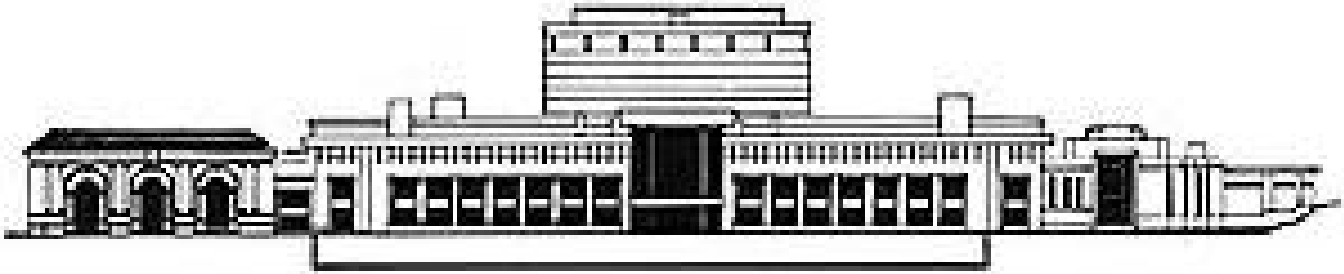


LES THERMES D'AIX-LES-BAINS

Edited by John W. Lund
from www.aixlesbains.com



Aix-Les-Bains, a prestigious spa town, is located at the heart of the Savoie Olympic region on the edge of the Le Bourget lake, the largest natural lake in France. The town is located approximately 75 km south of Geneva and 90 km east of Lyon near the Italian-Swiss border. It is a town of 26,000 inhabitants with Mt. Revard (1,550 m) overlooking the town and with a view of Mt. Blanc in the distance. One of the famous visitors to visit the region was Queen Victoria, who came incognito under the title of Countess of Balmoral. She liked the waters and the climate of Aix so much that in 1888, she wanted to buy a domain on a nearby hill to build a second home. This plan did not come to fruition.

EARLY GEOTHERMAL DEVELOPMENT AND USE

It was Celtic horsemen who first discovered the hot, healing springs on the slopes of Mt. Revard. They placed them under the protection of Borvo, their God of Healing. After the Romans had subjugated the Gaule Narbonnaise region around 120 BC, they baptized the city *Aquae Grantianae* and constructed the comfortable thermal baths then in fashion in the Empire. Patricians from the Roman *Gaule Provincia* region came to bathe here. First they took a hot bath



(*caldarium*) then a warm bath (*tepidarium*) and then a cold bath (*frigidarium*). All the pools were marble and the rooms decorated with columns and sculptures. They were heated by underground channels called *hypocaustes* containing hot air.

The tradition of taking baths in the hot springs was continued through the centuries under the reigns of the Burgundian, Frank, Merovingian and Carolingian kings. *Aquae* became Aix. In 1600, Henry IV “took a bath for one hour” in the only bath still accessible, the Royal Bath. In 1623, Doctor Cabias published a book on the “marvellous virtues of the baths at Aix-en Savoie.” The high-born could bathe at home in thermal waters brought to them by carriers, but most patients bathed in the grottos where the Soufre and Alun springs gushed forth from the rock. Water can be seen coming up to the surface today through a tunnel dug in the rock in the XIX century. Its underground journey from the opposite side of the lake takes more than 30 years and comes up from a depth of 2,000 m at a temperature of 46°C.

NATIONAL GEOTHERMAL DEVELOPMENT AND USE

In 1776, the King of Sardinia, Victor-Amedée II decided to give Aix baths worthy of the quality of its water. In 1784, he inaugurated the *Etablissement Royal des Bains*. The one became quickly too small, thus, at the beginning of the XIX century it was enlarged and new baths, a large swimming pool and a *vaporarium* (steam bath) were built. Zinc bath tubs were installed and new techniques invented: rain baths, the “*douche écossaise*” (cold showers) and a massage shower. Aix treated nervous diseases, syphilis and rheumatism. Restoration and enlargement in 1857, 1934 and 1970 have resulted in the present establishment which specializes in rheumatology. Attendance has risen since spa treatments have been covered by the french national health reimbursement system.



THE GEOTHERMAL WATERS OF D' AIX-MARLOIZ

The sulphureous water of a small stream running through Marlioz was known by the inhabitants of Aix to cure acne and mild skin disorders. The water was analyzed, controlled and in 1861 the Prefet of Savoy, Mr. Dieu, inaugurated the new thermal baths and springs of Adélaide, Esculape and Bonjean. Reconstructed in 1982, the Aix-Marlioz baths treat disorders of the ear, nose and throat, and various allergies.

RHEUMATOLOGY

The massage shower or “Aix shower” is the characteristic treatment of the Thermal spa. It combines a general massage under a spray at constant temperature and a

terminal shower jet. It is a general treatment leading to a circulatory stimulation. It can be preceded by a warm shower coming from a watering rose of large diameter, given in a steam-room atmosphere, called “bouillon”. The under-water shower takes place in an individual bathtub with a variant, the suspended bath, which support a patient with limited mobility. The applications of mud thermo-vegeto-minerals are made of a maceral argillite in the thermal waters which transforms the calcareous clay into a plastic state. The Berhollet is a warm air bath humidified by the thermal waters. The equipment provides a stray of water on various portions of the body. Hydrotherapy showers are also available.

POOLS

Various pools are available ranging from 33 to 36°C, with soaking times varying from 10 to 20 minutes, depending upon the treatment. These are used mainly from the treatment of rheumatism and for the recovery from various injuries such as for joint mobilization.

BALNEOTHERAPY

The Phytomer Center, the Aqualioz-Thalgo Espace and the Adelpia Baths all have a fitness area with heated swimming pools, sauna, stream baths and hydromassage, a therapy area, a beauty center and various specialized treatments.

PRESENT DEVELOPMENT

Today the Chevalley Baths is investing 307 million francs (44.5 million US\$) in one of the largest building sites in The Rhône-Alpes region. The aim is to complement the treatments already offered by the National Baths and to reinforce Aix-les-Bains' renown in the treatment of rheumatism. Other developments include a Great Lake project with improved access to the lake and new bath areas, viewpoints and walks. Aix-les-Bains will modernize the nineteenth century baths, rehabilitate the esplanade and also renovate the water sports center and the aquarium. Additional details on the baths and the town can be found on their website: www.aixlesbains.com.