

Letter from Father Sorin, founder of University of Notre Dame, to Madame Pasquier dated October 1, 1841. Translated by John R. Badry, Teacher of French, Mishawaka High School.

Madame La President

Thanks to you good friends in France, we are coming close to Vincennes. Still, four or five days and we will be, I certainly hope, at the end of our travels and our dreams. Thus we thank God and all the souls of the saints who have aided us in bringing us to this area, our heritage. Having a moment available, allow me, Madame, to give you some news of our adventurous journey. From the few days ago that I wrote to St. Croix about it, our life had become so romantic that the telling of it simply can not fail to interest you and your distinguished friends. Please read these feeble lines in witness of our sentiments of respect to all of you. I wish to dedicate these lines to all of you.

Perhaps it is possible that you know about two letters which I sent to Mr. P. Heeteur. I will begin where I finished in the last letter. We arrived, the 28th, at Toledo after three days of some of the most difficult traveling on Lake Erie. We found ourselves, as you can easily believe, quite a bit disappointed; the canal on which we had counted was not fully finished. We found no outlet. However, if you will glance at the map, you will see the route from the western point of the lake on which we have traveled. It was not as I had heard and we began to become afraid until we were able to get a little steam-boat which left for Maumee and which by correspondence was able to take us to Napoleon. It was to bring us to within 10 leagues of our destination. Our baggage was also transported. In the evening at seven o'clock, we arrived at the village, French in name only, for there was not a single Frenchman there. It was there that we met the obstacles such as we had not met since we began our trip from Le Havre. The canal had not gone any further. We had to leave the water for the first time and go for 20 leagues on land, crossing the forests or clearing the area in a canoe, a little boat hollowed out from the foot of a tree. I felt that we should stop there. We had a certain amount of confidence in the protection of heaven; others might say an unbelievable

rashness. We were on the point of descending in the boat, but our man asked for 100 francs and we left it there. We began to find a way across the 20 leagues of forest. Without a doubt, God preserved us from danger because when we stopped, we found the river-bed quite dry. After several anxious hours, we found two wagons, or rather, two carts and four horses which we rented for thirty piastres. At first we thought ourselves able to get by with a single wagon, but we were soon convinced of the contrary. Once on the way, our morning became calm - but not for long. Hardly had we gone a half league into the woods when we became frustrated in a very frightful way. It was less a beaten path than a nearly continuous succession of precipices. Can you feature a rutted road filled on all sides by the rain - so much water that it came up to the middle of our wheels? Also the road was cluttered with branches and large parts of trees and often with tree trunks completely barring the way. Then there were the bad passages over the foot-bridges thrown over puddles of 100 feet, sometimes as long as 200 feet over which we had a most jarring passage. This can give you an idea of our voyage. There were other problems-rivers to cross of such swiftness that it was often necessary to try to discover their source (to go around rather than to cross). We went with the current until we came to a vast marshy area where our horses fell up to their chests. The water came into our wagons and we jostled back and forth, right and left, always on the verge of having our equipment disappear into the middle of the stream and the waves.

At another time of our descent, nearly perpendicular to the ravine, we fell over the roots of the trees which bounced us from our seats, giving us more fear of losing our belongings. We had with us a very beautiful wooden clock which we had bought in New York. God knows how well it will chime at Vincennes. That's not all. Often in meeting an old oak recently fallen in the road or a swamp too dangerous, we would go into the woods, crossing the underbrush, the young plants, and the loose pieces of rotten wood where perhaps no other wagons had ever gone before ours.

It was here we had the most fear for often we ran into just what we had wanted to avoid, the sharp drops and the like where we were not feet, but inches from the edge and where the least mis-step of a horse would have sent us downward sixty to eighty feet. I would stop if I had not been telling less than the truth. It is impossible to describe to you the routes such as we have seen. Add to that, that we were guided by two young men, veritable rogues, who made efforts to steal from us, and also that we had three Americans for travel companions. Two of them carried guns which they shot aimlessly into the woods. They were quite suspect and completely without religion and you can understand that we were quite ill at ease in that group. Since the responsibility for our six brothers plus all of our baggage rested on my shoulders I made an effort to appear at ease, but at heart I was dying of fear. At each ravine and crevice I prayed an Ave Maria, my eyes fixed upon the dangers. However, my spirit and heart were in heaven. It was with this mortal fear that we traveled the first day of fourteen hours. It was at ten o'clock in the evening that we arrived at Defiance, the little village located in the middle of the woods ten leagues from Napoleon.

We would have arrived more dead than alive had not the last half league been along the shore of the river beautifully lit up by the moonlight. We gave our thanks by singing as well as we knew in honor to the Virgin Mary. We had never sung better perhaps because we never needed more the protection of the Good Mother. We were able to forget all of which we had suffered. When we got to the hotel, no one wanted any supper, although we had had nothing to eat since our departure except some dry bread that we had bought at Andron, where our guides stopped a short while to give some nourishment to their horses. We had about half a pound of bread left that we all shared after we went to bed. Such is the story of our first day.

The next day, September 29th, Saint Michael's Day found us under the protection of that glorious archangel. The evening before we had given a simple pater and an Ave giving thanks to Saint Michael. Now everyone was up at five-thirty for the Lord's

Prayer. We hoped to gain the confidence from God. We ate breakfast with a rather good appetite in the middle of about twenty Protestants who kept staring at us all during our prayers, before and after our meals. About eight o'clock we got back into our wagons, fired with a confidence perhaps more blind than ever. We needed it for we all had agreed last night that our second day had to be worse than the first. The more we thought about it, the more we were thankful for the goodness and mercy given to us. The entire world might say that there is no God, but the past two days are for me an eternal invincible truth to the contrary.

Each turn of the wheel was for us a sign of providence in the middle of these forests.

We left a little tired, it is true, and all covered with mud, but more aware than ever before of the knowledge and trust of God. This same God which has so well saved us now sent a little boat to us which took us on the canal. We took refuge there with great joy and now we are resting on the boat - losing a little of our tiredness, now that we are headed nicely towards Vincennes. We are now gathering the strength in order to sustain us for the rest of our trials which still await us.

Well, there it is, Madame, a rather long, perhaps too long narrative which perhaps you can not read for my green ink today is hardly better than my coffee of the other day. Nevertheless, you can see the proof of some good and fine memories which I can give to you. Best wishes to you, Madame President, I am well-devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Saurin