

French–Australian Shared Histories

2018 Symposium

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Some sources of Australian history at the Diplomatic Archives

Grégoire Eldin (and Agnès Chablat-Beylot)

The archives produced and maintained by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs speak to the different phases of the history of Franco–Australian relations: the exploration era, the era of the development of the colony's economic resources, the development of institutional relations with a land advancing towards independence, the world wars, and the tensions of the late 20th century.

While the archives of the central administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are now preserved in the Paris region, at La Courneuve, those of the French embassy and consulates in Australia are regularly repatriated to France to ensure their conservation and availability to researchers at the Nantes Centre for Diplomatic Archives. The resources of the two sites will be presented here successively, with the particular case of the archives resulting from World War I being left to last.

Archives of the Central Administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The documentation relating to Australia kept in the archives of the Central Administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the La Courneuve Centre of Diplomatic Archives, is largely composed of diplomatic dispatches and telegrams from the Consuls and the Embassy of France in Australia. It is clear, therefore, why there is little documentation before the 1840s and the opening of the first Consulate of France in Sydney.

The oldest documents about the island preserved at La Courneuve are isolated pieces kept in the series Memoirs and documents, in the sub-series Oceania (file 34MD), volume 1: there are some notes on New Holland dating back to 1822, simple translated excerpts from the *Morning Chronicle*; a brief complemented by a schematic map, entitled 'English Colonies of New Holland or Australia' (folios 8–33), which are said to be translated excerpts from the *Quarterly Review* of October 1825; and 'Some Observations on New Holland, the Sandwich Islands and the South Sea Islands by a nephew of Mr Martin Laffitte, of Le Havre, Toussaint Antoine Herval, arrived in France via England on June 14th, having been around the world after ten years of travelling to the East Indies. Paris, July 1st 1826' (folios 34–40), a brief produced to support Herval's claim to an appointment to a consular agent position to be created in Oceania. A few isolated pieces may be highlighted among the 16 bound volumes constituting the Oceania Memoirs and documents: in volume 3, a document relating to the taking of possession by England of the Keeling Islands (1857, folio 100–102); and in volume 5, a simple letter from the Minister of the Navy and Colonies reporting the impressions of the French Navy on the allegedly precarious condition of the British settlements in New Holland (1844, folios 202–203v).

The establishment in 1839 of the Consulate of France in Sydney finally offered a stable observation post, allowing regular correspondence. The first appointee to this position, Jean Marie Antoine Faramond, previously assigned to Milan, Malta, the United States and Mexico, left London in January 1842, and landed in Port Jackson on 6 May 1842, after a crossing of 102 days.

A French consular agency was created in Melbourne in 1853; it was upgraded to a consulate in 1862. The first appointee to the position, named in August 1853, was Count Lionel de Moreton Chabrilan (1818–58), a protégé of Napoleon III, married to Céleste Venard, known as Céleste Mogador (1824–99), a dancer of the Temple district in Paris, whose *Memoirs* as well as the comedy *In Australia* deserve a mention here (1862). Kept among the individual files in the Human Resources archives such as those of all the agents assigned since then to Australia (in the 19th century files 393QO and 394QO), the file of Count de Chabrilan's career does not provide any details on his personal life in Melbourne, while it does demonstrate the support he enjoyed in Paris.

During the 19th century, consular correspondence, essentially devoted to economic and maritime affairs, was collected in related volumes in the Consular and Commercial Correspondence series. The documents are in chronological order, and contain a simple digital directory, which does not allow the retrieval of documents on a given subject for the positions addressed here. From 1842 to 1901, correspondence with the Sydney Consulate (file 324CCC) produced the material contained in eight bound volumes (0.44 linear metres). The Melbourne sub-series (file 198CCC) contains nine volumes from 1854 to 1901, at which time the series was closed (0.51 linear metres). The volumes of the two sub-series include minutes of the dispatches addressed to the consuls from Paris, but they consist mostly of the original communications dispatched by the consuls. The main topics are trade, commodity prices, customs duties, wool, meat, the mining industry, and maritime affairs. There are also general dispatches on the state of the colony, its population, its government and institutions, others on the postal services and the railways, the situation of the whalers, scientific exchanges, as well as on the whole of the Oceania region: New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Tahiti, and the situation of Catholic missions in particular.

Exclusively political consular dispatches are fewer, and are classified in the Consular Political Correspondence series within the England sub-series (file 2CPC). The first dispatch of this type coming from Sydney is dated in 1846, while the first one from Melbourne dates back to 1860. The Consular Political Correspondence series ends in 1896.

For the 19th century, a few isolated documents concerning Australia can also be found in the Miscellaneous Political Affairs series within the England sub-series (file 5ADP), but also in the Situation of the French Abroad sub-series (file 28ADP), which, in item 28ADP/12, shows a count of the French nationals living in the colony of Victoria in the second half of 1872. The civil registrar's documents kept by French consuls for French nationals are also preserved (Civil registrar cartons series, file 172QO). Naturally, the other file series in the archives produced by the directorate of the Chancelleries, the predecessor of the directorate of French nationals abroad and foreigners in France, are also likely to contain resources relating to French residents in Australia. These include the registers of notarised deeds (file 430QO of the period

1834-1900), as well as the huge reservoir of personal files, which will become available only when its indexation, currently in progress, is completed.

But it is in the economic field in particular that it is possible to access substantial documentation for the 19th century, within the Various Commercial Affairs series (file 1ADC, covering mainly the years from 1830 to 1902), which brings together the 'thematic' files of the trade sub-department. Records on the Australian economy appeared here around 1880; they related to trade missions, customs duties, the recruitment of a French viticulture professor by the Australian Government (1897-98), maritime services, mining, and industrial and trade fairs in Australia (see mainly items 263, 280, 376, 377, 384, 385, 514-516, and 677).

In 1897 a major innovation was made at the archives of the Central Administration: from this date, the archives of the Quai d'Orsay main departments, including the Directorate of Political and Commercial Affairs, were to be classified methodically, and no longer chronologically. This classification would be carried out within each section by a 'classification office' and according to a predefined classification plan. Starting in 1897, the implementation of this new practice led to the closure of the old series of correspondence records and established a new set that consisted of the Directorate of Political and Commercial Affairs correspondence, and was nicknamed 'New series'. It covered from 1897 to 1918 for most geographical areas.

The New Series is a fundamental resource for this period, and includes a specific sub-series, Australia (file 139CPCOM), which has 29 items (2 linear metres), mainly relating to the various aspects of the colony's domestic and foreign policy, its relations with France, and military, maritime, economic, trade and consular issues.

The archival classification methods launched in 1897 were generally maintained - and perfected - throughout the 20th century.

For the period between the two world wars, the archives of the Sub-Directorate for Asia and Oceania include the Australia sub-series in the E Asia 1918-1940 series, with 35 items (File 31CPCOM, 1 linear metre).

The Central Administration archival files relating to World War II feature parallel files for the diplomatic services of the French State (Vichy regime) and Free France (London followed by Algiers) administrations. The resources for Australia from the Vichy administration appear mainly in the 'E-Asia' sub-series of the '1939-1945 War Vichy' series (file 3GMII), where only six items are directly related to Australia, dated from 1940 to 1943 (items 3GMII/72-77 and 3GMII/234). The 'Trade Relations' sub-series (File 17GMII) contains a small sub-file relating to the protection by Switzerland of French interests in Australia and New Zealand (March 1943 to January 1944).

The archives originating from the Free France departments ('1939-1945 War Free France' series, 'London-Algiers' sub-series (File 18GMII)) include a number of items directly related to Australia (items 18GMII/202, 344-346 and 371, 647, 1095, 1248-1250). Items relating more broadly to the Pacific, Oceania and French possessions in these two zones may also deserve a look. A significant portion of the files relates to the representation of the French National Committee and the movements in support of Free France. As will be shown below, the archives kept in Nantes from the French posts in Australia similarly associate files from the local committees and support associations to the official correspondence of Free France.

After World War II, the Central Administration archives produced by what is now known as the Directorate for Asia and Oceania (Asia-Oceania series) still contain an Australia sub-division, whose contents still increase today (File 114QO). The archives of the Australia sub-series, which are in successive chronological sections, represent, from 1944 to 1991, 14.5 linear metres. Naturally, these also include more recent issues such as decolonisation, the Cold War and nuclear tests. Australia also finds a place in other sub-series that relate to more regional matters. In accordance with the Heritage Code, the archives of the Directorate for Asia and Oceania are mostly sealed for 25 years.

During the 20th century, the activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gradually increased in new areas: the media and communication, promotion of French education and arts exchanges (exhibitions, artistic tours), cultural, scientific and technical relations, military cooperation and diplomatic aspects of atomic and space matters, as well as relations with international organisations. The diversity of these activities is clear not only from the archives of the Directorate for Asia and Oceania, but also from those of the various directorates specifically responsible for these various fields. As was already the case in the 19th century, economic and financial affairs also fall under specialised directorates and departments, whose archives are also preserved.

Archives of French Diplomatic and Consular Posts in Australia

While the La Courneuve Centre of Diplomatic Archives conserves the correspondence received from the French diplomatic and consular network, the one in Nantes has stored archives repatriated from the posts since 1967.

A check of the status of the archival material from French posts in Australia immediately reveals the gap between the date of the creation of the first consular posts and that of the oldest archives preserved today in Nantes. Although the Consulate in Sydney was established in 1839, the repatriation of the first documents did not start until 1879, and only a few files provide scattered insights into the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. As for the consular agency established in Melbourne in 1853, which became a consulate in 1862, its archives temporarily disappeared during a move, before being found fortuitously in a storage facility in 1987 and repatriated the following year. In spite of this incident, this file holds items dating back to 1854, including continuous correspondence from 1886. However, another gap occurred later, concerning most files of the 1930's. Since World War II, the legation established in Canberra in 1946, which became an embassy in 1949, became the main producer of documents, together with the two consulates, while the consular agencies of Newcastle, Perth and Wollongong only produced a few scattered records, consisting mainly of correspondence.

The opening towards the Pacific Ocean and the French colonies established there is a peculiarity of these pre-1939 consular files. Among the few pre-1900 archives of the Consulate in Sydney, there is a file relating to the New Caledonia escapees, from 1879 to 1898; this includes a collection of documents on the sale of the boats used for the escapes, the requests for extradition, prisoners' files, as well as press articles for good measure. Similarly, the correspondence of the Melbourne post involves exchanges with the Governor of New Caledonia from 1859 to 1892 and also with the French colonies, during the same period. The consular files of this period also contain some interesting material about the French community of Australia. In

particular, the consular registration records of Melbourne and Sydney, whose continuous series begin respectively in 1880 and in 1910, may be compared with the civil registers in order to understand the origin and motivation of the French nationals established at the other end of the world. Trade and navigation naturally dominate these items: the Melbourne international exhibition of 1888 is therefore abundantly documented, whilst navigation records provide insights into the years 1864 to 1876 in Melbourne or the early 20th century in Sydney.

Another set of items draws some attention in these files: the archives of World War II. Indeed, in response to the call made in London on June 18, 1940, French expatriates rallied to General de Gaulle and formed 'Free France committees' in allied or neutral countries: André Brénac joined in Australia on June 25, and was appointed as the General's representative on December 2, 1940. He took charge of the movement and created an association called Free French Movement in Australia, for which the central committee was established in Sydney. In 1941, local committees were formed and organised regional propaganda and fundraising for the Free French Forces. André Brénac, de Gaulle's personal representative, became a delegate of the French National Committee in Australia on 10 June 1942. Thus his role took on a more institutional nature, and led to the establishment of five regional offices in Brisbane, Newcastle, Perth, Melbourne and Adelaide, all of which performed consular functions. After the formal recognition of the French National Liberation Committee by the Australian Government on September 7, 1943, the Sydney delegation, renamed the CFLN delegation in Australia, acquired a status of quasi-diplomatic representation, and in 1944 found a new residence in the federal capital, Canberra. The Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide files hold records for the 1940–44 period. The largest file, Canberra, was transferred from Sydney in 1944; it reflects the different modes of representation of Free France in Australia, mixing Free French Movement archives with the delegate's official correspondence with London and Algiers, as well as with the Australian authorities. From Adelaide came the archives of the local committee of Free France, which was active from 1941 to June 1944, and which later led to the establishment of a consular agency and the Franco-Australian Association of South Australia: statutes, annual reports, and meeting minutes help follow the activity of this support body.

From 1944, Canberra's file – repatriated only until 1959 – expands according to a classification plan that organises, in a very traditional way, the main areas of diplomatic action in thematic files supplemented by complete correspondence series: protocol, political, economic, and cultural issues, information and media. Among these, there is an important set of files relating to Indochina, including studies that follow the evolution from 1950 to 1959, as well as documentation provided on the teaching of French and the dissemination of French culture in Australia. In the Sydney and Melbourne consular files, both repatriated until 1996, these cultural matters also occupy an important place, in particular through regular relations with many French–Australian associations. However, it is, naturally, the follow-up of the French community which generates the largest number of documents, directly resulting from consular activities: civil registrar, nationality, registration, military affairs, elections, pensions, etc.

Archives of World War I

Testifying to a major episode in the relations between French and Australian nationals, the archives produced during and following World War I were the subject of multiple restoration, classification and enhancement projects during the years of

the 'centenary. The specificity of these archival files deserves a more detailed presentation and, at the same time, an overview of some documents differing in form from the most traditional documentary typologies.

In the archives of the Central Administration, a series specifically dedicated to the conflict was created from archives of the Directorate of Political Affairs: the 'A – 1914–1918 War' series (File 1CPCOM), which specifically preserves the archives relating to strategic operations as a whole and to the provisioning of France abroad. The remainder is the 'A – 1914–1920 Peace' series (4CPCOM), which contains files relating to the definition of the objectives of the war and the conditions of peace of each country, negotiation attempts during the hostilities and the treaties eventually concluded. Australia is not specifically mentioned in the detailed digital directories of these two series. For direct access to archives concerning the country, researchers can go to the Australia sub-series in the above mentioned 'New series' (file 139CPCOM, ranging from 1897 to 1918), where files relating to the political, military and trade aspects of the conflict are well preserved. It should be noted that the records of the Australia sub-series in the E Asia 1918–1940 series, which covers the period between the wars, begin in the first months of 1918 and should therefore be consulted as well for material on the war period.

The Australia sub-series of the E Asia 191–1940 series (file 31CPCOM) includes three items on the diplomatic mission conducted in Australia by General Pau (items 31CPCOM/9-11). Naturally, the commemoration of the Franco–Australian friendship is the subject of a file. This topic and the maintenance of military monuments and cemeteries continued to provide correspondence material throughout the 20th century.

In the next few years, current work on the restoration and filing of archives of the Directorate and the Ministry of the Blockade, on the one hand, and the General Secretariat of the Peace Conference on the other, should document other aspects of Australia's intervention in World War I.

The archives of French posts held in Nantes illustrate the mobilisation of French nationals abroad during the conflict. Besides the files dedicated specifically to the call to arms, the file of the Vice-Consulate of France in Melbourne shows the Vice-Consul engaged in launching or supporting initiatives to collect donations for the benefit of soldiers and works of war. After a first subscription launched at the declaration of war (see booklet), a concert was organised by the Vice-Consul of France, the Alliance Française and the French Club of the University of Melbourne for the benefit of the victims of war on 30 September 1914 (see program). Two years later, still under the patronage of the same Vice-Consul, the French Red Cross organised a series of events around 14 July 1916 to raise funds for French soldiers and families: galas, concerts, quests, charity sales, theatre performances by students of the Alliance Française, etc. (see poster, etc). This patriotic mobilisation does not disregard commercial interests: thanks to the blockade imposed on German and Austro–Hungarian products, French companies with a presence in Melbourne or working from France with Australian companies want to take advantage of the lack of competition to develop on the Australian market and even replace Germanic companies. Thus the Vice-Consul is asked, in a letter from the National Office for Foreign Trade, to draw up a list of all the companies likely to develop their competitive advantage: the completed questionnaire is kept in these Vice-Consulate files (see questionnaire).

Most of the resources mentioned here have to be consulted on site, at La Courneuve or Nantes. On the other hand, the database listing the agreements and treaties kept by the Diplomatic Archives and the database giving access to the Archives' iconographic collection can be consulted online. Among the many files that deserve further investigation are the personal papers gathered in the series 'Agents' Papers - private archives', which contain, for example, some chronograms of private correspondence belonging to Louis Roché, Ambassador in Canberra from 1952 to 1955 (File 273PAAP). The libraries of the La Courneuve and Nantes archival centres have, for their part, their own wealth. Indeed the La Courneuve centre offers unique access in France to some official, mostly parliamentary Australian publications, starting in the 19th century. To conclude, I hope that this overview, which is not meant to be exhaustive, helps extend the interest now shown by so many young French nationals in the discovery of the Australian continent to include another field: that of the vast archival resources now ready to be explored.