

Historical overview of the buffer zone

The buffer zone contains several national monuments which have played an important part in the architectural history of colonial Mauritius. Some of these national heritages such as the La Bourdonnais Hospital or the Military Hospital and the Windmill date from the early years of French colonization. In 1735, King Louis XV, with the support of the French East India Company, appointed Mahé de Labourdonnais as the governor of Ile de France and Bourbon. Between 1735 and 1746, Governor La Bourdonnais initiated several construction projects which were aimed bringing at developing Port Louis and its harbour including Trou Fanfaron. The Trou Fanfaron was also known as ‘le port de sureté’ and was considered to be the most secure part of Port Louis harbour.

During the first six years of his administration, through the use of slave labour as well as contractual workers, the French governor was able to build a windmill, a bakery, workshops, fortifications, storage facilities and a large hospital. The objective of Labourdonnais was to provide the colonists with certain modern amenities in order to improve their lives.

The Labourdonnais Hospital or the Military Hospital was inaugurated by the governor in 1740. This impressive structure was built through the labour of slaves who were brought from Mozambique, Madagascar and India as well as skilled and semi-skilled artisans from the south of India. It contained three wings and accommodate more than 300 beds. During the 18th century, the Labourdonnais Hospital was already recognized as being an architectural marvel of early Ile de France. For a period of more than 150 years, it has served as a hospital for the white colonists, the free coloureds, slaves and indentured labourers. Between 1869 and 1869, it played a key role in the colony’s struggle against the malaria epidemic which cost the lives of thousands of Mauritians in Port Louis.

In 1999, the La Bourdonnais Hospital was decreed national monument by the National Heritage Fund and archival research has shown that it is one of the oldest buildings in the Mascareigne Islands.

During the second half of the 18th century, successive French governors continued to implement La Bourdonnais’ policy of constructing new buildings in order to modernize Port Louis. With the advent of royal administration in 1767, new buildings were constructed such as the Bagne Prison and the Parc-à-Boulets. The Bagne Prison was completed in 1772 and for a period of more than six decades it served as a place where maroons or fugitive slaves were incarcerated. The Parc-à-Boulets was a place where ships were repaired in Trou Fanfaron. During the early period of British rule, it was converted into a barracks for Indian convicts who worked and lived in Port Louis. By the mid-19th century, it became part of the Immigration Depot.

During the nineteenth century, the local British colonial authorities, just like the French, continued with the infrastructural development of Port Louis. At the same time, during the middle part of the same century, with the advent of the sugar boom, the importation of indentured labour and a rapid increase in the importation of food items and manufactured goods, a small but important class of merchants and traders emerged near the Aapravasi Ghat and the

Port Louis Central Market. In addition, gradually between the mid-1800s and early 1900s, in the rural areas, traders specially those of Chinese origin set up shop on or near the sugar estates. They provided food items, liquor and even manufactured goods to the indentured labourers, non-indentured labour and the planters.

By the 1850s and 1860s, Port Louis became one of the most important economic centres and cosmopolitan towns in the greater Indian Ocean region. As part of their initiative to modernize Port Louis, the British government, through the Surveyor General's Department, constructed several important buildings. Stone structures such as: the Port Louis Central Market (1844), the Customs House (1832/1844), the Presbyterian Church (1854), the Civil Hospital (1854) and the General Post Office (1871) became an integral part of the island's urban landscape.