

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 6, 1959

Mary Greene In Paris

May we present Mary L. Greene again as our guest columnist today. Her letter from Paris is both entertaining and informative, giving descriptions and opinions worthy of reporting.

Mrs. Greene writes that she was delighted and surprised with Italy - the people so enterprising, tiny farms so beautifully kept, not an inch of space wasted, a tree planted in every available spot, in the vineyard the vines festooned from tree to tree with spaces between planted with tiny grainfields.

"The ride from Milan to Lucerne by train, was interesting all the way. We passed through Como, got a glimpse of Lake Como and passed through the mountains. The train followed a mountain stream that foamed white past us, with waterfalls and cascades tumbling down the mountainside across from us.

"I stayed three days in Lucerne and there I took a 4 1/2-hour motor trip on Lucerne Lake into the William Tell country, where we viewed wonderful but hazy scenery. I came to Paris two weeks ago and of course it was thrilling just, to be here. On July 14th I did not attend the celebration but took a boat-ride up the Seine instead. I have walked miles although I have a seven-day streetcar pass. I can ride any of the public transportation, auto, bus, or subway as much as I like so I that also. Last night a girl from Dallas and I went to a "Creperie", a Bretonne restaurant where their specialty is huge thin pancakes - at least 12 inches across - which I ate with butter and my friend with plum jam.

"The highlight so far though was the three-day auto bus trip I took through the Valley of the Loire where we went through ten chateaux, palaces of the kings, so beautifully surrounded most times with outstanding gardens, parks, lakes and moats. We spent two nights in Tours and saw fine cathedrals there with beautiful stained-glass windows. We visited the Abbey Fontevault where in the church are the tombs of English kings - Richard-the-Lion-Hearted - his wife, and Henry II with his wife. The abbey built in the XIth century was for the monks and nuns who cared for the lepers, etc. After the revolution it was turned into a prison and parts are still for prison. We could see prisoners staring at us through the bars.

"At Saumur the chateau has been given to the city as a museum and it is filled with treasures, one room of early Madonnas, another room has the finest porcelain collection in France, also furniture. As Saumur is famous for its trained horses (like the Spanish horses of Vienna) the castle has also a horse museum which is being redone but we saw most of it, saddles from all over the world. One entire wall with stirrups and the opposite wall with bits and spurs. One wing has natural history exhibits which I did not enter as I was told a two headed stuffed calf was among the exhibits.

"At the city hall we were received in person by the mayor in his office. It was a beautiful old, paneled room, with huge fireplace and before it was laid a long table with white cloth, a huge arrangement of white gladiola and hydrangea at each end with an orchid in full bloom. Down the length of the table in front of a double row of champagne glasses set in a border of asparagus fern and bright garden flowers. All the champagne one wished to drink, was served to the 33 persons in our group - it was a cozy time.

I did not miss a thing in the chateaux. I climbed all the towers and down into the dungeons, over drawbridges over the moats. I was thrilled with it all but a few of the softies played out the first day.

Sunday night about 15 of us drove out to the illuminations at Villandry. It is a very beautiful chateau surrounded by water and gardens, acres of clipped hedge box all the geometric designs. We were high on the terrace above and under rows of clipped linden trees, 200 years old. There was taped music, strings, harps, and children's chorus, but of course I could not get the French story.

"As much as the chateaux, I enjoyed seeing the country. For long distances along the river there are limestone cliffs and people have tunneled houses in them, some very elaborate, (not poor people but middle class), with glass fronts, balconies, etc., and with chimneys sprouting out of the grass above. We were told these houses are very comfortable to live in, cool in summer, warm in winter, and the land in the valley very productive. Vineyards of course, many orchards, many of which are espaliered and full of fruit.

"The last day of the trip, we had lunch at Chartres and spent the afternoon in the marvelous cathedral. I shall never forget that experience. I shall be in Paris a week or so longer but will be in London on August 15th."

Mrs. Greene, the former curator of the Old Custom House in Monterey, is traveling alone and taking time to see everything she wishes to see, before heading for Spain in a Volkswagen which she will pick up after leaving London.