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SOME LETTERS OF MABANE TO RIEDESEL (1781-1783)

By MR. E. FABRE SURVEYER, F.R.S.C. AND DOROTHY WARREN

On September 10, 1781, Major Riedesel who had landed in Quebec on June 1, 1776, at the head of the Brunswick troops and spent a year in Canada arrived at Quebec for the second time. He was at once sent to take possession of his old quarters at Sorel. There a house was prepared for him, where the monotony of his life was broken by the occasional visit of a German or English officer and by his constant correspondence with his friends, the most important of whom were Governor Haldimand and Judge Mabane. Some of Riedesel's letters to Haldimand have been published by Max Von Eelking and translated by William Stone of Saratoga Springs. Twenty-one of Mabane's letters to Riedesel were acquired by D. R. McCord, K.C., and are now in the McCord National Museum. Some of these letters are in French. In one of them, undated, Mabane says: "Tout Anglais doit avoir de la Reconnaissance pour les Officiers Etrangers qui se distinguent par leur Zèle et Attachement au Service du Roi et Je ne suis que sincère quand Je Proffesse les Sentiments du Respect et Reconnaissance que Je ressens pour vous."

On March 28, 1782, Mabane excuses himself for not having stopped at Sorel on his way to Montreal, alleging that he has been kept busy attending General Haldimand who had had a fall.

A letter dated Quebec, October 30, 1782, hints at a duel fought by leading Quebec citizens: "The dispute between Davidson and Chandler is where you left it, except that in consequence of some Transaction at ye Coffee House Davidson and Lees desired him to meet them on ye Heights where exchanged a Shot wt each of them. The Affair gave me great uneasiness as I was a great Well wisher to both parties." Davidson and Lees were merchants in Quebec and partners. The father of Lees wrote a journal of his voyage in 1768 from London to Boston and back by the River St. Lawrence to Montreal, which occupied five and a half months. It was published in 1911 by the Society of Colonial Wars, State of Michigan. Strangely enough Davidson and Lees to whom Mabane was a "great well-wisher" took judgment against his Estate and had Woodfield sold by the Sheriff. As to Kenneth Cameron Chandler, Lees' opponent, he was an Ordinance officer who owned one sixth of the Seignory of Nicolet. He died in 1803.

On November 18, 1782, Mabane congratulates Riedesel on the birth of his daughter, christened "Canada". A sister of the new born baby had been called "America". "Canada," however died a few months later, which prompted Mabane to send sympathy. On January 23, 1783 Mabane deplores the levity of Quebeckers. "There is nothing here but feasting, dancing, and in short dissipation of every kind." A few weeks later he harps on the same subject, planning to stop at Sorel on his way to Montreal. "I am sure I will relish ye Society of your family more than the Noise and dissipation of this Town. Instead of enjoying Life, the whole business is how to impose upon one another & to make others think they are enjoying it when in reality they are only endeavoring to drive away Ennui."

Mabane however was very fond of theatricals and on February 17, 1783, wrote: "To our other Amusements we have added that of a Play

House which in my Opinion much exceeds the others. I can assure you that some of the Gentlemen excell in their parts. I have wished much that you & family had been present to partake of ye pleasure which I received from them." Three days later he adds "I could wish that they could partake of the Pleasure, which the Play-house affords, but I hope that next May you and they will judge whether the Accounts of the Merits of the Performers are exaggerated."

At last in March, 1783, Mabane succeeded in reaching Sorel. He was expected to bring back Cordelia Murray, the daughter of his friend, Walter Murray, but she apparently enjoyed herself so much at Sorel that she remained behind.

On April 3 he expressed sympathy on the death of "Canada" and invited Major General Riedesel and his family to stay with him. He said "The air at Woodfield is ye healthiest in Canada and the Exercise which can easily be come at there, will be useful for the whole family." Unfortunately before his letter had reached its destination Woodfield had been reduced to ashes. He did not, however, give up the hope of receiving his German friends. In a letter, dated April 10, 1783, he said "Had it happened last Nov. I would have felt less Regret but the loss is at present embittered by ye prospect of losing the enjoyment of ye Country for one Summer at least, or at least I cannot expect to be comfortably settled, I flatter myself nevertheless that I will spend many days there tho' in a Tent or hut wt you & Family. We can be conveniently accomodated in ye House in Town & what between Monmorenci & ye woods at Woodfield, Madme de Riedesel & ye Children will have sufficient Exercise and as You are fond of gardening, you will have it in Town for your Amusement."

On April 21 he renewed the invitation and extended it to Parson Aemilius, the faithful chaplain of the Riedesel family.

On April 28 he expressed dissatisfaction on the preliminaries of Peace and says "One would suspect yt the Articles wt regard to America & Britain were dictated by the Congress and implicitly agreed to by our Ministers."

The Riedesels stayed with Dr. Mabane and his sister in the spring of 1783 but shortly afterwards they were recalled to Germany and had to pay a last visit to Quebec before sailing. On June 22, 1783, Mabane wrote to Riedesel: "I own I begin to feel ye Regret of losing You I am perfectly reconciled to residing in this Country in every Respect but that of being so often separated from people for whom I feel friendship and Esteem, but there is no Situation in Life without Inconvenience."

In the last letter dated June 30, 1783, Mabane wrote to Riedesel, "in case you come by Land, and you can tell ye day you will be at Pointe aux Trembles, I will have the Callaise for you & Mrs. de Riedesel to bring You to Town."