

Summary History of the Alliance Française de Hartford from its Founding to the Present

Did you know the following: (1) the Alliance Française de Hartford (“AFH”) traces its history, through it and its predecessors, as far back as 1898; (2) one of AFH’s founders, in 1902, helped lead the effort to establish the Federation of Alliances Françaises of the USA (“FAF(USA)”), the U.S. national federation of Alliances Françaises; (3) AFH, since its founding, has had a continuous record of promoting the French language and culture in the Hartford area extending for many decades; and (4) AFH has been offering French language courses for more than thirty years?

These and many other facts about AFH have been compiled by a team of AFH members who recently completed a written history of the AFH. The effort was undertaken by Philip Sussler, with assistance from an advisory group of Suzi Smith, and Françoise and Garrett Weaver, and editorial comment from Larry Hall and Alan Tausch. The research to prepare the history entailed extensive delving into over 100 years of back issues of the Hartford Courant , the full archive of AFH’s newsletter published over several decades and numerous secondary sources.

The history describes AFH’s growth and evolution through the decades. AFH’s predecessor was founded in 1898, by Dr. J.J. McCook (of the Butler-McCook mansion and a professor of modern languages at Trinity College) and a group of Hartford notables. Professor McCook attended the founding meeting of the FAF(USA) representing Hartford and was named the national organization’s treasurer. For more than a century, AFH or its predecessors has sponsored, year in and year out, a full agenda of talks and lectures in French about French language and culture, music concerts, plays, conversation and book clubs and celebrations. As a leading promoter of the French language and culture in the Hartford area, AFH has also sponsored or co-sponsored many of the major events celebrating or arising due to the ties between the area and France and the rest of the *francophonie*. During the 1930s, Mrs. Louise Stutz Veeder played a central role in AFH. She was wife of the industrialist, Curtis Veeder (founder of the company now known as the Veeder-Root Company), and lived in the mansion which is now the home of the Connecticut Historical Society on Elizabeth Street. Over several decades, the organization has sponsored annual awards, the McFarland book awards and the Harpin-Rohinsky scholarship, given to deserving students from the area’s secondary and middle schools. Since 1980, AFH, due to the initial and sustaining efforts of Giselle Miller, Françoise Weaver and Marie-Claire Rohinsky, has offered a full suite of French language programs throughout the year. AFH began publishing its regular newsletter in 1990 and acquired permanent office and class-room space in 1995, now recently re-located to the Connecticut Non-Profit Center. Moreover, AFH has kept up with technological change by establishing its own web-site and social media connections and, with Dick Perlot’s invaluable help, installing updated technological tools for use in its class-rooms.

This and much more about AFH’s development and history is now recounted and documented in one place. This venerable legacy provides important context to AFH’s on-going operations and continued growth. AFH anticipates in the near future providing an internet link from its web-site for public access to the full written history.