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Out of the Attic

Alexandria's Sister City Caen

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With the 75th anniversary of the D-Day celebration last Saturday, we want to highlight Alexandria's sister city Caen, the capital of Normandy, France.

Readers might be familiar with Caen's World War II history; the city has rebuilt from the approximately 75 percent destruction that it suffered during the war. Today, the capital of Normandy has approximately 100,000 residents within the city limits and approximately 50,000 in the surrounding areas.

Founded in 1432, the Université de Caen Normandie plays a large role in the life of the city, with a student body of 28,000. Visitors and residents can enjoy strolling down the Rue Saint Pierre to browse shops, or eat in restaurants on or near the Rue du Vaugueux.

Caen is famous for its limestone, named Pierre de Caen. Particularly known for its suitability to carving, Pierre de Caen is probably most famous for its use in Westminster Cathedral.

Another renowned building made of Caen stone is the Château de Caen, built by William of Norman in 1060. Six years later, he conquered England and became known as William the Conqueror. Today, the castle houses three museums and a garden devoted to the cultivation of plants grown in the Middle Ages.

History fans also can't miss the Church of Saint Pierre, the site of Henry IV's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1593, ending the French religious wars. Those more interested in 20th-century history will be attracted to the Caen Memorial Museum, which focuses on World War II history and the Cold War.

On June 6, 1944, more than 160,000 Allied troops invaded Normandy, in then-German occupied France, gaining a significant foothold in continental Europe. The Battle for Caen took place from June 6 to August 6 of that year. When the dust settled, 80 percent of the city had been destroyed, and rebuilding the city took 18 years. While more than 9,000 Allied soldiers were lost during the invasion, it directly led to the Allied victory over Hitler and the Axis Powers.

The City of Alexandria has shared a Sister City relationship with the city of Caen since 1991. Today, Caen and Alexandria enjoy cultural, educational and economic cooperation. Throughout the year, ACSCC also organizes exchange programs, lectures, children's programs and additional events to promote our French-American relationship. You can see one of these lectures tonight at Alexandria's History Museum at the Lyceum, as Rear Admiral Tom Flynn, retired Judge Advocate General of the Navy, retired U.S. Army Historian Dr. Kim Bernard Holien and retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Gen. Bob Wood discuss the significance of D-Day.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria. A special thanks to Sister Cities exchange intern Anais Poplin for her help with this column.