

THE AMERICAN LIBRARY IN PARIS · INC.

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420 Lexington Ave., Room 2325

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Telephone: ~~XXXXXXXX~~
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March 10th, 1945.

Dr. H. M. Lydenberg,
A.L.A. International Relations Office,
Library of Congress Annex, Study No. 251,
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Dr. Lydenberg:

I am pleased to enclose a copy of a further
report dated February 3rd which Mr. Sumner received
a few days ago from Mr. Lord, the Reorganization Director
of the American Library in Paris.

Sincerely yours,

L. Quincy Mumford
for EB

L. Quincy Mumford,
Assistant Secretary.

LQM:EB
Encl. 1

*James - Amer
Library in Paris*

*MS Lydenberg has
3/12/45*

4 pages typed

Paul

Mr. Mumford:

A thousand thanks for your note of the 10th with the copy of Lord's report of 3 February.

Any word from Sumner as to distribution of it to members of our A.L.A. Board?

It's a moving document, and as I read it I noted with chastened humility my foolish comments now and then on the way heat is regulated here in this building, querulous complaints because of traffic snarls, and similar trivialities.

May God forgive me for them as I recall what Lord and millions of French are going through with!

12 March 1945

H.M. Lydenberg

Milton E. Lord, Civilian
American Embassy
A.P.O. 887
c/o Postmaster
New York City

Valerie - attached letter from Mumford which enclosed T
REC'D MAR 12 1945 *from Mumford*
#6
jm

3 February 1945

Dear Mr. Sumner:

Perhaps the time has come when a summary account may be useful by way of description of the conditions under which one has had to work in Paris this winter, particularly as illustrated by the experiences of the month of January. The American press has undoubtedly carried accounts of the situation here. What I can perhaps best do is to relate these conditions directly to the Library and the individuals connected with it.

This has been the severest winter in France since before the war. It has been so because of the severity of the weather, and because the winter has had to be faced without any reserves of stocks or supplies. Under the occupation France still had some reserves of supplies, and apparently the Germans saw to it that others were made available as necessary, although with decreasing quantity as the years passed one into another. And the French transportation system was still reasonably intact, so that supplies could be moved when and as necessary. For example, Paris had heat each winter, though on a limited basis. The American Library in Paris, for instance, received regularly each winter about 5 tons of coal right up through last winter. This allotment, added to the reserve of 13 tons set up in the winter of 1940-41, made possible each winter the heating of the Library sufficiently to take off the chill and the dampness of the winter air. It permitted the using of only one of the two furnaces heating the Library, but it sufficed relatively well under the circumstances even so.

Then came the liberation, in the course of which the French transportation system was smashed, either by allied bombardment in an attempt to prevent the German withdrawal or by actual destruction of it by the Germans in the process of actual withdrawal. Likewise French stockpiles such as remained were destroyed or withdrawn by the occupants. And thus the French came to the first winter of the Liberation with no reserve stocks of coal and food and raw materials, and particularly no transportation system with which to build up or to move new supplies of coal or food as they would be built up in the few months remaining before the winter.

The most severe winter in a number of years followed. Whereas in Paris, for example, there is ordinarily not much snow and relatively little freezing weather, this year the whole month of January was one of frequent snows (sometimes up to 5 or 6 inches at a time) and steadily continuing freezing weather (except for a one-day thaw on January 19th the temperature remained constantly below freezing). For days in succession the thermometer did not rise above 22°F. One day it went down to 16°F, which is the point at which one has to begin to hold on to one's ears. And the ground remained covered with snow and ice, and the transportation system as far as restored broke down. (What little of it did continue to function had to be used, in any case, for military transport to the fronts.)

The situation of the Library was typical of what happened everywhere, except for isolated instances which were for the most part directly related to military activities. The Library had no heat in it whatever. In fact, nearly a year has elapsed now since there has been any heat in it. It has been the same everywhere else in Paris, except in the governmental agencies at a more or less elevated level, the embassies, and a limited number of similar places. None of the hotels have had heat for the most part, except one or two privileged places. Not even those occupied by the Army (and 95% of the Paris hotels are so occupied) have had heat, except in their dining rooms. Nor for the most part has there been heat in any of military centers run by the Red Cross. One of the excepted categories, however, has been that of the daily working quarters of the Army. Thus the Army people have been able to keep warm during the working hours of the day, and during meal times in their dining rooms. On the other hand most American groups have been able to have adequate food in the army messes, which has of course helped to develop internal heat. That, together with being able to spend the working hours of the day in heated quarters, has made it possible for the army people at least, and their satellite groups, to withstand the cold without too great difficulty.

By contrast the staff of the American Library has had no heat at all in its working quarters, nor has it had adequate food. After a cold working day it has had to go home to unheated houses, in which not even an adequate meal was to be had. For civilians food is very strictly rationed. A black market flourishes, of course, but the library staff is not able financially to obtain for itself much food in that fashion. By way of warmth and stimulant it has not been able to get coffee or tea or chocolate. There is no milk, no butter, no eggs (each person has been allowed but a single egg since last September). The weekly allowance of meat is 160 grams, but try to get it if you can! There are practically no vegetables. Potatoes are difficult to get much of the time. There is no fruit other than an occasional apple or two. There is no cheese. Everyone was promised a chicken or a rabbit for Christmas, and now in February today's newspapers carry an announcement about the imminent delivery of the Christmas chickens. The same story holds for the bottle of wine which was promised everyone for Christmas. Thus one lives chiefly on soup, noodles, and potatoes, with an occasional cabbage thrown in, which isn't much of a diet upon which to keep up one's powers to withstand an unheated world and to do one's daily work.

From my own experience I know just what this means for the members of the library staff. As a private American citizen, without any official connection with the State Department or the Army or the O.W.I. or any other official governmental agency, no provision existed for me to have food other than on the same basis as the French people. I fell between all of the stools, and no one had any power to arrange for me to have food on an American basis in any of the messes run by the Army or by other agencies with food supplied by the Army. Despite efforts by many sympathetic American officials I was left on my own resources, and for four weeks I lived as do the French people without benefit of adequate food of the sort which is provided to all Americans attached to the Army or the Embassy or O.W.I. or other agencies. Gradually my resistance began to wear down in increasing measure. I succumbed to an attack of the grippe, presumably from decreasing resistance in an

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unheated world. Last week, for instance, I had nothing to eat from Monday through Friday except soup, noodles and mashed potatoes. I lost nine pounds in weight in the four weeks time. Finally, upon strong representation on my part, I obtained official action; and now I have a card for the O.W.I. mess, and also have been authorized to take my meals in a restaurant "résérve pour le corps diplomatique" of a number of the smaller nations, in which by special dispensation of the French Foreign Office the best of food is to be had. Thus I know from first hand experience just what the members of the staff of the American Library in Paris (who of course do not have access to food on an American basis) face in trying to carry on the work of the Library in a hungry and unheated world.

That hungry and unheated world came to a crisis on January 15th, and sharp measures had to be taken throughout France. Paris, for instance, was receiving only 1/7 of its daily needs of coal. Of that amount 1/4 had to go to the making of electricity for the city, 1/4 to the manufacture of gas, 1/4 to the running of the metro (the subway system being the only current mode of transportation, there being no street cars, no busses, no taxis), and the remaining 1/4 to the taking care of all other needs. To meet the situation the Government had to take strong measures. All passenger steam-train travel was suspended throughout the country. Shops were ordered closed daily at 5:00 P.M. Night clubs and cabarets were closed entirely. Electricity was cut off at 8:30 A.M. until 5:00 P.M., except for an hour at the time of the noon meal. Gas was cut off for the day at 8:30 P.M. Obviously measures such as those affected everybody. More places than not require electrical illumination even in the daytime, particularly inside areas without windows or at a distance from windows. Most daily activities were dislocated, and the Library was affected no less than any other place.

Under such conditions it was not possible to undertake any marked program for activities at the Library. Little more could be done there than to get along as best as possible. Before the crisis at the middle of the month negotiations were under way with the Army to get coal for heating the Library, with a view to undertaking an expanded program, particularly in helping the Army to provide greater opportunities for the use of the Library's book collections by military people and French people alike. Those came to naught with the arrival of the crisis. However, a new approach has subsequently been made; and there is a possibility that in February it may yet be possible to find heat for the Library and for taking up in earnest our contemplated improved activities. Once heat can be obtained substantial progress will be possible, but up to now the obstacles have been great indeed.

The Library staff has done wonders under the circumstances. Whereas as many shops and restaurants and even the Comédie Francaise have closed up entirely, the Library has kept open on a full daily schedule right through it all. It is pretty close to heroic for a civilian staff such as that at the Library to keep at its tasks all day long in a temperature hovering near the 20°F mark, and going down one day to as low as 16°F, and with electricity cut off, and personal comfort facilities unavailable because of frozen water pipes. I have

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had the greatest admiration for them. To me it augurs exceedingly well for the spirit which they will bring to the work of the Library when under improved conditions it can embark shortly upon a more developed program.

I realize that this is not perhaps the kind of report which may have been expected. Still it is one which ought to be known to the Trustees of the Library for clear realization on their part of the difficulties which have had to be faced on the spot, and over which nevertheless the human spirit of the members of the library staff have triumphed.

Yours sincerely,

/signed/ Milton E. Lord

To
Edward A. Sumner, Esquire
President, American Library in Paris