



International Symposium on "Old Worlds-New Worlds": The History of Colonial Cartography 1750-1950
Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 21 to 23 August 2006

Working Group on the History of Colonial Cartography in the 19th and 20th centuries
International Cartographic Association (ICA-ACI)

Francis Barrallier: A life in context

H. J. Steward

Professor Emeritus, Clark University
hsteward@clarku.edu

Summary

Louis François Barrallier (1773-1853), commonly known as Francis Barrallier, was a minor, but nevertheless significant figure, in the history of exploration and mapping. His relatively small body of work is amplified when contrasted with the much larger and various contexts against which it took place. These settings: the worlds of marine affairs, revolution, war, foreign refuge, assimilation, colonialism, military life, exploration, civil engineering, surveying and cartography brought Francis Barrallier into contact with many of the big events of a world that was fast-changing, politically, socially, industrially and geographically. In one way or another, his life touched upon the careers of Napoleon, Nelson, the Hamiltons, Greville, Colnett, Combermere, and Wellington; and for the purposes of this Working Group, a roster of Australian worthies: King, Paterson, Bass, Banks, Dalrymple, Flinders, Grant, Blaxland, Lawson, Murray and Caley. Since his death, a century and a half ago, the historical and disciplinary importance of his life has gone through a variety of evaluations: obscurity, fame, puzzles, confusion and imbalance. The detailed unfolding of his career and its interconnections is still ongoing and this paper aims to serve as an introduction to an evolving "cartobiography".

Introduction: The Family Background

Barrallier is a name long associated with south-west France. It can be traced back there to the 1400's and by the early 18th century had become common in Provence. At the latter time, a number of branches of this family were involved in maritime activities and, in particular, were associated with the port of Toulon. By the advent of the Revolution, one line of this family, through salvage operations, harbour construction, dredging and mapping had established a three-generation linkage with the city's official marine administration.

Jean-Louis Barrallier (1751-1834), the third in this line, was a gifted marine engineer, who commenced work at the Toulon Arsenal on his 16th birthday and rose steadily through the ranks to become, in 1792, *Ingénieur en chef des Travaux Maritimes*. If he had confined his activities to his official position, there would be little to record of him beyond evaluating his professional expertise. Jean-Louis, however, followed his father in dabbling in politics, which, in the turmoil of the time, was a risky business.

In 1793, following the execution of the king and the declaration of war by Britain, a series of counter-revolutions took place in France. The one in Toulon took a particularly dramatic turn when the counter-revolutionaries handed over the port to a combined British-Spanish-Neapolitan force. The go-between in the negotiations between the Toulonese and the British (who were the lead force in the Allied Fleet)

was Jean-Louis Barrallier. A siege commenced, with Toulon surrounded by a revolutionary army that included an unknown artillery captain named Napoleon Bonaparte.

Jean-Louis, having put all his eggs in one basket, was an energetic collaborator and, for his efforts, was awarded the post of *Secrétaire de l'Armée de S.M. britannique à Toulon*. This new prestige was to no avail: after four months, the revolutionaries gained the upper hand and, in December 1793, the port had to be evacuated. Amidst scenes of mass destruction and panic, with much of the French fleet on fire in the harbour, several thousands of the citizens of Toulon accompanied the departing Allied vessels. Amongst them, were Jean-Louis Barrallier, his wife and several of their children. They were not to see France again for 22 years.

For Jean-Louis, this two-decade absence, at least from the occupational standpoint, was relatively straightforward. After some 15 months assisting the British fleet in the Mediterranean, he became an expatriate in Britain. Initially appointed an assistant to the Inspector General for Naval Construction, he exchanged this position for the patronage of Charles Francis Greville and Sir William Hamilton. This pair; with Greville taking the active part, while Hamilton was British ambassador in Naples; had ambitious plans for developing the magnificent natural harbour of Milford Haven in western Wales. Their intention was to build a town, a port, a fishing industry and a shipbuilding dockyard and, in doing so, make themselves a lot of money. The wars with, first, the French Revolutionary forces, and, later, the Napoleonic Empire, were the anticipated catalysts to speed the process along.

An Act of Parliament was secured to launch the venture; a town was built, and several very large ships were constructed, but the enterprise never achieved the critical mass to make it a major success. While Jean-Louis and one of his son, Charles, laboured on behalf of Charles Greville and the Navy Board, three other sons; Francis, Joseph and Pierre; had to shift for themselves and eventually all took commissions, “without purchase”, in the British army.

Francis Barrallier

Francis Louis Barrallier (1773-1853) was the eldest of Jean-Louis's sons, and like all of them, to use his father's words, had been instructed in “drawing, plans and mathematics”. Francis, after unsuccessfully trying to get a position as the deputy surveyor-general in the new Australian colony, managed to obtain a promise of an ensigncy in its local regiment: the New South Wales Corps. This unit, perhaps the most derided in the British Army, was essentially a convict guard, and was often sarcastically referred to as “The Rum Corps”. In 1799, when Francis set sail for Sydney, the colony was only 11 years old and, like him, faced an uncertain future. However, what might have been decidedly an unpromising career move, was ameliorated by the fact that a fellow-passenger was the new colonial Governor: Philip Gidley King.

Governor King took a liking to Barrallier and, more especially, was impressed with the engineering and surveying skills inculcated in him by his father. Without official authority he granted him his sought-after army commission, (later approved

by London); appointed him to both the Engineering and Artillery Officer positions in the colony; and, later, made him his aide-de-camp. During the next three years, Francis Barrallier's military and professional life could be summed up in one word: busy. The nascent colony was large in area, much of it unknown to the eyes of the newcomers; it was politically charged, albeit far removed from the conflicts in Europe and the Caribbean; it was essentially an overseas penitentiary for a large number of convicts, but this basic *raison d'être* was set against a growing realisation of the land's potential for free settlement; and it was short of a skilled human infrastructure.

Francis Barrallier, thus, became something of a jack-of-all-trades. As an officer, he had his regular duties in a turbulent social situation, including attending a more-than-average number of courts martial; as a military engineer, he constructed the batteries overlooking Sydney harbour and planned a fort on what is, today, Observatory Hill; as a would-be architect, he built Australia's first children's orphanage at Parramatta, the colony's second settlement; he is credited, (perhaps/probably spuriously, but at least as an oblique acknowledgement of his marine background), with constructing the first Australian boat. Moreover, in the course of venturing outside the Port Jackson area, he made some of the first observations of the koala, the use of the boomerang, the native "Cooee" call, and recorded numerous observations on botany, geology, and inland aboriginal societies, much of which was conveyed to his patron, Charles Greville, and Sir Joseph Banks, "The Father of Australia" back in London.

More significantly, Governor King's interests were prompted by a desire for a viable, ordered and prosperous colony. This meant a need to have a greater familiarity with an unknown landscape, a wish to affirm and extend British sovereignty in the light of local French naval expeditions; and prompted by a number of food crises, the seeking of more fertile land. To these ends, he sent Barrallier on three reconnaissance missions of exploration. The first, to the great bay of Western Port, in what is now the state of Victoria; the second north of Sydney to the mouth of the Hunter River; and the third, in two separate forays, to explore the possibility of penetrating the Blue Mountain barrier behind Sydney.

The first ventured southwards to the Bass Strait: the task being to map harbours and to reconcile other marine surveys into one chart. The ship that carried Barrallier was the, now, famous, *Lady Nelson*, a name that, wryly, would have rung a bell with the Frenchman: the eponymous Lady Nelson, formerly Emma Hamilton, having been the mistress of his family's patron and employer, Charles Greville. The ship's commander was, Lieutenant James Grant, who later wrote an extensive account of both the noteworthy construction of the *Lady Nelson* and its sliding keels, and a narrative of the voyage itself; remarking in a number of places in the latter on Barrallier's presence and activities.

The *Lady Nelson* called in, briefly, at Jervis Bay and then proceeded to survey Western Port and the adjacent part of Bass Strait: an area possibly extending from Cape Northumberland to Cape Howe. The expedition, in surveying new ground was generous and politically aware when it bestowed new names on the landscape. For his efforts, Barrallier, despite his pioneering hydrographic work but having zero political clout, only had his name attached to a very small island in Western Port. Barrallier Island is low-lying and distinguished only by some of the southernmost mangroves in

the world, but it bears the first of many Barrallier toponyms that now dot the Australian landscape.

Overall, Barrallier's efforts led to a *Chart of Western Port and Coast to Wilson's Promontory*, and a *Chart of Bass's Straits*. The latter, was the more elaborate, covering a larger area, employing a simple conic projection and combining the observations of the *Lady Nelson* and two other vessels. Governor King, who was much interested in, and skilled at, hydrography and navigation, took a direct hand in directing the compilation, and the chart is recorded as being, "combined under the direction of P.G. King...by Ensign Barrallier". Both these pioneering charts were modified and reissued by Hurd in 1808, were still current in 1814, before and being eventually withdrawn sometime before 1826. The chart data was also, later, incorporated into the work of Matthew Flinders.

The Bass Strait expedition had taken about two months and the results were much approved by King. Within less than a month of returning to Port Jackson, the *Lady Nelson*, was on its way in the opposite direction, northward to Coal Harbour, at the estuary of the Hunter River. This time, Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson, commanding officer of the New South Wales corps was in charge and, again, Francis Barrallier, was the designated surveyor. The basic issue was to make a hydrographic survey of the local waters, and locate the topography of the surrounding shoreline and adjacent rivers, with some mind to the size of ship's draughts they could accommodate. In the manner of such exploratory surveys in a constricted temporal and technical setting, it yielded not much more than a simple reconnaissance sketch. It was, however, enough to act as an impetus for further investigations and, en route, Barrallier in his guise as a general natural historian, collected a number of interesting botanical specimens.

It is the third of King's exploring directives to Barrallier; to investigate and cross the Blue Mountains, that the Frenchman is best remembered in Australia. Curiously, it took place against a background of controversy and, albeit for different reasons, continues to be source of dispute today. In 1802, the argument was one of King versus Paterson; the Governor versus the Army; a contest of wills over administrative power. Paterson contended that he, as officer commanding the colony's troops, had the first call on Barrallier's services. King, who had nominated Barrallier as his aide-de-camp, saw him as his skilled agent; one that he could employ to examine the formidable natural barrier to inland expansion, the Blue Mountains. King triumphed by an artifice: ostensibly nominating Barrallier as his emissary to "The King of the Mountains": a reputed, but fictional, aboriginal leader in the hinterland.

The dispute today, is what exactly was the route that Barrallier took, and, to a lesser degree, whether or not he did "break the barrier" and was, thereby, the first to cross the Blue Mountains. What we do know, for sure, is that before departing he made a preliminary probe of about two weeks in September/October 1802 and his main foray started on 4th November 1802 and lasted almost two months. It resulted in a fascinating journal and a sketch map, and it is the analysis of this documentary evidence that has produced so much contention among Australian historians.

In May 1803, Barrallier's activities in New South Wales came to an abrupt halt when he got caught in further crossfire between King and Paterson, and was dismissed as the governor's aide-de-camp. The reasons are obscure but King was

clearly annoyed about some breach of etiquette, possibly a case of “loose lips” – i.e., Barrallier talking openly of confidences. However, whatever the truth involved, King later, although still commenting adversely about the Frenchman’s sincerity and the disillusionment he had suffered, went out of his way to praise his talents and wish him well. Barrallier then returned, very briefly, to his regiment, but quickly resigned his commission.

Only a few days later, he was on his way out of the colony aboard the returning convict ship, the *Glutton*, Accompanying him was his fellow explorer, from the *Lady Nelson*, John Murray, and some 79 soldiers, of whose well-being he was in charge. Within the last year there has been some evidence produced that he was not idle on the voyage; employing his graphic talents in making landscape illustrations while rounding Cape Horn.

Back in the U.K., Francis Barrallier spent some time writing up his exploration results for Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society. He then re-enlisted in the newly-raised 90th Regiment (the Perthshire Volunteers) and spent the next 12 years (1805-1817) as a topographic engineer in the West Indies. During this time, he took part in the military engagements in Guadeloupe and Martinique and was decorated. Apart from strictly military duties, such as fortification works, he distinguished himself by constructing a mini Trafalgar Square in Bridgetown, the Barbados capital. This edifice, preceded the definitive Nelson monument in London by some 30 years and has given him the odd, but erroneous distinction, of being frequently credited with being the builder of the larger project.

Located mostly in the Barbados garrison, he carried out a detailed seven year survey of the island, under the aegis of the Duke of York. The fine map, superbly engraved by J. Walker, lost its military significance with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, resulting in its publication being delayed until 1827. Nevertheless, it effectively, displaced William Mayo’s map, of a hundred years earlier, as the definitive cartographic template for the island. He also made a separate map, in two versions, of Carlisle Bay, the setting of the Barbados capital Bridgetown, which was a planning document for future hurricane defence. Appearing in 1818, it was one of the earliest maps to be lithographed in England.

Peace brought the Barrallier family back to France and the ennoblement of his father, but only his parents made a permanent transition to the old country. Time and its changes and the fact that the family, whatever it’s moral or political justifications, had fought against France, made it difficult to for them to reconnect with their compatriots. Francis married an Englishwoman, spent the rest of his life in the army, mostly on half-pay, and shared his home with his brother, Joseph, a Waterloo veteran. He was employed in, at least one more drafting project: making a plan for an abortive Tower Bridge in London, some 70 years before the present iconic construction. He died in Bedford Square in the East End of London in 1853 just short of his 80th birthday, having become a British citizen, just four years earlier.

His name lives on, not only in a number of Australian placenames, but, in a curious twist of fate, in royal genealogy. His widow, Isabel Barrallier, died in 1878, leaving a legacy to a nine-year old boy, Francis Barrallier Thompson, son of a prosperous London solicitor and family friend, Gustavus Thompson. This young boy

went on to become a doctor, a specialist in tropical diseases, and eventually the Chief Medical Officer in Cyprus. His eldest daughter, Stella, married an Irish peer, the 6th Marquis Conyngham, from a family, both famous and notorious in aristocratic circles, and the Barrallier name now appears in the family tree of the British royal family. One cannot help but think that Francis Barrallier, a destitute refugee from Revolutionary France and supporter of the Bourbon restoration, would have approved.

References

(A) Francis Barrallier: Cartographic Work

Chart of the Western Port and Coast to Wilson's Promontory forming part of Basses Strait, (1803), 1/375,000, approximately 5 nautical miles = 1 inch, 28.5 cm. x 44.8 cm., Hydrographic Office, London.

Chart of Basses Strait with Observations, (1803), approximately 40 nautical miles = 1 inch, 30.5 cm. x 30.5 cm. Hydrographic Office, London. Combined under the direction of Governor King, Hydrographic Office, London.

Coal Harbour and Rivers on the Coast of New South Wales, (circa 1802), Hydrographic Office, Taunton, Somerset.

Sketch of the Discoveries made in the Interior of New South Wales in 1802. Map to accompany Barrallier's **Journal du Voyage Enterpris Ordre de Son Excellence Gouverneur King, dans l'interieur de New South Wales**, (circa 1805), Public Record Office, Kew. A transcription and translation of the French original appeared in the Historical Records of New South Wales, 5, Appendix 5, 1897. It was republished by the Marsh Publishing Company, Melbourne, 54 pp. The sketch map is circa 1/700,000 with dimensions of 20.75 cm. x 31.25 cm.

Carlisle Bay, Bridgetown and suburbs, showing First Project of forming a grand naval establishment at Bridgetown, (1818), 3.75 inches = 1 mile, or 1/12,800, 33.95 cm. x 37.45 cm. Printed by the Quartermaster General, Horse Guards, London.

Reduced Plan and Elevation of the Proposed Bridge of Suspension from Little Tower Hill to Horsleydown, (1823), Scale 1½" = 400 feet, L. Clark and Co., Corn Hill, London, lithographed, 38 x 54.5 cm.

Trigonometrical Survey of Barbados, (1827), in six sheets, 2½ inches = 1 mile, or 1/25,344. Engraved by J. and C. Walker: 1st June 1825. Published by F. Barrallier, Captain HP, 25th Light Dragoons, Little Charles Street, Westminster, June, 1827.

(B) Select Bibliography

Anonymous, (1853), Obituary of Francis Barrallier, *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, July, p.632.

Andrews, Alan, E.J., (1990), "Mount Hunter and Beyond: with Hunter, Bass, Trench, Wilson, Barrallier, Caley, King and Macquarie, 1790 to 1815", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 76, 1, pp. 3-15.

Andrews, Alan, E.J., (1996), "Barrallier and Caley: The evidence for their Burrangong maps 1802-1806", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 82,1, June, pp.60-67. With an addendum by R. Else-Mitchell, pp.70-72.

Chichester, Henry Manners, (1885), "Francis Louis Barrallier", *Dictionary of National Biography*, London, III, July. Reprinted 1901, 1, pp.1193-1194.

Else-Mitchell, Rae, (1989), "*The Explorations of Lieutenant Francis Luis Barrallier*", Address to the New South Wales Military Historical Society, Sydney, 19 pp., 13 May, typescript, Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney.

Grant, James, (1803), *The Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Performed in His Majesty's Vessel "The Lady Nelson", of sixty tons burthen, with sliding keels, in the years 1800, 1801, and 1802 to New South Wales*, T. Egerton, London, xxvi, 195 pp. Reproduced by the Libraries Board of South Australia as Australiana Facsimile Editions No.28, Adelaide, 1973.

Lee, Ida, (1915), *The Logbooks of the "Lady Nelson" with the journal of her first commander, Lieutenant James Grant, R.N.*, Grafton, London, 328 pp.

MacQueen, Andy, (1993), *Blue Mountains to Bridgetown. The Life and Journeys of Barrallier*, Springwood, New South Wales.

Steward, H. J., (2000), "Francis Barrallier: The Man behind the Maps", *The Globe, Journal of the Australian Map Circle*.