Freedom through Exile: Mme de La Tour du Pin and the French Emigration to the United States during the French Revolution

By Mark Johnson

Henriette-Lucy Dillon Gouvernet de La Tour du Pin began her life in the royal court of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, but the French Revolution forced her, like many aristocrats, to flee for her life. She came to the United States with her family where she lived on a small farm near Albany, New York. Her adventures provide important insight into the history of women in France and United States during the Atlantic Revolutionary period because she lived in two different countries in different economic and social positions. La Tour du Pin preferred her life in the United States in contrast to her position in France, and the reasons for this sentiment reveal important characteristics about political and social culture in both France and the United States.

La Tour du Pin fashions her life in United States within the cultural icon of the Republican Mother. Her remembered self embodied vital principles of Americanism and republicanism, such as hard work, self-sufficiency, independence, frugality, and modesty. Her contentment in America, in contrast to her restlessness in France, reveals that republicanism in America, for La Tour du Pin specifically, provided more freedom and satisfaction than did the social norms of the French upper-class and the monarchy.