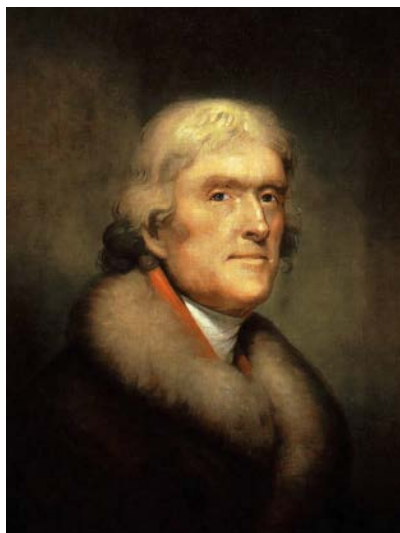


## Jefferson's peregrinations and the Verniquet plan of Paris

*Richard Chenoweth*  
Architect and Designer

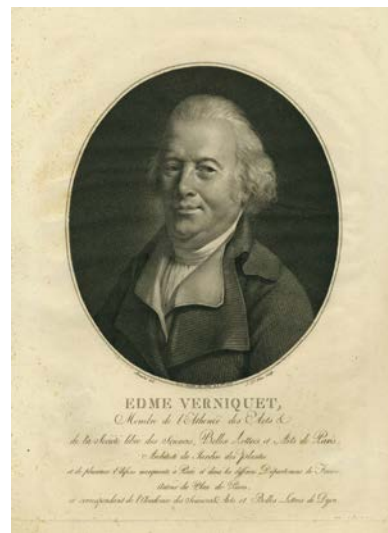
Thomas Jefferson resided in Paris as the United States' Minister to France from August 1784 until September 1789 (Rice, 1976; Adams, 2000; Dumez, 2011). A proponent and practitioner of Enlightenment philosophy, Jefferson was deeply interested in his new bailiwick. He immersed himself immediately in the city's architecture and art, its culture, its viniculture, its leading scientific laboratories and expositions, and its many spheres of cognoscenti in society and politics. The two houses he lived in during his five-year stay, first at Cul-de-sac Taitbout near Boulevard Chaussée d'Antin and then four years at Hotel Langeac on the rue du Berri, placed him in the center of his world. From these houses he explored both the right and left banks of the city – walking his daughter to school at the Abbaye de Penthemont, studying the scale of public monuments, examining the new architecture, and exploring all that the city offered in cultural and scientific advancement. By the time he departed in 1789, he'd made many lifelong friends and correspondents. Jefferson's dear friend Madame de Tessé, who lived in the beautiful Chateau de Chaville designed by Boullée (near the center of modern day Chaville), wrote to Jefferson about how important his peregrinations would be to future generations:

[...] je me suis élancée dans les siècles à venir, et j'ai distingué la jeunesse américaine lisant avec ardeur et admiration tout ce qu'on aura Recueilli de vos voyages. Lorsque la Richesse de son sol et l'excellence de son gouvernement auront porté l'Amérique Septentrionale au plus haut degré de Splendeur, que le midi suivra son exemple, que vous aurés donné des soins à la moitié du globe, on cherchera peutêtre les vestiges de Paris comme on fait aujourd'huy ceux de l'antique Babylone, et les mémoires de Mr. Jefferson conduiront les voyageurs avides des antiquités Romaines et Françaises qui se confondront alors. (Letter from Madame de Tessé, 30 March 1787, Library of Congress)



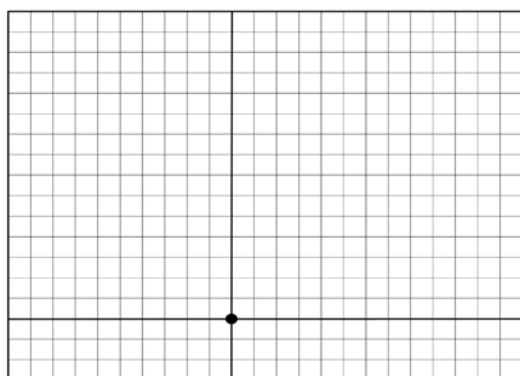
*Portrait de Jefferson,  
Rembrandt Peale (1805)*

*Edme Verniquet from the Butler  
University Pelton Botanical Print  
Collection*

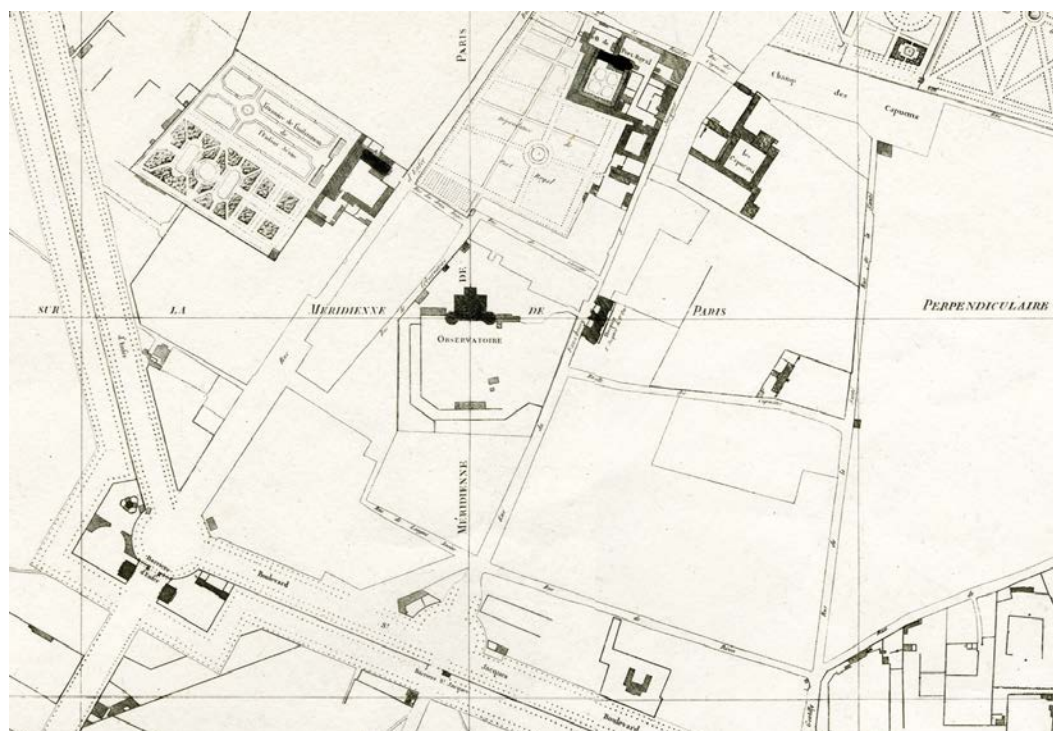


An architect and map maker named Edme Verniquet, also was living in Paris in the decade of the 1780s, but there is no indication that he and Jefferson were acquainted. He is not mentioned in any of Jefferson's contemporary letters. Jefferson might have known Verniquet, however, or at least his name, as the Architect du Jardin des Plantes, a conservatory Jefferson frequented for his botanical studies. Jefferson's friend and colleague Georges-Louis Leclerc the comte de Buffon was the Intendant of the Jardin des Plantes (the name changed in 1793 to Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle), and Verniquet worked for him designing structures at the conservatory.

By the time Jefferson arrived in Paris, Verniquet already had been working for more than a decade on something very different though—a very ambitious and accurate plan of the city based on the Meridian of the Observatory. Verniquet's 72-sheet folio, *Atlas du Plan Général de la Ville de Paris*, finished in 1791 and published in the Year IV (1795), was not in Jefferson's personal library, though Jefferson would have relished a copy. The Verniquet Plan came to be considered the most complete and accurate Paris plan for the next hundred years.



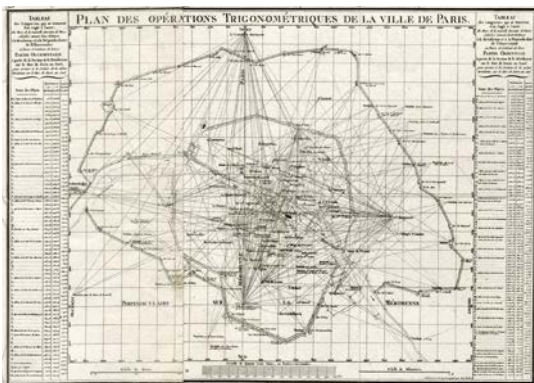
*A diagram of the entire plan*



*The plan's origin – The Paris Observatory*

Like Jefferson, Verniquet was a man of the Enlightenment. His method for documenting 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris was based on an elaborate system of surveying and triangulation. Verniquet divided the entire subject map area into a grid of 23 squares in the horizontal dimension and 18 squares in the vertical dimension, with each square being 22 cm and indicating topographic dimensions of 200 toises on the ground (the toise is six feet long; at that time, the toise in Paris was 1,949 meters – therefore,

each 200 toise square is about 389.8 square meters). The origin of this grid was Paris's Observatory. A Prime Meridian coursed North-South (map North) through the Observatory with ten squares to the West and thirteen squares to the East. A Perpendicular Meridian coursed East-West through the origin with three squares to the South and fifteen squares to the North. With his city thus scalable, oriented and divided into digestible segments, Verniquet triangulated all of the major landmarks in the city relative to known positions, such as the city's perimeter barrières. Using trigonometry, he developed a very accurate plan that was able to be checked and verified multiple ways. If each of the resulting 72 map sheets were placed together (each sheet grid being 3×2), the entire Verniquet Plan would measure 5.06 meters (h) × 3.96 meters (v). It was a masterpiece of cartography. His surveyors and engineers numbered over a hundred, and worked at night to avoid congestion in the streets, and it's interesting to muse that perhaps Jefferson's carriage passed the surveyors in the darkness.



The beautiful map was designed and engraved by Paul Thomas Bartholomé and A. J. Mathieu and included engraved handwriting by Francois-Joseph Bellanger. The facsimile edition of 1880, which reduces the map's scale to 1/3 the size of the original (e.g., a 3×2 grid is reduced in its horizontal dimension from 66 cm to 22 cm) was engraved by Heliog Dujardin and printed by Ch. Chardon.

How was it that Jefferson and Verniquet did not cross paths, then, in their overlapping worlds of math and science, architecture, botany, and common friendships? In an effort to introduce them, together again for the first time, the author will illustrate several of Jefferson's favorite destinations in Paris using the Verniquet Plan. The Verniquet Plan is the perfect device for demonstrating Jefferson's love for the city because it shows not only the rich formal detail of urban design, as is found in the Nolli Plan of Rome, but also luscious engraved detail of gardens and courtyards, typical of 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Jefferson would have admired greatly Verniquet's work for its depth of information as well as its scientific underpinnings, the qualities that made it the touchstone Paris plan for the next century.

Following are five detail examples from the Verniquet Plan of Jefferson's favorite places and a ground level image from a contemporary painting ■

*The diagram showing Verniquet's triangulation*

*Overall plan courtesy author*

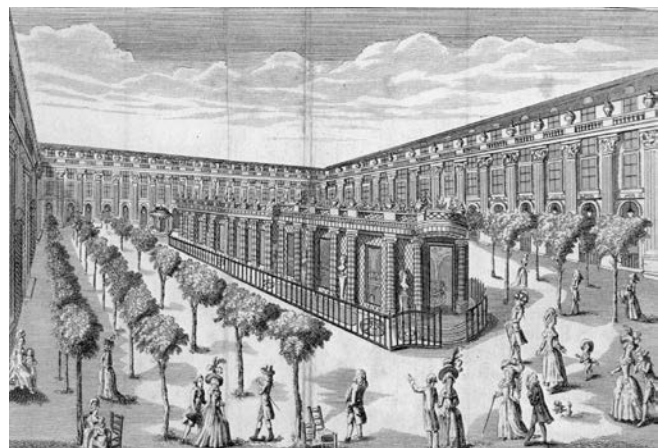


**Tuileries  
hôtel de Salm**

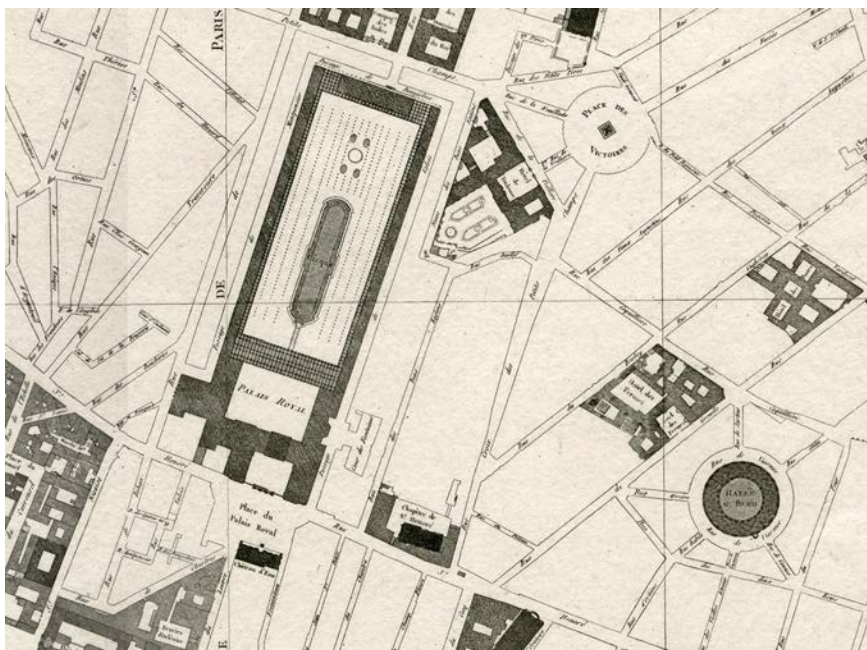
Jefferson frequented the Tuileries, on his way to the Pont Royal or to gaze upon the hôtel de Salm, being built across the river (now the Légion d'honneur). Jefferson wrote to Madame de Tessé that he was "violently smitten" by the hôtel de Salm. (Letter, 20 March 1787).



*Charge du Prince de Lambesc  
aux Tuileries, 12 Juillet 1789,  
Jean-Baptiste Lallemand (date inconnue)*



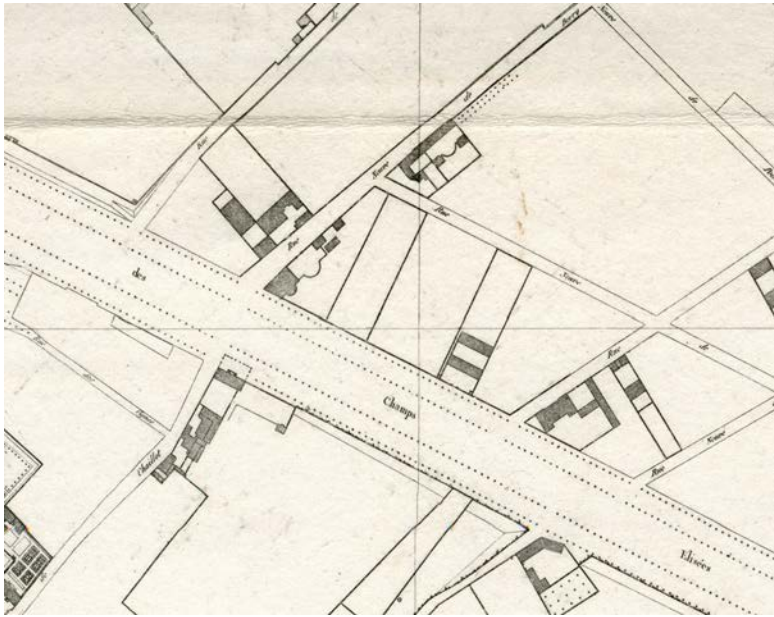
*Le jardin du Palais Royal*



**Palais Royal  
halle aux bleds**

The Palais Royal was a new development when Jefferson arrived in Paris, offering high prices and a parade of society. Jefferson's first meeting with Maria Cosway was at the halle aux bleds, which he later described to her in a letter as the, "most superb thing on earth". The halle later became a model for the design of the U.S. Capitol's roof, which had to be adapted by H. Benjamin Latrobe (Chenoweth, 2011).

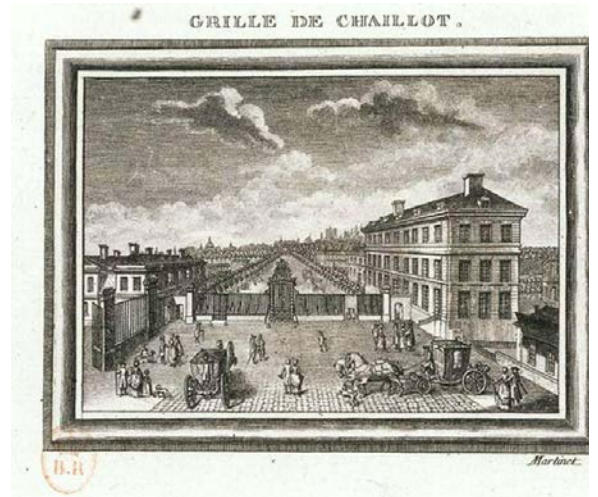




**Hôtel Langeac  
rue du Berri**

Many of his long walks and explorations began and ended at his residence at hôtel Langeac and the grille de Chaillot at the intersection with the Champs Elysées.

La grille de Chaillot et l'hôtel de Langeac, résidence de Jefferson (à gauche)

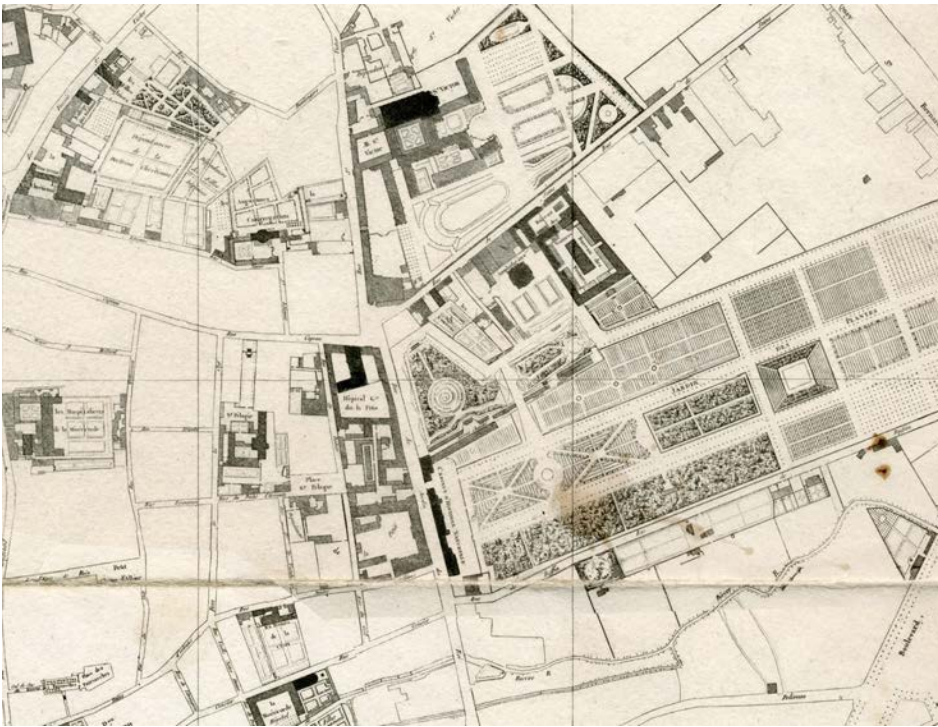


Carmontelle présentant les clés du parc Monceau au duc de Chartres, anonyme (XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)

**Parc Monceau**

An elaborate park of fantastic follies near Jefferson's house, Parc Monceau was designed by the painter Louis Carrogis Carmontelle.





### **Jardin des Plantes**

*A scientific destination for Jefferson was the Jardin du Roi, under the direction of his friend and colleague, the Comte de Buffon.*

*Jardin des Plantes,  
l'amphithéâtre de Verniquet (1787-1788)*



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