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(Foster, B. J., 2009a)

AKAROA, FRENCH SETTLEMENT AT

On 2 August 1838, at Little Port Cooper, Captain Jean Langlois, a French whaler from Havre, negotiated with a number of Maori chiefs for the purchase of a portion (30,000 acres) of Banks Peninsula. In the following year, when Langlois returned to France, he set to work to market the property he had "acquired". After complex negotiations, groups of merchants in Nantes and Bordeaux reached agreement with him to form a company to establish a French settlement at Banks Peninsula. The Nanto-Bordelaise Co. was formed on 8 November 1839 and immediately entered into negotiations to secure Government support for the scheme. On 11 December 1839 King Louis-Philippe approved an agreement whereby the Government undertook to provide transport for 80 colonists who would found a French settlement at Akaroa, now renamed Port Louis-Philippe. In order to protect the colonists a warship was to be sent out in advance of the emigrant ship. Its commander would exercise the powers of *Commissaire du Roi*, both in regard to the proposed settlement and to French whalers working in New Zealand waters.

On 19 February 1840 the *Commissaire du Roi*, Captain Lavaud, sailed for New Zealand in the corvette *Aube*, while Langlois and the emigrants followed on 20 March in the *Comte de Paris*. When Lavaud reached the Bay of Islands in July he found that Governor Hobson had secured British sovereignty of the whole of the country in the previous May; moreover, by a separate act on 17 June, Bunbury had acquired similar rights over the South Island. Confronted with this *fait accompli*, Lavaud could only report the situation to his superiors and make his way to Akaroa to meet Langlois and superintend the establishment of the colonists in their new home. In the meantime, and in order that he might reinforce his prior British claim by an act of Government in the district, Hobson dispatched HMS *Britomart* with two Magistrates to Akaroa. Lavaud followed leisurely and arrived five days later than the *Britomart*. The *Comte de Paris* arrived on 17 August, two days after Lavaud. In this connection it must be admitted that the "race to Akaroa" between the *Britomart* and the *Aube* for the possession of the South Island is, as McLintock says, "nothing more than a particularly tenacious legend of the period" which has no basis in fact.

When Lavaud came to investigate the validity of Langlois's title to the land, he discovered that other Europeans held equally valid claims to parts of the territory. He also found that the Akaroa chiefs had not been consulted when the original deed was drawn up and that very few of the Maoris who had signed this had received the subsequent payments made by Langlois. The Akaroa Maoris were willing to sell their land, but resented any attempt to occupy it without payment. In order to avoid this difficulty Lavaud promised to arrange for the necessary payment, while the Maoris agreed to allow the settlers to occupy the site in the meantime.

On 27 August 1840, when the *Britomart* left, C. B. Robinson remained in the settlement as British Magistrate. He quickly established a *modus vivendi* with Lavaud and they worked harmoniously together. The former agreed not to display the British flag on shore pending a settlement of the question of sovereignty, while the latter agreed to provide what-ever force was needed to maintain law and order.

In the following years the settlement became firmly established and, as the soil proved to be extremely fertile, the colonists prospered. Lavaud's period of service at Akaroa expired on 18 January 1843 when he was succeeded by Post-Captain A. Bérard. He was the last *Commissaire du Roi* to hold office in New Zealand and with his departure on 10 April 1846 the formal connection between France and the Nanto-Bordelaise Co. settlement ceased.

During most of this period the company's land title remained unsettled. The Land Commissioners, Colonel Godfrey and Mathew Richmond, who investigated the matter, found it too complicated for them to solve. Accordingly, they merely recapitulated the evidence which Sir George Grey forwarded to London. There, after protracted negotiations, the company was awarded 4 acres for every £1 they could prove to have spent on the settlement. On 30 June 1849 the French company's remaining interests in New Zealand were bought by the New Zealand Company for £4,500.

Today, apart from a few French street names, there remains little to show Akaroa's origin as a French settlement. It is a county town within the Canterbury Provincial District and has a population of 630.

Akaroa is the South Island form of Whangaroa and the generally accepted meaning of both is the literal one, "long harbour".

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