

The Mystery Man of Dorrit Street

On the eve of World War 2 in 1939, a mystery man took up residence in a modest terrace house at 18 Dorrit Street Carlton. As recalled by artist Des Norman, who spent his childhood years in Dorrit Street, he wore stylish clothes with a bowler hat, and a French medal on Bastille Day. Who was this quiet and secretive man?¹

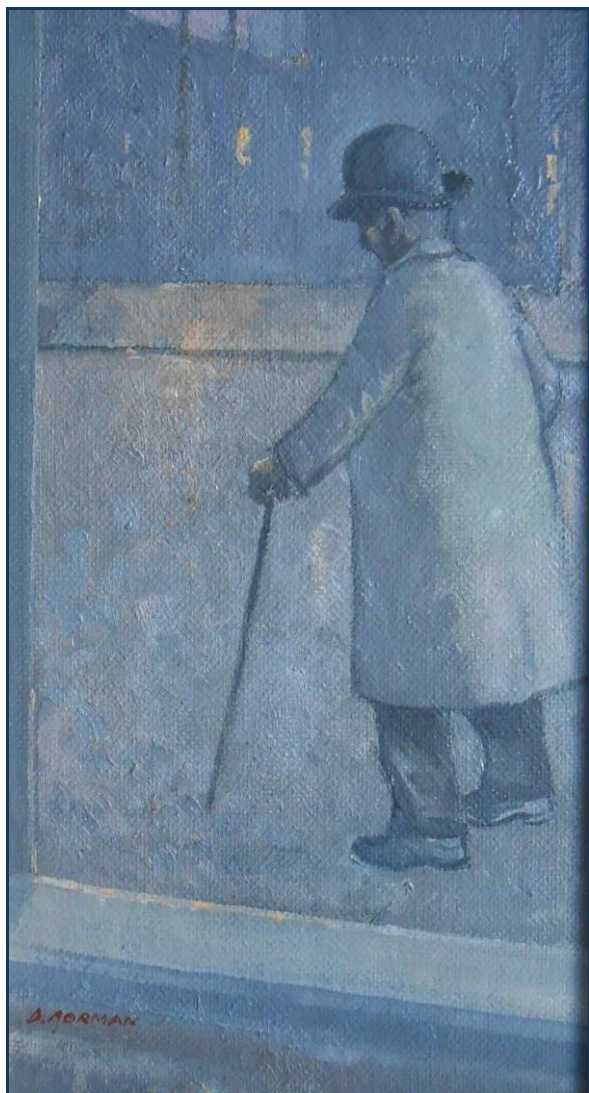


Image: Courtesy of Des Norman
The Mystery Man of Dorrit Street
Painted by Des Norman

Louis Marie Joseph Hippolyte Mouraud, to give his full birth name, was born in Guenrouët, France on 20 October 1877, the second son of farmers Julien Louis Mouraud and Jeanne Marie Togain. Louis had seven siblings – Julien, Pierre, Jeanne, Marie Virginie, Julie, Alexis and Marie Melanie – born between 1877 and 1890. When Louis was 14 years old, the Mouraud family migrated to the French colony of New Caledonia, where there was a demand for agricultural workers. Louis later served in the French Marines. In his military record, Louis is described as 1.58 metres tall, with brown hair and eyes, ordinary forehead, average nose, small mouth, round chin and oval face.^{2 3 4 5}

Louis travelled from New Caledonia to Australia on the steamer *St. Louis* and disembarked at Sydney. The timing of his arrival is in question, as he gave the same date of 14 March but two different years, 1901 and 1902, in official documents. He adopted the surname "Moureau" and spent his early years in Australia in New South Wales and Kalgoorlie, where he worked as a cook for 8 years. In March 1906 Louis Moureau, aged 29 years, was arrested for allegedly stabbing a workmate, Thomas O'Keefe, at Riordan's dairy in Kalgoorlie. In giving evidence at the Kalgoorlie Police Court in April 1906, Louis Moureau stated that he had been "on the [gold]fields" for four and a half years. He denied having stabbed O'Keefe, whose injury was considered minor, and the case was dismissed.^{6 7 8 9}

Louis Moureau turns up next in Tasmania in 1911. Directory listings and newspaper advertisements confirm that he operated a restaurant business at 76 Charles Street Launceston, variously described as "Cosmopolitan Dining Rooms", "Fish and Oyster Saloon" and "Moureau's Café", from January 1911 through to 1922. In August 1912, the restaurant was the scene of an incident involving "presenting firearms" by a dissatisfied customer named Tasman Bradley. Unlike the alleged stabbing incident in 1906, this time Louis was the complainant and not the alleged perpetrator. Louis was cross-examined in court by the defendant's representative, Mr M. J. Clarke, who queried his French nationality - "I thought you were Greek" - and implied that he was

"excitable". A woman named Margaret Moureau, described as "wife of the complainant", also gave evidence as a witness.^{10 11}

After the incident and subsequent court case, Louis may have decided to leave Tasmania. In January 1913, the "first-class business" was advertised for sale because the proprietor was leaving the state. However, Louis remained at the same address in Tasmania for the next 9 years. Margaret Moureau's name appeared on the Tasmanian electoral roll at Louis' address from 1914 to 1919, but no record has been found of their marriage or divorce in Tasmania. Louis may have been a latecomer to marriage compared to his siblings, five of whom were married in New Caledonia between 1903 and 1906. Louis' first verified marriage was to Lillian May Tiffen, a waitress at his café, in Launceston on 18 May 1919. The marriage ended in divorce in the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1926, on grounds of adultery and desertion. Shortly after their arrival in Melbourne in 1922, Louis found Lillian in a compromising situation with the son of their landlady, Mrs McConnochie, at her house in Regent Street Fitzroy. Lillian left Melbourne for Sydney in January 1923 and Louis alleged she had stolen some of his restaurant takings and was working as a prostitute. Louis travelled to Sydney in an attempt at reconciliation, but Lillian was unrepentant.¹²
^{13 14 15}

Louis first expressed his wish "to be a British subject and settle in the Commonwealth" in a letter to the Governor-General, dated 11 May 1914. World War 1 broke out a few months later and Louis may have delayed his naturalisation application because of his allegiance to France, the country of his birth. In September 1916, Louis wrote a letter to the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, reporting an incident of larrikinism late one night at his restaurant in Launceston. The larrikins referred to him as "German", which would have been quite insulting during the war years. Louis suggested that the "midnight marauders ought to be at the front facing the fiendish German foe". He also stated his intention to fight, alongside his brothers, for their native land "as soon as I can dispose of my business". Louis' military record confirms that he was recalled to service in March 1917, when he was 39 years old. His World War 1 military service could possibly be the origin of the medal he was seen wearing on Bastille Day.^{16 17 18 19}

In November 1920, while still in Tasmania, Louis placed an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, seeking to know the whereabouts of his younger brother Alexis. The two brothers may have lost touch when Alexis was convicted of the murder in the Criminal Court of Noumea in March 1908 and was sentenced to 7 years' hard labour. Alexis, born in April 1888, was only 19 years old at the time.^{20 21}

With the war over and Australia now at peace, Louis once again expressed his intention to apply for naturalisation. He made two applications, within a month of each other, in 1922. In his first application, dated 17 February 1922, he stated that he had arrived in Sydney on 14 March 1902 and had resided in New South Wales for 1 year, Kalgoorlie for 8 years and Launceston for 11 years. This application was rejected because the form was obsolete and the second application, dated 9 March 1922, differed in some of the detail. This time Louis stated that he had arrived in Sydney on 14 March 1901 and he added a year in New Zealand to his period of residency – a total of 21 years. The owner of Louis' restaurant premises, William Sidebottom, and a tailor named John Riva certified that Louis was "a person of good repute". Louis swore the oath of allegiance on 24 April 1922, renounced his French nationality and became a British subject. Louis and Lillian moved to Victoria in July 1922 and Moureau's Café was taken over by ex-sailor and boxing trainer George Lamb.^{22 23}



Photo: CCHG

**Former Café Parisien
209 Russell Street Melbourne**

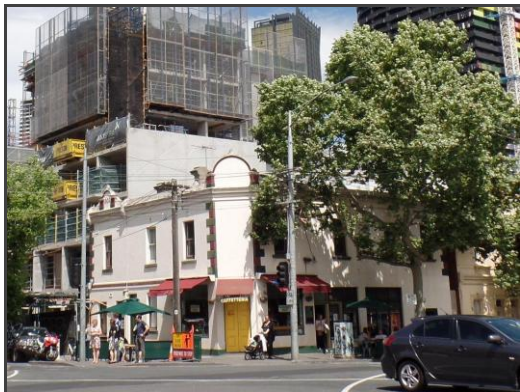


Photo: CCHG

127 Queensberry Street Carlton



Photo: CCHG

18 Dorrit Street Carlton

In Melbourne, Louis opened the Café Parisien at 209 Russell Street, a two storey building near the Exford Hotel. Advertisements for waitresses and a pantry maid appeared in *The Argus* in March 1923, two months after Lillian departed for Sydney. Once again, the establishment was the scene of an incident in May 1926, in which a Romanian man named Vallis Malini caused a disturbance and threw a beer bottle at a plate glass window. Malini was arrested by Constable Hitchcock and later charged with having wilfully broken a pane of glass valued at £45, the property of Louis Moureau.^{24 25}

Louis had a change of residential address in 1928 and, so it seems, a change in his domestic arrangements. A woman named "Nora Moureau", home duties, was registered on the electoral roll as residing at 2 York Place Carlton, the same address as Louis Moureau. Like Margaret Moureau, Nora (Hannora) had taken Louis' name, though they were not to marry for more than two decades. They lived there for about a year, then moved back to the city where Louis had dining rooms at 276 King Street. This time, Nora was registered as "Ann Nora Moureau" in the 1929 electoral roll. Then in 1931, they were in Carlton again at 11 Cross Street, where Ann Nora was registered at "Hannora Moureau". Louis' business address was 127 Queensberry Street Carlton, on the corner of Cardigan Street, where he had dining rooms.²⁶

In 1935, Louis reverted to his birth name "Mouraud" and he formally notified the Department of the Interior in a letter via his solicitor, R. John Horsfall of Collins Street. After a few years in Victoria Street, North Melbourne, Louis bought the house in Dorrit Street in 1939. The property ownership was initially registered in Louis' name, then in 1940 he and "Hannora Sayer" were registered as joint proprietors. Surprisingly, Hannora was described as "married woman" on the certificate of title. Could this mean she was married to someone else at the time? Louis and Hannora finally formalised their live-in relationship by marriage in Carlton on 10 October 1950.^{27 28 29}

While Louis may have appeared secretive to the local gossips, he was good friends with his neighbour, George Meddings, who lived next door at 16 Dorrit Street. Both Hannora and George were named as beneficiaries in Louis' will, dated 17 May 1948, together with Louis' siblings Pierre and Melanie. In his will, Louis gave instructions for a double plot to be purchased at Fawkner Cemetery for himself and Hannora. He also specified the wording of the inscription to go on the tombstone. Sadly, Louis' instructions were not followed. His carefully-worded will of 1948 was revoked by his marriage to Hannora in 1950, so he was deemed to have died intestate in 1955.^{30 31}

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Louis died in Royal Melbourne Hospital on 20 August 1955, two months short of his 78th birthday, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Melbourne General Cemetery three days later. In a final mixup of names, his death was registered under "Mourand" and his burial under "Maurano". Instead of his beloved Hannora, Louis had a stranger buried on one side and an empty plot on the other.³³

Louis was a man of many names - born as Mouraud, known as Moureau, died as Mourand and buried as Maurano. The grass has grown over his unmarked grave and his former Café Parisien is now a Chinese restaurant, serving a very different style of cuisine. The houses in York Place and Cross Street have been demolished, but Louis and Hannora's home in Dorrit Street still exists. Louis Mouraud, *The Mystery Man of Dorrit Street*, is immortalised in Des Norman's painting and in the words of his own final tribute:

***Louis Mouraud
Born 1877
A Native of France
One of the Best
R.I.P.***

**Susan C. Crowe
Carlton Community History Group
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Acknowledgements:

The research for this article was inspired by Des Norman and his painting of the Mystery Man. Des died on 13 September 2015, but his childhood memory of Dorrit Street lives on in his paintings.

Susie Morgan, a descendant of Carlton Frenchman Ludovic Marie, Nathalie de Andrade and Joe Rich provided assistance in sourcing and interpreting French archival records. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged.³⁴

References:

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- 1 From Des Norman's recollections in *Through the Eyes of a Child : A Street in Carlton 1939-45*. CCHG, 2013
 - 2 Loire-Atlantique Archives <<http://archives.loire-atlantique.fr>>
 - 3 La fondation d'un centre de colonisation libre : Voh : 23 janvier 1892 : Souvenirs d'un colon, p. 6
 - 4 New Caledonia was a French penal colony from 1864 to 1897.
 - 5 Military record of Louis Mouraud, Matricule no. 1302
 - 6 Naturalisation file of Louis Moureau (National Archives of Australia, NAA:A1, 1935/9664)
 - 7 According to shipping records, the steamer *St Louis* travelled regularly between New Caledonia and Australia. The voyage took seven days in favourable conditions.
 - 8 Louis' name (either spelling) does not appear in the NSW unassisted immigrant passenger lists, 1826 to 1922
 - 9 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 6 April 1906, p. 2
 - 10 *Tasmania Post Office Directory* and regular advertisements in the *Launceston Examiner*.
 - 11 *Examiner*, 2 September 1912, p. 7
 - 12 Electoral Roll for Bass District, Launceston Central Subdistrict, 1914-1919
 - 13 Relevés des Registres d'Etat-Civil en Linge du CAOM Effectué par le Cercle Celtique de Nouméa
<<http://www.cercleceltiquenoumea.org>>
 - 14 Australian Marriage Index, no. 1086, 1919
 - 15 Divorce petition of Louis Moureau, 127/1926 (VPRS 283)
 - 16 Naturalisation file of Louis Moureau, *op cit*
 - 17 In order to become a British subject, Louis would have had to renounce his French nationality and swear an oath of allegiance to the British monarch.
 - 18 *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1916, p. 7
 - 19 Military record of Louis Mouraud, *op cit*
 - 20 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November 1920, p. 13
 - 21 Judgement Summary, Criminal Court of Noumea, 23 March 1908
 - 22 Naturalisation file of Louis Moureau, *op cit*
 - 23 *Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 1922, p. 7
 - 24 *The Argus*, 27 March 1923, p. 13
 - 25 *The Argus*, 22 May 1926, p. 31
 - 26 Name and address changes sourced from Commonwealth Electoral Rolls and directory listings.
 - 27 Naturalisation file of Louis Moureau, *op cit*
 - 28 Certificate of title for 18 Dorrit Street, vol. 4821, fol. 964019 (First edition)
 - 29 Marriage Certificate of Louis Mouraud and Hannora Sayer, no. 18815/50
 - 30 Will of Louis Mouraud (VPRS 7591/P3/117/499/830)
 - 31 Probate File of Louis Mouraud (VPRS 28/P4/118/488/830)
 - 32 Death Certificate of Louis Mouraud, no. 10273/ 1955
 - 33 Melbourne General Cemetery burial records
 - 34 Ludovic Marie, French winemaker and entrepreneur, lived at Rathdowne Terrace, 333 Rathdowne Street Carlton from 1874 to 1889.