

Une dernière parade pour David

David Babelay est décédé le 13 octobre 2000. Bien que nos relations s'étaient tout de même relâchées depuis quelques années, les échanges historiques qui nous avaient longtemps tenus n'étaient plus guère d'actualité, ce fut un choc que d'apprendre le départ de ce cher ami. Et je ne cacherai pas qu'à cette nouvelle j'ai pleuré comme un enfant. Et que je pleure encore aujourd'hui au souvenir de cette personnalité attachante tout en même temps qu'étonnante.

David, dans le domaine historique très pointilleux, allant dans le détail, voulant tout savoir, tenace, patient, curieux, amateur de photos à la tonne, qu'il allait sans aucun doute classer méticuleusement, avec une belle légende à l'arrière des plus intéressantes. Généreux, m'offrant des documents de toutes sortes à foison. Et dans le domaine humain, bon enfant, bon vivant, naïf un peu, mais n'est-ce pas cela qui en faisait le charme. Amical. Généreux là aussi. Prêt à vous suivre pour une nouvelle découverte.

Bref un bon type. Un bon type dont vous pouvez être fier d'être considéré comme un ami. Sincérité en tout.

Et à vous donner l'impression que vous étiez le meilleur de tous ses amis, alors que de ceux-ci, il en avait, grâce à ce caractère avenant des dizaines. Des membres de sa famille, des gens animés d'une même passion, de ceux avec lesquelles il avait pu vivre ses « jubilee ».

Inutile de dire que les heures passées en sa présence furent grandioses ! Je le revois encore avec son grand tablier blanc à s'essayer à tourner des vacherins, opération en apparence d'une grande facilité, mais en réalité plus difficile qu'on ne le croit, et surtout pour une personne qui voudrait aller un peu vite et ne pas s'attarder une demi-journée sur un pendant !

On avait fait une fameuse expédition à Aigle, pour tenter de retrouver les escaliers de l'immeuble d'où était partie la famille Buffat. On avait cru au départ que ceux-ci étaient toujours ceux que les locataires pratiquaient. Or, juste avant de nous en aller, on s'était rendu compte que les vrais escaliers d'autrefois, qui par miracle existaient toujours, étaient tout simplement murés derrière une sorte de silo de béton. Mais effectivement derrière le mur ce qu'on avait pu découvrir par un trou, ils étaient bel et bien là les escaliers d'autrefois. Que d'émotion !

Il a assisté à un enterrement en mon village, il a mangé une fondue au Bonhomme avec le ski-club des Charbonnières, il a fait les foins avec nous aux Grands Billard, il a patiné à la patinoire artificielle du Sentier. Bref, il a connu pas mal de trucs de notre Vallée de Joux et qui, bien entendu, à chaque fois, lui permettaient de prendre toute une série de photos. Pour le souvenir. Pour que rien de ce qu'il avait vécu ne lui échappe.

Mais voilà, la page est tournée pour lui. Comme elle se tournera aussi pour nous. Que faut-il dire encore ? Rien. Que la vie est ainsi faite de rencontres, de bons moments, mais aussi de ces inévitables départs. Et que rien ni personne n'y

pourra jamais changer quelque chose, dussent être les progrès technologiques humains mille fois plus performants.

Les Charbonnières, le 8 février 2018 :

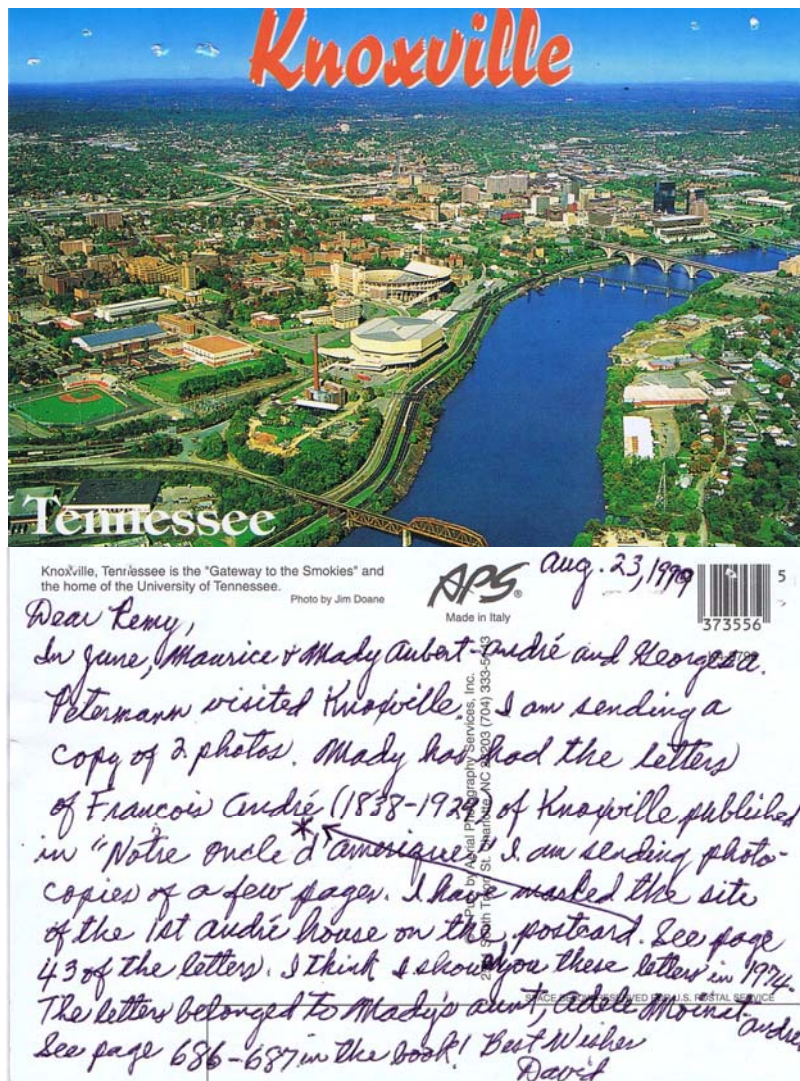
R. « Rotchette » !



*at the "Swiss Mails"
Nov. 29, 1998
Josiane & David at The
National Cathedral in
Washington, D.C. Dec. 7, 1998*



Même jour, à Washington.



Une dernière carte.

David Babelay, 1941-2000

Remembering the champion of the Swiss

by Jack Neely

The last time I saw David Babelay—I think it was just last month—he didn't seem ill. He didn't even seem tired.

He never did. He was almost 60, but he had the energy of a schoolkid.

I don't think his old colleagues will mind my saying he was the most energetic librarian in the county. Many librarians prefer to remain seated as they patiently instruct you about where to find a book or a file, and that's fine. But David always wanted to bounce up and show you—and in the bargain maybe find out for himself what you were looking for.

Asked a question, he would start to say something in his quick voice, then stop, standing still and looking at the floor with his hand to his chin, then be off in some surprising direction. Sometimes, if the trail led him back to the Employees Only rooms, he'd take you back there with a grin and a glance over his shoulder.

He worked at the McClung Collection, as a volunteer or a part-timer, for more than 20 years, but he sometimes had the effect of a schoolkid who'd snuck in there to look at something the teacher didn't want him to see. He'd open file-cabinet drawers with an intense, nervous anticipation, as if he expected the history would jump out at him, as sometimes it did.

week, there was a small Swiss flag attached to the coffin. David's great-grandfather came from Switzerland in the 1800s. To David, that wasn't all that long ago. He learned French and went to Switzerland himself, several times, trying to find old cousins and new connections. One of his Swiss friends made the trip to Knoxville for his funeral.

David never started a family of his own, which may have intensified his sense of belonging in the larger French-

Swiss family. They began arriving in Knoxville in the 1840s, most of them fleeing religious persecution; in Knoxville they became mayors, judges, authors, philanthropists. They kept their heritage for generations, speaking French in church, holding "love feasts" in the country and annual street fairs downtown. David could remember elderly first-generation Swiss who still spoke with an accent.

A couple of years ago, he presided over the Swiss Knoxvillians' sesquicentennial. A few years before, he had finished his massive two-volume opus, *They Trusted And Were Delivered*, a detailed genealogy of the French-speaking Swiss in the Knoxville area.

Many of Knoxville's Swiss have long since abandoned any sense that they're different from any Go-Vols East Ten-



inherited status as foreigner.

He favored the Swiss, but became the library's champion of all continental families, including the Austrian Knaffs. Last year, David discovered that the 1899 "Knaffl Madonna," the once-famous photo by Joseph Knaffl, was being used as a Christmas card by Hallmark, with no photo credit. David wanted people to know who made the picture, so he went to the site of the old Knaffl studio on Gay Street and taped up a Knaffl shrine on a vacant building—now, as then, one of the buildings condemned for the Justice Center project. His homage included a copy of the Knaffl Madonna itself, adorned with ribbons and captions explaining its significance, with information about the lives of the photographer and his models. It got your attention.

Within a couple of days, of course, the shrine had vanished, every trace of it fastidiously removed. Whether it was removed by an officious county employee or a random schizophrenic, it's hard to know. David responded as he did to every disappointment, with a head-shaking grin and a Gallic shrug.

To David and his research I owe several of my best stories. One of my favorites is that of Frederic Esperandieu, the errant winemaking cleric who lived in Knoxville before the Civil War. Briefly jailed by the Union army, he fled back home to Europe, unaware that the Franco-Prussian War was about to break out and he'd be enlisted to fight with Napoleon III against the Prussians. He then returned and taught French at UT.

The photographic book about Knoxville-area gravesites, *The Marble City*, that

would have been a different and much duller book without David's help.

In the McClung Collection he directed me to lots of graves, always jumping up to show me a map or a listing. I'll never forget one fall Friday afternoon when he leapt up and went all the way out of the Custom House and got in his car and gave Aaron and me a four-hour tour of French-Swiss Knoxville, driving down roads in parts of the city and county I'd never seen. Taking a spontaneous sidetrip on that jaunt, he startled Aaron and me when he abruptly drove through a passage in some woods, then right across some well-mown lawns to a copse of trees, which turned out to be a little-known family cemetery. There he showed us the obscure graves of a whole family of bootleggers, most of whom died young. We didn't use the photos in the book, in part because they would have been de facto proof of trespassing.

One of the graveyards he showed us that day was the ancient Anderson-Gouffon Cemetery, off Tazewell Pike, where he was buried Monday.

The last time I remember his helping was when I was researching the 11th Street houses, when he found a file about the Pilgrim Congregationalist Church that I wouldn't have found otherwise. He never told me he was sick. He spoke of his heart attack a couple of years ago the way some folks would talk about a sneeze, as if it was just one of those funny, embarrassing things that happens to all of us.

It'll be strange to be in the McClung Collection without David bouncing out of his chair as I walk in, whispering *Jack*.

Historian David Babelay dies at 59

Noted author, genealogist and historian David Babelay died early Friday morning.

Mr. Babelay, 59, was a reference librarian in the McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library and author of a two-volume book, "They Trusted and Were Delivered: The French-Swiss of Knoxville, Tennessee."

The book, which chronicled the history of 35 Swiss families between 1848 and 1913, took 15 years to write.

Mr. Babelay grew up on Washington Pike, where his ancestors settled more than a century ago and where his family ran a greenhouse business.

In addition to his academic work, Mr. Babelay arranged to mark the graves of George Mann, the last person in Knox County killed by American Indians, and Pharaoh Chesney, a former slave.

He organized a 1973 reunion marking the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the French-Swiss in Knoxville, and other anniversary celebrations were held in 1978, 1988 and 1998.

A grand celebration in 1991 marked the 700th anniversary of Switzerland as well as Knoxville's 200th birthday.

In 1991 Mr. Babelay was guest curator for an exhibit at the East Tennessee Historical Society that examined the his-

tory and contributions of the region's French-Swiss settlers.

He was the son of John P. and the late Virginia McCampbell Babelay and a member of Shannondale Presbyterian Church, Knoxville.

He belonged to a number of historical organizations, including the East Tennessee Historical Society, Sons of Union Veterans, and Descendants of Icarians of Nauvoo, Ill.

He was also a member of First Families of Tennessee through his ancestors David Adair, Samuel McKinley, William McKinley, and John Faust.

Survivors include: special friend, Josiane Babelay Hodel of Novalles, canton of Vaud, Switzerland; father, John P. Babelay; brother, Stephen and sister in law, Sylvia Babelay, Knoxville; sister Sarah and brother in law Al Weber, Jr., of Hendersonville, Tenn.; nieces and nephews, Adrienne and Marshall B. Weber, Hendersonville, Tenn., Timothy, Weston, and Teresa Babelay, Knoxville.

The family will receive friends from 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday at Gentry-Griffey Chapel.

Graveside services are at 10:30 a.m. Monday at Anderson-Gouffon Cemetery, Washington Pike.

The Rev. Robert M. Walker will officiate.

BABELAY, DAVID - 59, died Fri., Oct. 13, 2000 at 2:53 a.m. A reference librarian in the McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library, and the son of John P. and the late Virginia McCampbell Babelay. Survivors: special friend, Josiane Babelay Hodel of Novalles, canton of Vaud, Switzerland; father, John P. Babelay; brother, Stephen and sister in law, Sylvia Babelay, Knoxville; sister, Sarah and brother in law, Al Weber, Jr., of Hendersonville, Tenn.; nieces and nephews, Adrienne and Marshall B. Weber, Hendersonville, TN., Timothy, Weston, and Teresa Babelay, Knoxville. David was a well known historian and genealogist. In 1989 he led a group of 31 to Switzerland. He was the author of the two volume book *They Trusted and Were Delivered: The French-Swiss of Knoxville, Tennessee*, documenting the history of 35 families. In 1973 he organized a reunion celebrating the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the French-Swiss in Knoxville. Other anniversary celebrations were held in 1978, 1988, and again in 1998 (150th year). A grand celebration in 1991 marked the 700th anniversary of Switzerland, as well as Knoxville's 200th birthday. In 1991 he was guest curator for an exhibit at the East Tennessee Historical Society, examining the history and contributions of the region's French-Swiss settlers. In 1981 he had a tombstone erected for the former slave Pharaoh Chesney. A dinner and dedication ceremony held in Union County was attended by both white and black members of the Chesney family. He also has arranged to mark the grave of George Mann, the last person in Knox County killed by Indians. David was a member of Shannondale Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, and of several historical organizations: Sons of Union Veterans; Swiss-American Historical Society; Descendants of Icarians of Nauvoo, Illinois; First Families of TN through his ancestors David Adair, Samuel McKinley, William McKinley, and John Faust. He was also a member and volunteer of the East TN Historical Society, and photographs and artifacts from his extensive historical collection were frequently used in the museum exhibits. Friends will meet at 10:30 a.m. Mon. at Anderson-Gouffon Cemetery, Tazewell Pike, for graveside services. Rev. Robert M. Walker officiating. the family will receive friends 3-5 p.m. Sun. at *Gentry-Griffey Chapel*.

Octobre 2000

Biens Chers

A vous tous qui avez de près ou de loin connu David , je vous fais parvenir ce petit mot annonçant son décès.

Je joins les articles du journal de Knoxville ainsi que quelques photos.

J'étais auprès de lui les 10 derniers jours et je l'ai accompagné jusqu'à la fin.

Son hépatite s'est déclarée au mois de septembre et a été foudroyante, ne lui laissant aucune chance. Son foie et ses reins ne fonctionnaient plus du tout.

A sa sortie de l'hôpital, il aurait dû aller dans un hospice car il ne pouvait en aucun cas rester tout seul tellement il était faible; aussi, comme j'étais sur place, cela lui a permis de rentrer chez lui et de mourir dans son lit, ce qui était son souhait.

Je suis très heureuse d'avoir eu l'opportunité de m'occuper de lui 24 h sur 24 h. Il n'a pas souffert, il était prêt pour le grand voyage et il est parti en douceur à 2h53 le vendredi 13 octobre 2000.

Le vide qu'il laisse derrière lui est immense et on ne pourra jamais le combler, heureusement il y a tous les souvenirs, qu'on dit! Mais on a beau dire!

Voilà, je vous laisse, mais je suis atteignable pour ceux qui le désire et désolée pour les mauvaises nouvelles.

Josiane

David's cj-sunshine

Josiane Babelay-Hodel, Le Moulin, 1431 Novalles