A little **history**

Ceremonial rewards have existed since Antiquity. The "orders of chivalry" were born during the Crusades to treat and defend the sick and pilgrims.



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1. The Count of Provence wearing the blue ribbon of the Cross of the Holy-Spirit.

2. The Cross of Saint-Louis.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The Hospitallers of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem used to take the three solemn vows of the Roman Catholic religion in the same way as did members of monastic orders: "obedience, poverty, and chastity."

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The insignia of the Orders of the Holy-Spirit and of Saint-Michael are called the "Orders of the King.

The Orders* before the Revolution

Three Orders can be mentioned: the Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem – later called the Knights of Malta – the Templars, and the Teutonic Knights.

These Orders, placed under the protection of the Pope, could elect their grand masters without the interference of any outside authority.

Kings and princes created new associations in imitation of these Orders, also with rules (ordo) and a "grand master".

** The words followed by an asterisk are explained in the lexicon page 46.*

The creation of La Légion d'honneur

The First Consul would have spoken of La Légion d'honneur for the first time during a dinner at Malmaison*. Cambacérès, Second Consul, designed the plan for it.

This new secular and universal Order combined, by their merits, military men and civilians into a single organisation.

This very original idea has allowed La Légion d'honneur to exist during all the political regimes without ever being called into question.

On 29 Floréal, Year 10 (19 May 1802), the law setting up La Légion d'honneur was voted. The first article stipulated that "in execution of Article 87 of the Constitution regarding military rewards and also to reward civilian services and virtues, a "Légion d'honneur" is to be created. The First Consul is, by right, "head of the Legion*" and President of the Grand Council that appoints members of La Légion d'honneur."

The naturalist* Bernard de Lacépède was appointed Grand Chancellor. He set the headquarters of La Légion d'honneur in Paris, at the Hôtel de Salm, where it is still today.

On 11 July 1804, an Imperial decree established the outward signs of La Légion d'honneur: the "star", also called the "eagle", in silver for legionnaires*, in gold for senior ranks (officers, commanders, grand officers); it was worn in the buttonhole.



The Hôtel de Salm.

Did you know that...

Honour weapons made up the main reward of the Consulate. Bonaparte presented more than 2,000 of them.



Knight: the insignia of knight is made of silver, 40 mm in diameter, suspended from a red moiré ribbon



Officer: the insignia is in silver-gilt and the ribbon bears a rosette in the centre



Commander: the insignia of commander is gold, 60 mm in diameter, suspended from a moiré ribbon

Merits of **yesterday** and **today**

In its two centuries of existence, La Légion d'honneur has welcomed almost a million citizens to its different grades. If, in the past, the Order rewarded a majority of military folk, henceforth it welcomes to its bosom all the professions that make up French society. Today, there are about 93,000 people decorated with La Légion d'honneur.



On the 8th of April 1915, was created, besides existing decorations, the War Cross (La Croix de Guerre) designed to reward individual citations for war deeds in the service of armed forces.

The conditions of entry into the Order have evolved, and different sectors of activity are progressively represented.

From 1802 to 1914

During this period, because of the numerous military campaigns of the First and Second Empires, the proportion of military people in the ranks of those decorated rose to about 75%. However, Napoleon at first, and then his successors, did not fail to reward civilians whose first groups date from 1803. Thus, alongside soldiers and high dignitaries of the State, we find physicians (Corvisart), industrialists (Delessert), scientists (Cuvier, Monge, Montgolfier) along with artists (David, Gros, Gérard, Houdon), architects (Fontaine, Peyre), and musicians and writers.

During the July Monarchy, the Order was opened to craftsmen, small entrepreneurs and local tradesmen. With the growth of industry during the Second Empire, La Légion d'honneur continued to represent all sections of industry in the country, such as some important figures in the industrial world: the car manufacturers Robert Peugeot and Adrien Panhard, the inventors of photography

The Museum of La Légion d'honneur

Beside the central administration of the Grand Chancellery is the Museum of La Légion d'honneur and the Orders of Chivalry.

The Museum and its collections

The Museum of La Légion d'honneur and Orders of Chivalry gives a dominant place to the premier French national Order. In 1911, an exhibition took place at the Musée des arts décoratifs (Museum of Decorative Arts) entitled "La Légion d'honneur et les décorations françaises" ("La Légion d'honneur and French Decorations"), which had a great success. The photographer Maurice Bucquet (1860-1921), the instigator of this exhibition, had the idea of giving it a permanent nature and played a determining role in the creation of the Museum to which he bequeathed his entire collections of decorations, medals, books, drawings and prints, autographs and various other objects.

The Grand Chancellor at the time, General Dubail, a hero of the Great War (1914-1918), decided to turn over the whole east wing of the Hôtel de Salm to the Museum. To set it up, he launched a subscription* among the legionnaires. Faced with the lack of success he encountered, he was ready to give up when an American commercial lawyer, William Nelson Cromwell, made a personal donation to La Légion d'honneur which allowed the Museum to be finished under the direction of the architect, Jean de la Morinerie, in 1925.

Throughout its various rooms, one can today admire



Grand cross breast star given by Napoleon III to his Minister of State, Eugène Rouher.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the United States, who had known the Hôtel de Salm when he was Ambassador in Paris, took inspiration from it when he built "Monticello".

SMLH

SOCIETE DES MEMBRES
DE LA LEGION D'HONNEUR

The SMLH is regulated by the Administrative Council of 21 members, elected for three years and renewable by thirds, from among whom a board is elected as well as a president.

All are elected by members at the national general assembly. Different committees take part in the life of the association.

The Association is also present abroad, with strong dynamic sections (among others, Switzerland, Brazil, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Australia, Greece...)

By striving to ensure the dignity of life of legionnaires and their widows in adversity and by defending the moral and material interests of its members, the Society contributes to the prestige of the Order, which makes its actions the natural prolongation of those of the Grand Chancellery.

Since 1964, the SMLH publishes a quarterly journal, "La Cohorte" ("The Cohort").

It also places at the disposal of its members, two residences for rest, relaxation and holidays and which facilities also allow for the organisation, in a prestigious setting, of receptions, cocktail parties, buffets and meals for family occasions.

__William Nelson Cromwell__ (1854-1958), American lawyer and patron of the arts, spent a large part of his life in Paris. A passionate defender of the Panama Canal, he was also responsible for the Memorial to the Lafayette Squadron, the reconstruction of the lace school at Bailleul, a printing shop for text and music in Braille... He was also one of the instigators of the creation of the "American Society of the French Legion of Honour", housed on Fifth Avenue, New York.

"Honneur en action" ("Honour in Action")

In 2010, the SMLH was mobilised to "advance society", according to the words of the President, General Hervé Gobilliard. The initiative, suggested to the 60,000 members, was that they submit and participate in one or more concrete projects. As in a competition, each project was studied by a jury made up of ten members who devoted themselves to selecting 30 projects which could receive a sum of money up to 5,000 euros. This financial aid was possible thanks particularly to partnerships linking Honneur en action with major French firms who took part in developing projects. Not all required so much financing.