



CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF BOOKS

On May 20, 1920, the American Library in Paris was founded. To celebrate our 75th anniversary, we've chosen to devote this newsletter to sharing some of the wonderful photographs that tell our story in picture form.

OVER THERE. The Library's origins go back to World War I when the American Library Association created the Library War Service to provide books and magazines to American soldiers stationed at camps throughout France.

The project was a huge success, but with peace came questions about what to do with the books. Soon, however, it became clear that a demand for English-language books and magazines existed and dozens of individuals and organizations pledged their support. Instrumental in the Library's initial years were Charles Seeger, father of the poet Alan Seeger and grandfather of singer-songwriter Pete Seeger, and the American Library Association,

which passed on books, furniture and equipment and made a generous grant Library of \$25,000.

A PALACE FOR A HOME. According to Burton Stevenson, head of the Library War Service and then Director of the American Library in Paris from 1925 to 1930, the Library's first home was a truly extraordinary one. "To call the interior ornate is far from doing it justice. Great gilt mirrors rose to the ceilings above carved marble mantles; gilt cornices encircled every room, with angels and cherubs sitting on them or hanging over the edge; the walls were tapestried in silk and satin and velvet; the floors were of inlaid parquetry,

and a beautiful carving marble staircase rose from the ground floor to that above." The building, at 10, rue de l'Elysée, had been the residence of the Papal Nuncio. According to myth, a subterranean passage existed that linked the building to the Elysée Palace, but Stevenson and his colleagues "never found any trace of it and finally concluded that it had never existed except in popular imagination."



At the Library War Service Dispatch Office in Hoboken, New Jersey, two soldiers catch up on their reading.



Some patrons enjoy the materials and surroundings in the Library's first home at 10, rue de l'Elysée.

HARD TIMES, BUT... As was to be expected, the Depression hit the Library hard. But by the 1930s, the Library was “on the map” in literary circles and succeeded in drawing established writers and artists for its Sunday Afternoon Lectures. In our archives, we have a copy of the program from the 1933-34 season. While not every name on it is familiar to us today, those that are certainly do stand out. For example, Ford Madox Ford, Gertrude Stein, Louis Bromfield and Glenway Wescott spoke on successive Sundays on “The Book I Am Writing.” They were followed by André Maurois (“Young Authors I Have Known”), Léon Daudet (“Recollections of Henry James, George Meredith and Oscar Wilde”), Colette (“The Soul of Animals”) and Princess Bonaparte (“Edgar Allen Poe”). The last part of the series was given over to “American Artists and Sculptors” speaking on “The Trend in Fine Arts.”

her leadership, the Library enjoyed a turnaround. New donations boosted the budget to record levels, and the collection grew to an impressive 100,000 volumes by 1940.



Christmas in the Children's Room on the rue de l'Elysée circa 1930.

But most of all, Reeder's tenure was marked by her leadership in the face of the horrifying new world war. On September 3, 1939, the Library resumed the mandate that it held as an overseas ALA branch during World War I – to serve men in battle by providing books and periodicals to the front lines and, when possible, even to prison camps.

Between the start of the War and June, 1940, more than 100,000 books were shipped out to British and French soldiers under the auspices of the Soldiers Service. Meanwhile, in Paris, Reeder and her staff prepared for the worst – a possible Nazi occupation. The Library became an emotional, as well as an intellectual refuge.

THE WAR YEARS. “Nine rue de Téhéran was not only a library in those days, it was a rendezvous for all doing charitable work, for friends to meet and discuss the prevailing



The circulation desk in 1938.

situation, and for others to tell you of their loved ones from home,” said Reeder in 1941.

RESISTANCE. During the Occupation, the staff mounted its own resistance campaign by delivering books to Jewish members who had been forbidden by the Nazis to use libraries.

Still, the War took its toll. One staffer was shot by the Gestapo when he failed to raise his hands quickly during a surprise inspection. Eventually, most of the staff fled Paris, hours were



Dorothy Reeder, 1939.

cut back, and even Reeder was forced to return home once the United States entered the War.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES. German forces surely would have closed the Library if not for Countess Clara de Chambrun, a Cincinnati native and sister of Nicholas Longworth, former Speaker of the House of Representatives. A Shakespeare scholar, she oversaw the Library after Reeder's departure. She was also the mother-in-law of Josée Laval – whose father was Pierre Laval, a leader in the Vichy government.

The Countess later conceded that family connections not only helped to keep the Library open, but also saved the life of a young woman who was related to a Library secretary and who was condemned to death by the Germans on the false charge that she was a spy.

A NEW ERA BEGINS. As it had after the First World War, the American Library in Paris began to thrive in the years following V-E Day, thanks in large part to a growing international fascination with American culture.



The Catalog Room, 1945.

BRANCHING OUT. With the help of the European Cooperation Administration and the U.S. Information Agency, branch libraries were launched at Roubaix, Rennes, Nantes, Toulouse, Montpellier, Grenoble and Saint-Etienne.

In 1953, the Library moved again: to a mansion at 129, avenue des Champs-Élysées. As the world returned to a new kind of “normalcy,” the Library proved once again to be a literary mecca, adding Henry Miller, Richard Wright and André Gide to our heritage of friends.

Briefly, the Library was also embroiled in one of the most notorious episodes of the 1950s. In 1953, Roy Cohn and David Schine, two of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's key point men in his crusade against communism, made a visit to the Library in search of anti-American works. They were shown the door by then-Director



The Countess de Chambrun (right) helps select books for the Soldiers Service shipments.

Dr. Ian Forbes Fraser, who explained that the Library was not subject to governmental oversight.

STAY TUNED. We'll share more about our history in the coming months and we'll be talking about our plans to meet your needs, which include expanding the reading room and Children's Room, and adding more information services. As you may have noticed, our membership is growing. That growth necessarily means an increased demand for services. Our goal is to meet those needs and ensure the Library's place in the lives of our members into the 21st century.



The staff moves into 9, rue de Téhéran.

By 1935, the bitter reality of the Depression was inescapable. The budget for the Library hit an all-time low: 9,912 francs. Staff members were let go and those who stayed on received less pay. Library hours were cut back as well.

ON THE MOVE. Then, in 1936, the Library was evicted from its beautiful home at 10, rue de l'Elysée on “brutally short notice.” Fortunately, new quarters were found at 9, rue Téhéran. The new building, although not as sumptuous as the original, was still very nice. A diplomat's home, it offered a courtyard and garden for the enjoyment of staff and patrons. The move was accomplished in time for a public reception on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1936.

A NEW DIRECTOR SAVES THE DAY. Although the worst of the 1930s was yet to come, the Library did have one great stroke of luck during those years. In 1937, staff member Dorothy Reeder was named Director. Under

BULLETIN BOARD

* **JULIAN MORE**, author of *Views From a French Farmhouse*, *A Taste of Provence* and *Impressions of the Seine*, will talk about a "Kind of Living in France" on **Wednesday, May 17 at 8:00 PM**. Before turning to travel writing, Mr. More also wrote the international hit *musical Irma La Douce*.

* **OPEN HOUSE & BOOK SALE**, **Sunday, May 21**. In honor of our 75th anniversary, all books – hardbacks as well as paperbacks – will be offered at 7.50FF! The doors will open at Noon for members (1:00 for non-members). But, to get in early, you **MUST show your ALP membership card**. Sorry **NO exceptions**.

* **LE PRIX COINDREAU**, awarded to the best translation into French of a work of American literature, will be presented at the Library on **Tuesday, May 23, at 7:30**. This evening is made possible with the support of the Cultural Services of the American Embassy in France.

* **PHAROS**, a new journal of poetry and prose, will mark the publication of its second issue **Wednesday, June 14 at 8:00 PM**. Writers

included in the first two issues will read from and discuss their work.

* **CULINARY COLLECTION CELEBRATION**, June 8, at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to France. The Library will host a benefit to celebrate the inauguration of the Gregory Usher Collection.

* **75th ANNIVERSARY GALA**, October 26, at the Château de Versailles. The guest speaker will be Dr. Paul LeClerc, Director of the New York Public Library.

For further information about these two events call 45.51.76.84.

* **SUMMER**

HOURS will be as follows: June and July – 10:00 AM - 7:00 PM, Tuesday through Saturday (normal hours). August – Noon - 6:00 PM Tuesday through Friday, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM. The Library will be closed on Friday, July 14 and Tuesday, August 15.

CELEBRATE 75 YEARS OF BOOKS

THE 1995 OPEN HOUSE & BOOK SALE OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY IN PARIS

**SUNDAY, MAY 21
1 - 5:30 PM***

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE HARDBACKS & PAPERBACKS INCLUDING...

CONTEMPORARY FICTION, MYSTERIES, ESPIONAGE, HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY, POLITICS, SCIENCE, REFERENCE BOOKS, TRAVEL, SELF-HELP, HEALTH & FITNESS, HOW-TO, SPORTS, BUSINESS

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* NOON - 1:00 ALP MEMBERS ONLY (MUST SHOW ALP CARD)

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ALL BOOKS 7.5FF

IN HONOR OF OUR 75TH ANNIVERSARY



THE AMERICAN LIBRARY IN PARIS

1920 - 1995



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75007 PARIS