

**CONTACT:**

Rebekah Kohn  
(215) 599-7433  
rebekah@gptmc.com

**A TALE OF TWO CITIES:**  
*The Philadelphia/Paris Connection*

**HISTORY**

Though Ben Franklin seems to be associated with all things evolutionary and revolutionary in Philadelphia, the truth is that he spent the bulk of the War of Independence in Paris. Franklin left the struggling American capital in 1776, even while his glorious new house on Market Street was being built. He didn't return from France until nine years later, having been the toast of Paris and cementing the alliances, both cultural and political, that last to this day. (Franklin considered the Alliance with France, which granted support to the colonies, one of his greatest achievements.)

With Franklin's encouragement, the young nobleman Marquis de Lafayette came to Philadelphia by ship with a squadron of freedom fighters, showing the Revolutionary alliance was a two-way street. Nearly 50 years later, Philadelphians invited him back to the rededication of the State House, where the *Declaration of Independence* had been debated and passed. It was Lafayette who lovingly popularized the building as the "Hall of Independence."

The early ties between France and Philadelphia were not solely political and military, though. In 1776, a young French sea captain tried to maneuver his ship into New York harbor. Thwarted by a British blockade, he decided to dock in Philadelphia. He liked what he saw, sold his ship and bought office space on Walnut Street.

That young Frenchman, Stephen Girard, stayed in the city and became one of the richest men in the United States, with interests in mining and banking and a fleet of world-cruising clipper ships named after his beloved French philosophers: Rousseau, Voltaire and so forth.

French artisans, too, saw the new capital as a place to make a mark. Michael Bouvier fled to America as a young soldier after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. He took up cabinet-making, and soon had a thriving business on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, catering to Stephen Girard and his friends. Bouvier's

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fame flourished again 150 years later, when his great-great granddaughter, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, became the First Lady of the United States.

One of those who reveled in his collection of Bouvier pieces was Napoleon's older brother, Joseph Bonaparte, who had been King of Sicily and Spain until Napoleon's fall. Joseph fled to Philadelphia, where his home at 260 S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street, now a private residence, became the social headquarters of the city's upper-crust in the mid-1810s. While there, Joseph married and took his honeymoon in that new-found natural wonder, Niagara Falls, setting a tradition that French and American newlyweds have followed for two centuries since.

## ARCHITECTURE

When it comes to its landmark buildings and public places, Philadelphia may well be the most French of all American cities. The greatest French influence on Philadelphia's landscape is the **Benjamin Franklin Parkway**, planned by Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945), an émigré from Lyon, and designed by French landscape architect Jacques Greber (1882-1962). It was modeled after Paris's Champs-Élysées and completed in 1917, creating a grand boulevard where once stood a decrepit neighborhood.

While Greber returned to France, Cret stayed, and over the next several decades designed some of the area's landmark buildings, including the **Barnes Foundation** in Merion, the towers of the **Benjamin Franklin Bridge** and the **Rodin Museum**.

Up the Parkway from the Rodin Museum at 26<sup>th</sup> Street is the gilded statue of **Jeanne D'Arc** (Joan of Arc), created by the French animal sculptor Emmanuel Fremiet (1824-1910). Several of the sculptures in Rittenhouse Square were cast by the Parisian Antoine Louis Barye (1795-1875).

All throughout Philadelphia, you will see reminders of the French influence on Philadelphia's planners. **City Hall** carries the French Second Empire-style features of the Louvre and the Parisian Hotel De Ville. Look at the **Free Library of Philadelphia** and the buildings near **Logan Circle** and see a mirror of the Place de la Concorde. The **Founders Hall Library** at Girard College is in the classical style of Madeleine Church in Paris. **Rittenhouse Square**, the elegant commercial center of the city, was modeled, principally by Cret, after Paris's exclusive Parc Monceau.

## ART AND CULTURE

Albert Barnes and Jules Mastbaum could hardly have been more different personalities. Barnes was a working-class youth whose mother pushed him to Methodist revivals and medical school. He studied religion, medicine and art and developed quirky ideas of how to teach all of them. After garnering a fortune for his invention of the antiseptic Argyrol, Barnes started buying art, much of it by 19<sup>th</sup>-century French masters like Paul Gauguin, Henri Rousseau and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. He set up the **Barnes Foundation** to display his art in 1922. Its treasures are still arranged in the particular and peculiar settings Barnes designed; and the collection is widely considered among the most extensive of French Impressionism in the world.

Mastbaum, on the other hand, was a boisterous industrialist and movie-house magnate. In 1923, Mastbaum started collecting everything he could by sculptor Auguste Rodin. In the next three years before he died, Mastbaum had amassed the greatest collection of Rodin's work outside of Paris – 124 sculptures, studies, books, drawings and prints. They are now housed at the **Rodin Museum**, a building along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway designed by the Parkway's creators, Paul Cret and Jacques Greber.

Of course, there are French artistic treasures all around Philadelphia, from the **Philadelphia Museum of Art's** Van Goghs to the **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art's** collections to the French and French-style art holdings at the **Rosenbach Museum and Library**.

## FOOD

Since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Philadelphia has had a fondness for French food and service. University elites often sought out French-style boarding house, one of the more prestigious being that of Madame and Monsieur Allard at 33<sup>rd</sup> and Walnut Streets, near the University of Pennsylvania. It was here that turn-of-the-century Francophiles could find French speakers, French culture and, of course, French food.

Modern Philadelphia, though, owes its restaurant Francophilia to the meeting in Provence of Peter von Starck, the son of a Philadelphia lawyer, and an apprentice chef, Georges Perrier. The two came to Philadelphia to run the seminal French bistro Le Panetiere, the forerunner to Perrier's long-term Philadelphia gem, **Le Bec-Fin**.

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Many French chefs have followed the lead of Perrier, who also opened **Brasserie Perrier** in Rittenhouse Square and **Le Mas Perrier** on the Main Line. Jean-Marie Lacroix was the chef at the celebrated **Fountain Restaurant** and has now opened **Lacroix at The Rittenhouse**. Fritz Blank's **Deux Cheminees** is an example of how a young American has brought Philadelphia more upscale French cuisine. French-style bistros are peppered throughout the city. Places like **Rouge, Bleu**, the **Blue Angel** and **Pigalle** are filled with locals and international visitors eating well and socializing heartily.

Beyond the bistro and the elegant restaurant scene, French culinary delights are all over Philadelphia. Try the coffees and confections at **La Colombe** in the **French Quarter** near Rittenhouse Square and then stop by **DiBruno's**, where you can choose from a wide selection of French cheeses. Creperies such as **Beau Monde** have long been a Philadelphia staple. Or go up to Philadelphia's Northwest arrondissement, Chestnut Hill, with its cobblestone streets, and stop at the **French Bakery & Café** on Germantown Avenue.

- **Beau Monde**, 624 S. 6<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 592-0656
- **Blue**, 227 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 545-0342
- **Blue Angel**, 706 Chestnut Street, (215) 925-6889
- **Brasserie Perrier**, 1619 Walnut Street, (215) 568-3000
- **Deux Cheminees**, 1220 Locust Street, (215) 790-0200
- **DiBruno's**, 109 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 665-9220
- **French Bakery & Café**, 8624 Germantown Avenue, (215) 247-5959
- **La Colombe**, 130 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 563-0860
- **Lacroix at The Rittenhouse**, 210 W. Rittenhouse Square, (215) 790-2533
- **Le Bec-Fin**, 1523 Walnut Street, (215) 567-1000
- **Le Mas Perrier**, 503 W. Lancaster Avenue, Wayne, (610) 964-2588
- **Pigalle**, 702 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, (215) 627-7772
- **Rouge**, 208 S. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 732-6622

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## SHOPPING

Like the cozy and elegant shopping streets in Paris, those in the **French Quarter** of Philadelphia, near Rittenhouse Square, are filled with the elegant, owner-operated shops that welcome both grazers and serious buyers.

The French accents, home furnishings and objects de charmes at **Monique Messin** have a French flavor in a pleasant Parisian atmosphere. Not far away, the **Calderwood Gallery** has an international clientele and reputation for French Art Deco and 1940s French Art Nouveau furniture. It is unusual not to hear French spoken at **VOG**, where the stylists will gossip about French celebrities whose hair they have cut. Then head out to **Paris Europa** for a new outfit to complement that chic VOG cut.

Even out of Center City, there is a French flavor in Philadelphia. In the stylish shopping area of Manayunk, along the Schuylkill River, is **Ma Jolie**. And in nearby Haverford, there is **French Corner Antiques**.

- **Calderwood Gallery**, 1622 Spruce Street, (215) 546-5357
- **French Corner Antiques**, 16 Haverford Station Road, Haverford, (610) 642-6867
- **Ma Jolie**, 4340 Main Street, (215) 483-8850
- **Monique Messin**, 1742 Sansom Street, (215) 557-1060
- **Paris Europa**, 1315 Walnut Street, (215) 893-1115
- **VOG**, 135 S. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, (215) 546-2550

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