

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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A Princely Visitor

The American people were agog with excitement in 1841! The Prince de Joinville, third son of King Louis Philippe of France, had arrived in the United States and was making a triumphal tour of the principal cities along the Atlantic seaboard. At New York he had received a "very friendly welcome" from a "remarkable" naval officer — Commodore Matthew C. Perry. At Philadelphia he "beat an instant and hasty retreat" from the Chestnut Street Theater when his anticipated presence was heralded by a "huge poster" over the door informing the public that the Prince de Joinville had reserved seats for the evening performance. At Washington he was entertained in the Executive Mansion by a "blunt-spoken man with a big nose" named John Tyler. During a reception given in his honor the Prince "shook hands at least three thousand times". Tired but "highly gratified" by his warm welcome, the youthful emissary of the French Crown de-

cided to go to Buffalo, embark on a Great Lakes steamer for Green Bay, and then "follow up the track of our officers and soldiers and missionaries, who pushed on till they discovered the Mississippi."

News of the proposed visit of the popular young prince spread like a prairie fire throughout the West. Populous St. Louis fairly seethed with plans for royal entertainment. The ripples of enthusiasm even reached as far as the Territory of Iowa, a sprawling wilderness expanse containing less than fifty thousand settlers. On October 29, 1841, the editor of the Bloomington (Muscatine) *Herald* declared: "The citizens of St. Louis, in anticipation of a visit from the Prince de Joinville, have made arrangements for his reception, and for complimenting him with a ball. See here, Mr. Prince, we have not many delicacies or entertainments up here, but all ceremonies aside, if you'll just come up this way we'll stand a treat at the new *liquorary institute* down stairs."

The selection of the Prince de Joinville for the American tour was no mere accident. Born at Neuilly, France, on August 14, 1818, Francois Ferdinand Philippe Louis Marie d'Orleans, Prince de Joinville, was a young man of rich experiences and cultural attainments. He had been educated at the naval school at Brest and had proved him-

self a capable and courageous naval officer in the siege of Vera Cruz for which he was awarded *la croix de la Légion d'honneur* in 1839. In 1840 he was commissioned to sail for St. Helena in the frigate *Belle Poule* to bring back the body of Napoleon. Shortly after his return he was sent to Newfoundland to study the problems arising from the French fishing interests.

Perhaps an additional motive for the Prince's visit to the United States, if a paragraph from the *Journal des Débats* may be trusted, was the prospect of establishing a line of French steamships between the principal French maritime cities and the United States. His consultation with Commodore Perry, sometimes called the "father of the steam navy", was particularly appropriate since Perry had interviewed King Louis Philippe on lighthouses, naval steamships, and ordnance three years before. Throughout his American tour (whether along the Atlantic seaboard, on the Great Lakes, or on the Mississippi and its tributaries) de Joinville had ample opportunity to study steam craft. On the western waters of the United States, particularly, he was able to see a steam tonnage actually surpassing that of the English merchant marine!

Although he may have been lured westward by a desire to view the lands made famous by the

explorations of Joliet and Marquette, Michel Aco, Louis Hennepin, Nicolas Perrot, La Salle, and Tonty of the Iron Hand, the Prince de Joinville revealed still another, and possibly stronger motive in his *Memoirs*. "One of the first results of the use of steam", he recorded, "was to make it essential for all nations having war fleets to transform their arsenals and their naval stores. It was absolutely necessary to be able to oppose an enemy, whose means of attack could overcome wind and tide, with defensive means of equal power. That was as clear as A B C. This transformation interested me keenly — for the future of the arm of the service to which I had fervently devoted my whole life, and which I desired to see become once more a redoubtable weapon of our country's power, was bound up with it. But, to carry it through, we had to war with routine, with the obstinacy bred of old habit, and with the narrow ideas which were taught in the naval schools. It was a continuous daily struggle in which I bore an assiduous part."

With this in mind the Prince de Joinville first touched at Newfoundland and then embarked for St. Pierre Miquelon, Halifax, and New York City. De Joinville had considerable trouble finding the island of St. Pierre Miquelon because of the "continuous fogs" that blanketed this "bare,

wild, hideous islet" which contained, however, a "first-class" port. With commendable foresight in the light of events of 1941 the twenty-three-year-old Prince declared: "Admirable as victualing station and mart for our fishermen, its military value as far as our trade is concerned is absolutely *nil*. Whatever may be done for it, it will always be at the mercy of whoever is master of the seas in time of war." A brief visit at Halifax Bay, with its "fresh and verdant surroundings", revealed a splendid harbor where "the fleets of the whole world could find absolute safety, maritime and strategic, at once".

The French frigate *Belle Poule* arrived at New York City on September 19, 1841, four days after leaving Halifax. The "frantic bustle" of Americans, particularly New Yorkers, fairly stunned the young Prince. "One feels so bewildered that any idea of a picturesque description disappears", he wrote in his *Memoirs*. "Bustle on land, where everybody seems to rush as if they were demented — bustle on the water, where one keeps wondering why the ships of all sizes passing at full speed in every direction do not collide every other minute . . . This port is at the confluence of two arms of the sea, in front of the public walk called the Battery. Here, towards five o'clock in the evening, when the steamboats start, the huge

floating palaces may be seen shooting off in every direction, shrieking hoarsely. It is a maritime pandemonium. In it the American is in his element. Dressed in black, with a stovepipe hat, the quid in his cheek causing him to look as though he grinned sardonically, with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the engine-room bell, he drives his ship full speed through the throng with an audacity, decision, and coolness which made me shiver at first!"

During his brief sojourn in New York the Prince de Joinville visited numerous United States ships and made a special tour of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, with its many work shops and rope walks. At Washington he paid a visit to the Naval Arsenal. "A very nice little arsenal it was," commented de Joinville, "in a bad situation, but admirably arranged, and only put in that particular place to serve as a sort of school of elementary instruction to the ignorance of Congress, and interest its members in naval matters." This was especially necessary for the House of Representatives, "full as it was of journalists, who had never studied anything beyond the art of attracting subscriptions to their papers".

De Joinville and his suite narrowly escaped injury and possible death between Washington and Buffalo when the engine of their train ran off the

track on a viaduct and "was hung up in the framework, like a fly in a spider's web." He embarked from Buffalo on the staunch steamer *Columbus*, the last boat to leave that port for Green Bay so late in the season. During the course of the journey the *Columbus* smashed into a reef with an "awful shock", spent one whole night aground in Lake St. Clair, and almost went down in a squall in Lake Michigan. "Nothing I can say will give any idea of the recklessness with which the ship was navigated. To begin with, there were no charts; you went at haphazard, according to information that had come down by tradition, and yet these lakes are really small oceans, with currents, and fogs, and squalls coming off the coasts, just like the sea To danger by sea must be added danger by fire for our staunch *Columbus*. The boilers were heated with wood — aloewood — out of which pencils and cigar-boxes are made. It made a very pleasant smell, but being piled up pell mell in the hold, against the furnaces, it caught fire several times in my presence, and the stokers would just throw a little water on it to put it out. On the deck the very high pressure engine worked exposed and unprotected, amidst sheep and oxen and packages of all kinds, which were frequently shot against it by the roll of the waves, and above the whole there rose two stories of

cabins, built of light planking, as thin as paper, quite incapable of standing against the most moderate seas, but which caught the wind, and made the ship exceedingly unsteady."

After passing through the Strait of Mackinac, richly associated with such names as Jean Nicolet, Joliet, and Marquette, the *Columbus* finally came to its journey's end on the nineteenth of October. "Our good ship *Columbus* got to Green Bay at last, and, stirring up the mud which obstructs the entrance to Fox River, bore us up that fine stream and deposited us in front of a large store, surrounded by fifty houses, there or thereabouts. This settlement was not in the United States, but on Wisconsin Territory, an embryo State, not populous enough as yet, nor sufficiently organized, to be called a State, nor have a voice in the deliberations of the American Union."

After a brief visit with some Indians the Prince and his party secured saddle horses for themselves and a "farmer's waggon" for their baggage and set out for the Mississippi. "The whole journey was most interesting. There were no roads — the merest track through woods interspersed with prairies . . . stretching far and wide, over which we must steer as though we were at sea, or else be guided by the mysterious instinct of some trapper. We met many Redskins in the

woods, all busy hunting. Game was very abundant — waterfowl on the streams, flights of prairie hens (a sort of grouse), and herds of buck, which constantly crossed our line of march. Here and there was a clearing or first attempt at cultivation, round a squatter's log cabin."

Their route led them up the Fox River to Lake Winnebago and on to Fond du Lac, whence they struck out overland for Fort Winnebago. There the Prince determined to forego his visit to Prairie du Chien, the overland journey having already consumed far more time than he had expected. The party accordingly proceeded in a southwesterly direction to Galena.

The beauty of the countryside thrilled the Prince as his horse "cantered gaily over the frozen ground." Once a panther was driven across their path by their Indian guide. On another occasion de Joinville saw a "big cloud" on the horizon rapidly approaching in the form of a prairie fire. "We then took the well-known plan of setting it [the prairie] on fire ourselves just where we were. Within less than five minutes our fire had run a mile before the wind, going as fast as a horse can gallop, with a noise like a distant rattle of musketry. We and our horses entered the space we had set on fire ourselves, while the big conflagration in the distance, finding no food in front, fled

away to our right and left. I afterwards saw the same sight at night. It was most beautiful."

The Prince and his followers arrived at Galena on Thursday evening, October 28th, and registered at the Mansion House. "We came upon the Mississippi at Galena in Illinois, so called on account of its lead mines. When I say mines, I use an expression which was quite inappropriate at the time of my visit, for the galena, or lead-ore, lay on the surface of the soil. You saw its metallic brightness shining out everywhere, and so rich was the ore, that it yielded seventy-five per cent. of lead, even under the most summary of processes." Moreover, the expense of transportation was so small because of the "huge artery of the Mississippi" nearby that the lead miners never "took the trouble to extract the silver from it." The water was so "impregnated with lead" that one of de Joinville's companions had a "fainting fit" which they attributed to lead poisoning.

The Prince de Joinville found many evidences of French enterprise and activity in Galena. The firm of Billon and Norris had on sale at bargain prices French prints, French merinoes, the prettiest and latest style of mouseline de laines, and ladies' French kid slippers. Gratiot & Child advertised French calicoes, while A. Henderson sold French bombazines and "superior" French kid

gloves. An enterprising Frenchman named Peter Lepitre advertised "Hot Coffee, Oyster, Turtle and French Soups" served on the shortest notice. He hoped by "close attention to his business and the superiority of his articles to merit a share of public patronage."

The Prince and his companions spent but a single night in Galena, a fortunate thing, perhaps, in the light of subsequent events. On the following morning, as they were preparing to board the steamboat *Nauvoo*, the landlord of the Mansion House presented a bill which became the talk of the upper Mississippi Valley. "We heard", declared the *Dubuque Miners' Express* on November 4, 1841, "a most capital story about the good *Town* of Galena, too good to keep secret. The Prince de Joinville, with his suit, amounting in all to seven persons, came across the country from Fort Winnebago, on the Wisconsin river, to Galena in wagons. He arrived at the Mansion House, late in the evening, had tea, lodging, and breakfast for all. When the steward called for the bill, 'mine host' of the Mansion House only charged the Prince FORTY-FIVE DOLLARS! . . . Had the Prince honored our *Town*, with a visit, he would have been treated with 'hospitality.' Every gentleman knows what that means; but for the benefit of the worthy citizens of Galena, we will

state that one interpretation of 'hospitality', is the receiving [of] distinguished strangers as well as others with cordiality, without attempting to gull and fleece them, because perchance they will not complain, however outrageously they may be cheated. We mention this for the benefit of the good citizens of Galena who it seems have not advanced thus far in refinement and civilization.

. . . The Prince, however, ought not to complain because *he* is not the first one who has been skinned in that smutty, smoky, dingy, dirty, gloomy, muddy Hollow."

Although the Dubuque editor was clearly piqued at the failure of the royal personage to include Dubuque on his itinerary, it was not indifference or lack of interest which caused the Prince to forego this visit. Rather it was the fact that his journey had already "lasted longer" than he had planned and his "duty as a sailor" recalled him "imperiously" to his ship. "But means of communication in the West", de Joinville wrote, "were few and far between — railroads were unknown, roads hardly laid out." He accordingly planned to go down the Mississippi and ascend the Ohio to Cincinnati, whence he could proceed to the Atlantic States by mail-coach and railroad.

The young Frenchman was keenly aware of the strange phenomenon of the American frontier.

"We were following the first skirmishing line of that army of civilisation which is overrunning in its steady advance all that wild country which was once the Indian's sole domain", he observed. "When this advance guard collects at any given point, a hotel rises, and beside it the store where a trader will deal in every kind of merchandise, and especially in brandy, that most destructive of poisons to all indigenous races. After the hotel will come the bank, and then the church and school, and before long the whole will grow into a village or town, of which the United States will take possession by law. As for the original squatters, they will make over their log cabins and their bits of cultivation to new arrivals, of more sedentary tastes than their own, and will move on further, with their wives and children, to make a fresh settlement, often exchanging rifle shots with the Redskins the while, in some spot where they can find that absolute independence which they prize above all other goods. Thus does the tide of civilisation, which shall soon cover the whole American continent, move ceaselessly onward."

Although he failed to mention a single Iowa town in his *Memoirs*, the visit of the Prince de Joinville did not go unrecorded. Upon his arrival at Davenport on Saturday evening, October 30th, the Prince made inquiries for a suitable hostelry at

which to put up for the night. Through the columns of the *Davenport Gazette* he may have learned that A. H. Miller, the genial landlord of the Le Claire House, was prepared to "accommodate all those who may favor him with a call. The utmost attention will be devoted to administer to the comfort, pleasure, and happiness of visitors — everything connected with the establishment will be kept in the most perfect order, and the best which the country affords, will be well prepared and got up, and furnished to its inmates in as good style as at any hotel in the western country."

Intrigued, perhaps, by this advertisement, the Prince took lodging at the Le Claire House where he recounted to a group of Iowa pioneers (perhaps as a parable for his landlord) the story of the cupidity of the Galena hotel keeper, who had charged him three dollars for the use of the hotel piano for one tune, which had been played with "indifferent success". De Joinville spent two nights at the Le Claire House.

The dashing young Prince made a favorable impression on the editor of the *Davenport Gazette* because of his democratic attitude. "We like the manner in which this illustrious (by birth) gentleman traversed our country," he wrote. "All the pomp and panoply of wealth and station were thrown aside and in the plain and unostentatious

garb of the private American citizen he was welcomed in every part of our country. It is too generally the case, that a reverse course is practiced, that when foreign aristocrats appear amongst us, they take the air of that superiority to which they are entitled in their own country." Some foreigners, offended by the frontiersmen's "want of courtesy", repudiated their manners by firing "Diary's" and "Sketches" at American customs. But, the *Gazette* pointed out, such was not the course of the Prince de Joinville, who sought to pass incognito through the United States only to find "at every town" in every State and Territory "a newspaper to herald his appearance, and proclaim his destination."

Despite this statement, the route of the Prince from Davenport to St. Louis is not entirely certain. According to the *Davenport Gazette* he left that city in a "common road-wagon, and struck across the beautiful prairies of Illinois to Warsaw." The Prince, on the other hand, asserted that his journey down the Mississippi was "not altogether uneventful. Our boat ran aground several times during the descent of the Upper Mississippi. On one of these occasions we were delayed for some time near the confluence of that stream with the Des Moines River, flowing through an exquisite country called Iowa, which

in those days had not yet been annexed by the Union. It swarmed with game. I remember one shooting expedition I made with the ship's engineer, a young Kentuckian of colossal stature. We flushed thousands of prairie hens and other creatures, on whom we poured a hot but harmless fire. In our own justification I must add that the Kentuckian was shooting with a bullet, using a huge carbine, so heavy that it took him half a minute to aim with it, and I with a single-barrelled gun, lent me by a bar-keeper, with this information, "The barrel is all twisted. You must aim three or four yards to the right, if you want to hit anything!" "

It is possible that the Prince de Joinville did not remember his overland journey from Davenport to Warsaw. It is also possible that he intentionally swept over this minute detail, for he dismissed his travels along the entire western border of Illinois and the eastern border of Missouri in a few crisp sentences. The steamboat *Nauvoo* may have been running only between Davenport and Galena because of low water on the Upper and Lower rapids. The steamboat *Ione*, on which he arrived at St. Louis, may have been plying between St. Louis and Warsaw (at the foot of the Des Moines Rapids) or even as far as Davenport (at the foot of the Rock Rapids). The extremely low stage of the Mississippi at the time of his descent limited

navigation to light-draft boats, and most Iowa newspapers had to suspend publication for from three to five weeks because of their inability to secure paper from below. This, most unfortunately, has left some serious gaps in the story of the Prince de Joinville's travels along the eastern border of Iowa. The editor of the Quincy *Whig* mentioned that he "passed down" the river, which indicates that he must have boarded the *Ione* at Warsaw if not at Davenport, and the St. Louis *Missouri Republican* chronicled his arrival aboard the *Ione* on November 5th.

An episode closely associated with the Iowa country occurred as the *Ione* passed the mouth of the Missouri River. "The territory of Iowa", de Joinville explained, "was still disputed for by squatters and Indians. These latter, who exceeded the whites in number, belonged to a great tribe, both turbulent and warlike, the Saxes and the Foxes. They were at peace with the Government at the time I speak of, but a deputation of their chiefs, numbering thirty or forty, came on board our boat, on their way to Washington, where they desired to lay their grievances before the President. They arrived on board in full war paint, their faces painted half red and half yellow, and their heads dressed, like a cuirassier's helmet, with horsehair and big feathers, their bodies

naked, but hung about with baubles, their legs thrust into leather breeches, and big blankets over all. Their squaws were with them. They were ugly, but the men were splendid, with the most resolute and impassive countenances. They behaved with the greatest dignity while on board, and never showed any excitement except just as we were passing by the confluence of the Missouri with the Mississippi. Whether it was some superstitious feeling that attached itself to that spot, or the impression made on them by the grandeur of the scene, the meeting of the two great rivers forming a sort of lake, lighted up by a splendid sunset, I know not, but they all assembled in the stern of the boat, and repeated a sort of invocatory prayer. It was a perfect picture."

De Joinville took lodging at the Planters' House during the two days he spent at St. Louis. "I did no more than pass through St. Louis, already a large town and the capital of Ohio," he recorded in his *Memoirs*. The *Missouri Republican* of November 8, 1841, was more explicit: "During his short sojourn here," the editor wrote, "he was waited upon by many of our citizens, especially the French. He expresses himself greatly delighted with the country, and his trip; although in several instances, he was subjected to the roughest of 'backwoods' fare and accommodations. In

his appearance, dress and demeanor, he is quite republican, affable and polite, and studiously avoids every thing like display. In fact, his great anxiety appeared to be to pass unobserved. When he left, yesterday, a large number of persons had assembled on the wharf, to catch a glimpse of him as he passed from the hotel to the boat; but he baffled their curiosity. His suite first came down, and after a time he walked down, 'solitary and alone,' and passed through the crowd, no one observing or recognizing him, until he was on board."

The steamboat *Boston*, of 148 tons burden, carried the Prince and his suite from St. Louis up the Ohio River to Louisville and Cincinnati. Upon his arrival at the Cincinnati levee he found a new steamboat *Belle Poule* named in honor of de Joinville's own frigate, among the numerous river craft lashed to the levee. "At Cincinnati, the city of porkers, I took to the stage, at Pittsburg to the canal. Across the Alleghanies I travelled in a coach crammed with passengers of both sexes. It was a merry journey . . . At New York I found the *Belle-Poule* done up as good as new, thanks to the excellent care of my second in command". After a brief excursion to Boston the Prince returned to France aboard the *Belle Poule*.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN