

THE GARDENER'S JOURNALS

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The proposal to log parts of Recherche Bay in Tasmania, and the 2003 discovery of the presumed site of a garden planted during the first visit of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition in 1792, have focused considerable attention on the gardener Félix Delahaye (aka Lahaie/Lahaye) and inevitably on both his journal held in the Archives nationales (Marine, 3JJ 397) and the "Catalogue-Journal de botanique" preserved in the Bibliothèque du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle in Paris (Per-k-g-24).

The first transcription of the journal held by the Archives nationales was made some ninety years ago by Madame Marie Hélouis née Briau (c.1872–1934), an employee of the Paris Bourse recommended to the Mitchell Library by the Comte Alphonse de Fleurieu. The library did not obtain a microfilm (FM4/10411) from the Archives nationales until 1 July 1991, when it was purchased with residual funds from the dissolution of the Australian Bicentennial Authority. The National Library in Canberra also has a copy of the same microfilm (NLA Mfm 24799). In April and June 2000 I used the Mitchell's microfilm to make a working transcription of significant parts of Delahaye's journal as background for my biography of Labillardière, but I had no thought of publishing this separately. Although I had made a half-hearted attempt to locate Delahaye's garden in 1999 with my wife Susan and Tasmanian botanist Louise Gilfedder, I could not have imagined at the time that a bitter environmental and heritage debate surrounding the garden would unfold just as *Citizen Labillardière*¹ went to press.

On 5 March 2003 Christine Milne, now Senator Milne, obtained digital copies of part of the "Catalogue-Journal de botanique" held in the Bibliothèque du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle during a research trip to France. In the year or so after, a number of attempts were made by French-speaking Tasmanians to decipher Delahaye's difficult eighteenth-century handwriting. The gardener's idiosyncratic and archaic—often phonetic—spelling came as a shock to those who embraced the challenge. What was called for was a skilled translator, experienced with eighteenth-century manuscripts and blessed with the insights of a native speaker. My Mauritian-born mother, Maryse Duyker, who has long been a crucial aid to my own historical research and has published extracts from the journals of Marc-Joseph Marion Dufresne and Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, was ideally suited to this task.

Limited space forbids publication of Delahaye's entire account. What follows, therefore, is the unabridged narrative of the first visit to Van Diemen's Land in 1792, from the "Catalogue-Journal de botanique", followed by the account of the 1793 visit from the historical journal held in the Archives nationales. Both extracts have been meticulously rendered and retain Delahaye's original spelling and capitalization, together with a translation. As can be seen from the square-bracketed interpolations, Delahaye rarely used punctuation. The series of dots in the transcription are as he placed them and do not denote missing text. My mother has asked me to extend her thanks to Professor Ivan Barko for his careful reading and useful comments.

The journal extracts reflect Delahaye's lack of formal education and naiveté, but also offer testimony of his efforts to improve himself through reading and study—as suggested by his patron and mentor André Thouin at the Jardin du Roi. Delahaye emerges as a patient, stoic, unpretentious individual. His journals reveal most strikingly that his horticultural endeavours were not simply confined to a single garden site: "I had large quantities sown everywhere in the woods, in the more open spaces, and more friable. [. . .] I have also sown mixed seeds everywhere, thrown at random, where I believed they could succeed". This comment underlines the inadequacy of the Tasmanian Government's proposal to protect only the coastal zone and small buffer zones adjoining the "garden" site and the observatory. Indeed further study of the peninsula may yet reveal other important vestiges of Delahaye's work. The gardener's journals are also significant because he was one of the first members of the d'Entrecasteaux expedition to encounter the Tasmanian Aborigines.

It is hoped that the publication of these extracts will stimulate further informed discussion of the heritage issues associated with the northeast peninsula of Recherche Bay and provide useful background for the excavations planned by archaeologist Jean-Christophe Galipaud in early 2006.

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Note

1. Edward Duyker, *Citizen Labillardière: a Naturalist's Life in Revolution and Exploration (1755–1834)*, Carlton, Vic., Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 2003.