

The Château de Pourtalès hosted many illustrious personalities

Countess Sophie Mélanie de Pourtalès, born Renouard de Bussière
(26.03.1836 – 05.05.1914)



The Countess Sophie Mélanie de Pourtalès was both the lady and the soul of the Château de Pourtalès. Born to an influential Alsatian banking family, she married the Count Edmond de Pourtalès, and the couple had five children together. The Countess was introduced at the court of Napoleon III by Richard von Metternich. Through her beauty and intelligence, she quickly became a favourite of Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III. The Countess was very popular in Parisian society, and she was well known for her acting talent and for hosting elaborate feasts, at which prominent members of political, aristocratic, societal, artistic and cultural circles were among the many guests. In order to honour and remember the most significant guests, we have named the rooms of our hotel after them.

Count Edmond de Pourtalès
(06.04.1828 – 23.03.1895)

On June 30, 1857, Count Edmond de Pourtalès married Mélanie de Renouard de Bussière at the Robertsau Church in Strasbourg. The youngest son of Count James-Alexandre de Pourtalès-Gorgier, he followed his father's footsteps and often traveled to Paris for work. Together with Mélanie, he was a popular guest at the court of Napoléon III. However, both he and his wife felt most at home at their summer residence, the Château de Pourtalès, which they both expanded and enhanced. Count Edmond de Pourtalès was also the "Consulate general of Bas-Rhin" in the Regional Council of the lower Rhine.



Baron James-Alexandre de Pourtalès-Gorgier
(28.11.1776 – 24.03.1855)

Baron James-Alexandre de Pourtalès-Gorgier was a diplomat in Paris and Constantinople as well as a chamberlain for the Prussian king. He married Anne Henriette Falconnet de Palézieux (1792-1836) and fathered six children. His youngest son, Edmond de Pourtalès, married Mélanie Renouard de Bussière. Together, the couple owned the Château de Pourtalès. Count James-Alexander was a prominent banker and diplomat as well as a passionate collector and patron of the arts. He was particularly partial to art from Switzerland, but he also collected various works of Rembrandt, Bronzino, and Ingres. The auctioning of his extensive art collection inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his last Sherlock Holmes episodes.



Agnès Mélanie Marquise de Loys-Chandieu

(03.06.1870 - 1930)

Agnès, the youngest daughter of Mélanie de Pourtalès, inherited the Château de Pourtalès in 1914. In 1890, she married Henri Marquis de Loys-Chandieu in Paris, and she spent these initial years living away from Strasbourg. Upon the death of her mother, she felt a filial duty to renovate the family's castle, which had suffered significant damages during the war. Agnès' goal was to continue her mother's tradition and re-establish the Château de Pourtalès as a major European meeting place and cultural center in the region. In 1926 Agnès organized the "Décade", a panel discussion featuring prominent French writers and philosophers of her time.



Baron Alfred Renouard de Bussière

(14.06.1804 - Avril 1887)



Baron Alfred Renouard de Bussière was Melanie's father, as well as a banker, industrialist, and one of the major players in Alsatian politics and economics of his time. The Baron served as President of the Economic Court, Director of the Mint in Paris and Strasbourg, a member of the Protestant Consistory or Augsburg, Regional Councillor, and a member of the Departments of the Lower Rhine. As the owner of Metalworks of Illkirch-Graffenstaden, he was instrumental in the construction of the first railway line from Strasbourg to Paris, which was inaugurated in 1852. Shortly thereafter, he initiated the building of the first iron railway bridge over the Rhine between Strasbourg and Kehl.

Napoléon III, Charles Louis Napoléon Bonaparte

(20.04.1808 - 09.01.1873)



Napoléon III served first President, then as Emperor of France for 18 years. He was imprisoned during the Franco-Prussian war; after which was deposed and removed from office. Mélanie was a lady of his court and a confidante of his wife, Eugénie, and she remained loyal to the pair even throughout their exile. Mélanie often attempted to mediate relations between Berlin and Paris, in order to warn their leaders of the upcoming war. Unfortunately, Mélanie was ultimately unable to convince them, and she was only able to visit Napoléon and Eugénie in their exile in England. Napoléon expressed his deep gratitude for all of Mélanie's efforts in a heartfelt letter.

Empress Eugénie (05.05.1826 – 11.07.1920)

The Spanish-born Eugénie Marquise de Moya, Countess of Montijo, was the wife of Napoléon III. As Empress Consort of France from 1853 to 1870, she was part of what would ultimately be the last French monarchy. Eugénie was a strict Catholic, and she surrounded herself with the beautiful ladies of her court. Prince Metternich, a close friend of the Empress, introduced Mélanie de Pourtalès to her court in 1860. As a close confidante of the Empress, Mélanie was a welcome guest in the Tuileries. Due to her acting skills, she was often called upon to actively participate in the theatrical evenings in Compiègne and Fontainebleau.



Frédérique Wilhelmine de Frank, married de Bussière (1777 – 1854)

Frédérique de Bussière was the wife of Paul-Athanase Renouard de Bussière. Their second son, Baron Alfred Renouard de Bussière (Mélanie's father) inherited the bank from his father. Frédérique's mother was known for her parlour, to which she invited all the eminent people of the time. Nearly everyone of import traveling to and from Paris would make a stop in Strasbourg. The Cardinal Rohan once said that Madame de Frank was one of the three women in Strasbourg who had best mastered the art of conversation. Frédérique continued her mother's tradition, first in the family's home on the Quai St. Nicolas, and then in their Château in the Robertsau. This "feminine" tradition continued further, first to Frédérique's daughter Mélanie and later to her granddaughter, Agnès.



Baron Paul-Athanase Renouard de Bussière (09.04.1776 - 18.04.1848)

The Baron was Mélanie's grandfather. Originally a banker, Baron Paul-Athanase de Bussière was appointed to the City Council of Strasbourg on May 1, 1806. In this capacity, he received the future Empress Marie-Louis of Austria, who was on her way from Strasbourg to marry Napoleon in Paris. In 1821, he underwrote 10 million francs in order to fund the completion of the long overdue Rhine-Rhone canal. He was elevated to the rank of Viscount by King Karl X in 1826.



Baroness Louise Mélanie de Coëhorn (11.06.1802 – 1880)

The Baroness was Mélanie's mother and the daughter of the famous General of Coëhorn. She grew up in the Castle Ittenwiller, which was located approximately 29 kilometres south of Strasbourg. Baron Alfred Renouard de Bussière fell madly in love with her, but unfortunately his father was too stingy to give him a horse, so the Baron had to walk the entire distance on foot in order to visit his beloved. Their engagement lasted two years, until they were finally married on June 15, 1825. Their marriage was a happy one, and they were even able to celebrate their Golden Anniversary (a rare accomplishment in these times).



Prince Richard Klemenz of Metternich

(07.01.1829 - 01.03.1895)



Richard's father, Klemenz of Metternich, was already a close friend of the family and often a guest in Madame de Franck's parlour. Therefore, Prince Richard of Metternich routinely stayed with the family Pourtalès while "en route" to Paris, and he was also considered a close family friend. In 1860, Prince Richard was appointed Austrian ambassador in Paris, and he and his wife Pauline soon became the darlings of Parisian court and society. At a ball in the Austrian embassy, Mélanie de Pourtalès was presented to the Empress Josephine. Soon after, she was invited to the Empress' exclusive "Montagen", at which she became a favourite guest.

Princess Pauline of Metternich

(1836 - 1921)

Born as the Countess Pauline Sandor von Szlavuicza, Princess Pauline of Metternich was one of Mélanie de Pourtalès' close friends and confidantes. The two families often socialized together, and they invited each other often at their homes, in Johannisberg or at the Château de Pourtalès. Their children grew up together and were good friends. Pauline, as well as Mélanie, was very interested in theatre. They loved to organize festivities where they would play tricks to their guests. Together, they founded a circle of friends called "Loutons" with the motto "boredom is forbidden." Both Pauline and Mélanie tried hard to use diplomatic channels to mitigate the difficulties between France and Germany.



King Ludwig I. of Bavaria

(25.08.1786 in Strasbourg - 29.02.1868)

Upon the announcement of his birth in Strasbourg, each soldier from the Royal Regiment of Alsace gave a lock of hair to be used as pillow filling, so that the firstborn son of the future King Maximilian Josef of Bavaria might sleep soundly. King Ludwig's godfather was King Louis XVI of France. The tradition of Oktoberfest in Munich was founded to celebrate King Ludwig's marriage to the Princess of Sachsen-Hildburghausen. The king fathered 9 children and seduced many women, such as the Irish dancer Lola Montez. His affair with Lola ultimately led to his abdication. While traveling to the 1867 World Exhibition in Paris, he stopped in Strasbourg. Until the end of his life, he was a patron of the arts, a poet, and a promoter of economic development.



Maximilian Josef of Bavaria / Maximilien of Wittelsbach

(27.05.1756 – 13.10.1825)



Before the Revolution, Maximilian Josef von Bavaria was a popular commander of the Alsace Royal Regiment in Strasbourg. He lived in a beautiful building on “rue Brûlée” and was a frequent and welcome visitor at the home of Madame de Franck (Mélanie’s grandmother). His deputy battalion commander was Jean-Jacques de Coëhorn, grandfather of the future Baroness Alfred de Bussière. Maximilian rose to power in 1799 as Maximilian IV, First Duke of Bavaria. Through an alliance with Napoleonic France, he became the First King of the Kingdom of Bavaria on January 1, 1806. Among his subjects, he was often referred to by his popular nickname “King Max.”

Grand Duchess Stéphanie of Baden

(28.08.1789 – 29.01.1860)

The imperial princess Stephanie Louise Adrienne de Beauharnais was the adopted daughter of Napoleon Bonaparte and the Grand Duchess of Baden. In 1806, she married Prince Karl, the crown prince of Baden. When the first railway line between Paris and Strasbourg was inaugurated in July 1852, Napoleon and many other illustrious guests came for the festivities. In order to attend the event, the Grand Duchess came by boat over the Rhine and stayed at the Château. Seeing this, the ever-enterprising Baron Alfred de Bussière, who had played a major role in the construction of the railway line, suggested that to build a “peace bridge” over the Rhine. In 1858, the Baron’s company was awarded the contract to construct the first metal railway bridge between Strasbourg and Kehl.



Duke Alfred of Edimbourg

(06.08.1844 – 30.07.1900)

Duke Alfred d’Edimbourg was the second son of Queen Victoria, brother of Edward the VII (king of Great Britain), and husband of the Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna of Russia, the only surviving daughter of Czar Alexander II of Russia. The Duke tried to spend a few days each year at the Château de Pourtalès. As he greatly appreciated music, Mélanie de Pourtalès would arrange for the excellent choir of Robertsau to sing for him each time he visited. These concerts were always followed by sumptuous meals.



Marquis Philippe de Massa

(01.05.1837 – 23.05.1913)

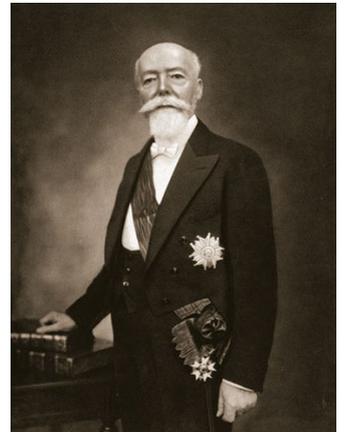


Marquis Philippe de Massa was an officer in the cavalry and later a member of both the "Horse Chasseurs of the Imperial Guard" and the "National Order of the Legion of Honour" due to his artistic gifts and great popularity in Paris. Empress Eugénie personally requested for him to choreograph charades and to write plays; these plays were performed at court and in the Compiègne castle. The actors in these works were part of a small circle of selected members of the court, such as Pauline de Metternich and Mélanie de Pourtalès. Inspired by the Mélanie's acting talent, he wrote roles and plays specifically for her. Mélanie also organized plays at the Château de Pourtalès. Two small summer parlours, complete with secret stage doors, were especially prepared for these performances.

Paul Doumer, 14th President of France

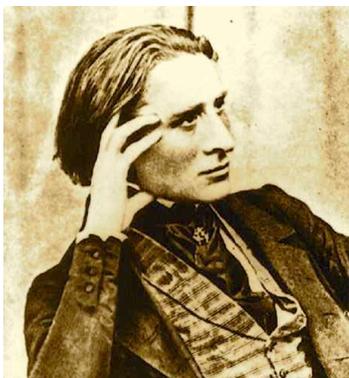
(22.03.1857 – 07.05.1932)

Originally from a humble background, Paul Doumer served as a teacher, a journalist, three times the Finance Minister of France, the Governor General of Indochina, and the President of the Chamber of Deputies. In December 1905, the future 14th President of France was a guest at the Château de Pourtalès. He was in Strasbourg for the conference discussing the colonization of peoples in faraway lands. Among others, he met with André Lichtenberger at the Château in order to discuss important topics, such as the law regarding the separation of church and state.



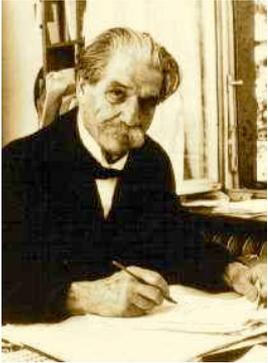
Pianist and composer Franz Liszt

(22.11.1811 – 31.07.1886)



In 1823, King Ludwig I of Bavaria came to visit his birthplace in Strasbourg. For his entertainment, Mélanie's mother organized a concerto concert starring a 12-year old child prodigy – Franz Liszt. The young Franz Liszt wanted to perform "Rondo brilliant 'Les charmes de Paris'", a 4-hand piano piece that had been written especially for him by Ignaz Moscheles. To this end, Madame de Bussière sent for her nephew, Ferdinand de Türkheim. The piece was difficult to play, but apparently quite boring to hear. However, the children performed with bravado and were rewarded in turn with many sweets.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer
(14.01.1875 – 04.09.1965)



The theologian Dr. Albert Schweitzer found a kindred spirit in Mélanie de Pourtalès; among other similarities, both were Protestant and loved music. He often came to the Château de Pourtalès in order to chat with Mélanie, and he visited her in Paris shortly before her death in 1914. Mélanie's daughter, Agnès de Loys-Chandieu, often invited Dr. Schweitzer to their parlour, where he was a welcome guest. In order to raise funds for his humanitarian projects in Lambaréné, he would perform piano recitals in the Grand Salon.

Prince Victor Napoléon
(18.07.1862 – 03.05.1926)

Prince Victor Napoléon Bonaparte was the grandnephew of Emperor Napoleon I and heir apparent to the house of the Bonapartes. He was the second son of Napoleon-Jerome Bonaparte and Marie-Clotilde of Savoy. Prince Victor's father actually stood to inherit power upon the death of the Imperial Prince, the son of Napoléon III. However, it was explicitly stated in the Imperial Prince's will that Prince Victor should succeed instead, since Prince Victor's father (nicknamed "Plon-Plon") was not particularly popular. At the age of 18, Prince Victor became head of the Bonapartists, who regarded him as Napoléon V. Due to his attempts to take power; the Prince was banished from France in 1886. He and his wife, Princess Clémentine of Belgium, were frequent guests at the Château de Pourtalès.



Princess Clémentine of Belgium
(30.07.1872 – 08.03.1955)



After an unhappy childhood, the Princess Clémentine of Belgium fell in love with Prince Victor Napoléon Bonaparte, the son of Napoléon III. At the death of Napoléon Eugène, the Prince Imperial, Prince Victor was appointed head of the house of Bonaparte, completely bypassing his father. This appointment led to a complete breakdown in relations between father and son, and the Prince was exiled to Belgium. Princess Clémentine's father, the King of Belgium, did not approve their marriage, as he did not want to harm diplomatic relations with France. Therefore, the couple had to wait until the death of Clémentine's parents before they could marry. In 1910 and at the age of 38, Princess Clémentine was finally able to marry her Prince Victor. Clémentine and Victor had two children and were often guests at the Château de Pourtalès.

Duchess Stéphanie von Wedel (1852 – 1937)



The Countess was the wife of Count Karl Leo Julius (later Prince) von Wedel, who was the German governor of Strasbourg from 1909 – 1914. The Count found that his nerves were often tested, not only by Mélanie de Pourtalès, but also by his own wife. Stephanie's heart belonged to the Alsatians. She sent flowers to the prisoners of her husband (Pastor Wetterlé). The Countess organized flower festivals to raise money for the construction of a children's hospital, which was named "Hospital Stéphanie." This hospital still exists. Upon her request, she was buried in Strasbourg-Neuhof.

Princess Marie Thurn und Taxis (28.12.1855 – 21.07.1939)

Born Princess Marie of Hohenlohe-Waldenburg Schillingsfürst, the Princess married Alexander Johann of Thurn and Taxis in 1875. Although they were not as wealthy as their relatives in Regensburg, the couple often promoted the arts and philanthropically endeavours. They themselves were artistic; Alexander was a violinist, and Marie was a painter. Princess Marie was the patron of the poet **Rainer Maria Rilke**, who wrote the famous "Elegies de Dino" when he was a guest in her castle "Duin". The Princess herself then wrote 'Remembering Rainer Maria Rilke'. Together with her three sons, the Princess often visited the Château, where she had conversations with Mélanie about their common passions: art and poetry.



The Tolstoy family



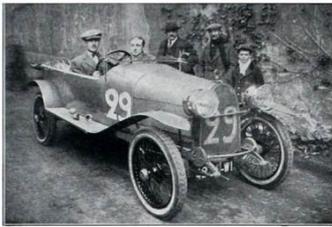
The University of Strasbourg attracted young people from all around Europe as well as Russia in order to learn the "ton français" on the way to Paris. Already in 1814, we saw the young Russian students, invited at Mrs de Bussière in her house located Quai-St.Nicolas, friendly invaders: the Generals Razumowski, Orlov, Worouzow, Tolstoy and Mouraviev. The links between the Pourtalès and the Tolstoy family has strengthened. A letter written by Tolstoy's spouse to Mélanie has been preserved in testimony.

Baron Albert de Dietrich (31.08.1931)

Baron Albert de Dietrich was a prominent industrialist. His family business produced everything necessary for the construction of railroads. Slightly less known was the fact that they also manufactured automobiles. In 1898, one of the first cars from the brand "Lorraine-Dietrich" came to Strasbourg. Baron Adrien de Turckheim, the head of the factory, and Madame de Dietrich personally handled the delivery from Lunéville to the Robertsau. The outbuildings of the Château were constructed specifically with the purpose of becoming the first automobile garage in Strasbourg. Additional cars were added to the collection, which was also used to take guests hunting.



Max Arthur Hubert de Pourtalès (25.11.1893 – 05.02.1935)



LE COMTE DE POURTALES ET LE VICOMTE DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD BATTENT LE

RECORD DU MONDE DES 24 HEURES sur **BUGATTI** (catégorie 1 litre 500)

à 76 kilomètres de moyenne courus: 1.835 kilomètres, soixante rigoureusement de série, chargés à 4 personnes.

Usine à MOLSHEIM (Bas-Rhin)
Magasin : 116, Av. des Champs-Élysées, PARIS

The Grandson of Countess Mélanie de Pourtalès was a passionate race driver. He was one of the pioneers of the 24 Hours of Le Mans. On May 26th and 27th 1923 together with his fellow countryman Viscount Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld and the Bugatti Brescia 16S he drove at the debut race. They finished this 1st Long Distance Grand Prix with a world record in the 1.5 liter class. Their average speed was 76 km/h for the 1.835 km distance. The Bugatti Company in Molsheim/ Alsace was so proud about this victory that they published it in major newspapers.

The « Decade » of writers & philosophers

From 1st to 9th of July 1926 numerous French writers and philosopher came to the Château de Pourtalès for a „Decade“ (round table discussion). Agnès Mélanie Marquise de Loys-Chandieu (Daughter of Mélanie) organised together with the Countess Jean de Pange this extraordinary meeting. This intellectual elite of France wanted to discuss how the „Malaise“ (not feeling well) of the Alsatian people could be better understood and cured, as they had particularly suffered during the two world wars.



Contributors: Constantin Photiades (writer), Jean de Pange (writer, friend of Robert Schumann), Daniel Halévy (historian, essayist), Camille Mayran (writer, translator of French Grand Prix Academy), Emile Henriot (Journalist for Le Monde & Libération, Member of the French Academy), René Benjamin (Journalist, writer, member of the Goncourt Academy), Charles de Bos (Journalist, critic), Mario Meunier (Hellenist, philosopher), Pierre Hepp (writer, Director of Revue de Paris), Jean-Louis Vaudoyer (Art historian, writer, member of the French Academy), Gérard Bauër (writer, critic, journalist at Figaro), Edmond Jaloux (novelist, critic, member of the French Academy), Guy de Pourtalès (Journalist, writer), François Mauriac (writer, member of the French academy, recipient of the Noble Prize for Literature in 1952), François Legris und Simon Lévy.

Dr. Walter Leibrecht (03.09.1927 – 24.02.2007)

Dr. Walter Leibrecht was the founder of the Schiller International University as well as several university campuses throughout Europe. He was also a prolific writer and published books. In 1979, Dr. Leibrecht saw an announcement in the newspaper calling the citizens of Strasbourg to come together and save the Château de Pourtalès, which had since fallen into disrepair. Dr. Leibrecht fell in love with the Château at first sight and bought it. The Leibrecht family then threw themselves into reviving the formerly grand Château, and they continue to renovate and preserve the Château today.

