

History of The American Club of Paris - New York Club

War has dominated the history of the Paris American Club, just as it has dominated the history of Europe in which the club is rooted.

The precursors of both the American Club of Paris and the Paris American Club in New York, the Benjamin Franklin Sunday dinners in Paris, were established on a regular basis because of the American Revolution. The French Revolution interrupted and then prompted the resumption of the Paris Club dinners. World War II led directly to the formation in New York of the Paris American Club.

By the late 1930's the large American business and professional colony in Paris was an established and integrated part of Paris life. There was some coming and going, but most of its members had elected to live and work in France on at least a semi-permanent basis. Nazi aggression changed the pattern. As the Germans conquered Austria, obtained the Sudetenland after the Munich conference and signed a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, the prospects for Americans living in Europe grew increasingly dim. Then the invasion of Poland in September 1939, put out the last lamp of peace. Americans in Paris, reluctantly and sadly, began leaving for home.

All during the so-called phony war, from September 1939 to May 10, 1940, the American colony in Paris moved bag, baggage and hopes, back to the United States. Most of the members settled in New York, and all were curious as well as heartbroken about developments in Europe. In restaurants, on street corners, at private parties, whenever two Americans from Paris met in New York, they asked anxiously about their City of Light. Their weak hopes faded when, following the Dunkirk disaster (and miracle), the German divisions turned south toward Paris. Their fading hopes were extinguished when Paris fell on June 10, 1940.

Shortly afterward, a few Americans who had been Americans in Paris began meeting at the Brevoort Hotel in New York for lunch. Raymond Harper, an international lawyer who had practiced in Paris, was the moving spirit but he sent out no announcements and made no phone calls.

Neither did anyone else. By word of mouth the news got around. At first there were five or six for lunch, then 10 or 12, soon 25 or 30.

In late 1940 the Brevoort lunches became, without much fanfare, the Paris American Club of New York. Dues were kept reasonable; Raymond Harper was elected President and agreement was reached to meet for lunch on the first Thursday of each month. That was about it. No constitution or bylaws were adopted; no membership qualifications were stipulated.

The New York colony that had once been the American business and professional colony in Paris wanted to remain in touch with itself and with France. The Paris American Club of New York was organized solely to realize that simple goal.

As might be expected, some Paris American Club of New York members returned to Paris following its liberation and the end of World War II. Most did not, however, and the decision was reached to continue the club as a Franco-American institution of mutual regard and goodwill.

The locale of the monthly meetings was shifted in the early days from the Brevoort to the Railway Machinery Club for a time because of its convenience for members with downtown offices. Over the years, Paris American Club luncheons have been held at the Lawyers' Club, the old Ritz-Carlton Hotel, the Hotel Pierre, The St. Regis, the Parker Meridien, The Westbury, The Union Club, the Club at the World Trade Center ("Windows on the World"), the restaurants Le Regence in New York's Hotel Plaza Athénée, Daniel, Le Cirque and La Caravelle.

In the Fall of 1989, the France-America Society, established in 1911, merged with the Paris American Club.

Today, the Club's membership is about equally divided between American and French government, business, professional and private individuals in New York.