

## **MONA BISMARCK FOUNDATION:**

### **ITS BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

**The Mona Bismarck Foundation, a New York not-for-profit organization, was created in the 1970s by Countess Mona Bismarck, a Kentucky-born American, during her lifetime for cultural, scientific, educational and artistic purposes. Her wish was that it become actively operational only upon her death.**

**The Countess appointed Mr. Russell M. Porter as the Executor of her Last Will and President of the Foundation. In her Will she bequeathed 100% of the shares of Mobis Corporation, which holds the title to the building at 34 Avenue de New York, 75016 Paris, and a small endowment to conduct charitable activities to be undertaken by the Foundation.**

**Although there was no specific instruction in her Last Will as to where and how she wanted the Foundation to carry out its charitable activities, she had indicated to Mr. Porter, who was her long-time friend and counsel, that her desire was to establish a Cultural Centre in Paris to enhance the cause of American / French friendship upon her death. Also, Mr. Porter and myself felt that she also wanted to perpetuate her name.**

**The Countess died in July of 1983. After the estate was partially settled towards the end of 1986, Mr. Porter, as President of the Foundation and myself as its Director of Administration and Finance, in order to materialize the wishes of the Countess, organized some cultural events in the name of the Mona Bismarck Foundation. We soon learned, however, that French law does not permit foreign foundations to operate on French soil. Therefore, with the good advice of officials of the French Ministry of Interior, we created a not-for-profit organization under the French law of 1901 named "Association Mona Bismarck" to be able to proceed with the charitable activities as mentioned in her Last Will .**

**Setting up a not-for-profit institution of this nature in France and making it viable on a long-term basis with limited financial resources, together with the burden of maintaining a very large building in the 16th *arrondissement* of Paris, proved to be an arduous task. Management had to be carefully thought out for long-term stability. The maintenance and up-keep of an independent town house is extremely expensive. The building at 34 Avenue de New York consists of approximately 1 200 square metres of space spread over four floors, including the usable basement.**

**Although there was no well defined mission statement for the Foundation in the Countesses' Last Will, through the experience gained by conducting numerous activities of eclectic nature at its premises, during over 20 years of its existence, we have gradually come up with a broad outline for the selection of the Foundation's programs and for allocation of space for users of its facilities.**

**As far as possible the Foundation's programmatic activity will aim to satisfy one or more of the following criteria;**

- **Perpetuation of the Countess' name as far as possible.**
- **Total not-for-profit character.**
- **Substance with America / French or American bent; be they artistic, literary, educational, historical, veterans, or scientific nature; may that be users of space.**
- **Subjects that reflect the diverse interests and tastes of the Countess or those with which she would have willingly associated with, or participated in.**

**We have carried out this mission by organizing both permanent activities and temporary events in the building.**

**With regard to continuing cultural activities, the Foundation and Mobis Corporation jointly sought to gather at their premises a few other not-for-profit organizations of American origin and French 1901 Associations, to facilitate their own philanthropic endeavours, in exchange for a token participation towards the expense and up-keep of the building. They are committed to enhancing Franco – American friendship and make a substantial contribution the well-being of the American community overseas as well as the French and international friends of the United States.**

**The continuing activities were to be self-financed through the contribution toward the building's operating expenses received from the other institutions that occupied space therein. At present there are 11 Franco-American organisations taking advantage of the facilities provided by the Mona Bismarck Foundation, with a sum total membership of over 5 000. In light of the success of the Foundation's program of creating an inter action among the other American – French not-for-profit organizations and their growing contribution towards the American-French friendship in Europe, the Mona Bismarck Foundation's Board of Trustees has recently decided to devote more attention to their needs. Since the beginning of 2009, the Mona Bismarck Foundation has, among other things, made available a fully equipped conference room on the first floor. As a matter of fact, they arranged over 100 non-profit events of different kinds for their membership within Foundation's premises in the year 2008.**

**The Associations housed at Mona Bismarck Foundation's premises are:**

- 1. Association of American Residents Abroad**
- 2. Association of American Wives of Europeans**
- 3. American Club of Paris**
- 4. Association France – Etats-Unis**
- 5. American Friends of Blerancourt**
- 6. US Girls Scouts**
- 7. Comité Français pour la Sauvegarde de Venice**
- 8. French Heritage Society**
- 9. Hiroshima Foundation**
- 10. Veteran of Foreign Wars**
- 11. World Monuments Fund**

**The interim or temporary events represent visual art exhibitions, seminars, symposia and the like, animated by the Mona Bismarck Foundation itself, in keeping with the essence of American-French friendship in mind. Since 1986, the Foundation has staged over 70 such events of eclectic nature. Admission is free, and the average monthly attendance has been between 6 000 and 10 000 visitors.**

**The Mona Bismarck Foundation and the Mobis Corporation being US charities under IRS 501 (c) (3) and 509 (2) respectively, it is mandatory that they file Tax and Information Returns with the IRS, Charity Bureau of New York and the Attorney General of New York. The Association Mona Bismarck is obliged to meet what is known as the expenditure responsibility requirements imposed by the U.S. tax authorities and the Attorney General of New York.**

**Finally I would like to divulge what inspired or motivated Mr. Porter and I to gather some American – French not-for-profit Associations at the Mona Bismarck Foundation. In the mid 70s, he and I were associated with a building known as Pershing Hall, at 49 Rue Pierre Charron , in the 8<sup>th</sup>, not far from Champs Elysée. The title to the property was held by the US Justice Department, farmed out to the American Legion in the United States and managed by a committee in France called Pershing Hall Operating Committee with the ex- officio membership of the American Legion, Paris Post No. I. The building was dedicated to General Pershing and the Expeditionary Forces of the United States of World War I. There were about 15 important US non-profit organisations housed in the building. Due to arguments among members of those Associations, the American Legion in the United States got tired of the situation and ended up withdrawing from the agreement; as result the justice Department gave the title to the Veterans Administration who gave a 99 year lease to a Hotel Management company.**

**All of the non-profit Associations had to be evicted from the building which was a very painful experience for everyone. Some of the Associations could not afford to rent space in Paris, and hence they operated from homes of the members. It was very sad for Mr. Porter and I to watch the situation. Thus, when we inherited the Bismarck property we decided to invite selected Associations that were housed at 49 Rue Pierre Charron to 34 Avenue de New York to carry out their philanthropic endeavours. I personally feel that Mr. Porter and I realized our dream.**

**Thank you.**

**C. Rajakaruna  
President  
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