

# French-Australian Dictionary of Biography

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The French-Australian Dictionary of Biography (FADB) is an initiative of the Research Committee of the Institute for the Study of French Australian Relations (ISFAR <https://www.isfar.org.au>). The first entries were uploaded onto the web-based platform in 2018 (<https://www.isfar.org.au/fadb/>); over 25 have been created to date. While still very much in its early development phase, the FADB has the clear and significant ambition of becoming a full-scale expression of ISFAR's central purpose: the exploration, documentation and analysis of the multi-faceted relationship—historical and present—between the nations and peoples of Australia and France.

Although Australian historians, at least since Ernest Scott's work in the early 1900s, have long been interested in the eighteenth and nineteenth century French voyages of discovery, it was not until the 1980s that French Australian relations first emerged as a discrete field of academic interest and research. Pioneering studies by Anny Stuer (1982, *The French in Australia*, Institute of Advanced Studies, ANU, Canberra, Immigration Monograph Series 2) and Jean Rosemberg (1985, *The French in Australia*, M.A. thesis, Monash University) were accompanied by the founding of two similarly motivated institutions: The University of New South Wales French-Australia Research Centre in 1984, and ISFAR, originally based at Monash University, in 1985. The former had a relatively short life, but produced several symposia and publications which have had enduring relevance. For its part, ISFAR, while incorporated in Victoria, grew into a national body, with active members in all states. It created a bi-annual journal, originally

entitled *Explorations*, which became *The French Australian Review* in 2014. Sixty-six numbers of the review have now been published.

Biography has been an important strand in the ISFAR journal from its inception. Early numbers included scholarly reflections on the lives of a variety of French individuals who could be seen as making notable contributions to the development of Australian society. The ‘gallery’ included academics like Antoine Denat (1905–1976), whose career spanned four different Australian universities; or Nazar Karagheusian (1898–1968), a largely self-taught Parisian of Armenian background who lectured at the University of Melbourne for over thirty years; or Augustine Soubeiran (1858–1933), co-founder of Sydney’s prestigious Kambala School; there were also musicians such as Henri Kowalski (1841–1916) and Léon Caron (1850–1905), and the photographer Antoine Fauchery (1823–1961). This paradigm of French presence and influence as expressed through biographies gave birth to a milestone publication in 2015: *French Lives in Australia* edited by Eric Berti and Ivan Barko (North Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publications). ISFAR contributed to the conception and production of the book, and its member-researchers produced many of the twenty-four biographical essays.

The FADB is not limited to the biographies of people with a French background. Many others have made important contributions to links between Australia and France. They come from a wide range of categories, stretching from the world of education to diplomacy, the arts, sciences and technology, trade, sport and so on. Sometimes the FADB will include figures who already have entries in the ADB, but with specific emphasis on the French Australian connection. For example, while the ADB entry on NSW Premier William Holman (1871–1934) notes his Francophilia, the FADB’s entry provides much more detail about how his attachment to things French led to deepening relations between France and Australia, particularly during and just after the First World War.

The 2019 ISFAR Research Committee consists of Stephen Alomes, Ivan Barko, Peter Brown, Jean Fornasiero, Kerry Mullan, Colin Nettelbeck (chair), and Margaret Sankey. In 2018, the committee compiled an initial list of over 100 names of subjects for the dictionary, together with a list of expert potential contributors. It was anticipated that the subject list would expand as the project gathered momentum; this has indeed proved to be the case.

A standing invitation to suggest contributions is expressed on the website. The criteria for selection are 1) that the lives documented must be complete and 2) that they must illuminate French Australian relations in some significant way. Guidelines for presentation and formatting are available for potential contributors. The author of the entry must obtain permission to reproduce any images used. The Research Committee determines whether a particular entry is included in the Dictionary. Draft entries are circulated to all members of the Research Committee for comments and suggestions. Once a decision to publish is reached, the entries are sent to the editorial team of *The French Australian Review* for final preparation. As with the ADB, entries provide essential bibliographical information, and are normally 600 to 1000 words in length. There is an ongoing procedure for correcting any errors that may occur in the entries.

The present web-based compilation process has been a practical way to get the dictionary up and running, but ISFAR remains open to the idea of book-form printing.

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### **Editors' Note:**

Since this article was published in *Biography Footnotes* there has been a change in membership of the ISFAR Research Committee. The current members are: Alexis Bergantz and Elizabeth Rechniewski (Co-Chairs), Stephen Alomes, Jean Fornasiero, Kerry Mullan, Margaret Sankey and Barbara Santich.

The next issue of *The French Australian Review* will provide further information about the new Research Committee and its current projects.