



French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about American values.

America's Heart

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE CAPTURED THE ESSENCE OF THE NEW WORLD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BEING AN ARISTOCRAT FROM THE OLD WORLD

"These Americans are the most peculiar people in the world. You'll not believe it when I tell you how they behave. In a local community in their country a citizen may conceive of some need which is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee begins functioning on behalf of that need. And, you won't believe this, but it is true. All of this is done without reference to any bureaucrat. All of this is done by the private citizens on their own initiative."

ALEXIS CHARLES HENRI CLÉREL, comte de Tocqueville (1805–1859), colloquially known as de Tocqueville, was a French aristocrat, diplomat, political scientist and philosopher, and historian. In his works "Democracy in America" (appearing in two volumes, 1835 and 1840) and "The Old Regime and the Revolution" (1856), he analyzed the improved living standards and social conditions of individuals, as well as their relationship to the market and state in Western societies. "Democracy in America" was published after Tocqueville's travels in the United States and is today considered an early work of sociology and political science.

VISITING A YOUNG AMERICA

When Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in Newport, Rhode Island on May 9, 1831 after 37 days at sea on board the steamer "Havre", it was the start of a journey that would take him up and down the East Coast, into the hinterlands of America, into French Canada, and back again to Memphis where he boarded a steamboat sailing down the Mississippi to New Orleans. Returning, he traveled through newly settled towns and hamlets to Philadelphia. Steamboat, stage coaches, horseback, and even canoe were his mode of travel through nine months of his epic journey, until he again boarded the "Havre" on February 20, 1832 in New York City.

De Tocqueville was accompanied by his friend Gustave de Beaumont, and this was no Grand Tour. Both were judges at a time when the French Chamber of Deputies talked about reforming the criminal code. The two young men received official permission to study America's prison system. Their families paid their expenses.

They fulfilled their assignment and their report, written by de Beaumont, won them the prestigious Academie Francaise Montyon prize. Their longest stop anywhere in America had been two weeks spent in Philadelphia. While there, de Tocqueville interviewed the prisoners in the Eastern State Penitentiary.

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

After his return to France and a visit to England, de Tocqueville began writing the monumental "Democracy in America" in an attic room of his parent's house in Paris. It remains among all-time great works of political philosophy, prophesy, and social observation.

In that nine-month journey, the Frenchman captured the extraordinary tapestry that was the young country—the aspirations of its people and their freedom of religious and political thought and speech. He found much that astonished his aristocratic European sensibilities, but he and de Beaumont both denounced slavery. He marveled at the Americans indomitable attitudes to the challenges they faced in their daily lives, and their attentiveness towards their fellow citizens:

"I must say that I have seen Americans make great and real sacrifices (sic) to the public welfare; and have noticed a hundred instances in which they have hardly ever failed to lend faithful support to one another."

These words were the inspiration for the formation in 1984 of the United Way's Tocqueville Society. With the blessing and gracious permission of de Tocqueville's descendants, the Society uses the family Coat of Arms and enjoys their involvement both in the United States and at the United Way and Tocqueville Society in Paris.

Membership was designed to deepen understanding of the commitment to service found in United Ways nationally and globally. Individuals who can contribute at least \$10,000 and upwards annually to a local Society, of which there are over 400 nationwide, are participating in a philanthropic effort to support recognition of local voluntary services and their volunteers, who exemplify the spirit of thoughtfulness and generosity that Alexis de Tocqueville found in America's heart over 190 years ago. While the life and work of great men of thought and philosophy mainly resides today in academia, de Tocqueville's name is recognized above all others to the present day. U



The "Ville du Havre" was the French steamship that Alexis de Tocqueville took to America. The ship made rounds between Northern France and New York City.

Alexis de Tocqueville and Barrington

"In the Townships, as well as everywhere else, the people is (sic) the only source of power; but in no stage of government does the body of citizens exercise more immediate influence". – ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

In so many ways, Barrington and its townships and surrounding villages exemplify all that de Tocqueville found good in America almost 200 years ago. When de Tocqueville, in the course of his epic journey on the night of August 7, 1831, crossed by steamer from Mackinac to Green Bay, Wisconsin, he was the closest that he would come to this area, still on the edge of the prairie wilderness. On August 10 he returned to Mackinac (Michilimackinac), and from there continued by steamer to Detroit, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls.

We were lines on surveyor's charts until 1840, when our townships elected their first officials and began that good government of which our own historian Arnett C. Lines spoke so eloquently. Then the Village of Barrington was founded in 1854, and grew through the 19th century, to become, by the mid-20th century, the hub of a cluster of unique "Barrington" villages. And throughout our local history, one of the qualities always distinguishing our residents is the spirit of volunteerism, first through the churches, social and civic organizations and activities, and through simple neighborliness.

In 1966, the formation of the Barrington Area Development Council (BADC) recognized that the world was vastly different from the days of community barn raisings, and that non-governmental support was needed for development in the arts, education, social services, medical needs, and the environment.

Oh that de Tocqueville could visit the Barrington area today and see what volunteer wealth, work, and wisdom has accomplished. The progress of government, too, would surely interest him in the form of a council of governments, today's BACOG, where leaders of all those small villages meet to discuss their mutual concerns.

"The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens," de Tocqueville wrote.

Alexis de Tocqueville would find his observations about American life, writ well in our Barrington communities today. *Merci Monsieur Le Comte, vraiment un homme pour tout les saisons!*



PHOTO: SUSAN MCCONNELL

Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980.



Learning That Inspires & Excites

We provide a dynamic and challenging environment for bright students from Preschool through 8th Grade. Mid-year enrollments are being accepted in most grades.



An independent school for gifted children from Preschool through 8th grade.

Contact our Admissions Office to arrange a Virtual Tour today. admission@questacademy.org or call 847-202-8035, ext. 438

500 North Benton Street, Palatine, IL 60067
www.questacademy.org