



La Gazette

November 2023 #67

President's Message



The Akaroa French Fest finally went ahead October 6-8 after a hiatus of three years due to Covid cancellations.

The programme for the day included the brass band and descendants parade through the town; opening speeches by dignitaries; Café Monet and a wide range of food stalls, rooster crowing competition and live music. The evening entertainment was a cabaret with variety acts; Sunday was a beautiful day for the Brocante fair, Fancy French pooch Parade and a circus for the children.

Several committee members went over for the weekend and manned the stand in the Heritage tent alongside the Comte de Paris descendants and Alliance Francaise. There was lots of interest in memorabilia displayed and the Libeau Family book was a great resource used frequently to trace lineage. This publication made an impressive statement on the table and generated genealogy envy!

Desiree made lavender sachets from Provencal fabric and lavender from my garden to sell on the stand, as well as packs of French sunflower seeds. Alfred Libeau's WW1 medals were displayed with his story, and we made several new family connections.

Our merchandiser flag made a strong statement and provided a perfect photo opportunity for the French Ambassador, who displayed strong interest in the Libeau stories.

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The main event for this festival is the re-enactment of the French arrival in 1840. This is no longer organised by descendants and since 2017 has become a two hour pantomime on the beach. The committee has concerns about the historical inaccuracies, sexual innuendo and profanity in the script as well as disrespectful comments about our French ancestors.

[continued overleaf]

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There was only one page about the French arrival at the end of the play. Frances and her daughter were involved in this and were not permitted to wear the authentic costumes we have made based on museum research!

The Landing is family entertainment and many in the audience expressed disgust at the content. We had a frank discussion about this at our committee meeting today and after liaising with the Comte de Paris committee plan to express these issues to the organisers.

Spring is here – strong winds, heavy rain, hail as well as bright sunny days.

My favourite lily of the valley (muguet) is out as well as wisteria and early roses.

It is the countdown to Christmas now and I look forward to catching up with you at our Christmas luncheon December 3rd. Sadly Maison de Crepes has closed down but we have a lovely venue and delicious buffet booked at the Russley village where we had the Comte de Paris landing Day lunch in August.

Heather



It's not FrenchFest

Let's set the context: I'm a direct descendant of two of the original French settlers who arrived at Akaroa in 1840. Joseph and Magdeleine Libeau were professional gardeners from the area south of Nantes, France. They left Rochefort, France on the boat le Compte de Paris only to find they had arrived in a country now declared British. Despite what must have been an enormous shock and disappointment, they persevered through great deprivations and hardships, cleared the land for market gardening, vines, dairy farming, brickworks etc and prospered by their own hard work.



Naturally Akaroa holds an important place in my heart and in the personal histories of all the descendants of the French and German settlers who disembarked from the boat. For thirteen years The Libeau Descendants Society and the Comte de Paris Descendants Society re-enacted the landing on the beach at Akaroa to the delight of locals and tourists. It was simply and honestly done but success grew the event to where they needed help and that appears to have been our downfall.

These days it is called FrenchFest but on any other weekend you'd be hard-pressed to find much that was genuinely French about the place. It has become a caricature and a nice financial vehicle for certain festival organisers. Akaroa itself has a great little museum but there isn't that much there from the French and German settlers, there are less than a handful of French people living there, the shops don't bother to greet you with a *Bonjour*, the products have little of a French theme. I guess it is still a unique place and we descendants are very proud of our ancestors who were poor, mostly illiterate but hard-working people brave enough to launch themselves into an adventure 18,000 kms away. For most it was a one-way trip into the wilderness

The re-enactment has been hijacked by 'Hollywood' types who care little for authenticity but prefer cheap shots, obscenities and woke pandering to certain groups. Ego reigns supreme. Actors from Auckland are flown in to perform stupidities in a bloated script. Rehearsals are held for weeks in Akaroa, effectively excluding most descendants from participating except as finale decoration. The script is 54 pages long. The French settlers arrive on page 53.

But hey, let's have sexual innuendo between Captain Cook and Joseph Banks, references to cellphones, pest-control characters in green Steve Irwin outfits, deliberately stupid references to sperm (laughed by reference to sperm whales), a Maori 'entrepreneur' selling multiple maps of Banks Peninsula (since when did Maori have paper-making technology?), totally unnecessary musical interludes, a camp male Queen Victoria. This appalling script is presented to families expecting to hear history. I was told many folks left after an hour, disgusted at the amount of obscenities used. In the end the duration of the play was 2 hours in freezing weather. When the descendants used to do it the duration was around 40 minutes.



The script is audibly insulting to Maori (yet Onuku Maori seem to go along with it). I wrote to the organisers requesting that they remove offensive lines from past scripts that were upsetting to Compté de Paris descendants. Nope still there. I had some lines to say but was never given the script before the final rehearsal. Hmm. It was stressful to have to cram an hour before.

The script describes our French ancestors - "These immigrants are all of the lowest order. I had to go around the pubs and taverns of Rochefort..... men and women reluctantly agree to the adventure."

In fact the venture was scarcely advertised because the French were scared of tipping off the British to the departure of the boat of colonists. The emigrants knew life was hard in post-Napoleonic France - crops failing due to phylloxera, high infant mortality and so they bravely sought to better themselves in a country none of them understood. The settlement was a hard-sell because information had to be kept secret and no-one knew anything about the bottom end of the planet.

During the Landings play on the beach on the Saturday of FrenchFest there were instances of actors used in place of settler descendants where the real descendant got just one word to say, "just", and that person even lives in Akaroa. Do we feel side-lined? Hurt? Disrespected? YES!



For the second time in a row I was obliged to wear a truly laughable costume. Despite sending my measurements to organisers the jacket didn't fit though I suppose it was an improvement on the blanket around my shoulders in 2019. I told the costume person that I was 'now known as the torn blanket wrapped around her head woman. What have you got for me this year?' Hey, a cut off strip of old cardigan, complete with half a pocket, to wrap around my head. I told her my ancestor would have had a bonnet. She disagreed and said

they would have been too dirty and too poor to have had a bonnet. My daughter was obliged to wear an old fur coat turned inside out. It literally fell apart before her eyes but she was told that made it more authentic and the arrivals would have been very scruffy. She just makes it up on the fly. The whole thing is degrading but you can't argue against the force of personality of this woman and her husband, who has no respect for true history, respect for the characters and no talent at all in writing a script.





I listened to the despairing comments of fellow descendants who knew more about the hijacking of Akaroa than I did, over the weekend. They are not heard. They have literally been shouted down. No wonder they no longer want to be involved in the re-enactment which is now a farce.

I would rather they called the event AkaroaFest, not FrenchFest as there is no respect for history and the French theme is mostly pseudo. The French character of Akaroa is dying under a thousand cuts. The Saturday evening cabaret cost \$79 per person with no food included and I have read several negative comments on Facebook about the lack of Frenchness and the disorganisation. I couldn't afford to go. Such events are now priced out of many people's pockets.

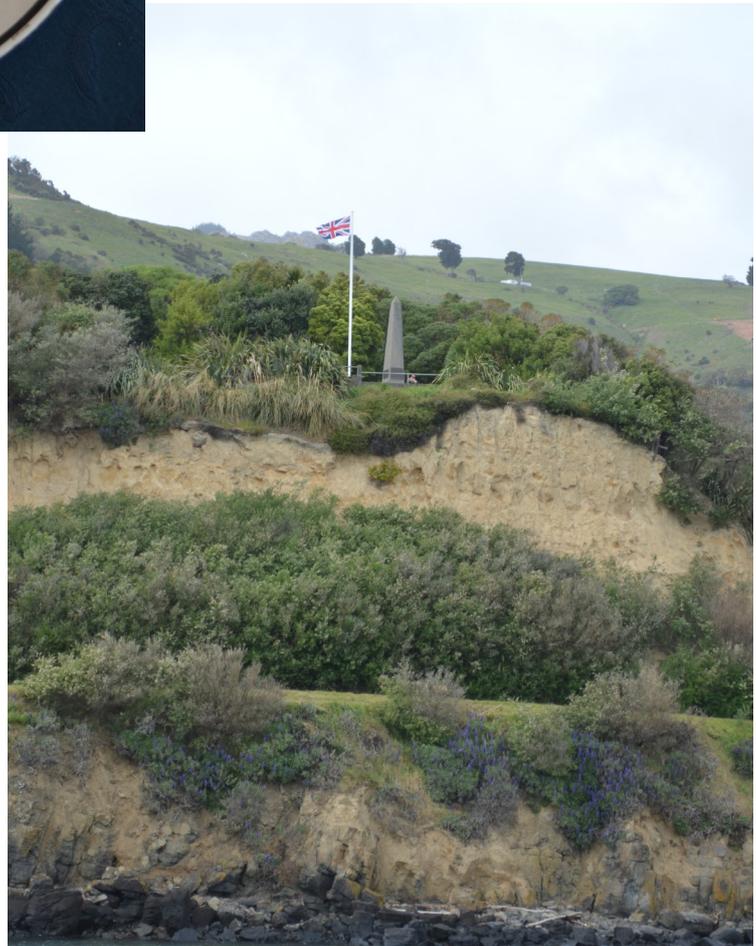


I made an effort to attend the Brocante on the Sunday morning. This is a French tradition whereby old stuff, occasionally antiques, is put up for sale. I came away with a little piece of French history which seems authentic. An old plate illustrated with King Louis-Philippe. He was the last king of France and who signed the agreement to send my ancestors to establish a French colony in the South Island of NZ.

Few people would have appreciated the significance of that plate (or it wouldn't have been up for sale for \$20) particularly over FrenchFest weekend but it's safe with me. I was pleased to meet the French Ambassador but there was no time to chat.

In short, there is little that is French now about Akaroa except the cultural appropriation required for FrenchFest. The play on the beach is insulting and hurtful and just a huge ego trip for the two people organising it. If I ever travel to Akaroa to attend FrenchFest in future I shall wear a more authentic style costume but I will not take part in the farce on the beach.

I would like to thank Black Cat Cruises for giving some of the descendants who came to Akaroa for the weekend a free 30 min cruise around the harbour. **Someone appreciated us.**



Frances Harrison—a personal account which may not be the opinion of others who were present.

Akaroa French Festival 2023 - A Fantastic Family Day

What a wonderful experience it was to attend the French Festival in Akaroa, held recently on the 6th -8th of October. It was an early start for us all leaving Christchurch on the Saturday morning but what a lovely scenic drive over Hilltop and down into the beautiful Akaroa. We made it just in time to see the historical landing re-enactment on the foreshore, which brought to life for us what it would have been like for our ancestors arriving on the Comte de Paris from France back in 1840 to settle in Akaroa.

We then joined in to the parade of French descendants, many dressed authentically in settler outfits, walking proudly along the Main Street behind our families named banners. It was a wonderful family experience and great to share with our children. We followed the procession down to the park where there was a sea of berets to be seen and a fantastic array of food stalls, live music & entertainment, games & activities all with a French twist. There were also many opportunities to stop at stalls and learn more about family history.



A highlight of the day for Jenny & I, our husbands & children, was when we were all welcomed aboard a complimentary Black Cat Harbour Cruise. The Black Cat Company had kindly offered a celebratory descendants harbour ride as part of the French Festival. This was greatly appreciated and it was fantastic to see Akaroa from another beautiful perspective out on the water, following the path our early family members would have travelled as they arrived into Akaroa in August 1840. Our children loved standing out on the front deck of the boat as we toured around the harbour. It was wonderful to have the chance while on board to meet and chat with other descendants and share interesting family stories.

As we walked down to the wharf to meet for our Harbour Cruise we came across the "Joseph Libeau & Family" commemorative seat that looks out across the harbour, we were proud to show this to our children.

What a fantastic opportunity the Akaroa French Festival was for our family, giving us the chance to connect with wider family members and experience for the first time the wonder of our French family arriving & settling in Akaroa so many years ago. Our Mum was an integral part of this festival over the years so the connection to the day for us was extra special. Thank-you to everyone involved who made our family trip such an enjoyable & memorable experience.



Mary-Ann Jenkins & Jenefer Bimler - Daughters of the late Patricia Stoneman . Along with family members who also enjoyed the day: Glenn, Lia & Kate Jenkins and Damien, Lars & Max Bimler

Dear Members of the Libeau Descendants Society

We are delighted to report that the Akaroa French Festival was an immense success for our organization. The turnout and enthusiasm exceeded our expectations, making it a truly memorable event.

The level of participation and enthusiasm from both AFC members and the wider public was amazing. It was heartening to witness so many individuals partaking in our various activities and competitions, showcasing a true appreciation for our cultural heritage: Musical Quiz, Draw-a-postcard competition, Gastronomy Quiz, raffle, etc.

Our on-stage comic show received a warm and receptive welcome from the audience, underscoring the strong connection we share with our local community. The language taster was a great opportunity to share our linguistic roots and was met with great interest, curiosity and laughs.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed to this remarkable event. Our commitment to celebrating our French heritage is stronger than ever.

Thank you for your unwavering support and for making the Akaroa French Festival an unforgettable occasion.

Warm regards,

L'Alliance Française de Christchurch



Births, Deaths & Marriages

Grace Burling died 2 June 2023.

The passing of Grace Winifred Burling on 2 June 2023 in Taupo marked the end of a generation of descendants of Joseph Libeau and Frederick John Clark Snr. Grace was the youngest of Fred's and Minnie's children, born on 21 October 1925 and spent her youth in Pahiatua. Grace was the much loved mother of Amy Goss, Heather Purvis, Terry Burling (deceased), Russell Burling, Sharon Morrah, Tony Burling, Lorraine Hagley and their partners.

Birth notice

Brody Malcolm FAIRBAIRN

Born in Tweed, 26 February 2023. Parents, Trisha Clark and Dave Fairbairn. Brother to Riley and Indiana (Indy) Fairbairn. Living in Elanora, Queensland, Australia. Grandson for Richard & Dale Clark, Rangiora.

DEATH Notice

Kenneth Malcolm DAVEY

Late of Rangiora. On October 5, 2023, passed away peacefully at Essie Summers Retirement Village, aged 83 years. Dearly loved husband of the late Josephine, (nee Clark, daughter of Hector and Dora Clark), loved father and father-in-law of Michelle and Stu, Bryan and Angela, Craig and Ana, and the late Katrina, much loved Pop of Dylan; Jarrod; Jonah, Daniel.

Libeau Cottage 60 rue Grehan, Akaroa up for Auction.

Built in the 1850s by Joseph Libeau as one of three workers cottages, this is an important part of Akaroa's Heritage fabric. The owners are selling as they are purchasing another cottage. It was last sold in 2021 for almost \$700,000 and they will be wanting quite a bit more than that. It has been well looked-after. Open homes are planned for November. The auction is in Christchurch 23 November.

<https://www.bayleys.co.nz/listings/residential/canterbury/banks-peninsula/60-rue-grehan-akaroa-5522417?fbclid=IwAR0J1tDK4bVL7TiPKCGpu9hT8oY3a13zcT9G5by7aY398EV9BnsienG4ytk>



CdP Descendants Weekend 25 and 26 Nov 2023

Please find below further details for the CdP Descendants weekend on 25th and 26th November 2023



- The main event will be the unveiling of the Memorial Entrance to the Catholic cemetery that we have been working on over the last 10 Years.
- This will take place on Saturday afternoon at 2pm Followed by an Afternoon tea at the Gaiety Hall
- The Saturday night dinner will be held at The Grand Hotel. starting at 6.30 pm(This will be at your own expense)
Definite numbers required by 5th November 2023
- Town walking tour will take place on Saturday morning at 9.30 - As numbers are limited to 20 per tour we require definite numbers for this by the 5th November and additional tours will take place as demand dictates.
- Museum visit to view Family Heirlooms at 11.00am on Saturday . The Museum need to know which families and numbers that wish to attend so please let us know if you are interested in this option
- Cemetery tour will take place at 10.00 am Sunday morning
- BYO picnic lunch at the Heritage park from 12.30 Sunday (weather permitting)

Could you please confirm numbers for all the above events to cdpdescendants@gmail.com by 5th November 2023



Aux membres de la famille Libeau en France

Can anyone please send us images of how our ancestors would have dressed around 1840?

We know they were poor but I am sure they would have always presented themselves to the best of their ability.

Des photographes de cet époque sont improbable mais peut-être d'autres types d'images?



In light of the dreadful costume and hair presentation of our ancestors and the stubborn refusal of FrenchFest Landings organisers to listen to Libeau family members, it would be much appreciated if someone has any evidence of what our ancestors actually wore, either indoors, outdoors or while travelling.

The only reference I have in my head is similar to that portrayed in *The Piano*—about a fictional British immigrant in the 1850s



Come and join the family for Lunch!!!



10 December 2023

Abode Café, Russley Village, 73 Roydvale Ave.

Christmas-Themed Lunch Menu \$40 per person.

Main buffet

2 meats for carvery (choose from below)

Roast Lamb and honey orange Glazed Ham (on the carvery with condiments like mint jelly, apple sauce, cranberry sauce and jus)

New potatoes (subject to availability) or Roast potatoes

Cauliflower broccoli au gratin

Roasted parsnips, roasted baby carrots

Peas, beans, and corn

Creamy tomato pasta bake

Dessert

Christmas tarts with Chantilly cream Or...

Plum pudding with custard

Tea or coffee - RSVP to Heather heatherlibeaudow@xtra.co.nz by 19 November

Emily Page (née Libeau, - daughter of Julia Libeau who was Joseph's last child with his French wife Madeleine) with daughter-in-law Isobel. Emily was active in the Red Cross in the 1940s and 1950s.



Libeau Subscriptions

Have you paid your [subscription](#) yet? It's only \$15 per year to keep in touch with other members via newsletters, have activities organised by your committee and learn about your personal history. Membership requests for payment for 2023 \$15.00 You now have the option to pay by bank transfer or international PayPal].

BNZ 02 08420171869000



Olive Kingston and Ida Page in front of the Libeau stables, 56 Rue Grehan circa 1920

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