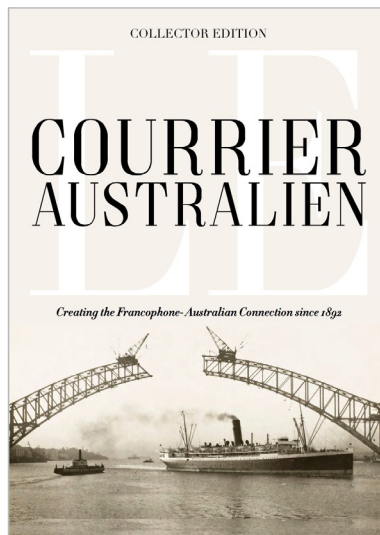


Book Note

François Vantomme ed. & Bernard Le Boursicot, *Le Courrier Australien, 1892–1945: Creating the French-Australian Connection since 1892*, Sydney, *Le Courrier Australien*, December 2019, 247 pp., rrp AU\$ 85.00, ISBN 978-0-64873-920-3.

Le Courrier Australien, the oldest foreign language newspaper still in existence in Australia (with a short hiatus, and now online) has published the first volume of a two-part bilingual collector's edition that offers a historical window onto the French-Australian connection from 1892 to 1945. It is a beautiful coffee-table book, richly illustrated both with reprints of past issues and photographs of the period. General readers will enjoy this unique opportunity to travel through time by reading intriguing historical documents that are a testament to the strength and complexity of the relationship between France and Australia and of the enduring legacy of the French and Francophone communities in Australia.



The book has been published by the two co-owners of the *Courrier*, François Vantomme (who is also the director and *rédacteur en chef*) and Bernard Le Boursicot, to celebrate the recent 125th anniversary of the publication. It is endorsed by a preface from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia and one by the *Secrétaire d'Etat auprès du ministre de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères*. It begins with a personal and endearing first-person account of the history of the *Courrier* by the late Jacqueline Dwyer, who was the *doyenne* of Sydney's Franco-Australian community which, for many years, sustained the *Courrier*, and was in turn sustained by it. The main body of the volume opens with an informative brief history of the newspaper by Emeritus Professor Ivan Barko (University of Sydney), one of the co-founders of ISFAR and whose own work on the history of the *Courrier Australien* will be familiar to many.

The volume contains six chronological chapters that reproduce editorials and articles, along with English translations. It is not a history book but a collection of archival documents. Each section starts with a short introduction and many articles are first contextualised by a short boxed text. The book celebrates the *Courrier* and its contribution, and features articles about important events, such as the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (featured on the cover), and significant historical periods such as the Great War and the Vichy period, offering an enriching and unique walk through time.

While landmark events appear to be obvious choices to structure the volume, the choice of other articles may appear arbitrary and could have benefitted from deeper engagement with existing historical scholarship. For instance, the volume contains an article from 1898 that talks about Australian Aboriginals. It relates a *fait divers* and discusses 'les aborigènes' as gentle good savages whom Western civilisation is easing into an inevitable oblivion. This raises many questions. Was this view always espoused by the *Courrier* under the various directors during the half century period we are dealing with? Are French views here similar or at odds with those of Australians? What does this teach us about the evolution of race relations, here, and elsewhere? These are not comfortable questions but they should not be ignored entirely, even for a celebratory volume. Readers should be given the tools to interpret the documents and ponder their significance. Similarly, one article recounting an Australian tourist's pleasant trip to

New Caledonia in 1934 could have benefitted from some contextualisation; the island is described as a forgotten tourist paradise at a time when the Kanak population was still being forcibly relegated to indigenous reserves.

Often, the sponsors who made this publication possible are skilfully woven into the writing thus showing the enduring legacy and longevity of many Franco-Australian institutions, many of whom have a history as long as that of the *Courrier Australien* itself.

While this book is not a history book per se, but a compendium of historical documents, it is a shame not to have any references or a selected bibliography that would allow readers to pursue points of interest. The historical sections cannot have been written without recourse to secondary sources. Similarly, a discussion of the archival documents could have been illuminating. Where are the archives of the *Courrier* kept and what state are they in? Are any issues missing and, as a result, what are the gaps in our knowledge of the history of this long-established institution?

This is an ambitious book that largely rises to the challenging task it sets itself. It covers a half-century period in just under 250 pages in a way that is entertaining and stimulating. It is an important publication, showing the extensive history of the *Courrier*, a key institution that has bound the histories of France and Australia together for more than a century and, I hope, will continue to do so in the future in its new digital format.

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