

Petite Plaisance Conservation Fund Newsletter

December 2019

Marguerite Yourcenar's Legacy

Many authors' homes are open to the public. What distinguishes Petite Plaisance from most of them is that the author herself was the one to determine how her house would be used after her death. In her last will and testament, Marguerite Yourcenar directed that during the summer months "those persons who are interested in my literary works and in my career should have an opportunity to visit my home property and to view the objets d'art which I have accumulated during my lifetime." She envisioned the tour as if a guest were coming to tea, which was a daily ritual at Petite Plaisance during her lifetime. She was particularly eager that her house and her garden be "maintained in the same condition as existed at the date of my death." Visitors often remark that the house makes you feel as if the author just got up from her desk to take a tour of the wood garden.

Madame Yourcenar finished *Memoirs of Hadrian* at Petite Plaisance in 1950 and wrote the lion's share of her oeuvre there over the course of the following four decades. Her "home property" opened to the public in July 1988. The house is filled with art works and mementoes from her travels, antique Persian rugs, and, of course, thousands of books. In the current millennium alone, Petite Plaisance has received guests from more than 75 countries, several of them nonexistent during her lifetime. We don't know if "Madame" envisioned what an international destination her simple farmhouse would become, but we do know that visitors from around the globe are grateful for her foresight.



Maine poet Jefferson Navicky and his wife, Sarah Yanni, pose for a photo with the elder Navickys, from Ohio, and French guests.



Projects

Thanks to outstanding assistance from project sponsors, other generous donors, and a grant from the French Heritage Society, Petite Plaisance now sports a beautiful new cedar roof. The project was finally completed on December 31, 2019, just in time for the arrival of the New Year and a fierce coastal storm. We look forward to watching the Maine-crafted shingles weather to a silver-gray hue. Many thanks to everyone who supported this essential project.

The replacement of the roof was the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the Petite Plaisance Conservation Fund, but we were also able to fund the restoration of Madame's beloved cherry orchard and the removal of several compromised trees in the wood garden.

Special thanks to Penelope Harris, Sue Lonoff de Cuevas, and Françoise Provost for their support of the cherry orchard.

Roof Project Sponsors

Roger de Bree, Laurinda & Edward Douglas, The French Heritage Society, Penelope P. Harris, Ann & Gilbert Kinney, Jane & Jeffrey Marshall, Liz & Arthur Martinez, Françoise Provost, Barbara & John Robinson, Suzanne Stroh, and Joan & Paul Van der Grift.

President's Message

Marguerite Yourcenar's literary legacy is forever ensured by her masterworks *Memoirs of Hadrian* and *The Abyss*. But it was her election to the Académie Française in 1980 that catapulted her to rock star status in France and dramatically raised her profile around the world. There is no way to know whether Madame Yourcenar would have become the first female "Immortal" had her creative spirit not been nourished for decades by life on an island in Maine. But there is no doubt that Petite Plaisance is part of her legacy.

The Petite Plaisance Conservation Fund exists to help safeguard Madame's wish that her home remain open to those who love her writing. It is thanks to our donors' generosity that we can continue the traditions of the house. Please know how grateful we are for your support.

~ Jayne Persson

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*Thank you as well to
our summer visitors for
their generosity—merci!*