Paris' Many Facets Intrigue Local Artist

(EDITOR'S NOTE—The writer, Robert A. Herzberg, 1936 Holland, sailed July 3 to visit Europe and his homeland Germany. An artist, he enjoyed the capital of France more than any place he travelled to in his first journey back to his native land since coming to the United States in his youth. When in Birmingham he lives with his daughter, Mrs. Carl Honkanan at the Holland address. Another daughter, Mrs. Delor J. Westerby, lives at 2895 Hunt. Three of his sons also live in Birmingham: Robert N. at 1831 Bowers; Herbert at 938 Chester; and Jack at 683 E. Lincoln. Herzberg returned here November 18. In his letter to the editor of The Eccentric, Herzberg describes his stay in Paris.)

By ROBERT A. HERZBERG

PARIS, France—Leaving New York, three of my friends prepared a grand lunch, presented me with gifts and put me on the S. S. Italia bound for Paris, France. The crew aboard the ship were all German including the captain which made me feel at home. My parents were German and I can speak the language.

I started out as a tourist passenger but before the trip was over I was travelling first class, eating in the first class dining room and enjoying a first class deck chair.

I took along some drawing materials and started to make some portrait sketches of the passengers and one of the captain. Besides gaining the first class cabin I earned $60. There were two other artists in my dormitory; one a young Englishman, and the other a young Spaniard.

The Spaniard, Jose Zonetti, is the artist who painted the murals for the United Nations building in New York. He was then making some sketches for a mural that he is to paint for the Dominican Republic.

THE ENGLISHMAN was returning to England to see his parents. He recently had a showing of his water colors in one of the New York galleries. He wasn't able to sell a one of them at the exhibition so he set the pictures up one day in the ship's library and sold eight of them in two days, enabling him to continue on to Spain to do some more painting.

On the 10th day we saw land with the Cliffs of Plymouth in the distance. The docks and cliffs were badly damaged by the war. We laid at anchor to let some passengers off that were headed for England and then sailed on to LeHarve.

At LeHarve we took a two-hour train ride to Paris. Arriving in Paris we hailed a taxi and started looking for a hotel. With the aid of Jose who could speak a little French we succeeded in finding a nice place for 450 francs (about $1.30) per day.

SO HERE I AM in the greatest city in the world, the most beautiful city in the world, and the cleanest city in the world. Everywhere you look you see a picture that you would like to paint.

The entire city is like an outdoor museum. There are no overhead wires, no ash cans in the street, no alleys—where they put the rubbish I don't know.

The buildings are all a uniform six stories in height with an added floor that slopes back with dormer windows. Chimneys are one solid mass of concrete and there is no wooden construction, no fire escapes.

All windows are large and reach from the floor to the ceiling. Usually every window has an iron grill-work balcony or at least a bar of some kind so that one can't fall out while at the windows. This balcony can be used as a fire escape but in the four months I have been here I have never seen a fire nor heard a fire engine.

THE STREETS ARE as clean as a kitchen table. They are cleaned every day by a street cleaner who has nothing but a broom made of tree twigs. He turns on the water at the curb on each corner and as the water flows along the gutter he walks along and sweeps the dirt into the sewers.

The traffic consists of small cars, two passenger scooters, bicycles, and now and then a horse-drawn vehicle. Now and then you see a nun riding a motorcycle. Parking is no problem for there is plenty of room. There are no parking signs and no street cars. Public transportation is by bus or subway.

The subway is the most popular which is easy to understand. Even if you do not speak French there are only two words that you must understand; Sorte, which means exit and corespondence, which means change. The fare is 30 francs and each train consists of six or seven coaches with one coach reserved for first class passengers who pay a little more fare.

THE BUSES ARE not so easy to ride. I always get in trouble when I ride on one. They are about the size of buses in the United States with large windows. The entrance is at the rear from a large vestibule, which is always crowded.

You jump on or off at any time you wish as the conductor is busy collecting the fares. Now all of these buses have horns and when they approach an intersection that does not have a traffic light they let out a toot.

The first time I got on one of these buses I had no place to go in particular and just wanted a ride. When the conductor approached me I handed him a bunch of francs (I had no idea what the fare was) and he mumbled something in French. I thought I hadn't given him enough money so I handed him another bunch of francs. Still he wasn't satisfied. He motioned for me to come inside, so I did. He pointed to a map and mumbled some more French so I handed him still more francs. Still he wasn't satisfied.

THEN I DECIDED I had better get off. I had no idea where I was and no one on either the bus or the street could speak English. Luckily I had a map with me so I walked back to the hotel.

Later I discovered that when you board a bus you must tell the conductor where you got on and where you are going so you can pay accordingly.

When I left the United States I was told that I would not have to learn French as there were always many people who could speak English. I found out differently.

I do a great deal of walking and enjoy studying the shop windows. They are so artistic—especially the pastry shops. It is difficult to pass by them without buying something.

At night, however, everything is boarded up with heavy shutters without a window in sight. Streets have the appearance of a ghost town with only the cafes showing their lights at night.

I LOVE TO eat and drink outdoors and every restaurant or cafe large or small has tables and chairs on the sidewalk. The price of a cup of coffee is 30 francs; with cream it is 35.

If you cannot speak French it is perhaps double. Tipping is not necessary as it is added to your bill as a marked service and costs between 10 and 15 percent of your bill.

Not only restaurants but department stores also display their goods outside on the sidewalks. French people love to do things in the open.

If I were to paint a representative picture of Paris I believe I would paint a loaf of French bread. It is one of the most outstanding things you see and you see it everywhere. It is about as thick as a person's wrist and nearly a yard long.

ONE DAY WHEN I was in the American Express office the man in line ahead of me turned and recognized me. He was a man I had met a year ago in Florida and later in New York. He commented that I would make a good policeman because he couldn't get away from me.

This money changing is a peculiar problem. The French banks will give you 350 francs on the dollar and less for travelers checks. The American Express will give you the same on the currency and more for travelers checks.

According to some, the black market operating within France will pay between 385 and 390 francs on the dollar according to the market and less for travelers checks.

SPEAKING OF cops the French policeman is the best looking police officer I have ever seen. He wears no shining brass buttons or badge but wears a dark blue uniform. The cap is in the shape of a stove pipe with a shield in front and a small colored stripe around the top.

In the front is a small emblem designating his rank. He wears a knee-length cape with a hood attached to the neck that can be pulled over his head in bad weather, blue pants and black shoes and carries a white stick to direct traffic with.

I visited the flea market recently. This is an open market at the end of one of the subways where merchants set up temporary tents for their wares on Saturday, Sunday and Monday only.

You can buy everything under the sun there and it stretches out for miles. It took me the entire day just to walk around. My friend bought an old French pistol and I bought a pipe.

I VISITED many art galleries and museums. Of all, of course, the most popular is the Louvre. I have been there many times to experience the thrill of viewing the greatest art masterpieces in the world.

I also visited the museum of modern art which houses paintings and sculptures of contemporary artists. The Petit Palais is a large building full of French works.

The Paris automobile show was recently in the Grand Palais. The other two galleries I have visited were the Sao Paulo Muse Musee Dart and the Musee De Limpressionnisme. I enjoyed both very much.

On the day I toured the Sao Paulo Musee I was tired when I left the museum and noticing a vacant iron chair on the outside I sat down.

As I was looking at all the statues and monuments on the Place De LaConcorde, an elderly lady tapped me on the shoulder murmuring something in French. Thinking that she was either selling lottery tickets or collecting for a church fund I made gestures to show her that I wasn't interested.

Still she stayed and seemed to get angrier and angrier. Finally someone told me that the woman was trying to collect the rental fee for the chair and I got up and left the place.

BEFORE I LEFT, Detroit, George W. O'Brien, congressman for the 13th district gave me a letter of introduction to the American Ambassador to France, Mr. Dillon. From the letter I received an invitation to a cocktail party given in his honor at his Paris home.

The party was given on the lawn of his home which was beautifully enclosed by shrubs and trees. I was received by Mrs. Dillon and her two charming daughters. Later I met the Ambassador.

In the center of the lawn was a big table loaded with all kinds of liquors and champagnes, and sandwiches and other foods. Six or seven waiters were in full dress, standing at attention, waited to serve the guests.

After I met all the important people there we sat down on chairs that were placed all over the lawn and talked while we enjoyed our drinks.

I AM DOING a great deal of painting outdoors. One day I was making a painting along the river front with a river boat in the foreground and Notre Dame in the background when a young couple approached me with a camera and mumbled something to me in French.

Thinking that they wanted a picture of me I nodded obligingly. They talked to each other in English then and I also spoke to them in English. They were very disappointed to find out that I was not a real French artist.

Another day while I was painting another view of Notre Dame two men approached me and asked if I would allow them to take motion pictures of me.

I said that I would and they returned in an hour with all their equipment. When I refused to move my easel for them they were very put out but finally they finished their filming.

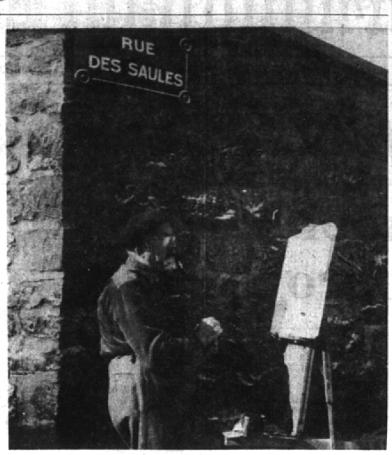
ARTISTS ARE as thick as flies along the river. One day while I was working in a lonely spot 10 artists joined me in the same location by afternoon. All of them were painting the same building as I was doing . . . the famed Notre Dame.

While we were working a man came along loaded down with artist supplies of all kinds. He would go from artist to artist offering his wares much the same as a hot dog vendor in our country at a ball game.

Most of my painting I did at Montmartre, one of the most famous art colonies in France. It stands atop the highest hill in Paris. Dozens of artists work outdoors there all day long and it resembles an outdoor art school. The place has almost as many art galleries as 57th street in New York city.

IN THE EVENINGS I usually eat my supper on Boulevard Montparnasse at a restaurant which all the artists frequent. Later I have my coffee at the Select Cafe, another meeting place of artists which they call the American Club for everyone speaks English.

Most of the patrons are students from the Academie De La Grande Chaumiere. Over here I feel like a young man of 21 years old going to art school. I will be leaving soon for the United States and Birmingham and later will return to Florida where I will work for money enough to return to Paris next year.



ROBERT A. HERZBERG
Painting famed "Lapin A Gilles" night club

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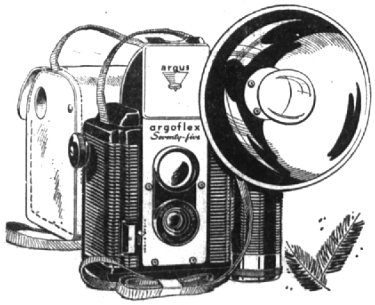

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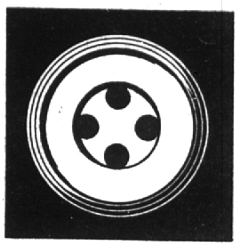

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