

U.S. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS VISIT FRANCE

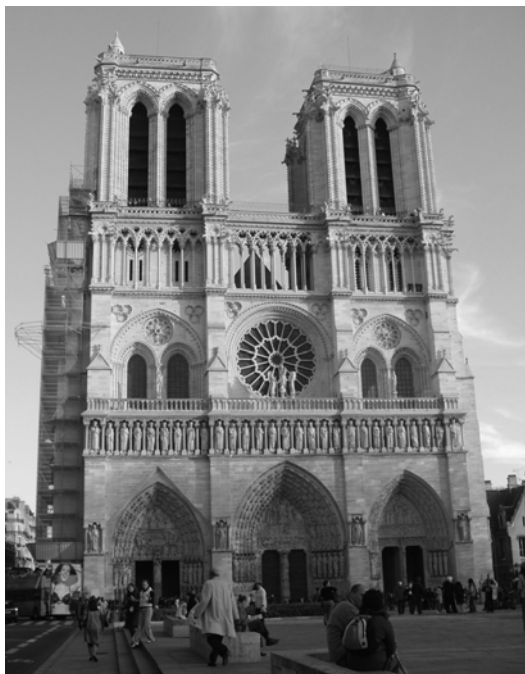
A group of ten American school administrators with responsibilities for foreign language programs arrived in Paris on November 8, 2005 as part of the French Embassy/*Washington Post*/AATF Fellowship Program. Participants included Cara Churchich-Riggs, Principal, Beveridge Magnet School for Arts and Global Studies, Omaha, NE (nominated by AATF member Emily Kaminski); Susan Flora, Principal, Cesar Chavez Public Charter School for Public Policy (DC); Fletcher James III, Principal, Central High School, Prince Georges County, MD; Thomas Leonard, Principal and Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, Barrington, IL (nominated by AATF member Judy Mascolino); Joyce Morgan Young, Assistant Superintendent, Auburn Schools, AL (nominated by AATF member Samia Spencer); Kirsten Rhodes, Director of Montgomery County, MD Council of PTAs FLES Programs; Sally Schwartz, Director of International Programs for Washington, DC Schools; Amy Ternois, ESL & Foreign Language Coordinator, Fauquier County Public Schools, VA; Frank Vetter, Principal, Frederick County Public Schools, MD; John Wollersheim, Acting Principal, Rosemount High School, MN (nominated by AATF member LaRae Ellingson). The group was accompanied by Carrie Morse of the *Washington Post*. Although none of us knew it, we were in for a whirlwind eight days of meetings, school visits, cultural activities, and, because this was France, fine dining.

The first group arrived at 6:30 a.m., and by 11:00 a.m. everyone was there. I met them in the lobby of the Sofitel Rive Gauche. Since rooms would not be ready until mid-afternoon, piles of luggage were checked, and we headed for the FIAP Jean Monnet, a block away, where we had coffee and croissants and discussed the program itinerary with Michel Girardin, AATF Honorary Member, Assistant Director of the FIAP, and Coordinator of the Paris portion of the visit. Before lunch at the FIAP, we went on a brief walking tour of nearby shopping, banks, and other facilities.

After a superb lunch and after checking into our rooms at the Sofitel, I suggested an outing to Notre Dame in an effort to keep everyone awake. Since it was sunny, we also wanted to take advantage of the good weather in case there was rain later on. Although the air was brisk, we enjoyed strolling through the cathedral, spending time people watching on the *parvis*, and browsing through the stands of the nearby *bouquinistes*.

In the evening, we were guests of the

FIAP at a Breton-themed evening with traditional music and typical dishes accompanied by cider. Also present were groups of American, German, and Swedish students. The administrators got their first taste of multilingual Europe as one after another my German and Swedish colleagues and I



Notre-Dame de Paris

translated Michel's French remarks into our respective languages. When at last, the group could no longer keep their eyes open, we returned to the hotel for a good night's sleep before our round of visits.

On Wednesday, we began our initiation into the French educational system with a visit to the *Ministère des Affaires étrangères* where we were received by Sophie Lovy, *Sous-directrice du français*, and her colleagues, Carine Remik-Adim and Irène Kirsch, *Chef de bureau des nouveaux publics pour le français*. After clearing security, we were joined by Chantal Manès, formerly at the French Embassy in Washington, now *Inspectrice d'anglais* in the *Académie d'Amiens* and AATF Honorary member, who accompanied us for a two-hour meeting with this team whose responsibilities include overseeing language policy for French abroad. We returned to the FIAP for lunch before proceeding in the afternoon to the *Ministère de l'Éducation*. Marc Rolland, *Sous-direction des Affaires internationales, Bureau Amérique*, and Frédéric Bellido provided an overview of the French educational system and, specifically, the importance accorded to the teaching of foreign languages from the primary level on.

On Thursday, our driver Christian and the bus were waiting to take us on the one-hour ride to the *Lycée international de*

Sèvres. Given the hillside site of the school and the typical winding, narrow streets, we descended from the bus at the nearest corner and walked the rest of the way, following the students on their way to class. We were received by Susie Martias-Dorville, *provisseure adjointe*, and several of the English teachers who took us to in pairs to observe classes. Following the classroom visits, we met again with Mme Martias-Dorville, and Christophe Macé, another *Provisseur adjoint*, and some of the English teachers. Although the *Lycée de Sèvres* is a public high school, the international section is privately run. The international section classes are taught in English, often by native-English-speaking teachers, and many of the students have an English-speaking parent or parents or have spent significant time in an English-speaking country. In addition to the international section, they also take the regular high school curriculum leading to the *baccalauréat*.

Because of its close proximity almost directly downhill from the school, we decided to walk to our next appointment at the *Centre international d'études pédagogiques (CIEP)*. After a brief photo op outside the *lycée*, we crossed the street and walked down the long stairway leading to the main street below and the remaining few hundred yards to the CIEP. We were greeted by Myriam Leroux who was our guide for the day. Because of the time, the first order of business was lunch in the CIEP restaurant. Then we were treated to a tour of the historic building. Initially built in 1756 on the instigation of Mme de Pompadour as a royal ceramics factory



Stairway in Sèvres

on the outskirts of Paris, it became in 1881 a normal school for women. In 1880 secondary education was opened to women, and this necessitated training more women teachers for these new pupils. Among the many famous teachers at this school was Marie Curie who taught physics and chemistry. Since 1945, it has housed the CIEP which organizes seminars and training institutes, and there are a number of guest rooms on the upper floor where participants can stay. Roger Pilhion, Director, and Gilles Castro, Claire Teninges, François Girardeau, Gilles Breton, and Jacqueline Demarty-Warzée, gave brief presentations on the various activities of the CIEP.

Friday was November 11 and a public holiday in France as it is in the U.S. We left the hotel at mid-morning for the *Centre Pompidou*. Fortunately, our VIP group status allowed us to by-pass the huge lines waiting to enter on this holiday, albeit under gray skies. We checked our coats and met our guide who led us up the escalators as we oohed and aahed at the view of Paris. Our guide provided us with a fascinating tour of the Dada Exhibit. (Note: the exhibit, in a slightly modified version, will subsequently be in Washington, DC, Feb. 19-May 14, 2006, and New York, June 16-Sept. 11, 2006). The visit left us ready to enjoy lunch Chez Georges on the top floor of the *Centre*.

After an excellent lunch, we were joined by another guide who led us on a tour of some of the rest of the museum's treasures. As is to be expected with modern art, we were not all equally enthralled by the various works. However, as Americans, we were intrigued to learn about the Spiral Jetty which none of us had heard of and which was featured in a video presentation. This work by Robert Smithson, constructed in 1970 using local rocks and earth, is a 1500-foot-long coil extending into the Great Salt Lake in Utah (for more information, visit [www.spiraljetty.org]). After going our separate ways to visit more of the museum or to browse the gift shop, we met again to board the bus for the short ride to the Galeries Lafayette. We arrived just at dusk and were given a quick tour of the immense store, accomplished despite nearly wall-to-wall shoppers, and which included a visit to the rooftop lookout from which we could see the *Opéra*. As we left the store, we were treated to the sight of the Christmas lights which had just been turned on.

The effects of lunch at Chez Georges had still not worn off, so we had dinner in a small *crêperie* in the Latin Quarter, *La Cour aux crêpes*. The crêpes were delicious, and we were all regaled with the stories of the Nassif brothers who ran the place and their tales of human jumping, three broth-

ers performing at horse shows by jumping the same course as the horses. From that humorous interlude, we headed for the nearby St. Julien le Pauvre Church, the oldest church in Paris, built in 1170 on a site used since the 6th century. The concert, "Les Plus Beau Ave Maria," performed by soprano Edwige Bourdy, was incredibly moving. A foot-tapping version of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" made us feel at home.

Saturday was a free day, and all the participants had plans to head off to visit various parts of Paris. One group even went to Versailles for the day, although they generated some interest by eating their sandwiches on the terrace, despite the November weather, in order not to miss any of the experience or view. We all met in the evening at the *Théâtre Mogador* for a performance by illusionist Dani Lary. Front row seats gave us an excellent vantage point to try and figure out the tricks, and even those in the group who spoke no French could follow the show.

Early Sunday morning, we were met by our driver José and loaded our many pounds of luggage onto the bus for the trip to Amiens. We had time to check into our hotel and have a quick *café* before heading to the magnificent Amiens cathedral for a guided tour. Having just recently visited *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the immensity of *Notre-Dame d'Amiens* was immediately evident. As our guide pointed out, the towers of *Notre-Dame de Paris* would fit inside. The tour was accompanied by the sun which shone through the clouds just as we left the bus. Our guide made the sculptures and history of the building come alive. He mentioned at the beginning of our tour something that became obvious before we had finished: there are no services held there from November through April because of the cold!

From the cathedral, we got on the *autoroute* and headed for the *Baie de Somme* and the charming village of St. Valéry. Our lunch was scheduled at *L'Usage du monde*, a bed and breakfast and art gallery. Artists can come and live and paint in a nearby dormitory and studio, and their works and works of others are accepted for exhibit in the house. A lengthy and delicious lunch allowed us to discover many local specialities, like *salicornes*, and learn about both the gallery and the town from the owner,



Amiens Cathedral: Signs of the Zodiac (l. to r.) Virgo, Libra, Sagittarius, and Scorpio.

Anne Mancaux. We managed to take a brief stroll through St. Valéry before nightfall, walking on the *quais* along the Somme River, learning about the history of the area and events of the World Wars which were played out there. Two of our group could not resist dipping their

feet in the Somme in spite of the wind and cold.

We couldn't linger long, however, because a *dîner gastronomique* awaited us at *La Clé des Champs*. Although we eliminated two courses and the *trou normand*, it was still a momentous experience. All of the participants, even those who had never visited France, threw themselves wholeheartedly into the culinary aspect of French culture. No one had trouble falling asleep that night after a long day, two outstanding meals, and the rest of the day spent in the cold, early winter air.

The sightseeing was over, and the professional work took up where it had left off. Much of our time in Amiens was devoted to visiting schools and meeting teachers. We began with a visit to the *Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres (IUFM)*. We were greeted by Christine Campoli, *Directrice adjointe*, responsible for training elementary school teachers. She explained how the Ministry of Education is dealing with the requirement it has instituted to teach languages in elementary schools by providing special certification for primary school teachers and by using English-speaking assistants, for example. English and German are the languages taught in elementary schools in the *Académie d'Amiens*.

We then headed for the *Lycée La Hotoie* which has a European section emphasizing languages. Before we visited classes, Principal Dominique Bif talked to the group, composed mainly of principals, about being a principal in France. The differences in the two systems fascinated both parties and led to many interesting exchanges.

The Vice-President of the *Conseil régional*, Michèle Cahu, hosted us for lunch. As the participants had already learned, a French "cafeteria" has nothing to do with its American counterpart. Three or four courses, *apéritif*, wine, and *café* were *de rigueur* everywhere. And, of course, no twenty-minute lunches for us! Mme Cahu explained the structure of the *Conseil* and its role in education as well as several of the international programs in which the *Conseil* is involved. The discussion was so interesting that we all wanted it to con-



Recess at the Collège Auguste Janvier in Amiens

tinue, and she joined the group for dinner later that evening.

In the afternoon, we split up between a middle school and an elementary school and were able to visit beginning English classes as well as French classes for immigrant children. The *français langue étrangère (FLE)* classes were not unlike ESL classes in the U.S., although the nationalities of the students were perhaps different (Moroccan, Algerian, Ivoirian, Romanian). Our presence in the courtyard during recess was particularly attractive to the middle school students who swarmed around begging to have their picture taken. We were able to enjoy a bit of free time before being received at the Amiens City Hall for a reception. We were warmly greeted by a number of city council representatives as well as the mayor, Brigitte Fouré.

Our last day in France was the longest, and no one wanted to miss a bit of it. We struggled down the tiny elevator with our voluminous luggage which filled the small lobby. José helped us load our things onto the bus, and we walked the block to the *Rectorat* where we had breakfast with *Madame le Recteur* Marie-Danièle Campion. As we had been during all our visits, we were surprised at the frankness with which officials were willing to discuss the current unrest in France. They shared their opinions and were interested in the experience that Americans had had in dealing with immigrant populations, sociological problems, and violence in the schools. From our breakfast meeting, we drove to the *Université Jules Verne* to meet with the dean and members of the English faculty to complete the picture of how all the pieces of language teaching in France fit together, from primary school through university.

Our last lunch in France was unique. It was prepared by the students at the *Lycée d'application Édouard Gand*. For those who

served us, it was the first meal they had served as part of their professional training. Both teams of students, those who cooked and those who served, came out and introduced themselves. Although simple, the meal was delicious and served as well as in any of the restaurants where we had

eaten. Although we would have liked to linger, we raced for the bus and headed for Paris. But not before saying a heartfelt goodbye to our hosts in Amiens, Philippe Simmonds and Véronique Chabaud, *Délégation académique aux Relations internationales et à la Coopération (DARIC)*, who had served as our unofficial tour guides and had quickly become our friends. By now, it was pouring rain, the only real rain we had had all week. As we neared Paris during weekday rush hour, it became obvious that we could not cross Paris to check in again at the Sofitel and make it back across the city to our next engagement at the American Embassy. Instead, we headed for the *Rue de Rivoli* where members of the group were able to do some last-minute shopping.

We were welcomed to the Embassy by Renée Earle, Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, Colombia Barrosse, Cultural Attachée, and Christiane Degueldre, Education Attachée. It was exciting to visit the historic rooms and to look out the window over the *Place de la Concorde* and see the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower in the background. From the Embassy, we boarded the bus and headed for the *quais*

de Seine. Our last event of the trip was a *dîner croisière*. The cruise was marred only by the rain streaming down the glass roof of the boat. The spotlights shining on the monuments of Paris--*Musée d'Orsay, Notre-Dame, Bibliothèque nationale, Conciergerie*, even the replica of the Statue of Liberty--never let us forget where we were. We were joined by Michel Girardin and his wife Paulette Foulem-Girardin (Paulette is the artist whose painting "Métis" was used as the emblem for the Quebec convention), Chantal Manès and her husband Jacques, Aurélien Lépine-Kouas formerly *Attaché culturel adjoint* in Atlanta, Christian Macé, Vice-principal from the *Lycée international de Sèvres*, Myriam Leroux from the CIEP, Irène Kirsch and Carine Remik-Adim from the *Ministère des Affaires étrangères*, and Marc Roussel and his wife from the *Académie d'Amiens*.

We finally reached the Sofitel well after midnight, checked in, and prepared to turn around and leave the next morning, at 6:30 a.m. for most of us. It had been an eventful, if exhausting, visit. All of the participants went home ardent Francophiles. Those who had never been to France termed it a life-changing experience. Those who were already Francophiles were even more fervent. All expressed a commitment to the teaching of French in their schools and, in addition, to working to ensure that language programs reached further down into the lower schools. This had been our goal from the beginning, and I believe it is a program that should be repeated.

Chantal Manès deserves special thanks. The initial idea was hers, and with her help, we found the necessary funding to bring it about with support from the *Washington Post*. She and Michel Girardin were instrumental in organizing the many visits and cultural activities.

Jayne Abrate
Executive Director



The U.S. Delegation and city council members at the Amiens City Hall. Center: Executive Director Jayne Abrate (L.) and Mayor Brigitte Fouré (R.)