

**The aqueduct at Cazilhac... and the starting point of a great career for a local entrepreneur from Lunas: André Mialane (1821-1890).**

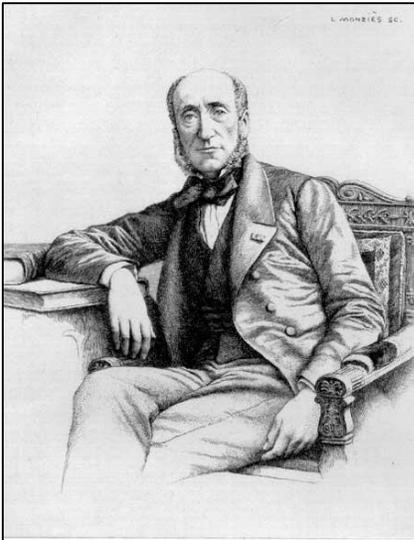


When leaving Bousquet-d'Orb, and heading up the Orb valley towards Avène, on the right you have the castle of Cazilhac and then, a little further on, you encounter an expected sight: a succession of 27 arches of stones ...

What is this structure for?

It is an aqueduct, such as the Romans built so well, providing water for the towns they built.

However, Cazilhac's one is more recent. Here is its story...



In 1845 a professor of political economy at the Collège de France, Michel Chevalier (1806-1879), was elected deputy in Aveyron. The same year he married the daughter of a wealthy industrial weaver from Lodève, Emma Fournier, 17 years his junior.

In 1851 he bought the Château de Cazilhac with his brothers-in-law, René and Benjamin Fournier.

In 1853 he became councillor of the canton of Lunas, then president of this departmental assembly. He stayed in this role until 1870.

*Michel Chevalier – Engraving by L. Monzies*

As soon as he acquired the Cazilhac estate Michel Chevalier had this imposing aqueduct built, bringing water from the Orb River to the château at a rate of 150 litres per second, allowing the entire property to be irrigated.

What is often unknown is the name of the builder of the aqueduct. We found it mentioned in a report of the deliberations of the General Council of 1859:

## **Chemin de moyenne communication N° 56 de Bédarieux à Sylvanès.**

Sur la ligne N° 56, on a terminé la rectification des abords de la route départementale N° 8. Sur cette partie, l'entrepreneur Mialane a construit un aqueduc. On a commencé également les travaux projetés entre l'usine de Cazilhac et la rivière d'Orb sur une largeur moyenne de 3 mètres.

Michel Chevalier engaged for this project André Mialane, originally from Lodève, but who had settled in Lunas following his marriage in 1850 to Véronique Nouguier, daughter of a Lunas doctor.

His meeting with Michel Chevalier changed the life of this craftsman who will become an important local figure.

Michel Chevalier, no doubt satisfied with Mialane's work, continued to keep in touch with him. He recommended that he submit tenders for several projects initiated by the General Council, such as the one for the creation of the 11,187 metres of the Route Nationale number 9, between Pégairolles and Caylar. In September 1861, he was awarded the contract.

This particularly tricky portion included traversing the foothills of the Larzac, where there was only a mule track on the steep limestone cliffs: the Pas de l'Escalette.

The site became the primary focus of the company and the Mialanes settled in Pégairolles where two of their children were born. As the work progressed the budgeted funds turn out to be clearly insufficient to cover the costs.

The archives of the General Council of 1864 record that Mialane requested and obtained the termination of his contract. However he completed, with his own resources, the part he had started and which stretched from Pégairolles to Pas de Escalette. It was in this section, except 150 meters from the Passage du Pas, that the most important and most difficult works are found.

These works were almost completely stopped in 1865. Strangely, in 1866, from the same source, we learn that Mr. Mialane, who had obtained the termination of his contract, agreed to restart it and he was authorized to do so by a decision of the ministerial meeting of February 5, 1866. It was reported that the work was progressing "with activity", and the chief engineer hoped to be able to deliver the entire road to traffic following spring and that "the total expense of this great enterprise will not exceed the forecasts".

How to explain this reversal of Mialane, without increasing the estimated cost?

It was most likely that Michel Chevalier came to the aid of Mialane by putting him in touch with a young Swedish researcher he met in Paris, Alfred Nobel.

The latter, being interested in explosives, carried out research to make nitroglycerin more easily usable by limiting its instability to shocks. Mialane went to an explosives factory in Bas-Rhin, where Nobel made his adjustments. There he learned to make nitroglycerin and, enriched by his new knowledge and his acquisitions, resumed his work at the Escalette site.

Thanks to this explosive, he finished the work within the announced deadlines.



The gap opened in the Larzac cliff by Mialane to allow the passage of the road!

Mialane remained in contact with Nobel and participated in all the projects that the scientist pursued in France and abroad. In 1875 we find him alongside Nobel and Barbe (polytechnician, industrialist) who was the administrator of the company created in 1875 for the manufacture of dynamite. In 1880, he invested in the Nobel dynamite company which included factories in Switzerland and Italy. Then in 1887, he invested in the holding company which included various factories in Europe, Latin America and South Africa.

In 1877 he established a dynamite depot in Lunas and became its representative for the region.

Mialane made a fortune with this explosive. He used it to dig new cellars in Roquefort, where he created his own brand of cheese before joining the "Société" in 1883.

Mialane was able to advise the bourgeoisie of Lunas by indicating the most profitable investments in the two areas where he was well informed: dynamite and Roquefort.

It was said at the time: "Sé a Lunas portan la levitae lo capèl de chambord es gràcia a la dinamita e al formatge de Rocafort! ».

Translation: "if, in Lunas, we wear frock coats and top hats, it is thanks to dynamite and Roquefort cheese!"

It is even said that he avoided the setbacks of the Panama scandal for his wealthy friends by telling them in time to sell their shares, to the great astonishment of the Biterrois bankers who then considered them safe...

Sources:

research by J & L Osouf for the Friends of Lunas.

<http://www.amisdelunas.fr/histoire-contemporaine/figures-lunassiennes/mialane/andre-mialane1.htm>

Dominique de Lastours (2016) - History of Cazilhac