

# The suburb of Villevieille



**C**ours Victor Hugo, formerly Cours Villevieille, has witnessed the entire history of L'Isle-sur-la Sorgue, from its origins to today.

The history of this suburb undoubtedly dates back to the city's very beginnings, when the first urban nucleus was created in late Antiquity or the high Middle Ages, perhaps on the site of a Gallo-Roman villa.

The Villevieille bridge is located at the exact place where one of the old city rampart gates used to stand. This gate once opened onto the Couvent des Minimes, a convent established within the city walls in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Cours de Villevieille was constructed in 1741 in the form of a promenade to connect the Villevieille and Avignon gates outside the walls. It was embellished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the diversion of the Sorgue des Jardins to the grounds of Ecole Benoit.

From 1927, this avenue became the centre of a grape market that met with great success and made L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue a major fruit- and vegetable-producing centre.



The Villevieille gate in the late 18th century (drawing, private coll.)

# Alphonse Benoit and his school

Alphonse Benoit (1809-1872), succeeding his father, made his fortune in the silk industry with his brother Casimir, between Lyon and L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue. When he died, he bequeathed a large sum of money to the city in his will to found a school for children from L'Isle as well as a shelter for his old employees.

Ecole Benoit was built in 1883 according to plans by architect André-Jean Boudoy. Initially an upper primary school, it became a practical school in 1922, then a national modern vocational *collège*, and finally a *lycée* from 1950.

New buildings have come to expand the establishment since its creation. The main building retained its U-shaped layout in the form of a large cloisters with archways.



Interior courtyard of Lycée Benoit

# Brun de Vian-Tiran factory



Wool carding in the BVT factory

© Photo: Stef Candé

The textile factory was built in 1808 by Charles Tiran and his son-in-law Laurent Vian, right beside the Pont des Cinq-Eaux, where the five branches of the Sorgue meet. In the late 19th century, Émile Brun married Laurent Vian's granddaughter and renamed the company 'Brun de Vian-Tiran'.

Today, it is the seventh and eighth generations who run the factory. Here, fabric is produced on-site from noble fibres that come from the five continents: merino, mohair, alpaca, camel, cashmere...

# The general hospital and La Charité

Built in the 18th century, the general hospital stretches over four wings in an h-shaped layout. This complex, now protected as a Historic Monument, still boasts a superb vestibule with its monumental staircase, the old pharmacy and the 18th-century chapel, not to mention the garden with its nymphaeum and the hospital and convent buildings.

In the 17th century, the city decided to provide beggars with shelter in a residence bequeathed by Jean de Favier. Most of the buildings belonging to this establishment known as 'La Charité' ('the charity') date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, with the exception of a chapel built around 1850.



Interior of the general hospital chapel, late 18th century