



La Trobeana

The Newsletter of the La Trobe Society of Australia

Grevillea La Trobeana Engraving by Edward La Trobe Bateman - La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria

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March 2002

The first year of life for the La Trobe Society has been a successful and exciting one.

The Society has been greatly honoured by Mr. John Landy, AC, MBE, Governor of Victoria, who kindly agreed to become our Patron. The reception hosted by the Governor and Mrs. Landy at Government House on 3 October 2001 to celebrate the arrival in Melbourne in 1839 of Charles Joseph La Trobe was the highlight of our calendar. Other stimulating events are planned for 2002.

Your membership is vital for the continued existence of the Society. We do encourage you to renew your subscription and to invite interested friends to join.

*The first Annual General Meeting of
the La Trobe Society will take place on*

*Wednesday 20 March 2002
at 6.00 p.m.*

*Venue: Smorgon Gallery
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
Dallas Brooks Drive
(near La Trobe's Cottage)*

Since the occasion marks the 201st birthday of Charles Joseph La Trobe, the formal proceedings will be followed by a vignette by Dianne Reilly, La Trobe Librarian, on recent discoveries relating to the La Trobe family.

La Trobeana is the newsletter of the La Trobe Society Inc. It appears twice yearly, with news of forthcoming events, and reports of interest to the membership.

Committee

Vice Presidents: Richard Heathcote

Susan Priestley

Treasurer: John Drury

Secretary: Dianne Reilly

The La Trobe Society Inc.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Professor Emeritus A.G.L. Shaw delivered the Society's inaugural address on La Trobe at Rippon Lea Estate. The paper which follows is an abbreviated version of a talk given to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria on 8 April 2001 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of La Trobe's birth on 20 March 1801.

C.J. La Trobe

The name La Trobe is familiar to Melburnians, but many people are rather vague about what it stands for. In fact, Charles Joseph La Trobe was Superintendent of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales from October 1839 until June 1851, except for a brief spell when he was acting-governor of Van Diemen's Land. From July 1851 he was Lieutenant-Governor of the new colony of Victoria, roughly the same area, until May 1854.

Of Huguenot ancestry, he was brought up with the intention that he serve in the Moravian church in England, but in his twenties he turned to teaching and travel. After his marriage to Sophie de Montrnollin in September 1835, family influence helped him to be appointed to report on the education of the recently emancipated slaves in the West Indies, and the excellence of his reports, submitted over the next two years, encouraged the Imperial government to appoint him to Port Phillip, where it thought the Aboriginal problem might be similar to that which he had been concerned with in the Caribbean.

His experiences here were mixed, but whether anyone else could have achieved better is doubtful; that is what we must now consider.

He was handicapped by a lack of administrative experience, and except in minor matters, he had to obey the instructions of Sir George Gipps, the Governor of New South Wales, a man strongly opposed to spending public money. La Trobe wanted to undertake some public works, but he had no convict labour at his disposal, as had been available in Sydney a generation earlier, and Gipps was 'quite sure it cannot be for the advantage of a young settlement in which labour is very dear to engage largely in public building'. It was 'no business of government to provide a public hospital' - nor apparently many other public works, so Port Phillip had to go without. But for this, La Trobe was hardly to blame, and he was able to remedy some of these deficiencies between 1846 and 1850, most notably by the reservation of city land for parks, the construction of the Botanical Gardens, the Melbourne Hospital and the Benevolent Asylum.

He was not successful in dealing with the Aborigines. The Imperial government had established an Aboriginal Protectorate, intended to prevent whites and blacks attacking each other, and to 'civilise' the latter so that they could become accepted as good citizens and labourers. But, under-funded and incompetently staffed, the scheme failed. With the forces he had available, La Trobe could not stop, the pastoralists driving the natives from their lands nor the natives resisting this, so violence was inevitable. The Superintendent deplored this. 'Will not the commission of such crimes call down the wrath of God?' he asked, on hearing of a murderous attack by settlers in 1842; but economically he was sympathetic to the pastoralists who were developing the colony, and regrettably they could not live peacefully alongside the Aborigines whose traditional way of life was based on their attachment to their land. La Trobe's West Indian experience might have encouraged him to hope for successful assimilation of the tribes but this was not possible in Victoria. It seemed inevitable that the Aborigines should die out, mostly from diseases introduced by the settlers, and the Superintendent could at that time do little about it.

In other matters he was more successful. Initially it was not intended to transport convicts to Port Phillip, so there was no problem about their treatment, and in 1844 La Trobe welcomed the British proposal to send out a few 'reformed' juveniles. They would relieve the labour shortage, he hoped. But the government abandoned this scheme, and La Trobe's experience of a convict colony in Hobart in 1846-47 changed his mind. He then strongly opposed the sending out of allegedly reformed ex-prisoners as 'exiles'. They would pollute the community. Enough ex-convicts came over from Van Diemen's Land anyway, so in 1849-50 he sent the 'exiles' on to Sydney. In 1853, when Victoria was a separate colony, disobeying his instructions, he assented to a bill prohibiting convicts with conditional pardons entering it - though his action here probably damaged his future career.

He was a great traveller in Australia, as he had been in Europe and North America. While in office he made 94 journeys through his district, incidentally discovering land routes to Gippsland in 1845 and to Cape Otway in 1846. These travels let him see at first hand the problems of the squatters, the Aborigines, the land. This experience must have suggested to him the need to make substantial land reserves 'for public purposes' near the gold-fields for unsuccessful diggers, and to refuse to issue leases with pre-emptive rights to squatters which would have locked up the land for generations. In both cases, he insisted on using 'timely foresight' to facilitate the improvement and development of the colony, despite the law officers' objections. development of the colony, despite the law officers' objections. 'timely foresight' to facilitate the improvement and development of the colony, despite the law officers' objections.

By this time, 1853, helped by the arrival of the Colonial Engineer, Andrew Clark, he was able to promote the building of roads - to Ballarat, Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) and Bendigo, and to the Murray at Albury and the future Echuca - the construction of the Yan Yean Reservoir to supply piped water to Melbourne, the building of a much needed public wharf on the Yarra, and the opening of a telegraph, soon to be followed by a railway, to Geelong. Less materially, he supported bills for the establishment of a public library and a University in Melbourne, just as he had strongly supported the district's

churches ever since he first arrived, showing his belief that 'it is not by individual aggrandizement, by the possession of numerous herds or by costly acres that the people shall secure for the country enduring prosperity and happiness, but by the acquisition and maintenance of sound religious and moral institutions, without which no country can become truly great.'

He was unsettled by the economic depression between 1841 and 1844 and the excitement of the gold discoveries of 1851, and though diffident and sometimes lacking in initiative (but notice his land policy!), he overcame his difficulties, despite his inexperience, avoiding by his tact and lack of dogmatic self-righteousness the rebellion provoked by his successor; instead, he succeeded in maintaining the rule of law while establishing a well-functioning administration for the new colony.

Overall, though I do not regard La Trobe as one of the great Imperial pro-consuls in Australia, such as Macquarie in New South Wales, Arthur in Van Diemen's Land, or Sir George Grey in South Australia and New Zealand, his achievements compare favourably with those of many others. Honest, dignified and enlightened, he was more than competent, even if sometimes slow in attacking his problems. Certainly his achievements were considerable and Victorians today can look back with much satisfaction on the record of their only Superintendent and first Lieutenant-Governor.

LA TROBE PORTRAITS

The La Trobe Society's Christmas Cocktails on 5 December 2001 at the Old Treasury Building, in the presence of our Patron the Governor, Mr. John Landy, AC OBE, provided a fitting way to celebrate the festive season. Mrs. Mary Lewis, Acting Picture Librarian at the State Library of Victoria, gave a thought-provoking address on the portraits of La Trobe known to exist in Melbourne. A synopsis of her talk follows.

Portrait in oils of Charles Joseph La Trobe by Sir Francis Grant 1803-1878 R.A.

The puzzle of the portraits.

It has not been fully appreciated that there are four versions of this painting produced by the artist Sir Francis Grant. The first to arrive in the Colony was commissioned by the citizens of Melbourne and forwarded to the Melbourne City Council in 1855. This portrait, in a cut down state, now hangs in the Lord Mayor's office at the Town Hall. It shows the figure of La Trobe but only as far as his knees. Why was it cut down? Perhaps as a result of damage? The portrait is the most finished, showing La Trobe dressed in the uniform of Lieutenant-Governor which he had worn first at the opening of Prince's Bridge in November 1850. He could be holding his commission in his hand. The painting of the epaulettes, the gold braid and the tassels is exquisite. The face is finely painted and the hair very natural.

Then there are the two full length and full size portraits, copies produced by the artist for the family; one held by the State Library of Victoria and the other by the National Trust.

The Library's full length portrait was the gift of Mrs. La Trobe Bateman of Sark in the Channel Islands in 1954. Mrs. Bateman approached the Agent-General in London with the offer of the

portrait, which had been owned by La Trobe himself. This portrait is the plainest, the background to the figure of La Trobe has been painted out in black and there is no billowing curtain as there is in the Melbourne City Council's portrait and in the one owned by the National Trust.

The portrait housed in the Governor's office at the Old Treasury Building, was presented to the National Trust by Captain Charles La Trobe, grandson of C.J. La Trobe. In an article in the Trust Newsletter No.5 June 1960, Professor Brian Lewis described the acquisition of the portrait as being of immense significance to Melbourne and Australia. At the time the Trust was negotiating for a site for the reconstructed La Trobe's cottage. This was to be the original site in the Domain. Lewis also referred to the benign expression on La Trobe's face:

"The face is that of a gentle and sensitive man who must have suffered much in the savage politics of that boisterous period."

This portrait is closest to the original Town Hall portrait, in particular because the curtain at the right hand side is painted in, although in a slightly more billowing fashion.

Finally, there is the small full length study for the original portrait by Sir Francis Grant, acquired by the State Library as part of the C.J. La Trobe Archive in 1992 (45.0 x 22.5 cm). The study has a liveliness and freedom in technique lacking in the formal portraits.

It was certainly common for portrait painters to do extra copies particularly of commissioned portraits for members of the family. It is interesting and fortunate for us that they have returned to Melbourne. A viewing of all four portraits together would be highly desirable but not possible at the moment. A Portrait Crawl has been suggested so that interested members can compare and contrast them as well as enjoying refreshments and discussion at each venue.

JOLIMONT REVIVED- research into the La Trobe's garden home by Richard Heathcote, National Trust Manager, La Trobe's Cottage.

C.J. La Trobe's timber cottage, which he was obliged to provide, was first erected at Jolimont on 12.5 acres of sloping land by the River Yarra purchased by the Superintendent in 1839. Together with a garden laid out in the grounds, this structure provided a modest but comfortable home for the first representative of the crown in the Port Phillip District.

The National Trust is now the custodian of the prefabricated British building which has moved a number of times in its peripatetic life. Most recently it was removed from within the Royal Botanic Gardens to its current site on the eucalypt lawn off Dallas Brooks Drive. Not all of the structure is authentic as much has been replaced, like grandfather's axe, in its 163 year history in Australia. The kitchen wing has been recreated but a second cottage on the original site has been entirely lost over time.

Although the cottage is orientated in the correct north-south alignment of its original Jolimont site, the plantings around the cottage are representative rather than an accurate representation of the landscape scheme. Charles and Sophie La Trobe were interested in gardening and took delight in the laying out of their grounds at Jolimont. The garden formed an integral part of the home both in utility and ornament. A vegetable garden and

orchard of fruit trees were established as well as flower gardens and decorative plantings along verandahs.

In a letter written on 17 August 1848 to his friend Robert Gunn of Launceston, La Trobe mentions: 'The plants (cacti etc) on my Rockery do exceedingly well despite the heat of summer'. The scale and complexity of this garden feature can be seen in one of many drawings by the La Trebes' cousin, Edward La Trobe Bateman.

These sketches and other contemporary water colours and drawings of the La Trobe's home give a clear indication of the style and success achieved in the landscaping effort at their Jolimont property. The drawings, some by La Trobe himself, are currently being researched by Trust Head Gardener Philip Tulk and myself, in a project which will endeavour to reconstruct the landscape layout and plant material used in this first vice-regal garden. Australian Garden History Society members are assisting in these efforts and Colleen Morris, a garden historian in NSW, recently provided the project with a list of 166 'plants, shrubs, cuttings and seeds distributed from the Botanic Gardens Sydney to CJ La Trobe Esq PP' on 14 June 1844.

If the project progresses successfully, an illustrated lecture on our findings will be presented at the AGHS annual conference in Hobart next October. Our endeavour is unusual since the original garden is long gone but some of the buildings survive, although not on their original site. If the Melbourne City Council control the area and if they can be persuaded, it may be possible to reintroduce some parts of the original scheme to the current location of the buildings, enhancing the visitor's understanding and appreciation of the first government house and garden in Victoria. More reports to follow as our investigations proceed!

A WORD FROM THE TREASURER

Members of our society currently stands at 141. In addition, Latrobe City based at Traralgon, and La Trobe University have joined as corporate members.

Membership renewal is due at the annual general meeting.

Subscription rates:	Individual	\$25.00
	Family	\$40.00
	Corporate	\$550.00

FUNCTIONS FOR 2002

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| 20 March
5.45 for 6.00p.m. | - Charles Joseph La Trobe's 201 st Birthday.
AGM at Australian Centre for
Contemporary Art, Dallas Brooks Drive
(near La Trobe's Cottage), refreshments
And the opportunity to visit La Trobe's
Cottage. |
| 18 June
5.30p.m. | - Inaugural "AGL Shaw La Trobe Lecture"
sponsored jointly by the Royal Historical
Society of Victoria and the La Trobe
Society: <i>Twists and Turns; the newspaper
press as a force in Port Phillip and early
Victorian history</i> , to be delivered by
Dr. David Dubstan. |
| 3 October | - Celebration of La Trobe's arrival in
Melbourne in 1839. Venue to be advised. |
| December | - Christmas Cocktails. Date and venue to be
advised. |