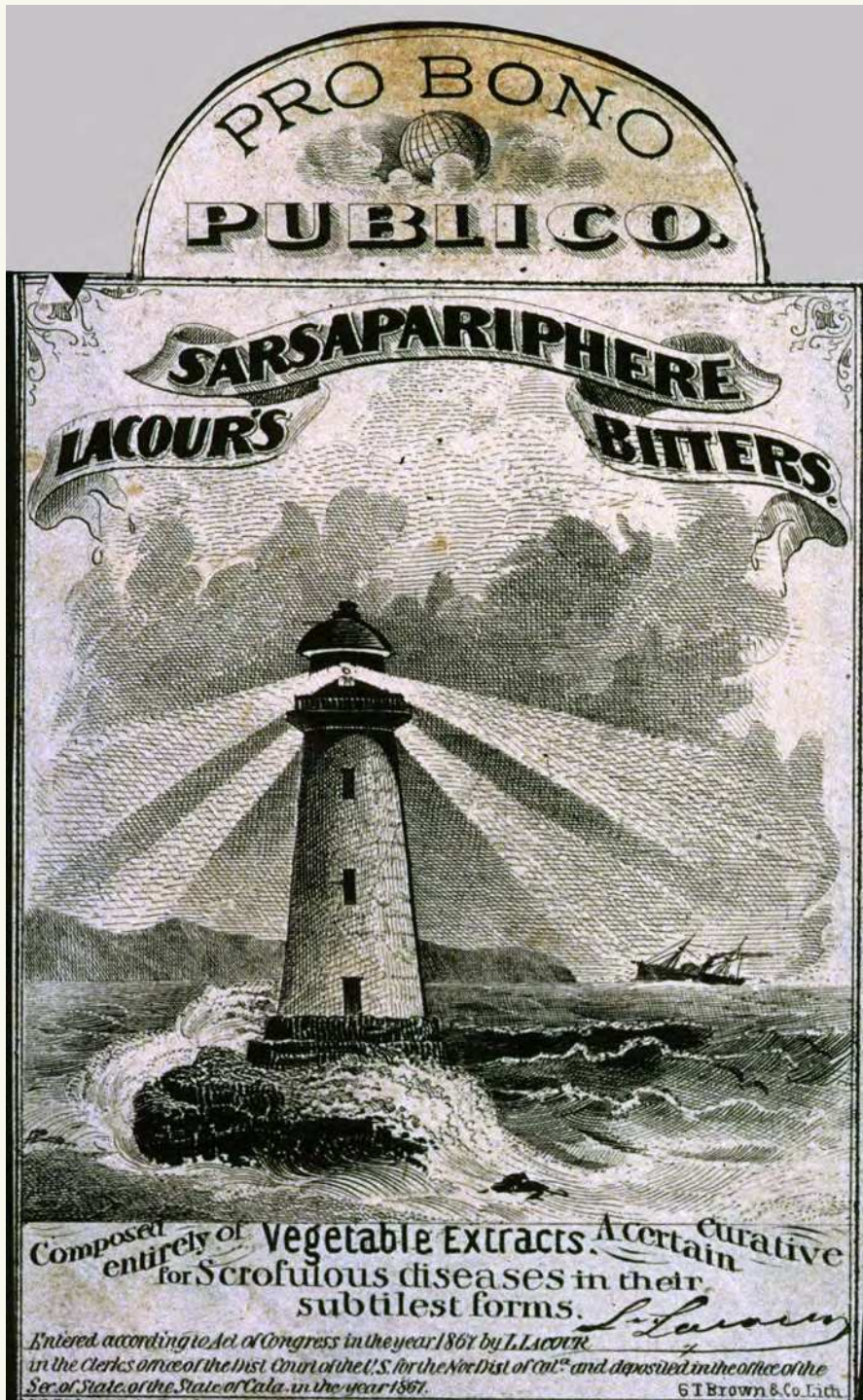


LOUIS LACOUR ANOTHER CHAPTER

By Eric McGuire



The central figure of the label for Lacour's bitters is the light-house. It became an iconic symbol for Lacour during his lifetime in San Francisco that had to carry significant meaning for him.





One of two native American sketches in the Lacour collection is this one of a male resident of Port Orford, Oregon Territory, probably from the Tututni Tribe. The other sketch is of a native female. It is dated 1854, a year before the Native / American conflicts in the region. The drawings imply that Lacour visited coastal Oregon Territory at that time. Lacour placed the subject on a beach setting, with a piece of bullwhip kelp at his feet.

By now nearly every bottle collector is familiar with the name of Lacour. His Sarsapariphère Bitters bottle is a classic example of design created in the highly competitive market of the late 1860s when it was popular to produce distinctive shapes for the product. A few years ago Warren Friedrich and I collaborated on an article that was an in-depth view of the history of Louis Lacour, his life, and his business dealings. (see *Bottles &*

Extras, May-June, 2020, pg. 28). In our fact-finding process we corresponded with a living relative of Louis Lacour who resides in France. Mme Florence Frigola is an avid researcher of her family and was able to add interesting facts about Lacour during his early life prior to coming to California. Mme Frigola recently contacted me regarding some information that she located through the Internet that is located at the University of Califor-



This sketch is marked, "L. Lacour, Castera & — ". If the naming convention is the typical left to right, then Lacour would be on the left. If not then Lacour would be on the right. The only certain figure is that of Jean Castera in the center. This sketch is the proof needed to confirm that the drawings contained within this folder at the Bancroft Library are, indeed, the work of the same Louis Lacour who later produced his Sarsapariphère Bitters, since he was in partnership with Jean Castera between 1858 and 1863. The unnamed figure is a mystery but may be that of P.H. Canavan, who joined Lacour and Castera in 1861.



Badinguet was a nickname given to Napoleon III (Charles-Louis Napoleon Bonaparte), the origin of which is unclear, with a number of theories abounding. He was the nephew of Napoleon I and President of France from 1852 to 1870. Lacour's hostility toward Badinguet is clearly marked in this drawing on the bottom of the red flag, which pronounces, "MORT A BADINGUET" (i.e., death to Napoleon). Lacour took the liberty of disparaging Napoleon because of his censorship and harsh treatment against his opponents during the first years of his leadership. This drawing apparently represents the sentiments of the French population in San Francisco, many of whom were exiled from France because of Badinguet's ruthless rule. Several of Lacour's drawings representing his feelings against Napoleon are in color, as is this one. The man holding a bottle is just a little bonus, but does imply the mental state of the group of protestors. Notice also, that the lead person in the drawing is carrying copies of *Le Phare*.

This sketch continues with Lacour's satire of Badinguet, showing him receiving the wrath of God. In the lower right is written, "Phare 21 Oct 1857". This is either the date of execution of the drawing or the date of when it appeared in the French language newspaper, LE PHARE, printed in San Francisco. Also, conspicuously located near the bottom of the drawing is a lighthouse. The symbolism of a lighthouse apparently stuck with Lacour long after the disappearance of the LE PHARE newspaper in 1863, since he used it as a marketing tool for his Sarsapariphère Bitters in 1868.



nia, Berkeley, Bancroft Library. It is in the form of sketches of various subjects that are attributed to Louis Lacour and dating to the mid-1850's. I was initially skeptical that her find was associated with the same Louis Lacour of bitters fame. She asked me if I would be willing to go to Berkeley to view the holdings. The sketches were purchased by the library in 1979 from an antiquarian bookseller in San Francisco.

Upon initially viewing the portfolio of drawings I was quite impressed with their quality, and again, doubted that they were rendered by our bitters man. After a closer look at the twenty or so drawings it became clear that they were definitely from the hand of our Louis Lacour. He was an excellent caricature artist whose favorite subject was the politics of France. Several of his drawings reflected views of his newly adopted home but a good number related to happenings in France. Lacour's frequent use of Latin phrases belies the fact that he

was well educated in European curriculum.

After studying the drawings one issue became clearer. As we know from the patent drawings and label of his bitters bottle, its shape is supposed to be in the form of a light-house. A few of his caricature drawings include text that refer to LE PHARE, including a precise date for each. It turns out that Le Phare, meaning "light-house" in French, was a French language newspaper printed in San Francisco. While I have yet to peruse the few remaining extant copies of the newspaper it appears obvious that some of Lacour's drawings were meant for publication in Le Phare.

Louis Lacour was a California pioneer who has fallen through the cracks by most historians but deserves due credit for shaping the State. His artistic abilities are yet another chapter in the life of this storied man.

