

# BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE  
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



Breton isn't a foreign language – in Brittany!

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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# BRO NEVEZ 138

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The **U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL)** was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. **Bro Nevez** ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly: February, May, August and November. Contributions, letters to the Editor, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

The U.S. ICDBL provides Bro Nevez on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/ Subscription allows us to do this. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above.

**This newsletter can be sent as a PDF file attached to an e-mail instead of, or in addition to, the print version. Just let the Editor know how you would like to receive it.**

*Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.*

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## Editorial

Yes, this "spring" edition of Bro Nevez is reaching you in the heat of the July summer. I have lots of excuses, but the only good one is that preparing material for the newsletter takes a great deal of time, which is sometimes hard to come by!

In the last issue of Bro Nevez we featured the contribution of the Canadian representative for the ICDBL Diarmuid Ó Néill on for the need to promote the use of the Breton language in all aspects of daily life (Condensed Reversing Language Shift Update for the Breton Language). This is certainly not a message lost on Bretons who have always fought for an audible presence for the Breton language in media (radio and television) and a visual presence on public signage. As you will read below the group Ai'ta! is keeping up the battle.



### Let's Go! Ai'ta! and Action for the Breton Language

Just ten years ago young Breton speakers decided enough is enough and decided action was needed to protect and promote the future of the Breton language. In Breton "ai'ta" meant 'let's go' and they did. While Breton was progressing slowly in the schools, its public presence was not going anywhere. There was no hope for political change that might put some teeth into legislation to promote the public presence of Breton.

While Ai'ta! has a website which describes what it does (In Breton, French and English), a new book has been published that eloquently shows the evolution and importance of the work of Bretons engaged in this group.



**Stourmerien Ai'ta! – Disentiñ / Désobéir pour la langue bretonne.**  
Yoran Embanner. 128 pages. ISBN 978-2-916579-71-6.

Founded in 2005 and inspired by active organizations in the Basque country and Wales, Ai'ta! not marks its anniversary this book by presenting their action and by posing a few questions to Bretons as to what they intend to do about the future of their language. The book presents the history and

action of the group in words and in many images (and links to video on a website). You see throughout the book lots of young Bretons – both men and women – in their 20s and 30s and beyond in bright orange Tee shirts and you read their voices (In Breton) in short passages that tell you why they are personally engaged in Ai'ta!. While most of the book text is bilingual in order to meet the people of Ai'ta! you need to work on your Breton.

Before presenting what Ai'ta! does, it is worth presenting some of its principles.

- The collective is open to everyone – Breton speaking or not – who wants to defend and promote the Breton language. Breton is the preferred language of the group's operation but efforts will be made to integrate everyone.

- Our collective intends to be clearly non-violent and is independent of any other organization (political, syndical/union, association, business...)

- Ai'ta! functions on a direct democratic model: there's no president, leader or officials to make decisions. Everyone can participate at their own level and decisions are made collectively.

- The action of Ai'ta! is done in respect for languages and cultures. The values of the Ai'ta! movement are incompatible with all compartments which are racist, xenophobic, sexist or homophobic in nature.

Ai'ta! looked to actions being taken by other minority language speakers of Europe to promote a public presence, but they were certainly aware of what Bretons before them had accomplished through acts of civil disobedience as well as endless efforts to make Breton a legally recognized language. The Diwan schools were created by Bretons who jumped in to create a new school system when public schools refused to give Breton a presence. Stourn ar Brezhoneg tarred over, physically tore down, or pasted letters over road signs that needed a Breton presence. Ai'ta! activists were well aware of the fines and jail time such illegal action brought. They have not planned action without careful preparation – learning techniques of civil disobedience and direct action that is non-violent but illegal, done in full public view ideally with a strong media presence.

The warriors for the Breton language active in the 70s, 80s and 90s are still as determined as ever and active in their defense of the Breton language, but let's face it, they're getting older. The entrance of new generations with Ai'ta! certainly gives me optimism. I like their democratic style and their courage.

So what are these loosely organized Ai'ta! participants actually doing? Most importantly they are keeping Breton and the need to increase its public presence in the public's face – not by screaming or blowing up things, but through varied public "appearances" which can be whimsical, surprising, theatrical, entertaining, and sometimes amusing. They are certainly a bit disruptive and no doubt disturbing to those who are targeted for failing to give Breton a public place.

Some examples:

- ❖ Spontaneous Breton lessons for summer beach-goers, at a market place or at music festivals.
- ❖ A presence with information at festivals and festou-noz.
- ❖ Activities within a festival such as the sport of long-distance tossing of unilingual French road-signs (liberated from a sign post or road-side)
- ❖ Protest of the exclusion of Breton language announcements on trains and on signage in train stations and post offices through a number of actions: having a Breton-speaking Santa Claus greet train riders at a station, setting up Breton signs and an alternate ticket window in Breton, staging a die-in with orange Tee-shirt clad bodies on the floor, or organizing a spontaneous fest-noz in the lobby.
- ❖ Tearing down highway signs and delivering them to the appropriate mayor's office or prefecture.
- ❖ Creating a contest for finding unilingual French signs with awards for those who find the biggest, oldest, or the one that most strikes the fancy of the panel of judges.
- ❖ A game of musical chairs to highlight the threat for the future for Breton set up in the town square of the city of Rennes.
- ❖ Regular gatherings with big banners at road signs on the super-highways to alert drivers to a need for change.
- ❖ Stickers plastered over any public sign where Breton should be introduced along with French. Roads, businesses, university campuses, the Lorient Festival!
- ❖ Tad-Kozh an Nedeleg – appearances by Old Father Christmas at schools, town events or Christmas markets.

- ❖ For the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1974 FLB bomb which brought down the Roc'h Tredudon TV antenna in protest of the lack of Breton in TV, Ai'ta! organized a panel discussion on media in Brittany and the Celtic countries, and led a festive march to the antenna site with a "Woodstock" style concert by Breton musicians.

Ai'ta!'s action has not just been to make a scene and disrupt things. Action has also included correspondence with mayors, regional leaders and government representatives to make practical recommendations and to remind them of their responsibilities to the Breton language.

Some 200 people have participated in Ai'ta! actions, not including those drawn into a spontaneous Breton lesson or dance, or a conversation with Tad-Kozh an Nedeleg. Sometimes actions have led to a bit more presence for Breton, but often it is clear that action needs to continue. But it's impossible to ignore the brilliant orange Tee shirts and young voices reminding us that Breton is a modern language which must have a public presence and future.

The book itself asks: where do we go from here? Certainly more Bretons will need to become engaged to keep up the momentum and continue to expand actions which will keep the demand for Breton in public space visible – media, roadways, town and city offices and signage, post offices, tourist offices, train stations, etc. Ai'ta! has worked no miracles but has shown that Bretons are relentless and creative in their action.

Forward, ai'ta.



### Diwan to Celebrate 40 Years

While the first petition on the part of Bretons to get Breton into the schools dates to 1870 with many since that time, the presence of Breton in the schools on more than a token level is very recent. Schools had served very effectively as the place where Breton children learned that their language was worthless and that to become civilized it was necessary to master French.

The Loi Deixonne of 1951 finally allowed Breton into the schools - if a teacher was willing to volunteer to teach it for an hour a week. The Savary law of 1982 was the first real support for Breton in the schools – yet only as an optional subject taught 1 to 3 hours a week, usually outside of regular class time.

It has always been clear that the French National Education system would only grudgingly open the door a crack for the languages of France (other than French) to enter the school room. When parents decided that enough was enough they launched the first Diwan Breton immersion class in 1977. At that time no one would have predicted the success the Diwan schools would have and the impact they would have in inspiring parents to insist on the creation of bilingual programs for public and Catholic schools (with the first class in 1982 in public schools and then in 1990 for Catholic schools).

Diwan administrators predict continued growth for the coming school year with a total of 4,342 students in all five departments projected. Like this past year, this is a 6% growth with the addition of 245 students. This is good news, but the bad news is that the availability of teachers is not keeping up with the growth. Diwan will need a dozen more teachers and is currently on a recruitment campaign to make sure that growth can continue to meet public demand.

Congratulations to Diwan for 40 years of determination and hard work to insure that Breton children have the opportunity to enroll in a public system of Breton language schooling.

### The Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient [festival@festival-interceltique.bzh](mailto:festival@festival-interceltique.bzh)

The Festival Interceltique de Lorient is one of the biggest festivals of Europe attracting some 750,000 people during its 10-day span (August 5 to 14, 2016). It includes 4,500 artists with over 200 concerts and events, 12 stages and 1,200 volunteers. This is a huge event. Not for everyone, but you are guaranteed to find the best of Celtic music. The headliners this year include the Coors, Joan Baez, Alan Stivell, Tommy Emmanuel, Dan ar Braz and the Symphonic Orchestra of Brittany, Duncan Chisholm, Youn Kamm et le Bagad du Bout du Monde, and as one representative from the featured country, Archie Roach from Australia. Since its founding in 1971 this festival has featured all six Celtic countries of Brittany, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man, but was one of the first festivals to welcome participants from Galicia and Asturias, as well as Celtic "exiles" throughout the world.

There are big concerts each evening of the festival and music going on-stop throughout the day, including jam sessions throughout the city of Lorient. During the festival you have one of two championship contests for the top bagads of Brittany. There are pipers, singers, dancers, rock, pop, orchestral and any other kind of musical ensemble from all of the Celtic countries. And besides music and dance there are art exhibits, sports and workshops and conference sessions.

There are dozens of other large festivals in Brittany as well as hundreds of small ones but Lorient is unique in its complete celebration of Celtic culture and music.



**BREIZH AMERIKA**

### The Breizh Amerika Collective

<http://www.breizh-amerika.com/>

In past issues of Bro Nevez we have introduced the work of Breizh-Amerika which is working here in the U.S. to build awareness of Brittany and to build some links between Brittany and the U.S. One very effective bridge has been to introduce Americans to Breton musicians. While the vastness of this country and the marketing required to introduce something brand new to audiences here can be daunting Breizh-Amerika has taken some interesting initiatives in this area (as has BZH-NY – see below)

This spring as Breizh Amerika Collective was initiated as a group of musicians from Brittany, France and the US to work collaboratively to create and produce original music and build some bridges.

At the core of the group is Breton accordion master Thomas Moisson and singer Lors Landat. For the US tour the group also included trombonist Alex Asher, a major player on the New York jazz scene. In May they traveled to Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago, with lots of time in Louisiana in New Orleans, Lafayette, Scott and Arnaudville. The tour was successful in introducing Brittany, and Breton music and language, to new audiences and fostered lots of musical exchange.

As a partner with the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient, Breizh Amerka invited the festival's VP Bruno Jaouen and General Director Lisardo Lombardia to come along for some of the tour where they had the chance to meet Louisiana state officials as well as Acadian musicians. Certainly a good opportunity to build some future musical and economic partnerships.



**BZH New York Forging Musical Links to Brittany**  
[www.bzh-ny.org](http://www.bzh-ny.org)

This May BZH New York was also active in creating the opportunity for Americans and Bretons to learn about each other's heritage. On May 25<sup>th</sup> New York City was the site for a performance of Simon Frisch's composition "The Body Untied." This is described as a multi-movement fable in music that revives the life and legendary funeral of Brittany's last duchess, Anne de Bretagne (1477 – 1514). Texts used in this composition are drawn from her court, funeral rites, poet Anjela Duval, and contemporary Anglo-Breton poet Claire Trévien. Performed by classically trained solo singer and a baroque chamber orchestra, Breton traditional music is also introduced.

Simon Frisch is a New York and Brittany-based composer and cultural advocate. Recent premieres include his Sandglass Vespers for the New Juilliard Ensemble at Alice Tully Hall, and a suite of Patricia Barber song adaptations commissioned by Renée Fleming. He is also a founder and director of Festival Daniou, a Brittany chamber music residency entering its third season after two acclaimed concert series in the summers of 2014 and 2015. See more at [www.festivaldanielou.com](http://www.festivaldanielou.com)

### The Cultural Institute of Brittany

[www.skoluhelarvro.net](http://www.skoluhelarvro.net)



**SKOL-UHEL AR VRO  
 INSTITUT CULTUREL  
 DE BRETAGNE**

Skol Uhel ar Vro was created in 1981 as a group to engage scholars of Brittany in a range of fields – music, literature, language, sport, economy, inter-Celtic relations, religion, history, etc – to work collaboratively. While it includes a number of university professors, the Institute members are quite simply experts in their field who want to share their passion of all things Breton.

The Institute organizes conferences and events, creates traveling exhibits, and publishes books. It has a library and is responsible for recognizing new members of the Order of the Ermine each year – men and women who make a significant life-time contribution to Brittany. The Institute's website is developing into a rich source of basic information on Brittany. I particularly enjoyed exploring a section called "Les clés de la culture bretonne" (keys to the Breton culture) and within this "Les bases de données" (basic facts). There are then several sub-sections within this.

One resource there is a directory of story-tellers where you can find dozens of active storytellers from all over Brittany. You will find a name (and the name they use for performance) as well as the language (Breton, Gallo, French ...), the repertoire, and setting for performance they prefer.

Another resource is called "Femmes de Bretagne" which includes 1,000 short biographical notes on women in Breton history, more contemporary times, or even from tales and legends. These are drawn for the *Dictionnaire des Femmes de Bretagne*, directed by Jeanne Urvoy and published by Coop Breizh.

A third area I explored was a directory of 1,100 twentieth century Breton writers – fiction and non-fiction, living and deceased. These short biographical notes are drawn from Marc Gontard's *Dictionnaire des écrivains Bretons du XXe siècle* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes).

And then there is the section on famous names in Breton history which includes 1,055 short biographical notes drawn from Emmanuel Salmon-Legagneur's *Les noms qui ont fait l'histoire de Bretagne* (Coop Breizh, Institut Culturel de Bretagne). There are various ways to search for a name (city or town, period of history and "profession" – corsair, saint, painter, philosopher ...) or you can just browse the first letter of the last name. Not all names are people born in Brittany, but all have an important association with Brittany and its history. Here's one example (my translation):

*WYLIE (Robert)*  
1839 Isle of Man – 1877 Pont-Aven  
Painter  
Conservator at the Academy of Philadelphia [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts] he traveled to Brittany in 1864 and 1865 and settled in Pont-Aven in 1866; He attracted his friends and was at the origins of the success of Pont-Aven and its artist colony. He drew on Pont-Aven for large anecdotal paintings. His *Sorcière bretonne* was the first American painting awarded a prize at the Salon de Paris (in 1872).

All of these directories are works in progress as new information could be added and entries updated or improved when needed, but they make a huge amount of information readily accessible.

Also on the Skol Uhel ar Vro website is Bro Nevez (with the permission of the U.S. ICDBL). You can now find 11 back issues from August 2013 to March 2016 with more to come. We hope that those who take advantage of the wealth of information on the website will also discover our newsletter and enjoy it!

Most of the work of Skol Uhel ar Vro is in organizing learning opportunities for people of Brittany, and one

important annual event is the Skol veur pobl – Université populaire bretonne. This is a series of presentations organized annually in Lorient during the Inter-Celtic Festival by Skol Uhel ar Vro with the Université Populaire Breton, and Emglev Bro Orient, with support from the Festival and the Morbihan Chamber of Commerce. From August 9 through the 12<sup>th</sup> you can attend two talks each day by an impressive line-up of experts. To get the details you can Google Université Populaire bretonne 2016 to get a PDF, but a short listing is worth including here.

Venceslas Kruta, Origine et histoire des Celtes  
Yvan Guéhennec, Les origines des langues celtiques  
Venceslas Kruta, L'Art des Celtes – Compréhension des symboles  
Philippe Jouët, Les 'pays' historiques et humains de la Bretagne  
André-Yves Bourgès, Hagiographie bretonne et mythologie celtique  
Andrew Hunter and Patrick Molard, Les porteurs de tradition, transmission et continuité (music)  
Erwan Fouéré, L'Irlande du soulèvement de 1916 à la nation européenne de 2016  
Ann-Marie Chiron, Les Seiz Breur (art and architecture)



### June 30th Launch of brittany-news.bzh and call for support

*Until today, Brittany did not have an international media source for English speakers on the subject of what is happening in Brittany and what matters to Breton people. And this despite the fact that Breton ex-pats and Brittany fans are scattered all over the world.*

*We, Philippe ARGOUARCH, Charles KERGARAVAT, Jacques-Yves LE TOUZE and Remy PENNEG, would like to fill this gap. We are therefore addressing this appeal to everyone who loves Brittany to join us in launching. [www.brittany-news.bzh](http://www.brittany-news.bzh)*

*Brittany news will be a pure player (internet only) media for all things Breton, past, present and future, covering all subjects from economics, agro-business, environment, culture, sports, politics, History, tourism and including current issues of daily life in the peninsula within the five administrative departments.*

*We are looking for English language local press correspondents, citizen reporters or journalists as well as persons willing to help in designing, coding and proof reading the web site content or translating French or*

*Breton texts in English. French or Breton language persons are welcome to contribute photos or movies. We are all potential citizen reporters ! Please contact us on [in-english@brittany-news.bzh](mailto:in-english@brittany-news.bzh) or [en-francais@brittany-news.bzh](mailto:en-francais@brittany-news.bzh)*

Editor's Note: I know that many U.S. ICDBL members will welcome this new English language source of current and varied information and Brittany. Bro Nevez has served since 1981 as a modest source of English language information about Brittany, but our reach as a paper publication sent by mail and now email to members and correspondents in Brittany and Europe is limited. While one can find Bro Nevez (and other information in English) on the U.S. ICDBL website, and now Bro Nevez is on the Cultural Institute of Brittany website, this is still a very limited reach compared to the internet Brittany-news project proposed. I have been asked if articles and notes from Bro Nevez could be contributed to this site, and have agreed that this would be a way for us to offer support and make a wider world aware of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language. But, I urge any Bro Nevez readers to act on their own to offer services to this project.

## English Language Speakers of Brittany

While the creation of more media in English about Brittany is a way to introduce Brittany to a wide international community, there is also a market for English language news and information for a sizeable community of English speakers who have vacation homes (or make a temporary vacation residency) and who have moved to Brittany for retirement or to set up a new business and raise a family. Certainly the short distance across the channel makes Brittany and desirable destination.

One estimate cites 13,500 as the number of British ex-patriots living in Brittany and certainly other areas of France have also been attractive. While one might have some concern that an influx of British seeking to hold onto their British ways might be disruptive to local communities, those moving to Brittany have in fact brought life back to older homes in need of restoration and have brought welcome business to small communities. And, among the "British" making a home in Brittany are a number of Welsh and Cornish who are aware of their Celtic kinship!

## THE AIKB – Association Intégration Kreiz Breizh [www.aikb.fr](http://www.aikb.fr)

Since 2003 the AIKB has worked as a non-profit association to assist English speakers moving to central Brittany to integrate into a new life in Brittany.

The AIKB has served to make the transition smoother by offering a number of essential services:

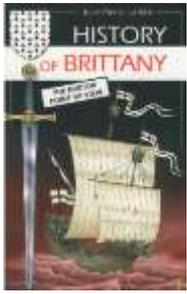
- The organization of French lessons for non-French speakers and English lessons for non-English speakers. There's nothing more basic than the ability to communicate.
- Translation services for official letters and assistance with phone calls or tax needs, registrations, etc.
- Regular conferences on how to set up a business, deal with inheritance laws or other official business.
- Cultural outings to explore Brittany and its heritage and history.
- Social events and conversation opportunities.
- A library of English language books.
- A radio feature called Spotlight on Brittany [www.spotlightonbrittany.fr](http://www.spotlightonbrittany.fr) about the life and culture of Brittany.

## The Central Brittany Journal

Since 2004 Gareth Lewis has edited a monthly magazine called the Central Brittany Journal. Its 50 plus pages include a larger percentage of advertising (which finances this enterprise) but also lots of interesting articles on a range of topics. Nature is always a feature with an article about a bird, insect, or other creature, with lovely watercolor drawings and photos. Gardening is another regular topic with advice from "Tim the Gardner" on what to plant and how to tend to your garden on and off season. Other features include articles on particular destinations of interest, business and computer advice, recipes, limericks and crossword puzzles, Breton tales and legends, Breton history, and a portrait of people – Bretons of note, and in recent issues families from Britain who have moved to Brittany. You'll find calendars of events such as cricket matches, concerts, English language film showings, and "boot sales" or flea markets.

The advertisements are certainly not without interest for British ex-patriots living in Brittany since they will guide you to French language classes, home repair services, houses for sale, markets, and where to find tea and foods you might miss.

Check out the website [www.theobj.com](http://www.theobj.com) for a bit more information and to subscribe.



## Breton History – A New Book in English

**Jean-Pierre Le Mat. History of Brittany – The Breton Point of View.**  
Yoran Embanner. 402 pages. ISBN 978-2-916579-70-2.

As anyone who has no mastery of the French or Breton language is aware, reading materials on Brittany and its history are pretty thin! So a new edition of Jean-Pierre Le Mat's *History of Brittany – The Breton Point of View* is definitely welcome to English readers, as the 2014 revised edition of the French version was welcome to French readers.

Why is a Breton perspective needed? I have taken the liberty to reproduce here the opening Note from the editor, Yoran of Yoran Embanner, who describes how Bretons have learned very little of their history in school.

*When I was a schoolboy, I was taught history.*

*On the colored charts of my textbook, I discovered with a childish pleasure that Brittany stood proudly in the West, different, independent of the Carolingian empire.*

*Then came disenchantment. Without any explanation, Brittany disappeared. Two centuries later the peninsula is part of the kingdom of France. Annexation? Conquest? Mystery ...*

*During the Middle Ages, the only noticeable Breton is du Guesclin, a crafty warrior, a joker, not really charismatic. Are the Bretons like that? ... Then comes the duchess Anne and the teacher explained that Brittany became French thanks to her marriage with the king of France. What does that mean? If Brittany was already French, what is the meaning of this marriage? Or if not, I was misled ...*

*It is easy to sneer at the little children of West Indies reciting "our ancestors the Gallic ones..." The little Bretons who learn "our good king Saint Louis" are in the same situation.*

*It was not possible, at school, to learn my country's history. Why is it forbidden, why such mysteries, why such lies? The history of Brittany, seen from Paris, must be dangerous. Several facts confirmed it thereafter to me. In 1979, the commemoration of Jean IV's landing in Dinard was prohibited. Six hundred years afterwards! Those who wanted to defy this prohibition were prosecuted. In 2006, the Prefect of Finistère prohibited the representation of Sebastan Ar Balp on a road panel financed by the town of Carhaix. Three hundred years afterwards!*

*From Paris, the history of Brittany seems to be subversive. A good reason to learn it.*

This book gives you that opportunity. First published in 2006 this 2016 edition is greatly improved with lots of illustrations, excellent maps and many pages of added information.

Le Mat's clear chronological summary of Breton history remains at the heart, with each chapter initiated by a very short chronology of what is happening in the rest of the world and in the Celtic countries, just to give a little perspective. In just some 250 pages Le Mat take us from prehistoric times through the action of the Red Bonnets in 2014. So you will not be getting all the details, but all the essential action and actors (and actresses) of Breton history that a Breton author wants us to know. It's a complicated history with lots of twists and Le Mat does not try to simplify things despite the fast pace in covering centuries.

Here's how Le Mat organizes time:

- The first inhabitants of the peninsula (until 1500 B.C)
- The Bronze period (1500-500 B.C.)
- The coming of the Celts (500-58 B.C.)
- The Roman conquest (58 B.C.-383 A.D.)
- The origins of Brittany (383-497 A.D.)
- The second wave of Breton settlement – the Breton kingdoms (497-714), The Frankish ambitions (714-840)
- The Breton monarchy (840-907)
- The Breton dukes (907-1148)
- English rule (1148-1203)
- The Capetian dukes (1203-1341)
- The war of succession (1341-1365)
- The last dukes (1365-1488)
- The end of Breton independence (1488-1532)
- The Renaissance in Brittany – the wars of the league (1532-1626)
- Facing the French absolutism (1626-1720)
- In the name of national rights (1720-1789)
- The Province of Brittany
- The French Revolution: a missed opportunity (1789-1804)
- Withdrawal to culture (1804-1911)
- Emsav (1911-1945)
- The Texans of Europe (1945-1986)
- In the whirlwind of globalization (1986 ...)

Of course, this book is not just a list of dates and events. It is from a Breton perspective and Le Mat adds both an introduction and a long postscript called "The Insufficient Nations" where he explains why a Breton perspective on history is important and how history has been interpreted and presented to bias our views of people and events.

Of practical value in this reedition is the addition of Appendices: More and much clearer maps to show changing borders of Brittany and its neighbors over time, a presentation by Evi Bargain of the history of the

Breton language, and a quick illustrated introduction to the Breton national anthem, flag and symbols. Although the length of the book makes it easy to look up information, I would have found an index of names useful.

There are hundreds of books on Breton history written by Bretons. These may certainly bring a Breton perspective, but can sometimes draw on the bias and perspectives of earlier French scholars. Le Mat does not pretend to present the only way to view Breton history, but he certainly presents an interesting view.



## Deep Inside a Breton Skull 48 Heathen and Christian heroes

Jean Pierre Le Mat

In Brittany, there is an old song. One of the oldest songs of Brittany. Our people are still singing it. It is called "the prophecy of Gwenc'hlan".

Gwenc'hlan was a druid, leading the war of Breton tribes against a Frank army, probably during the fifth century.

Was it a war between heathen and Christian warriors? Gwenc'hlan cursed the Christians:

"I heard an eagle calling in the middle of the night  
He called his eaglets and all the birds of the sky,  
He said to them in its calling:  
Get up quickly on your wings!  
Rotten flesh of dogs or sheep is not for us;  
We need Christian flesh for meal! "

The war turned against Gwenc'hlan. He was taken prisoner and the Frank prince pierced his eyes. Gwenc'hlan, dying, has the vision of a fight between a boar and a horse.

"I see the boar coming out of the wood  
It is limping badly, its foot is wounded  
Its mouth is open and full of blood  
And its bristle is grey with years;  
It is surrounded by its young boars  
And they are grunting with hunger.  
I see the sea-horse coming against the boar  
And the shore is quaking with fright.  
It is as white as pure snow;  
On his front, it bears silver horn.  
The water is boiling around  
With the fire and thunder from its nostrils;  
Sea-horses are surrounding it,  
Pressed as grass near the lake.  
Stand firm ! Stand firm, sea-horse !

Strike its head ! Strike boldly, strike ! (...)"

In my Breton skull, just near the heathen prophecy of Gwenc'hlan, there are the Christian words of the Book of Revelation. And there is there, too, a war call to the birds:

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven,

Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;

That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army."

The other part of the prophecy, about the fight between the boar and the horse puzzled me as well. Against all odds, Gwenc'hlan took sides against the boar. Yes, against all odds ... The wild boar always symbolized my people. The white horse is a horned animal. Is it a Unicorn?

Despite his plea in favor of the white horse, the prophet is not sure. He did not know the outcome of the fight.



Chapel of Graces, near Menez Bre  
Fight between a unicorn and a dragon

According to our tradition, Gwenc'hlan is buried somewhere under one of our sacred hills, the Menez Bre, between Morlaix and Guingamp.

The Menez Bre is now dedicated to one of our best saints, Saint Herve, who lived during the VIth century, one hundred years after Gwenc'hlan. His chapel is on the top of the hill. The chapel is well known for ceremonies of exorcism accomplished by Tadig Kozh, the priest of Begard. Tadig Kozh lived during the XIXth century. Alone in the chapel, during the night, he tore from the Devil the souls of local damned people.

The place is suited for exorcism. Saint Herve was an exorcist. He always refused to be a priest. He was a fierce man, like Gwenc'hlan. As a companion, he found

a wolf. He is known for his swift and bloody revenges against his enemies.

Herve's father was a bard. His name was Hoarvian or Arvian. Perhaps the son and father bore the same name ...

Hoarvian met his wife first in dream. The dream became reality when Hoarvian met a Breton prince, Konomor. The girl bore the name of a magician, Riwanon. When she knew she was pregnant with a son, she asked God that he would never know daylight. Herve was blind from birth.



Herve was a sort of prophet. He got the gift of clear vision. He cannot see the marvels of earth, but he could see the wonders of heaven.

Herve is famous because he led the Council of Menez Bre. There he united the Breton warriors and clerks against Konomor. That is a Celtic tragedy. It was the Prince who opened to Herve the way of earthly existence. After the Council, Breton troops were gathered and Konomor was killed at the battle of Brank Hallek.

Saint Herve remained a terrible fellow beyond death. Oaths ordered by the court on the shrine of the saint are fatal to perjury. It was on this shrine that Francois II, the last Duke of Brittany, promised to maintain peace and friendship with the King of France. The Duke died a few months after the defeat of the Breton forces in Saint Aubin du Cormier against the French armies.

Is Gwenc'hlan really a heathen? Is Herve really a Christian? I don't know. There is, in our ancient traditions, a strange song about an old man on the Menez Bre, fighting against a giant witch. Was he Gwenc'hlan? Was he Herve?

"Ahes the witch came in our country  
Bring great stones on the roads!  
Bring large stones and small  
On the highway in the middle of the moor.  
That's what the old man said  
Seating on the Menez-Bre (...)  
The bad war, the dreadful war  
Then will come with eagles  
With wolves, with ravens  
Seeking human flesh to eat "

Gwenc'hlan, Herve... Deep in my Breton skull, there is a prophet, blind and visionary, heathen and Christian, coming from dark ages. Who were I? Who am I?



Chapel of Lorette, near Menez Bre  
May with a pig nose

*Editor's Note:*

La Vallée des Saints / Traoñien ar Sent, in Carnoët

The stone image of Saint Herve above is a photo from the Valley of the Saints, a crazy project to create a sort of "Easter Island" of statues of the hundreds of saints of Brittany. Launched in 2009 the goal is to reach over 1,000 statues. While still short of 100 this valley in Carnoët is an impressive collection of modern (and very large) sculptures. Well worth a visit if you go to Brittany.



### Heard of, but not heard – 36 new CDs from Brittany

Notes for the CDs below were gleaned from Dastum's magazine *Musique bretonne* 246 (Feb.-March 2016) & 247 (Apr.-June 2016), the magazine *Ar Men* 211 (March-April 2016) & 212 (May-June 2016) as well as the website for the distributor Coop Breizh ([www.coop-breizh.fr](http://www.coop-breizh.fr)). This is not intended to be a complete list of all new recordings from Brittany. While I collect much information from print, it is quite possible to get musical samples and even YouTube videos online these days to hear what performers sound like and to get much more information about them.



#### **Bâbord-Tribord. *Paroles de copains.***

This is a duo of Dan Grall (song, guitar) and Nico Brung (chromatic accordion) who interpret a variety of songs (in French) by musical colleagues on maritime and river themes. They put poetry and texts to music and topics range from river navigation and corsairs to boating for pleasure and contemplation of the ocean's vastness.



#### **Bagad Cap Caval. *Tan De'i.***

One of Brittany's top bagadoù (bagad plural), Cap Caval presents 11 traditional and composed dances and melodies inspired primarily from Brittany, but also Galicia, Ireland and Scotland. They are joined by fiddlers Florianne Le Pottier and Jonathan Dour.



**Bagad de Vannes. Essentiel.**

This CD includes seven selections of Breton dance and melodies from one of the top bagadoù of Brittany. While the percussion of this ensemble gives them a characteristic sound, on this

CD you'll hear bass bombard – a very large and low member of the bombard family.



**Bodenes-Hamon. Daou don dañs.**

Featuring Steven Bodenes on bombard in pair with Sylvain Hamon on bagpipes, this group also brings in Rozen Talec (song), Julien Le Mentec (bass guitar), Thibault Niobé (guitars)

and Xavier Chavry (snare drum). The 11 selections present the repertoire of Loeiz Ropars and musicians of Poullaouen and central Brittany, including kan ha diskant style performance for dances as well as marches and slower melodies.

**La Bouèze / La Granjagoal / Maisons des cultures du monde. Chant on va savai c'que – Traditions orales en pays de Vitré.**

This CD is the fruit of collaborative work by young singers and musicians who teach traditional Breton music and dance for the organizations La Bouèze and La Granjagoal. Drawing from both written text collections and collection work with local performers, they have created a 26-page booklet and 28-selection CD to enable their students and everyone else to discover the rich oral tradition of song, dance and storytelling in this most eastern area of Brittany – Vitré (which also includes La Guerche and La Roche aux Fées). While it is the *kan ha diskant* singing and dances of western Brittany that are best known – especially to foreigners who might only know of the “gavotte” – musicians, singers and storytellers of eastern Brittany have done extensive collection work to encourage the transmission of unique and very interesting traditions of Gallo Brittany. This latest presentation of performances from the repertoire of the Vitré area proves that this is by no means a region devoid of its own Breton culture.



**Brou-Hamon-Quimbert. A l'arrivé de mon retour.**

This is the fourth CD from the singers Roland Brou, Matthieu Hamon and Charles Quimbert – masters of the song tradition of eastern Brittany (French and

Gallo). Here they include 17 songs including as well traditional songs from Louisiana, Québec, Reunion Island and the Désirade island of Guadeloupe.



**Carré Manchot. 30**

This CD is to celebrate 30 years of performance by this very popular fest noz band. 15 selections include a variety of dances – several different gavotte suites, plinn, waltz, rond de

Loudia, rond de Saint Vincent, and a march.



**Celtic Social Club. Unplugged in New York.**

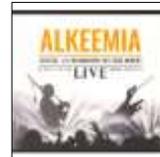
Keltia Musique KMCD 661. The Celtic Social Club was initiated in 2013 by Manu Masko, drummer for the Breton band Red Cardell. This CD was recorded live in a New York city

nightclub and includes a mix of primarily Breton, Scottish, and Irish dances and melodies. The group is currently made up of members of the bands The Silencers, Red Cardell and Ronan Le Bars: singer Jimmie O'Neill, guitar and banjo-player Jean-Pierre Riou, fiddler Pierre Stéphane, and uilleann pipes and whistle player Ronan Le Bars.



**Maria Desbordes. Exile.**

This is the first solo album by singer Maria Desbordes. It includes 11 selections of traditional song and compositions in Breton, French, Spanish and Judeo-Spanish.



**Digresk & Le Philharmonie des Deux Mondes. Alkeemia.**

This CD brings together the Celtic-electro-rick group called Digresk with the symphony orchestra of the Loire Atlantique directed by Philippe Hui and

created in St. Nazaire in 2013. In 10 selections of this live performance there is a mix of traditional Breton dances as well as quite a mix of instruments – strings, percussion, bombard, accordion, bagpipes and others.



**Epsilon. Ouvrage du Coeur.**

Described as Celtic-folk-rock, this CD presents 10 compositions in French (most by the group). The band includes quite a mix of instruments:

Nicholas Michon (song, electric and acoustic guitar), Antonin Martineau (bass and ukulele), Christophe Pouvreau (accordion, fiddle, veuze), Benjamin Sanchez (drums), Benjamin Goudéranche (bombard, clarinet, banjo), and Quentin Vallier (electric guitar and mandolin).



**L'Équipe Tonnerre. Bretagne Le Grand.**

Musicians who performed with Michel Tonnerre pay him homage with a performance of some of the many maritime-themed songs he wrote. 13

selections include some of his best known (Quinze marins, Le gabier noir) as well as lesser known or previously unpublished songs (Bretagne la grande).



**Ewen-Delahaye-Favennec. *Route 29.***

This trio of singers, musicians, and storytellers has been on the Breton scene for many years as soloists and more recently as a trio called Kan Tri, Tri Men and then Kan Tri Men. On this

CD they celebrate the beauty and personalities of western Brittany – 29 = the department of Finistère - in 14 songs. Ewen = Patrick Ewen with song, banjo, accordion, fiddle and harmonica. Delahaye = Gérard Delahaye on song and electric guitar. Favennec = Melaine Favennec on song, acoustic guitar and percussion.



**Fowler-Melrose-Siberil. *Celtic Guitar Journeys.*** Acoustic Music Records.

Three accomplished guitarists combine forces as a trio: Dylan Fowler from Wales, Ian Melrose from Scotland, and Soig Siberil from Brittany. They bring

virtuosity and interesting arrangements for dances and meloides from their home repertoires and beyond.



**Gavotte Menez Meur. *Anthologie Vol. 2.*** War'l Leur.

Volume 1 of an anthology of gavottes was produced in 2013 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Menez Meur gavotte contest. This second

volume features singers and musicians who are masters of the gavotte – and not just any gavotte since this dance has many versions. On this CD you find the styles of Bidar, Dardoup, Poher, Kernevodez and Kalanel. 12 sets of dances (3 parts each) are performed by paired singers (kan ha diskant), paired bombard and binou, and accordion. Performances were recorded between 2008 and 2015 and performers are: Yves Le Floc'h & Robert Quéré, Guy Cazuguel & Robert le Crann, Hervé Irvoas & Cédric Moign, Yann le Meur & Michel Toutous, Hyacinthe Le Hénaff, Régis Huiban, Gilles Le Goff & Pierre-Yves Pétilion, Hervé Irvoas (son) & Cédric Moign, Alain Le Clère & Armel An Hejer, Tristan Gloaguen & Etienne Cabaret, Yves Berthou & Patrick Molard, and Enora & Marie Berardy.



**Philippe Gloaguen & Gildas Le Buhé. *Bouezh ar Vretoned.*** Bémol Productions.

Philippe Gloaguen (guitar) and Gildas Le Buhé (song and sax) are part of the group Wipidou. Here they perform a

selection of traditional Breton Vannetais songs as well as some compositions by Le Buhé. Arrangements swing from traditional to jazzy in style.



**Laurent Gourvez. *Sentinelles.***

This CD presents 11 compositions in Breton and French with music and song texts composed by Laurent Gourvez (song and guitar). He is joined by Arnaud Gourvez (song and electric guitar) and Pat Péron (programming), as well as five other musicians – Clarisse Lavannant, Dan ar Braz, Ronan Le Bars, Pierre Stéphane and Ludovic Miroux.



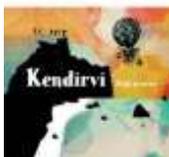
**Etienne Grandjean & Soig Siberil. *La Tempête.*** Marzelle MARZ 017

Master button-accordion player Etienne Grandjean joins with master acoustic guitarist Soig Siberil for 12 compositions and arrangements of Breton songs and dances.



**Gérard Jaffres. *Je sais d'où je viens.***

Singer from Finistère, Jaffres has been on the Breton scene for some 40 years and this is his 13th CD. He takes a nostalgic look at Brittany and his past and present with 11 song compositions and one song composed by Calro Masoni. He is joined by a number of singers and musicians for choral accompaniment as well as drums, percussion, fiddle, bombard, flutes piano, keyboard ...



**Kendirvi. *Pied à terre.***

Musicians in this group with invited guest artists bring a wide range of instruments – guitar, fiddle, trumpet, percussion, bombard, accordion, sax, trombone and tuba. They perform 10 Breton dances (plinn, mazurka, polka, rond de Saint Vincent, pach pi, an dro, ridee...). Described as a “goulash of kig-ha-fars, lambig served in a piña colada,” this is a high energy fest noz band.



**Kreiz Breizh Akademi. *Pempved round.*** Innacor Productions.

The Kreiz Breizh Akademi was founded in 2003 and continues to be directed by Eric Marchand. This music school brings together singers and musicians in an experimental collaboration based on modal musical traditions. The fifth “class” has produced a CD to present their three years of work. The twelve musicians explored micro-tonality in the Breton language song tradition, with links as well to Middle Eastern and Balkan traditions. The group included two singers, percussion and primarily strings with four violins, two cellos, bass fiddle, hurdy-gurdy (Vielle à roue) and the Bulgarian gadulka.



**Manu Lann Huel, Arnaud Le Goëfflec, John Trapp and Olivier Polard. *Un rien de temps.***

Called the Johnny Cash of Brest, singer Manu Lann Huel has been on the Breton scene for many years and has a deep unique voice. He performs six songs here with composer Arnaud Le Goëfflec, musicians John Trapp and guitarist Olivier Polard. Songs are on the darker side of life in a Johnny Cash type of way.



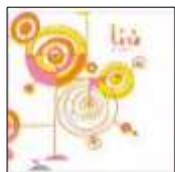
**Ronan Le Bars Group. *An Erc'h kentañ.***

This is Ronan Le Bars' second "solo" CD where he arranges 10 traditional Breton dance suites and presents his own compositions. A master of uilleann pipes and whistles, he is joined by Nicholas Quemener (guitar, bodhran), Pierre Stephan (fiddle) and Pierrick Tardivel (bass fiddle) as well as a half dozen guest artists adding keyboard, percussion and strings.



**Timothée Le Net & Maël Lhopiteau. *La Bénédiction du doute.***

This CD includes 13 compositions by Timothée Le Net (accordion) and Maël Lhopiteau (Celtic harp). While not particularly Celtic or Breton in influence, the compositions are finely constructed and varied.



**Liù. *En diabell.***

This trio composed of Fañch Ogey (song, kayamb, calabash), Nicholas Kervazo (guitar) and Vincent Guérin (electric guitar) presents 11 selections combining Breton song with blues from Mali and the influence of the Reunion Islands.



**Maestral. *Confluences***

This group includes Anne Postic (harp), Henri Locquet (percussion), Pierre-Antoine Colas (trumpet) and Stéphane Goasguen (bass fiddle).

While based in Breton traditions, the group has jazzy and classical esthetics and Latin and Arabic rhythms.



**Fred Miossec & Jean-Sébastien Hellard. *Cats & Dogs.***

Bemol Productions & Silage Musiques. Fred Miossec on clarinet pairs with Jean-Sébastien Hellard on chromatic accordion for a selection of popular

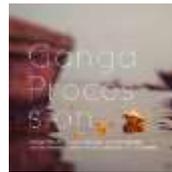
dance music from various European counties. This includes the gavotte of Brittany, swing and musette

styles from France and music from Galicia, Macedonia, Catalonia, Rumania, Israel, Ireland and Serbia



**Ork'ursus. *Ork'ursus.***

This group is made up of Claude Le Baron (bombards), Fabien Robbe (piano), Tanguy Le Doré (bass) and Erwan Le Doré (drums), with the addition of Marie-Pierre Balusson (song), Michel Marre (trumpet) and Antoine Volson (percussions). They present 12 compositions and arrangements pulled from Breton dances and melodies with jazz and swing influences. Many selections are drawn from collaboration with François Tusques, founder of the Intercommunale Free Dance Orchestra.



**Ronan and Jacques Pellen. *Ganga Procession.***

Ronan and Jacques Pellen are well known in Brittany for their innovative work as soloists and in groups who pull from Breton and world traditions. Here they collaborate with four musicians: Sukhdew Mishra, Satish Krishnamurthy, Pabhu Eduard, and Sylvain Parou – to present nine arrangements and new compositions inspired by India.



**Ruzerion Traoué. *Sonnenneu Languidig.***

Chanteurs du Pays Vannetais. Dastum Bro Ereg. Tradition Vivante de Bretagne 19. The seven singers on this new CD have been active for over 20 years in performance, teaching and promoting the rich song repertoire

(in the Vannetais dialect of Breton) of the region of Languidic which stretches from Baud to Hennebont and Lanvauden to Pluvigner. All native speakers of Vannetais, the group includes Pierrot Le Douze, Lucien Capitaine, Loïc Pasco, Guy Kermin, Eugène Le Diagon, Jo Conan and Michel Le Diagon. A 36-page booklet presents the Vannetais text for all 16 selections on the CD, with a transcription in a more standard Breton as well as translation to French. A study of the particularities of Breton spoken in this region is also included.

**Didier Squiban, Bernard Le Dreau, Jérôme Kerihuel. *Sonate en Trio.***

Lenn Production ([www.lennproduction.fr](http://www.lennproduction.fr)) Pianist Didier Squiban has recorded a number of albums where he performs solo on piano – jazzy arrangements of traditional Breton melodies and dances as well as original compositions inspired by Brittany and its maritime heritage and environments. He has also worked with a number of Breton musicians (notably singer Yann Fañch Kemener) and has composed symphonies! On this new CD he is in trio with Bernard Le Dreau (tenor and soprano saxophones

and clarinet) and Jérôme Kerihuel (tabla and percussions). And this is a true trio where the music composition and performance engages all three, and not Squiban accompanied by Le Dreau and Kerihuel. The CD includes 15 selections composed as three movements of a sonata: “Kermoal,” “Co-naissance,” and “My ‘sea’ song.” If you like Squiban’s work you will also like the innovative and free-flowing sound of this trio.



**Tanaw. *The Earth Cry.***

Tanaw first appeared in 1996 – the creation of composer, keyboard player and guitarist Sylvère Morisson with a dozen other musicians. The group disbanded but has been recently

recreated with a whole new cast of musicians and singers including Fanch Landreau (fiddle), Lena Le Foll (kan ha diskan), Yves Guével (bombard) and Soazig Kerambon, among others. The music is inspired by contemporary Celtic styles with compositions and arrangements by the group.



**Marc Thouenon. *La traverse imaginaire.***

Guitar and bouzouki player Marc Thouenon invites a number of musicians to join him in a performance of 11 compositions influenced by folk,

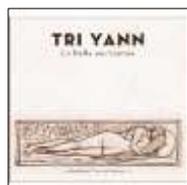
Celtic and world musics. Musicians include Mathilde Chevrel (cello), Marye Bayle (song, sax), Dan ar Braz (electric guitar), Youn Kamm (trumpet), David Hopkins (percussions) and Jacky Beaucé (electric bass).



**Trio Amañ. *Le bal trad.***

This CD includes 18 dances popularized at bals folk and festoù noz interpreted in a simple folksy style. The group often performs for dances for children, introducing them not only to a variety of Breton dances

but also ones from Ireland, Scotland or Galicia, or even from Cuba, Eastern Europe, or elsewhere for a very international flavor. While the group is called Amañ Trio, the performers here are Fañch Landreau (fiddle), Youenn Landreau (Chapman stick – a fretless guitar), Hervé Batteux (percussions) and Gwenaël Goulène (flute, accordion, tin whistle and darbuka).



**Tri Yann. *La belle enchantée.***

Tri Yann presents twelve previously unproduced selections on the theme of stories and legends from Brittany. Musical style is their characteristic and dramatic mix of vocals and acoustic and electric instruments.

While lots of guest artists join the CD, the group is composed of Jean Chocun (song, guitar, mandolin), Jean-Paul Corbineau (song), Jean-Louis Jossic (song,

psalterion) – the original Three Yanns – Gérard Goron (song, guitar, percussions), Jean-Luc Chevalier (electric and acoustic guitars), Konan Mevel (whisterles, flutes, bagpipes), Frédéric Bourgeois (song, keyboard, organ) and Christophe Peloil (song, fiddle, alto and bass).



**Marthe Vassallo. *Les Chants du livre bleu à travers les Musiques Bretonnes de Maurice Duhamel.***

Marthe Vassallo presents performances of songs and her reflections on *Musiques Bretonne*, the 1923 publication of 430 songs by Maurice Duhamel. One of the finest traditional singers of Brittany, Marthe breathes life into the Breton language texts of the Tregor collected and arranged by Duhamel.



**A 1900 Introduction to Brittany for Chautauqua Institute (New York) Adult Learners**

Editor’s Introduction:

Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson was born in Madison New Jersey in 1858. After studying law he became a writer and journalist and moved to Europe where he died in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1942. He is best remembered for his homosexually-theme novel *Imre: A Memorandum* as well as other writings in defense of homosexuality.

Here you get a taste of his travel writing with part of a series called “A Reading Journey through France” for the Chautauquan magazine. This monthly magazine was published for the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle based at the Chautauqua Institute for adult education in western New York State.

**IX. Around Brittany by Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson**

The Chautauquan Vol. 31, No. 3, June 1900

Earlier articles in this series have referred the reader often to the outlines of the northern and northwestern provinces of France: to boundaries no longer possessing governmental meanings under the new dispensation of the land since the Revolution abolished the old system of duchies and counties, yet still of import when French geography of travel is in question, or historic growth.

Let the reader pick up his map once more. He will observe that beyond Normandy – lately before him in this magazine – between the broadest part of the English channel and the Atlantic ocean, shoots out a long, jagged peninsula. It is the farthest section westward of modern France. You may say that its upper

beginning is defined by the Bay of St. Michel, and that towering and unique Mount, on which is built the stupendous fortress-abbey. The lower territorial mark comes as you locate the widening of the River Loire, and spy the ancient city of Nantes

Fanciful geography used to be a fashion with some school systems; if you exercise a trifle of your imagination, you can find in this peninsula the outline of the head and neck of a leopard (not an inappropriate beast in view of the heraldry of the land), with his jaws open and a curling tongue, snarling at a fly. (The fly is the little island of Ouessant, or Ushant.) Even about the map-aspect of the peninsula there are hints of the detached, the solitary, and the savage. You over-look it, inland and outland. You discover that it seems to be free from mountains – a low-lying bit of country, probably extremely rugged shoreward; whether traced out north, west or south, - and in fact it is a mass of granite, however modified and softened by fertile and well-wooded intervals.

You run your eye over the towns, to discover that the peninsula is one possessed of countless small cities or villages, rather than of great communities. Also you conclude quickly that its seaport interests, whether wide-reaching or merely local, and however unkind the sea-inlets, surely have had a great deal to do with developing its population. But as you spell over the names of the towns and harbors, especially toward the west and south, perplexity comes. Can these be French localities? – these barbaric, wild words, full of singular arrangements of the vowels and consonants, showing the continual recurrence of *k*, hard *c* and *g*, and guttural *ch*? – the open sounds of vowels not allowed to be diphthongs or slurred utterances, the constant *oe* and *oua*? Sometimes the names remind you of English ones – say in Cornwall.

Next you pick up a history, possibly with thoughts of meeting ancient French annals, in part familiar to you. Again you are surprised. What matters these pages first utter, as the annals of centuries consist in wild legends of races that you never have read about until now; dark and barbarous myths of paganism, stories of Christian enlightenment through saints not invoked in French calendars of our day; chronicles of vanished cities. And even when, still descending the ages and epochs, you enter upon times referencing to definite European history, lo, here succeed a race, or races, obscure localities, powerful kings and queens, striking events, steps in civilization, literatures, all persistently apart from the narrative atmosphere of Central Europe and almost heedless of France itself.

Now, these aspects of this peninsula properly may just thus emphatically impress one. We are considering Brittany; a world much aloof, long before it became a French province. We meet with a people that as Gaels

and Kelts and Kymri never were French – as we understand that race; that probably never can be French, unless Druid temples are to seem the same thing as boulevards, and such a set of words as “Belle Sainte Marie” come to sound like “Lok maria-ker.” The different qualities of the province, both along its coast and in its inland portion as you go west, are still vigorous. About a million busy people in Brittany do not speak French, - that is to say, as their spontaneous tongue. Breton, a rich and well-formed Keltic and Gaelic speech, is their birth-language.

The affairs of the French Republic are not a popular concern, but left to political aspirants. Plenty of Bretons and Bretonnes could not give you as quickly the name of the president of France as the name of some local witch who should be burned alive – yes, burned! – if honest farmers and fishers could be properly protected from devilry. And religion here is peculiar in phase. The zeal of the Catholic faith is patent: but the remonstrating village-priest does not do away with secret or open superstitions – rooted, part of the “blood and bone” of Breton men and women. Frequently the Church had had to admit a sort of compromise. All over the country occur special religious exercises each year, on different dates, but during the fine-weather months, in honor of local saints, and known as “Pardons” – with extraordinary processions, particular costumes, practices of worship or of social intercourse not like any other demonstrations of Catholic ardor among the peasantry-class which France affords.

Again, the general temperament and exterior of the typical Breton is not what France shows you elsewhere and oftenest. Allowing for dissimilarities in now one and now another locale, here prevails a physical type less beautiful, vigorous without refinement, and natures that are obstinate, secretive, ungenial and gloomy. While to be hospitable is felt to be virtuous, the stranger is not welcomed as in Normandy or Touraine; and interest in him is a sober duty rather than an impulse.

One thing more – as you cross the moors (*landes*) of Brittany-between-the-seas, or visit the sea-washed Morbihan haunts, you come upon whole avenues of enormous stones, rows of monoliths, set up in lines or piled into dark corridors, to add to the mysteries of the prehistoric days; contrasting with the cheerful little cities, fine farms, lusty and verdant woods and all that is of Brittany's gayer look.

The area of Brittany in its fullest estate took in five modern Departments – to wit, Ille-et-Vilaine, Loire Inférieure, Morbihan, Côtes-du-Nord and the Finistère. The three last-named refer back to the oldest realms of the land, - Cournaille, Vannes, Léon and Tréguier: and these circuits yet are most unlike “the French of France.” The relationship of early Breton history and pre-history to England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales is

not to be questioned. Language, early paganism, customs and historic witnesses of varied sorts attest this. Probably the theory of a land-connection, straight across the Channel, a great causeway submerged through natural convulsions, is not extravagance. But if we undertake to begin Breton history with the statements of its powerful bardic sages, we are on quicksand.

We read of King Brutus, the grandson of Ascanius. We are told of King Gomer, grandson of Noah, through Japhet, the founder of the Kelts as a nation. Mixed with incidents of battle or Druidic rites, and with episodes of poetical vigor, we learn of such great kings as Conan Mériadek, who decided on shattering the power of the Druids over Brittany; and did so with fire and sword. Quite as distinguished as King Conan is King Gradlon (or Gallon), reigning, according to the bards, in the fifth century, and the father of a particularly wicked daughter, Princes Ahès or Dahut.

The Roman invasion came when the generals under Caesar had partly crushed the bold tribe of the Veneti, and destroyed the old Armoric city of Vannes. Fine traces of Roman city-life, and of detached estates and castles, are plentiful in Brittany. In the mythical annals of the sixth century, we are constantly occupied with the reign of King Arthur, the doings of the Round Table Knights, the romances of Tristan and Iseult, Guinevère and Launcelot, the spells of Merlin and so forth, as much as when reading the fabulous accounts that make Arthur an English or Welsh ruler. Here was Brocéliande's Forest and Avalon's Isle. After the Arthurian narratives, succeed the doings of princes not any better established than that predecessor, as real sovereigns; kings with curious names, such as Nominoë, Erispoë, Hoel, Judhael, Waroch, Riwallo, and an extremely wicked King Comor – a wife-murderer of great diligence, in fact the original of Bluebeard legends, - and Alain I., called Alain the Great.

A Norman invasion of importance occurred in 907, successfully made a matter of occupancy of Brittany by the Normans for a generation. By this time we are in comfortably firm history. The first Duke of Brittany, Alain, called "Barbe-Torte," ruled in 937. Herewith begins the restless, dark and generally sanguinary chronicle of Brittany under some five-and-twenty dukes; some of them as an Irishman might put it, being duchesses. One queenly and truly feminine figure is Constance – Shakespeare's Constance, the mother of young Arthur, Duke of Brittany, who was slain in his Norman prison at Rouen, in 1202. A terrific and long civil struggle for the province came in the middle of the fourteenth century. It was between the rival houses of Blois and de Montfort; in it such famous leaders as Olivier de Clisson, Arthur de Richemont and Bertrand du Guesclin were indefatigable.

Effort after effort to possess Brittany, on the part of the English princes, also is to be recorded, and in the Plantagenet days there was success. But at last, with the reign as duchess in her own right, of Anne – Anne the Good – and the fifteenth century, Brittany ceased to be an independent duchy; and was ruled by France, from the council-seats at Paris, or in Touraine. It suffered or prospered, as a province, much like other portions of Western France, from religious or other contests, until the final convulsion of the Revolution and the bloody struggles of the Vendée campaigns were over. The anecdotes of the famed Chouans are part of its Revolutionary narrative. It was removed from the main course of Franco-Prussian campaigns; but they did not let the peninsula alone.

So much for a preliminary and general look at this thoroughly old land and at its recent historical sequences – bearing out the frequent declarations of its folk today that the Breton peninsula "is not French and can never become French." The reader will perceive resemblances, past and present, to the attitude of the Irish toward Saxon England, and the temperamental pose of the Irish; or to Scotland long after the annexation of the Gael to Sassenach dominion.

As regards "reading up" on Brittany, by going to its real or fanciful annals, collections of its early poetry (which especially includes the famous "Barzaz Breiz") the works of travel in French and English devoted to it, there is almost a disconcerting big bibliography. A book club easily can find a winter's work in Breton matters. The Keltic and Gaelic Keltic early literature is brimful of the dramatic. And, just as in Provence and Wales, there is an interesting literature in Breton by authors of our own day, who love and write their ancestral speech. Until within a generation, several of the curious old miracle-plays in Breton could be heard in western towns, when the local religious festivals occurred with a concourse of strangers and processions. Did the limit of this paper allow, I would cite many a fragment of the "Barzaz Breiz" as a matter of course.

*To be continued ... The author moves on to planning a tour and takes the reader on a journey to different towns and cities of Brittany, including famous landmarks, bits of history, and legends along the way.*



## An Introduction to the U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL)

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The Breton language is spoken by an estimated 175,000 to 200,000 people in Brittany, but it is threatened with extinction as older speakers are not replaced by younger ones. The Breton language is no longer forbidden in schools or totally hidden from public view, but France continues to withhold the resources necessary for its development as a healthy living language, despite demands from an ever widening Breton population for its support and growth in the schools, media, and public life.

### Who are the Members of the ICDBL?

Some U.S. ICDBL members are of Breton heritage, but the U.S. ICDBL is intended to be a group of “anyone and everyone” showing support for the Breton language rather than an organization for Breton-Americans like so many other “ethnic” organizations in the U.S. We do have quite a few members with Irish, Scottish or Welsh heritage, so there is an inter-Celtic element to our work. Most of our members speak neither Breton nor French and most have never been to Brittany. But we all have some reason to help fight for the survival of the Breton language.

### What the does the U.S. ICDBL do?

With Members of the U.S. ICDBL dispersed throughout the U.S. --from Maine to Florida, from Alaska to California, and lots of states in between—we do not hold meetings or have the ability to carry out many projects as a group.

### Quarterly Newsletter for Members and Subscribers

Our central activity is the publication of a quarterly newsletter called **Bro Nevez** (“new country” in the Breton language). It’s not slick and glossy, but includes 15 to 20 pages of current information about what is going on in Brittany related to the Breton language, and short articles on a range of topics, from music and dance, to sports, travel, the economy, or history. In November 2006 we published our 100<sup>th</sup> issue.

In the 3,000+ pages of **Bro Nevez** produced so far, over 800 books from Brittany have been reviewed or noted, and over 300 Breton music recordings have been reviewed and an additional 900 new releases briefly described.

The newsletter can be e-mailed as a PDF file you can share with others, and back issues can be found on our website. We are happy to send complimentary copies (ideally by e-mail) to organizations and individuals in Brittany active in work for their language and culture.

### The U.S. ICDBL Web Site: [www.icdbl.org](http://www.icdbl.org)

On our website we have published a guide to Breton music (updated in 2006), a guide to learning materials for the Breton language, an introduction to and map of the Celtic languages, a presentation of the Diwan Breton language immersion schools, and two documents presenting the Breton language and why it is endangered and what is being done about it. Bretons themselves have created many great websites to present their country and its culture, and we provide links to a large number of excellent and reliable sites created by Bretons themselves.

### Other Action

We assist people from the U.S. and all over the world with requests for information about the Breton language and culture. ICDBL Members throughout the U.S. have been ambassadors for the cause of the Breton language by distributing information at Celtic cultural events and music festivals or concerts, and by simply discussing their concerns with friends and acquaintances.

As is the case for all branches of the ICDBL, our support of the Breton language is mostly symbolic—the fact that outsiders care at all offers encouragement to people in Brittany who are working to sustain the Breton language and find new and creative ways to use it. And we know that this has been noticed and much appreciated in Brittany.

### PLEASE JOIN US. YOUR SUPPORT SHOWS THE PEOPLE OF BRITTANY THAT THEIR LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT TO THE WORLD

A yearly membership (including subscription to our newsletter) is just \$20. If you would simply like to subscribe to our newsletter, without becoming a Member, that is also \$20. Make out a check to “**U.S. ICDBL**” and mail it to the address below.

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