

Laperouse

Friends of the Laperouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

September - October - November - December, 1994 Vol. 4, No. 4

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On Friday, 15 July Michèle de Tarlé, Patrice Curien, and I met representatives of the NP&WS to discuss the future management of the museum. I believe it was a success - both parties agreed that the current organisational structure was not working and that a clear job description, with focus on the needs of the museum, was essential for the curator, which had not previously been the case. Three major outcomes of the meeting were:

1. Governance of the museum. The NP&WS believe an independent board was difficult to incorporate into their current organisation, but that an "advisory council" with representation from the Friends could function in a managerial and policy role with the goodwill that exists. I support this as a great step forward, providing at the same time a real opportunity for the Friends to maintain active involvement.

2. Five year plan. This has been agreed, and the new curator, Stephen Thompson, is currently completing a draft. It will include a plan to integrate the museum into peninsular activities without compromising its integrity.

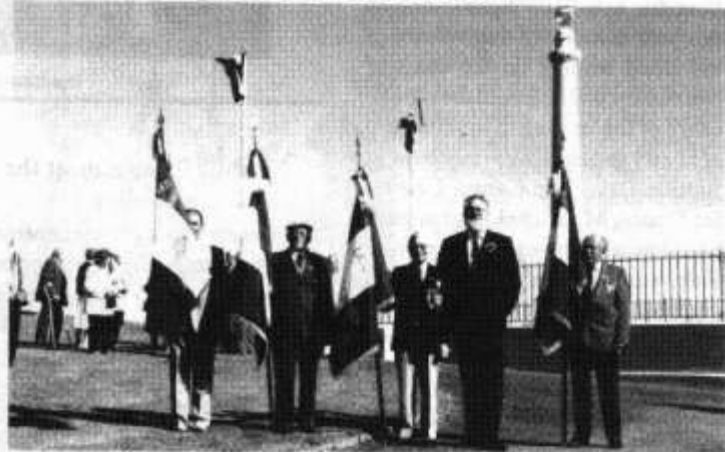
3. The Instrument Room. This has been seen as essential to enable the Museum to take on new challenges. We are now assured that the room will be a focus for museum activities, including temporary exhibitions, and this commitment is to be incorporated into a "Plan for the use of the Instrument Room" to be compiled by the curator.

An occasion of importance is the **Opening of the Instrument Room**. Yes - it has been magnificently restored, funded by the Friends to the tune of \$49,332.81. You have made this event possible, so do attend. It promises to be a splendid evening, and I look forward to meeting those whom I have yet to meet.

There is more - as we now begin a programme of temporary exhibits and related activities. I welcome Stephen Thompson as our new curator, who already has done much for the progress of the museum. I wish him a long and happy association with the museum, and assure him of our support.

Robert Clancy

BASTILLE DAY JULY 14 1994



Banner bearers of NSW Association of French Ex-servicemen, posed with the Consul-General. By Glen Blaxland.

Bastille Day this year was a solemn affair. For once the weather did not fully cooperate, it was a cold day, and on such days there are more pleasant places to be than Botany Bay. But nonetheless the service, though short, went off with its usual precision.

Among those present were, the Consul-General for France in New South Wales, M. Michel Legras; the president of the French Ex-Servicemen's Association and editor of the *Courrier Australien*, M. Pierre Sourdin; and M. Patrice Curien.

The Australian contingent consisted of Mr John Coleson, senior ranger in the NPWS, Mr Stephen Thompson, curator of the museum, a few Friends of the Museum, and a very welcome group of about 120 students from Randwick Girls High School; we hope they will come again.

Refreshments were as usual served in the museum, in what was once the shabby, but well-proportioned, Instrument Room of the original Cable Station, now elegantly refurbished and available for varied uses: receptions, functions, exhibitions and the like.

Helen Rosenman

DON'T MISS . . .

Friday, 7 OCTOBER, 6pm-8pm:

Opening Of The Instrument Room.

Sunday, 6 NOVEMBER, 11am: AGM & Grand Pique-Nique.

For other upcoming events, see page 4.

Museum News

The Instrument Room

The Instrument Room restoration is now complete. Stage two of the work has commenced, which will include the planning and installation of exhibition infrastructure.

Recent Events At The Museum

Bastille Day was low key, but nonetheless successful. A very moving address was given by the president of the French Ex-Servicemen's Association, **M. Sourdin**. **M. Sourdin** noted the significance of this year as the 50th anniversary of the allied landing on the coast of Normandy, and he linked the significance of the landing to the concepts of liberty and equality symbolised in Bastille Day. The Consul-General for France, **M. Michel Legras** gave his address to the ex-servicemen in French as a mark of respect on such a solemn occasion. Morning tea was later held in the recently refurbished Instrument Room.

While in Paris Carole Roussel had two lengthy and, she hopes, potentially fruitful telephone conversations with Rear Admiral Bellec, the Museum's godfather.

Delighted that the Instrument Room restoration is now complete, he looks forward to being involved in "joint ventures" for future temporary exhibitions, perhaps with the National Maritime Museum or with one of the many *Musées de la Marine*, of which he is director in France.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

John Winch has generously permitted the French Benevolent Society of NSW to print a Christmas card from one of his Maquettes for the Lapérouse tapestry - most recognisable as a museum *souvenir*. The cards will be available for \$1.50 each at the museum from 5 November.



The Instrument Room during restoration. By Glen Blaxland.

Public Programs at the Museum

Museums Week saw the Lapérouse Museum and the La Perouse Aboriginal Arts and Culture Museum combining to provide free admission and tours for the week 16-20 May. The statewide publicity provided by the Museums' Association (NSW) during that week saw many museum-goers visit the museum for the first time. This will lead to enhancing further revisits.

The June-July holiday program *Hunt For Your Life Topic Track* was a tremendous success. The whole program was fully booked following an interview on ABC's 2BL Drive Time show with Steve Chase. The program involved the interactive style of children's activities successfully employed at the Hyde Park Barracks and the Australian Museum, and involved the children role playing 1820's convict bolters attempting to survive in Sydney's bush. The program included interaction with the La Perouse Aboriginal Arts and Culture Museum which contrasted the differing cultures of European and

Aboriginal people then and now. This ties into the French-Aboriginal contact at Frenchman's Bay in 1788, and subsequent interaction since. Following the considerable interest from the media and the public, the program will be repeated in the September-October school holidays.

New tours, that will tap into the history, language and cultural studies of primary, secondary and TAFE syllabus, are in the planning stage. These new programs will boost the number of student groups visiting the museum and will enhance "word of mouth" awareness of the museum.

Museum Visitation

After the success of Museums Week and *Hunt For Your Life Topic Track* visitation has increased over the past few months.

Staff

Sue Jeffrey continues as acting interpretive assistant. **Stephen Thompson** continues as acting curator of the museum.

Stephen Thompson

THE DEBATABLE ROMANCE OF SAIL

Readers may remember that from Botany Bay Lapérouse wrote to his Eléonore that she would hardly recognise him. He had aged so much, his teeth were loose and his hair falling out; both unpleasant indicators of incipient scurvy (a cook had died from the dread disease on the way from Petropavlovsk). Despite being French, was Lapérouse, like Dumont d'Urville forty years later, a salt meat and hard tack man? Surely in Samoa they had loaded a number of the little pigs that proliferate in the villages there, and as for fruit and vegetables, taro grows wild in the Pacific islands! Also what about the antiscorbutic "sowerkraut" that Cook swore by, flogging sailors who tried to avoid eating it. Why weren't they carrying supplies of that?

Apart from scurvy, worse tropical diseases such as malaria and bacillary dysentery, could decimate crews of sailing ships. As yet, woefully ignorant of medical cause and effect, nobody suspected the source of these killers; mosquitoes for the first, and for the second the supplies of water they drew from tropical rivers and streams that flowed through native villages. These were the rubbish disposal system for dead animals, detritus, sewage. There was also the unwashed and uncooked fruit and vegetables they loaded, if available, wherever they anchored.

So what was it like to have a dysentery epidemic in the stinking cramped quarters aboard a small (by modern standards) bucking sailing ship, in the years before the advent of steam? They were completely at the mercy of winds and currents, in the days when medicine could do no more than offer palliatives, purgatives, nostrums, and laudanum to dull pain.

These are intensely human areas of history I have always found fascinating. What follows is a vivid description of the dysentery epidemic that diminished Dumont d'Urville's crews in 1839, which I found in the French Archives in the service file of Leguillou, one of the doctors aboard. He was an unpopular, contentious character, (the sailors hated him) but, from what I read, seemed quite a competent practitioner for the time.

Up till then the expedition had a good health record. From the Antarctic where in January 1838 they made their first stubborn, hair-raising but unsuccessful attempt to penetrate south beyond the Antarctic Circle to the heat of the tropics and the fever-ridden East Indies, after two hard years at sea they had lost only two men to illness. But disaster struck after they left Sumatra for Hobart Town, via the West Australian coast and the Roaring Forties.

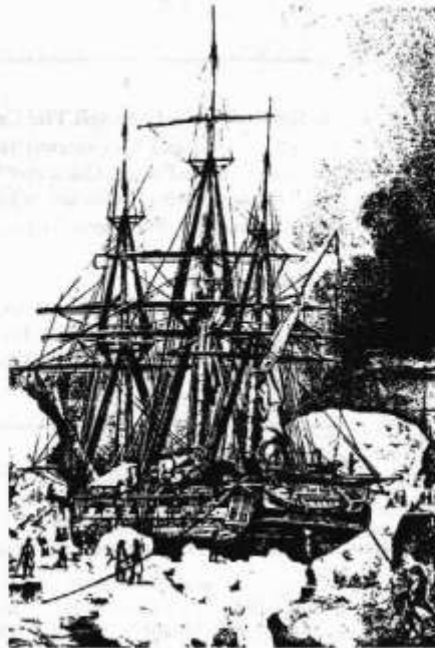
The ships had taken on apparently good water from a stream that ran through a village in Lampungs Bay, Sumatra, but a few days later a dysentery epidemic broke out. They made their painfully slow way down the west coast of Australia, battling

south westerly gales alternating with dead calms and huge swells in which the ships wallowed helplessly. As men started to die Dr Le Guillou tried to persuade D'Urville to break their hellish voyage south along the West Australian coast, and put in to the recently established British settlement at Swan River. D'Urville had a low opinion of doctors, disliked Le Guillou and was suspicious of his motives, so refused. But certainly the doctor had the right idea; just getting the sick out of their foul, crowded, wet quarters and off the bucking ship, away from contaminated water and into a warm dry climate would have saved many of them. They continued to Hobart, and the route was strewn with corpses.

Back in France Dr Le Guillou wrote the following report. I found it in his service file at the Service Historique de la

Marine, Vincennes, but I do not know whether it was published at the time:

"An Orlop Deck is four to five feet high, about 1,296 square feet, reduced to half that by the position of the galleys, storerooms, hatchways, lockers and another hundred temporary or permanent obstructions, work benches, sick men, all the hammocks, should bad weather prevent them being stowed in the hammock netting, or, depending on the time of day, if it was night, if it was raining, snowing, the ship hemmed in by ice, there would be forty to sixty individuals in the orlop deck, spitting, drinking, eating, while all the openings were tightly shut to keep the water out; and despite all precautions, every partition in the orlop deck would be streaming with water. The smells from the hold, from the storeroom, the smoke, steam and smells from the kitchen, the exhalations from the



Dumont d'Urville's Astrolabe

lungs and skin were not dispersed by the faintest breath of fresh air, daylight hardly entered this area . . ."

And added to the normal discomfort, this was the scene during the dysentery epidemic, November-December 1839:

"Men were lying on pallets or in hammocks, some unable to rest because of excruciating intestinal pain and frequent evacuations; others sleepless because of lack of space to stretch out, anxiety, physical discomfort or the foul air; some awakened by the moans of their neighbours and their death rattles; this was my night of 5-6 November when I decided to inform the leader of the expedition of this suffering and ask him to take suitable measures to remedy it. His answer was: 'Doctor, you must not take fright over nothing; you'll see plenty more; it's your job to see men die on board . . .'"

The romance of sail eh? I'll take a plane for preference any time or even a container ship thanks!

Helen Rosenman

LAPEROUSE

Quarterly Newsletter of the
Friends of the Lapérouse Museum

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**Friends of the Lapérouse Museum
Limited** (A.C.N. 003-547-699) was
established in 1989.

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NPWS: Elaine Shovic

Curator: Stephen Thompson

Editor's Footnote

Jen Rosenberg has recently moved to Canberra, but will continue to edit the newsletter from there. She would prefer material to be delivered to her as early as possible, as the extra distance will slow production slightly.

She can be contacted either c/- The Canberra Times, 9 Pirie Street, Fyshwick ACT 2609 Ph: 06 280 2122, or c/- Mr RJ Stead, 7 Loder Place, Kambah ACT 2902 Ph: 06 231 8018 from 24 September 1994.

She would also be pleased to receive any enquires regarding advertising. Rates are as follows:

ADVERTISING RATES

Copy Size	Single Issue	Per Year (4 issues)
Full page	\$600	\$1,900
1/2 page	\$350	\$1,100
1/4 page	\$200	\$ 600
1/6 page	\$125	\$ 400
Business Card (1/12th)	\$ 50	\$ 160

COMING EVENTS

Annual General Meeting & Grand Pique-Nique

Sunday 6 November 1994

The annual general meeting of the Friends will be held in the Instrument Room of the Lapérouse Museum on Sunday, 6 November 1994 at 11am.

The *grand pique-nique* which will follow the meeting promises to be an afternoon of fun and entertainment and a time to renew acquaintances and friendships.

Please bring along a picnic lunch to share.

Sunday, 19 February 1995: Annual open air mass in commemoration of Father Laurent Receveur - to be held on the lawns in front of the museum commencing at 11am and followed by a picnic and entertainment.

Thursday, 23 February 1995: Lapérouse Day celebrations.

Civic Reception To Farewell The Consul-General

The mayor of Randwick City recently hosted a civic reception to farewell the Legras on their return to France. Councillor Bastie spoke glowingly of the close ties forged by Mr Legras with the City and in particular La Perouse, and expressed the belief that his successor, Mr Thierry Viteau, would continue this close association.

Vale Father Roesch

The Friends were saddened to learn of the passing of Father Roesch. Chaplain to the French-speaking community of NSW, le Père Français Roesch was well respected and loved. His participation in the annual open air mass at La Perouse will be sadly missed.

CORRESPONDENCE:

To Michèle de Tarlé from Arnaud Littardi, l'Attaché culturel et de coopération, Ambassade de France auprès de l'état des émirats arabes unis, Abu Dhabi:

1/6/94

Cher Collègue,

J'ai l'intention de préparer, en collaboration avec notre principal partenaire émirien pour les manifestations culturelles, la Fondation Culturelle d'Abou Dhabi, une exposition sur le patrimoine maritime en France, pour laquelle le Musée de la Marine de Paris m'a envoyé de la documentation.

Je souhaiterais compléter cette présentation par une évocation des grandes explorateurs français. C'est pourquoi je me permets de m'adresser à vous afin de vous prier de demander à notre intention de la documentation au Lapérouse Museum de Sydney, affiches, photos ou brochures, qui pourraient venir compléter notre manifestation.

Je vous remercie vivement de votre assistance et vous prie d'agréer. Cher Collègue, l'expression de mes sentiments les meilleurs.

1/9/94

Madame,

J'ai bien reçu les documents que vous avez eu l'obligeance de me faire parvenir sur le Musée Lapérouse et qui viendront très heureusement compléter notre présentation. Je suis persuadé que nos visiteurs seront intéressés d'apprendre que le souvenir des grands navigateurs français est encore évoqué de nos jours aussi loin de leur pays!

Je vous en remercie vivement et vous prie d'agréer, Madame, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.