

Madame Marie Fretageot: Communitarian Educator

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OF ALL THE PERSONS who crossed the New Harmony threshold during the Owen-Maclure Community period, none played a more notable role than did Madame Marie Louise Duclos Fretageot. There would have been an Owen-Maclure Community without Madame Fretageot, but without her our most significant contemporary record—the 480 or so letters exchanged between her and William Maclure—about what happened in New Harmony, would not exist.

The details of Fretageot's early life remain fragmentary. The bulk of our information comes from manuscript collections, the most important being the New Harmony Workingmen's Institute's 415 original items of Maclure-Fretageot correspondence dating from January 1820 until her death in 1833.¹ Little of consequence is to be found in print with one outstanding exception: Arthur Bestor's *Education and Reform at New Harmony: Correspondence of William Maclure and Marie Duclos Fretageot 1820-1833*, published by the Indiana Historical Society in 1948. This work excerpts only fifty-two of the original 415 letters.

Why, one may rightly ask, with the Fretageot family in continuous residence in New Harmony from 1826 on, has nothing beyond Bestor's work been attempted? The answer seems to lie in the nature of the source material. Since Madame Fretageot's life—for the years of

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1. Other manuscript collections are: the Fretageot Collection, the Fitton-Fretageot Collection, and the Hodge-Fretageot Papers, all in the New Harmony Workingmen's Institute; also the Silliman Family Papers at Yale University, and the Wyck Papers (Reuben Haines, III, Series) at the Wyck Museum in Germantown, Pennsylvania.

their association—is inextricably a part of Maclure's² (for whom there is as yet no definitive biography either), materials are necessarily the same; namely, the letters they exchanged or wrote to others.

William Maclure (1763-1840) was a businessman and philanthropist; a scientist and the creator of the first geological map of the United States in 1809; a principal associate and financial partner of Robert Owen in the development of the New Harmony experiment; and the chief sponsor of the Pestalozzian teachers and the scientists who came to New Harmony.

Attempts to decipher Maclure's handwriting led to agreement with his friend, George William Erving,³ who complained:

It is with the utmost difficulty that I have been able, even with the aid of two pair of spectacles, to make out the contents of your letter "there or thereabouts"; not only your writing is as *usual*, like that of all great men, illegible nearly, besides being diminutive in the extreme, but you have used ink which has grown quite hoary, where it has not entirely disappeared, in its ten months voyage.⁴

Maclure's spelling is poor, punctuation nonexistent; he uses no capital letters or paragraphs; his syntax is weak; his handwriting almost illegible. The older he got, the worse he wrote. Madame Fretageot's letters, while not as difficult to read, are not always entirely clear either. She was writing in a language not her own, and while the expressions are sometimes charming or amusing, her intent is not always clear.

Fretageot was born 2 September 1783⁵ Marie Louise Duclos-it has been thought up to now in Paris but recent information regarding her family places them in Lyon. So perhaps that is her place of birth.⁶

She married Joseph Fretageot, date unknown, a Colonel of Husars with seven active years in the army of Napoleon. He participated

2. See W. H. G. Armytage, "William Maclure, 1763-1840: A British Interpretation/" *Indiana Magazine of History* 47 (March 1951): 1-20. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Education and Reform at New Harmony: the Correspondence of William Maclure and Marie Duclos Fretageot, 1820-1833*, Indiana Historical Society Publications, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Indianapolis, 1948). J. Percy Moore, "William Maclure—Scientist and Humanitarian," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia) 91 (August 1947): 234-249. Samuel George Morton, *A Memoir of William Maclure, Esq.* (Philadelphia: The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, 1844).

3. George William Erving (1771-1850), American diplomat, at one time United States Ambassador to Spain; long-time friend and correspondent of Maclure's.

4. George W. Erving to William Maclure, Paris, 13 February 1835. New Harmony Correspondence, Series I, Workingmen's Institute, New Harmony, Indiana. (Hereafter WMI.)

5. M. D. Fretageot to William Maclure, Philadelphia, 1 September 1823. New Harmony Correspondence, Series I M, WMI.

6. Legal Documents, Box I, Folder 13, Hodge-Fretageot Papers, WMI.

in the assault on Moscow, and though he survived the retreat which reduced the 400,000-man army to 20,000, the experience left him disabled in mind and body. Much of the remainder of his life was spent in a Parisian hospice both as patient and employee. Madame Fretageot was concerned for her husband's well-being, and made financial provision for his care as long as she lived.⁷

They had one child, Achille(s), born in 1812, at a period when Madame, though pregnant, had chosen to leave her husband.⁸ Several years later she went to the United States and set up a girls' boarding school in Philadelphia,⁹ for she turns up in the 1818 city directory as "Mrs. Mary Fretgot" living at 30 North Alley, now a part of Independence Mall. In January, 1819, both of her parents died within a week of each other, and her husband, identified as *cuisinier* (cook), represented her at the legal proceedings, "qualite de mari et maitre des droits de Marie Duclos son epouse actuellement dans les etats unis d'amerique."¹⁰

She probably returned to Europe sometime that year (1819) for the first letter in the Maclure-Fretageot correspondence is written by Maclure and dated 24 January 1820 in answer to an earlier one of hers, now lost.

By late March 1821 she appears to have become a staff member of the school¹¹ run by Guillaume Sylvan Casimir Phiquepal d'Arusmont in Paris. (In the United States he was known as William S. Phiquepal.) He had studied with Pestalozzi in Yverdon, and ten years later he would become the husband of Frances Wright. He received financial support from Maclure and later conducted his school in Maclure's house.

Thus the association and correspondence with William Maclure had begun in earnest by 1820, and lasted until the end of Fretageot's life.

I. *Relating to Maclure*

Because this early correspondence contains the most personal passages, it might be well to try to describe what the relationship between

7. Achilles Henry Fretageot's "Recollections," 1896, Box II, Fretageot Collection, WML.

8. Joseph Fretageot, Commune de Gentilly, to Achille Fretageot, Paris, 6 December 1833. Box II, Folder 16, Hodge-Fretageot Papers, WML.

9. Maclure to Benjamin Silliman, Madrid, 4 December 1821. Box 20, Folder 49, Silliman Family Papers, Yale University.

10. Legal Documents, Box I, Folder 13, Hodge-Fretageot Papers.

11. Maclure's letters, starting with 26 March 1821 until Madame Fretageot's July departure, were addressed to the care of Phiquepal at Rue des Brodeures, No. 20. Beyond looking after the household and some minor responsibilities for the young children, it is unclear exactly what Fretageot's duties were.

these two friends was. In 1821 Maclure was fifty-eight years old, Madame Fretageot twenty years younger. He was a wealthy man, his life dedicated to science and education, and through the latter, to social reform. In Madame Fretageot, Maclure found a trusted agent and friend, and a teacher whose methods embodied the principles he espoused.

In Maclure, Fretageot met with a man whose ideas paralleled hers, whose presence in her life served as an inspiration and a means of achieving her own educational ends, and an object of her mature love.

It is obvious, to the reader of the 1821-1822 letters especially, that Madame's feelings for Maclure went beyond the point of loving friendship:

My dearest friend, your letter dated 15th by Mr. Mallet came at hand one day latter than usually in a moment where I was scrubbing your house which was as dirty as possible; this servant is indeed the worst of all. I never seen in my life so much dirties . . . it is indeed a pleasure for me to do things which can be of some utility for the most amiable, the most beloved, the most cherished of men, when my thoughts are turned on your side (it is very often) my eyes are full of tears, my heart is broken of sorrow because I cannot see you, I cannot hold your hand in mine you dont know such a privation nothing in me can make [you] regret my presence but it is not so with you and I remain inconsolable.¹²

She complains about the problems of long distance corresponding after her return to Philadelphia:

When I will leave france it would encrease my sorrow to be deprived of your letters now I can support your absence more easily having of yours news each week but how long shall I be without hear something about my dearest friend you cannot imagine how I am unconsolate of it try my friend to come as soon as possible ... come you will see your work in mine you will help me with your counsels and spread the pleasure and happiness around you if I had not such hope I would not support [?] my life it would be to much tedious.¹³

Despite the adversities left behind in New Harmony, she wrote Maclure in Mexico from Paris in January 1832, and signed herself "I am yours until my last breathing."¹⁴

In return Maclure wrote nothing of a personal nature. He seems to have ignored, at least in writing, her ardent remarks and filled his letters with subjects which, he insisted, interested him. This is not to

12. Fretageot [Paris], to Maclure, Paris, 30 March 1821. Series I M, WMI.

13. Fretageot [Paris], to Maclure, Paris, 1 June 1821, Box I, Folder I, Hodge-Fretageot Papers, WMI.

14. Fretageot to Maclure, Paris, 15 January 1832, Series I M, WMI.

say that he did not appreciate her devotion nor prize her work on his account. Throughout the stormy period of the New Harmony experiment he backed her and sustained her in her desires, even though he sometimes doubted the soundness of them.

As late as February 23, 1833, when she had already arrived in Vera Cruz in Mexico to join him, in a letter she may or may not have ever read, he displayed his understanding of her worth.

In the long absence of all letters from you I had given you up more than once to the sweets and temptations of Paris but I was rather convinced that your spirit of activity and independence would not brook long that idle trivial and uncertain life of the rich.¹⁵

It was not until after her death, however, that he admitted his loss, and showed a realization of what her loyalty and devotion had meant to him.

No serious scholar, except Alberto Gil Novales in his book *William Maclure in Spain*,¹⁶ has even mentioned the emotional content of this correspondence. I contend that this content represents the prime motivating force for the existence of this most important body of material. Had not Madame Fretageot loved William Maclure deeply as a man as well as an ideal individual, she could not have withstood the many hardships that were her lot during the almost six years she spent in New Harmony.

Fretageot, then, in the spring and summer of 1821, wrote of her feelings, declaring that she would gladly join Maclure in Spain and set up a school there, even though America beckoned.

Maclure's plans, however, did not include her presence in Spain, and so her practical French disposition took over. Her letters are filled with mentions of the materials acquired for the American school: an organ, piano, a papirography; geographical objects like globes, spheres, maps; objects for teaching arithmetic and geometry; materials for needlework; lamps with crystal globes; a clock of gray marble—"old fashion but good"; table settings and linen; copperware and "an economical furnace."¹⁷ By buying in Europe she was able to save money and thus owe Maclure less. On July 22 she was on board ship ready to sail the following day with "ten and a half tuns at the rate of twelve dollars a tun . . . four trunks and three cases not measured."¹⁸

15. Maclure to Fretageot, Mexico, 23 February 1833, Box I, Folder 6, Hodge-Fretageot Papers, WMI. This letter was in a packet put together by Maclure with the notation, "Letters received for M. D. Fretageot before and after her death. Mexico, 1833."

16. Alberto Gil Novales, *William Maclure in Spain* (Madrid, Spain: Iniciativas de Cultura, 1981), p. 44.

17. Fretageot to Maclure, Paris, 16 June 1821, Series I M, WMI.

18. Fretageot to Maclure, on board ship at Havre, 22 July 1821, Series I M, WMI.

Tearfully leaving her son Achille behind in Paris with Phiquepal, Madame Fretageot was back in Philadelphia by November 1821 setting up a boarding school for girls. Maclure had already written to his Quaker friend and business agent, Reuben Haines, of the innovative teaching methods she was going to initiate:

teaching by substances tangible and sensible to all the senses substituting the properties of matter in place of the sound of words as taught in the old schools for which purpose she has collected all the necessary machinery.¹⁹

He had also informed his friend, Benjamin Silliman at Yale University, of Fretageot's return to Philadelphia, bringing with her

all the latest inventions for facilitating the acquiring of all useful knowledge which has been much perfected in different parts of Europe within this last few years such as mechanizm for teaching arithmetic and reducing all kinds of mathematics within the comprehension of very young children, teaching Geography and astronomy by Globes and ingenious inventions for rendering all the ideas clear . . . a new way of learning music in as many months as they used formerly to take years and giving correct ideas by designs and prints.²⁰

Within a month of her arrival, Charles Alexandre Lesueur, the great artist-naturalist, was describing Fretageot's immediate success: she already had six or seven pupils. Mr. John Griscom, a prominent New York Quaker, teacher, and professor of Chemistry at Columbia College, was sending his daughter. Reuben Haines had enrolled his little girl, who became the first pupil in the school. Dr. Philip Price, a Philadelphia physician and son of the Superintendent of the Friends' Boarding School in West-town, was a strong supporter and would eventually go to New Harmony. Lesueur himself went three days a week to teach the girls drawing and felt they were making good progress for the short time of the school's existence.²¹

Several months later (February, 1822) Haines informed Maclure that

the introduction of a system of education so novel had many prejudices to encounter, but after the experience of these months all of us who have had our children with her are so much convinced both of the superiority of her plan to the old system as well as the qualification . . . that our recommendations I have no doubt will induce others to send their children and that in time she will have so large a school as she wishes.... The pupils also have the superior advantage of

19. Maclure to Haines, Madrid, 11-15-220, Wyck Papers, Wyck Museum, Germantown.

20. Maclure to Silliman, Madrid, Box 20, Folder 49, Silliman Family Papers, Yale University.

21. Lesueur, to Maclure, Philadelphia, 10 December 1821, Series I, WMI.

Lesueur's instruction in drawing in which for as young as they are they are making admirable success.²²

Praise from Haines was particularly complimentary and gratifying since he had his own school in Germantown for which Maclure also sent instructional materials on occasion by way of either Lesueur or Madame Fretageot.

Her letters to Maclure that summer and fall of 1822 are full of details about her school. She has caught the attention and interest, followed soon by support, of the Philadelphia community. She is happy with her successes and waits impatiently for his coming, when he will give her good counsel and correct her defects. Phiquepal will come to the United States in about eighteen months, and will undoubtedly be successful, because the public is becoming convinced of the superiority of the new system.

One day she took her children to the Museum [probably Peale's] where they were admired for their attention and the propriety of their questions. Seeing Maclure's portrait there, she felt

a strong desire to see the original who is a great deal better than the picture I was most out of patience to see that inanimate face which raised in me the desire to hear again those delightful conversation so improving to my mind. [I]f I have a portion of good sense I owe it to you.²³

In a little over a year and a half she had acquired eighteen scholars for which she received \$2800. Her annual expenses were: \$120 to Lesueur for drawing lessons, \$170 to the music master, \$80 for the writing master, \$50 for the botanic master, \$120 to the servants, \$450 house rent—total, almost \$1000. Some of the children who could not afford tuition would be taught free; she would use them as helpers now, and eventually they would become teachers. She commented, "You may judge I do not make reserve, but I do not think about it as I will not bring no money in my grave."²⁴

Fretageot's successful school venture caught the attention, interest, and support of the community. The contacts she made among the influential people of New York and Philadelphia were of particular consequence for the future—the future in which Robert Owen²⁵ would play such a large part.

22. Haines to Maclure, Germantown, 2 February 1822, 11-15-161, Wyck Papers, Germantown.

23. Fretageot to Maclure, Philadelphia, 5 September 1822, Box I Folder 2, Hodge-Fretageot Papers, WML. Probably this refers to the Charles Willson Peale portrait painted in 1818 and hanging in the Peale Museum at that time. The Academy of Natural Sciences did not acquire it until 1854/55.

24. Fretageot to Maclure, Philadelphia, 14 July 1823, Series I M, **WML**.

25. Madame and Maclure had mentioned Robert Owen and his ideas as long ago as 5 May 1821. Series I M, **WML**.

Bestor calls Madame Fretageot "the principal intermediary"²⁶ for Robert Owen's growing recognition in Philadelphia. Since she was on friendly terms with members of the various learned societies, including the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and the American Philosophical Society, it is highly likely that Owen's educational and communitarian ideas were disseminated to Maclure's friends through her.

For example, she lent Dr. Philip Price a French translation of an account of Robert Owen's educational ideas and of the New Lanark schools.²⁷ His enthusiasm took him to Scotland in 1824, as it happened, when Maclure was also visiting. It was, coincidentally, also the time when Owen was in the midst of plans for his American experiment.

Owen's visit, in November 1824, during which he displayed his charm and expressed Fretageot's own ideas on the proper education of children, was immediately reported to Maclure:

I have had today the visit of Mr. Owen. When he entered in my house I took his hands saying; there is the man I desired so to converse with! And you are, said he, the woman that I wish to see. We are old acquaintances and in the mean time he gave me a kiss of friendship that I returned heartily.

You have no idea what pleasure I felt when I was talking by the side of a man whose actions and principles are so much in harmony with mine. When he said that children must be taken just when born in order to write in those blanc paper but what is correct, I felt an encrease of desire ... [when] I shall be able to put in practice the project of taking little babies who will be absolutely mine. Next Spring I will be in company with those two me[n] for whom I have the greatest esteem: You and Him.²⁸

Owen came several times to Philadelphia during the next year (1825) obviously attracting Maclure's friends by both his personality and his ideas. He was even more persuasive in his proselytizing after the purchase of Harmony, Indiana, in early January of 1825.

Nor did it take long for Madame Fretageot to carry Owen's educational theories to their logical conclusion: that these theories could best be realized in a communitarian society. At this time her letters to Maclure were filled with urgings for him to join his educational undertakings with those of Owen. In her 11 February 1825 letter she declared:

26. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., *Backwoods Utopins: the Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), p. 154.

27. Henry Grey Macnab, *Examen impartial des nouvelles vues de M. Robert Owen, et de ses etahlissemens a New-Lanark en Ecosse*, traduit par Laffon de Ladebat (Paris, 1821); Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, p. 154; Novales, *Maclure in Spain*, p. 48.

28. Fretageot to Maclure, Philadelphia, 28 November 1824, Series I M, WMI.

There is already a great many persons of this town making their preparations. Several of them are your acquaintances Doctor Troost, Mr. Say, Mr. Speakman, great many others, who expect you will join them.

If anything of that kind is to happen you may depend that I will not say no.²⁹

She bombarded him with suggestions for acquiring people appropriate to the new community such as a lithographer, "mecanician," and chemist; in fact, she urged Maclure to "gather as many people for the new colony [as possible]."³⁰

Maclure was not given to impetuosity. He attempted to restrain Fretageot's eagerness and spirit in his letters and after his arrival in this country. The very day (July 15) he met Owen he wrote, "When the imagination is exalted so as to leave room for only one favorite Idea in mind, it approaches to insanity." While he is totally in favor of, and admires Owen's theories, he fears that the material, that is, the people, he has to work with are "stubborn, crooked, and too often bent in an opposite direction from their own most evident interests." He insists again that "the education of the children must be the chief support and foundation of the system."³¹

In fact, Maclure did the equivalent of "goin' fishin'." He and his Academy friends—Lesueur, Say, Troost, Haines—went on an exciting geological expedition to an area embracing some of the most interesting mineralogical sites of the time. But the tide could not be held back. Robert Owen came back to the United States in November; he visited Philadelphia twice, conferring with Maclure, Madame Fretageot, and other friends. By late November Maclure had made up his mind to go with Owen.

Once the decision was taken, the combined parties of Owen and Maclure embarked from Pittsburgh 8 December 1825 on the keelboat "*Philanthropist*," destination New Harmony. Three days later the boat

29. Fretageot to Maclure, Philadelphia, 18 February/13 March 1825, Series I M, WML. Gerard Troost (1776-1850) was a Dutch-born scientist, interested in geology, mineralogy, and paleontology. He was one of the founders and was the first president of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Attracted to New Harmony by Maclure's sponsorship, he left in the spring of 1827 to become state geologist of Tennessee. Thomas Say (1789-1834) is the great naturalist, whose work on insects and shells has given him the twin titles of "Father of American Entomology" and "Father of American Conchology." Like Lesueur, he was a protege of Maclure. John Speakman (fl. 1812-1845), an apothecary, was one of the founders of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia and its first treasurer and librarian. He was also a partner of Say in a failed apothecary venture; a follower of Owen's communitarian ideas; and, for a while, a member of the Community. He visited Maclure in Mexico in 1839 on behalf of the Academy.

30. Fretageot to Maclure, Philadelphia, 18 February / 13 March 1825, Series I M, WML.

31. Maclure to Fretageot, New York, 15 July 1825, Series I M, WML.

was hopelessly stuck in the ice and there it remained for a month. Fretageot did her part to keep spirits up—by helping nurse Phiquepal who suffered a severe injury when he fell in the icy Ohio, and at the nightly gatherings by joining in the discussions of a community costume, or reading from the works of Fourier. Robert Dale Owen described her as "an excellent woman in every respect." He even found her so trustworthy that he discussed family matters with her privately. During the time the keelboat was stuck fast in the ice at Safe Harbour, Maclure and Madame Fretageot twice took off for brief expeditions, once to Beaver, then to Steubenville and Wheeling.³²

Once freed, this "Boatload of Knowledge" made the remainder of the journey down the river uneventfully, and the party reached Mt. Vernon, Indiana on January 23rd. On the next day some of the party made the final lap of the journey overland. The rest stayed with the *Philanthropist* as it made its way up the Wabash River to New Harmony. Owen's social reformers and Maclure's scientists and educators had joined forces.

2. A Leader at New Harmony

It is the next period, her life in New Harmony, that establishes Madame Fretageot as one of the most outstanding members of the Owen-Maclure Community. She arrived on 26 January 1826 and lived in New Harmony continuously for almost six years (she left 3 November 1831), during which time no other individual was more actively and responsibly devoted to the larger community interests.

During 1826 and 1827 when Maclure spent portions of the year in New Harmony she taught for a while in the Pestalozzian Infant School assisting Mrs. Neef, and she presided over the large household accommodated in the Rapp-Maclure mansion. After the break between the two leaders, and Maclure's decision at the end of 1828 to try Mexico for his health, she was left in full charge of his business and educational interests.

Maclure's holdings consisted of half the town of New Harmony: all of the land north of Church Street, plus the two churches. Also included were 8,000 acres of land and a coal mine near Petersburg, Indiana (from which she reported receiving one cent a bucket for coal on January 1, 1830).³³ She administered his property—rented and repaired the buildings, built fences, harvested and marketed the crops.

32. Details of trip taken from Josephine M. Elliott, ed., *To Holland and to New Harmony: Robert Dale Owen's Travel Journal, 1825-1826*, Indiana Historical Society Publications Vol. 23, No. 4 (Indianapolis, 1969).

33. Fretageot to Maclure, New Harmony, 1 January 1830, Series I M, WMI.

She managed a printing press, a store, a blacksmith shop, a distillery, a travelling books and prints cart, and a steamboat. Above all she tried to maintain Maclure's educational ideals in a School of Industry where the work could be done by the students.

Following the arrival of the "Boatload of Knowledge," peace and accord reigned only briefly in the community.

Fretageot had begun her work assisting Mrs. Neef with the Infant School in Community House No. 2. Very soon her letters to Maclure (who had gone off on a trip to Ohio with Thomas Say and her son Achilles) contained complaints, especially about the Neef family, to the point where she took her small children to No. 5 and carried on a school there.

Maclure, who was being bombarded by grumbling letters from other community members, was angered by the misunderstandings and maneuverings of his teachers, and by Madame's obvious siding with Owen's interference in the schools. He repudiated all mention of Owen as his partner. As to Madame's rigid stand against Neff, Maclure questioned her future usefulness:

What a humiliating situation your ambition and love of power has brought you to ... who gave you authority in the state of perfect equality of rights and duties to interfere with the duties of others? Who had the power to make you lord god and governor of the community? When you signed the deed you were all equal.³⁴

The storm blew over and an uneasy peace prevailed. But the damage was never repaired, and ultimately the cause of education in New Harmony suffered.

Maclure had no sooner returned to New Harmony from his winter in New Orleans than the final break with Owen took place. By May 1827 the formal community was over. Along with many others, the Neef family departed, thus solving one of the most serious of Fretageot's problems.

Maclure's almost eight months stay, the longest he ever made, was a fruitful one inasmuch as he launched his long-projected School of Industry, encompassing the publications program. This plan included a scientific journal, the *Disseminator of Useful Knowledge; Containing Hints to the Youth of the United States*, Lesueur's *Ichthyology*,³⁵ Thomas Say's

34. Maclure to Fretageot, Louisville, 19 September 1826, Series I M, WMI.

35. Lesueur's *Ichthyology* was never completed. As of fall, 1982, the Lesueur Collection at LeHarve's Museum d'Histoire Naturelle contained only sixteen pages of text and nine plates. This situation resulted from Lesueur's lack of an editor and translator for his labored English.

Conchology, Maclure's *Opinions*, and Michaux' *North American Sylva*.³⁶ To carry out and coordinate the scientific chores, which involved research, printing, engraving, and hand coloring, Maclure put Say in charge of the scientific work and the editing of the *Disseminator*, with Fretageot to administer the entire business enterprise. As he was leaving for Mexico, Maclure gave her his power of attorney, the strongest proof of his confidence in her integrity and ability.

The next few years were busy productive ones. Although her life was scarcely smooth, it was filled with activities connected with management of Maclure's affairs and her dealings with the other "stars" of the community such as the Owen sons, Frances and Camilla Wright, Phiquepal, Lesueur and Say, Oliver Evans, the Chases. More than once she wrote Maclure that her health was good and that being active agreed with her:

the multiplicity of business now hanging on my shoulders are quite pleasant to me. A bustling life is very congenial to my constitution, the more I have to think and to act, the more I have strength both in mind and body.³⁷

The year 1830 began badly. Very soon it brought Frederick August Ismar,³⁸ a young man who claimed to be sent by Pestalozzian school interests, with Maclure's assent, to observe and criticize Madame Fretageot's system of teaching. His presence created a great disturbance in town for some months, and it was specifically distressing to Fretageot.

36. Michaux's *Sylva* was final publication in 1841, after Maclure's death.

37. Fretageot to Maclure, New Harmony, 30 July 1829, Series I M, WML. The Owen sons living in New Harmony at this time were Robert Dale Owen, William, David Dale, and Richard, the latter two having arrived in January, 1828. Frances and Camilla Wright (1795-1852) (1797?-1831) were sisters. Frances is the famous writer, newspaper editor, and lecturer. She was also a reformer and advocate of the rights of women and blacks, and the founder of a colony for educating slaves for freedom. Elsewhere in this issue of *Communal Societies* Celia Eckhardt assesses the whole life and career of Frances Wright. Camilla, her loving younger sister, supported Frances in all her endeavors. Oliver Evans, Jr. (1800-1838), was the son of the inventor, and was himself an inventor of a system of milling and high-pressure engines. He married Louise Neef, the eldest daughter of Joseph Neef. Thomas and Martha Chase (? - ?) (? - 1834?) came to New Harmony late in 1827; he was a chemist and she an artist, both teaching these subjects in the schools. Martha divorced her husband and married Richard Owen in 1832, but she died after only about a year and a half.

38. Little is known about Frederick August Ismar (? - ?) other than the letters used for the account given in this article. Maclure's letter of introduction (ca. November 1829) has to be based on what Ismar claimed, and, therefore, is probably unreliable. Ismar did meet Constantine Rafinesque, the naturalist, who acknowledged using Ismar's material about Mexico in an article.

Ismar showed his gratitude to the Owens, who had befriended him, by carrying off some valuable articles and not paying his debt to them. Later, the Owens and others apologized to her for the part they took against her and exonerated her from Ismar's slanders.

Despite restored feelings, Maclure seemed a little less than satisfied with his agent. He felt the school was not operating under optimum conditions, and by August Fretageot learned that Maclure intended to keep the school going only one more year. She wrote,

For me to continue longer with your disapprobation is a task above my courage. I will only add that you do not see with your eyes nor hear with your ears. You are just as I would be if I were in your place.³⁹

On the other hand, New Harmony itself presented an increasingly pleasant aspect:

Our town is not so bad in its population [as] when you left. The Community system is wearing off, people are more industrious. They begin to respect the property of others and the most part of them are gone, many new ones have replaced the first.⁴⁰

The all-important printing activities continued in spite of problems with printers and interminable waits for the hard-to-get and sometimes poor-quality paper. By November 1830 the first issue of Say's shells was almost ready, and by the following spring Maclure's *Opinions* was being printed, with preliminary work done on Michaux' *Sylva*.^{*1}

Throughout spring and summer 1831 small difficulties continued to arise. Fretageot was obliged to dismiss for drunkenness seven boys who were defended by their parents despite bad, unruly behavior.⁴²

The peddling cart turned out unsuccessfully. The western country people were not interested in politics, education, etc. Scott's novels, on the other hand, would have made money.⁴³ The *Disseminator* had been stopped. Instead, the children would issue a half-sheet twice monthly called the *Western Hive*, price fifty cents a year.⁴⁴ Lesueur and Say refused to cooperate on the printing of the former's *Ichthyology*.

39. Fretageot to Maclure, New Harmony, 29 September 1830, Series I M, WMI.

40. Fretageot to Maclure, New Harmony, 12 October 1830, Series I M, WMI.

41. Say was asked by Robert Dale Owen, by then in New York, to become editor of *The Daily Sentinel*, and he refused. Fretageot reported: "Say says he will not accept anything offered him in New York or Philadelphia as long as you think him useful here. His wife would rather live in the east, but not he." 2 and 12 October 1830, Series I M, WMI.

42. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1831

43. *Ibid.*, 26 June 1831

44. *Ibid.*, 16 July 1831

Her attempts to upgrade the town by attracting the county seat to New Harmony, with Say as postmaster, came to naught.⁴⁵

Some cross letters from Maclure, in which he reproved her for engaging in too many random schemes not calculated to forward the schools, further hastened her demoralization.

On August 15, 1831, she informed Maclure that several pieces of business in France concerning her legacies needed attention, and requested him to return so that she could leave. By October, after a month's serious illness, she repeated her appeal. The November 8-26, 1831, letter announced her departure.

3. *Denouement and Death*

The Maclure-Fretageot letters exchanged during the 1830-1831 period contain many explanations for Madame's state of mind when she left New Harmony—as it turned out—for the last time. The Ismar episode took its toll; Maclure's family was jealous of her authority and caused many unpleasant situations; Maclure himself seemed discontented with the schools and her stewardship, although she offered numerous times to withdraw from both, if that was his wish. During this period she had frequent and sustained attacks of nerves and constant headaches. She became suspicious of those of Maclure's friends who had also been hers. The world had become an unfriendly, alien, and lonely place.

Madame Fretageot herself seems to supply a clue to what might have been a prime cause for her mental disturbance. In her letter of September 9, 1830, she says, "My health continues good, only now and then some feelings of old age. I think I am at that period which is a disagreeable one, but I am well altogether. Have grown fat." It is possible to suggest that Fretageot, now forty-eight years old, twenty to thirty pounds heavier in two years, was going through the discomforts, depressions, and psychic stresses of the menopause.

After a difficult ocean trip, she arrived in Paris on Christmas Day, and tried immediately to call on General Lafayette, who was indisposed. While there she learned that Frances Wright was living in Paris; she visited her and reported to Maclure the sad state of this once gloriously independent woman.

Fretageot's original intentions had been to attend to her business affairs, resolve her husband's future care, enjoy the company of her old friends, and return home in the spring. Cholera changed her schedule. During the months of April and May, 1832, 52,000 people in Paris died; 500,000 in all of France.⁴⁶ It almost claimed her, too, and though

45. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1831

46. Fretageot to Maclure, Paris, 25 May 1832, Series I M, WMI.

she survived, its debilitating effects remained. Nor could she go back to the United States, where she was sorely missed. Letters from Achille, Say, and Ward importuned her to come home.

The remaining months in France were taken up with recuperating in the lovely homes of her well-to-do friends, highly placed governmental officials and minor nobility. Writing to Allen Ward back in New Harmony, she reports: "They called me a savage, and tried to tame my fierceness. I believe they have succeeded fully."⁴⁷

Disturbing news from New Harmony from Achille and Say about her brother's nefarious activities hastened her decision to return to America, but not before going to Mexico first to see Maclure. She arrived February 1833, pleasantly surprising Maclure, who was in the process of preparing to go to the United States in a few weeks.

There is scarcely any information as to Fretageot's and Maclure's life from February to August when she died. There is an autobiographical letter of Maclure's translated into French by her some time in April intended as an answer to one from a French friend. There is a mention of a letter written by her to another friend in Paris describing the beauties of Mexico. There are prescriptions for her illness dated August 19, 20, 21. And finally there is a paper giving her brother permission to go through the effects of Madame Fretageot, deceased August 24, 1833.⁴⁸

Though Maclure had been guarded with his expressions of affection toward Madame during her lifetime, he was nonetheless keenly aware of his bereavement after her death. He wrote to various friends, among them Alexander Greaves,⁴⁹ who answered,

Your letter of the 28th excited in me various feelings of concern for you, amongst which condolence was the most active. Well can I comprehend that, as you say, you "have suffered a greater loss than ever you did before, in the death of M. D. Fretageot": it was indeed much to lose a cheerful companion, attentive nurse, kind friend, and disinterested manager, all in one person; and although your habit of being contented alone, will have come to your aid, I doubt not that the sudden privation of renewed comforts, will have been a severe affliction to you.⁵⁰

47. Fretageot to Allen Ward, Paris, circa 7 May 1832, Series I, WMI. Allen Ward was a young man who had been one of Madame's students, and had worked on various projects for the School of Industry. He acted as Maclure's companion on several trips.

48. Prescriptions and document in Box I, Folder 10, Hodge-Fretageot Papers. The document cited here proves conclusively that she died in August and not as hitherto believed in April.

49. Alexander Greaves (? - ?), Quaker friend and agent of Maclure's in New York.

50. Greaves to Maclure, New York, 1 November 1833, Series I, WMI.

Maclure had lost a loyal, loving, friend and colleague, one who shared his educational ideas and steady purpose of attaining democracy through education. Achille lost a devoted, wise, and affectionate mother. New Harmony lost one of its most effective and capable leaders, a pioneer teacher and communitarian. In Arthur Bestor's words: "New Harmony was Madame Fretageot's monument as truly as it was Rapp's or Owen's or Maclure's."⁵¹

51. Bestor, *Education and Reform*, p. 406.