The History of Reid Hall

Located in the heart of the Montparnasse neighborhood of Paris, Reid Hall has hosted for more than a century international conferences, undergraduate and graduate programs, and cultural and scholarly events. Over the years, it has earned a significant place in trans-Atlantic relationships. In March 2010, it was inaugurated as a Global Center and now forms part of a network of Global Centers located in nine major world cities: Beijing, Mumbai, Nairobi, Istanbul, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, Tunis and Amman. As such, it benefits from the significant resources provided by Columbia faculty, students and administration.

ORIGINS

Dating back to 1745, the original structure housed a porcelain factory. Its Left Bank location took advantage of underground kaolin deposits, and the factory thrived thanks to the burgeoning global market for Parisian ceramics. In 1799, as revolutionary France began to consolidate itself as an empire, the three Dagoty brothers leased the manufactory and expanded the premises after being named official providers to Empress Josephine. By 1812, they employed over a hundred workers. Dagoty porcelain was known worldwide, appearing not only at the castles of Compiègne and Versailles, but also in the United States, notably at state dinners hosted by President James Monroe, in which a full service featuring a patriotic American eagle was on display. As the Dagoty brothers expanded the premises, the main building came to resemble what exists today: a ground floor, two upper floors, an attic lit by seven casement windows that look out onto the street, and seventeen other windows overlooking a cobblestoned courtyard.

FROM PORCELAIN TO PEDAGOGY

In the 1820s, as the Parisian porcelain market flagged and the Dagoty firm moved its production out of the city, the buildings on the rue de Chevreuse underwent their first conversion to international educational purposes. In 1834, the site became home to the boarding school of the Swiss Protestant educator J.-J. Keller. The first such institution since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, it welcomed well-to-do French Protestants and visiting foreigners, and encouraged them to entrust their “young gentleman” to the establishment’s strict discipline. Charles King, President of Columbia College, left his son there while the family toured Europe in 1865, and the 17-year-old André Gide attended the school in 1886, an unhappy experience for the adolescent boy which he later described in Si le grain ne meurt. The Keller Institute closed its doors in the late 1880s.

A RESIDENTIAL CENTER FOR WOMEN

In the 1890s, as cosmopolitan and immensely rich Americans arrived in Paris, the property came to the attention of the philanthropist Elizabeth Mills Reid, daughter of the California financer Darius O. Mills and wife of Whitelaw Reid, who succeeded Horace Greeley as owner and editor of the New York Tribune. Mr. Reid was also the Minister Plenipotentiary to France from 1889 to
1892. Located in a neighborhood known as "The American Corner," the site especially interested Mrs. Reid as a potential residence for some of the aspiring American artists drawn to Montparnasse's lively artistic community. After acquiring the premises, she installed her newly created American Girls Club. In 1913, she bought a neighboring property and constructed the annex, which included dorm rooms, seven artist studios, and a dining room. To connect the old and new buildings, the Grande Salle was built to house receptions, exhibitions, and conferences.

When the U.S. committed troops to the Great War in 1917, Mrs. Reid converted the property into a French and American officers' hospital. After the Armistice, she turned the site over to the American Red Cross. It remained their headquarters until 1922.

With the U.S. now a permanent presence in post-Armistice Europe, a group of prominent American educators—or “The Ladies,” as Mrs. Reid called them—asked to use the premises as a residential center for university women, the American University Women's Paris Club. The founding signatories were all from elite women's colleges, notably Virginia C. Gildersleeve (Dean of Barnard College), M. Carey Thomas (founder of Bryn Mawr College), and three other women educated at Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley. Beginning in 1922, the premises also housed the French Association of University Women (AFFDU), the national branch of the International Federation of University Women (FIFDU). In 1927, Mrs. Reid turned the property over to her daughter-in-law, Helen Rogers Reid, a Barnard College trustee and later President of the New York Herald Tribune. The Board of Directors then decided to name the property Reid Hall in honor of Elizabeth Reid. Barnard graduate Dorothy Leet became Reid Hall's first director, and served until 1964.
A CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL HUB

Until the Second World War, Reid Hall housed between fifty and sixty-five women at any given time, and was an intellectual and social hub of the Montparnasse neighborhood. French scholars, civil servants, and intellectuals came to the Franco-American center to introduce students to the study of French theater, literature, and art, and to debate major questions in French political life. Gertrude Stein, for example, made an appearance at one end-of-the-year party, after she was invited to Reid Hall by an artist friend who rented one of its studios.

In 1939, the American University Women's Paris Club ceased its functions, and AFFDU was given management of the property. In 1941, AFFDU transferred Reid Hall to the Ministry of Public Instruction, which installed the École normale supérieure de jeunes filles de Sèvres. After the war, Dorothy Leet returned to France to revive it as a center for American education overseas. This moment marked the evolution of Reid Hall into a study abroad center as we would recognize it today, as programs from Smith, Sweetbriar, Middlebury, Bryn Mawr, and Yale began to establish their presence in Paris. In 1951, Miss Leet created the Third Year in Paris Program, which brought together students from various American institutions to spend a year studying French language and culture.

BEQUEATHED TO COLUMBIA

With new students and programs arriving in Paris, life continued apace at Reid Hall until 1964, when Helen Rogers Reid bequeathed the property to Columbia University. Two years later, Columbia created the Junior Year in Paris Program, its first study abroad program at Reid Hall, which continues to this day as the Columbia University Undergraduate Programs in Paris. In 1972, Reid Hall found a renewed mission in the hands of Danielle Haase-Dubosc, educated at Barnard College and Columbia University, and newly-appointed director. Together with Brunhilde Biebuyck, director of the undergraduate programs in Paris, she saw Reid Hall establish partnerships with many Paris university centers, and created Columbia's first full-standing master's degree at Reid Hall in 1993. With the backing of Provost Jonathan C. Cole, she inaugurated the Institute for Advanced Scholars, which ran from 2000-2010.
A GLOBAL CENTER

Columbia Global Centers l Paris was inaugurated at Reid Hall in 2010. Paul LeClerc was named Director and Brunhilde Biebuyck Administrative Director of the Center in 2012. Under their leadership, Columbia's presence at Reid Hall and in Paris has greatly expanded.

Today, in addition to the Columbia Undergraduate Programs in Paris, the University now offers at Reid Hall an M.A. program in History and Literature, an architecture program running in both New York and Paris, and residencies for the Executive Master in Technology Management. In addition, Global Centers l Paris hosts a series of public programs that engage faculty from Columbia and the French University world; it attracts over six thousand people per year. Reid Hall also hosts several American and European institutions of higher education and welcomes more than 600 students annually.

The Institute for Ideas & Imagination will open its doors at Reid Hall in September 2018. A University-wide academic organization, the Institute will host a total of sixteen fellows, bringing together faculty from Columbia University with brilliant creative thinkers from around world, including Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia. The Columbia Institute for Ideas and Imagination’s purpose is to question the established ways in which knowledge and ideas are produced, communicated and taught. As such, it will be an incubator of innovative ideas, thereby advancing President Lee C. Bollinger’s agenda of making Columbia University a global leader in humanities-driven thought, responsive to the changing conditions of the contemporary world.