WEDDING at the PALACE of VERSAILLES



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In 1770, Claude-Louis Desrais created a painting which depicts the marriage ceremony of Louis-Auguste, the Dauphin of France, to Marie Antoinette. They were still teenagers.

Marie Antoinette was fifteen years old on the day she last saw her mother. Departing for France and a <u>husband</u> she had never met, she faced life in a country whose people she did not know and whose language she did not well understand.

Joseph Weber, the son of Antoinette's former nurse and an eyewitness to her departure from the Hofburg palace, described what he saw and heard as the empress held her child a final time:

Adieu, my dear daughter; a great distance is going to separate us, but be just, be humane and imbued with a sense of the duties of your rank and I will always be proud of the regrets which I shall always feel ... Do so much good to the people of France that they will be able to say that I have sent them an angel. (Joseph Weber, quoted by Deborah Cadbury in The Lost King of France, page 5.)

It took a week for the young bride to travel from <u>Vienna</u>, through <u>Bavaria</u>, to the <u>Rhine River</u> near <u>Kehl</u>. Across <u>the river</u> was France, and the town of <u>Strasbourg</u>. But before the Austrian archduchess could meet the French courtiers waiting for her, she needed to complete a symbolic ritual.

On an island in the middle of <u>the Rhine</u>, a wooden pavilion had been built. Entering that building from the eastern side was an Austrian archduchess, betrothed to the dauphin of France. Leaving it, on the west side, was a young woman who had just stripped away all connections to her own country—<u>including her clothes</u>. Madame Antoine entered the pavilion; Marie Antoinette left it.

With her entourage, Marie Antoinette—now the <u>dauphine</u>—continued to <u>Compiegne</u> (about forty miles <u>northeast</u> of <u>Paris</u>). There, after traveling twenty-three days, she met <u>her fiancé</u> for the first time.

Marie Theresa's ambassador to France gave the empress a description of her new son-in-law. It was not flattering:

Nature seems to have denied everything to Monsieur le dauphin. In his bearing and words, the prince displays a very limited amount of sense, great plainness and no sensitivity. (Quoted by Cadbury, page 6.)

In fairness, the future king had never expected to rule France. His grandfather was the long-reigning <u>Louis XV</u>. His parents died before he was a teenager and, while a young boy, Louis-Auguste lived in the shadow of his older brother.

After the heir-to-throne also died, the new dauphin worried whether he could fulfil the expectations his future now demanded. Throwing himself into his studies, especially history, he also indulged his passion for making locks. He even had a forge built next to his library.

On May 16, 1770, the young couple were married at Versailles. Six thousand people attended a reception in the

Hall of Mirrors, and a lavish wedding dinner honored the bride and groom at Versailles' new Opera House.

In time, the young couple's love for each other grew. The people of Paris initially loved them, too. On June 8, 1773, Louis and Marie Antoinette visited the city where 200,000 cheering fans welcomed them. It is said the governor of Paris, Louis Hercule Timolon de Cossé (the <u>Duc de Brissac</u>), told Antoinette:

Madame, they are two hundred thousand of your lovers.

Had <u>the young couple</u> been given more time to prepare, perhaps they could have more wisely presided over Europe's then-most-populous country (of 25 million people). But in the spring of 1774—when Marie Antoinette was 19 years old—Louis XV developed a fever, and a severe headache, while eating dinner.

It was the beginning of the end for the once-handsome monarch.

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Media Stream



Louis-Auguste - Future King Louis XVI

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Vienna as It was During Marie Antoinette's Childhood

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Kehl - Map Locator

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Rivers of Germany

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Strasbourg

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Rhine River - Map

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Compiegne

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Compiegne - Location in France

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<u>Paris - View of the City</u> Image online, courtesy Davidson Galleries website. PD

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<u>Dauphin of France - Louis-Auguste</u> Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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<u>Duc de Brissac</u> Image online, courtesy Flickr.

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Hall of Mirrors - Versailles
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<u>Louis XV</u> Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress. PD

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Louis XV with Marie Antoinette

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Marriage of Louis-Auguste and Marie Antoinette Image described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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