places where certain subjects are treated. One of these slips, inserted before letter #41, says about Cahusac's book: "ouvrage disparu"; another slip, preceding letter #88, says about the book: "ouvrage perdu." Apparently the work was never published and Cahusac's name is not to be found in the bibliographies.

4<sup>o</sup>, 22 x 15 cm.

136 leaves.

Bound in boards.

Fair copies of letters, probably in the author's own hand, written on lined notepaper. The letters bear no signatures, and some of them have been abridged, with certain intimate or trivial domestic details omitted. The 94 items, numbered in red pencil, include a few letters and documents that were written by Cahusac's father, or which were addressed to Cahusac by someone else--but, except for these few items, all the rest are letters written by Cahusac to his relatives, friends, and to officials. Not paginated or foliated; no index or table of contents. A previous owner has inserted some marking slips among the letters. Some leaves have been cut out (see for instance, between #66 and #67). Four letters (##1, 15, 26, and 27) were addressed

to persons in New York, Charleston, and New Orleans. Bookseller's advertisement (Rolland et J.-B. Michel of Bordeaux) pasted to the front endpaper.

Purchased 1932.

Bibliographical note:

The name Jean Marie Cahusac does not appear in the standard French bibliographies, nor in the guides to the MSS of the Bibliothèque nationale. But two short pamphlets held by the Bibliothèque nationale may be of tangential interest:

Cahusac, père, propriétaire à Fleurance. Mémoire sur la culture de la vigne et sur les amendements, par Cahusac père. Lectoure: Impr. de M.-A. Devillechenous, 1855. 13 pages. There is a bare possibility that "Cahusac, Senior, landowner of Fleurance" may have been Jean Marie Cahusac (who would then have been about 76 years of age)--but he more probably was a brother, or son, or nephew of Jean Marie's.

Denjoy, Henri. Aux Fleurantins. [A report to the citizens of Fleurance on the completion of his term as mayor of Fleurance. Signed "Henry Denjoy, 25 November 1860." ] Auch: Impr. de Foix, 1860. 15 pages. The author may be the Denjoy who gave up his post as juge de paix to Cahusac.

3 June 1965  
T. Bentley Duncan