



La Gazette

March 2025 #72



President's Greeting.

Bonne Année 2025 .

Hopefully your new year has started well and although Christ-church summer weather was very disappointing we have enjoyed some sunny early autumn days.

Our Libeau Descendants Christmas afternoon tea was held in December. More than 20 members arrived at Cameron and Heidi's home which was beautifully decorated and enjoyed a sumptuous spread produced by Heidi and Saffron.

The photo opposite captures the begonias thriving in my conservatory as there is an interesting French connection to these long lasting ornamental plants.

At the mayoral reception during the 2000 Libeau Descendant's reunion in Rochefort, Monsieur le Maire presented the president Vaughan with a large bronze medallion featuring Michel Bégon and his wife who were residents in Rochefort 1688-1710. The inscription reads –*la fleur exotique connue depuis sous le nom*



Inside this edition:

- President's Greeting
- Akaroa garden tour
- Making history accessible
- Is France in my future?
- Obituary Rita Libeau
- Recipe
- Libeau-related photo
- Committee details

Begonia'.

Apparently a French Franciscan monk collected the first wild begonias in the Caribbean and named them after his favourite botanist Michel Bégon. The medallion is presented to incoming presidents and is currently in my care.

Website: libeau-family.org

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This year we celebrate 185 years since the arrival of the Comte de Paris in Akaroa.

Our AGM is confirmed for May 18 @ 2pm in the Alliance Francaise rooms 275 Cashel St.

Please plan to join us and celebrate the results of the committee's hard work over the past year, and bring a plate for shared afternoon tea.

We are considering a Rochefort 'petit reunion' in September 25-28 this year to continue strengthening the ties between Libeau/Libaud relatives. A proposed itinerary will be sent out shortly so if you are interested please let me know asap. The Akaroa-Rochefort Association went into recess recently but hopefully meeting the next generation of French family will re-new interest.

Best wishes

Heather xx

Comte de Paris Landing Day Lunch

They have booked the Old Vicarage for the Landing day Lunch for Sunday the 10th August at 12.00 , contact President Nicki Lancaster if you would like to attend.

nickiglancaster@gmail.com

Inside Out Akaroa House and Garden Tour 2024



This fabulous event, featuring our ancestors' hometown and surrounds, was advertised in La Gazette Newsletter. Given any excuse to visit our daughter and family in Christchurch to see the grandchildren, and my love of visiting gardens, Mike and I decided to plan a trip south.

With many others ahead of us in our search for weekend accommodation in Akaroa, we decided to stay in Duvauchelle - after all, didn't Joseph and Clemence live there for a while? Previously we'd only driven through and maybe stopped at the famous Barry's Bay Cheesery to sample some cheeses.

As the weekend approached, we visited Frensham garden with friends. It's a lovely garden in Tai Tapu near Christchurch open by appointment for part of the year.

Come Friday afternoon we arrived at Duvauchelle and settled into our motel with a lovely view towards Robinson's Bay. Thoughts of our ancestors and where they lived interested me, so I emailed cousin Kevin Clark for some more detailed information. His prompt response: "If you are staying at the seaside motel in Duvauchelle and look across the bay you will be looking at where Joseph and Clemence's property was. History?"



It is no longer there but is between the road to Akaroa and the shore from where the road goes up the hill and before the turn off to O'Kains Bay. In fact, the road is not the original road which was closer to the shore and steeper.

Libeau's corner was a local landmark and was 1 mile from the old Somerset Hotel."

[continued next Page]

The photo (previous page) was taken from our balcony on a grey, drizzly morning looking towards the point that Kevin was referring to. Isn't it great to have such helpful cousins sharing their knowledge of the family.

The highlight of the weekend, and the main garden I wished to visit, was the renowned Fishermans Bay Garden, requiring a 30-minute drive over a steep, windy and eventually shingle road with stunning coastal views. The fabulous garden with breath-taking views, sculptures and colourful plants was worth every minute of the drive. If you are in Akaroa, I'd highly recommend a visit to this garden, open by appointment with an entry charge.

To round out our first day we visited a few gardens in Le Bons Bay – the drive along the Summit Road and down into the bay was scenic and interesting. Knowing that our great-great-grandmother trekked over these steep hills, with butter and in her role as local midwife, gave an understanding of how hard life must have been for the early settlers.

There were 16 homes and gardens to explore over the weekend so, having covered the more remote gardens on Saturday, we took in the Akaroa gardens on Sunday. Included were the old cottages at 115 and 117 Rue Jolie, an olive farm, and French Peak Vineyard, so all in all lots of variety.

Another interesting garden close to the Libeau properties in Akaroa was the Kokopu Cottage at 155 Grehan Valley Road. A serene garden, with mature trees bordering the stream, gave an old-world feeling reminiscent to what the area may have been like in the 1840s. A hideaway nook and outdoor bath added to the atmosphere.

The gardening gene seems to have been passed down in our family with all my siblings being keen gardeners and/or plant enthusiasts - a link to our French ancestors. I garden on a small suburban section in Wellington battling the wind and clay soil – despite the challenges I manage to have a garden of interesting plants and interest throughout the year.

I'd be interested in linking with other family members who are keen gardeners, so we can maybe share our gardens for each other's appreciation via a Facebook group.

Contact: Alison Hannah alisonhannah@icloud.com, mobile 022 415 6480



Making history accessible

Last year I wrote about three Libeau properties in Rue Grehan, Akaroa, parts of which can still be seen from the road, some of which barely exist. I did this in order to make the information available indefinitely for family members and researchers. Keeping stuff in our heads or photo albums is pointless. To survive our stories have got to be accessible.

With that in mind, this year I will feature copies of land transactions/deeds pertaining to Libeau sales and purchases of land in Akaroa. There is likely to be some info included relating to other Akaroa settlers. The material has been loaned to me by author Kevin Clark so it can be included in future Gazettes.

Mostly, it is all pretty dry stuff with no context or explanation so I am cherry-picking a bit. I suppose what holds my interest is the knowledge that these are real historic documents and the cursive writing is truly visually lovely. It is a tangible link to our common ancestors who lived and worked and invested and divested. Some of you might find the addresses and dates of interest. The information may complement your family trees.

So, when you see a photo page of land transactions *in the next La Gazette* please don't skip it. Take some moments to actually read, looking for wee gems you can connect to. I don't know why some of the transactions occurred; why Joseph Snr et al decided to buy or part with land rather regularly. We know he was a successful businessman but perhaps, due to his intemperate and unpleasant personality at times, he may have been his own worst enemy financially and lost money maybe through careless and impulsive decisions, drinking or gambling. We don't know, but I always wonder why one of the most commercially successful French settlers couldn't keep his stuff together and leave plenty to his progeny who in many cases did it hard during their lives and some he deliberately abandoned. Prosperity wasn't passed down through my parts of the family tree.

I remember my grandmother telling me what a hard life her mother Emily Libeau had had as the daughter of Julie who died young in a mental hospital, and that my grandmother herself came from a poor farm labouring family lacking in education or comforts but always proudly clean and hardworking.

—*Frances Harrison*



Is France in my future? Again? Frances Harrison wonders where she's heading



I am a bit of a family anomaly. Although born in NZ and having spent most of my life here I just never felt I belonged, but the French genes didn't fully wake up until I was in my late 40s and then they just would not let me be.

Through some pretty disastrous circumstances while living and working in Auckland I discovered my career there had been utterly sunk by self-serving 'supercity' politicians and I would be unlikely to find work but would consequently lose my home. What to do? Take drastic measures, all detailed in a memoir I published in 2014 under the name of Frances Lawson (one of the characters was threatening me). A bizarre set of circumstances

saw me follow Emilie Libeau back to France albeit 180 years separating us. With just a suitcase (all other belongings of a lifetime had to be jettisoned) I finally stood on French ground.



I lived and worked in France for over 7 years. It was extremely difficult, not being an EU citizen and with never any reliable, stable employment, abused and caught in a media story of educational and political corruption, (yes, really!). I stuck it out, suffered the fonctionnaires and refused to give up because I discovered that France really was where I felt most ME and I was challenged, yes, but never bored. I wanted to stay but NZ had other ideas. Despite meeting all criteria for superannuation before I left, I discovered you must be permanently living in NZ to even apply for it.

My life and relationships and work in France had to be demolished but in the meantime, my persistence had resulted in a letter from President Holland informing me I had achieved the holy grail, French citizenship. I had the right to stay but not the financial means to retire there.

Back to the Southern hemisphere I was obliged to go. Alone and unemployed I built a house, created a garden and tried everything I could think of to fit back into NZ. Seven years later, still alone and unemployed I can say that something is very much missing in my life and I am troubled. At my time of life most women are in their stable bubbles with a husband or boyfriend and grandchildren providing interest. Not me, which is why I am contemplating doing something highly stressful and financially risky. Well, if life is comfortable why would you take risks?



So this year, instead of joining the Libeau family members heading off to Rochefort in September I will be going to France alone during a NZ winter to see how I still feel about the place and is it feasible in practical terms for me to find a way back to a life that was important to me. France has changed and so have I. Laws and rules which control our lives change. Would I be stepping into financial ruin, a possible future European war?

A life in France would never be easy in any way but as I get older it seems that experiences matter a little more than material things. I have proved I can survive with almost nothing. As I age and health gradually breaks down I feel I have to make this fact-finding mission. Whatever the outcome (move back to France one day or draw a line in the sand and stay in NZ always pinning for a part of me that was lost?) there will be pain. A foot in two camps doesn't work.

2025 may be a year of important decisions, one way or the other. I don't know of any Libeau members who have been in my situation. I will not be playing tourist during this year's visit, I will



simply reconnect with the places I used to frequent, and the language, and the fascination of French supermarkets, maybe teach English in a French college for free. Where do things stand in France regarding taxes that NZ does not yet have (CGT, Inheritance), the health system for retirees? I'm a lot older this time around. And so, dear Reader, watch this space. There's an adventure ahead. The next La Gazette will be written from France.

Photos of me in France, in the past.

Rita Libeau 1929-2024 [written by her daughter Frances Harrison]



Rita was descended from **both** of Joseph Libeau's wives. Her mother Louisa Frances Page was descended from the last child Joseph had with his French wife Magdeleine. Her father Francis George Hewit McNabb was descended from the first child Joseph had with his second and English wife Mary Ann. So those two branches of the family united in my mother and her brother Eric and the double dose of French is reflected in the DNA testing results.

She contributed a lot to the genealogical knowledge of the Libeau Descendants Society, especially in locating Mary Ann Hedgman's grave, and was involved in the 1990 Reunion, the likes of which, in terms of turnout and involvement from our French cousins will probably never be seen again. She also contributed information and has her own page in Kevin Clark and Angela Pyke's book *To the Wilderness*.



I would have wished for a more emotionally engaged and caring mother (she wasn't from the instant I was born) and this continued for the rest of her life. Her grandmother Emily convinced her I would be a boy. I suppose she was disappointed. She had a thing about birthday cake decorating and really

displayed a lot of creativity and skill. It might have been a fairy cake or a money cake or even Humpty Dumpty falling off his wall. I think she enjoyed her creations as a creative outlet.

She was also competitive when I was young in terms of entering us in community fancy dress competitions, notably Miss Muffet



– complete with embroidered spider on my pinny (see above), or I was transformed into a native American Indian with a papoose on my back.

Rita married twice, first to Raymond John Free, my father, and later to Stan Jenkins.

[Photos: on honeymoon 1953, my Miss Muffet outfit, with her mother Louisa, uncle Alf and grandmother Emily Page (nee Libeau), with Madeleine Morriset and the seal in France.





She was a determined person who was hard to please and who wanted to go her own way, but seemed to have felt stifled by her upbringing; society's roles and expectations, especially as regards family and education. This did not stop her from her dreams of tertiary education so when she was in her 40s she went to night school to get her University Entrance and once achieving that went on to complete a BA at Canterbury University which gave her an opportunity to be employed until she retired. She liked using her brain. This makes it all the more ironic as she developed dementia and paranoia fairly early and in 2016 suffered a near fatal stroke which left her unable to speak or walk or even feed herself and she remained like that for eight years in a nursing home.



She died in her sleep just five days short of her 95th birthday.

Her funeral service was held at St Michael of All Angels church in central Christchurch on a very rainy Friday. Officiating was Father Peter who had accompanied her on a trip to France in 2009. Everything went off as she would have wished with eulogies by daughter Frances and son Peter. Members of the Libeau committee attended.



Three days later she was buried at the top of the Anglican Cemetery at Akaroa, looking down on everyone there, including Joseph Libeau Senior, interred just a few plots away from her. It's a peaceful spot facing the rising sun each morning.

She is survived by her daughter Frances and grand-daughter Laura, and son Peter.

[Photos: Rita studying in her bedroom, with daughter Frances and her mother and husband John, in the nursing home, with her parents and brother at her 21st, outside Joseph senior's cottage at #56 Rue Grehan, Akaroa 1996 before it was burned down.] - Frances Harrison



Now you can hire an expert genealogist to find your family histories

One of our committee members, Matt McNabb, has started his own genealogy tracing business. Its called Kiwi Heritage Tracers and this is what Matt has to say by way of introduction and services provided to you. <https://www.kiwiheritage.co.nz/about/>

Founded in 2024 and based in Oxford, New Zealand, with my family, Kiwi Heritage Tracers combines technical skills with a love for history and genealogy, using a meticulous approach to help you trace your ancestry and connect with your roots. We offer a **free 30-minute consultation** to get to know you and let you know if we will be able to assist with your case.



[UK & Irish Research](#)

Hundreds of thousands of settlers came from the UK & Ireland to New Zealand in the latter half of the 19th century and onward. Here at Kiwi Heritage Tracers, we specialize in migration from the north of Ireland, but also have extensive experience with England, Wales, Scotland & the remainder of Ireland.

We comb a wide variety of data sources and newspapers to put together the history of your ancestors before their migration. It's often possible to identify exactly where they lived, and to identify other lines of your ancestors' descendants who emigrated to other countries. .

[Advanced DNA Analysis](#)

Genealogical DNA testing is a powerful tool for identifying your biological ancestors and relatives. You will test through commercial sites such as Ancestry.com – this usually involves spitting or swabbing into a tube, and posting it away. When the test results are complete, we will analyse your DNA match list using various advanced tools and methods.

- Verify your ancestors.
- Extend your tree upwards by identifying unknown ancestors; including biological parents of adopted people.

[Online Family Tree Assistance](#)

We are able to work on your Ancestry.com tree (and other sites). Identify and fix mistakes; clear up duplicate profiles; extend the tree; add sources; add photos; and so on.

If you have a handwritten or printed tree, we can convert that to an online digital tree, with the appropriate privacy considerations. We can also scan photos and documents for preservation. Of course, we can also start from scratch if you haven't ventured into your family history before.

Matt has other services he can provide to help you discover your family. Go to his website for more information and pricing. <https://www.kiwiheritage.co.nz/>

PANIERES DE TOMATES AU COUSCOUS

4 personnes

Ingrédients:

80 g de raisins secs

200 g de couscous

4 tomates

1 bouquet de persil finement ciselé

4 pincées de cumin

3 cuillères à soupe d'huile d'olive

jus d'un citron

sel, poivre.

Recette:

- ❖ Cuire le couscous comme indiqué sur le paquet.
- ❖ Creuser les tomates.
- ❖ Dans un saladier mettre la pulpe des tomates, les raisins secs, le persil, l'huile d'olive, le jus de citron et le couscous.
- ❖ Bien mélanger le tout.
- ❖ Remplir les tomates, les mettre au frais jusqu'au moment de servir.

Conseil: On peut ajouter une échalote hachée
ou des petits bouts de concombre.

TOMATO BASKETS WITH COUSCOUS

Serves 4

Ingredients:

80 g raisins

200 g couscous

4 tomatoes

1 bunch parsley finely chopped

1/2 teaspoon cumin powder

3 tablespoons olive oil

juice of 1 lemon

salt, pepper.

Method:

- ❖ Cook couscous according to the instructions on the packet.
- ❖ Scoop out the flesh of the tomatoes.
- ❖ In a bowl, put the tomato pulp, raisins, parsley, olive oil, lemon juice and the couscous.
- ❖ Mix well.
- ❖ Fill the tomatoes with the mixture, refrigerate until ready to eat.

Tip: Possibly add a finely chopped shallot and diced cucumber.



Painting of the Comte de Paris & the Aube by artist Paul Deacon

Libeau Subscriptions NZ

Have you paid your [subscription](#) yet? It's currently **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 2025 \$15.00 You now have the option to pay by bank transfer. We are sending out invoices and tidying up our membership lists. The fee is very reasonable compared to other descendants groups and we hope you'll resubscribe with us for all the great benefits we are working on for you.

BNZ 02 0842 0171 8690 00 Contact, our Treasurer, Alistair kiwitechie54@gmail.com

Libeau Subscriptions France

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CR CHARENTE PERIGORD

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