

Le Bal Marie Antoinette Revisited

JUNE 12, 2019



Guests of the American Friends of Versailles congregating in the Salon d'Hercule at Versailles on June 16th, 2007. Photo: JH.

SOCIAL DIARY • BY: **DAVID PATRICK COLUMBIA**

Wednesday, June 12, 2019. Yesterday was another beautiful sunny day in New York with temps in the mid-70s, after intermittent torrential rains the day before. We've been very fortunate with the weather in New York, considering the hardship and destruction many other parts of the country are experiencing with the rains and the winds.

Yesterday I got an email from my former wife, Sheila. I got three of them. All were photos she took with her phone from Paris. We correspond from time to time. I didn't know she was traveling right now.

Her photos said it all, and they got to me. I was even a little envious that I couldn't be in Paris. Although, unlike many friends and others I know, "to be in Paris" is heaven to the spirit. Somehow Sheila's photos (no other message included) brought it all back.



The Cour Marly in the Musée du Louvre.



Parisians parked in the Jardin des Tuileries.



La Tour Eiffel.



Shakespeare and Company on Paris's Left Bank.



The Panthéon in the Latin Quarter.



Walking up the Grand Staircase of the Palais Garnier.



The ceiling of the Grand Foyer at the Palais Garnier.

I went from her email into our archive to find one of the trips to Paris that we've made over the years on NYSD. I came upon a Diary from twelve years ago this week. June 18, 2007. **JH** and I were guests of the American Friends of Versailles on one of their very special sojourns to and for the Chateau that **Louis XIV** built. This Diary is about "*Le Bal Marie-Antoinette*" ...

Monday, June 18, 2007. Le Bal Marie-Antoinette. The big ball for the American Friends of Versailles took place on Saturday at the chateau. It had been raining off and on all week in Paris, sometimes spritzing sometimes torrents, worrying to the guests and planners of the ball, but not necessary as it turned out.



The invitation to Le Bal Marie-

Antoinette.

Versailles is about 15 miles from Paris. Once you're out of the city, it's mainly highway which passes through the town of St. Cloud, where another royal chateau which pre-dated Versailles by almost a century once stood.

The royals passing by on their way to and from Versailles used it frequently. **Louis XIV's** brother **Monsieur, duc d'Orleans**, enlarged it in the late 17th century. In the 1780s, **Marie Antoinette** enlarged it more. **Napoleon** made his *coup d'etat* against the Directory there in 1799. Five years later, the brooding, brash and ambitious proclaimed himself emperor there. Less than a half century later, **Napoleon III** had himself invested as Emperor there. Eighteen years later in 1870, the French at war with the Prussians, there was a battle at St. Cloud and the palace was gutted by fire. **Empress Eugenie** had already had the foresight to remove the furniture when War began. The shell was left standing until 20 years later when it was razed entirely.

I mention all this because the trip to Versailles always provokes thoughts for me about the Bourbons and the last days of their last King and Queen, **Louis XVI** and Marie-Antoinette. Louis XV, the grandfather might have had some of those thoughts too considering his alleged remark "*Après moi, le deluge.*" Versailles is about royal

splendor, but it is also a defining presence for France, and for the rest of us who care to notice history. The ride out to the chateau of the Sun King is mainly highway today, with traffic like the Long Island Expressway during morning rush hour (and it was 7 p.m. on a Saturday night). I was engaged in imagining what the countryside and the road was like in those last days of the monarchy. It was then that the “Bread March of Women,” the mob (of men and women) marched the 15 miles from Paris on the early morning of October 5th, 1789.



When the mob got to Versailles, they marched right into the palace, captured the King and Queen and marched back to Paris with them (in a carriage). As terrified as either Louis or his Queen might have been, they couldn't have possibly imagined what lay in store in the next three years. The Bourbon dynasty which began in the 14th century saw the beginning to its swift demise almost 400 years later on that carriage ride from Versailles back to Paris.

So that what was running through my head on this past early Saturday evening, the sun having set but sky still light and the air warm with no sign of rain.

The population of City of Versailles is about 88,000. It was 50,000 in 1789, but lost a substantial number after the Revolution. Driving through the place, it looks like a lot of other mid-sized European cities until you come to the end of the main boulevard, make a sharp turn and suddenly you see the sprawling massive chateau sitting imperiously and serenely on a knoll before you.



Today beyond the gates is the wide and deep cobbled courtyard. In the days of Louis XIV, who built the palace, the cobbles were wooden blocks so that the carriage traffic wouldn't make too much racket for the royal ears. Today the cars and buses give the place distinctly tourist attraction air.

However on this night, the tourists were guests alighting from the buses and the cars and the limousines were women dressed glamorously in jewels long dresses, with the men all cleaned up and looking smart in black tie. That did not look like a tourist event. Although, in a way, it was for the top (and oversold) ticket for the evening was \$50,000 and there were packages for \$500,000 (including ten guests for all the events). People came from all over the world, although mainly from the United States. They came via commercial airline, private jet, private yacht, train or limousine.

We entered the palace through the north wing, a casual procession distracted by the awesomeness of the place. Guests found their placement cards and made their way up a grand staircase to the *salon d'Hercule* where a receiving line greeted them. Waiters in blue jackets were passing trays of champagne.



L. to r.: Libby and Brittany Horn; Brinkley, Patsy, and Whitney Dickerson.



Walking up the staircase of the entrance gallery to meet the receiving line.



L. to r.: Mai Hallingby with Bob and Jaquine Arnold; Prince Jean de France.



L. to r.: Helene de Mortemart and Anne-Marie de Ganay; Monika Betts and Maurice Tobin



The

Holmes family.



L. to r.: Tanya Brandes; Mitzi Perdue and Ellen Graham; Sharon King Hoge.



L. to r.: Paul Austin and Carl Adams; Frank Schork and friend.



Sara and Ruth Levy (right).



Clockwise from above: The entrance gallery filling up; Surveying the scene from above; Frances Fisher, Jimmy Demers, and Josée Nadeau.



L. to r.: Byrdie Bell and mom; Asia Baker and Byrdie.



L. to r.: Kiarin and Jean Rafferty; James and Stanya Owen.





L. to r.: Michele Fieschi-Fouan (right); Mimi Stafford.





L. to r.: Joyce Rey and David Phoenix; Jeanne Lawrence with her daughter Stephanie.



Juan Pablo and Pilar Molyneux, Helene de Mortemart, and Maryann Carey de Edwards.



Catherine Graham and Lili Gaubin.



L. to r.: Georgiana Morton, Carole McFadden, and Piers Morton; Alison List and Jim Henson, floral designers for the Bal.



L. to r.: Joanne and Roberto de Guardiola; Michele and Larry Herbert.



Alan Fox, Katie Fox, James Owen, Katie Stapleton, and Patrick Coulson.



L. to r.: Dorothy Walker Stapleton and Muffy Miller; Patrick Coulson and Nicole Salinger.





L. to r.: Rosano Rubicondi and Ivana Trump; John and Alexandra Nichols.



Inside the Salon d'Hercule.



L. to r.: Michele Herbert and Ivana Trump; Mrs. and Mr. Nicholas Kugel.





Jerome Fouan and Michele Fieschi-Fouan (left).



Once inside the chateau, the palace, you are no longer a tourist. At least not under these circumstances. You are immersed in a piece of history. Old Louis went all out, and then some. You feel like visiting royalty in these grander than grand

rooms that never let up. About eight-thirty, the guests began moving from d'Hercule through other rooms down to the Salon des Glaces (or Hall of Mirrors). The gallery recently completed a restoration and was dazzling with its new chandeliers. It was here that Louis XIV blew the minds of all visiting hoi-polloi, royal personages and dignitaries no matter how important they were. It was also here where little **Jean Becu** (later **Madame du Barry**) was standing along with the rest of the public as Louis XV passed through one day and *noticed*, soon after inquired ("who was that girl?"), and shortly thereafter arranged to meet her. She was 26. The King was 59.

Despite the splendor of the *Salon*, in the days of the Sun King, there were solid silver commodes lining the walls opposite the windows to add to the royal bedazzling of the candlelit chandeliers reflecting on the mirrors. They are long gone, mostly melted down to help pay for various wars. **Susan Gutfreund** who was attending Saturday night told me that there is one that remains in the collection at Knole, the Sackville-West house in England.



Leaving the Salon d'Hercule for ... the enfilade leading to the Salon des Glaces.



A quick glance out the window ...



L. to r.: The King's Bedroom; Entering the Salon des Glaces.



The

Salon des Glaces.



The Salon des Glaces.



Scenes in the Hall of Mirrors.



L. to r.: Matilda Stream and Patsy Dickerson; Chris Walling and his girls.



L. to r.: Jay Krehbiel, Ondine de Rothschild, Ellen Graham, and Mai Harrison; Patsy Callahan with Buzz and Lois Aldrin.



L. to r.: DPC, Jeanne Lawrence, and JH; Adrien Meyer and friend.



J.J. and Janet Cafaro.



L. to r.: En route to Queen Marie Antoinette's bedroom; The Queen's bedroom.



Peering through the window at the fountain and the canal of Louis XIV.



L. to r.: Vena Seibert and Patsy Dickerson; Susan Gutfreund.



L. to r.: Carol McFadden, Barbara de Portago, and Count Denis de Kergorlay; Olivier de Rohan and Barbara de Portago.



Lisa Falcone and Zaldy Gocco.

From the Salon des Glaces, the American Friends we passed through an enfilade of royal chambers including the King's Bedroom and the Queen's Bedroom. These were very public in the days of the royals, as was the dressing and undressing of monarchs before sleeping and after rising. These rooms are your first real evidence that the life of the king and queen was *not* private, not something 21st century individuals dreaming of royal crowns might wish for. Dressing and disrobing everyday before a peering, lurking crowd, consummating your marriage in *public*?



The auto-train carrying guests from the rear of the chateau to the Bal in the L'Orangerie.

From the bedrooms and reception rooms, all large and tall and lavish with their tall paned windows overlooking the gardens and the distant fountains and royal lakes, we came to another grand staircase which led to a ground floor gallery and outside to the gravel terrace overlooking the lakes and canals of the gardens.

There we boarded auto-trains taking us across and down the parterres, snaking around sections of former or recently restored fountains, passing acres of overgrown remnants of the gardens of the Bourbon kings, arriving at the entrance to L'Orangerie where the Le Bal Marie-Antoinette was being held.



L. to r.: L'Orangerie; The table centerpieces designed by List and Hanson.



Scene from l'Orangerie.



L. to r.: DPC and Stéphane Bern, French novelist and social chronicler; Hilary and Wilbur Ross.



L. to

r.: Henry and Elizabeth Segerstrom with David Horn; John and Becca Thrash.



L. to r.: Loren Bassett and Brandt Hooker; Jaquine Arnold and Hilary Ross.

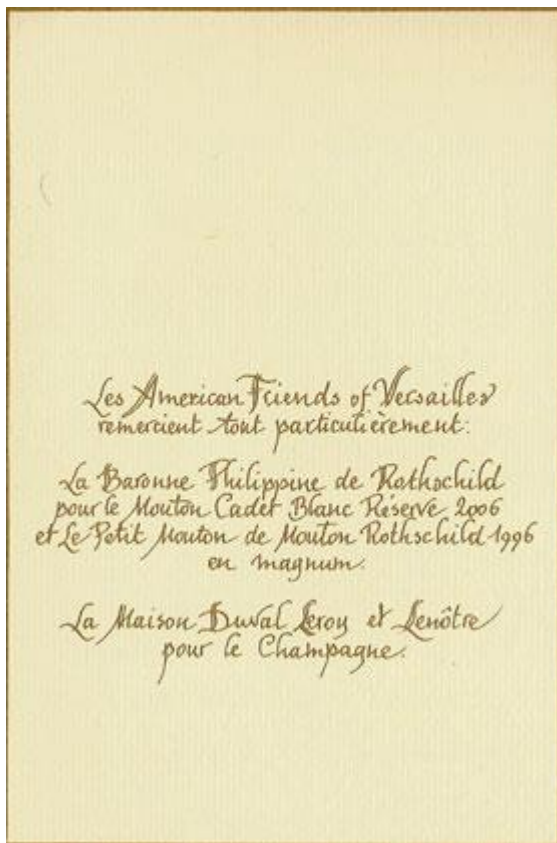
On entering, there before you, at the foot of two fanning staircases is a massive sandstone-colored hall, long and tall, inhabited with an allee of towering palm trees in enormous wooden boxes painted in the Versailles. green. On this night the place was set with tables either long or round for the 450 guests. The first landing between the two fanning staircases leading to the room is a marble pool that was once the bathtub (placed elsewhere in the palace at the time) of Louis XIV which was, in his day, filled with warm water. A perfect hot tub for today's billionaires.



The Ball menu.

By nine-thirty that l'Orangerie had begun to fill up with the elegant guests. More champagne being served as well as the elegant presented morsels for the famished to gnosh. The music of the American Mike Carney and his orchestra filled the hall. Many familiar faces from New York or Americans or Europeans we've met on these special tours.

In the crowd: **Hilary and Wilbur Ross, Matilda Stream, Mrs. Craig Stapleton**, wife of the American Ambassador (and cousin of **George W. Bush**), **John and Alexandra Nichols, Susan Gutfreund, Vicki and Bill Hood, John and Margaret Crowe, Mai Hallingby, Muffy Miller, Nicole Salinger, Christopher Walling, Prince Jean, Duc de Vendome**, the Orleanist pretender to the French throne, **Joanne and Roberto de Guardiola, Howdy and Carole Holmes** and **Howdy Jr.**, of Michigan, **Charles and Tanya Brandes** of San Diego, **George and Carole McFadden, Bruce and and Mary Southworth, John and Janet Cafaro, Mr. and Mrs. Ecclestone, Paul and Anne Krauss, Charles and Nancy Nadler; Becca and John Thrash** of Houston, **Ivana Trump and Rosano Rubicondi, Barbara de Portago, Melinda and Tom Hassen** of Greenwich, **Bernard and Mme. Steinitz, Baronne de Waldner, Patrick Coulson and Katie Stapleton** from Denver, **Stephanie and Jeanne Lawrence**.



The Wine list.

And more: **Ondine de Rothschild, Pilar and Juan Pablo Molyneux, Stephane Bern, Count and Countess Jean-Francois de Claremont Tonnerre, Comte and Comtesse Walewski, Rick Friedberg and Francine LeFrak Friedberg, John Marder, Patrick and Patsy Callahan** from Chicago, **Sandy de Yturbe, Ellen Graham, Natalie and Nicholas Kugel, Libby and David Horn, Whitney Horn and Matt Bromley, Sharon Hoge, Stonington Cox, Jay Krehbiel, Anne-Marie de Ganay**, her sons **Benjamin and Adrien Meyer**, the **Tobin family** from Washington – **Maurice, Joan, Ian, Alexis; Asia Baker** from New York; **Lisa Falcone and Zaidy Gocco; Jean and Kiarin Rafferty, Nancy and James Taipale**, the beautiful twins **Lisa and Ruth Levy, Olivier and Mme. Kraemer, Laurent and Mme. Kraemer, Marian Tattinger, Piers Morton, Georgiana Morton, Michele and Larry Herbert, Buzz and Lois Aldrin, Kay Krehbiel, Princess Milleul, Lawrence and Betsy Blau, Florence van der Kemp** (who with her husband the late **Gerald van der Kemp** started and ran the American support of Versailles for several decades); **Mitzi (Mrs. Frank) Perdue, Helene and Charles de Mortemart, Mimi Stafford, Princess de la Tour Auvergne, Comtesse de Mortemart, Jaquine and Robert Arnold, Jorie Butler Kent, Henry and Elizabeth Segerstrom** from California, the **Italian Ambassador and Mrs Ludovico Ortona; Brinkley and Patsy Dickerson** from Atlanta, **Paul Austin, Carl Adams, Loren Basset and Brandt Hooker, Kristen Smith**, and of course, **Elizabeth, Tennessee, Catharine and David Hamilton**, and hundreds more who've escape my memory or whom I never met.

It was probably ten o'clock before guests were seated and being served dinner (see menu above). After that it was dancing, socializing until quarter to midnight when everyone was alerted to move into the garden for the fireworks which had, by law,

to be finished by midnight. Fireworks, as you may know, was one of the great amusements of the Bourbons. From Louis XIV until the end, some of the greatest parties in Western Civilization – enormous and lavish beyond modern standards or imagination – were held on these grounds and completed with the spectacular fireworks *du Roi*.



After the pyrotechnics, guests moved back into the L'Orangerie for dessert (a very elaborate strawberry with merengue and ice cream) and dancing. About one o'clock, we were heading out to the front of the chateau (quite a long walk) under the starry sky, to the car and the short ride (no traffic then) back to Paris to pack for an early morning departure for New York.

The week of fetes of the American Friends of Versailles didn't end there for many others. Catharine and David Hamilton entertained at a "*Barbeque a la francaise*" at their Chateau St. Georges Motel (which once belonged to the American **Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan**), and on Monday morning there was the "Official Plaque Dedication" at the *Trois Fontaines Bosquet* which had been restored by the American Friends, and the "*Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*" by the Petit Trianon, and later in the day a *Cocktail Dinatoire* at the Italian residence in Paris, after which the hundreds of supporters of American Friends of Versailles boarded their trains, cars, jets and yachts and headed out to destinations all over the planet.



L. to r.: Barbara de Portago and friend; Henrik and Valerie Schlubach.



Clockwise from above: Melinda Hassen, Byrdie Bell, Cynthia Galvin, and Alex Steel; Rosano Rubicondi and Ivana Trump horsing around.



Sandra Boucher and Bruce Southworth.



In the moment.



L. to r.: Returning to the l'Orangerie after the fireworks display; Bringing out the Coupe 'Trianon'.



Dancing in l'Orangerie.



Louis XIV's former bathtub, now the lily pond in the l'Orangerie.