Perhaps no figure in the history of science is as famous as Louis Pasteur. Louis Pasteur was born in Dole in Eastern France in 1822. His parents were from humble origins; his father was a tanner by trade. Young Pasteur was not an exceptional student but due to his initial chemical work in optical rotation, he became sparked with the joy of discovery. Pasteur carried out pioneering work in microbiology and immunology, and his efforts to improve the wine and beer industries of France resulted in a new technique: pasteurization, a word which, is now part of our common vocabulary. His work for the wine growers demonstrated that germs were responsible for the souring of wine and beer. To remedy this problem, he developed the process of pasteurization where the bacteria are removed by boiling and then cooling the liquid. After his triumphs over the germs that threatened the wine and beer industries, the French scientist worked diligently to prove microorganisms caused the majority of illnesses.

In the mid 1840's, Pasteur began an impressive series of investigations into the optical activity of organic compounds, and then moved to the study of fermentation and spontaneous generation. By the mid 1860's he was involved in the study of silkworm diseases, a topic that would eventually lead him to investigating a number of infectious diseases and to developing appropriate vaccines.

Louis Pasteur is remembered largely for his efforts on behalf of his “germ theory” and the development of vaccines which have saved countless lives. His name lives on in the Institut Pasteur founded in Paris in 1888 for the treatment of diseases. He served as its director until his death in 1895. Pasteur was recognized as a national hero by the French Government and given a state funeral attended by thousands. He is buried below his beloved Institut in an ornately decorated crypt with mosaics depicting his many contributions to science and medicine.