How have France and the French influenced Philadelphia? Not at all in the city’s origins, we may suppose, since Philadelphia began as the direct product of English, not French, history. The founding of Pennsylvania, and therefore Philadelphia, was made possible by an enormous land grant from King Charles II for a debt owed by the crown to a naval officer who had been one of its chief defenders. Following that man’s death, when the actual grant went to his son on March 4, 1681, William Penn used it to give life to one of the most radical experiments undertaken by a group of Christian dissenters to come out of England. Thus, a royal grant from an English monarch to the young leader of an English-born religious group made the new town on North America’s Delaware River a thoroughly English project from the start.

Except that there were French connections from the outset. As an eighteen-year-old, William Penn had been sent to France by his father, the admiral, who was desperate to cure the boy of his inclination toward the radical, pacifist teachings of the Quakers. But once in France, the son met the theologian and humanist Moïse Amyraut, known for how he had moderated some of the teachings of John Calvin, the French giant of the Protestant Reformation.¹ Soon, young Penn moved into the religiously tolerant home of Amyraut in Saumur, where he was mentored for a year and encouraged to seek his own spiritual path. After he returned to England, that path soon led him to a lifelong commitment to the Society of Friends. Decades after Penn’s own lifetime, the examples he set for religious toleration, fair dealing, and contract-based government drew the admiration of the age’s leading philosophes, Voltaire.² By the time Penn’s Philadelphia held center stage in the creation of a new nation, it had been crucially shaped by the Enlightenment ideas sprung from both English and French minds.
Through its first century, from the 1680s into the 1780s, Philadelphia remained an essentially British colony in North America. While it grew as an urban center, its reputation as a place of religious toleration attracted nonconformists. In addition to English Quakers and Puritans, German Pietists and French Huguenots soon were drawn to this increasingly cosmopolitan community. With the coming of the American Revolution, its leaders turned to France, Great Britain’s historical enemy, for assistance in their drive for independence. The alliance with France brought a multitude of leading Frenchmen, including some who commanded armies, to Philadelphia. By the time it served as the capital of the new nation, between 1790 and 1800, the revolutions in France and then in Saint-Domingue in the Caribbean brought many more displaced French speakers to this city; in that decade, an estimated 10 percent of Philadelphia’s population settled there from France and its empire.

The new nation required the invention of visual symbols to proclaim military victories, record the likenesses of its leaders and heroes, and create a distinctive image of its independence from Great Britain. The Puritan shunning of images that marked the early colonial days in Boston yielded to a burgeoning market for visual symbols in Philadelphia as the city became the focal point of revolutionary sentiment. The diplomatic missions of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in Paris not only deepened their exposure to French Enlightenment ideas that would continue to shape the country’s ideals but also familiarized them with prominent artists and aesthetic traditions that would significantly impact late eighteenth-century American art. Jean-Antoine Houdon’s sculpted images of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin have remained fixed in the American mind as iconic representations of our founding fathers. His likeness of Thomas Jefferson remains on the American nickel to this day.

Charles Willson Peale’s numerous portraits of the leading figures who shaped America included eminent French supporters of the cause, such as the Marquis de LaFayette, Conrad Alexandre Gérard, the first French minister to the United States, and portrait busts of key French figures whose service to the nation helped secure American victory. These portraits eventually resided in Peale’s American museum alongside his collection of botanical, biological, and archaeological specimens. The Peale family helped establish the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, the first and oldest art museum and art school in the United States.

The French presence faded somewhat in the nineteenth century, although a number of individuals of French heritage—Stephen Girard, Pierre Duponceau, Michel Bouvier, and Napoleon LeBrun, among others—contributed greatly to the intellectual and physical landscape of the city. Add the work of the Du Pont family in neighboring Delaware, and the French legacy was continued, most often by members of the social and political elite. That legacy also included the influence of France and its culture on Americans. Several of Peale’s sons became noted painters. Rembrandt Peale’s stay in Paris in the early years of the nineteenth century had significant impact on his style and technique. The establishment in 1812 of his own picture gallery, which he named the Apollodorian Gallery, signaled his embrace of the French post-revolutionary neoclassicism as an appropriate style for the new nation.
The Marquis de Lafayette’s triumphal return visit in 1824 stimulated a whirlwind of portraiture of him around the country, with Thomas Sully receiving an important commission to paint the Frenchman while he was being feted in Philadelphia. Gilbert Stuart arrived in Philadelphia in 1795 and painted two of the most iconic images of George Washington while in the city. He based his Athenæum portrait of 1796 on Houdon’s likeness and used Pierre-Imbert Drevet’s engraving of a portrait of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet by Hyacinthe Rigaud for many elements of the pose and details in the painting. Stuart’s Lansdowne portrait relied heavily on a French engraving of a seventeenth-century French bishop and another of Louis XIV.

The established Parisian ateliers of Jean-Léon Gérôme, William Bouguereau, and the Académie Julian drew many American artists of the mid- to late nineteenth century to France to train in the academic style. Thomas Eakins studied in Paris between 1866 and 1870, bringing many of the teaching methods he learned in the studio of Jean-Léon Gérôme back to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts when he returned to Philadelphia. Mary Stevenson Cassatt and Henry Ossawa Tanner, as gender and racial minorities among artists, found France more hospitable to the advancement of their talents and careers. Despite living the majority of their professional careers abroad, both kept close ties with Philadelphia, exhibiting their work frequently at the Pennsylvania Academy. Edward Redfield, Walter Elmer Schofield, and Daniel Garber capitalized on their stays in France. Along with Mary Cassatt, they were highly influential in bringing impressionism to America and, more specifically, to the Philadelphia region. Robert Henri and William Glackens, both of whom spent substantial time in France, became prominent members of The Eight, also known as the Ashcan School. They distinguished their realist urban art from the landscape scenes that dominated American impressionist works, mounting significant exhibitions in New York that eventually led to the 1913 Armory Show, also known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art, that challenged the authority of the National Academy of Design, which had based many of its precepts on the French Académie.

The long effort that brought the Benjamin Franklin Parkway into being early in the twentieth century produced a Parisian-style boulevard from the hands of two distinguished French architects, Paul Philippe Cret and Jacques Gréber. Its midpoint at Logan Square is Philadelphia’s version of the Place de la Concorde, while it terminates at the magnificent French Renaissance Revival landmark, City Hall.

The museum district of the parkway also houses two of the largest collections of French art outside of France, one at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the second at the Barnes Foundation. Between them sits the Rodin Museum’s largest collection of that artist’s work outside France. Two prominent Philadelphia collectors, Albert C. Barnes and Jules Mastbaum, amassed vast amounts of French painting and sculpture. The Barnes Foundation boasts of more works by Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne than are owned by France, while Mastbaum’s donation of his collection of the sculptures of Auguste Rodin to the city comprises one of the largest collections of the master’s work, where examples of every phase of his creative career can be experienced, outside of Paris.
Philadelphia also became a repository of sculpture with the work of French-born Joseph Alexis Bailly, whose image of George Washington greets visitors to Independence Hall (see Figure I.1), while nearby in the Public Ledger Building his enormous bronze image of Benjamin Franklin, said to be the best likeness of the Philadelphian, contemplates his lightning rod. Emmanuel Frémiet’s sculpture of Joan of Arc facing the north side of the Philadelphia Museum of Art duplicates the original work located at the Place des Pyramides in Paris, near where Joan of Arc was wounded during her failed attempt to take Paris. Antoine-Louis Barye’s bronze Lion Crushing a Serpent became the first sculpture installed in Rittenhouse Square.

During the past half century, the French legacy in this city has grown to include an array of French restaurants and distinguished chefs. Georges Perrier, one of the first, became nationally renowned and attracted both gastronomes and other restateurs. Perrier is perhaps more responsible than any other individual for changing Philadelphia in the last decades of the twentieth century from a culinary semidesert into a gastronomic destination. During the same period, French hotels became prominent in the city’s burgeoning hospitality industry, France-based enterprises flourished within the regional economy, and individuals of French heritage continued to add their own contributions to the city’s social, cultural, and political life. (See Figure I.2.)

As this brief sketch suggests, French influence on Philadelphia has existed from the beginning. Sometimes its impact has been clear and obvious, sometimes oblique or hidden beneath the surface. It has been diverse when it comes to those aspects of the city’s life where it has made itself felt, sometimes having tangible, sometimes much more intangible results. French connections have been multifarious, produced by both major social upheavals and the singular acts of individuals. Over more than three centuries, the impact France and the French have made on Philadelphia has waxed and waned, as has the friendship between Philadelphians and the people of France. In this respect, the Franco-Philadelphia story is something of a microcosm of that between France and the United States as a whole. Yet, even though Philadelphia’s relations with France and the French have generally mirrored those of the nation, occasionally—as in the creation of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway a century ago—the enduring visual impact of a French legacy has perhaps been greater in this city than anywhere else in America.

Our goals in this study are to explore the connections between Philadelphia and France throughout the city’s history and to show the ways in which they have helped make Philadelphia the distinctive urban center that it is today. Obviously, Philadelphia is not a “French” city in the way that, say, New Orleans or Montreal clearly are. Nor do we claim that the influence of French culture or social history are in any way the dominant ones, either today or—with likely brief exceptions—at any time in the past. We have not engaged in a comprehensive survey of the cross-cultural influences from the colonial period to the present. Still, there is an important reason for undertaking this project. It is simply to pull to the surface the strand, or strands, of French influence on this metropolitan area as a way of acknowledging and understanding its importance. If it has always been a distinctive characteristic of American cities that...
Figure 1.1 Joseph Alexis Bailly, *George Washington*. Bronze. Marble original 1869, bronze replica 1908. $260 \times 79 \times 79$ cm ($102 \times 31 \times 31$ in.). This bronze casting of the marble sculpture of George Washington by the French immigrant artist Bailly was placed in front of Independence Hall when the marble original was moved for display inside City Hall.
they are melting pots, then it should be instructive to examine some of the ingredients that have gone into that mix in one of those cities. In our examination of one piece of what has made Philadelphia a cosmopolitan city today—one designated in 2014 as the first World Heritage City in the United States—we find much to celebrate, even though there have been moments when Franco-American relations have brought discord. That may be the perennial description of the impact of cultural exchange on societies. But, given the ever-greater diversity of modern cities around the globe, it may not be presumptuous to think that the influence of one nation and its culture on one American city may both resonate with and guide the experiences of others.

For some three hundred years, one feature of the French presence in Philadelphia has made it historically unique. It is this: the contributions of comparatively few individuals have very much outweighed the rather small numbers of French and francophone people who have immigrated to the Philadelphia region. Perhaps some of this may have been foreordained by the influence of French intellectuals from the Enlightenment who so powerfully informed the nation’s founders, contributing the fundamental ideas that have shaped the United States, including, of course, Philadelphia, from its birth down to the present day. But that disproportionate influence of the
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few upon the many has recurred several times since Penn created his “greene Countrie Towne” in the 1680s. It is evident in the way French immigrants became part of the region’s business and professional elite from late in the eighteenth century. It accounts for the Parisian cast to Philadelphia’s most iconic boulevard and for the Beaux-Arts style of many of its important buildings and public spaces. It is evident in how Philadelphia came to house some of the world’s most impressive collections of French art. It also helps explain the late twentieth-century development of Philadelphia as a culinary destination, with French restaurants and restaurateurs leading the way.

Because this influence of a comparative few is that of a cultural and social elite, it means that the contributions have generally been made to the city’s high, rather than to its mass, culture. We see French influence in the prominence of its fine arts holdings, impressive public structures, elegant boulevard, and fine restaurants rather than in what is peculiar to its popular music, public celebrations, or sports.5 All in all, the presence of the French and the heritage of France have contributed greatly to Philadelphia’s character as a cultural, educational, and commercial center. They have thereby left their special marks on one of America’s greatest and most distinctive cities.