



# La Ferté-Vidame

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# La Ferté-Vidame

land of illustrious memories

The destiny of this city has all it takes to arouse the visitor's curiosity. Created duke and peer of the kingdom by the protective grace of Louis XIII, Claude de Rouvroy, Duke of Saint-Simon (1607-1693) acquired this ancient stronghold - *feriteia* - built in the Middle Ages on the ruins of a rich Gallo-Roman villa, in 1632. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Dukes of Saint-Simon, father and son, affirmed the nobility of a site that had been marked by invasions and religious wars.

Duke Claude commissioned the construction of the Spanish Baroque church of Saint-Nicolas, unusual in the region. His son Louis (1675-1755), memorialist to the reign of Louis XIV and the Regency, was very attached to La Ferté-Vidame, which he visited at Easter, taking the opportunity to retreat to the nearby abbey of La Trappe (Eure) during Holy Week, and then again during the summer and autumn. In his study, he wrote most of his famous *Mémoires*, a monument of French literature.



The purchase of the estate by court banker Jean-Joseph de Laborde (1724-1794) from the Saint-Simon heirs in 1764 ushered in a new era of prosperity. Born a commoner, the new owner of La Ferté-Vidame won titles and honours to the extent he was considered the richest man in the kingdom under Louis XV. He embarked on a colossal project that involved demolishing the medieval château, rebuilding a huge neoclassical château designed by architect Antoine-Mathieu Le Carpentier, landscaping the gardens and ponds, and building a pheasantry and several model farms on his land.

With the help of the same architect, he urbanised the town estate in a fan-shaped layout adjoining a private area. Nearly a thousand hectares of parkland are surrounded by walls, making the estate - even today - the largest French property to be enclosed and not crossed by roads. A large central street lined with private mansions was laid out, then extended by a 13-kilometre long straight line along the axis of the Tour de la Madeleine in Verneuil-sur-Avre.

At the request of Louis XVI, Jean-Joseph de Laborde was forced to sell his château in 1784 to the Duke of Penthièvre. Plundered and dismantled by speculators of the "Black Band" during the French Revolution, the estate was inherited by Louis-Philippe, King of the French, who had the "Petit Château" (former outbuildings) restored by its current owner, the Eure-et-Loir County Council.



## The fiefdom of a memorialist

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1a



1b



2

1a. The outbuildings called “Petit Château” / 1b. The “Petit Château” from above / 2. Saint-Nicolas Church

## The fiefdom of a memorialist

**In 1632, Claude de Rouvroy, future Duke of Saint-Simon, acquired the lands of La Ferté-Vidame. He undertook various major works, but the town owes much of its fame today to his son Louis, author of *Mémoires*.**

### 1 The “Little Castle”

To distinguish it from the castle now in ruins, the people of La Ferté-Vidame refer to the “Petit Château”, converted from former outbuildings (staff quarters and stables) to serve as the residence of Louis-Philippe, King of the French. Regularly occupied since that time, albeit in a much deteriorated state, this vast residence is currently being restored by its current owner, the Eure-et-Loir City Council.

### 2 Saint-Nicolas Church

After acquiring the château in 1635, Claude de Rouvroy, the memorialist’s father, decided to demolish the former religious building, which had become a Protestant temple. To mark the return of Catholicism, he had Saint-Nicolas Church built in the Spanish Baroque style, with a high facade crowned by a domed bell tower, an unusual architectural feature in the Perche region.



3. The former presbytery / 4. La Maison Saint-Simon / 5. The Book Festival

### 3 The old presbytery

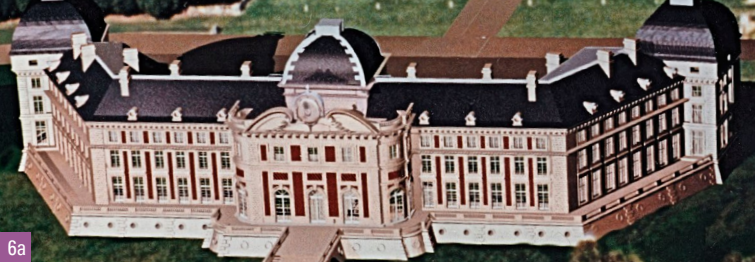
The old presbytery was originally a hospice for the destitute. It was built on the initiative of the young Duchess of Saint-Simon. More recently, the building has been transformed into a Maison des Associations community centre.

### 4 La Maison Saint-Simon

The Mémoires are a monument of French literature. In an ocean of often ferocious portraits and an abundance of anecdotes, the psychology of the men and women competing for honours, offices and rents emerges. This work can explain both the mechanisms of submission and the genesis of revolutions. It has been calculated that a reader will need twelve months at a rate of fifteen hours of reading a week to finish this prose work. The Maison Saint-Simon provides an accessible introduction to the memorialist's thinking.

### 5 The Book Festival

Every September since 1975, the estate has hosted the Prix Saint-Simon ceremony, awarded to an author of memoirs. The event doubles as a book festival, at which numerous authors present and sign their works.



6a



6b



6c

6a. Projection of Laborde Castle / 6b. The castle in the Middle Ages / 6c. Dramatised tours in front of the castle

## The planning period

**Jean-Joseph de Laborde, a merchant and entrepreneur, had great ambitions for his estate. Between 1764 and 1784, with the help - initially - of architect Antoine-Matthieu Le Carpentier, he urbanised the town into a fan-shaped layout adjoining a private area that had also been extensively remodelled.**

### 6 Castle remains

Jean-Joseph de Laborde destroyed the eight-century-old castle, keeping only the cellars and basements. In its place, using the best architects of his day, he built a sumptuous neoclassical castle, and laid out an immense, enclosed park that now covers an area of almost a thousand hectares. His wish was to welcome the most influential men of the time to La Ferté-Vidame. The future Emperor of Austria, Joseph II, paid him a private visit. Having attracted the attention of the royal family, the financier was invited to sell his luxurious home to the Duke of Penthièvre, the king's cousin.

In 1793, under the Terror, the estate was sold as "national property". Speculators took over and dismantled the entire edifice, leaving only the impressive remains and the outbuildings ("le Petit Château").



7a



7b



9

7a. Paths in the park / 7b. Park and châteaux, views /  
9. Former town house

## 7 The park

The castle's park offers visitors unusual views for a rural town: you can look far out over a landscape that is both man-made and in harmony with nature. Just stand in the heart of the park, in front of the ruins of the former Château de Laborde, and you'll discover a double east-west viewpoint, with a series of four ponds. The architect Le Carpentier even made a large breakthrough to create an optical effect that increases the impression of distance. Surrounded by fourteen kilometres of walls, the estate's 1,000 hectares (including the Citroën centre) make it the largest enclosed estate in France with no roads running through it.

## 8 Avenue Jean-Joseph de Laborde

The city's main thoroughfare, Avenue Jean-Joseph de Laborde, is flanked by 18th-century homes and is a prime example of elegant urban design. This can also be seen in the line of lime trees on Avenue du Général de Gaulle. The central avenue is followed by a thirteen-kilometre straight stretch to Verneuil-sur-Avre.

## 9 Former town house

The building housing the post office was inherited from the 18<sup>th</sup> century planning work. It was the home of the Comte de Meaussé, driver of the Marquis





## 10. The covered market and the town hall

de Chambray's hound hunting team, when La Ferté-Vidame was renowned as one of France's finest hunting grounds in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mansion now houses a post office, a multimedia library and a public services centre.

### 10 The covered market and the town hall

Jean-Joseph de Laborde had the Halles covered market built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A century later, the building was raised to accommodate the town hall. Louis-Philippe gifted this work to the people of La Ferté-Vidame. As "King of the French" from 1830 to 1848, the sovereign and his family wished to enjoy their secondary residence in the estate's outbuildings (now known as the "Petit Château").

### 11 Rues Pauline and Natalie

Two of the town's streets are named after the daughters of Jean-Joseph de Laborde, who was appointed Marquis by Louis XVI in 1784 after ceding his Château de La Ferté-Vidame to the Duke of Penthièvre. They spent part of their childhood there. Natalie had a very romantic destiny. Married to the Duke of Mouchy, she was nicknamed "la petite mouche" ("the little fly") but also "la mieux aimée" ("the best loved") by François-René de Chateaubriand's biographers, who agreed that, of all the mistresses of the author of *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Natalie was the dearest to his heart.





12a



12b



13

12a. The Mousseuse humid forest/ 12b. The “insects” trail  
13. The murals in the Réveillon Chapel

## On the edge of the Perche

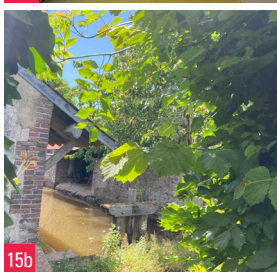
The town has had many names, including one mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> century: La Ferté-au-Perche, indicating its location in the Perche forest. Today, the town is part of the Perche Regional Natural Park. It still bears witness to inhabitant's life in years gone by and its architecture is characteristic of this unspoilt region.

### 12 The Mousseuse humid forest

La Ferté-Vidame covers an area of 4,000 hectares. Forests represent almost 90% of its territory. Listed as a Natura 2000 site, the Mousseuses humid forest helps to safeguard many plant and animal species that are protected at a European level. An educational trail runs through it, allowing visitors to discover different forest stands and some of the sphagnum mosses that have become rare in France. The public can thus familiarise themselves with a mangrove-like environment.

### 13 The Réveillon Chapel

One of La Ferté-Vidame's oldest treasures is the Réveillon Chapel, built of grison, a hard Perche stone, and flint. Initially Romanesque before being altered in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is one of the few places of worship to have preserved its murals intact (13b). A variety of themes reflect the iconography of the Middle



14. Timber-framed houses / 15a and 15b. The wash house

Ages, with a particular focus on angels and demons. The small cemetery houses the tomb of Michel Jobert, who was Secretary General of the Elysée Palace and then Minister under Georges Pompidou and François Mitterrand. The Saint-Hubert trail leads to the chapel, located five kilometres from the centre.

#### 14 Timber-framed houses

The Rue de l'Aqueduc neighbourhood is probably one of the town's oldest. The road that crosses it was once the village's main street, called Rue de Paris. Timber-framed houses (visible or not) stand on either side of this road, attesting to the district's proximity to Normandy as well as its age. The houses at 17 and 19 rue de l'Aqueduc are noteworthy, as is the former post house on Place de l'Etoile.

#### 15 The wash house

This building borders the Lamblore stream and is one of the town's best-preserved examples of local heritage. When you step inside, you can make out the traces of the clogs that dug out the brickwork. These attest to the fact that several generations of La Ferté-Vidame residents regularly used the site.



16a



16b



17

**16a.** Pipe-Souris Racecourse / **16b.** A Percheron /  
**17.** Relais de Poste post house, rear façade

### **16 Pipe-Souris Racecourse**

La Ferté-Vidame is lucky enough to be among the seven racecourses belonging to the Fédération des Courses d'Ile-de-France et de Haute-Normandie. It traditionally hosts harnessed and mounted trotting meetings three times a year, in summer. Since 2021, it has been chosen to take over the business of the Société Hippique de Dreux. The first La Ferté-Vidame races took place on Sunday 23 September 1928 on the former estate of King Louis-Philippe. Various events are now organised, including competitions for Percherons, the horse breed that represents the region (16b). Brought back from the Crusades by the Counts of Perche, these imposing mounts fall into two categories: the heavy horses used for draught work, and the fast ones that once ran from one post house to the next.

### **17 Post house**

The former post house dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The house is located on Rue de la Clouterie (in reference to the iron production in the region since the early Middle Ages). It was here that Louis de Rouvroy, Duke of Saint-Simon, would leave his abundant post. In addition to wood panelling, there is sandstone and sandstone cladding. Nearby, in the courtyard, you can make out the former stables. In the 1990s, the municipality undertook a vast restoration of the entire post house.



# Practical info

## ● Town Hall

18 rue de Laborde  
28340 La Ferté-Vidame  
Tel. 02 37 37 62 45  
[accueil@mairie-lafertevidame.fr](mailto:accueil@mairie-lafertevidame.fr)  
[www.mairie-lafertevidame.fr](http://www.mairie-lafertevidame.fr)

## ● Tourist Office

Pavillon Saint-Dominique  
28340 La Ferté-Vidame  
Tel. 02 37 37 68 59  
[tourisme@foretsduperche.fr](mailto:tourisme@foretsduperche.fr)  
[www.perche-tourisme.fr](http://www.perche-tourisme.fr)

# What to see and do

## ● La Maison Saint-Simon

Pavillon Saint-Dominique  
open April to November  
[www.maisonsaintsimon.com](http://www.maisonsaintsimon.com)

## ● The Réveillon Chapel

Lieu-dit Réveillon, 28340 La Ferté-Vidame  
guided tours on Sundays from June to September

## ● Hiking routes

3 hiking loops of around 10 km each:

- Ponds circuit
- Fief de Saint-Simon circuit
- Sentier Saint-Hubert circuit

Contact the Tourist Office

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**Collaborative text:** Municipality, Petites Cités de Caractère®  
Centre-Val de Loire.

**Proofreading:** Heritage and Inventory Department.

**Photo credits:** Christian Beaudin, Chloé Chauvel, Yohann Hervet,  
Levroux Town Hall, Les Forêts du Perche Tourist Office, La  
Ferté-Vidame Town Hall, Jean Weber.

**Design:** Landeau Création Graphique;  
Eure-et-Loir County Council

**Plan / Map:** Jean-Baptiste Nény, Jérôme Bulard

**Printing:** ITF Imprimeurs (2025)

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