

THE SYDNEY FRENCH CLUB, 1885 TO 1893

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In March 1893 author Robert Louis Stevenson, visiting from his Samoan island home, could say that he owed Sydney's Cosmopolitan Club 'the expense of the journey to Paris and back' as lunch there satisfied his 'Samoan dream' of entering a French restaurant, drinking good wine and meeting French gentlemen. But in little more than six months the Club was gone,¹ and an institution that dated back almost nine years had gone with it. The Club had been founded as the 'French Association' and formally established in January 1885. However, for most of its life, more than five years from 1886 until early 1891, it had been known as the *Cercle français*, or French Club, transforming into the Cosmopolitan Club only in early 1891.

Despite Stevenson's comments so late in its life, the club has been largely overlooked in histories of the French community in Australia. It has been concluded on the period up to 1914 that 'the concentration of the French in the urban areas of New South Wales and Victoria, that is mainly in Sydney and Melbourne, did not even promote any sense of solidarity among them' and that 'nearly every settler had a story of his own, not linked with another Frenchman', so that the 'increase of the French population was not accompanied by any development of group settlement ...'. The French were not supposed to be 'interested in recreating *La France* in the Antipodes, in meeting their fellow countrymen or in promoting ethnic group activities...' (Stuer 1982, 147, 137 & 165; Jupp 2001, 359).

It was later considered that French woolbuyers who settled in Sydney particularly from the late 1880s and early 1890s were 'instrumental in setting up the Sydney French colony's infrastructure, together with Sydney's first French Consul-General, Georges Biard d'Aunet', after the latter's arrival early in 1893. But a reference to the first known 14 July celebrations as 'a dinner in a local restaurant' organised by Dr Louis Laure in 1885, hints

¹ For Stevenson's comment see *SMH* 17.3.1893 and *Launceston Examiner* 2.3.1893; the *SMH* in the second of a series of articles on 'Strangers within our gates' published on 2.9.1893 and devoted to the French, commented that 'the community in this city does not now maintain a club', while the Cosmopolitan Club itself ceased to trade around this time and was liquidated in October and November 1893—see *Table Talk* 29.9.1893 and 10.11.1893 and *SMH* 28.10.1893.

at the existence of the earlier organisation in Sydney (Barko 2004, 34 and 2008, 66).

The French Association of New South Wales at Sydney

The dinner on 14 July 1885 is the first reported local Sydney celebration of France's *Fête Nationale*. It was held at Albert Cochin's 'Diner de Paris' restaurant and the organising body was the 'French Association'. According to French Consul Jules Decourt—the *président d'honneur de l'association*—the Association had been formally created on 12 January that year, due largely to the efforts of Association Vice-President, Henri Bonnard, a native of Aix in southern France who had arrived in Sydney in 1879 to see the international exhibition and had stayed on as a vigneron, wine maker and businessman (*SMH* 20.7.1885; *Evening News* 8.8.1884; *Australian Town and Country Journal* 3.2.1894, *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 5.9.1896).

Later, in 1887 and 1888, J. J. (Jules Joseph) Lachaume was credited with providing the momentum for the establishment of the French Club, which the Association became, rather than Bonnard. Lachaume, from Pamiers in southern France, had arrived in New South Wales in the mid 1850s and by 1858 was practising as a surgeon dentist in East Maitland in the Hunter Valley. In 1869 he petitioned to be declared insolvent after a fire destroyed his surgery and he was sued for debt, but by 1870 he had re-established himself in Wynyard Square in Sydney, where he remained for a quarter of a century. An active community member in Maitland, Lachaume was not identified as so involved for some years after his settlement in Sydney. The return to Australia in October 1883 of Théodore Lachaume—he had first arrived from New Caledonia, his birthplace, in 1873, aged six, to go to school at Bathurst—to partner him in his dental practice may have provided Jules Joseph with the leisure time to promote the establishment of the French club. The precise relationship between Jules and Théodore Lachaume is unclear, but based on their dates (1832 and 1868) and places (Pamiers and New Caledonia) of birth, it is possible they were uncle and nephew (*Maitland Mercury* 5.11.1863, 29.3.1864, 24.1.1867, 10.6.1879 and 8.12.1881; *Newcastle Chronicle* 30.3.1864, *Illawarra Mercury* 13.5.1864).²

² For Théodore Lachaume see National Archives of Australia, naturalisation file,

Dr Louis Laure was the Association president. Born in Toulon in 1831, he arrived in Sydney in 1869 with his wife and two daughters, establishing a medical practice in Castlereagh Street. He had already had a career in the French maritime service, including in the Crimean War, and had been appointed a chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1860 for his work during a cholera epidemic on the island of Reunion, where he had lived for some years. Although he demonstrated his links to local ‘prominent citizens—parliamentarians, judges, lawyers, professors, newspaper proprietors, merchants, public servants’—and a characteristic appreciation of high culture, when, in 1875, he subscribed to an illuminated address for touring Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori (Kirsop 2009, 222-233), as with Lachaume, he possibly spent the decade of the 1870s establishing his professional position in Sydney. By the mid-1880s, however, after more than a decade’s residence and with his two daughters married, he seems to have been ready to take a more active role in the social organisation of his community.³

At the 14 July 1885 Association dinner French Consul Decourt said the idea behind the new group was ‘not to create at once a wide association, able to show a long list of members by admitting from right and left.’ Rather, ‘the purpose ... is to organise a place of resort for French gentlemen residing, or passing, here; and for members of other nationalities, also residents, who feel an interest in our country, our language, our literature, and our customs.’ Decourt emphasised it was for the French to host the ‘place of resort’. ‘I trust’, he said, ‘that you may promptly secure the number of French subscribers which will enable you to entertain your foreign friends’.

There was also another, perhaps more important, purpose in Decourt’s mind. Although in 1884 he had become involved in a case where

series A63, A1910/1978; *SMH* 16.3.1864; *Freeman’s Journal* 1.1.1876; *Maitland Mercury* 11.10.1883. Théodore’s death registration gives his parents as Calixte and Marie Lachaume—New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Deaths, 1924/12816.

³ www.archives.var.fr/, Acte de naissance, n° 265 at Toulon, registered 9 March 1831; Archives Nationales, dossier LH/1498/52 (at <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/leonore/pres.htm>); Victorian Public Records Office, Shipping Arrivals, Index to Unassisted Passengers 1853-1923; *SMH* 22.10.1870, 11.7.1872, 1.9.1873 and 29.10.1900; New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Marriages 1882/001504 and 1883/000324.

accusations of ‘prejudice against Frenchmen amongst ignorant folk in the country districts’ had been made, Decourt said he had seen prejudice against the French community diminish in the four years he had been in Sydney. He wanted that process to continue: ‘I rely greatly upon the influence of the association of which you are the founders’, he said, ‘to assist Frenchmen in their efforts to reach in this fair land a safe position’. (*SMH* 20.5.1884 and 20.7.1885).⁴ The dinner was rounded off with the singing of the *Marseillaise*. In early September 1885, the Association further pursued the line Decourt and the July dinner had laid out—of engagement, cross-community goodwill, and music. A concert celebrating the life and work of Victor Hugo, who had died on 22 May 1885, was held, the ostensible purpose to raise money for local charities. With patrons from government circles and the University’s academic elite, the concert was an opportunity for the performers, all described as ‘distinguished literary and artistic French residents’ (*SMH* 8.9.1885), to shine.

The full name of the French Association—the ‘French Association of New South Wales at Sydney’—was revealed at this event and the wider Association committee was named. In addition to Laure, Bonnard and Lachaume, this included André Leverrier, Brittany-born and an established businessman and importer who had been in Sydney intermittently from the late 1850s and permanently from 1877 (*SMH* 12.6.1889 and Rutledge 1986), Lucien Henry, art instructor at the Sydney Technical College and a former Paris Commune who had settled in Sydney after his release from exile in New Caledonia in 1879 (Stephens 2001, *SMH* 30.5.1896, *Freeman’s Journal* 6.6.1896, Dunn 2011), the Comte de Louvières, French Vice-Consul and later briefly acting Consul in Sydney, Pierre Edouard Cornillon, a former captain in the French merchant navy who had married and settled in Sydney in 1868, becoming a wine merchant and vigneron (*SMH* 2.5.1868, 13.4.1887, 4.5.1917 and 26.5.1917), and Edouard Marin La Meslée, a French-born New South Wales civil servant, author and well-known amateur geographer who had arrived in Australia in 1876 and married locally in 1880 (*Australian Town and Country Journal* 28.2.1880, 23.12.1893 and Ward 1974). Although a lecture by Dr Laure on ‘Victor Hugo, His Life and Works’ was reported as too long and only ‘very interesting to those who understood

⁴Decourt had been French consul in Sydney since September 1881 (*Australian Town and Country Journal* 17.7.1886 and *SMH* 22.7.1886).

French', which the majority of the audience did not, 'the musical portion that followed', including a solo and a duet from Laure, 'was excellent enough to make all amends' (*Australian Town and Country Journal* 12.9.1885). In early December, a dramatisation of Hugo's 'Les Misérables' at the Gaiety Theatre 'under the immediate patronage of the SYDNEY ASSOCIATION FRANÇAISE' rounded off the organisation's activities, seemingly forever, as it was never again reported in the Sydney newspapers.⁵

The French Club

This was not because it had disappeared. Rather, it had been transformed into the French Club, or the *Cercle français*. The evidence for this transformation is circumstantial but compelling. The Club was once in mid-1886 referred to as the 'French Club, in Sydney, called the "*Association des Residents Française de la Nouvelle Galle-du-Sud*" [sic]' (*SMH* 15.6.1886), recalling the name of the earlier organisation. J. J. Lachaume later claimed the Club had been initiated in mid- to late 1884, just as the French Association would have been being formed. A court case between two members of the club also suggests a foundation date of some time in late 1884 or very early 1885, as one party, M. Bulteau⁶, had resigned from the Club on 20 February 1885, indicating it had been operating before that time.⁷ And there were other continuities between the Association and the Club: the position of the French Consul as '*président d'honneur de l'association*' (occupied by Decourt in

⁵ The French Association references occurred only in 1885—see *SMH* 5.9.1885, 7.9.1885 and 9.12.1885.

⁶ Alexander Victor Augustus Bulteau, a well-known French lecturer at the University of Sydney (*SMH* 17.8.1882, 24.2.1886 and 20.7.1912, and *Evening News* 31.8.1885). A French teacher, Marian Fleming Harwood, considered that Bulteau, although not having the 'cachet' of the Sorbonne, 'spoke French well' and that 'in that particular no one on the French staff of this University, either professor, assistant professor, or lecturer, was or is his superior' (*SMH* 7.7.1925 and 14.7.1925).

⁷ Pierre Cornillon had sued Bulteau for libel, seeking £1000, after the latter had repeated gossip about him in writing; as Bulteau had only done so to demonstrate 'the scandal-mongering going on amongst members of the club' from which he had resigned as a result, a non-suit was granted on the basis that no malice had been intended (*Evening News* 15.6.1886).

1885 and until his death in July 1886, and by his successor, the Comte de Séguier, from November 1886 to April 1889), the presidency in 1885 and 1886 of first the Association and then the Club of Dr Louis Laure, and the involvement in both of other conspicuous members such as J. J. Lachaume, Lucien Henry and Pierre Cornillon.

The philosophy of the French Club also was almost identical to that enunciated by Decourt for the Association. Lachaume echoed Decourt's thoughts when he said in October 1887 that 'it had been his ambition to see formed a club which, whilst in a sense it was French, would be a social circle for the good men of all nationalities to be found in Australia, and would contribute to the formation of a unanimity of sentiment'. He had 'the gratification', he went on, that while 'it was true that no small number of their members came from France ... in their ranks... [were] a goodly proportion of their fellow citizens who were not ...' and that 'their membership included every nation of any importance' (*SMH* 15.10.1887).

The French Club settled into a long-term home at 50 Wynyard Square East, later Carrington Street. Its premises were significantly enlarged in 1888, the original rooms being recognised as cramped and inadequate for the size of the membership, suggesting considerable expansion from its original twenty-seven listed on the 14 July 1885 dinner menu (*SMH* 21.9.1886, 15.10.1887).⁸

During the years it was known as the French Club, the institution's leadership continued to be overwhelmingly dominated by Frenchmen. Its presidents were Laure, Leverrier and then Lachaume for three years before music entrepreneur W. H. Paling (who was originally Dutch) took the position for a year in 1890–1891. Known vice-presidents were Bonnard, Lachaume, and Laure before the Dorset-born businessman and company director Thomas William Warren (1889). Treasurers were a mix of local and French-origin members, but the Club's secretaries were all Frenchmen up to 1891, including Pierre Cornillon from 1887 to 1888 and 1890 to 1891, his term interrupted by Rudolf Metayer in 1888 before Belgium-born engineer Clément Van De Velde took over for two years from 1891 to 1893. Like its committee, the Club's membership was strongly middle class, both French and non-French members coming from the business, shipping, banking, professional, political and artistic communities of Sydney. The Club's functions were also regularly

⁸ The Club was said to have 70 members in June 1887 (*SMH* 27.6.1887).

attended by the Sydney-based diplomatic community—consuls for the United States of America, Italy, Germany, Russia and San Salvador among them.⁹

The reported activities of the Club support its French character. On a day to day level, the club's kitchen was 'distinguished for the excellence of its dinners'. Although a report in 1887 said 'an irreproachable cuisine is supervised by Chinese artistes', this high standard appears to have been the responsibility of Kabell Mockbell, 'the well-known coffee-room proprietor, who was the club's esteemed chef for many years'. Later owner of Sydney's 'Paris House' restaurant, described as 'once the resort of the elite and the wealthy of Sydney' when it closed in 1931, Mockbell was a long-time resident who claimed to have arrived on the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes steam ship *Natal* which inaugurated the Marseilles to Noumea via Sydney route, in January 1883.¹⁰ The rooms were frequently decorated with the *tricolore* and its blue, white and red colours, although at times the flags of other nations were added to appeal to the Club's cosmopolitan membership. Even when members signed accounts for club services to be paid later, they were known as *bon pours* [sic], indicating the member was 'good for' the funds, and would pay when invoiced (*SMH* 29.12.1933). Many reported events held by the club were associated with arriving and departing consuls and other officials. French officials travelling to Australia, or to and from New Caledonia and passing through Sydney, who were wine and dined by the Club included governors of New Caledonia Louis Hippolyte Marie Nouet and Noël Pardon in 1886 and 1889, and Oscar Comettant, French delegate

⁹ For example, Dr Vincenzo Marano, Italy's consul for forty years, regularly attended Club functions. His obituary appeared in *SMH* 7.4.1924.

¹⁰ For the 'Chinese artistes' see *SMH* 27.6.1887; for Mockbell see *SMH* 29.12.1933, *The Burrowa News* 7.8.1931, *The Bathurst Times* 11.2.1913, *Evening News* 25.7.1910, and National Archives of Australia, Series A1, 1904/3119 and 1926/4592. Mockbell sought naturalisation in Australia in 1904 and 1914 before succeeding at the third attempt in 1926; he gave differing accounts of his background on each occasion, stating his birth details as 'about 1859' in Yemen (1904), 7.5.1862 in Egypt (1914) and the same date at 'Stamboul', near Constantinople (1926). He stated his nationality to be 'Arabian' (1904), that both his parents were Turks (1914), and that his father was Turkish but his mother Egyptian (1926). Reported in the Sydney press as a 'Mohammedan', his naturalisation records from 1926 show he 'does not now profess any religious faith and his children were brought up in the Church of England', while 'there is no doubt of his affection for the British Empire'.

to the Melbourne exhibition in 1888. At the joint farewell for the Comte de Séguier and welcome for his successor, Henri Léon Verleye, in 1889, Dr Laure, speaking to welcome Verleye, claimed that 'although so far away from France, they endeavoured to keep up French traditions, and their hearts remained French' (*SMH* 8.4.1889 and Campbell 1999, 71–72).

The only occasion when there was any adverse controversy created by the Club's activities involved French officials, local politicians who were guests and spoke at the farewell of the acting French Consul, the Comte de Louvières, and French government actions in the Pacific. At the time of the farewell of the Comte, in September 1886, there had been a significant escalation of tension between Britain and France when French troops had occupied part of the New Hebrides, contrary to an agreement that neither power would do so. There was considerable opposition to this move in Britain and the Australian colonies, in part bound up in competition in the islands between Protestant and Catholic missionaries. However, the dinner guests, the New South Wales Chief Justice Sir James Martin, Premier Sir Patrick Jennings, Colonial Secretary George Dibbs and prominent barrister and political figure Julian Salomons, QC, took the occasion to disagree. Sir James Martin called the characterisation of the French in the New Hebrides as a menace to Australia 'laughable' and said that 'the intelligent people of this colony' did not believe the French occupation would be 'dangerous to us'. Sir Patrick Jennings, New South Wales' first Catholic Premier, agreed, saying his government 'held that it would be a great boon to Australia to have the French nation settled in the Pacific', the only difficulty being 'the convict question', as France still used New Caledonia as a location for the transportation of criminals. Dibbs felt Martin and Jennings had expressed 'the real feeling of the nation with regard to the New Hebrides' and the agitation against the French in New South Wales 'was based on ignorance or sectarianism', while Salomons added that 'it was hardly credible ... that anyone should be so lost as to what was fitting and seemingly as to use the language towards such a nation as France as had been lately used' in England. All four were cheered at the dinner, but outside the response to the speeches was less enthusiastic.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* pointed out that, contrary to the sentiment of the speeches, the New South Wales Agent-General in London, Sir Saul Samuel, had been instructed by the Jennings government to protest against the French occupation and to inquire 'when they intended to evacuate the islands' (*SMH* 20.9.1886). An indignant Sir Henry Parkes complained in

the NSW Legislative Assembly that the Premier was informing ‘a meeting of Frenchmen’ what the Government ‘was doing in relation to the New Hebrides’ before telling the Parliament, publicly stating it was ‘using their influence in opposition to the Imperial Government’. Parkes ‘with some force ... questioned the propriety of the Premier’s going to the dinner at all’. Jennings’ defence was to deny there was any contradiction in the approach taken, and to say that the French offer, ‘that the New Hebrides should be allowed to go to France on condition that the transportation of criminals to the Pacific was given up, that missionary interests were protected, and that the island of Rapa was ceded to Great Britain ... commended itself’ to him and his colleagues. The key issue was transportation, New South Wales long being concerned at the number of escapees that made their way from New Caledonia to the colony.

The controversy died down, but at the next dinner reported, the 18 November 1886 welcome of the new Consul, the Comte de Séguier, Jennings, Salomons, Justice Manning and George Reid all sent apologies, the only politician or official present being the eminent but semi-retired Privy Councillor William Bede Dalley (*SMH* 19.11.1886). However, early in 1887 when a dinner was given by the club to celebrate the election of Francophile Bernhard Wise to parliament, Parkes, now Premier, was happy to attend, and Salomons was back (*SMH* 8.3.1887). The re-establishment of the Club’s reputation may have been assisted by their fund-raising concert in Wynyard Square ‘for the benefit of the sufferers by the recent disaster to the *Keilawarra* and *Helen Nicoll*’, a maritime disaster in early December 1886 resulting in the sinking of the *Keilawarra* and considerable loss of life. The concert organising committee included French pianist Henri Kowalski, Cornillon and Laure, vice-consul the Marquis de Rostaing, a ‘prominent member of the *Cercle Français*, and ... highly popular amongst the French residents of this colony’ (*Evening News* 25.8.1888 and *Freeman’s Journal* 1.9.1888), Clément Van de Velde and W. H. Paling. This was not the only cause to combine the Club’s French and philanthropic impulses. The club took up a subscription for the Tessero French Comedy Company, which had been stranded in Sydney due to the failure of their tour to attract sufficient popular support, when local ignorance of spoken French led to many empty seats at their performances (*SMH* 22.8.1888). The Cosmopolitan Club was to continue this philanthropic activity when, in one of its last reported public events, it held a Queensland floods benefit concert at the end of February 1893. Around 2000 people

attended to hear the concert the Club sponsored in Wynyard Square (*SMH* 2.3.1893). There were occasionally also justifications for celebration—J. J. Lachaume's birthdays during the years he was president, W. H. Paling's philanthropy, Queen Victoria's jubilee, Wise's election to parliament and, in January 1888, a celebration of the centenary of the founding of the colony of New South Wales. Dinners were frequently accompanied by music, at which the French members were most prominent—Henri Kowalski (piano), Louis Laure (singing), Horace Poussard (violin), and, later, Sydney City organist, Auguste Wiegand (Belgian but Paris-trained), among others, providing high quality entertainment.

Celebrating the *fête nationale*

Conspicuously, following the 1885 dinner hosted by the French Association, each year from 1886 to 1889 the Club held a dinner to mark the 14 July French national day, the only organisation to do so up to 1888. A notable contribution was made in early years by another former Communard, Alfred Tischbauer, who decorated the Club rooms on these occasions.¹¹ After the first dinner in 1885, the functions were held in the Club's own premises at Wynyard Square, where they were 'provided in true French style' (*Maitland Mercury* 19.7.1887), and 'would not have disgraced the establishments of [New York's] Delmonico or [Paris's] Frères Provençaux' (*SMH* 15.7.1889). Usually presided over by the French Consul—the exception being in 1886 when, due to the death of Jules Decourt, Club president André Leverrier stood in for acting Consul the Comte de Louvières—the dinners were a regular opportunity for the Club to assert its French character and origins.

In 1886 the dinner was postponed until 4 September due to Decourt's death on 11 July—the day the dinner was originally scheduled. When it was held, a 'large number of French citizens' attended what was a 'truly enjoyable' occasion, including, as well as chair the Comte André Leverrier, acting French consul de Louvières and vice-consul the Marquis de Rostaing, and Louis Laure's son-in-law, Alfred van Rompaey, the consul for Belgium (*SMH* 7.9.1886). In 1887 French consul the Comte de Séguier presided over 'an excellent dinner ... in true French style', which was enjoyed by a mixed group of both French and non-French members and guests. Toasts were made

¹¹ See, for example, *SMH* 7.9.1886.

to the Queen, the President of the French Republic, 'prosperity to Australia' (in relation to which Lachaume commented on the growth of the wool trade between Australia and France), and 'French art in Australia' (in which Laure mentioned particularly Séguier, Poussard, Kowalski, Henry, Caron (Hince 1969) and Madame Charbonnet¹²). Dr Laure sang the *Marseillaise*, accompanied by Poussard on the piano, after which Lucien Henry, 'to whom the great revolutionary hymn seemed to give much inspiration' delivered 'a short but exceedingly forcible piece of declamation' (*Maitland Mercury* 19.7.1887).

The 1888 dinner followed the pattern of 1887, with Séguier in the chair, and around one hundred attending. Toasts were made again to the Queen and the President of France, but this year also the Governor of New South Wales, the French Club and 'our guests', Sir John Hay, President of the Legislative Council, and Sir John Robertson (*Evening News* 16.7.1888).

For the 1889 dinner, held on 15 July, 'to remind the diners of the *raison d'être* of their feast that evening', the centrepiece was a gingerbread Bastille. Lachaume 'congratulated the members on the progress which had been made, the success of the club affording a proof that it really was a necessary institution'. But several circumstances indicated Lachaume was overly optimistic. The numbers at the dinner were down on previous years, only some fifty gentlemen attending. No government members were present, nor, significantly, anyone from the French consulate. In fact, this was the first year an alternative celebration was arranged, and it was at the instigation of the new consul. Verleye had already exercised his independence from the club on 5 May 1889 by holding a reception at the Consulate to mark the opening of the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris and the centenary of the meeting of the Estates General which precipitated the French revolution (*SMH* 7.5.1889). More importantly, on 14 July he organised a picnic at Correy's Gardens, Cabarita, on the Parramatta River, described in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as 'the first official gathering of Frenchmen which has been held in the colony to commemorate the national fete' (*SMH* 15.7.1889), overlooking the four

¹² Later Madame Alice Charbonnet-Kellerman. See Jin Guan Bong, *Alice Ellen Charbonnet: a French Musician in Nineteenth Century Australia*, Masters research thesis, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, 2006; also <http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/679082?c=people>. A brief summary of Madame Charbonnet's life appeared in an article about her daughter, Annette Kellerman, in *Truth*, Sydney, 30.1.1921, and there is a reference to her death in Paris in 1914 in *Punch*, Melbourne, 3.9.1914.

dinners held by the French Association and Club prior to 1889, with the active participation of Verleye's predecessors. In contrast to the French Club dinner, Verleye had 'used his utmost endeavours to gather in as many of his countrymen and women as could be induced to attend' and around 200 had done so—four times as many as attended the dinner. No senior French Club members were listed as being there, however.

Although the *Sydney Morning Herald* said the two 1889 events were 'totally distinct and independent of each other' and 'both equally successful', this withdrawal of consular support spelled the end of the French Club *fête nationale* dinners. Verleye's alternative celebration represented the first time the Consulate had not supported the Club's event, and the first time it had sponsored a rival activity on the day. Notably, Verleye was not mentioned, unlike his predecessors, as the honorary president of the French Club, and his arrival appears to have resulted in the permanent distancing of the Consulate from the Club. In 1890 there was only a second picnic—at Sir Joseph Banks Grounds, Botany—and no Club dinner. This time Dr Laure, Henri Kowalski, Clément Van de Velde, and André Conil, Sydney agent for the *Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes* (*Illustrated Sydney News* 20.1.1883) attended the picnic—all active French Club members up to that time. Around 250 people were there, with 'the success which attended the celebration at Cabarita last year ... quite eclipsed'. Verleye may have been prompted to organise the picnics by a number of reasons: he may have wanted the Consulate to take more of a leadership role in French symbolic celebrations in Sydney; he may have wanted to support a more broadly-based and inclusive French community structure; and he may have been following the French republican government's lead in Paris by making the celebration of the centenary of the revolution more closely associated with the Republic itself.¹³ After several months in Sydney he may also have felt the French community needed to move beyond Decourt's 1885 aim for the Club, of reaching for the French 'in this fair land a safe position'. At Botany in 1890 Verleye said he 'saw a number of his best and most congenial countrymen who occupied high positions in the distinguished world of Sydney', as well as a range of 'friends of France': 'The sympathy of so many Australians gave to Frenchmen fresh proof, if such were needed, that in Australia as elsewhere, France had preserved a

¹³ Gildea 2009, 264, wrote that 'the Republic used the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution in 1889 to proclaim its legitimacy'.

very precious friendship ...’ In other words, Verleye could claim the place of the French community in colonial society was assured and Decourt’s vision had been achieved. It was time to re-focus consular and community efforts elsewhere.

From French to Cosmopolitan

The expansion of the French Club rooms in 1888 had suggested both sound finances and solid membership. The President, J. J. Lachaume said in farewelling the Comte de Séguier in April 1889, that he agreed with a comment that ‘the Cercle Français was no longer a club: it was an institution’. Lachaume credited the departing Consul with a significant role in this: ‘the prestige of the Comte de Séguier and his assistants had very much to do with the gratifying position in which [the club] now stood’. ‘It was a matter to be thankful for’, Lachaume said, ‘that a gentleman of his official standing and social position should have associated himself’ with the Club, ‘which was French in its institution, but cosmopolitan in its formation’ (*SMH* 8.4.1889). French Club activity continued and dinners were reported in early 1890, but there were fewer in the latter part of the year. On 27 November a report in the *Illustrated Sydney News* suggested it was business as usual— one of the Club’s ‘periodical dinners’ was held with about 70 members and guests present. Kowalski performed on the piano, Dr Laure sang and the now President, W. H. Paling, performed ‘with his usual *verve*’, on the violin. But this was to be the Club’s swansong.

By March 1891 the Cosmopolitan Club Company Limited (described subsequently as ‘late French Club’), of 50 Wynyard Square, was advertising for staff (*SMH* 17.3.1891). As well as the change of name, Paling’s presidency signalled a hiatus in its French domination. In 1892 he was followed as president by Anglo-Australian dentist Alfred Burne and then newspaper proprietor Alfred Bennett, of the *Evening News* and *Australian Town and Country Journal*. But in December that year Bennett and vice-president auctioneer Samuel Ackman resigned, ‘owing to stress of business which prevented them from giving the time to the club that they desired’ (*Illustrated Sydney News* 21.12.1892). Henri Kowalski was subsequently elected the last president of the Club (*SMH* 24.12.1892). Born in Brittany, at

Dinan, his father Polish but mother Breton,¹⁴ and a star pianist in Paris and Sydney, Kowalski had long been a supporter of the club and a participant in its musical activities. His presidency was ‘calculated to promote the musical and artistic interests of the city’.

This signified a change in the Club’s character which had been evident through 1892. The arts had become a much more prominent part of its activities; business people and visiting entertainers, performers and writers—such as Franco-Irish humorist Max O’Reil (Léon Blouët) (*SMH* 23.4.1892 and Verhoeven 2008), Robert Louis Stevenson and Paris-trained Belgium-born violinist, Ovide Musin—were more likely to be guests than government members or public officials.¹⁵ On 2 August 1892 another bridge was crossed when, for the first time, female performers were included in a Club event, ‘two promising young vocalists, the Misses Llewelyn’ performing alongside recently arrived Sydney city organist Auguste Wiegand, as well as Kowalski, Poussard and a Miss Bryant. And on 8 December 1892 ‘there was a large gathering at the Cosmopolitan Club ... when a soiree’ was held, ‘at which many ladies were present’. In a further departure, in September 1892 it was reported the Club hung in its concert-room for a week a painting by Surrey-born, New Zealand resident Francophile artist L. J. Steele of ‘The Last Stand of Captain Starlight’ (*SMH* 12.9.1892).

At the 8 December 1892 soirée not only was music played but a medallion of President Alfred Bennett was presented, ‘a lightning sketch’ was done by Mr Percy Spence of Kowalski as he played, and the medallion maker, Emile Leysalle, modelled Kowalski’s face in clay (*SMH* 9.12.1892). The nature and focus of the Club would continue in this artistic vein under Kowalski. But while some members remained, along with the older approach of the Club many of the original members had also reduced or ceased their association with it.

J. J. Lachaume was no longer a prominent executive member, possibly as a result of business and personal circumstances, as his partnership with Théodore Lachaume seems to have been suspended in 1891 (Théodore ‘resumed’ his involvement with the practice in December 1892) (*Evening News* 23.12.1892). Laure may have been distracted by work with the newly formed *Société Française de Bienfaisance* (French Benevolent Society), of

¹⁴ *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* 20.6.1881.

¹⁵ See the *Illustrated Sydney News* 10.9.1892, for an account of a dinner for Musin.

which he was a prominent member (*Courrier Australien*, 4.6.1892). Leverrier appears to have been in financial difficulties from the middle of 1889 and was possibly distracted by his business affairs (*SMH*, 12.6.1889). Paling ceased active participation in club life with his departure for Europe in January 1892—he did not return until March 1894 ‘in failing health’ (*Illustrated Sydney News* and McCredie 1974). Lucien Henry had returned to France in 1891 and Alfred Tischbauer had moved to Victoria in 1890 (Stephens 2001, 9, and *SMH*, 14.3.1890). Bonnard seems to have moved on much earlier, perhaps distracted by his vineyard at Richmond and his role as consul-general for San Salvador (*Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 5.9.1896) and Cornillon, by now in his late fifties, had perhaps retired to his vineyard at Canley Vale, west of Sydney (*SMH* 4.5.1917).

Unfortunately, the new club was not viable. Despite the success of the Queensland floods concert, the later dinner for Robert Louis Stevenson in March, and a small number of other reported entertainments, it was in liquidation by October 1893.

Through its exemplary cuisine, the marking of Bastille Day, dinners for visiting Frenchmen and for arriving and departing French consuls, and its musical entertainments by French musicians, the French Club was a focus of an element of French society and culture during its lifetime, including in its incarnation as the Cosmopolitan Club. However, it was elitist and by 1890 it could be said that Decourt’s and Lachaume’s aim of establishing an organisation that could gain *entrée* into, and build bridges with, the upper echelons of NSW business, government and cultural life, in that way to ‘secure a place’ for the French in colonial society, had been achieved. Without the support of the French Consulate and of a group of long-standing and senior members, the Club ceased to have a role within either the French or the wider community. This may have combined with declining general economic conditions to undermine the financial stability of the Club—the early 1890s saw a significant shrinkage in the Australian economy and increasing unemployment (Macintyre 2009, 129–130). For six years though, from 1885 to 1890, the Club had served the interests of the Consulate and the upper echelons of the Francophile colonists well, and had, for a time, given French culture a high profile in Sydney society. But it had passed its useful life and was, perhaps unfairly, forgotten.

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