

The Franciscan Order, to which Laurent Receveur dedicated his life, is a Catholic religious community of men founded in the year 1209 in the small town of Assisi, Italy by Saint Francis (1182-1226).

Francis was born into a wealthy merchant class family. Although his early life was considered carefree and even frivolous, he was always both generous and gracious. Civil strife, however, ended the untroubled days of Francis' prolonged youth. He joined in a war against the neighbouring city of Perugia and was captured in battle. He was ransomed after a year of being held as a prisoner-of-war which led him to reflect on the meaninglessness of his life. Eventually, by gathering followers around him, the "friars minor" (lesser brothers) as they called themselves, became dedicated to a simple lifestyle of fraternity, service and charity. The friars' joyfulness was infectious and it would indeed radiate for centuries to come. Their influence would have a far reaching effect on every aspect of society.

*For further information contact:
www.franciscanfriarsaustralia.org*



Grave of Père Receveur at Botany Bay,
La Perouse Sydney

*"Long, long ago, his grave was made beside
The headlands grim; though blossom fade,
He shall not fade;
there is no death for him".*

"Père Receveur" by Roderic Quinn
The Crusader, 1 June 1933

Laurent Receveur OFM Conv. (1757-1788); scienziato e circumnavigatore, Isidoro Gatti OFM Conv. Miscellanea Francescana. January-June 1995, pp 187-257. Pontificia Facoltà Teologica S. Bonaventura, Rome.

Père Receveur, Franciscan Scientist and Voyager with Lapérouse. Edward Duyker, Dharawal Publications, Inc. Sydney 2011.

In Memory of Père Laurent Receveur



Franciscan Priest
Scientist
and
Naturalist of the
Lapérouse Expedition

Lapérouse Museum
Anzac Parade La Perouse, NSW

Père Laurent Receveur

Claude François Joseph Receveur grew up in the small French village of Noël-Cerneux. He felt a calling to the priesthood at an early age but by nineteen he also dreamt of military glory. Thus in 1776, his impulsive and adventurous temperament caused him to enlist in the French Navy. Two years later King Louis XVI signed a military alliance with the American colonists in their war of independence from Great Britain.

By 1781, after five years in the navy, Receveur left the sea and returned home. He chose to enter the Franciscan Order in Besançon, near his hometown and received the new name of "Laurent." He was eventually sent to University in Paris, to the Franciscan *Grand Couvent*, to continue his studies and was ordained in 1783. Beside his normal coursework in theology and philosophy, he studied astronomy, botany, geology, chemistry, meteorology, entomology and philology. By 1785, the amazing background of this young Franciscan was noticed by agents of King Louis XVI, who were then preparing an expedition to circumnavigate the globe. The French

Academy of Science and Medicine had encouraged the king to explore the vast areas of the southern Pacific Ocean which were still uncharted.

The tree trunk showing the epitaph of Father Receveur



Because Père Receveur had the necessary courage and was adapted to long sea travel, and since he could accompany the mission as a chaplain as well as a scientist, his superiors had no choice but to bow to the royal command.

The expedition of Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de Lapérouse, included two Catholic priests, Abbé Jean-André Mongez (1750-1788), a Canon Regular, the senior chaplain, also a scientist, and Père Receveur, the junior. These priests were among seventeen scientists who sailed on the *Astrolabe* and the *Boussole*.

The Lapérouse expedition took three years, landing on the shores of many new and unexplored habitats. The ships reached Botany Bay in Australia, on the 26 January 1788, only a few days after the landing of the First Fleet. Realising that the French were not on a colonising mission, the English welcomed them and treated them with great deference.

Tragedy had struck a few days earlier when Père Receveur and several others were attacked by natives on Tutuila in Samoa. Père Receveur was badly injured with a bruised eye. But by the time he landed at Botany Bay the eye seemed to have healed.



Franciscan Martyrs

However, only three weeks after his arrival, Père Receveur, aged 30, passed away on 17 February 1788, no doubt due to complications from his previous injury. He was buried on the headland at Botany Bay.

Considered an "*indefatigable naturalist and a man of amicable manner and good sense,*" by Lapérouse, Père Receveur collected many plant, mineral and animal specimens for future research. Père Receveur also collected many species of birds and was compiling a French dictionary of the many languages of the people of Oceania.

Tragically, the Lapérouse expedition was lost at sea after it departed Botany Bay on 10 March 1788.

Through these many years both French and English sailors have paid tribute to the grave of Père Receveur whenever they landed nearby. To this day, every year on the anniversary of his death, 17 February or nearest Sunday, Franciscan and others of the faith, as well as the people of the suburb of La Perouse and adjoining parishes, and representatives from the French Consulate, honour the memory of Père Receveur. The first priest, the first French national, and the first scientist to be buried on Australia's shores.

**Published by the Friends of
the Laperouse Museum
Inc.
PO Box 475 Matraville
NSW 2036.
www.laperousemuseum.org**

