

Critical acclaim for the first edition of *The Tallest Tower*

“An interesting story interestingly told, and as such it is welcome . . . offers a particularly clear description of Eiffel’s engineering principles, skillfully woven into the narrative.” — *The New York Times*

“Fascinating and highly instructive . . . a book not to miss.” — Janet Flanner, Paris correspondent, *The New Yorker*

“A comprehensive account of the man who designed and built [the tower], the period out of which it came and the significance it has assumed in art, engineering and architecture. The book is written with wit and charm.” — *Los Angeles Times*

“This volume is a delightful illustrated social history of the tower . . . telling the full story of the structure, so intricately twined with contemporary history.” — *Scientific American*

“Mr. Harriss has told the tower’s story with conscientious zest, packing his account with anecdotes and historic details.” — *The Christian Science Monitor*

“Certainly the best biography of a building and the cultural climate which spawned it we’ve read in a very long time.” — *Kirkus Reviews*

“Harriss succeeds admirably . . . This is a well-organized, exceptionally readable book; entertaining, informative, and highly recommended.” — *Library Journal*

“Marvelously evocative portrait of Gustave Eiffel and the technological daring, engineering know-how, and romantic vision which have made his tower a landmark.” — American Library Association *Booklist*

“Pleasant, thorough book . . . the Eiffel Tower emerges as a vibrant flagstaff to freedom, a scientific testing ground, a gigantic frivolity and a surprising aesthetic triumph.” — *Publishers Weekly*

The Tallest Tower

Eiffel and the Belle Époque

New Edition, Revised and Updated



Joseph Harriss

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One

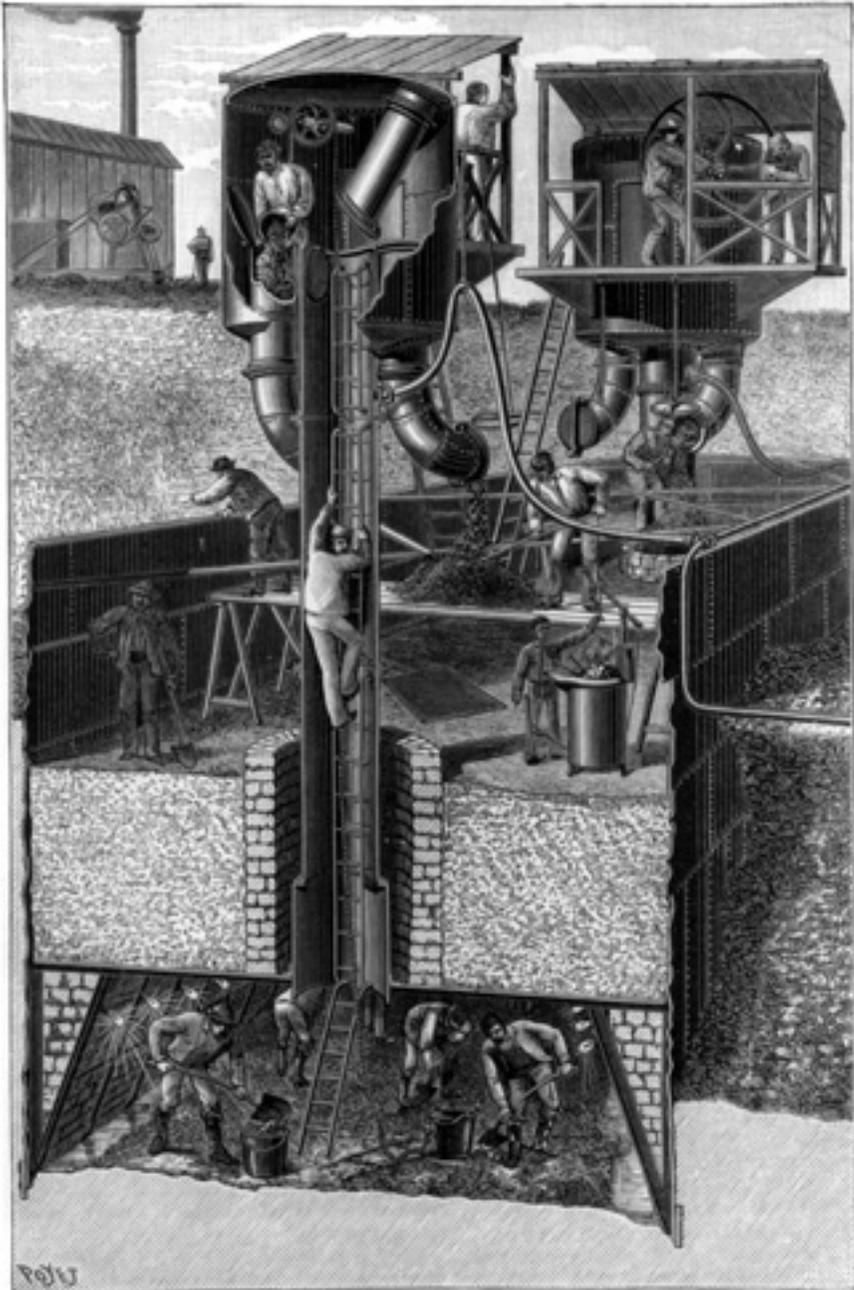
A Fair for France

THE FRENCH WERE not alone in enjoying the momentary state of grace known as the Belle Epoque. Most of northwestern Europe and the northeastern United States experienced it in recognizably similar form—the Gay Nineties. But if France’s euphoria in the last years of the 19th century appears heightened, the impression is perhaps due to a backdrop of travail. For the Franco-Prussian War, in which the Imperial Army of Napoleon III was smashed in a matter of weeks, was not merely a military defeat.

The war led to the loss of France’s large eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, with a population of nearly a million and a half, economically vital mines and industries, and the great city of Strasbourg. Moreover, the settlement that President Adolphe Thiers made with the Germans in February 1871 involved an enormous and debilitating indemnity of five billion francs, or about one billion dollars. It also stipulated that German troops would occupy the country’s eastern region until the sum had been paid.¹

Parisians in particular had borne much of the brunt of the war, undergoing a five-month siege during which they were reduced to eating cats, rats, and the animals in their zoos. No sooner had peace been concluded than the revolt of the Paris Commune broke out on March 18. A political insurrection in the image of those that had shaken Paris sporadically for a century, the Commune revolt was sparked when President Thiers suspended payment to national guardsmen—the only income of many families because of severe unemployment at the time—and ended a moratorium on rents and bills.

Moreover, Parisians felt increasingly isolated and misunderstood when the National Assembly moved to Versailles to escape the seething resentment in the capital. The national guardsmen of



*Cutaway view of the caissons in operation, with air lock at top and work chamber below.
(Collection Tour Eiffel)*



*On completion of his tower, Eiffel poses with his son-in-law, Adolphe Salles, on spiral staircase.
(Collection Viollet)*