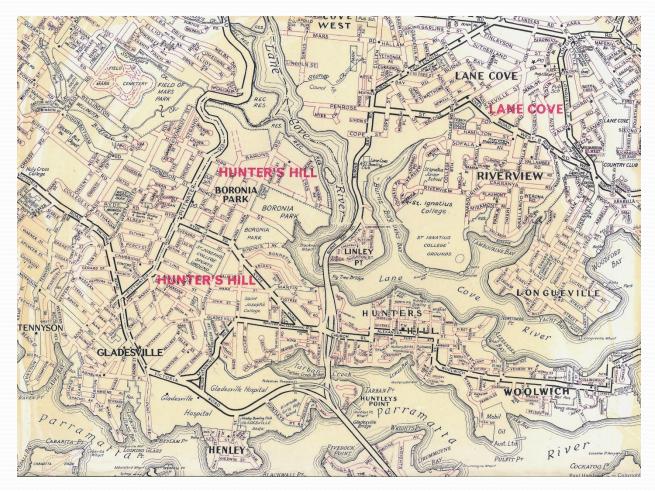# Hunters Hill French Village

How and why did the French settle in Hunters Hill , a finger of land between the Parramatta and Lane Cove Rivers

You are here

From National Trust publication Old Buildings of Hunters Hill

Dom Pierre Perignon, Dom Perignon champagne is named after him

French cake

War memorial in New Zealand to British sailors killed by Maori
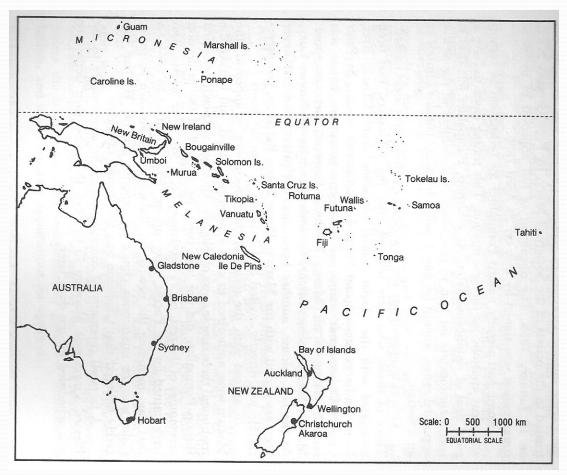
A family connection

Mary was one of our most successful businesswomen

The French offered to complete the survey of the Pacific which ceased when Capt. Cook was killed in 1779. They were also aware of the support in Britain for a convict colony at Botany Bay. The British gave Cook's charts to the French commander La Perouse, seen here with King Louis XVI before departing with two ships in 1795

La Perouse entered the Pacific from the East. He claimed a number of islands in the South-West Pacific. He headed north to explore the possibility of a passage through the Bering Strait off Alaska

VUE DU MOUILLAGE DES FRÉGATES FRANÇAISES À L'ILE DE MOWÉE.

Two years after he had left France, La Perouse received word while in a Russian Port that a fleet of English ships had left for Botany Bay. He was ordered to investigate.

LA PÉROUSE, JEAN-FRANÇOIS DE GALAUP, arrived at Botany Bay in January 1788 with his two ships *La Boussole* and *L'Astrolabe* two days after the British fleet commanded by Capt. Arthur Phillip. He stayed for six weeks, sailed north and disappeared.

LA PEROUSE'S MONUMENT, *Botany Bay*

La Perouse remembered at Botany Bay. The French believed that the British had destroyed La Perouse during the Napoleonic wars. Wreckage of the vessels was discovered in 1826 by an Irish captain, Peter Dillon, in Vanikoro (one of the islands of Santa Cruz).
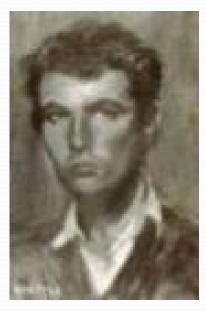
Early days in Port Jackson. At the time of the Napoleonic wars between Britain and France no French ship was seen in Port Jackson for 14 years.

July 14, 1799: Fall of the Bastille. The revolutionaries in control in Paris

Napoleon Bonaparte established himself as leader of the French Republic in 1799, dominating Europe and threatening Britain until his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium in 1815. Th French had a Pacific base in New Zealand at this time.

Didier Joubert, born in Bordeaux, France, came to the Pacific in 1837 as a trader, based at the French business centre in New Zealand. There he married Louise Bonnefin. He decided that New Zealand was too remote for trade and set up a shipping and business agency in Sydney in 1837. He was well placed to learn the business of all French persons coming to Sydney.

Didier Joubert sold French wine to New South Wales. During the goldrushes Australians were the largest consumers of French champagne in the world.

There was widespread hardship and hunger in France after the defeat of Napoleon. Bakers were required to bake a minimum number of loaves every day of a minimum weight at a fixed price to prevent profiteering. When peasants complained that the loaves had been sold the remark was made "Let them eat cake". There was no price control on cake.

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840, guaranteed that individual Māori *iwi* (tribes) should have undisturbed possession of their lands, forests, fisheries and other *taong* (treasures) in return for becoming British subjects.
The first skirmish of the New Zealand Wars was the 1843 Wairau Affray at the north end of the South Island. Others followed.

French possessions and the Marists were not touched and this led to the suspicion that the French were in league with the Maori. The Maori were waiting for goods promised to them by Bishop Pompallier.

Mary Reibey – painting in Hunters Hill Museum

Emancipist businesswoman Mary Reibey owned a hotel and liquor business and was one of Didier Joubert's customers. She invited him to visit her weekender on the Lane Cove River at Figtree. This site was part of a large area that was purchased by Reibey in 1835. Barley, maize, fruit and vegetables were grown on the site by Reibey's manager and, between 1838 and 1841, lessee Joseph Fowles and his wife. In 1848, Fig Tree Farm, as it was then known, was purchased by Didier Joubert for the purposes of developing real estate.

OLD FIGTREE

A few years after buying the Reibey land, Didier Joubert had established at ferry service from Figtree, at the foot of today's Mount Street, to Erskine Street.

One of the Patching slides from the 1920s. St. Malo had been known as Figtree House when Didier Joubert lived there.

A French Consulate was established at Millers Point in Sydney in 1842. The French flag flew over the harbour, creating unease amongst the British.

Didier Joubert's younger brother, Jules, then 17 years of age, worked at the Consulate but resigned when the king, Louis Philippe was deposed in the 1848 revolution.

Count Gabriel de Milhau, a Royalist who left France at the time of the second revolution joined Didier Joubert in building houses at Hunters Hill.

Other Frenchmen persuaded to invest were Leonard Etienne Bordier, a friend of Milhau, George Fesq and Vial D'Aram.

The **1848 Revolution** in France was one of a wave of revolutions in Europe. In France, the February revolution ended the Orleans monarchy(1830-1848) and led to the creation of the French Second Republic. The June Days were a bloody but unsuccessful rebellion by the Paris workers against a conservative turn in the Republic's course.

On December 2, 1848, Louis Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic, largely on peasant support. Exactly three years later he suspended the elected assembly, establishing the Second French Republic, which lasted until 1871.
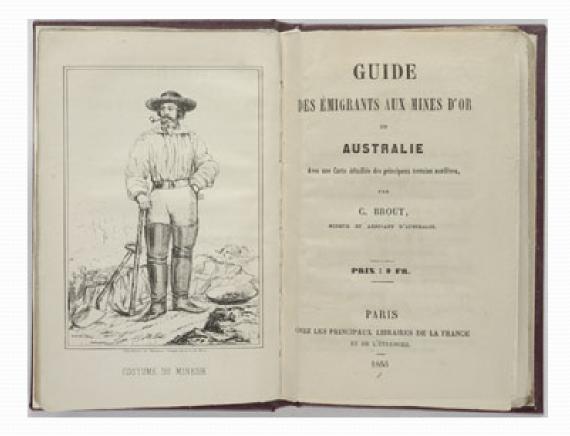
Relations picked up after the Crimean War: the picture shows Lord Cardigan leading the 17th Lancers in the Charge of the Light Brigade into the Valley of Death. In October 1854. He was supposed to charge along the ridge. He lost most of his men.

The French General Morris directed the 4th Chasseurs D'Afrique, a colonial cavalry regiment, to attack along the Fedioukine Hills and silence the Russian fire on the north side of the valley. This they did with great success and a loss of only 38 casualties. This relieved the British cavalrymen of the fire from the north side of the valley as they returned.
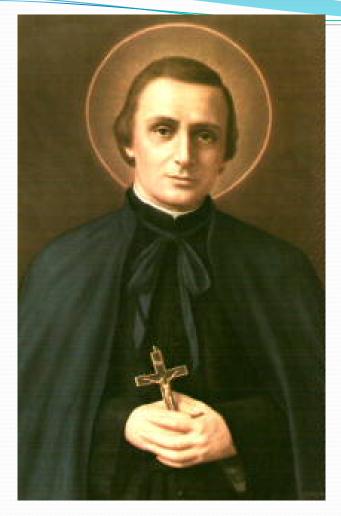
Members of the French Chasseurs D'Afrique : The 4th Chasseurs D'Afrique, who saved the British at the Charge of the Light Brigade. Efforts were made to persuade the French to migrate to Australia after this.

GUIDE
DES ÉMIGRANTS AUX MINES D'OR

AUSTRALIE

C. BROUT,

PARIS

COSTUME DU MINEUR

Frenchmen came to Australia for the goldrushes in
Victoria the 1850s and they were persuaded
to stay as citizens

Jean-Claude Colin was a French priest who became the founder of the Society of Mary (Marists) in 1816 to care for the poor around Lyon. In 1836 they were given the care of the Pacific mission of Western Oceania. Bishop Pompallier was put in charge. They arrived in the Pacific in 1837

Bishop Pompallier placed missionaries on islands as he crossed the Pacific, calling at Sydney in 1837 before going to New Zealand, in the Bay of Islands, where he set up his headquarters.

In November 1841, Pompallier received word that Pierre Chanel had been clubbed to death on the island of Futuna.
There was no picture of Chanel. This is based on a likeness of his sister, whom he resembled

ROCHER, JEAN-LOUIS In 1844 he was appointed to assist Fr Antoine Freydier-Dubreul and lay brother Auguste Leblanc to found a supply base in Sydney for Marist Pacific missions. On 12 April 1845 they reached Sydney with a letter of introduction from the cardinal prefect of the Propaganda Fide, Rome. Head of the Catholic church in Sydney, Archbishop Polding feared that the Marists would complicate his plan to make Sydney an 'abbey-diocese' for his own Benedictine Order, and his attitude caused them to consider leaving Sydney. In May 1846 Debreul returned to Europe leaving Rocher in charge.

Didier to the rescue

The Marists were first housed at Woolloomooloo which put them into conflict with Polding. They were given land on the Hume Highway. They decided not to go there.
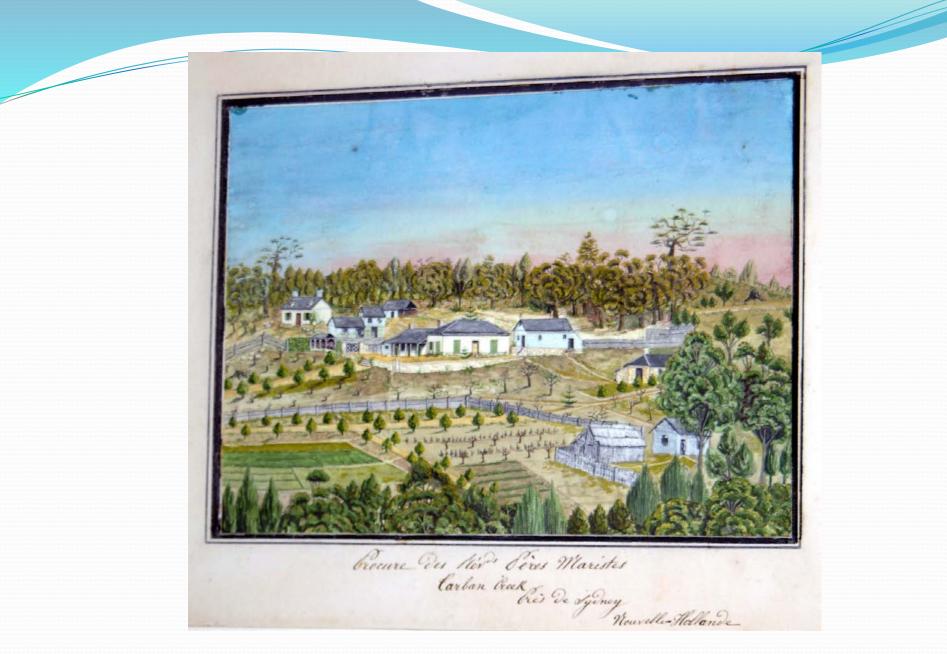
Dubreul paid cash for ten acres of land at Five Dock while Rocher was ill in bed, then left for France. When Rocher recovered he sold the land. Didier Joubert offered them 30 acres he owned at Long Nose Point – Birchgrove. He was unable to deliver the title. Then Joubert took Rocher to Hunters Hill. He bought Stubbs house and 18 acres at Tarban Creek in May 1847.
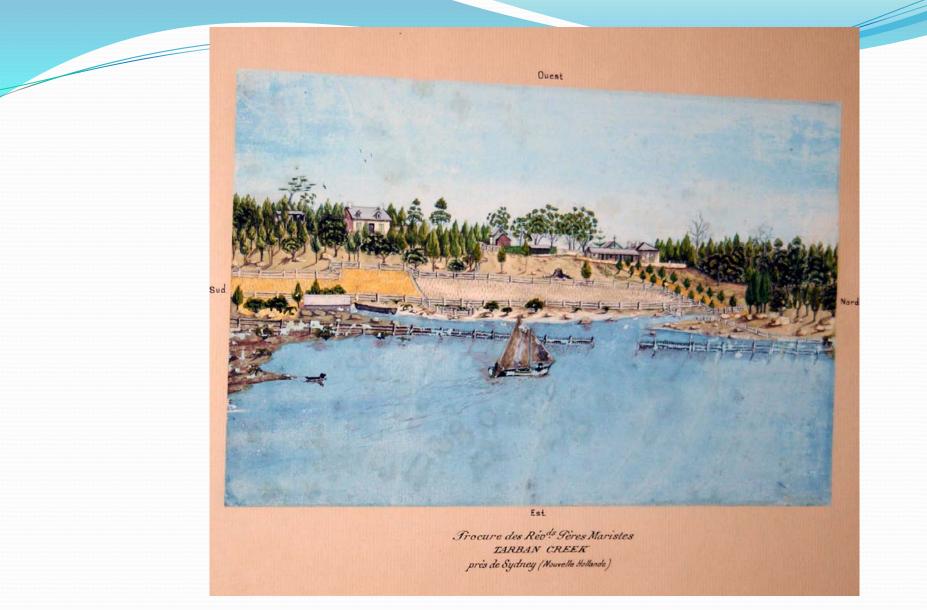
The land was held by nominees.

In 1853 he bought 18 acres on the other side of the creek.

Rocher became a naturalized British citizen so that he could own land. He concealed his money from Archbishop Polding.

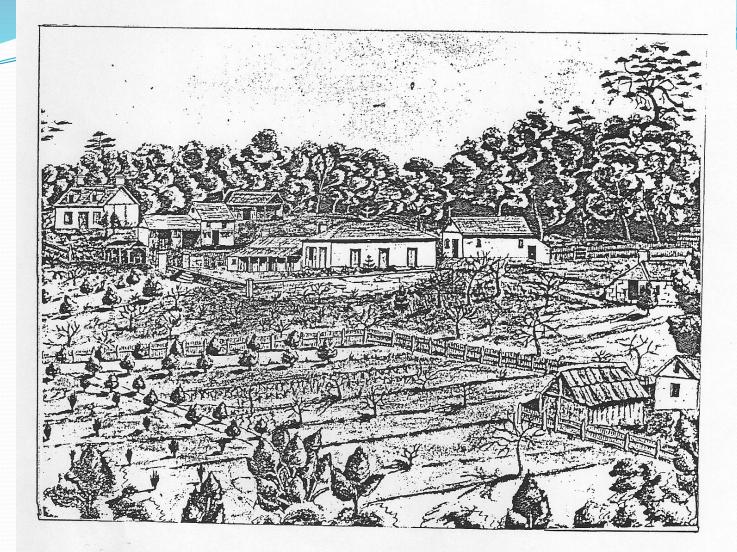# Didier starts his own development

- When Rocher bought Stubbs Farm, Didier Joubert subdivided Mary Reibey property and promptly sold building blocks and built a schoolroom, now known as St. Mark's Church.

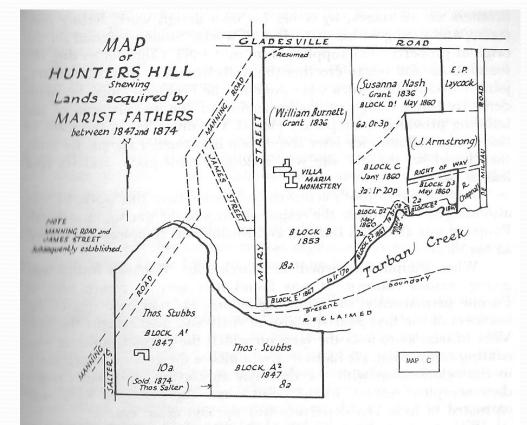Original painting now hangs in the Marist Provincial Office, Hunters Hill

View of the farm from the north shore of Tarban Creek

The buildings of Thomas Stubbs—then Villa Maria farm; from left to right are – The Mission House built for Fr. Rocher 1849–50; small cottage and cellar outbuilding 1840s; the timber house of Stubbs family mentioned in 1841 census; stone house of Stubbs c 1845; the wooden chapel (demolished) of Villa Maria missionaries; and stone outbuilding perhaps a kitchen. Two sheds, front right, are fenced from the orchard and vineyards.

Fr. Rocher's letter to France, describing the Tarban Creek farm:

- " There are 18 acres. The house is good, quite large, the orchard and garden are magnificent. One can count forty kinds of fruit, all the trees are bearing; they are three years old. The vines are coming along very well, already it seems that there will be sufficient to provide everyone in the procure with wine for one year …" 18 May, 1847.

- 1850 – addition of a four-roomed house

- 1857 – William Weaver calls for tenders to build Villa Maria

- 1874 – Thomas Salter buys the Priory

- 1888 – Government buys the Priory for use of asylum workers

- 1889 – mudflats filled in

From *Challenge – The Marists in Australia* by John Hosie

The Gladesville Asylum had become established on the other side of the North Road, later Victoria Road, and the Marists were asked to provide religious instruction.
In return, Dr. Francis Campbell, medical superintendent of the asylum, treated sick missionaries.

The Marists were also given permission to preach at Ryde.

The French Consulate was still in Sydney. The French had to weather discontent over the imprisonment of 58 French-Canadians who arrived in February 1840. They had taken part in an uprising against the British in Canada. Canada Bay, French Bay and Exile Bay on the Parramatta River were named after their prison compound.

The move of the French Consulate from Millers Point to Hunters Hill was probably seen as
a desirable diplomatic move.

When Joubert built Passy for the consul, all of the French were in the one place -   up the river in Hunters Hill.

Canada Bay. home of 58 French-Canadians
prisoners from 1840

The Priory seen from Salter Street

THE SUN-DIAL AT THE PRIO

Photo taken in the 1920s. The vertical sun-dial was there when the golf club was in operation in the asylum grounds in the1930s.
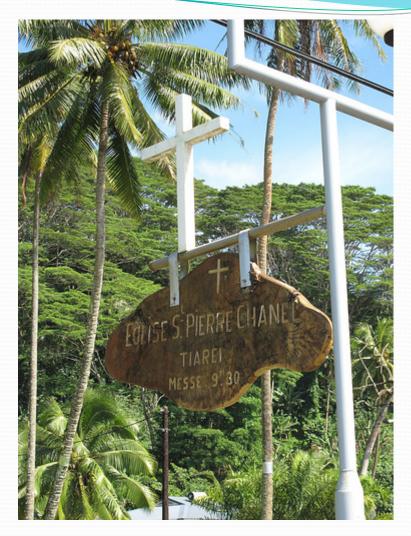It has since disappeared

The Priory today – a nice piece of real estate looking for a role

The Tarban Creek farm today – priorities have changed
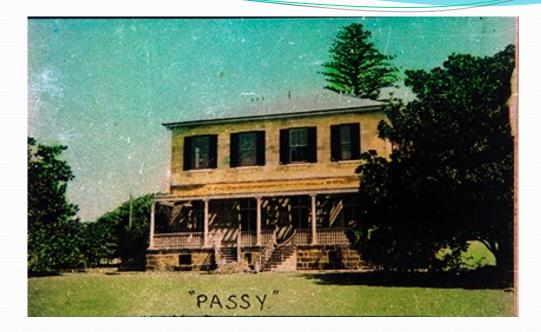
Vine of the Saint

- St Peter Chanel established a mission on Futuna Island in November, 1839. He planted one grape vine. Fr. Chanel was assassinated in April 1841. Canonised 1956.

- Remains were returned to Poi from Lyons, France. The church maintains a chapel and museum in St. Pierre Chanel's honour.

- Vines grown at the shrine were propagated from cuttings taken from the original vines. Natives take leaves from these vines in the belief they contain healing powers. The vine is Moschata Paradisa, from either Valparaiso or France. Only planting in Australia is at Mudgee.

- Dr. Richard Smart gave a propagated vine to Pope John Paul II when he visited New Zealand in 1986.

- Cuttings were subsequently sent to the Cardinal in Sydney in the hope that they would be propagated on the Marist farm site at Hunters Hill.

- The farm site was not re-established.

After being taken to New Zealand, Sydney and Lyon, the remains of St. Pierre Chanel are now in a shrine at Poi on the island of Futuna
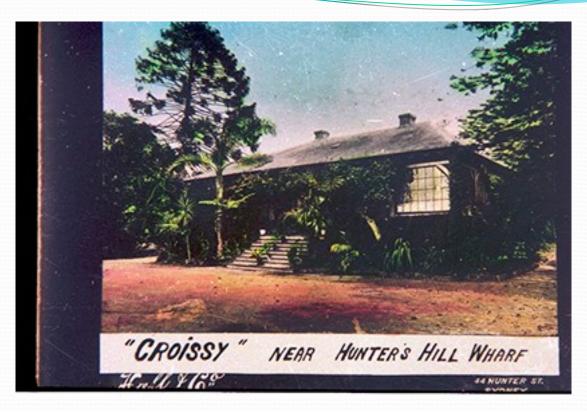
The vine growing at the site of St. Pierre Chanel's tomb

"PASSY."

Passy was built between 1855 and 1857 for Monsieur Louis Francois Sentis, Consul of France and the Sicilies. It was built in the two-storey Joubert, French-influenced style. It had diplomatic sound-proof double doors between rooms. By 1858 Sentis had sold Passy to Edye Manning.

Passy, former French consulate, sold to Dr Edye Manning in 1858. Manning ran the Parramatta to Sydney Ferry service.
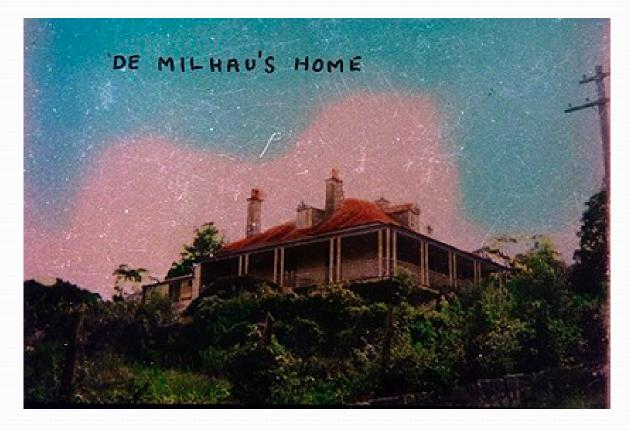
"CROISSY" NEAR HUNTER'S HILL WHARF

Croissy , built by Leonard Bordier, was the property of M Biard d'Aunet who was appointed Consulate-General from 1893 to 1905.

Leonard Etienne Bordier bought a four-acre piece of land on both sides of what is now Ferry Street, from the water to approximately Woolwich road in January 1855. In 1854 he had signed an agreement with three German workmen (Jacob Arndt was one who settled in Hunters Hill) to bring to Australian four pre-fabricated timber houses made in Hamburg, supervise their unloading and erect them on the land, two on either side of the then Wharf road. On Aprill 5, 1855 Bordier bought the last, wedge-shaped portion of two acres from Ambrose Foss, eleven days later Bordier mortgaged the whole of the property to Didier Joubert for £2000.

The Sydney Morning Herald 2 January 1858:

Within view of the Parramatta River several dwellings of
French residents may be seen.
The mansion of the French consul, M. Sentis,
had the tricolor waving.
The neat style in which the houses are built, and the taste
which marks the first improvements of the grounds around
them, denote the existence of a community..
From the circumstance, Hunters Hill is looked upon as almost
a French settlement, whilst on the land opposite is located a
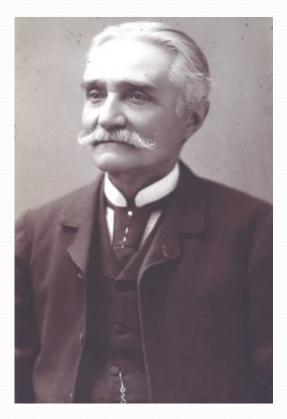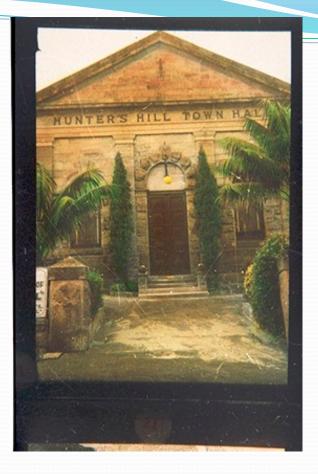society of French clergymen devoted to the French missions".

Paraza was built by Gabriel de Milhau in 1854. He owned land and three houses – Patching slide

VILLA FLORIDIANA

Didier Joubert's younger brother Jules returned to Sydney in 1855 after the death of his first wife, son and daughter and first bankruptcy. Jules and his new wife Adelaide lived in Villa Floridiana for no more than two years. By 1857-58 Jules had built Walshale, Innisfree and Passy as well as Pottsdam (now Windermere) where he lived until Moocooboolah was built in 1864. An Italian nobleman Chevalier Charles d'Apice, professor of music, had a family of eight children and after his death in 1888 Madame d'Apice conducted a small French school at the house which she called Villa Floridiana from 1893. It is said that when one of the d'Apices was jilted by a Piguenit daughter he flung an emerald engagement ring into the water

JOUBERT, JULES FRANÇOIS DE SALES (1824-1907), adventurer and entrepreneur, brother of Didier Joubert. In the early 1860s both Jouberts were active in moves to sell the Field of Mars common and use the proceeds to build bridges over the Lane Cove River at Fig Tree and the Parramatta River at Gladesville. They also petitioned for the incorporation of Hunter's Hill. Jules was first chairman of the council in 1861-62 and Didier first mayor in 1867-69. Jules started a ferry service and in 1865 was chairman of directors of the Parramatta River Navigation Co. but in December 1866 he was declared insolvent. His nephew Numa was later proprietor of the Hunter's Hill and Lane Cove River ferries.

A stone building 50 feet by 30 feet to be used as a council chamber was opened on January 13, 1866. The building was designed by C. Mayes, architect and cost £750. From 1890 to 1897 the Ladies Grammar School was located in the Town Hall; the principal was Miss Jessie Dobbie, daughter of the headmaster of the Hunters Hill Public School opposite.

The Borough of Hunter's Hill

MAYORS

CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL

Jules Joubert	1861-2
Gabriel de Milhau	1863
William B. Campbell	1864
Francis Campbell	1865
William B. Campbell	1866-7

MAYOR BY MUNICIPAL ACT
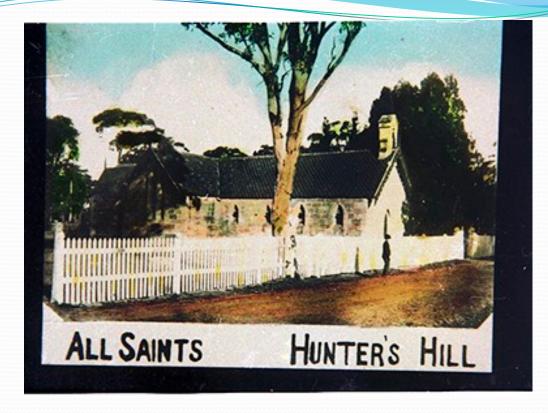
Didier N. Joubert	1867-9
Charles E. Jeanneret	1870-1
Robert Vining Gale	1872-3
Henry Prior Palser	1874
Ambrose Fitzpatrick	1875
Robert Vining Gale	1876
Ambrose Fitzpatrick	1876
Charles E. Jeanneret	1877-8
Angelo Tornaghi	1879
Jabez King Heydon	1880-1
Angelo Tornaghi	1882-3
James Nutman	1884
William J. Doyle	1884
Joseph Booth	1885
James Brown	1886
Robert Smith	1887
Numa A. Joubert	1888
Alfred Weeks	1889
Charles E. Jeanneret	1890
Frank McNeil	1891
Bernard McBride	1892-3
Thomas Turner	1894-5
Adelbert T. Schleicher	1896-7

James R. Thomson	1898-9
James M. Rooke	1900-2
Herbert J. Aspinall	1903-4
E. Marsden Betts	1905-12
William A. Windeyer, M.B.E.	1913
Adelbert T. Schleicher	1914-15
Herbert J. Aspinall	1916
William A. Windeyer, M.B.E.	1917-24
Ralph Unwin	1924-5
Louis A. Meyers	1926-7
Ernest H. Clarke	1928-31
George W. Woodbridge	1932-3
Clarence E. Farthing	1934
Robert S. Murray-Prior	1935
Louis A. Meyers	1936-9
Bert Cowell	1940
Henry E. Ryves	1941
Clement W. Weil	1942-51
Thomas W. B. Haynes	1952
John E. Reeves	1953
Clement W. Weil	1954
Alex A. Harding (died 6.7.58)	1955-8
Ken Bell	1958-

TOWN CLERKS

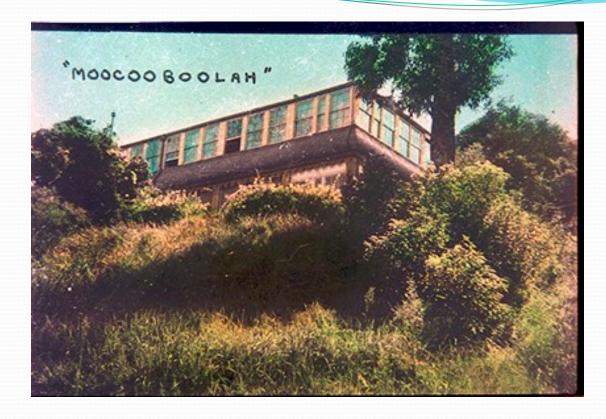|	
C. R. Fairland	1861
H. Glasscock	1862-7
P. Seymour	1867-76
R. V. Gale	1876-87
L. M. Badham	1887-9
W. C. Wise	1889-1935
R. D. Stuckey, O.B.E.	1935-

From *Hunters Hill 1861-1961* by Isadore Brodsky

ALL SAINTS   HUNTER'S HILL
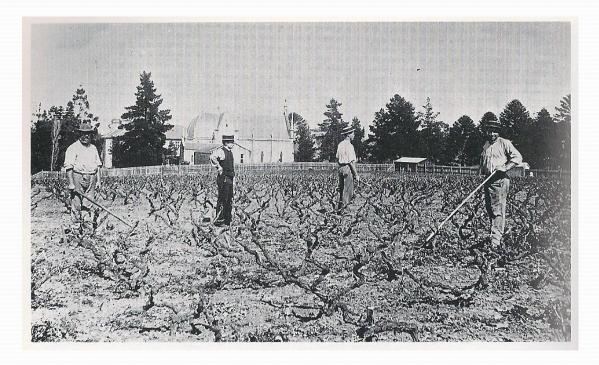
Didier built this as a non-denominational schoolhouse on his subdivision at Figtree to provide new residents with a place of education for their children. It became All Saints Church before the present All Saints Anglican Church was built in Ambrose Street. It is now known as St. Mark's, having been rebuilt, stone by stone, removed from the path of the Gladesville expressway in the 1960s.

"MOOCOO BOOLAH"

Jules Joubert built this on land bought in 1862 from the estate of Ambrose Foss. He paid his first rate of 10 shillings in 1863 and by 1864 this had increased to 60 shillings. Joubert was declared insolvent in 1866.
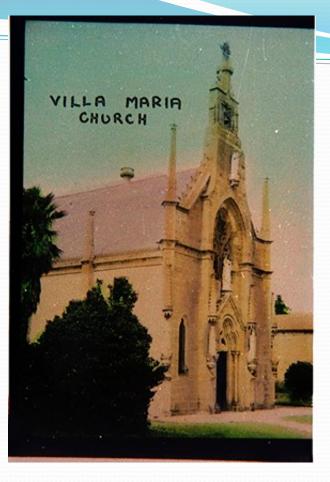
Vines brought from the Medoc by Jules Joubert were
planted at Tarban Creek on Marist lands.
Grapes from the vines went to a winery at the Villa Maria
monastery to be made into red wine.

A very good drop

- "The wine most resembling claret that I have ever tasted in this Colony is a wine which was grown near the Parramatta River, at Hunter's Hill, on a patch of sandy soil surrounded by rocks"
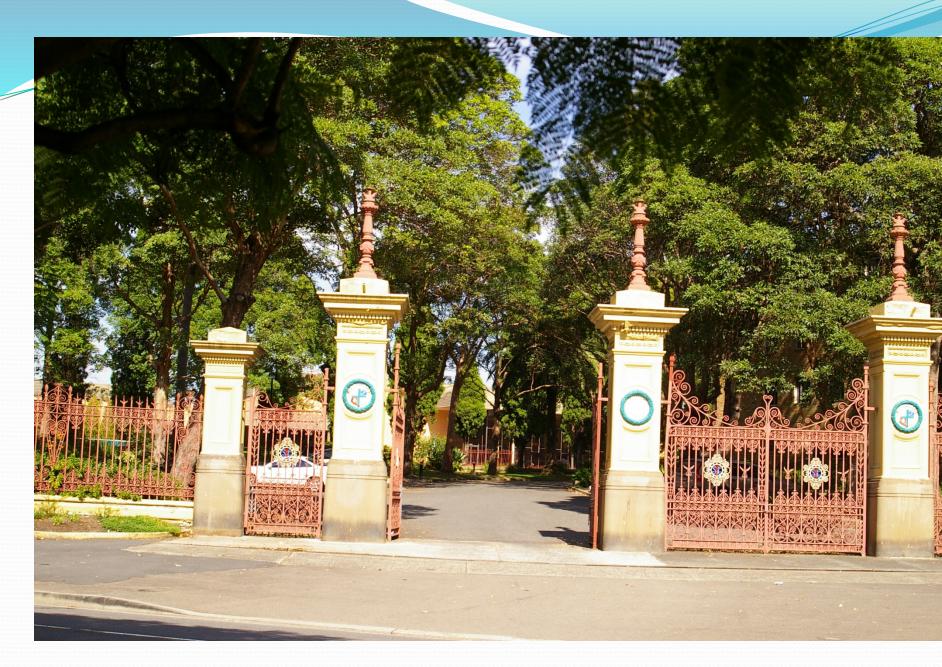
- Bulletin no. 1 *Report of the Conference of Fruit-Growers and Vine-growers. October 1890.* L Frere on winemaking

In 1864 a monastery was opened on the site. In 1868 a Roman Catholic School was established with 43 children on the roll. In 1871 Villa Maria Church was dedicated.

In 1872 four Marists Brothers opened a primary school in Harrington Street, Sydney, near St. Patricks Church. In 1875 a secondary school was added and in 1879 boarders were accepted.

The Joubert Brothers helped the Marist Brothers locate land at Hunters Hill which they named Mount St. Joseph. They began with a two-storey wooden building for boarders then began the main sandstone building in 1882. The southern wing was built in 1882-84, the central part and the northern wing in 1889-94. The cupola and statue of Mary Immaculate were added to the tower in 1904.

The main gates at the corner of Ryde road and Mark street were formerly the gates of Sydney Town Hall, auctioned in 1927 during excavations for the underground railway. The college was advertised as a four-minute walk from the Fig Tree Wharf.
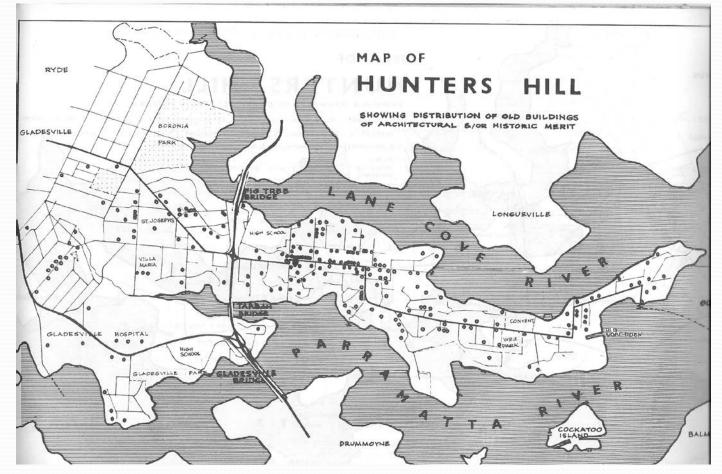
St. Joseph's College Gates today, formerly Sydney Town Hall, purchased 1927

Later developments

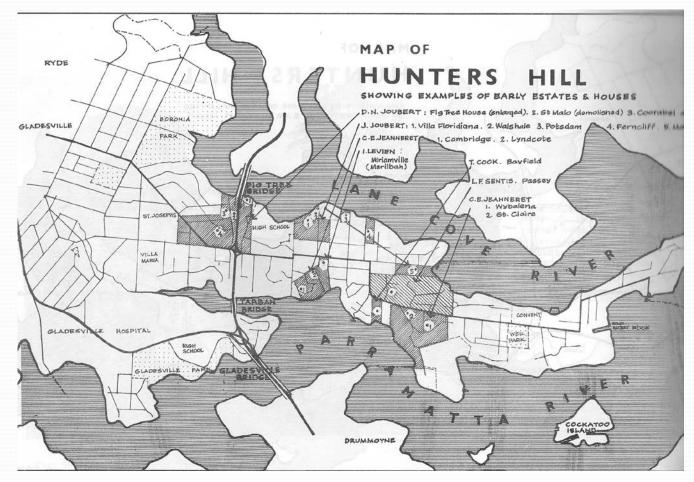- St Peter Chanel Church was opened in Futuna Street in 1899
- Teaching Sisters of the Society of Mary opened a school at Woolwich in 1908

The French Consulate-General moved to 2 Bond Street, Sydney, in 1905

Distribution of houses of the French era

From The Old Buildings of Hunter's Hill, Hunters Hill Trust, 1969

A distinguished few

From The Old Buildings of Hunter's Hill, Hunters Hill Trust, 1969