



# South African National Society

**History - Culture and Conservation. Join SANS.**

Founded in 1905 for the preservation of objects of Historical Interest and Natural Beauty

<http://sanationalsociety.co.za/>

PO Box 47688, Greyville, 4023, South Africa

Email: [hardy.wilson@telkomsa.net](mailto:hardy.wilson@telkomsa.net) | Tel: 071 746 1007



## NEWSLETTER & PROGRAM FOR October 2016

### PLEASE NOTE THE OCTOBER MEETING STARTS 17:15

THE DATE: 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016 at 17:15

VENUE: KwaMuhle Museum, Bram Fischer Road [Ordnance Road] Durban.

TIME: Meeting commences at 17:15; Refreshments will be served from 16:30.

PARKING: Off Bram Fischer/Ordnance road [next to the Museum]; security person is present

#### FEATURE: **The History the eThekweni Libraries**

Durban has many libraries servicing the wide needs of its citizens. This vitally important eThekweni Service is still very much in a growth phase so we are really looking forward to KwaMuhle Education Officer Thevan Harry telling us about both its history and future plans. Thevan has a close family connection with eThekweni Libraries so is well qualified to talk about the library service in Durban.

#### **BEACHFRONT OUTING 07:00 Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October**

**Meet on the Beachfront behind MiniTown where there is ample parking. Following the walk, which can be as long or short as members wish, we will meet at CircusCircus for breakfast together just before 09:00.**

Members will remember Dr Elsa Pooley's presentation a year ago when we looked at the process of stabilising the dunes and the rehabilitation of the Beachfront prior to the 2010 Football World Cup. Elsa will be showing us the floral secrets of the beachfront dunes and suggests you bring a notebook and binoculars. We will have a chance to share her many flower books during the walkabout.

This outing is a shared event with the UKZN Alumni and we anticipate there may be up to 40 people so it should be a pleasant social event as well.

#### **MEMBERS BRING – BUY – SELL BOOK NIGHT**

This will be a members bring, buy and sell books evening so bring along any titles about history and natural history, the environment or any subjects of interest to SANS members. Alex and Memory Coutts will be operating the sales table so please be ready to complete the slip with the selling price and all other details, particularly as there will only be thirty minutes selling time.

#### **REPORT BACK The story behind the writing of 'Their Destiny in Natal: the Story of a French Colonial Family of Natal'**

Georges Védie held everyone's attention with his fascinating, detailed and quietly amusing presentation in which we learned much about the part played by French Colonials in the development of Natal. Georges' presentation covered what to many was a less known period in a poorly understood epoch that doubtless was very new to many of us. It was a period one needs to understand if one is to understand how it influenced Europe for perhaps the next century.

Additionally anyone with an interest in genealogy listened just as attentively as we followed the research undertaken by Georges to learn about his family; in fact his Great grandparents who came from Mauritius in 1877 . It was as though we visited the many archives and sources of information in South Africa, France, Mauritius and elsewhere. Sadly for Georges no letters, diaries or other information had survived. Neither did any aunts or uncles remember much about them so he was forced to start with information in the public sphere the first of which was in Pietermaritzburg. **The Indian Immigration Archives** are an amazingly comprehensive resource for at that time a vast number of businesses employed indentured labour. This archive contains huge numbers of letters between the employers and the Indian Office.

Let us follow Georges as he continues in his own words.

Hippolyte is an old and quite uncommon French name and as Hippolyte Lavoipierre was an avid letter writer to the Indian Office there is quite a lot of correspondence. But in order to understand them I asked myself why they had come here and why they had remained when many of the family had not stayed but returned to Mauritius. Then I realised I needed to go further back and look at the background of both Hippolyte and his wife Pauline which meant I would have to go to Mauritius, to France and then to Britain.



**The Lavoipierre Family at Bellamont, Umdloti in 1905**



When I was 16 I got to know Great Uncle Louis who told me a great deal about the family; stories that his generation seemed able to remember far better than we do today; stories that went back for perhaps 200 years; stories whose veracity at the time I questioned yet subsequently proved to be true and stories that he did not tell me that I subsequently discovered. Being from Mauritius he was completely bi-lingual. In 1917 he had gone to Britain to join up with the British Expeditionary Force. On the left is a picture of Great Uncle Louis, who throughout his life proudly claimed British Nationality but being in France in 1940 realised he was at risk of being captured and imprisoned by the Germans. This is his forged Identity Card showing his 'French' nationality. In fact G-U Louis settled in France in 1920 and lived there for the rest of his life

## The Research

Online archives & sources such as Généanet & Findmypast.co.uk not only have superb archives, documents and resources but many of these are now searchable which makes finding the information so much easier. Although Généanet is primarily a French site it is free and having 10 m members in France it holds a wealth of material. Today it now includes much British information. If you are looking for anything French it is highly recommended.

Archives today often allow one to write ahead and book material and when this is coupled with Digital Photography one can copy a mass of information, take this home and study it at leisure. This to an archive junky like me is a wonderful way of working. So in two weeks in Paris I was able to visit 13 or so archives and gather an immense amount of data.

One thing that also came to light with this research was the universal fostering of infants in 18th century northern France. One would find a birth in a Parish Register, a mammoth book where the Parish Priest recorded information, but the children never died; they simply disappeared. This was an oddity because the mortality rate in children in the first year used to be about 25%. Then I realised after a couple of years that many babies were being farmed out to peasants and in fact some research suggests the mortality rate amongst these babies may have been as high as 60%. From a research viewpoint this made things very difficult because one assumed a child had died only to have it reappear 20 years later which in turned raised the question where have they been all this time? Subsequently I realised the practice existed in Northern Italy, suspected it happened in Scotland and have come to think it was far more widespread than we think.

### **Reading Room Bibliothèque Nationale de France**

The architecture of this building was so appealing that I walked around studying the building before even thinking about the archives.

Later I found there was yet another room which was reputedly even more attractive.



### **Bibliothèque Sainte Genevieve**



It was finished in 1851 and surely represents a perfect example of what a library should look like. At the time it employed the most modern materials of iron and glass and still has iconic appeal 150 years later. This library is linked to the Sorbonne and has excellent information sources pertaining to the Indian Ocean.

Archives can have a somewhat confusing range of rules; some allow photography but no photocopying; others allow the latter but

no photos; some have limits on numbers of copies per day and in fact on my last day I needed 56 pages copied when the allowance was 50. Much wheedling, cajoling and maneuvering went on before thankfully someone close to God upstairs allowed me the extra copies.

The Château de Vincennes is a massive 14th and 17th century French royal fortress in the town of Vincennes, to the east of Paris, now a suburb of the metropolis. This archive contains all the records of the Ministry of Defence including those from the Napoleonic Period. One can only assume that these records are housed in a massive basement in the complex.

In France as opposed to Anglo-Saxon countries land sales and other transactions were recorded by notaries who were paid by line. So there was every motivation to pad things a bit. The document to the right has the stamp of a notary. Some documents might even hold just two words per line which could be more than annoying as one might plough thru 200 hundred pages to discover virtually nothing. By the way the archives of Paris were burnt in the Civil War so if you have ancestors born in Paris before 1860 the records no longer exist which means you have to start looking in cemeteries.



**Familie Hugon Grave in the Père Lachaise Cemetery**

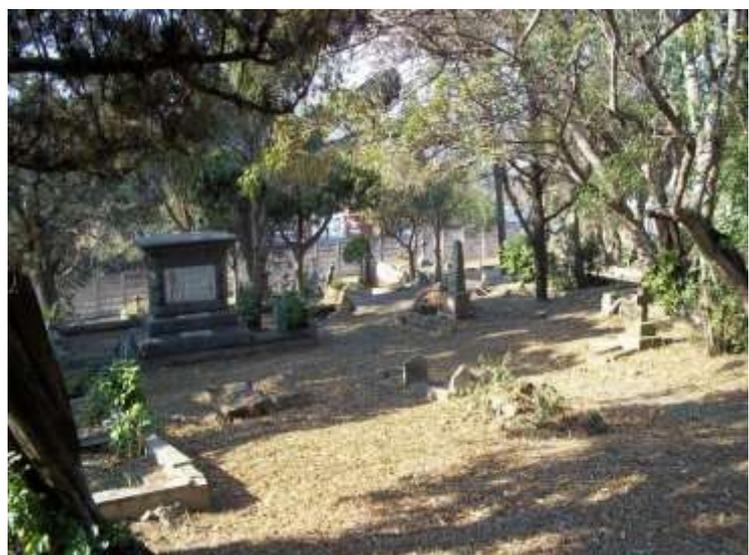
Pauline was a Hugon so I searched long and hard for and found this family grave in this huge and famous cemetery, the largest in Paris itself. Many famous people are buried here and some of the tombs are huge – almost echoing places like the Taj Mahal. Nevertheless the visit was well worthwhile for it gave me information that I was able to follow up and use.

**Pioneer Cemetery Verulam**

A local cemetery that yielded good information is the Pioneer Cemetery in Verulam where many of the Byrne settlers and early Natal pioneers are buried.

The Municipal Offices in Tongaat has a comprehensive list of people buried there.

With the arrival of the Mauritians there was need for a Catholic Cemetery and so a section was set aside for catholic graves.



## The France of the Lavoipierres and Hugons and how they came to be in the Indian Ocean



The Lavoipierres came from the Île-de-France the region around Paris and far inland which is most unusual but he ran away to sea. Pauline's family came from Granville and were associated with the sea being familiar with trade and the colonies. In fact probably half of all Franco-Mauritians had origins in Brittany. At that time half a dozen towns had the right to Colonial Trade, which meant slavery; remember that similar coastal towns in Britain also made their money from slavery; something which is no longer talked about.

The system of land ownership in feudal France consisted of; The manors; which owed fealty mostly to the king, sub-fiefs, the lord's demesne and the leaseholds

The lord of the manor had the following rights: the *cens* & champart, *corvée*, transfer duties, sole grain mill, wine press & bread oven, mineral rights, hunting, sometimes the tithe



### Seigneurie of Grisy

This latter could lead to the anomalous situation of the tithe being used for wine, women and song which was hardly in keeping with the original intent.

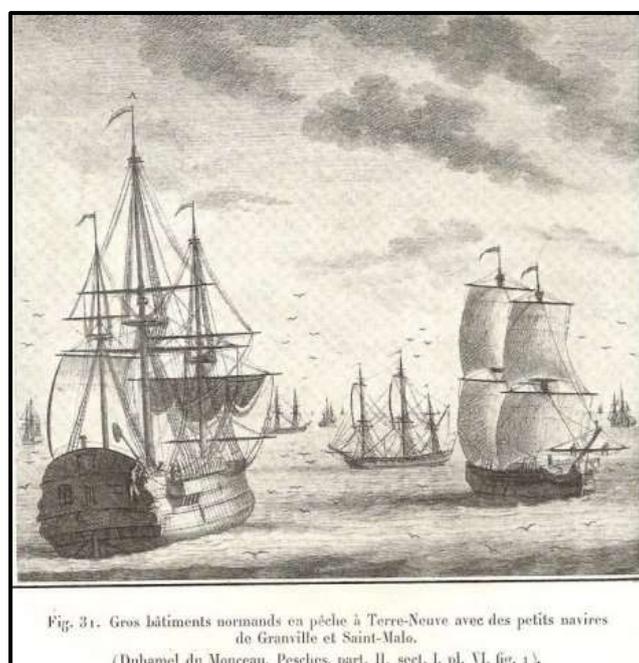
However the system could also allow a successful businessman to invest in a seigneurie which had in turn resulted in an equally successful descendant attaining the ranks of nobility. Our ex

The seigneurie (Manor) of Grisy belonged to the family Charpentier d'Ennery.

The Lavoipierre lease was for the lord's demesne, *cens* & *champart*, transfer duties, mineral rights, wine press, half the tithe and timber from some woods.

Charpentier retained hunting rights & transfer duty on sub-fiefs

Rent was in cash, grain & a horse-drawn carriage for four days out of harvest time.

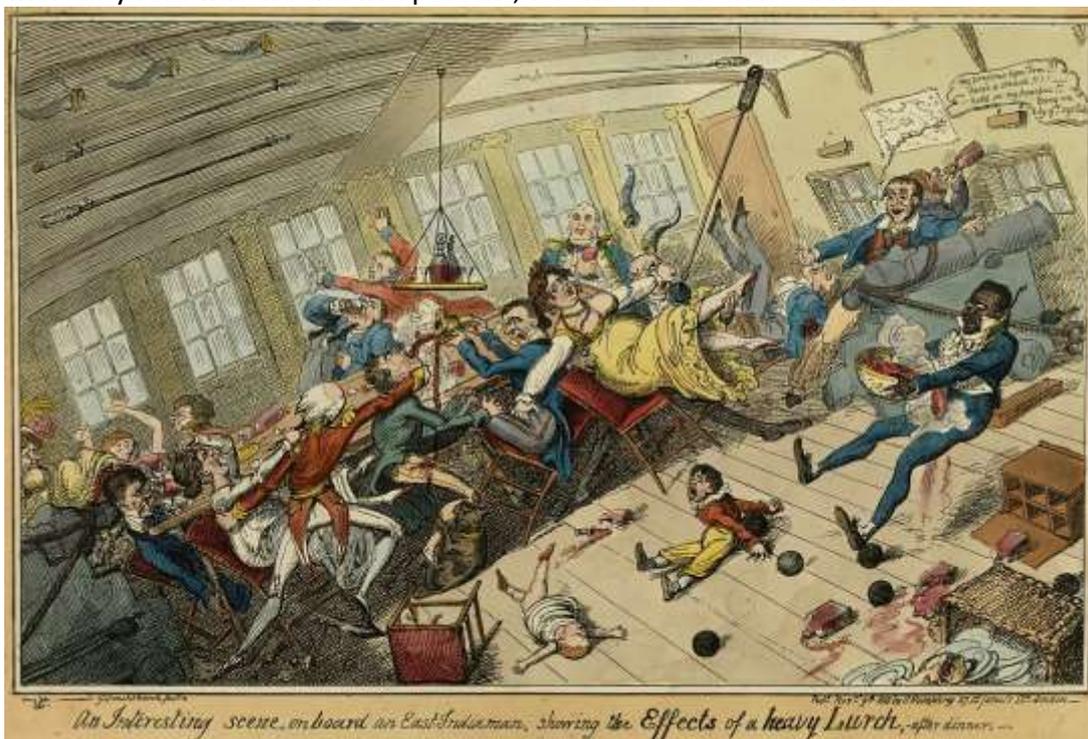


Pauline's family came from Granville, a small fishing town in Brittany. But Granville did not have the right to 'trade' as St Malo did so they stuck to fishing of which there were two types. One used small two-masted craft which set sail in Spring for the Grand Banks, where they would fish for June, July, August, processing the catch on the vessel and then in Autumn they would return thus avoiding the hurricane season in the North Atlantic.

Wealthier families would invest in a three-masted vessel which would have a bigger crew and arrive earlier in the season where they would set up on shore. Rowboats would catch the fish, bring it onshore where it would be processed, salted, dried in the sun and then loaded onto the vessel at the end of Summer. These vessels would then sail south to Cadiz and Marseille where there was a huge market for the fish. Then goods such as olive oil and other more valuable goods from the Levant would be purchased. But there was a huge inherent danger with this for they must run the gamut of the Barbary pirates whose aim was to capture white slaves. In fact this was such a problem that the church actually raised funds to buy back these captives, who then had to repay the church by working for it. So these vessels were fully armed with up to thirty cannons and each fisherman needed to be fully trained to work the armaments including muskets.

Understand also that at that time the oceans were an absolute jungle and during times of war these larger vessels were rapidly converted to what amounted to pirate vessels, euphemistically called privateers, which with a letter of marque from the crown would capture vessels owned by enemies. The spoils from which were shared by the Crown, the owners, the Captain and the crew.

The British and the French were competing for the same thing, namely the Caribbean with its wealth in sugar and coffee, and India with its spices. Sailing to either of these destinations was a nightmare, not the pleasant ocean cruise we think of today. The Caribbean trip took several weeks but the trip to India in a small sailing ship took over six months. In fact the trip was so appalling that Punch published this illustration which in any sort of running sea would be no great exaggeration. In fact the mortality rate was around five percent, for the vessels that survived.



Stephen Taylor has written two books which really capture the age. The first is, 'Storm and Conquest: The Battle for the Indian Ocean 1809'; the second, 'The Caliban Shore: the Fate of the Grosvenor Castaways.' (Both are available for Kindle – Editor).



Until the Seven Years' War which started in 1756 the French dominated India having by far the largest territory, far larger than the British. France also possessed the Indian Ocean Islands at the time. But this bitter war which started in the West in the US and the Caribbean and then spread to India was resoundingly won by the British who then stripped France of almost all her possessions. In fact in the Caribbean all France retained was San Domingue, now Haiti, which at the time produced more sugar than all the other Caribbean islands collectively.

In India the French retained literally tiny pieces of territory and even these lead at times to bitter wrangles and fights between British and French District Commissioner. Pondichery was the French Capitol of India, which was completely surrounded by British territory. It was tiny but nevertheless survived until 1947 and India's Independence.



Many French people moved from India to Mauritius either to farm sugar or to retire. The sugar industry thrived for many years and in spite of the British banning slavery for many years a blind eye was turned or post 1835 Indian indenture labour was employed.

But from 1850 onwards things started to go wrong in Mauritius. Sugar beet was developing in Europe; sugar cane was developing in Natal and other parts of the world; the previously malaria free island from 1867 suddenly had malaria where the population lacked any resistance so death from this and other diseases like cholera skyrocketed. In 1868 a hurricane that blew for three days wrought appalling havoc.

By 1800 the forested and timbered areas had completely disappeared.

At this juncture Georges knitted the genealogical puzzle together, revealed some of the ancestral skeletons which he uncovered with his exploration of archives in Mauritius. He went on to talk about the family that moved to Natal, settling around Mount Moreland, the home of some of the Byrne Settlers. The development of Bellamont and Umdloti and life as it was some 100 odd years ago.

Sadly space and time prevent the recording of the last quarter of Georges' outstanding presentation but to say his book is a masterpiece is no understatement for it is packed with information about the family as well as the lifestyle of many in France during the Ancien Regime and in her colonies post that period.

If you are lucky a few copies of Georges book, **'Their Destiny in Natal: the Story of a French Colonial Family of Natal'** may still be available on the members book night at this month's October meeting.

Thank you Georges.

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## Heritage Matters

Some time ago we put a link to the <http://theheritageportal.co.za/> on the SA National Society website, which we encourage members to use for it holds an amazing wealth of information on a really wide range of properties and subjects locally and overseas.

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Don't forget 1715 start time for the October meeting.