

# Charles-François Lavaud (1798 – 1878)

**B**orn at Lorient, France, on 25 March 1798, Charles-François Lavaud was the son of a Bordelaise naval officer and his Breton wife. In 1810, when he was twelve years old, he joined the French Navy. Serving on a succession of ships, he progressed through the ranks to receive his first command, that of the *Philomene*, in 1829. Ten years later, after a brief period in the Ministry of Marine in Paris, he was given command of the corvette *L'Aube* and sent to New Zealand to support the establishment of a French settlement in the South Island, and the French whalers operating in the area. He was also charged with collecting and sending New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*) for experimental planting in Corsica.

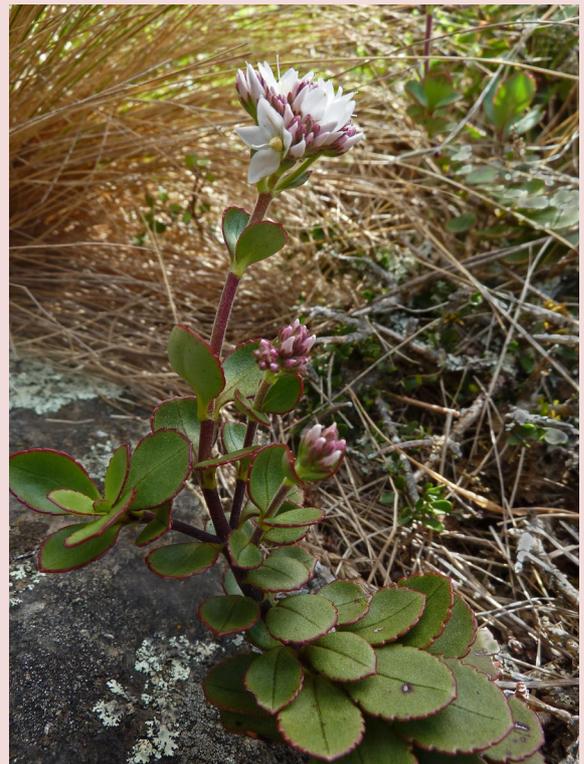
Although French expeditions had explored the South Pacific over many years, and French whaling fleets had worked New Zealand waters since the late 1830s, France had no colonies in the Pacific. Jean François Langlois, commander of the whaling ship *Cachalot*, embarked upon a grandiose scheme for French settlement at Akaroa, on Banks Peninsula. After a dubious land purchase from local Māori, he set up the French Nanto-Bordelaise Company, and with the eventual support of the French government, the *Comte de Paris* under his command left the port of Rochefort in March 1840 with 60 emigrants on board.

When *L'Aube* sailed into the Bay of Islands on 11 July 1840, Captain Lavaud found that the Treaty of Waitangi had been signed, proclaiming British sovereignty of the whole country. Governor Hobson sent HMS *Britomart* with two magistrates to observe the French activities at Akaroa. Lavaud followed, and the *Comte de Paris* arrived two days later, on 17 August. The French colonists settled in Akaroa without major incident, due largely to Lavaud's calm judgment and diplomacy. His exercise of French law within the French community had Hobson's backing, and his officers and men made a major contribution to engineering, science and the arts in the new settlement. The French navy also provided free health services to all Banks Peninsula residents and visitors. On a visit to Akaroa in March 1841 Lady Jane Franklin declared Captain Lavaud to be the most frank, honest-hearted Frenchman she had ever met!

In 1843, after four years and two months as King's Commissioner, Lavaud left New Zealand in *L'Allier*. For his tactful handling of the difficult situation at Akaroa he was made an officer of the Legion of Honour. He governed the French Pacific colony of Tahiti from 1846 until 1850, and two years after his

return to France was appointed naval prefect of the port of Lorient. In June 1853 he was promoted to the rank of rear admiral, and in 1860 he served on the Admiralty Council. He retired in March 1861 and died at Brest on 14 March 1878, one of the most highly regarded of French naval officers.

*Heliohebe lavaudiana* was discovered and described by Etienne Raoul, naval surgeon and botanist on *L'Aube*, and in 1842 her replacement ship, *L'Allier*. During excursions to the Bay of Islands and the long stay at Banks Peninsula, Raoul collected extensively. He wrote, "I have dedicated this pretty species to Monsieur Lavaud, captain of the vessel, as a token of recognition for all the facilities and friendly support which he has kindly consented to accord me in my scientific searches in New Zealand." Descendants of the French settlers live in New Zealand today, and Rue Lavaud is one of several Akaroa streets with a French name.



## *Heliohebe lavaudiana*

*Heliohebe lavaudiana* is a small shrub, seldom more than 20 cm tall, which occurs only on Banks Peninsula, usually on the shady side of bluffs and rock outcrops or in cool rock crevices. Its small, rounded, dull green leaves are serrated and edged in red. Compact clusters of 50 to 100 flowers appear in October and November, the pink buds intermingling with the open flowers that become white after pollination. Lavaud's hebe, sometimes also known as the Akaroa sun hebe, is now found only where not threatened by browsing animals or invasive weeds.

