



## Chronicles of Old Paris: Exploring the Historic City of Light

*By John Baxter*

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Discover one of the world's most fascinating and beautiful cities through 30 dramatic true stories spanning the rich history of Paris. John Baxter takes readers through 2,000 years of French history with tales of the kings, queens, saints, and sinners who shaped the city. Essays explore the major historic events from the martyrdom of Saint Denis near today's Abbesses Métro station to the epic romances of Heloise and Abelard, Josephine and Napoleon, and George Sand and Frédéric Chopin. Learn about the labyrinth of catacombs snaking under all of Paris and the artists who called the seedy Montmartre home in the 19th century. Then see it all for yourself with guided walking tours of each of Paris's historic neighborhoods, illustrated with color photographs and period maps.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

This lovely, gorgeous and intelligent book examines the Paris of old and not so old, with its many fascinating figures and tales. Included in the short but insightful chapters are Marie Antoinette, whom author John Baxter calls misunderstood; the famous Paris Commune; the man behind the Eiffel Tower; Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Maurice Utrillo and other painters of the bohemian community of Montmartre; Paris and the Beat Generation; and the new wave films of Godard and Truffaut. Also here are Marcel Proust, Coco Chanel, Ernest Hemingway and Josephine Baker. Baxter describes detailed walking tours of the area surrounding the Paris Opera and the adjacent grand boulevards of Paris. He also includes the seedy but always fascinating Pigalle neighborhood and its Moulin Rouge dance hall, which is, Baxter notes, an expensive cabaret/restaurant and still features the can-can. There are the charming if touristy Montmartre; the crowded Latin Quarter and Notre Dame; the Saint-Germain-des-Pres neighborhood, once the haunt of jazz musicians, philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and members of the Lost Generation; the Luxembourg Gardens; artsy Montparnasse; and the Eiffel Tower. In addition to its fascinating details, the book is lavishly illustrated.

—Chicago Tribune

Coco Chanel spent her teens during the late 1900s in a convent, where she learned the useful trade of dressmaking. This experience provided the foundation for the legendary French couturier's famed suits and "little black dresses." Chanel's story is just one chapter in the book *Chronicles of Old Paris: Exploring the Historic City of Light*. This fascinating read contains twenty-nine chapters, each including a brief story, photos, illustrations, and often a map of the area of the city where the tale took place. While this is a nonfiction book, it reads like fiction, whereby the reader journeys through Paris at different times in its history, through the stories of famous people and places. "Elle Est Partie! The Theft of the Mona Lisa" tells of the theft of the iconic painting from the Musee de Louvre in August, 1911. While the painting was ultimately found and the thief caught, the details of the heist and the mystery surrounding possible copies of the painting sold for a fortune make for a fascinating read. Marie Antoinette, wife of King Louis XVI, and infamous for telling her starving subjects, "Let them eat cake," was apparently innocent of that remark, according to Baxter. Was she also innocent of the many other wrongdoings for which she was accused and eventually executed in 1793? Many such stories have mysterious endings. In each of these short, punchy thumbnail sketches, readers learn about people in Paris but also about its history over the past several centuries. Marcel Proust, the Marquis de Sade, Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine, in addition to well-known and not so well-known authors, painters, architects, and courtesans, are among those presented. Who knew that the notorious guillotine was named after its designer, Dr. Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a curiously staunch opponent of capital punishment? At the end of a chapter on Jean Moulin, leader of the French resistance against the Nazi occupation, a page is devoted to memorials to Moulin. It tells where Moulin's ashes are interred, indicates the building where the first meeting of the resistance committee took place, and describes the Musee Jean Moulin, where the French hero's papers are on display. A map pinpoints those areas for tourists and Paris residents, as well as the armchair visitor. The style of writing is crisp and newsy.

Small enough to carry in one's purse or briefcase, *Chronicle of Old Paris* can be opened during a lull, sitting in the doctor's waiting room or riding a bus, and the reader treated to a fascinating tale about the famous and infamous City of Lights.

—ForeWord

Continuing the publisher's series (after James Roman's *Chronicles of Old Las Vegas*), Baxter (*The Most Beautiful Walk in the World: A Pedestrian in Paris*) gives travelers quick insights into the colorful history of Paris. There's something here for everyone, from artists (Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, surrealism, and the artist community of Montmartre) to history buffs (the Resistance) to writers (George Sand and Ernest Hemingway) and musicians (Django Reinhardt and Josephine Baker) to monarchy enthusiasts (Marie Antoinette) and architecture fans (Eiffel Tower, Opera Garnier). Each chapter gives a brief history of the subject matter and a short list of related sites, plus a small map that includes subway stops, though the lack of footnotes and references limits this book's use for a history report or research paper. The end of the guide includes walking tours by neighborhood for those looking for a more traditional, geographic approach. VERDICT A fun, supplemental travel book for those seeking to go beyond the traditional tourist spots an additional guide is necessary for basic travel information. Sara A. Miller, Atlanta-Fulton P.L. Syst.—  
Library Journal

About the Author

**John Baxter** is an Australian writer, journalist, and filmmaker. He is the author of *The Golden Moments of Paris*, *Immoveable Feast: A Paris Christmas*, *The Most Beautiful Walk in the World: A Pedestrian in Paris*, and *We'll Always Have Paris: Sex and Love in the City of Light*.

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