

Paris 2011 Journal

Touring the Marais Thursday March 10 with Barbara Stickler.

Barbara Stickler and I were roommates at West Hall (no longer in existence) at Arizona State University in 1963. We have maintained a long-distance relationship over all these years via correspondence. It is impressive how good she is about maintaining long-term relationships with friends.

Barbara majored in history and over the 25 years she has lived in Paris, she has developed a remarkable knowledge about the history and architecture of Paris. There is a lot of history to know about it. Ernie suggested we invite her to spend time with us and give us a tour of the Marais, the quarter where our apartment is. It is on the Right bank of the Seine and we have spent most of our time in Paris on the Left bank where all the universities are.

She started by walking us west on rue de Montmorency (the name of a noble family that lived in the Marais) and pointing out the houses on this street. Then south on rue Beaubourg to the next street rue Michel le Comte. We looked through a doorway that has columns around the doorway. They are made of stone and were done in rectangular stone instead of round columns like the Greeks made. The effect is pleasing and tranquil. We peeped through keyholes to look into the courtyards behind huge doors.

We walked toward the Archives Nationale. On the side of the rue des Archives there are two medieval towers, which were not taken down but are incorporated into the outside wall of the Archives. In the photo you can see the towers behind the front of the building.



The cardboard cut outs of decorations show the type of decoration that would be present during celebration for the king like a wedding or party.



The Archives covers a large city block that was once the “hotel” of the Guise family. The Hotel de Soubise was built over the ruins of the Hotel de Guise. In French, Hotel is a word that means large house or mansion. That explained a lot to me since so many museums are housed in the “hotel de” something or other. There is another hotel in the enclosure. The 4 statues over the entry way represent Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

The Archives for all of France are housed in this location and take up 200 kilometers of shelves!

There was a special exhibition so we weren’t able to walk around and see the interior. This is a venue for concerts and we have one on our calendar for Wednesday March 16. That will give us a chance to see some of the interior.



The garden enclosed is lovely, as is the entryway that is made up of a curved colonnade. The same architect who made the beautiful grounds of a Salt mine in a French village Ernie and I visited several years ago built the Hotel Soubise.

We walked around and Barbara pointed out to us the Credit Municipaux, which is a bank that since medieval days has taken goods in exchange for cash for the people. Even today there are auctions for diamonds and gold.

Next door to it is a restaurant called Le Dome de Marais. It is housed in a domed room where the auctions were held. It is supposed to be very beautiful.

On this street, Fracs Bourgeois, is a building, quite ornate on the exterior where people with large debts they could not pay, could live. The term Fracs Bourgeois meant people who didn't have to pay taxes.

We turned a few corners and were in rue de Rosiers, which is the Jewish quarter. A lot of its inhabitants were deported and murdered during World War II. There is a synagogue there and several Jewish delis. They are closed on Saturdays but bustling on Sundays. We bought some pastries and Barbara was delighted to find a favorite pastry with poppy seeds.

There were decorative details on the some of the buildings made of mosaic or of enameled brick. The buildings on this street are only 2 stories, which gives it an intimate feel. Also the streets are very narrow and are mostly pedestrian.

We tromped around a bit more then settled down in a tiny creperie on rue de Rosiers for an early dinner of crepes and salad and hard cider or wine. Barbara then took leave and we found our way home.

I won't remember all the architects she named but by pointing out architectural details she opened our eyes to the buildings surrounding us. Usually as we walk along the narrow sidewalks, we are concentrating on avoiding dog doo and trying not to get pushed into traffic and don't bother to look up.