

World War II Monument in Lake Ella Park (Fred Drake Park)

On any given day, one can see Tallahassee residents strolling around beautiful Lake Ella located in Fred Drake Park off Monroe Street. Families enjoy walks around the lake supplying pieces of bread to their children to feed the ever hungry ducks as well as other birds. A jogger may pass them by, running the .6 mile distance around the lake multiple times using perhaps the American Legion Post 13 building with its imposing helicopter on display as a lap marker. However, had that jogger stopped for a brief moment of respite, he or she might have noticed a stone monument about five feet tall not far away from the helicopter and pondered the meaning of the inscription engraved on it:

“Brou (Eure-et-Loir) – Libérée le 14 Août 1944” and “Merci aux Soldats et au Peuple Américains”.



In 2007, the Alliance Française de Tallahassee (then Association Française) sponsored a photographic contest for their members. The subject matter was to take a picture of something "French" anywhere in Florida (pictures of French restaurants or stores, monuments, flags, street signs etc.). The photos were posted on the Alliance's website. One of the entries was a picture of a stone monument located at Lake Ella.

Shortly thereafter a prominent resident of the city of Brou in France, Mr. Lallet, contacted the Alliance Française inquiring about the location of the stone structure and requesting permission to use the photos for a research project concerning the monument. Mr. Lallet subsequently posted the results of his research on his city's website. Read on to find out what Mr. Lallet uncovered about the stone monument and the link between the city of Brou and Tallahassee.

La borne de Lake Ella

In 1947, France was still suffering the devastating consequences of World War II. Food and clothing were still much needed. That same year, in the United States, the idea emerged to set up a donation program to help the French and Italians to recover from the food shortages: “The Friendship Train”. The train left Los Angeles on November 7, 1947 and proceeded through the United-States before reaching New York in less than two weeks. The Friendship Train collected foodstuffs from American donors to provide desperately needed aid in the aftermath of the war and was primarily a gesture of goodwill. Originally hoping to collect 80 train car loads of food, the train eventually collected over 700 cars (valued at \$40 million) of food, clothing and fuel. The train was shipped from New York city to Le Havre, France. Supplies were then distributed in France and Italy.

In 1948 the French Veterans “Fédération Nationale des Anciens Combatants” decided to express the gratitude of the French people. The Friendship train was reciprocated by the



“Merci Train” or “Thank you train”, a group of 49 French train cars loaded with gifts for the US. The cars were loaded with items representing French culture, art, folklore, and history.

In Brou, France, at the mayor’s suggestion, the city council decided to donate a “borne”, or boundary stone, of the “Liberty Road” to the “Merci Train”.

The Mayor presented his intention to put two commemorative inscriptions on this stone, recalling the liberation of the city by the Americans, to seal in this “Borne” a handful of dirt from the French city of Brou and to attach to the shipment a letter addressed to Tallahassee’s mayor who would receive the donation. The stone was placed in the “Merci Train” to be sent to Florida.



Presentation of the boundary stone. This photo was taken at the Carrefour des Américains in Brou, France. Sir Georges Bredier, Brou’s mayor during this period, appears to be sealing the stone in the presence of city council.

A translation of an article from the Brou newspaper, “Echo de Brou”, December 14, 1948. Gratitude Train.

Echo de Brou du 14 décembre 1948

— **Train de la Reconnaissance Française.** — Le Comité d’Organisation du Train de la Reconnaissance Française, ayant sollicité la Ville de Brou pour un don à la Nation Américaine, la Municipalité a décidé d’offrir une « Borne de la Voie de la Liberté ».

Cette borne, sur laquelle ont été gravées les inscriptions suivantes : « Brou (Eure-et-Loir) - Libérée le 14 Août 1944 » et « Merci aux Soldats et au Peuple Américains », a été remplie de terre de Brou et mise en gare le 11 décembre pour être dirigée sur les Etats-Unis d’Amérique.

Des vues photographiques de Brou et un résumé de notre histoire locale ont été joints à l’envoi ainsi qu’une lettre adressée au Maire de la Ville où sera placée cette borne.

La population sera tenue au courant des nouvelles qui seront reçues de cet envoi.

The committee of the “Gratitude Train” solicited the city of Brou for a donation to the American Nation. The city decided to offer a boundary stone (borne) from the Liberty Road. This stone on which is written “Brou (Eure-et-Loir) – Libérée le 14 Août 1944” and “Merci aux Soldats et au Peuple Américains” (thank you to the American soldiers and people) was filled with some soil from Brou and departed on December 11 for the United States of America.

Photographic views of Brou and an abstract of our local history were attached to the shipment, as well as a letter for the mayor of the city where the “borne” will be placed. The population will be informed of the events that will follow this shipment.

The “Merci Train” left Paris on January 10, 1949 and was loaded onto a ship, the Magellan, which departed on January 14, 1949, its sides decorated with inscriptions that read “Merci America”.



The Magellan arrived on February 2, 1949 in New York City Harbor and was welcomed by 200 000 people in an extraordinary celebration. A train car was sent to each state, including Florida.

The borne sent by the city of Brou was in Florida’s car and was immediately placed in the state capitol. When the new capitol was built in the 70s, the borne was moved to Lake Ella and is now located in front of the American Legion building overlooking the lake.

Dr. David S. Greenberg, vice president of the Alliance Française of Tallahassee, remembers going through the Merci Train car that was given to the state of New York. He says: “On a personal note I remember as a 13 year old teenager going through the Merci Train with my late mother when it came to our home town of Schenectady, New York (near Albany, the state capital). There was a long line, and we waited in that line for a good two hours. I was most impressed with the exhibit, and remember the experience after all these years. I am sure that cultural encounters with the French culture such as this one helped me decide on a career as a French instructor.”



The Florida boxcar can be found next to the city hall in Holly Hill, Florida, near Daytona Beach.

The Alliance Française of Tallahassee would like to thank Raymond Lallet (<http://brou.net>) from the city of Brou for his invaluable help in collecting the history of the borne.

This story was brought to you by the **Alliance Française** of Tallahassee. From Basic French to Immersion Workshops, your Alliance française offers you the opportunity to learn French or to improve your French. We offer many cultural activities and courses at all levels. For more information see **www.aftally.org**.