

Laperouse

Friends of the Laperouse Museum



Members Quarterly Newsletter

July - August - September, 1992 - Vol. Three, No. 1

President's Message

Lap erouse Day was a memorable occasion with the arrival in Sydney of two French Navy units, *Garonne* and *La Moqueuse*. On that day, Friends and their guests attended a brief but moving wreath-laying ceremony held at the Lap erouse monument, and the presentation to the Museum of a leather-bound facsimile of Lap erouse's last letter transmitted to the French government by the return to England of one of the ships of the First Fleet.

This historic document, a gift from Admiral Lanxade, *Chef d'Etat Major des Arm es*, was presented to the Lap erouse Museum by M. Michel Legras, *Consul-G n ral de France*, and gratefully accepted on behalf of the New South Wales Government by the Hon. Patricia Forsythe, M.L.C. The Committee of the Friends warmly acknowledges the generosity of the French Government in presenting to the Museum this last despatch from Lap erouse containing an account of the voyage of the *Astrolabe* and the *Boussole* down to their arrival in Botany Bay on 26 January, 1788.

As we move to our fourth year, we look forward to your renewed membership and continued support.

Peter Orlovich

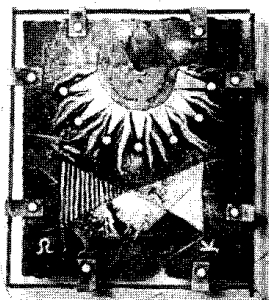
COMING EVENTS

Tuesday, 14th July 1992 10.00am
Bastille Day Ceremony
at the **La Perouse Monument**
Welcoming of Lap erouse tapestry
(date to be announced)

*It is now time
to renew your membership
For details, see page 4*

THE LAPEROUSE TAPESTRY AT LAST!

A new work of art will soon adorn the Museum's foyer, thanks to John Winch, a Friend indeed. Truly, surely, really this time, the Friends can look forward to a special event, their long promised preview of the tapestry designed by the well-known Sydney artist, John Winch.



The intricate tapestry saga was carefully and sympathetically told by freelance journalist, Chris Ashton, in the Sydney Morning Herald on Saturday 29 February, 1992. To recapitulate briefly: the tapestry was to have been a splendid gift to the Museum from the privately owned tapestry workshop, *Tapisseries de France*. In 1987, John spent two months in Aubusson supervising the dying of the earthy, subtle shades required to weave his background design. Then a bonanza of orders for the bicentenary of the 1789 French Revolution delayed the completion of the Lap erouse tapestry. Finally in December 1990, the Friends were advised by *Tapisseries de France* that the Museum could expect to receive it within the next two months. Remember the two newsletters announcing its expected arrival!

As with Lap erouse following his departure from Botany Bay, there was no further news - only an enticing photograph of the completed background. An exhaustive inquiry finally located a disconsolate, bankrupt Jean Laurent of *Tapisseries de France*. When in France last year, Carole Roussel was shown the tapestry, only to discover that it could no longer be donated. Laurent would however be prepared to exchange it for several sculptures he had admired when John Winch had shown him photographs of his work. John magnanimously agreed to give Laurent two sculptures. Laurent accepted. *UTA-Air France* will carry the crated sculptures to France and have made it possible for John's daughter to accompany them, so that she can ensure their arrival and re-assembly.

Yet to add the nine three-dimensional centre panels, John still has a great deal of work to do on the tapestry before it can replace his paintings in the Museum foyer. We thank and honour you, John. Your shining gesture is in the spirit of the 18th century ideals of humanism and generosity which both inspired and guided the Lap erouse expedition.

Museum News

It has been an exciting and busy period at the Museum during the last few months. The **Père Receveur Commemoration**, **Lapérouse Day** and the **Yalunga Festival** were all a terrific success and we wish to thank all those who put so much work into making the celebrations both moving and entertaining.

The Easter School Holiday programme was well attended and additional activities continued uninterrupted through April into early May as we celebrated "*Heritage Week*". This involved specially designed tours of the Museum, the Monuments and Historic Site. An important time for us is "*Museums Week*" from 18th to 24th May. On Monday 18th May, the Museum held its annual

free entry "*Open Day*" to celebrate International Museums Day. Although it was a Monday, we had numerous visitors thanks to considerable media support. We are now looking towards preparations for "*Bastille Day*". All Friends are welcome to attend the ceremony - then come and visit your museum and make yourselves known to the Museum staff. We are always delighted to meet New Friends.

CHIC + FLAIR = NEW MUSEUM IMAGE



The Lapérouse Museum acquired a new, vibrant image when the officers and sailors from *La Moqueuse* and *Garonne* joined the Friends and their guests for the fashion parade and aperitif concert on Saturday 22 February, 1992. The sailors helped set the scene and show the dazzling winter collection of **Countess Francoise Esterhazy** and **Nicole C. Vanson**, promenading with the models, leading the applause, serving Pernod at sunset and generally having a good time along with everyone else. Both designers generously donated 10% of their sales from the parade to the Friends Instrument Room Fund. Our warm thanks and appreciation go to the French Navy and the French Embassy

Defence Attaché, **Captain Leborgne**, for their presence and invaluable support throughout the Lapérouse Day (Week!) celebrations.

Imagine our delight when during the cocktail party on board *Garonne*, the two captains produced a large envelope containing some \$850 in cash collected among the officers and crew of both vessels! Our fund-raising drive for the Instrument Room restoration project is most auspiciously under way.

We are also grateful to **Pernod-Ricard** for providing their aromatic and thirst-quenching aperitif. It was so right for the weather, the time and the place.

The 1992 Père Receveur Commemoration: Sunday afternoon 16th February

was a splendid occasion in gloriously bright weather with a gratifying public attendance. At an altar erected in the Instrument Room, two priests in white vestments with attendant servers conducted the ancient Latin rite of Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament which, in origin, dates back to the 13th century. The subsequent procession to the grave of Père Receveur with lights and incense chanting the *Dies Irae* for the final prayers for the dead made a colourful spectacle enhanced by the presence of three naval officers: **Captain Leborgne**, the French Defence Attaché; **Captain Barrie R.A.N.**, commanding officer of HMAS Watson and **Lieut. Commander Macdonald R.N.**

F. Carleton, *Committee Convenor*

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Circular Quay - Dawes Point - The Rocks Walk \$ 25 --- Macquarie Street Walk \$ 25

(Special Rates for larger group) For Bookings, telephone (02) 327-2954 or fax (02) 327-1639

THE IMPACT OF LAPÉROUSE ON MAPPING OF THE AUSTRALIAN-PACIFIC REGION BY THE FRENCH (Part 1)

Address given by Rear-Admiral François Bellec at the NSW State Library on Monday 18 November, 1991

I propose to examine the evolution of French cartography through half a century of scientific expeditions in the Australian-Pacific region, focusing on accuracy rather than history. Firstly, it is the navigators who mapped the world as we know it today. Cartographers received far more accurate information from maritime explorers than their colleagues of the preceding centuries could expect from the land travellers of the silk roads. Since the first nautical map - probably the so-called *carte Pisane* dated approx. 1290, kept by the French National Library - every large scale map detailing the outline of the world has been a nautical document. Mapping the Pacific became the most important instruction given to the explorers, when humanism replaced trade and profit as a major concept for voyages of discovery. The problem was then no longer to discover new lands, but to determine exactly the coordinates and shape of an insufficiently known world.

The second reason to focus our attention on the accuracy of mapping relates to the fact that Cook and Lapérouse sailed around the world at a turning point in the science of navigation and hydrography. The Portuguese had led the way across the high seas during the final decades of the 15th century. Their navigation methods remained in use for three centuries, without any conceptual improvement except for better instruments. An important new development in the history of navigation began in the 1760's, to be fully adopted at sea only some half a century later. Seamen are conservative. And so, most of the voyages of exploration of the Pacific region took place during this exciting period of advances in nautical science. For these two reasons, I think that history must give precedence for a while to science.

Although it was not a great scientific voyage due to the loss of most of its records when both ships were wrecked on the reef off Vanikoro (Solomon Islands), the Lapérouse Expedition is famous nevertheless for the remarkable achievement of an ambitious programme in the field of cartography. With his passion for geography, King Louis XVI was anxious to extend and complete the work achieved by Cook, particularly in the North Pacific and along the coast of New Holland (Australia). Indeed Lapérouse confirmed these plans in a letter written from Botany Bay before setting sail in March 1788. He intended to survey in September and October of that year the gulf of Carpentaria and the west coast of New Holland, as far as Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Unfortunately, the perils of the sea were to interfere with disastrous consequence. The royal instructions for the expedition were extremely detailed in the field of navigation and mapping. King Louis XVI had personally annotated the text prepared by Marshal de Castries, Minister of the Navy, and Claret de Fleurieu, in charge of naval operations and bases, in accordance with the Academy's recommendations.

The maps for the expedition had been drawn up by Buache de la Neuville, France's most famous cartographer at that time. Two-thirds of the royal instructions concerned the astronomers

and cartographers. Their mission was to provide and attend to "every nautical detail deemed to be useful to navigators", a vast undertaking for men setting out to explore the whole barely known Pacific Ocean and its landforms. The two astronomers, Louis Monge and Lepaute d'Agelet, were young, brilliant scientists. Both were teaching mathematics at the Royal Military Academy. D'Agelet was a member of the Academy of Science. A clockmaker was in charge of the clocks and chronometers. Cartographers would be commanded by chief topographer Paul de Monneron, an old shipmate from the Hudson Bay days, when Lapérouse was engaged in the American War of Independence. Their instruments were of equivalent high technical level, with three astronomic quadrants lent by the Observatoire de Paris, a meridian transit instrument, several telescopes, five chronometers and three astronomic clocks for checking them when ashore. The expedition was not the first to embark scientists. Bougainville and Keruelen had previously obtained such assistance, but Lapérouse's scientific staff of fifteen far exceeded any precedent. The *Musée de la Marine* in Paris is proud to be in charge of some relics from the Lapérouse Expedition and shares this honour with the

Lapérouse Museum in Sydney. Among these relics, I am particularly moved by a reflecting circle and by an element of a gimbals-mounted chronometer. I positively identified this item a few years ago as part of the weight-driven clock number nineteen from Ferdinand Berthoud, delivered to Lapérouse by an order dated 23rd June, 1785.

France recovered some charts of the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan, including of course the strait between Sakhalin and Hokkaido, named by Lapérouse in honour of Marshal de Castries and today called *Lapérouse Strait*. Lapérouse then surveyed the Pacific Coast of North America, from Mount Saint Elias (Alaska) to Monterey (California). I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Lapérouse was personally responsible for the nautical and mapping programme of the expedition. He was anxious to send back to France as soon as possible the expedition's logs and maps, along with the mail and the brief reports entrusted either to members of the expedition returning to France from Macao and Petropavlosk, or to a French frigate met at Manilla, or to officers of the First Fleet met at Botany Bay. Thanks to these precautions, France received a small part of the scientific harvest of the expedition. Unfortunately, in those days, scientists were not given to sharing their knowledge, jealously keeping for themselves what they considered first and foremost their personal property. So their work disappeared with them. Nevertheless, thanks to the few remaining testimonies, we may attempt to estimate the capabilities of Lapérouse's scientific and naval staff in the field of mapping, during this voyage at the end of the 18th century. And may we also assign a place to their work within the history of nautical cartography. (*to be continued next issue*)



LAPÉROUSE*Quarterly Newsletter of the
Friends of the Lapérouse Museum*

Editor: Carole Roussel
Tel: (02) 389-8010
Publisher: Friends of the Lapérouse
Museum, PO Box 230
Paddington NSW 2021
Design: Stadia Graphics
Printed by: Uri Instant Printing

Friends of the Lapérouse Museum

Limited (A.C.N. 003-547-699)
was established in 1989.

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CURATORIAL NOTES

Correspondence from Jean-François, Comte de Lapérouse

On Lapérouse Day, the French Consul-General **M. Legras** presented the Museum with a generous gift from the French Government - a *facsimile* letter written by Lapérouse during his stay in Botany Bay. This gift was received on the Museum's behalf by the **Hon. Patricia Forsythe, MLC**.

As one of the last items of correspondence from Lapérouse, this letter, dated 1788, is especially poignant and enriches the collection considerably. The seven-page letter is beautifully bound in morrocan leather and comes from the French Naval Archives.

It is now on display in the Museum and an English translation will soon be available. This will enhance its significance and give us all greater insight into Lapérouse's own perceptions and experiences of Australia and the Pacific.

Addressed to a friend, the letter covers a wide range of subjects including measures taken to ensure the health of the crew, the death of *de Langle*, descriptions of "New Holland", the English "First Fleet" presence and the Aborigines. Friends who wish to have a closer inspection of the letter, please do not hesitate to contact the Museum to arrange a suitable time with the Curator.

Jennifer Carter
Curator, Lapérouse Museum

**FRANCE- AUSTRALIE Friday 6th March 1992
REGATTA**

Photograph by PHILIPPE SCHILLER
P.O. Box 646 Newport 2106

The Friends aboard our **Beneteau** "yacht for a day" racing towards a most honourable 3rd place in the France-Australia Regatta organised by the French Chamber of Commerce in Australia.

A **Veuve Cliquot** champagne briefing at the CYC, some 30 **Beneteau** participants, a perfect Sydney harbour day with sun, fair winds and the excitement of competition, an **Orlando Wines** finish at the jazz picnic and prize-giving, a true Franco-Australian joint spirit of adventure, and a peaceful sunset cruise back to reality... The Friends thank **Kama III's** crew for making this day possible.

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

Please read carefully

The Committee has decided that it would be more convenient for everyone if subscriptions were to be renewed in January, as is the case with most other Friends organisations. To re-adjust the membership period to the calendar year (January to December), you are therefore requested to make your subscription payment, **NOW DUE**, for either six months only, i.e. half the yearly amount, or for an extended period of 18 months i.e. one and half times the yearly amount.

A renewal form is enclosed for your convenience. Please return it duly filled with your remittance as soon as practicable (*Bankcard, Mastercard & Visa* are now accepted). Thank you!

It is sincerely hoped that this change will be readily accepted and the Committee looks forward to your continuing interest and participation in all affairs and events relating to the Lapérouse Museum.

"THE PACIFIC EXPLORER"

by Professor John Dunmore

This book is now for sale at the Museum. Regular Price: \$24.95

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ONLY \$ 21.95 (Save \$ 3.00)**

NEXT ISSUE

English translation of facsimile letter of Lapérouse written from Botany Bay and now exhibited in the Museum.

Also, Part II of Rear-Admiral Bellec's address given at the International Cartography Conference, Sydney on Monday 18th November, 1991.