

## Paris 1994: Looking Back Twenty Years to a Memorable Feast

*ED. NOTE: With this issue of the newsletter, we inaugurate a new feature celebrating past Hemingway Society conferences. With fifteen of them under our belt (and one ready to notch), the time seems opportune to look back and remember how each in its own way represents a significant accomplishment.*

As hard as it may be for some of us to believe, 2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of the one and only time the Society has officially met in that most obvious of Hemingway settings, Paris.

The sixth biennial conference, held July 3-8, 1994, was a veritable extravaganza of firsts and lasts: the one (and so far only) time the Society has paired up with another entity to split the billing with a fellow author (The F. Scott Fitzgerald Society was the official co-sponsor), the first conference to break the 300 registrant mark, but also the last conference organized without the luxury of email or the Internet.

“Looking back, putting the conference together through the mail and over the phone seems like a huge challenge,” says J. Gerald Kennedy, Boyd Professor of English at Louisiana State University and the conference site director. “But back then, that was just the norm. There were so many other hurdles to overcome I don’t even remember we weren’t online at the time.”

According to Vol. 18 of *The Hemingway Society Newsletter* (June 1994), various Society offices, as well as our still-popular listserve founded by Professor Jack Jobst at Michigan Tech University, had just begun tiptoeing into cyberspace as the conference took off. As an editorial note helpfully explained for computer novices, “E-mail is an easy way to send news and items and ‘notes and queries’ to the newsletter.”

For Kennedy, the conference posed two pressing organizational challenges. The first involved facilities. At the time, no site in Paris provided American-styled conference rooms and meeting halls that could accommodate large numbers. A tipster alerted Kennedy to the Mona Bismarck American Center. Housed in a beautiful nineteenth-century townhouse on the Avenue New York, the Center offered a wonderful view of both the Seine



*Speakers at the unveiling of the Hemingway plaque at 74 rue du Cardinal Lemoine: (l-r) Roger Asselineau, Gregory Hemingway, Jean Tiberi (former mayor of Paris), the president of La Memoire des Lieux, J. Gerald Kennedy, and Linda Wagner-Martin.*

and the Eiffel Tower. There was just one problem.

“Ventilation,” laughs Kennedy, who still keeps a box of conference documents desk-side in his office at LSU. “The Mona Bismarck had no air conditioning, and Paris is humid in the summer, so heat was an issue.”

The other problem was transportation. Given the prohibitive costs of renting buses, Kennedy had to write the cost of a Metro pass into the registration fee, which ran a whopping \$160. (Those were the days). Although Kennedy and co-program directors Jackson R. Bryer and Michael Reynolds worried about attendees getting lost on the M6 and the M9, registrants appreciated staying in Hemingway’s Montparnasse neighborhood, only a stone’s throw from the (long gone) cold-water flat above the sawmill at 113 Rue Notre-Dames des Champs and the Rue Delambre where sat the former Dingo Bar where one EH met one FSF in 1925.

Among the many conference highlights: a panel featuring such major biographers as Reynolds, Matthew J. Bruccoli, Scott Donaldson, Nancy Milford, and James R. Mellow; the stirring presentation by influential French critic Roger Asselineau, who recounted his memories of life as a prisoner of war in World War II; the conviviality of then U.S. ambassador to France, the legendary Pamela Harriman, who asked to attend a reception at the U.S. Counsel where Kennedy introduced her to every single attendee in a receiving line; and the unveiling of a plaque at Hemingway’s first Paris apartment at 74 rue du Cardinal

Lemoine, which Kennedy helped arrange through Association La Memoire des Lieux, the group that coordinates commemorative markers in the city.

“That’s my one contribution to the physical place [Paris],” Kennedy says of the plaque. “I gave a little talk at the unveiling that absolutely tapped out my French.” (He’s being humble there). Kennedy also notes that Gregory Hemingway spoke that afternoon, cracking a joke about his father liberating the Ritz Hotel from the Nazis. “I’ve stayed at the Ritz,” the younger Hemingway said, “and I can tell you it’s not free.”

Kennedy’s favorite memory, however, involves planning the conference in the summer of 1993 with close friend Reynolds, who passed away in 2000:

“I rented a car and we drove up to Compiègne where the Armistice was signed. We stopped at a couple of different war cemeteries. We saw rabbits as big as dogs. We just told each other, ‘Get out of the way if they start coming at us.’”

Of course, memories of any conference turn melancholy as we recall how many Paris attendees passed in the intervening years: in addition to Reynolds, we have lost Asselineau, Gregory Hemingway, Harriman, Bruccoli, Mellow, Robin Gajdusek, Robert W. Lewis, and many others since 1994.

If there’s one consolation to the inexorable toll of time and mortality, perhaps it’s this: Jerry Kennedy still looks exactly the same in 2014 as he did in 1994. ■