

# Charleston Mercury

DECEMBER 2020

THE PAPERZINE WITH A COSMOPOLITAN ATTITUDE

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## Le Carnet de France: Long lasting friendship: Saint-Omer

By Martine Dulles

You may or may not have ever heard of the small town of Saint-Omer located in the Pas-de-Calais, a French department in the northern part of France. Consequently, you may be surprised to learn that Saint-Omer was already known in the 18th century in North America, more precisely in Maryland, by one of the wealthiest families there — the Carroll family.

In 1566, the Bishop of Saint-Omer, Gérard d'Haméricourt, invited the Society of Jesus — the Catholic order created by Ignatius of Loyola in Rome — to open two teaching colleges. The Walloon Jesuit College opened in 1566 followed by the English Jesuit College in 1593. The education was of a very high standard. Many students came from England and North America at an early age and stayed many years. "The Jesuits, known for the quality of their teaching and use of artistic forms in their pedagogic approach were indeed able to respond to the needs of the community," note historians Pierre-Antoine Gatier and Alice Trévien. The results were obvious: Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737-1832) became the sole Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, his cousin, Daniel Carroll (1730-1796), was one of the signatories of both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution; Daniel's brother, the Most Rev. John Carroll, SJ (1735-1815), became the first archbishop of the United States and one of the founders of Georgetown University (1789).

Today, one of the gems of Saint-Omer is the Chapel of the Walloon Jesuit College, which was designed by Father Jean du Blocq in 1615 and completed in 1636. The façade, in a very Baroque style (the style developed in Italy at the time), is very similar to the Church of Gesù in Rome, the Jesuit Church "par excellence,"

whose architecture has inspired many Jesuit churches around the world.

From 2013 to 2017, thanks to the French Government, the Pas-de-Calais Department, The French Heritage Society and the Gould Foundation, the chapel (which is now deconsecrated) was restored. The inside, 131 feet high (as vast as Notre-Dame in Paris), has a particular feature — "the Doric frieze with alternating triglyphs and metopes, which unfolds around the choir and extends along the central aisle, was inspired to transmit a moral lesson to students."

Adjoining the chapel is one of the most substantial libraries of France, created by the city of Saint-Omer in 1799. The main room, made with oak and pine shelves, is filled with 20,000 books and manuscripts, all dating prior to 1820. A copy of the complete first part of Gutenberg's Bible and an annotated manuscript by Sir Isaac Newton are among the treasures to be admired.

A few meters away is the Musée de l'Hôtel Sandelin, in a mansion built in the 18th century by Pierre Sandelin, Comte de Fruges, and his wife Marie-Josèphe Sandelin. The mansion had various uses until it was opened as a museum to the public in 1904. It owns one of the largest collections of ceramics (4,000 pieces) from Europe and Asia, as well as more than 1,000 pipes, paintings from the 15th to the 19th century, sculptures from the 19th and 20th centuries and much more.

Not far is the Gothic Cathédrale de Notre-Dame, which took four centuries to be built, starting with the choir in the 12th and ending with the west tower in the 16th century.

Today, the relations between France and the U.S. are still very much alive. The Fondation Saint-Omer Valeurs Transatlantiques (the Saint-Omer Foundation for Transatlantic Values) was created in 2017. It is under the Academy of Moral and

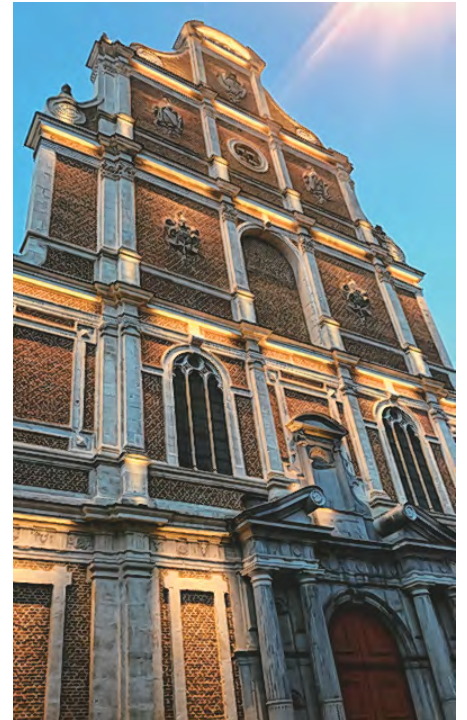


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The Jesuit Chapel at dusk.

Political Sciences in the Institut de France, in Paris. The purpose of the Foundation is to offer a new approach and awareness of the bonds of friendship between America and France. It organizes colloquiums and conferences as well as cultural and educational exchanges with Georgetown University, Stonehurst and Johns Hopkins University.

During the year of its creation, the Foundation ordered a statue made by the French sculptor Marine de Soos. Guess of whom — Charles Carroll.

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