**FRIENDS OF THE TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY**

**LECTURE BY TARA EDMONDSON, GARDENER**

**GOVERNMENT HOUSE BALL ROOM, FRIDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2017**

My name is Tara Edmondson. I have been working here in the Government House garden for 13 years. My primary role and passion is our horticultural production: growing the fruit, vegetables, herbs and cut-flowers for daily use at the Government House Estate.

My most recent project to complement our production area has been to recreate the lost Eighteenth Century French garden of Recherche Bay, which we call Lahaye’s Garden.

Recherche Bay is 11kilometres south of Southport. The Bay was named in April 1792 following the arrival there of a maritime expedition led by Rear Admiral Bruni D’Entrecasteaux.

## The primary purpose of this expedition was to search for the missing French explorer Jean-François de Galaup La Pérouse. The expedition comprised 223 personnel and included botanist Jacques Labillardière and the appointed gardener Felix Lahaye.

The second purpose of the expedition was to strive for the improvement of human knowledge and to make useful discoveries. The expedition’s two frigates, frigates, *La Recherche* and *L’Espérance*, were equipped with astronomical equipment, supplies for plant specimen collection, gardening tools and large quantities of seed.

In April 1792, a storm blew the expedition off course from its intended landfall at Adventure Bay, Bruny Island. The expedition was forced in shelter in Recherche Bay; thus the landing came about by accident.

During this three-week stay astronomical observations were taken, botanical samples recorded and collected, and an experimental vegetable garden was built. Evidence of the presence of indigenous people was recorded but no contact was made.

Both Lahaye and Labillardière wrote numerous diary entries relating to the vegetable garden.

Lahaye wrote: “Upon my arrival, I planted here some garden cress that comes up very week after three days. Eight days later, with the assistance of two men we dug a square section of land 28 feet, with great difficulties during three days of work. I sowed some plants … Celery, chervil, chicory, cabbage, grey romaine lettuce turnips, white onion, radishes, sorrel, peas, black salsify, and potatoes. The soil is generally very difficult to cultivate. Most of it is swampy, made of clay.”

In mid-May 1792 the D’Entrecasteaux expedition set sail from Recherche Bay heading for the Pacific Ocean to search for the missing La Perouse expedition.

In January 1793 the D’Entrecasteaux expedition re-visited Recherche Bay. The Vegetable garden was examined. Unfortunately for Felix Lahaye virtually no seedlings had survived.

Lahaye wrote: “I found plants that I sowed last year, some of them emerging from the soil whereas others had not come up. The first ones exhibited only the first two seminal leaves, without further development. I attributed this to the soil, which was very dry and hard, whereas it was very humid at the time of the sowing.”

During the 1793 return expedition, frequent and amicable interactions took place with the local Lyluequonny Aboriginal people, providing a solid foundation for a long history of friendship.

Many observations of language and cultural practices were recorded*.* Recently when I attended the opening of the Baudin Exhibition at the TMAG I learned just how important these records are to the aboriginal community*.* Without these detailed observations, parts of indigenous language and cultural beliefs may have been forever lost.

The D’Entrecausteaux expedition departed Recherche Bay in February 1973 Heading to Java.

Felix Lahaye stayed in Java until 1797, tending to the many live plant specimens that had been collected during the voyage. He eventually returned home with a herbarium of some 2,700 plants, comprising flowers and fruits and seeds from all the stops of the expedition. He had also written up an extensive journal and plant catalogue.

This success led to new employment opportunities for him. In 1798 he was appointed chief gardener at the Estate of the Versailles castle. In 1805 Lahaye became the chief gardener in charge of exotic and rare plants at the Estate of Empress Josephine,Château de Malmaison.

Felix Lahaye’s legacy goes beyond the sowing the seeds of the first Tasmanian kitchen garden in Recherche Bay. Lahaye and his descendants played a central role in the development of horticulture and the distribution of exotic plants in France during the Nineteenth Century.

In the early 2000s Recherche Bay was on the verge of becoming the focal point of a new confrontation between landowners, logging companies, politicians and many concerned Tasmanians. In 2003 the potential remains of the lost French garden were unearthed. This triggered significant public interest and an associated political debate.

An environmental campaign sought Heritage protection for Recherche Bay and in March 2005 some one thousand people marched through an intended logging site, singing the ‘French Garden Song’.

By 2006 the Tasmanian Land Conservancy had secured protection for a 142-hectare section of the area, which is called the Recherche Bay Reserve.

In 2016 it was decided that the Recherche Bay story, together with the lost garden history, should be celebrated and retold. The grounds of Government House were chosen to embark on this project, the Government House Estate being both a high-profile venue and frequently visited by the public.

A suitable location for the vegetable garden was chosen in the eastern paddock. Historically this area of the Estate was the site of a large vegetable production area. Records indicate that livestock were also kept there. In the 1980s during a period of rationalisation, the vegetable garden was moved to its current location behind the Estate cottages, and the paddock returned to grass.

This paddock has recently been reinvigorated with new production opportunities. In 2014 we planted 1,800 vines of merlot, cabernet and Riesling. We are looking forward to producing our own wine for use at ceremonial and other occasions.

This site is also appropriate because of its distance from the existing formal Victorian Landscaping. Lahaye’s garden doesn’t impact on the original landscape of the Estate. The site location is also within the boundary of the Government House production area, this assisting in managing the whole area as one production space.

From very early I felt there was more to this than simply recreating a vegetable garden. There was enthusiastic support from prominent Tasmanian architect Robert Morris-Nunn and senior Government House staff, as well as emails from Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, co-author of *Secret Garden at Recherche Bay – 1792*.

On one Jean-Philippe wrote: “It is so unique in the Eighteenth Century where there are so many sad stories of unhappy interactions between migrants and the old world and the local populations, that this place is also a symbol of humanity and something very special.”

These words confirmed to me the importance of this project in bringing to light the French-Tasmanian connection.

The design therefore had to include not only Lahaye’s lost vegetable garden, but also elements that could represent both the indigenous inhabitants and the French explorers.

The design aims to illustrate this and it also is intended to prompt conversations about how — like modern community gardens — Lahaye’s garden brings together incredibly diverse groups of people.

I chose, in consultation Mr Richard Warner, Steve Percival, Garden Supervisor and David Owen, Official Secretary, to use the stone alignment uncovered by environmentalists Helen Gee and Bob Graham at Recherche Bay in 2003.

Many historians believe this to be the remnants of Lahaye’s garden, although this remains unconfirmed, and there is counter-evidence that the site is the foundation remains of huts associated with logging in the early Twentieth Century.

This is why the Lahaye’s Garden at Government House is an imagined reconstruction. It is not intended to be a definitive historical statement about the exact geographical location of the original French garden at Recherche Bay.

Having said that, there is general agreement that Lahaye’s garden was divided into four beds. I therefore placed the stones exactly to these reported dimensions.

The vegetable seeds that we used for our garden were imported from the French seed company, Vilmorin, in Paris. Vilmorin Seed Company was founded in 1743. The company thus has a long and distinguished history in France, where it was family-owned for almost two centuries.

Vilmorin produced the first catalogue for farmers and academics. Today it is owned principally by an agro-industrial cooperative, Groupe Limagrain. They provide the professional market with vegetable and tree seed.

I worked to import the seeds with Richard Weston, the owner of Weston Farm at Brighton which specialise in Peony roses, Extra Virgin olive oil and fresh Vegetable Produce.

We chose our vegetable varieties to include those noted in the journal of Lahaye. We also chose vegetable varieties that were in popular use during the 1700s.

Unfortunately, quarantine regulations restricted our import range and we were unable to grow some of Lahaye’s list.

Seeds that we did receive are:

* Spinach ‘*Matador fonce*’. This is a particularly old variety and was first introduced to France from Spain the the 14th Century.
* Two varieties of onion; celery; cabbage; chicory; leek; parsley; three varieties of lettuce including Lahaye’s romain lettuce; pumpkin; carrot; and beans.

I also wanted to illustrate in the design just how difficult a task it would have been for Lahaye to establish a vegetable garden in the dense bushland of Recherche Bay. I chose to illustrate this with the addition of the wine barrel that you saw in the garden. This is because it has been suggested by historians that fresh water would have been carried to the site in barrels to irrigate the vegetable crops.

We sourced the wine barrel from Frogmore Creek Vineyard at Richmond. That barrel is constructed from 150 year-old French oak.

You also may have noticed on our visit to the garden, that another garden bed has been made below the stone alignment. This bed has been included to allow for increased vegetable production, allowing us to cater for larger events or ceremonies.

We are now planning for our upcoming Open Day, on Sunday 5th November. I have chosen to add to the overall display at Lahaye’s Garden by planting this space in a French Parterre Style. French Parterre gardens were becoming popular during the 1700s, so this timing fits in with the D’Entrecasteaux expedition.

It has also been essential to protect the garden, from rabbits in particular. The resulting fence is a modern take on the ‘Tea Tree Fencing’ that was used by pioneering Tasmanians.

Native grasses have been planted outside the garden fence. These grasses symbolically recognise the bonds formed between the French explorers and the Lyluequonny clan. The Tasmanian grasses I chose are all common to the Recherche area, including: *Dianella Tasmanica*, *Carex appressa* and *Austrostipa stipoides*.

Many were used by the indigenous inhabitants for weaving mats and baskets. Specimens of *Dipplarrena moraea* and *Lomandra longifolia* were also collected by Labillardière and Lahaye. D’Entrecasteaux’s Botanist has also been remembered with the planting of his namesake, *Poa Labillardière*. The native grasses, when mature, will also enhance the entrance to the garden by softening the perimeter fence.

Construction began in March 2016, ploughing up the area to be planted out. This was followed by improving the soil’s organic content by sowing a green manure crop. The green manure crop also works to increase the vital function of fertilization, by slowly releasing nutrients as it decomposes.

This crop was cut down and turned in to the soil after three months. I could then begin marking out the Lahaye’s Garden and placing the stones in formation.

An automatic irrigation system was later installed. This was followed by the construction of the boundary fence and the planting of the native grasses. Limestone gravel was then laid to complete the paths.

During this time of construction I began the first round of seed sowing in our glasshouse. I had planned to co-ordinate having construction of Lahaye’s Garden completed and the vegetable seedings large enough to be planted out by September 2016. This allowed me to take advantage of the spring weather.

The seedlings were planted out in succession to ensure they were mature and looking their best for the official opening of Lahaye’s Garden in March 2017.

Having an onsite kitchen garden allows our Executive Chief Ainstie Wagner to create unique and super-fresh event menus. Having access to heirloom seed companies gives us the opportunity to raise and grow many vegetable varieties that you don’t find in local supermarkets.

And so, it was that at the dinner opening of Lahaye’s Garden we dined on: *Nantaise Amelioree* Heritage Carrot Potage; *Matador Fonce* Spinach Sorbet and a salad of Romain Lettuce; French marigolds; Pea Shoots; Crispy Baby de Carentan Leeks — all of which of course had come from Lahaye’s Garden.

We have had great success in growing the Vilmorin varieties in Lahaye’s Garden. Many varieties have proven to be far superior in plant vigour and flavour than plants I have previously grown.

Ainstie also strives to and is very successful in ensuring that there is very little waste of Estate production. All excess produce that cannot be used in menus after picking is conserved, preserved, pickled, turned in to jams and sauces, or frozen down or dried to be used during winter and early spring, when there isn’t as much produce coming from the Government House gardens.

Already we have had many visitors to Lahaye’s Garden, including dozens of school groups, garden tour groups, and guests staying at Government House. In February this year Jean-Phillip Baeulieu visited Lahaye’s garden. He was impressed with the garden, so much so, he took a basket of produce back to his Hobart accommodation. He later emailed saying he had actually taken a cabbage home to France.

The garden will continue to produce food for use at Government house events, particularly events with a French theme. The garden can also be used as an educational resource highlighting French Tasmanian History, horticultural techniques and culinary skills.

Felix Lahaye’s determination to carve out an experimental vegetable garden in the wilderness of southern Van Diemen’s Land is courageous. That small vegetable plot of his has provided inspiration over two centuries — inspiring the imaginations of artists, poets and musicians.

His garden has motivated historians, researchers and politicians.

Lahaye’s garden has also connected members of the Tasmanian and French communities in lasting friendships.

Government house is very pleased to have embarked on this project to ensure that the memory of the French explorers, Felix Lahaye, and the lost garden of Recherche Bay, remains alive.

Thank you.