

200th anniversary of Nicolas Pike's birth 2018 – some associated papers

Nicolas Pike, American consul in Mauritius (and thus also Seychelles) from 1867 to 1873, is most famous for his book on the culture, history and wildlife of Mauritius, published in 1873, entitled *Subtropical rambles in the land of Aphanapteryx*. Less well-known is a briefer account of the granitic Seychelles in the same vein. Pike was also an inveterate collector of all manner of natural history taxa, most of which ended up in museums in the United States.

In October 2018 the Royal Society of Arts & Sciences of Mauritius organised a symposium to celebrate the 200th anniversary of his birth, which took place over two weekends. October 13th saw presentations in the lecture hall of the futuristic building of the Mauritius Commercial Bank in St. Jean, while some further talks, and an amusing acted sketch, followed on October 20th at the old plantation house of St. Antoine in the north of Mauritius, a place Pike himself visited and discussed in his book.

The Society's original intention was to publish these papers in the next issue of their published proceedings, now renamed the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts & Sciences*. However contributors were informed without prior discussion in June 2019 that "Unfortunately now that the bicentenary of Pike's birth is past history, the Society's Executive Committee, after discussing the matter fully, has decided that unfortunately there was not enough interest locally to carry on with this plan [to publish]". Although they were prepared to accept papers for a future issue of the journal, this would result in the loss of coherence of the Pike event, and in any case the interval between their publications was generally several years, so any immediacy would be lost.

Having failed to persuade them to change their minds, some of us decided to look elsewhere, and Justin Gerlach accepted the proposal to publish in *Phelsuma*. I then offered this option to all contributors, but some, notably those also contributing to the Society's tercentenary events commemorating Pierre Poivre in October 2019, declined. The remaining papers from the 2018 Pike symposium are presented here, together with an annotated version of Pike's 'Visit to the Seychelles Islands' and a brief essay contextualising the tradition of 'rambles' in Mauritius.

Anthony Cheke, October 2019