For more than two centuries, the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Lassay have been at the heart of French political life. From the very moment the Council of Five Hundred moved there in 1798, the edifices lost their original residential function and became the seat of national sovereignty and the cradle of our Republican values.

These ancient walls resonate with the grand voices which, together, have made France and which have shown us and continue to guide us along the path of liberty and solidarity: Lamartine, Schœlcher, Hugo, Jaurès, Clemenceau, but also, more recently, Robert Badinter or Simone Veil.

These splendid buildings are also an extraordinary testament to the architectural and artistic development of our country, from the Regency to the modern day. The architect Jules de Joly, the painters Delacroix, Vernet, Pujol, Alechinsky, and JonOne, as well as the sculptor De Maria, have all left their indelible mark here. Their artistic interpretations speak to us of France, of the demands of democratic debate and of our collective capacity to overcome our divisions.

These national palaces, brimming with history, are also, through the parliamentary sittings, the daily arena for the work of MPs, their assistants and of the civil servants of the National Assembly.

The work of Parliament must be better known by all. More than ever, our Assembly, which is the expression of direct universal suffrage, must be the shared house of all French citizens. New technologies have enabled us to make huge steps in the field of transparency and the National Assembly will continue its efforts in this direction, in the same way as it wishes to allow its heritage to be accessible to all.

This current work, through its exceptional visual and textual quality allows the reader to discover our National Assembly in all its historical, contemporary, architectural and institutional dimensions. It opens up an extra door leading to the seat of the national representation where all citizens are, quite simply, at home.

Richard FERRAND
President of the National Assembly
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ICONIC SITES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

This overall plan of the architectural complex consisting of the Palais Bourbon and the residence of the President of the National Assembly, the Hôtel de Lassay serves as a guide to the reader. All these rooms are numbered and presented in the following pages.

1. Salle Fragonard and Salle Empire
2. Amphitheatre
3. Salon Delacroix
4. Salle Casimir-Perier
5. Library
6. Salon Abel-de-Pujol
7. Salle des Quatre-Colonnes
8. Salle des Pas-Perdus
9. Salle des Fêtes and Galerie des Tapisseries
10. Hôtel de Lassay
11. Cabinet du Départ
12. Salle des Conférences
13. Salon des Mariannes

The Salle des Séances
The Salon Delacroix
The Library
The Galerie des Fêtes
A major construction site began in Paris in 1722 on the left bank of the Seine, just steps away from the “Pré-aux-clercs,” a countrified outlying district of motley reputation; a place where duellists met to fight. The large plot of land stretched from the Seine to the Rue de l’Université. The Duchesse de Bourbon’s palace that rose on the site was one of the largest private commissions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, worthy of the fortunes of its owner, the legitimised daughter of Louis XIV and the Marquise de Montespan. It was a freestanding building in the middle of the gardens. Under the Regency, the members of the country’s high society returned to Paris, and the nobility moved into new districts, creating speculative markets. The fashion tended toward private mansions surrounded by gardens, an arrangement that required large tracts of land. It was the Comte de Lassay, the duchess’s lover, who suggested this more rural site. He had his own private mansion built there. Soon, these neighboring buildings formed the most fashionable complex in Paris.

The architect selected, Lorenzo Giardini, was Italian. He had barely sketched out the initial plans when he died in 1722. Yet his project demonstrated a clear penchant for a light and elegant style. Pierre Caillletau, known as Lassus, took over the plans. While working for Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Louis XIV’s leading architect, he had participated in the royal construction projects at Versailles and the Regency, the members of the country’s high society returned to Paris, and the nobility moved into new districts, creating speculative markets. The fashion tended toward private mansions surrounded by gardens, an arrangement that required large tracts of land. It was the Comte de Lassay, the duchess’s lover, who suggested this more rural site. He had his own private mansion built there. Soon, these neighboring buildings formed the most fashionable complex in Paris.

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The construction projects for the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Lassay were completed around 1728 under the direction of a fourth architect, Jacques Gabriel. The buildings shared the same style: a single-floor Italianate design. With its U-shaped plan, horizontal lines and Italianate design, the architecture of the Palais Bourbon echoed that of the Grand Trianon designed and built by Hardouin-Mansard and inaugurated in 1688. “The Marble Trianon imposed the so-called Italian fashion, with a single floor and no attic, which had not garnered much success since Philibert de l’Orme first introduced it into France [for the Château de Saint-Maur in the mid-sixteenth century],” said historan Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos. Another original element contributed to the building’s elegance: the use of rounded corners for the main building’s elevation.

A palace for a daughter of royal blood and a mansion for her lover next door: constructed in the early decades of the eighteenth century, this first building would later become the official seat of the national legislature.

**Glossary**

**PILASTER:** flat column projecting from a wall.

**CHANNELS:** lines carved in an exterior wall to imitate joints between stone courses.

**AGRAFE:** ornamental relief on the keystone of an arch.

**LINTEL:** architectural member supporting the weight above an opening; the shape may vary to include a segmented arch.
The Palais Bourbon was one of the most important private commissions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and was a suitable reflection of the owner's fortunes. It was a palace, whose main building sat in the middle of gardens. The U-shaped, elaborate floor plan was reminiscent of that of the Grand Trianon in Versailles (the Marquise Tramoy), designed and constructed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart and inaugurated in 1688. Another innovative element contributed to the elegance of the building: the use of varied stones for the corners of the main building and the ends of the wings. Engraving by Janinet.

With the end of Louis XIV’s reign, the court returned to Paris, but the city had changed. The Marais, traditionally an aristocratic area, was out of fashion. The district was too dense to accommodate the designs of sumptuous private projects. Architsects turned to the large tracts of open land in the outlying areas on the left bank and the Champs-Élysées to the west. Prestigious private homes were constructed there. These included the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel Matignon on the left bank, and the palace for the Comte d’Evreux (the current Palais de l’Elysée) on the right bank.

For the time. Reception rooms (centre, right wing, enfilade on the Seine side) and residential apartments (left wing) were separated; the rooms were of very varied shapes, which made it possible to create small service areas and recesses; the private apartments included many small rooms dedicated to specific functions. Another novel feature was the introduction of corridors. Finally, the architect sought by all means to increase the comfort and practicality of the palace, qualities which were to contribute to its renown.

The Duchess de Bourbon died in 1743; her lover in 1750. The palace was then sold to Louis XV, who probably wanted to include it in the reconstruction of the new Place Royale (the future Place de la Concorde). In 1764, the king finally sold it to the duchess’s grandson, Louis-Joseph de Bourbon Condé, who had returned from the Seven Years’ War as a hero. The fashion in the second half of the eighteenth century tended toward more monumental buildings with antique themes, a style Louis-Joseph selected for his project. Even before purchasing his grandmother’s home, he had commissioned a monumental palace from Marie-Joseph Peyre, an architect with a passion for archeology. The Prince de Condé was not, however, satisfied with the ducal palace alone; he therefore purchased the Hôtel de Lassay in 1768 and decided to expand both buildings. Several architects participated in the project, most notably Belliard and Le Carpentier. In addition, some of Peyre’s ideas were used, as for example, the design of the main entrance on the Rue de l’Université. But the main entrance from the duchess’s era was replaced by a large central portal with a semi-circular arch, framed by a gallery of columns, considered highly fashionable at the time. Other transformations included the extension of the two wings of the Palais Bourbon, and the construction of the pavilion known as the “small apartments” for one of the prince’s daughters alongside the stables and storerooms. The decoration was also refurbished to reflect the glory of the new owner: the palace vestibule was decorated with trophies recalling his exploits. Weapons, shields, armour and other stucco motifs are still visible today, as are all the preceding transformations. By the late 1780s, when the work had just barely been completed, the rumblings of the revolution had begun. The Prince de Condé went into exile, and the two buildings were confiscated in 1792. The royal palace was about to become one of the symbols of the Republic: the National Assembly.

PARIS ONCE AGAIN BECOMES THE CAPITAL

FURTHER INFORMATION
In the eighteenth century, the centre of Paris was overpopulated and had been for some time; the countryside areas to the west of the capital then gradually filled up with estates featuring splendid aristocratic homes built in the midst of gardens. The Duchesse de Bourbon’s palace was completed along the banks of the Seine in 1728; this was the ideal example of a wealthy country retreat, the exact opposite of the urban Parisian mansion. The same landscape of gardens was repeated along the Rue de l’Université, with the large main entrance to the palace. It opened onto a forecourt adjacent to the main courtyard, flanked by the two wings of the building. To the left, the small Hôtel de Lassay, constructed at the same time as the Palais Bourbon, has a more modest facade, also facing the river.
From 1789 to 1798, the Duchesse de Bourbon’s former palace was used for various purposes before housing the legislature, a function that required major transformations to the building.

During the Revolution, many aristocratic homes, including the Palais du Luxembourg and the future Palais de l’Élysée, became government property. When the Palais Bourbon was nationalised in 1792, the buildings were transformed and remodelled for reuse. The army convoy administration moved into the stables and outbuildings. As for the Palais itself, after housing the École des Travaux Public in 1794—the future École Polytechnique—it was attributed to the Council of Five Hundred in 1795.

Yet the building lacked a room for the Chamber to meet, and architects Jacques-Pierre Gisors and Emmanuel-Chérubin Lecomte were commissioned for the task. The amphitheatre, shaped like a Roman theatre, had a dome with a central oculus, and borrowed other design elements from the amphitheatre of the École de Chirurgie, built from 1769 to 1774. This Chamber replaced the official apartments along the Seine. On 21 January 1798, the Council of Five Hundred met for the first time and discovered that the interior was well designed, but the acoustics were poor.

Few elements still remain from this first Chamber: the desk and chair of the President of the Assembly and the bas-relief of the orator’s rostrum. The desk and chair, made of mahogany and gilt bronze, are attributed to Georges Jacob’s workshop after a design by Jacques-Louis David. As for the bas-relief, it was designed by François-Frédéric Lemot, one of the official sculptors under the Directory. It consists of two female figures, allegories of History and Fame: Fame blowing her trumpet, decreeing the law, while History records them on a tablet. The bust of Marianne stands atop a pedestal in the centre of the composition, decorated with a medallion representing the Roman god Janus. The two faces symbolise “the experience of the past and the foresight of the future.” The reliefs, finely carved in white marble, stand out against the dark, polychrome marble background of the composition.

In the same period, a Rotunda was added to the front of the palace on the courtyard side, an addition designed thirty years earlier by the architect Peyre for the Prince de Condé. Finally, a wooden gallery was constructed to link the Palais Bourbon to the Hôtel de Lassay.

With the start of the Empire in 1804, it became clear that the original palace had lost the beauty, elegance and symmetry for which it had been so highly admired during the Ancien Régime. To construct the amphitheatre, Gisors

1789 | 1814

NEW FACADES AND NEW STYLES
and Lecomte added a floor to the main building, and 7 the roof of the new Chamber created an unsightly overhang above a building designed to have a flat roof. Finally, the building did not fit within the axis formed by the Madeleine Church, the Place de la Concorde and the new Concorde bridge. Viewed from Place de la Concorde, the Palais Bourbon was even partly concealed by the bridge.

To solve this problem, the legislative Bureau submitted a proposal for the Seine facade to the emperor in 1806. This facade, whose design has been attributed to architect Bernard Poyet, would be symmetrical to that of the Madeleine. This required two major steps: first, the building would be raised so as to be visible from the right bank, and second, it would be offset vis-à-vis the axis of symmetry of the building itself, so that its centre line ran along the axis of the bridge. This is how an elegant eighteenth-century building came to be buried under a monumental neoclassical structure with twelve Corinthian columns supporting an entablature and a carved pediment.

The decor of this pediment changed with each new regime. The original was carved by Antoine-Denis Chau-
det and represented Napoleon on horseback, offering the legislature the flags he captured at Austerlitz. With the exception of these various decorative elements, the facade has remained the same to this day. In 1810, four statues of the legislature the flags he captured at Austerlitz. With the exception of these various decorative elements, the facade has remained the same to this day. In 1810, four statues of Napoleon’s architect, then for the Chamber of Deputies during the Restoration. He created numerous decors for the Palais Bourbon, notably the bas-reliefs, the trompe l’oeil designs in the Salon Empire and the Salle des Gardes, and an intermediate design for the pediment of the Chamber of Deputies.

The Prince de Condé recovered the Palais Bourbon in 1815 after the fall of the Empire, but the building had been transformed almost beyond recognition. The Hôtel de Lassay still retained its original charm, but the Duchesse de Bourbon’s refined palace no longer existed.
The Revolution should have begun on the spot where the deputies now meet, in the Palais Bourbon. But it actually began a few kilometres away, in Versailles, in a place that was never meant to house the future representatives of the nation: the “Jeu de Paume” (the Tennis Court), a large, empty rectangular room, measuring 30 meters long and 10 meters wide. For more than a century, it had been used to play paume, the precursor of both tennis and squash. The date was 20 June 1789. The deputies from the three orders of the realm, called to Versailles as part of the Estates General to solve the country’s financial crisis, had already been meeting for over one month. But the situation was blocked. King Louis XVI had closed down the Assembly’s meeting room in the Hôtel des Menus-Plaisirs, and was preparing a counter-move. The 600 or so deputies of the Third Estate (the commoners) refused to assemble separately, in keeping with the defined order, and did not wait for this royal session; instead, they created a National Assembly on 17 June, electing the famous astronomer Bailly, a deputy from Paris, as their President. It was raining and stormy on the morning of 20 June. The Third Estate deputies, joined by some twenty dissident members of the clergy (First Estate) and a few deputies from the nobility (Second Estate) from Santo Domingo, decided to meet in the Jeu de Paume.

There were no tables or chairs; everyone was standing. Bailly presided from a plank laid across two barrels. The public, packed into the galleries and watching through the windows in the attic, observed the proceedings. What happened that day, just steps from the royal chateau, the absolute symbol of absolute power, was a takeover disguised as a theatrical stunt. The National Assembly existed wherever its members chose to gather. In the heat of the moment, the already famous deputy from Grenoble, Jean-Joseph Mounier, proposed the “solemn oath not to disperse and to remain together wherever circumstances demand, until the Constitution of the kingdom be established and constructed on solid foundations.” This was the first of the great civil oaths from this period, which helped to both foster the Revolution and maintain it in a Manichean logic. On that day, the nation dispatched the old orders for good, where they remained in a past that would come to be called the “Ancien Régime” (Old Regime). The nation
Ah, the tocsin you hear today is not an alarm, but an alert; it sounds the charge against our enemies. To vanquish them, sirs, we must dare, and dare again, and continue to dare, and France will be saved.”

Danton, 2 September 1792.

The king’s fate
Report from the permanent session on 16 and 17 January, Folios 190 and 191. Photograph: Philippe Fumey. Eachriday, when his name was called, he stood before the President of the Assembly and answered the question: “What sentence has Louis, former king of France, incurred?” The roll call of the 721 deputies started on January 16 at 6:30 pm and continued, uninterrupted, until the next evening at 7:30. Illustrated here: the votes of Danton, Desmoulins, Marat, David d’Anglas, Barère de Vieuzac, Mounier, Barnave. A single deputy, an obscure representative from the bailiwick of Castelnaudary, dared to publicly challenge a resolution taken against the king’s orders. He signed “Martin-Dauch, opposed.” He was allowed to leave. In the heat of the moment, the deputies then raised a unanimous cry of “Long live the king!” How many of them knew that at that very moment, the king was merely a shadow of his former self. The entire history of the Convention that moved into the so-called “Salle des Machines” in the Château des Tuileries in May of 1793, renamed the Palais National, can be summed up by the magic of speech. Whoever controlled the floor controlled power. And the battle for words began with the Convention, after the judgment and execution of the former king on 21 January 1793, in the Homeric struggle that opposed the Girondins and the Montagnards. The former wanted to consolidate the Revolution; the latter, to pursue it. The Girondins represented provincial France; the Montagnards, the Parisian dictatorship. The history of the Republic was encapsulated within this ruthless battle. It would only finally end one century later, in the 1890s, with the triumph of the radical republic—dominated by the provinces, with its civil service, its lodges and its committees. History remembers the invective of Gaston Grémieux, a future Communist—who would be executed by firing squad—speaking to the provincial and conservative majority of the Bordeaux Assembly in February of 1871: “You are nothing but a bunch of country bumpkins.” This power struggle temporarily ended on 2 June 1793 with the arrest of twenty-two of the Girondin leaders under the pressure of the Parisian sections.
controlled by Montagnards; it was a bloodbath—they were executed in October. The Convention or death!

Long before Lamartine became the poet of the Girondins, Charles Nodier wrote a clear-sighted account of these leaders and their “last supper” in the Conciergerie prison the night before their execution: “The poemic of the first national assemblies was tumultuous, but not fatal. During the Convention, each speaker brought his head to plead his opinion. A session of the Convention was a battle or a tragedy.” Woese lay ahead with the ensuing Terror. The indivisibility of the assembled nation could not accept opponents; it demanded traitors. While Vergniaud, the deputy from Bordeaux, was responding to Robespierre’s accusations in the midst of the storm, he pronounced what may have been the first great political speech in support of moderation: “I know, Robespierre, that freedom is always as potent as a flame; that it is indestructible by the assembly of the deputies; it was saved by Murat and his grenadiers: “Throw all these people out of here!” From this point on, the heart of power shifted from the assemblies to the government. “Citizens, the Revolution is attached to the principles that started it,” Bonaparte would say several days later. “It is over.”

The coup d’état of 18 Brumaire took place at the Château de Saint-Cloud, where the councils had been transferred. In reality, the elected Council of Five Hundred had already been meeting at the Palais Bourbon for nearly two years—while the Council of Ancients held sessions in the Palais du Luxembourg. Both the place and the date are symbolic. The new semi-circular Chamber had been created from the former council of princes; it was a branch of the Hapsburgs’—the king’s cousin and leader of the émigrés—which had been “nationalised” in 1792. The date, 21 January 1799, when the members of the Five Hundred entered their new building in a procession, wearing caps and gowns, was equally symbolic as it was the anniversary of “the legitimate punishment of the last of the tyrants.” But this new and definitive national palace was poorly ventilated under its temporary glass roof, insufficiently heated and had echoing acoustics that were ill-suited to flights of oratory. This was scarcely a problem in the early years, because the legislative body that replaced the Five Hundred after the Brumaire coup d’état was condemned to silence. The deputies merely listened to the First Consul (Napoleon) when they met and then voted, without discussion, the laws drawn up by the Council of State and debated in another Chamber, the Tribunate. Johann Friedrich Reinhardt, a German observer who attended the opening session of the legislative body on 25 February 1803, expressed his disappointment: “Although the session lasted under one hour, the deputies were instantly coming and going. A secretary read out the minutes from the first session, according to custom; we could not understand a single word. It’s true that the secretary read in a very low voice and that the legislators were constantly making noises, coughing, spitting, sneezing and blowing their noses; it sounded like an inferno filled with the patient.”

As the Consulate was shifting toward an Empire, genuine legislative power was increa-

KEY DATES

1789

17 June The Third Estate proclaims the National Assembly, the Tennis Court Oath on 9 June.
4 August The Constituent Assembly votes to abolish noble privileges. Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen on 26 August.
1790

14 July 1790 the Federation on the Champ de Mars. Atkinson, the citizens of France take an oath to remain loyal to the nation, the law and the king. Louis XVI takes an oath to the constitution.
21 June The royal family is arrested in Varennes.
1792

10 August The Palace of Tuileries is overrun by insurgents. Louis XVI is arrested from power and imprisoned. Proclamation of the First Republic on 21 September.
1793

21 January Louis XVI is guillotined. The revolutionary tribunal is created on 10 March. The Terror begins on 17 September.
1794

28 July Robespierre, Saint-Just and their friends are executed without trial.
1795

23 September The constitution is proclaimed. The new assemblies, the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of the Ancients are formed, the Directory begins on October 29.
1799

9 November 18 Brumaire Coup d’état of General Napoleon Bonaparte.
1804

2 December Coronation of Emperor Napoleon.
1814

4 April Napoleon abdicates at Fontainebleau.

Jacques Louis David

Napoleon Bonaparte

Oil on canvas, 1812
The Restoration adopted the bicameral organisation of the legislative power inaugurated by the Directory; yet the royal decree of 24 May 1814, returning the Prince de Condé’s property, compromised the seat of the “Chambre des Députés des Départements” for a time. After seventeen years of successive remodelling projects, the public function of the former aristocratic dwelling was finally settled; the Parliament would remain in situ as a tenant of the prince for the period of three years. The first act of the new regime (in July of 1815) was to eliminate all the imperial emblems and the five bas-reliefs on the main facade, as well as the eagles and the “N” adorning the frieze of the entablature. As for Chaudet’s pediment (completed five years earlier), Bernard Poyet suggested it be concealed using a canvas-covered frame on which an appropriate image would be painted. This idea was rejected: it was unthinkable to let any image of the emperor remain, even a concealed one. A plaster composition designed by Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard was once again placed on the pediment: Louis XVIII Granting the Charter of 1814.

As a mere tenant, the Chamber had to wait until July 1827 to recover ownership of the walls. Yet the prevailing indecision concerning the building’s fate and the possibility of a transfer (new locations in Paris were proposed, including the then-unfinished Quai d’Orsay building) meant that the buildings were not regularly maintained: at the time, the Room of the Five Hundred had fallen into such a state of disrepair that reconstruction had become essential. As soon as the real estate issues were resolved, the questeurs (parliamentary administrators) asked architect Jules de Joly (1788-1865) to submit his project for the construction of a new room. This Montpellier native, who had been working for the Chamber since January 1821, was well versed in the procedures of public programmes. Earlier in his career, on his return from Italy, he had embarked on an official career with the Ministries of Public Instruction and the Interior.

The first step for Joly and his clients was to agree on a shape for the future Chamber itself. The commission set up by the Minister of the Interior opted for the form of a semi-circular room from among the four projects submitted by the architect for their opinion (the others were elliptical, rectangular, octagonal). The Conseil des Bâtiments Civils, whose mission was to assess and, if necessary, to modify the project, examined the architect’s sketches; in January 1928, Joly presented his final project, which was approved the fol-
in the constructed surface area allowed for the creation of a series of large interior spaces surround-
ding the Chamber itself (the Delac��ux, Casimir-Périer, Abel-de-Pujol rooms),
where the former layout had required people to cross the amphitheatre or the courtyard to go from one wing to another. Finally, the architect tried to introduce a certain formal diversity in the rooms and gallery, determined sometimes by proportions, sometimes through the intro-
duction of supports, columns or pillars—after which various elements such as ceiling, colours and decor, were then added. Work was begun in 1837 to complete the exterior decor, starting with the Seine side. Eliminated in 1815, the three bas-reliefs located behind the colonnade were not replaced, a decision that resulted in the more rigid overall appearance of the facade. Only those on the two retreating parts of the building were restored, based on new themes: Prometheus and the Arts (Rude) and Public Instruction (Pra-
dier). On the pediment, Cortot depicted France Flanked by Force and Justice, summoning the elite to the preparation of laws. But this apolitical and timeless decor was only one element in the overall programme. A second theme joined the first, usefully linking two themes: the great men of the Nation and—an extremely timely choice—the restored monarchy. This series of images was based on four sculptures in the round installed in front of the peristyle: Sully (sculpted by Beauvallet), Colbert (Dumont), d’Aguesseau (Foucau) and L’Hôpital (Descène). Until 1836, the sculpt-
ures were an extension of the series of statues placed on the Concorde bridge around 1828: the figures of four great ministers (Suger, Sully, Richelieu, Colbert), four military leaders (Bayard, Du Guescin, Condé, Turenne) and four seamen (Duguay-Touron, Toulouse, Duquesne and Suf-
net). Thus, arriving from the Concorde—the former Place Louis XVI—the visitor followed a symbolic route commem-
orating the return of the Bourbons to the throne.

The carved decor in the Cour d’Honneur, begun in 1838, is less eloquent. Joly asked Goupil for two statues to frame the main portal: France and Liberty, which were not installed until 1860—and renamed Force and France Placing her Veil in the Urn.

Despite the construction work undertaken during the July Monarchy, the Chamber and its services remained in cramped conditions in the buildings acquired in 1827. It was therefore urgent to create new offices to house the committees set up to examine the proposals and bills sub-
mitted by the deputies. Furthermore, due to a lack of space, the President of the Chamber did not live on the premises (initially he lived on Rue de Lille, then Place Vendôme). In 1830, negotiations started up again to acquire the remain-
ing Condé property. This resulted in the transfer of the western wing of the palace (occupied by the Duc de Bour-
bon) in November 1830 and the signature of a lease for the Hôtel de Lassay in June 1832. But very soon after, the ques-
teurs realised that this arrangement would be insufficient. The Lassay building was in poor condition, the decor shabby, and the remodelling project to create an apartment for the President and his family implied a large-scale construction campaign, which they did not feel was justi-
fied for a building under lease.

The commission decided to purchase the Hôtel de Lassay, and the sale was concluded in April 1843. Jules de Joly was then asked to submit his proposal for the project, as defined by the quêteure (parliament’s administrative department). The architect recommended adding a floor to the building, which was perfectly feasible given the excellent construction of the Hôtel de Lassay. The Pres-
ident would then have a spacious apartment and reception areas. Joly sent his projects to the Minister of Public Works in October 1843, who approved the plan. Describing the work done during the Empire as “vandalism,” the architect explained his project in these words: “I believed that it was appropriate, in restoring this hôtel, to return to the origi-
nal design both inside and out, and to even apply this approach to the new buildings, which would be used as outrbuildings.” Work began in the summer of 1845, and the project was nearly finished when the 1848 Revolution broke out. Although the Galerie de Morny (now known as the Galerie des Tapisseries) was constructed twelve years later, it is entirely in keeping with the initial programme.

Introducing an approach that would be followed by his successors, Joly strove to ensure that his work would adapt to the building’s style. The extra floor repeated the layout of the ground floor and echoed the Italianate style, notably in the simplicity of the newly created floor, and the vases and sculpted groups adorning the balustrade. At the same time, despite major remodelling undertaken inside the building, Joly endeavoured to retain the spirit of the original decor.

This decision cannot be explained entirely by the rei-
gning eclecticism of the 1840s: it was also a way to set off the polarity that existed between the two buildings: one was eminently public and required a severe demeanor; the other was more intimate and private, and was more in kee-
ping with the rocaille style. This polarity constitutes one of the unique aspects of the National Assembly, as compared to similar structures in other countries, which are formally more compact and aesthetically more unified. ✷
Amphitheatre

Created from 1828 to 1832, the Amphitheatre is shaped like the earlier Salle des Cinq-Cents: the extremely precise design is semi-circular in shape, which sets off the area of debate, and creates a public space arranged in two rows of galleries. The overall room has a lowered arch with a glass ceiling. Most of the imagery is concentrated on the supporting wall, the focal point of this design; still unchanged, it was created after the Revolution of 1848. The tapestry on the wall, designed from Raphael’s School of Athens, echoes the statues of antique orators that once stood on either side of the rostrum in the first assembly Chamber, now in the Salle des Quatre-Colonnes.

Today
The Amphitheatre is fitted with cameras, so that the debates can be broadcast live on the National Assembly website; they also provide images for use by television stations. Electronic boxes have replaced the keys with which the deputies used to vote, and Internet connections have been installed in the rows.

François-Frédéric Lemot (above)
History and Fame
This relief on the orator’s rostrum was initially placed in the Salle des Cinq-Cents. Joly had this work for the Chamber under construction, as a symbol of the new regime’s desire for historical continuity and to create a sense of solidarity among the French. Marble, 1797-1798.

After Raphael (below)
The School of Athens
The change in regime (1848) meant that the iconography had to be altered. Instead of the paintings that were planned for the supporting wall of the Amphitheatre, July ordered gold-embroidered crimson velvet, according to one of his own designs. The central motif, Louis Philippe I Swearing on the Constitutional Charter, was replaced by a Gobelins tapestry (wool, silk and gold), 1683-1688.

The Sucre (right)
Nicknamed the seat of the President of the National Assembly, because it overlooks the Amphitheatre. Symbolically, however, the presidential chair is the same height as the highest seats in the Amphitheatre, so reminder than the President remains a deputy like the others. Designed by David, the presidential chair belonged to Lucien Bonaparte during the Council of Five Hundred. The word is sometimes used as a metonym for the function of the presidency of the Assembly.

James Pradier, Liberty (detail) (right)
With a panther skin on her head, Liberty is trampling chains and a broken yoke underfoot. She holds the Triomphant flag in her right hand, and a victory in the left, which replaced the swag of laurel originally planned. This small figure commemorates the Three Glorious Days, as does an inscription on the base at the bottom of the statue. Marble, 1830-1832.

Sculptures in the Amphitheatre
The sculptures in the Amphitheatre are part of a highly structured design. The role of Eloquence, Justice, Force and Prudence, crowning the composition, is to inspire the behaviour and motivations of the parliamentary work. Below, Public Order and Liberty exhort them to resist pressure from the executive branch and to oppose popular insurrection.

The Guignols
Nickname for two loges situated above the side entrances to the Amphitheatre: upholstered in red, they look like puppet theatres, revealing just the heads of the people sitting in them. They are reserved for photographers, television crews and government commissioners.
In August of 1833, the Minister of the Interior, Adolphe Thiers, commissioned Eugène Delacroix to decorate the Salon du Roi. The politician’s choice was logical: eleven years earlier—when he was 25 years old—Thiers had written about the major artistic event in France, the Salon, the official exhibition for living artists. An avid supporter of change, the author defended the young artists, taking the side of those who were freeing themselves from the “yoke of the academy.” It was therefore not surprising that he developed a particular fondness for the foremost romantic painter of the time, and that, once in power, wanted to offer him such a prestigious opportunity to express his talent. Yet the attribution for this commission was greeted with surprise.

Eugène Delacroix
Oceanus (left) and Mediterranean Mare (right)
Oil paint and wax on the wall, 1833-1837.

The painter completed the decoration of this room with a series of eight figures symbolising the rivers of France, along with the Mediterranean Sea and the Ocean, which, according to the artist, “form the natural frames of our country.” As part of restoration work undertaken in the room, the Oceanus was cleaned; during this process, an alteration to the composition in the upper section of the face was discovered. An underlying image appeared: a nose and two eyes looking in the opposite direction from Oceanus, suggesting an overpainting by the artist.

Louis-Philippe, King of the French and not King of France, attended the opening session at the Palais Bourbon every year. A suitable space therefore had to be created, where he could receive homage from the parliamentarians. The new function of this room required a lavish decor; all the architectural elements were gilded and painted figures covered every surface. Completed in December 1836, the room was inaugurated to wide acclaim. Delacroix produced a work in keeping with the selected theme: “Four allegorical figures dominating the composition, who symbolise in [my] mind the guiding principles of the States: Justice, Agriculture, Industry and War.”

According to tradition, left-wing deputies use the Salon Delacroix to reach their seats in the Amphitheatre. It is the room closest to the left side of the Chamber. This is also where last-minute negotiations are held concerning the amendments they are proposing during the sessions.

Eugène Delacroix, Justice [detail], Oil on mounted canvas, 1833-1838.

**DELACROIX: OPTING FOR THE AVANT-GARDE**

In August of 1833, the Minister of the Interior, Adolphe Thiers, commissioned Eugène Delacroix to decorate the Salon du Roi. The politician’s choice was logical: eleven years earlier—when he was 25 years old—Thiers had written about the major artistic event in France, the Salon, the official exhibition for living artists. An avid supporter of change, the author defended the young artists, taking the side of those who were freeing themselves from the “yoke of the academy.” It was therefore not surprising that he developed a particular fondness for the foremost romantic painter of the time, and that, once in power, wanted to offer him such a prestigious opportunity to express his talent. Yet the attribution for this commission was greeted with surprise and displeasure. On 11 April 1834, *Le Constitutionnel* published a critical article: “This is a painter so unconcerned with his glory, so unsure of his work, which was selected from such rough sketches, from mere indications on paper, to decorate an entire room in the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies; it is to such a painter that we have given one of the largest commissions for a monumental painting that has ever occurred in our time!” Delacroix had barely finished the work before the critics changed their minds. The press outdid itself in praise for the artist. Théophile Gautier, for example: “On seeing these cheerful and luminous paintings, one could imagine oneself in a Renaissance room decorated by artists from Florence...”
Salle Casimir-Perier

Situated in the alignment of the Cour d’Honneur and inspired from the design of Roman basilicas, this room features a series of eight Corinthian columns and a semi-circular arch; it is used as a vestibule for the amphitheatre and the adjoining rooms. The walls are decorated with statues placed in alcoves; they illustrate resistance to absolutism (Mirabeau and General Foy) and opposition to popular sedition (Bailly and Casimir Perier), and celebrate the Civil Code (Portalis and Tronchet). The coffered arch, with two bas-reliefs at either end, is illuminated by ten lunettes carved with different attributes (Meditation, Justice, Peace, Work, Industry, Commerce, Strength, War, Sea and Agriculture).

Henri de Triqueti

The Law as Protector [detail]
The bas-relief symbolises confidence in commerce and industry, the safeguards of government and the security of family. It faces a second group, featuring a much more dynamic composition, depicting The Law as Avenger.

Francisque Joseph Duret
Casimir-Perier
Marble, 1832.

A BRONZE BAS-RELIEF WEIGHING FOUR TONS

The back of the room, which corresponds to the back wall of the amphitheatre, was unadorned at the start of the Third Republic. Thus, to commemorate the centennial of the Revolution in 1879, the Chamber of Deputies launched a competition to celebrate in situ the first meeting room, located in Versailles. The monument was supposed to consist of a column crowned with an image of the Republic, placed on a granite pedestal with two bronze bas-reliefs representing the sessions of 24 June and 4 August 1789. Jules Dalou, recently amnestied for his activities during the Paris Commune, participated in one of the winning projects. In 1881, Gambetta, then President of the Chamber, opted for Dalou’s project, requesting that it be executed full-size and placed in the Salle Casimir-Perier. The work was first made in plaster and exhibited at the 1883 Salon. A decision was immediately made to reproduce the work in bronze, but this was not actually done until 1891. The bronze founder Eugène Gonon executed the work in a single piece; the lost-wax casting was a masterpiece of craftsmanship given the complexity of the model and the size: 6.5 by 2.3 meters!

TODAY
Members of the government enter the Palais Bourbon through this room to reach the Amphitheatre. This spot is particularly busy on Tuesday and Wednesday during questions to the government.
GUIDED TOUR

Library

The library is based on a rectangular floor plan. Three pairs of pillars on either side of the nave support a series of five domes on pendants illuminated by Diocletian windows. Delacroix painted the decorative elements from 1838 to 1847. The project was immense: he was responsible for four compositions for each dome and one for each of the two half domes. The artist had to fit twenty-two subjects into a difficult space, as the entrance to the room is located in the middle. He therefore decided to illustrate a sufficiently fragmented theme, the five fundamentals of human thought: poetry, theology, legislation, philosophy and the sciences.

Armillary sphere

The armillary sphere in the Library of the National Assembly may have been manufactured in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century by Erasmus Habermel; Rudolf II issued an imperial decree on 8 August 1594 naming him "creator of astronomical and geometric instruments."

Eugène Delacroix

Cul-de-four of Peace

Orpheus Civilising the Uncultivated Greeks and Teaching Them the Arts and Peace.

Encaustic painting, 1838-1847.

Today

The National Assembly library has adopted the digital revolution. The archives have been digitised, and the library’s online catalogue includes no less than 600,000 books and periodicals, available to the deputies and their colleagues. The library also provides access to numerous online databases via the Assembly’s intranet.

A COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL TREASURES

The prestige of the Palais Bourbon’s library goes beyond the quality of the paintings decorating the upper sections of the reading room. Its collection of books and periodicals, initially formed during the Revolution, has grown over the years with the addition of remarkable works, ranging from incunabula (with a Latin bible from Mainz, 1462) to a diverse group of manuscripts including the judgment of Joan of Arc (fifteenth century), the Codex borbonicus (an Aztec manuscript, ca. 1507) and the manuscript of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Confessions. Finally, and above all, the library is a genuine conservatory for the parliamentary memory, as it contains Mirabeau’s death mask and major historical first drafts by Victor Hugo, Jean Jaurès, Léon Blum and others.
The theme selected for the decoration of the Salle Abel-de-Pujol, named for the artist who created the grisaille paintings on the ceiling (1838 to 1840), is similar in tone to that of the Salle des Conférences: the celebration of the royal figure. Here, the artist glorified the judicial events that marked the regimes, reminding the deputies of the monarch’s right to initiate laws. Four figures embody the fundamental elements in the formation of French law: Salic law, the capitularies of Charlemagne (opposite), the edicts of Saint Louis and—a symbol of monarchical continuity and the perfection of the political system—the Charter of 1930.

A door leads from this vestibule, decorated with four columns, to the Amphitheatre. It is flanked by two sculpted busts: to the right, one representing Christian Democrat deputy Albert de Mun and to the left, Socialist Jean Jaurès. Their sculptures here illustrate the importance placed on political pluralism. In each of the corners of the room are statues of ancient Greek and Roman legislators—Brutus, Solon, Lycurgus and Cato—that were in the Council of Five Hundred in 1798 before the Amphitheatre was reconstructed in 1832. A marble monument on one of the walls bears the names of deputies who died for France during the First World War. Opposite is a statue of the Republic carved in homage to the deputies and parliamentary civil servants who died during the Second World War.
The Salle des Pas-Perdus appears solemn, due to the walls covered with yellow stucco from Siena; the ceiling was painted by Horace Vernet, with ornamental elements by Charles Séchan. The central motif consists of three allegories painted within trompe l’oeil frames. In the centre, Peace Distributing Her Benefits is framed by two themes depicting dynamic images: The Spirit of Steam on Earth and Steam Expelling the Gods from the Seas. Horace Vernet, Peace Distributing Her Benefits

In this triptych, the artist was able to use an allegorical approach for a modern subject, glorifying both material prosperity and technical progress (The Spirit of Steam on Earth and Steam Expelling the Gods from the Seas) as factors of peace (subject of the central motif). Oil on Canvas, 1839.

The President of the Assembly, flanked by two rows of republican guards, crosses this room from the Hôtel de Lassay to reach the Amphitheatre. Initiated under Louis-Philippe, this ceremony is conducted to the sound of drumbeats.

The Salles des Fêtes and the Galerie des Tapisseries form a link between the Palais Bourbon and the Hôtel de Lassay. The former was remodelled from 1846 to 1848 with the addition of a sumptuous decor; 150 laborers worked day and night to meet the deadline set for the inauguration. The style created by the large windows and Ionic pilasters are similar to Versailles, yet the theme of the decor, created by Heim, is altogether different. A number of activities are celebrated on the walls: the arts, letters and sciences, industry, commerce and more.

The Salle des Fêtes stands on the site of a wooden gallery created in 1809. It connects the Cabinet du Départ, at the end of the Hôtel de Lassay, to the Alechinsky Rotunda, which is the link between the two buildings.

The Salle des Fêtes is used for public exhibitions and conferences, as well as for official ceremonies held in honour of foreign figures. This is also where the President of the National Assembly holds the ceremonies presenting the government’s New Year’s wishes.

Created under the presidency of the Duc de Morny, who wanted to display his collection of paintings there, the Galerie des Tapisseries doubled the Salle des Fêtes in 1860. The collection was broken up in 1865 and then replaced by a set of nine Beauvais tapestries that were placed in moulded panels, created in 1900.
Although the Hôtel de Lassay’s restoration project considerably modified the building’s overall appearance, the general layout remained the same: the front side of the ground floor retained three main rooms with a series of five salons on the garden side. All of these rooms, which were widely redecorated by Jules de Joly, were used as formal reception areas by the President. The five salons were designed as an ensemble in Joly’s earliest plans. Thus, two large doors were installed between each room to facilitate movement during official receptions. The architect added an additional and particularly daring panoptic device to this section, underscored by a delicate and rich stucco decor—he cut through the partition walls and replaced the fireplace overmantels with large bay windows. This plan on transparency, intended to emphasise the brilliance of the chandeliers and both expand and unify the space, did not change the individual character of each room, which are distinct through the use of diverse decorative elements. Heim was tasked with designing the overdoor features, themed in relation to the name of each room: Games, Seasons, Elements.

Hôtel de Lassay, courtyard side

The Hôtel de Lassay was altered considerably, but the architect was able to retain the spirit of the original building.

Staircase and Diana the Huntress

The additional floor, designed for the President’s private apartments, required the construction of a staircase. The spatial layout of this element created a superb eighteenth-century pastiche. An elegant Diana the Huntress stands atop a pedestal in the centre of the vestibule.

Salon des Jeux

The Salon des Jeux is named for the overdoor decoration by Heim, which represents Le Jeu de Boules, La Main Chaude, L’Escarpolette, Le Saut de Mouton, Colin-Maillard, Le Volant. The Conference of Presidents, responsible for drawing up the Assembly’s agenda for the current week and following two weeks, is held in this room.
The garden is the only element that does not correspond to the aesthetic principles in fashion during the first half of the eighteenth century. Instead, a large grassy area was created; it is neither divided by pathways nor embellished with ornaments. The only concession to a systematic layout is the pond and fountain, which are aligned with the Grand Salon.

This room has been a study since the construction of the Hôtel de Lassay. The office, decorated with furniture from the Château de Versailles, was requisitioned in 1794 for the Committee of Public Safety. The Louis XIV-era carpet comes from a series of 93 carpets woven by the Savonnerie manufactory pour the Grande Galerie of the Louvre. Above the doors are allegories by François-Joseph Heim. A Gobelins tapestry reproduces Raphael’s famous painting, The School of Athens. Two candelabra with 11 branches are installed on either side of the door leading to the Salle des Fêtes.

A bell on the desk in this room rings throughout the Palais Bourbon to announce the imminent opening of the session. The Cabinet du Départ is named for the fact that the President of the session walks from this room to reach the Amphitheatre.
At the start of his Mémoires, François Guizot summed up the extraordinary events that took place between the end of the Empire and the start of what would be called, inaptly in fact, the Restoration: “During the Revolution, we fought; under the Empire, we remained silent; the Restoration traded freedom for peace. With the ambient susceptibility and lack of experience, the movement and the clatter of freedom, it was a civil war, about to start over again.” The regime established under Louis XVIII, the younger brother of Louis XVI, was certainly a monarchy, but it was a parliamentary regime as well. The constitutional charter of June 1814 established a system by which the legislative power was shared by the king and the two Chambers, and even granted the latter the possibility of indirectly initiating laws. Admittedly, the electoral system for the Chamber of Deputies was extremely elitist, and would remain so to a certain extent until 1848. The deputies were elected by slightly less than 100,000 electors (under the Restoration) from a population of 30 million people. These were the famous “eligible voters” who paid more than 300 francs in annual property taxes and were assumed to be the only ones qualified to participate in the nation’s political life. Royer-Collard, one of the great orators, later to become President of the Chamber during the Restoration, described this as a “metaphor” of representation. Nevertheless, the Chamber would become, along with the press, a forum for essential freedoms and speech in the country throughout its political process. It is hard to overestimate the importance held by the great orators of the Chamber at the time: Camille Jordan, Royer-Collard, Benjamin Constant and Foy on the left; La Bourdonnais, Cobriére and Villele on the right under the Restoration, but also Guizot, Thiers, Cormenin, Odilon Barrot and many others under the July Monarchy, after 1830. These orators not only excelled at addressing the Chamber, they were also skilled political players; furthermore, they the doctrinaires of their political actions, as both authors and speakers. Until 1848, what Thibaudet would later call political literature (during the Third Republic) was inextricably linked to action. Later, these two occasionally contradictory exercises of politics would diverge. Guizot, who created a chair in the history of civilisation at the Sorbonne is one example. With his eloquence, he was the embodiment and voice of the parliamentary system during the July Monarchy. On 26 January 1844, one of the most violent scenes in the entire history of the constitutional monarchy took place. At this
time, Guizot was President of the Council, leader of the resistance against the Liberal Party of Movement that was pushing to democratize the electoral system. The discussion revolved around the principle of loss of citizenship rights, which brought up the issue of emigration. Yet in the eyes of his adversaries, Guizot was himself an emigrant because he had joined the king in Ghent, Belgium, during the Hundred Days, when he was still a young secretary general at the Ministry of Interior—with the purpose, he would say, of pleading the cause of constitutional principles. The attack lasted nearly two hours, and for two hours, Guizot would stand up to the Assembly, improvising—written speeches were not allowed—yet perfectly mastering the discussion, defending his past in long sequences punctuated with the same leitmotiv, proudly tossed out to the pack of his hecklers: “Yes, I was in Ghent.” Louis Blanc described Guizot during this period: “His peremptory gesture, his dogmatic tone gave him something indomitable.” What has come down to us from this long speech full of passion and suppressed violence is this: “The insults, the slander, the superficial anger can be repeated and piled as high as you want, but they shall never rise above my disdain.”

The art of oratory also implied the brilliant turn of phrase, a moment when a majority could shift on a single word, in a period when parties—not to mention parliamentary groups—took a very long time to form and even longer to consolidate. The entire history of the Chamber during the Second and Third Republics is littered with these oratorical disputes that occasionally came very close to personal duels between Thiers, Molé and Guizot in the late 1830s and early 1840s; between Victor Hugo and Falloux in 1850 on the question of Catholic education; between Clemenceau and Jules Ferry in the 1880s; and between Clemenceau and Jean Jaurès from 1906 to 1909. Take the example of another famous session, that of 12 June 1906. Clemenceau, Minister of the Interior in Sarrien’s Cabinet at the time, refuted the “sumptuous mirage” of Jaurès’s socialism, who had just violently criticized the doctrine of “absolute individualism”: “You, singly, do not embody socialism, you are not the good Lord Himself.” Jaurès’s courteous response: “And you, Monsieur Minister, are not the devil.” And Clemenceau’s immediate comeback: “That’s what you think.” Right-wing historians would claim that the Chamber of Deputies formed majorities according to common interests; left-wing scholars would say they were based on ideas, a mystique. In any case, they often fluctuated, which explains, for example, the bloodbath of ministers during

Tony-François de Bergue
Episode from the 1848 Revolution

Henry-Félix Philippoteaux
Lamartine Rejecting the Red Flag in Front of the Hôtel de Ville, 24 February 1848 (detail)

“You will triumph, fear not, over the final difficulties still remaining on the path to an honest Republic, the national Republic, the Republic of universal law, without exception, without category or preference, excluding none of its citizens—the Republic of the entire nation.”

Alphonse de Lamartine, National Constituent Assembly, 12 June 1848.
The orator is the sower of seeds. He takes from his heart, his instincts, his passions, his beliefs, his sufferings, his dreams, his ideas, and throws them, by handfuls, into the midst of men. Every brain is to him an open furrow. One word dropped from the tribune always takes root somewhere, and becomes a thing. You say, ‘Oh! it is nothing—it is a man talking,’ and you shrug your shoulders. Shortighted creatures! It is a future which is germinating, it is a new world bursting into bloom.”

Victor Hugo, Exile and Poesy, 1852.

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Victor Hugo, Exile and Poesy, 1852.
The Third and Fourth Republics definitively established the regime of national representation. The fast-growing legislature soon ran out of space, leading to the series of renovation projects undertaken during this period.

The defeat of 1870 and the episode of the Commune sent the representatives of the legislative branch into exile. After traveling to Bordeaux then to Versailles, on 27 November 1879 the deputies returned to the Palais Bourbon after an absence of nine years. At the time, the Chamber of the Third Republic had far more members than the Chambers of Louis-Philippe and of the Second Empire (this legislative body had only 260 members). Fitting the 531 parliamentarians returning to Paris into the Amphitheatre was not an easy task. At this point the President of the Chamber, Léon Gambetta, examined measures: he asked Jules de Joly’s son, Edmond—who had been working for the government since 1865—to study ways to expand the seating capacity.

The narrow rows were not, however, the only faults enumerated by the deputies. As early as 1880, they were criticising various problems in the amphitheatre: the lack of ventilation, a dysfunction that the author of a report for the public hygiene commission (March 1901) cited frankly as the reason for the death of a dozen elected officials. By the end of the Second Empire, the mediocre condition of the ventilation system had prompted the questeurs (parliamentary administrators) to undertake a number of renovations, in compliance with the ideas suggested by Arthur-Jules Morin, Director of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers and author, in 1865, of a work on this issue. Yet the replacement of the mechanical ventilation with a natural system did not produce the anticipated results.

And finally, added to these practical problems was a more intangible requirement: during a period when the leading European monarchies were building elegant parliamentary palaces from London to Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Rome and Stockholm, as well as the distant Melbourne, the young French Republic—for which the Parliament was the indisputable centre of political life, had to offer its elected officials a monument that would also stand as a symbol. Therefore, in November 1879, Gambetta promoted a study to modernise the Palais Bourbon and commissioned Joly to "examine whether it would be possible to use part of the palace’s large courtyard to construct a new amphitheatre." He also encouraged the architect to travel to other capitals and study major European parliament buildings. Shortly after, in March 1882, an internal commission, realising that it would be impossible to improve the existing room to satisfaction, concluded that a new Chamber room had to be built; what had been one proposal among many others two years earlier had become a clear necessity. Joly (1882, 1886 and 1890), and his successors, Edouard Buquet (1893, 1898 and 1905) and Georges Demoget (1913) proposed various solutions—some of which called for the demolition of the facade of the Seine side—although none was authorised: the political officials who had promoted the undertaking left office; budgetary problems soon became pressing; it all resulted in the continual postponement of this ambitious project. The problem of insufficient space remained, inspiring this diatribe from the Secretary General to the President’s office, Eugène Pierre: "It’s like a shoe that’s too narrow; no matter what you do, it always hurts; the Chamber from 1832 is not a constitutional size." The deputies were soon forced to adopt a number of expedient actions to carve out the necessary space: under the presidency of Charles Floquet (1885-1893), an idea was proposed to divide the Salles des Gardes and the Salon de l’Empereur with a false ceiling to create a press room. Although the questeurs did not manage to create a sufficiently functional and comfortable working space for the deputies, they did try to attend to their comfort, when they...
were not in session. In February 1900, Edouard Baquet submitted a proposal to transform the refreshment area; he suggested cladding it in “large carved panels of Sèvres sandstone.” Sculptors Alfred Boucher (1850-1934) and Constant Roux (1865-1929) were commissioned by the Minister of Public Instruction and the Beaux-Arts to create four decorative panels symbolising the seasons. The decor was completed in early 1902. A Saccarde, carved by Théophile Barrau (1848-1913), was installed in the niche and a Sèvres vase was placed in the centre of the room. Two additional panels, Water and Fire, both by Roux, completed the decoration on the front of the bar in 1905. Meanwhile, the technical modernisation of the Chamber moved forward: in 1880, the Chamber itself was equipped with incandescent lighting, a method of illumination that was only extended to the rest of the buildings in 1899 and to the apartments in 1912. At the time, electricity was produced by gas motors set up in the Cour Sully. The great flood of 1910 therefore meant that the Chamber was plunged into unheated darkness. While the First World War forced the Chamber to perform only absolutely necessary maintenance repairs and to protect the buildings from bombing, the law of 28 December 1931, “aimed at the immediate execution of compulsory work force” (Compulsory Work Force) employed a few students from the École Normale Supérieure there. The battles during the Liberation caused some damage: a fire in the library destroyed some 20,000 volumes. After 1945 microphones appeared in the Chamber's amphitheatre. The palace architect, Marcel Macary, undertook major work after seeing to the repairs required after the Liberation: he linked the east and west wings, added elevators and used the mezzanine and attic spaces to install the administrative offices. Finally, in 1954, in the first in a series of acquisitions, the Assembly purchased buildings outside the Assembly complex itself, on Rue de l’Université, thus expanding the number of services available to deputies.  

Since 2004, two collections of busts of Marianne, the allegorical figure of the French Republic, have been exhibited in the Salon des Mariannes, located in the vestible of the Palais Bourbon. All very different in style, they illustrate both artistic and political developments.
THE THIRD REPUBLIC, FROM TRIUMPH TO POWERLESSNESS

By EMMAUEL DE WAREQUIEL

In the 1930s, Albert Thibaudet, author of *La République des professeurs*, wrote a keen analysis of the history of the Third Republic in terms of thirty-year generations. There was the generation of the founders, the elected assembly of Orleans and then Versailles until 1879, of Thiers, Gambetta, Jules Grévy and Waldeck-Rousseau, then the generation of the Dreyfus Affair, with Clemenceau and Jaurès; and finally, the generation of the “Cartels des Gauches” a radical-socialist group in the 1920s, including Briand and the triumphant graduates of the École Normale Supérieure: Herriot, Painlevé and Blum. But behind this brilliant gallery, the faces of the deputies had changed dramatically in a half-century.

The provincial notables, aristocrats and property-owning bourgeoisie from the elections in February 1871 had gradually been replaced throughout the 1880s, from one election to the next, by lawyers, merchants and teachers. The tone shifted gradually from the grands to the petits bourgeois. From 1893 to 1914, nearly one-third of the parliamentarians came from working-class origins, the sons of craftsmen, workers and peasants. These men rose from their origins to reach the heights of the republican elite: Clemenceau through medicine, Jaurès through the university, Briand through the bar. Another change occurred soon after with the major, radical educational reforms; the Jules Ferry law of 1880 creating free, obligatory and secular primary schools with Herriot’s proposal for a unique school: that of “heirs” gradually becoming one of students with stipends. The black hussars (the nickname for primary school teachers during the Third Republic) had done their work, as well as the educational reform in 1902 by Combes, known as le petit père (little father) which closed non-authorised religious schools. The deputy of the 1920s was a man of modest origins who had built himself up through study, a secular man of the provinces in a republic of comrades, networks and lodges; in sum, a cultivated humanist. In 1925, an English liberal, Lord Bryce, made this observation: “In no other legislature of modern times can one find a group of such competent political men, so skilled and distinguished [as the French parliament].” This description applied equally well to a radical deputy. “I believe that France is radical,” said a consternated Barrès, to whom Briand replied: “You have the spirit, but we have the cadres.”

The radical, even radical-socialist mystique of the Chambers was, starting in 1898, based on two battles, that of total secularism—which culminated in 1905 with the law calling for the separation of Churches and State—and that of tax redistribution, with the creation of an income tax by Caillaux in 1914. This radical period of the republic coincided above all with the absolute primacy of the Chamber of Deputies over the country’s political life. In the 1890s, the deputy was the most important figure in the district, not the civil servant.

In Paris, the Chamber created an organisation of committees—the powerful budget committee became a genuine seat of power within the republic—and instituted the formation of parliamentary groups. The importance of the Chamber can be assessed by the status of its president, called “father” which closed non-authorised religious schools. The deputy of the 1920s was a man of modest origins who had built himself up through study, a secular man of the provinces in a republic of comrades, networks and lodges; in sum, a cultivated humanist. In 1925, an English liberal, Lord Bryce, made this observation: “In no other legislature of modern times can one find a group of such competent political men, so skilled and distinguished [as the French parliament].” This description applied equally well to a radical deputy. “I believe that France is radical,” said a consternated Barrès, to whom Briand replied: “You have the spirit, but we have the cadres.”

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In Paris, the Chamber created an organisa- tion of committees—the powerful budget committee became a genuine seat of power within the republic—and instituted the formation of parliamentary groups. The importance of the Chamber can be assessed by the status of its president. This figure obviously had far more power than the President of the Republic himself. Elected at the start of each parliamentary session, he went to the Chamber in a morning coat between two rows of soldiers; he opened and closed the proceedings, controlled the agenda, directed the debates, allowed deputies to speak, and received the bills and proposals for laws, as well as petitions and resignations. When the President donned his jacket, the session was over. There were occasional complaints in the corridors of the Chamber about the overarching power of the presidents, even their “suffocating dictatorship.” Gambetta in particular was criti- cised, as he wouldn’t hesitate to step down from the platform to defend his ideas to the assembled members, as on 19 May 1881, when he spoke brilliantly in favour of a vote by list, leading Jules Simon to say that “We have come to an era when the government is run by the President of the Chamber.” The old parties that were formed along with the republic, particularly the radicals and the radical-socialists, continued to subsist, with their allies and traditional methods, until the First World War. It was not the sacred poli-
The stock market crash of 1929 and parliamentary worlds and that of finance. The republic suffered from an increasingly murky collusion between the political and financial worlds. Starting in 1935, laws were replaced by decree-law by legislative delegation. There were increasing moves to invest the government with full powers, even though the Cabinets were replaced at a rapid pace. This concept of “full powers” (pleins pouvoirs) brings to mind a certain 10 July 1940. The scene took place in Vichy in the theatre of the casino. Philippe Pétain was President of the Council. He had requested an armistice from the Germans on 16 June. On 10 July, the deputies and senators who had just arrived from Bordeaux, fleeting the advancing German army, voted to give Pétain full powers. “The National Assembly gives full power to the government of the Republic, under the authority and signature of Marshall Pétain, granting him the power to write … a new constitution for the French State.” The outcome of this decision is, of course, all too well known, but it is always easier to predict events in hindsight. Yet eighty parliamentarians, led by Vincent Badie, the deputy from the Hérault, were clear-minded enough to save the honour of the Third Republic. On that day, they drew up and signed a statement: “The undersigned parliamentarians … refuse to vote for a project that will ineluctably result in the disappearance of the republican regime.” And thus the die was cast for the following four years.

After the war, particularly in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a new dividing line began to take shape: that of order and authority. The nationalisation of philosophical and scholarly works, not the rising power of extremists on the right now. “In the eyes of many, the republic of comedians had become the republic of scoundrels.” The Action Française, in its last days, led the Action Française to give up its hope of a reaction to the 1924, the Stavisky scandal in 1934. Faceted with this rising tide of criticism and crises, the Chamber gradually surrendered some of its powers—not voluntarily as at the start of the war, but because it was powerless to institute reforms or find solutions to the economic crises triggered by the stock market crash of 1929.

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EIGHT MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793)
She championed all the great causes of her time, defending the rights of those excluded from civil and political society or slaves from the French colonies. A pioneering feminist, her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (1791) is a landmark text for those who combat abuse and discrimination against women. She tirelessly advocated for women's rights in her political brochures or her theatre. From 1789 to 1793, she regularly sent missives to the elected Assembly that followed, to coalesce the various socialist movements into a single party. She was guillotined on 3 November 1793, during the Terror.

Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869)
Initially a poet, he then became a career diplomat and earned fame in 1830 with his Méditations poétiques. Elected a deputy in 1833, he was called a "revolutionary of the imagination" under Louis-Philippe, for his incoherent political stances. A member of the provisional government of 1848 and unsuccessful candidate for the presidency of the Republic, he retired from public life to pursue his writing.

Victor Hugo (1802-1885)
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Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893)
Elected from Martinique, then Guadeloupe, Schoelcher was Under-Secretary of State to the Navy in 1848; this former militant for the abolition of slavery presided over the committee that would enshrine abolition in law. He opposed Napoleon’s coup d’état in 1851 and was banished. After returning from England in 1870, he was re-elected deputy from Martinique, then Guadeloupe, Schoelcher became head of a short-lived Ministry, “he was a doctor of the Constituent Assembly in 1879 and became head of a short-lived government in 1881.

Léon Gambetta (1838-1882)
Born in Cahors, Gambetta was a career diplomat and earned fame in 1830 with his Méditations poétiques. Elected in 1869, he became the leader of the Republican soldier, a “bleu.” Nicknamed the “destroyer of ministries,” he was a doctor of the Constituent Assembly in 1879 and became head of a short-lived government in 1881.

Georges Clemenceau (1841-1929)
A native of the Vendée region, Clemenceau was the son of a Republican soldier, a “bleu.” Nicknamed the “destroyer of ministries,” he was a doctor of the Constituent Assembly in 1879 and became head of a short-lived government in 1881.

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Albert de Mun (1841-1914)
A philosopher and novelist, Mun was elected as a republican deputy from the Tarn in 1885; he shifted towards socialism and founded L’humanité in 1904. A great orator and defender of the working class, he strove to condense the various socialist movements into a single party. A partisan of peace, he was attacked by patriots and moderates, and was assassinated the day before France entered the First World War.

Jean Jaurès (1859-1914)
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In the rooms and corridors...
LIFE AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Locksmiths, IT specialists, doctors, printers, cabinetmakers and more: dozens of different professions are at work in the National Assembly. Every day, over a thousand people are busy keeping the parliamentary institution, which covers a surface area of nearly seven hectares in the heart of Paris, in good working order. The life of the parliament requires detailed logistical planning so that the deputies can exercise their mandates in optimal conditions. This includes scheduling hundreds of meetings every week, hosting official receptions, organising parliamentary travel, recording video broadcasts of debates, handling parliamentary mail, printing legislative documents and maintaining buildings.

TODAY

Walter de Maria (left)
Bicentennial sphere
Granite, marble, gold, 1989.
This sphere commemorating the bicentennial of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen contains a gold heart. It is placed in the Cour d’Honneur.
This was the winning project from an international competition launched in 1989.

The National Assembly shop
The National Assembly shop, located opposite the Palais Bourbon, has original objects (stationery, tableware and decorative items, leather goods, jewelry and accessories), as well as books written by deputies.
Post Office
With 8 million letters received and 11 million sent every year, the National Assembly Post Office handles a volume of mail equivalent to that of a city of 30,000 people. The mail for deputies is delivered to their personal mailboxes.

Parliamentary “buvette”
Since 2007, many offices have been renovated with two separate areas: one for the deputy, the other for his or her colleague. These offices, measuring 25 square meters, are designed so that the deputies can stay there when the Assembly is holding a night session.

Salle Lamartine
The Salle Lamartine, equipped with cutting-edge technology, hosts inter-parliamentary European and international meetings. Most of the National Assembly conference rooms have video rebroadcast systems so that the proceedings can be followed via Internet.

A deputy’s office
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CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

In keeping with the tradition of patronage of the nineteenth-century Chambers, the Palais Bourbon has embraced contemporary art. For the bicentennial of the French Revolution, Waléry de Maris created a monumental sculpture for the Cour d’Honneur commemorating the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Assembly purchased works of art by Jean Le Gac, Gilles Aillaud and Hervé Di Rosa. This collection of contemporary art has expanded over the years and the works of many French artists are now installed in the public spaces and meeting rooms in the various buildings of the National Assembly.

Hervé Di Rosa, born in 1959
History of the Assembly [Detail: 1981: Decentralisation]
The artist designed a fresco for the public entrance leading to the galleries of the Amphitheatre, Two Centuries of Combat for Law and Justice. Acrylic on canvas, 1991.

Djamel Tatah, born in 1959
Untitled
Painting acquired by the National Assembly in 2011; it is now exhibited in the lobby of the Salle Lamartine. Oil and wax on canvas.

Pierre Alechinsky, born in 1927
The Fragile Garden
The rotunda linking the Palais Bourbon to the Hôtel de Lassay was decorated by Pierre Alechinsky in 1992. This work illustrates an inscription by poet Jean Tardieu: “Men seek light in a fragile garden shimmering with colour.” This work is certainly one of the major official commissions of the 1990s. Acrylic on mounted linen canvas.

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Today | Contemporary Art at the National Assembly

Fabienne Verdier, born in 1962
Arbre des arbres - Tribute to the Companions of the Liberation
Inaugurated on 27 May 2014 on the occasion of the centenary of the First National Day of the Resistance, this work was designed for the lobby of the Jacques Chaban-Delmas building. It responds to the wall that bears the names of 1,038 Companions of the Liberation. The sculptor assembled ash branches to form a mould in which the bronze was cast.
One of the seven horizontal rows bears the engraving of a line from the poet René Char: “Acquiescence illuminates the face, refusal gives it beauty.” (Feuillet d’Hypnos, note 81, 1943-1945).

Vincent Barré, born in 1948
Column of branches - Tribute to the Companions of the Liberation
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JonOne, born in 1963
Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité
Created for the Salle des Mariannes and installed in January 2015, this work was made using the “reverse stencil” technique. It revisits the famous painting La Liberté guided by people by Eugène Delacroix, whose frescoes decorate the adjoining library as well as the ceiling near the Salle des Sénateurs that bears his name.
The artist, of American origin and part of the graffiti and street art movement, chose this motif to “symbolize youth, the future and hope.”

Artist’s signature on the back of this canvas.
THE ASSEMBLY AT WORK

A prestigious historical building, the Palais Bourbon is also the pinnacle of French institutional life and the effective demonstration of democracy at work. People are familiar with the image of deputies in the Chamber, however the details of parliamentary activity, as defined by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, are frequently less well known.

The deputies, elected by all French citizens, form the National Assembly, which votes laws, operates as a control on government and evaluates public policies. It shares legislative power with the Senate, but if the two Chambers of parliament do not reach an agreement on a particular text, the National Assembly has the final decision. It alone has the power to censure the government, in other words, to force its resignation; it is the only governmental body that can be dissolved by the President of the Republic.

THE DEPUTIES

The National Assembly consists of 577 deputies, who are elected to five-year terms. Since June 2012 (the XIVth legislature), 11 deputies have been elected by French citizens living outside of France. They are national officials, but also represent local constituencies, and as such, act as intermediaries between citizens, who have delegated to them part of their sovereignty, and the power of the State.

While the parliamentary institution works 52 weeks per year, the public meetings are only held during session. The Constitution stipulates a nine-month ordinary session, from the first working day of October to the last working day of June. Outside of this period, the President of the Republic can convocate an extraordinary session of the Assembly, with a specific agenda. The work in public session does not represent majority of a deputy’s work. Each one is a member of one of the eight standing committees responsible for examining texts. They may also be part of a committee of inquiry, a fact-finding mission, a parliamentary delegation or office or a study group on a specific topic.

The deputies also meet within their own parliamentary groups. Finally, some deputies represent the Assembly in public institutions or international organisations (European Council, Union of Western Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of French-Speaking Countries and so on). The deputies and senators meet together at Versailles when they are brought together as a full Congress, to revise the Constitution or, in compliance with article 18 of the Constitution as revised on 21 July 2008, when the President of the Republic addresses the parliament.

ORGANISATION OF THE ASSEMBLY

Elected by secret ballot at the beginning of the legislative session, the President of the Assembly represents the Assembly and directs discussion and debates. This major role includes other considerable prerogatives: the French President consults with him in the event the National Assembly is dissolved or if the emergency powers stipulated by article 16 of the Constitution are implemented; he designates three of the nine members of the Constitutional Council, an institution that has the power to assess the compliance of a law or a treaty with the Constitution; and he appoints people to certain independent administrative authorities. In terms of protocol, he holds the fourth highest post in the government.

The Bureau, a collegial institution responsible for the major decisions concerning the operation of the National Assembly, includes the President; six vice-presidents who can sub-
тину for the President during public sessions, if necessary; three questeurs (parliamentary administrators), responsible for the Assembly’s financial and internal management; twelve secretaries, whose primary task is to assist the President when votes are counted in the Chamber.

At the start of the legislative session, most of the deputies choose to work with parliamentary groups organised according to political affinity. The group designates the candidates who participate in the Bureau and on the committees. Each group president has specific powers, such as the right to request a public vote or to verify the quorum. The conference of Presidents consists of the President of the National Assembly, the six vice-presidents, the committee presidents, the chairman of the Finance Committee, the President of the European Affairs Committee, the President of the Constitutional Revision Committee, the President of the Domestic Affairs Committee, and the President of the Defence Committee. The assembly examines the articles one by one, along with any amendments. The committee may call for hearings to obtain additional information about a text, for example, members of government or outside experts and specialists in the field. The report recording the sequence of this work is published and distributed to all the deputies. The report is available on the website of the National Assembly.

Since 1 March 2009, the discussion of draft bills must, in session, be based on the text adopted in committee, with the exception of bills revising the constitution, bills for finance laws and bills for financing the Social Security system. A public discussion is held once the text has been placed on the agenda. This begins as a general discussion, with several participants: a member of the government, the person who followed the bill in the committee (the rapporteur) along with others consulted for information, as well as the deputies who, either in the name of their group or as individuals, would like to indicate their point of view. The Assembly examines the articles one by one, along with any amendments that may be attached to each. When all the articles have been examined and voted, a vote on the entire bill of law is taken. Political groups may sometimes intervene before the vote to explain a particular position. In order for a text under discussion to be definitively adopted by the Parliament, the identical text must be voted by both Chambers. The text voted by one assembly is immediately sent to the other: these successive readings form the “shuttle,” which can by suspended by the creation of a Commission Mixte Paritaire. This committee, which consists of seven deputies and seven senators, must negotiate to obtain a joint text that covers the elements for which the two houses could not reach an agreement. If this negotiation procedure is not successful, the government can, after both Chambers have read the text, give the “last word” to the National Assembly, in other words, request that it take a final decision. After the law has been examined by the Constitutional Council to verify its compliance with the Constitution, if necessary, it must then be promulgated by the President of the Republic and published in the Journal Officiel. According to article 34-1 of the Constitution, added on 21 July 2008, the two houses can also vote on resolutions.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL

Control of the government’s action is one of the chief functions of the Parliament. Deputies can question ministers, either in writing or orally. The Assembly can create committees of enquiry and committees to collect information. According to article 35 of the Constitution, a declaration of war is authorised by the Parliament. In the event the armed forces intervene abroad, the government—in compliance with article 34-1 of the Constitution, added on 21 July 2008, must inform the Assembly within three days, by specifying the specific goals to be achieved. When the intervention lasts more than four months, the government must submit an extension for authorisation by the Parliament and can request the National Assembly to decide in case of last resort. Above all, the government is responsible to the Assembly. The Prime Minister can request a vote of confidence concerning his programme or a declaration of general policy. The Prime Minister’s speech is followed by a debate in which the representatives of the various political parties participate. The programme or declaration is then put to a vote by public balloting. The programme or declaration is approved if the number of votes “for” exceeds the number of votes “against.” The Assembly can dissolve the government by voting a motion of censure, which means that the government no longer has the support of the majority of the deputies. The motion of censure must be signed by at least one-tenth of the deputies. At the end of the discussion, only deputies in favour of the motion of censure participate in the vote. The motion is adopted if it receives the majority of votes of members of the Assembly, currently 289 out of 577. The Prime Minister can also involve his government by requesting a vote on a particular text: this procedure is stipulated by article 49, paragraph 3 of the Constitution. A text is considered to be adopted unless a motion of censure is voted. Once an “all or nothing” system, the recourse to the “49.3” is now strictly regulated by the constitutional revision of 21 July 2008: it is reserved to finance bills or finance laws for the Social Security, as well as to one bill or proposal per session. When a motion of censure has been adopted (which has occurred only once since 1958), or if the programme or declaration of general policy has not been approved, the Prime Minister must submit the resignation of his government to the President of the Republic.
Le jardin des Quatre-Colonnes
The National Assembly opens its doors

Visiting the Palais Bourbon
Free tours of the Palais Bourbon are organised for groups with a maximum of 50 people, invited by a deputy, as well as for individual visitors. Reservations must be made at least 3 months in advance through a deputy.

PUBLIC ENTRANCE
33, quai d’Orsay, 75007 Paris
All information concerning tours of the Palais Bourbon (times, reservations, access) are available on the National Assembly website:

www.assemblee-nationale.fr

All news concerning the National Assembly is also available on the website:
❖ Information concerning your deputy
❖ All parliamentary documents
❖ Access to the video site to follow the debates live, or to watch a video on request.

The National Assembly is also on facebook and twitter

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