A Genealogical Discovery: Contact with a Member of the Michaux Family in France

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Henry and Elizabeth Savage, in their biography of André Michaux and François André Michaux, wistfully comment that, apart from their contributions to the advancement of botany, horticulture and forestry in the United States, the botanists Michaux, father and son, “left no posterity.” If one may broadly interpret the expression “posterity,” the dark tone of the statement brightens. Footsteps of the Michaux are increasingly in evidence, not only in America but also wherever these gifted and industrious plantsmen lived, worked and introduced their collections of plants, many now bearing the name Michaux. True, André Michaux’s only child left no children. But if one includes Michaux descendents from the parents of the elder botanist, one encounters numerous persons of his lineage. It is our good fortune that one such person in France has made himself known to us and is interested in our project.

Members of the André Michaux International Society (AMIS) in the United States and in Rambouillet, France are delighted with this new window on Michaux studies: We are now in contact with a member of the greater Michaux family, Régis Pluchet of Savigné—l’Évêque near Le Mans, France. A student of Pluchet genealogy, Monsieur Pluchet traces his descent from Geneviève Antoinette Michaux Pluchet, the niece of André Michaux, daughter of André-François, the botanist’s younger brother by one year. Régis Pluchet is now our active colleague in efforts to broaden appreciation for the life and work of the gifted plantsman who revealed to North Americans much of our botanical riches and who sent to France a staggering number of plants and seed collected in the American “wilderness.”

We share vital interest in Michaux with our friends at Rambouillet and hope to be their allies in replacing there some of the North American trees provided by André Michaux, notably specimens of Taxodium distichum, the bald cypress. These old trees at Rambouillet planted from the shipments of Michaux were battered by two severe storms that twice swept the Rambouillet landscape, near the beginning and again near the end of the 1990s. Michaux ardently hoped the plants he collected and shipped to France in great number would be useful and enjoyable in his cherished homeland. In gratitude for this distinguished botanist’s gift to the Carolinas, and as a tribute to his service to both of our nations, we hope to aid in the revival of Michaux’s project at Rambouillet.

Learning of Walter Kingsley Taylor’s book on Michaux’s botanizing expedition to Florida, Monsieur Régis Pluchet wrote Dr. Taylor on February 11, 2003 of his relationship to the Michaux family. Pluchet was then unfamiliar with English. Like the botanist himself, his lycée studies were in the classics, Latin and Greek, with German as his modern language. Working from a dictionary, Pluchet electrified Dr. Taylor with his first stark sentence: “I am from family André Michaux.”

This e-mailed note continued with skeletal information about his descent from Geneviève

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