

FRENCH MANUSCRIPT SOURCES FOR AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND STUDIES

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Searchers working in French archives in the past have established the fact that a considerable amount of manuscript material directly relevant to Australian-New Zealand studies exists in a variety of French repositories. To date, however, little has been done to describe these documents in a comprehensive manner or to bring them as an archival series within the easy reach of scholars resident in this country.

Madame R. Helois made transcripts of significant naval series between 1914 and 1920⁽¹⁾ for the Mitchell Library; Miss Mander Jones has given a broad survey of source materials in France in her article "Australian Records Abroad",⁽²⁾ and Scott⁽³⁾ of course has provided us with a comment on materials for the Napoleonic period. But these were all written before a great deal of locating was done and they do not give a complete statement of the situation in French archives, as regards Australian-New Zealand sources. They provide in effect no more than an initial orientation in the direction of French materials and an indication that significant records series exist. They do not present us with a detailed guide.

Recent surveys indicate that manuscript material is preserved in a much more extensive manner than has been envisioned in the past; and the documents are of such significance that they cannot be ignored by collectors of Australiana. Chronologically they span approximately five centuries of French effort of discovery, from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries, and even longer than this if we take cognizance of medieval cosmographers and cartographers. From the point of view of form and origin the records are similarly extensive, consisting of a variety of explorers' accounts, scientific data, naval documents, diplomatic archives, the records of commercial houses and ventures, private family papers and other series; and considered by subject they cover fields of interest to the geographer, the historian, the anthropologist, the linguist, the meteorologist, the zoologist, the artist and art historian to name but a chosen few. There is no need to refer back to the works of the researchers mentioned above to illustrate the scope and importance of the various series. We need only to contemplate the history of France's achievements in the Pacific-Indian Ocean regions to realize the potential of the country's archives. France has no mean maritime tradition, and as an exploring and colonizing power she made significant contributions to the growth of knowledge of the "South Seas" in Europe. Moreover the French were not only active voyagers and settlers but were and are still careful documenters and records preservers and as a result they have left voluminous accounts of their activities and observations in the region under consideration.

(1) These are listed in a catalogue made by the Mitchell Library, Sydney, under the title *Transcripts of Documents Relating to Australia and the Pacific in French Archives*. Madame Helois copied documents in the Bibliothèque du Service Hydrographique de la Marine, Paris; the Département des Manuscrits, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Archives Nationales, Paris; the Musée de Paris; and the Musée de Histoire Naturelle, Paris. The call numbers used in the transcripts in the case of the Bibliothèque du Service Hydrographique, it is to be noted, are outdated and no longer exist in their old form. The documents listed for this repository have, for the most part, now been transferred to the custody of the archivist at the Archives Nationales where they are filed under a different series of accession numbers.

(2) P. Mander Jones, "Australian Records Abroad" in Royal Australian Historical Society. *Journal and Proceedings*, vol. 37, 1951, p. 81-95. The French series are described on p. 92-93.

(3) Published sources are described in E. Scott, *Terre Napoleon: a History of French Explorations and Projects in Australia*. London, 1911. Note there is also a short account of French archival series in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. 7, part I. "Australia". Cambridge, 1933, p. 681.

These records that have been created and taken into archival custody over the decades have not been used by Australian scholars to any great extent as yet. There are the Helois transcripts already mentioned which have been supplemented in piecemeal fashion by copies of documents made at times by different scholars working on specific topics in the field. And there are interpretations of events written by students working in France⁽⁴⁾. The result so far is that a collection of French records of sorts has been made on Australian - New Zealand topics and is available to scholars who remain working in this country. This collection as it exists, however, is not adequate for the research worker who wants to penetrate deeply into a subject in the field. Nor are the copied records of such a quality as to be of future use to a growing national research university unless they are supplemented in some way. In the past this has been done by individual scholars, and it is doubtful if this collecting technique is the most beneficial to the archivist or to future research workers who will be confronted by numerous seemingly illogical gaps. What is required if a substantial collection is to be created (as is being done in Australia in the case of British records relating to the Pacific) is a carefully planned and directed scheme which aims at the total location and copying of complete series or items of interest leaving no gaps; or if these cannot be avoided due to one cause or another, then leaving gaps which are noted and described in detail. An analysis of the various archival series not yet copied in France suggests that such a programme is worth consideration. The documents in that country have the very same qualities that C. Burmester describes in his article entitled "The Collection of Australian Historical Records" published in the December, 1961 copy of this journal⁽⁵⁾; the records are unique, they are manuscript and they are original works.

This article is written in the belief that such a programme for locating and copying further records series on the continent of Europe is not inconceivable in the future. No attempt is made in these pages to list and describe the relevant series and repositories existing in France. That lies within the scope of a separate work. What is described is the way in which a copying project was carried out in France for New Zealand in 1959: added to which are some thoughts on work carried out for some years in the same field before that programme commenced, in the hope that it will be of some service to archivists who may have occasion to work in this non-British sphere.

The constant impression gained when researching in French archives was the need to make a logical approach to the problem of locating and noting manuscripts with a view to having them copied. Costs in France are high and a great deal of time and effort can be wasted if careful plans are not laid. Similarly, if work is started in a hasty, ill-conceived manner duplications will be made, and valuable man-hours lost on "back tracking" to pick up series that had been by-passed. Conscious of such pitfalls that face any searcher in the archives it was found best to work and administer a scheme of three stages consisting of periods of preparation, describing and copying. Various trials of different methods indicated that this course of procedure was the most economical and the one that resulted in the most comprehensive coverage of the scattered archival series.

I. THE PREPARATORY PERIOD

No time limit can be suggested for this. The length very much depends on the qualities and experience of the searcher who should endeavour to avoid

(4) J. Dowling now of Queensland University, wrote a dissertation entitled *Soixante Ans de Navigation Francaise Autour de l'Australie, 1768-1828* for the University at Aix en Provence in 1955.

(5) *Archives and Manuscripts*. Vol. 2, No. 2, Dec., 1961, pp. 19-26.

the inherent dangers which face the traveller who "s'embarque sans biscuits". The aim in this period was preparation which would allow work to commence immediately on arrival in France.

Study made beforehand can lead the searcher to understand French archival techniques and filming systems; to gain some knowledge of French administrative procedures (which is of inestimable help when tracking down documents); and to get acquainted with the field of study. Such information can be gleaned in a variety of ways. Reference and explanatory books are available⁽⁶⁾; and there are a number of scholars and experts who can be contacted and who are only too willing to help and give advice.

Besides these broader efforts to build up background information, three more tangible results were sought in the preparatory period, and when work was completed there existed:—

1. A LIST OF ARCHIVES AND REPOSITORIES CONTAINING AUSTRALIAN - NEW ZEALAND SOURCES

No comprehensive list of these exists⁽⁷⁾. The searcher has to compile his own guide as he goes along. Recourse can be made to the Helois transcripts to make a start in the first instance, but these hold good only for Paris, and not all of the significant documents exist there. They are in fact scattered about France in a most absonous manner⁽⁸⁾ and both capital and provincial repositories must be searched with equal fervour if a comprehensive survey is to be made.

In creating a list of these it was found that the following formula was useful and served as an interim work guide and schedule of procedure that allowed an itinerary to be planned. Under each heading a list of repositories containing or likely to contain manuscripts of interest was made to be used when the stage of describing the documents was reached. The outline formula used was :

A. Paris

I Public archives and governmental repositories, e.g., Archives Nationales; Ministère de la Guerre; Ministère de la Marine, Bibliothèque du Service Hydrographique; Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, etc.

II Public libraries and museums, e.g., Bibliothèque Nationale; Musée d'Histoire Naturelle; Musée de l'Homme, etc.

III Private archives

- i. Ecclesiastical, e.g., Mission Etrangère de Paris.
- ii. Commercial, e.g., Chambre de Commerce de Paris.
- iii. Learned societies, e.g., Institut de France.
- iv. Family papers.

B. Provinces

I Archives départementals.

II Branch repositories, e.g., Bibliothèque de la Marine, Brest, etc.

III Bibliothèques Municipales. These frequently contain manuscript collections.

IV Private archives

⁽⁶⁾ e.g., V. Langlois et H. Stern. *Les Archives de l'Histoire de France*. Paris, 1891-93.

⁽⁷⁾ A select list of French repositories is given in *Archivum*, 1955.

⁽⁸⁾ For example records relating to the Duperrey circumnavigation, located so far, are in six different repositories in Paris and the provinces.

- i. Ecclesiastical (where headquarters are situated outside Paris).
- ii. Commercial.
- iii. Learned societies.
- iv. Family papers.

Once names of repositories were tabulated in these categories, and the list was very much a living one being added to all the time, it was possible to start listing the records that they contained.

2. AN INITIAL LIST OF RECORDS TO BE CONSULTED

This list need consist only of the call number and short title of the documents that have to be consulted in each repository listed. The information for this was obtained for the most part before the searcher landed in France. The French Ministry of Education has made available comprehensive catalogues of manuscript collections in Paris and provincial repositories⁽⁹⁾ and these are sufficiently detailed to be used for a preliminary survey. In fact it pays to work on these series of volumes in a preparatory period away from France where there is less call being made for them. They are, however, not wholly adequate for the researcher. The titles do not always make a précis of the contents of the volume. Occasionally a binder's title is used in the catalogue and this results in the passing over of documents of significance which then must be picked up when working in the repository itself, by using their indexes and examining the individual volumes. Also recent acquisitions are not included in the published lists and these have also to be scanned in each repository when work is commenced there.

3. READING TICKETS

Few of the repositories and the archival series are open to the general readers. Tickets and permits to consult records series have to be obtained, and arranging for these takes time and some effort. Applications were all made and completed before actual work commenced, thus saving valuable days.

One major problem had to be faced in the initial stage of the work. A choice had to be made as to what to include as being relevant to the field.

CRITERIA OF SELECTION

If copying is to be done then the laying down of principles of selection is the task of the organising body administering the project. The choice to be made is not always clear cut, obvious and easy to make.

Recent work on the New Zealand copying programme indicated that four geographic regions have to be considered in any survey of French effort in the period of discovery : the Indian Ocean; India and the Indies; the Pacific, and the Antarctic. Not all the voyagers to these areas, of course, came into contact with Australia and New Zealand. A decision therefore had to be made as to where to draw the line. Similarly one's mind had to be made up as to whether or not all of the records of a circumnavigation were to be listed and copied, or whether only that part of the series relating to Australia and New Zealand was to be noted.

Documents consulted so far suggest that the following principles of selection are generally applicable when listing French sources for Australia - New Zealand studies :

⁽⁹⁾ France, Ministère de l'Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts. *Catalogue General des Manuscrits des Bibliothèques Publiques de France*. Paris, 1885. See also the catalogues and inventories of documents published by H. A. Omont.

(1) All material to the mid-eighteenth century (that is to about the time of Lozier Bouvet) be listed as relevant and copied. The reason is that during this period only general terms, such as Mer du Sud; les Indes; or Terre Australe were used and can be taken to mean anywhere in the region bounded by Africa and the eastern Pacific, the Antarctic and the East Indies. If a rigid formula based on modern geographic definitions is adhered to when selecting documents to approximately 1740, there is a chance that significant and relevant manuscripts relating to the French search for Australia would be lost.

(2) From the mid-eighteenth century a more precise definition of the Australia-New Zealand area can be made for copying purposes. From that time Australia and New Zealand began to appear as separate place names (under, of course, varying titles such as Terre Australe; New Holland, etc., which were used at the time) in the itineraries of travellers.

It was also found that a tendency to err on the over-generous side when selecting for listing paid dividends, for it is easier to discard unwanted material than to back-track to fill in gaps.

When the initial list was complete, describing and copying was commenced. I should point out that these are not necessarily two separate and distant functions. In fact both can be done at the same time. Frequently I found it was more logical and better from an administrative point of view to work just ahead of the copier, as long as he had plenty of work to do, so that any queries that arose or problems that appeared were settled on the spot. The various stages mentioned are not meant to represent true divisions. Some of each can be worked on each day if necessary. They only indicate separate functions which can be used to mark level of work. This is valuable in cases where a halt has to be made with the scheme, due to a change in personnel or some other factor. When searching is recommenced the stage of work reached will be known and a start can be made immediately at that point.

II. THE COMPILATION OF A DESCRIPTIVE LIST

This list, which is the final one, was made while working with the documents in the various repositories. It took the form of a separate catalogue of documents made for each archives and each fond or series kept in that place.

Each of the manuscripts entered on the preparatory list was called for and examined, together with any others that came to notice, and complete details of the document, if it proved to be significant, were noted on the descriptive list. When completed, this formed the reference guide to documents in a repository.

After a period of trial and error the following form was adopted for the list. Entries for each item were made in eleven columns set out on foolscap as follows :

REPOSITORY :

MSS		Date of MSS	Collation		Title of MSS	Comments and Description	Copying Instructions	Photographer's Remarks	Reel No.	Frame No.
Series	No.		Page	Size						

This allowed a complete description to be made of each document. The final result was a list that had three uses. It served as :

(a) an aid for organizers of the scheme who, when considering the principles of selection, could assess the merits of each document and suggest lines of demarcation.

(b) an order sheet for the photographer; and a record for the accountant who was responsible for making payments.⁽¹⁰⁾

(c) an index to the rolls of microfilm or copies of manuscripts. The list indeed can readily be filed with the series of rolls.

Once the documents of interest were located the final stage of the project, copying, was commenced.

III. COPYING THE MANUSCRIPTS

Each repository has its own regulations and work programmes for copying documents placed in its custody and therefore generalizations are not easily made. Good results and economic work methods, however, were found in the following procedure.

The descriptive list, when complete for an archival series or repository, was submitted to the photographic section. The searcher then proceeded with further descriptive work in that, or a nearby repository as the situation dictated. For example the map series was listed in the Bibliothèque Nationale and then copies ordered while work was proceeded with in the Manuscript Department of that library. This kept me within easy reach of the photographer and allowed me to call at the technical department at the end of the day if that was necessary.

Series or fonds existing in repositories were listed in order and copied as a whole in the same order so as to preserve as much as possible the original archival arrangement, which itself, especially in France, has historical significance.

This procedure also simplified the photographer's task. The order list he was given described series in order and documents in order of accession and he was able to work through a series from beginning to end without jumping all over the place.

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The programme which has been described is meant, of course, for the French archives which have a distinct character. However, there is no reason why similar principles could not be used in the case of locating documents in other countries which have collections of interest and significance to archivists and research workers here in Australia.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This was discussed with Miss Mander Jones who made the valuable suggestion that the back of the list could be used for administrative and accounts purposes.