



Florida for Sale: Achille Murat (1801-1847)



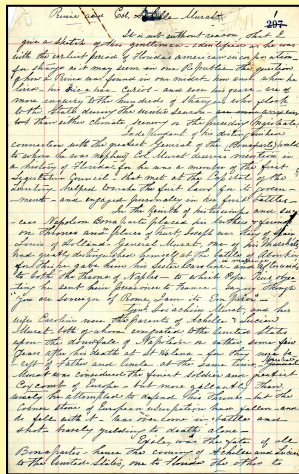
Jonathan Sullivan

Dr. Benjamin Gunter and Idy Codington

Florida State University, School of Dance/School of Communication

Methods

The method for research was conducting a literature review of Achille Murat. Primary sources were crucial to accurately understanding his character. More specifically, this project relied on primary sources from key American figures, like R. K. Call in 1824, Lafayette in 1825, Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1827, and Murat himself to showcase how Achille Murat looked, acted, and behaved. These sources are cross referenced with each other to demonstrate the many perspectives on Murat. Supplementary sources from historians like R. K. Call's daughter, Ellen Call Long (1909), and A. J. Hanna (1946) are also used. One limit to this form of research is that it risks cutting out important details that these historical figures were not privy to. However, focusing research on key events in Murat's life should be more than sufficient to create a profile of him.



First page of an excerpt from R. K. Call's journal entry on Achille Murat (c. 1825)

"It is not without reason, that I give a sketch of this gentleman identified as he was with the earliest period of Florida's American incorporation for strange as it may seem in our Republic. The question of how a Prince was found in our midst..." (R. K. Call)

Perspectives on Murat

1817

- Murat is now sixteen years old and has been exiled from Italy with his mother.
- *"I am not French, and I will never be. I am an Italian, and I shall always be an Italian."* (Theodore Lung)
- Five years later, Murat would sail to New York as an exile.

1824

- R. K. Call convinces Murat to move to St. Augustine, where Murat settles down in a plantation and practices law. (R. K. Call)

1825

- Lafayette meets Murat.
- *"We found at Savannah a young man whose name and destiny were calculated to inspire us with a lively interest; this was Achille Murat... Deprived of the hope of wearing the crown promised by his birth, he transported to the United States the trifling remains of his fortune, and sufficiently wise to appreciate the benefits of the liberty here enjoyed, he has become a naturalized citizen of the United States... He explained himself with great freedom on the subject of the holy alliance, and, in general, upon every kind of despotism. I could not avoid saying to him, in pleasantry, that it was a very extraordinary circumstance to hear such discourse from the mouth of an hereditary prince. 'Hereditary prince,' replied he with vivacity, 'I have found the means to be more than such a thing—I am a freeman!'"* (A. Levasseur)

1827

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, a transcendentalist and American philosopher, traveled on ship from St. Augustine to South Carolina for health reasons. On this ship, he met Murat, who was travelling to Bordentown.
- *"For my kind genius had sent me for my ship-mate Achille Murat, the eldest son of the old King Joachim ... He is a philosopher, a scholar, a man of the world; very skeptical but very candid, and an ardent lover of truth. I blessed my stars for my fine companion, and we talked incessantly...His soul is noble, and his virtue, as the virtue of a Sadducee must always be, is sublime."* (Emerson et al.)
- Another peculiar thing about this interaction is that Emerson is one of the earliest American abolitionists, and Murat, while greatly advocating for the freedom of men and women, was an ardent defender of slavery.

1830

- Murat travels to London, where he meets with other exiled Bonapartes including his uncle Joseph. Joseph's secretary, Louis Mallard, had this to say about him:
- *"Annoyances with the nephews Achille and Louis[-Napoleon]. These young people have strange ideas, they are of all countries depending on the circumstances. [Joseph] is reticent with them."* (Peter Hicks)
- Achille Murat travels back to the United States, but not before publishing two books on his time spent in America: *Lettres sur les Etats-Unis and Esquisse Morale et Politique des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique du Nord*. They did decently well, but now Murat was seriously out of money.

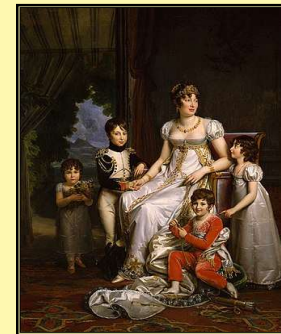
August 1, 1839

- At this point, Murat has lost most of his properties due to an economic depression, both his Lipona plantation in Florida and his Louisiana ventures. But his mother had recently died, so there was a possibility of some inheritance if he would travel to Europe once more. A fellow shipmate, Vincent Otto Nolte, wrote this about Murat:
- *"Murat was a good-natured, jovial fellow, who had forgotten all about his princely youth and gave promise of being enormously fat."* and on occasion when people were discussing Waterloo Murat would chime in with, *"Had my father led the French Cavalry... he would have eaten up the Marquis of Anglesea and his troops and won the fight."* (Vincent Nolte)



Key Points of Interest

- Paris-born Murat was aggressively American, to the point of annoying some, especially with his European colleagues like Lafayette. He took the idea of "freedom" as an excuse to act and behave in strange ways, including refusing to shower or wash his clothes. Florida was a perfect place for quirks like this.
- Murat was an intelligent, well-educated man, but struggled with money due to a combination of poor schemes, Union Bank scams, and alcoholism. He made quite a first impression, but people who were close to him were privy to the stranger sides of him.
- Murat traveled to Europe three times after his exile, each time with the purpose of reclaiming Napoleon's wealth, each time coming away with little. A few years after his death in 1847 at the age of 46, his wife would claim the titles he had fruitlessly sought.



Achille Murat with his siblings and mother, Caroline Bonaparte. Achille Murat is in uniform.

References

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, et al. *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: With Annotations*. Reprint Services Corp., 1998.

Hicks, Peter. "Joseph Bonaparte and the 'Réunion de famille' of 1832-33", *Napoleonica. La Revue*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2010, pp. 30-52.

Iung Théodore. *Lucien Bonaparte Et Ses mémoires. 1775-1840: D'après Les Papiers déposés Aux Archives étrangères Et D'autres Documents inédits*. Vol. 3, Charpentier, 1882.

Levasseur, A. *Lafayette In America in 1824 and 1825; or, Journal of a Voyage to the United States*. Vol. 2, Carey and Lea, 1829.

Nolte, Vincent. *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres: Or, Reminiscences of the Life of a Former Merchant*. Nabu Press, 2010.

Call, Richard Keith and Long, Ellen Call. *R. K. Call's Journal, "Prince and Colonel Achille Murat"*. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, c. 1852 <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/267579>.