



The History of the Château de Pourtalès

Nearly three centuries of history can be discovered at the Château de Pourtalès: peace and prosperity, beauty and aristocracy, prodigy and higher learning, even war, tragedy, devastating fire and ruin. Through it all the Château has nobly stood, inspiring all who come to dream big dreams and to persevere.



Begun in the first half of the 18th Century, our Château was first conceived as a small manor house nestled in pastoral Robertsau, an agricultural suburb of Strasbourg. The preeminent construction contractor to the King of France, Joseph Guerault, found himself in need of a quiet place to relax from his arduous duties, building fortifications for the city of Strasbourg.

His house served its purpose well. The Guerault family happily enjoyed the home and the tranquility of its surrounding forest until 1802, when it was sold to Baron Paul-Athanase Renouard de Bussierre. Soon after, the Baron married the daughter of a prominent Strasbourg banker and nobleman. Baron de Bussierre and his new wife eagerly expanded the manor into a gracious Château.



The Bussierres were a social family and, because of their standing in society, were frequently attended by the aristocracy of their time. The Château's guest books were graced by such nobility as the Duke of Cumberland, son of King George III; Imperial Chancellor Clemens, Baron of Metternich of Vienna; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the German literary icon who penned such notable works as "Faust"; as well as many members of the Napoleonic elite, including Bernadotte, who later became King of Sweden. The Château was also privileged to host young Franz Liszt, the Hungarian piano prodigy, when he performed to the great delight of King Ludwig I of Bavaria at a reception held in his honor.



With the next three generations of Bussierres, the aristocratic period in the Château's history continued. Viscount Alfred de Bussierre championed significant technological advancements beneficial to Europe and Strasbourg in particular, including Rhine canals offering safe passage for commerce and the foundation of a factory for railway locomotives. He bridged French and German cultures as a member of Parliament in 1845 by connecting the countries' respective railways through Strasbourg. A reception held at the Château to honor this accomplishment was attended by Napoleon III and the First Lady of the neighboring state in Germany, the Grand Duchess Stephanie of Baden.

The third generation brought Melanie, the Château's namesake. Daughter of the Viscount and wife to Count Edmond de Pourtales, Countess Melanie was exceedingly beautiful and had a reputation for peerless grace. She elevated her social standing to its pinnacle when she became a member of Empress Eugenie's Paris Imperial Court and subsequently associated with many distinguished intellectuals and artists of her time. Renowned for garden parties and receptions she frequently hosted, Countess Melanie gathered Europe's most notable elite and nobility right here at the Château de Pourtalès for intellectual and cultural exchange.





Following the death of the Countess in 1914, Melanie's daughter, Agnes, continued hosting prominent guests for political, theatrical and musical events. As was her mother, Agnes was committed to bringing people together for the expansion of knowledge and creative enrichment. She was also dedicated to her home region of Alsace, determined to promote its role as a bridge between European cultures. Among Agnes' more notable guests was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the Alsatian Nobel Peace Prize winner and famous humanitarian, theologian, medical doctor, and founder of a hospital in west central Africa. Her other visitors during those days included Russian Grand Dukes, Belgian Princesses, a German Imperial Governor and a Prussian Prince, just to name a few.

Despite its impressive past, the Château has not stood without hardship. It has persevered through several wars, suffering fire damage during the French-German War in 1870, and serving its duty as an army hospital during that same conflict. The two World Wars were also difficult, for it was held by the Germans in WWI as "enemy property". Private owners closed the Château in 1939 without plans to reopen. During WWII, it was confiscated and forced to house high-ranking German officers, then occupied by Allied Forces for a short period following the war.

After a brief effort to assist young Czech and Hungarian students escaping the Iron Curtain under the auspices of the so-called "University of Free Europe", the Château began to decline and eventually fell into utter despair. It spent many years in such disrepair it was scheduled for demolition by the City of Strasbourg.

Just in time, the Château once again fell into loving hands. It was purchased in 1972 by Dr. Walter Leibrecht, founder of Schiller International University and a pioneer in higher education and study-abroad learning. Dr. Leibrecht and his family literally rescued the Château from its ultimate demise, granting it a new mission when he appointed it home to the Strasbourg campus of his beloved Schiller International University.

Harkening back to the days when Countess Melanie drew some of the finest minds of her time to the Château for the pursuit of knowledge and creative ideas, the Château de Pourtalès has blossomed as a center for education and multi-cultural learning. One might even imagine a very proud Countess Melanie, keeping a watchful eye as her gracious home continues to reach out, embracing people from around the world as they come here for study, business, governmental policy and parliamentary sessions, and to celebrate special occasions.

The new millennium attracts a variety of different guests to the Château and its surrounding park. The grounds of the Château de Pourtalès are still used as a study abroad center for educational groups. The salons and ballroom are still used for festivities such as weddings and parties, product presentations, seminars, workshops and concerts. In the neighboring building, built in the Swiss style „Chalet “ recent renovations have helped transform the rooms into comfortable, modern guest rooms. In November 2009 the Château de Pourtalès opened its doors as an official hotel. The small restaurant located in the southern gate building the "Jardin de Pourtalès" offers regional Alsatian specialties for all individual guests or groups who visit the Château.

Whether it's the way the Château links us to its distinguished spirits of the past or because of its sheer scale and grandeur, the Château de Pourtalès inspires each of us to imagine great things... and to believe all things are possible. It challenges us to fulfill our full and highest potential, as it has itself done for centuries. Maybe that's why people who visit our beloved Château don't rush away, they usually come and stay awhile. The Château de Pourtalès will carve out a special place in your heart and live there for a lifetime.