

Presentation to Virginia Huguenot Society meeting
March 1, 2008
Williamsburg, Virginia

When approaching his seventieth year,
within two weeks after the death of his wife, Anne,
Antoine-Charles de Cazenove,
prepared his account
Of his youth in Europe,
of the French Revolution,
of his reasons for emigrating from Switzerland to this country,
and of his marriage, his wife, and his children in Alexandria, Virginia.

I, Anthony-Charles Cazenove, second son of Paul Cazenove of Geneva in
Switzerland by Jeanne Elizabeth, born Martin, his wife, was born in Geneva
on the 8th of April A.D. 1775.

The Autobiographical Sketch of Anthony-Charles Cazenove
Political Refugee, Merchant, and Banker, 1775 – 1852
Was published in 1970 - in the Virginia Historical Society's publication of
Virginia Magazine of History and Biography.

I discovered this autobiographical sketch
of my great, great, great grandfather
while assembling my membership documents - And it captivated me!

The sentiments he so eloquently expressed
Provide an intimate glimpse into his character
and this brief memoir of sorts
provides a taste of
that experience we'd all love to have –
of sitting at the knee of a family elder listening to family stories.

>>His first-hand account of the persecution suffered
at the hands of the Jacobins (the worst of the French Revolutionaries)
best captures the tone of his experiences,
So I'll be telling the story using excerpts from his writing.

First – A little background history -

In the 16th century, Geneva declared itself a free republic - opening its gates to the religious refugees of other countries. At that time Geneva was justly called “The Rome of Protestantism”.

During the mid 1600’s, the Cazenove family fled France, emigrating to England, the Netherlands, and to Geneva – where my direct ancestors settled.

But Then in 1789 - Geneva was seized by a French Army and incorporated with France. And just 5 years later, - in the summer of 1794, the Jacobin Revolution broke out in Geneva.

The Jacobins – were a French political party of revolutionaries who ruled under Robespierre through the Reign of Terror (1793–1794) - that 1-year period of the [French Revolution](#) that was characterized by a wave of executions of presumed enemies of the state.

The leaders of the French Revolution had hoped to start a similar revolution in the peaceful little Republic of Geneva. Geneva was attractive to the Jacobins because of its position as a natural gateway into France, Switzerland, and Italy – And - also because of its fortifications and the great wealth and learning of its inhabitants. Geneva was -at that time- one of the luminaries of the world.

Robespierre, with some of the leading Jacobins, was already in possession of Savoy (which bordered Switzerland) , and other nearby military posts. From these positions he and his men soon afterwards surrounded Geneva, hoping to later make it appear they were justified in so doing – because of its proximity to Savoy.

In one night the Jacobins,
with the help of some banished Genevese who had gotten within the city
walls,
succeeded in taking possession of three of its gates, its Arsenal, and its
Powder Magazines.

The following day,
the more daring of their number arrested the heads of some of the best and
most distinguished families of Geneva.

This is where I'll begin my great, great, great grandfather's story.

Antoine Charles was just 19 years of age in early 1794,

He writes :

the French Revolution was at its height
And produced one in Geneva,
very similar to that of France where all its horrors were repeated,
with fortunately one exception,
that the guillotine was never raised there !!

Antoine Charles refers to this "Jacobin Revolution"
as "The French Revolution in miniature".

On the 10th of July 1794 "Mar say lwa"
the Jacobins and the Marseillois (the worst of the Jacobins)
induced those of Geneva to seize many of our best citizens -
the heads of Geneva - to the number of 300-400
and cast them in prisons, -
being two large, four story warehouses
which were always kept full of wheat on account of the scanty means
of supply for the dense population of Geneva
and which these "fraudulent" republicans had emptied soon after
getting into power.

My elder brother Jean –Antoine and myself were arrested in the streets the first day of that sad revolution, on our coming into town, and conducted by armed men to Chanterpoulet, (one of those two political prisons where the number of prisoners was hourly increasing), and were strongly-guarded, and a cannon loaded with grape-shot ready to sacrifice any that might attempt to escape by a single small door at the foot of a spiral staircase, and two sentries armed to their teeth at the door of each story, and a guard of about 100 men in the street, which was released every 24 hours by another.

The next night we spent on the bare floor, in considerable anxiety; when the next morning a proclamation was made before our windows, that the Jacobins had appointed a Revolutionary Tribunal, to punish traitors to the Republic and to purge it; -- tantamount of course to announcing scenes of blood.

Several of our prisoners, the best men that Geneva or the world could boast, and heads of our best families were summoned to appear before it – and carried thither by an armed force. Some days of painful suspense for them and for us had elapsed when to my no greater surprise than horror, I saw my father's coach approach the prison and him get out of it, to be incarcerated with us. Being the only person that had ever been brought there or ever was afterward brought, otherwise than on foot, I thought it was intended to hold him up as one of the greatest aristocrats and therefore a victim, but as happily this did not prove to be the case.

I have reason to believe that it was a kind of favor granted to his coachman Buffles, who though a good man, was a moderate member of one of their political clubs (a Jacobin) and as being a convenient way to send at same time a mattress for him to lay on.

The party which called at Mountbrilliant for my father
(Mountbrilliant was the family home in Geneva)
Left there a guard of 7 men
who confined my mother to her bedroom,
Placing a sentinel at each door of it, -
While the others permitted themselves all the excesses they pleased --
And actually stove in the heads of some of the casks of wine in the
cellar, before leaving the house.
My mother is the only lady in Geneva who was thus used during the
Revolution
and when my father and my brother and myself were afterwards
released,
I was refused by the sentry at her door permission to see her.

Several days of painful suspense for the safety of those who had been
dragged before
The Revolutionary Tribunal passed away,
in most of which proclamations
- calculated to strike terror in the prisoners –
were made before the windows of their prison when one of them
announced the horrid facts that
a number of men had been tried and acquitted
by the Revolutionary Tribunal ---
(*the enforcer of the activities to root out treason*) –
But that the Revolutionary Nation
(*meaning the Jacobins*),--
displeased with this judgment, had forced the jail during the night
where they were confined, - and actually shot them by torch light.

These sanguinary rascals – however – soon found out
that they had gone too far –
and that their turn might come next, -- as was in fact the case.
Grobesi, one of them, having proved the next victim of that
revolution.

In order therefore to quiet the people, 40 of the prisoners,
(Of which my father, my brother and myself were of the number,)
were one afternoon carried before The Revolutionary Tribunal –
(a band of ruffians with swords to their sides,
pistols in their girdles and bottles at their feet),

the President of which told us -
that we had conspired against the State, to which we were traitors,
but that as our plot had failed,
the Revolutionary Nation in its clemency pardoned us,
that we might go to our homes,
but that the vigilant eye of the nation and its functionaries was upon us,
and that we would pay with the forfeit of our lives,
if we were found again conspiring against the State.

It had been for sometime the intention of my brother, my cousin Fazy
and several other Genevians, -
who had foreseen that the worst excesses of The French Revolution
would soon reach Geneva --
and who believed that the principles of The French Revolution
were to overrun Europe, -
to have emigrated to the United States,
(where the revolution was happily over),
as the only tolerable place of safety that we could depend upon.

The day of departure
of my brother, my cousin Fazy and myself was fixed,
Our trunks packed up,
One day later we were to have been off,
and my brother and I were taken when going into town for our passports -,
for ourselves, our two men servants and farmers and a coach and four --
(which we had engaged from Degeau to carry us to Hamburg,
as we dared not go through France or Holland.)

How to carry on still our plan into operation was one of our first
considerations after being released from prison
and getting to Mountbrilliant.

The great difficulty was to pass the French post of Versoy, -
(On the road along the lake, which separated Geneva from Switzerland.)

My brother fortunately found the next day,
Two Swiss Boatmen, belonging to Copet
(the first town on Lake Geneva after Versoy)
who had come to save anyone
disposed to escape in the night through the lake; --
(not only Genevians, but people from Lyons who were able to escape after
the siege of that city by the troops sent by the French convention.)

They told us that two of their comrades were undercover of the night to pass
by Versoy - and at a certain hour
they would be waiting in the lake out of sight of shore, at a given place,
till the two who had come by land would throw a certain number of stones
as far as they could in the direction of the boat, and to be answered
by an equal number of stones from the boat to the shore.

Depending upon that assurance, at nightfall of the same day,
Without being able to see our mother,
who I was destined never to see since, nor even let her know our intentions,
our father accompanied us to the bottom of the garden at Mountbrilliant -
where by stealth we took leave of him,
for fear of being seen by the guard at the house.

Our two Swiss Boatmen were waiting for us in the road,
And piloted us by what they considered the best way to avoid the
revolutionary patrols which were about in every direction, -
and once so near us, but on the other side of a thick hedge,
that we had to stoop in the ditch till they had passed
and were some distance off.

Arrived like animals turned out to forage, at the lakeside,
where we were to make signal for our boat to near the shore and take us in.

We were alarmed by discovering - notwithstanding the night -
which was not a dark one, -
several persons who retreated at our approach,
and who proved to be ladies, fugitives from Lyons,
Who were also waiting for a Swiss boat,
and who were not a little alarmed in turn by our coming.

When our boat made the shore they were in hopes it was theirs,
and attempted to get in, but finding their mistake, -
as ours was too small to take them all, - they were left behind.

The French had one or two barges cruising on the lake,
to prevent people escaping through the lake,
and when nearly opposite Versoy - where they kept them –
we saw one bearing down upon us which we expected would stop us;
But we fortunately found was the one going for the ladies from Lyons, -
with whom we had the pleasure
to breakfast the next morning at the inn of Copet,
Where they and us arrived safe during the night.

Our Swiss boatmen took a letter to our parents the next day,
And a day or two afterwards arrived our cousin Fazy and our trunks -
with our servants in the coach, which we had previously engaged.

Whether the Jacobins of Geneva thought they had sufficiently vexed us,
(annoyed us)
or were as willing to part with us, as we were with them,
they made no opposition to their coming and gave them passports.

I'm pausing here to insert some supplemental information.
During my research I found a book entitled:
A New England Family and Their French Connections –
Written by Gertrude Montague Graves, printed in Boston in 1930.
This wonderful resource
included the story of Antoine Charles' journey
with some interesting details.

Ms. Graves wrote the following:

The two de Cazenove brothers escaped by boat to Copet, the nearest town on
the lake - where they were joined by a cousin.
In order to reach a seaport in safety, and to escape the French armies making
their second incursion into Flanders and Germany,
these refugees were obliged to go farther into the interior.

Taking every precaution possible, Antoine-Charles separated from his brother, with the understanding that they should both stop at certain Inns on their roundabout journey through Holland to Hamburg. They further agreed to communicate with each other on the way by writing on the backs of the pewter plates used in these Inns.

Both brothers arrived in Hamburg safely, where they found their cousin Fazy and their 4 servants all waiting to embark for America.

I can conclude only that these additional details probably were relayed verbally by Antoine Charles when telling family stories to his children and possibly his grandchildren – and that these were included in these same stories as they were passed down over the generations, BUT that Antoine Charles just didn't include them in his brief memoir –

- possibly because of his grief at the recent loss of his wife, who had died just weeks before he put pen to paper.

Back to his memoir -

We traveled through the towns on the lake to Berne, Shaffhausen, Nuremburg, Gotha, Coburg, and into Hamburg, making constant enquiries after the French armies, - which were making their second invasion of Germany.

At Hamburg we were joined by other Genevians who had planned with us emigrating to America, And while there we stayed some weeks, Waiting an opportunity for the U.S. We learned of the death of Robespierre and were not far from all retracing our steps to Geneva, But as every leader in the Revolution had proved worse than his predecessor, We thought this might be the case with Danton and therefore concluded to proceed.

(News in those days apparently wasn't always accurate –
A footnote mentions that Danton actually had predeceased Robespierre,
having been guillotined just several months before Robespierre met his
death also by guillotine.)

We therefore engaged the cabin and steerage of the fine brig *Eliza*,
Captain Thomas Mann,
Belonging to Mr. James Yard of Philadelphia.
We embarked on one of the first days of September 1794,
compelling Captain Mann to go (North about) to avoid French privateers in
the channel –
my cousin Fazy being one of the defenders of Lyons and a reward offered
for his head.
Landed safe in Philadelphia about the 12th of November,
having had a passage of upwards of 65 days.

Anthony-Charles then writes of his experiences of being met when landing
in Philadelphia - forming a land company and establishment
of a town they named Little Geneva, of his marriage and subsequent move to
settle in Alexandria, Virginia and of his 9 children, their marriages and their
children.

He concludes his autobiographical sketch with a very sentimental statement
about his wife:

The health of my good wife having gradually grown feeble,
it particularly gave away this Spring of 1843, daily growing worse,
till Sunday 9th July 1843, a few minutes before 3 o'clock P.M.
when the best of daughters and sisters, the best of wives and the best of
mothers, quietly breathed her last, relinquishing her soul to her God and
Saviour, whom she had ever fervently loved and served
ever since she had been old enough to serve him.

We had then lived upward of forty-six years together, when it pleased
Divine Providence to separate us, I trust to meet again, never more to part.

Signed:
Ant. Chs. Cazenove
Alexandria July 15th 1843