



René Daubenfeld and Julie Ann Trenkamp: Building Bridges between Luxembourg and the United States

In the past few decades, a movement has been afoot involving Luxembourg visitors connecting with Americans of Luxembourg descent and vice versa. "Cousins" long separated by the ocean have been reunited and lifelong friendships have developed between residents of the Grand Duchy and the U.S.

In the past few years, a leader in this important movement has been Mr. René Daubenfeld of Surre, Luxembourg. Not only is René the mayor of the Township of Boulaide, Luxembourg, he is also an avid genealogist and historian who has developed useful websites to assist people researching their Luxembourgian roots.

In 2001, René received a letter from Julie Ann Trenkamp of Preston, Iowa. She had discovered the family name *Thines* on René's website and asked for additional help. In 2002, Julie and her husband visited Luxembourg and René joined them in doing their research. A wonderful friendship began which set the stage for *Building Bridges* tours.

In 2003, René traveled to the U.S. to visit the main settlements of Luxembourgers in

Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. During that visit, René and Julie Ann brainstormed about organizing trips from Luxembourg to the Midwest and from the U.S. to Luxembourg.

After René shared photos and information about his U.S. trip with friends in Luxembourg, they urged him to organize such a tour for them. The first tour was a two week trip which took place in May 2005. Julie Ann agreed to assist René and the group in the States. Of that first tour, René muses: "At that time, I felt like an emigrant who came back to the Old World to take my friends with him to the New World!" The tour turned out to be a success on both sides of the ocean, so plans soon began for a second tour.

During the first tour, René and Julie Ann discussed possible ideas for a logo for the tours. René states: "For the logo I immediately developed the idea of two flags and a ship in the middle. Together with Julie Ann, we developed the name *Building Bridges*. So the two flags are illustrating the links between our two countries and the ship



René and Julie Ann

means the link to the past and immigration – because they all came on ships!"

To date, René and Julie Ann have led six *Building Bridges* tours from Luxembourg to the United States and one from the United States to Luxembourg. The most recent *Building Bridges* tour took place this past August 22 – September 6. René, Julie Ann, and 27 Luxembourgers spent 16 days touring Luxembourg settlements in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska.

At most of their major stops, the *Building Bridges* group was welcomed by members of the Luxembourg American community from that specific locale. Often members of the tour group meet family members here in the United States or people with familiar last names or those who descended from one of their own hometowns. René states: "It is always an immense pleasure for us to bring people together and help them find their distant cousins on both sides of the ocean. We are always overwhelmed by how we are welcomed in the United States."

The LACS would like to commend René and Julie Ann for the amazing job they have done, and continue to do, in "building bridges" between Luxembourg and the United States.

Learn more about *Building Bridges* Tours at www.haffren.lu



*Building Bridges Tour Group
August 2009 – Visiting St. Mary's Church, Port Washington, Wisconsin*