

HÔTEL DE SOUBISE

Museum of the National Archives

A MUSEUM FOR HISTORY



The Princess' salon on the opening of the Musée des Archives, an engraving published in L'Illustration, 1868.

Housed in the Hôtel de Soubise, the Musée des Archives Nationales (Museum of the National Archives of France) invites visitors to admire the Rococo-style rooms in this former princely residence and presents the archival heritage preserved by the institution.

The Hôtel de Soubise, which became the headquarters of the National Archives in 1808, was listed as an Historic Monument in 1862 due to the quality and richness of its interiors, which are a French decorative art masterpiece, dating from the reign of Louis XV.

Since its opening in 1867, the Musée des Archives has fulfilled a dual ambition in this princely setting: to offer visitors a compendium of the history of France, while at the same time highlighting the evolution of writing. In keeping with this strategy, the current tour presents iconic items from the archives such as the Edict of Nantes (which put an end to the French Wars of Religion in 1598), the Jeu de Paume oath (1789) or the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1958), as well as an anthology of items that provide a glimpse of the diversity of the archive, from commonplace to unusual items, selected from the millions of documents held by the National Archives.

Temporary themed exhibitions also provide a fresh look at the infinite richness of the fonds by focusing on a particular aspect of history.

THE RICH HISTORY OF A VERY OLD PARISIAN MANSION HOUSE



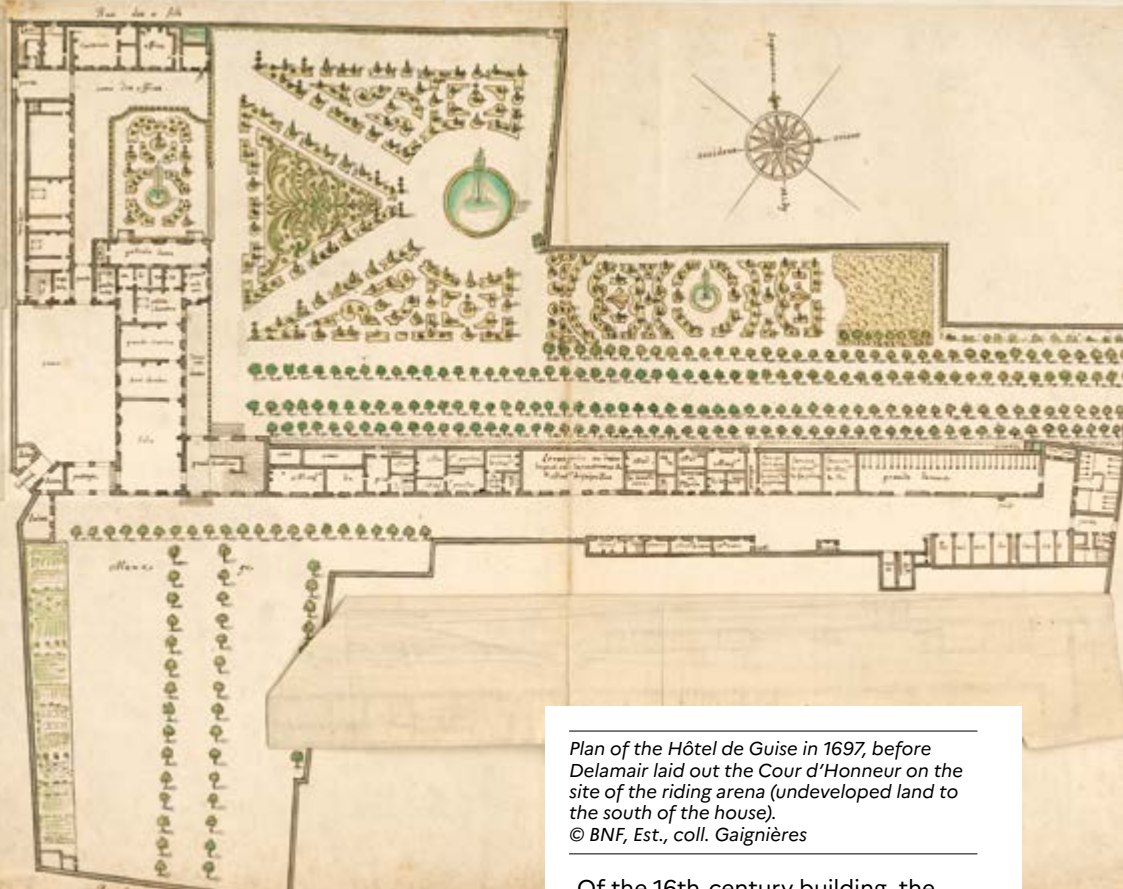
The entrance porch to Hôtel de Clisson, seen from the Rue des Archives.

Before becoming the headquarters of the National Archives, the Hôtel de Soubise was a private mansion, a richly decorated urban residence inhabited by an aristocratic family and its staff. Its architecture and fittings, most of which have been preserved, are testimony to the wealth of the Rohan-Soubises and the eminence of their position at court. Parts of earlier residences have also been preserved and, with them, the memory of their occupants.

THE HÔTEL DE CLISSON, THE RESIDENCE OF THE CONSTABLE OF FRANCE

In 1371, Olivier de Clisson (1336–1407), a Breton lord, bought a plot of land in Paris, in the heart of the Temple district, a favoured area for many of King Charles V's friends. As future Constable of France (1380), head of the King's armies, he had a residence built there worthy of his rank.

All that remains of this fortified house are the vast vaulted cellars and, above all, the entrance porch, flanked by two corbelled turrets, opening onto the Rue du Chaume (now Rue des Archives). Carefully preserved by all the successive occupants of the site, this portal remains the oldest vestige of private medieval architecture still visible in Paris today.



Plan of the Hôtel de Guise in 1697, before Delamair laid out the Cour d'Honneur on the site of the riding arena (undeveloped land to the south of the house).
© BNF, Est., coll. Gaignières

THE HÔTEL DE GUISE, FROM THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION TO THE GRAND SIÈCLE

The Hôtel de Clisson was acquired in 1553 by François de Lorraine (1519–1563), Duke of Guise, and his wife Anne d'Este (1531–1607). The building was in very poor repair and required major reconstruction work, which the powerful Guise family entrusted to the famous Italian artist and head of the first Fontainebleau school, Francesco Primaticcio, known as Le Primatice. Niccolo dell'Abbate decorated the chapel with paintings that are unfortunately no longer preserved today.

Of the 16th-century building, the semi-circular bays on the north side of the chapel opening onto the Cour de Clisson remain, as do the walls of the former guard room where "ligueurs" (members of the Catholic party) met during the French Wars of Religion. It was here that the St Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572) was probably planned as was the Day of the Barricades (1588), which forced King Henri III to flee Paris.

In the second half of the 17th century, Marie de Guise – the last descendant of the name – refurbished her residence and entrusted its gardens to the landscape gardener Le Nôtre. The Hôtel de Guise became the setting for a dazzling court, regularly attended by the likes of scholars Corneille and Tristan L'Hermite and composer Marc Antoine Charpentier.

THE HÔTEL DE SOUBISE: LUXURY, ORDER AND ELEGANCE

The last heiress of the Guise family, Marie de Guise, died childless in 1688. The mansion was purchased in 1700 by François de Rohan-Soubise (1630–1712) and his wife Anne de Rohan-Chabot (1648–1709). In 1705, on the advice of their son Armand Gaston, the future Cardinal de Rohan, they chose the young architect Pierre Alexis Delamair (1675–1745) to refurbish their residence.

In order to create a prestigious entrance to the residence newly-acquired by this family, who was influential at the court of the Sun King, Delamair changed the orientation of the mansion. He placed a new classical-style façade against the old south wing and built a majestic Cour d'Honneur with a rounded portico on the site of the Guise family's former riding arena.

At the same time, Armand Gaston de Rohan (1674–1749) commissioned Delamair to build the Hôtel de Rohan, whose monumental façade overlooks the gardens shared by the two properties.



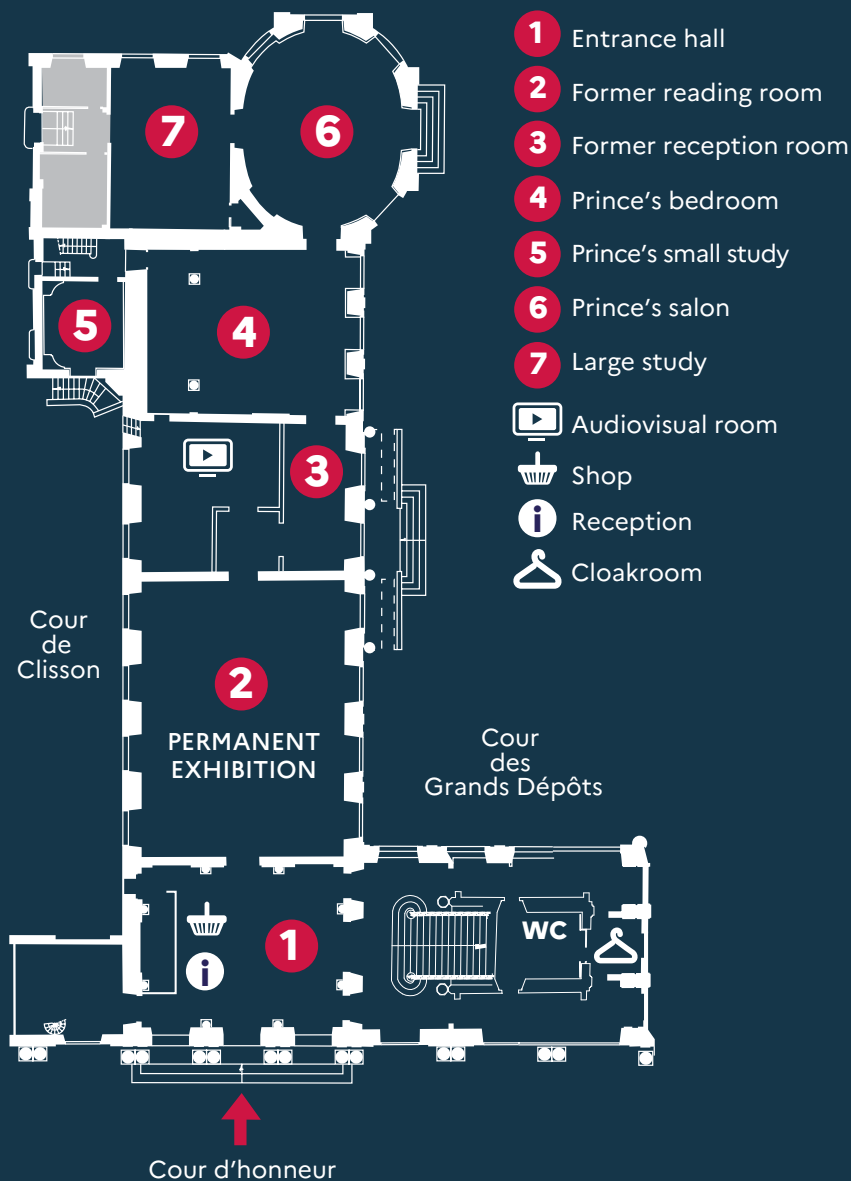
Princess of Soubise's Oval Salon.

It was only thirty years later, between 1735 and 1740, that the Hôtel de Soubise was given the sumptuous decorations it still retains today. Following his second marriage, to Marie Sophie de Courcillon, Hercule Mériadec de Rohan (1669–1749) commissioned Germain Boffrand (1667–1754) to renovate the mansion he had inherited from his parents. The architect built a polygonal "hors-d'œuvre" (i.e. projecting from the building) pavilion at the end of the string of stately apartments, to accommodate a large oval salon overlooking the gardens. But it is the exceptional carved woodwork, the stuccowork and the Rococo paintings, whose quality equalled that of Louis XV's apartments at the Château de Versailles, which remain his masterpiece. Boffrand brought together the best painters and ornamentalists, such as François Boucher, Charles Natoire and Jacques Verberck, to create a décor with a rich and skilful iconographic schema.



*View of the Hôtel de Soubise, Jean-Baptiste Rigaud, circa 1730-1740.
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GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES QUADRANGLE

Confiscated during the French Revolution, the Hôtel de Soubise was sold to pay the Soubise family creditors, as was also the case with the neighbouring Hôtel de Rohan. In 1808, it was acquired by the French State and allocated to the Imperial Archives by Napoleon I, while the Hôtel de Rohan was assigned to the Imperial Printing Office.

In response to the steady growth in its holdings, the National Archives built a series of repositories in the 19th and 20th centuries, extending beyond the Hôtel de Soubise to occupy almost the entire block between the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, the Rue des Archives, the Rue des Quatre-Fils and the Rue Vieille-du-Temple, now known as the National Archives Quadrangle.

The historic archive repositories, known as the “Grands Dépôts” (Great Repositories), were built in two phases: from 1838 to 1848 by the architects Édouard Dubois and Charles Lelong, and from 1859 to 1880 by Hubert Janniard, and then Edmond Guillaume. The first buildings, known as the Louis-Philippe repositories, were built in the eastern extension of the Hôtel de Soubise, across the gardens, breaking the view of the façade of the Hôtel de Rohan. The wing built under Napoleon III on the site of the north wing of the Hôtel de Soubise and completed under the Third Republic, extended the Louis-Philippe repositories at right angles to the current Rue des Quatre-Fils and Rue des Archives.

A courtyard, known as the “Cour des Grands Dépôts”, thus closes off a T-shaped space where the architecture of the Soubise Palace is now in dialogue with that of the monumental National Archives stacks.

At the centre of the Napoleon III repositories is the “Armoire de Fer” (Iron chest), a strong box housing a collection of documents considered to be of national importance, which continues to be enriched today: constitutional texts and laws are held here along with the metre and kilogram prototypes, the will of Louis XIV, that of Napoleon I, the hunting diary of Louis XVI and the last letter and Gazette of Marie-Antoinette.

Initially opened to the public as part of the Musée des Archives inaugurated in 1867, the Great Repositories were soon closed for security and conservation reasons.

The gradual extension of the National Archives site throughout the 20th century made it possible to continue the construction of other repositories as well as taking back the Hôtel de Rohan in 1927, after the departure of the National Printing Office. Finally, in 1988, the most recent building in the quadrangle, the CARAN (National Archives Reception and Research Centre) was inaugurated. It is dedicated to the consultation of documents and to welcoming researchers.

The Armoire de Fer, made in 1791 by the locksmith Marguerit, installed in the centre of the Napoleon III repositories.



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, France's records conserved for its citizens

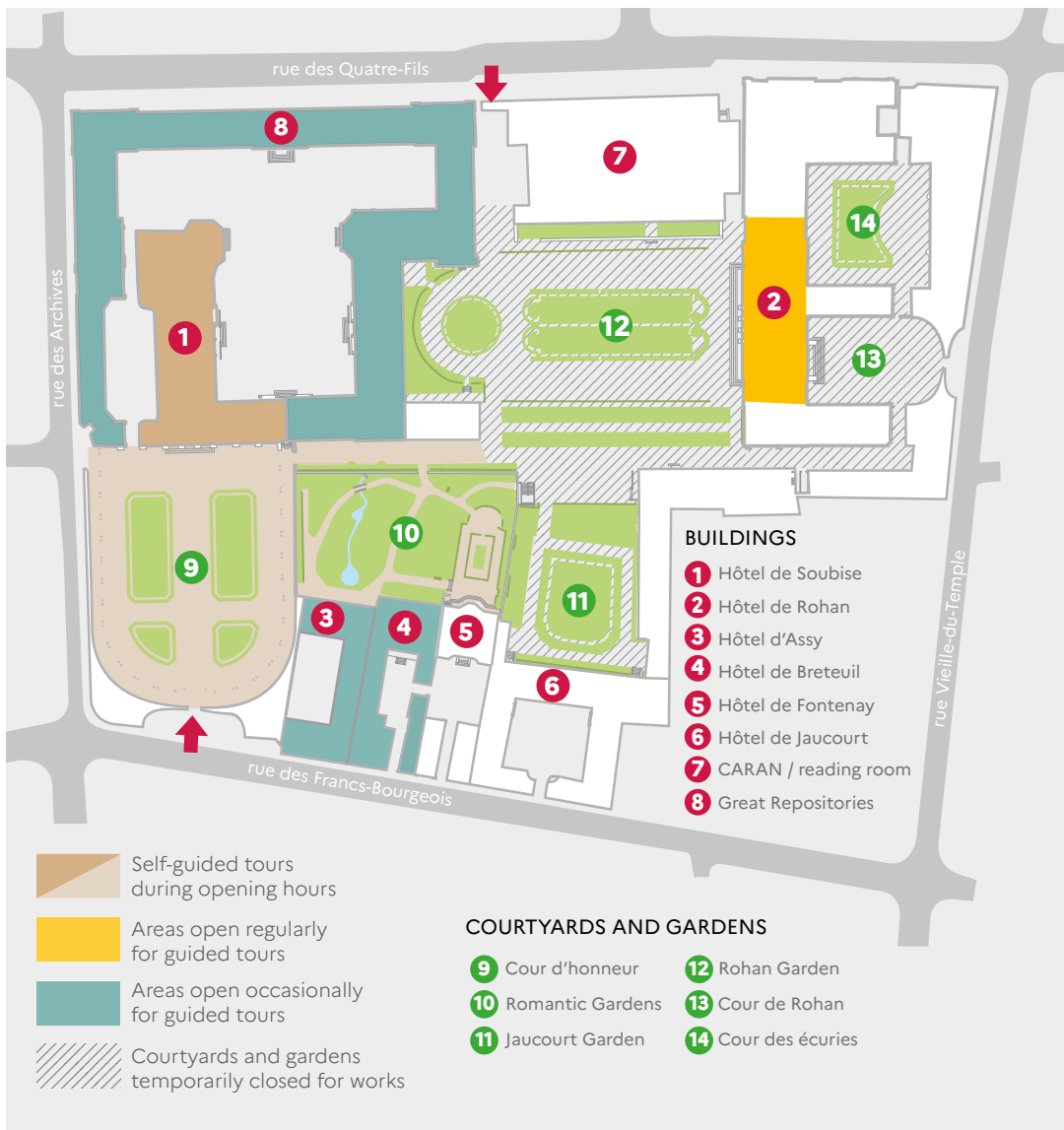
As early as 1789, the French Constituent Assembly created an archive service, which was renamed "Archives Nationales" on 12 September 1790. The law of 7 Messidor An II (25 June 1794) defined the remit of this institution, headed by Armand Gaston Camus. The legislator's intention was to centralise and preserve the papers of the new regime, to take charge of the archival heritage of the monarchy and to ensure the widest possible access to these documents. Since then, regardless of changing governments, the National Archives have been collecting, classifying, conserving, communicating and enhancing the value of documents produced and deposited, as they are required to do by law, by the central bodies of the French State, guided in their daily practice by advances in archival science. Local archive services receive "deposits" from the regions, departments, municipalities and decentralised State services. In addition to public archives, these services also preserve the papers of private individuals, companies and organisations who wish to deposit their records with them.

The National Archives of France, part of the French Ministry of Culture, has been Europe's largest archive centre since the construction of its second site at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, inaugurated in 2013. As a depository for France's records, they preserve the archives of the French State dating as far back as the Middle Ages, those of Parisian notaries and private archives of national interest, making them available to the public. Through exhibitions, publications and numerous outreach activities, the National Archives contribute to disseminating knowledge of history and civic values with all publics, particularly young people.

A gallery of Napoleon III repositories built by Hubert Janniard between 1859 and 1865.







FREE ENTRY

COURTYARDS AND GARDENS OPENING TIMES

Summer: 8am-8pm
Winter: 8am-6pm

MUSEUM OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES Hôtel de Soubise

60, rue des Francs-Bourgeois
75003 Paris

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday,
Friday: 10am-5:30pm

Saturday, Sunday:
2pm-5:30pm (2pm-7pm during
major exhibitions)

Closed on Tuesdays and
1st January, 1st May,
25th December

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