Early History of La Causerie Française
1910 Until 1940 — August, 1957 —
In 1910 Mrs. Haebert White, Miss Marie Powers, Mrs. William Beebe, and Mrs. George Stephens formed a class which took two lessons a week in French from Miss Millit Ayers, late of Paris. Because new material was constantly being studied, no time in class could be used for conversation and review. So Mrs. White invited the other members of her class for tea, one Friday to practice speaking. Then they repeated that to Miss Ayers. She said "oh, why didn't you invite me!". Then they asked the next time she was invited, and suggested that the group be called "La Causerie Du-Temps." When the four were invited to her house, she asked many from her other classes. French games were played, songs were sung. Such meetings grew rapidly in size, as they seemed to fill a real cultural need in Kansas City. The Allée Française met only in the evening, with only members present once a month, and was soon discontinued.
Soon the "Causerie Intime" became "La Causerie Francaise", with Mrs James A. Vineyard as the first president. Meetings were held in homes, once a month, with tea, and lectures given gratis by Consuls Emil Breu, Georges Mignonnet, Paul Constant, and Colonel Georges C. Peron, French military attaché at Fort Leavenworth, and his beautiful wife. They are now living in Paris, where he is head of the International Association of Auto mobile Clubs, and a Commandant of the Legion of Honor. Mme. Adolphe Beyenbecke, gracious Parisienne whose grandfather had a street in Paris named after him, came to Kansas City to live, and gave lavishly of her time for years to help all she could, without charge.

Mrs. Vineyard taught gratis at her home on Mondays a fort nightly class in French history. Mrs John A. Prescott had a morning book-reading group. Thursdays to her home. Mrs. James Neil Foster and Mr. William Preston had
Small groups in their homes, taught by M. Joseph Desmond. A group of eight had weekly Wednesday elocution lessons in their homes to study Bernequin's Idioms, with the Hostess playing Mme. Ayers' part. Mrs. Esther Brame, Miss Josephine Green, Mrs. Mary Clark, Mrs. Howard Harrison, Mrs. B. Landis Elliott, Mrs. Dunn Schwartz, Mrs. James O'Neil Brown were the early members.

The first play was given about 1914 in the little Unitarian Church on Baltimore, north of Armorel Blvd, destroyed by fire years ago. It was "La Duchesse Vénérable", coached by Mme Ayers with Marie Powers in the title role excellently done. Others in the cast were Mrs. White, Mrs. Beebe, Mary Kelley, now Mrs. William E. Lyons, & Mrs. Stewart, Mrs. Stephens. Many delightful dramas have been given since, chiefly at the annual lunches now become the Festes. These were given at the Blue Hills Country Club, Mission Hills Club, the Athenaeum, the Roof Garden and...
and Florentine Rooms of the Kansas City Club. A schedule of classes was made, dues were collected, and Mrs. Bixler was paid from the treasury. Additional funds were raised by French bridge parties, lotteries, and the presentation of French movies. These were the only French movies that were seen in Kansas City until the Vogue Theatre and the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery showed some.

The Charlot Books, the Berlitz Method, Fraser and Piquet, Mrs. Jandel, M. Centre were among the books studied.

After World War I several war brides came to Le Cauzere which was helpful both to the club and to them. Outstanding among them was charming Mme. Fenelon, who still attends when she is in Kansas City. Mme. Kamin, her sister Simone Boujon and mother, Jeannette Stroble who sang beautifully, Sueie Eaton and talented Marquerite Leitner whose book reviews are still events to be remembered.
Brilliant was her performance as the femaining lead in "Jorarich" at the Mission Hills Club in 1937, with Katherine Bredenow, McCartney and Richard Wagner giving fine support in their roles. Other productions were "Le Medecin Malgre Lui" with a visiting Frenchman, and "Marie Antoinette" with Mrs. White in the title part. Other delightful actors during the years were Mrs. Allan Browne, Mrs. William DeRouen, Mrs. Wm. E. Campbell, Mr. James Neil Foster, Elizabeth Clinton, Geneviève Moore, Mrs. Joseph W. Ivy, Mrs. Lee Cowles, Mrs. Roy Shylee, Mrs. Wm. C. Crain, Richard Renus were later lights in plays given. Several of these proved to be president, notably Mrs. Claude In McFarland, the only one to be distinguished by receiving a medal for aiding in the knowledge of the French language; her picture appeared in the Kansas City Star, receiving it from the French Ambassadeur.

During Mrs. White's two terms as President, La Causerie became
Also, Court Leo Tolstoy talked for us.

A member of the National Alliance Française, and engaged thus distinguished lecturers once or twice a year, usually at a fee of $100 plus expenses. M. Reau of the French Academy was the first scholar to come; others were M. Caster, whose grammar was being studied, and M. Henri David of the University of Chicago; he was a favorite who came two or three times. Associate membership was created to help finance these lectures, with most of the City's French teachers joining, and often bringing pupils—these latter were admitted at half price. Mrs. McFarland often accompanied Mrs. White on the visits to the schools, as vice-president.

The library was started with a donation of thirteen books from the National Alliance; other were given by interested people: Mrs. Frank Hoffman {14} was the first in charge, and would bring the books in a suit-case to the Kansas City Club, where
La Causerie was then meeting and offering them to members. Now, they are kept in a handsome mahogany bookcase, bought at wholesale from Robert Keith, where Mr. White was vice-president. It is at present in the hospitable home of Mrs. James L. Burnett, a former club president. Mrs. Wilkinson, also a president, sponsored an advanced group in her home, coached by nuns. Members brought sandwiches and cake, paid a drive for coffee. When the present Kansas City Club building was finished, Mr. Herbert White was its treasurer, and house committee chairman. He arranged for La Causerie to hold its classes there. Graves luncheons were served in the beautiful ladies' dining room, now the cocktail lounge. The Causerie Treasurer collected a dollar from each one who lunches and that was turned over to Mr. White. Sometimes there was difficulty straightening out
income and outgo. Those who paid something in English were fined a nickel, which was dropped in a little silver bowl supplied by Mrs. Drennan.

About this time the Livre began to appear, a minuscule of those coming later, a constitution was written; the device, suggested by Mrs. Ayers, “De jour en jour, en toute occasion, je parlerai le français de mieux en mieux” was adopted. The membership rose during the prosperous twenties to one hundred and fifty members, embracing some of Kansas City’s finest musicians. Mrs. George Farisee, Mrs. Franklin Murphy, whose son is now Chancellor of Kansas University, Miss Annu Roberts, Mrs. George Cowden. The depressing thirties made our roster shrink. Classes moved from the Kansas City Club to the Athenaeum, and later to the Brookside Hotel. At a tea at the lovely home of Mrs. Chas. Phil.
Phillips about twenty-five years ago, morning pictures were made, which she still has.

Among books read in classes were "Sur la Branche" by Pierre Comtes, "Le Crime de Sylvester Bonard" by Anatole France, "Les Roches Blanches" "Les Femmes Errantes" by Moliere.

When our vivacious leader, Mrs. Ayers passed on, there followed a succession of teachers which included Miss Moscherosch, M. Gustave Behr, M. Paul Constant, which ended with the acquisition of our beloved Lucie Harding for many years. Her sad loss in the summer of 1927 was deeply felt.

About 1940, when Marion Dunning Collins, now wife of Chicago University's Chancellor, Lawrence Herkert, was president, the advisability of Spanish Studies was considered, and after much debate, the flourishing Spanish classes were commenced. Senior Marie
Riggs-Miller, a cultured former opera singer from Sevilla, was the first instructor, and continued for about eight years, when she left to join her son in Brazil. Buttera Marguerite Exeter, born in Alsace Lorraine and former resident of Peru, succeeded her, and is still teaching.

With the coming of La Causerie to the pleasant Young Matrons Clubhouse at 51/2 W and Oak streets, as its Friday home—the "Ancienne Histoire" ceases. Its founders were they here to-day—only Mrs. White and Mrs. Pollock, Mrs. van Gouen still live in Kansas City, would indeed be gratified to know that a successful cultural asset it has become to our fair metropolis.

Garrettte White, August, 1937

Perhaps it would be helpful to announce at the opening tea that all programme directors, recollections will be welcomed to supplement this imperfect recital—"the many were the hours I spent with it dear heart"!