



PALAIS DE COMPIEGNE

Located in Compiègne, Oise

GRANT SUMMARY

The Emperor's Guests Library, spacious and well-lit, has two large adjoining rooms and the librarian's area which contained some 22,000 volumes that were dispersed at the end of the 19th century.

The restoration of the Guests Library is essential in order to present the daily life and leisure activities of the prominent guests of the Emperor to the palace. Work will include structural restoration, the painted décor and putting in electricity. Furnishings will also be restored and a digital library created. After restoration the Guests Library will be open to the public and for schools and workshops.

AT A GLANCE

Location:	Compiègne, Oise, 86 km north of Paris
Ownership:	French government
Grant Request:	Available for funding (goal \$80,000)
Matching Fund Source:	TBD
Allocation of Funds:	Emperor's Guests Library Cost of work : 356,500 € / \$ 399,280
FHS Payment:	TBD

HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP

The Palais de Compiègne, a royal residence built for Louis XV and restored by Napoleon, was one of three seats of royal government, the others being Versailles and Fontainebleau. Even before the château was constructed, Compiègne was the preferred seasonal residence for French monarchs, primarily for hunting given its proximity to Compiègne Forest.

In 1750, prominent architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel proposed a thorough renovation of the château. Work began in 1751 and was finished in 1788 by Gabriel's student Le Dreux de La Châtre. The ancient town ramparts dictated the château's triangular plan; the resultant building covers about 5 acres. It is Neoclassical in style, with simplicity and clarity governing both its external and interior features.

COMPELLING INDICATORS

During the French Revolution, the château passed into the jurisdiction of the Minister for the Interior. In 1795 all furniture was sold and its works of art were sent to the central museum; it was essentially gutted. Napoleon visited in 1799 and again in 1803.

In 1804 the château became an imperial domain and in 1807 Napoleon ordered that it be made habitable again. Architects Berthault, Percier and Fontaine, decorators Dubois and Redouté, and cabinetmakers Jacob-Desmalter and Marcion restored the château. Its layout was altered, a ballroom added, and the garden was replanted and linked directly to the forest.

The result is an example of First French Empire style (1808-1810), though some traces of the earlier décor survive. The writer Auguste Luchet remarked that "Compiègne speaks of Napoleon as Versailles does of Louis XIV".

From 1856 on, Napoleon III and Eugénie made it their autumn residence, and redecorated rooms in the Second Empire style. During their celebrated "Séries", they hosted prominent guests from the worlds of politics, and the arts and sciences entertained by hunts, excursions, balls, concerts and plays. To receive these guests nearly 200 lodgings and a library were put in place to make their stay as comfortable as possible. Two guest apartments were restored and opened to the public in 2014. The next phase is to restore the Guests Library.