



## OFF TO SCHOOL

Considering the historical context and mores, Donat Corriveau, who did not finish eighth grade, and was the father of four daughters, might easily be forgiven for thinking that his priority was not spending precious capital to send them to college when they would surely marry, and have a man to provide for them. Donat always said that one of the reasons he ran for Registrar of Deeds for Hillsborough County was to use that compensation for educating his daughters. And like Bill Sr., in the 1930's he sent his 3 oldest daughters to Smith (Camille), Skidmore (Mariette) and the Rochester School of Music (Clairlouise).

### SMITH COLLEGE AND JUNIOR YEAR ABROAD IN PARIS

Camille grew up between the world wars nurtured by her family, local neighborhood, and parish. There were vacations at the beach, and all the drama in the lives of four sisters. In such an environment, speaking French perfectly as her first language, it is not surprising that she developed a deep love of her culture, language, food, art, etc. But her commitment and interest went beyond the typical young lady of the time. Her academic achievements at Nashua High School reflected ambition to focus her college education, and possibly her profession, on her further mastery of the French language, and that was a major motivator in her selection of Smith College.

There are no rooms available in houses of your choice  
**SMITH COLLEGE**  
 Northampton, Massachusetts  
 OFFICE OF THE WARDEN

Miss Camille H. Corriveau Sept 2 1934 has been assigned to  
 single room No. 24 in the Talbot House  
 for the college year 1934-1935 at a charge for room and board of \$ 30.00

Rooms are assigned for the college year. No refund will be allowed except in extreme cases of which the College shall be the sole judge.  
 Students leaving personal effects in college buildings do so at their own risk.

Laura W. L. Scales Warden.  
 DUPLICATE—TO BE SIGNED AND KEPT BY THE STUDENT  
 I accept this assignment subject to the conditions as stated above.  
Camille H. Corriveau

Not too happy about having a double-- had my heart set on a single-- wonder what my room-mate will be like.

No change will be allowed from the hours here indicated except by written permission from the Registrar's Office.

Name Camille Henrietta Corriveau Class 1934

HOUR	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
9.00		Phys 26		Phys 10		(10) P19
10.00	Fr 26		(10) H 4	Lat 10		(10) H 4
11.00	Fr 22		(10) H 13			
12.00	Govt 11		264			
2.00						
3.00						
4.00						
5.00						

Course card for my Sophomore year.

From Camille's scrap book:

Left, her room assignment signed by Laura Scales, the college "Warden." Camille's daughter Laure would spend four years in Laura Scales House when she was at Smith.  
 On right, Camille's sophomore course schedule.

*“My years at Smith broadened my interest in areas unexplored until then, they made me aware of the world in which I live, and the responsibility that was mine to assume. Smith provided the springboard to a life that has been most rewarding, one which I have enjoyed thoroughly, along with friends who have been so very dear to me these many years.”<sup>1</sup>*



*Camille (front, left) and the Smith College French Club, 1939.*

During that time all the Ivy League schools were single sex. This situation encouraged lots of “road trips” for the Smith girls to Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, etc. Camille was not an exception as it would appear she had a marvelous time:



*From Camille’s scrap book.*

The French Civilization program at Smith had top level institutional support, professionally recognized teachers, and included a junior year abroad in Paris. Camille more than met the rigorous academic and fluency requirements for entrance into the program, and in late August 1938, joined a group of 24 women who sailed on the SS Paris bound for Le Havre, France. Two days after landing, the women were already in Dijon. Orientation and rapid immersion courses stressing grammar and composition began immediately with classes scheduled to begin at the Sorbonne in early November.<sup>2</sup>

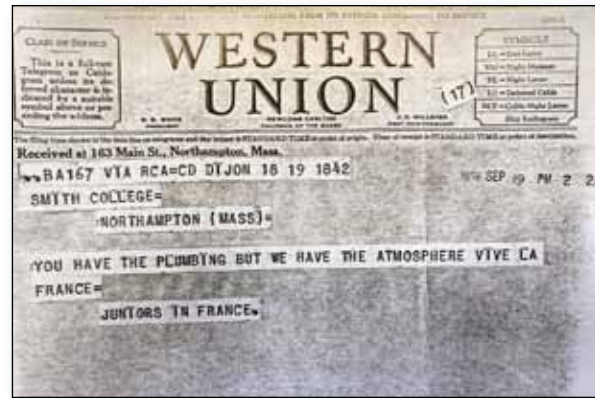


*Camille (front, second from left) on the SS Paris.*

Already a decade old, the junior year abroad program was blessed by the French Government, which awarded Smith’s President Nielsen the Legion of Honor in recognition of its success. Smith was one of a handful of colleges offering such an opportunity to women. By the end of the 1930’s, Smith’s program had already sent more than 500 young women to France, and the curriculum was increasingly focused on preparing teachers.

According to their yearbook, by junior year the Smith women were reading the newspapers regularly, and those on campus followed the fates of Spain, China and Czechoslovakia in Monday morning chapels. Nearly 10% of the class spent their junior year abroad in six European countries, and then, as now, discussion of events in the world were the subject of constant debate. Soon after arriving in France, Camille started listening to the radio, “Last night I heard the voice of the one and only Hitler. He delivered a speech at Nuremberg ... However, we’re all waiting for Tuesday to see what he says about the Czechoslovakian question.”<sup>3</sup>

For the juniors in Europe, reverberations of momentous world events soon shifted from background rumbling to a near emergency. The Munich Crisis erupted in mid-September 1938, just two weeks after the Smith group's arrival in France and indeed threatened to end the whole endeavor.



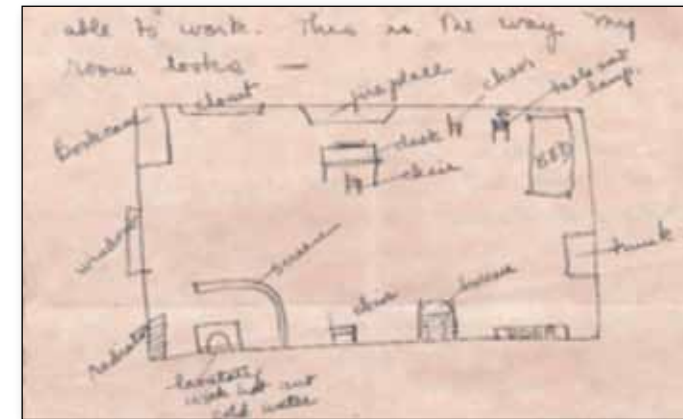
A telegram the girls sent on September 19, 1938, back to the College.

The administration of the College sent a cable to the leader of the group, Mlle. Bourgoin, instructing her to bring the group back to the United States. Immediately she organized a bus trip on September 26 leaving at 3:00 AM, arriving in Le Havre 18 hours later. As can be expected, many people were anxious to leave France and passage for all 24 girls in one sailing was impossible to secure once they arrived. However, when British Prime Minister Chamberlain declared that he and Adolf Hitler had negotiated a "Peace for Our Time," war fever cooled, and the girls returned to Dijon. The surge of concerned parents' letters to Smith ended. After six weeks in Dijon, the group arrived in Paris.



London Daily Herald, October 1, 1938.

A few months after the Munich Crisis, on November 9, 1938, the Germans unleashed *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, a pogrom against the Jews, and a harbinger of the inferno to come. Because of Mussolini's restrictions on Jews, a Mills College student intending to study in Italy, moved in with Camille, who welcomed her and helped ease a tough transition. The Smith women lived with local families, and Camille's host was Madame Rene Baudry, 94 Rue de Miromesnil in the 8th Arr. She had a spacious and comfortable room with her own bathroom, and hot and cold water.

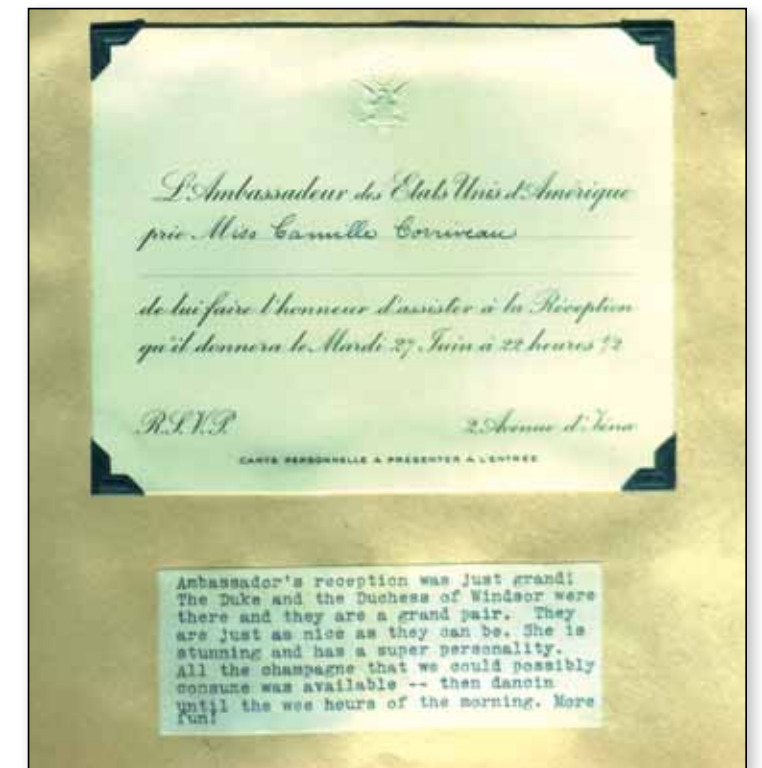


Camille's sketch of her room in Paris, November 1938

There were picnics in the great parks of Paris, cultural events, including a performance by the Yale Glee Club at the American Embassy attended by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (invitation below).



From Camille's scrap book.



Camille did well at the Sorbonne, while helping the others, and was ranked #7 overall, out of more than 150 American students, achieving an overall rating of Très bien, the highest. Clara, Camille's mother, later wrote a letter in French thanking the Madame for taking such good care of her daughter.

After the program ended, Camille met her father in Paris and they toured Europe together. The grand tour of capitals included grand balls with royalty, and other excitement, deepening Camille's love of travel. She saw their long-time friends, Mrs. Trudeau and her daughter Suzette, who were their neighbors at the beach. Pierre, a young man already marked for success, was back home, and they corresponded during her year abroad. In July 1939, Camille and her father boarded the SS Normandie and left Le Havre. Just a few days later, back home on July 16, the Nashua Telegraph interviewed Camille about her experiences abroad.

#### "Nashua Girl Back from the Sorbonne, Miss Corriveau High in Praise of French in Crisis"

"Miss Camille Corriveau was high in her praise of the French people during the crisis of September 1938, in an interview yesterday afternoon. She admires the French spirit, and fortitude and resignation of the people who know that war is an eventuality and pursue their everyday life, as though they were not confronted with difficulties. She landed in New York July 10, but remained there for a few days to see the New York World's Fair, arriving in Nashua late Thursday night.

Miss Corriveau went abroad for her junior year at Smith College. Her first two months were passed at the University of Dijon, but when the Studenten crisis occurred in September 1938, they were ordered by the American consul to evacuate Dijon at once, as it was but an hour's ride by plane from the German border, and war was feared ... All American students, of whom they were about 150 were in a special section of the school. There were about 400 foreign students there from all countries. French majors from Smith studied French literature, philosophy, the language, manners, customs, political background and history of France. Miss Corriveau was particularly proud of the showing that the Smith College contingent made, for eight of the group were in the highest ranking students in the foreign section.

When queried regarding the French attitude toward the probability of war, Miss Corriveau stated that the French people, no matter from what section of the country, are completely resigned to the eventuality of war, but they just don't speak about it, she stated. They go about their work as though nothing unusual were happening, although preparations for war are continuous and they never speak of the possibility and imminence of war, unless questioned by foreigners. From her questioning and living and traveling, she observed that the French people feel that the longer war is averted, the stronger Germany becomes.

Miss Corriveau traveled considerably while abroad, passing Christmas vacation in Switzerland, going to Holland and Belgium after mid-year, to Italy during Easter vacation and a trip to the French Riviera after the students left Dijon. She visited England with her father and was in Rome when Albania was taken. People of Italy know little of what is going on, she stated, as there was absolutely no manifestation whatsoever in Rome when King Zog

and Queen Geraldine flew from Albania and the people of Rome did not know for four days that Albania was taken. While there is no such thing as a free press abroad, Miss Corriveau feels that the French people are more cognizant of actual conditions than the people of Italy where Mussolini controls the press.

Miss Corriveau saw King George VI and Queen Elizabeth upon their return from their goodwill trip to America where they reviewed the troops at Hyde Park and after spending several days in England feels that the British seem to be more fearful of air raids than the French people. Intensive preparations are going on, dug outs in backyards, amassing of aeroplanes at a rapid rate and the conscription of young men, all in preparation for war which is felt to be imminent."<sup>4</sup>

Six weeks later the Germans invaded Poland, triggering the Second World War.

Newspaper headlines about the Class of 1940 highlight the two major motivations of the class: "38 Smith Seniors Prospective Brides, of the 314 Class Members with Definite Plans for the Future, 55 are interested in Teaching." Of the total class of 438 women, History was the leading major (69), followed by English (57), and Camille's major, French Civilization, was sixth on the list (26).



*Studying at Smith.*

The "most interesting and profitable" course was Modern European History, taught by Professor Hans Kohn. The runner up was History of Art. Camille was a loyal alumna and was an active member and officer of the Fitchburg Smith College Club, and from 1970-1975 was the Smith College Class of 1940 Treasurer.

Armed with a Bachelor of Arts degree in French Civilization, the perspective that comes from travel, and personal witness to historic events, Camille headed home to look for a job. She was soon teaching three French language classes at the Nashua Junior High School, including one section made up of only boys. Not surprising to her friends and family, she enjoyed that section the most, especially the banter of a group of young men. Work, family, church, and socializing took all her time, but like the events of the world, things were about to take an unexpected turn.

<sup>1</sup> "Life after '40, Remembrance of Camille Corriveau (Aubuchon)," 1990, Smith College Archives

<sup>2</sup> Smith College Yearbook of 1940. The account of Camille's years at Smith is based on research in the Smith College archives, especially for the Junior Year Abroad program, including parents' correspondence 1938-1939.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, Camille to her mother, Saturday, September 10, 1938.

<sup>4</sup> "Nashua Girl is Home from the Sorbonne, Miss Corriveau High in Praise of French in Crisis," *Nashua Telegraph*, July 16, 1939



*Nashua Telegram.*



*Setting sail for France on the SS Paris, August 1938.*



*Christmas in Switzerland.*



*Camille in Cannes.*



*Student ID at the Sorbonne.*



*Arrive in Dijon.*



*Camille in Dijon. She wrote: "Just imagine me working! A matter of necessity made me give my all and get my clothes clean. What unpleasant memories this place brings."*



*Camille wrote: "Emergency evacuation to Le Havre, September 26, 1938. Left at 3 AM, arrived 9:00 PM; stayed one week waiting for a ship until Munich Pact was signed and then back to Dijon."*



*Donat in England with Camille, July 1939.*

## LETTERS FROM FRANCE ~ 1938 -1939

Below are excerpts from some of the dozens of letters Camille wrote home to her family from her year abroad. They are remarkable not only for the breath of subject matter, but that they were written by a nineteen/twenty year old. She wrote of her observations of being abroad for the first time, the eccentricities of the French, the wonderment of the many places she was able to travel to despite hostilities everywhere, the people she met through her host family (the Baudry's) in Paris, going to couture houses to see the current "models" to the opera, and, to commenting on the French lack of central heating or any heating for that matter. But most powerful is her witness to the growing threat of war. Her comments are made with a combination of naivety and bravado of only someone so young. So many of her letters ended with the need to make the next sailing of the Queen Mary or the Normandie, etc. To read them, is most definitely to hear "her voice."

### August 25, 1938 - Onboard the S. S. Paris having sailed New York on August 24

*Mother - Tom Mix [popular actor/cowboy], his wife and his horse are on board but I haven't seen them because they're in first class.*

*This is the first Sunday that I've ever missed Mass and been in perfect health. There was no Mass on board! We have with us eight nuns and they couldn't do anything about it.*

### August 29, 1938

*We had at a party last night in first class. It was a grand affair. Tom Mix sat about 2 feet away from me. If I wanted to I could've touched him. I got his autograph on the program.*

### September 4, 1938 – Smith juniors arrive in Dijon.

### September 10, 1938

*Mother - Last night I heard the voice of the one and only Hitler. He was making a speech at Nuremberg about his dear country, and the dear people of that country. I really wish that I could understand German because it would be interesting to hear what he has to say without it being translated. However we are all waiting for Tuesday to see what he has to say on the Czechoslovakian question. You need not worry about the war question. If anything broke out, the American consul in Paris has our addresses and would take care of us individually and collectively. If Hitler doesn't declare war on the Czechs this Tuesday, I don't believe there will be any immediate danger. However, everyone is perfectly calm here.*

*The French here sure aren't too fond of President Wilson. They blame him for the re-organization and rearmament of Germany. They say that it's the treaty that he made that is the cause of it all. I can't say much but would sure like to open my mouth and tell the old man that if they didn't like the proposed treaty why in the hell did they sign it. They aren't too fond of Americans. They think we're strange and have queer ideas. They say they obeyed the rules of the treaty and disarmed, but in the meantime, Germany re-armed and became very strong. It would take France two years to prepare for war.*

### September 13, 1938

*Mother - Last night we listened to Hitler's speech and the Czech in the house translated it for us. This morning I read the French papers and there was absolutely nothing about it. They keep beating around the bush and don't come to any point. I sure wish I could get a New York Times or Herald Tribune and see what's going on over here. We had to have some pictures taken for identification cards. We are taking all precautions necessary, because Mlle Bourgoïn told us that if anything happened we leave at a moments notice, and to keep all our papers, passports etc. at hand if we needed them.*

### September 15, 1938 – Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain meets with Hitler at Berchtesgaden.

### September 25, 1938

*Mother - You're probably wondering what's happening here. Everything is calm and safe in Dijon and you've no cause to worry. Mlle Bourgoïn went to Paris to see the American ambassador and he told her that if anything happened we would be taken care of immediately. They would send cars after us and take us to a port to wait for an American ship. We have taken all necessary precautions in case, so that we won't be caught. Mlle. told us to keep all our papers together, passports etc. Then asked us if we had enough money and if not we could borrow some from the college. I have enough so I'm all right. Our suitcases are all packed too. Maybe nothing will come of it but if anything did we could get out fast. You have no cause to worry because there are so many people here looking out after us that nothing could possibly happen. I mention all this because you would have thought it.*

### September 29, 1938

*Clairelouise - When you receive this letter I'll either be on my way home or back to Le Harve or maybe in Paris – no one knows. Our stay here will depend entirely on our neighbor Hitler. When we came to classes on Tuesday Mlle. Bourgoïn called us immediately into a room and told us that we were leaving the next morning Wednesday the 28th for Le Havre and that we would leave Dijon promptly at four A.M. She had just received a telegram from the*

*American consul telling us to leave at once. She told us to cash \$20 of our American Express checks because she didn't know if the banks would be so willing to give out money if war was declared. The night before, on Monday, we listened to Hitler's speech and an English woman was staying at our House and translated it all for us. Really the man is crazy!*

*I forgot to tell you that when we were at Chartres they were taking down some of the windows and putting them away in case of bombardment by the Germans. If they were destroyed they could never be replaced. They have a system where all the windows can be taken down in 20 minutes if it is really necessary.*

*Don't ask me how tired we all were after riding in a bus from 4:00 AM until 9:30 PM. Le Havre is full of Americans. It's like old home week! Nothing is absolutely definite that we will leave. If things are fixed up within a week which I doubt very much realizing how stubborn Hitler is – we will stay, if not, we have reservations on the Champlain sailing October 12.*

**September 29, 1938 – British, French, German and Italian leaders sign the Munich Agreement allowing the annexation of the Sudetenland — “Peace in our time.”**

**October 2, 1938**

*Mother - The other day when we went to the movies and they showed Roosevelt in the newsreel and we clapped like fools. One thing that has made me plenty mad is the way they gave Chamberlain and Daladier all the credit for saving peace, when it's Roosevelt who suggested that meeting of the four great powers to smooth out the difficulty. It's upon receiving Roosevelt's cable they decided to meet altogether. Did the newspapers give him credit for anything? I should say not, they never even mentioned him.*

**October 6, 1938**

*Mariette - Last Monday a crowd of us went to see the Normandie come in. Never have I seen anything as beautiful or as huge. We stood at the breakwater for hours and finally the ship started coming over the horizon. We wanted to go onto it but when we went to pass the door they told us we needed a card, so we went to the “Bureau de Renseignements” and asked for a card. They asked us who we were meeting at the boat so we made up a name. They gave us the card and on the Normandie we went.*

*Will write you next week to catch the Queen Mary.*

**October 8, 1938**

*Mariette - Now comes the subject of finances. You'll probably be surprised when I tell you that I have only about \$75 left. Now I will tell you how I've spent the formidable sum of \$75 in one month and a half. First of all, that little trip to Le Havre cost me around \$40, then when I arrived I had to buy books, a dictionary, papers etc. Then we've had excursions every week. I've bought “patisserie” and just fruit for my room and in the afternoon I treat myself to a cup of hot chocolate.*

**October 10, 1938 – Germany completes annexation of Sudetenland.**

**October 16, 1938**

*Mariette - Speaking of seeing the country – anyone who wants to see Europe had better come over now. Everything will be completely ruined in the next war and cities destroyed and famous places hardly recognizable. The feeling here is that war has been postponed temporarily. They believe we will have another crisis in March or April and that by September of next year there will be a terrible war if it doesn't happen before. So Daddy this is your last chance – you better come after me and see Europe as it was because you realize that the next war will be bombs everywhere, and Europe will be hardly recognizable. Ann got a letter from her father and he says the feeling in the US is very anti-Chamberlain for having sold Czechoslovakia “down the river”. I think it is a darn shame that at Chamberlain's say, the Czechs lost 90% of all they owned! Hitler sure has his hand in Central Europe. Oh well, he sure pulled a fast one.*

**October 18, 1938**

*Mother - What a beauty of a cold I got. Madame says it's because I don't wear enough clothes. I'll tell you what I have on - shoes, ankle socks, stockings, girdle, pants, bra, slip, yellow shirt, sweater, blue suit, and topcoat. I feel as if I live in “Le Moyen Age”. It's just like being out on a raft.*

**October 25, 1938 - Cannes**

*Mother - Everything is so beautiful down here – it's just like a fairy land. I wish I could spend a few weeks here. I simply adore this part of France. It's so French. I'm so glad I came because I would've gotten an altogether different idea of France if I had only seen Dijon as provincial life. On our way to Nice we stopped at Antibes where the Duke and Duchess of Windsor are staying. We didn't see them though. The drive from Nice to Monte Carlo is just beautiful. If I lived to be hundred, I'll never forget it.*

**October 25, 1938 - Paris**

*Clairelouise - now about our courses at the Sorbonne. I am taking history of art, philosophy, 19th century literature, grammar, translation and phonetics. This is only for first semester, second semester our courses will change. We also have to go to the theater to see classical plays, those of Corneille and Racine.*

**November 3, 1938**

*Mother - Now for the Sorbonne. I'm simply scared of it because I know that it will flunk me. It's dark and gloomy and looks like a tomb. There are statues all around that look down upon you and make you feel so dumb. They have statues of Pasteur and Richelieu and Voltaire etc. Who are we in comparison to them? I feel like an imbecile in a place like that.*

*I just received your letter that came over on the Bremen. From now on, write to me at 94 rue de Miromesnil VIII. I don't always go to 76 rue Bonaparte. I'll start another letter for the Queen Mary because it would make this one too long.*

**November 9, 1938 – Kristallnacht****November 23, 1938**

*Clairelouise - Last Sunday Ann's cousin invited us to her house. She married a Duke de Rachevsky, a Russian who was compelled to leave after the revolution. The house was filled with Dukes, Barons, Countesses etc. we had a marvelous time. Tuesday Harriet, that's the Duchess, took us out to lunch at the Ritz. What divine clothes I saw there. It was just like going to a fashion show. Gary Cooper was there. Then we went shopping and then sat at Molyneux's to watch model clothes.*

*This afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Neville Chamberlain arrived in Paris with Lord and Lady Halifax. I planned on going to see them but I had work to do so listened to it over the radio. It would have been terrible because it was such a mob there.*

**November 30, 1938**

*Mariette - I'm glad Mr. and Mrs. Daval are planning on coming over in June. I know if they do, that Daddy will. There's no sense in his waiting 30 years—then he will be too old. Opportunity knocks once—and it's knocking right now. Don't put off until later what you can do right now.*

*Gosh! When I think of it on the 28th – I'll be 20 years old. I'm getting old I can feel it*

*because my bones are beginning to crack! A good part of my life is gone, and what will I have accomplished? I can answer that in one word - nothing. I have one foot in the grave already! And you my dear are in the prime of life - when you're as old as I am you'll understand – Ha ha.  
Love to you all –*

*Camille Henriette*

**December 5, 1938**

*Mariette - Yesterday, Madame had guests in for lunch and one woman was Madame Malvalle, who's husband has some governmental position and she told us the inside dope about the Munich conference. They are very friendly with the Daladiers, so it came direct. It seems that Daladier was late, so when he came into the room he faced Chamberlain who was dressed horribly. His suit looked as if he had slept in it for weeks. Hitler was dressed very well in a dark suit with a light coat. Mussolini who is short and fat had his Fascist suit on with eagles all over it. During the entire conference Hitler didn't say one thing, except at intervals he would get up and burst forth "my people, my people!" Then he would sit down again! A real maniac! That is absolutely all he said. When it was over, he shook hands and said "I am very glad to meet you. Sometimes, I'd like to see Paris, because I never have." When Daladier came back and he spoke to the members of his cabinet he said "I couldn't very well ask him to fly back to Paris with me."*

*Don't worry about Mussolini. He has his hands tied behind his back. If he does anything contrary to what the king wants the king will abdicate in favor of his son and the son and Mussolini are like water and fire. Personally, I don't think there will be a war yet. However, I do think that it's inevitable but not for the present. I must say that there is enough war propaganda around to start a world conflict.*

**December 8, 1938**

*Mariette - I suppose you read in the papers that von Ribbentrop had come to Paris to sign the Franco – German pack. Well I have never seen as many police in my entire life. They were four rows of them lined on the side of the street where he was supposed to pass in a car. The hotel where he stayed was just surrounded with men, they were so afraid that someone would try to assassinate him. It would've been horrible if somebody had. I wonder what would've happened then. I get the Paris Herald Tribune practically every day to keep me "au courant" of what is happening in the world. I just don't get anything out of these French newspapers. There sure is a loophole in that pack that they signed. I knew it couldn't be the real McCoy.*



**December 15, 1938**

Mariette - Last Saturday I went to a football game. The Fordham team and the all stars from the good old USA were in Paris giving an exhibition game so Ann and I went. These dumb French didn't know what it was all about. They didn't understand the first thing about it when the players got into a huddle they wanted to know what they were doing there. So we told them they were talking about their girlfriends! We told them that because they made us so mad by saying it was an easy game and that only sissies played it. All the Americans in Paris were at the game. There were groups of Americans who wanted to get together and shout "we want a touch down or hold that line or block that kick". It was wonderful. I've never had as much fun since I came to France. It was like a reunion seeing all the Americans there.

**December 29, 1938 – Time Magazine names Adolf Hiter “Man of the Year.”**

**December 30, 1938 Villars, Switzerland**

Mariette - What is this business about Germany in the USA. From reports here and there I gather that the relationship between the two countries is none too good. I haven't seen the New York Times for about three weeks so I wondered if Daddy could cut me out some editorials – Walter Lipmann, and send them to me to give me an idea of what is going on. Do you think anything will come of it? I hope that nothing will happen over here but we never can tell, because we sure are sitting on a keg of dynamite and when it explodes I don't want to be anywhere near it. Rumor has it though that nothing will happen until 1940.

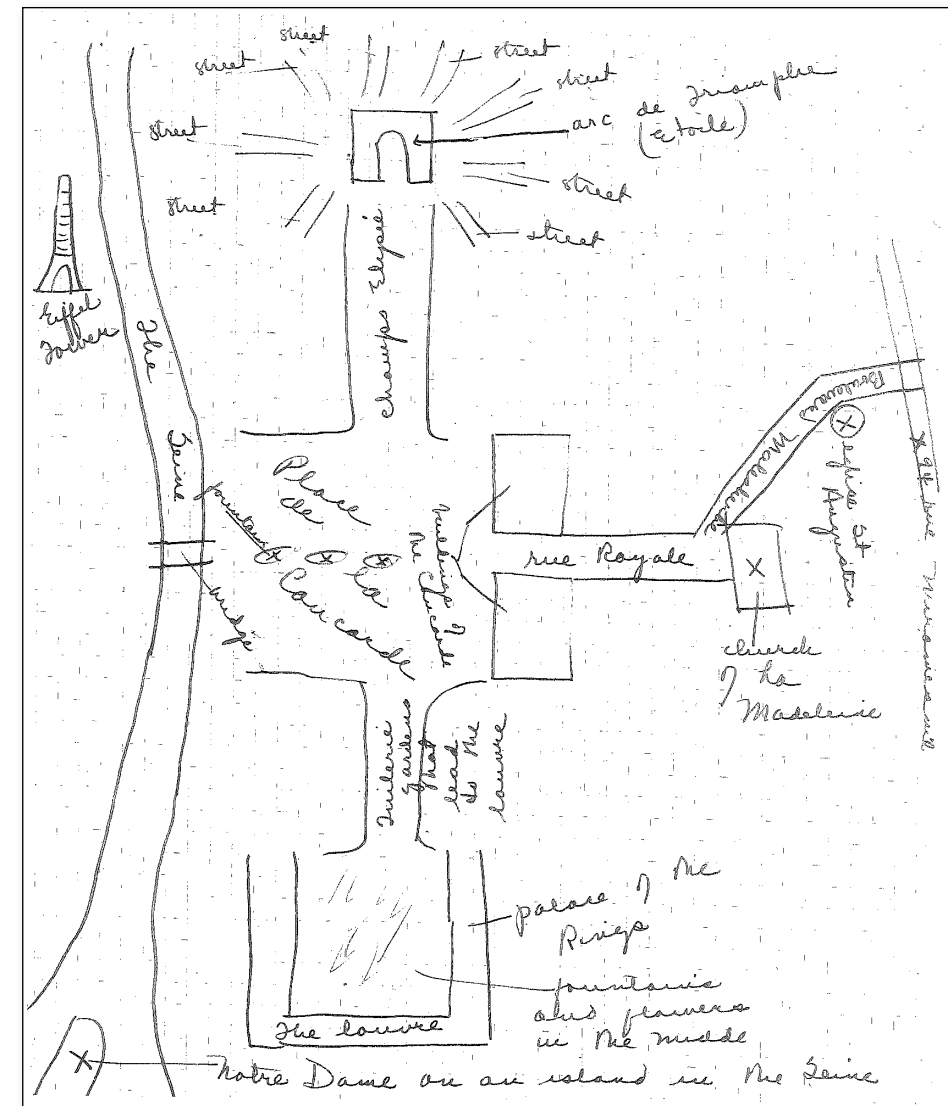
**New Year's Day - 1939**

Mariette - Last night we celebrated at the hotel and it was such fun. First we had dinner at 8 o'clock, then dancing started at 9 o'clock. At 12 o'clock we had midnight supper and the orchestra played all of the national hymns. After supper they started to dance again and danced until 6 o'clock in the morning. Everyone stayed up all night nobody wanted to go to bed.

**January 7, 1939**

Mariette - My dear, I will now explain to you about the Champs Elysee. It isn't a park. It's really the main street of Paris, we call it the "main drag". I will try to draw you a diagram. The Arc de Triomphe which is in the center of Paris is everything. It is also called L'Etoile. The Champs Elysee starts from L'Etoile and goes to the Place de la Concorde.

I don't know whether or not you can follow this diagram but if it doesn't make sense let me know and I'll try to explain it a little better.



**January 17, 1938**

Mariette - Yes my dear, I heard from Pierre for Christmas. He sent me a card and had written poetry on it.

**February 13, 1939**

Mariette - I will be home July 10. I have made reservations on the Normandie that leaves on July 5, I have gotten myself a first-class cabin for the price of second class. Smart work don't you think? I got chummy with the manager of the French line and asked him if I couldn't have an interchangeable cabin and he said he would tell me by March 1.

**March 6, 1939**

*Clairelouise - Mlle. Bougoin will tell us more next week about our trip to Italy. It seems that a few weeks ago they were very difficult with Americans trying to get into Italy. It seems that they are mad at Mrs. Roosevelt for something or another I hope everything is OK because I want to go so badly.*

**March 16, 1939**

*Clairelouise - Madame Baudry seems to think that Hitler will concentrate on the eastern part of Europe for the present and that in six months he'll go into Switzerland as he has already said. Hitler going into Switzerland would never be tolerated and that would cause another world war. For my part I know that I'll never forget this year being in the midst of this has been very exciting and lots of fun because you see everything and get red-handed news about everything. What is the public opinion around home?*

*You know it makes me so furious to think that we only have 3 1/2 months to go and Adolf isn't behaving himself. If anything broke we wouldn't be able to stay in Paris and that would mean I wouldn't get my diploma and I want it so badly.*

**March 23, 1939**

*Mariette - I am so mad at this point I could blow a fuse. We had a meeting this morning with Bourgoïn pants and she will not let us out of France for spring vacation. I had all these wonderful plans for Italy and now she won't let us go. She says there might be war and they will close up the frontier, but I'm sure they'd let the foreigners through because after all they don't want them on their hands. She went to see Bullet, the American ambassador, and if they were ever two alarmists in the world it's Bourgoïn and Bullet.*

**March 28, 1939 – Spanish Civil War ends, Madrid falls to Franco who executes 100,000+ opponents.**

**March 29, 1939**

*Mariette - Now that I am able to go to Italy I will tell you that I'll be in Turin, Genoa, Pisa, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Ile of Capri, Florence, Venice, Milan, the Lake District, the Lido Beach, Stressa and all for about \$50.*

**April 6, 1939 – Great Britain and Poland sign military pact.**

**May 4, 1939**

*Clairelouise - I was shocked to hear that you'd forgotten what I look like. My dear, how could you, when I have such a lovely, sweet, considerate, intelligent, beautiful and wholesome face. Just look at my picture in the living room and there I am with my sophisticated air.*

**May 7, 1939 – German and Italy form “Rome-Berlin Axis.”**

**May 14, 1939**

*Mother - As for buying clothes in Paris I didn't buy anything because they are too expensive. However I will buy myself some sort of an ensemble to get off the boat. I want something very chic. I wish you were here to see the styles.*

*I think it's perfectly silly that Mr. Daval doesn't come. Really there are millions of tourists in Paris now and if there was any scare certainly nobody would leave home. You must talk him into coming. He's being silly about it all. Hitler won't do anything. He can't move. He has his back against a brick wall. Good God, look at me, I've been here all this silly situation and I'm still alive. He doesn't have to go to Italy or Germany if he doesn't want to. Every other place is safe. Tell him I insist on his coming. He can come in full confidence in my judgment – nothing will happen in the two weeks he's here. If people thought that we were on the verge of a war they wouldn't be coming over and every boat that comes in is full.*

**May 18, 1939**

*Mariette - I have enclosed a clipping which you can show Mr. Daval. Really if so many Americans are over here they don't think that there will be a war. You can see that I'm not making it up. You can see it for yourself in black-and-white.*

**May 22, 1939**

*Clairelouise - Yesterday I went out to the races at Longchamps. I played the horses and won two races out of four and came out five francs in the hole. It was a real fashion show, all the women were in their Lanvin and Patou models. Right in back of us was Schiaparelli and she was dressed fit to kill as you can well imagine.*

**May 28, 1939**

*Mariette - Here I am down visiting the Châteaux of the Loire. I bought you and Clairelouise each a pendant to wear on a chain. It's a little book that locks and when you open it there's a picture of*

*a château on each page. I think it looks very chic when you wear it with a sweater and one thing is that nobody will be able to copy you because the only place you can get them is here.*

*I am having myself made a blue flannel suit. It's pale blue with a pleated skirt and a tailored jacket. They are wearing a lot of that in Paris just now. I bought myself a divine white chiffon evening gown. It's a Lucian Lelong model and it's plenty smooth - wait until you see it on me.*

**July 5, 1939 – Camille with her father Donat sail on the Normandy for New York.**

**September 1, 1939 – At 4:40 A.M., Germany invades Poland.**

**September 3, 1939 – England declares war on Germany.**



*Donat made the papers with the receipt of Camille's letter from France among the first-ever air mail in the United States.*

## BILL AT ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

Embedded in the immigrant story is the belief, bordering on dogma, in the liberating power of education for their children as the foundation to assure a better life than they themselves had. Never was that more evident than with Bill Aubuchon Sr. who did not go past the 5th grade. In the depths of the Depression, Bill Sr. sent his three oldest children to Assumption College (Bill Jr.), to Middlebury (Denise), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (Maurice). His son Bill Jr., would often recount his father telling him “Billy, I want you to live better than I have.”

It was a given that growing up in a home with deep French roots, Bill would go to school with a firm French orientation. In 1930, when he entered Assumption Preparatory School, Bill began what would be a lifelong “love affair” with Assumption, and the Assumptionist priests. He commented frequently that he had received the “best education possible in the United States for the amazing cost of \$2,400 total, for all 8 years, including tuition, room, board and medical expenses.” For some students even \$300/year was too much money to raise, and part of the folklore of the college was the often repeated story of the Cyr boys from northern Maine who paid their tuition in potatoes.<sup>1</sup>



*Assumption Preparatory School and College at the time Bill attended.*

Founded by the ‘Augustinians of the Assumption,’ the Prep School and College were established to provide an education to French-speaking men of the river towns of New England. For the first 50 years of its existence, classes were taught by French and Belgian priests. With a bilingual curriculum, it followed the French baccalaureate structure with the four years of the Prep called sequentially Elements, Syntax, Methode and Versification, and the four years of college—Belles Lettres, Rhetorique, Philosophie 1 and Philosophie 2. In his discussion of his remarkable education, he would say that it was not only the quality of the courses, but the clarity and logical sequence in the curriculum emphasizing the classics, religious education, philosophy, the natural sciences, mathematics, literature and history.<sup>2</sup> Bill’s class (1938) was the first one to defend their senior year’s thesis in French, as opposed to the Latin that has been required of all previous classes.

Bill was incredibly organized and disciplined, traits undoubtedly traced, in part, to his Assumption experience. He commented often on the importance of the bell, which regulated the flow and pace of life at Assumption. “The bell gave a sense of order; it reminded one that certain activities must end and others must begin; it implemented a sense of discipline. There were times to play, to pray, to study, to eat, to sleep etc.” Many alumni have remarked how much this discipline paid off in professional schools, in the military as well as their daily personal and professional lives.<sup>3</sup>

Bill was a serious student who did well academically. He was an outstanding basketball player in high school, and in college at the end of 1936 he stood #13 on the list of the top scorers in New England college basketball.<sup>4</sup> There were 11 graduates in the class of 1938, including three doctors, three lawyers, two business men and a judge. Bill served as the long-time treasurer of his class. He used an analogy to sum up his education: “It is not enough to have top quality cloth if the thread used to sew the pieces together is inferior. The thread used at Assumption was of superior quality used by master tailors to make an educational suit of quality material and style that would last.”<sup>5</sup>

Bill III graduated from Assumption Prep School in 1962, and several of Bill Jr’s nieces and nephews graduated from Assumption College. His daughter Laure has been a member of the Board of Trustees since 1999 and has always said that she has “her father’s seat” on the board. Bill was a long-standing trustee and first lay chairman of the Board of Trustees of the College.

Bill Sr. was always proud of his Franco-American heritage and rightly saw Assumption College as the embodiment of that tradition. For a man who never finished 5th grade, he was passionate about education. He also “walked the talk” with his financial support. During the war he wrote to Bill Jr. about a project he was proud to be part of to benefit the College.

Letter re Assumption College Campaign sent to his son, Bill Jr., in Australia dated February 22, 1945

*Dear Billy,*

*Assumption College is launching a big drive for \$250,000. Andre Gelinas and Paul are co-chairman for Fitchburg. I have taken a lot of personal interest in it and have obtained good size donations from different people. I am sold 100% on that drive, we cannot look to other ethnic groups for the support of the college it is our job, our duty. I have found Franco-Americans very responsive when the cause was explained to them around a noble cause - “Assumption College”, maker of priests, maker of professional men who go out in the world to bring prestige to our own ethnic group. We are what we are, Catholics and Franco-Americans and nobody can change that. It is all those different groups that make up that grand country of ours. We had a meeting of about 40 people in the Eagles Hall, Father Martel was present also Father Pelletier and enthusiasm ran high. I started the ball rolling by pledging \$100 each from my younger children, \$250 from you, I know how you feel about this matter, \$1,000 from the company, \$500 from your mother, \$100 from Standard Sash. Father Martel was all smiles. Some had come to the meeting having in mind giving \$10 to \$20 but that took the wind out of their sails. But they were good sports and fell in line. We had a quota of \$10,000 for Fitchburg and hope to make it. We will go house to house canvassing if we have to.*

*Your loving Dad*

1 Personal observations of William E. Aubuchon Jr., Conference of the Legacy of Assumption College, July 7, 1989, Assumption Archives.

2 William E. Aubuchon Jr., July 7, 1989, Assumption Archives.

3 Personal observations of William E. Aubuchon Jr., Conference of the Legacy of Assumption College, July 7, 1989, Assumption Archives.

4 “Lowman of Harvard Now Leading Scorer,” Boston Globe, December 15, 1936 (Boston Globe On-Line)

5 Personal observations of William E. Aubuchon Jr., Conference of the Legacy of Assumption College, July 7, 1989, Assumption Archives.