



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

Stock#: 90005
Map Maker: McKee - St. Hilaire - McHenry -
Panton - Tillary
Date: 1797
Place: Pensacola, Florida; Mobile;
Philadelphia
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG+
Size: 9.5 x 15 inches
Price: \$ 65,000.00



Description:

Southern Borderlands in 1797

Letters from John McKee (Confidential U.S. Agent in the Southwest and Associate of William Blount):

Eyeing Southern Native American Lands: Panton, Leslie & Company and Back Channel U.S. Expansionism

Letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from French-born Spy in Service of United States



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

(Felix de St. Hilaire) Concerning General Victor Collot

Evidence of Collot's Seized Maps Dispatched to U.S. Government

A superb group of manuscript source material illuminating the beginnings of American expansionism in the Southwestern borderlands of 1797, including a plan by agents of the United States to dispossess southern tribes of their lands. Nine of the ten letters are addressed to Secretary of War James McHenry, who served under both George Washington and John Adams. A staunch early proponent of American territorial expansion, McHenry clearly kept a close eye on the situation in the southern borderlands, primarily through specially appointed agents that communicated directly with him. Outstanding here are letters from John McKee, one of the agents, to McHenry, concerning the powerful position of the trading firm of Panton, Leslie among the southern Native tribes. Through their dealings with the southern tribes Panton, Leslie wielded great influence over tribal lands in South - leverage which McKee and McHenry were seemingly keen to exploit for the benefit of the United States. A companion letter present here relating to McKee is from William Panton himself, written from Pensacola. Panton expresses his suspicions concerning McKee's representations as an agent of the United States, particularly in regard to his ability to treat on matters concerning Native Tribes in Spanish Florida on behalf of the government. Another fascinating McKee letter, written from Mobile, is addressed to William Blount - of Blount's Conspiracy fame - in which McKee candidly shares details about Panton, Leslie & Co as a conduit to access southern lands through debts owed by Native tribes to the trading firm. A key passage from McKee's May 29, 1797 letter to McHenry, also written from Mobile, summarizes his thinking about Panton, Leslie:

The House of Panton, Leslie & Co. which I mentioned to you in Philadelphia is the only channel thro' which this Government has ever been able to influence the Indians. That house has supplied the four southern tribes with goods since the revolution and its members possess all the influence with the Indians which their situation of being almost the only persons who for many years supplied them with the necessaries of life would necessarily give. They feel themselves a little uneasy under the jealous eye of the Spanish Government, and would I think avail themselves of any opportunity that would not materially affect their interests of leaving this quarter and transferring the trade and consequently the affections of the Indians to the United States. A Guarantee for such quantity of Land equal to their outstanding debts as they could obtain from the Indians would be expected.



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

Perhaps just as fascinating as the McKee documents are letters and notes from Felix de St. Hilaire to McHenry, conveying intelligence on the movements of French spy Victor Collot, including exciting evidence, apparently unknown to historians, that Collot's maps of the Mississippi region were dispatched (or purportedly so) to McHenry in Philadelphia.

As a collection these documents shine new light on early American expansionism, particularly on American plans to dispossess southern Native tribes of their lands through financial machinations that involved a powerful regional trading firm in the South. The letters are vital puzzle pieces for the history of American territorial ambitions in the 1790s, bringing to light the private thoughts of prominent, albeit little-known, early architects of American empire.

Together 10 manuscript documents (described in detail below).

Historical Background: Southern Borderlands in 1797

In the late 18th century an expanding United States engaged in a power struggle with European powers over a significant portion of the Southeast. This butting of empires was focused in the southern borderlands, an area which encompassed the modern day states of Alabama, Florida and Louisiana. Initially a French colony, Louisiana had been ceded to Spain in 1762. And while Britain had acquired the Spanish colony of Florida in 1763 as part of the treaty that ended the French and Indian War, the Floridas were returned to Spain with the 1783 Treaty of Paris. France in particular continued to harbor territorial ambitions in North America. The United States, in the earliest stages of southwestern frontier expansionism, was very early interested in access to the Mississippi River Valley, as a transportation corridor also coveted for its strategic value. At the same time, Native peoples in Florida and throughout the southern borderlands played a significant role in the commercial nexus which attracted diverse powerbrokers, including traders, frontier people, and government officials.

Historians have not fully assessed the scattered primary sources of this fascinating period in American history, from 1797-1802, when the United States and European powers were still very much engaged in a power play over a large swath of the interior of North America, before the Louisiana Purchase. Much of the South was awash with land-coveting intrigue characteristic of a region of unresolved boundaries. While recent excellent books by historians David Narrett (*Adventurism and*



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

Empire: The Struggle for Mastery in the Louisiana-Florida Borderlands, 1762-1803) and J. C. A. Stagg (*Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish-American Frontier, 1776-1821*) help contextualize the major actors and forces in the big picture that determined the path of American expansionism during the 19th century, the documentation of lesser-known, yet significant figures, such as Felix de St. Hilaire, and confidential agent John McKee, deepen our understanding of a key historical moment in the history of the Southern United States as well as the nascent western frontier.

Intrigue and Adventurism

Historian David Narrett has characterized the adventurism of the 1790s as a vital force shaping American history:

Adventurism and intrigue were not simply leading elements of U.S. imperialism: they were vital forces shaping cross-border and transnational interchange among numerous historical actors and ethnicities in the Louisiana-Florida borderlands. That legacy of multiplicity would endure in many human struggles - both bloody and peaceful - shaping the Americas far into the future.

A number of individuals involved in the intrigue pervading the Louisiana-Florida borderlands are represented in the present documents, either as authors of the letters themselves, or in references therein. Foremost among these is the French general, Victor Collot, an experienced bilingual military engineer who was sent to the region by the French government in 1796 to report on the strategic importance of the Mississippi River Valley and to assess the possibility of reclaiming Louisiana for France. His reports were influential in France's planning to retake Louisiana from Spain.

William Blount, a U.S. senator from Tennessee who was involved in a controversy related to the borderlands, is also represented in the present archive, specifically in the letter from John McKee to Blount, which seems to provide sensitive information to which McKee was privy as a confidential government agent. Blount is of course known to history for his foiled plot to detach parts of Spanish Florida and Louisiana. He was ultimately expelled from the Senate as a result of this controversy, the first American to be impeached from high public office.

The thread that ties the various documents in the present group together is the issue of territorial



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

expansion in the United States as it was understood in the year 1797. The present documents add significantly to our understanding of how the southwestern frontier of the United States at the end of the 18th century, with all the concomitant risks and possibilities associated with it, did not follow a smooth trajectory in the years before the Louisiana Purchase. In 1797 the exact nature of the future expansion of the country was far from assured; what we see here instead, through the contextualization of the present documents, is an agitated country, whose leaders were struggling with frontier issues, and hardly on an assured path of Manifest Destiny.

The collection comprises the following 10 items:

1 - 4. McKEE, JOHN (Confidential American government agent, aspiring Indian Agent). Four extensive autograph letters, all signed. Written from Mobile and Pensacola: May 1797 - June 1797. Overall condition is excellent. Two with small losses where opened. Together about 12 pages in McKee's hand offering fascinating reports of happenings in the southern borderlands, particularly the importance of Panton, Leslie & Co. vis-a-vis Native Americans in the region. The first letter, written from Mobile to William Blount (of Blount's Conspiracy fame). The other three letters to James McHenry. In the first letter to McHenry, written from Mobile, he notes "a report prevails here that is not authenticated that 4000 French troops were landed at New Orleans a few days past, 1000 for Pensacola & 600 for this post [Mobile], and that 8000 were left at Havanna. The report is not improbable as the French in their Treaty with Spain have shipped 18,000 men to be accompanied in the Gulf. This I shall be better able to write you with certainty from Pensacola." The remaining letters relate to Indian trading and political affairs in the region: "I have seen a Chief from the Lower Creeks who reports that about the 15th of May the Governor of East Florida had a conference with some of the Indians of his town and requested their assistance to fight the English and Americans provided they should attack the Province." Overall amazing content throughout, with much on his travels along the Mississippi, including descriptions of the French settlers and New Orleans. He mentions the activities of the Panton, Leslie trading firm, a key player in interactions with Southern tribes, and a go-between for the United States government in its dealings with southern Native tribes. Excerpts from the letters here follow:

1. Mobile, May 28, 1797, to William Blount at Knoxville. 3 pages of manuscript text. Minor paper loss where wax seal was broken. A candid letter to Blount, full of interesting



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

content "inside information," including mention of debts owed to the trading firm of Panton, Leslie by Native tribes in Florida, suggesting the feasibility of allowing the tribes to pay debts to the trading house with tracts of land:

Dear Sir,

If I was with you I could ask fifty questions respecting the politics of the U. States, particularly whether the two high running parties are likely to come to an understanding. God send they would for there never was more need for harmony in our government than now. I have dreamed of French Liberty and friendship for us but now I am awake and believe that no nation has ever at any time laid deeper schemes for our inquiry than they - It was been a favorite object for many years & to detach the Western from the Eastern states nor have they abandoned it yet, I am well informed, they have at least three emissaries in Kentucky for the purpose of sounding the leading characters and sowing discord. - I believe and hope they are too late, I have this morning been informed that four thousand French Troops were landed a few days past at Orleans -- that 600 are to be fixed here and 1000 at Pensacola - and this country is lent to the French for the purpose of effecting with more ease their objects on our Government, for I have not a doubt but both they and the Spaniards have declared war against us or that they will shortly everything here has that appearance, indeed few take the trouble to deny that such a thing is expected. -- The Indians too I find are to be attended to a large number of guns are purchased and stand at Pensacola for the Creeks, I fear your Country will again be the scene of Indian warfare nothing can prevent it but drawing all the trade within our limits and that can be effected only thro the House of Panton, Leslie & Co. and they I am pretty confident would lend their aid provided they could without injury to themselves, and I believe nothing would be asked of our Government but liberty to contract with the four southern tribes for a tract or tracts of Land for the debts due on their Books, and a Guarantee from the U. States for the sale, this is a Treaty that in my opinion would with greater certainty secure peace to the frontiers than any Indian Treaty that has yet been made.

I write this as I do most letters in a hurry, adieu dear Sir, Adieu

John McKee



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

2. Mobile, May 29th 1797 [but actually sent Aug. 14, 1797], to James McHenry.

Bifolium. 3 pages of manuscript text. Address panel reads: Nashville / 14 Augt. 97 / The Honorable / James McHenry Esq. / Secretary of War / Philadelphia. Docketed as "rec'd 5 Octbr."

Sir,

I wrote you a few lines from Natchez by a Colo. Rankin of Kentucky on his return from New Orleans which I expect you will have received before this reaches you, I then had but little hope that the Spaniards would execute the Treaty and I have if possible, still less now. The Baron de Carondelet Governor General of Louisiana, tho' he says he has not received any official communications from his Court for six months past, not only refuses to give up the posts claimed by the United States under the Treaty but has lately sent Troops from New Orleans to strengthen those of Natchez and Walnut Hills, thus it appears that the Baron is acting without authority which is not probable or orders have been issued more than six months ago for suspending the execution of the Treaty.

The attention of the Government here is already directed towards the Indians one thousand guns have been purchased and are now at Pensacola for the use of the Creeks, and more goods are to be given to the Indians this year than in any preceding year.

The House of Panton, Leslie & Co. which I mentioned to you in Philadelphia is the only channel thro' which this Government has ever been able to influence the Indians. That house has supplied the four southern tribes with goods since the revolution and its members possess all the influence with the Indians which their situation of being almost the only persons who for many years supplied them with the necessaries of life would necessarily give. They feel themselves a little uneasy under the jealous eye of the Spanish Government, and would I think avail themselves of any opportunity that would not materially affect their interests of leaving this quarter and transferring the trade and consequently the affections of the Indians to the United States. A Guarantee for such quantity of Land equal to their outstanding debts as they could obtain from the Indians would be expected. -- I will start from this to Pensacola in a few days and from there send an express to Savannah with dispatches to you which will possibly



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

reach before this and I will then be more full on this head. This letter I send by a careful Indian as far as the Chickasaw Nation from that to the Post office in Nashville it must trust to a fortuitous conveyance.

A report prevails here tho' tis not authenticated that 4,000 French troops were landed at New Orleans a few days past for Pensacola & 600 for this post, and that 8000 were left at the Havanna - the report is not an improbable one as the French in their Treaty with Spain have stipulated to... furnish 18,000 men to be occupied in the Gulf of Mexico on this head too I shall be better able write you with certainty from Pensacola.

I have the honor to be with respect and esteem your obedient humble Servant.

John McKee

3. Pensacola, June 7th 1797, to James McHenry. Bifolium. 2 1/2 pages of manuscript text.
Docketed: "Rec'd & communicated to the President 22 July 1797."

Sir,

The House of Panton, Leslie & Co are now in possession of the whole of the Chactaw and Chickasaw trade and near three fourths of the Creek within these few years the Cherokee has chiefly fallen from them, but I think I am not wrong in asserting that in all these nations of Indians they possess more real influence than any set of men on the continent, an influence which they have acquired and enjoy from their having been the only persons who for twelve years past supplied them with goods and which has been been and is now very beneficial to the interests of these provinces which would have been long since a mere nonentity had it not been for its favorable operations in keeping the Nations in a state of perfect harmony with the subjects on the frontiers of his Catholic Majesty's dominions. Having been early apprized of the necessity of an Indian establishment, the Court of Spain invested this house with privileges never yet perhaps granted to any company of private Merchants in the Spanish Dominions, but apparently having become indifferent about their interests they have sacrificed them by their treaty with the United States without any stipulation for the indemnification they were bound



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

to make, a neglect for redress of which there is scarcely an appeal. The house I believe now feeling bound neither by contract nor inclination to continue under this Government would be willing to decline the trade in favor of the United States, upon receiving an adequate compensation for their debts. This appears to me an object of importance to the Union and once effected would do more towards putting the Agents in a situation to embrace the whole of the trade than all the regulations hitherto made for that purpose, it is the most sure and speedy plan that can be adopted for the end proposed, in short it is a matter of national importance fraught with advantages of magnitude to the United States and which if not speedily secured may be regretted too late especially if France should declare war against the United States and Spain to act as proconsul of the Republic both which is fairly to be counted on from appearances in this quarter, in which case this house if it continues here would be compelled to embrace the views of either government or sacrifice their property.

A fair statement of the debts upon bonds and notes due from whitemen-traders and Indian factors in the Nations corroborated by the Books of the Company might possibly amount to 200,000 dollars these would be transferred to the different factors of the United States upon assurances, being given for the payment of the amount in two yearly and equal payments - Supplies being stopped from this house they must flow from the United States the change could be effected with very little difficulty, and once made, the Government would feel the beneficial consequences in the tranquility of the frontiers and the tractability of the Indians whom its agents could manage with ease. Should this plan not be approved, there is another which might be thought economical. A tract of land might be obtained from the Indians in payment of their arrears due to the traders, this was often done under the British government and as it is equally felt by every individual of the Nation who are pretty equally advantaged by it might be called the fairest bargain that can be made. The House would then require a guarantee for such a tract as may indemnify them not exceeding thirty miles square which is conceived little enough to satisfy the debts liquidated the Indian arrears and pay the necessary expenses of treating for the land. - But it is to be clearly understood that should the Indians refuse to agree to the cession the first plan is to be adopted. This last plan as I said before would be the most economical for the United States but at the same time from the very natural jealousy of the Indians might have a very bad effect on their minds if misrepresented to them



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

by evil minded persons which I am of opinion might be the case, it ought therefore be laid aside in favor of the first unless economy forbids it, and a more favorable opportunity taken by the union to reimburse itself by the same means.

I need not observe to you the necessity of a speedy answer on this subject - if I had powers from you I am of opinion the object might be accomplished at any rate explicit and it meets with your approbation let your power be ample. This house will suffer much even after the assumption of their debts - they have in lots buildings and other effects of no value but to themselves upward of 45,000 Dollars.

I have the honor to be with due respect, your obedient humble servant,

John McKee

4. Pensacola, June 22nd 1797, to James McHenry. Bifolium. 3 pages of manuscript text.
Docketed: "22 June 1797 / From John McKee / (a confidential agent)"

Sir, Since writing you by express on the 7th Instant, I have seen a Chief from the lower Creeks, who reports that about the 15th May the Governor of East Florida (Col. White) had a conference with some of the Indians of this Town, and requested their assistance to fight the English and Americans provided they should attack that Province. Whatever subterfuge the Governor might find under the proviso the Indians understood as a pretty direct invitation to take up the hatchet against the United States and refused to imbrace it without the consent of their nation, and after returning home they have sent him a talk declaring their resolution not to interfere in the wars of white people but to live in peace with both parties. The Indians I find are generally well affected towards the United States.

No French troops have yet made their appearance in this quarter and it is suspected by some that Spain will not give them possession of these provinces if they should come, it is certain that the Baron de Carondelet has confined some and expelled others for preaching to the French Creoles of Mississippi a change of Government he now also declares publically that he will not give up the Natchez without farther instructions from his Court. - If the United States



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

should determine to take possession of that District by force which at present would be an easy matter the militia at least 1800 would with inthusiasm join the standard of the United States.

This letter I send by a careful halfbreed Cherokee to Tellico Blockhouse. The American character is a very suspicious one in this quarter and I find it very difficult to get opportunities for writing - the haste in which I am consequently obliged to write my letters will O hope be an apology for their incorrectness.

I have the honor to be with sincere esteem and respect.

Your obedient Servant,

John McKee

The Hon. James McHenry

Secretary of War / Philadelphia / Via Knoxville

5 - 7. ST. HILAIRE, FELIX DE. (French Spy for the United States, hired by Secretary of War James McHenry to shadow General Victor Collot in 1796-1797) Historians have not written much on the spying activities of Felix de St. Hilaire. The little documentation that exists is necessarily cryptic, but the present letters by St. Hilaire, addressed to Secretary War James McHenry, stand as fresh source documents for the career of this intriguing figure. Felix Leblond de St. Hilaire was a merchant who came to the United States from France. He served as French vice consul for the port of Alexandria, Virginia in 1779, and in 1797 he spied for Secretary of War James McHenry on the activities of French general Victor Collot. As is well known, Collot's reconnaissance of the Mississippi Valley raised U.S. suspicions about France's designs on North American territory. In later years, St. Hilaire appears to have returned to his usual scheme of ingratiating himself into the upper echelons of American society, advertising his services - at times under assumed names - as an art and dance instructor in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and upstate New York. St. Hilaire married Margaret "Peggy" Smith on 29 Aug 1795 (Margaret's sister Sarah "Sally" Smith was married



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

to Charles Adams, President John Adams's son). Charles Adams included a colorful description of St. Hilaire in a March 21, 1796 letter to his father, part of the *Papers of John Adams*. Adams had clearly developed a distaste for his French-born in-law:

Mrs Smith and her family have been very much distressed. Mr de St Hilaire has turned out to be as errant a Chevalier D'industrie as France ever produced and after swindling as many people as he possibly could and his greatest benefactor the most he attempted to run off but was taken by some of his Creditors at Poughkeepsie and confined in jail Amen. Such is the imprudence and folly of trusting and being the dupes to the acts and flattery of Strangers. I have known the villain from the fourth day after his marriage but had I had the Lyre of Amphion I could not have persuaded that family that he was capable of a meanness.

Abigail Adams herself described St. Hilaire thusly in an April 10, 1796 letter to John Adams:

I last Evening received a Letter from Mrs Smith, giving me a detail of the Mountabank Swindler St Hillair.

The details of how and why St. Hilaire was chosen for the task of shadowing Collot are not readily known, but his connection by marriage to the prominent Smith family (and thus with the president) might have played a role.

According to Kyte, McHenry was very much concerned with Collot's activities and actively looked for a legal pretext to seize Collot's papers and maps:

Since Spain and the United States were at peace with France, permission to make the trip was granted [to Collot], but the representatives of the two governments eyed Collot's preparations with misgivings. After he made his departure from Philadelphia for his starting point, McKeesport, near Pittsburgh, the United States secretary of war, James McHenry, wrote to Governor Arthur St. Clair of the Northwest Territory to have Collot and his companions followed and to take advantage of "circumstances upon which to ground a legal seizures of their papers." Thus Collot was a marked man, regarded by Federalists as well as by Spaniards as a spy and a potential organizer of seditious activities of one kind or another.



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

The above statement that Federalists saw Collot as a spy and potential organizer of "seditious activities" deserves elaboration. Even as Alexander Hamilton and other influential Federalists were aggressively suspicious of France, John Adams, throughout his term as president, tried to steer clear from an outright war with France, often acting against the advice of his cabinet, which was largely a carryover from that of George Washington, including James McHenry, who was solidly in the Hamiltonian camp.

The friction between Adams and his cabinet apparently continued in later years, when McHenry tried to get reimbursed for his expenditures on St. Hilaire:

Vigilant in their endeavors to obtain information relative to any project of France to excite the Southwestern part of the Union and Georgia to a separation from the United States in the winter of 1797 and 1798, McHenry and Pickering expended \$2,560, paid to one St. Hilaire. The account for this was one of the causes of accusation made against McHenry, after he left the war department and was not closed until 1810 - The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry (1907), page 272.

5. ST. HILAIRE, FELIX DE. Autograph letter, signed, to James McHenry. N.p.: 5 July 1797. A one and half page letter in French on the recto and verso of a bifolium sheet of laid paper, with remnants of wax seal, addressed to McHenry as Secretary at War in Philadelphia, 13 x 8 inches. The usual folds. Sheet is crisp and fine.

An intensely fascinating letter by which Felix de Saint Hilaire which informs Secretary of War McHenry that the information he had passed on about Georgia was in fact true; he further reports on a store of canons and munitions held on an island across from St. Augustine, Florida. An intriguing reference to "Gabarus" (likely Stephen Cabarrus, a prominent French-born resident of Edenton, North Carolina) who Saint Hilaire reports has sent \$60,000 to a Gen. C [i.e. Collot]. He continues offering information on French officials and comments on the creation of a map of Detroit.

A translated excerpt here follows:

...I am going to bother you again about that letter. All the news you have had from me about



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

Georgia. It has turned out to be very true. You shall learn that on the island of Sapello next to St. Catherine on the river St. Marie and, if I am not wrong, not far from the bar, there is a storage of arms, and lately 8 cannons have been brought there from St. Augstin. There are cannons also on the island Jaquel across from St. Simon. And more - in New York State way back one has done some recruiting. A person called Gabarus living in Edenton [likely Stephen Cabarrus, native of Bayonne, France, came to Edenton in 1776, speaker of the N.C. House of Commons], a judge or a member of the Senate of North Carolina sent 60,000 dollars to Gen. C. That was before yesterday... The map of Detroit is almost finished... Several things don't go well between ambassador E. and General C., but whatever it may be, I shall not neglect anything. You can rely on me! Rest assured that it is lucky that we did not ruch things. C. has not left yet. That is not important. He is busy enough where he is. That man is getting more and more arrogant. He is a poor politician. I know from accurate sources that there are disagreements between him and the minister, C, has said publicly that your ambassadors will not be received. Don't send anyone. Believe me that I see everything and I shall profit by the occasion that will give you total knowledge of everything without compromising anyone.

6. ST. HILAIRE, FELIX DE. Autograph letter, to James McHenry. Philadelphia: 3 August 1797. A one and a quarter page letter in English on the recto and verso of a bifolium of watermarked paper, unsigned, addressed to McHenry in Philadelphia. Condition is fine. Here Saint Hilaire comments on information provided by a Mr. F, a French engineer and reports that Mr. F has "not gone to France but has been sent by the Spanish Minister, either to Louisiana or Canada." He reports Mr. F has not been seen since traveling to Detroit and left no papers. An excerpt follows here:

The information obtained on Mr. F. lately employed as an Engineer, are the best that could be procured: his brother in law is still in this town and employ'd as a clerk at the French legacy, he seems to be unacquainted with the gentleman's projects and by whom he is employed: Mr. F. is not gone to France but has been sent by the Spanish minister, either to Louisiana or to Canada - he travelled with his mother in law - his wife in her fifth month of pregnancy, went through Louisiana - Said to some persons he would go to Detroit and has never been heard of since - he has left no papers and his brother seems to think he had none in his possession. More particulars might be obtained in a few days. Gen'l C. being daily expected.



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

7. **[ST. HILAIRE, FELIX DE].** Autograph note in his hand describing a cache of maps. A small square slip of laid paper, 6.25 x 5.25 inches, 12 lines, undated and unsigned (but likely written in May of 1797, and confirmed to be in Saint Hilaire's hand). Tiny tear affecting a couple words. Saint Hilaire here provides a detailed inventory of papers being sent to Secretary of War James McHenry, including an interesting list of maps, likely stolen from the French, and almost certainly being maps made during a reconnaissance of the Mississippi frontier by General Victor Collot (the "General C." mentioned elsewhere in Saint Hilaire's correspondence with McHenry). The cache of maps included "two maps of the Mississippi" and "a plan of Pittsburg and an old and new project of fortification for the Natchez and St. Louis of Mississippi." In a related letter from Saint Hilaire to McHenry dated June 1, 1797, digitized as part of the *Papers of the War Department*, Saint Hilaire follows up by saying that he will give the key to the trunk to a young man, and that tomorrow he (Sainte Hilaire) will meet with McHenry in Philadelphia. Complete text of this outstanding and highly remarkable note:

Tomorrow Mr. D. St. Hilaire will direct to you a trunk - you will fond [sic] in tow [two?] maps of the Mississipi - Lisbon - Havanah and Cuba maps - letter from Mr. A. to General C. answer of Grl. C. - Plan of Pitsburg - and old and new project of fortification - for the Natchez and St. Louis of Mississipi - a map of the Ohio - 42 Commission - only 8 sign'd. by A. and 34 by General A. A letter of General Jacson - to Mr. A - 50 differents other paper - tomorrow I must go to take a view of Fort Miflin.

8. **HUNTER, NARSWORTHY (First Mississippi Territory delegate, representing the "at large district" in U.S. Congress).** Autograph letter, signed, to James McHenry. N.p. [Philadelphia?]. 3 July 1797. Docketed on verso: *Capt. H. acct of state of things at Natchez*. A single-page letter signed, folds and some creases. In this letter, Colonel Hunter describes leaving Natchez and concern over Indian attacks on forces there influenced by Spanish agents. Curiously, Hunter refers to Andrew Ellicott, who was then surveying the southern border between the United States and Spanish Florida. Full text:

Sir, When I left the Natchez Country, which was the 12th of May, the people were very seriously alarmed on Account of the Indians - a Certain Mr. Rappalie in that Country had got a Number of them together at his House, & had been giving them an inflamatory talk -



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

persuading them that this was the time to fall on the troops & Inhabits. of that place - that if it was not done at this time, they would soon become so numerous as to overrun their country & take their Land from them. That this talk had a very considerable effect upon the Indians must be notorious to Mr. Ellicot, & every person in Natchez. & what made the alarm the more serious, the people were universally of opinion that Rappalie had done this at the Instance & in Agency of the Spanish Governmt., and that they were warranted in the truth of this Conjecture little short of positive testimony, is what I will undertake to establish --

The Day after I left the Comissioner I met with a Certain Mr. Ward who lives in the Chactaws - that there were several Spanish agents in the Nation endeavoring to bring the Indians on the inhabitation - & that it had been with the utmost Difficulty, Eight of the Chiefs had been able to keep them back - whether this was a fact or a fabrication only, time will determine. -- When I came to the Chickersaws, I found that a letter had just arrived, addressed to the Wolf's Friend, from G. Gayoso, informing him that this line would not be run, untill his Majesty saw them secured in their territorial Rights, upon the Broadest & most permanent Bassis, & that their annual presents were to set out in three Days for the Chickersaw bluff etc.

I have the Honor to be Sir yr most Obt. Servt.

Hunter

9. PANTON, WILLIAM (Prominent Scottish trader in Spanish Florida). Autograph letter, signed twice, to Dr. James Tillary. Pensacola: 14 June 1797. A long three-page letter signed and with a signed postscript, reporting to Dr. Tillary that Indian Agent John McKee is with him in Florida, describing McKee's relationship to Governor Blount of Tennessee. Panton reports McKee has offered a verbal assurance of the payment of debts owed by Native tribes to Panton's firm (Panton, Leslie & Co.), with additional intriguing content on land and trade issues between the Native Americans, Spanish, English and Americans. A fascinating and important letter:

I wrote you a few lines by the Brig Sheerwater dated the 11th Ulto. We have now the favour of a visit from Lieutenant Colo. John McKee, who is at present under this roof. This person was formerly some connexion of Governor Blunt [i.e. Blount], and at present according to his own



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

report to a friend he confides in, is employed by your minister of War, the nature of which I have not sought to know, nor has he told me anything about it, beyond what immediately relates to the Interest of this House: - he it was whom Governor Blunt commissioned to go to the Spanish Garrison at the Chickesaw Bluff, & to demand the reason of the incoachment on the Territory of the Union, and to summons the Garrison to relinquish it: - It was there that my partner Mr. John Forbes became acquainted with him, & a friendly intercourse by letter has since been kept up, in the course of which Mr. Forbes discovered to McKee our willingness to relinquish the Indian Trade on having our debts secured to us.

This young Gentleman has now come forward with a verbal message from the Secretary of War Mr. McHenry, assuring us, "that everything would be done, in the Powers of Government to do to facilitate the recovery of our debts."

He has however in no shape furnished himself with any written paper from persons in power to impress the belief of this, nor is he possessed of any official authority that we can see, to come on any fixed terms with us. - All therefore that we could do was to repeat the offer, and if he knew Government to be serious, we expected that he would write immediately for powers: - this he has done, of which he have given us the inclosed Copy, & the matter is so far at issue: - He seems fond of the plan of getting a Tract of Land in payment of our Debts, because government, directed by rigorous oeconomy, will be apt to hesitate on a proposal that take from its Treasures an Advance of Two hundred thousand Dollars, This may be true in point of fact, Yet I confess to You that I think it would be wiser to be at this advance, than to adopt the other plan. The encroachments of the Georgians has made the Indians extremely Jealous about their Lands, and in my opinion it would be better for Your Government to pay the money, & wait a little for reimbursement, untill the Georgia encorachment is forgot, & until the late kind & benevolent disposition of their favour, reconciles them to the American Government, when a much larger Tract of Country than is necessary for the present pirpose may be obtained with ease. - Two hundred thousand Dollars at first vein, appears large for the Government to advance; but it should be noticed that one half of that sum will be lodged by the Traders and our Indian Factors in the Stores of the Union, even before the first payment will become due. - The other half may be considered as a fund Sunk, not lost, for the purpose of securing the Indian Trade to the federal Government with the Influence that must accompany it, which we



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

could clearly make appear, and Your Government ought not to expect to get it on easier terms than it cost us. The trouble that you took, Sir, on a former occasion about our affairs, gives us reason to hope that the present application to You will not be disagreeable to You - It is therefore my wish that you wait on Your friend with the present & its enclosure, and I depend on Your Candour to be informed what reliance I ought to place on the present overture - If the Government is Serrious in making it, & if this Young Gentleman is the person we are to treat with, no time should be lost in giving him ample powers to conclude the bargain - for if the present moment is neglected we cannot promise You that it will be in our power to renew the offer. -

We shall wait untill the 15th of October for an answer, and if none arrives by that time, we must consider McKee's information as badly founded, and that we are left at liberty to accept of other proposals - I need not tell you that the Contens of this letter must be shown only to those who it immediately Concerns.

I have the pleasure to remain with best affection for you & Yours

Dr. Sir, your most Obedt. Servt.

Wm. Panton

Write by Land day by Post to Savannah directing them for me & put Your letter undercover to Messrs. Gairdners & Mitchel Merchants in Savannah on the first day of September I shall have an Express waiting on these Gentlemen to bring me Your letters with any others which the Secretary of War may have for Colo. John McKee or by the same rout do send me a few of Your late news papers. Yours as before.

Wm. Panton

Inform Messrs. Charles Smith & Co. of what I mention about having an express at Sanvannah that I may hear from them also.

Background on Panton, Leslie and Company.



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

Although West Florida was in Spanish hands, Governor Tonyn in East Florida still had a strong relationship with Panton, Leslie and Company, the trading post entrepreneurs. The house of Panton, Leslie and Company survived the capture of Pensacola by Bernardo de Galvez. Its head, William Panton, remained in West Florida although his fellow loyalist employees quickly withdrew. The continued presence of William Panton was so essential for the prosperity of Pensacola and the maintenance of good relations with the Creek Indians that the Spaniards entered into a separate treaty with him by which his trading posts were assured their rights, possessions, and Indian trade through its branches at Pensacola, Mobile, and Apalachee. Such agreements were very rare in these days. In return for these concessions, Panton agreed to act as the financial agent of the Spanish government and to promote goodwill between between the Spaniards and the Indians. At one time Spain owed Panton \$200,000 for advances he had made to them; and the same for the Indians who amassed such a large debt to his firm. The Indians discharged their debt to Panton by the transfer of a tract of land in Florida 40 miles square. The Southern Indians, Creeks, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee had lost finally, and without a real struggle, the balance-of-power position they had so long enjoyed among the French, Spanish, and English - James W. Raab, Spain, Britain and the American Revolution in Florida, 1763-1783, pages 137-138.

The Spanish presence in the American West could not simply be ignored, however, so McHenry developed a carrot-and-stick policy to separate the Spanish from the land....McHenry also ordered more gifts for the Indians, with the injunction that they not be seduced by the other countries. Then he ingratiated the most important trading firm in the area, Panton, Leslie & Co., ordering McKee to allow the company unidentified "indulgences" when collecting their debts from the area Indians. This would strengthen American influence in the area without physically threatening the Spanish and risking an unnecessary incident - Robbins, Forgotten Federalist, pages 182-183.

10. TILLARY, JAMES (Scottish-born New York City Physician, cousin of William Panton), to James McHenry. Autograph letter signed. N.p.: "Four O'Clock Monday " [but circa August 1797]. A single-page letter signed. Tillary describes papers sent to McHenry and mentions Governor Blount of Tennessee and the treasonous actions that would get him expelled from the Senate (the so-called Blount Conspiracy, involving a plot to get Great Britain to seize Spanish-controlled Louisiana in the



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

hope of boosting western land prices). Text of the letter:

Dr. Sir. I received this morning the enclosed, & but for an accidental meeting with Judge Troop who informed me that you had returned from Philadelphia they would this evening have been on their way to meet you there. -- I cannot say that they are of consequence enough to warrant such expedition, but supposed that if they could afford any useful hints to the Government, your being near the fountain of Authority, would facilitate the communication. --- Govr. Blount's home you will find early mentioned, but if there be treason connected with it, I need scarcely say that I am guiltless, as I hope my [Cousin? or Countryman?] Panton is. -- I have submitted to your perusal any papers of consequence which heretofore I have received from that quarter the motive that induced me then is operative at present, but it is not necessary that I should say more than that I am in spite of Munro & all the pesecuting herd.

most sincerely yours

James Tillary

4 o'clock Monday

Summary

These manuscript documents provide an extraordinary window on a shadowy moment in American history, and represent evidence of the intrigue and adventurism characteristic of the late 1790s in the Southwestern Borderlands, where British, Spanish, French, Americans, and Native Americans all clashed over the political and commercial future of a large swath of North America.

Rarity

An important collection of James McHenry's papers was dispersed, by order of the heirs, by Parke-Bernet in 1944, and over the years bits and pieces from this sale have resurfaced in the market. There are collections of McHenry's papers, including letters, in the Maryland Historical Society, the Library of Congress, and the Papers of the War Department.



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(18th-Century Southern Borderlands) [Collection of manuscript letters to Secretary of War James McHenry from confidential U.S. agent John McKee, relating to southern borderlands, Native Americans and Panton, Leslie & Co.; a letter from John McKee written from Mobile, Alabama, to William Blount of Blount's Conspiracy fame; a letter from William Panton concerning John McKee; and letters from Felix D. St. Hilaire, concerning General Victor Collot]

The present group of manuscripts is by far the most historically relevant collection concerning McHenry to become available in decades. To assemble a comparable collection relating to the southern borderlands in 1797 would be well-nigh impossible today.

Provenance.

Dr. Herbert Ernest Klingelhofer (1915-2015), collector and former President of the Manuscript Society.

Detailed Condition:

10 manuscript letters, mostly on bifolia of laid paper (though some on wove paper), many with remnants of wax seals. Usual folds. Paper generally fine and crisp.