

# The Wood Panelling in Québec's Parliament Building

In keeping with the motto *Je me souviens*, the Parliament Building of Québec is like an open book, presenting us with a gallery of illustrious historical figures.

## Christian Blais

The Parliament Building is a fitting tribute to the women and men who shaped the history of Québec. Engraved on the wainscotting inside the building are the names of 84 historical figures.

In the Main Hall of Parliament, all the coats of arms commemorate important figures from the French

Lower Canada are featured; beside the Legislative Council Chamber, the same is done for members of the Upper Chamber. Many of these parliamentarians were members of the first Parliament in 1792.

While the collection reflects the politics that pit the patriots against the bureaucrats, the figures who stand

Québec National Assembly  
collection Édouard De Blay



Eugène-Étienne Taché left empty spaces so future generations could pay tribute to individuals of their choosing. In 2013, to mark the 350th anniversary of the creation of the Sovereign Council, the names of new historical figures were inscribed into the wood panels. Bourdon, Lemire, Hertel and Taché were all elected by the people of New France as their representatives.

Regime and are arranged symmetrically to create a harmonious flow. The shields facing each other represent similar historical figures. For example, an explorer is across from an explorer, an intendant is across from an intendant, and so on.

On the first floor, next to the National Assembly Chamber, members of the Legislative Assembly of

out are the moderate reformists, who formed a majority. They defended the interests of the French Canadian nation, while also maintaining an attachment to British parliamentary institutions. Many of them condemned the Act of Union of 1840.

The stairs showcase the Governor General of Canada at the time the building was constructed (1877–1886), the first Lieutenant-Governor of Québec, the first historians of French Canada, Canadian martyrs and renowned bishops.

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*Christian Blais is a historian with the Research Service of the Library of the Quebec National Assembly.*

Main Hall, Parliament Building.

Québec National Assembly collection/  
Clément Allard, photographer

Unfortunately, the archives are silent as to why Eugène-Étienne Taché, the designer who drew the Parliament Building, chose this set of individuals in particular. However, two clues seem to suggest that he drew inspiration from François-Xavier Garneau's book *Histoire du Canada* (1845). Taché mistakenly wrote the name "Verazani" instead of "Verrazzano" on the wood panels, an error Garneau also made in his book. As well, the wood panels bear the name of Sébastien Cabot instead of his father's, Jean Cabot, as Garneau's book focused more on the son than on the father.

In keeping with the motto *Je me souviens*, the Parliament Building of Québec is like an open book, presenting us with a gallery of illustrious historical figures. Both Taché's architectural masterpiece and Garneau's monumental book prove how wrong Lord Durham was when he wrote in his 1839 report that the French Canadians were "a people with no literature and no history."

If the historical figure being commemorated was a noble, the family's coat of arms was engraved in the black walnut panelling.



Québec National Assembly collection/Édouard De Blay, photographer