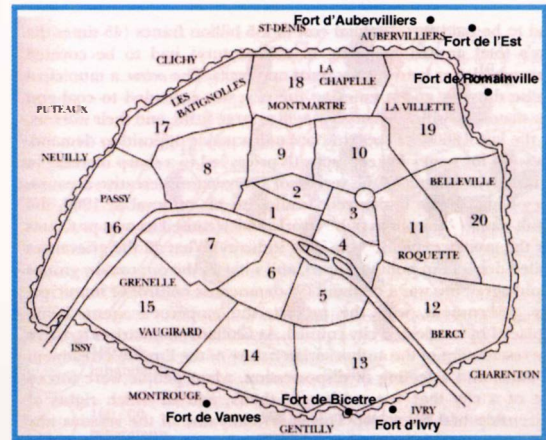


Political Prisoners' Mail from the 1848 Paris "June Days Uprising"

Scope and Purpose: This exhibit presents incoming and outgoing correspondence of Parisian political prisoners generated during the 1848 Paris "June Days Uprising" and its aftermath. The letters span 18 months, beginning June 25, 1848. Examples to and from all six categories of detention sites are included. The purpose is to highlight detention sites, daily prison life, and fate.

Organization and development: The exhibit is organized in three sections; Paris, Paris Environs, and Harbor Locations. Detention sites within these locales include military barracks, police stations, prisons, military fortifications, prison ships, and shore installations. Excerpts from letters provide testimony to a range of personal circumstances and harsh living conditions endured during incarceration.

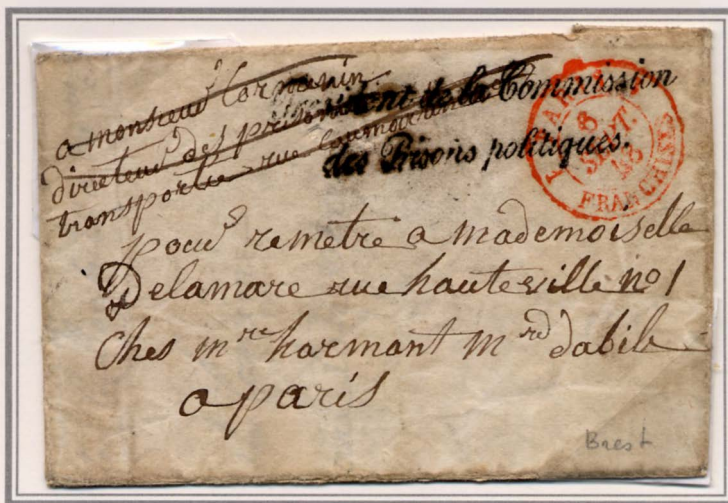
Paris and Environs



Known detention sites at military fortifications for political prisoners in Paris and environs

Historical Note On the June Days Uprising: Following the overthrow of King Louis Philippe in February 1848, the elected government of the Second Republic ruled France. In the months that followed, the working classes felt abandoned by the bourgeois politicians who had founded it. On

24 June 1848, 170,000 unemployed Paris workers rose in revolt, an insurrection known as the June Days Uprising. This bloody but unsuccessful three day rebellion resulted in dragnet arrests and detention for thousands of Parisians. Fifteen hundred workers died. More than 12,000 were arrested, although half of them were released within a few days or weeks. Five months later Louis Napoléon Bonaparte was elected President of the Second Republic, largely on peasant support.



Brest Harbor ship prisoner to Paris via the Commission of Political Prisons, Sept 8, 1848. Free frank (FRANCHISE).

Significance: Two hundred thirty-five letters involving June Days Uprising prisoners have been recorded from several collections, enabling identification of the universe of detention sites. Content of letters in this exhibit suggests indiscriminate arrests, stressful living conditions, and desperate attempts to seek release. Personal research has helped identify the fates of some prisoners. Given how little material appears to exist, the exhibit likely could not easily be reproduced.

Exhibit highlights are bordered in red and annotated in bold italics.

Military barracks (*casernes*) within the city served as short term detention sites for prisoners arrested while the three day insurrection was still going on. Within days they were moved to other locations.

Caserne Tournon



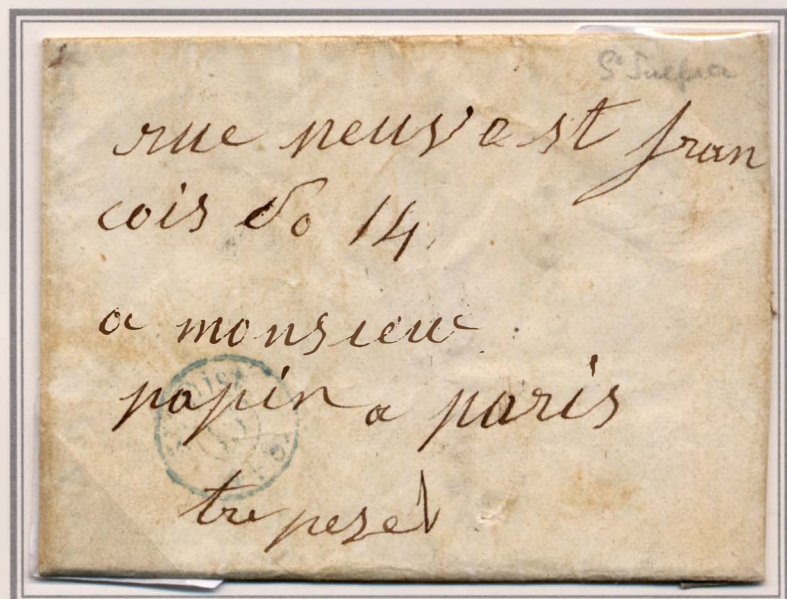
Cousin, I beg you to come and claim me as quickly as possible at the Tournon barrack. . . . I would be much obliged if you would ask for a certificate from Mr. Perret, with whom I worked, signed by the commissariat.

- From a political prisoner at *Caserne Tournon*, to his cousin, in Paris
- Postmarked Paris 27 Jun 1848
- 7 décimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: released 19 Aug 1848

Caserne St. Sulpice

- From a political prisoner at *Caserne St. Sulpice*, to his brother and sister, in Paris
- Written 25 Jun 1848
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: released 7 Sep 1848

We were in Paris for two days when the National Guard arrested us. We cannot get out. I have no money.



Some individuals arrested during the insurrection were taken to nearby police stations (*préfectures*) for questioning prior to release or detention elsewhere.

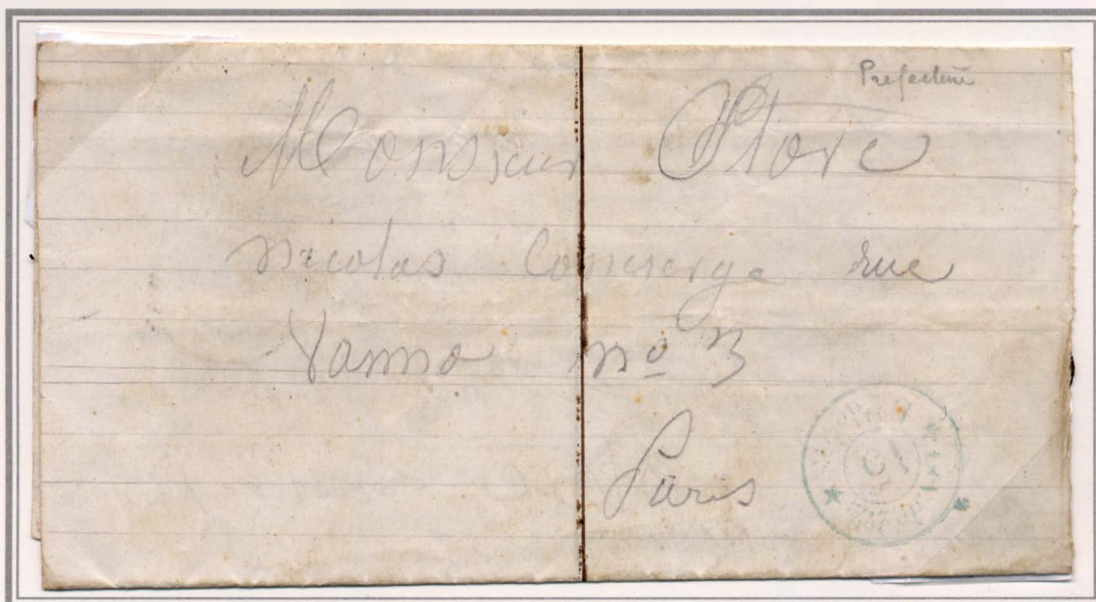
Préfecture, central Paris



- From a soldier arrested on 23 Jun 1848 in central Paris to his Lieutenant advising of his arrest
- Postmarked 25 Jun 1848
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: unknown

I was arrested yesterday evening, Saturday, at the Place du Chatelet going to the post office without arms or ammunition. I was taken to the prefecture. . . . I beg you come and claim me as soon as possible.

Préfecture, northeast Paris



Postage due marking effective:
Jun 1848 - Mar 1851

- Curt, pencilled note from a political prisoner arrested on 24 Jun 1848 in a northeastern section of Paris
- To his brother advising of his arrest
- Letter intercepted by police and examined prior to posting on 25 Jun 1848
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: unknown

Many prisons dotted the Paris landscape and its environs, some of them in existence since the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. They provided temporary detention sites for political prisoners awaiting trial or release.

La Petite Roquette



Post paid marking
effective:
Jul 1848 - Jul 1850

- Incoming letter to a 15-year old boy at *La Petite Roquette* prison, (*âge de 15 ans au Jeune Détenues à La Roquette*)
- Written by the political prisoner's brother, 26 July 1848; postmarked 27 July
- Double circle Paris PP post paid marking
- Fate of prisoner: released 5 Sep 1848

I have just learned from friends who are working on your behalf that you will soon be at liberty. Therefore, be calm, as soon we will have the pleasure of seeing you.

Only example known to the exhibitor of June Days Uprising mail involving an imprisoned adolescent

La Conciergerie

I will tell you that I was arrested without reason and that I am at the Conciergerie. Do me the pleasure of sending me whatever will be possible, as I no longer have anything.

- From a prisoner at **La Conciergerie**, in Paris writing to his brother
- Letter undated, but postmarked Paris 29 Jun 1848
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: released 31 Jul 1848



Postage due marking
effective:
1841 - 1850

La Maison de la Force

- To a farm laborer imprisoned at **La Maison de la Force**, in Paris
- Postmarked Argenteuil 10 Jul 1848; circled B indicates rural post office
- Post paid to Paris
- Contents provides a notarized affidavit providing an alibi for the addressee
- Fate of prisoner: court-martial 27 Aug 1848; released 21 Feb 1849

P.P.

St. Pélagie

- From a 17-year old farm laborer imprisoned at **St. Pélagie** prison, in Paris
- Written 30 Jun 1848; received 1 Jul
- Contents concerns request for parents to acquire certified documents to help him receive freedom
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: released 29 Aug 1848

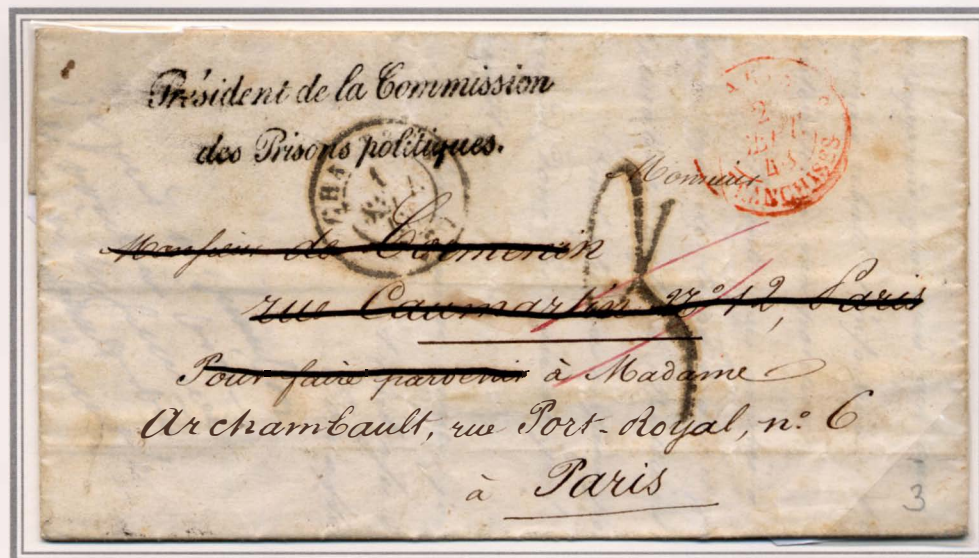
St. Lazare

We were arrested by the National Guard who doubtless took us for insurgents. They brought us to the Batignolles town hall where they questioned us, then took us to the St. Lazare prison where we are waiting to be questioned again.

- From two political prisoners at **St. Lazare** prison to their superior in Paris with the Northern Railroad (*Compagnie du Nord*) where they are employed
- Postmarked Paris 29 Jun 1848
- Amount of postage to be assessed (2 décimes) not indicated
- Fate of prisoners: unknown

Starting September 1, 1848, some prisoners' mail bears the hand stamp, *Président de la Commission des Prisons Politiques*. It served as a free frank marking. Thus, incoming and outgoing prisoners' mail routed via Monsieur de Cormenin's *Commission* avoided postage due charges.

Chartres Prison



Free frank
(FRANCHISES)
stamp

- From a political prisoner at **Chartres Prison**, to his wife in Paris
- Written 31 Aug 1848; postmarked Chartre 1 Sept; received 2 Sept
- Sent via the office of the President of the Commission of Political Prisons; forwarded
- 2 décimes postage cancelled because the Commission had the free frank
- Fate of prisoner: imprisoned *Citadel de Port-Louis*; pardoned 15 Dec 1849

Vincennes Prison

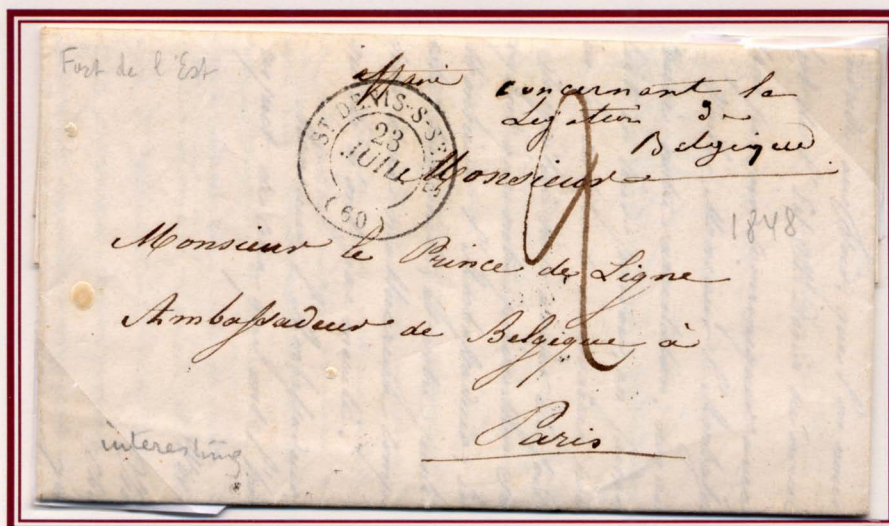


Coming from Joinville to Paris in the evening of the second day of the revolution, I presented my pass to National Guard troops who claimed it was improperly stamped. They took me to the dungeon of Vincennes. I do not know when I will get out.

- “From the dungeon” at **Vincennes Prison**, to a friend in Paris
- Written 15 Jul 1848; postmarked 16 Jul Montmartre & La Chapelle-St. Denis
- 2 décimes postage assessed for up to 40km
- Fate of prisoner: released 21 Aug 1848

A series of defensive fortifications (*forts*) ringed Paris, constructed outside the ramparts of the city. The majority of political prisoners were held here for at least part of their imprisonment.

Fort de l'Est



- From a Belgian prisoner at *Fort de l'Est*, north of Paris
- To the Ambassador of the Belgian Legation, at Paris
- Postmarked St. Denis-S-Seine 23 July 1848; received the next day
- Letter begs assistance for release from detention
- 2 décimes postage assessed for up to 40 km
- Fate of prisoner: released 5 Sep 1848

Only example known to the exhibitor of a non-French political prisoner

Fort de l'Est



- From a prisoner at *Fort de l'Est*, north of Paris
- To "The Gentlemen of the Military Commission, Department of Justice, Paris"
- Postmarked St. Denis-S-Seine 24 July 1848; received Paris the same day
- Letter discusses an affidavit attesting to the prisoner's innocence
- Docketed at the Commission, so 2 décimes postage cancelled because the Commission had the free frank
- Fate of prisoner: released 20 Sep 1848

Fort de Vanves

Having been claimed by my commander, the officers of my company and my whole company I thought it would be sufficient to free me. For I can prove I was innocent when I was arrested not a quarter hour after I was separated from my comrades.



- Outgoing letter from *Fort de Vanves*, southwest of Paris, to Paris
- A soldier writing to citizen members of the military commission
- Postmarked 13 Aug 1848
- Letter concerns a lost file whose contents would result in certain freedom
- 2 décimes postage cancelled because the Commission had the free frank
- Fate of prisoner: released 31 Aug 1848

Fort de Bicêtre



I am writing to let you know that Sunday we are allowed to send out our dirty laundry. Go find General Bertrand at the Military Commission in the law courts and ask him for an entry pass I don't need to tell you to dress up.

- Outgoing letter from the prison at *Fort de Bicêtre*, south of Paris, to Paris
- Postmarked Bicêtre 13 July 1848; received Paris the same day
- Letter concerns prisoner's dirty laundry
- 2 décimes postage for up to 40 km
- Fate of prisoner: imprisoned on *ponton, La Guerrière*, at Brest Harbor 5 Aug 1848; pardoned 24 Nov 1848

Fort d'Ivry

We are in complete ignorance of what is going on, and many of us make conjectures born out of fear that helps increase the pain of our captivity.



- Outgoing letter from **Fort d'Ivry**, southeast of Paris, to Paris
- Written 5 Jul 1848; postmarked 7 Jul
- Letter concerns the prisoner seeking his freedom
- 2 décimes postage assessed for up to 40 km
- Fate of prisoner: released 22 Aug 1848

Fort de Romainville



The captain in command of the post found on me the sum of ten francs and key to my room, which he has kept. I appeal to you to have them returned and not let me believe that French troops commit such thievery

- Outgoing letter from **Fort de Romainville**, northeast of Paris to the Chief of Police, Paris
- Postmarked Romainville 28 Aug 1848; received Paris the next day
- *Rèclamation* (claim) manuscript notation
- 2 décimes postage cancelled because the Commission had the free frank
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 11 Nov 1848

III. Harbor Locations

Brest Prison Ships

Decommissioned ships (*pontons*) held prisoners at Brest, Cherbourg, and Lorient harbors. Numbers held on each ship ranged from 193-602.

L'Uranie

- Outgoing to Paris from the *ponton*, *L'Uranie*, at Brest Harbor
- Letter written to prisoner's wife, 18 Dec 1848
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 1 Sep 1849



La Didon



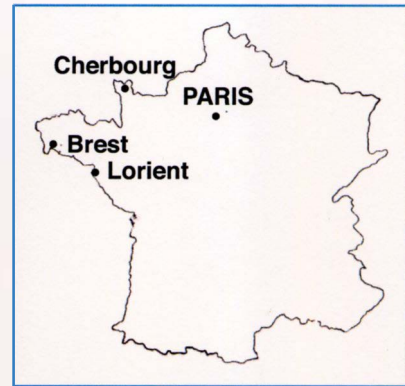
- Outgoing to Paris from the *ponton*, *La Didon*, at Brest Harbor
- Correspondence between spouses
- Letter written 18 Jan 1849
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 28 Feb 1850

La Guerrière

- Outgoing to Paris from the *ponton*, *La Guerrière*, at Brest Harbor
- Letter written 7 Oct 1849; postmarked 9 Oct
- Correspondence to an official so 2 décimes postage cancelled
- Fate of prisoner: unknown



Le Triton



Harbor locations

- Incoming from Paris (Belleville) to the *ponton*, *Le Triton*, at Cherbourg Harbor
- Written 30 Oct 1848; Cherbourg receiver 2 Nov 1848
- Sent via the President of the Commission of Political Prisons, so no postage assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 30 Nov 1848

Lorient Prison Ships

La Sémillante

I don't believe we will be in the pontons for much longer. There is talk of sending us to Belle Île where I think it will be better. . . . Here the inhabitants look at us as if we were wild animals, not daring to come close to our ship.



- Outgoing to a Paris suburb (Belleville) from a prisoner aboard the *ponton*, *La Sémillante*, at Lorient Harbor
- Paris receiver, 15 Oct 1848
- 9 décimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: imprisoned *Fort de Belle-Île* 28 Apr 1849; pardoned 3 Dec 1849

Fortified shore installations (*forts*) were constructed as a defense against invasions from sea on the north and west coasts. A small number of political prisoners were detained at several of these sites.

Fort de L'île Pelée



- Incoming to a political prisoner at **Fort de L'île Pelée**, near Cherbourg (Manche)
- Postmarked Paris 14 Sept 1848; received Cherbourg 15 Sept
- Prisoner worked as a pit sawyer before his arrest
- Letter sent via the office of the President of the Commission of Political Prisons
- No postage assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 27 Mar 1849

You have been included in the number of the so-called insurgents only by the fatal thinking of our Commune and because of a very small number of men who were led astray. Furthermore, they were completely foreign to the country having lived here only a very short while.

Fort de L'île Pelée



- Incoming personal letter to a political prisoner at **Fort de L'île Pelée**
- Letter sent via the office of the President of the Commission of Political Prisons
- Written 6 Oct 1848, held; postmarked 18 Nov
- Received 19 Nov
- No postage assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 6 Jun 1849

Fort du Homet



- Outgoing from **Fort du Homet**
- To the President of the Commission Investigating the Political Detainees of June at Paris (*President de la commission d'enquête des détenus politique de juin a Paris*)
- Paris receiver, 14 Jan 1849
- 15 centimes postage cancelled because the Commission had the free frank
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 27 Mar 1849

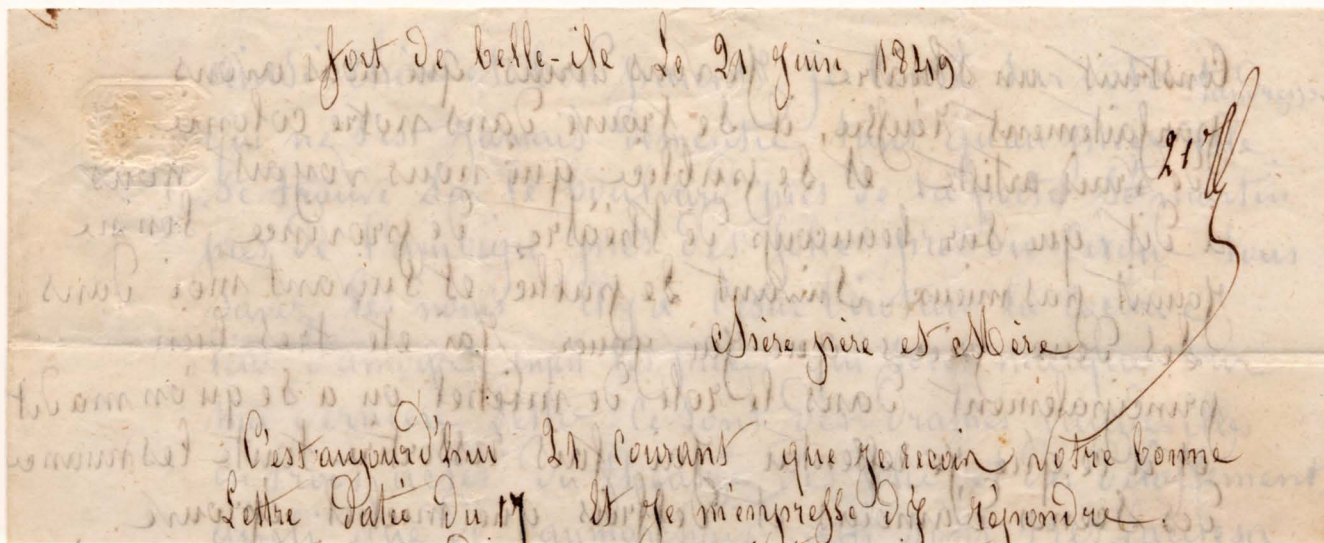
Fort du Homet



A month ago I wrote you that I was pardoned and going to go free. Doubtless not seeing me arrive you feared I had deceived you, or I was mistaken myself, or I had been misled.

- Outgoing from a political prisoner at **Fort du Homet**, to his wife in Paris, a wine dealer
- Written 2 Feb 1849; postmarked 1 Mar, after a delay of one month
- An official's signature on the letter suggests the letter may have been withheld; received 2 Mar 1849
- 9 décimes postage assessed
- Fate of prisoner: pardoned 27 Mar 1849

Fort de Belle-Île



- Outgoing from a political prisoner at **Fort de Belle-Île** to his parents in Paris
- Written 21 Jun 1849; postmarked Le Palais 23 Jun; received 26 Jun
- Writer describes his activities as an actor in captivity
- Fate of prisoner: transported to Algeria; sentence commuted 29 Jan 1853

We built a theater, and I would say we have completely succeeded. There are true artists among our colony, and the audience told us that in most of the theaters in the provinces they play no better.

Citadelle de Port-Louis



- Outgoing from a political prisoner at **Citadelle de Port-Louis** to his mother in Paris
- Written 24 Mar 1849; received 30 Mar
- 15 centimes postage due assessed
- Fate of prisoner: imprisoned *ponçon, La Sémillante*, at Lorient Harbor 28 Sep 1848; at **Fort de Belle-Île** 28 Apr 1849; pardoned 3 Dec 1849

Epilogue

Of the 6,000 insurgents still detained months after the June Days Uprising, 468 eventually were transported to French Algeria for long term internment. Survivors were pardoned in June 1859.

Twenty-seven months of ongoing captivity (June 1848 - September 1850)



- Two letters in one cover from a political prisoner: written 28 Dec 1849 at *Fort de Belle-Île*; written 29 Dec 1849 on the *ponton, La Guerrière*, at Brest Harbor
- To his brother, a Paris hotel restaurateur, admitting to being an insurgent and accepting the probability he would never be freed
- No evidence of examination by government officials
- Fate of the prisoner: transported to Algeria (Bône) 20 Feb 1850; died there 3 Sep 1850

Latest postmark known to the exhibitor on June Days Uprising mail, plus the only correspondence documenting a political prisoner at two consecutive detention sites

A longer, bloodier insurrection occurred 23 years after the “June Days Uprising” at the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War when Commune of Paris workers in 1871 once again rose against perceived oppressors.



- Incoming to a political prisoner aboard the *ponton, Le Napoléon*, at Brest Harbor, 1871