

THE 2006 AATF BOOK CLUB



Two years ago AATF President Margot Steinhart initiated the AATF Book Club whose objective is to bring French teachers together through reading books in common during the year. Each year a theme was identified and three books were

selected reflecting that theme. The first year AATF members read three works by Quebec authors while the second year a literature and film theme revolved around three books and their film adaptations.

President-Elect Marie-Christine Koop continues this exciting new tradition and has selected as the Book Club's theme "Le Français aux États-Unis." The theme is the same as that of the 80th annual AATF Convention to be held in Baton Rouge, July 12-15, 2007. This year there will be four books, a reference work and three narrative works. The reference book is a glossary of Louisiana French expressions and figures of speech, while the three narrative works include (1) a recent prize-winning novel that takes place in rural French Louisiana, (2) the first Naturalist novel published on American soil, and (3) a biography of the Marquis de La Fayette whose 250th birthday we will celebrate in 2007. A brief summary of the works as well as information on obtaining them is included below. A discussion of each work, including accompanying activities will appear in subsequent issues of the *National Bulletin*.

Tonnerre mes chiens! A Glossary of Louisiana French Figures of Speech (1999) contains some 1200 expressions collected from 23 South Louisiana parishes. The work not only explains the metaphorical meanings of these figures of speech but also explores their origins and compares them to similar expressions in other French-speaking countries and cultures. The book is divided into 24 thematic chapters such as Food and Drink, Body and Health, Feelings and Moods, Comings and Goings, etc. Many of these expressions can be incorporated in French classes at all levels of instruction. Instead of "Comment ça va?" imagine saying "Quoi ça dit?" or "Comment les haricots?" to which you might respond "Mieux que ça et les prêtres seraient jaloux." The author, Amanda LaFleur, is a native of Ville Platte, Louisiana and a longtime activist for the preservation of Louisiana French. This work is available on-line at

[www.booksXYZ.com].

Ouragan sur le bayou (2004) is the first of a trilogy of novels on Francophone Louisiana entitled *Ma chère Louisiane* authored by Quebec writer and singer Lili Maxime. The novel takes place amidst the pelicans, magnolias, crawfish, and oil rigs of Cajun Louisiana and tells the story of a sociologist from Quebec who arrives in Louisiana to research its Francophone heritage and falls for a young Cajun singer-fisherman who is married to an Indian from the French-speaking Houma tribe. The novel provides intermittent but accurate historical information about the Acadian passage to Louisiana and gives the reader a good grasp of rural Cajun culture. Included in this work are limited passages written in very readable Cajun French. Any difficulty in reading these passages is solved by using the glossary of Cajun words. *Ouragan sur le bayou* was awarded the 2005 France-Acadie Literary Prize in Paris. Copies of the book may be obtained by contacting *Les Éditions La Grande Marée*, C. P. 3126 *siège social*, Tracadie-Sheila (New Brunswick), Canada E1X 1G5; e-mail [jouellet@nbnet.nb.ca]; Web: [www.lagrandemaree.ca]; telephone: (506) 395-9436; fax (506) 395-9439. Please note that prices found on *La Grande Marée's* Web site are in Canadian dollars.

L'Habitation Saint-Ybars by Alfred Mercier first appeared in 1881. It was published a second time in 2003 by *Les Éditions Tintamarre* at Centenary College of Louisiana under the direction of D. A. Kress, Editor in Chief. Mercier was born June 3, 1816 on the McDonogh plantation near New Orleans. He spent much of his youth traveling in Europe where he studied medicine, frequented the salons of major romantic literary figures, and established friendships with the radical thinkers of the period. In 1869, Alexandre Dumas, a friend of Mercier—who served as editor of Dumas' literary journal, *Le d'Artagnan*—advised his younger protégé to flee the coming Franco-Prussian War. Heeding his advice, Mercier and his family sought refuge in New Orleans where he earned his living as a doctor and became involved in the literary scene of Creole Louisiana. The period between 1873 and 1881 was particularly prolific for Mercier as a man of letters. He published a series of novels in quick succession, culminating in his masterpiece, *L'Habitation Saint-Ybars*.

This semi-autobiographical novel straddles the years of the American Civil War and explores daily life on a Louisiana plantation where color lines are often blurred and where complex relationships regularly transgress socially accepted norms of the period. Mercier dissects this

hierarchical society where race, power, money, and gender are engaged in a dance of wounded souls. This extraordinary novel has the epic proportions of a 19th-century *Gone with the Wind* recorded by a firsthand witness to the events described. Narrated in French and Louisiana Creole, Mercier uses language to show how his characters are conditioned and controlled by their environment, heredity, instinct, and chance. Copies of the book may be obtained by contacting the bookstore of Centenary College; e-mail: [bookstor@centenary.edu]; telephone: (318) 869-5278; fax: (318) 869-5295.

The last work, *La Fayette, La Stature de la Libérée* (1988) is selected because the year 2007 is the 250th anniversary of the birth of the Marquis de La Fayette. An Honorary Citizen of the U.S., La Fayette is considered a national hero in both France and the U.S. for his participation in the French and American revolutions. The city of Lafayette, Louisiana, located 50 miles from Baton Rouge, will celebrate this important anniversary throughout 2007, including during the AATF convention.

Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de La Fayette, was an orphan and billionaire at 14. At 16 he married his lifelong partner, Adrienne. He became a Major General in the American army at 19. At 20 he was famous on both sides of the Atlantic. Gonzague Saint Bris, author of more than 30 books, spent seven years on two continents researching the life of La Fayette. Having uncovered surprising revelations, discovered unpublished documents, family archives, and private correspondence, the author offers a fresh look at the 77 years of a man of action and ideals who during his life's journey is the cause of upheavals in four kingdoms, three revolutions, two republics, and one empire. In addition to a lengthy and detailed biography, Gonzague Saint Bris paints the picture of an era whose main actors and stars include Marie Antoinette, Beaumarchais, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Washington, Louis XVI, and Napoleon. This work is available on-line at [www.booksXYZ.com].

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