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After the revolution began, it seems the king never doubted he would be killed. The question was: How would it happen? Hearing rumors that an assassin would end his life when France celebrated the third anniversary of the Bastille's fall, Louis told Madame Campan:

...they will not assassinate me; their scheme is changed; they will put me to death another way.

Of one thing the king was sure. He did not want to repeat the mistakes of Charles I, the British monarch who lost his head to an axe during the English Civil War. Antoinette discussed this with her assistant:

...he had long since observed to her [the queen] that all which was going forward in France was an imitation of the revolution in England in the time of Charles I, and that he was incessantly reading the history of that unfortunate monarch in order that he might act better than Charles had done at a similar crisis. "I begin to be fearful of the King's being brought to trial," continued the Queen; "as to me, I am a foreigner; they will assassinate me. What will become of my poor children?"

(Campan, Book 6, Chapter 7 - scroll down 75%.)

On the 11th of December, 1792 - while the king and his family, including his sister Elizabeth, were confined in different quarters of the Temple Prison - Louis was indicted for all sorts of crimes. Revolutionaries argued about whether he should be given a trial. (What would happen to the revolution if the king, for example, were found innocent?)

A trial did take place, with Louis defended by the respected lawyer Malesherbes, but the charges were specious and the evidence slim. Nonetheless, judgment against him was a foregone conclusion. No one voted in his favor.

However, the King's sentence was not as close as one might think. When the final vote was taken on the 19th of January, 1793, Louis XVI - at the time referred to as "Citizen Capet" - was condemned by a vote of 380 to 310.

Louis was sentenced to death by guillotine.

The King spent time with his family, at Temple Prison, the day before he died. Although he promised to see them again the following morning, he couldn't make himself go through the pain of another parting.

The former monarch asked for Henry Essex Edgeworth de Firmont, an Irish cleric whose family had moved to France, to be his spiritual advisor and confessor during his final hours. Edgeworth wrote an account of the January 21, 1793 execution:

The steps that led to the scaffold were extremely steep in ascent. The king was obliged to hold to my arm, and by the pains he seemed to take, feared that his courage had begun to weaken; but what was my astonishment when, upon arriving at the last step, I saw him escape, so to speak, from my hands, cross the length of the scaffold with firm step to impose silence, by a single glance, upon ten or fifteen drummers who were in front of him, and with a voice so strong that it could be heard at the Pont-Tournant, distinctly pronounce these words forever memorable: "I die innocent of all the crimes imputed to me. I pardon the authors of my death, and pray God that the blood you are about to shed will never fall upon France."

The executioners seized him, the knife struck him, his head fell at fifteen minutes after ten. The executioners seized it by the hair, and showed it to the multitude, whose cries of "Long live the Republic!" resounded to the very bosom of the Convention, whose place of meeting was only a few steps from the place of execution.

Thus died, at the age of thirty-eight years, four months, and twenty-eight days, Louis, sixteenth of his name, whose ancestors had reigned in France for more than eight hundred years.

Immediately after the execution, the body of Louis was transported to the cemetery of the ancient Church of the Madeleine. It was placed in a pit six feet square, close to the wall of the Rue d'Anjou, and dissolved instantly by a great quantity of quicklime with which they took the precaution to cover it.

In ten months, Marie Antoinette would meet a similar fate.

Both the king of France, and his queen, had to face the guillotine - a method of beheading people. What was the guillotine, and how did it become so closely associated with the French Revolution?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/EXECUTION-of-LOUIS-XVI-Marie-Antoinette>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/EXECUTION-of-LOUIS-XVI-Marie-Antoinette>

Media Stream



Bastille - Attack and Fall

Image online, courtesy the World Visit Guide website.

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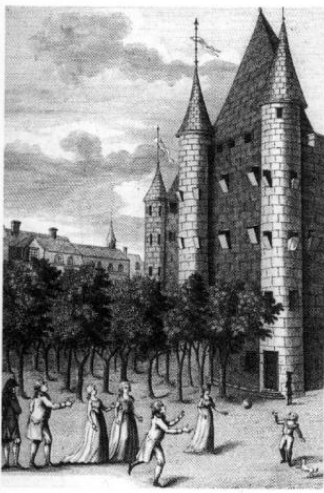
King Louis XVI and Family - Confined

Image online, courtesy the wikigallery.org website.

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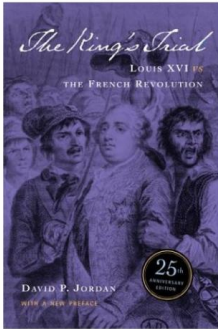


Temple Prison

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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The King's Trial - by David P. Jordan

Image online, courtesy the amazon.com website.

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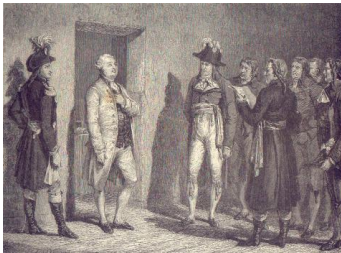


The Trial of Louis XVI

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Louis XVI - When a King became a Citizen

Image, described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Louis XVI - Time with His Family before Execution

Image of Louis XVI with his family, at the Temple, the day before his execution; online, courtesy Le Roi et Moi (a French-language website which is now offline).

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Louis XVI - Saying Good-Bye to the Children

Image of Louis XVI with his children, at the Temple, the day before his execution; online, courtesy Le Roi et Moi (a French-language website which is now offline).

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Henry Essex Edgeworth - Witness to Louis XVI's Death

Image of Henry Essex Edgeworth, online courtesy Nobility.org

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Louis XVI - At the Scaffold

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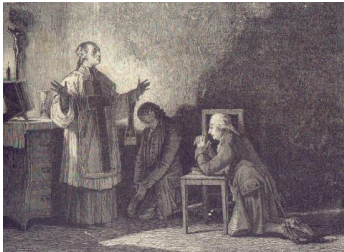


Louis XVI - Death Mask

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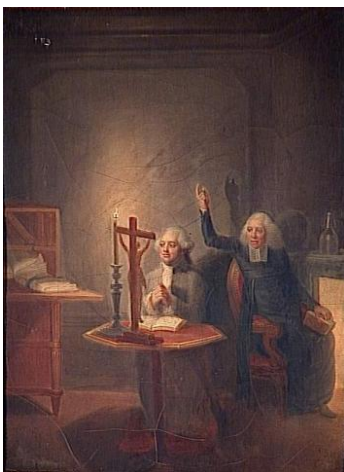


Louis XVI - Final Hours

Image of Louis XVI with his spiritual advisor - Henry Essex Edgeworth de Firmont, an Irish cleric who had moved to France - at the Temple, the day before his execution; online, courtesy Le Roi et Moi (a French-language website which is now offline).

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Louis XVI - Praying the Night before His Execution

Image of Louis XVI praying with his spiritual advisor - Henry Essex Edgeworth de Firmont, an Irish cleric who had moved to France - at the Temple, the night before his execution; online, courtesy Le Roi et Moi (a French-language website which is now offline).

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Louis XVI and Family - Under Guard

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