

French–Australian Shared Histories

2018 Symposium

Imagination | Exploration | Memory



A history of Franco-Australian relations through the lens of the Economic and Financial Archives Service (SAEF)

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Introduction of the Economic and Financial Archives Service (SAEF: Service des archives économiques et financières)

The SAEF has taken over from the former Historical Library of the Ministry of Finance, which held and managed ministerial archives; it is located within the documentation-archives office, and is now attached to the General Secretariat of the Departments of Economy and Finance. It manages support services and operations of the central administration services, and coordinates the activities of the various directorates; thus, it provides guidance for ministerial policy on the management of both paper and digital archives.

The content of SAEF archives is a reflection of historical dynamics: with the exception of some resources established by former monopolies (Directorate of Coins and Medals, the Royal /Imperial / National Print) and of the Foreign Exchange Company, the documents held today by the service go back no further than the last quarter of the 19th century.

The Old Regime Archives are preserved in the National Archives; later documents were mostly burnt in the May 1871 fire at the premises of the Department of Finance located near the Tuileries during the Paris Commune era; later, a further number of the documents which were scattered in various fortifications or unsuitable housing were destroyed in the early 20th century. The ambitions of an archive's commission set up in 1937 were quickly thwarted by the war and its aftermath. However, with buildings approaching full capacity, an archive service was organised in 1951 to ensure the sorting of the National Archives in preparation for future additions. In the 70s, documents were gradually gathered at two department sites thus ensuring improved conservation conditions until their consolidation in the current Savigny-le-Temple Archives Centre situated south of Paris in the Department of Seine-et-Marne, which was inaugurated in 1997. The archives that survived these successive upheavals are therefore relatively recent.

It is also important to bear in mind the expansion of the department over the course of the 20th century and the ever growing scope of its portfolio, which generates vast quantities of documents, and partially explains the self-government agreement that assigns to the SAEF the task of collecting, classifying, preserving and communicating, within its own premises, the archives produced by the Departments of Economy and Finance, under their various denominations, as well as any public operator and institution in charge of economic and financial matters (currently: 16,000 central administration staff, 96 operators and 25 related departments or agencies).¹

Sources listing and timeframe:

A sources listing (available in the appendix) has been developed from the available materials for Australia. It helps draw an overall picture covering essentially the last 80 years. Occasionally, some files may go back to 1911 or the 1930s, but in fact, substantial information may be found only from World War II onwards.

¹ The SAEF makes available to researchers a website (<https://www.economie.gouv.fr/caef>). It also has a Tumblr account (<https://archivesbercy.tumblr.com/>), where a post drafted for the seminar 'Shared Stories' may be consulted.

Researchers who wish to tackle these resources should be forewarned:

- The sources listing offers about 100 entries (109) but the material is rather motley: sometimes an archive box covers several decades with a wealth of impressive detail; sometimes it involves a single event; sometimes again, it is only a few pages or one of many versions of an administrative note. It would be ideal to find a continuous coverage of events but unfortunately a single article or brief may have to suffice, between two periods of time left unmentioned.
- It comes down to a keyword search in the database describing resources, with words derived from the word 'Australia'. But if the search does not detail the countries, the search engine may leave a box out. It is therefore important to extend the search to Oceania, also including the French presence in the Pacific, Polynesia and New Caledonia. In the most recent contributions, data for Australia may be found sometimes in files covering 'Japan', probably because the Financial Agency for Asia is based in Tokyo.
- A portion of the resources has not yet been filed and is therefore briefly described in contribution slips, thus significantly decreasing their visibility on one hand and frustrating the researcher on the other.
- It is important to reconstruct a complex puzzle, as the SAEF holds complementary pieces issued by many other institutions that are specific to the organisation of French ministerial departments but also to the many international institutions with whom France and Australia collaborate, sometimes accounting for profoundly intricate state connections: OECD, IMF, the European Union, and so on.
- The presentation of the resources faces three challenges: firstly, several department administrations are involved in the conduct of bilateral relations (mainly Economy / Finance, Foreign and European Affairs, Armed Forces); secondly, certain structures are attached successively to various departments, when they do not, for example, belong to a distinctive department that only exists intermittently (for example, the Department of Foreign Trade); finally, within the Departments of Economy and Finance, and as a result of reorganisations, the responsibilities of one entity may then fall partially or entirely to another entity. It is therefore difficult to gain an organised and complete overview. Rather there is a distinct impression of juxtaposition.

Content of resources

Regarding Franco–Australian relations, the SAEF contains several major archival categories:

- Cabinet Archives (1953–56; 1986–2012): focal point of the administration's work to educate ministers and advisers. A sort of quintessence, a final overview at the time of decision-making
- archives of the major departments which, at the mercy of restructuring, played a role in international, commercial, banking, customs and diplomatic relations, guaranteeing the development of exchanges, ensuring their consistency, monitoring businesses, and promoting French 'savoir-faire' (know-how)
- published statistical data (published today by the General Directorate of Customs and Indirect Taxation) revealing the nature of France's international trade and allowing comparisons and outlooks.

The archives contain numerous observations and analyses of Australian daily life, mainly from local diplomatic and consular bodies: financial advisers in Treasury-related positions, commercial advisers falling within the Directorate of Foreign Economic Relations, economic expansion areas and the Financial Agency for Asia in Tokyo, the French–Australian Chamber of Commerce, the French centre for foreign trade or permanent committee for the organisation of fairs abroad, which have now merged. Embassy dispatches and diplomatic services advice may also be found here. A quick look at the list of recipients of the same note shows the juxtaposition of organisational flowcharts and, consequently, the existence of sometimes identical files in several distinct bodies.

The heading ‘Bilateral Relations’ includes information on news updates for the country, negotiations and agreements, difficulties encountered, the country's projects with its usual partners and also for potential new markets. It contains analyses of investments, ongoing projects or markets to be developed, trade issues (customs, taxes, investments, statistics, newspaper clippings, views provided by, for example, the French Ambassador in England who can observe the relations between Australia and ‘the mother country’).

Regarding tax legislation, we gain an overview of the evolution of bilateral relations, the negotiations of Australia with favoured countries (United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, etc.), testimonies of people or organisations directly involved in the field, studies on investments or, on the contrary, on barriers to investment, as well as the organisations actively working for the development of French companies and the diversification of French exports in Australia, correspondence from entrepreneurs in hardship, and a build-up of arguments showing the urgency of an agreement to stimulate trade: the *Agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion*², signed by the two countries in April 1976, was the subject of multiple negotiations since 1946 – 30 years!

A note from the embassy shows an indicative list of major French economic interests in Australia: banks, industrial enterprises (including Pechiney, Le Nickel, Renault-Peugeot, Air Liquide, DAVUM for the Pont-à-Mousson Group), public works (SITRA and DUMEZ), petroleum research (Société nationale des pétroles d'Aquitaine, Compagnie française des pétroles), engineering firms (Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières, Compagnie générale de géophysique), and also maritime and air transport companies (Union des Transports Aériens – UTA, Messageries Maritimes, the maritime hotel and catering industry, etc.) ...

There are also more specific or unexpected aspects, including:

- business support files or printed listings of organisations that have received state aid and sureties
- real estate management of France's assets in Australia
- equity investments in Australian interests
- two INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) files listing French citizens born in Australia between 1857 and 1968.

² Departments of Economy and Finance, Archives Service, reference PH 242/98-0004.

Conclusion

This brief overview highlights the fact that the hundred or so references contained in the resources held by the Economic and Financial Archives Service present varied and divergent material, which must be compared with many other sources: diplomatic archives, international institutions, publications and of course, with Australian archives with which they may be aligned.

Resources

http://naa.gov.au/naaresources/documents/french-symposium2018/Etat_sources_Australie_201804.pdf